



April 1, 2025

Via E-Mail Delivery

Senator Mary K. Kunesch, Chair
3209 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Jason Rarick, Republican Lead
3413 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Kunesch and Senator Rarick,

As the founder of Hope Academy, and on behalf of our 400 families, I want to thank you for the wise and generous support the state has provided for five decades to inner-city families who are doing the right thing--choosing to invest deeply in the future of the citizens of our state.

Located in the Phillips Neighborhood of south Minneapolis, Hope Academy is a K-12 school, serving 700 students, 78% of whom live in poverty. Most of our families live within the boundaries of the Minneapolis School District and are brought to and from school each day on 15 buses.

While I understand that most independent schools are in suburban areas, Hope Academy is one of the most beautifully diverse schools with some of the highest reading and math scores of black and brown children in our state. One of those scholars is a third grader named Kendall.

Kendall's mother, DeMarra, is a single parent who lives just south of Lake St. She's a working mom who is also taking classes. DeMarra doesn't own a car. She's trying to do right by her third-grade daughter by giving her the kind of remarkable education that she didn't receive herself. Kendall has been at Hope Academy since Kindergarten and is already reading up a storm. She is surrounded by caring teachers and friends and is benefiting enormously from a faith-based education.

DeMarra's only way to get Kendall to Hope Academy is on the school bus that our state currently provides. Recently, DeMarra told me that removing busing from Kendall would be devastating both to her and her daughter.

Kendall has benefited from an approach to teaching reading called "The Science of Reading," an evidence-based reading curriculum that Hope Academy has used long before it became law in the MN Read Act. For Minnesota students whose parents choose an independent school like Hope Academy, how does Kendall's family pay for the consumable textbooks to support Kendall's reading instruction? For years, it has been provided by our Non-Public Pupil Textbook Aid to Students.

As you might imagine, our scholars at Hope Academy suffer from some the highest adverse childhood experiences of any in the state—traumatic experiences like hunger, the incarceration of a family member, or parental substance abuse. A few years ago, I testified before this committee that children



don't leave these traumatic experiences at the door when they arrive at school each morning. Attending to the mental health needs of our younger students is essential to their being able to attend to their teacher.

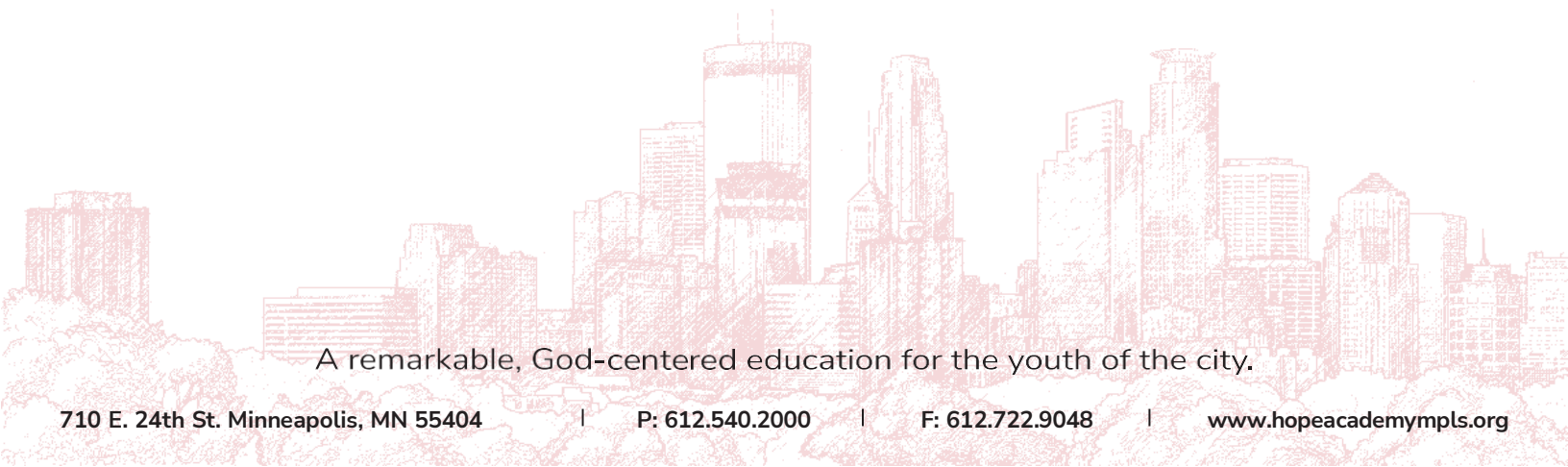
Hope Academy has an annual graduation rate of 95%. And half of those graduates are the first ones in their family to ever go to college. Those of us with teens know how hard it is to navigate the college admissions and scholarship process. One of our 2019 graduates, Kenneth Granados, came back to Hope Academy last month to encourage our students. He said that the full ride scholarship he received to a local college would have been impossible without the help of our College and Career Counseling office—counseling supported by Minnesota's non-public pupil aid program.

Lastly, I want to remind you that Non-Public Pupil Aid also provides a licensed school nurse to our 700 students two days a week. She handles all the reporting to the state to keep our students current on their immunizations; she reviews the medical histories of our scholars and develops diabetes action plans; she oversees the hearing and eyesight screenings of all our scholars, and she keeps abreast of state law changes and informs us of public health threats so our scholars can be healthy and safe.

I suspect that it must be an oversight to consider eliminating these vital benefits from some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Thank you for standing up for all the children and families in our state and opposing the proposed elimination of aid to nonpublic students and transportation services included in Governor Walz's budget recommendation to the legislature.

Sincerely,

Russ Gregg
Founder and Head of School
Hope Academy



A remarkable, God-centered education for the youth of the city.