

Association of Metropolitan School Districts

2023 Legislative Platform

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Minnesota's future prosperity is directly tied to successfully closing our racial and income-based opportunity gaps while accelerating achievement for all students. The pandemic has hastened the rate at which millions of Baby Boomers throughout the nation are retiring and leaving the workforce, creating unprecedented workforce shortages. These shortages come as Minnesota is experiencing a major demographic transition.

In the next decade, children aged 0 – 14 will be outnumbered by retirees aged 65 and above for the first time in Minnesota's history. At the same time, Minnesota is becoming increasingly diverse. Minnesota's youngest residents (age 0-4) are 32 percent of color, compared to 6 percent of residents 65 and older. Eleven percent of school age children live in poverty.

To ensure the workforce needed in the coming years, it is critical that every student graduates from high school ready for college or career. Attaining this goal will require bold leadership and additional resources not currently provided by the state. It will also require that state policymakers and educators think creatively and do things differently.

The AMSD Board of Directors has identified a series of recommendations to help Minnesota reclaim its place as a national leader in education by addressing its racial and economic disparities and prioritizing high levels of achievement for all students.

Strengthen and Stabilize Funding

Adequate, equitable and stable funding is essential to ensuring equitable academic outcomes for our students. Toward that end, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Increase the basic formula allowance by 5 percent per year and index it to inflation;
- Raise special education cross-subsidy reduction aid to 40 percent to reduce the funding shortfall;
- Fully fund the English learner program;
- Increase Local Optional Revenue to \$840 per pupil and index it by average county wages to account for market-based geographic labor cost differentials;
- Allow locally elected school boards to renew an existing operating referendum; and
- Increase equalization of the operating referendum, local optional, and debt service levies to reduce taxpayer and education funding disparities.

Enhance School Safety and Increase Mental Health Support

To address the mental health needs of our students and ensure safe and secure learning environments for students and staff, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Increase the Safe Schools revenue from \$36 to \$108 per pupil through state aid and an equalized levy to allow school districts and intermediate school districts to hire additional support staff to address the growing mental health needs of our students; and
- Remove the per pupil limit in the Long-Term Facilities Maintenance Revenue program and expand allowable uses of revenue to allow school districts and intermediate school districts to enhance safety through security modifications to buildings, including remodeling and additions to existing space.

Close Opportunity Gaps and Spur Innovation

To address disparities and meet the needs of underserved students, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Make funding for the Voluntary Pre-K program permanent and increase access to school-based pre-kindergarten programs;
- Allow school districts to implement a competency-based education model in lieu of seat time requirements to allow for personalized learning opportunities;
- Modernize the online learning law to expand opportunities for students;
- Establish a pilot project to allow approved school districts to replace the high school MCA exams with a nationally recognized college entrance exam; and
- Allow locally elected school boards to establish the school calendar that best meets the needs of their students, staff, and community.

Diversify the Educator Workforce and Address Shortage Areas

To diversify the educator workforce and address staff shortages, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Create incentives and alternative pathways to attract, develop, and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas;
- Streamline the process to obtain a short-call substitute teaching license and maintain multiple pathways to teacher licensure in the tiered licensing system; and
- Invest in rigorous teacher induction and mentoring programs.