

NEWS RELEASE

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Minneapolis and St. Paul educators to rally for safe, equitable and sustainable education during pandemic

MINNEAPOLIS, Sep. 28, 2020 -- The students in Minneapolis and St. Paul deserve safe, equitable and sustainable public schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their educators will rally Wednesday afternoon for the policy changes required to deliver it for the 2020-21 school year.

Educators in the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals and the Saint Paul Federation of Educators are calling on their respective school boards to do five things before switching the learning model in their districts from distance learning -- with in-building care for children of certain essential workers -- to hybrid models combining in-person and distance learning.

- Respect the voices and experience of educators by publicly negotiating over issues of safety and academic quality in specific schools and worksites in the two districts.
- Honor the work of education support professionals, or ESPs, who are providing childcare for students of essential workers by lowering staffing ratios and resuming hazard pay.
- Slow the transition to hybrid instruction until it can be done safely and equitably for all students, no matter what they look like, where they come from, or how much money their family has.
- Join educators working in union to advocate for and create the conditions to improve distance learning, including expanding access to high-speed internet and adding asynchronous options.
- Publicly acknowledge and immediately address the history of underfunding in the districts that has allowed Black, brown and Indigenous students to go without essential educational opportunities while the richest 1 percent of Minnesotans fail to pay their fair share.

Logistics for Wednesday, Sep. 30

At 4:30 p.m., educators from St. Paul will march across the Lake Street Bridge to meet up with educators from Minneapolis. The two groups will walk a short distance to West River Parkway for a program that will be open to the media. The program will start at approximately 4:45 p.m. and conclude by 5:30 p.m.

Quotes from union leaders

"Distance learning is part of our hybrid plans. We cannot begin talking about hybrid learning until we can assure families that schools are safe and that distance learning is working effectively for all families and sustainably for staff. Right now, many of our families are unable to connect due to lack of interpreters for IT problems and unreliable internet access. These are problems we could fix if we made the commitment to tax those who are profiting in this time to pay for them," said Nick Faber, president of the Saint Paul Federation of Educators.

"Now is the time for creative thinking, not a one-size-fits-all approach. We want to meet our students where they're at but we are being placed into a box that is similar to the way things were when we were in-person, yet *nothing* about this is the same as in-person learning. We need the time and flexibility to meet our students' needs right now. We must focus on and ensure that distance learning is equitable for all of our learners. That's why we are fighting to get MPS to the table to bargain around these issues," said Greta Callahan, president of the teachers chapter of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals.

"Our frontline workers know what we need to make sure distance learning is safe, successful, and sustainable. That is why we are calling on MPS to come to the bargaining table and work out what we need to ensure safe and stable staffing," said Shaun Laden, president of the ESP chapter of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals

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