



Saint Paul
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board of Education
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Saint Paul City Council
310 City Hall
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To the members of the Saint Paul City Council:

As you are aware, Linwood Monroe Arts Plus School's lower campus at 1023 Osceola is poised to undertake building renovations designed to meet the 21st century learning needs of students.

The renovations planned for this successful school are the result of a very intentional, very comprehensive community planning process begun back in 2014 to create a 10-year plan for our schools. Our goal is to prioritize the updates in our facilities based on constantly changing student needs, while at the same time maximizing the resources provided by Saint Paul's taxpayers. We are honor-bound to use these dollars wisely and I have seen every indication that we are doing that.

As chairperson of the SPPS Board of Education, I want to underscore for you the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of this planning process. Let me share the highlights of concerns about this project and why we believe the Board of Zoning Appeals reached the right decision to grant our variances:

- **The enrollment and use of the site are in keeping with the history of the site:** There is a concern that changes to the building will lead to overutilization – too many kids in too small of a space. Looking at past uses of the building, however, and you'll see enrollments 20% higher than what is being proposed. In fact, the proposed enrollment of the school is within 11% of the average enrollment of the school over the last 45 years. In that same time frame, the school has housed K-3, K-6, and K-12 programs, so the site has accommodated many different uses and students.
- **Moving prekindergarten and 4th grade to Linwood for a PreK-4 grade continuum makes sense for learning:** The decision to move students to this building from the Linwood-Monroe's upper campus is not based on expediency or business practices, but on research on grade-level continuity and the physiological and emotional benefits of extended relationships between students and educators. These decisions were made by district experts in partnership with community members from across Saint Paul and in accordance with our school learning pathways.
- **Saint Paul Public Schools has responded to every resident concern:** As a neighbor and community partner, SPPS has diligently considered how we can meet both students' and neighbors' needs. Every detail outlined in the appeal has been asked and answered, changes have been made and compromise has been repeatedly sought with neighbors on many issues. As a city-wide system of schools, all options about programs and locations have been thoroughly vetted through our strategic plan and Facilities Master Plan processes, and when the learning and safety of our students is prioritized renovating the lower campus on Osceola is the right decision.

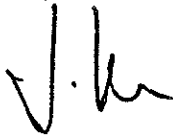
- **Increased playground space:** The new multiple areas of play space in the plan, when added together, *increase* the amount of outdoor playground space. The play space will look different, but more space will be available for more students, as well as neighbors. Outdoor play field and sport court areas are also more efficient and offer more opportunities for play than the existing spaces. Considering the site was entirely asphalt a few short years ago, this will be a welcome improvement to this community asset.
- **The resulting Linwood will be a spectacular benefit to the neighborhood:** The building you will see upon completion of this renovation will far surpass the current building not only in function, but in aesthetics. I am confident that even detractors—though understandably concerned about change in their neighborhood environment—will be pleased with the end result.

We stand today at the precipice of moving forward. Without the variances now before the City Council construction will not just be delayed for another year (with all the disruption and additional expense that implies) but necessary improvements to the school based on years of planning by the District, families and a sizable group of community members may be effectively halted.

I know change is difficult, but change is about the only thing we can count on in this world. At Saint Paul Public Schools, we embrace change and encourage that value in our students. Education itself is changing at the speed of light and we need to move forward with it or risk a great disservice to the future of our students and city. This change will provide a more expansive campus at Linwood to better meet the learning needs of today's and tomorrow's students so they can receive a stellar education with an arts focus that can compete with comparable programs in the metro area.

I implore you to consider the greater good of Saint Paul students in your decision on the variances requested. Reasonable people can, and will, disagree on aesthetics, but our job is to provide all Saint Paul kids with the educational opportunities they need to succeed. This project does that and has been made better by a high degree of community engagement. Now it's time to give our students the facilities they deserve.

Thank you.



Jon Schumacher
Chair
St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education