

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the House Education Finance Committee. My name is Cheryl Jechorek. I am the chair of the board for the Brooklyn Center Community Schools school district.

I appreciate the opportunity to address the committee in support of HF759. Brooklyn Center Community Schools is a culturally diverse district with 94% students of color currently enrolled in the district - 2% American Indian, 16% Asian, 50% Black, 25% Latino and 6% White.

We serve a 15% special education population, 43% with a home language other than English, and 85% students with Free and Reduced Lunch. 49% are open-enrolled from another district. 16% report some instance of homelessness during the past school year, 27% live with an adult with mental health concerns, 30% indicated they have to skip meals because their family does not have enough money for food, and 40% indicate they experience daily anxiety.

We know that Minnesota is currently last in the nation in offering foundational computer science courses in our public high schools. Schools reaching the most diverse student groups are far less likely to offer computer science. In order to change this, Brooklyn Center will need support in planning and implementing computer science education, including teacher professional development.

Brooklyn Center recognizes that the future computer science professionals are already in our communities and schools. If we want to ensure that the children we serve today have access to these high-paying, in-demand careers, we must ensure that they receive high-quality, engaging and meaningful instruction and job experiences that will help them see themselves and their interest in these career fields.

This cannot be isolated to specialized coursework at the high school level. We must look at computer science as a foundational component of our K-12 academic curriculum and ensure that all of our teachers are confident and prepared to effectively open the world of computer science to all of the children we serve.

In the fall of 2020, Brooklyn Center Elementary teachers indicated that they had not intentionally taught computer science concepts in the previous year. 79% reported they were uncomfortable with integrating computer science concepts in their regular instruction due to their own knowledge of content, lack of access to computer science professional development and time and competing priorities.

Without adopted K-12 academic standards in this content area, most pre-service teachers receive little to no instruction on how to teach computer science. Following this survey in the fall of 2020, Brooklyn Center Schools have worked closely with our partner organization, CodeSavy to support ongoing professional development for our teachers and non-licensed staff in computer science. Additionally, we continue to work with teachers across all content areas to highlight areas where computer science concepts like computational thinking can be explicitly taught outside of a high school level computer science course. Brooklyn Center fully supports the development and ongoing support of a comprehensive state policy framework that expands the teaching and learning of computer science.

9 out of 10 parents recently surveyed in a nationwide Gallop poll indicated that they WANT their child to study computer science. Coding is an important tool, but it is a bit like arithmetic is a Tool for doing mathematics, and words are a TOOL for English. Coding creates software, but Computer Science is a broad field encompassing deep concepts that go well beyond coding. All students should have access to this in their schools. The reality is that computer science is about logic, problem solving and creativity. It teaches students how to think differently about problems they are trying to solve - in any context. A simple way to think about this is, it teaches kids how to CREATE new technologies instead of just being CONSUMERS of technology. Requiring that all high schools offer Computer Science is as foundational as literacy and numeracy for students entering the workforce in the next generation. All students should have access to computer science coursework through their public schools. Every 21st century student should have a chance to learn about algorithms, how to make apps, and how the internet works.

Thank you for your time.