DATE: January 30, 2018

RE: Heart of Dance Grant Application

TO: The Rochester Area Foundation Grant Committee.

I am pleased to hear that Heart of Dance is being considered for a Rochester Area Foundation Grant. As a lifelong resident, I can testify to the fact that Dancing Classrooms is an experience that will benefit our students and future citizens for years to come. Yes, the steps were fun to learn, but more importantly, I’ve seen 10 and 11 year olds develop into ladies and gentlemen while growing in confidence, respect, and collaborative skills.

I had the pleasure of hosting one of the first Dancing Classroom residencies in Rochester during the fall of 2017. Twice a week for the first quarter, we pushed back the desks and a professionally trained teaching artist taught 10 & 11 year olds ballroom dancing. As a former theater artist in residence, I understand the value of infusing the arts into our schools. Arts experiences build confidence, promote positive self-esteem, and encourage creativity. The Dancing Classrooms program goes further by teaching the values of respect, elegance and teamwork in a well-organized, structured, and lively manner. It is a program that not only welcomes all students, but expects them to demonstrate strength of character at the highest level.

Any teacher will tell you that we begin each school year by explicitly focusing on building relationships and developing community in the classroom. Spending 10 weeks together in dance frame, elbow to elbow and eye to eye, accelerated the collaboration and community of the 2017-2018 class. Dancing Classrooms host teachers are expected to participate and I enjoyed the opportunity to learn new skills along with my students each visit. Students arrive in fifth grade at a variety of skill levels in reading, math and other subjects. However, we all started the year as beginners in ballroom dancing and learned the lessons of dedication, tenacity and support as we mastered dances like the Foxtrot, Tango, and Swing.

To quote my most reluctant student, at the end of the culminating event he wrote:

Why fund this project? Three words: Respectful physical contact. It is explicitly taught, modeled, and expected. Watching the nightly news, you can see that this is a critical skill to teach our young ladies and gentlemen. Lesson 1 begins by showing the effects of body language and verbal communication between partners that I still refer to in my classroom. We were fortunate to be included in the initial residency and I hope that your Rochester Area Foundation grant funds will ensure that this program continues to grow and flourish in our community.

Sincerely,

Lisa Pestka Anderson

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