

# COALITION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

March 22, 2022

Education Finance Committee  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Davnie and Members of the Education Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Coalition for Children with Disabilities, we are writing to express support to House File 951, Representative Richardson's bill to end suspensions for students aged kindergarten through third grade.

The Coalition supports legislation that decreases the use of suspensions, exclusions, and expulsions and other disciplinary practices that neither meet the needs of students nor promote a positive school culture. Our students need to be in the classroom. Suspending our youngest students for behavioral concerns does not provide any benefits for the student, teacher, or school. Suspensions do not help address the underlying reason for any disruptive behavior. It is in these moments that our students need more access to school resources and connection to their school community to serve any unmet needs of the student. Removing a student from the school community inhibits a child's academic success and reduces their ability to form connections with their classmates. Additionally, suspensions are disproportionately used against students of color and students with disabilities. There are other tools available for our school system to utilize that are more inclusive for our students and our school community.

We strongly support HF 951 and to remove the option for teachers to suspend our youngest learners.

## **Coalition for Children with Disabilities**

The Arc Minnesota • Epilepsy Foundation of Minnesota  
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid/Minnesota Disability Law Center • Minnesota Brain Injury Alliance  
PACER Center • Prader-Willi Syndrome Association of Minnesota  
Proof Alliance

March 23, 2021

To: Chair Davnie and Members of the House Education Finance Committee  
RE: HF 951

Dear Chair Davnie and members of the House Education Finance Committee

We write in support of HF 951, which would limit dismissals for Minnesota students in grades kindergarten through third grade. This bill is a critical step to ensuring that young learners in Minnesota have full access to school and the supports they need to be successful in school. Suspensions are not helpful for young learners and disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and students of color, and students who have disabilities.

Young students who present with behaviors at school need support, as those behaviors are almost always the student's way of expressing unmet needs or demonstrating that they can't handle the stress they are experiencing at school and they don't have access to appropriate coping skills. What students need in these circumstances is support in order to build more appropriate coping skills and to be able to use them in the school environment. Removing students from the school in these situations actually makes it worse – it sends a message to the student that they don't belong in school and that school isn't a place that can help them learn how to handle being overwhelmed.

Being suspended at a young age has long-term consequences. Children suspended in the early school years are 10 times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, and face incarceration than those who are not.<sup>1</sup> Racial disparities in the use of suspensions at these young ages drive disparities in educational outcomes throughout students' careers and lives. Students who have challenging behaviors at school need more support, not to be excluded from their supportive learning environments. Research shows that frequent use of dismissals harms all students, including those not subject to discipline.<sup>2</sup>

Limiting the use of suspensions for young learners would be a tremendous move to ensure that young Minnesotans experience belonging and success in school environments during their foundational years in school. We support this important effort and are grateful for the leadership of Chair Richardson in advancing this key issue on behalf of Minnesota's young learners.

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<sup>1</sup> See Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings, U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services at 3, <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/3/13/21104493/when-chicago-cut-down-on-suspensions-students-saw-test-scores-and-attendance-rise-study-finds>; <https://edsources.org/2015/study-suspensions-harm-well-behaved-kids/72501>; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122414556308>

Thank you for your leadership on behalf of Minnesota's students and for considering this important step to address racial disparities in Minnesota's schools and to ensure that Minnesotans have full access to school from a young age.

Sincerely,

Advancing Equity Coalition  
The Arc Minnesota  
The Autism Society of Minnesota  
Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis  
Centro Tyrone Guzman  
Center for Victims of Torture  
Children's Defense Fund Minnesota  
Coalition of Asian American Leaders  
Ed Allies  
Educators for Excellence Minnesota  
HACER  
Integrated Schools Minneapolis  
Legal Rights Center  
Legal Services Advocacy Project  
Mental Health Minnesota  
Metropolitan Center for Independent Living  
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid/Minnesota Disability Law Center  
MIGIZI  
Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health  
Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities  
Multicultural Autism Action Network  
Minnesota School Social Workers Association  
NAMI Minnesota  
National Association of Social Workers, MN Chapter  
National Parent Union  
Northside Achievement Zone  
Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities  
Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition  
Think Small  
Uplift MN  
Voices for Racial Justice  
Washburn Center for Children  
Wellness in the Woods

Minnesota House of Representatives  
Education Finance Committee  
Chair – Rep. Davnie  
March 23, 2022

**Re: HF 951, Keeping K to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students in the classroom and teaching them**

Dear Mr. Chair and Members,

Many thanks for the opportunity to testify today in support of this important legislation. I want to thank Rep. Richardson for her focus and tenacity in our children's education.

This is a political body, and I would like to speak to you as such.

- I want to say to all of the legislators in this committee that Minnesota has the only divided legislators in the country. What this means is that your voters have mandated you to work together and get along for the benefit of all your constituents.
- I want to say to the Democrats – you control two of the government bodies here which means you slightly have the upper hand. You have been supporting this bill from last year and this year, but you have got to come out stronger by saying what you mean and meaning what you say.
- You must get Education Minnesota and the teachers to support this bill with no reservation. You know that black and brown voters have supported you. Now it is your turn to support their children and ensure they are kept in the classroom to learn and be nurtured. I respectfully and humbly ask you to carry this bill to the finish line and not let it become a casualty during the conference committee hearings.
- Now to the republican legislators – yes, the principals and administrators need to have a toolbox at their disposal. Kicking young students out of school does not have to be a tool in the box. Maybe this toolbox can have compassion, competency, and kindness
- Finally, I know you are aware that racism and discrimination exists in the education system and elsewhere. It was Sen. Coleman who first helped us Somali autism families back over a decade ago when we were advocating for autism awareness in our community. It was Abeler and Hann who helped us with DHS' inequalities and ensured Medicaid covered autism therapy. Please help us now with education gap by keeping the kids in school so that they can learn and prosper.

I beg all of you in this committee to validate parent's pain and children's despair by standing with us, for us and by us. Please support this bill this year.

I thank you for your time and for listening as always

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March 23, 2022

To: Members of the House Education Finance Committee  
Re: House File 951

Dear Chair Davnie and Members of the Education Finance Committee,

The Minnesota Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (MNCCD) would like to express our support of HF 4210. MNCCD is a broad-based coalition of advocacy and provider organizations and individuals working to change public policy to improve the lives of people with disabilities through building awareness, providing education, and engaging in the community. Thank you for spending time today as a committee considering House File 951, which would limit the use of exclusionary discipline for K-3 students.

One of MNCCD's policy principles is to promote an accessible, equitable, and inclusive society. Schools should be accessible, equitable, and safe for everyone. Unfortunately, students who have disabilities, and particularly students of color who have disabilities, don't always experience inclusion in schools. Students of color and students who have disabilities are more likely to be subject to exclusionary discipline – including suspensions and expulsions.

We support House File 951 because it will help reduce the over-reliance on exclusionary discipline for Minnesota's youngest learners. Even in these young grades, students who have disabilities and students of color are disproportionately suspended and subjected to exclusionary discipline, particularly for subjective behaviors. Students who are struggling with behaviors need support and inclusive environments that meet their needs, not to be removed from the environment. Much needs to be done to address racial and disability disparities in discipline, but we hope the legislature can agree that suspensions are not the right approach for these young ages.

Building a society where people with disabilities belong will require that people who have disabilities experience inclusion and access beginning with school. House File 951 will help make that a reality. We urge the committee to support this bill and are grateful to Chair Richardson for her leadership on it. Thank you for this opportunity to share our views.

Sincerely,

Melissa Haley  
Public Policy Co-Chair

Maren Hulden  
Public Policy Co-Chair



# Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition

March 18, 2022

**To: Chair Davnie and Members of the House Education Finance Committee**  
**RE: House File 951**

Dear Chair Davnie and Members:

Thank you so much for your commitment to Minnesota's students! We write as the Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition, a coalition of students, families, community members, and organizations committed to changing policies, practices, and mindsets in order to end exclusionary discipline practices that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and students of color (BIPOC) and instead foster positive school climates for all students.

The Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition has been advocating for discipline reforms to address racial disparities for over six years. Yet, racial and disability disparities persist. Black students in Minnesota are suspended or expelled eight times more than white students, Indigenous students are suspended or expelled ten times more than white students, and students with disabilities account for approximately 15% of students but nearly 45% of suspensions. without disabilities.

These disparities exist even for our youngest learners. In the 2018-19 school year – which is the last school year uninterrupted by Covid-19, data from the Minnesota Department of Education shows that, of kindergarten students, the percent of suspensions accounted for by white students was less than one percent. For Black students it was 6.69% — over 8 times as much. And the rate of suspensions for Black students increased from kindergarten — at 6.69%, to 10.5% for 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 13% for second grade, and nearly 15% for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. The rate for suspensions for American Indian/Alaska Native students that year was almost 17%. Meanwhile, the rate for white students hovered right around 1% for all three grades. And young students who have disabilities also experience disparities – while they accounted for only about 13% of students in grades K-3, Kindergartners with disabilities accounted for 30% of suspensions, and that percentage grew to 44% by third grade.

The progression of increased disproportionality in the years from kindergarten to third grade tracks what the research shows about exclusionary discipline for young learners – that discipline when students are young has a lasting impact on the student's success in school. Students who are suspended in the early school years are ten times more likely to drop out of high school, experience academic failure and grade retention, and

face incarceration than those who are not.<sup>1</sup> Exclusionary discipline sends the message that a student doesn't belong, which often exacerbates the stress they were experience that led to the behavior challenges in the first place, and it is clear that this can compound over a student's educational career.

House File 951 as amended gives our state the opportunity to agree that exclusionary discipline is simply not the right tool for behavior challenges in the early grades and to provide grants to support schools and teachers to use other practices. When students present with behavior challenges, it is likely their way of communicating that they're not doing well, that they need help. Many of our schools recognize this and prioritize meeting student needs when they present with behavior challenges. It is time to move away from exclusionary discipline for young students and towards these more effective and age-appropriate approaches. This is important so that students of color and students who have disabilities who are disproportionately impacted by exclusionary discipline can be full participants in their school communities, and important for all students.<sup>2</sup>

Thank you so much for your work on behalf of Minnesota's students and for this opportunity to share our views. We are eager to work with you and all stakeholders towards a Minnesota where students get the support they need and don't experience disproportionate uses of discipline based on their race or disability.

Sincerely,

Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition

Coalition legislative contacts:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/policy-statement-ece-expulsions-suspensions.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2018/3/13/21104493/when-chicago-cut-down-on-suspensions-students-saw-test-scores-and-attendance-rise-study-finds>; <https://edsources.org/2015/study-suspensions-harm-well-behaved-kids/72501>; <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122414556308>