



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 appreciates the provisions in House File 163 that support the development of family engagement opportunities and that strengthen parent voice in district strategic planning and goal setting. As the bill addresses, well-designed parent engagement opportunities, designed with equity in mind, can lead to inclusive and respectful learning environments for all students and a collaborative school-family culture that supports student success.

We are pleased to see the bill strengthen language that would see parents and families and other community members representing a 2/3 majority of the district advisory committee on instruction and curriculum. Parents and family members must be at the table when plans and goals are set for the year so that their voices and experiences can shape the roadmap for district priorities and budgeting. While the bill language does not require it, we hope districts will actively recruit parents and families of color and American Indian parents and families to participate on their district advisory committee, and will accommodate parent and family schedules and barriers to participation to ensure that they can be present.

We are also pleased to see the support for components of the strategic plan that would involve parents and families beyond participation on the district advisory committee. District and schools should always be identifying opportunities for all families, especially families of color or American Indian, to share their experiences in the school setting with school staff and administration to inform development of specific proposals and programs.

We also support the language in the bill that requires strategic plans to focus on strategies for “inclusive and respectful” environments, especially strategies that address policies and practices that currently result in inequitable parent involvement.

Strategic plan components for “family engagement initiatives that involve families in their students’ academic life and success and improve relations between home and school” will not be impactful without this 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 they do not feel included and respected first. 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.

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.

Minnesota PTA is committed to working with legislators and the Minnesota Department of Education to continue working to our joint goal of improving family engagement opportunities throughout Minnesota, and addressing the structural inequities that prevent parent’s from fully engaging to support their children’s success in school. Thank you for your consideration.

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