

January 16, 2021

Dear Members of the House Education Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, I am submitting comments on HF4. We greatly appreciate Representative Hassan's efforts to address the educational needs of students during the pandemic.

- **Extended Time Flexibility:** Extending the programming into the summer is critical for students who had difficulty with reliable internet, lack of adult support and who were already struggling with meeting educational goals. Not all children on an IEP are eligible for summer programs and allowing them to receive extended time will help them realize their IEP goals.
- **Prioritizing On-site Instruction:** Families who have a child on an IEP are struggling greatly. In a small nonscientific survey sent out to families who have a child with a mental illness, over 75% said their child's mental health was fair to poor. Many struggled to keep their child on a daily schedule, stated that keeping them engaged on a screen was hard, and that some were falling even farther behind. They wanted more in-person learning, tutoring, fewer videos, smaller zoom groups, and in-home support. These children need to come back to school as soon as possible to obtain the specialized supports they need to learn. We understand that implementing and IEP at home during a pandemic is nearly impossible, but we support prioritizing special education students to get return to the classroom.
- **Truancy:** We have had calls from parents whose children were being labeled as truant. One was a kindergartner, and the family could not get the device to work and they were threatened with truancy. Another was a child with a serious mental illness and Autism and the parent could not get the child engaged and they reported the child truant to the county. We would even support the language being stronger.
- **Full-service Community Schools:** Eliminating barriers to accessing health and mental health care, along with social services, especially with the pandemic is critically important.
- **Trauma-informed Schools:** NAMI strongly supports investing in trauma-informed schools. While everyone believes that returning children to in-person education will be a positive thing we must remember what children have experienced during the pandemic – isolation, fear, lack of food, housing instability, lack of structure, witnessing violence, and the community trauma of George Floyd's murder. Students will have difficulty adjusting and some children who have anxiety may be reluctant to return to school. It is critical that there be extra education and support and that students not be punished – through suspensions – especially younger students, when they do not have the "tools" to deal with what they have gone through.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director