2020 Legislative Session Issue Brief

Education funding

A strong system of public schools, one that gives every Minnesota student an equal opportunity for success no matter their race or where they are from, will strengthen our communities and improve the lives of children and their families.

The foundation of the system rests on well-trained teachers, supported students and policymakers taking the responsibility to create the conditions in which teaching and learning flourish.

Investing in smaller class sizes, mental health services, high-quality training for educators, learning environments where students get the supports they need and competitive compensation packages are key to attracting and retaining great educators.

But Minnesota has failed to make those needed investments and now faces a critical teacher shortage, particularly in greater Minnesota and with teachers of color.

One of the biggest problems is the state's share of funding schools hasn’t kept pace with inflation—it's 12.7 percent less than 2003 in real dollars. Ninety-three percent of Minnesota's 330 school districts received less real per-pupil aid in 2019 than they did in 2003, according to a 2018 North Star Policy Institute report.

Continued on back
Minnesota also isn't fully funding the programs and services we know help students lead successful lives. Investing in teacher quality improves student performance. Access to counselors and other support services also helps our students so they can focus on learning.

If Minnesotans truly want to create the public schools our students deserve, we must infuse a significant investment in public education so we can:

- Reverse Minnesota's perpetual underfunding of education by significantly increasing the per-pupil funding formula and tying it to inflation. The state must also fully fund its portion of special education costs instead of relying on school districts to pay for them.
- Lower class sizes so teachers can give students more of the individual attention they need and deserve.
- Attract and retain teachers of color by increasing starting salaries and creating loan forgiveness, mentoring and other programs to support educators on the job.
- Ensure all education support professionals earn a living wage.
- Expand 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.
- Provide additional resources for school districts to hire more student support staff, including counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other job classifications. Minnesota has one of the country’s worst ratios of counselors to students—one counselor for every 669 students.
- Create an equitable and sustainable funding stream for the 2011 Teacher Development and Evaluation law, an unfunded state mandate, to ensure teacher quality and lift the cap on the Q Comp program.
- Expand access to full-service community schools across the state. If we want to have equitable outcomes for our students, we must have equitable opportunities for our children and families, no matter where they live.
- Increase teacher compensation. The salary and benefits teachers earned in 2015 was 11 percent less than similar college-educated workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute.
- Make health insurance more affordable, fair and predictable for educators and school employees so they stay in the profession.
- 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.
- Invest in infrastructure and deferred maintenance so that all students—no matter what they look like or where they live—are in in 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.