



June 15, 2020

Dear Chair Youakim and members of the Education Policy Committee,

Since 1922, the Minnesota PTA has supported parents, students, and educators across the state. We currently have 200 local units in Minnesota with 8,000 members representing all forms of schools, including rural, suburban, urban, district, and charter.

Minnesota PTA supports the provisions in HF 36 to:

- Boost district actions to make our schools culturally relevant, inclusive, and respectful environments for teaching and learning
- Strengthen the role of parents and families – particularly those that represent diverse communities - in district strategic planning and program decision-making
- Shine a spotlight on the need for meaningful family engagement programs and strategies to be integrated in district comprehensive strategic plans
- Help all students to see themselves in their teachers by bringing more teachers of color into our classrooms
- Eliminate the harmful shaming of students related to school lunch payments
- Clarify language that keeps students learning in the classroom while addressing their behavioral and social-emotional needs

A body of research connects strong family engagement in schools to student success. As Minnesota schools work to do better for our black students, students of color and American Indian students, opportunities for all families to share their experiences in their children's schools will inform the development of impactful proposals and programs. The reinforced language in this bill will remind districts that they must refocus their efforts to actively recruit parents and families from Minnesota's diverse communities to participate in district planning, and must work to accommodate parent and family schedules and barriers to participation to ensure that they can be present.

Furthermore, this distance learning period has provided parents and families with a unique opportunity to see their children's education up close and personal and to be immersed in it in a way they never were before. As a result, parents will have many opinions, and districts and schools should be prepared to receive them in a collaborative spirit toward improving education for all students. Parents will be better informed because of these distance learning experiences, and their voices and input will be more valuable to the development of district plans and strategies that support student success as we plan for education in a time of pandemic and beyond.

"Family engagement initiatives that involve families in their students' academic life and success and improve relations between home and school" will not be successful without a focus on inclusion and respect. Family engagement goes far beyond "involving" families. It must be more than one-way communication to families. Engagement at its foundation focuses on families feeling included and respected by their child's principal and teacher, in their school environment, and by their district administration. Districts and schools will not have effective two-way communication with parents if parents do not first feel included and respected. Parents and family members will not accept invitations to participate in the school environment if that environment is not inclusive and respectful of their student's and family's racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity or the barriers that structural inequities create for their connection and participation.

Minnesota PTA is committed to working with legislators and the Minnesota Department of Education toward our joint goal of improving family engagement opportunities throughout Minnesota and addressing the structural inequities that prevent parents from fully engaging to support their children's success in school.

Thank you for your consideration.

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