

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Policy Committee
Chair – Rep. Richardson
February 1, 2021

Madam Chair, Vice Chair and Members, Good afternoon.

Many thanks for the opportunity to testify and speak for my son and so many others like him. My son was suspended on Thursday May 3rd at 5:18pm in 2018 by teacher Kelly Morris and principal Jaysen Anderson from Jefferson high school in Bloomington Public Schools.

My son has non-verbal autism and did not nor does he now understand what suspension is or comprehends cause/effect. Nevertheless, Kelly and Jaysen kicked him out from his educational environment. As you are aware and have seen data after data, Minnesota has a horrible and shameful record for racial discipline. This is not an accident. It happens and will continue to happen because there is no accountability for the teachers nor the principals and administrators. This is also not an accident.

So now what? As a parent along with many other families, we cannot keep asking the same question every legislative session while nothing significant nor meaningful passes. For students with special needs, I would like to suggest some ideas:

As I learn and dig what other states are doing, I came across WI statute (attached to this testimony). Please take a read under suspension, question 4 which states the following:

May a suspension be appealed? A parent or pupil may, within five school days following the commencement of a suspension, have a conference with the school district administrator or his/her designee. The designee may not be the principal, an administrator, or a teacher in the child's school. If the school district administrator or his/her designee finds that the child was suspended unfairly or unjustly, or the suspension was inappropriate given the nature of the offense, or the child suffered undue consequences or penalties as a result of the suspension, reference to the suspension must be removed from the child's records. The finding must be made within 15 days of the conference, s. 120.13 (1) (b), Wis. Stats

Imagine if I had such opportunity along with thousands of other families whose children were kicked out of school unfairly and unjustly. Imagine if the teacher and the administrators were held accountable for their actions and had to explain. Imagine if children went to school to learn and not be afraid of getting kicked out. Just imagine.

Currently, the way Minnesota education laws are written are not child/student/family centered nor friendly. They instead are teacher/administrator friendly and protect the adults who chose this profession instead of the children.

My son communicates with a device and is routine oriented as many kids with autism are. Yet, his teacher on this day changed his routine and neglected to give him his communication device. Then when he had a behavior because he wanted to finish his routine of going to his locker at the end of the day, she called the principal and security on him. This is a day I will never forget not because of what

Kelly did but because how Minnesota's laws allow her. If teachers and administrators are not accountable for their actions or lack thereof, then really what is the point here?

I ask you all to take a read of the attached information from WI and see how our current Minnesota laws can be amended to ensure what happened to my family does not keep happening to more children and parents.

As always, I thank you for your time and for listening.

Idil – Somali Autism Mom and Advocate