

March 18, 2021

To: Chair Ruth Richardson and Members of the House Education Policy Committee
RE: HF 951

Dear Chair Richardson and members of the House Education Policy Committee

We write in support of HF 951, which would limit dismissals for Minnesota students in grades kindergarten through third grade. This bill is a critical step to ensuring that young learners in Minnesota have full access to school and the supports they need to be successful in school. Suspensions are not helpful for young learners and disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and students of color, and students who have disabilities.

Young students who present with behaviors at school need support, as those behaviors are almost always the student's way of expressing unmet needs or demonstrating that they can't handle the stress they are experiencing at school and they don't have access to appropriate coping skills. What students need in these circumstances is support in order to build more appropriate coping skills and to be able to use them in the school environment. Removing students from the school in these situations actually makes it worse – it sends a message to the student that they don't belong in school and that school isn't a place that can help them learn how to handle being overwhelmed.

Being suspended at a young age has long-term consequences. Children suspended in the early school years are 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, and face incarceration than those who are not.¹ Racial disparities in the use of suspensions at these young ages drive disparities in educational outcomes throughout students' careers and lives. Students who have challenging behaviors at school need more support, not to be excluded from their supportive learning environments. Research shows that frequent use of dismissals harms all students, including those not subject to discipline.²

Limiting the use of suspensions for young learners would be a tremendous move to ensure that young Minnesotans experience belonging and success in school environments during their foundational years in school. We support this important effort and are grateful for the leadership of Chair Richardson in advancing this key issue on behalf of Minnesota's young learners.

¹ See Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at 3, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

² See, e.g. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/3/13/21104493/when-chicago-cut-down-on-suspensions-students-saw-test-scores-and-attendance-rise-study-finds>; <https://edsources.org/2015/study-suspensions-harm-well-behaved-kids/72501>; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122414556308>

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Minnesota's students and for considering this important step to address racial disparities in Minnesota's schools and to ensure that Minnesotans have full access to school from a young age.

Sincerely,

Advancing Equity Coalition
The Arc Minnesota
The Autism Society of Minnesota
Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis
Centro Tyrone Guzman
Center for Victims of Torture
Children's Defense Fund Minnesota
Coalition of Asian American Leaders
Ed Allies
Educators for Excellence Minnesota
HACER
Integrated Schools Minneapolis
Legal Rights Center
Legal Services Advocacy Project
Mental Health Minnesota
Metropolitan Center for Independent Living
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid/Minnesota Disability Law Center
MIGIZI
Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health
Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities
Multicultural Autism Action Network
Minnesota School Social Workers Association
NAMI Minnesota
National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter
National Parent Union
Northside Achievement Zone
Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities
Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition
Think Small
Uplift MN
Voices for Racial Justice
Washburn Center for Children
Wellness in the Woods