



February 16, 2021

Chair Chamberlain
95 University Ave W
St. Paul, MN 55103

Re: Governor's Policy Bill (SF788)

Dear Chair Chamberlain and members of the committee,

Senate File 788 contains a number of provisions that would help to build a more equitable education system in Minnesota. We are particularly appreciative of the Governor playing a leadership role on improving the discipline process to strengthen school climate and student behavior through a long-term lens. The bill also contains a few provisions that would take us in the wrong direction—most notably, removing a permanent licensure pathway for teachers who are demonstrating success in the classroom. We urge the committee not to advance this provision, and to explore provisions related to charter schools and lunch shaming more closely, as described below.

A STEP BACKWARDS ON TEACHER LICENSURE

Our current tiered licensure system acknowledges the many factors that can make an educator effective: their teaching experience, their content knowledge, their training and professional development, and, most importantly, their impact on students. We know that great teachers come from many different backgrounds. The role of our licensure system is to provide a floor that acknowledges this, without creating arbitrary licensure barriers that cause students to miss out on great teachers.

Senate File 788 would take us in the wrong direction by removing a pathway to permanent licensure for Tier 2 teachers who have taught for at least three years and have a track record of effective teaching (Lines 45.8-45.11). This change would:

- Push high-quality teachers out of the classroom who have demonstrated a positive impact on students,
- Exacerbate growing teacher shortages,¹ and
- Interrupt pathways to diversifying the teacher workforce.²

The new tiered licensure system is working. At least 21% of teachers who hold a Tier 1 or Tier 2 license are teachers of color, while the overall workforce is stagnant at 5%.³ Eliminating the pathway would push dedicated and high-quality teachers out of the profession. Furthermore, as this is the third year of the tiered licensure system, there are Tier 2 teachers who will be eligible to receive their permanent, Tier 3 license at the end of this year. Kids need great teachers now more than ever, and we should not pull the rug out from under those who are making an impact.

LEADERSHIP ON SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Senate File 788 contains a number of provisions that would change Minnesota's approach to school discipline by improving school climate, strengthening parental involvement, and ensuring student due process. These are important first steps to addressing Minnesota's disproportionate rates of suspensions for students of color and students with disabilities.⁴ These provisions are the result of years

¹ Golden, E. (February 2021). "Teacher shortage hits schools in rural, urban districts across Minnesota." Star Tribune.

² Professional Educators Licensing and Standards Board. (2021). "2021 Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report." https://mn.gov/pelsb/assets/Supply%20and%20Demand%202021_Final_tcm1113-463801.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kaput, K. (July 2019). "For Students of Color With Special Needs, Action on School Discipline is Urgent." EdAllies.

of debate and compromise in legislative committees, community meetings, and beyond. We believe the discipline provisions in the bill represent strong, bi-partisan approaches that can advance meaningful progress on the issue, and we urge the committee to advance them.

LUNCH SHAMING

All students deserve to have a school meal without punishment or shame. Unfortunately, lunch shaming still happens too often in Minnesota schools. We appreciate the Governor raising this issue, but urge the committee to amend the language to mirror the language in Senate File 777, Sen. Housley and Sen. Chamberlain's bill, which has bipartisan support in the House and the Senate, as well as from a broad coalition of organizations, including EdAllies. We prefer the language in Senate File 777 because it contains specific language about what lunch shaming is, which provides clarity to districts on what behaviors they cannot do to students. This bill would also forbid other types of lunch shaming like bans on participating in graduation ceremonies, extra curricular activities and field trips.

EXTRA HURDLES FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

All parents want what is best for their kids and should have the power to choose the right school for their children from a range of high-quality options. However, there are a few provisions in this bill that would create programmatic barriers for charter schools by:

- Codifying that an affiliated building corporation—entities that lease schools because charter schools cannot own their school building outright—can only own one building. This provision creates extra work for a small number of schools with no clear benefit to the state.
- Allowing the Commissioner of Education to terminate charter authorizers—the extra layer of oversight required to ensure quality in the sector—without providing clear parameters for decision-making. Authorizer quality is an important issue, and we hope the committee will explore other avenues to address it that create a clear, objective process.

The bill would also require new or expanding charter schools to complete a market need and demand study. While we support the idea of such a study, we recommend the committee do further exploration to strengthen the proposed language and avoid unintended consequences. The current proposal has not been fully vetted by impacted stakeholders, and could create both red tape and subjectivity. We encourage further study.

The bill contains many other provisions that we support, including addressing teacher diversity, expanding ethnic studies, and more, and we appreciate Governor's Walz efforts to advance education equity through this proposal. We hope to see much of the bill advanced through the Senate education omnibus bill, but encourage further exploration of some of the issues outlined above.

Sincerely,



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