April 4, 2012

Dear Caitlin,

I am continually amazed and impressed by the excellent, innovative work you do with your students. The philosophy and lessons you have included in your portfolio only serve to reinforce my high opinion of your teaching. I also think using wikispaces to organize and present your portfolio demonstrates your commitment to taking advantage of available technology for your students and yourself.

What a wonderful idea to empower the students in designing the curriculum! You have done a great job of adapting the students’ needs and interests to the requirements of the PEI and Common Core. It is clear that by giving students ownership of their learning you have increased their engagement and responsibility. Although I can see from the your rubrics and planning sheets that the students are well supported and directed by their teachers, their work demonstrates that you encourage them to work independently and cooperatively to the degree they are able. I like that they are given an opportunities to share their learning with peers, the public, or family in ways that are meaningful in terms of the project’s purpose.

As we speak about introducing Expeditionary Learning to Warsaw it is clear to me that you have already taken the first steps on this road. The projects you have included in your portfolio all involve active learning with a purpose, include communication with experts outside the classroom, are easily differentiated, have articulated standards and expectations, are interdisciplinary, utilize technology and multimedia, result in a genuine product and provide a showcase for that product.

Your students’ work demonstrates that they acquire a wide range of skills beyond just the academic content of their work. As you mentioned in your letter, learning to budget time and work with others will serve students well not only in school, but in life. I also like that the student reflection you included features a genuine middle school voice showing that it is clear to your students that this writing was very different from the formal writing that was expected when presenting a health related bill or an interview. (It was nice that your portfolio had examples of writing at a variety of levels – not just the best ones.) The consistency of the rubric format and guiding documents within each project must be reassuring for students. Your student work also showed that you address a variety of learning styles by providing multiple ways of interacting with information, expressing ideas and communicating.

Finally I should comment on how much I admire the way you and Lindsay have cooperated and worked together to provide a meaningful educational experience for your students. I am sure this requires give and take, flexibility, time and mutual respect. You should both be proud of the work you have done.

Sincerely,