



# OUR Promise FEATURES

Integrity - Perseverance - Inclusivity - Innovation - Excellence



## Ben Sierra: A Passion for Supporting Our Students

For this month's Promise Feature we met up with School Psychologist Ben Sierra. From assessing students for IEP eligibility to creating impactful initiatives like Guitar Club, Ben's work ensures students are connected to the resources they need to succeed, all while fostering meaningful relationships that make his role deeply rewarding.



### Psychology, Guitar Club, PBIS

For nearly a decade, Ben Sierra has been a part of our District's efforts to support students academically, socially, and emotionally. Starting in the 2015-2016 school year, Ben has made it a point to ensure that every student he meets with at Creekside Middle School is connected to the resources needed to succeed. "The majority of my time goes to assessing students for IEP eligibility," said Ben. "To see if they have any type of learning disabilities, what their strengths are, and I assess so that we can put together a comprehensive plan to bridge any learning deficits that they may have."

Additionally, Ben Sierra evaluates the social emotional needs of students and makes sure that they have access to the proper resources to be able to continue with their school year emotionally grounded. "I've always enjoyed working with students...I like being a resource for them, and for staff."



## **“Those little *thank yous* are the most rewarding part”**

A graduate of the Patterson High School class of 2003, Ben Sierra pursued post-secondary education at Stanislaus State with the intention of becoming a School Counselor, however, his time in Graduate School aligned with the Great Recession, which prompted him to take a closer look at different career options. “I was looking at the outlook for jobs in School Counseling and there wasn't a big demand [at the time]. But School Psychology was still hiring so I researched more, connected with the School Psychologist in Patterson and I liked what I saw.”

Beyond his core role as a School Psychologist, Ben Sierra has left a unique impression on students through initiatives like Creekside’s Guitar Club. “Guitar Club started when I was working with a student who was bummed that he didn’t have a place to play guitar and wanted to do the club and I was like ‘Dude, I play guitar and I can fit in an hour a week,’ so that’s how it started.” Guitar Club is now in its third year and has seen upwards of over 20 students at a time. Students of all skill levels partake in what the club has to offer, such as basic music theory, finger strengthening exercises, guitar stringing and tuning workshops, and learning how to play particular songs.

Ben Sierra also serves as the district’s Tier 2 Positive Behavioral Intervention Support coordinator at Creekside, and leads efforts to keep students positively connected to school, by helping to connect students to supports like mentoring, mental health programs, and counseling to reduce suspensions. What keeps Ben Sierra going after nearly a decade? Positivity from students. “What makes [being a School Psychologist] rewarding is the small group counseling. You can walk around campus and kids actually say hi to you and go out of their way to greet you and we get a lot of little notes and thanks yous from students. Those little thank yous are the most rewarding part.”