



February 23, 2021

Sen. Roger Chamberlain
Chair MN Senate Committee on Education Finance & Policy
3225 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Subject: Senate File 446

Dear Chair Chamberlain and Members of the Committee,

Education Evolving has a vision of student-centered learning for all students, which we characterize as learning design based on each individual's needs. There is an abundance of research showing that students achieve more when they have representation in the classroom,¹ and given the ever-increasing rich diversity of our state, we need more teachers of color and American Indian teachers (henceforth TOCAIT) to advance student-centered learning in Minnesota. We express here our support for SF446 and detail the reasons why it makes a step towards a quality education for all students, but particularly for students of color and American Indian students who have faced historical and contemporary deprivation of cultural resources and representation at school.

Before we even address the benefits of teachers of color and American Indian teachers for our children, we must ask ourselves how we got here as a state and why racial disparities in the teaching profession have persisted for decades, particularly since *Brown v. Board*,² and why white Minnesotans have largely accepted the status quo of a majority-white teacher workforce. This reflection exposes the white supremacy embedded in our state's education system and provides the strongest evidence why the time for change is now.

¹ Cherng and Halpin. (2016). "The Importance of Minority Teachers: Student Perceptions of Minority Versus White Teachers"; Egalitea, Kisidab, and Wintersc. (2015). "Representation in the classroom: The effect of own-race teachers on student achievement"; "Study: Black Teachers Bolster Black Student Achievement" reported by Jamaal Abdul-Alim in *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* (April 6, 2017); Gershenson, Holt and Papageorge. (2015). "Who Believes in Me? The Effect of Student-Teacher Demographic Match on Teacher Expectations"

² Bell. (2004). *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the unfulfilled hopes for racial reform*. Oxford University Press.

The benefits of TOCAIT teaching our children are indeed abundant and well-researched. Teachers of color have been proven to contribute to positive academic and non-academic outcomes for students of color, such as increased access to gifted programs, increased graduation rates, and reduced absenteeism.³ While white teachers often possess implicit bias and low expectations of their students of color, leading to reduced academic outcomes,⁴ teachers of color promote higher expectations for students of color and mitigate implicit bias in their students.⁵ A Johns Hopkins University study similarly found that Black students are significantly more likely to graduate if they have just one Black teacher in elementary school.⁶

Minnesota has made great strides in recent years to diversify our teacher workforce. SF446, if passed, would continue this progress by reducing barriers to licensure that disproportionately affect TOCAIT. One example is the proposed expansion of Grow Your Own Pathways to teacher licensure (Sect. 16), including residency programs which have proven successful in diversifying the teaching workforce. (In 2015-16, 45% of teacher residents nationally were people of color.⁷)

The bill not only addresses the barriers to TOCAIT entering the profession, but seeks to retain TOCAIT who have entered the workforce by requiring schools to implement plans to dispel institutional racism that harms students, families, and teachers of color; prohibiting discriminatory curriculum policy; fostering culturally-responsive leadership practices in schools; and protecting the culturally-affirming practices of students, families, and teachers of color at schools. Fostering antiracist school environments is important not only to retain teachers of color for what they give to our children, but to support their wellness as human beings. We are missing the bar if we recruit teachers of color into a system that devalues and harms them as people and professionals.

³ Stohr et al. (2018). "Patching the Leaky Pipeline: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color in Pennsylvania."

⁴ Will. (2017). "Teachers' Low Expectations for Students of Color Found to Affect Students' Success." <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/teachers-low-expectations-for-students-of-color-found-to-affect-students-success/2017/05>

⁵ Stohr et al. (2018). "Patching the Leaky Pipeline: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color in Pennsylvania."

⁶ Rosen. (2017). "With Just One Black Teacher, Black Students More Likely to Graduate." <https://releases.jhu.edu/2017/04/05/with-just-one-black-teacher-black-students-more-likely-to-graduate/>

⁷ Stohr et al. (2018). "Patching the Leaky Pipeline: Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color in Pennsylvania."

We support SF446 because culturally-affirming teachers are key to equitable learning communities and student-centered learning. The time is now to make these changes as COVID-19 has caused extreme and disproportionate devastation in communities of color and Indigenous communities, and BIPOC children need the support of BIPOC teachers to heal and process this severe disruption in their lives. We have no time to lose as these plans and strategies require time, care, and trust-building from all sectors with a responsibility to help create an equitable pathway to the profession.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carly Benusa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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