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...becoming the model for urban education in the United States.

18 May 2017

To Whom It May Concern:

I write to recommend Ms. Cindy Elsbernd for the Business Record's Women of Influence award. I have known her for six years and have worked closely with her over that time. It is my pleasure to recommend her as an outstanding nominee for this prestigious recognition. Her ethical standards, her active modeling of civic engagement and selfless giving, and her spirit of service make her a quietly powerful leader deserving of this recognition.

Ms. Elsbernd was elected to the Des Moines Public Schools board of directors only a few short months before the superintendent made an unexpected and high profile departure from the district. Despite her relative lack of experience in this position, she quickly won the confidence of her colleagues and the district staff by her principled leadership. Despite functioning in a contentious (and some would say toxic) environment, she brought cohesion and focus to the board of directors and was elected to two consecutive terms as the president. Her leadership brought unity, stability and a much-needed student focus to the Board.

As president, she brought a historically high level of focus and discipline to the operation of the Board and its practices. In 2015, Ms. Elsbernd was a finalist for the Council of the Great City Schools prestigious Green-Garner Award, the nation's highest urban education honor that recognizes outstanding contributions in urban education. She has also been called upon to share her governance and leadership expertise with other districts around the state and the country. Indeed, after stepping down from that role, it was evident that the culture that she established has continued to positively impact our 33,000 students and their families as well as our nearly 5,000 staff members.

In addition to her monumental service to Des Moines Public Schools, she continues to make a lasting impact on the community through her non-profit organization Kidstrong, Inc., which promotes a healthy, active lifestyle to youth that has directly influenced thousands of students since its founding in 2005.

Cindy Elsbernd is one of those rare individuals that is so consistent in her principled efforts, without drawing attention to herself, that her outstanding contributions can be too easily overlooked. In nearly three decades in public education, I have never had the privilege of working with an elected official as caring, selfless, ethical, and effective as Ms. Cindy Elsbernd.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas M. Ahart", written in a cursive style.

Thomas M. Ahart, Ed.D. | Office of the Superintendent

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