

My name is Erik Queen. I am a former special education teacher of 18 years and currently serve on the board of directors at Great Oaks Academy, a public charter school serving students in the southwest metro area.

I am writing to you in regards to SF2255 and the proposed idea of using a cut in special education funding to help balance the budget at the state level. I understand that the task of balancing the budget is not an easy task, and that some difficult decisions will need to be made. I would like to share a few reasons why I do not think a special education funding cut should be considered in this effort.

1. These cuts will result in a reduction of services. The schools that provide these services will not be able to continue with current service levels with such a reduction.
2. There are a number of schools in the state who serve a higher proportion of students who would be impacted by these cuts. My 18 years of teaching was at a charter school that served 100% special education students. These schools are doing great things for these students! These cuts would be devastating to these institutions.
3. Students in special education are among some of the most vulnerable people in the state. I do not think it is reasonable to have them bear the burden of balancing the budget.
4. Schools are still trying to deal with the effects of the pandemic on these student populations. To cut their funding now would only exasperate the educational deficiencies they are trying to address.
5. These cuts are short sighted. While they do balance the budget in the short term, by cutting special education funding, the ability for these students with special needs to be taught and prepared for an independent life that contributes to society is greatly diminished. As a result, we as a state will have to pay more money in the future to provide services for these individuals into their adult years as a result of trying to save a few dollars in the immediate term. The old adage is very appropriate for this situation, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Minnesota has prided itself in being a state with a high class educational system for our students. I have been honored to serve as a teacher in that system for so many years. While I know that balancing the budget will require difficult decisions, please do not make decisions that will harm our students and tarnish the great reputation our state has of valuing the next generation and their education!

Sincerely,

Erik Queen  
Teacher Alumni of Metro Deaf School  
Board Chair of Great Oaks Academy