

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter in support of Vermont Education Secretary, Zoie Saunders. During my time as an elected official in the City of Fort Lauderdale, Florida I had the pleasure of working with Ms. Saunders in her role as Chief Education Officer for the City.

A tireless advocate for public schools and early childhood education, Ms. Saunders' leadership was key to numerous successful education related initiatives in the City of Fort Lauderdale. Fort Lauderdale is a diverse city with a wide range of needs from neighborhood to neighborhood and school to school. Zoie Saunders took a very intentional approach to connecting with, responding to, and advocating for the unique needs of the community members she was working with.

- Ms. Saunders paved the way for lasting municipal partnerships with community members and anchor institutions to successfully launch programming which offers robust educational training in the growing area of aviation and aerospace training. The unique Education Framework offers multiple learning pathways in aviation and aerospace and resulted in the launch of a new Avionics Systems Technician program in partnership with Atlantic Technical College and 10 aviation business partners. Via this innovative partnership, dual-enrollment high school students and adults can earn a variety of competitive industry certifications upon graduation.
- Ms. Saunders led the investment of \$12,000,000 into public school playground improvements. The investment was funded via a municipal parks bond and community feedback drove the equitable use of funds across Fort Lauderdale. This initiative allowed for enhanced school grounds, more community park access, and cross-entity collaboration.
- Ms. Saunders ensured that students and families who were at-risk of or experiencing homelessness had access to wrap-around services.
- Demonstrating a deep ability to earn trust from both community members and educational professionals, Ms. Saunders was able to successfully advocate for improvements of school facilities and educational programming.

Ms. Saunders' dynamic approach to her carrying out her responsibilities as Chief Education Officer in the City of Fort Lauderdale, FL resulted in both local and national recognition. The city was recognized for its innovation in education and workforce development as Broward County Public Schools' 2020 Education Partner of the Year at the Secondary Level and the 2021 recipient of the Florida Department of Education's Commissioner's Business Recognition Award. Additionally, in 2023, Fort Lauderdale was one of sixteen cities selected by the National League of Cities and U.S. Department of Labor to join the Good Jobs, Great Cities Academy.

I believe that Zoie Saunders work has paved the way for enhanced approaches to education in the City of Fort Lauderdale for generations to come. I'm proud to support Zoie Saunders and excited to see the results she brings to Vermont.

Regards,  
Ben Sorensen  
Former Vice Mayor and District 4 City Commissioner, Fort Lauderdale, FL  
954-802-3311  
[ben@bensorensen.com](mailto:ben@bensorensen.com)

Dear Chair Senator Brian Campion,

I am writing this letter in support of Zoie Saunders being confirmed as Vermont's Education Secretary. I had the pleasure of working with Mrs. Saunders on numerous education initiatives and I hold her in the highest regard. As a former school board member, an active community member and literacy advocate, I have witnessed Mrs. Saunders' dedication to serving the interests of students and their families to build stronger communities.

Her ability to actively listen to community members and apply feedback in the decision-making process has been paramount through my previous interactions. Additionally, her focus to share data and consider unintended outcomes, is a unique quality that sets Mrs. Saunders apart from other educational leaders.

During my tenure as a school board member, Mrs. Saunders was instrumental in creating aviation pathways in partnership between the City of Fort Lauderdale and Broward County Public Schools to help address identified workforce gaps. Mrs. Saunders advocated for a partnership with Broward County Public Schools in spite of pressure from some elected city officials and community members with close ties to charter schools, because she knew it was the best decision for an educational pathway to serve our community. The successful pathway exists today because of Mrs. Saunders' efforts.

During my time on the education Advisory Board for the City of Fort Lauderdale, I had the pleasure of working closely with Mrs. Saunders on many educational endeavors. I find her to be a person of great integrity, with a passion for service to all communities and intent on ensuring the voices of the underserved are lifted to address community needs equitably. From listening tours as the Chief Education Officer with the city to gain valuable resident feedback, to sensible reciprocal use agreements with the local public school district to bring much needed park and play space improvements to communities where park deserts previously existed, to accepting the role for redefining schools to better serve communities and ensure those directly impacted communities were included in all conversations Mrs. Saunders has exemplified integrity and veracity in her words and her work.

Finally, as a literacy advocate, I worked with Mrs. Saunders to bring reading mentoring programs to 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> graders attending the city's afterschool programs through the Parks and Recreation Department. Mrs. Saunders was thoughtful in her approach, made data driven decisions and sought to provide wrap around educational services in both the afterschool and summer programs within the city to improve academic outcomes for students.

Without question, Mrs. Saunders will be an asset to Vermont's education system. Your state's residents will benefit from her knowledge and experience as much as they will from her work ethic and commitment to the community she serves. I implore you to confirm Mrs. Saunders as Vermont's Education Secretary.

Sincerely,

Heather P. Brinkworth

954-324-6179

[hpbrinkworth@bellsouth.net](mailto:hpbrinkworth@bellsouth.net)