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# Essay test

## *Wondering why Johnny can't write*

Please write an essay after considering the following: The U.S. Department of Education says three of four American schoolchildren are poor writers. Research also shows that most American kids spend more time in front of television and computer screens than they do reading, writing, talking with their parents and playing. Do these findings surprise you? Do you think there is a connection between them?

In developing your essay, think about what it takes to become an able writer. History shows that it takes imagination, hard work and practice. Yet the average American spends more time watching TV than attending school — and thus more time engaged in an activity so passive and undemanding that it can't rightly be called an activity.

Neuroscientists say that TV-watching replaces activities that help young brains grow (reading, kickball, paper dolls) with one known to impair the ability to think. Do you suppose how

children spend their time these days has anything to do with their writing abilities?

Many writers have contemplated this topic. William Faulkner's advice to aspiring writers was "Read, read, read." Henry James urged writers to "Live all you can; it's a mistake not to." No writer has ever urged his friends to watch more television. Indeed, Roald Dahl expressed strong views on this subject in his 1964 classic, "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory":

*TV rots the senses in the head!*

*It kills the imagination dead!*

*It clogs and clutters up the mind!*

*It makes a child so dull and blind.*

*He can no longer understand a fantasy,*

*A fairyland!*

*His brain becomes as soft as cheese!*

*His powers of thinking rust and freeze!*

Do you agree with Mr. Dahl? If so, explain why. Then share what you've written with the nearest schoolchild.

# Harvey's changes raise costs for St. Paul schools

STPP 10-03-99

## ■ Salaries, accountability, planning most expensive

PAUL TOSTO STAFF WRITER

St. Paul schools superintendent Pat Harvey came in like wildfire last April on a mission to remake education and accountability in the city schools.

Since taking over as the district's chief executive, the school board has channeled hundreds of thousands of dollars toward Harvey's accountability and testing plans. She also has hired more and higher-paid

central administrators. District staff recently added more to the superintendent's contingency fund, a move that will place nearly \$1 million at Harvey's disposal.

So far, her plans have won widespread applause. But they also are generating some big up-front costs.

Board members and others watching the changes say the money spent now will pay big dividends later. Good people must be paid good wages, they say, and the district didn't have enough administrators to make the ambitious new plans work. There is faith in Harvey, and a belief that her work will raise achievement for all St. Paul students.

"This district was not organized to support accountability," Harvey said in an interview. "When we change an administration, we have to build an organization to support it. What we want to do is to be lean, but we also want to provide services for a changing school district."

Harvey said much of the money for accountability and from the contingency fund will go to train tutors to help under-achieving children, for quality reviews of every school, to train parents and teachers to run schools in site councils and for other activities targeted to schools and students.

The goal of the new spending, she said, is

continuous improvement for all schools in St. Paul. The investment should be judged by the benchmarks laid out in the strategic plan, including higher test scores, higher attendance, raising graduation rates and reducing dropout rates.

St. Paul had low numbers of administrators, not just for Minnesota but compared with those of the nation, she said. Building the accountability system required putting in new staff and spending. Some of the changes and their costs include:

- **Administrative salaries.** Nine central

HARVEY CONTINUED ON 5A ▶

INFORMATION FOR LIFE

# HARVEY/St. Paul school costs were historically low, officials say

▼ CONTINUED FROM 1A

office administrators are earning \$100,000 or more now in St. Paul, compared with two before Harvey's arrival.

Before Harvey's hiring, St. Paul ran with four people who held a "superintendent" title (interim, executive assistant and two assistant superintendents) and who were paid a total of \$421,000 a year.

Seven people hold a "superintendent" title now (superintendent, deputy and five area superintendents) and earn \$775,000 collectively.

The reorganization, which Harvey says will make headquarters more responsive to the schools, cut 12 administrative positions and added 17. The old jobs cost the district about \$1.33 million a year in salaries and benefits. The new jobs are forecast to cost \$2.06 million, an increase of \$728,000. The salary difference alone between the old and new positions totals about \$586,563, or the equivalent of 20 first-year teachers, each year.

Harvey earns \$155,000 a year, significantly more than her predecessors and nearly 25 percent more than Carol Johnson, superintendent of the Minneapolis district, which teaches about 3,000 more students than the St. Paul district.

Most of the top people in St. Paul's central office are earning more than their counterparts in Minneapolis who hold similar titles. St. Paul's area superintendents, for instance, earn \$4,000 to \$5,000 more than those with the same titles in Minneapolis. St. Paul school's general counsel earns nearly \$25,000 more a year than his colleague in Minneapolis.

St. Paul officials point out that district administrative costs have been very low historically. State data shows St. Paul spending about \$269 per student on administrative costs in the 1997-98 school year, compared with \$351 statewide and \$473 per student in Minneapolis. That average includes principals, the board and others who supervise staff.

Even with the new positions, St. Paul will still fall below statewide spending averages and well below the metro area costs for administration per pupil, said Deputy Superintendent Bill Larson.

"Accountability is a new ap-

proach and it needs to be staffed with good people to make it work," he said.

■ **Critical friends and Strategic Planning.** Harvey in late May brought in some 20 "critical friends" to assess district departments and operations and recommend improvements. Many were her professional friends and former colleagues.

The district says private donations will defray the initiative's \$24,000 expense. Still, four months after the assessment, school board members still haven't seen a summary report of the work. The "friends" are expected to conduct a follow-up visit. Harvey said they may return in early November and the board will get an analysis shortly after.

Two weeks after the group toured St. Paul schools, Harvey launched several days of strategic planning. The strategic planning committee was made up mostly of people from the local business, education and political establishments, although the planning process also included feedback from the public through surveys and focus groups.

Harvey brought in Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy and her former boss, to speak to the group. He received \$2,500 plus \$1,200 in expenses for his St. Paul speech.

The five "target areas" that

emerged from the planning (preparing all students for life, engaging the public, creating institutional change, providing clear and accurate reporting, respecting and including all cultures and differences) looked similar to the district's "high five" goals published

**The larger administrative staff and their greater salaries have gone mostly unchallenged by the board.... That's traceable to the excitement Harvey has created and the widespread belief she will make St. Paul a model of urban schooling.**

in 1994 (increased learning readiness, increased student achievement, increased quantity and quality of graduates, increased parent and community involvement, increased adult literacy).

■ **Accountability.** The school board in June agreed to spend another \$750,000 to fund Harvey's accountability plans this school year as part of a budget that cut classroom aides, closed New Ar-

rivals (a school that taught transient and homeless kids to try to bring them up to speed) and eliminated a grant fund that helped neighborhood schools pay for field trips and other student programs. (Some of the new accountability money is also expected to help pay for the new administrative salaries, Larson said.)

The district, at Harvey's request, also is buying a second round of testing using the Metropolitan Achievement Test, the exam on which this year's academic probation list is based. The extra testing is expected to cost the district about \$160,000. She told the board two rounds of MAT7 testing were needed for her accountability plans.

The board, during last June's budget debate, agreed to add another \$100,000 to the superintendent's "contingency fund," which traditionally finances emergency needs that arise in the schools during the year.

Larson recently told the board the district was shifting another \$590,000 into the contingency fund, money that was intended for a funding equity lawsuit against the state that the district agreed recently to drop. That puts about \$890,000 into Harvey's hands to spend on contingencies.

The intent, she said, is not for her to have more money in the contingency fund but to make sure that it gets disbursed to schools

and student programs.

The larger administrative staff and their greater salaries have gone mostly unchallenged by the board, as have the money spent for strategic planning and the spending on accountability and the contingency fund. That's traceable to the excitement Harvey has created and the widespread belief she will make St. Paul a model of urban schooling.

"We were basically in a situation where we knew as a district we had to be more accountable for results, become more accountable for schools achieving the outcomes that we wanted, and yet we were unable to make it happen," said Greg Filice, the school board's vice chairman.

"I think the organization is better and that we are much more likely to improve education," Filice said. "The bottom line: We have all said that test scores are going to be the central and most easily understood measure of whether we're successful or not."

David Evertz, a member of the citizens committee that advises the school board on budget issues, also believes district administration probably has been understaffed.

"It looks like she's made all the right moves. Part of me keeps saying I've got to believe in that," Evertz said. He hopes Harvey's work is "taking us to where we want to go. If not, we're going to

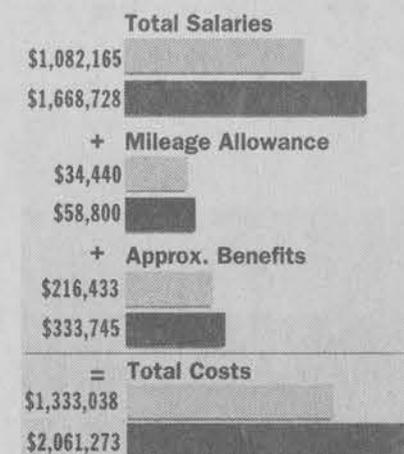
## New administration costs

Superintendent Pat Harvey has won accolades for her reorganization and school accountability plans. But they're also creating some big new costs. Here's a look at the annualized expense of her central office.



12 Central Office Positions cut:

17 Central Office Positions added:



Difference:  
**\$728,236**

Percent increase in annualized administration costs: **55%**

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have an awful lot of highly paid people."

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# Wave of immigrants challenges schools



Star Tribune photo by Ann Heisenfelt

First-grader Mohamud Hassan got instructions from his teacher at Benjamin Banneker Elementary School in Minneapolis. Like Mohamud, about a third of Banneker's 650 students are from Somalia. Three of five Somali kids in his class are repeating first grade.

## Twin Cities districts face language, cultural barriers

By Kimberly Hayes Taylor  
Star Tribune Staff Writer

After lunch one recent school day, William Scheible read Dr. Seuss' "Hop on Pop" to his first-grade class at the Benjamin Banneker Elementary School in Minneapolis. The book has simple, snappy three-letter words. But some of his 16 students didn't understand them.

New arrivals to Minneapolis from Kenyan refugee camps, they are Somali speakers. They had a blank look on their faces as they listened. But they brightened up, smiled and became talkative when Somali teachers came to get them to explain that night's homework.

Scheible will push them as far as he can by June. Still, only some will make it to second grade. Three of five Somali students in his class are repeating first grade.

An unprecedented wave of immigrants

is moving into the Twin Cities. Most of them are Somali, but others are from Ethiopia, Spanish-speaking countries, Russia, Bosnia, Ukraine and other nations. And as the numbers grow, more teachers will face the struggles that confront Scheible.

Within the past month, resettlement agencies in the Twin Cities have counted about 400 arrivals.

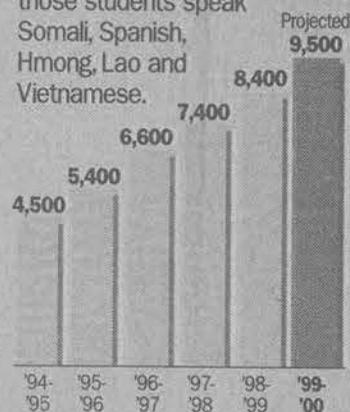
Hundreds of others have come this year, part of about 7,000 Africans expected to arrive in the United States by the end of this month. They are coming to join relatives, and people who resettle immigrants knew they were coming.

But no one seems to have anticipated the sheer numbers coming to the Twin Cities, or the stress in helping them make this area their home.

**SCHOOLS continues on A8**

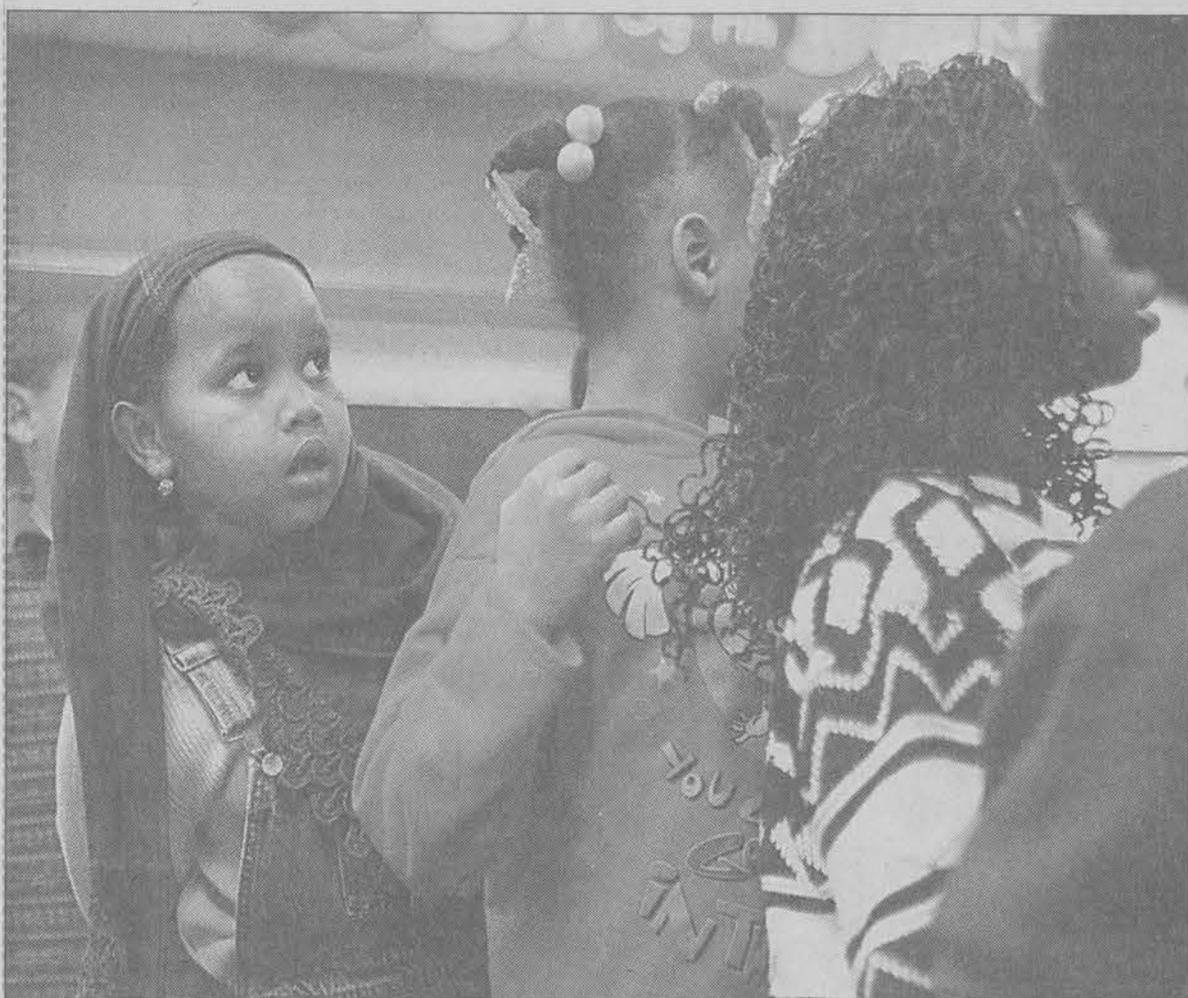
### Non-English speaking student body grows

There has been a steady increase in the number of students who speak other languages in Minneapolis schools. The number is expected to increase again this school year. Most of those students speak Somali, Spanish, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese.



Source: Minneapolis Public Schools

Star Tribune graphic



Star Tribune photo by Ann Heisenfelt

Hani Mahamed, one of five Somali children in her class of 17 at Banneker, lined up for gym class. Many of the new immigrants to the Twin Cities are from Somalia, but others speak Spanish, Amharic or Russian as a first language.

## SCHOOLS from A1

### School placement workers face long hours to deal with influx

At a time when crowds normally would be dwindling at the Minneapolis public schools' welcome center, every seat is filled. Parents, some with as many as 11 children, are waiting to enroll. The crowd seems overwhelming.

To Bonnie Mitchell, English language learner assessment/placement coordinator, and her staff, it is. Part-time workers are pulling nine-hour shifts. They are taking work home. Mitchell works on weekends. They are still behind.

"We are really, really busy," Mitchell said. "We were already busy, but I guess we didn't know what busy was."

In the past two weeks, the tide of immigrants has been so high that they have filled whole planes. Mitchell said the district hasn't registered those children yet. There is such a backlog that new students will have to wait up to two weeks to begin school.

Mitchell doesn't know how many children who speak other languages have enrolled in the district so far this school year. Her earliest estimate is that the totals are at least a third higher than at the same time last year.

Then the district had enrolled about 1,100 new non-English-speaking students. By the end of June, that number had increased to 3,346.

At least 8,400 of the district's 50,000 students didn't speak English as their first language during the 1998-99 school year. The district spent \$9.8 million, about 3 percent of its operating budget, to help them. This school year, \$10.9 million is budgeted for the English language learners program, said Jackie Turner, a district spokeswoman.

#### Learning English

This year, the district, home to students who speak 80 languages, has added eight schools with bilingual programs. Now, 62 of the district's 121 schools have them. Longfellow and Cooper elementary schools serve many Somali students. Ethiopian students, who speak Oromo or Amharic, attend South High. More Hmong students are attending Jordan Park School of Extended Learning and Northside Community Schools.

Northeast Middle School serves more Spanish-speakers, Hmong, Lao and Vietnamese.

Soua Yang, who works with schools to implement English programs for students who speak other languages, said he expects that all schools in the district eventually will need some bilingual teachers and staff members.

Because of the backlog of new immigrant students, and with large families that often include

six to nine children, the wait is even longer to place immigrant children in the same schools as their siblings.

The delays are frustrating to Yang, who spent the summer helping principals and teachers understand cultural issues and how to help new immigrants.

"They need to go to school as soon as they come to the city," Yang said. "The more time they wait, the more time they lose in school."

Once students enter school, the real work begins.

Yang said the district has learned that it takes elementary students a year to learn basic English, and another three to seven years to become proficient. Students who begin their education in high school need at least seven years of English instruction to be able to pass basic-skills tests required for graduation.

Because of the civil war that began in Somalia in 1991, some students are entering school for the first time at ages 13 and 15. Some need to be taught such basic skills as how to hold pencils.

Helping immigrant students of any age learn is both exciting and frustrating, said Scheible, who has been teaching an increasing number of foreign-born students for five years.

"It makes things go slower in the classroom," he said.

#### Never too old to learn

Sometimes, his old worries resurface: "How am I going to communicate with these children. Am I going to offend them?"

He has made mistakes.

He has had to learn not to shake Somali mothers' hands, because touching between members of the opposite sex is considered rude. He no longer requires children to look him in the eye when he is talking to them — looking downward is a show of respect. He never waves a curled-up index finger to beckon students, a gesture used to call a dog; instead, he turns his entire palm down and waves all his fingers toward his body.

He has learned that Somali families have a different sense of time, believing that the day begins at 6 p.m. He expects some parents to show up a day early or a day late for appointments.

"It's a good thing and a bad thing," said Scheible, a native of New Ulm, Minn., who never saw a black person until he was in eighth grade. "If we were all the same, it would be incredibly boring. So we live with differences. This is the real world. It's exciting and scary."

#### Making changes

Life has changed in other ways at Banneker, where about a third

of the 650 students are Somali. For instance, pork no longer is served in the cafeteria.

Even that has become challenging for Angie Martinez, who manages the cafeteria. Many Somali students won't eat the "turkey-ham" sandwiches and some other foods for fear that they contain pork. But other students miss eating sausage pizza and complain about the taste of the turkey pepperoni.

At the district's central office, Turner has been charged with helping parents of color understand the school district better.

She is holding community meetings with Somali parents, many of whom she discovered haven't grasped some basics. Some didn't know what time school starts, what days children have off or what their children should wear.

Turner also is coordinating extra help for students who will have difficulty passing the basic-skills test. She and others are planning a new after-school tutoring program with bilingual instruction at all Minneapolis high schools and alternative schools. It will begin Oct. 4 and run through Jan. 29.

"It's not going to be an excuse that they don't know English," Turner said. "Our mission is to ensure that all students are learning."

Although the arrival of so many new immigrants at one time is stressful for the schools, it probably is even more stressful for the new students.

Leymon Sheik-Yusuf, 14, of Minneapolis, was 10 when she first began learning her ABCs after a large group of Somalis came to the Twin Cities in 1996.

"I was afraid of everybody," she said. "For the first two weeks, I cried every day."

She met friends, learned to speak English and enjoys her new life in Minneapolis.

"This is a strange new world," she said. "I really didn't want to come [to the United States]. For the first two weeks, I was crying every day. After that, I was OK. I like it here now. There are a lot of other Somalis here. I have a lot of friends."

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