

# Education debt and college affordability

Minnesota ranks fifth in the nation for student debt, with the average student debt load at \$34,932 for state college students, according to the Student Borrower Protection Center. Minnesota's outstanding debt burden is \$27.1 billion.

In a potentially devastating blow to our state economy, a fast-growing group of borrowers isn't just college students, it's seniors. Greater Minnesota is feeling the impact as well with nearly 175,000 borrowers with debt impacting 51.4 percent of all millennials living outside the metro area. Between 2012 and 2017, there was a 46 percent increase in the number of Minnesota seniors with education debt.

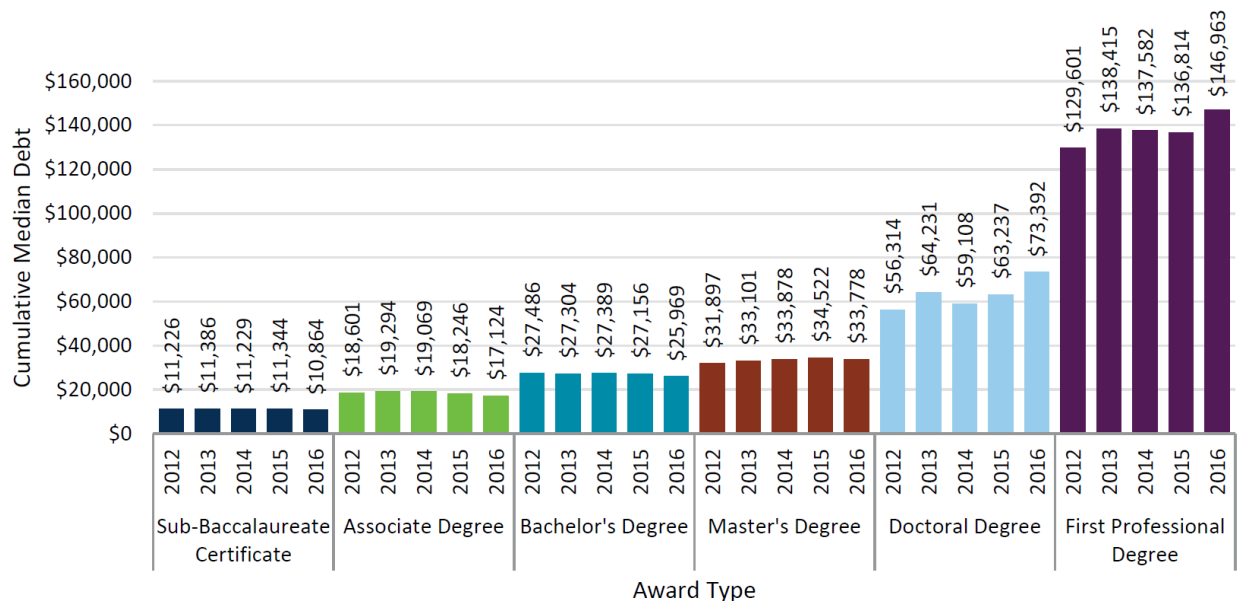
Your union works to help relieve your debt burden and make college more affordable and accessible to all. This is particularly important for our public schools. If teaching becomes an unaffordable profession, it will become even more difficult to attract and retain high-quality educators.

## Degrees, Not Debt training

As increasing numbers of Minnesotans have to take out loans in order to afford college, the possibilities and opportunities of higher education will be open to fewer people. The scale of the problem is significant: 775,600 Minnesotans have student debt, amounting to \$27.1 billion owed. Education Minnesota's Degrees, Not Debt program rallies public support to decrease the cost of college and make it easier and cheaper to pay student loan debt.

Education Minnesota's Degrees, Not Debt training provides members with an overview of the scope of the education debt crisis, explanations of student loan basics, information on available loan forgiveness programs and how to apply.

## Cumulative Median Debt Continues to Increase by Award Type in 2016



Source: Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Cumulative Median Debt Survey, 2016



## Loan forgiveness support

Loan forgiveness programs are useful, if you can access them. Technical aspects of loan forgiveness programs make it hard to know who is eligible and how to apply. Education Minnesota provides direct support to members navigating these challenges.

- **Public service loan forgiveness:** Federal loan forgiveness for anyone who works in public service. There are more than 23 million people eligible nationally but only about 3 million take advantage of it.
- **Teacher loan forgiveness:** For teachers who work in schools serving low-income families.
- **Minnesota Teacher Loan Shortage Repayment Program:** Minnesota's loan forgiveness program for teachers working in shortage areas.
- **Access to premier online support:** Education Minnesota's members have access to Summer, an online support service and tool that assists with applications for income-driven repayment and public service loan forgiveness.

## Legislative action

The education debt crisis cannot be addressed by one single policy or program. Attacking a massive, billion-dollar problem requires energy at all levels. Education Minnesota supports a number of legislative reforms and policy changes that will address student debt:

- A Minnesota student borrower's bill of rights, including a student loan advocate within state government to act on behalf of consumers against abuses by loan servicers and lenders.
- Expansion of Minnesota's existing teacher loan forgiveness programs to provide adequate funding and increase eligibility to include additional areas in which educators work and where there is a shortage, including school counselors, licensed school nurses, occupational therapists, speech therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, and other instructional support personnel.
- Free college for Minnesota residents, focusing on targeting students based on need and ensuring that public institutions are funded at equitable and appropriate levels.
- Improved and more consistent loan counseling for students at all levels of education, including assistance with available loan forgiveness programs.

**Want to join your union in our Degrees, Not Debt campaign or get more information on loan forgiveness? Contact your local president or email [dnd@edmn.org](mailto:dnd@edmn.org).**