



June 23, 2020

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Division:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to discuss community organization efforts to support students during distance learning.

Minnesotans enjoy a remarkable quality of life - our economic prosperity, educational success, and cultural assets are enviable. But Minnesota also has among the largest economic and education gaps in the nation. The coronavirus pandemic has further exposed deep racial and socio-economic disparities, particularly in education. Many students do not have access to equitable, high-quality education, particularly when it comes to distance learning because a high percentage of low-income families do not own devices or experience access and affordability barriers connecting to the Internet. Too many Minnesota students, particularly in underserved communities, are experiencing a digital divide that puts them at risk of being left further behind.

Members of the Minnesota Business Partnership, representing over 100 of Minnesota's largest companies, are deeply concerned about the impact of the digital divide compounding our community's achievement and opportunity gaps. Our companies are leaning into their community leadership roles to ensure Minnesota's highest-need students have computing devices and access to the Internet. Several initiatives have already been stood up by our members to provide students with the computers, tablets, and the Internet access necessary for distance learning. Another major initiative is being launched soon to further close the digital divide for tens of thousands of Minnesota students. There is much to do, and public-private partnerships like these will accomplish a lot.

Moreover, we must continue to work together as business and community leaders to address disparities in education and remove systemic barriers, so students are not left even further behind when we emerge from the pandemic. We must demand that high-quality learning is accessible to every child, and we must continue to advocate for proven solutions to ensure achievement is rising and gaps are closing.

The impact of our community's achievement and opportunity gaps will compound if we do not take action to ensure students have equitable access to education, during distance learning and beyond. We need to all work together to support schools, students, and families through this moment and be ready to lean in to ensure every Minnesota student is receiving an equitable, high-quality education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Amy Walstien'.

Amy Walstien  
Education Policy and Workforce Development Director  
Minnesota Business Partnership