

Hamilton School District

217 Daly Avenue
Hamilton, MT 59840

voice: 406-363-2280 x513

fax: 406-363-1843



Marie Antonioli
antoniolim@hsd3.org

October 10, 2025

It is my pleasure to endorse the Biomedical Science lessons and field trips led by health educator **Brittany Leatham** at Bitterroot Health. This program is an invaluable asset to our community, providing local students with unparalleled insight and hands-on experience in the world of healthcare.

Last year, students in my Human Body Systems class, travelled several times to the Bitterroot Health Hospital where they joined students from other schools in our valley to engage in activities highlighting the anatomy and/or physiology of various body systems. Even though my students were not directly enrolled in Ms. Leatham's online courses, my students were so appreciative for the opportunity to expand their knowledge of medicine while interacting with like-minded students from other schools. For many of my students, this was their first opportunity to see the inner workings of a hospital, interact with professionals, and envision a future for themselves in this vital field. Brittany's program does more than just teach science; it sparks curiosity and passion.

The need for programs like this has never been more urgent. Across the country, the healthcare sector is facing a critical shortage of workers. Since 2020, hundreds of thousands of healthcare professionals have left the field, leaving a massive gap in patient care. In rural areas like ours, the impact of these shortages is felt even more acutely.

Brittany Leatham's work is a direct and effective response to this crisis. By investing in our students, we are cultivating a homegrown workforce of skilled, passionate, and dedicated healthcare professionals who are more likely to live and work right here in the Bitterroot Valley. This initiative is essential for ensuring the long-term health and well-being of our community.

If you have any questions regarding the experience my students had with Brittany, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Marie Antonioli

Science & Health Enhancement Teacher
Hamilton High School
327 Fairgrounds Rd
Hamilton, MT. 59840
406-375-6060 ext. 5101

October 9, 2025

Dear Brittany Leatham-Olney,

I am pleased to offer my enthusiastic support for the creation of the Stevensville Health Sciences Academy. As Director of the Nursing Programs at Missoula College – UM, I've had the privilege of working with many high school graduates from the Bitterroot Valley. A significant number of these students apply to and are accepted into our nursing programs, reflecting the region's strong interest in healthcare education. We remain deeply committed to expanding educational opportunities for individuals throughout our community.

The launch of a dedicated Health Sciences Academy will provide high school students with early exposure to essential skills and knowledge that form the foundation of successful careers in healthcare. Your commitment to advancing health-related education in the region is both commendable and increasingly recognized. By expanding access to healthcare-focused programs, you will not only enhance the local workforce but also contribute meaningfully to the strength of Montana's—and the nation's—healthcare system.

Feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance in advancing this initiative. The Missoula College Nursing Program values the collaboration we've shared and looks forward to continuing our partnership in the future.

Sincerely,



Linda Barnes MSN, RN, CNE
Nursing Program Director

I wanted to share how much the healthcare program has positively impacted my daughter, Sophia Barreto. She has really enjoyed the program and speaks very highly of **Brittany**, her enthusiasm and support have made a lasting impression on Sophia.

Through this experience, Sophia has developed a strong interest in pursuing a career in medicine. Her goal is to become a surgeon specializing in reconstructive and plastic surgery, with a particular passion for staying in a rural community and one day working for Bitterroot Health. This program has given her both the confidence and the direction to pursue that path, helping her understand how rewarding a career in healthcare can be.

I truly believe programs like this are essential for the Bitterroot Valley, as they inspire and prepare the next generation of healthcare professionals who want to give back to their own community. It's an incredible opportunity for students to explore healthcare careers early and see firsthand the difference they can make.

As an employee of Bitterroot Health myself, I'm grateful for the opportunities this program provides and would be more than happy to assist or support the program in any way Brittany might find helpful in the future.

Thank you for investing in our students and helping shape their futures.

Warm regards,
Stephanie Barreto



October 29, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of Bitterroot Health, I am pleased to express our strong support for the Stevensville Health Sciences Academy, an innovative program dedicated to preparing students from the Bitterroot Valley for meaningful and rewarding careers in healthcare.

This academy represents a forward-thinking approach to education—one that bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world experience. By combining college-aligned coursework, industry-recognized certifications, and hands-on training, students will develop the essential knowledge and skills needed to thrive in today's healthcare environment.

Bitterroot Health is proud to partner with the Stevensville Health Sciences Academy in multiple ways, including providing CTE-certified instructors to teach healthcare courses, offering experiential learning opportunities such as job shadowing and mentorship, and giving students exposure to a wide range of medical careers. These experiences not only strengthen students' technical competencies but also cultivate a sense of purpose and connection to their community.

As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, so too does the need for a skilled, compassionate, and locally rooted workforce. The Stevensville Health Sciences Academy addresses this need directly by creating personalized academic pathways that align with both student interests and the workforce demands of the Bitterroot Valley.

We believe this program will have a lasting impact—empowering students, supporting local families, and ensuring the long-term vitality of our regional healthcare system. Bitterroot Health is committed to being an active partner in its success.

Sincerely,

Becci Conroy Bargfrede
Chief Transformational Officer
Operational Excellence

1201 Westwood Dr., Suite A
Hamilton, MT 59840

Tyler Joyner and Bradford Fruechte

Science Teachers

Stevensville High School

10/30/2025

To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing to express our support for the integration of the **Bitterroot Health Charter School** into our district. This new partnership would offer new opportunities for our students interested in medical professions and strengthen the Stevensville High School science department.

We believe that the Bitterroot Health Charter's focus on a medical and health science pathway will provide students with a unique jumpstart into the healthcare field. This program will create immediate opportunities for students through access to specialized science courses, such as *Anatomy and Physiology*, which in turn will help address the long-term need for healthcare providers in our community. Additionally, it will strengthen our science department by providing additional personnel, equipment, and financial resources. We also appreciate that a new teacher will be occupying a currently unused laboratory space.

Overall, we think that integrating the Bitterroot Health Charter School into our system is a positive step that will improve the quality of education in the science department.

Sincerely,

Tyler Joyner and Bradford Fruechte

Stevensville High School science department

Christine Lewanski
Attorney at Law
194 Chaffin Creek Rd., Darby, MT 59829
calewanski@hotmail.com

October 9, 2025

Via Email
BrittanyLeatham@BitterrootHealth.org

Re: Endorsement for the Continuation and Expansion of Healthcare Education Opportunities in the Bitterroot Valley

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strongest possible support for the continuation and expansion of comprehensive healthcare education opportunities available to students in the Bitterroot Valley community. These programs serve as a vital gateway, helping students discover their passion for healthcare, preparing them directly for professional certification programs, and critically supporting their transition into college and/or the workforce.

The value of career and technical education has been evident in my own family. My daughter benefited immensely from the experience she received through the Certified Nursing Assistant program at Bitterroot Health. This program provided a professional, immersive environment through which my daughter learned not only the clinical skills required by the CNA pathway, but also gained a crucial understanding of how CNAs fit within the larger healthcare landscape—an invaluable perspective.

CTE programs, particularly those offered in the healthcare field, are vital to the long-term economic health of the Bitterroot Valley. Collectively, healthcare organizations represent the largest employer in our region. Unfortunately, recruiting qualified candidates for these essential positions from outside the Valley is increasingly challenging due to disparately high housing costs. By nurturing a skilled local talent pipeline through early education programs, we proactively address a critical workforce need and invest directly in the stability of our community's largest employment sector.

The practical impact of this foundational experience is already being seen in my family. My daughter is now applying the skills she learned during her CNA certification class to her biochemistry-premed studies in college. The certification she obtained through Bitterroot Health also offers her immediate employment opportunities, both during the school year and over summer breaks. When the time comes to apply for medical school, she will also be able to offer her CNA certification as compelling evidence of her qualifications and commitment to patient care.

Early career and technical education in the field of healthcare provides an essential launchpad for future leaders and critical frontline workers. I urge you to support and expand these indispensable healthcare education programs.

Sincerely,



Christine Lewanski

Endorsement – Support for CTE Healthcare Pathways
By Cheyenne Scott

I am writing to express my strong support for the CTE Healthcare Pathways programs in the Bitterroot Valley. As someone who has personally participated in the Bitterroot Health CNA program, alongside my friends Vanessa McKay and Madisyn Netwig, I have seen firsthand how impactful these healthcare classes are not only for individual students like myself but also for the strength and future of our community.

Going through the CNA program was a life-changing experience. It taught me real-world skills, boosted my confidence, and gave me a clear direction for my career in healthcare. Being able to work and learn in a hands-on environment helped me understand what it truly means to care for others. It also made the classroom content more meaningful, knowing that what we were learning could and would be used to help people in need.

For students like me, these programs offer an opportunity to explore a meaningful and high-demand career path without having to leave the valley or wait until after high school. They open doors early, allowing us to graduate not only with a diploma but with skills, certifications, and experience that put us a step ahead.

The Bitterroot Valley, like many rural areas, is in need of skilled healthcare professionals. Supporting CTE healthcare pathways means investing in our local workforce and ensuring that people in our community can receive quality care from people who truly care—people who have grown up here and want to stay here.

This program didn't just give me technical knowledge it helped shape my future. I now have a clearer vision of my career goals in the healthcare field, and I feel prepared to take the next steps thanks to the foundation this program gave me. In fact, Vanessa and I are planning to continue from our CNA certification to the CMA (Certified Medical Assistant) program, and during our contract with Bitterroot Health, we plan to work toward earning our LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) licenses. The opportunity to grow in the healthcare field while staying local is something I never imagined would be possible before this program.

I fully endorse continued support and expansion of CTE healthcare pathways. These programs don't just educate students they empower us, and they strengthen our entire community.

Sincerely,
Cheyenne Scott



October 31, 2025

Brittany Leatham-Olney, MSN-Ed, RN CMSRN, CTE
Employee Health Nurse & Educator
Bitterroot Health
BrittanyLeatham@bitterroothealth.org

Main Campus

Anna Pearl Sherrick Hall
P.O. Box 173560
Bozeman, MT 59717-3560

Tel 406-994-3783
Fax 406-994-6020

Billings Campus

1500 University Drive
MSU-Billings, Campus Box 574
Billings, MT 59101

Tel 406-657-2912
Fax 406-657-1715

Great Falls Campus

1704 29th Street South
Great Falls, MT 59405

Tel 406-994-4450
Fax 406-994-1697

Kalispell Campus

210 Sunny View Lane, Suite 5
Kalispell, MT 59901

Tel 406-751-6967
Fax 406-994-1919

Missoula Campus

32 Campus Drive #7416
Missoula, MT 59812-7416

Tel 406-994-2123
Fax 406-994-6159

Re: *Letter of Support for Stevensville Health Sciences Academy*

Dear Ms. Letham-Olney,

Please accept this letter of support for the application to create a public charter school, the *Stevensville Health Sciences Academy* (SHSA), in partnership with Bitterroot Health. The Mark & Robyn Jones College of Nursing recognizes the value of high-quality K-12 educational preparation as foundational to Montana's healthcare workforce initiatives. The use of dual enrollment, early hands-on clinical experience, and basic healthcare skills and certifications provide students with an efficient running start to their post-secondary education and career goals.

We look forward to collaborating in support of your effort to create this unique educational pathway for Montana high school students.

Sincerely,

Sarah Shannon, PhD, RN, FAAN
Dean and Professor
Mark & Robyn Jones College of Nursing
Montana State University
sarah.shannon1@montana.edu

SS/sjr

To Whom It May Concern;
October 29, 2025

Imagine having a child that physically can't attend traditional schooling. Nothing appears visually different about your child, but you know that traditional schooling is slowly killing your child. The battles are becoming worse, and the answers seem unachievable. Imagine knowing that homeschooling isn't an option because of the financial need for you to work full-time. Now, imagine that there's no hope. Imagine knowing that it's only a matter of time until your child either drops out, becomes irate at the school system, or starts thinking of ending it all, permanently.

It's a scary situation to picture. Bleak. Hopeless. A parent's worst nightmare.

Now, realize. Realize that there's a solution to helping your child graduate. Realize that there is a possibility that your child won't have to fight their way to graduation. That schooling can come to your child in a way that she/he can learn, be successful and graduate feeling accomplished instead of ran over by traditional constraints.

My daughter faced the daunting situation I described above. As a student with high functioning autism, anxiety, and a high I.Q., traditional schooling was slowly killing her. It had killed her hope, her confidence, her self-esteem, her will to graduate, and was working on killing her will to live. Reaching out to the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) was the most remarkable thing I've been able to do for her as her mother. It not only gave her an environment she could survive in, could thrive in, it gave us back the hope that she would graduate, that she would feel successful, and that she could learn with her head held high instead of bowing to the pressures of traditional schooling.

I'm so very proud and extremely grateful to be able to say my daughter graduated from ALC last year, with fantastic grades. She graduated a year and a half ahead of her original classmates. She graduated with feeling confident in finding a job, with knowing that she accomplished 12 years of work, and she now believes that she can finish what she starts.

While this may seem like a short cut to some, believe me, while It's the path less taken, it's just as vital as the path most taken.

Please grant Stevensville the funds to grow their ALC program! It is incredibly important to the health and stability of our marginalized youth. Please see it as an opportunity to save, not only our students' education, but more importantly, their lives. I beg this of you, from one parent to another, please find it In your heart to save our children.

Sincerely,
Katherine Braun

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of the Alternate Learning Center (ALC), at Stevensville High School. I have both professional and personal experience with the ALC. I provided mental health support for students at Stevensville High School for 2 ½ years and worked with several students who transitioned from traditional high school to the ALC. I witnessed several students who were at risk of not graduating high school catch up on credits and earn the privilege of walking across the stage to receive their high school diploma. I worked with several students who were at risk of suspension from behavioral issues, but once the student was in a smaller and quieter setting, they were successful.

My daughter also attends the ALC, which has provided a less stressful and chaotic atmosphere where she can complete her school work with much less distraction.

I want to show my support for a charter school so the Stevensville School District can continue to offer alternative education options for the students. It is so important to provide alternative educational settings because not everyone can thrive in a traditional environment. A high school diploma is an important building block to success for all students and having access to an alternate educational setting is incredibly beneficial to our area.

Thank you,
Laura Burrows

Cottonmontana <cottonmontana@aol.com>
To: "Haxton, Ayse" <haxtona@stevensville.k12.mt.us>

Sat, Oct 11, 2025 at 10:12 AM

Jennifer and Brent Cotton

[433 Sharrott Hill Loop](#)

[Stevensville, Mt. 59870](#)

cottonmontana@aol.com

10/09/2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the Alternative Learning Center (ALC) in Stevensville and to strongly advocate for its transition into a charter school. Our community deeply needs this option for students who thrive outside the traditional classroom model. The ALC has proven to be an invaluable resource not only for our family but also for countless others whose children might otherwise have fallen through the cracks of the conventional education system.

Our daughter's experience is a powerful example of the life-changing impact the ALC has had. During a very serious illness, she was forced to leave her regular school for an extended period to focus on recovery. By the time she was able to return, she had fallen significantly behind her classmates and felt hopeless about catching up. The ALC gave her a second chance. The staff met her where she was, supported her emotionally and academically, and helped her rebuild her confidence and motivation. Without the ALC, she likely would have given up on school entirely. Thanks to the compassionate teacher and flexible structure, she not only graduated but is now pursuing an associate's degree in college. We are certain this would not have been possible without the ALC's individualized approach and unwavering support. We cannot imagine where she would be today if the ALC would not have been an option for her.

Our son has also flourished at the ALC. He is a bright, creative, and hands-on learner who struggled in the traditional public school setting—not because he lacked ability or drive, but because he learns differently. Despite the fact that he understands aviation to the point where he could land several different aircrafts in a pinch at 14 yrs old, or that he understand and has memorized the algorithms he needs to solve several different rubic cubes in under 30 seconds, he felt like a complete failure in the traditional classroom. He became depressed and lost all confidence in his ability to do well in classes. The ALC recognized and

celebrated his strengths rather than forcing him into a rigid mold. The program has helped him understand that intelligence takes many forms and that success is not defined solely by test scores. In the calm, quiet and supportive environment of the ALC, he has regained confidence, rediscovered his love of learning, and developed a clearer sense of purpose for his future.

The ALC's unique approach serves students who think "outside the box" — young people who need flexibility, encouragement, and a learning environment that honors their individuality. Without this program, many of these students, including our own children, would have been at risk of dropping out or disengaging from their education altogether. The ALC has given them and many others a path forward.

We are deeply grateful to Ayse and the entire ALC team for their vision, compassion, and dedication to helping every student succeed in their confidence in education. Establishing the ALC as a charter school would ensure that this vital resource remains available for generations to come. Our community needs this — for the students who don't fit neatly into the public school system, for those facing life's unexpected challenges, and for every child who deserves the chance to discover their own potential.

Please, and thank you for your consideration and for recognizing the tremendous value the Alternative Learning Center brings to our community and how important it is to obtain a charter school status.

Sincerely,

Jennifer and Brent Cotton

[Sent from the all new AOL app for iOS](#)

On Thursday, October 9, 2025, 12:09 PM, Haxton, Ayse
<haxtona@stevensville.k12.mt.us> wrote:

To Whom It May Concern,

As a parent in the Stevensville School District, I want to express my strong support for the proposed Stevensville Alternative STEPS Charter School. Our community is filled with bright, capable students whose learning styles, personal circumstances, and goals don't always fit within a traditional classroom structure. STEPS appears to offer a much-needed opportunity for those students to succeed in ways that honor their individuality.

The vision behind STEPS — a Student-focused, Teacher-guided Educational Pathway for Success — reflects what I believe education should be: flexible, innovative, and deeply connected to the people and programs in our own valley. The idea of combining in-person, online, and remote options, while maintaining collaboration with trusted teachers, local colleges, and career programs, will open doors for students who might otherwise struggle to find their place.

I fully support the creation of the Stevensville Alternative STEPS Charter School and believe it will be a valuable addition to our district and community. Thank you for considering this important opportunity for our students and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Miller". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Stephanie Miller
Stevensville Parent

10/20/25

To Whom it Concerns,

My name is Bridget Sampson and I am writing this letter, with assistance, on behalf of Mrs. Haxton and the ALC program at Stevensville High School. I wanted to share my support for this program and the amazing job that Mrs. Haxton is doing by sharing how our family has been personally impacted.

I have seen three children through the ALC program, all of which I was told would be a "lost cause" and would never graduate. The first is my younger sister who I have raised from a very young age. She experienced significant childhood trauma and school was very challenging for her. The administration at Stevensville High School did not give me much hope and so I took her out of school completely for a while. Mrs. Haxton reached out to my sister, Hannah, personally to let her know about the new ALC program and how she felt it could help her finish school. Hannah agreed to try it and graduated successfully from the program in 2024. Hannah credits Mrs. Haxton and this program for giving her the support, skills and confidence she needed to finish school and navigate the rest of her life.

The second of the three is my daughter, Aydin. Aydin struggles with a learning disability and school was very challenging for her as well. She became very frustrated and wanted to drop out, but Hannah and Mrs. Haxton convinced her to try the ALC program. Mrs. Haxton met Aydin where she was at academically and created assignments that fit both the requirements and Aydin's ability, allowing her to regain her confidence and be successful. Aydin also graduated in 2024, a year before the rest of her class.

The third of the children in my experience was Aliviana, a close friend of Hannah and Aydin, who I had temporary guardianship over. Aliviana also struggled with significant childhood trauma that eventually led to neglect. She lived with our family for a while and during that time, after having fallen behind in school from missing so many days, she was also given the option to join the ALC. It would have been extremely difficult for her to catch up and graduate on time given all that she had been through, but she worked hard with Mrs. Haxton and graduated 2 years early, in 2024.

Mrs. Haxton worked diligently with each of our girls, helping them gain the

confidence and skills they needed to succeed. She worked from each of their strengths and was mindful of their mental health needs. She was kind and caring, but also pushed them and held them accountable. The difference that this program has made will be felt throughout the lives of these three girls, but also the many others that have been served and succeeded because of Mrs. Haxton's dedication to this program.

The thought of a charter school in the valley is exciting to me because it can benefit even more students who need this individualized educational approach. Thank you for making this option available to those who would fall through the cracks otherwise.

Sincerely,

Bridget Sampson



Stevensville High School District
300 Park St
Stevensville, MT 59870

October 13, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

We, at Summit Career Center, are thrilled to learn Stevensville High School is creating and applying for the Stevensville Alternative Steps Charter School (STEPS). There is a great need for alternative learning options in the Bitterroot Valley and this would be a big step forward in filling that need.

Summit Career Center is very willing to partner with STEPS to provide educational and experiential career opportunities for students in high school and beyond. We are currently working in two locations providing career training for adults ages 18-55 and have expanded into high school programs as well. We are truly excited to be working in the high school setting as it is our desire to help as many students prior to graduation as possible. This is a very important focus for us going forward!

Please do not hesitate to contact me, for further information. I will do anything I can to help expedite this program.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Stevens
Executive Director
Summit Career Center
www.summitcareercenter.org
Office: 406.777.7232