

Saint Paul Public School referendum adds \$9 million for technology

Written by Melvin Carter III, Saint Paul City Councilmember
Tuesday, 30 October 2012 11:06



It is critical that our community support the Saint Paul Public School Referendum on the November 6 ballot, which asks Saint Paul voters to renew the \$30 million levy that passed in 2006 and add a \$9 million investment in technology for our kids.

Simply put, strong public schools are critical to strengthening our communities and building the best possible future for our children. While there remains much work to be done, our children in the Saint Paul Public Schools have made promising progress over the past six years which simply cannot be sustained without the resources this referendum generates.

So, what is this progress? Since 2007:

- State reading scores for African American students have increased by 9.8 percent;
- Enrollment in post-secondary education by African American graduates of Saint Paul Public Schools has gone from 57 percent to 70 percent and it continues to climb; and
- The dropout rate among African American Students has decreased to eight percent - its lowest rate in recent history. While even this number is unacceptable, it shows that our schools are making great gains.

These gains are the fruit of programs and resources funded under school levy passed in 2006 by Saint Paul voters. This work includes: pre-kindergarten, all-day kindergarten and Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) programs; increased math and reading staff in elementary schools; reduced class sizes for math and science in middle and high schools; and, more secondary guidance counselors for postsecondary preparation. Each of these vital programs is in jeopardy if our referendum fails.

Seventy-five percent of the funds in this year's referendum will be used to maintain proven programs that are delivering results for our children. If the referendum does not pass, all of these programs go away and the next generation of kindergarteners loses an opportunity for a great start.

The other twenty five percent of the referendum will fund technology and training upgrades designed to ensure our children are ready to compete in the 21st century economy. This portion

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of the levy will accelerate the district's investment in classroom technology – ensuring Saint Paul students like my two girls are just as competitive and well prepared as students from other districts. It will make classrooms more like the workplaces our children will be entering, therefore allowing us to better prepare students to master the skills they will need to compete and excel in the job market they'll face as adults.

State school funding has not favored students in our urban schools, and it shows no signs of getting better anytime soon. It's up to us to see to it this funding gap doesn't stand in the way of success for our students. Since 2000, Saint Paul's voters have stepped up to pass and renew local funding to keep our schools strong. Superintendent Silva and other district leaders are continuing to work and partner through efforts like the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood to identify opportunities to improve our schools in ways that will improve learning outcomes for our kids.

As a graduate of Central High School, I am thankful that my public school education gave me a chance to win a college scholarship, earn a degree, and go on to serve on the Saint Paul City Council. As board chair of the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood, I know these resources are critical to our work in closing the Twin Cities' nation leading achievement gap. Most importantly, as a parent of two students enrolled at Saint Paul Public Schools, I am as determined as ever to ensure that all children across our city have the opportunities that were afforded to me and others through a second-to-none public school education.

This November 6, I ask that you stand with me along with our parents and children in Saint Paul by turning over your ballot and voting yes on the referendum to ensure our children receive a first class education.

Melvin W. Carter III serves on the Saint Paul City Council representing Ward 1. He is also the chair of the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood initiative and the co-chair of Vote Yes for St. Paul Kids.