

By Bill Hosko, Letter to the Editor:

'It's time to take responsibility for our schools'

In Senator Pappas' April column, Addressing Minnesota's Public Education Crisis, she avoided using six critical words: parental responsibility, personal responsibility and professional responsibility. (Her column is below.)

Thousands of St. Paul kids have now been moved from public schools into charter schools by their parents and/or into private schools if they can afford them. Their number one reason is that order and respect in every classroom, for teachers and fellow students, is no longer expected. Privately, most teachers agree.

It is an election year, and Senator Pappas used her column, which the Community Reporter generously gives her, to with all due respect, sanctimoniously wag her finger at people who dare to disagree with her viewpoints. Increasing public school funding to record heights – in this case, let's use tens of millions of dollars from the state's revenue surplus, is her perpetual answer to our distressed public school system. 'We must support our teachers and our students' is her decades-old message.

The truth: Our public-school decline has grown exponentially under her oversight and misconduct has indeed been normalized. Subsequently, we continue to have one of the lowest graduation rates in the state, according to Minnesota Department of Education data.

This can never be repaired until the following occurs:

1. Parents from all backgrounds and economic status need to be reminded of the importance that children get enough sleep, have a good breakfast before leaving home and are taught the importance of good behavior in school.
2. Our kids are as bright as kids anywhere. However, they do need to know it is expected that they behave and be respectful when in school. They can't learn well, and neither can other kids in class, if they are acting up.
3. Lastly, our school board, superintendent and the politicians who send them funding, need to take an honest look at what is occurring under their collective watch. Continuing to allow misconduct and disruption of classrooms has been a massive mistake, and, based on my conversations with educators, it's growing.

Simultaneously, politicians are now ensuring that kids (and adults) are allowed to misbehave on public transit, openly shoplift and engage in any number of antisocial behaviors with little or no consequence.

This isn't complicated and our kids are smart. Looking the other way, or worse yet, placating student misbehavior is basically telling them that 'we don't care enough about you to stop your mistreatment of others, or yourself.'

Lastly, for those who have never seen the film *To Sir with Love*, now is a perfect time to do so. Its message about earned respect between teacher and classroom is as timeless today as it was in 1967.

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District Perspectives Column, By Sen. Sandy Pappas:

'Addressing Minnesota's Public Education Crisis'

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended our public schools over the past two years. Teachers are stressed, students are dealing with mental health issues, and parents have taken on extra responsibilities at home to help educate their children.

Lack of resources has left schools with crowded classrooms, unaffordable special education costs, and a lack of counselors to provide students with the support they need. To make matters worse, teachers are departing the profession at an alarming rate because they are burnt out and lack support. Students cannot learn in this environment. That's why I'm fighting to provide schools with the resources they need.

Teachers, parents, and students across the state are all telling us the same thing: they need additional funding to hire on-site counselors, reduce class sizes, and provide funds to recruit teachers and retain the ones we currently have.

Funding for schools was once an area of bipartisan cooperation at the legislature. Unfortunately, it has become highly partisan in recent years. What I'm hearing from my community is that we should use our state's \$9.25 billion surplus to invest in the things our schools need.

Right now, the Saint Paul Public School District is swamped with special education costs. These costs take away funding that could be invested in other areas. If special education and English Language Learners (ELL) programs were properly funded, it would free up millions of dollars that schools could use to hire teachers, expand mental health resources and improve school facilities. That's why it's so important that the state begins to take this burden off our schools.

Minnesota also needs to confront its achievement gap. Communities of color have been disproportionately harmed by the pandemic. There are already existing programs, such as Grow Your Own, which helps identify future teachers at a young age, and the Collaborative Urban Educators Program, which provides scholarships for college students seeking to enter the profession. Investing in these programs and other educational initiatives will not only help students of color find careers but also create safer and healthier communities.

As the legislature works to appropriate our historic budget surplus, we must focus more resources toward public education by increasing salaries for teachers and expanding support for education support professionals (ESPs). Education has always been critically important to Minnesota families, communities and our economy. By making these necessary investments, we will take an important step toward keeping our schools strong now and into the future.