

March 26, 2024

TO: Minnesota Senate Education Finance Committee

RE: Letter of Support for SF 4259

Dear Chair Kunesh and Members of the Senate Education Finance Committee:

I am writing to voice my strong support for SF 4259, a pivotal piece of legislation aimed at advancing computer science education for all Minnesota students. The recent enactment of the computer science education advancement act was a significant step forward. We have already seen the impact of this legislation, including the creation of a full-time position at the Minnesota Department of Education and the establishment of a dedicated working group. Despite these advances, there is more work to be accomplished.

In Minnesota, we actually have a rich history of computing education. You may remember the 'The Oregon Trail,' computer game. This game was actually created by the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium. This consortium was created and funded in 1973 by this very legislature to bring computing to Minnesota schools. The consortium's initial budget from the state was \$3.6 million and the results of that investment were: "Within four years, 96 percent of Minnesota children had access to computers, by far the highest rate in the world." For nearly two decades Minnesota was a leader but the consortium ceased operations in the 1990s and since then we have fallen behind.

SF 4259 aims to enhance and extend the ability of schools to offer computer science education through professional development. As a former educator and current Director of Policy at Code.org, I can testify to the crucial role of equipping teachers with the necessary resources and training to prepare our students for the future. The success stories from other states, such as Iowa, underscore the benefits of sustained investment in computer science education. In Iowa, a \$3 million legislative allocation has enabled the training of over 1,000 teachers, leading to 84% of high schools offering computer science courses—a milestone achievement.

Additionally, as a proud alumnus of Saint Paul Public Schools, I personally experienced the limitations of access to computer science education. It was not until my senior year at Central High School that I had the opportunity to enroll in a computer science class, where I was one of only two girls among more than 30 students. This underscores the need for early and inclusive exposure to computer science for every Minnesota student.

I appreciate your attention to this critical matter and strongly advocate for your support of SF 4259. Together, we can ensure that Minnesota reclaims its place as a leader in computer science education, paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future.

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