

# Testimony to the Minnesota Senate

By Shaunya Kumar, Shakopee Public Schools Ex-Officio Board Member

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Shaunya Kumar, and I have the privilege of serving as one of two student representatives on the Shakopee Public Schools Board. I support [SF 0197](#), which would ensure that students have a voice on school boards by requiring two student members to be included starting in the 2025-2026 school year. I was appointed by district leaders in the spring of 2024 and have served since then. I currently sit on the district's policy and community engagement committees along with being a representative at the Shakopee Education Endowment Foundation. I want to thank Good Trouble MN for connecting me with this testimony opportunity and for their unwavering dedication to supporting student advocacy.

Students are directly affected by the decisions made at school board meetings. The distance between students, teachers, and elected board members has grown too wide within districts, to the point that boards often only hear from the broader district community, and not the students and teachers impacted directly by the policies. Furthermore, because of the bureaucracy of board meetings, students have virtually very limited ways to provide feedback on board decisions, or even to know what decisions are being made on their behalf.

This is why student representatives are so critical. We act as a bridge. First, we're vocalizing real, on-the-ground student issues to district leaders and board members. But we're also representing the board back to the student body by raising awareness of decisions and policies that shape their school. This two-way connection isn't just beneficial—it's necessary for the success of our schools.

Minnesota prides itself on being a leader in diversity and inclusion. Our schools *strive* for and celebrate progress. Yet if we don't give students a voice in the very system that educates them, we fall short of those values. A district's mission statement means little if it doesn't take action to ensure student representation.

And what better way to ensure responsive policies and engaged student bodies than having student voice on the district board? I've seen firsthand how student representation leads to more responsive policies. My fellow student board member and I raised concerns about changes to the elementary and middle school math curriculum—concerns that had not been considered, simply because no one else on the board had gone through the system as students. We also brought forth discussions on why more students of color aren't encouraged to take accelerated classes, and we've pushed for greater advocacy for multilingual learners, an issue often overlooked at the district level.

Shakopee has been a leader in implementing the ex-officio student board member program, but no district is perfect. Having students in the room allows us to highlight areas for growth and collaborate on solutions in real time.

Lastly, schools strive to empower future leaders within their buildings. Beyond shaping policy, serving on a school board gives students invaluable experience in civic engagement, governance, and public policy.

If we are serious about making Minnesota schools more equitable, effective, and student-centered, then student representation on school boards should not be an afterthought. It should be a priority.

Thank you all for your time.