

Hello Members of the Senate Education Committee:

My name is Kessie. I am a mom to 5 children, 4 of whom are enrolled in District 51. I am a foster parent, adoptive parent, and a mom to children with disabilities (the term special needs has been falling out of favor). I am also a wife of a school administrator.

My oldest is a junior who is part of the MN Honor Society, Student Council, A honor roll, and 3 sport athlete. He also works at a long term care facility as a CNA, and is taking multiple college classes. I've watched his optimistic keep pushing attitude slowly erode with each new disappointment, loss, and contradiction between health care and government lockdowns. As he so aptly put it, "They've taken away all of the fun things about school and we are just left with the things that are hard."

I have a freshman who is also a straight A student and three sport athlete. He has high functioning autism. Thankfully, he is no longer on an IEP. He is still on a 504 plan which has needed to be adjusted twice already thanks to the constantly changing of learning models. At first he didn't mind being at home, but desperately needs the socialization in person learning and sports.

In October, we received a letter warning us that we were in jeopardy of being reported for truancy for our freshman in accordance to MN Statute 120A.22. I informed the school that they should feel free to expedite our family being reported though I felt it a gross waste of taxpayer dollars to bring us before a judge for our freshman son who currently had straight A's, no missing assignments, and had just been awarded All-Conference Honorable Mention for Cross Country. Also after reading Subdivision 1 of 120A.22, "Parental Responsibility. The parent of a child is primarily responsible for assuring that the child acquires knowledge and skills that are essential for effective citizenship," I assured them I felt we were doing a great job.

My 7th grader is still getting good grades, but is NOT thriving. Her cheerful creative personality has become sullen and unmotivated. Sure you could argue that it's "just" puberty. My response would be, all the more reason she needs interaction with people, not a screen.

My 5-year-old is a preschooler. He is on an IEP. His main diagnosis is FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder). One of the most important ways to deal with FASD is consistency which absolutely is not happening. Without in person learning SO many students who need services are not receiving them or are getting them in an ineffective distance model.

My 2 year old is supposed to be receiving early intervention services. These therapies need to be hands on, but that also isn't happening. The reality is many kids who fall into this vulnerable category or just falling further behind.

We hear often about kids being our future, right now they are being treated as disposable. I am able to be home with my kids, our finances haven't been disrupted, overall we are doing fairly well. While my kids are falling behind to some extent the reality is they are going to be leaps and bounds beyond so many. That may sound good, but I'm not happy about it. Caring little about those falling behind is a travesty.

As a foster parent it's terrifying to me how little oversight is happening with schools closed and social services also operating remotely. Years ago I went to the Capital when they were holding meetings about the mental health crisis and foster care. The discussion mainly focused on the

cost. I spoke up and said something along the lines of, We will pay either way. We can pay now and hopefully make a difference in these kids lives or we can pay later. Paying later will be far more costly for us and for them.

There has been a shortage of youth beds for mental health needs for years. Everyone is talking about a shortage of ICU beds now for Covid. Where is the uproar for mental health?! This pandemic and all the closures has exacerbated mental health needs! Why are we not concerned about this?!

If kids are our future and we keep treating our future like we are, despite seeing the devastating effects, then we are creating and choosing a pretty bleak future for ALL of us. We must change that. We must do what is truly best for our future. Data is showing over and over that kids are safe in school. Kids need to be back in school.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter. I implore you to choose what is best for kids, for our future.