June 20, 2006

Tenure Review Committees
School of Teaching and Learning
College of Education and Human Development
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, OH 43403

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to describe and evaluate the contributions of Dr. Savilla Banister to the BGSU effort to improve public schooling through collaboration with the Toledo Public Schools and a variety of community based organizations. I am including a rather lengthy overview of the project, which represents the largest grant in the history of BGSU, both to situate Savilla’s activities and to show the scope of her involvement and impact at BGSU and in the Toledo community.

The GEAR UP Project

The Midwest Educational Reform Consortium (MERC) is a three-state, integrated and collaborative partnership, which culls the best practices from previous work in school reform programs to create GEAR-UP Learning Centers to address the systemic gaps causing severe educational, and performance needs of high poverty students. After establishing student performance benchmarks based upon an analysis of those gaps, MERC mobilizes partnership resources to restructure schools; improve professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and staff; and provide parents and students with the knowledge, financial support, and academic enrichment needed for post-secondary education. These MERC GEAR UP Learning Centers now exist in western Michigan, the greater Chicago area, and in northwest Ohio in East Toledo, funded by two federal grants totaling over $35 million.

Through intensive partnership intervention, MERC intends to increase students’ achievement scores, on-time graduation rates, and the percentage of students attending and completing post-secondary education. MERC also intends to engender sustainable improvement of the educational delivery system, student learning and achievement broadly defined, and family and community involvement in the educational system.

The four GEAR UP goals are linked with a first level of specific interventions. There is some flexibility regarding the implementation of the interventions among sites as well as among schools within each site. Not all sites will implement the interventions at the same time and some sites or schools may choose not to implement specific interventions. These interventions will later be linked with a second level of indicators that will provide a greater degree of specificity with regard to the implementation of each intervention at a particular site or school.
Goal I: Restructure schools to provide systemic structural reform that is sustainable and replicable. The restructuring will be designed to provide extensive professional development opportunities for teachers and improve student achievement so as to increase the percentage of students prepared to attend and complete post-secondary educational opportunities.

Goal II: Improve professional development opportunities for teachers in order to transform the educational delivery system and improve academic achievement so as to increase the percentage of students prepared to attend and complete post-secondary educational opportunities.

Goal III: Improve student/family support to establish a family atmosphere, a more intimate learning community and broad-based community involvement so as to increase the percentage of students prepared to attend and complete post-secondary educational opportunities.

Goal IV: Determine the indicators for successful access and completion of post-secondary education, develop a “profile of success,” and increase the number of students who approximate this profile so as to increase the percentage of students prepared to attend and complete post-secondary educational opportunities.

Savilla Banister’s Contributions

As you can see, GEAR UP is a massive project. I feel very fortunate that I can rely on people such as Savilla Banister to conceptualize and implement large portions of it. Dr. Banister has worked with the Gear-Up team at East Toledo Junior High, soon to be East Broadway Middle School, throughout the academic year 2005-2006. She has primarily been involved with the professional development component of the project, supporting teachers and administrators in using various digital technologies to impact student achievement. Specific activities over the past year and extending through the current year include:

Technology Tuesdays
Dr. Banister has spent one entire day each week at ETJH/EBMS, meeting with clusters, academic departments, and administrators, assisting them in planning for successful technology integration. She has also been co-teaching technology-rich lessons with teachers that request her partnership and collecting data from students and teachers about their experiences with technologies in the classroom. Due to the success last year of Technology Tuesdays, Dr. Banister will continue her technology integration work with staff through the 2006-07 school year.

Distance Learning System
Dr. Banister has been working with TPS technology staff to trouble-shoot ETJH/EBMS’s distance learning system, in order to get the system in use in classrooms by the spring semester of this year. If the system can be functional in the fall, a teacher professional development series will be offered that provides teachers with experience with the system and connects them with the various resources provided for teachers and students via distance connections.

Administration/Guidance Tech Collaborations
Dr. Banister has been meeting with school administrators, counselors and deans to inform them of the technology resources and activities available at ETJH/EBMS. She also supports their goals for possible data management system development at the school, as well as other technological needs and interests identified.
Gear-Up Tech Resource Manager
Dr. Banister is currently also in the process of a systematic inventory of all computer resources purchased with Gear-Up funds to date and is assisting in communicating procedures for equitable distribution and use among the faculty. In the event of loss or damage, she will report these conditions to the BGSU Gear-Up office and facilitate replacements/repairs if approved.

Additional plans for 2006-07 include:

Tech Connections
Besides supporting teacher professional development through a 10-day summer session, classroom technology integration will be supported through Dr. Banister’s availability to co-teach alongside of East Broadway Middle School and Waite High School teachers. This availability will extend to ALL teachers, not merely the 20 officially participating in the TC project. In addition, classroom technology integration will be documented through the use of classroom observations (video taped), student and teacher interviews, and surveys. TC participants will meet once a month throughout the school year to share ideas and challenges. All EBMS teachers will be welcome to attend these meetings. Additional after school workshops will be offered to those not officially a participant in the TC project, to give everyone a chance to learn about the new technologies available in the new building and to share ideas for effective technology integration.

Tech Club
Dr. Banister will assist the EBMS “technology” teacher in organizing and meeting with students interested in the Tech Club, September-May. Tech Club will hopefully meet on Tuesday afternoons. Students will be creating webpages and digital media products, as well as being “certified” as tech support personnel for teachers.

Documentation of Professional Development and Student Services
Dr. Banister will collect evidence and data documenting the types of classroom technology use at EBMS. Hours spent with faculty in professional development experiences and hours spent with students, providing student services in the area of digital technologies will be documented and submitted to Dr. John Fischer each semester.

The staff at ETJH/EBMS views the work of Dr. Savilla Banister as among the most useful and valuable professional development and technical assistance offered through the GEAR UP grant. As one example of the quality of her work, she has co-authored an article with an ETJH teacher on classroom technology in special education classrooms. Given the current and future technology needs of teachers and students, we simply could not have had the successes we have achieved in GEAR UP without her talent and effort. Because she is so respected and valued by the staff, we will be able to intensify our efforts at meaningfully integrating technology into classroom instruction.

Sincerely,

William D. Armaline, Project Director, BGSU GEAR UP and Professor, School of Teaching and Learning