*﻿****How HF 2551 (Advanced Thinking Skills for All Students) Aligns to Expectation of Ongoing Professional Development in Cultural Competency and Reading Preparation***

**HF 2551/SF 2904/SF 3498/SF 3831 provides monies for professional development of all teachers K-12 in teaching Inquiry Learning, Problem Based Learning, Creative and Critical Thinking , and Collaborative skills for all students**. In honing their instruction of these skills, teachers can exercise competencies within the broader, state-directed professional development areas of cultural competencies and reading comprehension. The present legislation focuses on teacher instruction in skills needed in today’s and tomorrow’s world. Thus, it is in our collective, enlightened self-interest to support such legislation, with its emphases on equity, equality and economics.

**From an economic standpoint, these skills, once mastered by our teachers and students, would enhance student productivity in changing workplaces and would thus fuel tax revenue.** That added revenue would facilitate state government’s role in funding health care, education, infrastructure, social services, and other government responsibilities. **But most importantly, with our support of these skills for teachers and students would be providing to all students, including the most vulnerable, the skills necessary to lift them out of poverty.**

**Cultural Competency**

**This legislation requires all teachers to be taught how to teach skills of critical, creative, collaborative, inquiry, and problem-based learning. These skills, when taught with fidelity, would result in the narrowing of the achievement gap — a gap which currently is more dramatic among some cultural groups than others.**

**In facilitating inquiry experiences with students, facilitators would tap students’ cultural and other strengths in initial inquiry experiences.** Well-prepared teachers, in the professional development they receive, would more clearly understand the importance of tapping students’ strengths. Tapping those strengths creates student motivation to learn and triggers student engagement. Employing a resource for the inventory of students’ strengths, the teacher begins to understand a student through a different lens. Instead of looking for deficits, a teacher/facilitator learns more about an individual student, the pupil’s strengths, and the student’s motivation to dig deeply into an area of inquiry. This strengths-based understanding enables the teacher/facilitator to continue to tap into the student’s cultural lens, to connect with the student with resources and strategies that can lead to success.

**Reading Comprehension**

**Some evidence suggests reading comprehension and other literacy skills are enhanced through inquiry learning.** If an educator’s lesson plan includes learning targets for reading comprehension, as well as other skills, research indicates that many students can reach deep comprehension of texts as they strive to answer the big questions (Biancarosa &Snow 2006; Brozo & Simpson 2007). Today’s state standards emphasize topical informational texts and literary nonfiction, such as essays, speeches, biographies, and autobiographies, as well as fictional texts. All could become sources for an inquiry, in their search for expert voices to support that inquiry. Standards also require students to read in all content areas, to engage increasingly complex texts beyond their proficient reading levels, and to cite evidence from texts to support inquiry interpretations.

**Inquiry allows teacher-facilitators to provide open-ended experiences and investigations that enable students to enter at their own reading readiness levels.** Inquiry entails flexible language-based approaches that range from creation of classroom Wonder Centres, to problem-based projects, to action research, to ethnography. There are many inquiry models from which districts and teachers can choose. The teacher’s role in inquiry models is different from more traditional models, in planning, guiding, and supporting learning as needed

**In a small study examining impacts of inquiry learning on reading comprehension, results showed that there were statistically significant differences at α ≤ 0.05 in the total post-test mean scores in reading comprehension tests between students who learned through using inquiry learning strategy (experimental group) and youth who learned through the traditional method (control group).** Also, results showed statistically significant differences at α ≤ 0.05 in total mean post-test scores of self-regulation between the students who learn through using inquiry learning strategy (experimental group) and youth who learn through the traditional method (control group).

**In another study, researchers examined the effects of six-year integrated information literacy instruction on elementary students.** Researchers measured subjects’ comprehension of content through inquiry learning, taking into account students' existing academic achievement levels. 75 students participated in the study from the time when they entered elementary school. The school adopted information literacy instruction and integrated it into various subject areas using inquiry learning. Overall,11 inquiry learning projects were implemented from Grade 1 through Grade 6. **Results showed that inquiry-based integrated-information literacy instruction helps students memorize facts and apply new concepts within subject content.** In general, progress in comprehension was higher than in memory learning for the six-year integrated information literacy instruction. Regardless of students' prior academic achievement levels, if they devoted their efforts to inquiry processes, their fact memorization and conceptual understanding of subject content improved. **Low-achieving students displayed the most progress, both in memory and comprehension learning, compared to their medium- and high-achieving peers.** This study underscores the importance of informational and literacy instruction in students' learning.

***How HF 2551 Encourages Teachers to Seek out Professional Learning Explicitly on Working with Student Strengths***

**Just as with professional learning in cultural competency and reading comprehension, there exist several ways under HF 2551 in which teachers can attain knowledge about either strengths-based learning or gifted education.** Their districts can invest, with the monies from HF 2551, in in-service training that can happen during teacher workshop days. This training can be supplied by various of the more than 500 graduates of the Hamline or other recent teacher certificate programs. Further, group of individual training can be supplied through commercial programs, such as the University of Iowa’s field-tested education modules on creative and critical thinking. Finally, teachers can partake in existing courses in the state, in the University of Minnesota’s and Hamline’s teacher education programs in creative and critical thinking skills.

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