



THE HARVEST NETWORK OF SCHOOLS
Harvest Preparatory School/Best Academy/Mastery School

Legislative Working Group on Economic Disparities in Minnesota Meeting

Harvest Network of Schools Testimony

Sent via Email

Friday, January 15, 2016

Chairs Knoblach and Champion, I am pleased to submit for the public record the following testimony on behalf of the Harvest Network of Schools. I am Eric Mahmoud, President and CEO of the Harvest Network of Schools, a group of three high-performing charter schools in north Minneapolis, including Harvest Preparatory School, Best Academy, and the Mastery School. Together our schools serve nearly 1,300 primarily low-income African American and East African students in two locations in north Minneapolis.

As you likely know, north Minneapolis is ground zero for the highest crime rates, lowest home ownership rates, and lowest educational performance and degree attainment in our state. Though the Legislative Working Group has chosen to focus on “Economic Disparities,” I implore you to consider the important link between an effective education and life success as you develop policy responses to the economic conditions facing our state. ***At the Harvest Network of Schools we believe that education is the lever to create community change and transformation.*** This connection is especially important given the future demographics of Minnesota when according to the Metropolitan Council “two of every five adults in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area will be a person of color.” People of color, in particular the African American and African immigrant students served by the Harvest Network of Schools, will be the workers and citizens of Minnesota’s future. To be successful they must have a strong and robust education that prepares them to think critically, read and write effectively, and to work in the careers of the future such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). This need extends not only to the students we serve, but also every child in our state deserving of a quality education. Yet fewer than 50% of African American students are graduating from high school in Minneapolis (47.3% African American vs. 81.2% State of Minnesota) according to the Minnesota Department of Education Report Card. This is unacceptable and clearly will undermine the opportunities for children of color to compete economically. Research shows that a high school graduate has the potential to earn up to one million dollars in lifetime earnings more than their peer who does not graduate; the rate of potential earnings increases with the amount of education one

achieves. The unemployed young people in our community are the same young people who have not completed high school, or in some cases, even if they did they were not adequately prepared to succeed in life.

Having strong, high-quality schools in neighborhoods is the lever for change. These schools are then part of an ecosystem that includes job training for youth and adults, thriving businesses, opportunities for entrepreneurs, home ownership incentives and assistance, and additional resources that allow both the adults and children in our community to be whole and contributing members of the community. Educational and economic strategies must be viewed together for community success. Barriers to participation must be removed so that all can equally participate and benefit from educational and economic opportunities.

I thank you for your work on behalf of our 1,300 scholars and their families and look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations. I also welcome the opportunity to discuss further with you my thoughts about the link between education and economic success. Thank you.

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