



January 22, 2023

Dear Members of the House Education Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, I am writing to support HF 271 which promotes nonexclusionary discipline policies. Especially at a time when we are seeing students, especially younger students, struggle with dysregulation and a lack of emotional skills, we need to find ways to help them learn new skills and how to deal with their emotions. Another reason to focus on nonexclusionary discipline policies is that BIPOC students and students with disabilities are suspended at disproportionate rates.

Exclusionary policies lead to disengagement from school and lower graduation rates. It is not a learning experience – students are not being taught new skills or repairing any damage. A study of New York schools from the American Institutes for Research found that “disciplining students through exclusion did not reduce future misbehavior for the disciplined students or their peers, nor did it result in improved academic achievement for peers or perceptions of positive school climate. Further, the more severe the exclusionary discipline, the greater its negative effects were on a student’s future academic performance, attendance, and behavior.”

Some classrooms use taking away recess as a disciplinary measure. The American Academy of Pediatrics believes that recess is important for a child’s development. There are notable health benefits along with learning social skills such as how to share. Having unstructured time helps a child move and release energy while also leaving time to be creative.

There are strategies that can be used to address the behaviors seen by teachers and school staff. These include restorative justice practices, positive behavior intervention and supports, social emotional learning and trauma informed care. In the research conducted in other states about the use of nonexclusionary discipline found that it was critically important that teachers and staff receive training on new approaches so that exclusionary practices are being replaced with different strategies, not simply abandoned.

We urge your support to develop nonexclusionary discipline policies in our school. It will lead to better outcomes for students.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director



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