

Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition

January 20, 2023

To: Chair Kunesh and Members of the Senate Education Finance Committee
Re: Senate File 69

Dear Chair Kunesh 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 seven 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 1st grade, 13% for second grade, and nearly 15% for 3rd 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.¹ Exclusionary discipline sends the message that a student doesn't belong, which often exacerbates the stress they were experiencing that led to the behavior challenges in the first place, and it is clear that this can compound over a student's educational career.

Senate File 69 gives our state the opportunity to agree that exclusionary discipline is simply not the right tool for behavior challenges in the early grades. 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 behavioral challenges. It is time to move away from exclusionary discipline for young students and

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

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.²

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

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Coalition Partners

Advancing Equity Coalition

American Academy of Pediatrics, Minnesota Chapter

The Arc Minnesota

The Center for Victims of Torture

Children's Defense Fund Minnesota

EdAllies

Educators for Excellence-MN

Fannie Education Alliance

Legal Rights Center

Legal Services Advocacy Project

The MN Association of Black Psychologists

MN Child Care Association

MN Council on Disability

Minnesota Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities

MN School Social Workers Association

Multicultural Autism Action Network

Minnesota Prenatal to Three Coalition

NAMI Minnesota

National Parents Union

Think Small

Uplift MN

Voices for Racial Justice

Wellness in the Woods

² 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>