

## 2021 Legislative Session Issue Brief

# Fighting for racially just schools

No matter our differences, most of us want similar things for our children. We want them to grow up safe, supported and loved. We want them to attend joyful, welcoming schools that prepare them for success after high school. And we all want a voice in how our kids are taught.

Unfortunately, public schools in Minnesota are not meeting the needs of many students, particularly students of color, students living in poverty and students struggling with past traumas. Educators are unhappy, too. There are educator shortages everywhere, particularly for teachers of color. Decades of chronic underfunding created this crisis.

Education Minnesota is working with dozens of community allies around the state on specific proposals to truly provide every student – no matter what they look like or where they come from – with racially just schools and educators who are culturally competent.

### Culturally responsive school environments

If we want all students to thrive and succeed, Minnesota must build culturally responsive schools that reflect the diverse students they serve. We can start doing this by:

- Increasing school funding: Create a new racial equity funding stream and increase American Indian aid so schools can better serve students of color and Indigenous students and parents and educators have a voice in how money is spent.
- Attracting and retaining teachers of color: Increase starting salaries and create loan forgiveness, mentoring and other programs and protections to support educators on the job.
- Expanding ethnic studies curriculum: Develop a more accurate and holistic understanding of our state's diverse inhabitants, history, geography, government and economics. Education Minnesota members, students, parents and community allies will work together to demand new curriculum in their local school districts.
- Expanding trauma-informed practices: Create funding for schools with large racial disparities to provide trauma-informed professional development to all staff who work with students.

### ESP 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.

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[www.educationminnesota.org](http://www.educationminnesota.org)

Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.  1763



**THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS**

Our ESPs are worth more: Education Minnesota, along with faith organizations and other community groups, are advocating for:

- Requiring school districts and charter schools to pay their ESPs at least \$20 an hour.
- Helping all educators and their families get high-quality, affordable health care.
- Ensuring our hourly school workers, who perform critical jobs and are woefully underpaid, are eligible for unemployment insurance.

## **Universal child care and early learning**

Minnesota's system of care and education for our youngest children is in urgent need of dramatic overhaul.

Our education system yields deeply inequitable outcomes. And childcare is vastly underfunded, relying on workers earning poverty-level wages. Moreover, the system doesn't have nearly enough capacity to meet the needs of Minnesota's families.

ISIAH's Kids Count On Us Coalition and Education Minnesota's Educator Innovation Policy Center, or EPIC, recommend raising revenue to build a new system for our youngest learners and the workforce that cares for and educates them. This includes:

- Creating a mixed-delivery pre-K system aligned with the early indicators of progress and built on equitable practices that excludes no family that wants access.
- Sustainable funding so that low-income families pay nothing and all other families pay no more than 7 percent of family income, regardless of number of children in the birth-4 system.
- Funding to immediately raise the wages of the birth-4 workforce, and to increase compensation, benefits and professional development via a career-wage ladder.
- Streamline state agencies and create regional hubs to better align early care and education systems and give educators, child care workers and families a voice in the services they give and receive.

## **Full-service community schools**

Full-service community schools offer a better path to equity and excellence. By welcoming community members as partners in school improvement, bringing community services into the school, and empowering the people closest to students to examine disparities, racial and economic opportunity gaps close.

Education Minnesota supports sustaining and creating more full-service community schools across the state to help meet the needs of students and families.

The 2021 Legislature should approve \$90 million a year to expand full-service community schools and provide ongoing support to those already up and running. Most of the money would be used to hire a site coordinator for each school. This person manages the public-private partnerships and is key to a school's success.

## **Paid family and medical leave**

Working families need paid time off to care for themselves and their loved ones during times of need.

Education Minnesota will continue to work for legislation to do just that as a part of Minnesotans for Paid Family and Medical Leave, a coalition of more than 40 organizations that represent health care workers, faith leaders and families.

Minnesota must pass a bill that would provide up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave through a state-administered insurance program. Wages would be replaced on a tiered scale – 66 percent of an employee's salary on average – while protecting the worker's job and health care benefits.