

2024 Education Minnesota Legislative Agenda

Our top priorities are supporting educators with professional pay, pensions and health care.

Students learn best when they can develop a trusting relationship with their educators, but what happens when there aren't enough educators?

From the statewide shortage of teachers, licensed school staff, substitutes and education support professionals to burnout among state college faculty, it's clear Minnesota must improve the financial well-being of its educators to address the labor crunch in public education. Nine out of 10 schools in Minnesota are significantly affected by the educator shortage, which harms students of color, students with disabilities and students from rural areas the most.

Understaffing accelerates burnout, low pay forces educators to work multiple jobs, and spiraling health insurance costs encourage educators to work sick. Add in broken pension plans, and it's no wonder educators are reluctantly leaving their students for higher wages outside public education.

Educators are worth more—and they know it. That's why Education Minnesota, a union of more than 84,000 educators in E-12 and higher education, supports a package of bills designed to recruit the next generation of passionate and knowledgeable educators, and retain the best group of education professionals in America.

To offer our students the highest-quality education, employers must pay their educators fairly from day one through retirement, show them the respect they deserve and reduce burnout. Together, these proposals are a responsible reaction to the staffing crisis. Our students, and educators, have waited long enough.

Educator Pay

Minnesota teachers in E-12 schools make 28% less on average compared to other workers in Minnesota with the same education level. Hourly school workers only make minimum wage in many areas, and often don't make enough to cover their health insurance costs. The state of Minnesota should make **direct investments in the compensation of its educators**. Our union supports legislation that:

- Raises wages for all teachers, commensurate with other professions with similar educational requirements, and raise starting wages to a minimum of \$60,000 annually.
- Establishes a minimum wage for hourly school workers of \$25 an hour.
- Supports higher compensation for the faculty in the state's college and universities, including wages and expanding the right of dependent tuition waivers to state universities.

Educator Pensions

Educator pensions are not the **recruitment and retention tool they were created to be**. Our teachers' top priority is reforming their pension plan. With some of the highest educator contribution levels to their own pensions compared to other states, direct state investment is required. We support legislation that:

- Reduces penalties and increases flexibility for educator retirement, so educators can choose when they're ready to retire without losing a significant amount of their pension benefit.
- Supports improving the retirement plans for higher education faculty, including better pensions and increasing the Supplemental Retirement Plan statutory maximum.

Educator Health Care

Health insurance costs for educators have soared in the past decade, and in many areas are **rising faster than negotiated salary and wage increases**. The state needs to invest in educator health plans, including the Public Employees Insurance Program, or PEIP. Many educators who leave the classroom cite health care costs as a reason to change industries. To address the staffing crisis, Minnesota must provide affordable, reliable health insurance to these essential workers. We support legislation that:

- Reduces the exorbitant cost of health insurance for educators through strengthening PEIP and supporting policies that make health insurance more affordable for all Minnesotans.


Our top priority is ending the educator shortage with professional pay, pensions and health care for all school workers. We must also work together to reduce educator burnout. We can do this by:

- Ensuring educators are safe at work mentally and physically.
- Fully staffing **mental and physical health teams** by hiring more licensed school counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other support professionals.
- Reducing class sizes and/or improving educator-to-student ratios in public schools and reducing special education teacher caseloads so that our students can benefit from 1-on-1 support.
- Offering **paid student teaching** to all teacher candidates and reducing educator student debt.
- Supporting the **freedom to teach an honest history** of the United States and to make available age-appropriate, thought-provoking books in school libraries to counter the national movement to whitewash history, ban books and restrict our students' freedom to read.
- Providing all students with access to **professional media specialists** who can teach the differences between reliable information and misinformation and disinformation flooding social media.
- Increasing "**prep time**" for effective lessons for all teachers.
- Providing dedicated **due process time** to special education teachers to meet students' needs and to hold meetings with families and manage caseload sizes.
- Bringing Minnesota into compliance with federal law by requiring all **special education teachers to have training** in meeting the needs of students with IEPs before entering the classroom.
- Fully funding services for all members of the school community, including **E-12 students in special education and English language learners**.
- Increasing the per-pupil funding formula to compensate for past underfunding and historic inflation.
- Funding a total of **18 hours of paid training** for all paraprofessionals who work directly with students.
- Supporting specific policies to **attract and retain teachers of color**, and work toward creating school climates that reflect the diversity of Minnesota.
- Increasing **access to college** by renewing the state of Minnesota's commitment to public higher education by returning to statutory levels of funding for state colleges and universities.
- Supporting changes to PELRA to clarify that higher education personnel who regularly teach students should be classified with faculty bargaining units and not with professional and administrative staff.
- Creating a **universal child care and early learning program**, using mixed delivery, where low-income families pay nothing, and no family pays more than 7% of family income.

The term "educators" includes all school workers. Education Minnesota represents and advocates for teachers, education support professionals, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, school media specialists, cultural family advocates, higher education faculty and other licensed school staff.

Updated: Dec. 15, 2023

www.educationminnesota.org

Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.  4249



**THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS**