



January 12, 2010

Alice Seagren, Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 Highway 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113

Dear Commissioner Seagren:

We are writing on behalf of the Minnesota Business Partnership, the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce and the Itasca Project to express support of Minnesota's Race to the Top application. With active support from our organizations, Minnesota has a 25-year track record of bipartisan education reform and innovation consistent with Race to the Top's goals and objectives. This long history of reform includes charter schools, post-secondary enrollment options, statewide standards and assessments, and performance pay for teachers, among others.

Minnesota's Future Initiative – Reaching for World-Class Education

Currently, through the Minnesota's Future Initiative, our organizations and the Bush Foundation are supporting several initiatives aimed at bringing Minnesota's education system up to world-class levels. Our commitment to this multi-year initiative focuses on the following elements, which are well aligned with Race to the Top:

- Transform teacher recruitment, training and placement to make it more selective and rigorous while also extending training through the first few years of a new teacher's career.
- Recruit top teaching talent for high-need subjects and areas.
- Provide top-quality principal leadership development.
- Use data to improve student performance.

Minneapolis Public Schools Partnership – Focused Support for a Challenged Urban District

We have worked extensively with the Minneapolis School District to develop and now implement a five-year strategic plan aimed at raising the achievement level for all students and closing the achievement gap. The strategic plan identifies nine key reform strategies, which are consistent with the goals of Race to the Top, including:

- Raise expectations and academic rigor; aligning programs to college readiness goal.
- Develop high performing teaching corps and provide professional development and support.
- Develop highly effective principal corps and ensure they have the capacity to establish and lead outstanding instructional teams.
- Set clear expectations for staff; reward success, provide support, but remove low performers when required.
- Restructure the lowest performing 25 percent of schools. Increase flexibility and autonomy for lowest and highest performing schools.

The District has made significant progress on these and other reform strategies, and we look forward to continuing our partnership to accomplish the District's goals.

Trends in International Math and Science Study – Global Comparison Shows Dramatic Improvement

We drove – and helped fund – Minnesota’s participation in the 2007 Trends in International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), which documented dramatic improvement in math education since Minnesota last participated in TIMSS in 1995. Extensive analysis by Michigan State University Professor William Schmidt credits reforms that our organizations have advocated – and are consistent with Race to the Top – for this success, including:

- Rigorous statewide standards
- Standards-based curriculum
- High-stakes tests

We are now working with SciMath^{MN} – a statewide education and business coalition advocating for quality K-12 science, mathematics and technology education based on research, national standards and effective practices – to implement recommendations from the TIMSS analysis. We also support numerous programs to increase student interest, and improve achievement, in science, technology, engineering and math courses and careers.

Not Just Policy – Employers Commit Financial and Human Capital to Education

These are just three recent examples of how Minnesota employers have joined with other stakeholders to advocate and support education reforms that are consistent with Race to the Top. Beyond public policy support, Minnesota employers and foundations provided \$246 million in grants to education in 2007, according to the Minnesota Council on Foundations, with more than half of that coming from corporate giving programs. The Minnesota Business Gives program has helped almost three dozen greater Minnesota communities establish business giving programs. Supporting the local school district is frequently the focus of these largely small business giving programs.

In addition, Minnesota is a leader in youth mentoring, with more than 400 youth mentoring programs across the state, according to the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota. Nearly half of those programs are school-business collaborations connecting thousands of at-risk students with caring adults committed to helping young people reach their academic potential.

Whether it is through public policy, financial support or human capital, Minnesota employers value education and are deeply committed to ensuring that all students are prepared for higher education or a career.

We would like to thank the Obama Administration for this opportunity and the Minnesota Department of Education for its extensive effort and inclusive process in developing Minnesota’s Race to the Top application.

On behalf of Minnesota employers, we assure you that a grant for Minnesota would be greeted with enthusiasm and redoubled efforts to close the achievement gap and bring our education system up to world-class levels.

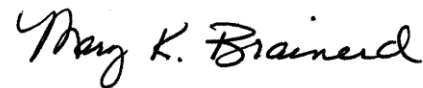
Sincerely,



Charlie Weaver
Executive Director
Minnesota Business Partnership



David Olson
President
Minnesota Chamber of Commerce



Mary Brainerd
Itasca Project Co-Chair
President & CEO, HealthPartners