

Governor Exercises Power to Cut State Budget - Including Education

...concerns exist over what impact these reductions might have on students of color...

On Tuesday, June 16, 2009, Governor Tim Pawlenty exercised his power to "un-allot" - cut appropriations made by the State Legislature in bills he signed based on having an unbalanced negative budget represented in those bills.

Compared to other parts of the State budget, education was left relatively unharmed; however concerns exist over what impact these reductions might have on students of color and on race disparities in education.

In higher education both the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities suffered a \$50 million cut each. These reductions are meant to occur in the second year of the biennium (the state budget is set in two year terms). The Governor acknowledged that these cuts will pose a challenge to higher education institutions but thought they were manageable.

The Chair of the Minnesota House Committee on Higher

Education expressed concern that the true impact will be significantly higher noting that it comes on top of the \$60 million cut in the higher education bill sent to him by the legislature and that he signed. The Chair also noted that \$40 million had been cut in a previous unallotment decision by the Governor and that tuition relief for struggling students might be eliminated.

There will no doubt be great anticipation by many students on whether these cuts will impact tuition rates in the year to come. With a need to raise the total number of college graduates quickly in order to participate strongly in a global economy calling for high knowledge technologically disciplines, reductions to our higher education system could make it difficult for Minnesota to achieve such a forward thinking, but necessary goal. The Minnesota Minority Education Partnership, Inc. (MMEP) recognizes that those goals can only be achieved by dramatically raising the college going rates of students of color.

Yet these are the very students, as documented by the



Minnesota
Minority
Education
Partnership, Inc.

[If we are going to end race disparities in Minnesota it is incumbent that we move forward with aggressively preparing students of color for, and recruiting them into, postsecondary opportunities.]

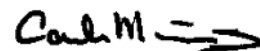
organization's *College Access Matters* report, that are the most affected by barriers to college attendance. Two such barriers include the cost of tuition, and isolation from outreach efforts that may be affected by such cuts. If we are going to end race disparities in Minnesota it is incumbent that we move forward with aggressively preparing students of color for, and recruiting them into, postsecondary opportunities. MMEP will work to measure what impact this unallotment decision might have on this and report its findings to the public.

K-12 education suffered no direct cuts. Instead the Governor used a mechanism to temporarily delay entitlement payments to schools of \$1.17 billion. This constitutes the single largest saving to the budget. By delaying payments, schools will receive only 73 percent of their entitlement for the year with the rest to follow during the remaining in the next year.

As in higher education, many students and parents will anxiously watch to see what

decisions districts faced with the possibility of reaching into reserves or borrowing in order to pay expenses will make. Either decision will entail loses in interest income that could have negative long term programming consequences. With one of the highest K-12 student race disparity gaps in the nation such a change in finances could exacerbate that reality depending on program decisions schools districts make. MMEP will pay close attention to such decisions and report what impact they may have on students of color.

With students of color comprising ever larger portions of the student body we must be vigilant in articulating the constant need for our state to not retreat on investing in K-12 education. These are the very students that need the strongest investments given the disproportionate presence of poverty and social isolation that exists in large parts of these communities. ■



Carlos Mariani Rosa
Executive Director