

Farmington Area Public Schools
Board of Education
29655 Flagstaff Ave
Farmington, MN 55024

February 25, 2025

Senate Education Policy Committee,

I testified to this committee in mid-January during a hearing related to the extreme burdens your unfunded mandates placed onto the shoulders of school board members across Minnesota.

Since then, my school board eliminated career and technical education programs at Farmington High School. We authorized our administration to lay off over a dozen teachers and staff. And we made other tough choices to close a \$4.4 million deficit for the 2025-26 school year.

I had hoped after the hearing in January, this committee would take the testimonies of some of Minnesota's most respected superintendents, principals and educators seriously. I hoped maybe you'd begin work on some relief for our schools.

Today, instead, I am writing in opposition to SF197, an ill-conceived bill that would require school boards to establish procedures to allow students in our schools to elect two fellow students to the school board. I am all for student voices and input, but this bill requires these members to have full voting rights on all matters before the school board.

I am quite certain the authors of this bill have interesting intentions, but they clearly lack a working understanding of what school boards do and to whom school boards are accountable.

Matters before the school board affect property taxes for homeowners and businesses. They affect capital expenditures and key spending initiatives. They determine compensation and benefits for teachers and other staff to whom students are subservient in the school environment. And school boards have oversight of student and staff discipline and other data-sensitive issues.

I have no doubt that there are students who can offer valuable insight to discussions around these matters. I have seen it firsthand. My board has two student representatives for exactly that reason.

But school board members are accountable to the taxpayers of our communities. When we are forced to cut popular programs to balance the budget in the face of a legislature that has other ideas for how we should allocate our resources, board members take the heat. When we need to go out to levy higher property taxes, we bear responsibility for the success or failure of the referendum. When student test scores fall because the State has prioritized a litany of incoherent policy directives over properly funding public education, school board members get the angry emails.

I assume the authors of SF 197 would like to see more student voices in decisions affecting schools. But if placing children in positions of authority to make decisions for school districts, why not add students to the State legislature, and this committee specifically?

This bill is a solution in search of a problem. Worse, it represents another distraction for school districts dealing with serious issues. Please dispose of it.

Sincerely,

Kyle Christensen
School Board Member
Farmington Area Public Schools