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Oglebay Institute
Rural Arts Collaborative
c/o Carmelle Nickens
Project Manager
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To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to offer this letter of support for the amazing work that Carmelle Nickens and the Rural Arts Collaborative have accomplished in rural Pennsylvania schools.

This project teams teaching artists with formal educators to enable students to create works of public art. It began as a purely academic venture, where students would write and perform plays to master reading, writing, art, and music; or create sculptures that taught chemistry and mathematics. It has been a successful academic effort, with test scores and attendance improving. What has been an extraordinary value added, and something we did not expect, was that these public art forms give students voice – students working in groups created messages and expressed their feelings and opinions on issues of importance to their communities. It has been very moving.

The Benedum Foundation provided the seed funding for the very first RAC residency in Washington, PA. Since then we have provided \$2.5 million in funding as the program expanded to over 60 schools in western PA, West Virginia, and Eastern Ohio. I am proud to say that this project continues to expand, and not only attract new schools, but other supporters, such as EQT, community foundations, banks, and other local businesses.

We in philanthropy have an obligation to seed new ideas and help them grow. We also seek partnerships with government to sustain what we have piloted. We will continue to invest in new RAC partnerships in rural communities throughout the Commonwealth and I hope we can cultivate partnerships with government at all levels as we go forward.

Sincerely,



Jim Denova, Ph.D.
Vice President
Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation