



April 6, 2005

NEAT is an independent, citywide association working to support public education in Saint Paul.

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**Working to Support a
Premiere Education For All**

Senator Linda Higgins
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther Blvd., Room 328
St. Paul, MN 55155-1606

Representative Keith Ellison
229 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: HF1923; SF 1727

Dear Senator Higgins and Representative Ellison,

Thank you for introducing legislation to reduce the allowable blood lead level from 20 micrograms per deciliter or 20 ug/dl to 10 ug/dl.

NEAT is an independent, citywide association of parents, parent groups and community members working to support public education in Saint Paul. In November 2004, we hosted a public forum on the Achievement Gap in Saint Paul. To provide a framework for our investigations, we used the October 2003 Chicago-based study, "*Parsing the Achievement Gap: Baselines for Tracking Progress*" which identified six school-based and eight community-based correlates of student achievement. We published the results of our efforts on January 9, 2005. The full report is available at: www.stpaulneat.org/Report.html

Lead Poisoning was one of the community-based variables we looked into. In the course of our investigation, we found:

- The research shows lead levels cause "reductions in IQ and attention span, reading and learning disabilities and behavior problems." Lead is a major, preventable pediatric environmental health risk. Children are particularly at risk from exposure to lead, with blood lead levels above 10 µg/dL considered elevated. Although lead is found throughout the environment, the major exposure pathway of public health concern is through deteriorated, lead-based paint. [Wilder Research Center, November 2004]
- About 2,000 children a year in Minnesota are identified as having elevated levels of lead in their blood (greater than 10 ug/dL). [Minnesota Medical Association, October 2002] Approximately 85 percent of the reports of elevated lead levels in Minnesota come from Hennepin and Ramsey counties. [Minnesota Blood Lead Surveillance Data, 2003]

Suggesting that 1,700 children in Hennepin and Ramsey County are identified as having elevated lead levels each year.

- Universal screening is recommended for children residing in Minneapolis and St. Paul and those recently arriving from other major metropolitan areas. [Minnesota Blood Lead Surveillance Data, 2003]

UNIVERSAL SCREENING IN RAMSEY AND HENNEPIN COUNTIES IS CURRENTLY NOT REQUIRED BY LAW.

What would the data show if universal screening were required?

- A 2003 study showed schools having more children with lead poisoning greater than 10 ug/dL is significantly related to not achieving AYP status [Michigan Department of Community Health, October 2003]. Because under No Child Left Behind the Annual Yearly Progress of a school is based student achievement by income and ethnicity, we made a substantial effort to find lead incidence data broken down in the same way. We received the following reply from the Minnesota Department of Health:

"Unfortunately, we do not report blood lead data by race or ethnicity. Even though these are two of the data fields we collect from analyzing laboratories, the data are incomplete and collected in a widely varying manner. Approximately 50% of the race data and 70% of the ethnicity data are not reported to us. Also, these data can be collected in a wide variety of ways. It can be gathered by the laboratory personnel at a clinic through observation, by asking the patient, or by looking at clinic records. We suspect that the percentage of missing data is not consistent across races or ethnicity, and has a lot of bias. Therefore, to answer your question, we do not report race and ethnicity for blood lead data due to incompleteness and bias in the data. Let me know if you have any other questions about blood lead data for Minnesota." [October 2004]

MINNESOTA LEAD INCIDENCE DATA IS CURRENTLY NOT AVAILABLE ON A DISAGGREGATED BASIS.

What would the data show if it were reported by income and ethnicity?

What would a study conducted in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties show about the relationship between elevated lead levels and student achievement?

- Given that,
 - a) the correlation between student achievement and elevated blood levels has been established;
 - b) universal screening in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties has been recommended but not required;
 - c) lead incidence data is currently not collected or reported by income and ethnicity;

WE URGE YOU, to include provisions in your bills for

- a) universal screening in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties;
- b) data collection and reporting by the Department of Health using the same income and ethnicity guidelines as provided in No Child Left Behind;
- c) provision for a local study to determine the relationship between elevated lead levels and student achievement in Hennepin and Ramsey County public schools

NEAT fully supports data-driven decision-making. We also believe that if we're going to make a genuine effort to close the Achievement Gap, we need to broaden the scope of accountability to include the public agencies responsible for overseeing efforts correlated to student achievement. This includes the Minnesota Department of Health.

This is an environmental justice issue that disproportionately affects the children of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties and the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Public Schools. Please let us know if we can provide any additional information or input to help you address these essential issues.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jennifer Armstrong, President
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Saint Paul, MN 55104

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cc: Representative Fran Bradley; the Saint Paul Delegation; Superintendent Patricia Harvey; Superintendent Thandiwe Peebles