

Minnesota Senate
Education Policy Committee
Chair – Sen. Kunesh
Thursday, January 25, 2023

Re: SF 0069 – Let’s keep students in the classroom

Dear Madam Chair and Members, many thanks for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill. First, I want to thank the author, Sen. Mann.

The first time I testified for this bill, Madam Chair you were a representative in the House. This bill has been introduced every session for years now. I am hoping this is the year that it is finally carried to the finish line.

My son who has autism was suspended by Bloomington School District on Thursday, May 3rd – 2018 at 5:18pm. This was a traumatizing day for our family because my son did not understand suspension then and does not understand it now. His routine was disrupted this day and his communication device was denied to him. I will let EdAllies and other data experts tell you that black, brown, and students with disabilities are suspended disproportionately in Minnesota. And yes 2+2 is 4, not 3.5 and not 5. All of us, both democrats and republicans must accept data and facts. Otherwise, we are living in la la land.

I often hear from the opposing side that suspension must be in their toolbox. For students with disabilities - the toolbox must have kindness, compassion, empathy, knowledge, training, and most of all human decency, not suspension. These are children who are in a special classroom. The adults who chose this profession need to understand the child’s needs, behaviors, and disabilities. In other words, you cannot be a chef and then complain because you smell like food. You cannot be a pilot and be afraid of heights.

I suggest that if school districts want suspension in their toolbox, perhaps not getting funded while the student is suspended should also be in this toolbox. Why are school districts getting paid for work they are not doing. The money should follow the student, not the district.

Imagine working for 3 days yet getting paid for 5 days. This is what is happening now in school districts. They are still funded even though our kids are kicked out. How is this fair, cost-effective nor humane.

Finally, just because you have been lucky enough that your child has not experienced this horrifying event, does not mean your fellow Minnesotans have not. Please do not deny our pain and our experience. We need to pass this bill now.

Sincerely,

Idil Abdull – Somali Autism Mom & Advocate