

Laura.Taken-Holtze@house.mn

Sarah Keller

7232 Ojibwa Rd

Brainerd, MN 56401

Dear House Education Policy Committee,

I am a mother of children in private school, and have home educated my children for ten years. My children start private education at an academically rigorous institution in 9th grade. I believe they received a “quality” education at home, and continue to receive a “quality” education at the private school I have selected.

While I believe the authors of Bill HF874 have wonderful intentions, I oppose it for three reasons. Firstly, how does changing the language in our state constitution affect your desired change? Secondly, the language “**All** children have a fundamental **right** to a quality **public** education” is unclear. Thirdly, if this bill was created to “create better outcomes for students of color and those from low- or moderate-income families”*, it is unclear how this language change would bridge this gap.

Everyone can agree that every child has a right to education. In the United States, parents have choices to find the best educational fit for their child. We can choose public, charter, private or homeschool options.

I am having a hard time understanding how changing the language of our state constitution will affect change. If your intent is to raise the bar of the quality of public education, why not raise standards for the public school teacher’s education ensuring they are equipped to teach children of all levels in the classroom? Why not pay our teachers in accordance with the importance of their jobs -- educating the next generation? Look to Finland for an example of how their teachers are held in high regard, and how their teachers identify learning disabilities in their students and come up with strategies to overcome them at young ages. If your intent is to ensure every child has mastery of core subjects before passing them on to the next grade, why not create an initiative that would enable classrooms, teachers and students to do exactly that? Why not look at successful models of education from the past, such as the one room schoolhouse, or the mixed aged classrooms or the Montessori school model to find successful ways of educating that do not pass children on to the next grade simply because they are a year older? A problem that our school system has now is that it treats every child the same. In my sample of three children, I can assure you they are all different, and each one of them learns differently and has different gifting. I have had to adjust my strategies for each one of them as they progressed in their education. I can also assure you that they did not accomplish educational milestones at the same time. I had

one child teach himself to read at age four, and another not ready to read until age seven. Creating an initiative in our public schools to recognize these individual differences in our students would be more effective than changing the language of our state constitution.

“**All** children have a fundamental **right** to a quality **public** education” leaves much for the reader to interpret. The words “all”, “right”, and “public” are concerning because, if I am a parent who chooses private schooling or homeschooling, those words imply that I’m denying my child a constitutional right. While I don’t believe the authors of this bill intended to limit parent’s ability to choose their child’s best educational path, the language of the bill as written poses a problem.

Creating “better outcomes for students of color and those from low- or moderate-income families”* is an admirable goal, but it is unclear how changing the language in our state constitution will achieve this. In the March 4, 2021 edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, Naomi Schaefer Riley comments on the book *How Schools Really Matter* by Douglas B. Downey. Mr. Downey observes “Gaps in achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged kids can be traced mostly to the time when children are *not* in school – to home, habits, neighborhood, culture. And the gaps begin to appear well ahead of school itself.” While I disagree with Mr. Downey’s proposed solution to the inequality gap, I agree with him that the inequality gap is not within the schools, but with the child’s individual circumstances. Perhaps programs that would encourage and strengthen the nuclear family**, or creating more safe, affordable housing would be a better first step in changing the trajectory of at-risk children.

I oppose Bill HF874 and encourage you to re-evaluate what changes will affect your desired outcome.

Sincerely,

Sarah Keller

7232 Ojibwa Rd

Brainerd, MN 56401

*<https://www.minneapolisfed.org/policy/education-achievement-gaps/why-a-constitutional-amendment>

** <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/02/nuclear-family-still-indispensable/606841/>