

Date of Hearing: Tuesday, January 11, 2021

To: Members of the Education Finance Committee

From: Jaden Henderson

Affiliated Organization (grade and high school): Bemidji High School, 11th Grade

City of Residence: Bemidji, Minnesota

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Chair Davnie and members of the committee, my name is Jaden Henderson and I am a first-year Minnesota Youth Council member and I have the privilege to speak to those here today. I'm a junior in high school, I'm 17 years old, I'm from CD7 and I am also a member of the environmental subcommittee. My focus is wide and I'm a very open-minded person but today I want to focus on the effects of the pandemic and the impact it had on the younger generations.

Over the past 10 or so months one of the major issues I have had and that many of my classmates have had is the problem with technology and access to materials needed to do our school work properly. On average I spend from 8:19 am to 3:05 pm in class and I'm one of the more privileged students here in Bemidji because I have a computer to use and have access to the internet. For example, I know many students in my school that have to use their phone for class and homework because there aren't enough devices for them. This is a problem because using your phone leads you to be easily distracted and more prone to getting sidetracked. Then there is the issue of materials and this year we had to spend much of the limited budget on Chromebooks that were received very late into the year. One of my fears is that this additional expense cutting into our district's budget will lead to cuts elsewhere later into the year when students are back in school.

In addition to technology, another major problem is mental health and motivation. Part of the problem in this is the fact that school systems are set up to be similar to a factory so that in the past they could turn out good workers. Today we have different needs and different types of jobs and the system should fit the individual and not the group. For me before the pandemic, I had my schoolwork and home life separated which helped my mental health and I had trained my body and mind to fit those spaces which in turn gave me more balance in life. But, with the pandemic, those two spaces collided and that has added a new layer of stress into my life which has been difficult to focus on and has made me feel overwhelmed multiple times. I'm not alone in these feelings and getting access to help is harder than before. For instance, now, if a student needs to ask a question or needs help both with schoolwork and health-wise they have to email and set up a meeting which adds to the already mounting load of things to do in a day.

Another concern for me is students falling behind due to different life circumstances. For some students, the basic resources for classes such as pencils, paper, and notebooks are mostly provided by the teachers and if the student can't receive those resources then they don't have the adequate things to do the homework that is given to them. The pressures of society on students to not be the odd one out discourages students from getting or asking for help with said materials, which then decreases their grade which then adds stress to get better grades and starts the spiral of procrastination.

I would like to thank Chair Davnie and the Committee Administrator Sarah Burt for listening to us students. I appreciate your commitment to providing young people opportunities to share our experiences and I look forward to working with you in the future. I am happy to pass to one of the other young people on the call or open for a question.