

Staff and student safety during COVID-19 and beyond

School safety starts with unity

Most of us believe that every educator and child, no matter their job or grade, race or ZIP code, deserves a safe and welcoming school environment where they can thrive. But for too long, certain politicians have deprived our public-school educators of the resources they need to safely reach and teach every child, no matter if we are talking about the chronic lack of resources to support students in crisis or educating during a pandemic.

These same powerful few politicians are now spreading disinformation about the virus and trying to divide us by race and by place, insisting our state put our children and educators at risk, and leaving parents scrambling for solutions to a crisis created by years of policies that benefited the largest corporations and the wealthiest Minnesotans at the expense of working families.

We know that we can't go back to business as usual because business as usual didn't work for many educators and students. For now, educators and students must stay physically apart until schools have the resources to ensure everyone in them can stay well and until there's a vaccine or other means to control the spread of COVID-19.


By pulling together, Black, white, and brown, rural and urban, young and old, we can demand safe, fully resourced schools. We can prevent unnecessary illness, save countless lives, get students who act out the support they need, and ensure a better, brighter tomorrow for all of our children, no exceptions.

Specifically, our union favors policies to make our buildings safe during the pandemic and for when all educators can safely return to their buildings. Our plan:

1. Schools operating during the pandemic must meet the highest safety standards from the Minnesota Department of Health and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC.
2. Educators and families, including multilingual families, must be part of the planning process for reopening and, if necessary, closing school buildings during the pandemic.
3. When all buildings reopen, hire one counselor, social worker, psychologist or similar support staff for every 250 students. Minnesota's current ratio of counselors-to-students is 1:723
4. Create enforceable caps on class sizes for every grade and ensure passing times are safely staffed with well-supported ESPs or other professionals.
5. Teach every educator about restorative practices, a successful strategy for reducing in-school violence and reducing racial disparities in school discipline.
6. Provide a full-service community school in every district that asks for one.

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Four things to know

- In July, a survey of Education Minnesota members found at least 8,200 union members said they were in a high-risk category for COVID-19, while nearly 9,600 said they were the primary caregiver for someone in a high-risk category.
- The preferred option for resuming classes this fall was in distance learning (49 percent of respondents), according to the July survey. Hybrid models (29 percent) and in-person learning (17 percent) received less support.
- Educators of color were far more likely to prefer distance learning to the other models, a finding repeated in polls of parents of color. Communities of color have been hit harder by the pandemic than white communities.
- A 2018 survey of more than 1,200 Education Minnesota members found an overwhelming majority say the most effective way to make school safer is by hiring more counselors and support staff.

Taking charge

- School administrators are following the guidance of the CDC, which news reports say has been pressured by the Trump administration to change reports and its guidance about COVID testing. Presidential candidate Joe Biden has pledged to keep the CDC and other federal health agencies independent.
- Minnesota schools could receive more than \$850 million if the U.S. Senate would pass the HEROES Act and the president signs it. Sen. Tina Smith, who is running for reelection, is on the record as supporting the bill.
- The Minnesota Legislature controls the state budget for hiring mental health professionals, reducing class sizes and paying for improvements to the physical security of schools. Ask your local candidates for the state House and Senate where they stand on funding school safety.