

# Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals



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February 17, 2021

Senator Roger Chamberlain  
Chair Senate Education and Finance Committee

Re: Department Policy Bill  
Senate File 788

Dear Senator Chamberlain and Members of the Committee:

Minnesota principals appreciate the opportunity to offer our input into the provisions of S.F. 788. The purpose of this letter is to highlight several of the provisions that directly affect the operation of Minnesota Schools.

### **Article 1, Section 3 Graduation Requirements**

This provision adds a requirement of earth and space science beginning in 2023-24. This replaces an elective science credit. The provision also adds a physical education credit, consequently reducing the number of elective credits from seven to six. These proposals have been offered in the past but were not adopted by the legislature.

We continue to have concerns about restructuring graduation requirements that result in the reduction of electives for students. Certainly earth science, space science and physical education are important. The reality is that student schedules are completely full at the present with little or no room for additions. If additional graduation requirements are mandated, what current courses will be lost? What options for students will no longer be available? What electives will no longer exist? The answers to these questions are generally not acceptable to students and parents.

### **Article 3, Sections 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16(b), 18 School Discipline**

These proposed changes would substantially alter the current statutes governing student discipline in Minnesota. We expect you will hear testimony that significant disparities exist in the suspension of students of color and American Indian students. We agree more must be done to address the disparities. Unfortunately, the changes proposed here do not address the underlying causes. The changes provide no resources to address the underlying issues involved in student behavior, no programming, no training and no staffing. Schools would be left with a new set of procedural mandates if these changes were adopted with no programming or resources to address them.

Districts have struggled to address this issue over the past several years. Forty two school districts in Minnesota have entered into agreements with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights to address the disparities in suspensions. These districts account for the overwhelming number of the suspensions of students of color. The results from those plans submitted by the districts should be reviewed to determine what worked and what did not. We submit that a targeted approach with meaningful interventions would best address this issue.

Some of the proposed statutory changes, in our view, could be modified but in their current form do not meet the needs of students and school communities. These provisions include Article 3, Sections 3, 12, 13, 14, 15. These sections have technical issues that need to be discussed and worked out prior to adoption. In their current form the implementation of the sections would be problematic.

#### **Article 4, Section 1 Health and Wellness; Section 2 Safe and Supportive Schools**

These two sections change existing law from permissive to mandates. Section 1 contains a new mandate moving mental health instruction from “encouraged” to “must provide” for students in grades 4 through 12. The requirement is that mental health instruction be integrated into existing programs, curriculum or the general school environment activities. Section 2 mandates several standards for safe and supportive schools.

#### **Article 5 Teachers of Color**

We support the provisions that reflect those provisions of the Teachers of Color bill.

#### **Article 5, Sections 10 and 11 Teacher Evaluation**

These provisions modify the teacher evaluation provisions of the Continuing Contract Law and the Teacher Tenure Act. Existing law requires that districts negotiate a teacher evaluation plan consistent with the statute. All districts have done this. It appears that this statute would require that the process be reevaluated. The changes here require the district to “create, adopt or revise a rubric of performance standards for teacher practice”. It requires the inclusion of “culturally responsive methodologies and at least three levels of performance, to determine common descriptions of effectiveness.”

While this provision is well intended, it would take a significant amount of work to create the required standards here and they must be adopted through the collective bargaining process. The section is not effective July 1, 2023.

#### **Article 9, Section 1 PSEO**

Principals have a problem with this proposed change. Student schedules are established on an annual basis. The May 30<sup>th</sup> timeline allows student schedules to be constructed so that students can get in the classes necessary for graduation.

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Rearranging these schedules mid-year is difficult for schools and, depending on the size of the schools and number of students leaving, poses some staffing issues. We would strongly urge the committee to hear from school counsellors and principals regarding the scheduling issues involved with the implementation of this provision.

We look forward to working with you and your committee as this complex bill works its way through the process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Adney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "A".

David Adney  
Executive Director

c: MASSP Board of Directors  
Roger Aronson