



March 18, 2022

To: Members of the House Education Policy Committee
Re: House File 951, House File 3402, House File 1362

Dear Chair Richardson and Members of the Education Committee,

The Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD) would like to express our support of HF 4210. MNCCD is a broad-based coalition of advocacy and provider organizations and individuals working to change public policy to improve the lives of people with disabilities through building awareness, providing education, and engaging in the community.

Thank you for spending time today as a committee considering three bills that are all on MNCCD's policy agenda for 2022: House File 951, which would limit the use of exclusionary discipline for K-3 students, House File 3402, which would address the practice of withholding recess and lunch as a punishment, and House File 1362, which would ensure that parents who have disabilities get the accommodations they need in navigating their child's special education processes. All three of these bills address various ways that children and adults with disabilities navigate our school communities – and each would help create more accessible and inclusive schools.

One of MNCCD's policy principles is to promote an accessible, equitable, and inclusive society. Schools should be accessible, equitable, and safe for everyone. Unfortunately, students who have disabilities, and particularly students of color who have disabilities, don't always experience inclusion in schools. Students of color and students who have disabilities are more likely to be subject to exclusionary discipline – including suspensions, expulsions, and less formal uses of exclusionary discipline such as withholding lunch and recess. And when the parent of a child who uses special education has a disability, they may also face accessibility barriers in navigating the processes of supporting their child's learning and special education services.

We support House File 951 because it will help reduce the over-reliance on exclusionary discipline for Minnesota's youngest learners. Even in these young grades, students who have disabilities and students of color are disproportionately suspended and subjected to exclusionary discipline, particularly for subjective behaviors. Students who are struggling with behaviors need support and inclusive environments that meet their needs, not to be removed from the environment. Much needs to be done to address racial and disability disparities in discipline, but we hope the legislature can agree that suspensions are not the right approach for these young ages.



We support House File 3402 because it offers common sense solutions to a practice that has long been used in schools but research shows is not effective and is not helpful to students – withholding recess or lunch as a punishment. We have heard from many parents who were alarmed by the frequency of this practice and whose children report long-lasting mental and emotional impacts from being excluded from recess or lunch as a punishment. Unstructured play time, physical activity, and of course eating, are all essential parts of a school day for children, and withholding these important opportunities is likely to make it more difficult for students to effectively participate in learning throughout the day. We support the common sense solutions in this proposal.

We support House File 1362 because schools and a child’s special education process should be fully accessible to parents who have disabilities themselves. The special education and Individualized Education Plan team process can be a complex one for any parent, and the child’s parent has a disability, they should have access to reasonable accommodations to be able to fully participate in the process. The IEP team includes parents because they are experts on their children and their perspectives are essential to crafting an IEP and supports for the child that are most likely to support the child to participate in school. If the parent experiences barriers as a result of their own disability, that is not only unfair to the parent, but it is also likely to impact outcomes for their child. House File 1362 will help ensure the process for requesting needed accommodations for parents is clear.

Building a society where people with disabilities belong will require that people who have disabilities experience inclusion and access beginning with school. These three bills will help make that a reality. We urge the committee to support HF 951, HF 3402, and HF 1362 and appreciate this opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,

Melissa Haley
Public Policy Co-Chair

Maren Hulden
Public Policy Co-Chair