



March 1, 2023

Governor Tim Walz

Senator Steve Cwodzinski, Chair, Senate Education Policy Committee

Senator Mary Kunesh, Chair, Senate Education Finance Committee

Representative Laurie Pryor, Chair, House Education Policy Committee

Representative Cheryl Youakim, Chair, House Education Finance Committee

cc: Members of the House and Senate Education Policy and Education Finance Committees

Dear Governor Walz, Senator Cwodzinski, Senator Kunesh, Representative Pryor, and Representative Youakim:

We are writing today as a diverse group of organizations—including community groups, associations, service providers, and advocates—to express our concerns with the proposed changes to teacher licensure that would close pathways to teaching for countless educators, disproportionately impacting teachers of color.

Since tiered licensure was fully implemented three years ago, we have seen evidence that it is working. The process is more streamlined and straightforward for both school leaders and educators—and we are already seeing positive signs when it comes to increasing teacher diversity. In fact, 25% of all teachers who hold Tier 2 licenses are teachers of color. We must focus on supporting these teachers to advance in the profession, not revisit, once again, proposals that would eliminate pathways to teaching for experienced, effective, and diverse educators.

Eliminating pathways to Tier 2 licensure (found in HF1224/SF1477) and preventing Tier 2 teachers who have demonstrated success from becoming permanent Tier 3 teachers (found in the Governor's education policy bill as well as House and Senate proposals) would place further

restrictions on emerging teachers, creating unnecessary hurdles between great teachers and Minnesota classrooms and failing to acknowledge the many skills, experiences, and pathways that can make a teacher great. It would push high-quality teachers out of the profession at a time when many Minnesota schools and districts are struggling to staff their classrooms, and would have an especially devastating impact on career and technical education teachers, special education teachers, and teachers of color.

In the past year—the first year we looked to teacher experience as part of our licensure requirements—99 teachers were able to advance from Tier 2 to Tier 3 licensure based on demonstrated success in the classroom, giving them and their students the certainty they need. A critical element of tiered licensure policy, sparked by an in-depth report from the Office of the Legislative Auditor, was to allow teachers to advance based on evidence of experience and effectiveness. Eliminating this provision would be a step back.

In addition, House and Senate proposals would strike several pathways to a Tier 2 license designed to acknowledge the many skills and experiences that can help prepare an educator for the classroom. These coursework pathways are currently utilized by nearly 800 active educators, with unique circumstances but desirable qualifications. We should not force high-quality teachers to go back to teacher preparation or spend time and resources to obtain a Master's degree—privileges that not every educator has the luxury of being able to afford and that will have little impact on their effectiveness as educators.

We are specifically concerned that the bill will:

- Undermine efforts to increase teacher diversity. As of this year, 18% of Black teachers, 15% of Latino teachers, and 10% of Asian teachers currently hold a Tier 2 license, as compared to just 2% of white teachers. As such, any steps backward on Tier 2 licensure will inherently have a disproportionate impact on teachers of color. Teachers of color need supports to stay and improve as teachers, not new laws that make it harder to stay in the classroom.
- Strip school leaders of flexibility to hire the best educators. Under proposed changes, a candidate could teach for eight years on Tier 2 and secure multiple successful evaluations, but would be forced to leave the profession on year nine—no longer having a straightforward pathway to stay in the classroom. This is especially concerning in a time of growing teacher shortages.
- Increase shortages for the state's career and technical education programs, among other targeted licensure areas. Currently 49% of CTE teachers hold Tier 1 or 2 license or an out-of-field permission. Restricting Tier 1 and Tier 2 licensure would reduce career and technical education offerings—courses that improve high school graduation rates for all students, especially Native American students.

The proposals on the table undermine effective educators and harm the schools and students who need them—when all the evidence points toward them being an asset we should be working to support and celebrate. We urge our elected leaders to think carefully about the impacts of these proposals.

To avoid taking licenses away from current educators, policymakers proposed an amendment that would allow current teachers to keep their licenses and continue on the pathways promised to them, but still eliminate pathways for any future teachers seeking to enter the profession, or move up from Tier 1, beginning July 1, 2023. These restrictions would block countless future educators from the profession and move us back toward a one-size-fits-all system, where those who face barriers are forced into short-term Tier 1 licenses perpetually—still supporting students daily, but without a clear career path. Efforts to keep current teachers in the classroom are a good start but not a long-term solution to improving teacher diversity and ensuring straightforward licensure pathways.

Minnesota's previous, broken teacher licensure system deterred and pushed out experienced, effective educators. Our new tiered licensure system, signed into law by Gov. Dayton, was the result of bipartisan compromise and finally did away with arbitrary barriers, instead providing effective teachers with clear pathways to enter and stay in the classroom. It respects school leaders and seasoned educators as professionals, and considers the variety of skills, experiences, and expertise that can make a teacher great. Most importantly, it values what matters most: a teacher's impact in the classroom.

At a time of severe teacher shortages, and with an ongoing need for diverse educators, we urge you not to entertain these counterproductive proposals. Please continue to focus on improving the diversity of our educator workforce by investing in our current and future teacher of color workforce and protect the Tier 1 and Tier 2 licensure pathways that are working to increase teacher diversity. We would welcome further conversations about what we are seeing and hearing on the ground, as well as alternatives that allow Minnesota schools to develop, recruit, and retain the quality teachers our students deserve.

Sincerely,

Advancing Equity Coalition
African American Leadership Forum
Black Men Teach - Twin Cities
Bridgemakers
Children's Defense Fund Minnesota
Coalition of Asian American Leaders (CAAL)
EdAllies
Education Evolving
Educators for Excellence-Minnesota
Great Minnesota Schools
Integrated Schools Minneapolis
LatinoLEAD
Minnesota Business Partnership
National Parents Union
Northside Achievement Zone
UnitedWomen.org MN
Urban League Twin Cities
Voices for Racial Justice