

To whom it may concern:

My name is Kaitlyn Shead and I am the parent of a current kindergartener at Edward Neill Elementary School in Burnsville. I am writing to testify that the voluntary Pre-K program (VPK) at ISD 191 was an exceptional program with significance to my family and especially my son, and it would be a gross mistake to diminish or be rid of it.

It was important to me that my son attended Pre-Kindergarten, and the fact that it was available free of cost through the VPK program at his elementary school was a game changer for our family. He had attended preschool the year prior (3 year-old program) but only attended the two half days a week option due to cost. Last year, however, he was able to attend four half days a week as it was free of charge. I noticed a leap in not only his academic knowledge and how quickly he was picking up new concepts, but also in his social skills. Also, for both my son's sake and for my own as a first-time mom, it was extremely helpful to have familiarity with the building he would be attending elementary school in. Once Kindergarten came around, both my son and I felt comfortable with him being in the building, with what a school day looks like (they just became longer), and even with the teachers. The Pre-K teacher prepared him for Kindergarten. And not just for any Kindergarten, but for a classroom that was right next door.

Without the VPK option at ISD 191, my son likely would have only attended two half days a week again, due to cost. It would have been in a different location. It wouldn't have had the wonderful teacher he had, who worked directly with his current Kindergarten teacher for scope and sequence to ensure a successful transition. My son wouldn't have been as ready academically, have already had some friendships heading into the same class together as he did, and wouldn't have been as comfortable with the building as he was able to be for his first day of Kindergarten.

Finally, it's important to mention that VPK was especially successful in teaching my son and keeping him being educated during the COVID Pandemic stay-at-home order last spring. There was highly professional, engaging, and thoughtful education still happening for my son through virtual schooling. I have no doubt that had he been in a part-time, paid for Pre-K program (which he would have been if VPK wasn't available), he would not have been educated during last spring - not only not in person, but not even virtually. It was imperative to his success in Kindergarten this year that his education continued through the spring last year and VPK did that. I would say it was even more imperative that he learned how to be a good, virtual student during that time so that he was prepared for the hybrid and fully virtual parts of this current, Kindergarten school year. VPK did that.

I am asking you to keep in place the VPK program and funding it has, that have so highly benefited my eldest son, so they may one day benefit my youngest son as well. Keep them in place to keep this mom's mind at ease. Keep them in place to help ensure a better future for our state with people who have been well-educated from Pre-Kindergarten on.

Sincerely,  
Kaitlyn Shead

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To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing today in

an effort to urge legislators to reconsider the proposed Delete-All Amendment (HF2230DE1) via my first-hand experience with ISD 191.

I consider our family

lucky to be one with a child that attended Pre-School the year before Kindergarten. We were able to do this *because*

this program was available & offered. The funding provided was a huge benefit for our family, and in addition to the no cost option, we had a wonderful experience. I feel very strongly about this. The early learning phases of life are so important & can set

the stage for a lifelong love of learning!

The ISD 191 program provided

a fantastic environment for learning as well as enriching experiences to learn about life in very exciting ways – skills and information FAR beyond just learning letters and numbers. The class my daughter attended had many different “studies” (topics/subjects

that were introduced, including projects, books & activities to really be able to learn about that subject) that were presented in ways to help grow their individual skills as well as being in groups working toward bigger goals. Through play, the children were

able to bring some of their real life experiences to the classroom & include their peers in their traditions & each others’ lives to help give a broadened view of the world. They learned about different cultures and holidays, the earth & environment, teamwork,

being kind & treating property & others with respect. My daughter very much enjoyed learning through play, songs, art, being on the playground with her peers, learning about different sports and gained a wonderful sense of community.

It was also a great way

to get a glimpse at a neighborhood school (the program we attended was in one of the elementary schools) & see the older elementary kids in the setting of school. I feel that was a really nice way to ease into the elementary school setting as starting school

can be a very scary thing for kids with no prior experience. It made for a smooth transition for the next year. My daughter was excited to “go back to school” and had the skills that she needed to be successful in Kindergarten. She knew how to act during class

& was able to set an example and also help her peers that didn’t have the opportunity to do a Pre-K program.

Honestly, I feel that

it would be an enormous loss to take these options away. Just ISD 191 would be losing nearly 2/3 of their current availability that is offered to the community. I don’t want to imagine what the impact state-wide would be. This program is a fantastic start to

these kids’ schooling years. This district is currently very diverse & I think that is a beautiful thing. Cultural diversity is one thing, but of course it comes with all different levels of ability to afford things such as Pre-K options & it would be quite

detrimental to the community to no longer be able to offer all of these children opportunities.

Please reconsider taking

this step as it will most definitely effect many families & school for years to come.

Sincerely,

Teresa Vik

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Hi

I am a Kindergarten teacher in Burnsville. We have had a VPK program in our building for the last 3 years. This program has had such a positive impact on our student's preparedness for Kindergarten socially-emotionally and academically. Lack of funding to support this VPK would be a huge determinant to our students, their families, and school communities. I beg you to keep this funding in place. It is for the best of our students and their education.

Sincerely,

Jonalyn Lippka

Kindergarten Teacher

ISD 191

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To Whom this may Concern:

I am writing to testify about the importance of Voluntary Prek programming and funding. I am a VPK teacher at Edward Neill Elementary School in ISD 191. I serve a variety of children coming from all different backgrounds. I started with this district and program three years ago-those kids are now in 1st grade and wow what awesome first graders they are! Of course I am biased because the relationships I have with these kids and their families are special and strong-some I have had the pleasure of having their siblings in the following years to come and still get a horn honk at drop off or dismissal, cards and the oh so special and new this year air hugs!

This program has opened doors to families in our community. As a parent, preschool and childcare is expensive and at times not even a realistic financial option for families. This program gives children a fun, safe, learning opportunity in their neighborhood to obtain high quality education in a school setting where they will be attending Kindergarten. These families receive peace of mind sending their children to school in a school system where culturally proficient staff are teaching their children with standards upheld by the State of Minnesota and backed by developmentally appropriate practices. The team of Early Childhood educators are DEVOTED to this work-we eat, sleep and breath all things Pre-K and we are all happy to do so. It is the work that keeps us going. This program allows for collaboration in the MOST critical years for graduation success! This program is designed to jumpstart skills that families are working on at home VPK classrooms in Elementary buildings are the stepping stones to leaders. Kindergarten teachers are equipped in September, with rich literacy, mathematical, language, cognitive and social/emotional data on these children. Kindergarten teachers are not only able to build relationships from day one but many natural leaders emerge into the classroom. Those Kindergarten teachers have a much smaller gap in abilities in September-WHY? because children are having the opportunity to be in Prek. If that funding is cut, we have significantly less children showing up in Kindergarten with basic skills-unable to share, wait, follow a two step direction, identify their name, PLAY, carry on a conversation with a peer. Since adding VPK classrooms to each building in ISD 191, organic relationships are developing amongst Prek and K teachers to collaborate together about appropriate practices, understand the age of progressions of learning and scaffolding methods for tier 1, 2, and 3 children. Day after day these important steps are happening, to better the child-which is why we are here!

This year, facing not only the Covid-19 pandemic but Social Injustices, I reflect back on what we have accomplished and it is hard to put into words what was done. In summary we developed successful ways for children to learn Prek experiences ONLINE!!! and thrive. We explored ways to shine in the homes of these littles-some of us even streamed LIVE on Youtube and then casted into living room television sets. Others found ways to work together with social distancing and masking requirements. It was really easy to look at how these horrible and unfortunate events allowed for some

major opportunities for children and families. One of which was Free Lunch, breakfast and a snack at school and sent home, opportunities for food and supply deliveries. We have been through a lot this year. Cutting funding to a program where children are thriving would be a grave disservice to our youngest learners, families in the community and elementary teaching staff.

Thank you for your time.

Kaitlin Cantolla