

MACTE Weekly Legislative Report, 3.24.16
Prepared by Cyndy Crist, MACTE Legislative and Policy Liaison

Teacher Shortage and Diversity Bills Advance. Tuesday was a busy day for us at the legislature, with both the House and Senate hearing bills addressing such critical issues as teacher shortages and preparing more diverse teachers. The House Education Policy Innovation Committee heard HF 2944, a bill designed to address issues raised by the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota. A number of individuals from MACTE institutions were among those testifying in support of the bill, which would bring attention to improving “students’ equitable access to effective and more diverse teachers” in an array of education measures and school district provisions/requirements and create a task force, convened by the Office of Higher Education, to study and make recommendations in the five areas of focus identified by the Coalition.

At the same time, the Senate Education Committee heard SF 2610, the companion bill to HF 2944, as well as several bills focused primarily on addressing teacher shortage issues. MACTE testified in support of these bills, which include SF 2513, The Teacher Shortage Act (Dahle), SF 2908 (Jensen), SF 2516, providing grant funding for a Grow Your Own teacher residency pilot program (Hayden), SF 2553, providing grants to recruit underrepresented teachers in the Saint Paul Public Schools (Pappas), SF 2981, allowing a tax credit for teacher licensure and professional development; and SF 3003, expanding CUE funding and eligible recipients (Bonoff). A number of our MACTE peers also testified in support of SF 2610. Because they all include strategies to address the teacher shortage, it is likely that some, but not all, provisions of each of these bills will be included in the final omnibus bill.

Our primary concern with these bills involves one provision of SF 3003, which would require that at least half of the proposed \$5 million for 2017 be awarded to alternative and non-conventional programs, when few of those non-conventional programs have any focus on diversity. We are working with senators and staff to make sure they understand non-conventional programs and to revise bill language to make all of the funding available to institutions based on the quality and applicability of grant proposals. Since all of the non-conventional programs are offered by MACTE institutions, we hope to make it clear to legislators that our concern about this provision has nothing to do with the quality of these programs but rather with a focus on the purpose of CUE funding (diversity and urban education) and ensuring a level playing field to potential grant applicants.

Next Week at the Legislature. *In the Senate*, next week will focus on unveiling, taking testimony on, and passing an omnibus policy bill on Wednesday and Thursday mornings. Because many of the bills of interest to us include funding, it is not clear at this time which bills/provisions will be included in the policy bill and which will be set aside for inclusion in a funding bill (at this time, we are hearing that separate policy and finance bills are expected in the Senate). *In the House*, among a long list of bills to be heard are two teacher shortage bills – HF 2805, the Grow Your Own bill (Fenton), and HF 3132, the Teacher Shortage Act bill (Erickson). The committee will convene at 8:15 and, if needed to complete the agenda, reconvene at 5:00 or 20 minutes after the House floor session adjourns if applicable. Please feel free to join me at any of these hearings as your schedules permit.