

2009 MASA Legislative Position Paper Six Policy Positions

Why

MASA recognizes that the citizens of Minnesota expect continuous improved results from the public school system. The State must assist with this improvement by untying the hands of schools and adopting policies that encourage progressive changes in the education system. To move toward a world class education system, MASA recommends the following initiatives be adopted by the legislature in 2009.

How

- 1) NO NEW MANDATES: Legislative mandates often hamper the ability of Minnesota's schools to serve student needs. What often seems like a good idea to legislators in fact diverts energy and attention from the core academic functions of schools. Therefore, no new mandates should be added and several recently passed mandates should be rescinded. Two recent mandates include a 'maintenance of effort' provision covering certain staff groups and another restricts the ability of school staff to provide TYPE III transportation for students.
- 2) TEACHER QUALITY: Minnesota needs to secure, develop and ensure we have the best possible teachers to educate our children. In addition to working collaboratively with teacher training institutions to provide highly skilled teachers, the following changes should be instituted:
 - a. Create an entry exam for admission into teacher training programs that ensures that all individuals being trained as teachers have high quality basic academic skills. Require a reading and a math competency exam at the time of teacher licensure.
 - b. Create a state level teacher supply/demand commission to quantify teacher availability and create a framework that could be used by local school districts and bargaining groups to develop a differentiated pay system for teachers based on the areas of licensure and the supply of teachers needed in each licensure area.
 - c. Create a system of loan forgiveness for new teachers and minority group teachers willing to work in rural, urban and other challenging locations.
 - d. Commission a study to recommend ways to provide a system of post-tenure review that will require professional educators to continue their effectiveness throughout their careers and establish a method of professional help and correction in the event of ongoing sub-standard performance. Such a system must contain safeguards so that it is used appropriately and effectively.
 - e. Require that persons hired as principals be held to the timeline of an initial tenure process, including two years if hired inside an existing system and three years if hired new to a system.
- 3) EARLY EDUCATION: Minnesota should make the leap to ensure that every child is provided with the support to become 'learning ready'.

- a. Provide funding for School Readiness, ECFE, Head Start, and child care through state investments in programs or through direct financial support through scholarships and allowances.
 - b. Provide full day funding for kindergarten for every low-income child in the state.
- 4) EDUCATION MUST BE EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY: Create a state supported campaign to help students, parents and community members support a culture of high standards and high expectations for student learning and preparation for post high school education. Such a campaign would help our citizens understand that schools cannot promote success alone.
- 5) TIME IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN LEARNING: Current state laws do not provide school districts with the necessary flexibility. School schedules must be coordinated when programs are shared with other education institutions and enough time must be provided for instruction.
 - a. Remove limits on the date school can begin annually. Many high schools are now co-locating programs with Technical Colleges which requires that public schools begin the school year in late August at the same time that the MnSCU System begins classes.
 - b. Add five days to the school year and standardize the length of time/days provided in a school year. Much instructional time has been usurped by mandated testing requirements. To have the time to improve student performance requires that Minnesota move toward a world standard regarding the length of the school year.
- 6) CHARTER SCHOOL REFORM: Revamp requirements regarding the sponsorship and regulation of charter schools. The present system is providing spotty oversight, there are instances of corruption and an abandonment of efforts to integrate student populations. Further, as the number of students in Minnesota decreases, a number of public school facilities should be closed. This process is inhibited by the concern that irate citizens will ask to open charter schools rather than have students be consolidated into fewer public school facilities.
 - a. Only public schools and colleges should be allowed to sponsor charter schools. Funding should be utilized by the sponsor to provide oversight and the sponsor should be required to place an 'ex-officio' member on a charter school board to facilitate that oversight.
 - b. Charter schools should be limited geographically to the service area of the sponsor and an impact appraisal on the school districts in the service area should be completed before a charter is approved.
 - c. Create a three-year moratorium on the creation of a charter school in the geographical area of a school district where the closing of a school is proposed or underway.