

**Words of gratefulness from founding ESLC Director, Sister Audrey Lindenfelser, SSND  
May 24, 2017**

I stand before you with an overflowing sense of gratitude for your presence and show of support. The theme for this event and of this whole year is “Bridges to the Future”. While the intent of this gathering is to honor my years of service within East Side Learning Center, you and I know that it takes many committed people to build a critical bridge. Those of you who know me understand that I don’t believe ESLC is only about me...it’s about what EACH of us brings to this critical work. Thank you for honoring me with your presence and for celebrating the bridge-building we have been doing together for nearly 17 years. YOU, through your support and continued belief in OUR children, are playing a vital part in their success which reverberates throughout the entire St. Paul Community today and into the future.

As I look around I see a lot of people who have contributed to the success of ESLC and to helping me “look good”! While I can’t acknowledge everyone by name, I still would like to recognize some of our bridge builders to the future. *Please raise your hand when I mention your connection to ESLC so we have a visual picture of all the people who work to make ESLC successful.*

**Community Leaders** who cared enough to revitalize and improve the quality of life on the East Side and turned to the School Sisters of Notre Dame for help.

When the **Sisters** were asked by East Side leaders to collaborate with them in finding ways to improve student achievement you might say the School Sisters of Notre Dame were “first responders” with funding, personnel, creating a vision for ESLC, expertise in education, and they have continued all that support since the beginning! For us School Sisters of Notre Dame education means “enabling persons to reach the fullness of their potential as individuals created in God’s image and assisting them to direct their gifts toward building the earth.” That belief influenced the determination of the ESLC mission. *Any SSND’s and members of other religious communities here please raise your hands so we can thank you.*

**Employees and Board members from the St. Paul Public School District and our Charter Schools who embrace ESLC.** Thank you for your strong commitment to the children of St. Paul. We’re grateful for the opportunity to join with you as one of the strong partners to increase achievement for all students. *Anyone who is part of the Charter schools and St. Paul Public School District would you also please raise your hands. We’re grateful you could be here to help us celebrate.*

**Many, many Donors & faithful Funders.** Your investment changes the lives of children and affects the well-being of the entire East Side community. Thank you for your steadfast support and for making ESLC an extension of your mission. *Please raise your hand so we can thank you for what you make possible for our children.*

**ESLC Staff & Tutors.** Your **passion** and **commitment** to the children you tutor are **phenomenal**. You are the **heart** of ESLC, bringing love and learning together for our children every day.

**Board,** past and present - you **work hard, remain actively engaged,** and consistently provide wise **guidance** to ESLC.

**My Family.** Many of my family are here and others are here in spirit. They didn't want to miss this chance to see if their oldest of nine would really "look good" on stage! I'm blessed to have your loving support today and every day.

**The planning Committee.** I wish to thank Dean Andrew, board chair, Chris Flippo, executive director, Lauren Johnsen, coordinator of volunteers and communications, and board members Debbie Lee, Sr. Donna Wermus, SSND, and Jen Santini who worked tirelessly to prepare for this event.

**ALL--**Please look around the room. Each one has helped directly or indirectly to foster a successful outcome for children who are learning to read. We could not do our work without you. Thank you from the bottom my heart.

As you can see, since our beginning in 2000 I've been blessed to work with totally dedicated staff and tutors, hundreds of extremely generous volunteers, steadfast donors, supportive funders, and committed Board. Throughout these 17 years ESLC remained focused on rigorous and compassionate work to ensure our children have the reading skills they need to flourish.

The theme of "Bridges to the Future" has provided a context for facilitating a smooth ESLC leadership transition since I stepped down as Executive Director this past January. I have seen ESLC transition from a fledgling organization to the well-respected non-profit it is today. And, most importantly, I have experienced intense joy and satisfaction from seeing our children become readers. I am confident that ESLC will continue to thrive and be responsive to the needs of the East Side community.

When I was first asked by my community to start a reading tutoring program on the East Side of St. Paul I felt some resistance. I felt it was the responsibility of the schools to meet the needs of their own children. But as I visited schools and saw the needs it became very clear to me that these are ALL our children. I learned that together we have both a responsibility and an opportunity to make reading success possible for EACH child.

This isn't about a generic group of children. It's about one child at a time. It's about Andrew. Let me tell you about Andrew.

As a first grader, Andrew came to tutoring with a lot of insecurities, his head bowed low and a sadness in his eyes which you don't usually see in a child. He frequently said to his tutor, "Miss Mary, you know I can't read. It's too hard for me." Together they worked on letter names, sounds, and how to blend sounds to build words. By spring he was reading simple books. He was very excited and 'proud as punch' to tell everyone, "I can read! I can read!"

When Andrew started second grade, his Mom gratefully shared, "I can't believe how his attitude and confidence have improved. He no longer says --"It's too hard, or I don't want to read."

By winter break he had mastered 200 high frequency words and was excited, motivated and eager to do more.

Andrew is the reason all of us have continued to serve children through ESLC. My longing is that we find the resources to help many more Andrews unlock their potential as readers.

**Please pause for a moment and take this in...YOU are changing the lives of children forever...**

As we build “Bridges to the Future” one very important thing remains the same - the beaming smile that breaks out on a child’s face when things begin to “click” and they proudly say “I am a reader!” **Thank you for these many years of honoring me with the opportunity to serve with you in helping to bridge the gaps for the sake of ALL OUR children.**