

2019-2020 LEGISLATIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Strengthening our Schools Through Educators' Voices

There is no one more capable of knowing what works in teaching and learning than our educators.

Research shows that school climate improves when educators are engaged and collaborate with decision makers on policy and school-based decisions. It promotes a better learning environment for students, which raises student achievement, and creates a better working environment for teachers which reduces teacher turnover.

DSEA is committed to intentionally fostering and supporting lasting structures for collaboration at all levels, so they become a part of the school community culture and are sustained at a systemic level, beyond any individual's duration.

Creating a Safe, Secure and Supportive School Environment

Every educator knows the heartbreak and frustration of children who are hungry, sick, lonely, or traumatized when they enter school. The opportunity to learn cannot be divorced from their socio-economic and social-emotional realities; realities that make learning more challenging.

To close the opportunity gap, DSEA must advocate for integrating a range of student services into the school building. Schools must provide access to mental and general health practitioners, school counselors, and social workers who can connect children and/or their families to much needed social services.

Students and staff deserve a safe place to learn and teach. DSEA supports school discipline policies that require timely reporting of and appropriate response to behavior that threatens the safety and welfare of educators and students.

Targeted and Sustained Funding for Public Schools

Every state should guarantee its students a quality education by providing the funding needed for all students to achieve educational success. It is essential that adequate and equitable funding from public tax sources be provided for schools to obtain the resources (e.g., personnel, programs, materials, buildings, and technology) to meet the needs of all students.

Delaware has a unique and strong foundation for funding public education. It is intended to meet the varied needs of our students, free from political influence. However, since the inception of this funding formula over 60 years ago, our students and their needs have changed. A once-balanced system has been tinkered with too often. The funding stream for basic instructional needs, utilities, programs, and people have been significantly reduced

In order to create a supportive environment for teaching and learning, we must reexamine our use of education units, both how they are funded and used. We must identify ways to target funding based on student need and to provide reduced class sizes. We must create school communities which allow educators to meet individual student academic and social/emotional needs. More specifically, DSEA supports enhanced funding for students identified as needing special education services. To this end, DSEA supports full funding of IDEA by the federal government, and providing additional sustained funding for K-3 basic special education, ELL and poverty by the state government.

Competitive Compensation to Recruit and Retain Educators

Today's graduates are entering the profession with significant student debt. Currently, Delaware is losing teachers to nearby states who can offer competitive compensation and benefits packages. Compensation must be improved to attract and retain high quality public education staff for our schools and state agencies.

DSEA supports creating a compensation system that recognizes the skills and knowledge of educators, that is cooperatively developed by the State and educators, that incorporates a unique pay component to recruit/retain educators for high needs schools, recognizes additional leadership roles, and can be fully funded and sustainable.

Early Childhood Education

High quality early childhood education represents one of the best investments our country can make. DSEA believes it's a common-sense investment we can't afford to pass up. Research shows that providing a high-quality education for children before the age of five yields significant long-term benefits. Children in high quality preschool programs are less likely to repeat grades, need special education, or get into future trouble with the law.

Like NEA, DSEA believes voluntary free, publicly funded, high quality "universal" pre-kindergarten programs should be available for all three- and four-year-old children whose parents choose to enroll them. Furthermore, dedicated funding for early childhood education must be allocated in the same manner as K-12 schools.

High quality pre-kindergarten programs establish a lifelong basis for learning, but learning at all levels should be developmentally appropriate. The value of play and its place in public school classrooms has long been debated. Research provides evidence that play in all its forms is beneficial to a child's overall development and that guided play—structured by educators for an intended purpose—supports positive social foundations, executive function, and cognitive development. DSEA will advocate to maintain K-3 classrooms that include learning centers, free play, and outdoor recess to support student learning.

School and Educator Accountability

With the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states were given a tremendous opportunity to redefine school accountability. Delaware led the charge in focusing on support for schools that need it. However, there is more that needs to be done.

DSEA believes that state and district accountability and responsibility extends beyond just accounting for and reporting student proficiency and growth. Both entities must also be accountable for allocating sufficient resources to meet student needs and supporting student learning regardless of the zip code. Once identified, these resources must be allocated equitably – the greater the need, the greater the resources.

As we work to redefine school accountability, we cannot overlook educator accountability. Educator evaluations will never be fair, valid or reliable when driven by test scores. ESSA removes the federal mandate that ties test scores to educator evaluations. It's time to end this policy in Delaware.

DSEA believes that evaluations should be conducted to improve educator performance and the quality of instruction offered to pupils. Evaluations should also be based upon written criteria and follow procedures mutually developed by and acceptable to the local affiliate, the administration, and the governing board.

Right to Representation

The right to organize and join a union is, for most employees, a fundamental employment protection under federal and state labor laws. America's labor unions have led the fight for working families, winning protections such as the 8-hour day and the 40-hour week, overtime rights, and access to health care and retirement security. DSEA will continue to fight for due process and the collective bargaining rights of our members.