



February 19, 2023

Dear Members of the Education Finance Committee:

NAMI Minnesota strongly supports HF 58 that would prevent students in k-3 from being suspended. These young children should not be suspended. They learn nothing from being out of school.

Suspension isn't producing good outcomes – just the opposite. There are studies showing that children suspended in younger grades feel rejected by the school, have a negative attitude towards school, lose trust in the adults, are 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention. They are also more often to be from a BIPOC community adding to our education disparities. We don't need to make the situation worse.

Often we see that children haven't learned how to use their words, express their emotions, or how to calm themselves down. They may have experienced trauma. We have long known that we should not be asking "what's the matter with you" but rather "what happened to you." We also know that some mental health concerns begin to emerge in these early grades, particularly anxiety and ADHD. Let's think about some of the actions that might lead to suspension by a young student – acts before thinking, easily frustrated, inattentive, poor social interactions, irritable, fear of humiliation, repetitive behaviors, aggressive, can't sit still, intense rigidity, angry, defiant. These are all symptoms of childhood mental illnesses.

They essentially have lagging skills – they are lagging in executive function skills, language processing skills, cognitive flexibility skills, emotion regulation skills or social skills. We need to especially note the impact of the pandemic on children. Recent studies have identified developmental delays in children's development due to the lack of routine and structure and not playing with other children. Parents reported tantrums, anxiety, clinginess, boredom, and under-stimulation.

We need to teach these young children the skills they need to be successful and acknowledge that some may need treatment. Therefore, instead of suspending them and thinking that a suspension will change behavior, let's teach them how to deal with frustration, let's teach them some mindfulness practices, let's understand the trauma they have experienced and help them through it. We urge your support for HF 58. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director



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