

Supporting MN Students During COVID-19 Crisis

Minnesota leaders have been acting fast to react to COVID-19, with the Governor leading the way through executive orders, the Department of Education developing distance learning guidance, and educators from district offices down to the classroom building and implementing plans for food, academics, and more. This rapidly changing education landscape and the sudden shift to distance learning open new opportunities for innovation, but also create risk for our most vulnerable students.

It's critical that state policymakers act now to address the emerging needs of students and the schools working to serve them. Policies that provide flexibility around funding formulas and teacher licensure, among others, are crucial. Some policies, however, should be considered with caution. And several important things are missing from the conversation to ensure all students are receiving a rigorous and relevant education during and after this unprecedented time.

IMMEDIATE ACTION IS NEEDED

State legislators must step up to provide for students in this crisis. Students, families, educators, and advocates have identified numerous unmet needs that state support can help address, including access to:

- **Dependable internet:** Over 17% of Minnesota students,¹ especially low-income and rural students, do not have access to the internet, and even more do not have access to internet sufficient for distance learning;
- **Devices:** Resources to implement distance learning like devices, technology, and supplies;
- **English Learner and special education services:** Schools and districts must implement plans to effectively support our most vulnerable populations;
- **Nutrition:** For many kids from low-income families, the food they receive from school often makes for their healthiest meals. All students, including those who are homebound, must have easy access; and,
- **Learning innovations:** As schools work to implement innovative, student-centered practices through distance learning, the state should provide support and resources to expand and replicate successful models.

Even though the federal government passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in late March, which includes money for K-12 schools, Minnesota policymakers still have a critical role to play in ensuring student-centered approaches have the support and guidance needed to take root in both the short and long-term. It could take months for federal funds to flow down to where they are needed, but many students, families, and educators do not have the privilege to wait. Minnesota legislators must act now to address the immediate needs of students, especially our most underserved. Through policy and supplemental funding, we can address remaining gaps and make sure that students aren't left behind in the wake of COVID-19.

MOVING FORWARD FROM COVID-19

Once the COVID-19 crisis eases and students head back to school, the K-12 world will face significant questions about how to make up for lost learning and reintegrate students in building cultures and academics equitably. State leaders will need to play a critical role, working to:

- **Address learning loss:** Advance plans to make up for lost learning during school closures and remote learning, whether through summer programming, extended years or days, or other approaches;
- **Adopt best distance learning practices:** Build on and institutionalize lessons learned during the rapid innovation happening across the state and nation; and,
- **Measure student learning:** Find meaningful ways to measure both learning loss and progress toward its recovery. Minnesota will not have statewide test data for 2019-20, but we must stay true to the equity goals of good data and be nimble enough to respond effectively.

¹ Callaghan, P. (March 20, 2020). "What internet providers are doing to keep Minnesotans online during the pandemic." MinnPost. <https://www.minnpost.com/business/2020/03/what-internet-providers-are-doing-to-keep-minnesotans-online-during-the-pandemic>