Sample LTE Guide

Education Minnesota 2023

Funding

Strong public schools that give every Minnesota student an equal opportunity for success—no matter what they look like or where they come from—will strengthen our communities and improve the lives of children and their families. Schools need a reliable, ongoing source of funding to be able to serve our students well. With fully funded schools, we could see reasonable class sizes, more support staff, teachers who stay in the profession and better outcomes for our students.

I hope our representatives and senators in the Legislature will prioritize increased funding for public schools. Our district and many other districts across Minnesota have seen a funding drop of $3,000 per pupil since the early 2000s. If we want our children to be set up for success, we need to invest in them. Please contact [INSERT NAME OF LOCAL LEGISLATORS] with me to ask them to fully fund schools and give all our students the support they need to achieve their dreams.

Pension Reform

Minnesota’s school staffing shortage was already a growing problem before COVID-19 hit, but now it’s at crisis levels. We need competitive compensation packages that attract the best educators to the profession and keep them in our schools. The state has underfunded public pensions for years. We’re asking lawmakers this year to examine the breadth of options available to make teaching attractive and rewards teachers’ hard work on behalf of students.

Education workers have lower wages and worse benefits than most other sectors. We choose this job because we genuinely care about the students and the future of our state. The working conditions, behavioral issues, wages, benefits and lack of respect is pushing dedicated educators out of the profession. Nearly a third of teachers leave the profession within their first five years. Something’s got to give – what we have now is unsustainable and is hurting the students.

Pensions provide educators with a guaranteed, reliable source of income in retirement and are one tool to attract and retain qualified, experienced educators to the profession. Our teachers are paying the highest employee contributions in history yet their plans are designed to only benefit the teachers with the longest careers and are limiting choice as to when and how they will retire.

Educators are the glue that keep our communities going. I believe that the investment should match the size of the staffing crisis. Please ask your legislators to support better pensions for educators.

Fund the mandates

Our public schools have the responsibility of educating every child who comes through the door, regardless of ability, language, race, or income. Every child should be set up to succeed. Our federal government knows this, which is why they’ve put in place funding mandates for special education and English language learner programs. The hard thing is, as much as they’re putting attention to these important groups of students, they’re not putting their money where their mouth is. The school districts have to make up the funding gaps themselves, which ends up causing a lot of turmoil within schools.

For too many years, state and federal governments have failed to fully fund these educational areas, placing a large burden on local school districts. EL and special education teachers and paras have been advocating for full funding for years, not only because their programs will be able to meet the students’ needs, but because schools are facing more funding challenges than ever and they want the best outcomes for their students.

Join me in asking state lawmakers to support H.F. 18/S.F. 28, which fully funds special education, and H.F. 22/S.F. 21, which fully funds English language learner programs. Both are essential to our state, if we want a school system that sets children up to thrive.

Special Ed Paperwork

I’m a special education teacher at [insert school name]. Special education teachers play an essential role in our communities, yet we’re facing a staffing crisis in schools. We choose this job because we care about the children, but it’s getting harder to stay because of the lack of support from the federal and state government. Today I want to write in about one issue that gets in the way of addressing student needs: paperwork.

I am required to document my work to ensure procedural safeguards for students with disabilities. This mandatory paperwork is an increasing part of special educators’ workload. No matter how good of a teacher you are, there are legal consequences for failing to complete paperwork, and you risk losing your job if you fall too far behind. Some paperwork is important, but as a whole, it’s repetitive, time-consuming and distracts from meeting the needs of the students. Paperwork time often goes unpaid as well.

In Minnesota, 60 percent of special education staff in have no clerical support to assist with due process paperwork. Seventy-six percent of special education teachers and related service providers have no guaranteed due process paperwork time scheduled as part of their professional duty day.

If we want all of our kids to be set up for success, we need to address caseload and paperwork issues within special education. Addressing these issues will also help to recruit and retain educators. Please ask your legislators to work on these issues, so all of us can thrive.

Special Ed Caseload

I’m a special education teacher at [insert school name]. Many don’t realize the dire situation we’re struggling with in our schools at this moment. I have to meet the individual needs of \_\_\_\_ children. Often I have to choose between helping a student in crisis, instructing other students or doing tedious, often repetitive, government-mandated paperwork. We choose this job because we care about the children, but it’s getting harder to stay because the day-to-day work should be split up among more people. We are also seeing students have more needs than ever and we’re not getting the support we need from the federal or state government.

This is an essential job. These kids need to not only be cared for, but have the staff needed to provide them with what they need to succeed. I want special education teachers to have better working conditions and smaller caseloads. We’re losing educators every day because this hasn’t been handled yet. Please contact your legislator and ask them to support HF 18/ SF 28 which provides the increases in special education funding our students deserve.

Support our ESPs

I’m an [job position] at [school]. Schools can’t run without education support professionals. ESPs are paraprofessionals, clerical staff, janitorial staff, food service workers, bus drivers and any other hourly staff that support students in schools.

Teachers can’t do their work without support staff. Many ESPs currently make less than a living wage and lack access to health care and insurance. These critical educators are the first people students see in the morning and the last adults they see when they leave in the afternoon. Though the importance of their work is apparent, thousands of ESPs don’t have enough left in their paychecks after paying for health insurance to pay for a week of groceries, much less childcare, housing and utilities.

Low pay and uncertainty of summer employment are forcing many to leave the profession for more secure jobs. School staffing shortages are at an all-time high and we need to move quickly to ensure we can recruit and retain quality school staff for our kids.

We need to pay ESPs more, because they’re worth it. Please join me in asking our legislators to support two important bills this legislative session. The ESP Bill of Rights, which establishes a $25/hr minimum wage for school workers, supports better healthcare and paid training hours; and unemployment access for during the summer, allowing us to retain more qualified staff. Please help us be heard by state legislators, because these changes are crucial.

Student Mental Health

Did you know that Minnesota has one of the worst student-to-counselor ratios in the nation? In fact, our ratio is worse than all of our neighboring states, with an average caseload of 570 students for every one school counselor. Students are waiting weeks to see a school social worker, psychologist, counselor or nurse – in a time where students have more needs than ever. Schools that adequately fund these essential positions and support manageable caseloads see more student success, and less behavior issues.

This year at the Legislature, there’s a bill that would give every school funding to hire more mental and physical health support positions. I can’t tell you how transformative this would be for our schools. Every Minnesota student should be set up for success. We need to address the mental health staff shortage in schools. Please join me in reaching out to our state legislators and urging them to support H.F. 8/S.F. 56 so our schools can better meet the growing mental and physical health needs of our students.

Teachers of Color

Students of color in Minnesota face some of the worst opportunity gaps in the country. They’re just not supported like they should be – despite years of asking for support. One way the Legislature can support them is by passing the Increase Teachers of Color Act. Students do better when they see themselves reflected in their classrooms. This year is the first time in Minnesota history that students of color in the seven-county metro make up more than 50% of our student population, yet less than 10% of teachers in the same area are teachers of color.

It’s impossible for one person – or one type of person – to meet the needs of every single child. We need to recruit, prepare and retain prospective teachers of color and American Indian teachers. We should make sure that our population of educators is as beautifully diverse as the students that we teach.

Revenue

We need a fair tax system if we want our communities to thrive. I’m an educator at [school], and I know what years of disinvestment look like. Our state’s most important essential services, like education and health care, have gone underfunded year after year. In order to be the best state we can be, and meet our communities’ needs, we need ongoing revenue dedicated to these services.

Our state’s budget surplus gives us a great opportunity this year to fund important things, but it doesn’t solve many issues we face in the long run. Much of the surplus is one-time money. Our schools deserve a robust, reliable funding stream from the state so we can support the future of Minnesota — our children. Please join me in asking legislators to ensure adequate funding for the collective needs of all Minnesotans. I’m asking that they say no to tax cuts for the rich, and work to ensure that the wealthy and corporations pay what they owe. No more loopholes. No excuses.

Equalization

Fully funding schools includes reducing the local burden for levies that our local community has passed. Soaring inflation and rising prices are squeezing working families in Minnesota, who are already dreading their spring bill for property taxes. Passing a tax equalization law will help families in communities like ours, which have stepped up to pass levies to support our students even though we have a smaller tax base than many suburban and urban districts. For those of us in districts without the ability to generate significant funding for our students, equalization support would help provide more state aid. All students deserve the same well-funded programs, no matter what part of the state they call home.

Minnesota has a school-finance system that now requires local taxpayers to raise our own taxes to support schools. But if the Legislature were to invest in tax equalization, our students in [district name] would receive more state money and remove some of the pressure on local taxpayers. Tax equalization is one way for the state of Minnesota to ensure all students, no matter their ZIP code, receive a well-rounded education that provides them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed after high school.

Please join me in reaching out to our local legislators, and ask them to support equalization for better public schools for all Minnesota students, including those from communities like [district name].

Educators Need a Raise

We all grew up knowing that teachers don’t make that much money. That notion, with no signs of progress, has led to a one-of-a-kind school staffing shortage. 9 out of 10 schools in Minnesota are currently in a staffing crisis, hardly able to run, much less meet the needs of the students. Educators have larger class sizes than ever and their wages haven’t even kept up with inflation.

Even so, many educators still work for poverty-level wages because they care about the kids in our communities that much. It’s time we treat these jobs as the essential career paths that they are.

There are bills moving through the Legislature right now that would give every teacher a $10,000 annual raise and pay hourly staff at least $25 an hour. This would be transformative for our Minnesota schools. We would be able to recruit and retain the professional, qualified staff that our children need to succeed. Educator working conditions are student learning conditions.

When there aren’t enough teachers and education support professionals, it’s hard for students to learn the lessons and skills they will need to succeed after high school. Raising educator pay shows we respect our educators and value their work. It’s good for our students, too. It’s time that we fully support our educators. Please join me in contacting your legislators in support of these proposals.