

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

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January 25, 2021

Dear Members of House and Senate Education and Higher Education Committees,

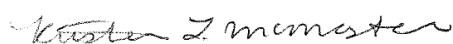
We are writing in our respective roles as Chair of the Department of Educational Psychology and Coordinator for Special Education Programs in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota, **to indicate our endorsement of the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act (ITCA)**, which is scheduled for a hearing this Wednesday, January 27, 2021. Our department houses a nationally recognized special education teacher preparation program—one of the primary special education teacher preparation programs in the state. We are strongly committed to addressing the **persisting and urgent need to increase teachers of color in our field**, particularly in Minnesota, and see ITCA as an important opportunity to address key barriers.

The ITCA addresses issues of critical importance to diversifying Minnesota’s teaching workforce so that it is more representative of students in this state. Currently, approximately 34% of Minnesota students are people of color, compared to only about 5% of Minnesota teachers. In fact, the racial and ethnic composition of Minnesota’s teachers has not changed in decades, while the racial and ethnic diversity of our students is ever increasing not just in the Twin Cities area but also across the state. At the same time, **Minnesota has one of the largest racial and ethnic achievement gaps in the country** (including gaps in standardized testing performance, graduation rates, and college readiness indicators). Research has demonstrated that **teachers of color play an important role in promoting positive outcomes for students of color**—including promoting higher achievement, higher graduation rates, and higher likelihood of attending college.

The ITCA includes provisions to **remove barriers that historically have hindered progress in diversifying the teaching workforce**, including barriers related to recruiting teacher candidates of color, obtaining licensure, and retention. These provisions include grant programs that are essential to institutions of higher education and local school districts seeking to deliver “grow your own” programs that serve as promising pathways for teachers of color to enter the field through their community schools. Further, amendments to licensure rules, funding for mentoring programs, policies to reduce discrimination and promote culturally responsive practices in schools, and scholarship programs for aspiring MN teachers of color are evidence-based tools for facilitating a more diverse workforce.

Please support the proposed 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act to address the urgent and critical need to diversify Minnesota’s teaching workforce—and ultimately to help close achievement gaps and improve the educational experiences and outcomes for students of color in our state.

Sincerely,



Kristen L. McMaster, Ph.D.
Professor of Special Education
Chair, Department of Educational Psychology



LeAnne D. Johnson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Special Education
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