

Key MEA Legislative Priorities for 2023

From school safety and student mental health to curriculum flexibility and overhauling how public education is paid for in Michigan, there is a long list of pro-education policies that the Legislature and Gov. Whitmer need to address over the long term.

MEA's legislative agenda for the coming years is set by the MEA Legislation Commission, which includes members from across the state and is informed from input gathered from rank-and-file members. The commission's report for 2023-25 will be considered by the MEA Board of Directors and published later this spring.

In the short run, however, several areas need immediate attention in Lansing that have been brought up repeatedly by MEA members since the successful 2022 elections. While far from exhaustive, these are some of the issues that MEA is working with lawmakers to accomplish in 2023 and beyond.

Student Academic Support

■ Repeal third-grade reading retention, shifting focus from punishing students who under-perform on standardized tests to supporting their individual literacy needs.

■ Invest proper resources for PreK-3 reading intervention (such as “individual reading plans”), provide educators with professional latitude for assessments, and develop consistent post-fourth-grade literacy supports to help students get the support they need.

■ Implement supplemental post-pandemic academic support, like district-based tutoring programs, class size reductions and other interventions to drive extra resources to students who need more help.

NOTE: MEA members have been sharing thoughts about legislative priorities through the MEA Legislation Commission's input process — you can still share your thoughts at mea.org/legislative-input-form.

In the words of MEA Members:

“I am concerned about the 3rd grade reading bill, which seems to punish students by holding them back in school rather than support them in intensive reading intervention. More money is needed for all schools to hire more professionals to provide intensive reading intervention for at risk students, as well as additional teachers to have smaller class sizes.”

Mary Thomas, Watervilet



Senate Education Committee Chair Dayna Polehanki (D-Livonia) on the third grade reading law:

“Our goal needs to be to actually help kids read. The existing law has some good ideas in it, like funding for literacy coaches. However, flunking a third grader based on one reading test isn't among those good ideas and needs to be repealed before any other students are held back.”

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Evaluation & Testing

- Fix the teacher evaluation system to make it developmental rather than punitive by removing state testing data, changing “effectiveness” labels, ensuring educator voice in the process and providing due process for evaluation appeals.
- Streamline and minimize assessment requirements to reduce both time spent and high-stakes assigned to standardized testing.
- Take advantage of freedom provided by new federal law by eliminating dated, Michigan-specific requirements around frequency of testing, evaluation requirements and accountability systems.

In the words of MEA Members:

“The existing legislation surrounding teacher evaluation must be fixed. It is punitive for teachers. At least decrease the amount/percentage that student scores on standardized testing play a role on a teacher’s yearly evaluation.”

Krista Anderson, Brandon

“State standardized testing is not useful or informative information for teachers, it eats up a lot of instructional time between teaching students how to test to actual test-taking, and it is not equitable or accessible to whole swaths of students.”

Melissa Villanueva, Ann Arbor



State Rep. Amos O’Neal (D-Saginaw) on changing the teacher evaluation system:

“Helping teachers improve their work with students isn’t a partisan issue. I’m proud to continue the work done by my term-limited Republican colleague, former Sen. Ken Horn, to reduce the weight of standardized tests in the process, and to broaden the voice all educators have in their profession.”

Regarding “right-to-work” repeal and public sector workers

Repealing Michigan’s so-called “right-to-work” law is a Democratic legislative priority, but a 2018 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the *Janus v. AFSCME* case will keep that repeal from impacting public education employees and other public workers. While MEA supports repealing right-to-work for our private-sector union sisters and brothers (including private-sector MEA members), a repeal will not apply to the vast majority of MEA members without a reversal of the court’s *Janus* ruling. Read more at mea.org/janus.

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Collective Bargaining & Job Security Rights

- Repeal prohibited subjects of bargaining to provide employee voice in the workplace on job placement and security, outsourcing, evaluation, just cause requirements for dismissal, and more.
- Remove automatic penalties for school employees when working under an expired contract, like step freezes and pass-through of health insurance cost increases.
- Allow school employees the freedom to allocate their paycheck as they choose, including permitting payroll deduction of union dues like every other public and private worker in Michigan.



House Education Committee Chair Matt Koleszar (D-Livonia) on PA 54 of 2011 governing expired contracts:

“When I was an MEA local president, this bill and the damage it did to my members was one of the key things that made me want to run for the Legislature. It needs to be repealed, along with every other misguided limitation on the rights of school employees to negotiate a fair contract. After all, teachers’ working conditions are students’ learning conditions.”

In the words of MEA Members:

“Laws about what is allowed to be bargained in public education have crippled our ability to negotiate fair contracts, particularly when it comes to discipline, evaluations, and seniority. Repeal the unfair bargaining laws that are in place for public education employees and give us back our bargaining power so that we can come to the negotiating table as equals.”

Sara Sweat Ziegler, Monroe

“We must address language that was stolen from our contracts. Insert lay off, seniority, recall rights, and just cause directly into state law. This is what gives teachers a voice.”

Joe Ligaj, Lincoln Park

“So many restrictions were placed upon educators and districts by politicians in the past years, seriously limiting the bargaining and decision-making power of people who work directly with students and know what the best practices are.”

Jane Cottey, Plymouth-Canton (retired)

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Educator Compensation

- Allow public employers to pay a greater share of health insurance costs (beyond the current 80% or hard cap limitations) to improve school employee take home pay.
- Repeal the pension tax that reduces the retirement security of school employees and others seniors across Michigan.
- Work with employers to increase wages for all public education employees, including approving the minimum wage increase ballot measure, which will help drive up take-home pay for lower-wage education support professionals.



Senate Appropriations School Aid Subcommittee Chair Darrin Camilleri (D-Brownstown) on recruiting and retaining educators:

“Every student deserves a great public education and that starts by having great professional teachers and support staff in our schools. We need to improve the pay and respect for the education profession so that we can attract and keep the best and brightest in our classrooms.”

In the words of MEA Members:

“We have been losing teachers at every grade level at an alarming rate. We need to find a way to keep teachers in the classroom, and a way to attract people into choosing education as a career path. Show teachers more appreciation. Raise their salaries, better benefits, listen to the needs and concerns they have relating to their students in the classrooms.”

Briana Post, Bangor

“The insurance hard cap is not even close to keeping up with inflation and insurance costs have skyrocketed. Work with the Legislature to significantly increase the insurance caps paid by districts to ease the pain of the steep cost increases faced by members across the state (or repeal the legislation and allow it to be bargained again locally after each contract expires).”

Jennifer Poupard, Monroe

“We need to eliminate the hard cap on insurance and remove the prohibition on automatic deduction of dues. We also need to fight to eliminate the pension tax started in the Snyder years.”

Jamie Buchanan, Petoskey

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Public Education Funding

Continue historic investments in early childhood through higher education — including increases to both base funding and equity needs to meet different student needs (from special education and poverty to transportation and program availability for rural schools).

Encourage school districts and higher education employers to invest funding increases in employee recruitment and retention efforts.

Invest more in ensuring post-secondary learning opportunities — from trade programs to college tuition — are affordable to all students to pursue the jobs our economy needs.



House Appropriations School Aid Subcommittee Chair Regina Weiss (D-Oak Park) on the need for continued historic investment in education:

“As an educator, I know how critical it is to ensure that the individual needs of each student are addressed to ensure that they can thrive from one year to the next. That’s why it is so important that the state and school districts spend every available dollar to improve educational opportunities for Michigan kids — because the gains our children make today will last a lifetime.”

In the words of MEA Members:

“We need to overhaul the school funding model to make funding more equitable and address the consequences of years of inequitable funding. Part of that should be advocating for a larger supplemental funding percentage for at-risk students. We currently give an additional 11.5% which is significantly lower than studies recommend.”

Frances Lazette, Ann Arbor

“We must address inadequate funding between urban and rural schools, as compared to suburban schools. Explore funding structures that don’t leave rural and urban schools with a disproportionate level of support for the services ALL schools need, not just those that serve suburban areas.”

Doug Damery, East Lansing

“The state should mandate and fund appropriate ratios for mental health support positions including counselors, social workers, school psych positions, and other mental health support personnel. We currently do not have enough overall funding support from the state allocated specifically for all of these positions.”

Lauren Robinson, West Ottawa