

March 18, 2021

To: Chair Ruth Richardson and Members of the House Education Policy Committee  
RE: HF 951

Dear Chair Richardson and members of the House Education Policy Committee

We write in support of HF 951, which would limit dismissals for Minnesota students in grades kindergarten through third grade. This bill is a critical step to ensuring that young learners in Minnesota have full access to school and the supports they need to be successful in school. Suspensions are not helpful for young learners and disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and students of color, and students who have disabilities.

Young students who present with behaviors at school need support, as those behaviors are almost always the student's way of expressing unmet needs or demonstrating that they can't handle the stress they are experiencing at school and they don't have access to appropriate coping skills. What students need in these circumstances is support in order to build more appropriate coping skills and to be able to use them in the school environment. Removing students from the school in these situations actually makes it worse – it sends a message to the student that they don't belong in school and that school isn't a place that can help them learn how to handle being overwhelmed.

Being suspended at a young age has long-term consequences. Children suspended in the early school years are 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, and face incarceration than those who are not.<sup>1</sup> Racial disparities in the use of suspensions at these young ages drive disparities in educational outcomes throughout students' careers and lives. Students who have challenging behaviors at school need more support, not to be excluded from their supportive learning environments. Research shows that frequent use of dismissals harms all students, including those not subject to discipline.<sup>2</sup>

Limiting the use of suspensions for young learners would be a tremendous move to ensure that young Minnesotans experience belonging and success in school environments during their foundational years in school. We support this important effort and are grateful for the leadership of Chair Richardson in advancing this key issue on behalf of Minnesota's young learners.

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<sup>1</sup> See Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at 3, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/3/13/21104493/when-chicago-cut-down-on-suspensions-students-saw-test-scores-and-attendance-rise-study-finds>; <https://edsources.org/2015/study-suspensions-harm-well-behaved-kids/72501>; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122414556308>

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Minnesota's students and for considering this important step to address racial disparities in Minnesota's schools and to ensure that Minnesotans have full access to school from a young age.

Sincerely,

Advancing Equity Coalition  
The Arc Minnesota  
The Autism Society of Minnesota  
Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis  
Centro Tyrone Guzman  
Center for Victims of Torture  
Children's Defense Fund Minnesota  
Coalition of Asian American Leaders  
Ed Allies  
Educators for Excellence Minnesota  
HACER  
Integrated Schools Minneapolis  
Legal Rights Center  
Legal Services Advocacy Project  
Mental Health Minnesota  
Metropolitan Center for Independent Living  
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid/Minnesota Disability Law Center  
MIGIZI  
Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health  
Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities  
Multicultural Autism Action Network  
Minnesota School Social Workers Association  
NAMI Minnesota  
National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter  
National Parent Union  
Northside Achievement Zone  
Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities  
Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition  
Think Small  
Uplift MN  
Voices for Racial Justice  
Washburn Center for Children  
Wellness in the Woods