

February 12, 2023

Honorable Members of the Senate Education Policy Committee,

I'm writing as the Executive Director and District Superintendent of Minnesota Online High School (MNOHS), and as a person who has worked exclusively in alternative high school settings since first becoming licensed as a Minnesota secondary science teacher in 1984. Based on this experience, I am requesting your support of S.F. 620 (Sen. Kunesh), which would establish a pilot program to improve educational accountability and therefore educational outcomes, especially for students of color.

The current lack of meaningful and valid measures for evaluating student achievement and for holding schools accountable is a well-known and deeply troubling problem for educators and education policy makers. The compliance-based frameworks against which schools are currently measured have not only failed to close achievement gaps for students of color—they have in many cases widened the gaps by inappropriately labeling as failures, explicitly and implicitly, communities, institutions, families, and individuals.

The equity-focused framework of measures proposed in S.F. 620 is supported by research, aligned with the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s recommendations around accountability, and developed with input from a diverse group of stakeholders. Most important of all, it is grounded in a strengths-based view of the students and communities we work with.

The equity-focused framework of measures proposed in S.F. 620 gives me hope as an educator and as a school leader. For years, MNOHS and other schools that serve students who have been underserved for various reasons have had to answer “not applicable” to a whole host of compliance reporting questions—not because we want to be let off the hook but because the questions do not apply to our settings. For years, I and other school leaders have been actively asking our legislators, our state education department, our charter school authorizers, and our accreditation agencies to help us find and implement better measures.

S.F. 620 is a step in the right direction because it proposes to hold participating schools accountable by measuring the things that matter. Research and experience tell us that the actions outlined in the bill are more likely to reduce educational disparities than anything we have seen or tried to date. For this reason, I urge you to support S.F. 620.

Thank you for your time and attention,



Elissa Raffa, Executive Director and District Superintendent
File folder # 295044