



Project Montana  
207 Montana Hall  
Montana State University  
Bozeman, MT 59717

July 30, 2019

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing this letter to endorse Montana State University's application for the 100&Change grant. As an Instructional Coordinator in the Content Standards and Instruction Division at the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), I am pleased to offer my support for **Project Montana: Gathering Together to Save Lives Through Culture**.

Montana is a large, rural state. More than 50% of our students and teachers live and work in isolated and rural areas. With a suicide rate *nearly three times higher* than the national average for youth ages 11-17, everyone from family members to educators, from community members to lawmakers, and students to tribal elders, feels the call to action and the urgency to find a solution that has been elusive. Research from the program Turnaround Arts, a program that brings art into schools without arts programs, found significant positive impact on academic achievement, reduction in discipline referrals, and increases in attendance. With Montana's rurality and lack of arts programming in mind, Montana adopted new content standards for arts in 2015, and needed to support all teachers in implementing the arts standards in all schools and with all students.

To address the need for arts education in all Montana schools, the OPI and the Montana Arts Council (MAC) partnered to create a Montana Teacher Leader in the Arts (MTLA) program. I am fortunate to be the grant and activities manager (along with MAC) of the NEA-Artworks grant funded program. Currently in its 4<sup>th</sup> cohort, the year-long program has trained thirty-five teacher leaders who actively provide professional development on arts integration and coherence to the Montana Arts Content Standards. Each year, the cohort trainees attend a week-long summer institute where they receive training, plan a field project, and implement the field project in their schools and communities. Examples of these field projects include:

- Notebooks exploring science through the seasonal rounds of the Salish Kootenai Tribal traditions
- Community art sculptures in public spaces where community members are invited to engage and interact with the artwork
- A high-school art share where a high school teacher provided art classes to the elementary school in a small community because no art classes had ever been provided at the elementary level

These are just a few examples of the community-building aspect of the projects that our Montana Teacher Leader in the Arts program successfully implements. In addition, our thirty-five arts leaders have reached more than 360 teachers across the state with professional development on the Montana

Arts Content Standards. This number illustrates the incredible impact our teacher leaders have had on educators across the state during the last four years. An additional way we reach educators is by designing courses in all academic and social-emotional areas for our free, online service called the Teacher Learning Hub (Hub). We have about 12,000 Montana teachers enrolled in these online professional learning courses. With nearly 15,000 educators in the state, we are reaching close to 80% of our educators. The results of providing equitable, professional development for all teachers through the Hub are unparalleled. With these incredible avenues of support for teachers, we are poised to provide even more support in arts education through the 100&Change grant.

I enthusiastically offer my support for Montana State University's application for the 100&Change grant. I fully support the integration of all stakeholders in working to change youth suicide statistics in Montana by supporting teachers and art programs that build communities and preserve cultures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "CM-Stutz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christy Mock-Stutz  
English Language Arts and Literacy Instructional Coordinator