



January 26, 2021

Dear Members of House and Senate Education and Higher Education Committees,

We write to express support for the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act (HF217). When signed into law, this package of bills will create the comprehensive systemic change that it's needed to address opportunity and achievement gaps for Minnesota students. The provisions in the bills will also strengthen existing programs and will create new opportunities to attract, prepare, license and retain an increased percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers (TOCAIT) in MN. Recruiting more teachers of color, strengthening teacher preparation, supporting TOCAIT to develop professionally, and retaining more diverse teachers are key to improving student outcomes.

As an immigrant and former teacher who grew up in a low-income household, I know too well how challenging it is to become a licensed teacher in Minnesota. In 2015, Educators for Excellence MN members researched and published a set of recommendations to the MN State Legislature to recruit, induct, and retain teachers of color. I was one of the co-authors of that document and it is my learning during that fellowship and my experience as a public school teacher in Minneapolis that allows me to speak with authority about this issue. The 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act addresses many of the challenges that our study found, and I am pleased to share our analysis of the Act with you as it relates to recruitment and retention of diverse teachers.

### **Recruitment**

In our state, pursuing a traditional teaching license preparation program is highly unaffordable for a couple of reasons. The existing student-teaching requirements force teacher candidates to quit their jobs and work for free at schools for months while they complete their residency requirements. A teacher candidate pursuing a license to teach English as a second language could be out of work for a full year. This is why we particularly support the Act's proposed expansion of the "Grow Your Own" program pathways to teaching for students, parents and non-licensed employees who are of color or American Indian. We also support the proposed increase in college scholarships and loan forgiveness opportunities for teachers.

### **Retention**

Licensed teachers of color need to feel welcome and supported by their peers and school leaders at work. This cannot happen without the commitment of school districts and their leaders to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is why we endorse the proposed requirement in the Act to ensure that school districts address institutional racism within their school policies, structures, and practices. Similarly, we support the request to ensure that school learning and work environments affirm, embrace, and integrate cultural and community strengths. Educators for Excellence-MN urges the legislature to commit to these changes in order to close opportunity and achievement gaps.

As a teacher, I know that goals have to be measurable so that we assess if our efforts have achieved results. The 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act calls for the establishment of an official state goal to increase the

percentage of TOCAIT annually (increase of 1% = 630 teachers) and we support this goal as a crucial step to gradually increase the number of demographically diverse teachers in Minnesota.

Ultimately, to reach all of our students, we must ensure Minnesota has a teacher workforce that is representative of its students, that is culturally competent, and also highly effective. Through action at the state and local level, improved policies can help diversify the teacher workforce and elevate the profession as a whole. Educators for Excellence-Minnesota members have long fought for federal, state, and local policies to increase teacher diversity, and we call on you to partner with us and with The Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota.

In partnership,

Paula Cole, Executive Director for Educators for Excellence- Minnesota