

February 16, 2021
Sen. Roger Chamberlain
Chair MN Senate Committee on Education Finance & Policy
Subject: Senate File 788
3225 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Written Testimony Submission (Governor's Bill SF788)

I, Brendan O'Hara, Teacher and Equity Coordinator at Nova Classical Academy, submit the following comments to be considered by the Senate Committee on Education Finance and Policy during the hearing on February 17th, 2021 regarding bill SF788.

Context on School

Nova Classical Academy is a small charter school in St. Paul. Back in September 2020, over three hundred school stakeholders (teachers, parents, students, alumni) took an equity survey in order to help the school determine equity related action steps moving forward. The data was clear and compelling. Over 70% of survey takers highlighted Race equity as the area of desired focus. Additionally, nearly half (49%) specifically targeted "Staff Training & Diversity" as an area of growth. Many went on to enthusiastically note the need for more teachers of color at our school. In short, we want our staff to better represent our student body.

Testimony Regarding Bill SF788

Teacher diversity is a significant area of concern in the state of MN - where too many students of color do not have access to teachers and leaders who reflect their own identities. As a state, we must continue to advocate for and advance policy that will both diversify our teaching force and ensure each student has access to a high quality, effective teacher. As written, SF788 will remove a pathway to licensure for our states effective Tier 2 teachers who would like to pursue a Tier 3 license (Section 7 Subdivision #2). This pathway provides a way for individuals who have demonstrated that they are effective educators to get permanent licenses. These teachers must first secure a Tier2 license, satisfy requirements for the initial renewal of a Tier 2 license, and complete three years of teaching that demonstrates effectiveness through satisfactory evaluations. It has been three years since our state passed our tiered licensure system. There are high-quality Tier 2 teachers who are in their third year and, if this pathway is removed, they would not be allowed to receive the Tier 3 license they have been working towards and that would allow them to stay in the classroom. Currently, 21% of individuals teaching on a Tier 2 license are teachers of color. Closing this pathway would remove a way for many of our state's teachers of color to get permanent licensure and would require many quality teachers in our state to navigate additional financial, time, and system barriers in order to secure a license. This pathway allows for quality educators who are meeting the standards of their local leaders and boards to continue teaching on a Tier 3 license without needing to overcome additional barriers that may be present in the teacher preparation program space. Additionally, this proposed change would only further exacerbate challenges that districts and schools are experiencing with attracting and retaining qualified teachers ([PELSB MN Teacher Supply and Demand Report 2021](#)) at a time when we need qualified teachers to address COVID-19 related impact on student learning and academic achievement. We strongly urge the committee to remove the updated language found in Section 7, Subdivision #2 and keep our tiered licensure system intact, as originally written.

Sincerely,

Brendan O'Hara *Brendan O'Hara*

Equity Coordinator--Nova Classical Academy