



April 29, 2025

House Ways and Means Committee Members,

I joined MDE as the Commissioner in 2023, and, when entering my tenure, we had the goal of stable and smart investments in our state's public education system. Together, we passed important legislation in 2023 and 2024, and the state significantly progressed on a range of critical education programs on behalf of Minnesota students, educators, families, schools, and communities.

We entered the 2025 legislative session building off the work we accomplished together in 2023 and 2024, with a continued focus on ensuring a measured and responsible approach to investing in our state's public education system. The proposals laid out in the Governor's education budget bill addressed this and maintained our priorities to fund Minnesota's public education system on behalf of our students and educators while responsibly balancing our state's budget.

In a year where we face critical budgetary decisions, we appreciate that the House's education finance omnibus bill before us protects many of the investments made over the last biennium. This is especially true of the automatic inflator for the general education formula, an essential funding stream school districts across the state have asked for.

Thank you, Chairs Kresha and Youakim, for including funding and budget neutral proposals from the Governor's budget, including the proposal to repurpose the fund for the Summer Food Service Program to be distributed to schools for their work on uploading data for the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program, as well as extending the Full-service community school grants, and clarifying language for the American Indian Teacher Preparation grants to be specifically used for pre-kindergarten through grade 12 settings. Although not the full amount needed, we are also thankful for the inclusion of funding for MDE's legal costs. We look forward to continued conversations to ensure the agency has adequate support for litigation that the agency is managing on behalf of the State and ensure the agency has legal counsel to provide top fiscal and legal accountability and customer experience.

We are also appreciative of the continued and added funding to the Read Act to continue the state's support of ensuring all our students can read well. We are eager to continue to work with the legislature on the best statutory language and ensuring that we have the right resources and timelines for MDE and Regional Literacy Networks to carry on critical implementation work.

We would like to make members aware of several concerns we have in the bill. While we support the inclusion of the compensatory revenue task force and the funding for it, we have heard from districts across the state that the formula itself also requires a modification, and we are hopeful that as we continue conversations this session we are hopeful the House considers including one time funding for compensatory revenue that support some of our most at risk and underserved students.

Additionally, while we are also thankful for an investment in the school unemployment aid for hourly school workers, we strongly urge the House to reconsider the decision to remove this essential benefit in the future. This benefit supports some of our lowest paid educators and makes the prospect of returning to schools the following year much more viable when there are not adequate opportunities over the summer term.

Lastly, we would ask that the House adopt the Governor's anti-fraud proposals, including \$550,000 for MDE's Office of Inspector General and Office of General Council, critical components of the Governor's anti-fraud and program integrity package. This essential funding is needed to continue to support the agency's infrastructure to prevent, identify, and take action against program participants who are found to have engaged in fraud, waste, and abuse.

Finally, I strongly encourage the committee to reconsider funding MDE's operating adjustment so the agency may continue to support Minnesota's students, educators, and schools, especially as we face so much uncertainty at the federal level.

Once more we are appreciative of this bill incorporating many of the Governor's proposals. With less than a month left in this session, we are committed to the work ahead of us and the partnership we have built over the years to accomplish our goal of a measured and responsible approach of investing in our state's public education system.

Sincerely,



Willie Jett II

Commissioner

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