



**Rebecca Elpus  
2023 Outstanding Arts  
Educator Howie Honoree  
Example Application**

## **Nomination Narrative**

*Please include a brief, but informative, narrative of no more than 1000 words describing the nominee and their impact on the arts in Howard County. It is important to include detailed facts, any distinguishing awards or achievements, and ongoing specific contributions to their field or community.*

Rebecca Elpus has taught choral music in Howard County since 2011. In her time teaching in Howard County, Mrs. Elpus has proven to be a teacher dedicated to helping her students find their voice, build confidence, character, and accountability, and grow community both in and out of her classroom through the art of choral music.

Mrs. Elpus has brought a very high level of performance to choral music in Howard County. Her students have consistently earned the highest praise at annual assessments, concerts, and music festivals. She has inspired her students to push themselves while also encouraging them to lean on each other. She has motivated students of all ages to allow themselves to be vulnerable and take risks through the art of ensemble singing. Her work to create a safe space in both her classroom and her choir program has allowed students to truly flourish. Notably, Mrs. Elpus truly works to know her students. She values and loves them as individuals and ensures that they know they are loved and appreciated by her every day.

Mrs. Elpus has been recognized in Howard County as a Teacher of the Year three times in eleven years. She was first recognized in 2012. Her contributions to the Oakland Mills Music Program and to the broader Oakland Mills community were so significant that the OMHS Parent Teacher Association awarded her the Teacher of the Year award after just one year of teaching at Oakland Mills High School. In 2015, the senior class of OMHS voted for her to be the Senior Class Teacher of the Year. During her time at OMHS, Mrs. Elpus worked to raise the profile of the choral music program. She was consistently asked to bring her students to perform in the University of Maryland High School Choral Invitational. In the spirit of community and unity, she founded the OM Choral Festival for the Oakland Mills community. This festival included choirs from OMHS and the four elementary schools and two middle schools in the Oakland Mills cluster. This annual festival included over 400 voices in grades 5-12 and ended in a combined finale in which all of the students sang together. She loved giving her high school students the opportunity to be role models for the younger children in the Oakland Mills community.

Mrs. Elpus was very committed to bringing her OMHS students to college campuses so they could experience a college atmosphere and work with college music professors. Mrs. Elpus organized a performance tour for the choir program to Chicago, IL where the choirs sang both in the city of Chicago and on the Northwestern University campus. She organized a performance tour to Nashville, TN where her students sang at both Baylor University and at Vanderbilt University. The OMHS choirs also sang at Messiah College.

Mrs. Elpus believes strongly in teaching her students to use their gift of music making to do good in the greater community. Mrs. Elpus co-produced an annual benefit concert that, over her time at OMHS, raised \$60,887.54 for families in need in the greater Baltimore area. This concert was not about superior ratings or travel, but it became the favorite concert of the OMHS choir students because, thanks to Mrs. Elpus, it taught them about service.

In 2017, Mrs. Elpus transferred to Burleigh Manor Middle School. She continues to inspire her students at Burleigh Manor in the same way that she did at OMHS. In 2020, Mrs. Elpus was awarded the Burleigh Manor Teacher of the Year award. Her work to continuously inspire her students and to bring her colleagues together, especially during such an incredibly difficult time in the world of education was remarkable and recognized. Mrs. Elpus not only poured hours of emotional energy and time into creating incredible virtual performances of her choirs during Virtual/Hybrid Learning, she also created two staff virtual videos. One of the videos she created is a faculty performance of a song to recognize and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community at Burleigh Manor. The video includes nearly all of the BMMS staff and is a testament to how strongly Mrs. Elpus feels about being inclusive and truly making the effort to see her students, parents, and colleagues.

Mrs. Elpus has served in many leadership positions during her time in Howard County. She has served as the high school choral representative on the HCPSS Music Leadership Team, the coordinator/rehearsal conductor of the HCPSS High School GT Choir, the coordinator/rehearsal conductor of the HCPSS Middle School GT Choir. She has served on the BMMS Leadership Team and is frequently asked to present workshops to her choral music colleagues on professional development days. She has presented workshops at the Maryland Music Educators Association Conference and has also served as a mentor teacher for the UMD Junior Practicum students for five years, guiding future music educators in the classroom. Finally, Mrs. Elpus is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher.

Mrs. Elpus is a teacher who loves her students, loves her community, and loves her field. She truly deserves this award!

## **Rebecca Elpus**

### **Career Summary**

#### Work History

2017 – present	Teacher of Choral Music <i>Burleigh Manor Middle School, Ellicott City, MD</i> Howard County Public School System
2011 – 2017	Teacher of Choral Music <i>Oakland Mills High School, Columbia, MD</i> Howard County Public School System
2008 – 2011	Teacher of Choral Music <i>Lyons Township High School, LaGrange, IL</i> Lyons Township High School District 204
2004 – 2008	Associate Artistic Director & Conductor of the Semi-Tones <i>Princeton Girlchoir, Princeton, NJ</i> Westrick Music Academy
2003 – 2008	Teacher of Choral Music <i>Timberlane Middle School, Pennington, NJ</i> Hopewell Valley Regional School District
2002 – 2003	Teacher of Choral Music <i>South Plainfield Middle School, South Plainfield, NJ</i> South Plainfield School District

#### Educational Background

2006	Master of Music in Music Education <i>Northwestern University, Evanston, IL</i> Choral music education emphasis
2002	Bachelor of Music in Music Education, <i>magna cum laude</i> <i>The College of New Jersey, Ewing, NJ</i> Choral music education emphasis

#### Honors Received

2020	Teacher of the Year <i>Burleigh Manor Middle School</i>
2015	Senior Class Teacher of the Year <i>Oakland Mills High School</i>

2012	PTA Teacher of the Year <i>Oakland Mills High School</i>
2008	Conducted PGC Semi-Tones at ACDA East Conference <i>American Choral Directors Association</i> Chosen by competitive audition to perform at the biennial ACDA Eastern Region professional development conference (one of only 13 choirs and the youngest singers on the conference)
Other Significant Achievements	
2019	Presentation to University of Maryland Music Education Students <i>Patterns with Purpose: Melodic Sight Reading in Choir</i>
2018	Presentation to University of Maryland Music Education Students <i>Middle School Choral Repertoire</i>
2018-2021	Burleigh Manor Leadership Team Music Department Representative
2018	Presentation to HCPSS Choir Teachers <i>Patterns with Purpose: Melodic Sight Reading in Choir</i>
2017	Achieved <b>National Board Certification</b> Music - Early Adolescence through Young Adulthood <i>National Board for Professional Teaching Standards</i>
2017-present	Mentor Teacher for Junior Pre-Service Choral Music Teacher Field Experience University of Maryland, College Park Students at Burleigh Manor MS
2017-2019	Organize and direct annual collaborative performance including Centennial Lane ES 5th Grade Choir, Burleigh Manor MS Chamber Choir, Centennial High School Chamber Choir to build community
2017-2018	HCPSS Middle School GT Choir Coordinator and Rehearsal Conductor Choir comprised of students from all HCPSS middle schools
2017	HCPSS 6th Grade Honor Chorus Guest Conductor
2017	Presentation to HCPSS Choir Teachers <i>Build a Better World: Choral Music that Represents our Community</i>

2014–2017	HCPSS Music Leadership Team member High School Choral Representative
2016	Presentation to HCPSS Choir Teachers <i>Blended Sound: How Choral Luminaries Achieve Optimal Choral Tone</i>
2013–2016	HCPSS High School GT Choir Coordinator and Rehearsal Conductor Choir comprised of students from all twelve HCPSS high schools
2011–2016	Co-produced with Philip Hale the Oakland Mills High School Concert For Kids Benefit Concert to raise money for the WBAL Kids Campaign <b>Over the course of six years, helped the OMHS community to raise \$60,887.54 for families in need in the greater Baltimore area</b> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHXy5CY21C4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHXy5CY21C4</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrFC1F4l1Dw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrFC1F4l1Dw</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1YeSopwsAg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1YeSopwsAg</a>
2016	Oakland Mills High School Performance at Vanderbilt University <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_PVNrnSq1w">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_PVNrnSq1w</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_CZk_bXCt4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_CZk_bXCt4</a>
2013–2016	Oakland Mills High School Performances at the Annual University of Maryland Choral Invitational <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REHI3VHsm3o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REHI3VHsm3o</a>
2015	Presentation to HCPSS Choir Teachers <i>Foundations: Exciting Repertoire for Your Training Choir</i>
2014	Oakland Mills High School Performance at Northwestern University and Fourth Presbyterian of Chicago <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cP-vMs3kzws">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cP-vMs3kzws</a>
2014	Presentation to HCPSS Choir Teachers <i>Choral Festivals: Building Community through Collaborative Performance</i>
2013–2017	Organized and produced community concerts of over 400 students, grades 5–12 for all of the schools in the Oakland Mills Cluster (Talbott Springs ES, Jeffers Hill ES, Cradlerock ES, Stevens Forest ES, Lake Elkhorn MS, Oakland Mills MS, Oakland Mills HS) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__QNm-zm8saA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__QNm-zm8saA</a>
2013	Presentation at the Maryland Music Educators Association Conference <i>Well Rounded: Repertoire for the Healthy High School Choral Program</i>

April 14, 2022

To Whom it May Concern:

It is my honor and pleasure to write this letter of recommendation in support of Becca Elpus for the 2022 Howie Award. I worked with Ms. Elpus for three years as her supervisor while I was principal of Burleigh Manor Middle School. During that time, I had the absolute privilege of learning from her as she taught students both the craft of choral music and innumerable life skills, seamlessly wove a love of music into the fabric of our school and brought staff together around common goals.

As a teacher of choral music, Ms. Elpus steadily grew the program over the course of her tenure at Burleigh, and now teaches hundreds of students each year. Children sign up for her classes year after year because of the immense amount they know they will learn in her class, and because of the classroom climate she creates. Students have input into the songs they sing, are invited to contribute their own cultural background and understanding to the classroom and are empowered every day to be full members of the choir. Becca's classroom is a truly energetic and intellectually busy place, where students work from bell-to-bell, and they're excited to do so. I was always astounded at the technical knowledge students were able to share during class periods.

Students at Burleigh regularly name choir as their favorite class. They share how included they feel, how much they learn about making music together and about their own voice. It is evident that students in Ms. Elpus's class leave with a lifelong love of the choral arts. Throughout the period of virtual learning, Ms. Elpus would regularly meet with students outside of her normal class hours, individually providing feedback, hearing their work and building their confidence. The choir, under her direction and through hundreds of hours of work on her part, put out multiple virtual concerts. Students would wait for their concert to "drop" to see the final result of their hard work. In addition to learning the craft and love of choral music, students in Ms. Elpus's class learn to be good human beings. More than any other class, or club, or group of students, I've ever worked with, Becca's choir students cheered each other's successes, comforted each other in hard times, and were inclusive of all.

In addition to her work as a classroom teacher, Ms. Elpus is a powerful force for cultural change. As a leader of the music department, and a leader among the teaching staff, Becca was able to impact the tone of the school building. Her consistent good spirits, willingness to listen to others, and persuasive advocacy for the role ensemble music can play in the life of a child changed a legacy of division among the staff at Burleigh. Prior to her tenure at the school, there were tensions between teachers of music and the rest of the teaching staff. Becca's advocacy for the value of all aspects of a child's education, and her ability to articulate the need to teach the whole child, chipped away at years of resentment felt by other teachers in our building. During the past few years, Becca has led the staff in multiple whole school projects for students and in support of students; even the most non-musically minded of our staff participated in her music projects for our students. Staff no longer work with a music versus the rest of us mentality, and music has become a strength of the school that is universally embraced and interwoven into everything that Burleigh does.

On a personal level, I struggle to fully articulate the impact Ms. Elpus has had on me as a professional. She taught me to embrace challenges of building community with a positive mindset, the value of a

group project to bring people together, and the beauty of a harmony that is hard sought. As an administrator and an educator, I will forever be a fierce advocate for arts, and particularly music, in schools because of what I learned from Becca. Her impact on our profession, and on the role of arts in schools, is exponential; every person she works with, young and old, gets a first-hand, in-person lesson in the power of music to teach, to move, to empower, and ultimately, to bring us together. I can't think of anyone more deserving of the honor of an award for uplifting the arts in our schools.

Sincerely,

Mikaela Lidgard, Principal  
Principal  
River Hill High School





To Whom It May Concern,

Becca Elpus is one of the finest examples of a mentor who compels you and challenges you to not only be a better teacher but a better person. I had the privilege to work with and under her mentorship in the Spring of 2019 but the lessons I learned from her have stayed with me since and many are implemented in who I am as a teacher and person now.

In spring of 2019, my class had the opportunity to observe Becca's class and teach portions of her two ensembles: Chamber Choir and Concert Choir. Although our teaching time was limited to only fifteen minutes each week, her high expectation for us to have thorough preparation, execution, and reflection was consistent. She gave us tools to be successful in her classroom and was always a text or phone call away if we had questions or needed advice on how to best teach for the upcoming week. Becca challenged each of us to first fill the shoes that we then ask our students to fill. She would always tell us that we cannot expect our students to do well the things that we have not yet mastered ourselves. Although we were all still two years away from having our own classrooms, Becca challenged us to be the very best, not merely for ourselves but because the students deserved committed educators.

Becca stressed that in order to give students your best, you must care for your own wellbeing. She encouraged us to take care of ourselves mentally and physically. Becca would always say something along the lines of "these students deserve your 110%, so you need to be prepared to give it to them every day." While we know that going above and beyond constantly is impossible to attain, she gave us an ideal to aspire to.

Becca understands that being a good educator not only means mastery of content and classroom management but also constant work to be a person of upstanding moral and care. She set standards for equity and culturally responsive teaching. In that semester, we assisted her in teaching a Thai folk song, Ngam Sang Duan. She took time to carefully study the Thai text and teach the pronunciation respectfully and well. Because she treated the cultural context of the piece with care and excitement, I felt seen and respected and I am sure many of her students did as well.

Becca understands the context of what is happening in her students' lives outside of her room. She knows what other classes they're in, what their home situations are like, what brings them joy and life. Becca would tell us that "each day is one of your students' worst days," this proves the empathic and nurturing character of Becca. I remember her taking us on a walkaround her school to show us some of the art work her students have been making in their art classes. This showed me how holistically she viewed her students, valuing their growth in all areas of their lives. She not only sets high expectations for her students' musical abilities but also their development as complete human beings.

In conclusion, Becca's mentorship has inspired me to be a teacher who aims for balance in all that I do. I will never fail to be in awe of her groundedness, care, and excellence. She is truly a gift to all who have the privilege of experiencing her guidance.

-Emily Chu

I first worked with Becca as a high school student in Howard County G/T Choir. I was then lucky enough to work with her again during my practicum at Burleigh Manor Middle School. While teaching there, Becca changed the way I analyze and teach a piece of music. She helped me to discover the teachable challenge within each piece, and then figure out what tools I could provide to help students succeed. Rather than just give students the answer, she would give them musical tools to help them succeed, whether this be count singing, solfege, or rote song procedure, to name a few. When I called her with questions about the repertoire, like with her students, she never just gave me the answer. She would ask questions to help me figure out what the most challenging part of the piece is, and how to break it down and give kids the tools to figure it out themselves. Watching how her students interacted with her, with each other showed me the importance of building relationships with each student and how that helped her to hold them to high standards. Becca taught me that

Becca also continued to shape me into the music educator I am today through her workshops. At my request, she came and led two workshops through UMD's chapter of NAFME. She led a workshop on how to teach sight reading. In this session, she outlined the major steps towards teaching sight reading, including developing students' ability to navigate the solfeggio of a major scale, develop an aural vocabulary using patterns, develop audiation skills, develop student leadership, and recognize melodic patterns in repertoire. I use her methodology for teaching sight reading in my own classroom. Becca also led a workshop on choosing repertoire for middle school chorus. In this workshop she outlined her approach to choosing repertoire, including identifying goals of repertoire and pedagogical goals for vocal development. She provided a list of recommended repertoire to meet those goals, which I draw from for my choirs. In her list, she recommended repertoire that met developmental goals but also encouraged student buy-in and interest, as well as repertoire that required more intrinsic motivation.

After my time at University of Maryland, Becca continued to offer me guidance as I chose between jobs, and struggled as a first year teacher. She served as a sounding board and trusted source of advice from classroom management to choosing music that would promote student buy-in for my new program. Becca helped me to think about my own teaching. She has helped me to build relationships with students and to promote effective behavior management through personal relationships. She has also helped me to think about scaffolding instruction through a spiral curriculum to promote student-centered, hands-on learning, giving kids a musical experience that they can feel proud of. Her expertise has also helped me to understand middle school adolescent development and how to navigate having high expectations for students and holding them to those standards through positive relationships. She has taught me that building a program requires student buy-in that comes not only from culturally responsive music but also through showing students you care about them.

Becca is also a masterful vocal pedagogue. My students have good vocal technique through Becca's focus on breath, support, and phonation, which I teach my students through various vocal exercises during our voice build. I use Becca's concept of a Voice Build - rather than a warm up - at the beginning of class. The voice build is the most important part of the rehearsal because it develops their vocal technique. In voice builds, students practice vocal exercises in order to understand how to use their voice, AND how their vocal apparatus and breathing musicals work. This promotes a concrete understanding of breath, support, and phonation. I teach these through modeling these vocal exercises, and then having students sing the exercises themselves, another method that Becca taught me.

In conclusion, Becca had a positive impact on my student's learning through helping to develop how I teach, and how I think about teaching. My students know how to sight read because of her workshops on sight reading. Her sight reading process also promotes student leadership in my classroom. I hold my students to high standards, and they are willing to meet those standards because of the way I connect with them, something I observed from Becca. I have used the repertoire that she programmed and recommended, which has gotten student buy-in and success. The way I look at repertoire allows my students to succeed at learning new music and to retain that information because, through the tools I provide, students are figuring out the teachable part of the repertoire themselves. Becca showed me that it is possible to prioritize the kids AND have high expectations for music making because students understand through my personal relationships with them that I am pushing them to create worthwhile music and sounds because I care about them, and want them to succeed. I believe now that you can have both. It is a hard balance to strike, and it takes a special person to make it work. But Becca can do it, and through her, so too can I.

Maryshea Kustas

To Whom It May Concern,

Today, I write for one of the best teachers I have ever had the honor of learning under. Rebecca Elpus, who teaches choir at Burleigh Manor Middle School, is far beyond what she is given credit for. I am merely another high school student amongst the millions across the world, yet I urge you to listen to my voice and story.

It was my last year at Burleigh Manor when I was a student under Rebecca Elpus. She was the new teacher after the previous teacher, Ellen Doring, left to retire. Ellen Doring had a legacy in the choir department at Burleigh Manor, which did not leave an easy task for Mrs. Elpus.

Some students followed Mrs. Elpus without question, some were not accustomed to the change of teaching, some did not care too much about it. Just another teacher, as some would say. However, Rebecca Elpus is more than just another teacher.

It was clear to all the students--even the ones that did not care--that Rebecca Elpus was phenomenal at what she did. She worked us harder, more intensely, and urged us to go further. To push ourselves out of our comfort zone and truly learn. To make mistakes and errors. To put our one-hundred percent into whatever we did.

Rebecca Elpus taught more than the subject. She taught us skills and values outside the classroom, things that are not easy for middle schoolers to grasp. She taught us invaluable lessons that build character. Leadership, courage, hard-work, patience, empathy--Rebecca Elpus taught, and continues to teach life lessons and values.

One might ask, why does it matter? It's just a middle school choir class. So what?

That is where Rebecca Elpus takes the extra step forward that I seldom see from other teachers. She does not teach the class like it's "just a middle school choir class." She teaches selflessly, inspiring those under her to be more, to do more. If we sing a piece in choir, Rebecca Elpus cares about the bigger impact of the piece to the audience--how can the choir touch the heart of the audience through the words, notes, and rhythms. It is less about having a nice pretty performance, and more about how we can create a profound impact on the audience.

I would not be the person I am today without the teachings of Rebecca Elpus. She has inspired me to think critically and take risks, to work hard and to live fearlessly, to become a leader and to think not only about myself, but what I can do for the world.

I am merely another high school student amongst the millions across the world. And I believe exceptional teaching should be recognized.

Rebecca Elpus is exceptional with what she does, and I believe that her ability to inspire those around her does justice to the true beauty of what it means to become a teacher.

Sincerely,  
Terranova Oh

To Whom It May Concern,

As one of Ms. Elpus' former students, I can happily say that she is, without a doubt, the most hard-working and passionate teacher I have ever had. I believe that there is always a motive for why teachers teach the way they do. When I had Ms. Elpus as a teacher, her motive was evident: to encourage students to love music as much as she does. She was not a teacher who gave it her all 50% of the time, or 70%, or even 95%. She was a teacher who consistently put in 100% of her effort into teaching. During class, no one ever understood why Ms. Elpus put forth so much effort when conducting, since no other adults or teachers were watching us rehearse. It was only after the concert that I learned why she taught the way she did. Her energy was contagious. By spreading her positive attitude to really feel the music, she made the performance so much more enjoyable and memorable. Ms. Elpus is not only an amazing teacher, but also a remarkable person. Normally, teachers wouldn't be able to know every student personally to the full extent, but somehow, Ms. Elpus was able to befriend over 50 students in a class. One of the things that made her so incredible was her ability to make each and every person in the room feel appreciated. Until I had her as a teacher, I never realized the potential I had to help others in choir, nor had I ever imagined myself singing alone. She was the one who gave me the confidence that would've stayed latent if not for her. I managed to learn how to become a better leader and to sing a solo in front of an audience. Everything that I have learned from her has helped me get to a point in my life where I feel comfortable with myself and my abilities. I would like to nominate Rebecca Elpus not just because of her dedication as an educator, but because of her dedication to her students.

Sincerely,

Jessica Cyriac

Student