

To: Senator Roger Chamberlain, Senator Zach Duckworth, Representative Heather Edelson, and Representative Sandra Feist

From: Jim Freihammer, Superintendent, Wabasha-Kellogg ISD #811

Re: Proposed bill SF1441 / HF1644

Date: 3/16/2021

As Superintendent of the Wabasha-Kellogg ISD #811, I am writing to voice my concerns with proposed bills SH1441 and HF1644. The language unilaterally makes all Independent School Districts on-line learning providers. Although I am able to sympathize with the sentiment and rationale behind the proposed legislation, I must emphasize, that I believe the pathway to providing on-line learning to resident students and non-resident students should be done with scrutiny and fidelity with a focus on quality education for students while ensuring all programs are treated equally in terms of approval. When School Districts were pushed into Distance Learning last spring and then directed to provide this option throughout the 2020-21 school year, we all did our best to educate students during a public health emergency. Now that the public health emergency is waning and there is a light at the end of the tunnel, distance learning should not be relegated as a forced option for School Districts to offer. If a School District believes it is in their best interests to offer distance learning (on-line learning option), there is a pathway already in place at MDE. In fact, this year dozens of ISD's have submitted and been approved to do this with more being reviewed.

Please reconsider the merits of this bill. And in doing so, remember that there is no longer an emergency and consider the following:

- Students deserve a pathway for approval under MDE oversight to ensure that this is real on-line learning and not just synchronous distance learning.
- All district programs are approved under the same standards and stipulations such as teachers and administration must be employees of the school district.
- The systems and services of contracted service providers and/or partners have high quality curriculum, protected access, and expectations consistent with those for school district employees.
- The on-line program is more than a learning portal, supervised by a handful of teachers who do not carry the appropriate license for the content area they are supervising. It should not lead to listing a teacher of record in the content area who has no direct involvement in the delivering of the content, the evaluation of the learning and/or the adjustment to the instruction delivered.

Turn Over

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- Students of an online program deserve an equally robust learning program and not something labeled an “online program” but lacks the accountability and rigor that other online programs provide or our brick and mortar schools provide.
- Online learning programs should not be created on a whim. They need to be created with requirements, best practices and with oversight.
- Who will be representing the non-resident students if the teachers are not school district employees and there is an issue? This creates a potential liability situation of several layers between the teacher and the student when issues arise.
- There has not been an appropriate amount of time to testify or to vet this out in open session due to restrictions on in-person governance.

Jim Freihammer

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Freihammer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Superintendent
Wabasha-Kellogg ISD #811