

----- Superintendents Innovation Discussion Group -----
Leaders seeking better results through innovation

April 29, 2020

Senator Carla Nelson
Chair of Senate E-12 Finance and Policy Committee
3235 Minnesota State Senate Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Representative Cheryl Youakim
Chair of House Education Policy Committee
591 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Representative Jim Davnie
Chair House Education Finance Division
443 State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Senator Nelson, Representative Youakim and Representative Davnie:

We are an informal group of superintendents from district and chartered schools across Minnesota who have worked on the Innovation Research Zone (IRZ) bill this session. Thanks to both of the authors, you Senator Nelson and also Representative Steve Sandell, for being so supportive. Unfortunately, because of cancellations, your Committees did not hear testimony from us as to the innovations we are planning.

Although some of us have individually e-mailed or telephoned you, other legislators and the Commissioner in support of this bill, we are sending you this group letter because our experience with this pandemic has only heightened the need for this bill. We are asking you to please enact this bill.

When this pandemic is over education will never be the same again. Yet, we have the same system; the same laws; the same rules; the same everything. To create new models, schools need flexibility so we can personalize learning for every single student knowing their needs, aspirations and aptitudes are different. But frankly Madam Chairs, we can't do that as well as we'd like as the current system provides weak support for innovation. We need the Legislature to provide several statutory exemptions to permit a few schools to conduct solid research on new and different models. That is what the IRZ is all about.

The bill has no mandates. No appropriation is requested. No school has to use it. Only three rural and three metro applications are added. The bill is supported by the 30 of us and also MSBA, MASA, AMSD, MREA, SEE, MESPA and MSSPA. We know the COVID-19 virus matter is taking all of your time. Ours too. But we must not let the virus halt everything else as the future is not waiting. Our schools have ideas we want to implement this summer and next fall that will close achievement gaps, enhance equity, redesign high schools, empower teachers, provide career certifications to high school students so they have middle-class jobs when they exit high school, and the list goes on. We are asking for your trust.

Thank you for your work this session to help Minnesotans survive this pandemic. And thank you for enacting the Innovation Research Zone bill. The list of supporting superintendents is attached.

Sincerely,

Dennis L. Carlson Jay Haugen Bob Wedl
Facilitators of the Superintendents Innovation Discussion Group

Denny denniscarlson@yahoo.com -- Jay jchaugen@mac.com -- Bob robert_wedl@yahoo.com

*-----Superintendents Innovation Discussion Group-----
Leaders seeking better results through innovation*

Members of this Group Co-signing the letter to Senator Carla Nelson and Representative Cheryl Youakim

Andrew Almos
Superintendent of East-Central District Schools

Carrie Bakken
Coordinator of Avalon Charter School

Ben Barton
Superintendent of Princeton District Schools

Jason Berg
Interim Superintendent of Farmington District Schools

Joseph Brown
Superintendent of Fairmont District Schools

Julie Critz, PhD
Superintendent of Alexandria District Schools

Barbara Duffrin
Superintendent of Mahtomedi District Schools

Brian Erlandson
Superintendent of Minnesota Transitions Charter School

Julia Espe, EdD
Retired Superintendent of Princeton District Schools

Les Fujitake
Superintendent of Bloomington District Schools

Matt Grose
Superintendent of Deer River District Schools and
Superintendent of Grand Rapids District Schools effective July 1

Deb Henton, EdD
Superintendent of North Branch District Schools and
Executive Director of MASA effective July 1

Ted Kolderie
Co-founder of Education Evolving

Charlie Kyte, PhD
Retired Executive Director of MASA and
Retired Superintendent of Northfield District Schools

Keith Lester
Retired Superintendent of Brooklyn Center District Schools

Phil Moye, PhD
Retired Superintendent of Inver Grove Heights District Schools

Denise Pontrelli, PhD
Superintendent of Stillwater District Schools

Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed, PhD
Superintendent of Hopkins District Schools

Jerry Robicheau, PhD
Retired Superintendent of Inver Grove Heights District Schools and
Current member of the Board of Education of Faribault District Schools

Jeff Ronneberg, EdD
Superintendent of Spring Lake Park District Schools

Mark Schmitz
CEO/Executive Director of Resource Training & Solutions and
Former Superintendent of Staples-Motley District Schools

John Schultz, PhD
Superintendent of Edina District Schools

Teri Staloch, EdD
Superintendent of Prior Lake-Savage District Schools

Chris Swenson, EdD
Superintendent of Holdingford District Schools

Tom Tapper, PhD
Executive Director of Innovative Quality Schools and
Retired Superintendent of Owatonna District Schools

Jason Vold
Superintendent of Onamia District Schools

Patrick Walsh
Superintendent of Brooten, Belgrade, Elrosa District Schools