

**Testimony for Legislative Hearing
Room 102, January 6, 2005
Marilyn Delger, Principal, Hawthorne School**

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee: For the record my name is Marilyn Delger and I am the principal at Hawthorne Elementary School in Bozeman. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you about the impact of the Montana Arts Council on my school and on education in Montana.

My story starts 14 years ago when our school was awarded a grant from the Montana Arts Council to develop a model school, for the state of Montana -- a school which would prove the importance of inclusion of the arts in the educational process. This was a dream come true! The staff was very excited. It meant extra money for something we already knew was important, but, of course, we had no idea that in the long term the project would become so important to the state of Montana. Just yesterday, Hawthorne received the prestigious Governor's Art Award for enhancement of the arts in Montana. This is a huge honor for an elementary school.

For 14 years the Montana Arts Council has been a constant partner in the Hawthorne Project. Initially it provided funding for planning time so that teachers could delve into current brain research and educational theory. Early on, the Council provided opportunities for staff to participate in conferences with acclaimed educational theorists as Maxine Green, Howard Gardner and Csikszentmihalyi. They provided the clearinghouse and financial support for arts residencies. They assisted with a comprehensive assessment of the project through MSU. Without their support this project wouldn't have happened.

What the staff has discovered, is that the critical ingredient, of an exemplary school, is the inclusion of powerful emotional arts experiences during the learning process. An arts rich environment enhances academic performance and helps meet the needs of all types of learners, including those who struggle with academics. The mission of the Hawthorne Project would be to demonstrate that exemplary schools have exemplary arts programs. And, the project has been wildly successful! Certainly, the investment by the Montana Arts Council has had far reaching effects for our state, and for education as a whole.

One of the first decisions the teachers made was to decide exactly what it was, that we wanted our students to be able to do when they leave their elementary school. The staff based their decision on a report by corporate leaders describing attributes of the ideal American employee. The report explained that employers want adults that are creative, productive thinkers. They want quality producers, who have a strong work ethic, and they want excellent communication and technology skills competence. They highlighted the need for workers to be culturally literate. Most importantly, though, they want adults who can work

together, and who are motivated, lifelong learners. The staff decided that these attributes would become the Student Goals of the Model School Project. Interestingly enough, 14 years later, all current research says that these are the qualities that are strengthened when students have strong arts backgrounds.

The main thrust of the project was the development of thematic units designed with "arts at the heart," incorporating the works of master artists to help students focus attention on the big ideas of the unit. Arts residencies, community participation and parent involvement are key elements to the Project. Each year artists from Bozeman area are invited to share their expertise and enthusiasm with the students from such diverse areas as calligraphy, tap dancing, mime, African drumming, opera, and mask making.

Performance is strongly emphasized. The children are constantly encouraged to share their talents whether is in the area of drama, music, dance, literary or visual arts. The staff has learned that performances build self-esteem and self-confidence. Performances occur during the school day and during the evenings so that working parents can attend. It is not unusual to see children singing and dancing as part of unit of study. Recently 5th grade students performed an opera depicting the experiences of the pioneers on the Bozeman Trail. Parents loved it. And children will always remember the emotions experienced by the brave people traveling to the frontier-- loneliness, fear and hope -- because of their experience with the opera. The arts make learning "real." Every year 5th graders perform Shakespearian plays. They are a high point for all students -- whether they are performers or part of the audience. The students love the language and vocabulary.

The Hawthorne Children's Choir is often asked to sing at state and local events. Last year the choir (62 students) performed at Carnegie Hall in New York City. They performed Dreams of Montana Children, a composition by composer Eric Funk, based on children's drawings of their dreams.

The Children's Art Gallery, in the hallways of the school, displays the talents of all students. Children develop pride in their school when they see their artworks professionally displayed. And, the Children's Sculpture Garden, located on the school's front lawn, encourages students toward a sense of community responsibility. The student's favorite sculpture, the Dragon, designed with the assistance of artist, Rex Moon, serves as a gift to the community and a historic reminder of the Year of the Dragon. During all the displays of student art the public is amazed at the student's ability to sustain attention to detail with an artist's eye. There is no question that Quality Product is a student goal!

In Bozeman, parents can choose the school they want their child to attend. In the past few years Hawthorne has become a popular choice often with waiting lists at every grade level. The school has received much recognition. It has been included in lists of exemplary schools disseminated by the Iowa Department of

Education, the Iowa and Nebraska Arts Councils and Harvard University Project Zero. The staff was recognized, nationally, in 2002, with an Honorable Mention for the Boyer Best Practices Award, by the Boyer Center, which is an educational research organization, in conjunction with the National Elementary Principal's Association. Other special recognition has been awarded by the Montana Arts Alliance, and the state universities. Two teachers have won coveted National Milken Educator Awards for their expertise in interdisciplinary curriculum design.

The Hawthorne Project is widely supported in the community. In the early years of the project it was sustained by donations and grants but in the past few years, over \$25,000 has been raised each year by parents and community to perpetuate the Model School Project. No money comes from the general fund. Local arts organizations serve as partners in the endeavor and make it possible to offer opportunities for all children in artistic endeavors such as ballet, theater, and the fine arts.

People often comment about the energy and enthusiasm felt in the school. There are very few discipline problems. Hawthorne students care about the school environment, and care about their fellow classmates. And, visiting artists always comment about Hawthorne students' creativity and persistence in doing a project.

In 1999, a long range assessment was conducted by staff of Montana State University. They found Hawthorne students have remarkable strengths, apparent as students move to the middle and high school. They are willing to put a great deal of energy and persistence toward a quality product. They are often class leaders. They show Joy in the learning process and they love to perform! Students appreciate and enthusiastically celebrate the creative achievements of their peers.

BUT, in this is the period of No Child Left Behind! The public wants to see test scores! In the past ten years Hawthorne has become a high performing school. Each year standardized tests scores average in the 80 to 90th percentiles. These are consistently above the state and national averages. Bottom line, the Hawthorne academic environment, enhanced by its arts focus, is a highly successful method of providing students the skills and abilities they will need in the workplace.

Despite the fact that most Montanans choose to live here because they want to live in a rural setting, they also want a sophisticated educational system; one that will adequately prepare their children for a world culture. The Montana Arts Council helps schools do that! They are persistent in their efforts to remind educators that the arts are basic! Funding for the Montana Art Council is critical for providing Montana schools increased opportunity for improved academic excellence and cultural literacy.