

The Honorable Charles Wiger  
Room 205, Minnesota State Capitol  
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Jennifer Loon  
449 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Wiger and Representative Loon:

Our HOPE is that the Legislature, sitting on a \$1.8 billion surplus, realizes that an investment in education always pays the best interest, does the right thing, and makes a solid investment in increasing educational funding for our students, Minnesota's future workforce.

The North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District has 10,600 students with 50% students of color & 50% qualifying for free & reduced lunch; and we desperately need HELP from the education bill. We receive \$1200 less revenue per pupil than the 7 County Metro Average & attempts to increase our referendum or pass a tech levy have failed. We just cut \$8 million (6%) of our general fund budget for 15-16, for a total of over \$30 million in budget reductions during my 10 year tenure as a superintendent. We will be forced to cut another \$8 million next year if a minimum of 2% & 2% on the formula is not realized. Without assistance from the legislature, The Minnesota Constitution's promise of a "uniform system of public schools" won't be a reality for our district's 10,600 students.

Despite over \$30 million in reductions, our school board funded all day K with no fee for the last 10 years (at a cost of \$1.2 million per year) and is now funding 4 year old programs at three of our elementary schools. We desperately need preschool programs at all 9 of our elementary schools but could only scrape together enough money to fund three. Why cut budgets and then spend money we don't have for preschool programs? Our data clearly shows that the achievement gap between our students who have had preschool education and the large number who haven't is a huge chasm that can't be closed without earlier intervention.

Like Art Rolnick, I ask, "How can Minnesota build a new ballpark for the Twins and invest hundreds of millions in a Vikings stadium but fail to secure the future for vulnerable children who make up the fastest growing segment of the state's next work force?" Our students need to get their turn. Please target a portion of the education bill for preschool programs in our public schools.

Sincerely,  
Patty Phillips, Superintendent  
N. St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale