

To whom it may concern,

After 29 years of experience leading and teaching in schools, with a particular focus on neurodivergent students and those impacted by school-related trauma, I've become deeply concerned about the academic progress of students with disabilities. It's crucial that we thoroughly investigate reading and math proficiency rates within this population and critically evaluate the effectiveness of our current educational systems in meeting their unique needs.

My direct observations at Innovation Academy (Moorhead, MN), a nonpublic school, have reinforced these concerns. We frequently receive students transferring from Fargo schools who exhibit significant discrepancies between their demonstrated learning potential and their current academic standing. These students often arrive with substantial learning gaps, despite possessing the innate capacity to learn and thrive. However, when provided with individualized attention, targeted instruction tailored to their specific learning profiles, and a supportive, trauma-informed environment, these same students begin to make remarkable progress. The key factor, I believe, is creating a sense of safety and belonging. As these students develop positive connections with their peers and the adults around them, they transition from a state of sympathetic activation – often triggered by past negative school experiences – to a state of calm engagement, where true learning can flourish.

Given these observations, I strongly urge a comprehensive study of the efficacy of current educational policies, programs, and resource allocations. This study should specifically examine how effectively these systems address the documented disparities in academic achievement experienced by students with disabilities. Understanding the root causes of these discrepancies is essential if we are to create truly equitable and supportive learning environments for all students.

Sincerely,

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