



Harrington High School

of Lower Merion School District

12 July 2019

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am honored to write this testimonial for the Legacy Marker Program. I worked closely with Eugene Hough during the past school year to develop senior projects for a number of my students. I am in my thirty-second year as an educator, and I teach English at Harrington High School in the Lower Merion School District in Rosemont, Pennsylvania. I also developed and coordinate the senior project for all of our seniors and for more than 40 faculty advisors. The senior project position brings me into contact with numerous people and programs in the community. My work with the Legacy Marker Program and Eugene Hough has created exciting opportunities and outcomes for my students.

I first met Eugene in the late fall, early winter of 2018 through mutual outreach efforts. Our first brief conversation led to a meeting about how the Legacy Marker Program could benefit my students in the senior project. I was attracted to the mentorship opportunities for my students and authentic connections to history and to local community organizations that include a local Baptist church where the restoration and preservation of their historical cemetery was underway. Other important contacts and mentorships came through the Legacy Marker Program's partnerships with the Lower Merion Historical Society and a local communications leader who uses drones to capture footage that assists in the cataloguing of historical sites. Connections to other community members will certainly be a part of our future partnership.

Eugene and I then created programs for two of my students who each had specific interests and needs. The students met with Eugene, a number of special education teachers, and me, to help organize the project. Four meetings occurred over a three-week period in which we organized the projects and set goals and identified the desired outcomes. We agreed that the Lower Merion Baptist Church cemetery preservation project would be the anchor to the students' senior projects. One student needed to have very specific guidelines set so that her organizational skills could be enhanced and be used in leadership opportunities. This student brought highly developed interpersonal skills in one-on-one interactions, but struggled with using those skills in larger groups. We wanted to use those already-existing skills to build her leadership skills. The second student needed to engage in a project with other students and adults so that he would develop skills that would lead him to become comfortable during interactions with others as he enters his post-high school life. He brought with him very good technology skills and we decided that he should use those skills in this project.

Much has been written on the need for learning in authentic environments and the Lower Merion School District believes this to be accurate. This belief is the foundation for and the investment in our senior project. In fact, we dismiss our seniors from their traditional classwork in early May so that they can spend three weeks in these authentic environments. The Legacy Marker Program offers so many opportunities to satisfy these needs and to be the foundation for student growth in ways that are not only academic, but also authentic. Opportunities for mentorship is the foundation of the project and both of my students met community leaders in their areas of interest. Our first student had an interest in forensic psychology, so through the mentorship with a local psychologist, our student was encouraged to seek clues to the lives of the people buried in the cemetery, uncovering a richer history because of her investigation. Our second student was mentored by a church official, who maintains the database for those buried in the cemetery, as he catalogued all of the headstones that were restored during the project. Eugene was the mentor who kept the overall goals of the project in the forefront of each student's thinking.

I could not be more pleased with the outcomes. Our first student not only developed preservation skills, but she spoke eloquently to a large group of peers not only about how one works to preserve these legacy markers, but also why it is important. I wanted to see her use those excellent one-on-one interpersonal skills in a larger setting and she succeeded. She spoke of the new use of those skills in her final presentation to a panel of faculty members. Our second student used his technology skills to develop his database. In his final presentation, he spoke of work with other people, a skill that was a challenge for him entering the project. Although he never felt comfortable presenting in front of peers, we believe that he advanced just as much as our first student in developing interpersonal skills, at his own pace. Both students learned much about our local history and its connection to world history and learned how one goes about organizing an authentic project, which is not only important for success in college, but more obviously important for success in career choices.

Eugene and I have been so thrilled with the results of this year's project, we are now in the process of discussing expansion of the project to a full year from the normal three weeks. Our preliminary conversations include developing a pilot program at Harriton in which I seek out interested students who want to invest the entire year in their senior project and seek a deeper understanding of local history. Eugene would establish the foundations of the project based on preservation of markers, and while doing so, the foundation of learning our local history. I will then identify individual needs of each student and work with Eugene and those students to develop desired outcomes. Eugene and I will then both identify interests and talents of these students and assign mentors who are connected to those interests and talents. I look forward to these next steps in our partnership. I would not have had this opportunity to offer my students these unique opportunities for growth without this partnership with Eugene Hough and the Legacy Marker Program.

If you would like further information about the Legacy Marker Program and the unique and individualized programs that we are developing for Harriton's students, please do not hesitate to call me at my office (610-658-3980). I would be thrilled to talk more about it.

Most sincerely,

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