



March 18, 2025

Dear Committee Members,

United Way of Steele County, in collaboration with the District Attorney's Office, MN Prairie County Alliance, the Owatonna Public Schools, Medford Public Schools, Blooming Prairie Public Schools, Sphero, and numerous other interested parties, joined together in 2022 to address the truancy crisis in Steele County. High percentages of our youth were missing over 100 days of school coming out of COVID, and the current systems in place were not working. Together, we created U.P.L.I.F.T. (United Partnership for Leadership, Inspiration, Focus, and Transformation) to reverse the truancy trend by hyper-focusing on our 9th graders.

With the Youth Intervention Project (YIP) Grant, we were able to hire a Youth Support Coordinator and launch this pilot program. We have already found significant success with this initiative, particularly within our BIPOC communities. Additional funding would allow organizations like ours to develop and implement solutions that can be duplicated across Greater Minnesota and other rural communities nationwide. Research shows that punitive consequences are no longer effective in terms of long-term in addressing truancy. YIP funding enables communities to develop and implement programming that works, increases student engagement, and helps our youth reach graduation and beyond.

We strongly support fully funding of the YIP Grant, as it is an investment in our future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Annette Duncan", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Annette Duncan, President
United Way of Steele County