



Chair Jim Carlson
95 University Avenue West
Minnesota Senate Building, 3221
St. Paul, MN 55115

March 12, 2024

RE: SF 4951 Requirements to fill a vacancy in the office of school board member modified.

Dear Chair Carlson:

Thanks to you and the esteemed members of the House Elections committee for taking the time to gather input regarding Senate File 4951 which modifies the requirements of a school board when filling a vacancy. I also want to personally thank Senator Westlin for sponsoring this bill.

My name is Dr. Heidi Hahn and I serve as the Superintendent of Brainerd Public Schools. In my short tenure, Brainerd Public Schools has been faced with the challenge of filling a vacant board seat on two separate occasions. It used to be rare to have a board member leave prior to their term ending, and now this is occurring more and more. In the past three years, an average of 58 board vacancies have needed to be filled.

Senate File 4951 modifies statute so that when a school board member resigns, if the vacancy occurs less than two years prior to the expiration of the term, no special election is required, and the appointee of the board shall serve for the remainder of the unexpired term.

By allowing this modification, this helps our public schools by preventing labor-intensive and costly special elections from being held in off years after a board member resigns. These elections are often very expensive, and they often have very low voter turnout. For example, the cost of running a special election for Brainerd Public Schools carries an estimated cost close to \$30,000. It would be much more beneficial to use those dollars directly serving our students, rather than running a special election.

In the most recent board vacancy for Brainerd Public Schools, a board member moved outside of the district boundary and needed to resign from their position. The board members

resignation occurred 3 months prior to the general election cycle. Current statute required the school district not only to appoint someone into the position due to the vacancy, but to also implement the 30-day waiting period after the appointee was named. This left the appointed board member serving for only one board meeting, prior to new board members being seated. We were fortunate that a retired board member accepted the appointment and easily stepped in for the one meeting.

This most recent process also seemed awkward and clumsy at the time, due to 12 individuals in our community actively campaigning for election to the Brainerd School Board. Senate File 4951 would modify the requirement to appoint a board member, if a member resigns within three months of the end of their term. This bill would move from requiring an appointment, to a school board *may* appoint a replacement, but it is not required.

Again, thank you for taking the time to gather input for this bill. Senate File 4951 makes sense, and it allows school districts and school boards to appoint members that are necessary and reflective of the needs in each unique and respective district. This bill ensures dollars are spent on our students, and not on added layers of process and procedures.

Thank you for your service to our state and to public education. With great respect,

Dr. Heidi Hahn - Superintendent - Brainerd Public Schools