



STATE OF MINNESOTA

Office of Governor Mark Dayton

130 State Capitol ♦ 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard ♦ Saint Paul, MN 55155

May 24, 2011

The Honorable Kurt Zellers
Speaker of the House
State Office Building, Room 463
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Mr. Speaker:

With this letter, I am vetoing and returning Chapter 42, House File 934, the Education Finance Bill. I do so with the hope that we can come together to find a compromise: a balanced solution without the damaging cuts and harmful policy items contained in this legislation.

Legislators from both parties have worked well with Education Commissioner Cassellius and with me, to find areas of common within this bill. I thank them for their thoughtful and persistent work. Ensuring an excellent education for all Minnesota students should be among our highest budget priorities. Having worked together on the alternative pathways to licensure bill, I know we can find compromise. I am encouraged by the potential to find common ground in this bill in early reading proficiency and recognition of high-achieving schools. I am hopeful that we can build on those areas of agreement.

Unfortunately, this Education Finance Bill would have very harmful effects on students, on teachers, and on schools. I will not sign an education funding bill that pits student-against-student or district-against-district. I have consistently stated my intention to increase education funding, which is why my original budget included \$36 million in new funding for schools. Subsequently, in agreement with the Legislature's desire to put additional money on the per pupil formula, I proposed to increase the formula allowance by \$50 per pupil in each fiscal year of the biennium, for a total of \$164 million in new education investments. By contrast, this bill cuts school funding by nearly \$44 million below current base-funding level. Within those reductions, it unfairly and disproportionately shifts funding among school districts.

The cuts to special education would create significant funding gaps that would force school districts to shift funds from general education programs, increase class sizes, or raise property taxes, just to maintain their current levels of special education services.

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Additionally, the elimination of integration revenue and freezing of compensatory revenue wrongfully harms poor children and children of color, which I will not accept.

None of Commissioner Cassellius and my education proposals are contained in this bill; most notably, funding for optional all-day Kindergarten and initiatives in early childhood education. The bill also contains numerous policies, including school grading, collective bargaining limitations, teacher evaluation, and Common Core prohibitions, which are controversial, are punitive to teachers, and have little research to support their efficacy in improving student learning and closing achievement gaps. I am disappointed that the bill creates a private school voucher program, an experiment that has not worked in other states. Until our public schools are funded at adequate and sustainable levels, a diversion of public dollars to private schools is unwise.

The funding cuts to the Department of Education were reduced in this bill, which I certainly appreciate. However, when combined with the 15% staff reductions in the State Government bill, the agency would be faced with the loss of at least 30 fulltime employees. Cuts of this nature, on top of eight years of cumulative budget reductions, would further hinder the Department's already limited capacity to provide technical assistance, support, and oversight to schools throughout Minnesota.

Budgets are about priorities, and priorities are about choices. We can choose to work together, compromise, and create a budget that fairly spreads the burden we must all shoulder if we are to weather these tough times and position Minnesota for future success. I know that working together we can create a reform-minded blueprint for our state's K-12 education, of which we can all be proud.

Each of us started our budget proposals by making a choice. I chose a balanced approach to our budget; one that included both significant cuts, but asked the top two percent of Minnesotans to pay more to ensure our quality of life and the services millions of Minnesotans depend on. My approach chooses not to balance the budget on the backs of the other ninety-eight percent of Minnesotans.

In the spirit of compromise, more than one week ago, I cut my proposal in half, in the hopes that an offer to meet in the middle would spur action towards the balanced solution the people of Minnesota have asked for.

Instead, you chose to present me with an all-cuts approach, one that has serious consequences for Minnesotans, and that I do not believe is in line with our shared commitment to build a better Minnesota.

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From the beginning of this legislative session, it has been clear that compromise would be necessary to balance our state's budget. In November, Minnesotans voted for a divided government, and I believe, in their wisdom, they did so because they want part of what each of us has to offer, and they want us to work together to solve the state's budget crisis and build a better Minnesota.

Compromise is never easy, because each person must give up something that is important. Compromise requires us to agree to items that we don't agree with. That is the only way we will reconcile our differences on the state's budget. I am returning this bill to you with the hope that you will choose to work with me, to find a fair, responsible, and balanced solution.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Dayton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark Dayton
Governor

cc: Senator Michelle L. Fischbach, President of the Senate
Senator Amy T. Koch, Majority Leader
Senator Thomas M. Bakk, Minority Leader
Senator Gen Olson
Representative Paul Thissen, Minority Leader
Representative Pat Garafolo
The Honorable Mark Ritchie, Secretary of State
Mr. Cal R. Ludeman, Secretary of the Senate
Mr. Albin A. Mathiowetz, Chief Clerk of the House of Representatives