



Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition

May 4, 2020

To: Members of the House Education Policy Committee

RE: In support of Pupil Withdrawal Agreement language in HF 163, DE 3

Dear Chair Youakim and Members,

We write as the Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition in support of the provision regarding Pupil Withdrawal Agreements in HF 163, DE 3. Solutions Not Suspensions is a coalition of students, families, community members, and organizations committed to changing policies, practices, and mindsets in order to end exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately impact students of color and instead foster positive school climates for all students. This is a pressing need, as Minnesota's racial disparities in discipline are significant: in the 2018-19 school year, Black students were 11.2 percent of the statewide K-12 student population but accounted for 38.4 percent of disciplinary actions.

We support the provision in HF 163, DE 3, that defines and requires reporting on pupil withdrawal agreements (Article 2, Section 4; lines 16.11-16.16). Pupil withdrawal agreements are commonly used as alternatives to expulsion or exclusion. This can be a beneficial arrangement for both the student and the school, as it allows the school to forego a formal expulsion hearing and allows the student to continue their education in a different district without a record of expulsion.

But, unlike expulsions and suspensions, districts are not currently required to report the number of pupil withdrawal agreements they enter into. This leaves a significant gap in our state's discipline data and prevents that data from telling the full story of students experiencing exclusionary discipline. Data is important because it can reveal disparities and other problems and can also be a tool in developing solutions. We are very supportive of requiring reporting on pupil withdrawal agreements (*see* Article 2, Section 6; lines 16.24-17.4).

We also support limiting pupil withdrawal agreements to 12 months. This matches the limitation on expulsions (*see* Minn. Stat. 121A.41, subd. 5). Minnesota Statutes treat expulsion as the most severe form of exclusionary dismissal, and in turn provides a student subject to an expulsion the right to an administrative hearing. If a student is being dismissed by means of a mechanism that affords the student less rights – like a pupil withdrawal agreement – there should also be a limit on its duration.

Finally, we also support adding pupil withdrawal agreements to Minnesota Statutes 121A.45, Subdivision 1 (Article 2, Section 5, lines 16.18-16.22). This section requires districts to attempt to provide alternative educational services before dismissal proceedings, and HF 3186, DE 2 would make that apply to pupil withdrawal proceedings too.

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Minnesota's students. We encourage you to support and advance these important improvements to the Pupil Fair Dismissal Act.

Sincerely,

Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition

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