

January 28, 2021

To: Members of the House Education Finance Committee  
RE: House File 4, Special Education and Summer Programming Provisions

Dear Chair Davnie and Members of the House Education Finance Committee,

On behalf of our group of organizations that advocate for children who have disabilities, thank you for your attention to their needs during Covid-19 and the disruptions to education that the pandemic has caused. Our organizations have been hearing from countless families of children who have disabilities who have experienced significant challenges due to school changes since March 2020. We are very grateful for your efforts to address the needs of students during this time and to give schools the resources they need to support students who are struggling. We write to share our support of House File 4. We believe this bill includes important steps to address the dire needs of children who have disabilities.

Despite tremendous efforts by educators, many students who have disabilities simply cannot engage with distance learning. Students with disabilities and other students have experienced significant disruption to their learning, their self-regulation skills, their social-emotional skills, adaptive skills, and other critical benefits they typically receive from in-person school. We have heard from so many families whose children are not making progress on academic or other Individualized Education Plan goals, and that many students are seriously regressing, particularly in social-emotional and self-regulation skills. We are including a handful of stories that we've received from parents across the state, which we shared with the Education Policy Committee last week.

The funding mechanisms in House File 4 would be helpful steps to give districts the resources they need to address the tremendous loss of learning and skills that many students are experiencing and have been experiencing since March 2020. Summer program grants would give schools additional resources and tools to support students who have been the hardest hit by Covid-19 disruptions. This is a good start and we look forward to continuing to work with you on ways to help address the significant learning and skill loss that has occurred for students, particularly students who have disabilities and students experiencing other barriers to stability and support during this time. We believe it is important that these efforts support the individualized needs of children, include enough flexibility to make additional services work for families and students, and are used equitably, taking into account the significant racial disparities impacting students before the pandemic and perpetuated during it.

We are also supportive of other proposals in the bill, including proposals regarding Full-Service Community Schools, Trauma-Informed Approaches, Extended Time, and other important programs. Schools, educators, and families will need tremendous supports to help children who have experienced significant disruptions due to Covid-19 to regain their footing. We believe bold and urgent action is needed to address the unmet needs of many students who have disabilities across Minnesota. House File 4 contains many helpful steps and we are grateful to Representative Hassan for bringing this important bill. If you have any questions, you can contact Maren Hulden, of Legal Aid and the Minnesota Disability Law Center, at [mhulden@mnlisap.org](mailto:mhulden@mnlisap.org).

Thank you for your commitment to the students of Minnesota, particularly students who have disabilities. We hope you will take this opportunity to address their pressing needs.

Sincerely,



Stories we've heard from families across the state:

From a parent in a Metro District

We are struggling to determine how to best support my son during distance learning education. My son is 8 and entering 3rd grade. He receives multiple therapies and a 1:1 Educational Assistant at school for his entire school day. Schools are not being allowed to send support out to homes so, though he may be able to access some of his therapies at school in person, his academics will be all held over zoom remotely. He has significant motor delays and attention and impulse control issues, in addition to cognitive delays and a seizure disorder. When assessing our needs for support during this unprecedented time, we NEED an additional adult in the house during the academic day to support him in doing this. He is and will be able to do distance learning via zoom with assistance, as he has proven successful with music therapy and OT this way, but he HAS to have someone by his side to stay engaged. An EA on the other side of the computer screen was nothing but a battle in the Spring.

From a Greater Minnesota District

My child needs to be in person school at least 4 days a week to learn something this year. She cannot go on google meets or do any of her work unless I am home because she can't navigate the iPad in that aspect on her own. I also work so she misses out on all google meets, and zoom meetings, etc.. that happen during the day. (8-5). The school offered to give her para an iPad and then she and my child can FaceTime from my computer and do work that way but again that can only be done when I am home to assist with technology and making sure she and the para are on the same assignment, etc.. It is very difficult to do distance learning without proper supports.

From a Metro District

My child needs 100% 1:1 hands on support and supervision both for engaging distance learning, and for ADLs (feeding, diapering, dressing, etc) during school hours. He receives services both through special education and a DD Medicaid Waiver, but the waiver won't provide services pertaining to education, and my district is not sending employees into student homes. The result of this situation for our family has been job loss: the parent has exhausted CARES and all other leave but must remain home to provide direct support to the child. Parents' employers will not grant a leave of absence for this purpose, so our household will lose it's main source of income to facilitate distance learning for our child.

From a Metro Suburban District

My child is being denied an education. She is unable to do distance learning due to her communication needs. We have seen so much regression and the loss of such hard fought skills.

From a Metro District

My child hasn't been able to participate at all. She has severe ADHD and is only 6 so she just presses random buttons on her iPads and won't comply with doing any of the assignments. This is how it was last spring. She is repeating kindergarten this year and it's the same. Likely I will have to find a tutor and pay out of pocket and have her do other work not on her iPad. She really can only do in person work in a school environment. She won't do it with me at home.

From a Metro District

Our daughter is a 13 year old student starting 8th grade. She has not had any form of school, distance or in person, since schools were closed in March 2020. She has significant disabilities which make distance learning inaccessible for her, even with modifications from school. She is non-verbal, cannot write or type. Is unable to attend or participate in a class virtually as she cannot "watch" a teacher on a screen. While in school she is in a self contained classroom with a one to one aide. We have asked the school district over and over how distance learning is equitable for our child, as we know it is not. She has a 25+ page IEP and not one of her IEP goals or services are being met or provided through distance learning.



January 28, 2021

To: Chair Davnie and Members of the Education Finance Committee

From: Matt Shaver, EdAllies Policy Director

Re: Support for HF4 Addressing Learning Loss & Supporting Students

Dear Chair Davnie and members of the Committee,

When schools closed in spring 2020, all students—particularly those historically underserved—were impacted. Gaps in internet and device access, varying levels of student participation, a lack of support for students with disabilities and English Learners, and worries about mental health and social-emotional learning have left students and families concerned about the long-term implications.

Given all of this, it's critical that the state take action to ensure that no students are left behind. There are a number of provisions in House File 4 that would help to address learning loss, accelerate learning, and support students with long-term recovery. In particular, we are supportive of:

- **Reading and Math Corps (Lines 5.1-5.15)**: Recent research found that, as a result of disruption in education during the pandemic, average math achievement has declined by 5-10 percentage points, as have reading outcomes for Black and Latino upper elementary students.<sup>1</sup> Without intentional intervention, many students will struggle to stay on track, and gaps across lines of race and ethnicity will continue to widen. However, there is evidence that we can reverse this course with interventions like high dosage tutoring, which has been proven to be an effective intervention to accelerate learning, and these investments would provide critical additional support.<sup>2</sup>
- **Summer Program Grants (Lines 6.8-6.15)**: Providing extra support to students with disabilities in the summer of 2021 will help to accelerate learning and address learning loss. We recommend the committee consider broadening eligibility for these grants to include English Learners, low-income students, and other students who have been negatively impacted by COVID-19.
- **Students with Disabilities (Lines 2.24-3.15)**: From conversations we have had with families and educators, we know that the experiences of students with disabilities have varied greatly, and in many cases, their needs have gone unmet over the course of the pandemic. This critical provision requires school boards to prioritize certain groups of students with disabilities for in-person learning, while also allowing for in-home services

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<sup>1</sup> Kuhnfeld, M., Tarasawa, A., Ruzek, E. & Lewis, K. (November 2020). "Learning during COVID-19: Initial findings on students' reading and math achievement and growth." Collaborative for Student Growth.

<sup>2</sup> Allensworth, E. & Schwartz, N. (June 2020). "School Practices to Address Student Learning Loss." Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.



to ensure students are getting the accommodations and modifications that they are entitled to.

- Adjusted Pupil Units (Lines 1.19-1.22): Districts and charter schools are experiencing temporary fluctuations in enrollment due to COVID-19. This provision would take this into account, ensuring schools and students are not adversely impacted by allowing the use of either 2020 or 2021 pupil unit counts, whichever is greater, for general education revenue.
- One-Time Extended Flexibility (Lines 2.13-2.22): Extending the school day or school year will allow schools to provide support and help to students who have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. This language provides important flexibility to districts as they develop strategies to address learning loss, and as they implement learning recovery and acceleration programs with new federal stimulus funding.
- Trauma-Informed School Incentives Grants (Lines 4.3-4.31): Students have faced a wide range of adverse experiences, and many have had to manage mental health and social-emotional challenges during the pandemic. This provision would support much-needed training in nonexclusionary discipline and trauma-responsive practices as educators welcome students back into buildings and work to support their long-term social-emotional success.

To measure the impact of these investments, and ensure that state resources are targeted to the schools, communities, and students with the greatest need, we strongly support the Minnesota Department of Education's efforts to implement the MCA test with an online option to capture the best data possible, giving us a baseline for student outcomes as we enter the COVID-19 recovery phase.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Matt Shaver  
Policy Director

January 28, 2021 HF4

To: Members of the Education Finance Committee

From: Cathy Nathan

Advocacy Commissioner, Minnesota PTA

City of Residence: Rochester, MN

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Since 1922, the Minnesota PTA has supported parents, students, and educators across the state. We currently have 200 local units with 8,000 members representing all forms of schools, including rural, suburban, urban, district, and charter.

Our parents and families across the state are struggling to support their students during this pandemic and are concerned about their children's academic learning loss and mental health issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The provisions in HF4 are important because they are targeted at addressing those concerns and to provide supports that parents and families cannot do on their own.

School districts will need stable funding and additional resources to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on all students and staff. Specific resources for students and families who were underserved by our schools prior to the pandemic will be needed. We support the provisions and appropriations in HF4 that:

- Calculate school district general education revenue using the greater of the 2019 or 2020 pupil counts.
- Provide flexibility and resources to extend the school day or school year – including summer school. These out of school supports will be an important nexus for programs and services to help students who have been adversely impacted by COVID-19.
- Expand development of and access to full-service community schools that bring social, medical, family-centered, and before- and after-school services and activities to the school campus.
- Fund trauma-informed instruction, restorative practices, and non-exclusionary discipline programs to address the needs of students with adverse childhood experiences that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic or were newly experienced or multiplied during the current pandemic.
- Fund reading and math corps services to specifically address academic learning losses in reading and math.

We also encourage you to set the general education aid appropriation in this bill at a level that increases the general education basic per pupil formula by at least 2% per year in each year of the biennium.

We would also ask you to consider in this bill or in additional legislation the need for transportation to and from these programs that are outside of the school day or over the summer. This is a barrier that our parents and families face across the state. Providing extra support in these programs are wonderful; however, if students cannot get to the program or if the end of the day buses are the only way they can get home, then there are significant barriers to participation in these programs.

Thank you for your consideration and your support of this important legislation.

Heather Starks  
President, Minnesota PTA

Cathy Nathan  
Advocacy Commissioner, Minnesota PTA

January 25, 2021

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, I am submitting comments on HF4. We greatly appreciate Representative Hassan's efforts to address the educational needs of students during the pandemic.

- **Extended Time Flexibility:** Extending the programming into the summer is critical for students who had difficulty with reliable internet, lack of adult support and who were already struggling with meeting educational goals. Not all children on an IEP are eligible for summer programs and allowing them to receive extended time will help them realize their IEP goals.
- **Prioritizing On-site Instruction:** Families who have a child on an IEP are struggling greatly. In a small nonscientific survey sent out to families who have a child with a mental illness, over 75% said their child's mental health was fair to poor. Many struggled to keep their child on a daily schedule, stated that keeping them engaged on a screen was hard, and that some were falling even farther behind. They wanted more in-person learning, tutoring, fewer videos, smaller zoom groups, and in-home support. These children need to come back to school as soon as possible to obtain the specialized supports they need to learn. We understand that implementing and IEP at home during a pandemic is nearly impossible, but we support prioritizing special education students to get return to the classroom.
- **Truancy:** We have had calls from parents whose children were being labeled as truant. One was a kindergartner, and the family could not get the device to work and they were threatened with truancy. Another was a child with a serious mental illness and Autism and the parent could not get the child engaged and they reported the child truant to the county. We would even support the language being stronger.
- **Full-service Community Schools:** Eliminating barriers to accessing health and mental health care, along with social services, especially with the pandemic is critically important.
- **Trauma-informed Schools:** NAMI strongly supports investing in trauma-informed schools. While everyone believes that returning children to in-person education will be a positive thing we must remember what children have experienced during the pandemic – isolation, fear, lack of food, housing instability, lack of structure, witnessing violence, and the community trauma of George Floyd's murder. Students will have difficulty adjusting and some children who have anxiety may be reluctant to return to school. It is critical that there be extra education and support and that students not be punished – through suspensions – especially younger students, when they do not have the "tools" to deal with what they have gone through.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director

TO: Members  
House Education Funding Committee

FROM: Brad Lundell  
Executive Director, Schools for Equity in Education

RE: Support for HF 4

Schools for Equity in Education wants to thank Representative Hassan for providing leadership in addressing key challenges facing Minnesota school districts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has caused massive disruptions throughout society, and the education sector has not been spared from this upheaval. HF 4 aggressively tackles issues school districts, district staff, and students have faced since the advent of the pandemic nearly one year ago.

The unpredictability caused by the pandemic showed up noticeably for school districts with smaller than expected enrollments. There was no way that school districts could have prepared for this development. The fall-off in student enrollment and the accompanying reduction in revenue have put a considerable dent in school district budgets. While revenue delivered through the various Federal relief initiatives has been helpful, funding gaps still exist and are being experienced by school districts throughout the state.

Schools for Equity in Education's 2021 legislative platform calls for the legislature to "expend every effort to make sure that school funding is stable and policies are flexible as school districts adjust to the pandemic's challenges." Article 1, Section 1, of HF 4 largely addresses the problems emanating from the pandemic's revenue fluctuations.

Article 1, Section 3, provides school districts with the opportunity to address learning deficits that may have resulted due to the move away from in-person attendance to hybrid and distance learning models by expanding the extended time program. Extended time has shown to be a program that is effective in addressing students' learning needs and would be an extremely helpful tool during a time of unprecedented challenges.

Schools for Equity in Education looks forward to working with Representative Hassan as HF 4 continues through the legislative process.

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- Anoka-Hennepin
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  - Belle Plaine
  - Big Lake
  - Braham
- Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose
  - Byron
- Cambridge-Isanti
  - Cannon Falls
  - Centennial
- Chisago Lakes
- Dassel-Cokato
  - Delano
- East Central
  - Faribault
  - Forest Lake
  - Fridley
  - Hastings
- Hinckley-Finlayson
- Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted
  - Hutchinson
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