



April 5, 2021

Dear Members of the Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee:

Students are going to be struggling with their mental health and with academics. There is a need for teachers and school staff to have the best training on suicide prevention and trauma and to understand that the behaviors they see may be related to the impact of the pandemic on the students' lives. Thus, it is critically important that we promote alternatives to excluding students from school and that we support them to "catch up" on learning lost.

NAMI Minnesota supports several provisions on the bill, specifically the following:

- Not suspending students in grades K-3 unless the child poses a safety threat to the child or others.
- Conducting an annual review of the district's discipline policy by stakeholders
- Funding the digital well-being grant
- Expanding extended time revenue for pupils in children's residential treatment
- Addressing the impact of the pandemic, particularly the disruption of in-person education, on special education students. Extended school year, comp ed, additional IEP services can all be helpful to special ed students.
- Funding the suicide prevention online program for teachers.

We are a little concerned about the laser focus on violent behavior of students without providing what happened in context. A child who is tactile defensive may unintentionally hit someone when touched. A child who has experienced trauma may be triggered by an event in the classroom. A child who has difficulty with transitions may not react well to unscheduled or announced changes. In order to prevent these issues from reoccurring, teachers and paraprofessionals also need to know what led up to the incident.

NAMI also urges the Senate to support the summer 2021 programming package that the Governor and Lt. Governor have prioritized to help students catch up and receive additional opportunities for mental health services following this year of unprecedented learning disruptions caused by COVID-19. The package included more funding for mental health supports, creating community partnerships for mentoring and tutoring, and additional funds for school-linked mental health providers to support the mental health needs of both students and staff.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH
Executive Director



1919 University Ave. W., Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104
651-645-2948 | 1-888-NAMI-HELPS | www.namimn.org

