

# Annual Report 2021

EdAllies Celebrates 5 Years of Being Your Eyes & Ears



# Our Mission

EdAllies partners with schools, families, and communities to ensure that every young Minnesotan has access to a rigorous and engaging education. We advance policies that put underserved students first, remove barriers facing successful schools and programs, and foster an inclusive conversation about what's possible for students.

## Our Core Values

EQUITY • INVENTIVENESS • HUMILITY • HONESTY • COURAGE



## Letter From Our Board Chair



Like you, I care deeply about the quality education our kids receive and the care with which it is delivered. I want to know the barriers they face and the best solutions to remove them. But, the engine of everyday life makes it difficult or impossible for parents to keep up with the ever-changing information landscape. That's where EdAllies comes in.

In 2021, EdAllies celebrated a milestone: five years as one of Minnesota's most trusted voices in education policy and advocacy. From the steps of the Capitol to community coalition meetings to the classroom, that's five years of being your eyes and ears on all things impacting the quality of education our students receive. Five years of elevating the voices of those who, historically, have been left out of the conversation. Five years of partnering with students, parents, educators, community organizations, and policymakers to work toward our shared vision of a Minnesota where every student succeeds.

Last year was no different, as advocacy efforts led to major wins that kept diverse and effective educators in the classroom and student-centered policymaking on multiple issues. We produced critical research and looked for the most promising solutions, providing

recommendations to advance equity and opportunity. We heard from students and educators whose bravery to tell their stories directly led to change.

EdAllies even leveled up on our commitment to being your eyes and ears with a creative series of weekly video updates that quickly and understandably broke down the most important news in education policy for you.

The last five years have reinforced one thing: We cannot do this work alone. Thanks to you, our community of advocates, organizational partners, and generous supporters, we have been able to advance our mission. We want to deepen our relationship with you as we focus our eyes forward and put our ears to the ground for the next five years and beyond. Because the closer we work together, the closer we will be to changing what is to what should be for our kids.

**Karn Engelsgjerd**  
EdAllies Board Chair



## EdAllies Celebrates 5 Years!

EdAllies set out to be a locally-led nonprofit relentlessly bringing kids' needs to policy conversations and fighting to ensure equity is at the center of decisions that impact students across the state. We took a moment to pause, reflect on what we've accomplished, and take stock of the most urgent unmet needs as we recommit to our next five years. We are grateful for the generosity and vision of supporters who have made this work possible, along with the many students, parents, educators, partner organizations, and critical advocates who consistently worked alongside us to fight for the needs of Minnesota's students. 🏡



Take a moment to watch our [reflection video](#), looking back on our achievements and forward to our goals for the next five years!



## School Lunch Shaming Ban and Healthy Hunger-Free Schools Fellowship

Our partnership with the Healthy Hunger-Free Schools Coalition, led by Hunger Solutions, Second Harvest Heartland, General Mills, and Children's Minnesota, to work toward establishing universal school meals for all Minnesota students, led to major progress and change for students.



At the start of the COVID pandemic, as a country, we decided to feed all students, no questions asked. The waivers that established a temporary right to a school meal for all students expire at the end of the 2021-22 school year. And we know the damaging impact hunger has on students' learning, health, and overall well-being.

In coalition with our Healthy Hunger-Free Schools partners, EdAllies fought to end lunch shaming at the Capitol, and we won. As a result, schools can no longer deny meals to students simply because they cannot afford to pay, nor can they punish them for having lunch debt such as banning them from participating in graduation ceremonies or extracurricular activities and stamping their hands. No child should be shamed for their family's inability to pay an outstanding balance. It's a win for equity. It's a win for students.

Additionally, through our EdFellows program, EdAllies brought on two fellows, local parents and advocates Ruth Davis and Reggie Evans, to support our community outreach and grassroots efforts to engage with families and students to become advocates and advance the critical issue of universal access to school meals. 🏡



**For more information, check out these related stories:**

-  **We're Tackling School Nutrition. Here's Why Policymakers Should Care Too**
-  **Minnesota Halts School Lunch Shaming Over Student Debts**





## Advancing Student-Centered COVID Recovery

EdAllies responded nimbly to the needs of students, playing a watchdog role to track leadership from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), advocating for a student-centered response at the Capitol, and giving families tools to advocate at the local level. We convened a coalition of more than a dozen organizations to make recommendations to the Commissioner and Governor on the most equitable, student-centered investment of COVID relief funds and brought some of these ideas to legislators. At the Capitol, we helped secure language to ensure students with disabilities receive individualized COVID-19 recovery interventions.

When we found out that Minnesota would receive \$1.3 billion in federal stimulus funds for K-12 education, we knew it was critical that community stakeholders have the opportunity to provide input on how MDE would spend \$132 million of those funds on statewide needs. The opportunity was just too big to miss. Questions regarding a plan for tracking progress toward COVID recovery, addressing gaps, and community feedback loomed large.

Before MDE submitted its plan, EdAllies organized a live-streamed town hall with a coalition of partners to elevate community needs directly to decision-makers. Community stakeholders had the chance to hear directly from Commissioner Heather Mueller about MDE's vision and plans for how to invest in COVID recovery for students. Questions and feedback from this town hall helped guide MDE's decision-making as they finalized their plan. 🏡



### For more helpful context:

- As a trusted voice in the education policy ecosystem, Executive Director Josh Crosson was interviewed by several news outlets. He shared EdAllies' trademark, student-centered insight, with recommendations for using COVID-19 relief funds. [Read MinnPost's Coverage.](#)
- [Read our blog with an overview of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 \(ARP\) or the](#)
- [MDE webpage with more detail on federal relief funds over the past year.](#)



## Improving Charter School Oversight

Along with a coalition of key stakeholders, including the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools, and Great Minnesota Schools, EdAllies was a leader in advancing new legislation to strengthen accountability for charter school authorizers in Minnesota—and it passed. To ensure quality, charter schools have an extra layer of accountability through “authorizers,” who review school performance and ensure they are meeting their mission. MDE oversees these authorizers—but that oversight process had significant room for improvement. Now, Minnesota is setting better guardrails for school authorizers by creating a clearer timeline for authorizers on corrective action, restricting what authorizers on corrective action can and cannot do, improving school-authorizer relationships, and raising the overall expectations around quality in the sector. This law is one of the largest advancements in improving charter school quality in over 30 years. 🏡



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## ► Bringing An Equity Lens To College And Career Readiness

Every Minnesota student should graduate from high school with the preparation and tools to succeed in college and career. In 2021, EdAllies released a new research brief looking specifically at whether we're providing effective support to ensure low-income students, English Learners, and students with disabilities have access to rigorous, college-aligned coursework. Our research highlights notable access gaps, and the brief includes concrete recommendations for change.

The 2021 report builds off our first-of-its-kind 2020 report highlighting the egregious gaps in rigorous coursework access and success facing students of color. These combined reports show a reality that college-level and standards-aligned courses are simply not made available to many Minnesota students, which leads to K-12 and post-secondary achievement gaps.

Throughout the year, we advocated for recommendations from our research, building traction around two key issues. First, we elevated successful efforts around the country to increase access to rigorous coursework by creating automatic enrollment systems. Second, we advocated to improve Minnesota's World's Best Workforce System by adding a critical indicator identifying whether students are on track to graduate at the end of 9th grade. This research-backed measure would promote early intervention for students most at-risk of falling behind. Both of these ideas garnered significant interest among policymakers, laying the groundwork for action in 2022. 🏡



### Review our report:

- 📄 **Closing the Rigorous Coursework Gap, Part 2: Access & Success for Minnesota's Low-Income Students, English Learners, and Students with Disabilities."**





## A Go-To Source For Education Policy In Real-Time

Education policymaking happens fast, and too often, behind closed doors. So, where does this leave families, students, and educators with a stake in these decisions? We aim to be a conduit, bringing light to a too-often opaque and exclusive process and connecting community members to opportunities to inform change. In 2021, we did this in spades, with two full-time policy experts tracking not just what decision makers were saying, but also helping demystify “why” and “what was next.”

In addition to a series of candid events on happenings at the Capitol, we also served as a liaison between several coalitions back to state agencies and launched a highly successful weekly video series—Capitol Update.

When it comes to education policy, we know that people have limited time. They can’t spend hours reading through documents and sitting through hearings—they need to know what’s going on and how to take action.

That’s where we come in. Our various communications strategies, including the Capitol Update, are on-ramps for people at whatever their capacity is to engage with what can be an intentionally opaque process. Some people have time to read a blog or an email, others can do an action alert, and some people just have the capacity to watch a 2-minute video.

In 2021, we embraced that reality and created videos, both through specific series and in topical form, reaching tens of thousands of Minnesotans. These efforts received praise for helping demystify education policy in Minnesota and provide weekly Cliff Notes from the Capitol at a signature rapid pace. 🏠



**We aim to be a conduit, bringing light to a too-often opaque and exclusive process and connecting community members to opportunities to inform change.**



## Advancing Pathways For Teachers Of Color And Teachers From Diverse Backgrounds

Having high-quality teachers that reflect the students they serve has been a central focus of our work. We advocated for policies and practices in teacher preparation, licensure, and retention that reflect best practices, are aligned to equity and student achievement, and that provide fair pathways to the classroom for diverse educators.

Sometimes in advocacy, advancing change is only the first step. Successfully implementing our state's new teacher licensure system requires intentional work to understand how it is working, who it is helping, and where further improvements are needed. With the help of passionate educators, students, and our organizational partners, EdAllies worked to understand and elevate the experiences of Tier 1 and Tier 2 teachers, along with the schools and students who need them, to help maintain and improve these vital licensure pathways.

*Advancing Pathways continued on next page >>>*



**Watch Educators Speak Out at the Capitol.**



Despite clear signs that the new tiered licensure system is working to increase teacher diversity and welcome experienced and effective educators into Minnesota schools, the Minnesota Legislature again considered bills that would eliminate licensure pathways for these experienced, effective, and diverse Tier 1 and Tier 2 educators. Legislators heard extensive feedback from educators, school leaders, and even students about the negative impact of the proposed roll-backs to tiered licensure. Preserving the tiered licensure system is a huge victory that ensures that Minnesota doesn't go in the wrong direction on teacher licensure by protecting teachers of color and pathways into the classroom.

We also advocated for policy that would help recruit and retain teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas. First, we continued to support innovation in teacher preparation by providing technical assistance and policy support to the state's emerging alternative teacher preparation programs, focusing on programs that remove barriers, increase teacher diversity, and address shortage areas. Second, we worked to identify and elevate state policy strategies that would help districts retain teachers in high-need areas during layoffs. We worked with legislators to explore options like allowing retention of teachers in designated shortage areas—which in some cases includes underrepresented teachers of color. This helped elevate the retention conversation at the state and local level. One area of progress was the Increase Teachers of Color Act, spearheaded by our partners in the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers, elements of which were adopted in the final state budget. 🏡



**For more helpful context, take a look at these related blogs:**

- **Teachers Push Back on Licensure Changes**
- **Let's Break it Down: Five Reasons Why We're Saying "NO" to This Year's Licensure Bill**
- **Proposed Bill Would Hurt Struggling Students (Like I Was) the Most**





## EdVoices: An Entry Point to Advocacy

“When we change who’s telling the story and how the story is told—we change what’s possible.” – Adrienne Vitt

Through EdVoices, we help community members weigh in on the education challenges and solutions that matter most to them—and in the way that works best for them. It has quickly become an entry point—where community members become advocates.

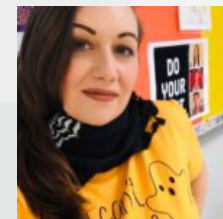
Some EdVoices contributors are writers, others are artists, some have a lot to say on just one education issue, while others want to cover many topics through a series of contributions. But above all, we believe that to improve local conversations on education and, ultimately, student outcomes, the voices of those most impacted—students, families, and educators—need to be front and center.

In 2021, EdVoices didn’t just put these voices front and center in print; participation in this program led to several contributors bravely elevating their commitment to advocacy by giving voice to the issues that impact their lives – providing testimony at the Capitol, like these passionate contributors featured to the right. 🏠

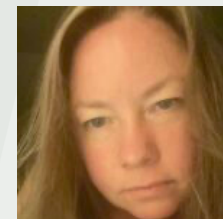
**Giving voice to the issues on our blog:**



➤ **Jose Perez (Student)**  
“Proposed Bill Would Hurt struggling students (like I was) the Most.”



➤ **Kara Cisco (Educator)**  
“6 Responses for People in Your Life Who Want to Ban Critical Race Theory.”



➤ **Jenifer Bertram (Parent)**  
“Atypical Symptoms of Autism Meant My Daughter Went Years Without the School Support We Needed.”





## For 5 Years (and Counting) Our Partners Recognize the Value We Bring

We take our name seriously, striving to be strong allies in the fight to ensure all of Minnesota's students receive the education they deserve, making partnerships essential to everything we do. From our process for identifying the most pressing issues facing our communities to our strategies for driving the change they seek, we aim to be a conduit for change—a megaphone for those most impacted by education inequities. We work closely with students, parents, educators, school leaders, and community organizations. And when a project or campaign winds down, we seek to learn from them what we did well and what we didn't. In addition, through our annual partner survey, we gather candid feedback to ensure we can be a better partner in the year ahead.

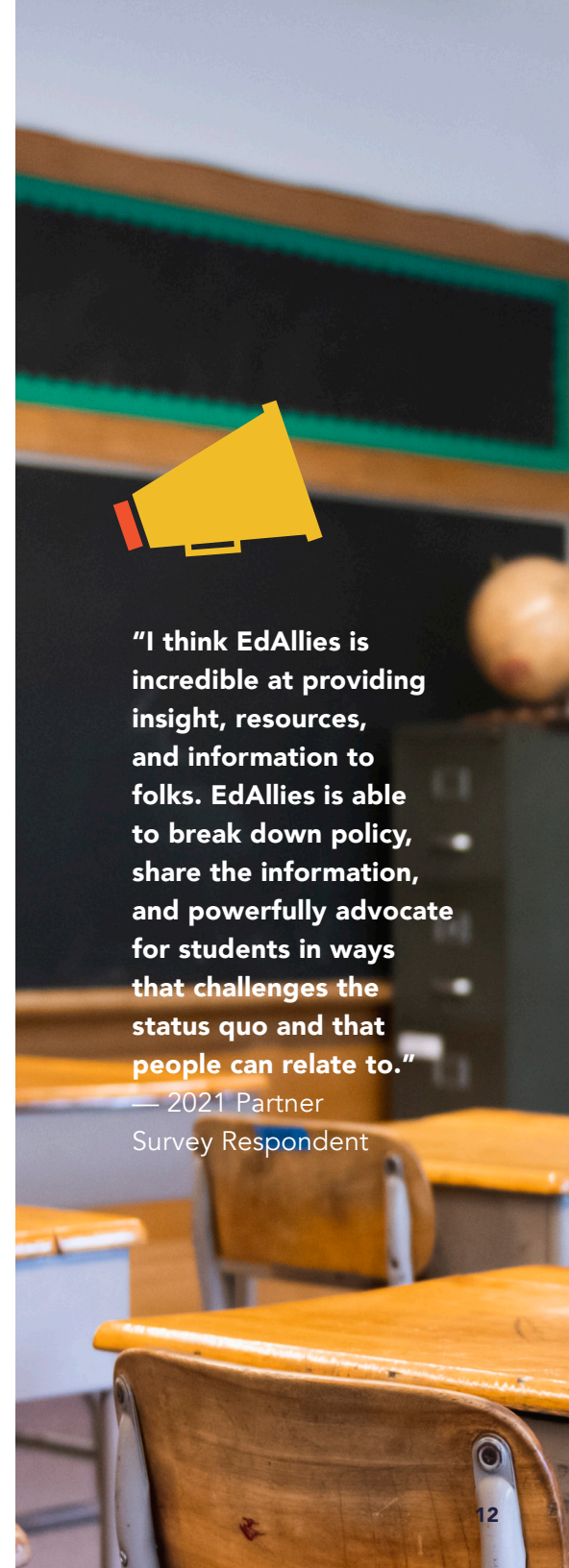
For five years running, we are humbled that our close partners have given us top marks, while articulating the unique value our work brings to kids and their families, educators and advocates, and other hardworking organizations in the education justice ecosystem.

*Annual Partner Survey continued on next page >>>*



**"I think EdAllies is incredible at providing insight, resources, and information to folks. EdAllies is able to break down policy, share the information, and powerfully advocate for students in ways that challenges the status quo and that people can relate to."**

— 2021 Partner  
Survey Respondent



Across five years of Partner Surveys, when responding to the statement:

“EdAllies is a valuable partner.”

Our partners graded us a generous 4.6 out of 5.0, with 92% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

**Then:**

“EdAllies has been a valuable partner in a few ways. Primarily as an information and education source on issues that impact those of us who work in education. Secondly, EdAllies has sought out our engagement on many issues in genuine and authentic ways.”

– 2017 Partner Survey Respondent

**Now:**

“EdAllies is a partner with their pulse on education Equity in the state. I feel if they’re in the room and I can’t be, I know they will make sure the voice and needs of BIPOC students and families are center.”

– 2021 Partner Survey Respondent

Having this survey as part of our annual learning and evaluation framework is critical for organization, because if we are not providing value to our community of partners, we do not deserve to exist. 🏡

**Partnership Highlight**

## **Box Tops for Education**

**We were thrilled to be featured as part of Box Tops for Education’s public commitment to advance equity by investing in organizations working to reduce the negative consequences of racism and unconscious bias in the classroom!**

**To all of our partners  
...THANK YOU!**

 **Watch our video about the partnership**



## Staff

### **JOSH CROSSON**

Executive Director

### **ANDREA ROETHKE**

Managing Director of  
Strategy and Operations

### **CITLALY ESCOBAR**

Capitol Pathways Intern

### **DANIEL HODGES**

Development Manager

### **BETHANY ISRAELSON**

Operations Manager

### **KRISTA KAPUT**

Research Director

### **JENNIFER LOON**

Senior Policy Fellow

### **MATT SHAVER**

Policy Director

### **ADRIENNE VITT**

Strategic Communications  
Director

## Board

### **KARN ENGELSGJERD**

Board Chair (July – Present)

### **HOLLY KRAGTHORPE**

Board Chair (January – July)

### **TASHONDA WILLIAMSON**

Treasurer

### **FLOR TREVIÑO FREY**

### **GINYA DAVIS**

### **SIMONE HARDEMAN- JONES**

### **ANN JOHNSON**

### **MICHAEL O'CONNELL**

### **LEW REMELE**

### **ROBERTA WALBURN**



## This is How We Fight – Together

Thank you to all of our partners who advocated for students on many fronts during the 2021 legislative session—from ensuring pathways to the classroom for the diverse teachers our kids need to stronger guardrails for charter school quality.



**56**  
meetings with  
legislators



**25**  
formal letters written  
on legislation



**66**  
total testifiers  
before  
**6**  
different committees



**251**  
grassroots action  
takers sent  
**6,822**  
emails



## Supporters

### Foundations & Corporations

3M  
Advance Consulting  
Briva Health  
DailyPay  
Douglass Brandenburg Family Foundation  
The Box Top Fund of the Minneapolis Foundation  
The Curtis L. Carlson Family Foundation  
F. R. Bigelow Foundation  
Frey Foundation  
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GHR Foundation  
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Graves Foundation  
The Joyce Foundation  
McKnight Foundation  
The Minneapolis Foundation  
Mortenson Family Foundation  
Ciresi Walburn Foundation for Children  
WEM Foundation  
Valley Community Food Co-op

### Individuals & Family Funds

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Cheryl Coombs  
Matthew Crnobrna  
Joseph Crnobrna  
Brad Crnobrna  
Josh Crosson  
John Crosson  
Leland Culver  
Athena Currier  
Erin Daly  
Ella Daniels  
Amanda Demeules  
Lola Dorsogna  
Karn Engelskjerd  
Emory Erker-Lynch  
Stephanie Farrell  
Jeffrey Feldman  
Grace Ficara  
Molly Flannagan

Katie Fuller  
Keely Gage  
Maryanne Gehrenbeck  
Gunderson Family Foundation of The Minneapolis Foundation  
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Afua Harris  
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Nora Kaye  
Amber Kerrigan  
Lisa Key  
Ariana Kiener

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Holly Kragthorpe  
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John Bellaimey  
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Adrienne Vitt  
Roberta Walburn  
Amy Walstien  
Rebecca Weaver  
Janet Weber  
Joseph Wenger

Aliana Whelan  
Ben and Mary Whitney  
Fund of The Minneapolis  
Foundation  
Varsenik Wilson  
Amy Zylka



## FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <span style="color: #FFD700;">■</span> Program              | 72% |
| <span style="color: #3CB371;">■</span> Fundraising          | 12% |
| <span style="color: #FF4500;">■</span> Management & General | 16% |

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

### ASSETS \$1,351,519

#### Current assets \$1,163,320

|                           |           |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Cash and cash equivalents | \$958,885 |
| Pledges receivable        | \$176,943 |
| Prepaid expenses          | \$27,492  |

#### Property and equipment, net \$96,720

#### Contributions receivable \$91,479

### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS \$1,351,519

#### Current liabilities \$173,337

|                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Current Liabilities -Total          | \$125,169 |
| Accounts payable                    | \$175     |
| Fiscal Sponsee                      | \$105,727 |
| Deferred lease incentive            | \$19,267  |
| Deferred rent – net current portion | \$48,168  |

#### Net assets \$1,178,182

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Without donor restrictions             | \$298,263 |
| With donor restrictions                | \$717,046 |
| Board designated for operating reserve | \$162,873 |

## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

|                            |                  |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| <b>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</b> | <b>\$971,365</b> |
| Contributions              | \$962,840        |
| Program revenue            | \$100            |
| Interest income            | \$7,738          |
| Other                      | \$687            |
| <b>EXPENSES</b>            | <b>\$960,232</b> |
| <b>Program</b>             | <b>\$691,064</b> |
| <b>Supporting services</b> | <b>\$269,168</b> |
| Administration             | \$157,248        |
| Fundraising                | \$111,920        |
| <b>NET ASSETS</b>          |                  |
| Change in net assets       | \$11,133         |
| Beginning of year          | \$1,167,049      |
| End of year                | \$1,178,182      |

## STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL EXPENSES

|                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>SALARIES AND BENEFITS</b>     | <b>\$797,507</b> |
| <b>Salaries</b>                  | <b>\$653,889</b> |
| Employee benefits                | \$90,812         |
| Payroll taxes                    | \$52,806         |
| <b>EXPENSES</b>                  | <b>\$960,232</b> |
| <b>Total before depreciation</b> | <b>\$938,328</b> |
| Fees for services                | \$39,062         |
| Office expenses                  | \$17,477         |
| Information technology           | \$20,505         |
| Advocacy and promotion           | \$1,738          |
| Occupancy                        | \$41,168         |
| Travel                           | \$4,537          |
| Conferences and and meetings     | \$6,098          |
| Insurance                        | \$8,454          |
| Other                            | \$1,782          |



## What's Next

We have been hard at work on our 2022 campaigns, from recruiting and retaining the diverse and effective teachers students deserve to ensuring all students are ready for college and career to providing opportunities for those most impacted by Minnesota's education inequities to guide our work, tell their stories, and demand justice in education.

**To learn more, get involved, or make a contribution to support our work, please visit [edalliesmn.org](https://edalliesmn.org)**

