



March 2, 2021

Dear Chair Richardson and members of the House Education Policy Committee,

On behalf of Educators for Excellence - Minnesota (E4E), a teacher-led nonprofit with approximately 2,300 members across the state, we are submitting the following written testimony in support of HF 951.

We write in strong support of HF951, which extends the pre-kindergarten suspension restrictions and expulsion limitations to students in grades one through three. Research shows time and time again what common sense suggests: When students are not in school, they are not learning.

Students need supportive environments to help them grow academically and develop their social-emotional skills. As teachers, we recognize that a negative school climate, overly punitive discipline policies, and a lack of focus on supporting the whole child can keep our students from reaching their full potential.

We recognize that responding to student behaviors and acts of defiance with exclusionary, punitive, and disparate discipline practices is counterproductive. Too often, students are removed from their classrooms through suspension, expulsion, or in-school arrest. Student data also tells us that these students are disproportionately students of color. Not only does a punitive approach not address the reasons students act out, but it can break their trust with their school and teachers, place them on a negative trajectory, and set them behind academically. We have seen it firsthand in our own school communities, and we cannot allow it to continue.

We also know that our students' lives are impacted by much more than what occurs within the school building and focusing solely on students' academic growth can be harmful. Research shows what we have seen firsthand: classroom culture is most quickly established through relationship-building between teachers, students, and families. As educators, we must take responsibility for changing our practices and mindsets so we can eliminate discipline disparities and positively intervene to put students on the path to be successful in the classroom and beyond. We also recognize the role of community partners in providing additional support to our students who require it and encourage further collaboration.

We believe in investing in safe and inclusive school cultures that affirm the rights and identities of all students, while also creating responsive and relevant classrooms that increase student engagement and prioritize social emotional learning. We know that there is more at stake for our students than their academic performance alone and we understand our responsibility in recognizing and supporting the whole child.

Our teacher members are available to speak with you, should you have questions.

In partnership,

Paula Cole
Executive Director, E4E-MN