

TO: Chair Richardson and Members of the House Education Policy Committee:

RE: Support for HF217 Increase Teachers of Color Act

Good afternoon. My name is Sandra Saucedo-Falagan and I have been an educator for over 15 years. I currently serve as the Achievement and Integration Coordinator for South Washington County Schools. I write this as an educator of color and a parent of students of color. In my roles as a teacher and administrator I have experienced not only the benefits I bring to my students but also the trauma of being a teacher of color. My own children have had similar experiences, but unfortunately for my children it has been more traumatic having no or few teachers of color in their classrooms and schools. But I write to help find solutions and I believe that the Increase Teachers of Color Act is one such a solution.

Proposed in this bill are solid solutions to the inequities we find in Minnesota's schools. When we don't have a state supported plan in place, we get experiences like a teacher of color walking into a teachers' lounge and all of the people in the room, get up and walk out. That teacher also receives no invitation to collaborate with others planning the same content. When having the courage to engage in professional conversations, their ideas and perspectives are dismissed on a consistent basis. You'll get experiences of parents of color refusing to go to school events or even call a teacher because their concerns have been rebuffed or have been treated in a way that made them feel less than. You'll have students of color who feel disconnected and unmotivated because they don't see themselves in the curriculum, they don't see themselves in their adult leaders and daily examples. They don't have anyone or anything to connect with. You'll have little beautiful brown girls like my daughter come home and tell me that she wishes she had "Caucasian" hair so that she can be like her friends and teachers. You'll have that same child years later as she is on her distance learning social studies class trying to engage with the supply and demand lesson and respond to a statement made by her teacher that plantains are not in large demand because most people don't like them. When that little girl responds that people from Caribbean, Latin American, and African heritage eat plantains, her teacher responds with a dismissive comment "I understand that but I'm what I'm saying is that most Americans don't like them." My daughter who is of Afro-Cuban and Mexican descent disengaged after that. Although, you might see that as a small harmless comment. The implicit message that the teacher sent to my daughter who already doesn't feel like she belongs is that she is not American or at least not like most Americans. I am sure that the teacher had no idea what she said and the damage that it did but that is why we need an effective state supported plan to make sure that school districts are able to create a safe and equitable environment for all students. Safe and equitable environments help all students, it expands the experiences of students of all backgrounds, and allows them to form relationships and connect with all people and cultures. Being able to do that makes our students and our school systems stronger.

To address problems like those which I have described above, a very important section of the bill is Section 20 that seeks to strengthen the Achievement and Integration

statute. The proposed amendments would require that district have plans to validate, affirm, embrace and integrate cultural and community strengths in all of our students, teachers, and staff and to address institutional racism. Our school systems must knock down the barriers that have continued to underserve our students, especially our students of color. By committing to such a plan a school district can begin to professionally develop and support their teachers of color and all teachers to support student success. By committing to a plan a district can professionally develop their staff in becoming more culturally competent to not only better serve their students but also the ability to effectively collaborate with their peers of color. This plan allows for A& I funds to be used for teachers, students, and families of color to safely contribute ideas and perspectives of the school environment and allows for a larger range of engagement that can build lasting relationships. This plan also allows districts to use funds for curriculum to be assessed through a lens of equitable inclusion of all cultural experiences and perspectives.

Thank you for your full support of this bill.