



April 7, 2020

Chair Youakim and members of the House Education Policy Committee:

On behalf of the more than 450 nonpublic schools educating more than 65,000 students in Minnesota – we support HF4415 as it authorizes the Education Commissioner and MDE to recalculate nonpublic pupil transportation aid if necessary to ensure that the full appropriation is distributed to school districts.

By way of introduction, I am the President of the Minnesota Independent School Forum. We are the largest statewide organization representing nonpublic schools of MN since 1976. I also have the privilege of serving as Chair of the Nonpublic Education Council for the MN Department of Education.

This legislation is important as it follows the precedent set for other portions of nonpublic pupil aid program. A majority of nonpublic schools rely on this vital resource for transportation of students.

Similar to our counterparts in the district and charter sectors, these last three weeks have been unexpected and unprecedented. Leaders and educators are developing new ways to deliver a quality education to students in all areas of Minnesota, without a roadmap.

The extended effect of this crisis brings a greater concern for a number of nonpublic schools - survival. The average size of a nonpublic school is 144 students, and the median size is 90 students. Many of these schools are part of the fabric of their community or town. These schools stretch all of their resources to the limits. A crisis of this magnitude puts their future in great jeopardy. At times like this, families and children are greatly concerned about the uncertainty of whether they will return to their school, their teachers, their friends and school community.

It's critical at this time to show the state supports nonpublic schools as part of the education ecosystem. As a reminder, the nonpublic pupil aid program was established in the 1970s when, due to financial stress a large number of nonpublic schools nearing closure. This would have potentially lead to a surge of students into the local public school system. Depending on how long this emergency lasts, there may be the need to have a once in a generation conversation again.

One mantra we have used throughout the initial phases of this crisis to our schools is “**we hear you, and we are here for you.**” Thank you for the opportunity to support HF4415.

Sincerely,

Tim Benz
President

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