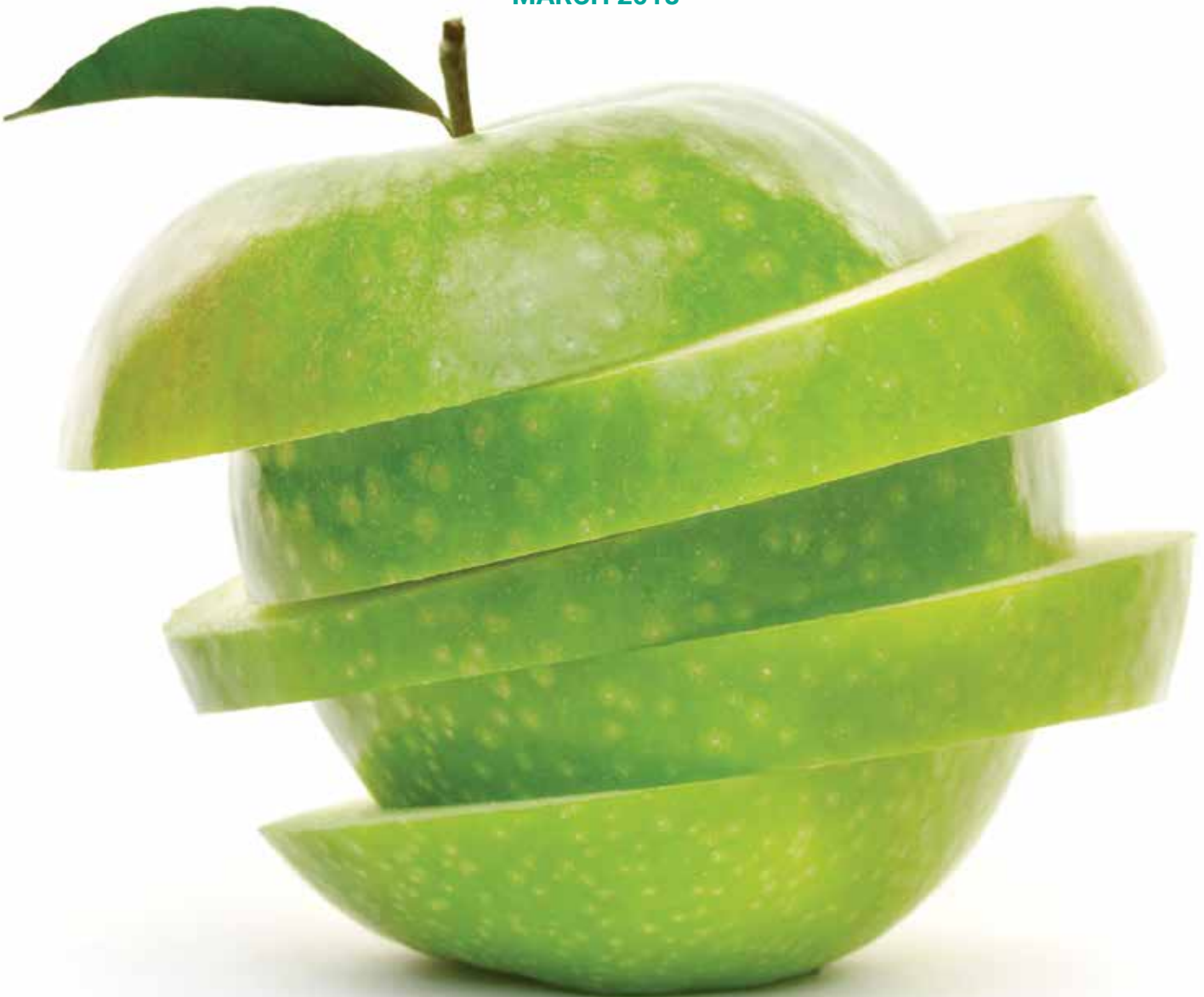


# Our Students Can't Wait

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Ensuring equitable access  
to funding and resources

MARCH 2018





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A special thank you  
to the Teacher Policy  
and Action Team  
members who drove  
this work and shared  
their experiences and  
key takeaways.



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# Our Students Can't Wait

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**Dear Colleagues,**

Education funding is about much more than red and black ink on a ledger. School and district leaders charged with budget management are responsible for more than just the financial sustainability of schools. They are accountable for ensuring every student's access to highly skilled teachers, enriching materials, and the crucial social-emotional support that are the bedrock of students' academic and personal growth.

Despite using a state funding formula designed to send more money to high-needs schools, as teachers, we know that for too many students Minnesota's education funding system is neither adequate nor equitable. We stock our own classroom libraries. We keep students supplied with pencils and notebooks, and buy coats and hats for students spending their first winters in Minnesota. On average, teachers spend approximately \$500 of own money on students each year, and that is just for physical needs. Minnesota teachers know their students need more than this. A teacher can't pull out his or her wallet to pay for the inadequate heating in school, leaving students shivering for days. Students need to know that their schools care for them, and inadequate funding sends the opposite message.

As our team researched school funding in Minnesota, two themes clearly emerged: the need for transparency and the importance of educator equity. As a team of educators, we believe it is critical for teachers, parents, and the community to be able to answer the questions, "Where is money currently being spent? Is it being spent equitably? To what results?" The current lack of financial transparency deprives the school community — and the public at large — of meaningful opportunities to weigh in on education priorities.

And, because staff salaries constitute the largest funding allotment for a school, any discussion about equitable funding must account for the challenge of ensuring that all schools are staffed with qualified, talented teachers. It is well documented that students of color and students living in poverty are more likely to have inexperienced and ineffective teachers. In this environment, Minnesota's achievement gap persists, as our most vulnerable students are disproportionately impacted.

The set of recommendations outlined in our paper address these issues, and are necessary but not sufficient to foster all students' academic, social, and emotional growth. In addition to these proposals, we believe that an equitable funding model must also promote innovation, address the needs of the whole child, and elevate the voices of teachers, families, and students, themselves. Still, we believe that these recommendations are important, concrete first steps toward a more adequate and equitable education funding paradigm. At their core, school budgets are statements of values, and our state and district education budgets are no different. Like our values, our budgets should be clearly articulated and represent the interests of all our students.

In solidarity,

The Educators for Excellence 2017 Teacher Policy Team on Equitable School Funding and Resources

## INTRODUCTION

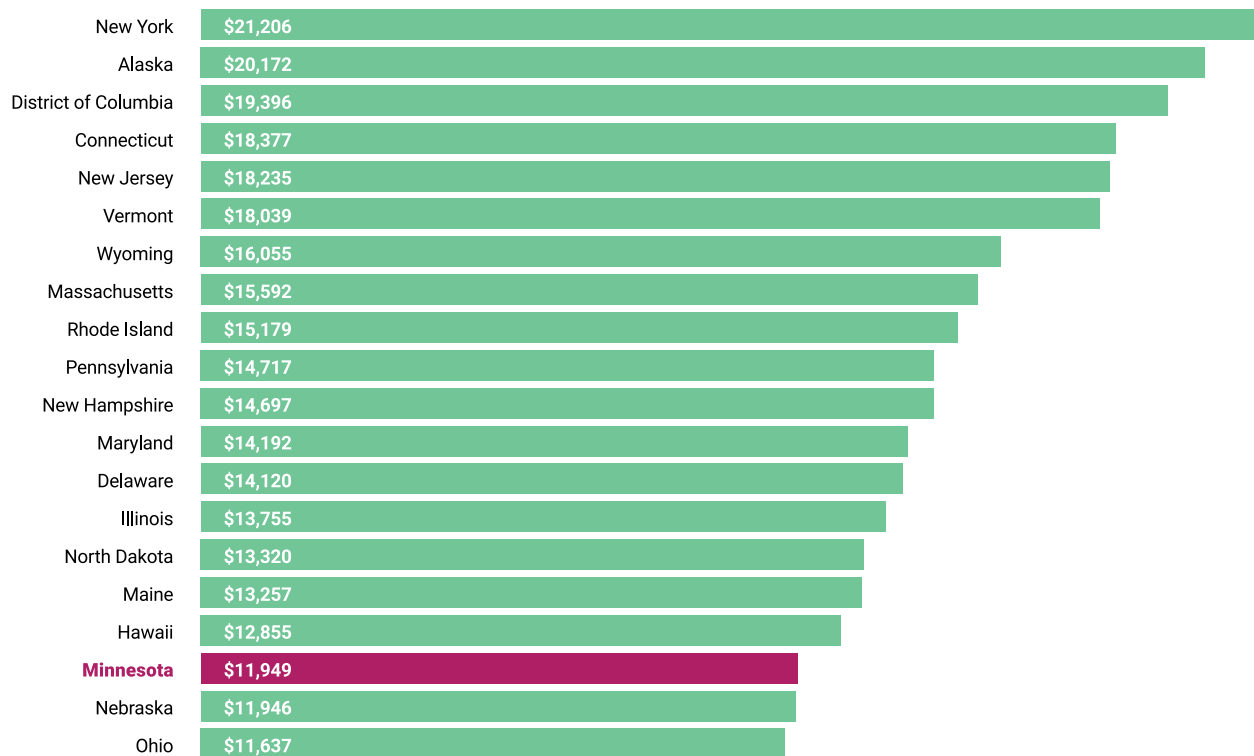
# The Current Reality

## Lack of adequate funding

Minnesota students deserve a high-quality education, yet our schools do not have the resources to give students what they need to thrive in our classrooms and beyond. Although our state education spending is slightly above the national average, it has not kept pace with inflation.<sup>1</sup> Although the costs of educating students have only grown over the past five years, today we spend \$595<sup>2</sup> less per student than we did in 2013. Additionally, Minnesota receives lower marks in “effort,” a measure that considers Minnesota’s financial health relative to how much we invest in education.<sup>3</sup> These investments are critical to student learning, as most research shows that an increase in funding positively impacts student achievement.<sup>4</sup>

### Top 20 states ranked by per-pupil spending

The national average of per pupil spending is listed at \$11,392.



Source: Star Tribune

<sup>1</sup> There is a debate about whether or not per-pupil funding has adequately kept up with inflation. In sum, if per-pupil funding is calculated using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), funding has kept up with inflation. If it is calculated using the Implicit Price Deflator, it has not.

# THE CURRENT REALITY

## Lack of transparency

We also know that while more funding is necessary, it is not sufficient to ensuring that we are addressing opportunity gaps in our schools. In fact, Minnesota already spends a great deal more per pupil in districts serving higher populations of special education students, English learners, and students who are living in poverty.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, we are home to some of the nation’s worst opportunity gaps — and the districts that receive the most funding often still struggle in terms of student outcomes.

Stakeholders would be remiss to believe more money alone will fix these large disparities. Instead, policymakers and school leaders must conduct a thorough review of current spending to determine where inequities or inefficiencies exist. Unfortunately, while the state formula includes several equitable spending provisions, because the dollars are allocated to districts and not directly to schools or students, it is unclear how much of the money actually reaches the students for whom the dollars are intended.<sup>6</sup> We learned that across the nation, intra-district inequities are prevalent in large districts and often masked.<sup>7</sup>

**Minnesota’s funding formula includes several equitable spending provisions,** meaning that districts receive additional funding based on student need. Major categories include:

Concentration of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch within a school building

English Language Learner/Bilingual Education

Special education

Gifted and talented

## Lack of equity

One of the biggest equity issues is access to high-quality teachers. Across the nation and in Minnesota, students of color and students living in poverty are more likely to be taught by inexperienced and ineffective teachers than their more affluent peers. Additionally, as experienced teachers move within districts to schools serving more affluent communities, they take district resources with them, because their salaries, which are largely based on years of experience, are higher.

## Lack of collaboration amongst schools

In a time when Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) and St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) are facing significant budget deficits, the lack of transparency prevents us from focusing on students, especially students who have been historically underserved by our current education system. Some are quick to place blame solely on charter schools for causing a decline in district school enrollment. This assumption is inaccurate and problematic for a number of reasons. MPS’ enrollment has, in fact, remained the same over the past two years, yet their budget deficit has grown. This negative rhetoric is a barrier to district and charter schools working together to serve all students. There are also funding laws that exacerbate tensions between public charter and traditional district proponents, for example, regarding special education and transportation.

<sup>5</sup> “Living in poverty” is determined by a student’s federal free- or reduced-lunch status.

## Our Vision:

As a team of educators, we sought to provide recommendations to address these challenges. We created a shared vision that guided our research and discussions and is the foundation of our recommendations. We believe that school funding and resource distribution must:

- Be student centered
- Be equitable
- Result in positive academic outcomes
- Enable schools to access effective educators
- Decrease opportunity gaps and hold school leaders accountable
- Be transparent, down to the student level, and easily accessible to all
- Be informed by many voices, including teachers, students, and the community, recognizing and elevating the power of impacted communities
- Encourage collaboration across school types



## EQUALITY vs EQUITY

**Equality** means everyone gets the same while **equity** means everyone gets what they need.



# Summary of Recommendations



## Increase financial transparency

The state should require the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to collect and report school-level spending alongside academic outcomes and student demographics, in an accessible way that allows for comparisons among similar schools.

The state should also include the following information on the school-level spending report:

- Actual and median teacher salary at the school level
- All incoming funding, including federal, state, local (property tax and levies), and philanthropic funding (Parent Teacher Associations, foundations, corporations)
- Total spending per pupil and by category (including actual costs for salary, transportation, curriculum (not district averages)
- Teacher retention rate



## Ensure equitable access to high-quality teachers

The state and districts should fund programs and policies that seek to attract and retain effective and experienced teachers to work in high-poverty schools, especially in co-teaching and hybrid leadership roles to more quickly develop early-career teachers.

Districts should empower principals to support teacher leaders as they develop novice teachers in way that results in high-retention rates and increased student achievement.



## Incentivize collaboration and ensure equity across schools

The state should convene a task force to evaluate the opportunities for district schools and charter schools to collaborate with an eye toward equitable access to resources for all Minnesota students, regardless of school type.

The state should increase the reimbursements for special education services.

Districts and public charter schools should explore opportunities to collaborate and engage in strategic partnerships.



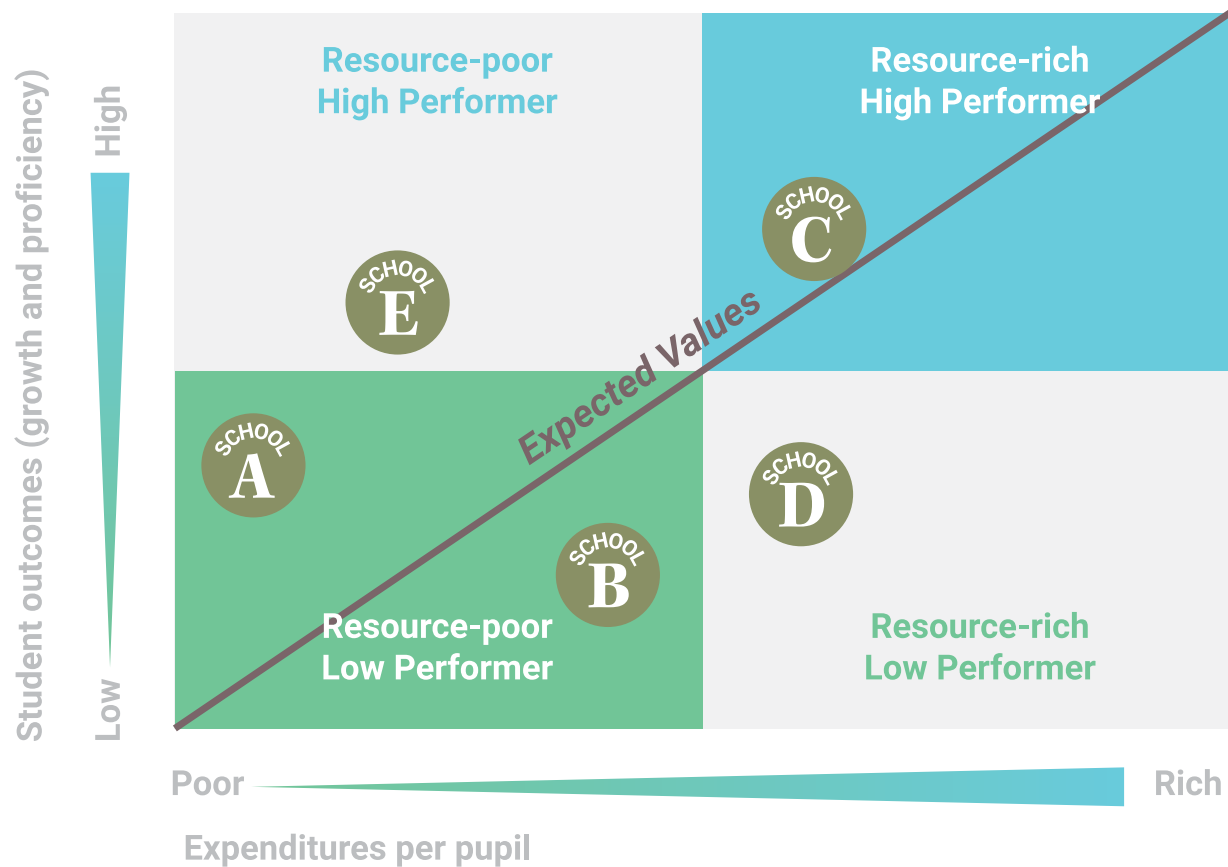
# Increase financial transparency



## Recommendation

The state legislature should require the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to collect and report school-level spending alongside the data about academic outcomes and student demographics.

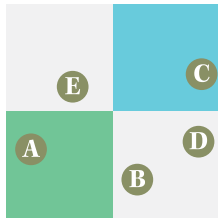
## What it could look like



A chart that displays student outcomes and funding together (along with student demographics) would allow stakeholders and the public to compare similar schools and identify schools that do well relative to the resources at their disposal. It would also inform conversations about struggling schools because stakeholders would know whether this was in part, due to a lack of funding or not.



## INCREASE FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY



# School Report Card

### ACADEMICS

### EXTRA CURRICULARS

### FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY



#### Average Per-pupil Revenue

Including local and philanthropic money

**\$16,000**

#### Average Per-pupil Expenditures

**\$10,091**

#### School Median Teacher Salary

**\$51,000**

#### Actual Teacher Salary Total

Number of full-time licensed teachers

**\$2,350,000**

**43**

#### Average Teacher Retention Rate

**5.6 years**

In addition, the report should also include:

- Revenue - All incoming funding, including federal, state, local (property tax, levies), and philanthropic funding (parent-teacher associations, foundations, corporations, alumni, etc.)
- Expenditures - Total spending per pupil including actual costs (not district averages) for salary, transportation, curriculum, broken down to the extent practicable
- Actual teacher salary and median teacher salary at the school level
- Teacher retention rate

MDE should include this information on a tab of the school report cards currently being developed as part of Minnesota's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). MDE should also provide technical assistance to districts to ensure proper reporting and conduct random annual audits of some schools to ensure the school funding data is accurate, especially at the school level.

## Rationale

School spending is the underlying foundation for every education decision and program, and it is also indicative of priorities. As a team, we started our work by exploring the question, "How equitable is spending at the school and student levels?" We learned that though Minnesota's formula includes several equitable spending provisions, it was not clear how much of the money follows the students for whom the funds are intended down to the school level versus the district level.<sup>8</sup> When it came to school-level spending, we found limited resources and even heard conflicting opinions from various education and policy experts.



## INCREASE FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

Additionally, it is currently difficult to assess the funding students receive because local property taxes, levies, and funds raised from parent-teacher-associations and the business community are not reported along with state funding. One study found that “hidden money” — money from parents’ associations and local businesses in wealthier areas — contributes to sizable school funding inequities.<sup>9</sup> As both St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) and Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) face budget shortfalls, all stakeholders must have a clear picture of current spending and the corresponding student achievement results so stakeholders can determine how to distribute resources in the most equitable way possible.

Teacher salaries and benefits comprise approximately 85 percent of the average district’s budget. Salaries are a proxy for experience since the traditional steps and lanes pay scale dictates that teachers’ salaries largely reflect years of experience. In many urban districts, teachers who make the most money because of their years of experience work in schools with whiter and more affluent student populations than schools where there are concentrations of early-career teachers. In this way, district resources are disproportionately allocated to wealthier, whiter schools. For example, in 2013, the median MPS teacher salary at Bethune — a school where the student population is primarily students of color from low-income households — was \$49,449. At Lake Harriet (Lower) — a school with a predominantly white and affluent student body — the median teacher salary was \$80,355.<sup>12</sup> Both MPS and SPPS use a districtwide, average teacher salary for calculating school budgets. The result of this use of average rather than actual teacher salary is that while schools like Bethune bring in additional funding from the state to Minneapolis Public Schools because of the greater needs of their students, the district is allocating much of that money to other schools, like Lake Harriet (Lower), to pay for their more experienced teachers.

In the fall of 2017, the Duluth School Board, residents, and a community group for equity debated whether restructuring the district’s budget was needed so that the low-income students for whom state compensatory education funds were intended actually received the funds. Some voiced concerns the district was distributing these funds to schools serving wealthier students within the district.<sup>10</sup> The following information is from a piece that ran in the *Duluth Tribune* after the debate heated up:

**“The district this year received about \$6.8 million in compensatory education funding. Denfeld received about 80 percent of its allocation, while East received nearly 400 percent.”**

- East High School has a more affluent student population
- Denfeld High School has significantly more students from a low-income background

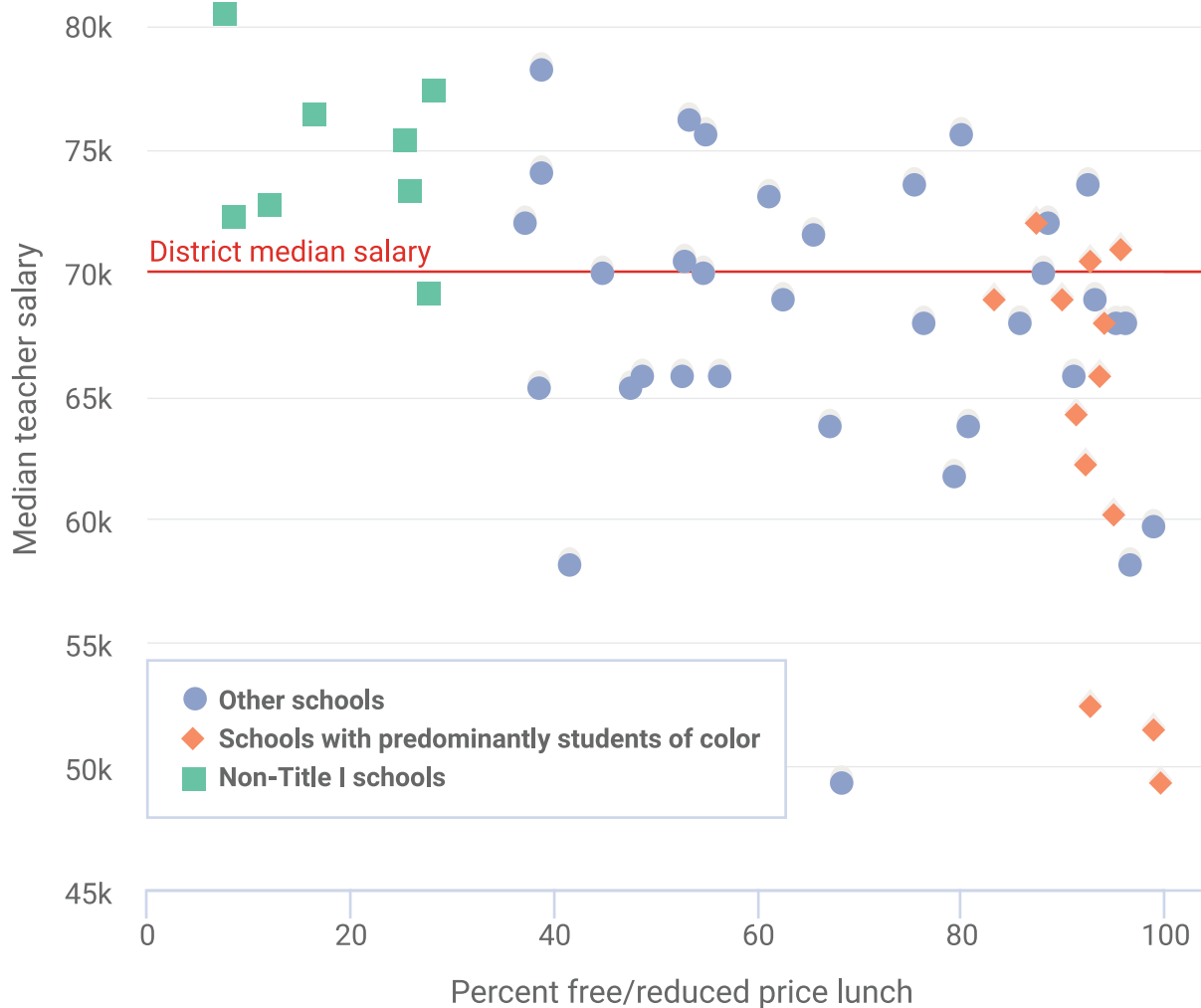
This information suggests that in this district, the money allocated from the state to students with greater needs is not actually reaching them directly. Also, this information cannot currently be gleaned from the MDE public financial reports alone.<sup>11</sup> We must create a system that allows the average person to have understandable financial data so they can give meaningful input regarding what districts prioritize and who receives what resources instead of depending solely on reporters conducting time-consuming Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and analyzing data.



## INCREASE FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

### MPS median salary vs. free/reduced lunch percentage

Source: *MinnPost* 2014 analysis of Minneapolis Public Schools data, Schools on the left side of the chart, with the lowest proportion of students receiving free/reduced price lunch, also have some of the highest median salaries in the district.



The data above was reported by a news outlet after reporters requested and analyzed data under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). After multiple requests for updated information under FOIA, Educators for Excellence has still not received updated information on median teacher salaries from SPPS or MPS (at the time of printing). Given the stark contrast in the salaries of teachers in more affluent neighborhoods compared to those in those in under-resourced areas, we need this data publicly reported if we are going to achieve equity and ensure that dollars reach the students whom they were intended to support.

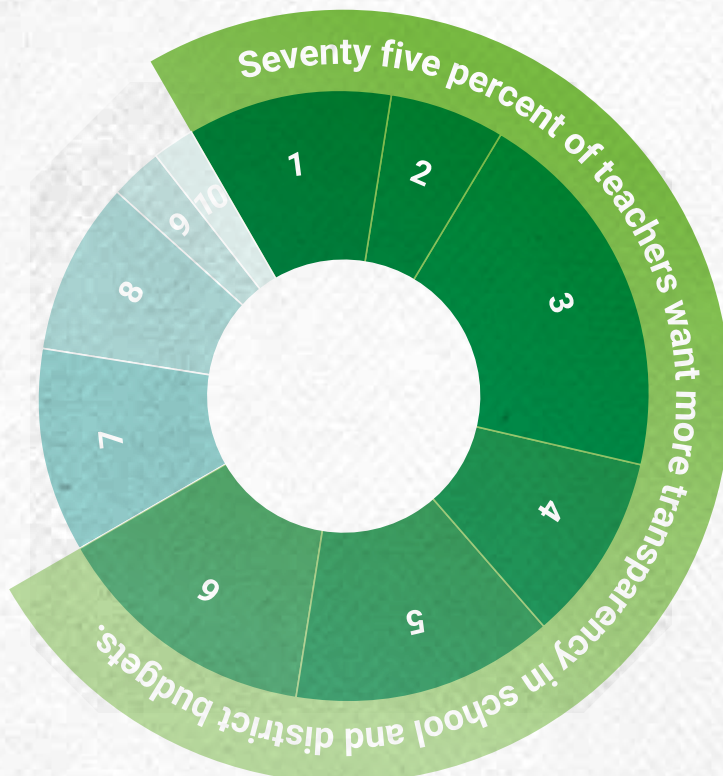


### Caveats & Considerations:

With more transparency at the school and student level, decision-makers could — and should — take bold corrective action if funding is not equitable across a district. Districts should set their staffing based on their school budgets rather than the reverse, which is current practice. This leaves principals with little remaining to make strategic decisions to meet the unique student body needs. Districts could move toward a student-based funding system instead of funding staff positions and other fixed school costs. For example, in a position-based system, a school will get funding for one teacher per twenty students. In a student-based system, each student would be assigned a dollar amount, based on need, and the money would follow that student to the school they attend. The state may need to assess and change the amount of funding for various student groups based on their needs. For example, currently the state provides additional funding to the per-pupil amount a district gets for English language (EL) students. The state does not differentiate the amount based on, for example, whether the student is new to the country or is about to exit EL status because they're nearly proficient in English.

**“We need a system that shows us more clearly where funding and resources are going, but more importantly, we need to allow ourselves to be shocked.”**

— Ellen Morehouse, Media Specialist at  
Brooklyn Center High School.



**On a scale of one to ten, ten being very transparent, how transparent is your school or district budget?**

N = 106 educators



# Ensure equitable access to high-quality teachers



## Recommendation

The state and districts should fund programs or policies that seek to attract and retain effective and experienced teachers to work in high-poverty schools, especially in co-teaching and hybrid leadership roles to more quickly develop early-career teachers.

## What this could look like

Funds could be used for:

- Evidence-based trainings for teacher leaders and principals on best practices for developing early-career teachers
- Turnaround teams of high-quality teachers and school leaders who commit to a school for a certain period of time in exchange for greater compensation or workplace benefits, such as additional prep time or co-teaching
- Contracts with outside organizations that have demonstrated success in helping districts implement high-quality residency or co-teaching models, such as the National Center for Teacher Residencies<sup>13</sup>
- Extended planning and training time over the summer and corresponding compensation for participating expert and early-career teachers





### Rationale

As educators, we know the impact we have on students each day, in their academic, social, and emotional development. Research confirms teachers are the most important in-school factor driving student achievement. A great teacher can add up to six months' worth of student learning compared to low-performing peers.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, there is little within our salary structures or policies that aims to place the best teachers in front of the students who most need them. Unfortunately, students who are most in need of experienced and effective teachers frequently do not have access to them. In Minnesota, students in schools with higher concentrations of students of color or students from low-income households are twice as likely to be taught by inexperienced or out-of-field teachers.<sup>15</sup>

If Minnesota is like a majority of other states, students of color and students from low-income households are also disproportionately taught by less effective teachers, although that is something the state has not measured. Going forward MDE will collect this information but not report it publicly.

The Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, the 2015 reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act) requires states and districts to create and execute plans that address inequitable access to experienced and effective teachers. Unfortunately, in too many districts across our state, these are just words on a paper. Little has changed about recruitment, compensation, or retention efforts to address this inequity.

The state and districts must invest in programs and policies that empower expert teachers to lead in high-needs schools by developing early-career teachers to address this gap in access to high-quality teachers. This includes paying teachers more for working in a high-needs placement area or for taking on additional responsibilities. We also recognize that financial incentives alone are often not enough to attract and retain effective and experienced teachers at high-needs schools.<sup>16</sup> As professionals, we have worked with colleagues who were critical to our development. For some of us, they were formal mentors, and for others, they were experienced teachers who helped us on their own time. Work conditions, such as collegial support and school leadership, are among the most important factors in whether high-quality teachers will move to and stay at high-needs schools.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, intentionally creating and investing in high-quality programming for cohorts of expert teachers to develop early-career teachers in high-needs schools holds great potential for ensuring the best teachers are in front of the students who most need them.





### Caveats & Considerations

In the short term, districts can use or apply for Quality Compensation (Q Comp) funds to pay for incentives for high-quality teachers to work in high-needs schools, serving in hybrid leadership roles. Districts could also proactively seek out and use Title II funds to expand innovative residency programs and diverse teacher preparation programs that place candidates at high-needs schools (e.g., Minneapolis's Grow Your Own program or the Urban Teacher Program at Metro State University).

Additional ways to address inequitable access to high-quality teachers include:

- Provide high-needs schools with funding for additional literacy and content specialists, highly effective mentor teachers, and restorative justice coordinators.
- Fund wraparound service structures for high-needs schools (or community service school model, such as Harlem Children's Zone or Northside Achievement Zone). These services could help children and families meet other needs, which could in turn, help them in the classroom, thus improving working conditions for the teachers and prevent turnover.
- Provide additional trainings for teachers working in high-needs schools to improve their craft. Trainings should be targeted to meet the needs of the particular school. For example, provide training on teaching English learners (ELs) for non-EL teachers who work in schools with a large EL populations.

*\* These ideas were developed by the 2016 Educators for Excellence ESSA Rapid Response Team*

**“We need to go beyond focusing on getting great teachers to move to high-needs schools; we need policies and programs that grow and develop teachers with potential currently in those schools.”**

— Chris Mah, English Language Teacher at FAIR School

### Addressing Educator Inequities

In Minnesota, students of color and low-income students are much more likely to be taught by ineffective, inexperienced, and/or out-of-field teachers. What do you believe would help address this inequity? (check all that apply)

N = 106 educators

**62%**

Residency models where new teachers work with an effective and experienced mentor teacher for a year before teaching on their own

**50%**

Offer hybrid leadership roles to effective and experienced teachers in high-needs schools (hybrid meaning .5 teaching students and .5 being an instructional coach, equity lead, restorative justice coordinator etc.)

**48%**

Non-monetary incentives for those educators, such as extra preparation and collaboration time

**48%**

Monetary incentives for effective and experienced teachers and principals to move to and stay in high-needs schools



### Recommendation

Districts should empower and equip principals in high-needs schools with more autonomy and flexibility to support teacher leaders in developing early-career teachers.

### What this could look like

Early-career teachers, especially in high-needs schools, should have access to mentors and instructional coaching, which has been proved to increase retention rates and student achievement. Districts could do this by giving principals in high-needs schools: (1) resources for co-teaching and hybrid programs; (2) increased budget autonomy and staffing flexibility (such as first-choice hiring) to meet student and teacher needs; (3) training on budget analysis and identifying proven areas to focus spending on; and (4) ongoing and high-quality professional development on how to develop teacher leadership.

### Rationale

As educators, perhaps one of the most important factors in our job satisfaction is the extent to which we are empowered to do our best work with our students each day. Having a principal who inspires us and builds our trust is hard to find and even harder to leave behind. Research confirms that principals like this tend to create leadership opportunities for effective teachers and to retain them.<sup>18</sup> If the best teachers are going to work in high-needs schools, we must have strong school leadership, starting with the principal, who will empower and support highly effective teachers as they co-lead and co-develop early-career teachers.

### Caveats & Considerations

Principals need autonomy but they also need ongoing, high-quality training to make the best school-specific decisions with the flexibility they are given. Additionally, shared leadership can further improve school-specific decisions, take some of the burden off principals, and increase buy-in and retention rates among teacher leaders.

**“Too many conversations about ensuring great teachers work in high-needs school fail to mention teacher retention — developing and keeping teachers. A principal who is a strong leader is essential for creating environments where teachers grow, lead, and stay.”**

— Alyssa Carlson, English Learner Teachers at HOPE Academy

# Incentivize collaboration and ensure equity across school types



## Recommendation

The state should convene a task force to evaluate the opportunities for district schools and charter schools to collaborate with an eye toward equitable access to resources for all Minnesota students, regardless of school type.

## What this could look like

This task force should include school leaders and financial managers from traditional districts, charter schools, and representative of urban suburban and rural districts along with parents and teachers. It should also include school-funding technical experts. The task force would explore the impact of all education funding formulas, laws, and taxes to determine how equitable spending is across school types and geographical location. It would also review laws and policies that were hindering collaboration between different types of schools.

## Rationale

When Minnesota passed legislation allowing for the creation of public charter schools in 1991, the intention was for the public charter schools to be laboratories for experimentation, and for traditional district schools to then adopt promising practices.<sup>19</sup> In practice, however, limited collaboration has taken place, and instead, tensions have grown between supporters of traditional district schools and charter schools.

These tensions are fueled, in part, by inadequate funding of public schools overall, as well as claims from both traditional and charter school proponents that the funding system treats them unfairly. For example, district schools pay 90 percent of the special education costs for students who live in the district but do not attend their neighborhood school because they attend public charter schools (or other traditional district or private schools). On the other hand, charter schools miss out on millions of dollars that traditional school districts can raise through levies (when school boards ask property owners — sometimes through a vote — to pay more in property tax for building improvements, technology upgrades, or more per-pupil funding). Removing barriers and incentivizing collaboration could benefit all Minnesota students by increasing the use of innovative and successful practices across school types.

The legislature has not changed many funding laws since passing the first-in-the-nation charter school law. It would serve Minnesota well to conduct a comprehensive review of all education funding for adequacy and equity across different school types. Then, lawmakers can make changes if needed to ensure funding is equitable and based on student need for all public schools.

Charter schools are tuition-free public schools. They are publicly funded schools governed by families, teachers, and community members who are elected by the school body.

[www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/ss/sschtsch.pdf](http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/ss/sschtsch.pdf)



## Recommendation

The state should increase reimbursements for special education services.

## Rationale

As mentioned above, currently, resident school districts fund 90 percent of special education costs for students who live in the district but do not attend the district school. The school the child attends covers the remaining 10 percent. Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) spends approximately \$11 million each year for special education services for students who live in Minneapolis but do not attend district schools because the state does not pay for the entire amount of special education services. While some advocate for holding the school the child attends accountable for all special education expenses, the unintended consequences of this could be dire for special education students and their ability to attend schools that meet their needs. Schools may have a perverse incentive to lower Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals or requirements in order to save money. Worse, they could have an incentive to kick a child out of school (using disciplinary actions) or counsel families out of services for which they are entitled. If the state reimburses for more special education services, it will ensure all schools are incentivized to serve students with disabilities.



## Resident districts fund 90% of the special education costs for out-of-district schools

- A student with special education needs does not attend their local district school, but instead attends a neighboring district, public charter or private school
- The state reimburses the cost of some of the special education services
- Expenses that are not reimbursed by the state are primarily covered by the district the child lives in (90%), with the school the child attends covering the remaining portion (10%)



## Recommendation

**Recommendations:** Districts and public charter schools should explore opportunities to collaborate and engage in strategic partnerships.

## What this could look like

Districts could:

- Authorize charter schools.
- Rent out extra space because charter schools cannot own their space.
- Sell services such as meals, extracurriculars, or professional development.
- Teachers and school leaders could share best practices with other schools, regardless of school type.

## Rationale

Bipartisan advocates and policymakers who passed the charter school law sought to create a system that spurred innovation and collaboration. The main hope was that some schools would have the flexibility to try innovative approaches to education and that traditional schools could adopt best practices that were improving student outcomes.

However, there is currently very little collaboration occurring between some of Minnesota's largest districts and nearby public charter schools. In fact, charged rhetoric between traditional district and charter school advocates has stressed or ended partnerships that could have been beneficial. For example, in 2010, MPS, six charter schools, seven community organizations, and two former mayors all signed on to support the development of a leadership incubator, which would accelerate student achievement and promote the growth of high-performing public charter schools.<sup>20</sup> This would have allowed MPS access to professional development programs offered through high-performing charter schools. It also would have opened up opportunities

for educators to learn from and collaborate with charter schools that are excelling at serving students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Given a lot of backlash from opponents of charter schools, this compact was ended and a subsequent, more narrow agreement appears dormant.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, these missed opportunities ultimately harm our students. Charter schools are not going away. Rather than blaming charter schools and the families that enroll in them, it is worth exploring partnership opportunities that encourage families to have a positive view of the district and more opportunities to interact across those boundaries. Regardless of school type, the students in them are all Minnesota's youth who deserve a high-quality education. To that end, school leaders, policymakers, and the broader community should move beyond unproductive divisions and embrace opportunities of innovation and collaboration.

## Caveats & Considerations:

This could be a space where the newly elected Minneapolis and St. Paul mayors could play a unique role in starting initiatives that bring together district and charter school leaders to work for the benefit of all the students in their cities.

Beyond the academic benefits for students that could come from cross-collaboration and sharing of best practices, there could be financial benefits as well. At a time when MPS and SPPS are both operating with sizable deficits, it would be wise to explore renting space and selling services to charters schools.





# Conclusion

With one of the most significant opportunity gaps in the nation, especially between white students and students of color and indigenous students, we need to engage in difficult conversations about education funding and resources. We hope that state and district policymakers, as well as the broader public, will put students and their academic, social, and emotional growth at the center of discussions about school funding. As a team of educators, we firmly believe that increasing funding overall, along with increased financial transparency, will allow for the elevation of voices from impacted communities and educators to challenge inequitable policies and practices that are negatively impacting students. However, improving transparency, and as a result shining a light on inequities, is insufficient. We must then take bold action to ensure each student has access to the resources they need, including excellent teachers, to succeed. We call on our fellow educators and state leaders to join us in fighting for a more equitable school system in Minnesota.





# Methodology

## Identifying E4E's Policy Focus

E4E conducted focus groups with diverse groups of teachers who work in public district and public charter schools. We polled hundreds of E4E members across Minnesota to identify the most important policy issues affecting teachers' classrooms and careers. Equitable school funding and resources emerged as a priority for many of our members.

## Reviewing Research

We met over the course of two months to review research on school funding and access to resources. We looked at the current funding formula, problems, and potential solutions. As we explored solutions, we looked at case studies from across the nation, as well as promising policies and practices right here in Minnesota. We conducted interviews with teacher colleagues, surveyed over 100 educators, and spoke with school funding experts and other education stakeholders to gather critical information about current policies and practices. We coupled this research with our experiences as educators to craft our recommendations for school districts and the state.



# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> There is a debate about whether or not per-pupil funding has adequately kept up with inflation. In sum, if per-pupil funding is calculated using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), funding has kept up with inflation. If it is calculated using the Implicit Price Deflator, it has not.
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- <sup>6</sup> Minnesota: Funding Formula. Retrieved (September 30, 2017) from <https://schoolfinancesdav.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/minnesota2011.pdf>
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- <sup>17</sup> National Education Association and the Center for Teaching Quality. Recruiting and Retaining Quality Teachers for High-Needs Schools: Insights from NBCT Summits and Other Policy Initiative retrieved (January 5, 2017) from [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf\\_nationalstrategyforumreport.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_nationalstrategyforumreport.pdf)
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For far too long, education policy has been created without a critical voice at the table—the voice of classroom teachers.

Educators for Excellence (E4E), a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers. E4E has a quickly growing national network of educators united by our Declaration of Teachers' Principles and Beliefs.

E4E members can learn about education policy and research, network with like-minded peers and policymakers, and take action by advocating for teacher-created policies that lift student achievement and the teaching profession.

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