

**Minnesota Association  
of School Administrators**

**2010**

**Legislative  
Platform**





# Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) 2010 LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

The education of our children is a shared state and local responsibility. Decreasing funding and increasing mandates make this already complex system even more challenging. To improve Minnesota's education system and enhance the education of every learner, MASA recommends passage of the following proposals in the areas of finance (six), policy (four) and pension (one).

## **Finance**

### **1) Fulfill Minnesota's Constitutional responsibility to support public schools.**

Article XIII, Section 1 of the Minnesota Constitution states, "The stability of a republic form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state."

- *Reform state tax policy with a greater emphasis on a consumer-based taxation system to meet the Constitutional responsibility for a thorough and efficient system of public schools.*

### **2) Restore the K-12 funding system to a stable and predictable system.**

In 2001, the State changed the structure of financing public schools but did not implement a funding mechanism capable of sustaining the change. The result is that districts continue to rely on local levies and increased property taxes for basic programs and services.

- *Adopt a schedule to phase-in comprehensive education funding reform based on the New Minnesota Miracle framework.*
- *Formalize in state statute the loan from school districts to the state made through un-allotment.*
- *Enable school boards to have the ability to set tax levies without specific voter approval.*

### **3) Revise statutes and rules that limit staffing and operational efficiency.**

Minnesota's schools must have the ability to promote change if they are to provide a world class education. It is very difficult to make changes in the currently over-regulated environment.

- *Revise statutes specifying rules for professional evaluation, tenure and educator quality to allow students to have access to the best educators. Authorize a study, with broad input, resulting in recommendations brought to the 2011 legislature.*
- *Remove the rules requiring a financial penalty for non-settlement of teacher contracts by January 15th. Require districts and employee bargaining units to use binding arbitration as a last resort to settle contractual differences.*
- *Repeal the maintenance of effort requirements in the Safe Schools levy that creates another protected class of employees.*
- *Allow school districts that transport charter school and non-public school students to charge for the cost of transporting students that exceeds the state transportation funding reimbursement to school districts. Provide charter schools with transportation aid and require charter schools to provide or contract for the transportation of their students.*

**4) Provide incentives and remove barriers to optimize the voluntary use of shared services among school districts.**

Cooperation among Minnesota public school districts' and other governmental units occurs on a regular basis across our state in areas such as technology, provision of special education services, purchasing and services. A strategy to support increased voluntary share services will require significant changes to existing practices and strong incentives to be successful.

- *Expand on the goods and services already available through the Cooperative Purchasing Venture (CPV) administered by the MN Department of Administration.*
- *Negotiate statewide contracts for natural gas, building fuel and bus fuels.*
- *Eliminate barriers to combination and consolidation.*
- *Provide incentives for combination and consolidation of districts and the cooperative sharing of staff when educationally and economically effective.*
- *Purchase statewide management software and make it available to all districts.*
- *Create a state repository of shared services opportunities, and list the specific services, prices and goods offered.*
- *Encourage partnerships between other governmental units, businesses and school districts.*

**5) Encourage a set of health insurance options that allows choice for school districts and requires a strong role in decision-making for program participants.**

The increasing cost of health insurance is a national problem. Changes to employee compensation are being nearly completely absorbed by the increasing cost of health care premiums. School employers and employees need more flexibility in selecting providers and coverage options.

- *Allow employers, with input from employee representatives, to determine changes to health insurance options and coverage levels.*
- *Allow school districts to consider health insurance policy options including participation in a state system, self-funded system or regional systems.*

**6) Allow the Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System (ATPPS) to be available to all districts.**

The ATPPS system has helped school districts and educators align goals for school improvement and student success.

- *Remove the requirement to eliminate the traditional 'steps and lanes' system from ATPPS plans.*
- *Provide full state funding for all districts to participate in ATPPS.*
- *Encourage an emphasis on student performance within ATPPS.*
- *Allow and require administrator participation in ATPPS.*

## **Policy**

### **1) Support increased access to expanded early childhood education and kindergarten opportunities.**

Research indicates that education investments made at an early age will develop students better equipped for success throughout their education careers. Minnesota has trailed other states in investing in this critical area.

- *Phase-in funding so that within three years all school districts have funding to provide full-day Kindergarten for every student.*
- *Provide adequate funding for early childhood programs so that every pre-school child has access to an early learning program.*
- *Support implementation of a quality rating and improvement system to ensure early learning programs provide age-appropriate high-quality education.*

### **2) Sunset mandates and direct the Minnesota Department of Education to waive mandated reporting, not create any new rules and concentrate on best practice leadership.**

The number of mandates imposed upon school districts is overwhelming. The reporting required to comply with mandates is time-consuming, cumbersome and diverts resources away from serving students.

- *Sunset all mandates as of July 1, 2011, and require that any mandate can only be reinstated if re-adopted into statute with full funding included.*
- *Require that no rules be adopted by the MDE without specific legislative direction.*

### **3) Increase student achievement and teacher effectiveness by more effectively aligning education calendars.**

Minnesota schools need support from the Governor, Legislature and MDE to increase student achievement and professional staff effectiveness. How state assessments are scheduled and how staff development opportunities are supported can make a difference in student learning.

- *Develop a common school calendar that maximizes high impact instruction days in advance of high stakes assessments to provide valuable instructional time that is currently not possible to schedule.*
- *Recognize that staff effectiveness can be improved when schools pool financial, human and intellectual resources to provide significant high quality, job-embedded professional development to staff members, ultimately resulting in an increase in student achievement.*
- *Develop a calendar that is common to both K-12 and post-secondary schools to better meet the needs of all students and creates a more seamless K-16 education calendar.*
- *Encourage the Minnesota Department of Education, upon receiving appropriately vetted requests from school districts, to approve flexible learning year calendars and other innovative proposals intended to improve student achievement.*

### **4) Re-examine the effectiveness of the current state testing system.**

The current statewide MCA testing program was developed based on the requirements of the 2001 federal NCLB Act. Despite promoting healthy accountability, the NCLB Act is widely recognized as significantly flawed and punitive in nature. As the federal education act is re-authorized, it is imperative that Minnesota re-examine its MCA testing program to allow greater flexibility for school districts and a wider use of measures to assess student learning.

- *Commission a study of alternatives for districts and the state to use to assess student performance, with a recommendation completed by December 2010.*
- *Adopt a resolution urging the federal government to complete the re-authorization of the federal education law on or before January 2011.*

## **Pension**

The Teachers Retirement Association (TRA) system is an important part of educator compensation, with teachers and administrators participating as partners with employers and the state. The TRA system must be adequately funded and provide a fair level of benefits to retirees.

- *Increase the contribution level of employers and employees in equal increments over several years beginning as soon as possible to provide long-term stabilization to the fund.*
- *Provide a direct infusion of state funding into the TRA system in FY 2011 to help stabilize the fund in the near-term.*
- *Allow school districts to make a one year extraordinary property tax levy in 2010 to provide the first year of employer and employee funding prior to adjustments in state funding levels for K-12 education.*
- *Assure that all extraordinary contributions committed to the 'roll-in' of the Minneapolis Retirement fund into TRA be continued.*
- *Delay benefit increases to retirees for two or more years until the fund is well on its way to stabilization, and do not consider any other benefit adjustments to the TRA fund until the fund has been sufficiently stabilized.*
- *Build in mechanisms to ease the burdens of pension contributions and to the limits of pension cost of living adjustments as the fund regains stability.*

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## **Minnesota's Promise: Ten Strategies for Creating World Class Schools**

Minnesota is at a crossroads, with two unacceptable achievement gaps that threaten our future: gaps between our students and their peers in the highest performing countries in the world, and gaps between demographic groups here at home. Schools will not be able to address those gaps without a consistent and substantial investment in our public education system. We support the vision outlined in the final report of Minnesota's Promise: World Class Schools, World Class State through ten interconnected strategies designed to focus energy at all levels on creating a world-class educational system.

1. Ensure that all academic roads are rigorous and lead to higher education.
2. Invest early in educational success.
3. Recruit, prepare, support and retain great educators.
4. Embrace our multicultural future—locally and globally.
5. Engage families and communities as full partners in education.
6. Use data and research to improve teaching and learning everyday.
7. Shape time to meet the needs of learning, rather than shaping learning to meet the constraints of time.
8. Provide services for students with special needs that are proactive, effective, efficient and adequately funded.
9. Provide schools with funding that is predictable and sufficient to produce world-class performance.
10. Ensure that students come to school physically and mentally ready to learn.

## **Key Contacts**

### ***President***

Dr. Gary Amoroso  
Superintendent, Lakeville Area Schools  
952.232.2001 gmamoroso@isd194.k12.mn.us

### ***Legislative Committee Chair***

Dr. Debra Bowers  
Superintendent, St. Louis Park Schools  
952.928.6003 bowers.debra@slpschools.org

### ***MASA Executive Director***

Dr. Charles Kyte  
651.247.6505 ckyte@mnasa.org

### ***MASA Lobbyist***

Ms. Valerie Dosland  
Ewald Consulting  
612.490.3052 valeried@ewald.com

### ***President-Elect***

Dr. Jeffrey Olson  
Superintendent, St. Peter Schools  
507.934.5703 jolson@stpeterschools.org

MASA members include over 500 public and non-public superintendents; directors of special education; other central office administrators; service providers such as instructors or administrators of education administration training programs; Minnesota Department of Education staff; and education district and service cooperative leaders.

**Minnesota Association of School Administrators**

1884 Como Avenue  
Saint Paul, MN 55108

651.645.6272

866.444.5251

Fax: 651.645.7518

[members@mnasa.org](mailto:members@mnasa.org)

[www.mnasa.org](http://www.mnasa.org)