

Representative Wiens,

Thank you for inviting the ISD 834 School Board to attend today's Met Council Task Force Hearing. It was an enlightening experience. I did not prepare to speak, but want to share my thoughts with you as I'm reflecting on today's testimony.

First, our Superintendent was spot on with his assessment of the downstream impact of Met Council decisions on our school district. The expansion in Lake Elmo has directly impacted our district and has created additional challenges as we plan to implement our newly approved bond.

As plans for restructuring the Met Council continue, I believe there may be an opportunity to add school districts somewhere into the equation. To my knowledge, cities are not required by the Met Council to account for the educational services that school districts are legally required to provide the new residents brought in through expanded development. While increased enrollment is wonderful, the reality is that funding does not enter the district until those students actually enroll. In our district this has led to overcrowding in certain areas and tough board decisions to delay a referendum ask until it was long overdue. Planning for future growth is a difficult sell to communities-- as we witnessed in the failed ISD 833 bond in August 2022. Meanwhile those delays further strain district resources as teachers and principals absorb the impact or transportation costs rise as school district boundaries shift in an effort to relieve overcrowding.

Public schools, like ours, are already at the mercy of all the development decisions in our many communities and are left to navigate the impact alone--at times further straining relationships with those same communities, something we experienced in our latest referendum campaign this fall. Ideally, school districts would at least be brought into the conversation earlier to help anticipate future needs so that local governments understand the whole picture. This could make them aware of the additional costs and opportunities for partnerships coming as we all work to serve all our residents.

Please share my comments with the rest of the committee. I appreciate the thoughtful process and look forward to seeing the recommendations for reform to the Met Council.

Best of luck.

Katie Hockert  
Board Director  
Stillwater Area Public Schools