

Preparing to respond to opposition using the Affirm-Answer-Redirect (AAR) method

Minnesota educators and students cannot wait for others to decide to fund our schools. We have to make it happen through our own organizing work.

We will hear from people who have a hard time believing that full funding is possible or who think our schools already have too much money. We want to be ready to talk with them, not by having the perfect answer, but by understanding how to respond.

When we get pushback from family, friends, colleagues or from the community, it will usually come in the form of a “yes, buts”– the “nice” way to say no.

YES, I agree with you....BUT...

A “yes, but” is an opportunity for us to respond to the fear or roadblock that someone has just shared with us. We should respond with honesty and work to create another opportunity for someone to join us. The “yes, buts...” in a conversation should be addressed respectfully and redirected.

Use the AAR method

- **Affirm:** Show respect. Someone has just shared something true for them. Even if you disagree, let them know you hear them.
- **Answer:** Provide information. Give an honest, objective, values-based response. Sometimes, this can just be sharing your own experience.
- **Redirect:** Turn to a shared value or a vision for what is possible by working together. Invite them to be part of what is ahead.

Examples of “yes, buts” and AAR responses

My community cannot support any more levies.

A: I’ve heard that very thing from educators across the state. We have leaned on our own communities by asking families to raise their own taxes, and I know people are tired of levy campaigns.

A: Our campaign isn’t about asking local communities to individually pass more levies; we know that isn’t sustainable. What we are talking about is asking the very wealthiest to pay their fair share, including corporations making billions of dollars in profit every year. They benefit from our education system and we think it is time for them to invest more in our future.

R: We’ve talked about the possibilities that exist for our students if we have fully funded schools. Think about your classroom and students if we weren’t facing cuts every year. Isn’t that worth fighting for?

Why should we give colleges more money if their graduation and completion rates aren't improving?

- A: It can seem a little backwards to provide more resources to our colleges if not enough students are graduating, I agree.
- A: Since 2003, every level of education has faced devastating cuts, and higher-ed did not escape without harm. It's easy to blame the institution for failure, but there are so many other factors at play. One of the reasons many students at our two-year colleges don't finish their degree is that they have to make a decision between paying for their tuition and the costs of childcare that they need while they are in class. Imagine having to choose between furthering your education to get a better job and working several jobs to provide care for your children.
- R: I ask you to think about what students would say if we had the funding to make affordable childcare available on every campus in our state so that no one ever had to make that choice. Will you join me in talking with others about how we can make that a reality?

Going to college isn't a right, it's a privilege. If people want to go, they should pay their way.

- A: I know I feel very privileged to have been able to attend college, and I hope the choice is available to any student who does the work.
- A: The problem that we are seeing more and more, is that is the economically privileged, those who already have a leg up, still get to make that choice while for others, going to college isn't even a viable option. As perspective, I learned recently that up until the mid-90s, Minnesota was covering two-thirds of the cost of college, and tuition and fees were much smaller. Folks could work for the summer and pay for their tuition! The numbers now show the state is funding less than half of the price of college. The only way to make up that discrepancy is to raise tuition and fees on the backs of students. I could never have afforded that.
- R: What we are working on is truly affordable college, so that those who have earned the chance to go to college through hard work in high school have a real shot at making that dream come true. I'd like to ask you to join me in making that dream real for more students.

School funding already goes up each year.

- A: You're right, and legislators love to talk about the two percent increases that schools receive every few years. On paper, it seems like funding for our schools is constantly increasing.
- A: The reality is that funding for schools will always look like it is going up if enrollment is still increasing. It even looks like funding is going up while schools are cutting staff and programs right now. The issue is that funding hasn't kept up with inflation, and that really hurts our schools' ability to provide the most essential services. I hear from colleagues who don't have a nurse or a counselor in their building, and that really makes me worry about our students' health and safety.
- R: We expect the best from our students and we ask them to invest the time and energy into their learning every day. I think we expect the best from the state, since we are educating the citizens and workers that will ensure that Minnesota prospers. I hope you will join me in demanding more investment from the wealthiest people and corporations in our state who benefit every day from the work we do in our schools.

If we fund prekindergarten, then what about the survival of daycare providers?

A: I hear you. I am not advocating that we should put people providing childcare out of business.

A: To have the best chance at succeeding in school, our youngest learners need preK programs that use play to teach numbers, letters and routines. Too many families don't have access to any daycare that provides that experience. In some parts of the state, there are zero daycare providers, period. I know people who drive an hour each way to get their kids to a daycare provider because that's their only option. We can't keep doing that to families.

R: Existing schools within communities all over Minnesota have the best chance at providing preK programs for all children. Research shows this could be the answer to eliminating our stubborn achievement and opportunity gaps. Our littlest learners should be an investment that everyone can agree on, and I would love you to join me in creating chances for them to love learning by funding preK in our state.

Teachers already make enough, especially in rural Minnesota. Why pay more to teachers who only work nine months?

A: You're not alone in that thinking. In fact, I hear that a lot.

A: The thing we all have to grapple with is the fact that we have a really serious crisis in teacher retention and the profession continues to change dramatically. Educators who are staying in the profession are often working multiple jobs throughout the year, including summer. We must be really honest about the fact that there are educator vacancies in every district in Minnesota, and it's only getting worse. It is going to take more than the status quo to make education a job people want to do and a job that people can stay in over time.

R: If we want our students to have the best experience, that is going to include teachers who have experience, passion, and who can focus their attention where it matters, on students. I know there is a new generation of Minnesota kids who deserve to have teachers who believe in them the way someone believed in us. Please join me in making sure we have the funding to pay them what they deserve.

Why should I pay more taxes for schools on the other side of the state? If you want good schools, move to where they are.

A: I can certainly understand where you're coming from. When we see levy after levy being passed and local communities picking up the tab for what the state hasn't paid for, I can understand feeling frustrated about your tax bill.

A: We are talking about a new approach, so the success of your schools isn't dependent on your zip code. No parent should have to take on the burden and stress of moving simply to have access to a quality, public education. Our approach is talking about multi-billion dollar corporations paying **their** fair share in taxes, something that hasn't been the case for a long time.

R: If you didn't have to foot the bill for the investments our kids deserve, what would you want for your kids or others that you know? We have the opportunity to act together and make sure that all students in Minnesota have access to an amazing education. I hope you'll join me in that journey.

A student is a student is a student. Schools should just teach kids with what they have. Why do we need to fund all this special programming?

A: I hear where you're coming from. Sometimes it feels overly complicated until I hear about what going to school looks like now, I am amazed. It does seem like a lot more is going on than when you and I were in school.

A: A well-rounded education might look different for different kids, but there are mandates that are really important. Programming for special education students is important and it is also legally required. Did you know that the federal government has **never** kept its commitment to fund 40 percent of the cost of special education? I just learned that in Minnesota, the federal contribution to special education costs has never been more than 16 percent.

R: I think all parents want the best for their children. If we can figure out a fairer way to fund schools so that kids in every community have not just a basic education but a great education, we'll all do better. What would that mean to you? What could we do together to make that happen?

None of this is going to make a difference. Political leaders of every party do whatever they want and they get away with it and nothing we do makes a difference.

A: I totally understand why it feels that way. For my whole life as an educator, there has never been enough funding. We live with that reality and how it has hurt our kids and our colleagues every day. And I go home at night wondering if we can ever overcome the divisions I see and feel in our politics.

A: The reality is, I look at the big, bold actions that other educators have taken in other states to show up, demand more, and not take no for an answer, and I think we are in a moment where we could make generational change. The public supports education like they haven't in years and educators actually are winning huge investments by being clear about the need and united around their demands. It's an amazing moment.

R: We **can** decide to do big things by starting with small things, like talking with other people in our school or in our community about what kids need. We don't have to accept that things will never change, and we can do it together.