

April 18, 2024

Dear Vermont Senators,

I am writing you to express support for Zoie Saunders to serve the students, families, and communities of Vermont in the role of Secretary of Education.

I have over thirty years of experience as an educator in traditional public schools. During my career I have served as a teacher, principal, and in a variety of roles at the district level. My district leadership roles have included serving as the Chief Academic Officer of both Broward County Public Schools in Florida and the Houston Independent School District in Houston, TX, the Executive Officer for Innovation and Change for Newark Public Schools in Newark, NJ, and the Executive Director of Secondary School Reform for the District of Columbia Public Schools. I have served as a teacher and a principal. It is this diverse and extensive background as a public-school educator and advocate that informs my full endorsement of Zoie Saunders.

Her impact on our educational systems has been profoundly positive. One specific example of her effectiveness is how she led a multi-year, multi-partner task force to align state and local resources to provide education programming combining the public schools and private industry in support of having local students access the fast-growing aviation and avionics industry. This required ensuring students had high academic outcomes, were on an articulated career and technical pathway starting in middle school and extending through higher education, and that their learning was enabling industry certifications. A second example of her leadership was in the examination of both pre-school and recreational park “deserts” in the community. She carefully navigated the competing interest groups, convened people to educate each other prior to establishing recommendations, and cultivated support from community, political, and business leaders to support successful implementation of decisions. She knows how to ensure compliance with relevant statutes and regulations, is intelligent and wise enough to respectfully listen and to advocate and is tireless in her work ethic. Zoie’s results have rightfully been recognized by the school district, state, and business community with awards in the past several years. She is a trusted partner, a sought-after advisor, and is deeply respected throughout the community.

In late 2023, Zoie was hired by the School Board of Broward County to establish processes to implement a school board and superintendent initiative to address the severe under enrollment of dozens of schools, overcrowding of some schools, and the reality of uneven academic achievement across the county. This undertaking was necessary because of demographic changes in the county that resulted in fewer school age children in several cities, increased populations in newer suburban developments, and the failure of previous boards to address the changes on an ongoing basis. As one school system in a county with approximately 270,000 public school students across thirty-one municipalities there are numerous historical patterns, public anxiety, and political interests impacting such a process. Florida public schools are significantly challenged with low state

funding, only recently having crossed over \$8,000 per student. Upon assuming her position, she immediately commenced public meetings across the county. By bringing clarity through facts of the situation, providing opportunities for public voice to the district leadership, and transparency to the process she was able to reduce public concern, bring people together to focus on relevant decision points, and establish a process that is resulting in progress on a decades old problem. This success is a direct result of her prioritizing the experience of students, the impacts that decisions will have on families and educators, and her leadership effectively finding common ground for moving forward together. It is these values of cooperation, respect, and finding practical solutions that will serve the students, families, educators, and broader Vermont community well.

I have experience working in a state education agency as the Deputy Director of Innovation for in the New Jersey Department of Education and I currently work with departments of education across the United States advocating for best practices in student development and education in my position at HP, Inc. as Chief Technology & Strategy Officer for Education. I know what attributes make someone an effective leader at the state level for education, and Zoie Saunders is an exemplary candidate. She would serve the people of Vermont with expertise, passion, and effectiveness.

I strongly urge you to approve Zoie Saunders. I encourage you to review the letter of recommendation that I, and others, submitted to the selection committee for her initial application. She is an extraordinary public servant who knows educational practice, educational policy, and will work with all parties to establish a world-class education system in Vermont. Please contact me if you have any questions about this letter, her capabilities, or related questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel F. Gohl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Daniel F. Gohl
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