PACER Center
State Legislative Priorities 2015

School Discipline: Develop and support legislation limiting use of extreme disciplinary measures for all students.
Zero tolerance policies and extreme discipline measures (suspensions, expulsions, use of law enforcement) have been shown to be ineffective in changing behavior and are disproportionately used with students of color and students with disabilities. The Coalition will work to enact legislation that will: require schools to exhaust strategies for re-engaging students before suspension, expulsion, or police involvement is utilized; expand the use of positive behavior interventions; ensure that students who are suspended have continued opportunity to make academic progress; and require schools to notify parents if police become involved or a student is taken to a police station.

Disability Specific Training: Require disability-specific training for paraprofessionals to decrease the occurrence and impact of disruptive behaviors.
Paraprofessionals who are unfamiliar with the disabilities of the children with whom they work often unintentionally escalate a child’s disruptive behaviors. The Coalition will work to enact legislation that will require schools to provide disability-specific training to paraprofessionals that will allow them to better understand and positively address students’ behavioral and educational needs and lessen or avoid disruptive behaviors.

Young Children with Emotional Behavioral Disorders: Improve training for early childhood educators.
The Coalition will look for ways to improve educational services for young children with emotional or behavior disorders by developing language requiring increased training for early childhood educators about challenging behaviors and mental health concerns. In addition, the Coalition will continue to pursue other opportunities to improve mental health services, including supporting increased funding for school-linked mental health programs.

Assistive Technology: Improve the use of assistive technology and training of teachers to support students with disabilities.
Assistive technology can make a significant difference in students’ ability to learn and communicate. The Coalition will promote support improved implementation of assistive technology in the classroom through increased training of teachers, funding, and inclusion of students with disabilities in school-wide technology programs such as the use of iPads or other devices.

Special Education Funding: Secure increased and adequate funding stream for special education.
Minnesota’s funding commitment to educate students with disabilities has historically been strong. However, schools continue to rely on their local operating budgets in order to cover all special education costs. The Coalition will advocate for increased state funding for special education. The Coalition will also monitor the recently implemented pupil-driven funding formula for special education to assure it has no adverse impacts on children with disabilities.

Restrictive Procedures: Ensure safe and appropriate use of seclusion and restraint for students with disabilities, including eliminating the use of prone restraint.
The Coalition will continue to support limiting the use of seclusion and restraint and oppose any attempt to delay the end of the use of prone restraint in schools beyond 2015. The Coalition will also continue to support the expansion of positive behavior intervention strategies to reduce the need for restrictive procedures.

Special Education Policies: Uphold Minnesota’s historically strong laws and rules for students with disabilities.
Minnesota students with disabilities benefit from an education system that supports their unique learning needs. The Coalition will actively work to ensure that Minnesota’s strong laws and rules on special education are maintained. The Coalition will also monitor Minnesota’s waiver from provisions of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA – formerly referred to as No Child Left Behind) to ensure that accountability for academic achievement includes students with disabilities.

Bullying Prevention: Uphold Minnesota’s strengthened bullying prevention law.
The Coalition will monitor implementation of the Safe and Supportive Schools Act, including the development of local district and school policies, training of school personnel and volunteers, provision of safe and supportive schools programming, and impact of the law’s enactment on students with disabilities and all students.

Priority Monitoring Issues
• Access to special education services for students in mental health day treatment and the juvenile justice systems.
• Access to health care financing supports and services for children with disabilities and special health care needs including Medical Assistance, TEFRA Parental Fees, PCA services, Home and Community Based Waiver Services, Consumer Directed Community Supports, MNsure, and Dental Care.

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