

2021 Legislative Session Issue Brief

Bouncing back from COVID-19 disruptions

COVID-19 is the flashlight illuminating the inequities within our schools and broader communities. We already knew they existed.

Our country has struggled with racist policies in our communities, justice system, schools and health care system. And for decades, our federal and state governments have been slowly divesting from public education, leaving educators and school districts with sorely inadequate resources.

COVID-19 is not just about learning loss. There is collective trauma around losing loved ones to the virus and the economic strife families endured. New examples of racial injustice in our criminal justice system and the dog-whistle rhetoric in the presidential campaign during the pandemic have only made the trauma worse.

Minnesota can start addressing not just the academic, but the emotional, toll caused by the global pandemic, and then strategize the best way to provide supports to struggling students and rebuild our schools.

- Provide funding for districts to offer quality, equitable extra-time programming.
- Give educators the time and resources needed to address the unprecedented levels of collective trauma experienced in the pandemic, racial injustice and other experiences in 2020.
- Waive the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments and other state or federally mandated tests and move toward better locally driven assessments.
- Encourage districts to start preparing for future, long-term disruptions now.
- Close the digital divide for students, families and educators.

This is also a moment to completely reimagine public education. In particular, lawmakers should:

- Direct state agencies to study how reduced class sizes during hybrid learning impacted student learning and classroom management.
- Convene education experts to examine the traditional school calendar and day.
- Consult educators working with students identified for special education on how some students, particularly students with autism spectrum disorder or an emotional-behavioral disorder diagnosis, thrived in online learning.
- Ask researchers to look at any correlations between distance learning and decreases in bullying and harassment directed at LGBTQ+ students.
- Provide more funding for full-service community schools.

Minnesota's students and educators are strong and resilient. Lawmakers should equip them with the resources they need to reinvent our systems of education. It is time to provide an answer to the foundational question of this moment, "How can we transform what has not been working for children and for our society into a more equitable and empowering future?"

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