

Minnesota House Education Policy

January 25, 2021

Chair – Rep. Richardson

Madam Chair Richardson and Members: First I would like to congratulate Representative Richardson and vice chair Representative Hassan for their leadership in education related matters.

I also thank you all for the opportunity to send my written testimony today.

My name is Idil Abdull, I am an autism mom & advocate. I have testified extensively about racial disparities particularly in discipline for the last couple of sessions ever since my son who has nonverbal autism and does not understand suspension was kicked out of Bloomington Public Schools on a Thursday afternoon at 5:18pm in May 3, of 2018. From that day on, I have tried to understand racial disparities in our education system, how it happens, why it happens and what possible solutions can be.

While I do not claim to have all the answers, I do know that any racial gap comes from differential treatment of a situation that is similar. For example:

My son was 14 years old and a 9th grader when he was suspended. His teacher, a white female named Kelly Morris disrupted his daily routine, did not give him his communication device then when she didn't understand what he wanted called security and the principal on him, all while I am outside the building waiting to pick up my kid from school. Autism as you may know is a developmental disorder that affects the person's ability to communicate, socialize and regulate their behaviors. My son had a behavior due to his disability and school kicked him out of his education environment for not one, two, three, four but five days.

In parallel: A white child (I will call him Kid #B for privacy purposes) who also had autism would have repeated and chronic behaviors at the same school – Jefferson high. His white female teacher did not suspend him, instead, she would ask for a behavior analyst to analyze the function of his behaviors. I remember during kid #B's 9th grade, he had severe behaviors as his routine from middle school to high school changed. The district then decided to bring him back to middle school until he was comfortable. The district also decided to have his middle school teacher go with him to high school and help him with transitions.

You see Madam Chair and Members; this is what is called differential treatment to a similarly situated situation. For the white autistic kid, the school ensures he is successful in his learning environment. On the other hand, you have a black autistic kid (my son) whom the school takes the easy road and kicks him out of his education environment. These types of treatments create racial disparities in education. Sadly, there is nothing unique about my story. There are thousands of children like mine who are treated the same.

The question for you all is what are you going to do about such differential treatments? How will you hold teachers like Kelly Morris at Jefferson high school and principals like Jaysen Anderson accountable? Because without accountability, there is no change and there is no justice.

Thanks again for your time and I look forward to tangible solutions this legislative session!