



Ensure Quality Data Is Available and Used

Youth Voice

Why is this an Important Issue for Minnesota Children and Young People?

GradMinnesota believes in the power of young people to create their own bright future. By listening to their voices, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and choices they face. Thus it is important to empower and mobilize youth to share their experiences, bring their perspectives, and give recommendations on issues that affect them. When young people are actively engaged in the decision-making process, programs are more likely to meet their needs and create the changes they desire. While identifying the priority recommendations for GradMinnesota, the GradMinnesota Advisory Council and staff listened carefully to the voices of young people and incorporated their input.

Some input from youth relevant to this GradMinnesota recommendation is provided below. In addition, a feedback letter to Senator Wiger on a proposed bill establishing a “student digital backpack” (SF990) from the Minnesota Youth Council in 2016 is included.

Keeping Track of Credits is Critical to Graduation – Especially for Students Who Change Schools

“Even though I was taking extra credit classes and doing after school work, they didn’t give me any of my extra credits or any credits from the credit recovery program. So, then I just kind of fell off, I figured there was no point in trying. There was no way I could win. No matter what I said about my lost grades, they just had the same excuse.” – Donald¹

“The staff called me into the office and said they gotta hold me back for two years because my old school that I went to back from ninth and tenth grade, they said they lost my credits and I wasn’t in their system no more. So I told them I wasn’t staying. I rather just drop out and do what I do.” – Marcus (group interview participant)²

“[Credit tracking] is a big issue in the suburbs; a couple lines and you’re in a new district with your credits thrown off then [you’re] behind for graduation, I see it all the time.” – Minnesota Youth Council Member³

Standardized Testing Should Not Be the Only Data Used to Measure Achievement

“Standardized tests measure a very narrow range of schooling (math and reading) and types of intelligences. They do not allow the full range of human skills, creativities, different learning abilities, and intelligences to be expressed. By their very name they are standardized, yet there is no such thing as a ‘standard human’ and attempts to make humans standard is dehumanizing” – Student Advisory Committee, Minnesota Youth Council⁴

“Tests are designed and administered in ways that limit student power, a particular issue when tests are also extremely limiting to different intelligences, abilities, preferences, cultures, and languages. Instead, school systems have created cultures and expectations that students attempt to fit themselves to a version of the ‘good student’ that is narrow and unhealthy and view students who get low scores as ‘lesser than.’ Standardized tests are authoritarian in that they suppress difference and require conformity to an ‘authority’ on what is and is not ‘standard.’” – Student Advisory Committee, Minnesota Youth Council⁴

SF 990 Digital Student Achievement Backpack Establishment

Feedback Letter, Minnesota Youth Council (Spring, 2016)

The Minnesota Youth Council (MYC) (<https://mnyouth.net/minnesota-youth-council/>) is a collaboration of youth and adults working together to empower and mobilize young people across the state to exercise their voices, opinions and ideas and take action on issues affecting youth. Through their work at the state legislature, the MYC acts as a voice for youth to the legislature and the governor. MYC members hear testimony on bills related to young people and develop feedback letters to the authors of each bill heard. In March 2016 Senator Wiger testified and presented to the MYC on a bill to establish a Student Achievement Backpack. "Student achievement backpack" was defined as a complete learner profile that is in electronic format, follows the student from grade-to-grade and school-to-school, is accessible by the student's parent or guardian, and is accessible by an authorized local education agency user; and "Minnesota Student Record Center" as a repository of student data collected from local education agencies. See more about the proposed bill at www.senate.mn/departments/scr/billsumm/summary_display_from_db.php?ls=89&id=2641

March 2016

Dear Senator Wiger and Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for testifying and presenting SF 990 Student Achievement Backpack to the Minnesota Youth Council on March 29th during Youth Day At The Capitol. The entire Council believes that this bill is not only helpful, but essential for many students' success. Switching between schools can be a stressful time for students and ensuring an easy transfer of information between schools will increase a students' ability to continue their education faster than otherwise.

The fact that many other states have already implemented similar laws is encouraging. Having this platform to grow upon will not only make the implementation process easier, it will also be beneficial if changing certain aspects of the program are needed in order to fit different or unique requirements.

Another concept we support is that all data collected will be anonymous in the aggregate. Data is essential for research and improvements, but having an aspect of privacy is necessary to ensure everyone is comfortable with how their information being used. The bill also specifies who can use the information and what it will be used for, furthering that sense of privacy. Furthermore, the ability for students to opt out was viewed favorably by many members for similar reasons.

An additional point that was weighed in the minds of members was the system safeguards if the system was breached. Obviously, this is not a situation we want to happen in the first place. Many members were encouraged that victims would be notified if their information has been stolen. This would ensure protection of data and peace of mind in conjunction with an investigation and prosecution of the alleged perpetrator.

Some points of worry, however, raised by some members should also be noted. A major concern of the Council is implementation costs and potential for additional work for administrators who may need their attention elsewhere. While both of these may in the end come down to the Minnesota Department of Education, school district and schools, respectively, many members believe that these potential problems may cause further issues if not addressed. As a Council, we appreciate you taking the time to present us this bill and we hope that our feedback will help strengthen the legislation.

Sincerely, Minnesota Youth Council

References

1. America's Promise Alliance and Center for Promise (2014). *Don't Call Them Dropouts- Understanding The Experiences of Young People Who Leave High School Before Graduation*. Retrieved from http://www.gradnation.org/sites/default/files/DCTD%20Final%20Full_0.pdf
2. America's Promise Alliance and Center for Promise (2015). *Don't Quit on Me- A Follow-up Report to Don't Call Them Dropouts: What Young People Who Left School Say about the Power of Relationships*. Retrieved from http://www.gradnation.org/sites/default/files/FullReport%20DontQuit_2.pdf
3. Minnesota Youth Council (2016). Digital Student Backpack Establishment (SF 990): Policy Review Ballot Results and Feedback.
4. Minnesota Youth Council, Student Advisory Committee (2017). A User-Driven Education System in Minnesota Supplementing Standardized Tests with Comprehensive Needs Assessments and Community Developed Discipline Policies. Retrieved from <https://mnyouth.net/files/sac-whitepaper-myc-jun2017.pdf>