



# 2021 Legislative Agenda

**Fully funding public education. Improving the living and working conditions for education support professionals. Raising teacher licensing standards. Protecting workplace freedoms.**

**The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the idea that public schools are the bedrock of our communities. It has also put a light on the glaring inequities our students and working families face every day in Minnesota, particularly people of color and low-income families.**

**Educators are the experts on what happens in classrooms, lunchrooms, busses, hallways and college campuses across Minnesota. Together, with our students, families and neighbors, educators will fight for the funding and policies our schools and communities need to deliver the education our students deserve, from early childhood through college.**

# Fully funding safe and equitable public schools

If we're serious about making sure every student can pursue their dreams regardless of what they look like or where they're from, our state needs to get serious about funding what works.

Minnesota's share of funding for public school districts hasn't kept pace with inflation—it's now 11.8 percent less than 2003 in real dollars.

It's time for Minnesota to fully fund public education to give students and educators the safe and racially just schools they deserve. That means the richest 1 percent need to pay their fair share and the state needs to invest billions of dollars into strategies proven to help our students succeed.

## Education Minnesota is fighting for:

- Reversing Minnesota's perpetual underfunding of education by significantly increasing the per-pupil funding formula and tying it annually to inflation.
- Creating a new racial equity funding stream and increasing American Indian aid so schools can better serve students of color and Indigenous students.
- Full funding of special education costs at the state and federal levels instead of relying on school districts to pay for them.
- Ensuring all education support professionals earn a living wage of at least \$20 an hour.
- Attracting and retaining teachers of color by increasing starting salaries and creating loan forgiveness, mentoring and other programs and protections to support educators on the job.
- Universal access to child care and early learning.
- Expanding access to full-service community schools.
- Lowering class sizes so teachers can give students more of the individual attention they need.
- Providing additional resources for school districts to hire more student support staff, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other job classifications.
- Expanding mental health services and trauma-informed practices for students to ensure all schools are safe and welcoming places for students and educators to learn and work to end the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Helping educators get quality, affordable health care through innovative, cost-sharing initiatives and allowing any Minnesotan to take advantage of any affordable public option.
- Lifting the cap on Q-Comp, so every educator has access to equitable and sustainable funding for professional development.
- Making post-secondary education affordable and accessible so all students can pursue higher education free from the stress of unmanageable loans and debts. This includes expanding Minnesota's existing teacher loan forgiveness program and creating a student loan advocate within state government to act as an advocate for consumers against abuses by loan servicers and lenders.
- Investing in infrastructure and deferred maintenance in K-12 schools and college campuses so that all students – no matter where they live – are in high-quality learning environments and have access to a wide range of resources and a well-rounded education.
- Provide up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for all workers through a payroll deduction and employer tax.
- Proposals that help keep students and educators safe and that support teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the different learning models it brings with it. This includes expanding broadband access and mental health services and helping educators, especially in special education, with increasing workloads.

## Education Support Professionals Bill of Rights

Everyone who works in public education deserves the same things. Respect for their contribution to the care and education of our students. Fair compensation for their work, including affordable health care. Safe working conditions. Unfortunately, most education support professionals across Minnesota don't get enough of any of those. These critical educators are disproportionately women and people of color, performing multiple jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic and most at risk of exposure to the virus.

All education support professionals, or ESPs, deserve the pay and benefits to sustain a family, safe work environments and a voice in their working conditions.

### Pay and benefits to sustain families

- Require school districts and charter schools to pay their ESPs at least \$20 an hour.
- Help all educators and their families get high-quality, affordable health care.
- Ensure our hourly school workers, who perform critical jobs and are woefully underpaid, are eligible for unemployment insurance.
- Provide up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for all workers through a payroll deduction and employer tax.
- Defend the law that protects workers from wage theft and crack down on employers who circumvent wage and benefit standards and laws, don't pay overtime, etc.

### Safe work environments

- Require paraprofessionals who directly work with students to receive 16 hours of annual paid training.

### Voice and respect on the job

- Establish reporting and transparency requirements to identify issues of concern for ESPs on the worksite. This could include staffing levels, pay scale, safety, fair scheduling, etc.
- Ensure ESPs have a voice in their local school district's policies and decisions by requiring representation on district committees.

### Licensing

Minnesota's shortage of practicing and prospective teachers is real – and it will only get worse if the Legislature fails to respond with policies that attract and retain more educators, particularly teachers of color.

In 2017, the Legislature used this very real teacher shortage it created as a pretext to ram through an overhaul of the teacher licensure system that corporate-backed groups had wanted for years.

Let's improve the Tiered Licensure Law so it can both honor teacher preparation and recognize different pathways into teaching, while allowing districts to use the system as a vehicle to elevate teachers, support them through their career and keep them in the classroom.

Our proposal:

- Permit Tier 1 teachers to join the teacher bargaining unit so that they may negotiate together for the time and resources to get the training they want and need at the local level.
- Recruit and retain more teachers of color, which includes getting rid of the racially biased Minnesota Teacher Licensing Examinations, or MTLE, an unnecessary barrier for some aspiring educators who have already completed their college coursework.
- Close the loophole that allows a candidate to attain a Tier 3 license without any type of teacher preparation.
- Ensure Tier 1 licenses are appropriately granted.



## Worker freedoms

Educators care about more than their compensation.

They want more control over the learning environments in their worksites and the future of their profession. They want workplace protections so they can advocate for students, their livelihood and racially just schools. It's time for state law to reflect these values.

Education Minnesota is pushing for:

- Expanding the list of mandatory subjects of bargaining to include things like class sizes and setting safe student-to-staff ratios for ESPs who work with students.
- Amending the Tiered Licensure Law to include Tier 1 teachers in the teacher bargaining unit. Many are educators of color and they are denied the freedom to join a union and get protection against exploitation.
- Ensuring that all early childhood positions in public schools require licensure, and therefore guarantee that the educators in these positions have collective bargaining rights and the opportunity to earn tenure or continuing contract rights.
- Deleting the current exclusion of early childhood and family education and adult basic education teachers from coverage under the continuing contract and tenure rights laws.
- Modifying the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act to make it mandatory, rather than permissive, for employers to provide bargaining teams and member rights advocates the information they need to represent their members fully in negotiations and contract enforcement matters.

