

May 17, 2015

The Honorable Governor Mark Dayton
Office of Governor Mark Dayton
& Lt. Governor Tina Smith
116 Veterans Service Building
20 West 12th Street
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Lt. Governor Tina Smith
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20 West 12th Street
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Charles Wiger
State Senator
Room 205, Minnesota State Capitol
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Jennifer Loon
State Representative
449 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Dayton, Lt. Governor Smith, Senator Wiger, and Representative Loon:

My name is Toni Cox, and for the past three years I have served as director of the Northern Sky Regional Center of Excellence, based out of Thief River Falls, Minnesota. On behalf of Minnesota's Regional Center of Excellence Directors, I am writing to express support of Governor Dayton's \$550 million budget proposal and Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence. As a former primary level teacher and K-12 literacy specialist from a rural, high-poverty community that serves a high percentage of American Indian students, I have seen firsthand the positive impact that pre-K and early childhood education programs have on preparing children for school and closing the achievement gaps earlier rather than later.

Additionally, I support funding for Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence. Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence have brought much needed support to some of the highest need schools across Minnesota. In particular, schools in remote and rural locations in Minnesota now have access to on-site and regionally delivered school improvement support and professional development opportunities which historically have not been as readily available. In our first three years, Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence have demonstrated success in improving student achievement and growth, along with closing the academic achievement gap with Priority and Focus schools. With additional funding, Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence fully expects to serve more schools, such as Continuous Improvement schools, by expanding this regional school service model that has shown results.

Specifically, as a result of Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence, the following results have been demonstrated:

- Seventy-four percent of Priority schools who worked closely with the Regional Centers of Excellence demonstrated better student growth in 2014 than in 2011.
- Eighty-three percent of Priority schools that worked closely with the centers are doing a better job today of closing achievement gaps than they were in 2011.

- Focus schools working with the centers are also making strides in closing gaps—about 54 percent have better achievement gap closure now than in 2011.
- In just one year, between 2013 and 2014, almost 20 percent of schools across the state improved their MMR score by more than 10 points, and 7 percent improved by more than 20 points.
- Since being designated as Priority or Focus schools in 2012, nearly 20 percent of schools working with the state improved so much that they are now being recognized for strong performance by receiving the Celebration Eligible or Reward designation.
- Forty-three percent of all schools initially designated as Priority or Focus improved to the point where they are no longer designated as low-performing.

I thank you for your continued efforts as servants of the State of Minnesota and appreciate your attention to serving all children across the State of Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Toni Cox
Director, Northern Sky Center of Excellence
Northwest Service Cooperative
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Thief River Falls, MN 56701
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CC: Senator Thomas Bakk, Senate Majority Leader
Representative Kurt Daudt, Speaker of the House