

## **Testimony of Eric Celeste to the Senate E12 Division in support of SF530**

Thank you Mr. Chair and Committee for this opportunity to testify. I am Eric Celeste and the dad of two Crosswinds graduates. I am here to testify for a group of current and former EMID Families who decided to honor your tight time in committee by limiting our testimony to just a couple representatives. We strongly support SF530 and the conveyance of Crosswinds and its wonderful program to the Perpich Center for Arts Education.

We have been advocating for Crosswinds for many years and were disappointed when we heard the experience of families so misinterpreted at the last hearing for this bill. The decline in Crosswinds enrollment since 2008 was interpreted as a critique of the program, especially when compared to the steady enrollment at Crosswinds' sister school, Harambee.

Let me be very clear: nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, you all received a letter from one parent of children in both schools, Laurel LeBlanc, describing the vast difference in the context of these two schools over the past five years. While the East Metro Integration District Board was threatening to shut down both schools, it was always understood that should that happen the Roseville Area school district would step in to continue the program at Harambee in as seamless a way as possible. Meanwhile, at Crosswinds, there was never such an assurance.

Over those years we weathered four superintendent transitions, resisted two attempts by the board to divest itself of our schools, withstood the loss of special integration funding for the schools, and suffered last year's failure of the legislature to convey Crosswinds to Perpich.

Then the unthinkable happened. The EMID board, which had twice tried to close the school, overwhelmingly decided instead to let the program continue under the management of Perpich. This was in July. As any of you who are parents of school-age kids realize, the season for settling your school choices for the coming year is January and February. All of us families in this room and organizing to save Crosswinds had urged every family at the school to have a Plan B in case the school was closed, and by July every single Crosswinds family was enrolled elsewhere for the coming year. In other words, our enrollment was effectively zero.

The real indicator of the value of the Crosswinds program is not the enrollment decline over five years of battery from those trying to capture integration funds to cover funding gaps. The families who left consistently begged the EMID board for stable governance so that they could have the confidence they needed to stay at a school that was serving them so well. No, the real indicator, the real miracle, was that in less than one month Crosswinds enrollment rose from zero to the 174 you see today. And we are still growing!

Crosswinds has been badly hurt by the actions of its joint powers board and by the refusal of this body to hear this bill in the last session. It has been badly hurt, but it is a fantastic program waiting to become stronger than it ever was under the stable and effective governance of the Perpich Center for Arts Education. You here today have the power to be our heroes and the heroes of true integration in the east metro. Please work with families, teachers, and the Perpich Center to build a model for integration that will serve Minnesota for many years to come. Please support SF530.

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