



February 12, 2023

State Senator Steve A. Cwodzinski, Chairman
Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee
Minnesota Senate
2231 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: S.F. 620 Education Policy: Pilot program to improve educational outcomes and accountability.

Dear Senator Cwodzinski,

As President and CEO of the Aurora Institute, I am writing to express support for S.F. 620, a bill for establishing a pilot program to improve educational outcomes and accountability.

Aurora Institute provides research on global best practices to support K-12 education systems to advance breakthrough policies and practices toward transformation. Aurora Institute's values are equity-driven, student-centered, future-focused, credible, non-partisan, knowledge-driven, and collaborative. Aurora believes we must redesign learning experiences to be more student-centered and responsive to families and communities.

After 21 years of the current accountability construct in the United States, there is growing recognition that the current accountability framework in federal and state policy isn't working for our students, families, and communities to improve teaching and learning, nor preparing them for the future. An important opportunity to drive forward systems change to innovate our education systems toward equity must be fostered.

I am writing to support S.F. 620 to create a pilot for next generation accountability in Minnesota. A pilot is the first step to build next generation accountability based on global best practices (see below).

From Global Best Practices

To summarize global best practices in accountability policy, the [Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development](#) (OECD) recommends that policy should:

1. Encourage accountability systems that encourage outcomes, student experience, culture, and community engagement in creating performance frameworks.

2. Develop high-quality data systems to measure and report performance metrics, including student engagement, learning experiences, and student achievement, and promote data-driven approaches to improvement.
3. Prioritize quality of teaching, assessment, and learning in both formal and informal (work-based, community-based, digital) learning environments.
4. Foster partnerships between communities, parents, providers, institutions, and education systems in order to create high-performing schools.
5. Promote equity and inclusion by addressing inequity in school funding and resources as well as biases in assessment and teaching and learning practices.
6. Promote equitable access to resources, services, and opportunities across schools, especially for students most in need.
7. Ensure student assessment is used effectively to monitor and improve learning transparently, rather than solely to rank or compare schools.
8. Support teachers to use evidence-based practices, build assessment literacy, and become reflective practitioners based on the research on how students learn best.
9. Dedicate resources and strategies to increase student engagement and graduation, for example, increasing graduation rates through multiple pathways and extended learning opportunities.
10. Develop a culture of continuous improvement in schools, with communities, parents, students, educators, and leaders taking ownership of school outcomes through reciprocity.¹

In the United States, compliance-based accountability entails narrow, time-based metrics of student achievement, examining age-based cohorts of students with groups and subgroups, after-the-fact use of data, and a one-size-fits-all approach. While prevalent methodology in the United States, this is no means a well-researched best practice globally for continuous improvement of education systems toward transformation. Accountability systems have been designed to rank and sort schools—identifying the lowest 5% performing schools in each state.

Following, the most recent data from National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) release illustrates sharp declines across the United States. There is growing recognition that despite more than 20 years of investing in current accountability efforts, the theory of change undergirding the nation's top-down accountability model isn't working. And, on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)—a more open-ended test that evaluates how students apply their knowledge and demonstrate their reasoning—U.S. performance has declined in math, reading, and science between 2000 and 2020, both absolutely and in relation to other countries.

It is time to create space to pilot next generation accountability built on global best practices. S.F. 620 is a first step to building a path forward for students.

¹ OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education Synergies for Better Learning: An International Perspective on Evolution and Assessment [Http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en](http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264190658-en)

Continuously improving education systems use evidence-based practices and performance frameworks to improve learning and monitor progress in real-time. In response to ongoing feedback and data, they drive change to improve and evolve practice. Continuously improving systems evolve culture and structures to ensure that students get the supports they need in real time to support growth and success.

Research supports the pilot proposal in S.F. 620. For example, Linda Darling-Hammond of the Learning Policy Institute writes in *Pathways to New Accountability through the Every Student Succeeds Act*, “The resources and conditions that support students’ opportunities to learn must also be included. When systems include information about school resources and supports, the staff can readily identify inequities and respond appropriately with supports to aid improvement.”²

Multiple measures frameworks are well established in other countries and in localities across the United States (the State of Vermont, California’s CORE Districts, Colorado’s Local Accountability Pilot, New York City School Quality Guide, Alberta, Canada and New Zealand).

A key tenet in global best practice for accountability and school quality is creating strong family to community ties. For example, in New York City the School Quality Guide measures the extent to which the school forms effective partnerships with families and outside organizations to improve the school. It is measured by data from the NYC School Survey (e.g., Percentage of parents that report the school staff regularly communicate on how staff help their children learn. Schools report and they measure the percentage of teachers who report that teachers work closely with families to meet students’ needs).

The proposal in S.F. 620 provides an important pilot to updating policies to support local decision-making and reciprocity processes.

I believe the introduction of S.F. 620 is overdue to examine the purpose of schooling toward human flourishing and generate an important conversation, backed by research on global best practices, for creating space for next generation accountability.

I recommend reviewing the state policy recommendations outlined in the Aurora Institute issue brief, [Next Generation Accountability: Creating Performance Frameworks for Success](#), for a perspective on how to ensure states create space for reciprocal

² Linda Darling-Hammond, Soung Bae, Channa M. Cook- Harvey, Livia Lam, Charmaine Mercer, Anne Podolsky, and Elizabeth Leisy Stosich, *Pathways to New Accountability Through the Every Student Succeeds Act* (Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute, 2016). This report is linked: https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/10/pathways_to_new_accountability_through_every_student_succeeds_act_0.pdf

accountability and transparency for performance metrics and data on what matters most for student learning.

Policy Recommendations:

- Create flexibility and enabling policy to allow for new accountability systems with room for piloting next generation accountability models.
- Rethink measurement systems to more effectively evaluate school quality through performance frameworks and new metrics.
- Be flexible to allow for new metrics, frameworks, and concepts for quality assurance in evaluation.
- Launch investments to build capacity to modernize accountability and evaluate school quality using reciprocal accountability and results-based performance frameworks.
- Focus on accountability that provides coherence for education systems at all levels, emphasizing learning and continuous improvement, aligning to learning sciences research, advancing student-centered learning, and building trust.

I would encourage policy makers and legislators concerned about improving student outcomes to focus on studying the [lack of alignment of the current accountability policy with the research on how students learn best](#) and how to improve it.

With mounting evidence of the failure of the status quo to support academic and personal growth of students, policy makers should provide room to innovate around equity-driven frameworks as a pilot. It is central to local control to support local communities enabling more innovative schools to help kids.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts. Aurora Institute supports accountability, transparency, and driving continuous improvement. Aurora's Center for Policy is available to provide assistance and resources as you consider supporting policies that create space for next generation accountability and performance frameworks for equity.

I appreciate your support of S.F. 620 and ask that you please let me know how I can assist in helping move this bill forward.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Susan D. Patrick
President and CEO
Aurora Institute