



June 23, 2020

Dear Chair Davnie, Chair Youakim, and Members of the Education Policy and Finance Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the members of Minnesota PTA. Our members, as with parents all over the state, had varied experiences with Distance Learning. The conversation with parents would often start like this: "I know the teachers and district are doing the best they can, but..." ...and they would proceed with listing the many challenges encountered with Distance Learning:

- Hard to juggle working (from home or out of the home) and children's schoolwork, especially with multiple children. The younger the children, the harder this was.
- Multiple children in one family often had varied experiences and expectations, even within the same school.
- Trouble balancing academic expectations with mental/emotional/physical wellness.
- If 1:1 devices were not supplied by school, trouble sharing one device with multiple children and parents' needs.
- The home internet connection could not always handle the load, especially for video - that is, if there was access to internet at the home to begin with.
- There were too many digital platforms for students and parents to navigate. It often took quite a bit of time to find the lesson or assignment - parents were not well versed in the various platforms (SeeSaw, Canvas, Google Classroom, Moodle) and could not support students.
- Parents felt alone and as if they were failing, until they found other parents in the similar situation. They needed stronger connections to the school and with each other.
- Parents of students with special needs felt as though they could not effectively support their student at home, especially for those students where independent work is impossible.

Parents, however, were also quick to point out successes and we encourage these to be considered in fall planning:

- Students thrived if individual, small group, or classroom "live" video check-ins were offered. These connections to their teacher and classmates were critical.
- Teachers that had clear expectations, easy to navigate assignments/due dates, and timely communication about student performance were appreciated by parents and students alike.
- Assignments that had a "minimum" requirement plus enrichment helped parents prioritize what struggling students did or did not need to do - or what high performing students could add on.
- Recognition that Distance Learning is different than homeschooling or online learning.

Minnesota PTA appreciates the work of legislators and the Minnesota Department of Education that has focused on the needs of our students, teachers, and families in responding to the educational impacts of COVID-19. We look forward to our continued joint efforts.

Sincerely,
Heather Starks, President
Cathy Nathan, Advocacy Commissioner