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Selection Committee
National Alliance of Black School Educators

Re: Letter of Recommendation for Shakira Abney-Wisdom

Dear Members of the Scholarship Selection Committee,

It is my great honor to recommend Shakira Abney-Wisdom for the Dr. Charles Mitchell, Jr. Leadership Scholarship. I have had the distinct pleasure of working closely with Shakira through my role as the Partner of Leadership Development at TNTP and as the Founder and Creator of The Village for Leaders in Education, a year-long, cohort-based program designed to support education leaders of color through coaching, professional learning, and network building. Shakira was selected for our third Village cohort, where she quickly distinguished herself as a deeply reflective and equity-minded leader.

During her participation in the cohort, Shakira served as Principal of the Denver School of the Arts Middle School, and her leadership throughout the program was both visionary and courageous. Her strategic initiative focused on cultivating a school culture of belonging, a comprehensive effort to ensure that every student, particularly Black students, experienced psychological safety, affirmation, and academic challenge. She led her community through honest conversations about race, identity, and equity, and implemented structures that built adult capacity to confront bias and strengthen inclusive practices. This initiative was not simply a professional project; it was an extension of who Shakira is as a leader: grounded, bold, and relentlessly student-centered.

Over the course of our work together, I have witnessed Shakira's entrepreneurial spirit, discipline, and deep sense of purpose. She approaches challenges with clarity and composure, balancing strategic thinking with empathy and humility. She is organized, meticulous, and models integrity in every aspect of her leadership. When TNTP presented at the 2024 National Alliance of Black School Educators Annual Conference in Atlanta, Shakira represented The Village as an alumna presenter, sharing her school's transformation story with authenticity and brilliance. Her presence and insights reflected both her professional excellence and her unwavering commitment to NABSE's mission: advancing equitable education for Black students.

Shakira embodies the spirit of Dr. Charles Mitchell's legacy – visionary leadership grounded in service, community, and justice. I have no doubt that her continued pursuit of advanced study in educational leadership will only amplify her impact on schools and the broader field. She is precisely the kind of leader this scholarship seeks to support: one who transforms systems while uplifting others along the way.

I offer my strongest possible recommendation for Shakira Abney-Wisdom's candidacy. Please feel free to contact me if I can provide additional insight into her qualifications and contributions.

With deep respect,

Nicola Martin
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