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**Valley Varro**  
Executive Director

October 14, 2011

Dear Governor Dayton:

Minnesota has much to be proud of. National rankings validate our unrivaled charitable giving and volunteering, our initiatives to foster sustainable communities and a strong sense of place, our unparalleled voting, and our thriving business sector. We also have a proud history of living up to our commitment to public education. Our public schools are some of the best in the country, but our achievement gap is a disservice to the next generation of Minnesotans and jeopardizes our collective future. We support Minnesota's Race to the Top application for the Early Learning Challenge grant to help correct our academic disparities.

The conversation in Minnesota surrounding the achievement gap is changing. We are leveraging Minnesota's legacy of educational innovation, from the first teacher-training school west of the Mississippi River (founded in Winona in 1858) to the nation's first charter school (founded in St. Paul in 1992), to close the gap.

Despite our historically innovative policies, we face two Minnesotas. In one, children receive a great education at their local public schools and learn skills that will help them compete in the workforce and live out the American dream. In the other, children enter our schools behind and drop out of them with alarming regularity. Too often, they fail to learn even the most basic skills a 21st century-job requires.

Our population is changing rapidly. In the next 30 years, the number of African-American, Latino and Asian Minnesotans will double. By 2035, 44 percent of Hennepin County residents and 48 percent of Ramsey County residents will be people of color. In the suburbs, the non-white population will double by that time. As our achievement gap demonstrates, we need to have a different conversation about how to adopt proven strategies to close the gap.

The good news is we're doing a lot of things right. We are embarking on changes to the way we engage, treat and teach our young learners. For example, in 2011, the Minnesota Legislature approved \$4 million in scholarships for low-income families to access early childhood education opportunities. We also have your commitment to expand Parent Aware, Minnesota's system to rate child care providers, statewide so that those scholarships are available more broadly. There is more we can do and Race to the Top funding will position us to reach more young children in more meaningful ways. We support the principle that all young learners should have access to high-quality early learning opportunities because it is one of the key elements in closing the achievement gap. When we prepare students to succeed in kindergarten, will allow them the opportunity to be high-performers throughout their education.

We stand among many organizations that are addressing Minnesota's academic disparity. But this letter is not to promote who we are, rather to reinforce that we are collectively collaborating on how to provide every Minnesota child an equal opportunity to access education. As a testament to our unwavering support for Minnesota's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge application, we assembled this coalition who stand for effective, inclusive early childhood learning as a tool to help close the achievement gap. Many of us have also participated in an online video to capture our collective spirit and commitment, and select screen grabs are enclosed.


Prioritizing public education is a defining characteristic of our state and, rightly so, a source of tremendous pride. We are also increasingly rich in ethnicity, and, collectively, we are excited to chart the course for the future of Minnesota. That begins with education.

Thank you for your consideration.


Sincerely,



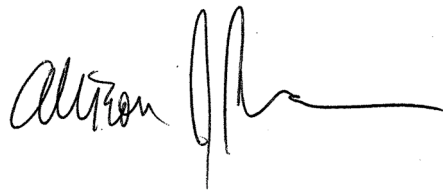
Vallay Varro  
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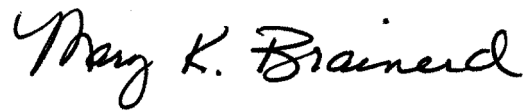
Art Rolnick  
Senior Fellow and HCRC Co-Director  
University of Minnesota



Robin Ewing  
President  
Minnesota Library Association



Allison Barmann  
Director  
Itasca Project



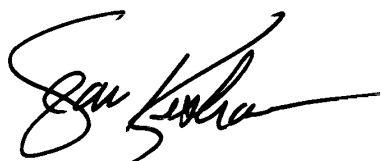
Mary Brainerd  
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Itasca Project



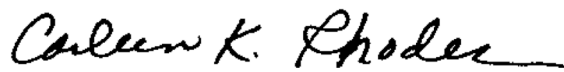
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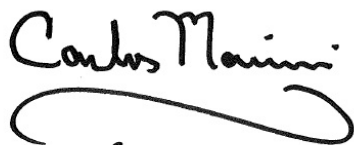
Carleen K. Rhodes  
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Carlos Mariani Rosa  
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Al Fan  
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Charter School Partners



MaryAnn Baenninger  
President, College of St. Benedict  
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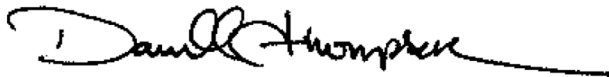
James H. Barnes, III  
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