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To whom it may concern:

Acting in my capacity as the instructor of social studies "methods," on 11 February 2010, I observed Jessica Durinsky in an early field experience (prior to student-teaching) at North High School in Akron. On this day, Jessica was teaching a 12th grade class of approximately 15 students. The topic was non-governmental organizations (NGOs), their nature and functions in modern society; the instructional strategy was a blend of cooperative learning and direct instruction.

The lesson began promptly. Jessica focused students' attention with a "hook" question about their experiences with NGOs. Following a brief canvassing of students' opinions, she delivered a succinct statement of the lesson's purpose and objectives. She then explained the procedure, distributed an outline guide for note-taking, and directed students to form small groups for a jigsaw activity (one group per type of NGO).

Students formed groups quickly and, on the whole, were on-task. After a brief period of group work, one student took the lead in summarizing each group's conclusions. Jessica used the reporting as the basis for discussion and teacher-explanation. As each small group's leader reported, she probed for understanding, solicited other students to contribute, and called attention to significant points. She was attentive to students, affirming their statements, clarifying their comments, and using their responses as the jumping-off point for her explanations. It was clear that Jessica had prepared, in advance, a set of key questions for guiding discussion, as well as a set of prioritized content points. Her questions and explanations targeted main ideas. At the conclusion of small group reporting, she summarized the main features and purposes of the different types of NGOs.

The next activity after the teacher-led debriefing was another cooperative learning activity. In this activity, students were directed to describe an imaginary NGO that would address a current "need" in society. This activity was designed effectively to apply the main ideas of the lesson. Students were to describe the NGO, its activities, membership, and anticipated benefits. However, time constraints prevented completion of the activity. Students were asked to complete the description as homework for the next class session.

In my judgment, this lesson was a success, particularly for a student enrolled in an early field experience lesson. Aside from the time issue, the pedagogical design was sound, as was Jessica's familiarity with the content. Directions and explanations were clear and focused. No significant behavioral problems occurred, and Jessica interacted well with students. Based on this lesson, I think Jessica has the makings of a fine teacher of the secondary social studies.

My experiences with her, in my "methods" course, indicate that she will continue to grow into that role with relative ease, for she is conscientious about her duties, talented intellectually, and very responsive to feedback and constructive criticism. She was truly "a pleasure to have in class." I fully expect her mentor in student-teaching to reach the same conclusion.

Sincerely,

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