1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

"Leaving a Legacy" began eight years ago. The PTA and the school's art teacher worked after school with roughly twelve eighth graders to create a mural, which served as both a remembrance and an inspirational message from that year's eighth grade class. These murals earned a prominent place in the school building and are an integral part of the graduation festivities each year. Through the years, this interdisciplinary activity has grown and evolved into an annual tradition.

The objectives of the **"Leaving a Legacy"** mural project include:

1. To offer real-life application of content areas including writing and art.
2. To offer understanding of mural design as a historical tool.
3. To create a lasting legacy for upcoming classes.
4. To develop and enhance interpersonal skills such as effective communication.
5. To develop decision making skills through practice in the use of compromise and consensus.
6. To create an opportunity for 100% of grade eight students to work as one cohesive group to create a historical statement encompassing the elementary school experience.

After an overview of the activity and an explanation of the process, students are asked to develop a theme describing their elementary school experience, or their hopes and dreams for the future. The Language Arts teachers then ask each student to write a brief essay explaining this theme. The essay is used as a learning experience in writing. The students are required to create a theme or develop a main idea; defend and explain their choice by using supporting reasons and data; and create a summative statement to conclude their thoughts.

The themes are then grouped and examined for commonalities and essential thoughts. A process of class discussion then attempts to "find the essence" from each group of themes. The art teacher aptly describes the process, "We are making gumbo. I don't want to lose the flavor of any of our ingredients – our suggested themes." This process of distillation requires cooperation and consensus from the students. The discussions with the students make use of comparison and contrast. These activities reinforce the understanding of these terms from Language Arts. Finally, a single theme emerges as a distillation of all the ideas presented. The theme for the class of 2001 was, "Hold on to today, but reach for tomorrow."

This process is then repeated for the visual component of the planning phase. Once a common theme and a common visual image are developed, a group of roughly twelve volunteers work after school to create a scale drawing based of this common image. This group is often comprised of, but not limited to, the students of the gifted arts class. This drawing is then brought to the entire eighth grade for critique, additions and approval. Using a grid, the design is then transferred to the wall itself. Each mural takes up a space approximately nine feet by twelve feet. Students come after school, in groups of five, to

do the actual painting of the mural. An evening dedication is held in June, at which time each eighth grader is given the opportunity to sign the finished mural.

2. List the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standards(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

The **Language Arts Literacy Standard 3.3** states, "writing activities should include opportunities for students to think about their ideas and feelings and the events and people in their lives." The grade eight students each create a theme for the mural and then write an expository paragraph with the theme as the main idea, facts and information to back up their choice and a conclusion statement. Standard **3.3.11** requires students to learn about syntax, grammar and punctuation. As the students work to synthesize the theme for all their ideas, these technical skills are employed. The assessment of the language arts component uses these criteria. Standard **3.3.6** asks teachers to be sure children write collaboratively and independently. **"Leaving a Legacy"** has the students do both. After completion of the individual writing assignments, the students collaborate to create a list of the themes. This list is then distilled into one theme.

Our practice addresses the Core Curriculum Content Standards for **Visual and Performing Arts** as follows. After a theme is chosen, students examine murals from different cultures including our own. Emphasis is placed on how murals reflect political, social, cultural, and historical influences. **(1.5)** Each student is asked to create a visual interpretation of the theme. **(1.2 & 1.3)** A smaller group of select students searches through all these designs looking for commonalities, and combines dissimilar visual images to come up with a design. The resulting design is a synthesis of all the individual ideas from the students. This process is similar to the collaboration that developed the theme for the drawing process. The ensuing design is subject to the critique, adjustment and approval of the entire class. This design is done in a way that allows all students to paint on the mural itself without the evidence of forty-eight individual hands at work. After the design is transferred to the wall each student is then given the opportunity before or after school to paint on the mural. **(1.2 & 1.3)**

Workplace Readiness Standards 1 and 4 require all students to develop "Workplace Readiness Skills." Employers today say the major reason for termination of workers is not lack of skills but an inability of employees to work in collaborative settings. In today's technology-based workplace, no individual can be the single, sole source of knowledge and information in his/her field. Our project focuses on the skills needed to work in collaboration toward a common purpose. These skills are emphasized while determining the theme and in designing the mural itself. Critical thinking, decision-making and problem solving skills are integral to the effort. **(Standard 1)**.

3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.

The Language Arts teachers evaluate each student's theme and supporting essay. Using a traditional writing rubric following the skills needed on the GEPA, the essay is evaluated for main idea, and defense of position using data and concluding statements. The essay is also evaluated for grammatical correctness. This component of the project has been added to ensure each student clearly thinks through his or her position. The essays are assessed and the grade included in that marking period's language arts grade. The students' individual designs for the mural are assessed as part of their art grade as well.

However, the true measure of the success of this project is the degree of participation and enthusiasm of all involved. What began as an after school activity involving only a fraction of the eighth grade now has 100% participation. The enthusiasm is most evident during the mural's dedication on the evening of our eighth grade awards assembly. On this evening, students bring their parents to the unveiling of the mural. The parents proudly photograph their children in front of the finished mural, with the same degree of solemnity and satisfaction as a graduation photo. Every student in the class signs the mural. This 100% participation creates a feeling of ownership in each student.

160,000 children miss school each day because of bullying. 1 in 5 families moves each year. Adolescent depression has increased 1000% over the past 40 years and adolescent suicide has increased 400% over the past 30 years. These national statistics are applicable to our district. This project fosters a feeling of unity and attachment, to combat the deterioration of institutions of our society.

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

Minimal funding to purchase material such as paint, brushes and rollers is necessary. A large wall space is essential. Our funding for paint, brushes, and other supplies is still provided by the PTA, and our School Nurse. The help of the custodial staff is often needed to clean and prepare the area for the application of the mural.

A willingness on the part of teachers, parents and students to share their time and talents is indispensable. This activity stretches from September through June, both before and after school. A major commitment regarding time is required from the students and the staff. However, as the saying goes, "Many hands make light work." The Art teacher, who has a unique aesthetic talent and long-term involvement with this project, maintains the leadership role and gives the project the stability needed to complete the design in a timely fashion. However, the participation of an art teacher is not required. A gifted parent or even a student willing to act in this role would suffice.

An individual with the ability to steer the students toward selection of the theme and design through consensus is needed. Searching for commonalities and essential ideas and distilling these into one theme and design, without losing the identity of any element, is an art requiring significant leadership and interpersonal skills.

Professional development training of staff in cooperative learning techniques, learning styles of students, and learner active techniques would benefit this project. Many of our teachers have been trained in the Nancy Sulla Learner Active Technology Infused Classroom methods, enabling them to lead the students through the difficult process of developing consensus.