

February 21, 2021

Dear Members of the Education Policy Committee:

NAMI is writing to overall support HF 950, the Department of Education's policy bill and offers the following comments on sections of the bill:

- Article 3: Section 4 – defining school mental health systems. We suggest amending this section to read as follows (I have highlighted major difference in wording):  
Mental health is defined as the social, emotional, and behavioral well-being of students. Comprehensive school mental health systems provide an array of supports and services that promote prevention, early identification and interventions, and indicated treatment. They work to promote positive school climate and social emotional learning, in order to enhance the mental health of all students. School mental health systems are built on a strong foundation of purposeful partnerships with district and school professionals, including administrators, educators, and specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, school nurses and other school health professionals), in collaboration with community health and mental health partners, all in strategic partnership with students and families. Core features of a comprehensive school mental health system are: 1) educators and student support personnel; 2) collaboration and teaming with youth, families, community health and mental health partners; 3) multi-tiered system of supports (such as PBIS); 4) evidence-informed services and supports; 5) cultural responsiveness and equity and 5) data-driven decision making. These systems also assess and address the social and environmental factors that impact mental health, including public policies and social norms that shape mental health outcomes
- Section 7 – non exclusionary disciplinary policies and practices. We are very supportive of this section and would recommend taking it further by not allowing students in k-3 to be suspended.
- Section 12 – minimum education services. We also believe it is important for a student to be allowed to progress in the curriculum while suspended.
- Section 16 – discipline policies. On line 25.29 and 25.30 we believe you should delete “until the pupil is enrolled in a new school district.” Often the current school-linked mental health provider can continue to provide care even when the child leaves the school. It is really up to the provider, not the school. You could instead use the phrase “until the pupil has found a new mental health provider or if it is determined that they can continue with their current provider.”



- Section 17 – prone restraints. Prone restraints were phased out on being used with special education students due to the serious harm that could occur – even with extensive training. Employees, SROs, or police officers should not use prone restraints due to the harm that can be done.
- Section 18 - exclusionary practices. Suspending a student for truancy simply makes no sense.
- Section 20 – restrictive procedures. NAMI Minnesota is a member of this committee and the data in terms of disparities and disproportionality is concerning. Requiring the oversight committee in districts to look at this data is important for change to occur. We also support expanding the protections to students who are not in special education.
- Article 4, section 1 – mental health education. NAMI Minnesota wants students to learn about mental health – the continuum, how to promote good mental health, signs and symptoms of an emerging mental illness and suicide prevention. The problem is that there are not a lot of well-vetted programs out there. Last fall, NAMI Minnesota researched what programs existed and we are happy to provide that document to the committee. Our major concern is that there is very little for middle school students and that any education on suicide prevention be approved by experts in suicidology. Schools will bring in a suicide survivor or a suicide family survivor who tells their story. If the story does not follow safe messaging, they could be promoting contagion – the last thing you want to have happen.
- Section 3 – social emotional learning. We support the creation and adoption of standards related to social emotional learning.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the bill. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director