

From: Michael-Jon Pease <pease@stpaulparks.org>
Sent: Monday, July 17, 2023 9:08 PM
To: Nelsie Yang <Nelsie.Yang@ci.stpaul.mn.us>
Subject: Please support early learning on Wednesday

Think Before You Click: This email originated outside our organization.

Hello CM Yang,

I'm so glad we can partner to create such great park and rec outcomes on the East Side!

I'm writing now to ask you to support early learning at Wednesday's City Council meeting. My request has four inspirations: my work with parks and rec, my work in the theatre, my volunteer service on the board of Dodge Nature Center and Pre-School, and my lived experience.

1. Our parks and rec department features an amazing early learning program at Linwood Rec Center. Even if that program could be replicated at the other 25 rec centers, it could not reach the thousands of early learners Saint Paul is leaving behind by not having options for universal early learning. **So many of our parks and rec programs – as well as the amazing programs at our libraries – have three times the work to do to support kids who never got the start they needed as they navigate life in school and out of school.**
2. During my time at the Des Moines Playhouse I was fortunate enough to attract funding to expand the theatre's work with the local head start program in the city's most underserved areas. **The difference that program made for many of the city's poorest kids in school readiness, confidence, and the ability to navigate life was measurable and was documented nationally in a federal case study.** Unfortunately when the grant funding ended, so did the community's investment in exceptional early learning. What a difference having sustained local government funding would have made there.
3. Dodge Nature Center Pre-School was one of the first nature based early learning institutions. As a board member I get to see how this always in-demand program readies young people for school, as well as a lifetime of curiosity, hunger for learning and environmental stewardship. **I have seen firsthand how a neighbor's child has blossomed and come into her own because of access to high quality early learning.**
4. In my own life, I was blessed to have access to great early learning opportunities. I entered kindergarten as an avid reader and remained ahead of most of my peers from kindergarten through my master's degree. **I know what it is like to be put a step ahead, and I have seen around me how hard it is to live life constantly a step or three behind.**

The majority of critical brain development happens between the ages of 0-5 years. We know that every dollar spent on early learning brings a return of \$16. By not investing in early learning for all Saint Paul kids, we are leaving the City's greatest asset on the bench and playing with a huge human resource handicap.

We can no longer afford to prevent so many young people from achieving their potential in school, in community, in the economy, and in the human family. **It is a choice to leave those children behind, to decide for them that they and their families simply don't matter enough get a fair start.**

In closing, I reflect on the words of a school leader from my youth: *We are not measured by how we help truly gifted students, even though that is important. They will find what they need and the world will step forward with scholarships, patronage and the lucky break. We are not measured by how we help students with real learning disabilities, even though that is important. There will always be those with the heart and courage to help those who really struggle. As a society, we are measured by how many “average” young people we inspire; those who “C” students who just get by, but attract no real notice. Who come to believe they have no particular greatness or contribution to make. **They are the majority among us. If we can help them unlock their potential, they would truly change the world.***

If you’ve made it this far, thank you for reading. And thank you for considering your support for early learning in the city of Saint Paul.

Be well and enjoy today,
Michael-jon

C. Michael-jon Pease, CFRE

Executive Director

He/him/his *

C – 651.341.7269



**SAINT PAUL PARKS
CONSERVANCY**

NEW ADDRESS: 401 Robert St N, Ste 150, Saint Paul, MN 55101

*Read why pronouns matter [here](#).