



February 26, 2023

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Committee:

NAMI Minnesota strongly supports HF 362 which would create two leads within the Minnesota Department of Education to focus on the mental health of students, teachers, and staff.

The pandemic has caused an increase in depression and anxiety among students - and also adults. The uncertainty of the situation, ambiguous loss, stress of distance learning and so much more have had a huge impact. Now, more than ever, we need to address the mental health needs of everyone in our schools.

While teachers must have continuing education related to the early warning signs of mental illnesses in students and evidence-based suicide prevention training, this is only one aspect of a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention. Schools need to know what is effective – and harmful -in teaching suicide prevention to students as well as how to respond to suicides, including attempts, in their schools.

Minnesota has a nationally recognized program for providing mental health treatment in schools, the school-linked mental health program. But again, this is just one part of a comprehensive plan. Helping schools expand their services to students by learning about resources and best practices is important.

Teachers and staff have experienced a great deal of stress these past nearly three years. Healthy adults support healthy children. We need to ensure that teachers and staff have access to health and wellness activities along with mental health treatment and supports. Having one place dedicated within MDE to seek out information is resources will help promote good mental health for all.

This bill is very different than just adding staff to the safe and supportive schools division within MDE. It's very important that we call out mental health and not use a euphemism. Never has there been greater awareness and discussions around mental health. Let's take that next step and ensure that information and resources are easy to access at MDE.

Sincerely,

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

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director



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