

Chair Cowles, Trustees, Chancellor Malhotra,

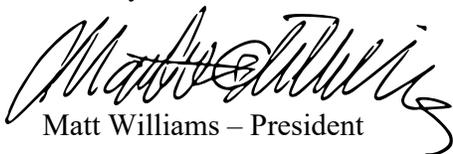
We remain in the midst of a long pandemic winter. As eager as we all are to look ahead to spring and new possibilities that are undoubtedly on the horizon, we continue to face and struggle against multiple convergent crises.

COVID-19 continues to be an imminent and omnipresent crisis. One critical area to be aware of is vaccination. Unfortunately, higher-education faculty have not yet been included in the Governor's vaccination pilot program for educators, even though there are faculty currently teaching face-to-face because there is no other option. We have been engaged in advocacy to get higher-ed faculty that are teaching in-person to be included in this early pilot program and would greatly appreciate continued and expanded joint advocacy from Minnesota State, as well. Compared to the overall number of K-12 educators, the number of faculty this would affect is relatively small—yet the impact it would have on ensuring our students can continue to work toward their educational goals is immense.

Relatedly, it is now beyond question that the burdens of this pandemic have not been felt equally across different groups in our country. This is truly a pandemic of health on top of a pandemic of long-standing systemic racism. We are grateful that many of the federal relief packages have dedicated funds to directly assist our students. However, I must share with you that the long-term effects of teaching in this environment have had severe consequences on the well-being of faculty. Just recently I had a conversation with a colleague who broke down in tears because, in their words, they just didn't know how much longer they could keep up with the needs of their students while also trying to help their child navigate distance learning and do all the other things we have to do differently. Their story is common, and we must recognize that our BIPOC faculty face these challenges in addition to already existing challenges. As we consider how we might utilize relief funds from the federal government, we cannot overlook how important it is to take care of the people who are taking care of our students.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge we are facing these crises while being undercut by another crisis: austerity. One area that illustrates this crisis is counseling within the 2-year colleges. Over the past two decades, there has been a roughly 50% decline in the number of counselors in our system. Because of the comprehensive nature of their skillset, faculty counselors are uniquely positioned to provide essential, holistic support to students through individual and group interactions, as well as classroom instruction, on a range of concerns from mental health to academic concerns to career counseling. They truly represent the gold standard of how we can best support our students in attaining their educational goals. In a time in which the conversation unfortunately gets framed by what we can afford financially, I urge the trustees to consider the long-term cost of not supporting faculty counseling on our campuses in terms of a diminished educational experience for our students.

Thank you,



Matt Williams – President

55 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103
651-767-1262 800-377-7783 Fax 651-767-1266
www.msctmn.org

MSCF is an affiliate of Education Minnesota, the American Federation of Teachers,
the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.

