

February 7, 2023

Written Testimony re: HF1259

To the Honorable Members of the MN House Education Policy Committee:

My name is Terry Plath, and my wife Maren and I have homeschooled our 4 children (Grace-18; Josh-16; Lily-13; Micah-11) throughout their academic careers. One of the reasons we chose to homeschool was the freedom offered to allow our children to pursue their natural curiosities, academic interests and giftings. We are seeing the fruits of this freedom as they continue to grow and mature.

Our concern is specifically with the proposed changes in Section 2 , Subdivision 1 - Reports to Superintendent in HF1269. We strongly object to the 1) requirement of us to provide standardized test scores to the superintendent (we have no issue planning/administering them, that works well today and we enjoy a very good relationship with our school district and homeschool liaison there); and 2) requirement to provide evidence that any protocols agreed to with the superintendent's office were followed.

We feel these are intrusive on us as homeschooling parents, who have taken on the accountability and responsibility for our children's education and progress, including any corrective actions needed to be taken based on their standardized scores. This is not the domain of the school district or the state, and we do not see any value of this information being in the school district's possession other than to infringe on our ability to freely educate.

Additionally, this reporting requirement will place an unnecessary administrative burden on our local school districts, and inevitably will require budget funding to oversee this data collection, and will inevitably result in budget dollars being taken from another, more productive educational use for reporting that will be of marginal benefit.

The current homeschool law and reporting relationship to the superintendent has functioned very well and served both parties well for decades. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Plath
Woodbury, MN

I am writing today as a homeschool father and former homeschooled student, to oppose the new language that is being proposed to be added to HF 1269. There are many objectionable things in this bill, but I would like to highlight two things in particular: 1) the requirement for non-public schools to report test scores and 2) the introduction of so-called “ethnic studies” into required academic standards.

Let’s start with reporting test scores. As a 2nd generation homeschool father, I can tell you that this will have a profoundly negative effect on the vibrant homeschool community we have here in Minnesota. No homeschool parent or child has ever been helped by the burden of additional paperwork or the stress of wondering what some school superintendent might say about a particular test score. We, as homeschool parents, know our children and their needs better than any school system could ever hope to. Homeschool students have consistently, over decades, met and exceeded required academic standards in Minnesota with little oversight. If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it.

You might ask why it’s a big deal to have to submit test scores if our children are doing so well academically. It is an unnecessary burden and stressor to parents and threatens the freedom we have as Americans to educate our children as we see fit. Every child learns at his or her own unique pace and there are many things our children learn that could never be quantified on a test. We shouldn’t need to justify any educational decision we make for our own children to a school superintendent or government official who doesn’t know anything about or have a vested interest in our individual children. We homeschool so that we can decide what our children are taught. It’s our responsibility, we take it seriously, and many years of success shows this.

As for my second point, there has been growing concern nationwide over Critical Race Theory being taught in our schools. Many people see this as an ideology with an agenda rather than as education. The most honest definition of this theory I’ve come across is from Christopher Rufo, who says: *“Critical Race Theory is the idea that the United States is a fundamentally racist country and that all of our institutions including the law, culture, business, & economy are all designed to maintain white supremacy.”* We have been assured by the leaders of our state time and time again that Critical Race Theory is NOT being taught in our schools. Some would define the term differently and we could argue about whether the definition I have just provided is an accurate representation of the theory, but my point is that this is exactly the idea that parents across the country, including in the state of Minnesota, are up in arms about. We don’t want our kids indoctrinated and divided into classes based on something as arbitrary as the color of their skin or what nationality they happen to be.

I bring all this up because there is a lot of aggressive and divisive language in this bill, particularly in the definitions of several terms including “ethnic studies”, “antiracist”, “culturally sustaining”, & “institutional racism”. Let’s have a look at them. This is from proposed changes to Minnesota Statutes 2022, Section 120B.11, Subdivision 1

(e) "Ethnic studies curriculum" means the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of People of

Color within and beyond the United States. Ethnic studies analyzes the ways in which race and racism have been and continue to be powerful social, cultural, and political forces, and the connection of race to the stratification of other groups, including stratification based on gender, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, and legal status. The ethnic studies curriculum may be integrated in existing curricular opportunities or provided through additional curricular offerings.

(f) "Antiracist" means actively working to identify and eliminate racism in all forms so that power and resources are redistributed and shared equitably among racial groups.

(g) "Culturally sustaining" means integrating content and practices that infuse the culture and language of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities who have been and continue to be harmed and erased through schooling.

(h) "Institutional racism" means structures, policies, and practices within and across institutions that produce outcomes that chronically favor white people and disadvantage those who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

These are not really definitions, they are agendas. They suggest that white people are a problem, that racism permeates our schools, and that minorities are oppressed by our current systems. We can argue about whether this fits the definition of Critical Race Theory, but what is crystal clear is that parents don't want their children taught these lies.

You, as our elected leaders, should support materials that teach and protect our children, not ones that indoctrinate them with dangerous ideologies and make them resent their neighbors and classmates who look different than they do. If you want to know why people are leaving the public schools in droves, consider that parents don't want their children belittled, bullied, and lied to by the people who are supposed to be educating them. Stop the indoctrination and excessive oversight and focus on education.

Jeremy Marquez

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

Dear Members of the Education Policy Committee:

My name is Kim Munson and I am a homeschooling mother to two children in Lakeville. Additionally, I am a licensed Tier Four teacher and I have a Master's Degree in Education from the University of Saint Thomas. I currently hold a K-6 license in addition to two specialty licenses in 5-8 Social Studies and 5-8 Language Arts. I am also in my second year of LETRS training for which I thank many members in this committee for supporting. I have been in field of education for 14 years and currently teach ABE in a public school district at night.

I am writing to oppose the language in this bill that requires homeschooling families to submit test scores to superintendents for the following reasons:

- The testing burden for homeschoolers is already greater than that of public-school children. Public school children can opt-out of standardized tests whereas homeschooling children cannot. This is a troublesome double standard for which the legislature has yet to resolve.
- The language in this bill fails to address what superintendents are to do with this information. It appears to give superintendents carte blanche which will cause confusion and misinformation.
- The lack of nuance and specificity is infuriating and will undoubtedly cause strife for homeschooling families across the state.
- Who at the superintendent's office will obtain and organize this information? Is a fiscal note attached to this bill? Is this another unfunded mandate that this legislature thinks will cause no additional work, but in reality, will be incredibly burdensome from an administrative perspective for both homeschooling families and school districts?

Beyond just some of the above concerns, I think about my own experiences in the classroom at night as an adult education teacher. Our public-school students are already underserved. Our students, our teachers, our staff, and our superintendents are at their max, and factions in our state want to add more unfunded mandates from this body?

This is what I want from our superintendents:

- I want our superintendents to focus on addressing the reality that Minnesota has the largest opportunity gaps for students of color in the country.
- I want our superintendents to focus on the nearly 40% of our children who are not reading at grade level proficiency.
- I want our superintendents to focus on addressing the fact that one in five children who have Dyslexia are vastly under-identified and underserved.
- I want our superintendents to focus on addressing the serious mental health and bullying problem in our schools.

And, I suspect that a vast majority of our superintendents feel this way, as well.

As a homeschooling family, I receive NO funding for our homeschool from the state, and in fact, I want to keep it that way. Believe me, if a bill to “fund the student not the system” came up for discussion, I would be here in opposition of that, too. I believe in and support our public schools – my levy votes prove it. And, I am in the trenches every day teaching students from the most marginalized populations from across the state. I advocate for their success every day, and I need our superintendents to be laser-focused on that, as well.

This bill implies that homeschooling families don’t follow the law. There is no evidence to suggest that this is a problem. Homeschooling families already follow the law and submit paperwork **EVERY** year to the superintendent. There are already penalties in place if they don’t. And as mentioned before, our family has more of a burden to test our children than public school children.

Please vote no on this language and allow homeschoolers to school their children and allow superintendents to focus on the thousands of children already in their care each day. They have a tremendous burden, they are doing a fantastic job, and they need less work to do, not more.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Munson, M.Ed.

Written testimony regarding HF 1269 Pre-kindergarten through grade, 12 provisions modified, including general education, accountability, and transparency.

I have been actively home schooling our four children for the last 20 years. This is a decision I will never regret! As a homeschool parent, we are constantly on the look for educational opportunities. Education is not only found in the classroom, there are educational opportunities all around us and through out our day! Most of my adult life has been consumed with preparing for, and carrying out the education of our children.

As a homeschool community, we are known for our bright and respectful children. We hold our children to high standards and expectations. Many schools talk about teaching the “whole child,” as homeschool parents, we accomplish this!

Education should not be focused on how many facts and figures a student can memorize and spit out onto a test. The whole reason for education is to teach a student HOW to learn so that they're able to pursue and gather the information they need to succeed where ever their path in life takes them!

I am opposed to the requirement of home school parents reporting their student's test scores:

- We are essentially a separate and private school. Each individual school will lay out their teaching schedule differently. The sequencing of subjects and the vast number of curriculums cannot be standardized. A homeschooled third grader taking a standardized test may not have been taught some subjects simply because they are being taught in a different sequence than the test believes should be done. As a teacher, I use the test results as a gauge for what I know my student has been taught and I ignore what I know they have not been taught yet. Standardized test scores are used as a gauge for what adjustments need to be made for next year, such as potentially switching curriculum, or spending more time on a specific subject if needed.
- Testing scores are of little use to a public school superintendent, if they are the ones receiving this information. They have no idea of our teaching schedule or our curriculum. They have no idea of the direction we are taking our student in and frankly, they do not have the time to discuss this with each homeschool family and make a proper determination.
- As a norm, most homeschool children actually test above grade level. Requiring the sharing of test scores would be like a Superintendent sending public school student report cards to the state. Test scores are personal and private information that is unnecessarily required.
- Finally, many home school students take advantage of PSEO. In order to qualify for this, they must take a standardized test and score above 70%. This is the test that counts and many homeschool students are able to achieve this.

There is no historical basis for the need of requiring annually submitted test scores. I strongly request that you as State Legislators please choose not to micromanage the institution of homeschooling as you have done unsuccessfully with the public schools. We all see in our public schools what happens when you force teachers to teach to a test! We will not fall in that same trap!

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views with all of you,

DeEtta Moos
Cambridge Minnesota

To the Chair and Committee,
My Name is Sara Bertschinger
and I am writing in Opposition to HF 1269/SF 1311

Parents, not the State are responsible and accountable for their own children. This bill is government overreach and I am very concerned as to where we are headed if this legislation is passed.

There are two philosophies at play. State control vs Parental Rights. We are not a collective, we are a Sovereign State made up of Free individuals who have the Right and responsibility to raise our Children. Some Parents chose to allow local School District to help in the education process. This is a **volunteer** partnership of the School and Parents. This bill would **mandate** government control onto parents.

Every child learns differently. Parents know their children best and need the flexibility to provide their child with the education structure that is best suited for said child. This bill decertifies homeschooling by creating more regulation, bureaucracy, and government interference.

Please, stand up for the best interest of Minnesotan families and help Protect Parental Rights. Reject this bill and its precepts.

Thank you for your time,
Sara B.

My name is Laurel Kelly and I am a homeschooling mother of seven children in Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota. I strongly reject the proposal in HF1269 and SF1311 of homeschooling parents to submit standardized testing scores to their school officials. Children are absolutely under the loving stewardship of their parents. Parents have the natural unalienable right to the care and education of their children from the moment of conception, through childhood, and beyond.

My point will be more fundamental than just to eliminate extra paperwork for homeschooling parents. I want to remind you of what is truly at stake with any additional or even existing restrictions on homeschooling.

A standardized test necessitates value discrimination. What a test contains is determined by the values of the creator of the test. Parents have the natural right to guide their children toward good values; government bureaucrats do not have this right, unless usurped from the parents.

As we have seen in recent months especially through the state teaching licensure requirements, the Minnesota state government values a plethora of topics and content that not only differs from that of most homeschooling parents, but is in complete opposition to it. Therefore, we can only assume that standardized testing will follow suit, with tests themselves changing to reflect these same viewpoints and subject matter. Homeschooling parents will have to teach “to the test,” content that runs counter to their values. Forcing us to submit test scores is really just a way for government administrators to look over our shoulder and ensure we are teaching according to the approved groupthink.

This bill is a stepping stone toward more government control over freedom of speech, over freedom of religion, and ultimately mind control over our children, the next generation of Americans.

Let me quickly bring this home for you. Think of your own children. Would you want them submitted to a school, or a way of learning that goes against your convictions? What if the tides were turned and the content that is being forced upon you and your family ran counter to everything you not only believed, but fundamentally knew to be true? Who knows best for your children? Someone in a high seat in this very legislature? Or would you rather reserve that right to yourself? I’m guessing you would want the same freedom that I’m asking for now.

This is ultimately a fight over our children’s education, minds, values, and the nuclear family itself.



Fostering excellent science education in Minnesota for all!

February 1, 2023

Dear House Education Policy Committee Chair Pryor and Committee Members,

My name is Jill Jensen, and I am writing this letter as the President of the Minnesota Science Teachers Association (MnSTA), which is representative of over 800 Minnesota K-12 teachers of science.

The board of directors of the MnSTA, on behalf of our members, supports the following revision of *Minnesota Statute 120B.024 Credits*:

*Subdivision 1. **Graduation Requirements.** Students beginning 9th grade beginning in the ~~2011-2012~~ 2024-25 school year and later must successfully complete the following high school level credits for graduation:*

(4) three credits of science, including at least one credit of biology, one credit of chemistry or physics, and one ~~elective credit of science~~ credit in earth and space science. The combination of credits under this clause must be sufficient to satisfy (i) all of the academic standards in either chemistry or physics and (ii) all other academic standards in science.

This revision of the statute will clarify and agree with Minn. Statute 120B.021- Required Academic Standards, Minn. Statute 120B.02 - Educational Expectations and Graduation Requirements for Minnesota's Students, and MN Rule 3501.0960 Academic Standards in Science.

This revision will improve the implementation of the 2019 *Minnesota Academic Standards in Science*, which is required to be implemented by the 2024-25 school year. These standards place life science, physical science, and earth and space science on an equal footing. Current statutes require all students to accomplish the standards in all three areas. These standards are based on the most current best-practice research in science content and pedagogy found in *A Framework for K-12 Science Education* by the National Research Council.

Minnesota schools and districts have a variety of plans for implementing the current graduation requirements with the standards. Many plan to continue a physical science class with some earth science standards in 9th grade, even though the physical science standards are moved to 8th grade in the new science standards. According to a recent MnSTA survey, *Fidelity in Teaching of the High School Earth and Space Science Standards in Minnesota*, teachers representing 24.7% of schools that responded indicated that their district offers a REQUIRED, high school earth and space science course, and that 37.9% offer an ELECTIVE earth and space science course where SOME of the Minnesota benchmarks are addressed. Having a required earth and space science course would ensure that the earth and space science standards are accomplished by all students. **This revision would not change the number of science credits and hence would not impact the availability of elective courses in other content areas.**



**Fostering excellent science
education in Minnesota for all!**

In a dedicated earth science class, for example, all the required standards would be taught by an earth science teacher, who has extensive knowledge and training in earth and space science and has earned licensure via specific teacher preparation programs that are reviewed and accepted by the state licensing board, and professional organizations at the state and federal levels.

To implement this revised graduation requirement and the new science standards, the number of licensed earth and science teachers will need to be increased. MnSTA is partnering with ESTEP (Earth Science Teacher Education Project), to offer high-quality, Minnesota-focused, professional development to already practicing science teachers to help them learn the content and teaching strategies that will help them gain additional licensure in 9-12 Earth and Space Science. The ESTEP program is funded through an LCCMR grant as well as contributions from districts and educators. This program is entering its second year of programming and over 50 Minnesota educators have participated in one or more high school ESTEP programs so far.

Minnesota's economy, industries, land use, water quality, soil, recreation, and conservation activities are all deeply rooted in earth science. Local and global businesses, societies, and economies are critically dependent on real-time data about the earth. A citizenry with a working knowledge of the earth sciences is essential to the existence of our state and the globe.

A MnSTA representative is willing and available to speak with you regarding Minnesota science education as well as on the issues presented.

Sincerely,

Jill Jensen
President, Minnesota Science Teachers Association
400 NE Stinson Blvd.
Minneapolis, MN 55413
jill.jensen@charter.net

cc Dana Smith, MnSTA Advocacy Chair

Honorable Representatives
House Education Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
120 Capitol Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1298

RE: Hearing for HF1269
7 February 2023

Dear Honorable Representatives,

The year was 1776. The messenger drove his horse as fast as he dared. Mile after mile into the night. He finally arrived at his destination. It was 2am. The sick Delaware delegate met him at the door. "The vote is to be today, sir!" the messenger declared.

Without hesitation, the delegate responded, "Get my horse!"

Back into the darkness they rode - 80 miles. Hooves pounding pavement as at last they reached Philadelphia. The delegate, ill, worn from the journey, had to be carried into the meeting hall. They were just in time.

"What is your vote?" the question was posed to him. He knew his vote mattered. It would break the tie cast by his two fellow delegates, declaring Delaware's position. He also knew his only hope of healing may be lost with this vote, but he made it.

"Yes! For independent states!" the delegate declared.

And with his influential vote. It passed. These 13 colonies were to become a unified body of independent states.

This, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee, was part of the kids' recent American History lesson. Lessons containing true stories of real people who displayed great character.

Vision.

Courage.

Conviction.

Self-sacrifice.

Character traits we long for in ourselves and are teaching to our children.

Those serving the nation in 1776 had difficult decisions before them. That has not changed in 2023.

As our representatives, serving the people of Minnesota, you have difficult decisions before you as well. As part of the Education Policy Committee the charge to ensure excellence must be ever before you. That charge would be the reason behind making modifications to previous policy. Policy changes are difficult decisions. Yet let not HF1269 be one of them.

I oppose HF1269. It is the responsibility of parents to raise up their children in the way they should go. Homeschooling families take this responsibility seriously. The new language proposed in HF1269, specifically to report to the superintendent “a copy of the actual test scores sent from the testing provider of the annual nationally normed achievement test from the previous school year; and evidence that any protocols agreed to with the superintendent's office were followed;” will provide an unnecessary burden on homeschooling families and district administrators.

Talk with any homeschool parent. We are the biggest critics of ourselves, holding to a high standard of excellence – just like this Committee. Study after study demonstrates excellent academic results from homeschooled students. Colleges and universities seek out homeschooled students for their strong work ethic, ability to teach themselves, and thoughtful contribution. The proposed language in HF1269 treats homeschooling families with suspicion. What will a change in annual test reporting result in other than larger file drawers at district offices? This suspicion is unjustified.

The character of homeschool families speak loudly.
They have vision.
Courage.
Conviction.
Self-sacrifice.
Something we all long for more of. Something our state and nation need.

I train my children to show you the respect and honor you deserve as our appointed representatives. Please show me, and all homeschooling parents, the respect and honor we deserve as the God-appointed ones to raise up our children in the way they should go.

Oppose HF1269.

Thank you.

Mellany Zepelak
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February 7, 2023

Re: *HSLDA Opposition to HF 1269*

Dear Chair Pryor and Members of the Education Policy Committee:

My name is Amy Buchmeyer, and I am a Staff Attorney at the Home School Legal Defense Association, a national nonprofit advocacy organization with over 100,000 member families.

HSLDA opposes HF 1269. Please amend it delete the changes the bill would create in lines 3.5 to 3.12.

The new language would require homeschoolers to annually submit a copy of their standardized test scores and evidence that any agreed-upon protocols were followed. There is no justifiable reason for these changes. It is a solution in search of a problem.

- 1. Minnesota homeschoolers test annually, but they have never been required to submit the test scores.** In 2011 the homeschool law was changed to reduce the paperwork burden for both parents and superintendents. This language adds to that burden without any clear reason or purpose.
- 2. Only six states currently require homeschoolers to submit annual proof of testing.**¹ Of those states, one currently has a bill to eliminate testing entirely.² The trend is away from adding to the burden on homeschooling parents, not towards it. Over the last decade, South Dakota, North Dakota, Arkansas, and Iowa eliminated their mandatory testing requirements. During the same period, no state has added or increased testing.
- 3. This bill will cause increased tension between homeschoolers and their school districts, resulting in unnecessary conflict.** The proposed language requiring parents to show proof that they followed agreed upon protocols is both vague and broad. It will only lead to conflict in the future when parents and school districts disagree about what it means. This is unnecessary.

There is no reason to add this burden to homeschool families. If anything, I would encourage this committee to follow the national trend and eliminate the testing requirement altogether.

Should you have any questions, I can be reached at amy.buchmeyer@hsllda.org.

¹ Hawaii, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Virginia.

² See Ohio SB 1.



Ellen Crain

Regarding HF1269 before the House Education Policy Committee

2/7/2023

My name is Ellen Crain, and I am a resident of Wyoming MN, a longtime homeschooling parent and the owner of Homeschool Boss, a homeschool testing service that works with homeschool families across the United States.

I am testifying to share my concerns about the proposed changes in the homeschooling requirements in HF1269. I believe the changes violate the privacy of homeschooled students while offering them no benefit and will be a bureaucratic nightmare for school districts to administer.

Here in Minnesota, we don't share student data unless it is for the benefit of the student.

I started my homeschool testing business because I believe that testing is an integral part of teaching and homeschool educators benefit from the feedback testing provides in the same way that teachers do. However, test data about an individual student is meaningless without context— are the results in line with their day-to-day performance? – is the student growing academically? – are there any other factors going on in the student's life that might be impacting their academics? Without this kind of information, school districts cannot use a homeschool student's test data to help the student, and therefore they shouldn't have access to the data.

As a business owner, I know that small inefficiencies can add up to a lot of employee time. Currently, continuing homeschoolers submit one simple form for their whole family, and districts just have to record that they received it. If this change is approved, in addition to spending an extra minute for every homeschooled child in the district once the additional paperwork has been submitted (1 minute x 30,000 students adds up), they will also have to spend substantial time informing/reminding/cajoling families to submit the new paperwork. As we recover from the pandemic, I feel confident school district employees have more productive things to do with their time.

From my perspective, Minnesota's current homeschool law works well. If the Department of Education has concerns about homeschoolers, I encourage them to reach out to our community and work with us to find solutions that respect student privacy and are practical for everyone.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.