

March 31, 2025

Senator Kunesch, Chair
Senate Education Finance Committee Members
75 Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Kunesch and Members:

My name is Cecelia Dodge and I am the Superintendent/Executive Director at North Lakes Academy Charter School, founded in 1999. I worked for MDE 1998-2004, where I oversaw special education funding and data, so I am intimately familiar with the MN Legislature and how it works.

As you consider SF2255, the Governor's proposed budget, I want to call your attention to the proposed deeply problematic cuts to chartered public school students. These cuts include reductions to special education funding.

- *Our K-12 charter school has 140 students who receive special education. That is about 30% of our student population.*
- *At NLA we say "Who you BECOME is as important as what you ACHIEVE." That is because we focus on helping students become better human beings through our Becoming curriculum, which is based on an approach called Top 20. We provide a small & safe community where we build curiosity and confidence. We are also authorized by Osprey Wilds, so we connect learning and the environment.*

In my school, reductions in special education funding and operating revenue for our students would mean:

- *With our already declining enrollment, and high facility costs, we are already not able to keep a safe amount of fund balance or days cash on hand. These cuts would force us to make reductions that make it difficult to operate, especially our high school, where the state requirements for teacher licenses and course offerings already challenge a small charter high school to be viable.*
- *Our buildings need regular maintenance, just like those that belong to traditional school districts. Letting them deteriorate will create safety concerns and will eventually cost more money.*

- *We have not been able to fill some of our special education teaching positions. A cut in special education funding would reduce resources to fund creative solutions that we've put in place to deal with staff shortages - and we would no longer be able to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This means failing to fulfil our legal and moral obligation to a large percentage of our students.*

As you put forth your Education Finance Omnibus bill, we respectfully urge you to protect this critical state funding for charter school students during this challenging time. Our students need your support now more than ever.

Sincerely,

Cecelia Dodge

Cecelia Dodge, Superintendent/Executive Director



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