



January 29, 2021

Chair Richardson
463 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Recommendations in Racial Disparities Report

Dear Chair Richardson and members of the Committee,

My name is Citlaly Escobar and I am a Capitol Pathways Intern for EdAllies, a statewide education advocacy nonprofit. I am also a senior at Augsburg University where I am majoring in Political Science and Sociology.

I am writing about what it means to have an education that allows all students in Minnesota to succeed. For me, this revolves around three main points that were mentioned in the report on racial disparities:

- The need to hire and retain staff of color in the Minnesota's school districts;
- The need to mandate culturally-responsive teaching and anti-racism training; and
- The need to increase the access to dual-credit enrollment and rigorous coursework opportunities for all students.

These points are all important to me because of my own personal experiences and because I also have three younger siblings in Minnesota that are being negatively impacted by the lack of opportunities.

Growing up as a Mexican-American in Minnesota, my experience in the public school system was at a minimum, alienating, and at most, traumatizing. One of the moments that particularly sticks out the most was when I asked my dean to help me apply for college as a senior in high school. As a first-generation college student, I didn't know how to apply; however, my white best friend encouraged me to see my dean because she had a great experience with her. But, when I met with my dean in her office, she didn't even look at me; instead, read my name on her desk and said, "Why do you want to go college? Students like you don't make it, so I think you should be happy where you are now."

I know what many of you may be thinking: "Wow, there's no way this could have happened recently!" Or something like, "That dean is one in a million, people just aren't like that anymore in normal school districts!" Well, this happened in 2016 at the Mounds View School District, one of the most-resourced districts in the state in Minnesota. And this horrifying experience I had is not one in a million. In fact, it's a common story for too many students of color in Minnesota. Even though I eventually did end up succeeding in spite of my dean and the barriers I had to overcome, it is frankly unforgivable that the Minnesotan school system was ever set up like this for students of color, and that it continues to operate this way even years after my graduation in 2017.



Following the events of insurrection at the Capitol in early January, it is clear that Minnesota needs to step-up and be willing to lead the country in providing equitable and anti-racist education for all their students, staff, and community members. One of the ways Minnesota can do that is by investing in the recruitment, training, and retention of teachers of color. This involves not only in investing in programs like tuition assistance and loan forgiveness, but also in changing layoff policies to ensure that teachers of color are protected. This is critical because in my K-12 education, I didn't have any teachers of color until my first year at Augsburg University, which is unacceptable.

Secondly, Minnesota must also be willing to take the initiative to mandate anti-racism training and culturally-responsive teaching practices. The few teachers and staff of color employed by school districts should not bear the weight of serving as cultural liaisons for the school alone; instead, Minnesota should mandate these trainings to enhance the skill set of their entire education staff. This ensures that predominantly white staff will invest in their students of color as much as they do with white students and that future administrators won't harm students.

Additionally, Minnesota must also increase dual enrollment and rigorous coursework for students of color. Something I think about often is that I ended up being one of the lucky ones. Despite my dean, I was still able to take college courses in high school and now be part of the 10% of all Latinas nationally that graduate college. However, what happened to the students who had deans like mine, who refused to help them? It is essential that all students in Minnesota have access to dual-enrollment and rigorous coursework because their futures are on the line and it is the duty of the state to ensure that all students have the all opportunities to succeed.

Lastly, I also implore this committee to add one final strand to this report: ethnic studies. Students are more likely to succeed when they see themselves reflected in the materials and as Minnesota continues to diversify, its curriculum needs to expand to include narratives from communities of color to ensure the success of all students.

Thank you and please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Citlaly Escobar
EdAllies' Capitol Pathways Intern
cescobar@edalliesmn.org