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SERVING THE WHITTIER NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH HIGH-QUALITY, LOW-COST CHILDCARE, FAMILY SUPPORT AND YOUTH PROGRAMMING

February 8, 2010

Minnesota House of Representatives
Early Childhood Finance and Policy Committee

Dear Committee Members,

I have been asked to share with you information about my organization's experience with the Parent Aware Program. Our unique child care center, Innovative Supports to Empower Parents considers Parent Aware a huge benefit. The program has greatly increased our capacity to deliver the high quality experience our families deserve but cannot afford.

INSTEP is a one-of-a-kind childcare center that provides high quality part-time care focused on early childhood education and school readiness for children that fall through the cracks of traditional childcare assistance. For parents, it provides family support advocacy and parent group learning sessions. For the majority of our children, INSTEP is the only formalized early childhood education they will receive before entering kindergarten. The average hourly cost of childcare in Hennepin County is \$8.56 per hour, per child. Our families cannot afford this. INSTEP charges 50 cents per hour, per family. The balance of expenses is paid through foundation funding, faith communities and individual donor contributions. 99% of the children served last year were children of color and 90% of our children speak a language other than English in their homes.

Of particular benefit to our program is the opportunity to get financial support for teacher training and our new curriculum. We are excited to be better able to track the progress of our children through the assessment tools. Our consultant Kamyla Howard has been particularly helpful in offering ways to better connect with our parents.

Please know that should you be interested in further information, I would do my best to be available.

Sincerely,

Kathi Eilers
Executive Director