

2021-2022 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. Now more than ever, educators should play a leading role in conversations about education.

The COVID 19 pandemic is a testament to why intentionally fostering and supporting lasting structures for collaboration at all levels is critically important. When collaboration is sustained at a systematic level and is a part of the school community and culture, decision making in times of crisis is timely, relevant and impactful.

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, raises student achievement, and creates a better working environment for teachers which reduces teacher turnover.

DSEA will continue to advocate for statewide and local decision-making systems to include representation from our union and the educators that belong to it.

Creating a Safe 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, and those realities are what make learning more challenging.

COVID 19 placed a magnifying lens on the chaos some children experience at home or internally. Just because students return to the classroom does not mean these problems will disappear. We cannot allow the trauma our students face to go back into the dark after they have been brought to light.

Therefore, 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. DSEA is committed to passing House Bill 100.

Students and staff deserve a safe place to learn and teach. From day one of the pandemic, DSEA has advocated on a number of platforms, that if there is a shadow of a doubt that districts cannot adhere to health and safety guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control and the Delaware Department of Public Health, do not re-open for in-person instruction.

DSEA will continue to inform the legislature on the conditions of classrooms as more schools open for in-person instruction. DSEA will advocate for accountability and oversight to ensure adherence to health and safety guidelines and for penalties when not. DSEA will advocate for stronger indoor air quality and ventilation standards, as well as overall building maintenance standards. DSEA will advocate for robust public information on the COVID-19 vaccine and a quick roll out to educators who can and want to be vaccinated.

Targeted and Sustained Funding for Public Schools

On October 12, 2020, the American Civil Liberties Union of Delaware and Governor John Carney reached a settlement agreement on the landmark education funding lawsuit, *Delawareans for Educational Opportunity & the NAACP Delaware State Conference vs. State of Delaware*. It is critical that DSEA ensures that the provisions of the settlement are met and that DSEA remains an active partner in discussions regarding long-term changes to our funding system.

With that being said, our objectives and the foundation they were built on remains the same. Every state should guarantee its students a quality education by providing the funding needed for all students to achieve educational excellence. 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, how they are funded and used, and identify ways to target funding based on student need and 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 and Pre-K basic special education, EEL and poverty by the state government.

Competitive Compensation to Recruit and Retain Educators

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 cannot 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, including special 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.

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 is 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.