

MREA, comprised of 198 Greater Minnesota school districts, 11 education districts, and additional associate members, supports expanding educational opportunities and closing achievement gaps in Minnesota through the following strategies and initiatives.

Facility Fallout

Close the glaring funding inequity for maintenance of existing facilities that exists between large metro schools and all other districts. MREA's top budget priority during the 2015 budget-setting session is to advance the recommendations of the School Facilities Financing Working Group, specifically Recommendation #1 in its report.

Early Learning Coordination

Break down the silos in early childhood education and ensure coordination of early learning programs to build high-quality early learning capacity in rural Minnesota.

Quiet Teacher Crisis

Address the silent crisis of teacher shortages in rural communities, which has wide-ranging and complex policy impact. Secure ongoing funding for teacher development and mentoring to ensure all students have high-quality educators in their classrooms.

Local Control and State Accountability

Repeal barriers and reduce reporting to achieve the best balance between statewide accountability and local decision-making regarding implementation of education policy, with legislative action to:

- Repeal statutory and administrative barriers that restrict local school districts when establishing the learning year for their students.
- Consolidate school district reporting requirements under the World's Best Workforce statute.

MREA is the only advocate exclusively for Greater Minnesota schools. Under the leadership of school board members, administrators, teachers and community members, MREA focuses on the education, growth, and development of learners to bring about our best possible future.

Additional Initiatives to Expand Opportunities and Close Gaps

MREA supports many additional initiatives for 2015 and is working with local districts to advance them. These issues range from securing school-linked mental health grants, supporting American Indian students, and expanding broadband capacity and school technology, to maintaining local control while fending off unfunded mandates or state restrictions on basic district operations.

Learn more about these issues and others on the following pages and at MnREA.org.

FACILITY FALLOUT: EQUITY IN MINNESOTA'S INVESTMENT

Minnesota's 25 largest school districts spend an average of \$2.79 per square foot on facility maintenance because they qualify for Alternative Facilities Authority. The remaining 305 Minnesota school districts spend on facility maintenance an average of \$0.58 per square foot -- one-fifth the amount of their counterparts.

To ensure that a student's general education allowance has similar buying power for educational programming regardless of zip code, the state should reduce this 5:1 gap in facilities maintenance spending power between large districts qualifying for Alternative Facilities authority and the remaining districts that do not qualify.

To accomplish this, MREA supports legislation to enact Recommendation #1 of the MDE School Facilities Financing Work Group report which calls for extending the "alternative facilities authority" to all school districts in the form of an equalized, board-approved Long-Term Facility Maintenance levy.

To make the equalized Long Term Facility Maintenance levy program more palatable to local communities, MREA urges the legislature to examine and consider the following issues:

- Ensure school district tax bases accurately reflect the actual wealth of the families and children living in the district.
- Enact a stop-loss type of property tax relief program so tax burdens to agricultural production land do not inhibit the use of school board levy authority by local boards.
- Create a base level of state funding for deferred maintenance needs through additional state aid.
- Utilize existing state property tax levies (i.e. the Statewide Business levy and the Student Achievement Levy) to assist districts in maintaining current facilities.

For the interactive map and to learn more, visit MnREA.org/FacilityFallout

EARLY LEARNING COORDINATION: PLANNING FOR RESULTS

While there is wide-based support for early learning and preschool students receiving some type of public preschool education, the state funds six major programs serving early learners and their families, costing hundreds of millions of dollars each year. Minnesota needs to define a statewide aligned, coordinated approach to deliver high-quality preschool education.

MREA supports a more aligned, coordinated and expanded model for the delivery of early learning opportunities across Greater Minnesota. Minnesota should support community-based early childhood options for low-income families and should require from early learning providers a coordinated plan for benchmarks, assessments and results accountability. To achieve this, MREA support legislation to:

- Transition the funding for Early Learning Scholarships into the School Readiness program (124D.15) or a formula-driven program (0.6 of the general allowance).
- Support community-based early childhood options for families and require providers to coordinate planning, align assessments, use best practices, and demonstrate results for accountability.

Learn more at MnREA.org/EarlyLearning

QUIET TEACHER CRISIS: TEACHER DEVELOPMENT & AVAILABILITY

Minnesota's 845,000 students need highly qualified licensed teachers, across all grade levels and specialties, guiding them every day. The two greatest factors in students' academic success are parental involvement and the quality of the teachers in their classrooms.

Minnesota needs to balance the availability and supply of teachers across the state with the rigor and quality of Minnesota teacher candidate tests, to ensure that districts can attract, provide and retain quality teachers for all students.

Development & Evaluation

MREA supports legislative action to promote teacher development and evaluation by:

- Merging the current Teacher Development & Evaluation program with the Q Comp program and expanding funding to districts currently not in the Q Comp program.
- Establishing a college tuition rebate and/or scholarship program for newly licensed teachers who are employed in Minnesota public schools and who are graduates of a Minnesota teacher licensing college. Teachers would qualify for this rebate or scholarship program if they agree to teach in geographic areas of the state and/or in subject areas with less than adequate teacher availability or are hired for positions in these shortage areas.

Board of Teaching and Licensing Options

MREA supports legislative restructuring of the Board of Teaching so that each Economic Development Region in Minnesota is represented among the Board's appointed members.

In addition, MREA urges the Board of Teaching to amend licensure requirements to accomplish the following:

- Create a robust array of alternative licensing options with Minnesota teacher education programs for college graduates.
- Increase the flexibility of licensing categories to allow teachers in small and rural schools to teach across disciplines and specialties.

Teacher Quality

To ensure an adequate level of rigor with regard to beginning teachers' pedagogical skills and ability to relate to children and youth, MREA supports legislation incorporating:

- Multiple strategies, rather than a single standardized test, to measure the basic reading, writing, and mathematics skills and knowledge of teachers and prospective teachers.
- The elimination of cut scores on any single teacher standardized test to determine licensure.
- Amending the required passage of state board exams for teacher licensure to required completion of state board exams, with full disclosure of results to hiring agencies including school districts.
- Commissioning an independent, longitudinal research study of the relationship between the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exam (MTLE) score and teacher proficiency in the first three years of a teacher's career.

Learn more at MnREA.org/OurTeachers

ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES: EXPANDED OPPORTUNITIES AND CLOSED GAPS

Coordinated early learning investments and seamless transitions between high school and post-secondary education are cornerstones of career and college readiness to effect the World's Best Workforce. Testing reform, technology, mental health services, and regional support are critical to the development of learners. American Indian students have the lowest graduation rate in the nation and the largest achievement gap in Minnesota. Rural communities need help meeting all the needs of these learners.

Secondary to Post-Secondary and Career

- Reinvest in vocational and technical education and skills (i.e.: welding, robotics, accounting), including funding summer school programs, by expanding Average Daily Membership (ADM) funding similar to targeted services up to 0.25 pupil unit reimbursement. Encourage school districts to collaborate with local employers in summer programs.
- Provide flexibility to schools, students, families, post-secondary institutions, and employers as they begin using the new suite of assessments and planning tools for career and college readiness.
- Re-examine high school coursework and standards requirements to ensure alignment with the data regarding state workforce needs.

Technology

- Expand Telecommunications Equity Access program funding to ensure cost-effective, high-speed broadband access to schools.
- Enhance operating capital funding and equalization.
- Expand broadband development grants to local communities to expand cost-effective, high-speed broadband access to underserved rural communities and households.

Testing

- Continue to pursue waivers from federal accountability requirements to reduce high volumes of testing currently required in Minnesota's K-12 system.
- Since ACT testing is not required for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are still in effect, allow districts to waive up to 15 percent of students from taking the ACT with parental permission.

Mental Health Needs of Children

- Enlarge the School-Linked Mental Health Grant program and enable MDE to work proactively with the Department of Human Services, counties, and private providers to identify mental health providers to partner with districts.

Regional Centers of Excellence & Regional Initiatives

- Continue funding for current Regional Centers of Excellence (RCE) initiatives and gather school district input, by region, on potential initiatives and support funding for regional and cooperative educational initiatives.

Support Our American Indian Students

Modify the language and structure of the Integration Aid program to place American Indian students within the formula. Replace *Success for the Future* competitive grants for with categorical funding based on:

- School and district eligibility based upon program purposes and targeted students
- Required application describing proposed expenditures and match with program criteria
- State accountability with Commissioner Authority to withhold and redirect set percentage of funds based on program performance