



December 11, 2009

Dr. Chris Richardson
Alliance for Student Achievement
1400 Division Street South
Northfield, MN 55057

Dear Dr. Richardson:

Thank you for the opportunity to address your members. At this time, we are only completing questionnaires for organizations that are endorsing in the race for governor. However, I hope I may take this opportunity to make a few points about my history and views on education issues and direct you to my website (www.entenza.com) for additional information about my campaign.

Education has long been a core Minnesota value and the foundation of our economic competitiveness. It's also traditionally been a bipartisan value, championed notably by Governors Orville Freeman (a DFLer) and Elmer Anderson (a Republican). In the 1970s and 1980s, Minnesota was in the top five in the nation in education.

Over time we realized that we couldn't start with kindergarten; that early childhood education had a high rate of return on investment, ensuring our kids entered kindergarten ready to learn. We were recognized as a national leader.

As we've begun to disinvest in education, unsurprisingly, our rankings have fallen. Between 2006 and 2007 we fell from number six in the nation to number 13. Today some – even some DFLers – talk about further cuts to education. Neglecting education, particularly during a time of economic hardship, is Minnesota's fast track to mediocrity. We simply can't accept that.

I have been a strong leader on education for 15 years. As a new legislator, I became a leading opponent of vouchers. In 1995, I was chief author of the first bill to provide funding for all-day kindergarten, and though then-Gov. Carlson vehemently opposed it, I worked to expand access to all-day kindergarten to hundreds of schools.

In 2000, I independently initiated investigations into our state's charter schools when there were signs of trouble – which led to later investigations that put two charter school leaders in prison.

As House Minority Leader in 2005, I worked with Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnson to bring about the first meaningful increase to education funding in years. As the founder and board chair of Minnesota 2020, Minnesota's leading progressive think tank promoting investment in education, I took on those seeking to hurt our public schools.

Education is a very personal issue for me.

I arrived in the Worthington Public Schools as a rebellious 15-year-old. My father, who suffered from alcoholism, had just abandoned my family, forcing my mom, my brother and sister and I out of our home and into my grandmother's. Given my attitude, what my family had just been through and the upheaval it had caused in my life, I wasn't exactly on a path to success.

But several things happened. One: My family rallied in a tough time to help me get my priorities straight. Two: one of my teachers kept on me because she thought she might be able to tap into some hidden talent if she just spent a little extra time with me. Three: I joined the high school debate team and in it, found something that challenged me and a way to excel. I also found friends who thought doing well in school was a good thing.

Through the time I spent with teachers, coaches and other adults who believed I had potential, I turned my grades around and pretty soon, I was college-bound.

It's time for a change in education. Our public schools are charged with teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, but also with helping create whole human beings on a path to contributing to their communities. We need less focus on how to fill out tests and more focus on learning. We need tests that *actually* measure student learning. We need better mentorship for teachers. We need long-term investment in E-12 education that does not rely on levy after levy, unfairly punishing districts that lack the property tax base to raise funds. I am ready to lead the charge.

We have a tough fight on our hands again in 2010. I have the right campaign, the right message and the right priorities to win and make Minnesota work again – creating jobs all over Minnesota and refocusing on providing the kind of high quality education that traditionally has made our state an economic leader.

Our times call for a leader with the vision and strength to take on tough challenges. I'm up to the challenge of taking back the governor's office – and I'd like your members by my side.

Best regards,



Matt Entenza