

EPIC report provides smart solutions to Minnesota's teacher shortage

Minnesota has a teacher shortage, particularly in specific fields and in specific geographic parts of the state. There is also a severe shortage of teachers of color.

It is past time for policymakers to take the necessary steps to attract and retain more qualified teachers for the classrooms of Minnesota students.

The Minnesota Department of Education's Teacher Supply and Demand report shows that during the 2013-14 school year, there were 58,211 teachers employed in Minnesota's public schools, including those run through school districts and charter schools.

But because of the shortage of teachers, districts and charter schools hired 3,504 teachers who "lacked the necessary licenses for the subjects and the grade levels taught," according to the report.

Districts report difficulty hiring special education teachers and educators with specialties in math and science. Increasingly, public schools are reporting that certain positions will simply not be filled, which leads to administrators seeking variances and hiring unqualified people to teach.

In addition to a shortage of teachers in specialty and geographic areas, the gap between the number of teachers of color and the number of students of color is both severe and highly detrimental. In 2014, 29 percent of Minnesota's schoolchildren were Native American, Asian or Pacific Islander, African American, or Hispanic. In contrast, roughly 3 percent of Minnesota's teachers were people of color, according to the Teacher Supply and Demand report of 2015.

EDUCATION MINNESOTA RECOMMENDS SEVERAL POLICY CHANGES TO ADDRESS MINNESOTA'S TEACHER SHORTAGE.

To recruit a diverse and talented teaching force, Minnesota should:

- Create programs to promote the teaching profession to high school students, with an emphasis on reaching students of color.
- Design and foster grow-your-own programs aimed at candidates of color who already work in education.
- Provide resources so school districts and teacher training institutes can create new programs to recruit a racially diverse workforce of future educators.
- Provide additional financial support to attract highly qualified teachers, including higher starting salaries and effective loan forgiveness programs. Additional incentives should be considered, including housing assistance for recruiting teachers in rural schools and high-needs schools.

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MINNESOTA SCHOOL DISTRICT STARTING SALARIES



Minnesota must also retain high-quality educators, who are now leaving the profession before retirement age at alarming rates. To do this, Education Minnesota recommends:

- Increase support for teacher autonomy so teachers are empowered to meet the changing needs of their students.
- Provide additional financial benefits to all current educators with additional incentives for educators of color.
- Invest in quality professional development for all educators. Provide additional resources to allow educators of color to seek professional development for their unique needs.
- Decrease the paperwork and unnecessary stress on educators who work with students with special needs.
- Give more attention to the mental health and well-being of all educators. Minnesota must give particular support for the well-being of educators working in high-needs schools.

High-quality teachers are the backbone of a school community. If Minnesota is serious about improving educational outcomes, then policymakers must be equally resolute about recruiting and retaining talented individuals to the teaching profession.