Chronic Staffing Shortage in Schools

Key Facts:

- **SHORTAGE AREAS:**
  - PARAPROFESSIONALS
  - NUTRITION WORKERS
  - SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS
  - SCHOOL NURSES
  - BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL CHILDCARE WORKERS

- **ANOKA HENNEPIN STARTED THE SCHOOL YEAR DOWN 50 WORKERS IN CHILD NUTRITION**

- **ROCHESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS IS SHORT 82 PARAS, 45 OF WHICH WORK IN SPECIAL EDUCATION.**

- **SHAKOPEE STARTED THE YEAR WITH 24 PARA POSITIONS NOT FILLED.**

- **DULUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE 1/3 OF THE SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS THAN BEFORE THE PANDEMIC.**

- **ST. PAUL HAD 300 LICENSED TEACHERS OUT AND ONLY 150 SUBSTITUTES TO FILL THE POSITIONS.**

- **CROSBY-IRONTON CUSTODIANS ARE DOWN 50%.**

**Issue**

Minnesota schools report unfilled positions in the areas of school bus drivers, after school care workers, school nutrition staff, paraprofessionals, and nurses – positions difficult to fill before the pandemic and now have turned to desperate hiring strategies as districts are adapting to another new reality.

Bus driver shortages have hit Minnesota particularly hard. Our districts have resorted to asking parents to drive their students, encouraging carpooling, limiting extended day programs, changing start times, expanding Metro Transit, or opting out of busing entirely. Other ideas implemented are asking staff to get a school bus driver’s license, offering bonuses, increasing hourly wages (up to $28/hour) and offering improved benefits in the hope to attract and retain bus drivers. In some instances, schools have closed due to the shortage. It is impossible to educate students if they can’t get to the school building.

The pandemic has also left staff shortages in before and after school programs, resulting in long waiting lists or eliminating the program. The ripple effect of this is parents don’t have affordable childcare options leaving them to sometimes open enroll to another district or make job concessions. Parents will “travel” to another district where their child can get before and/or after school care so the parent can work.

Tutors, educational assistants, and paraprofessionals are an essential component to the delivery model of public education especially in special education. Regardless of a staffing shortage, unlike like big box stores, districts have a legal obligation to deliver special education services.

COVID certainly impacted the labor market and school districts have not been exempt. Federal relief funding has mitigated some of the fiscal impact but once the federal funding runs out these financial obligations are not sustainable.

No matter the reason for the shortage, whether it be vaccination or mask requirements, childcare insecurities for employees, fear of contracting COVID or staff leaving for higher paying jobs in local businesses, the reality is schools districts are experiencing a shortage in support staff.

**Ask**

Ask lawmakers to partner with districts to provide the financial resources and flexibility, especially reducing barriers to hiring, needed to adequately staff our schools.