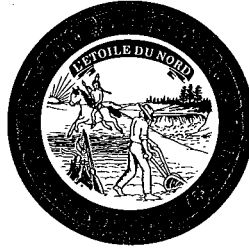


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MIN. DEPT. OF EDUCATION

2014 DEC 15 AM 11:51



December 11, 2014

Governor Mark Dayton
116 Veterans Service Building
20 West 12th Street
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Dayton,

Thank you for making early childhood education a top priority of your Administration. Last biennium, we were proud to work with you to pass funding for All-Day Kindergarten, because we believe that it will provide children a stronger foundation to be more successful academically and throughout their lives. Moving forward, we believe it is important that four-year-olds have access to public pre-kindergarten. We appreciate your recent statements supporting expansion of early childhood education, and we urge you to include financial support for pre-kindergarten within Minnesota's public school systems across the state in your budget proposal.

We commend your commitment to early childhood education scholarships and childcare tax credits in your remarks following the budget forecast announcement last week. However, we believe that this vision of access to early childhood learning can be achieved in a way that is more fiscally prudent by focusing investment in public pre-K programs.

Early childhood scholarships are available for children up to age four for low income families. Yet when a child turns four years old, he or she may be able to attend a public school program. In many of our school districts, including Minneapolis, South Washington County, Deer River and Anoka/Hennepin, four-year-olds attend public pre-K programs. If the state of Minnesota funded pre-kindergarten public school programs, all children, regardless of income, would be able to attend. Additionally, these programs would help alleviate the critical shortage of daycare options for families in rural parts of the state. It would also lead to greater economic security for low and middle-income families.

Another benefit of public pre-K programs is that children can ride public school buses, eat school breakfast or lunch, participate in extended day options for working parents (eligible families can use childcare assistance). There is existing infrastructure, in other words, that serves these children and their families well. Test results from public pre-K programs are encouraging and demonstrate pre-K programs can help close the achievement gap.



In addition to funding for pre-K programs, we believe there should be programmatic changes to the Early Childhood Education scholarships. When four-year-olds attend public schools, it will free up scarce dollars for the birth to three-year-old children who receive early childhood scholarships. Additionally, if thousands of Minnesota's four-year-olds attend pre-K programs, it should significantly reduce the waitlist for childcare assistance.

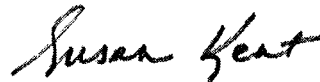
We understand that the state budget faces many pressures from many areas. We appreciate the leadership your Administration has taken with the legislature to stabilize the state's finances and put Minnesota back on the right economic path. We believe funding public pre-kindergarten would be a wise investment in our future. It will help more children, on a dollar for dollar basis, we believe, than childcare tax credits, or additional funding for early childhood scholarships. While we may not be able to fully fund a pre-kindergarten program this biennium, we believe the state's investment toward this long-term vision should begin now.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let us know how we can be of assistance.


Sincerely,



Senator Katie Sieben, District 54



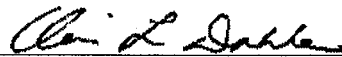
Senator Susan Kent, District 53



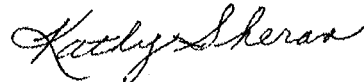
Senator Chris Eaton, District 40



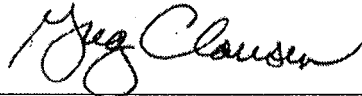
Senator Bev Scalze, District 42




Senator Kevin Dahle, District 20



Senator Kathy Sheran, District 19



Senator Greg Clausen, District 57



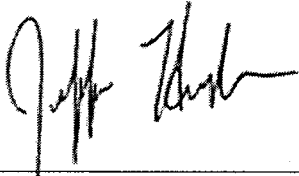
Senator Jim Carlson, District 51



Senator Ron Latz, District 46



Senator David Tomassoni, District 6



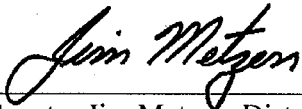
Senator Jeff Hayden, District 62



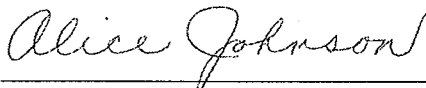
Senator John Hoffman, District 36



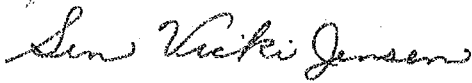
Senator Sandy Pappas, District 65



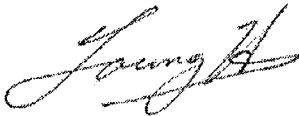
Senator Jim Metzen, District 52



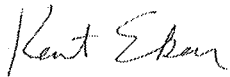
Senator Alice Johnson, District 37



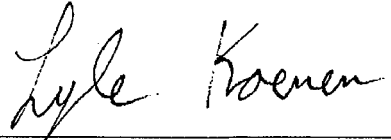
Senator Vicki Jensen, District 24



Senator Fong Hawj, District 67



Senator Kent Eken, District 4



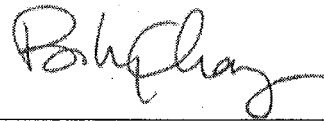
Senator Lyle Koenen, District 17



Senator John Marty, District 66

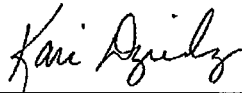


Senator Rod Skoe, District 2

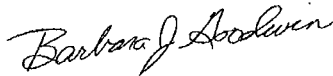


Senator Bobby Joe Champion, District 59

Senator LeRoy Stumpf, District 1



Senator Kari Dziedzic, District 60



Senator Barb Goodwin, District 41

cc: Lieutenant Governor-Elect Tina Smith
Commissioner Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner Myron Frans