



Building an Equitable School System for All Students and Educators

Executive Summary



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Building an Equitable School System for All Students and Educators

Minnesota's public schools have long been a source of pride for our state. After all, our students have earned the highest average on the ACT multiple years in a row. However, we also have one of the worst racial achievement gaps in the nation. In addition, Minnesota educators are leaving classrooms to find other work in droves.

The dual crises of racial disparity and educator attrition expose a soft underbelly of public education in Minnesota—chronic underfunding of our schools has created a racialized system of haves and have-nots.

The dual crises of racial disparity and educator attrition expose a soft underbelly of public education in Minnesota. Chronic underfunding of our schools has created a racialized system of haves and have-nots. And underfunding has left teachers under-resourced and driven many out of our classrooms because these professionals simply do not have the tools to do their job effectively.

From approximately 2000-2010, the state of Minnesota changed the way it funded schools and then spent a decade chipping away at school funding. Decision-makers at that time froze funding, and for eight straight years they did not even provide an inflationary increase to schools. This dug a massive budgetary hole for schools, driving up class sizes, forcing districts to leave even basic building or structural repairs undone, and slashing support services that are critical to student success.

At the same time that funding became scarcer, demands on schools started to rise. New testing regimes were imposed with no money to implement them. Demands for paperwork for everything from special education to teacher evaluations rose dramatically. Mandate upon mandate was leveled at school districts from state and federal officials, but no resources were provided to meet them. Pressure to do more, often not for students but to fulfill mandates, was exacerbated by declining resources. All of this made it harder to retain great educators, and more difficult to close opportunity gaps directly related to the achievement gap.

Intentionally or unintentionally, Minnesota lawmakers created a system where a basic, inflationary increase in education funding was and is "historic," not because it's the amount of resources that schools need to meet these demands, but because the bar was set so low in the first decade of the 21st century that even a basic amount of funding is now seen as a major investment.

But as it turns out, even the “historic” investments that have been made over the past six years have not come close to erasing the massive burden of new mandates that came with a decade of disinvestment in public schools.

**Minnesota students—all of them, no matter where they live
or what race they are—deserve a 21st century education
delivered by highly-skilled professionals.**

Why does this matter? Because Minnesota students—all of them, no matter where they live or what race they are—deserve a 21st century education delivered by highly-skilled professionals. This is a moral and economic imperative for our state, which is why it is spelled out in the Minnesota Constitution.

“The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state.”

*–Article XIII, Section 1
Constitution of the State of Minnesota*

The framers of the Constitution of the State of Minnesota gave the state government the direct responsibility of creating a fair and uniform public school system. In what follows, we explore 10 education policy areas to show how the state has not met its moral and economic obligation as promulgated in the state constitution. Minnesota has hard working educators and bright and talented students. However, state leaders have made policy decisions that have hampered the success of students and devalued the work of educators. It is time to reverse this trend. We offer this paper as a call for critical reform. Lawmakers can do better to build a truly equitable school system for all students, all educators, and all communities in the state.

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for all students, all educators, and all communities in the state.**

Minnesota has a promising, but troubled, structure from which to reverse national and state trends that harm all students, especially students of color. We support the Minnesota Education Equity Partnership's (MnEEP) (2016) call for lawmakers to repay the "educational debt" that has resulted in an inequitable education system. The partnership also argued:

the cumulative effect of generations of social, political and economic injustice creates an unpaid "education debt" from society that results in larger percentages of students of color and American Indian students persistently achieving less than their White peers... The longer Minnesota and its districts and schools allow these annual disparities to continue between the achievement of White students and the achievement of students of color and American Indian students, the greater the overall educational debt becomes because disparities reinforce and produce disparities (Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, 2016, p. 19).

State leaders owe the communities, educators, and students of Minnesota resources to build strong schools.

Minnesota's lawmakers have not created an equitable mechanism for funding public schools. In addition, state leaders continually embrace poor policy ideas that exacerbate racial divides in education. We offer a quick glance at (1) the funding shortfalls in the state, (2) the racial achievement gaps in Minnesota, and (3) the teacher attrition epidemic to frame the remaining 10 sections. Baker, Farrie, and Sciarra (2018) have confirmed that:

1. "When states make a greater fiscal effort to fund their schools, school spending goes up, and that translates into higher staffing levels, smaller class sizes and more competitive wages for teachers" (p. 1).
2. "A study of school finance reforms of the 1970s and 80s finds that increased spending led to higher high school graduation rates, greater educational attainment, higher earnings, and lower rates of poverty in adulthood" (p. 1).
3. "Fair and equitable state finance systems must be at the center of efforts to improve educational outcomes and reduce stubborn achievement gaps among students" (p. 1).

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Education Funding Shortfalls in Minnesota

In each of the following 10 sections, we show how Minnesota has failed to fund specific parts of public education. We also offer the costing numbers required to fix the financial burdens placed on local education agencies. We support the arguments of school finance expert, Bruce D. Baker, who recently argued “the central policy objective of government-financed public school systems is to provide for an equitable system of schooling that makes efficient use of public resources to achieve desired (or at least, adequate) outcome goals” (Baker B. D., 2019, p. 17). However, he also noted that this goal is difficult to achieve because in the United States, “our education system is actually fifty-one separate educational systems providing vastly different resources, on average, and with vastly different outcomes” (Baker B. D., 2019, p. 6). Minnesota’s lawmakers need to fund all schools in the state.

We ask lawmakers to quit listening to the “persistent denial by pundits across the political spectrum of the importance of money for determining school quality and for achieving equity” (Baker B. D., 2019, p. 2). School finance is a direct reflection of how much a state values students and educators.

Researchers have proven that investments in public education produce positive gains for states (Baker B. D., 2019, p. 6). In Graph 1, we report the findings of the Education Law Center’s (2018) “State Funding Profiles.” Minnesota has consistently received a grade of “C” for its efforts to fund public schools. This “average” rating has produced poor results for all students, especially students of color. Unfortunately, previous administrations and legislatures have only given minimal efforts to reversing these trends. We ask lawmakers to quit listening to the “persistent denial by pundits across the political spectrum of the importance of money for determining school quality and for achieving equity” (Baker B. D., 2019, p. 2). School finance is a direct reflection of how much a state values students and educators. State leaders should heed the warnings issued by Baker (2019). In particular, it is time for lawmakers:

(1) to recognize “the importance of equitable and adequate funding as a prerequisite condition for quality public (or any) education systems.”

(2) to ignore “empirically weak, politically motivated research advancing preferred policies of choice, market competition, and disruptive innovation as substitutes for additional resources.”

(3) to abandon “a continued full-speed-ahead approach to the preferred policies without regard or careful measurement of the consequences of those policies” (Baker B. D., 2019, pp. 226-227).

Minnesota can, and should, equitably fund all schools for the benefit of all students and educators.

GRAPH 1: MINNESOTA’S SCHOOL FUNDING PROFILE

EFFORT

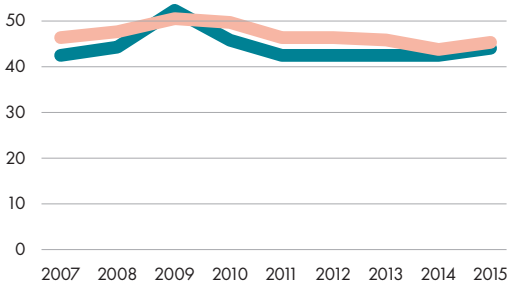
The ELC develops these grades based on the “income capacity” of a state’s residents as well as their ability to “support public services” through taxation (Baker, Farrie, and Sciarra, 2018, p. 15). In 2015, Minnesota spent a mere \$40 on public education for every \$1,000 generated in personal income activity and \$36 for every \$1,000 generated in economic productivity.

GRADE



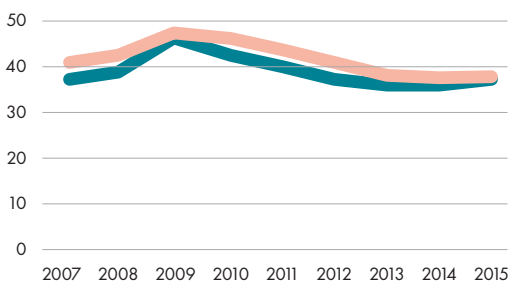
INCOME

K-12 expenditures per \$1,000:



GROSS STATE PRODUCT

K-12 expenditures per \$1,000:



*We reproduced Graph 1 with permission from researchers at the Education Law Center. The original authors retain copyright permission to this image. The original image appears in: Baker, Bruce D., Danielle Farrie, and David Sciarra. 2018. “Is School Funding Fair? A National Report Card”, 7th Edition. www.schoolfundingfairness.org.

The funding issues that plague Minnesota schools perpetuate the racial achievement gaps and cause teacher attrition.

The funding issues that plague Minnesota schools perpetuate the racial achievement gaps and cause teacher attrition. These related issues can be addressed by stable, fair funding for Minnesota schools in the 10 areas identified in this paper.

Equity and Minnesota's Public Schools: Achievement Gaps, Discipline Gaps, and Legacies of White Supremacy

Minnesota's lawmakers need to give critical attention to the tremendous racial disparities that plague public schools. MnEEP (2016) has argued:

At the center of Minnesota's historical and cultural inheritance are unresolved legacies of both the conquest of American Indian nations, including broken treaties, the stealing of land and attempted genocide, and the enslavement and continued oppression of Blacks as evidenced by massive incarceration rates, suspensions from school, unemployment, etc. Asian Americans, Latinos, African and Arab immigrants and refugees also face forms of discrimination similar to earlier times in our state's and nation's history by not being able to become "White" like previous European or Scandinavian immigrants and settlers. Minnesota's legacies are much like the rest of the United States of America. Despite the constant struggle and fight against past and current forms of oppression, what we choose to tell and include in our history has profoundly influenced the way we view the educational progress made by students of color and American Indian students (Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, 2016, p. 11).

The racial academic achievement gaps and the racial discipline gaps are direct byproducts of structural racism rooted in White supremacy.

MnEEP, and other researchers, have identified systems of White supremacy as the driving forces behind inequities in public education. White supremacy "is the effect of an historically-based, institutionally-perpetuated global and national system of exploitation and oppression of peoples of color by White peoples of European descent for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege based on whiteness" (Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, 2016, p. 21). The racial academic achievement gaps and the racial discipline gaps are direct byproducts of structural racism rooted in White supremacy.

White students are the only demographic that surpass state averages for reading achievement, math achievement, and the four-year graduation rate.

There is a difference between identifying the “White supremacy” that drives systemic oppression and calling an individual a White supremacist. Following the work of MnEEP and other researchers, we use this frame to speak of the ways policies and systems have benefited White Minnesotans at the expense of other demographics. Like MnEEP and several critical race scholars, we do not believe all White people are part of a monolithic group. Nor do we believe that “all White people have conscious beliefs that espouse White supremacy or act with intentionality to maintain and strengthen White supremacy” (MnEEP, 2016, p. 21). Instead, we argue that decisions rooted in White supremacy have benefited all White people, although some White people have garnered greater benefits than others have. We offer data about the achievement gaps as proof of this frame.

Minnesota’s educators are working to reverse these trends, but state policymakers continue to tie their hands and hamper their efforts with poor funding.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) (2019) recently provided the state Legislature with the most recent data on achievement gaps in Minnesota. We reproduced MDE’s data in Chart 1. MDE has now confirmed that yet again. White students are the only demographic that surpass state averages for reading achievement, math achievement, and the four-year graduation rate. In addition, the data shows that Black students hold an average reading achievement rate of 33.9% (25.3% below the state average) and an average math achievement rate of 28% (28.2% below the state average). Minnesota’s educators are working to reverse these trends, but state policymakers continue to tie their hands and hamper their efforts with poor funding.

Minnesota also ranks among the states with the worst racial disparities. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University provide regular updates on the progress each state is making to close racial achievement gaps. In the most recent report, DePaoli, Balfanz, Atwell, and Bridgeland (2018) used the “adjusted cohort graduation rate” (ACGR) to illustrate racial disparities in public education. They have argued that the ACGR measure could be improved but it “is still considered to be the ‘gold standard’ of graduation rate metrics with individual student identifiers” (DePaoli, Balfanz, Bridgeland, & Atwell, 2018, p. 10). These researchers confirmed:

1. The graduation rate gap between White students and Black students in Minnesota is higher than 20 points (p. 9, 26).
2. The graduation rate gap between White students and Hispanic students in Minnesota is higher than 20 points. Only Minnesota and New York have gaps this high in this category (p. 9, 26).
3. Minnesota has the third highest graduation gap in the nation between low-income and non-low-income students. Only North Dakota and South Dakota have higher gaps in this category (p. 27).
4. Minnesota has the second highest postsecondary attainment gap between White and Black residents, ages 25 to 64 (p. 38). Only Connecticut has higher gaps in this category.
5. Minnesota has the eighth highest postsecondary attainment gap between White and Hispanic residents, ages 25 to 64 (p. 38).

Minnesota must do better and reverse these problematic trends.

CHART 1: ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAPS IN MINNESOTA

<i>STUDENT GROUP</i>	<i>MATH ACHIEVEMENT RATE</i>	<i>READING ACHIEVEMENT RATE</i>	<i>FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE</i>
All students	56.2	59.2	82.7
American Indian and Alaskan Native	28.2	34.5	50.7
Asian	55.4	54.6	85.5
Black	28.0	33.9	64.7
Hispanic or Latino	33.8	38.5	66.3
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	42.0	50.3	62.7
White	65.2	67.5	88.0
Two or more races	49.1	55.3	71.1
English learners	31.0	31.2	64.7
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	35.9	40.3	69.0
Students in special education	32.0	33.5	61.2

**Reproduced from (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019, p. 7).*

Minnesota's Teacher Exodus

One out of every three teachers leaves the profession in the first five years of employment.

In addition to the deeply entrenched inequities built into our education system, Minnesota, like most states in the nation, is facing a crisis in the form of a mass exodus of teachers from the profession. In our state, one out of every three teachers leaves the profession in the first five years of employment. The average baccalaureate graduate carries a student debt load that requires payments of between \$350 and \$450 per month. Family health insurance premiums for educators are sky high, in many cases requiring teachers to pay over \$1,000 per month.

Teachers of color leave at a rate 24% higher than their White counterparts.

In a survey conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) of more than 30,000 teachers nationwide, 89% of the respondents reported being enthusiastic about their profession at the start of their careers. Only 15% sustained that enthusiasm as their careers progressed (Educator Policy Innovation Center, 2016, p. 12). One out of every three teachers leaves the profession in the first five years with a student debt load of \$32,000, on average. This is an attrition rate unlike any other similar field. And while Minnesota has a dramatic and devastating shortage of teachers of color, teachers of color leave at a rate 24% higher than their White counterparts.

Minnesota's shortage of teachers of color is one of the worst in the nation. Though our student population is made up of 33.5% students of color (identified as American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial), only 4.3% of our teaching workforce is made up of teachers of color (Wilder Research, 2019, p. 4). The percentage of students of color has been increasing steadily over time. The percentage of teachers of color has not.

Ingersoll and May (2011) outlined three reasons often cited for why the mismatch between teachers of color and students of color is detrimental. These included: 1) Demographic parity. This argument holds that "minority teachers are important as role models for both minority and White students." 2) Cultural synchronicity. This argument "holds that minority students benefit from being taught by minority teachers because minority teachers are more likely to have 'insider knowledge' due to similar life experiences and cultural backgrounds."

3) Candidates of color. “This argument holds that candidates of color are more likely than non-minority candidates to seek employment in schools serving predominantly minority student populations, often in low-income, urban school districts,” which are the schools that suffer disproportionately from teacher shortages (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. 11).

Achinstein et al. (2010) cited the increasingly large body of research showing that teachers of color “can produce more favorable academic results on standardized test scores, attendance, retention, advanced-level course enrollment, and college-going rates for students of color than White colleagues” (Achinstein et al., 2010, p. 7). Many other scholars have argued “that this demographic gap creates a teaching-learning disconnect that contributes to the too-often dismal academic performance, high dropout rates, and low graduation rates of diverse urban students” (Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012, p. 16).

Burciaga and Kohli (2018), explained further what teachers of color bring to students. They bring “knowledge and skills cultivated by communities of color to resist and survive racism” (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6). Minnesota needs to get serious about increasing the numbers of teachers of color in our teaching workforce, which will mean looking honestly at the structural racism inherent in our current school systems. State lawmakers need to get serious about the teacher attrition problem overall, which is wreaking havoc on our districts and leaving too many students without teachers trained to meet their educational needs.

Districts cannot invest in high-quality induction and mentoring programs in part because of the amount of money being spent on the constant process of recruiting and hiring new teachers.

Districts cannot invest in high-quality induction and mentoring programs in part because of the amount of money being spent on the constant process of recruiting and hiring new teachers. According to the Learning Policy Institute, the average cost to a school that has to hire a new teacher is \$20,000 (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). Given that one out of every three new teachers in Minnesota leaves the classroom in the first five years, Minnesota districts are spending millions of dollars on the problem of high teacher turnover. In the 2017-18 school year, 2,392 teachers were new graduates of teacher preparation programs, both from Minnesota and from other states. If one third of those teachers leave in their first five years, Minnesota districts will be looking to refill 789 positions. At an estimated cost of \$20,000 per new hire, that’s \$15,787,200 spent on teacher turnover in just five years. In addition, that figure does not take into account the hiring costs associated with replacing retirees and other educators leaving later in their careers.

And the costs are not merely financial. There are also instructional and academic costs to high levels of teacher turnover. High levels of teacher turnover “in a particular school may have adverse impacts on outcomes for the school’s students. Student outcomes will be

adversely affected, for example, if turnover leads to a lower quality mix of teachers, loss of coherence within the school's educational program, or the inability of the school to replace all the teachers who leave" (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018, p. 1). In a recent study, researchers looked closely at how schools responded to teacher turnover and exposed part of what is at stake:

A school may respond to the loss of teachers in a particular year or subject by increasing class sizes, either as a chosen strategy or because of its inability to hire replacement teachers, either from within the school or outside the school. If the replacement teachers are more qualified than the ones they replace either in terms of instructional effectiveness or their ability to work with others toward the institutional mission of the school or both, the change could be beneficial for students. In contrast, if the replacement teachers are less qualified than the ones they replace along either or both dimensions, the change will be detrimental to student outcomes and to the smooth operation of the school (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018, p. 3).

Sorensen and Ladd explained further:

We consistently find that the loss of math or ELA teachers at the school level leads to larger shares of such teachers with limited experience or who are lateral entrants or have provisional licenses. We find suggestive evidence that turnover also leads to higher shares of teachers that are not certified in the specified subject, and of teachers with lower average licensure test scores. All four of these characteristics typically signify less effectiveness in the classroom, and may signify a lower ability to contribute to the coherence of the school's mission. Greater shares of the teachers with these characteristics may also contribute to higher future turnover rates, given that departure rates for members of these categories of teachers tend to be high. Moreover, we find that the adverse effects of turnover rise linearly with the rate of turnover and are higher in high poverty schools and higher in period of student enrollment growth (Sorensen & Ladd, 2018, pp. 3-4).

Overall, high rates of teacher turnover are costly in terms of their impacts on instruction and academic achievement, in addition to the financial burden they impose on the system.

Lastly, the costs of failing to address both the low number of teachers of color in the workforce and the high rate at which they leave the profession costs our state dearly, in that teachers of color have the greatest potential to recognize and address education inequities.

What We Must Do, Together

Minnesota's lawmakers can take drastic steps in 10 education policy areas to address systemic inequity and reverse the trend of teacher attrition. The list of 10 includes:

1. EDUCATOR COMPENSATION AND WORK ENVIRONMENTS

Educator salaries have not kept up with inflation, and when we add in the costs of health insurance and average student loan payments, too many educators and potential educators simply cannot stay in the profession. New teachers earn about 20% less than individuals with college degrees in other fields, and that gap widens to roughly 30% by midcareer. This teacher pay gap has not always existed, but rather is the result of decisions made at the Legislature over the past 30 years to underfund our public education system. In addition, Minnesota's education support professionals do not earn a living wage. Many of them are paid less than workers who work in entry-level retail and food service positions, and in too many cases, they work simply for the health care benefit and take home paychecks that range from pennies to less than \$100.

2. TEACHER MENTORING AND INDUCTION

Minnesota's failure to fully fund its education system has bled districts of dollars that could be used to fund robust induction and teacher mentoring programs. Research on the topic of what types of induction and mentoring programs lead to more equitable and better outcomes for students and greater teacher attrition rates is not hard to find. The United States is one of the only developed countries that takes brand-new teachers and throws them into classrooms for full days on their own without time to reflect with one another and without time to observe, be observed by, or collaborate in a meaningful and regular way with mentors and other experienced teachers. Further, Minnesota's teachers of color have specific needs in the areas of induction and mentoring, given that they are often completely isolated and given that the system they work for is inequitably built and funded. They, too, need time to collaborate, to support one another, and the induction and mentoring process needs to reflect that need. Such collaboration takes time, and Minnesota's districts are so strapped for dollars, that they simply cannot afford to develop programs for newer educators that allow for these best practices to be implemented.

3. SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

The physical state of our public school buildings is inadequate and vastly inequitable. Given the state's model of underfunding districts such that they have to rely on local tax levies to survive, in too many cases, a student's ZIP code determines the quality of his or her learning environment. School facilities play a significant role in determining a student's sense of self-worth, they correlate to academic achievement, and they correlate to teacher attrition rates. Many of our students and educators are working in schools without natural light, without proper ventilation, and without the appropriate resources for learning, whether that be age-appropriate playground equipment or chemistry laboratories with appropriate equipment. They work in schools with plumbing, windows, and HVAC systems that are in disrepair, and in temporary buildings that were never intended for long-term use.

4. PRESCHOOL

When the K-12 system was initially formed, we knew far less than we know now about brain development in years birth-five. Our state's achievement gaps are firmly entrenched before students even get to kindergarten. We now know that the early years of brain development are the most dynamic years in a person's life. Without appropriate education, whether that be by parents who understand how their infants' access to language is correlated to their capacity for literacy or by making sure four-year-olds have access to age-appropriate, play-based education, the brain's capacity for further learning in all areas is greatly diminished. The United States lags far behind other developed countries in its commitment to public education for our youngest learners, and Minnesota lags far behind most other states in the country.

5. TRAUMA-INFORMED, RESTORATIVE SCHOOLS

Over the past 30 years, our public schools have relied more and more heavily on exclusionary discipline as the only approach to student behavior problems. We have known for some time now that zero tolerance and three-strikes policies, and policies that send disruptive students directly to exclusion, whether in the form of simple removal from the classroom without appropriate intervention, suspensions, expulsions, or direct referrals to law enforcement, have failed to decrease disruptive incidents in our schools and have had a negative effect on student academic outcomes. They have also led to an inexcusable American invention—the school-to-prison pipeline. Trauma-informed, restorative schools have a wholly different approach to student behavior, and when developed with fidelity to the practice, they reduce inequitable disciplinary outcomes for students, they reduce the frequency of disruptive incidents, they increase student academic achievement, and they lead to better satisfaction for students, parents, communities, and teachers.

6. TEACHER PREPARATION

Instead of addressing the reasons that teachers leave the profession at a rate unlike any other, instead of addressing the reasons that teachers of color leave at even higher rates than their White colleagues, and instead of investing in programs to fully prepare more candidates of color to enter the profession, in 2017, the Minnesota Legislature responded to district-level complaints about the increasing difficulty of filling open positions with qualified teachers by simply lowering the requirements for teacher licensure. And they did so in dramatic fashion. In the span of time it takes to adopt one law, Minnesota moved from being among the states with the highest levels of requirements for teacher licensure to being among the states with the lowest levels of requirements for teacher licensure. Unless the licensure law is changed, our most high-needs students will be even more likely than they already are to be taught by teachers who lack content training and pedagogical training to meet their students' needs.

7. SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS

Because Minnesota has underfunded our public school system, districts have had to reduce the number of related service providers (RSPs) and specialized instructional personnel (SISPs). Schools with higher populations of students of color or larger concentrations of students with disabilities have some of the largest opportunity gaps, and they are often the same schools that lack enough RSPs and SISPs to help reverse these trends. School counselors, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, school-based physical therapists, school nurses, school-based occupational therapists, and school social workers play a critical role in the success of our schools, and yet our schools are so starved for operating dollars that they simply cannot employ sufficient numbers of people in these fields. This problem further exacerbates the achievement and opportunity gaps, and it further exacerbates our ever-worsening teacher attrition rates.

8. FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The full-service community school strategy is an educational equity-focused model that places the needs of students at the center of analysis and decision-making in school improvement. The development of a community school begins with a comprehensive needs assessment that examines opportunity gaps and looks at systematic disparities affecting student achievement. The school itself is then modeled to meet those community-specific needs. A \$75 million state investment would allow every school currently identified in need of improvement under federal law to adopt the full-service community school model. As opposed to funding unproven, or even detrimental education reforms, Minnesota would make real progress in closing opportunity gaps by instead funding full-service community schools.

9. PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

Minnesota's approach to funding our public institutions of higher education is deeply flawed. Over the past several decades, Minnesota has vastly disinvested in public higher education. In 1995, 12.2% of our state's budget went to higher education. Now, public higher education accounts for only 4% of the state's budget. As the state appropriation to higher education diminished, student debt skyrocketed. In addition, the state has adopted a model of appropriation to public higher education that has been misleadingly advertised and that has made the student debt problem much worse. What is left of the state's spending on higher education is divided into three pools: one for the Minnesota State institutions, one for the University of Minnesota institutions, and one for the State Grant Program. The myth that the State Grant Program helps those who most need assistance needs to be challenged, and that program needs to be recognized for what it is: a program that drives up tuition at our public institutions and doles out the largest grants to students who need the least assistance, while leaving those most in need with fewer and fewer options short of assuming massive amounts of debt or forgoing college altogether.

10. SPECIAL EDUCATION

Federal and state-level decisions to underfund special education needs lead to exactly the outcomes we would expect. Special education teacher positions are by far the most difficult to fill, and far too many of our special education students are being taught by educators who lack the training necessary to meet their needs. Teacher attrition rates are highest in these fields, as are educator injury rates. General education teachers lack the tools they need to work with special education students in their classrooms. Students of color are wrongly identified as in need of special education far more often than White students are, and they are overrepresented in our special education settings, which means their opportunities are greatly diminished and they are, again, less likely to be taught by educators with the training necessary to meet their needs according to best practices. Funding our districts such that they can meet the needs of their special education students, including better identifying who those students are, would allow them to adopt targeted policy interventions that address the needs of their special education students. Such policies include increasing measures to help special educators facing compassion fatigue, physical injuries, and burnout; building far more collaborative relationships between special education and general education teachers so that students really are being educated in the least restrictive environment possible; hiring more education support professionals and educators, including more educational support professionals of color to work in special education; developing outreach programs to increase parent awareness of special education services before kindergarten; and more.

What follows is a robust discussion of each of these 10 topics, including recommendations for addressing the problems with an equity lens and an eye toward teacher attrition.

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