



PORTOLA HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear Admissions Committee:

It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation for Sandhya “Sandy” Shanmuga-Nathan. I have had the privilege of knowing Sandy for the past three years as her AP Precalculus teacher, AP Calculus BC teacher, and now as her teaching assistant. Over that time, I have seen her grow into one of the most intellectually curious, collaborative, and motivated students I have ever taught. She is a rare combination of analytical brilliance, creativity, and humor that makes her both a joy to teach and a positive influence on everyone around her.

Sandy is one of those students who does not just learn math, she lives it. She approaches each concept with genuine curiosity, always eager to understand the why behind the how. Her questions are insightful and often lead to rich discussions that deepen understanding for everyone in the room. I have watched her connect abstract calculus concepts to real world applications in astrophysics and engineering with impressive clarity and precision. She earned top marks in one of the most rigorous courses offered at Portola High School, which is a testament to both her intellect and her perseverance.

The first three words that come to mind when I think of Sandy are curious, collaborative, and motivated, but I would also add humorous and insanely intelligent. Her quick wit and warm personality make her approachable and well liked by her peers, while her sharp intellect continually pushes the class forward. She has an incredible ability to make even the most complex concepts understandable, and as a teaching assistant, she now shares that gift with others. I frequently see students seek her out for help because she explains challenging ideas with patience and empathy. Watching her guide classmates through difficult topics with enthusiasm and care reminds me why she will one day be an outstanding leader in any field she pursues.

Sandy’s academic record and research experiences reflect a level of depth and passion that extends far beyond high school expectations. She has conducted research through the UCI Gifted and Talented Institute’s BEAM Siwy Lab, participated in the NASA SEES program developing applications of artificial intelligence for space travel, and published her scientific work in the UCI X GATI Science Journal. Her research on identifying habitable worlds and detecting biosignatures on exoplanets reveals her ability to merge scientific inquiry with creativity and vision. She also earned recognition for her Beamline for Schools international submission, placing in the top ten percent of proposals worldwide. These accomplishments highlight her natural curiosity and her ability to turn abstract theory into meaningful, real world applications.

Sandy is also a very special person to me. She will be greatly missed by me and I am sure by the staff alike. What stands out most about her is her selflessness. She helps others without hesitation and never seems as worried about herself as she is about making sure those around her succeed. Her kindness and compassion have made a lasting impact on our math department, and she has left an impression that will not fade easily.

Sandy is a one of a kind student whose intelligence, warmth, and humor brighten every room she enters. She has the rare ability to elevate those around her while continuing to challenge herself. I am confident she will make an incredible impact in any academic and professional environment, particularly in STEM, where her curiosity, leadership, and determination will empower both her own success and those around her. It is with my highest recommendation that I support her application for the Women in STEM Empowerment Scholarship.

Please feel free to contact me at (949) 936-8200 or shelleygodett@iusd.org with any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,

Shelley Godett

Mathematics Department Chair

Portola High School

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