

February 17th, 2025

Dear House Education Finance Committee Members,

My name is Rachael Bauleke, and I am a constituent and speech-language pathologist with over a decade of experience in public education. My work centers on providing equitable, high-quality services to culturally and linguistically diverse students, and I have been a strong advocate for evidence-based literacy practices throughout my career. I am writing in support of H.F. 6, specifically Article 1, Sections 3, 5, and 9.

In our pluralistic society, it is essential for English Language Arts (ELA) curricula to reflect a diverse range of authors, characters, and perspectives. However, the current language of the READ Act—which requires approved curricula to be “culturally and linguistically responsive and reflect diverse populations”—has unintentionally led to the exclusion of high-quality, diverse ELA programs from the Minnesota Department of Education’s (MDE) reimbursement list.

The original language of The READ Act was created with good intentions, but its current implementation has led to the omission of rigorous, evidence-based curricula based on MDE’s determination that they are not diverse enough—a characterization that does not reflect their actual content or effectiveness. This stems from the subjectivity of the requirement, as determining whether a curriculum meets this standard is a matter of interpretation. As a result, several high-quality, evidence-based programs have been left off MDE’s Highly Aligned Curricula list, limiting schools’ access to proven literacy resources.

One example is Amplify’s Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) – Second Edition, which has been left off MDE’s list despite its strong track record and its inclusion of a diverse range of authors, topics, and characters. CKLA and similar curricula have been implemented successfully in states like Louisiana, where they have contributed to measurable gains in reading achievement among racially diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, as reflected in Louisiana’s 2024 NAEP reading scores. Because only “highly aligned” curricula are eligible for READ Act Literacy Aid and Literacy Incentive Aid, exclusions such as this have significant ramifications for students in our state.

I urge the committee to advance H.F. 6 to ensure all Minnesota students can access high-quality literacy instruction. We must remove unnecessary barriers to evidence-based curricula and give students the opportunity to achieve grade-level reading standards—a goal that has remained out of reach for too many for too long in this state.

Sincerely,

Rachael Bauleke
Hopkins, MN

To Chair Kresha and the members of the Education Finance Committee,

My name is Alex Maitheanas, a former college access coach. I worked with students who were English language learners, and I have several friends and connections that also work in the K-12 education system. I urge you to vote AGAINST HF 6, modifications to the READ Act.

When I was working in college access, most of my students were refugees and first-generation immigrants. Many of them were the only people who spoke English in their household. They were able to learn the language, along with literacy skills, quickly after moving here due to teachers using methods that are evidence-based. It is concerning to me that legislation has been introduced, and is proceeding to a committee, that outright dismisses the importance of facts and evidence. As a graduate of the Humphrey School, a nationally recognized top ten school of public policy and public affairs, I strongly advise you to pass policy that is focused on evidence, facts, and has a proven standard to help our communities. This bill does not do that.

It's very telling that none of the educators I have spoken to about this bill support it. Literacy rates are already currently falling around the U.S. (using national data from 2024, 21% of adults are illiterate and 54% of adults read at or below a 6th grade level) partially due to governments allowing schools to teach "reading skills" through methods that have no evidence of improving student literacy. This bill would allow using these same, unhelpful tactics to teach reading comprehension. If literacy is already decreasing across the nation and the state, why on earth would you allow teachers to use methods of teaching that don't work instead of the ones that are proven to help students succeed and gain a love of learning? We need to stick to what works.

I once again urge the committee vote AGAINST HF 6.

Sincerely,

Alex Maitheanas

Dear Members of the Senate Education Policy Committee,

As a science teacher of 24 years, member of the Minnesota Science Teachers Association, and constituent, I oppose the proposed language in HF6, specifically in Article 3, Section 2, parts a and b. I ask you to reject this bill in its entirety, and consider the reasons for this bill's introduction and purpose. It does not mandate anything that is helpful to Minnesota teachers and students, while it dismantles and defiles what is strongest in Minnesota's proud tradition of high quality education: consistency, oversight, best practices and innovation, equity and inclusion. Disregarding these laws, districts would now be able to:

- allow unlicensed individuals to teach in Minnesota schools with all reporting demands removed.
- determine all course offerings in science, CTE, computer science and steam areas without consideration of mn academic standards
- ignore graduation requirements in mathematics, science, social studies, art and physical education.
- do away with mandates to maintain inclusive, antiracist, and diverse courses, programming and student supports
- remove/refuse to allow students the opportunity to learn about the Holocaust, genocide of Indigenous Peoples and genocide in world history
- strip protections for vulnerable and underrepresented populations in school, school activities, etc.
- marginalize specific groups of students and leave them unprotected
- discontinue social/emotional learning programs and suicide prevention programs and training for teachers and students
- use physical force to restrain/subdue students
- walk back progress made on inclusion and celebration of Minnesota Native Mmericans by again allowing districts to have native american mascots, and for districts to prohibit native american student regalia to be worn at graduation, and smudging ceremonies
- censor or remove student expression, including student journalism

These changes are a calculated attack on Minnesota's tradition of high quality K12 education. These "reliefs" are nothing more than an attempt to shut the voices of Minnesota's historically underserved populations, marginalized and underrepresented groups, and people of color and different cultures. Further, it gives districts and school boards carte blanche to dismantle

protections for our most vulnerable students and educators, and removes any state oversight, leaving those harmed by these changes without any recourse or legal supports. Finally, HF6 effectively cancels decades of important and collaborative work between lawmakers, the Department of Education, PELSB and a diverse, and well rounded community of stakeholders and gives individual districts and school boards sole control over licensure, academic standards, course development and topics, and graduation requirements. In the past, Minnesota has been intentional about not endorsing any curriculum; leaving those decisions to the local district and school board because they recognize that even in Minnesota, students in different parts of the state have different local needs, but there has always been a state mandated framework to work within, for the benefit of ALL students. If HF6 passes, there would be zero oversight above the local level.

Oversight is essential to maintain consistency in best practice content and pedagogy methods used throughout the state. Oversight provides a pathway for stakeholders to collaborate and hold each other accountable. Oversight allows for diversity and inclusion to be considered and improved upon as we learn more about how to reach all students effectively. Finally, oversight provides frameworks that protect all students.

I implore you to think about the consequences of passing this sweeping bill that unravels decades of collaborative legislative work, and progress we have made in equity, inclusion, critical thinking and humility. These are the skills our students will need in the world's best workforce, and in life. Think ahead beyond the four years mandated by this bill. This passage of this bill will lead to educational, physical, and emotional harm to Minnesota students. It will not be something we can come back from. Please see this bill for what it is - a strategic attack on public education, and the underrepresented students, families and communities we serve. Please oppose HF6 in its entirety.

Sincerely,

Dana Smith



February 17, 2025

House File 6 Letter of Concern - Minnesota School Counselor Association

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Minnesota School Counselor Association's (MSCA) concerns regarding House File 6. This legislation, which would allow school districts to opt out of state mandates and transfer between any funds, poses a significant risk to critical areas such as mental health services, culturally relevant instruction, and literacy curriculum.

As school counselors, we are deeply committed to supporting the whole child—academically, socially, and emotionally. We work every day to ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to the resources they need to succeed. The ability for districts to opt out of vital state mandates directly undermines that commitment.

Minnesota's Mental Health Crisis

Minnesota is already facing a severe student mental health crisis. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, one in three high school students reports struggles with mental health, and many students lack access to adequate support. The state has taken important steps to address this issue by investing in Student Support Personnel Aid (SSP Aid), ensuring that districts can fund school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses.

School counselors play a critical role in student well-being by:

- **Providing individual and small-group counseling** to help students navigate anxiety, depression, family issues, and peer conflicts.
- **Delivering classroom lessons** focused on social-emotional learning, coping strategies, career readiness, and conflict resolution.
- **Intervening in crisis situations**, such as student attendance concerns, self-harm, bullying, or concerns about abuse and neglect.
- **Collaborating with teachers, families, and community agencies** to provide wraparound services for students in need.

If districts are allowed to opt out of SSP Aid and other mental health initiatives, many students—particularly those in rural and underserved communities—will lose access to life-changing support. Given the rising rates of youth mental health challenges, we cannot afford to roll back progress in this area.

Educational Equity and Disparities in Minnesota

Minnesota has some of the largest racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in the country. Data from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) shows that disparities in graduation



(MSCA Letter of Concern for HF 6 continued)

rates, standardized test scores, and college readiness disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and students of color (BIPOC), as well as low-income students.

Culturally relevant curriculum is a proven tool for closing these gaps, as it helps students see themselves reflected in their education, leading to higher engagement and academic success. School counselors actively support these efforts by:

- **Facilitating discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion** to foster an inclusive learning environment.
- **Advocating for equitable policies and practices** that ensure fair treatment and opportunities for all students.
- **Providing targeted support for underrepresented and marginalized students**, helping them access academic and social resources.

HF 6 would allow districts to opt out of culturally responsive instruction, sending the message that equity and inclusion are optional, rather than essential to student success. In a state where over 30% of students identify as BIPOC, ensuring culturally responsive education is not just beneficial—it is necessary for a well-rounded and effective school system.

Minnesota READ Act and Literacy Equity

Minnesota has recently invested in literacy improvement through the Minnesota READ Act (2023), which ensures that districts implement evidence-based, research-backed reading instruction aligned with the science of reading. This is especially critical given that literacy gaps disproportionately impact low-income and BIPOC students, leading to long-term academic struggles.

School counselors support literacy efforts by:

- **Identifying students struggling with reading** and connecting them with intervention services.
- **Promoting a college- and career-ready mindset**, emphasizing the importance of literacy in future success.
- **Collaborating with teachers and specialists** to implement strategies that enhance student reading engagement.

HF 6 could allow districts to opt out of these proven literacy initiatives, creating further disparities in reading proficiency and long-term educational outcomes. Without consistent, research-based literacy instruction, students in some districts will fall behind while others move forward, deepening educational inequality across Minnesota.



(MSCA Letter of Concern for HF 6 continued)

Funding and Long-Term Implications

Minnesota has prioritized state funding to address disparities in student support services, mental health, and literacy. Allowing districts to opt out of these mandates without clear accountability measures could result in:

- **Inconsistent educational experiences across the state**, where a student's access to mental health care, culturally relevant learning, or literacy instruction depends on where they live.
- **A rollback of progress on key education initiatives**, especially in underserved and rural communities where these supports are needed most.
- **Increased financial strain on families**, as parents may need to seek expensive private services when public schools fail to provide necessary supports.

At the core of our work as school counselors is advocating for equity and access for every student. HF 6 risks deepening inequities, undermining proven student supports, and reversing progress on key education initiatives in Minnesota. We cannot afford to create a fragmented system where a child's opportunities and well-being are dictated by their zip code. Allowing districts to opt out of essential programs contradicts the very foundation of our mission: ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

For these reasons, MSCA urges you to reject HF 6 and protect the essential educational supports that benefit Minnesota's students, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Calli Moreau".

Calli Moreau, MA, NCC
Board Chair
Minnesota School Counselor Association

February 18, 2025

Chair Ron Kresha
2nd Floor, Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Kresha and Members of the House Education Finance Committee:

OutFront Minnesota, founded in 1987, is the state's largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization. And we write today to oppose HF 6 as currently introduced.

OutFront Minnesota seeks to advocate for and ally itself with those seeking to push for the inclusion of underrepresented communities in our educational spaces. Minnesota's teacher licensure standards recognize the importance of culturally relevant materials for diverse communities - as a means for reflecting and representing the diverse communities in our state - and engaging our learners with shared narratives that reflect their life experiences. This connection in seeing oneself represented and included in the learning process has proven to yield better educational outcomes for *all* students. And just as importantly, it helps all learners to recognize and appreciate the rich cultural landscape of our state.

At a time when many of our state's historically marginalized communities are experiencing increases in school bullying and harassment, having culturally relevant stories provides a critical teaching tool and a reminder in our classrooms that we are all part of the fabric of this state.

We recognize the need to continuously improve Minnesota's educational systems for *all* students, families, and educators; and we support good work to dig into these big problems. We encourage you to pursue approaches that seek those solutions while upholding the value and importance of culturally inclusive materials that have research-proven benefits in promoting positive learning environments.

OutFront Minnesota respectfully urges a NO vote on HF 6 as introduced, and urges further discussion around our state's approach to curriculum that seeks to support and include *all* of Minnesota's students, families, and educators.

Sincerely,

Kat Rohn
Executive Director