

Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Matt Grose, and I serve as Superintendent of Grand Rapids Area Schools, a district serving around 3800 students in Northern Minnesota.

I want to begin by acknowledging the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission for Special Education. The Commission has brought important attention to the structure and sustainability of special education funding in Minnesota, and I strongly support honoring the work of the Commission by reviewing the findings and recommendations to-date as part of thoughtful, long-term policy work.

However, I am here today to express concern about the provision that would require up to \$250 million in reductions to cross subsidy aid if savings are not identified by the Commission, and even more under the Governor's new budget proposal.

Special education services are not optional. They are required by law. When funding is reduced, the services do not go away, because the needs of the children do not go away. Districts must make up the difference using general education dollars intended for all students.

Like many regional centers, Grand Rapids serves a higher percentage of students receiving special education services than many surrounding districts because we provide programs that smaller districts may not be able to offer. That is part of our responsibility as a regional hub, but it also means that reductions to cross-subsidy aid affect us disproportionately.

Even a reduction smaller than the Governor's proposal, \$250 million statewide, would wipe out the inflationary increase we are counting on and would mean more than one million dollars in lost revenue each year for our district alone. That is funding currently supporting legally required services for students with disabilities.

Minnesota has made important progress in recent years toward reducing the special education cross-subsidy. Reversing that progress shifts costs back onto local districts and ultimately onto general education programming at a time when most districts across the state are already making budget reductions.

The state's budget challenges are real. But they should not be addressed by reducing support for students whose services are mandated by law and essential to their success and reducing funding we all count on.

I respectfully ask that the Legislature use the Commission's work to-date to guide long-term improvements, but not make reductions to cross-subsidy aid as a solution that would impact all school districts, and disproportionately impact regional service centers like ours.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.



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Our mission: To make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.

April 6, 2026

Re: HF4114 - Contingent reduction in special education aid appropriations repealed

Dear Members of the House Education Finance Committee,

Minnesota PTA supports legislation to repeal the contingent reduction in special education aid appropriations. As the Federal government continues to pay less than 13% of the average per-pupil cost for special education, significantly less than its original 1975 commitment to fund up to 40%, we were grateful for the 2023 Legislature's commitment to 50% coverage of the cross-subsidy by 2026-27. However, the 2025 Legislature's action to automatically reduce cross subsidy aid by \$250 million, if service cuts or efficiencies of the same amount are not implemented, threatens the financial security of school districts and instruction and programs for both special education and general education students alike. This is the wrong direction.

School districts continue to face significant funding challenges. There are no plans to allocate additional state dollars to close the gap between past revenues and cost increases due to inflation, and no agreement yet this year on holding districts harmless for decreases in compensatory revenue. Cost increases in staff salaries, health insurance, transportation, curriculum and other school district expenditures are still increasing faster than the rate of inflation. Many school districts are already planning cuts to programs, teachers and staff, and services for next school year and beyond to address deficits.

Services to special education students, and the staff that support them, must be provided to all students who need them. This level of special education funding reduction would be destabilizing for both special education and general education students. Districts on average in Minnesota already redirect 8-15% of their general fund revenue to cover the special education cross subsidy; further reductions in state funding would require districts to shift even more. Diverting funds from the general fund to special education would primarily result in staff reductions, which could include many staff recently trained in new literacy curriculum and instruction strategies under the READ Act, counselors and social workers that provide student mental health services, and staff for elective options that help students chart their plans for life after high school. Many districts cannot make up the difference by increasing local property taxes, creating more inequities in school funding across the state.

Minnesota PTA has advocated for Minnesota parents, students, and educators for over 100 years. We currently have over two hundred local units in Minnesota with 4,000 members representing all forms of schools, including rural, suburban, urban, district, and charter. We believe that every child in Minnesota must be provided with a well-rounded, high-quality education, which will ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and become productive members of society. Repealing the automatic reduction in special education funding will help ensure that Minnesota schools are adequately, sustainably and predictably funded. The Blue Ribbon Commission on Special Education is charged with developing long-term recommendations by October 2026. We ask that you let them complete their work and present their recommendations before setting a reduction amount for special education services.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rachel Coleman
President, Minnesota PTA

Joanne Barkmeier
Advocacy Commissioner, Minnesota PTA



April 14, 2026

RE: Support for H.F. 4114

Members of the House Education Finance Committee:

The Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE) is writing to advocate for the safety and stability of the children and families we serve across our state.

We value the bill's intent to protect Minnesota students with disabilities from a looming \$250 million biennial cut to special education aid. This bill to repeal the cut reflects our core values of serving all families with dignity, compassion, and respect. Every child deserves a free, appropriate public education, and the educators, paraprofessionals, therapists, and service providers who deliver that promise deserve to know their funding is stable.

We support key elements of this bill, including:

- Repealing the \$250 million biennial contingent reduction in special education aid appropriations assumed in the state forecast beginning July 1, 2027, so that school districts can properly plan, staff, and serve students with disabilities.
- Protecting districts from further deepening of the special education cross-subsidy, which already forces local school boards to pull dollars out of general education budgets, including early childhood programming.
- Ensuring that any efficiencies identified through the Blue Ribbon Commission on Special Education are reinvested in students and services, not used as a mechanism to reduce the state's commitment to children with disabilities and their families.

The families we partner with in Early Childhood and Family Education include many whose children are first identified as needing early intervention during the birth-to-five years. Early identification, screening and strong special education supports in the earliest grades are some of the highest-return investments our state makes. Special education investments change trajectories, keep families connected to their public schools, and reduce costs later on. A looming cut of this size would be felt first and hardest by the youngest learners and the districts serving rural, greater Minnesota, and high-need communities.

We ask that you stand with us in creating schools where children feel safe enough to grow into who they are meant to be. Thank you for your leadership and for your commitment to Minnesota's youngest learners and their families.

Sincerely,

Jen Jaros, Early Childhood Family Education Coordinator

Government Relations Chair, Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education,

www.mnafee.org



ST. MICHAEL - ALBERTVILLE SCHOOLS

EXCELLENCE IS OUR TRADITION

April 10, 2026

Dear Chairs Kresha and Youakim and Members of the House Education Finance Committee,

As a locally elected school board member, parent of a child who received special services, and teacher of children with special needs, I am asking for your support of HF 4114, which will be heard in the House Education Finance Committee on Tuesday.

This bill removes the potential \$300 million in cuts to special education funding that would be triggered if projected savings are not achieved by the Blue Ribbon Commission. Without this repeal, districts risk losing critical funding and face significant uncertainty, making it incredibly difficult for boards to plan responsible, long-term budgets.

Special education services are federally mandated; we cannot simply reduce spending if state aid is cut. If funding is reduced, schools must shift dollars from general education classrooms, impacting students, essential staff, and programs. School districts like ours are already struggling with cuts that had to be made through no fault of our own, and cuts to special education would force districts to take money from their general fund to cover special education. This would mean heartbreaking cuts to staff and classroom programming.

The strain on our schools has been noticeable by students, staff, families, and the community for the last six years. Though the school district has been fiscally responsible and maximized our resources (spending almost half as much per pupil on administration as the state average), the district has had to make heartbreaking cuts to staff, programs, and materials. The district was forced to cut 77 amazing staff from every job classification from 2021-2023, and we've only been able to add 15 teachers back from those cuts. This has affected students' academic skills and mental health, as well as that of our staff. Our students now have fewer programs and classes from which to choose, including AP, advanced, and high-potential classes. In addition, activity fees have doubled, and bussing has been reduced so students are walking greater distances to school.

I have been blessed to work with children with special needs since I was 10 years old. I volunteered in an inclusion preschool at that time, volunteered in the special education classrooms in middle school and high school, coached Special Olympics for 5 years, worked

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in a "mild to moderate" classroom in a public school, offered private ABA and DT therapy for children with autism, and have taught and cared for many children with a variety of special needs in my family child care, centers, and public schools (where I sub and volunteer). I share this so you know how much inclusive education, these children, and this bill mean to me.

Most importantly, our youngest son was blessed to receive ECSE services for two years and speech services through 3rd grade. Thanks to his phenomenal ECSE teachers and paras, social worker, and speech pathologist, as well as his teachers working with us, he was reading at grade level by 2nd grade and didn't need speech services once he started 4th grade. He is thriving as an 11th grader who makes the "A" Honor Roll every year and has almost completed 32 college credits. High-quality special education services made all the difference!

I know that these services cost district's extra money, and our son's needs were not even "high needs." Those cost significantly more. I can't imagine what these proposed cuts to special education would mean to families in similar situations like ours and how they would negatively impact everyone's education.

The legislature recently made significant progress by committing to cover 50% of the special education cross-subsidy. This contingent cut threatens to erase those hard-won gains and return us to an unsustainable funding model. Our district and other school districts cannot sustain further cuts to our funding.

I urge you to support HF 4114 to ensure that special education funding remains a stable and reliable state commitment.

Thank you for your service and support of our students.

Kind regards,

Hollee Saville | School Board Vice-Chair
St. Michael-Albertville Schools



April 4, 2026

House Education Finance Committee

SUBJECT: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR HF 4114

Dear Education Finance Committee Members,

The Multicultural Autism Action Network is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting families of children with disabilities in multicultural communities. We write to express our strong support for HF 4114, authored by Representative Bakeberg and co-authored by Representatives Knudsen and Hicks, which would eliminate the contingent reduction in special education funding.

The legislature established the Blue Ribbon Commission on Special Education to carefully examine the cost drivers of special education and develop thoughtful, evidence-based recommendations. Over the past several months, this commission—including educators, parents, advocates, administrators, and legislators—has engaged in a collaborative and deliberate process to assess how best to improve the system.

However, the inclusion of an automatic reduction in the cross-subsidy, which is triggered if the Commission's recommendations do not reach \$250 million in cut, undermines the very purpose of this work.

At a time when special education needs are rapidly increasing, federal funding remains deeply inadequate, and the state is experiencing a budget surplus, it is difficult to justify mandatory cuts that operate outside the Commission's informed recommendations. This approach risks harming students and families who rely on these essential services.

Since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, the federal government has committed to covering 40% of the average per-pupil cost of special education. In reality, funding has consistently fallen far short of that promise, with recent contributions covering less than 15% of costs. This gap has placed a growing burden on states and local school districts.

Meanwhile, the demand for special education services continues to rise. As children born during the COVID-19 pandemic reach school age, more students are being identified with diverse and complex learning needs. Early intervention and appropriate supports are not only

critical for student success—they are among the most effective long-term investments we can make.

We strongly support ongoing efforts to identify efficiencies and improve special education outcomes through stakeholder engagement. However, preemptive cuts that conflict with the Blue Ribbon Commission's work are not the right path forward.

We respectfully urge you to support HF 4114 and ensure that any changes to special education funding are guided by thoughtful analysis, collaboration, and the best interests of Minnesota's students.

Sincerely,

Multicultural Autism Action Network

Fatima Molas

Delia Samuel

Rufo Jiru

Maren Christenson Hofer

Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage
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April 10, 2026

Co-Chair: Rep. Ron Kresha,
Co-Chair: Rep. Cheryl Youakim and
Members of the House Education Finance Committee, Minnesota Legislature

Re: HF 4114 – Repeal of the Contingent Reduction in Special Education Aid Appropriations

To the Chairs and Members of the Education Finance Committee:

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage offers this letter in full and unwavering support of **HF 4114**, legislation that repeals the automatic \$250 million reduction in special education aid scheduled to take effect in 2027. This bill carries deep significance for African Heritage children, families, and communities throughout Minnesota.

Minnesota's African Heritage population includes African Americans with multigenerational roots in the state and African immigrants from nations such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, and Eritrea. These communities enrich Minnesota's cultural, economic, and civic landscape, yet continue to experience some of the most persistent disparities in income, employment, homeownership, access to health care, and educational opportunity. These inequities shape daily life for African Heritage families and intensify the consequences of any reduction in essential public services.

Special education is a vital support system for African Heritage students. Black students in Minnesota are disproportionately identified for special education, often in categories shaped by bias, and many attend schools with fewer resources and higher needs. African immigrant students frequently face additional barriers, including language access challenges, trauma histories, and cultural misunderstandings during assessment and placement. For these students, special education services are foundational to academic success, emotional well-being, and long-term economic stability.

The contingent reduction repealed by HF 4114 would have triggered an automatic cut to special education funding if projected savings failed to materialize. Such a cut would have placed the greatest burden on districts with the least capacity to absorb it, districts where African Heritage families are concentrated and where property wealth is limited. The resulting strain would have increased class sizes, reduced paraprofessional and mental health support, and forced schools to divert general education funds or raise local levies. These outcomes would have deepened existing racial and geographic inequities and placed additional financial pressure on families already navigating significant economic challenges.

HF 4114 removes this structural threat and ensures that any future changes to special education funding occur through transparent legislative debate rather than automatic formula-driven reductions. This approach honors the principles of equity, accountability, and community voice. It protects students with disabilities, many of whom are of African Heritage, from service disruptions that could have lifelong consequences. It also safeguards families from increased local tax burdens and preserves the stability of school districts serving communities with the greatest needs.

The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage views HF 4114 as an essential measure to prevent harm and advance racial equity in Minnesota's education system. The bill aligns with the Council's statutory mandate to advise and advocate on policies that improve the lives of Minnesotans of African Heritage. Protecting special education funding is critical to ensuring that every child, regardless of race, income, or zip code, has access to the supports required to thrive.

Sincerely,

Linda Sloan | Executive Director
Lolita Davis Carter | Legislative & Policy Director
Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage

The Minnesota Legislature empowered the Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage to ensure that people of African heritage fully and effectively participate in and equitably benefit from the State of Minnesota's political, social, and economic resources, policies, and procedures. Generally, the Council is charged with the responsibility of:

- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on issues confronting People of African Heritage;*
- *Advising the Governor and the Legislature on statutes, rules, and revisions to programs to ensure that Black people have access to benefits and services provided to people in Minnesota;*
- *Serving as a liaison to the federal government, local government units, and private organizations on matters relating to People of African Heritage in Minnesota;*
- *Implementing programs designed to solve problems of People of African Heritage when authorized by statute, rule, or order; and*
- *Publicizing the accomplishments of People of African Heritage and their contributions to the state.*