



January 25, 2021

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

Re: Addressing Racial Disparities in Education

Dear Chair Richardson and members of the Committee,

We want to thank you for hosting a hearing on addressing racial disparities in education. Even when controlling for income, the data show that Minnesota students of color are not receiving the same opportunities and resources, and it is important to explicitly tackle the issue of race within our schools. EdAllies works with families, students, educators, and policymakers to understand and rectify these persistent and unjust inequities, and we are pleased to share some strategies we believe can advance student-centered change in Minnesota schools.

STRATEGY 1: EQUITABLE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

- Address student needs in the wake of COVID-19. Preliminary national data indicates that the pandemic has increased gaps between students of color and their white peers, with Black and Latino students experiencing the most significant declines in achievement for math and reading.¹ This is driven not by students' ability, but by disparities in programming, technology, and other supports throughout the pandemic. Minnesota's students of color need robust academic and social-emotional support to ensure that the negative effects of COVID-19 are not long-term, and the Legislature can achieve this by:
 - Ensuring strong systems to assess student learning needs and measure progress toward recovery;
 - Investing in research-backed interventions to address learning loss;
 - Investing in culturally responsive mental health and social-emotional support; and
 - Closing the digital divide so all students can fully participate in a 21st century system for learning.
- Reduce discipline disparities. In 2019, students of color accounted for 65.5% of all disciplinary action, even though they only account for 35.2% of the student population—often reflecting more punitive consequences than those faced by their white peers for similar actions.² Minnesota must invest in discipline strategies to keep students in school and engaged, like restorative practices. Suspensions and expulsions—which are ineffective *and* disproportionately impact students of color and students with disabilities—should only be used as a last resort. Legislators can move the needle on this work by:

¹ Kuhfeld, M., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E. & Lewis, K. (November 2020). "Learning during COVID-19: Initial findings on students' reading and math achievement and growth." Collaborative for Student Growth.

² Minnesota Department of Education Discipline Data. Accessed January 22, 2020.

- Supporting policy requiring schools to notify parents of disciplinary actions and allowing them a state level ombudsperson; and
- Investing in and supporting implementation of nonexclusionary discipline practices.

STRATEGY 2: TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS WHO ARE WELL-SUPPORTED & EFFECTIVE

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.³ Minnesota has many policies in place that sustain this, and make it hard to move the needle. To diversify the teacher workforce, we must make changes to how we prepare, license, and retain teachers, including:

- Keeping doors open to high-quality teachers. The new tiered licensure system is doing what it’s supposed to do: streamline the system process and create clear, fair pathways to the classroom for candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Currently, at least 20% of Minnesota’s educators of color teach on a Tier 1 or Tier 2 license, making it critical to support policies to help these educators advance in their career and along the licensure continuum.⁴ This means ensuring a path to a permanent Tier 3 license based on experience and effectiveness.
- Increasing efforts to recruit teachers of color and retain them during layoffs. Research emphasizes the importance of teacher diversity for student success, especially for students of color and Native American students. Too often, however, young teachers of color are negatively impacted by layoff policies that require schools to lay off teachers with the least seniority first, regardless of their impact. Minnesota must continue to acknowledge teachers of color as a statewide shortage area, and require schools to prioritize retaining them in times of layoffs. At the same time, we can do more on the front end by creating more alternative teacher preparation programs that support pathways to the classroom with fewer barriers and more support.

STRATEGY 3: MAKE SCHOOLS RIGOROUS AND ENGAGING, BOTH ACADEMICALLY AND CULTURALLY

- Increase access to rigorous coursework. EdAllies recently released a report which highlighted the racial gaps in access to rigorous coursework—particularly for Black, Latino, and Indigenous students—which help to lay the groundwork for success in college and career.⁵ From gaps in enrollment in concurrent enrollment and gifted and talented to success on AP and IB exams, policymakers must work to ensure that we’re supporting students’ fullest potential. This session, policymakers can address racial disparities in access to advanced programming by:
 - Adopting an automatic enrollment policy that would opt students into rigorous coursework,
 - Protecting state investments that support access to rigorous coursework, and
 - Expanding college and career readiness measures in World’s Best Workforce.

³ Mahamud, F. & Webster, M. (2018). “Minnesota schools struggle with widening racial gap between students and teachers.” Star Tribune.

⁴ Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board. (2020). “2020 Tiered License and Permission Report.” https://mn.gov/pelsb/assets/2020%20Tiered%20Licensure%20Report%20FINAL_tcm1113-457236.pdf

⁵ Kaput, K. (November 2020). “Closing the Rigorous Coursework Gap: Supporting College and Career Readiness for Minnesota’s Students of Color.” EdAllies. <https://edalliesmn.org/research/college-career-readiness-for-minnesotas-students-of-color/>

- Protect equitable funding for schools. As policymakers seek to address education funding and potential shortfalls, they should guarantee that budget priorities intentionally reverse rather than perpetuate existing inequities. This means keeping students at the center of all budget debates, from special education, to early learning, to critical formulas like compensatory education revenue.
- Ensure access to high-quality charter schools. After decades of being underserved by Minnesota schools, many families of color exercise parent choice to find the best school for their child—whether for a more culturally relevant setting or better academic outcomes. Overall, 62% of charter school students are students of color.⁶ We owe it to these students to not only preserve options, but also provide a framework to ensure quality—namely, by ensuring charter school authorizers are held accountable to effective oversight.

Thank you for considering these policy strategies, and for making racial disparities in education a priority. Please reach out to discuss these ideas further.

Sincerely,



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⁶ Minnesota Association of Charter Schools. (February 2020). "A Primer on Minnesota Charter Schools." https://www.mncharterschools.org/_uls/resources/2.25.20_A_Primer_on_Minnesota_Charter_Schools.pdf