

Dear Legislator,

Our schools are on the front lines of preparing Minnesota's future to face a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. Right now, we're stuck educating 21st-century students in a 19th-century system. HF 4098, establishing innovation research zones, gives school districts the power to build partnerships in the community and find innovative ways of educating students in a relevant and equitable manner.

Schools know best what is right for our students, and teachers even more so. As a graduating high school senior, the classes I will remember most fondly are those where teachers provided creative approaches to learning. In one of my courses, my teacher guided my classmates and me to construct our own grading rubrics. My peers participate in a program to learn employment skills and spend part of the school year in an internship of their choice. Students, myself included, earn college credit while in high school with Post-Secondary Enrollment Options and College in the Schools courses. These are just a few examples of how schools are educating students in the real world.

But, more can be done. Students are currently only able to access these opportunities if they are able to overcome systemic barriers. Many students are only able to participate in these opportunities if they completed graduation requirements early on in their high school years or if they have an independent source of transportation. We all share a responsibility in working to remove these barriers, and to do so, we need to be given the flexibility that HF 4098 provides in methods and models. We need to:

- Enable and recognize learning that happens beyond school walls, such as service-learning, internships, and apprenticeships.
- Educate and engage students in ways other than time in a seat, such as digital or blended learning and project-based learning.
- Better address the whole student by working with partners to close the opportunity gap, develop school-based mental health resources, and more.
- Involve parents and the community in the success of our students and our future.
- Redesign outcomes based on the real world and personalized learning.

Recent events with the COVID-19 pandemic have shown us that Minnesota educators are adaptive; in a few short weeks, the entire state transitioned to a new way of delivering education online. **When we are clear of the virus, we cannot accept "returning to normal." Our society will have changed, and education needs to change with it.** This doesn't mean we won't return to classrooms, but we must do better to ensure all of our students are being prepared for a complex, digital, outcome-based life post-graduation across the globe. To do so, we need your support of HF 4098.

Signed Joe Ramlet, Hopkins High School Class of 2020
Hopkins Legislative Action Coalition