

St. Cloud Area School District 742
Board of Education
2025 Legislative Platform (DRAFT)

Adopted December XXXX

The Constitution of the State of Minnesota, in Article XXIII, section One states:

“The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state”.

St. Cloud Area School District 742 has a 22.9% special education student population (State average is 17.6%) and a 22.5% English Language Learner student population (State average is 9.2%); additionally, we have a 69.9% free/reduced lunch population (State average is 43.4%). These demographics create unique challenges to our district that make it difficult to provide an equitable education for all our students. Despite these numbers, District 742 continues to focus on and work towards the shared goals with the MN Dept. of Education’s World’s Best Workforce and Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness (CACR) of making sure:

- All children are ready for school
- All third graders can read at grade level
- All racial & economic achievement gaps are closed
- All students are ready for career and college
- All students graduate from high school
- To prepare students to be lifelong learners

With those goals in mind, the District 742 Board of Education wishes the following:

#1: We are formally asking that the Governor and legislature eliminate the Special Education and ELL Cross Subsidy by increasing special education funding to 100%, a point that fully funds the state share of the cross-subsidy.

Background:

Despite recent efforts during the 2023 legislative session, Minnesota is still short of fulfilling its obligation to adequately fund mandated special education and ELL programming. Consequently, school districts are forced to re-direct funds meant for regular classroom instruction to pay for mandated special education programs. Larger cities and regional centers typically have much higher special education populations and therefore much larger special education cross subsidies. These large cross subsidies disproportionately affect these school districts, causing disproportionate funding in regular classroom programming from district to district, statewide. While general formula increases help all districts, they do not help to eliminate the disproportionality of programming caused by mandated and underfunded special education costs.

In ISD 742, the Special Education budget is **\$42,986,000**, and our ELL budget is **\$5,608,207**. Despite every effort to make our Special Education program more efficient and cost-effective, our special education cross-subsidy for the 2022-23 school year is expected to be **\$7,025,000**; this is roughly equal to **\$768** per student. Our ELL cross-subsidy is expected to be **\$2,936,369**; this is roughly equal to **\$321** per student. As a Regional Center, our special needs population continues to grow, and addressing the special education and ELL cross-subsidy is vital to sustaining the health and financial stability of District 742! Now is the time to plug this gap, and own up to Minnesota’s promise for ALL our students.

#2: We are asking the legislature and Governor to support the immediate update of the 2008 Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) report on Charter Schools.

Background:

“The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state.” Minn. Const., art. XIII, §

In statute, one of the primary purposes of charter schools is to increase learning and all student achievement. However, concerns have been raised consistently regarding the performance of charter schools in comparison to traditional public schools. According to the OLA report from 2008, in that year, a greater percentage of Minnesota charter schools than district schools failed to make 'Adequate Yearly Progress,' and students in charter schools generally did not perform as well on standardized academic measures as students in district schools. Based on our own experiences and data reviews we have done using the MN Report Card, we do not see any indication that this trend has changed in the intervening.

One key issue identified in the report was the unclear and complex oversight of charter schools, with duplication in some areas and gaps in others. Charter school sponsors were found to vary in the amount of oversight they provide, and expectations for sponsors were not clear. Moreover, the Minnesota Department of Education's role in sponsor oversight was not clearly outlined in law.

The St. Cloud school district is directly affected by charter school performance. Using MCA test scores, local charter schools are performing on average at more than a 10-point deficit when compared to the St. Cloud Public School District in Math and Reading. All local charter schools perform substantially lower than St. Cloud Schools. Students who attend K-6 (8) charter schools and then enroll in St. Cloud secondary schools come to us significantly behind. We also see a substantial number of students who come back to our district from charter schools every year. The St. Cloud district incurs additional costs including remedial education to bring these students up to the level of their peers

The OLA report made several key recommendations to address these issues. It suggested clarifying the roles of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and sponsors in charter school oversight by requiring MDE to approve sponsors and increasing sponsors' authority. It also recommended implementing standards for charter school sponsors and providing additional training to improve sponsor expertise. Furthermore, the report suggested requiring all new charter school board members to attend financial management training and amending charter school laws to remove the requirement that teachers comprise a majority of charter school board members to resolve the circular reporting structure it creates.

Charter schools are not part of the constitutionally mandated Uniform System of public schools, yet they are funded by state taxpayers. While we understand charter schools are supposed to be differentiated from public schools in how they deliver education, we do not believe charter schools that underperform public schools should be given a pass and allowed to continue without intervention.

#3: We ask our representatives to advocate for the state to move away from using MCA tests to rank the quality of schools, as it unfairly places the causation of scores directly on the school districts and not on the true causes.

Background:

There are many reasons why the state system of standardized testing, especially MCA tests, should not be used to rank the quality of our schools, and the most pressing reason is the impact of poverty. The "cultural and socioeconomic bias" of standardized tests have been well-documented. The only thing that standardized tests have been proven to measure accurately is the affluence of the family of the student taking the test. Kids from middle class, upper middle class and wealthy families do better on standardized tests. Students, schools and districts with high poverty do poorly. There may be a few outliers, but it's a trend that holds across the country. Additionally, is the political use of test scores. It is unfortunate, but standardized tests have hurt the

very students they were designed to help. Local media can't wait to publish and compare the standardized scores of local schools. Groups of students, especially those new to country, living in poverty, or with special needs, are categorized and have been identified as "failing students." Schools have been identified as "failing schools" and districts have been identified as "failing districts." The result has been flight from public school systems to private or other public schools located in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods, which bring with their socioeconomic status the "appearance" of better teaching. Meanwhile, the loss of state funding for students who open enroll leaves fewer and fewer resources available for those students most in need. The continued annual drudgery of MCA testing results is harmful to the community, to our teachers, and above all, to our students.