



March 4, 2021

TO: Members, House Education Policy Committee
FROM: Dr. Julie Bunn, Executive Director, Minnesota Council on Economic Education
RE: HF 1617 with A1 amendment

The **Minnesota Council on Economic Education (MCEE)** has been deeply involved in promoting and providing personal finance education since our founding 60 years ago. Through a statewide network of K-12 teachers, university educators, and community partners, we have pioneered curricula and methods that bring personal finance concepts to life for students and families in alignment with state academic standards and national guidelines from the Jump\$tart coalition and the national Council on Economic Education (CEE). To continue providing value to Minnesota teachers, we track national research on teaching methods and pedagogy to be able to prepare teachers with the most up-to-date information to ensure student success.

Each year, MCEE supports Minnesota teachers and school districts by providing professional development opportunities and curriculum (developed by MCEE and curated from across the country). MCEE collaborates on delivering the highest quality personal finance professional development to Minnesota teachers with a network of over 100 state councils and centers for economic education associated with the national CEE, the National Endowment for Financial Education, and NextGen Personal Finance, as well as Minnesota content-specific teacher associations.

MCEE is deeply appreciative of the increased legislative attention to the need for greater investments and accountability in economic and personal finance literacy in the state, and commend Representative Hassan for engaging in this discussion with the introduction of HF1617. We also thank Representative Hassan for her A-1 author's amendment that deletes the word "online" on page 2, line 9.

MCEE believes that developing economic and personal finance literacy and proficiency are very important for students to succeed in the 21st century workforce. Research has shown that students with adequate financial education have higher levels of savings over their lifetimes, are less susceptible to scams and falling victim to fraud, and are more financially secure overall. Online courses often stress rote memorization and do not adequately engage students beyond that; in-person learning allows students to develop communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills that are invaluable in their future career, while online courses do not provide the same skill development or socialization that is critical to the development of young people.

MCEE has long been a champion for developing and using culturally responsive curricula and lessons to engage students in personal finance and make concepts relevant to their lives. Online courses in personal finance, even if they meet state standards, cannot easily provide content in a manner that centers students' lived experiences or responds to the diverse needs and perspectives that Minnesota classrooms require. For too long, education in personal finance and economics has left behind students of color due to systemic inequities in educational funding and access; to reduce the role of Minnesota teachers in delivering personal finance content is to do a disservice to students who face countless barriers to financial services and education.

MCEE Master Teacher, Emily Anderson (Anoka-Hennepin) captured these points well in the feedback she provided to MCEE in response to the original bill language:

While I am in support of having kids take a personal finance class, the worst thing we could do is teach kids personal finance concepts virtually/online. As a teacher who has been teaching economics for 18 years, I can testify that the things kids connect to our personal stories from the adult they know, trust, and have a relationship with. These concepts must be taught in an interactive, personal way or kids go on autopilot and don't appreciate their relevance and importance. I have used online personal finance modules in the past (as part of my in-person course), and they are not impactful unless they are followed up with in-person conversations, simulations, and interactive, life-application activities. Just because something can be taught online doesn't mean it should be done that way!



Having taught these concepts (as well as the MCEE College Dollars & Sense summer course) for 15+ years, I cannot stress enough the importance of personalizing this learning. Different cultures have different viewpoints on money, loans, investment, debt, etc. To maximize the benefit of personal finance education, it needs to be culturally relevant and personalized.

The Minnesota state Social Studies standards currently contain within the economics area a personal finance standard, and benchmarks for each grade level K-12 within that. These standards are unevenly taught across districts and schools (and sometimes not at all), and the quality of the instruction and curricula employed also varies widely. Moreover, we know from recent national research that when there is only a standard (and often weak enforcement of implementation) that more affluent and more white districts are more likely to offer instruction in personal finance than less affluent or more diverse student population districts. **MCEE believes that interested legislators and external stakeholders should work together over the next two years to develop consensus around a comprehensive plan to ensure that all Minnesota students receive quality and effective instruction in personal finance prior to graduating high school.**

MCEE supports the following principles in moving forward towards achieving this goal:

- 1) Minnesota students should receive instruction in economics and personal finance. While it is undeniably important for young people to understand concepts and practices related to personal finance, it is equally important that these students understand broad economic issues that affect their lives on a daily basis. Economic issues are at the center of much political and civic discourse: global trade, taxes and tariffs, budget deficits and spending, inflation and price changes, and regulations for various economic activities at the local, state and national levels. In order to participate in an informed political debate, today's students must understand the economy.
- 2) Minnesota teachers should remain central to the delivery of this education. While online modules and hybrid in-person and distance learning may well be part of effective delivery of these subjects, there are no substitutes for a classroom teacher guiding students through, and interacting with students about, these topics.
- 3) If the content requirements in the personal finance area, either through standards/benchmarks and/or a course, are to be enhanced, Minnesota teachers, appropriate experts from higher education, and content experts should be fully engaged in the process.
- 4) Personal finance should be delivered in a culturally responsive manner, employing pedagogy and lessons that will engage and prove inclusive to diverse student populations. And,
- 5) The state should have a system of metrics by which to measure that students are successfully learning personal finance and that the financial literacy of Minnesotans is remaining stable at an acceptable level or improving over time. We cannot adequately address what we do not measure.

Minnesota has long prized the quality of education that we provide to our students. MCEE shares the sentiments behind HF1617 and the organization thanks Representative Hassan for helping shine a light on a critical issue facing Minnesota and pledges to work with her and other legislators interested in elevating students' personal finance and economic knowledge. MCEE supports giving students and schools options for learning, but firmly believe that those options must be of equal quality and rigor to set all students up for achievement.

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