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To Whom It May Concern:

I am honored to write this letter recommending Suzie Cartagena for para-educator of the year. As an educator for over a decade and an administrator going on six years, I look to surround myself with those people that have a passion for education. I look for those that truly understand that educating young people is a calling that will shape lives. Suzie is one of those exceptional educators. In the six months that I have worked with Suzie, I have come to recognize several qualities that set her apart. Suzie approaches each day acting on the belief that the work we do will change the direction of a young person's future. She understands that education takes all members of the learning community working together; she is a catalyst for collaboration. Finally, she cares deeply for our students and all members of our community.

Suzie brings a unique perspective to her role of para-educator. She was born in Mexico and immigrated to El Paso, Texas at the age of seven. As a child, she was a level 1 ELL student in 3rd grade. Suzie's empathy and understanding for our students that struggle is apparent throughout her practice. She serves 86 students in our building with a focus on our ELL students at the 7th grade level, but this is only the beginning of Suzie's work. Her desire to ensure that every child has access to the best education has propelled her into a number of roles. In addition to her 'in classroom' support, Suzie serves as supervisor for an intervention class aptly named Access. There, Suzie creates an atmosphere of collegiality and support among over a dozen students that are in need of support outside of the classroom, many of whom are ELL students. This year, Suzie approached me and asked if there might be a way to support the ELL students after school. We already have general homework support, but she noticed some students understood better if they received support in Spanish and English. Suzie now runs this program. She touches base with these parents regularly and does not let these students "fall through the cracks". This effort to bridge the gap between home and school highlights another of Suzie's strengths, collaboration.

Suzie has stated that, "Each minute of every hour, every day, I am in contact with kids, teachers, administrators, and the whole learning community is an opportunity to break down barriers to learning." Suzie relentlessly reaches out to all to support our students. She makes regular phone calls home. She works with parents to ensure that students are writing in their planner and completing homework. She works with other para-educators and teachers tirelessly. For instance, she recently attended a weekend workshop with me and other teachers at Western Washington University on integrating growth mindset in our practice. Suzie immediately began thinking of ways to implement what she had learned. When Suzie is involved, she brings people together to make good things happen for our kids. One example this year that has had a tremendous impact on our ELL students is her partnership with a 7th grade core teacher. They have planned and implemented monthly parent nights for the ELL students clustered in the class they share. Suzie speaks to the families in Spanish and has covered topics like: how to ensure their students are writing down homework, how to check grades on line (most parents had not taken advantage of Skyward until Suzie showed them how), how to promote students advocating for themselves, and many other topics. I was absolutely amazed at the response from these families. I asked Suzie and her partner teacher if they would be willing to organize an *all school* Spanish speaking family night. Suzie and her colleague enlisted the help of the district migrant family coordinator, another Spanish speaking para-educator, and several teachers to help that night. They served the families dinner, covered many topics that would help parents to help their students be active learners, and had the computer labs available for parents to learn how to check grades. That night we served over 100 members of our community from 27 families. Suzie signed 16 students up that night for College Bound Scholarships! That is dedication that makes a difference.

Our entire educational community benefits from Suzie's amazing energy and abilities. I feel honored every day to work with her; I'd like her to be honored for her tremendous efforts in changing the lives of middle school students here at LMS.

Sincerely,

Molly Mitchell-Mumma