

Ms. Carey Gilcher
Principal



To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Anne Siskin, and I am writing this letter of recommendation on behalf of two amazing Teaching Artists, Ms. Karen Debitetto and Ms. Cathy Miller. I am a fifth grade teacher at BridgePrep Academy of Collier, a Title I, Dual Language Public Charter School located in Naples, Florida.

My class, school, and I are very appreciative and honored to have been the first classroom of 5th graders in Collier County, Florida to have had the opportunity to participate in the Dancing Classrooms Program. The Program was brought to our school and taught by Teaching Artists, Ms. Karen Debitetto and Ms. Cathy Miller. These two energetic, talented, devoted, and remarkable Dancing Artists “changed the lives of our BridgePrep Academy Fifth Graders one dance at a time” in 20 classes! My dream is that every 5th grade classroom in Collier County could be so lucky!

A Countywide program would enhance learning by giving all 5th graders the opportunity to meet each other on the dance floor as school teams to have a friendly competition. Collier students compete in many school team sports, and the inclusion of Dancing Classrooms’ Ballroom dancing program would open the door for a different kind of competition for student. For my students, the process of learning to ballroom dance under the guidance of Karen and Cathy, and later, to confidently dance with a partner has been transformational! Dancing Classrooms has been a social and educational experience that my students, our school, their families, and I will never forget. It changed the way we see each other, ourselves, and dance!

It was exciting and joyful to be a part of the Dancing Classrooms Program, and it was the skilled teaching, patience, and encouragement of our Teaching Artists who made learning so impactful for students. So impactful, that I hope next year’s 5th grade students at our school and all schools in Collier County will have and embrace the opportunity!

Karen and Cathy are an amazing duo and very organized. Their communication with me, the classroom teacher, students, and our school principal, was always professional, timely, detailed, and supportive. They followed the Dancing Classroom Program philosophy and scope and sequence with fidelity. The program was more than a social, physical education experience. The Program also integrated academic opportunities to explore geography and culture in other countries. Students also had many opportunities to reflect and write about their thoughts and feelings regarding their dancing experience.

Karen and Cathy are amazing teachers, and what makes them extra special is that their hearts are as big as their smiles, and they earned the trust, respect, and love of my students. They created an atmosphere of growth mindset and fun that allowed my students who are typically introverted and reserved to step out and shine, to really glow and take a bow!

The individual relationships Karen and Cathy built with students, and students with each other, played a big part in my students' growth and success! After a few weeks of class, students looked forward to their dance lessons without hesitation, and fully embraced dance! When they wrote their acrostic "Favorite Dance" poems, it illustrated how much they had learned about the different dances, and it was clear that they all had a favorite dance!

After their final class and school performance for their parents and the 4th grade, my students told me that they will miss their dance class! Although their classes have ended, they have continued to grab a partner to ballroom dance whenever they have the opportunity!

Our amazing Ballroom Dance teachers are trying to spread the joy of dance to future BridgePrep Academy students and other 5th grade classrooms throughout Collier County. They are doing this through their nonprofit, Dance For Joy SWFL, <https://danceforjoyswfl.org/>, and by bringing more Teaching Artists to Southwest Florida for Dancing Classrooms Trainings. With Karen's experience teaching over the years in Lee and now Collier Counties, I am confident future Teaching Artists will be well prepared to take on a residency with skill, enthusiasm and most of all joy!

Sincerely,

Anne Siskin

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