

From: Office of Senator Smith
Subject: Reply from Senator Smith
Date: January 14, 2025 at 3:12 PM
To: dick.bernard

Office of Sen. Tina Smith



January 14, 2025

Dear Dick,

Thank you for contacting me about education. I appreciate hearing from you.

I believe that a high-quality public education system—from early childhood to higher education—is one of the most important investments we can make as a nation. An excellent education system enables people of all ages and from all backgrounds to reach their full potential, support their families with good-paying jobs, and become well-informed and engaged citizens. Schools and educational programs help keep our economy and our communities strong.

When it comes to K-12 education, I believe we need to address the opportunity gaps that prevent too many students from reaching their full potential and provide teachers and schools the support they need to be successful. That's why I have led the *Addressing Teacher Shortages Act*, which would provide support to school districts, especially those in rural areas, so they can recruit, mentor, and retain a diverse teacher workforce. Additionally, I am a proud cosponsor of the *Keep Our Promise to America's Children and Teachers (PACT) Act*, which would fully fund special education services for students with disabilities. It would also fully fund the Title I program for low-income schools under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*.

Another one of my top priorities is to expand access to mental health services for young people across rural, urban, and Tribal communities. I strongly believe that kids should be able to get the help they need—when and where they need it. That's why I introduced the *Mental Health Services for Students Act*, which would help schools partner with local mental health providers to establish on-site, mental health services for students. It would also provide training for school personnel on how to recognize, assist, and refer students who may need mental health assistance.

After students leave the K-12 system, I don't believe they should have to take on a massive amount of student debt to pursue higher education. Yet the average student loan balance in Minnesota is over \$34,000. I support efforts to forgive student debt and address the root causes of high student debt. First, I believe we should double the Pell Grant to restore its historic purchasing power, which has significantly eroded over the past 50 years. Second, I believe we should rein in for-profit colleges and invest in the many under-resourced colleges, such as two-year community and technical colleges, that provide an excellent return for students and taxpayers alike. Third, I've championed federal investments to make free or low-cost open access college textbooks available to more students, which have already generated millions in savings. The high cost of college is not fair to students and prevents people from making important life decisions like starting a family.

It's also important to recognize that a 4-year degree isn't right for everyone. I strongly believe that people need to have excellent options no matter which path they choose, and that means that we need to invest in career and technical education. Not only will this help more young people enter good-paying careers, but it will also help prepare people for the jobs that employers are hiring for today. That's why I sponsored the *21st Century Workforce Partnerships Act*, which would fund more career exploration and pathway programs in middle and high schools.

Finally, I understand that many barriers to education occur outside the classroom. Things like access to childcare, nutrition, transportation, and housing can all have an enormous impact on whether a student is successful in school. I believe we should support schools and colleges in helping students address these challenges so they can focus on learning and attaining their goals. Furthermore, as Minnesota continues to become more diverse, I believe we need to invest in high-quality English language learner programs and other initiatives that support new Minnesotans as they become members of our communities.

You can count on me to fight for an education system that prepares all Minnesotans to lead the lives they want to live. Thank you again for contacting me about this important issue. Please do not hesitate to reach out in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tina Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, stylized "S" at the end.

Tina Smith
United States Senator