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2026 Education Minnesota Legislative Agenda

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

Almost every Minnesotan agrees that educators are the foundation of our public schools, and those educators need to be focused, healthy and present for our students to learn. But right now, certain health insurance companies are gouging educators and the school districts that employ them. Too often, Minnesota educators are working sick, or are sick with worry about their finances, because their health care costs are out of control.

In the summer of 2025, a poll of over 84,000 Education Minnesota members found that health insurance costs were their top concern. Nine in 10 said every educator should have affordable, high-quality health insurance, but half the educators said their insurance was not affordable, and 49% said they had put off medical care because it was too expensive. Worries about pay and pensions were not far behind. Working conditions that were burning out staff rounded out the top tier of issues.

It is no wonder that Minnesota has a statewide shortage of teachers, licensed school staff, substitutes and education support professionals. More than 80% of Minnesota school districts report a significant shortage of teachers and substitutes, which harms students of color, students with disabilities and students from rural areas the most.

Understaffing results in significant workload increases, which accelerates burnout. Low pay adds stress by forcing educators to work second and third jobs. Although the Legislature and Gov. Tim Walz made meaningful progress on teacher pensions in the 2025 session, educators still need more flexibility to retire with dignity after giving their working lives to Minnesota's students.

Educators are on the job and doing their best in every community and ZIP code in Minnesota, but they need more financial support from the state. That is why Education Minnesota supports a package of bills designed to recruit the next generation of educators and keep Minnesota's current educators healthy and in the classroom.

In 2026, our union will work toward a solution to the health care affordability crisis by creating an insurance pool of every school staff member in the state and empowering them to use their collective negotiating power with the insurance companies to control costs. We will also work to alleviate the staffing shortage by raising pay, improving pensions, funding higher education, and improving working conditions to alleviate burnout and boost retention.

We must also resist the efforts to privatize public education coming from the Trump Administration. We oppose state participation in the national school voucher program, and we will reject any attempt by the U.S. Department of Education to induce or coerce school districts to adopt a whitewashed, dishonest civics curriculum that aligns more closely with a political agenda than the truth. Our union will ask the state to backfill cuts by the federal government to vital programs for our most at-risk learners, if necessary.

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 improve working conditions to reduce burnout. Together, these proposals are an important, achievable solution to the staffing crisis. Our students and educators have waited long enough.

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www.educationminnesota.org

Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO. #6045



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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 creating a mandatory statewide health insurance pool for all school district employees. Many educators who leave the classroom cite health care costs as their reason for changing industries. To address the staffing crisis, Minnesota must provide affordable, reliable health insurance to these essential workers, modeled after the state employee pool. We support legislation that creates a large pool to:

- Maximize the value of cost-sharing to reduce premium increases from year to year.
- Reduce unpredictability by ensuring better coverage and maximizing bargaining power with health insurance carriers regarding coverage and benefits.
- Lessen administrative burden at the local level to increase transparency and remove unnecessary and costly broker fees.



Educator Pay

Minnesota teachers in E-12 schools make 31% less on average than other workers in Minnesota with the same education level. Hourly school workers only make minimum wage in many areas and often do not 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 for teachers with a bachelor's degree and \$80,000 for teachers with a master's degree
- Establishes a minimum wage for hourly school workers of \$25 an hour and a minimum annual salary.
- Supports higher compensation for the faculty in the state's colleges and universities, including wages and expanding the right of dependent tuition waivers to state universities.

Educator Pensions

Educator pensions are no longer the **recruitment and retention tool they were created to be**. A top priority for teachers 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:

- Achieves an unreduced career rule of 60 years of age and 30 years of service, rewarding decades of public service with a fair retirement benefit that will help retain mid-career educators.
- Reduces penalties and increases flexibility for educator retirement, so educators can choose when they are ready to retire without losing a significant amount of their pension benefit.
- Removes the delay on cost-of-living adjustments for educators who retire before their Normal Retirement Age and immediately increase COLAs for retirees.
- Ensures a living wage in retirement for education support professionals.
- Improves the retirement plans for higher education faculty, including better pensions and increasing the Supplemental Retirement Plan statutory maximum.



Increasing Retention and Reducing Educator Burnout

Our top priority is ending the educator shortage with professional pay, pensions and health care for all school workers. More than 38% of licensed teachers are not working in our schools. We must also work together to increase retention and reduce educator burnout. We can do this by:

- Ensuring educators are safe at work, both mentally and physically.
- Fully staffing **mental and physical health teams** by hiring more licensed school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, school nurses and other support professionals.
- Reducing class sizes, 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, expanding registered teacher apprenticeship programs and reducing educator student debt.
- Supporting positions from the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers that call for a ban on high-capacity magazines and assault-style rifles.
- Supporting the **freedom to teach an honest history** of the United States and to make age-appropriate, thought-provoking books available in school libraries to counter the national movement to whitewash history, ban books and restrict 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.
- Ensuring all educators have proper time in their duty day and compensation to meet READ Act requirements.
- Increasing duty-free "**preparation time**" for effective lessons for all teachers.
- Providing dedicated **time** to special education teachers so they can meet students' needs and hold meetings with families.
- 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 working to create 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 students with behavioral challenges and disrupted learning in a fair and equitable manner.
- 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.
- Improving working conditions for contingent faculty, including stability of workload and access to health insurance.

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.