



Chair Mike Freiberg  
381 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55115

March 12, 2024

RE: HF 4287 Requirements to fill a vacancy in the office of school board member modified.

Dear Chair Freiberg:

The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) is pleased to offer our support for HF 4287 which modifies the requirements of a school board when filling a vacancy. We also thank Representative Virnig for sponsoring the bill. The changes in HF 4287 will help public school districts by preventing costly and labor-intensive special elections from being held in off years after a board member resigns. Because they are outside of general election years, school districts must run these elections themselves. School districts do not have any dedicated funding to run elections so they must be paid for with the general fund, taking money out of the classroom.

Historically, there have only been a handful of school board resignations each year. Unfortunately, these vacancies have become far more common and school boards have more unexpected resignations than any other elected office. There were 82 vacancies in 2020, 48 vacancies in 2022 and another 44 vacancies in 2023.

According to data collected by MSBA, the average cost to a school district for an off year special election is approximately \$10,000 per election. Across the state, that's well over \$300,000 lost to pay for special elections which often have very low voter turnout.

For almost six decades, if a board member resigned, school boards were able to appoint a community member to fill the position until the next election cycle, a commonsense way to handle the large number of vacancies that can happen on school boards. This approach saves that special elections money for what it is supposed to do; help educate all of our students.

The appointment process allows boards to give opportunities to a wide range of community members to get experience serving their local schools. Examples include appointing community members who reflect the make-up of the students in a district or perhaps community members who may not run because they think they don't fully know the campaign process or may not be able to afford the cost of a campaign. The appointment

can then be an interim process where the community can watch how an appointed member serves the school district. If the appointed member runs for election, the community has the opportunity to vote in the election.

MSBA also supports this bill's change in requirements when a school board member resigns less than 90 days prior to the end of the term, the board may, but is not required to, fill the vacancy by board appointment. Given the 30-day waiting period that is required after the resolution to appoint is approved, a board may do all the work of appointing to have a newly appointed board member serve at only one meeting before the end of a term. We appreciate this local control and flexibility.

Thank you for your work on school board elections, MSBA fully supports HF 4287 and believes that education funding should be used to educate students, not for elections.

Sincerely,  
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763-458-1252



# **Brainerd Public Schools**

*Opportunity. Innovation. Success.*

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381 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55115

March 12, 2024

RE: HF 4287 Requirements to fill a vacancy in the office of school board member modified

Dear Chair Freiberg:

Thanks to you and the esteemed members of the House Elections committee for taking the time to gather input regarding House File 4287 which modifies the requirements of a school board when filling a vacancy. I also want to personally thank Representative Virnig for sponsoring this bill.

My name is Dr. Heidi Hahn and I serve as the Superintendent of Brainerd Public Schools. In my short tenure, Brainerd Public Schools has been faced with the challenge of filling a vacant board seat on two separate occasions. It used to be rare to have a board member leave prior to their term ending, and now this is occurring more and more. In the past three years, an average of 58 board vacancies have needed to be filled.

House File 4287 modifies statute so that when a school board member resigns, if the vacancy occurs less than two years prior to the expiration of the term, no special election is required, and the appointee of the board shall serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

By allowing this modification, this helps our public schools by preventing labor-intensive and costly special elections from being held in off years after a board member resigns. These elections are often very expensive, and they often have very low voter turnout. For example, the cost of running a special election for Brainerd Public Schools carries an estimated cost close to \$30,000. It would be much more beneficial to use those dollars directly serving our students, rather than running a special election.

In the most recent board vacancy for Brainerd Public Schools, a board member moved outside of the district boundary and needed to resign from their position. The board members

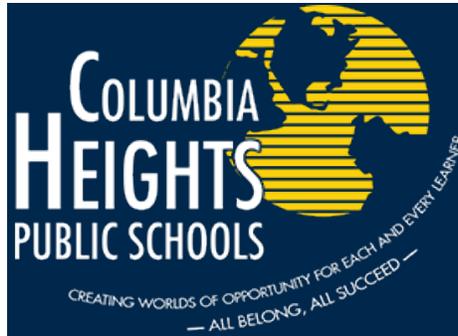
resignation occurred 3 months prior to the general election cycle. Current statute required the school district not only to appoint someone into the position due to the vacancy, but to also implement the 30-day waiting period after the appointee was named. This left the appointed board member serving for only one board meeting, prior to new board members being seated. We were fortunate that a retired board member accepted the appointment and easily stepped in for the one meeting.

This most recent process also seemed awkward and clumsy at the time, due to 12 individuals in our community actively campaigning for election to the Brainerd School Board. House File 4287 would modify the requirement to appoint a board member, if a member resigns within three months of the end of their term. This bill would move from requiring an appointment, to a school board *may* appoint a replacement, but it is not required.

Again, thank you for taking the time to gather input for this bill. House File 4287 makes sense, and it allows school districts and school boards to appoint members that are necessary and reflective of the needs in each unique and respective district. This bill ensures dollars are spent on our students, and not on added layers of process and procedures.

Thank you for your service to our state and to public education. With great respect,

Dr. Heidi Hahn - Superintendent - Brainerd Public Schools



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RE: HF 4287 Requirements to fill a vacancy in the office of school board member modified

Dear Chair Freiberg:

My name is Zena Stenvik and I'm the Superintendent of Columbia Heights Public Schools. I'm writing to share my support for HF 4287. The members of the House Elections committee are all familiar with running successful campaigns, and I want to share the perspective of school district administrators who are responsible for organizing, funding and carrying out the School Board election process.

If a school board member moves out of the district or resigns before their term is up, the School Board needs to replace that position outside of the regular election cycle. School Boards are allowed to appoint a qualified replacement, but then must run a special election within a year to fill the vacancy. In order to do so, the following steps must be completed:

1. Adopt a school board resolution calling for the special election
2. Notify the county and the commissioner of education 74 days prior to the election
3. Work with the county on the creation of the ballots and make sure absentee ballots are available 46 days prior to the election
4. Adopt a school board resolution appointing election judges 25 days prior to the election
5. Publish in the official school district newspaper, the notice of the special election two weeks prior to the special election
6. Publish in the official school district newspaper, the notice of the polling locations and where the ballots will be counted one week prior to the election
7. Publish in the official school district newspaper, the notice of the testing of the optical scan systems used 2 days prior to the election
8. Adopt a school board resolution canvassing the results
9. And notify the Commissioner of Education within 15 days after the results are canvassed.

All of these steps come with about a \$10,000 price tag.

In Columbia Heights Public Schools, we just went through this process in 2023, and since we were the only item on the ballot, we footed the entire bill. The appointed candidate won their seat with an overwhelming majority. That vacancy will now expire in 2024, so the Board member will need to run again- two years in a row. In 2015 we had two special school board elections in one year.

Public schools stretch every dollar in order to provide high quality education and supports to our students. We have a responsibility to our local communities to be fiscally responsible. House File 4287, authored by Representative Virnig, makes good sense. I encourage this committee to advance the bill.

Thank you for consideration.

Zena Stenvik  
Superintendent  
Columbia Heights Public Schools