

Tuesday, April 8, 2025

To: Emma Zellmer, Committee Legislative Assistant to Senator Mary Kunesh
Cc: Senator Mary Kunesh, Chair of the Senate Education Finance Committee

Re: Senate Delete All Amendment to SF2255

Please let me introduce myself. My name is Aaron Stolp, and I am an educator in the Sauk Rapids-Rice School District #47. I am a K-5 STEAM specialist at Rice Elementary School.

It has come to my attention that funding for STARBASE is at risk. For the past four years, I have essentially used the STARBASE Destination Mars curriculum and accompanying STEM kits as the primary instruction for fifth grade students. Implementing and using the Destination Mars curriculum has made it possible to cover numerous fifth grade science standards. Mississippi Heights Elementary and Pleasant View Elementary, the other elementary schools in the Sauk Rapids-Rice School District, also use the Destination Mars curriculum and STEM kits.

As a teacher, one of the aspects of the program I most appreciate is the fact that student books, accompanying videos via the STARBASE MN Destination Mars website and all necessary materials for the hands-on investigations and experiments are provided at no cost! I know that I can speak not only for myself and my colleagues, but also for the hundreds of teachers and thousands of students that have participated in the Destination Mars curriculum: Thank you for the previous support of STARBASE MN and we urge you to continue funding the STEM kits.

I have not only experienced the impact of the Destination Mars curriculum as a teacher, but also as a parent. My children attend the Annandale School District, where I live. Last year, I had a daughter in fifth grade, and they used the STEM kits. There were many conversations after school where my daughter shared what she had learned, observed and experienced vis-a-vis the Destination Mars curriculum.

Senator Bruce Anderson represents District 29, the district where I reside. Although he is not on the Education Finance Committee, I am going to contact his office too. Realizing that the state has a projected deficit to address, it is my opinion that this can be addressed without impacting the funding for the STEM kits. The Destination Mars curriculum has literally benefited thousands of students across the state. Exploring STEM careers is how I have always chosen to start the Destination Mars curriculum with fifth graders, and hopefully it has inspired students to pursue an occupation that uses STEM skills. Businesses are clamoring for students that have STEM skills, interest and aptitude. Continuing to fund the STARBASE MN STEM kits can help ensure that employers have qualified candidates in the future.

Sincerely,

Aaron Stolp