

Minnesota Schools at a Breaking Point: Pandemic stories from Educators across the State

“Many teachers like me are searching for someone to listen to their concerns, I’ve been met with a deafening silence.”

--EdMN member, Spring 2022

Justin Killian, PhD
Education Issues Specialist



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Educator Policy Innovation Center



www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/EPIC

- Minnesota's only educator led and educator funded research think-tank
- Combines practice and research to propose real solutions to the problems facing public education
- The voices of educators are too often lacking in policy conversation



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Minnesota Schools at a Breaking Point: Pandemic stories from Educators across the State

Advisory team:

- 21 member advisory team: licensed educators, support service personnel, ESPs, all regions of Minnesota, diversity of role and racial/gender identity
- Capture as many first-hand accounts of public school during a global pandemic
- Data set of ~200 narrative responses from EdMN members
- Qualitative analysis, 7 predominant themes from member respondents



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What did the team find?



Systemic failures have created unsafe, under-resourced working and learning environments that are exacerbating educator attrition and stifling student learning. To be direct, we are using this paper to give voice to our membership and to highlight the severity of the situation facing students and educators.

“Simply put, things are not good; teachers are not well.”

--EdMN member, Spring 2022



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National context and Minnesota's data

COVID-19 is only part of the narrative

systemic racism
chronic underfunding
divestment in public education
opportunity gaps
racial-wealth gaps
mental health of educators
mental health of students
racial-discipline gaps
housing insecurity
special education cross-subsidy
poor educator compensation
biased testing
educator attrition
recruitment of educators of color
corporate reform attacks on teaching profession and public education



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National trends and concerning realities:

- In 2022, only 12% of teachers reported being “very satisfied” with their jobs as compared to ~57% in 2005. (Merrimack Winston School of Education and Social Policy, 2022, April, p.4)
- Educator Attrition is at a crisis level--1 out of every 3 teachers leaves the profession within the first 5 years.
- The mental health crisis among U.S. adolescents, which was further aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching what clinicians have termed a “student mental health pandemic.”
- Highest level of child poverty among developed nations matched with lowest investments in public education.



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Minnesota trends and concerning realities:

- Minnesota's public school system is not working for BIPOC students and staff; Our state reports some of the largest opportunity gaps in academic achievement, student discipline, graduation rates, and measures of future life outcome.
- Educator retention, not recruitment, is the primary staffing problem.
 - It takes 63,000 licensed teachers to fully staff Minnesota's public and charter schools. There are more than twice that number of professionally licensed educators in Minnesota today than required to fill all positions
- Minnesota schools still lack the minimum number of school-based, mental health professionals to meet national staffing recommendations.
- State government continues to divest from public education at a time when funding matters most.



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What did our members teach us?

Workloads are unmanageable.

Educators lack a voice in decision making.

Student mental and social emotional health is at a crisis level.

Educators are reporting experiencing higher levels of physical and mental health concerns.

Education Support Professionals feel disrespected and exploited.

Educators are exhausted by a lack of meaningful support and continuous toxic positivity.

Lawmakers continue to fail special education students and the educators who serve them.



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What do we need?

A Marshall Plan for public education:

- Recruitment
- Preparation
- Mentoring
- Professional learning
- Leadership development
- Compensation
- School redesign



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Testimony from Advisory Team

Andrea Lisko Lemon

Care and Treatment Teacher

Fairview Mental Health Residential and Day Treatment Programs for Adolescent Mental Health and Dual Diagnosis.

ISD #622 North St. Paul- Maplewood-Oakdale Schools

Katie Angel

Preschool and Early Childhood Family Education Teacher

Jordan Public School District



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