

February 9, 2022

Dear Chair Richardson and Members of the House Education Policy Committee,

As our Councils have done every year since 2017, we are here to share a united message from the three State Ethnic Councils and the Indian Affairs Council in strong support of the Increase Teachers of Color Act - H.F. 3079 as our top joint priority in education.

As state agencies, our important charge is to advise and inform State Lawmakers about our constituent communities and their needs. As you heard from the youth who testified, they are yearning for more teachers who they can relate to racially, ethnically and culturally. However, this gap between the increasing diversity of students in schools and the lack of diversity of teachers widens each year. Addressing this severe shortage is key to narrowing our state's persistent opportunity and achievement gaps, which disproportionately impact our constituent communities.

Like previous iterations of this bill, HF3079 will strengthen policy to help ensure a greater return on state investments and address systemic barriers to recruiting, preparing, and retaining teachers of color and American Indian teachers. It is a comprehensive set of policy proposals, most of which were heard in this committee last year and incorporated in your omnibus bill last session but they didn't make it into the final omnibus bill sent to the Governor. These proposals have been informed by feedback from hundreds of parents, students, educators and others from our communities over the past seven years. As in years past, we are pleased that legislators from both parties are co-sponsoring the Act in both the House and Senate, and that dozens of education organizations have expressed their endorsement despite having strong disagreements on other pieces of legislation.

The Councils, our communities and the Coalition have a sense of urgency on this issue, as our students' learning continues to be impeded by structural and systemic challenges that have only been exacerbated by the pandemic and have worsened the state's wide opportunity and achievement gaps.

Over the course of the pandemic, our families have expressed that the policy language included in this bill could have mitigated a number of the communication issues and lack of support they experienced during shifts to and from distance learning. It's important that this bill would require districts to have plans to ensure that curriculum is "rigorous, accurate, anti-racist, and culturally sustaining" and that learning and work environments "validate, embrace, affirm, and integrate the cultural and community strengths for all students, families, and employees." These strengthened plans will be critical in addressing the wide-ranging impact that COVID-19 has inflicted on student learning. Students' mental health is suffering these past two years even more than before due to the pandemic and current events. More than ever, it's important for students to have teachers who understand racial and generational trauma and who can provide the support they need to deal with their mental health and be successful in school.

Research has clearly demonstrated that ALL students benefit from diverse teachers. Research is also clear that gaps narrowed for students who are of color or American Indian who have teachers reflecting their diverse backgrounds. We must be responsive to their needs. Together, we can and must change the trajectory for these students.

Many schools across the state are struggling to stay open due to daily workforce shortages. A recent national

study about the Great Resignation found that the highest rates were among those working in education. This bill will not only address the shortage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers, but increasing teachers from our communities will address the overall teacher workforce shortage in schools.

Our Councils and communities have called for racial justice in all aspects society. If we are to expect different results in our effort to narrow our achievement gaps, we must do things differently as a state and address opportunity gaps. In this regard, H.F. 3079 represents significant, positive change that will make a difference in the lives and learning of students.

We strongly recommend that your committee fully support all of the policy language in the 2022 Increase Teachers of Color Act.

We appreciate the leadership demonstrated by Chair Richardson to prioritize hearing this bill and Representative Hassan for serving as lead author.

Thank you for your leadership in doing what is right for all students in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Shannon Geshick | Executive Director | Minnesota Indian Affairs Council

Rosa Tock | Executive Director | Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs

Sia Her | Executive Director | Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans

Linda Sloan | Executive Director | Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage