

Personal Statement for James McCue

For my personal statement, I would like to discuss my background, my goals and why I became a math teacher. My intent is for the reader to become familiar with who I am in order to better understand my works that follow for courses EDCI 552-559.

I was born and raised in Butler, Pennsylvania, which is a small steel town about thirty miles north of Pittsburgh. I am the oldest of seven boys and graduated from Butler High School in 1977. My journey to becoming a high school math teacher was rooted in math being my best and favorite subject. I always viewed math as a foundation subject that I could use to propel myself to whatever path I chose.

While at a small college twenty-fives miles north of Butler, I found myself enjoying computers and decided to major in mathematics. During my sophomore year, I was torn between teaching and technology. I chose the technology path, graduating in 1981 from Grove City College with a BS degree in mathematics, and then entered a system engineering career in New Jersey.

My engineering career began with serving on a large team of engineers that designed, tested and built the AEGIS radar and combat system to defend our Navy ships from incoming missiles and aircraft. I considered myself fortunate and was proud to serve the Navy's AEGIS project for fourteen years.

During the 1990s, needing new challenges, I began working on a major computer modernization project for the Federal Aviation Administration that gave me the opportunity to become a system field engineer. In that role, I assisted in installing and testing new hardware at twenty air traffic control centers all over the United States. During this project, I designed and implemented an innovative, diagram-based, hardware connectivity troubleshooting system for the air traffic technicians. Part of my responsibilities included training the technician teams on how to use the troubleshooting system, which I enjoyed immensely.

During my travels, I also discovered I loved the Rocky Mountains and decided that I would eventually move out West to live. So, whenever I had vacation, I began traveling to various states in the Rockies to backpack and enjoy nature, while also searching for a new place to call home.

In the summer of 2004, I traveled to Missoula, Montana and realized this was the place to which I wanted to move. Around the same time, I also had an epiphany that I had a passion for teaching, which I believed would enable me to give back to our next generation. The time was right to make a mid-life career change, since I had raised twin boys who had recently graduated from high school. A new career in teaching mathematics at the high school level seemed right to me.

My reasons for becoming a math teacher are woven throughout my background. However, after twenty-four years in the corporate world working on large government projects, I longed to fulfill a strong desire to help people on a more personal level.

In researching alternative routes to becoming a teacher, I discovered the Northern Plains Transition to Teaching program. I quickly enrolled in the program and after completing the first part of the program, received my class 5 certification and moved out to Missoula in 2005 to begin my new career.

In the course of my studies, I realized that with the No Child Left Behind Law that students' performance in mathematics was poor. It seemed likely to me that math teachers like me who came from industry would be able to help students see how mathematics skills can be used as tools in solving problems. I believe this ability is going to be critical in our new global economy, where creativity and problem solving will be essential skills for our next generation in the twenty-first century.

Once I got to Missoula, I was able to secure a part-time math position at a local high school, teaching an Integrated Math course, as well as an applied math class. This went well, but the highly competitive job market in Missoula precluded me—as a brand new teacher—from obtaining full time employment for this year.

Currently, I am in my first full year teaching Algebra I and II at Clearwater Valley High School in the small, rural town of Kooskia, Idaho, which is about 150 miles west of Missoula.

My goal as a high school math teacher is to help students realize that math is a tool to use in their lives that provides many avenues of opportunity for them to pursue. Also, I would like to become a key member of the math teacher community and use my system engineering skills in helping to reform how math is taught and learned. Too many students are not getting the connection to how important math is, despite national testing by the government to insure they have the minimum skills needed. A new math system is needed to integrate the development of math skills from kindergarten to high school graduation which maximizes the mastery and level of math skills learned and used in real life.

My journey as a math teacher is just beginning; my goal for this portfolio is to demonstrate my commitment to excellence in becoming the best math teacher possible in helping our students learn and use mathematics. Upon review of my works that follow, I believe the evaluator will see strong evidence of my commitment.