

February 24, 2021

Chair Chamberlain and Honorable Members of the Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee,

The Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs, Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans, and Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage have the important role as state agencies to advise and inform elected officials about our constituent communities and their needs. Students from our communities currently represent 35% of all students in schools across Minnesota. Moreover, our communities continue to endure well-documented and widely reported disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in various economic, health, and education measures.

While our state's overall population continues to grow increasingly diverse, the severe shortage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers (TOCAIT) persists. It is then with great urgency that we write today to ask that you support the 2021 Increase Teachers of Color Act (S.F. 446), which has been the top education priority that has united our four Councils since the Increase Teachers of Color Act was first introduced in 2017.

In 2016 state law, several statutes were amended to ensure that all students have "improved and equitable access to effective and diverse teachers" who reflect the diversity of students in their schools. Providing all students with equitable access to TOCAIT is something our state has yet to do in order to narrow our state's persistent opportunity and achievement gaps, which are among the worst in the country for our constituent communities. As a state, we have yet to take serious systemic action and must do things differently to truly achieve improved results in narrowing equity gaps, including addressing the persistent shortage of TOCAIT.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that you fully support the proposed strategic investments and important policies needed to ensure positive returns on the investments in S.F. 446. As a comprehensive package with the higher education bill for the Act, you have the opportunity to address systemic barriers to TOCAIT recruitment, preparation, and retention while also addressing factors that contribute to achievement gaps that deeply impact students from our communities.

While we all eagerly anticipate the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the centuries-old pandemic of racial inequities will persist. This legislation takes meaningful action to resolve this legacy and offer opportunity to all students in Minnesota.

Together, despite the challenges of an uncertain and difficult budget climate, we believe you as leaders of both parties can create a budget that reflects a serious commitment to providing all students with equitable opportunities to succeed in school and life.

Thank you for your leadership in doing what is right for the success of all students by fully supporting S.F. 446.

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