

March 8, 2010

Dear Senators,

We convened a meeting on Friday, March 6, to outline the concrete steps and criteria requested in follow-up to our conversation Wednesday night regarding the State's Race-To-The-Top (RTTT) application. While our charge included operationalizing definitions for key terms noted in the proposal (e.g., "cultural competency"), we, as representatives of diverse community sectors, believe it is now essential to highlight strategic plans for our continued, collective success in addressing the pressing and future needs of children and adolescents. This view considers the latest news that the proposal, as presented, did not receive funding. We therefore focused on ways we might proceed from this point.

It is our recommendation that we focus on the global necessity for greater inclusiveness and respect regarding intercultural communication needs while enhancing the economic viability of Minnesota's future as it relates to education. As Tom Dooher, Education Minnesota's president, noted recently in the Star Tribune, the current dynamics in our approach to education are simply "not going to close the achievement gap or increase teacher quality or effectiveness." He further observed that "We knew there were serious problems from our perspective" and that, to achieve this goal, we have to have "a collaborative relationship." Dooher concurs with our consensus that we already have what is needed in terms of research knowledge to effectively close the achievement gap and move towards greater success as a State and nation. It is therefore our collective suggestion that a more open dialogue regarding the State's proposal among various community sectors be held to address Minnesota's re-submission of a proposal.

Specifically, we would like to convene a hearing of representatives from P-12, governmental, political, community, and higher education sectors, including leaders in American Indian and minority communities, to openly address Secretary Duncan's feedback and to offer substantive ideas that might lead to a more comprehensive proposal for re-submission. In doing so, we will not only address learning disparities generally and among various minority communities specifically, we will also contribute significantly to the success of a new application in June to the benefit of all Minnesota citizens. Intentional responses to the challenges of our respective communities are also pivotal to our future success.

We also recommend that this discussion take place within the next three weeks and would appreciate your assistance in convening a panel of state senators, such as yourself, who can share diverse perspectives regarding the proposal, to be followed by a responsive discussion of the issues by other legislative and educator participants, such as Commissioner Seagren, Representative Mariani, and Superintendents Silva and Johnson. Following remarks and responses, we will then open the floor to general attendees for ideas and specific suggestions for further consideration to improve the proposal.

Dr. Sheila Wright, Dean of the School of Education at Hamline University, is prepared to organize and host this event and work with her colleagues to invite peers, including those in other institutions of higher education in the Twin Cities area (e.g., deans of education, business, and law) to attend. In essence, this effort is a kick-off event for developing circles of influence who are able to assist in drafting new language that considers the State's economic viability in the context of excellence in education and that, regardless of our respective backgrounds, will focus exclusively on the similarities in our collective voices, goals, and desires.

Once initial conversation has taken place, we further propose that a smaller group, such as the originally MMEP coalition and/or similar to this one, develop core recommendations based on what we hear from all stakeholders for additional consideration.

We believe the actions noted above are essential to the development of a new version of the RTTT application.

Respectfully,

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Hector Garcia, Executive Director, CLAC
Jennifer Godinez, Associate Director, Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc.
Ilean Her, Executive Director, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans
Annamarie Hill, Executive Director, Minnesota Indian Affairs Council
Barbara Milon, Executive Director, Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
Yvonne Wells-Ellis, Office Administrator, Hamline University
Sheila Wright, Ph.D., Dean, Hamline School of Education, Hamline University