

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



TAKE ACTION TO PROACTIVELY MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER

Keep students and teachers safe by proactively intervening before safety concerns emerge. This involves increasing mental health services and offering specialized teacher training. We need to fully and permanently fund programs that are already showing results through the Safe Schools levy, professional development dollars, or innovative mental health funding.

ALLOW EXTENDED TIME REVENUE FOR STUDENTS IN ALL RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITIES

Ensure students in residential settings for chemical or mental health treatment have the same educational opportunities as their peers. We need to allow these students to access extended day programs so they can have a more complete high school experience.

ELIMINATE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR STUDENTS IN RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES WHO ARE WARDS OF THE STATE

Reduce the financial responsibility of school districts by ensuring school districts are paid through tuition billing for educating students who are wards of the state.



EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS OVER AGE 18 ENROLLED IN AREA LEARNING CENTER PROGRAMS

Increase the age limit for attendance in a public school to age 22 for any student that was enrolled in high school and attending an ALC during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.



SUPPORT RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT OF A DIVERSE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

Increase funding for Grow Your Own programs to recruit more teachers of color to represent the growing student population.

TAKE ACTION TO PROACTIVELY MAKE SCHOOLS SAFER

Public schools have become the frontline of children's mental health services and have become the de facto mental health system for children and youth, at least during the school day. **Critical incidents, assaults on staff, threats to schools, police interventions, and suicide attempts are not uncommon.** Schools do not have the funding for the necessary training, staff support, or specialized mental health services to serve in this capacity and prevent unsafe situations for students and staff. Temporary grant funds that the legislature awarded in 2017 are set to expire in the next few months. We have pilot programs in place that are already showing results - students are avoiding hospitalization and costly county services, and they are able to engage in school more than ever before. But we cannot sustain these programs with temporary funding.

We propose that the legislature fully and permanently fund these programs. There are opportunities for meeting this need through the Safe Schools levy, professional development dollars, or innovative mental health funding.

ALLOW EXTENDED TIME REVENUE FOR STUDENTS IN ALL RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITIES

A residential care and treatment program does not have access to revenue for extended day programs like a typical high school or an Area Learning Center (ALC). This means that students with mental health needs in residential care cannot benefit from the broad curriculum opportunities available to their peers. One residential program, Prairie Lakes Education Center in Willmar, has access to extended day revenue per MN Statute 126C.10 Subd 2a (b). Because of this funding, they are able to offer students options that other residential programs cannot.

We propose expanding extended day revenue to include all residential treatment programs in the state so that students enrolled can take part in the broad curriculum experiences they need for returning to high school or to graduate.

ELIMINATE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR STUDENTS IN RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES WHO ARE WARDS OF THE STATE

When a student who is a ward of the state is enrolled in a residential treatment facility, the district where the facility is located is responsible to pay for the educational costs in the current year, even if this student has never attended a district school. Eighteen months later, the state reimburses the district. These high costs and cash flow delays put a significant burden on the district's finances and can risk their financial stability.

We propose the following:

- *that documentation necessary regarding the status of a student being a ward of the state should be accepted from either a county authority or from actual court documents;*
- *that the educational costs for wards of the state be paid through tuition billing on a current year basis;*
- *that the payment be made directly to the serving district, thus eliminating the need for the district where the facility is located to be an intermediary for cash flow; and,*
- *that MDE pay the costs directly for students placed in a residential facility out of state.*

EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS OVER AGE 18 ENROLLED IN AREA LEARNING CENTER PROGRAMS

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profoundly detrimental impact on students enrolled in area learning programming and their ability to complete schoolwork and earn credits needed for graduation. Most students in an ALC program arrive behind in their academic credits and the pandemic only exacerbated these students' credit deficiencies. For the average ALC student, these impacts have impacted their academic standing and put many at risk of dropping out or aging out of public school without a diploma. It is imperative we allow these students more time to finish the necessary coursework and obtain the required credits for graduation.

We propose increasing the age limit for attendance in a public school to age 22 for any student that was enrolled in high school and attending an ALC during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

SUPPORT RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT OF A DIVERSE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

Minnesota ranks among the lowest graduation rates nationally for Black and Hispanic students. The disproportionality of educators of color in comparison to students of the same identity remains stagnant in the state, while research shows that teachers of color help close achievement gaps for students and are resources in hard-to-staff or low-income schools. Aspiring Black and Hispanic teachers are more likely to borrow student loans and have struggles paying them back, making the financial barrier a deterrent for entering the education profession. By increasing funding for Grow Your Own programs, the Intermediate Districts can recruit diverse educators with scholarship incentives and ensure that prospective staff successfully complete preparation programs before entering the classroom.

We propose increasing funding for programs that recruit more teachers of color and provide supportive professional development.