



Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition

February 24, 2021

To: Members of the House Education Policy Committee

RE: House File 950

Dear Chair Richardson and Members,

We write as the Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition in support of many provisions in House File 950. 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.

The Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition has been advocating for discipline reforms to address racial disparities for over six years. Yet, racial disparities persist, such as the fact that 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.

There are many provisions in House File 950 that we believe will help address the overuse and disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline. We are grateful to the Department of Education and Chair Richardson for advancing these important pieces! These provisions include:

- Requiring non-exclusionary discipline practices to be used prior to dismissal (except where there is an immediate threat)
- Defining in school suspension as having missed a half day or more of in class instruction.
- Requiring written notice to parents about dismissal to include which non exclusionary practices were tried
- Requiring that pupil withdrawal agreements be reported
- Requiring that alternative learning services be provided to students when they are suspended for 5 or more days
- Ensuring that students receive full credit for work completed during a dismissal
- Limiting grounds for removal to willful conduct that endangers surrounding persons, including school district employees, the student or other students, or the property of the school
- Adding to readmission plans to include what support systems to improve behavior will be included

- Requiring districts to outline a procedure for who will have input on discipline issues
- Banning the use of prone restraint by school staff or contracted staff, including school resource officers
- Defining a framework for anti-racist Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
- Banning the use of restrictive procedures for students under 5 years of age
- Adding racial disparities data to information to be reviewed by restrictive procedure oversight committees

These proposals will help address the problems caused by discipline disparities from several angles: promoting the use of non-exclusionary alternatives, ensuring that students who are suspended have the academic support and opportunity to make up their work, and strengthening supports students receive upon readmission. We also support the proposals to limit the uses of physical restraints, including prone restraint, and for our youngest children.

We also note two other discipline priorities we believe would be important steps in reducing the use of exclusionary discipline. First, we support ending the use of suspensions for K-3 students. Second, we support addressing an ongoing need we hear frequently from our coalition community – the need for parents and families to have the opportunity to raise issues when discipline is used in ways that don't meet the requirements of the Pupil Fair Dismissal Act. Right now, if a student is suspended and those protections are not followed, there is no way for parents, families, or students to address that—the Pupil Fair Dismissal Act itself does not contain a grievance or complaint process for suspensions and courts have found that there is no way to address such issues in civil suits. We believe it is essential for families and parents to have an opportunity to raise such issues.

We encourage you to support and advance the discipline provisions in House File 950. We hope you will take these critical steps to address unacceptable racial disparities in school discipline in our state.

Sincerely,

Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition

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