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Dear Steering and Rules Committee,

My name is Nicole (Nico) Loeffler, and I am an Environmental Educator with the Urban Ecology Center. I am writing to support the renewal of Milwaukee Math and Science Academy's charter. I have had the pleasure of working with Milwaukee Math and Science Academy (MMSA) for the past year and a half through Urban Ecology Center's Neighborhood Environmental Education Program, a nationally recognized and innovative partnership-based program that provides field trips supplemental to classroom science curriculum for local schools with a focus on outdoor education experiences and science curriculum. In urban areas like Milwaukee, it has become increasingly important for people to get outside and reconnect with our natural spaces for physical and mental health. Many school locations are locked in among buildings, with little space for students to get out and move around outdoors. The Urban Ecology Center offers sanctuaries and outdoor learning spaces for neighborhood school children. Through our programming, trained educators lead experiences with positive role modeling, student-informed approaches and deep curiosity to support the development of students as they grow in their learning journeys. Research shows that children develop stronger connections with nature when they get outdoors regularly and with people who also care about nature.

Engaging with MMSA students and staff has been an extremely rewarding experience. Every visit the students are bursting with enthusiasm for the program experiences! They are always inquisitive and ready to learn during our lessons. I enjoy the thoughtful questions they bring to the classroom, and the connections they make between our programs and their real world experiences. I am always impressed by how much they remember from previous trips and discussions about what they have learned from their visits with the UEC. Not only are students learning about the natural world and their place in our community, they are also learning about care for nature, etiquette in natural spaces, teamwork, dressing for various weather conditions, and gross motor skills. Students are also learning executive skills, such as memory, risk assessment, self-control, focusing attention and adaptability through a variety of sensory engagement and physical activities. No matter the program, from orienteering or fishing to soil science or forces of sledding, I can count on MMSA students and teachers arriving with open minds and eagerness to learn!

From my first experience with MMSA, I have admired the work and efforts of the teachers and staff to support the enrichment of their students' lives. Prior to field trip experiences, the teachers engage by sharing goals, intended themes and needs of their students through collaborative planning with our educator team. Teachers prepare their students and are prepared when we arrive for field trip activities. During the field trips teachers are engaging and encouraging their students, which supports the willingness of students to participate in the activities. Students and teachers demonstrate mutual

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respect and uphold the dignity of each individual. I have noticed that this assists with student willingness and interest to participate in the programming. Even during the outdoor portions of our trips and when weather is unideal, I have witnessed teachers participating and enjoying the visit themselves – everything from flipping logs and observing decomposers to racing down the hills with the class! It is clear they enjoy their work and deeply care for their students.

MMSA is an important partner in our community and programming and for our students' futures. Renewal of their charter would allow us to continue this impactful work and engage our future leaders to connect with and care for our Earth and each other. The partnership and relationship we have created with MMSA has been a rewarding experience for both parties and I look forward to continuing and growing the connections we have made!

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nico Loeffler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nico" being more prominent than the last name "Loeffler".

Nico Loeffler

Environmental Educator