

# 2017 Legislative Platform RECOMMENDED BY MREA BOARD

MREA members support expanding educational opportunities and closing achievement gaps in Minnesota in the following ways. MREA's membership includes 220 school districts across Greater Minnesota, 11 education districts, special education and service cooperatives and additional associate members.

## FUNDING STUDENT NEEDS

Rising inflationary pressures, student needs, technology, packages to attract quality teachers and needs for innovative offerings demand increases in basic funding for each student. Minnesota's general education formula allowance currently lags \$1,000 per pupil behind 2003 funding levels, when adjusted for inflation.

### Key Actions Needed:

- Increase the General Formula allowance sufficiently to cover operating costs for high quality education.
- Improve Tier II and Tier III operating referendum equalization.
- Streamline and stabilize the Local Optional Revenue (LOR) program by eliminating the Operating Referendum subtraction and increase LOR authority for local community initiatives in educating students.

## EARLY LEARNING

There is widespread understanding and support for the value of early learning and expanded preschool opportunities. While Minnesota has significantly increased funding for preschool opportunities, the state's multiple categorical, competitive funding streams impede the ability of rural school districts to deliver high quality preschool education to all young children.

### Key Actions Needed:

- Expand Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten to fund school districts that are ready to implement the program with flexibility to lease spaces and use mixed delivery models at the site and district level.
- Establish new, equalized school facilities improvement revenue to replace the lease levy to provide needed classrooms.

## FACILITY FALLOUT

The state share of K-12 building debt is a historical low of 2.5 percent. At the same time, agriculture land values have increased significantly over the past decade, shifting the burden for school debt to farmers in rural Minnesota. Rural communities now disproportionately struggle to pass bonds to modernize school facilities.

### Key Actions Needed:

- Reduce high agricultural taxes for school building bonds while protecting homeowner and business property taxes through Ag2School, a targeted, ongoing, bond credit program.
- Equalize homeowner tax effort for school facility bonds by linking Debt Service Equalization to a fixed percent of state average Adjusted Net Tax Capacity (ANTC).

## QUALITY TEACHERS: TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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.

### Key Actions Needed:

- Secure adequate, ongoing funding for loan forgiveness to attract and retain teachers in rural Minnesota.
- Provide degree programs for all Minnesota teaching licenses and, when possible, include online courses within each program.
- Expand QComp funding for interested school districts and create full eligibility for cooperatives to participate.
- Maintain a stable, defined-benefit retirement plan through shared responsibility of the state, school districts, teachers and retirees.

Learn more about these issues and others at: [MnREA.org](http://MnREA.org)

## CAREER AND COLLEGE READY: CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

Minnesota adopted a goal to have at least 70 percent of residents ages 25 to 44 to hold postsecondary degrees or certificates by 2025. In 2010, the state average reached 58 percent, with wide disparities including only 21 percent among American Indians.

### Key Actions Needed:

- Require and facilitate the ability of Minnesota State institutions to partner with high schools to preserve the early college opportunities for juniors and seniors without interruptions in concurrent enrollment with blended delivery models.
- Provide targeted categorical funding to allow high school students to gain vocational skills and certificates in the summer through school district collaboration with local employers.
- Re-examine high school course and standards requirements to best equip young adults with the knowledge and life skills to be productive citizens and meet the complex challenges of the World's Best Workforce.
- Ask for congressional hearings into Higher Learning Commission, and decisions they are making to restrict access to college-level courses.

## STUDENT OPPORTUNITY GAPS

Small schools, regardless of size, are required to offer all the subjects, elective opportunities and services for students. The challenges with class sizes and secondary electives start around 1,500 students and are magnified greatly for schools with fewer than 750 students. Minnesota also has seen a significant growth in the English Language Learners (ELL) student population, putting additional strains on schools to provide effective Limited English Proficiency (LEP) instruction and support for classroom teachers.

### Key Actions Needed:

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS:** Raise the minimum amount of funding to each district serving ELL students to \$32,000 and increase the amount per pupil with a minimum of \$17,000 per district increase.
- **SMALL SCHOOLS REVNUUE:** Expand Small Schools Revenue to include more districts and eliminate the downward slope of funding below the mid-point Adjusted Pupil Unit (APU) to better serve school districts with fewer than 1,500 students.
- **COOPERATIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:** Support cooperative technical assistance for rural districts and schools to make improvements in curriculum, instruction and the effective use of data.

## STRENGTHEN RURAL CONNECTIVITY

Affordable, robust Internet connectivity is rural electrification of the 21st century.

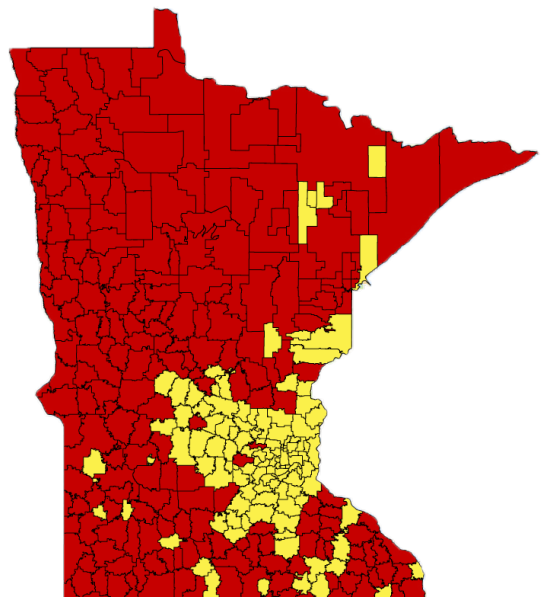
### Key Actions Needed:

- Expand funding for the Telecommunications Equity Access (TEA) and Regional Library Telecom Aid (RLTA) programs to ensure cost-effective, high-speed broadband access to learners of all ages.
- Expand broadband development grants to underserved, rural communities to further high-speed broadband Internet access at home for students and families and maximize student success with school-based 1-to-1 initiatives.

## MREA MEMBERS

In addition to 219 school districts in Greater Minnesota as shown in the map, MREA members include:

- Service Cooperatives
- Minnesota Education Districts Association
- Special Education Cooperatives
- Colleges & Universities
- Businesses & Nonprofits
- Individuals



Learn more about at: [MnREA.org](http://MnREA.org)