

February 14, 2023

Members of the Senate Education Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SF619. The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) oversees the state standards required to be a licensed teacher in Minnesota and is responsible for preparing the biennial Teacher Supply and Demand report.

One of PELSB's primary goals is to grow, support, and diversify Minnesota's educator workforce. For the past several years, the Board has voted to formally support the proposals included in the Increase Teachers of Color Act. It is well known that there is a large disparity between the racial makeup of Minnesota's students and teachers. Research has shown that having more teachers of color and Indigenous teachers is extremely beneficial for all students, but especially students of color and Indigenous students. As the number of students of color continues to increase in the state, it is essential that we work together to foster a similar increase in teachers of color. While this goal is a challenging one, SF619 includes several key policy changes that would bring us closer to achieving it.

State Goals and Reporting

The first policy change we would like to highlight is the establishment of a state goal around teacher diversity. State leaders, students, teachers, parents, and community members continually express the need to increase teachers of color and Indigenous teachers in Minnesota. While we are all working to meet this need, establishing a state goal would strengthen this work by making it measurable and transparent. Additionally, the collaborative work between PELSB, the Department of Education, and the Office of Higher Education will ensure state efforts to increase teachers of color are coordinated and complementary, therefore increasing their impact. Additionally, by collaborating, our agencies will have a better sense of state policy and funding impacts, which will improve future policy recommendations.

Licensure Exams

Another provision that would have a dramatic impact on increasing teachers of color is the removal of testing requirements for those who have completed teacher preparation in Minnesota. Currently, about one third of teachers who hold a Tier 2 license have completed teacher preparation. About 30% of these teachers are people of color. The only barrier to them obtaining a Tier 3 license is passing licensure exams. Research on licensure exams show no correlation to preparedness or effectiveness as a teacher. Furthermore, individuals who have completed teacher preparation in Minnesota have already demonstrated meeting the standards of the profession, as well as their capacity for success in the classroom. As such, PELSB agrees that removing this barrier to licensure is a key component of diversifying the teacher workforce while also ensuring all students have access to well-prepared educators.

The Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color Grant

In addition to the proposal to remove testing barriers for teachers of color and Indigenous teachers, PELS B is also supportive of proposed changes to strengthen the impact of the Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educator of Color Grant program. In 2021, the Office of the Legislative Auditor released a report on this grant and found that while minor changes in administration could help, the CUGMEC grant would drastically improve with legislative changes that clarify the purpose of the grant and its place among state priorities. PELS B has implemented the small administrative changes and sees the items in SF619 as a necessary step to complete this work so teacher candidates of color and Indigenous teacher candidates can be better supported across the state. Having spent time visiting each of the institutions that have used these funds, we can say wholeheartedly that teacher preparation providers are working diligently by devoting staff and financial resources to support candidates of color. Yet, we consistently hear that this work is underfunded. As the CUGMEC grant has shifted to a competitive grant, the number of people doing the work has increased. Unfortunately, the amount the state dedicates to it has remained the same. We are confident that given an increase in funding, teacher preparation providers would be able to amplify their work in clear, measurable ways.

Teacher Mentorship and Retention of Effective Teachers Grant

The final item I would like to highlight is PELS B's support of the proposed changes to the Teacher Mentorship Grant. PELS B worked with the Coalition to provide technical support on this section to clarify the purpose and allowable uses of state funds under this grant program. The clarification on fundable items will help focus grant administration on efforts related to teacher mentorship, particularly for teachers of color, as well as closing the opportunity gap for students of color. Additionally, extending the grant period and reporting dates will allow teachers and districts to create sustainable programs that will work toward long term retention goals.

In closing, we would like to reiterate the Board's full support for SF619 and encourage committee members to vote in support of it as well.

Sincerely,

Yelena Bailey, Ph.D.

PELS B, Interim Executive Director

Angela Osuji, Ph.D.

PELS B, Chair