



May 4, 2021

Re: Higher Education Omnibus Bills

Dear Chairs Bernardy and Tomassoni, and members of the conference committee,

When students of color have teachers of color, they're more likely to be placed in gifted programs¹ and less likely to experience disciplinary referrals.² They also feel more cared for and interested in their homework,³ and are ultimately more likely to graduate from high school.⁴ And yet, Minnesota continues to have one of the whitest teacher workforces in the nation: 96% of the state's teachers are white, and that percentage has barely changed in two decades despite the student population becoming increasingly diverse.⁵

We applaud the following provisions that seek to remove barriers that prevent teachers of color from entering the teaching profession, as well as language changes that would ensure public funds are being used in the most impactful manner:

- **Aspiring Teachers of Color Scholarships:** We support language in the House omnibus that would create a dedicated scholarship program for undergraduate and graduate teachers of color.
- **Specifying "Licensure Shortage Area":** We support language in the Senate omnibus bill (38.15-38.20), which strengthens language around what licensure areas qualify as a shortage. Currently, nearly all teacher candidates qualify for the Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness program, which makes the pool too large and dilutes impact. By specifying which licensure areas qualify for the money, this will ensure that the candidates receiving funds are filling persistent, statewide shortage areas, including teachers of color.

In addition to the provisions that would help more teachers of color and teachers in licensure shortage areas enter the profession, we also support the provisions that remove barriers and support the success of traditionally underserved students obtaining a postsecondary education:

- **Expanding State Grant Program:** We support language in the House omnibus (lines 25.12-25.13) that add language to the state grant program to students who have taken developmental education—remedial education that students must take based on college entrance or placement exams. Despite initiatives to improve developmental education, Black, Latino, and Indigenous students still take these courses at much higher rates than white students. This is problematic because evidence shows that developmental coursework doesn't help students advance toward success in

¹ Grissom, J. Rodriguez, L., & Kern, E. (2017). "Teacher and Principal Diversity and the Representation of Students of Color in Gifted Programs: Evidence from National Data" The Elementary School Journal.

² Lindsay, C. & Hart, C. (2017). "Exposure to Same-Race Teachers and Student Disciplinary Outcomes for Black Students in North Carolina." Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis.

³ Boisrond, C. (September 2017). "If Your Teacher Looks Like You, You May Do Better In School." NPR.

⁴ Gershenson, S., Hart, C., Lindsay, C., & Papageorge, N. (March 2017). "The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers." IZA Institute of Labor Economics.

⁵ Mahamud, F. & Webster, M. (2018). "Minnesota schools struggle with widening racial gap between students and teachers." Star Tribune.

postsecondary education. In fact, it's just the opposite: students who take developmental courses are significantly less likely to complete college.⁶

- **Summer Academic Enrichment Program:** We applaud the inclusion in both bills of a summer academic enrichment program and encourage the members to work through their minor differences on the issue.
- **Hunger-Free Campus Grants:** No college student should have to worry about where their next meal is coming from. We applaud the inclusion of hunger-free campus grants in both bills and urge the members to work through their different views on the funding so that we can ensure that we are reducing food insecurity for our state's college students.
- **Expanding concurrent enrollment:** We support the inclusion of concurrent enrollment grant programs in the House bill (lines 51.1-52.17). Concurrent enrollment programming is the second largest college and career readiness program in Minnesota, with over 30,000 students participating annually. However, there are still large disparities in participation across race and ethnicity.⁷ This grant program would help to address these disparities and help more underserved students get the benefits from participating in concurrent enrollment.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,



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⁶ Minnesota Office of Higher Education. (2018). "Getting Prepared 2018: Developmental Education Course-Taking of High School Graduates, Classes 2009-2017."

⁷ Kaput, K. (2020). "Closing the Rigorous Coursework Gap: Supporting College and Career Readiness for Minnesota's Students of Color." EdAllies.