January 14, 2011

Chancellor Award Selection Committee

I am writing this enthusiastic letter of support for Dr. Robin Hughes who has been nominated for the Chancellor's Award. Although our disciplines are different, Robin and I share a strong commitment to social action and anti-racism scholarship. Indeed, Robin saw value in cross-disciplinary collaboration and was instrumental in organizing scholars from different fields to take part writing a proposal for an action-research project targeting Black boys. She invited me to work with her and others, like Russ (IUB) Skiba, Mark Giles (from Miami University Ohio), and Khaula Murtadha (IUB), on the proposal for the African American Male Equity Project (AAMEP), a three-year grant funded by Lumina Foundation in Education. Robin serves as a co-principal investigator of the project. The goal of AAMEP is to uncompromisingly advance change in communities and schools throughout the state relative to the persistence of Black males throughout the educational pipeline. As a researcher with the Project, I have observed Robin present papers, orchestrate administrative meetings and retreats, and meet with a wide range of constituents, from the highly influential --- elected officials and the leaders of national education organizations, to those who are often in need of resources to create an impact on their communities, like parents and students. I am well-positioned to comment on her case and very honored to do so.

I'll begin by describing the particular thrust of the project we work on and why Robin's leadership can be characterized as nothing short of brilliant. The basis of our activities as action researchers of the AAMEP is relationship-building. We want to go much further than collect data or provide a service to communities by entering in and out of very troubled, public spaces. For example, knowing how violence plagues Black communities especially in settings like Gary, Indiana, we have to take into account issues of distrust, manifestations of internalized racism where Black people can set themselves apart from other Black people and even prefer their engagements with Whites over other groups. We knew at the outset that we needed to be realistic about the longevity of our relationships, but more significantly, *many of the relationships we have formed throughout the state were already in the "forming" stages prior to the research*. In other words, many already had begun building relationships in Indiana and were known for our commitment to advocacy. But Robin knew that we also couldn't rest on our coattails. We needed to be actively involved in various aspects of organizations, consequently, she knew that our commitment needed to involve having a presence in various arenas, especially in legislative circles.

Furthermore, we knew that an essential feature of our work was to operate using a *critical race theoretical* set of lenses. Critical race theory attends to the reproduction of racism in virtually all aspects of life. In hiring research assistants --- three doctoral students and three newly minted scholars, it was also clear that the way research was approached required careful mentoring and informed guidance. What Robin has managed to do is not only to develop not opportunities for our less-seasoned team

members to equip themselves with research skills, but also to expose them regularly to discussions about *ways* of interacting with various audiences. To me, the production of research is one thing, but the cultivation of critical race scholars is yet another. Both of these tasks require considerable skill and patience. But more than anything, the execution of these tasks requires a level of brilliance as few doctoral programs help students navigate their way toward professional excellence inclusive of a deliberate advocacy orientation. This orientation is also clearly evident in her work with her students. I have heard on a number of occasions how exciting her courses are. She doesn't just talk about the different forms of oppression like racism, sexism, class exploitation, and heterosexism. She also challenges her students to discover their ability to work against the perpetuation of oppression.

Robin Hughes is a scholar who sees her role as addressing multiple audiences --- a public intellectual is what many call it. She's as concerned about how her knowledge and research reaches low-income, Black parents who express hopelessness in how their experiences in schools, as she is about the colleague in another state who is eager to build upon the treasures she offers in her own scholarship. I highly recommend her for the Chancellor's Award.

Sincerely,

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