

January 20, 2021

Chair Richardson
463 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Support for HF4 Addressing Learning Loss & Supporting Students

Dear Chair Richardson and members of the Committee,

When schools closed in spring 2020, all students—particularly those historically underserved—were impacted. Gaps in internet and device access, varying levels of student participation, a lack of support for students with disabilities and English Learners, and worries about mental health and social-emotional learning have left students and families concerned about the long-term implications.

Given all of this, it's critical that the state take action to ensure that no students are left behind. There are a number of provisions in House File 4 that would help to address learning loss, accelerate learning, and support students with long-term recovery. In particular, we are supportive of:

- Adjusted Pupil Units (Lines 1.19-1.22): Districts and charter schools are experiencing temporary fluctuations in enrollment due to COVID-19. This provision would take this into account, ensuring schools and students are not adversely impacted by allowing the use of either 2020 or 2021 pupil unit counts, whichever is greater, for general education revenue.
- One-Time Extended Flexibility (Lines 2.13-2.22): Extending the school day or school year will allow schools to provide support and help to students who have been adversely impacted by COVID-19. This language provides important flexibility to districts as they develop strategies to address learning loss, and as they implement learning recovery and acceleration programs with new federal stimulus funding.
- Students with Disabilities (Lines 2.24-3.15): From conversations we have had with families and educators, we know that the experiences of students with disabilities have varied greatly, and in many cases, their needs have gone unmet over the course of the pandemic. This critical provision requires school boards to prioritize certain groups of students with disabilities for in-person learning, while also allowing for in-home services to ensure students are getting the accommodations and modifications that they are entitled to.
- Trauma-Informed School Incentives Grants (Lines 4.3-4.31): Students have faced a wide range of adverse experiences, and many have had to manage mental health and social-emotional challenges during the pandemic. This provision would support much-needed training in nonexclusionary discipline and trauma-responsive practices as

educators welcome students back into buildings and work to support their long-term social-emotional success.

- **Reading and Math Corps (Lines 5.1-5.15):** Recent research found that, as a result of disruption in education during the pandemic, average math achievement has declined by 5-10 percentage points, as have reading outcomes for Black and Latino upper elementary students.¹ Without intentional intervention, many students will struggle to stay on track, and gaps across lines of race and ethnicity will continue to widen. However, there is evidence that we can reverse this course with interventions like high dosage tutoring, which has been proven to be an effective intervention to accelerate learning, and these investments would provide critical additional support.²
- **Summer Program Grants (Lines 6.8-6.15):** Providing extra support to students with disabilities in the summer of 2021 will help to accelerate learning and address learning loss. We recommend the committee consider broadening eligibility for these grants to include English Learners, low-income students, and other students who have been negatively impacted by COVID-19.

To measure the impact of these investments, and ensure that state resources are targeted to the schools, communities, and students with the greatest need, we strongly support the Minnesota Department of Education's efforts to implement the MCA test with an online option to capture the best data possible, giving us a baseline for student outcomes as we enter the COVID-19 recovery phase.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Matt Shaver
Policy Director

¹ Kuhnfeld, M., Tarasawa, A., Ruzek, E. & Lewis, K. (November 2020). "Learning during COVID-19: Initial findings on students' reading and math achievement and growth." Collaborative for Student Growth.

² Allensworth, E. & Schwartz, N. (June 2020). "School Practices to Address Student Learning Loss." Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.