

St. Cloud Area School District 742 Board of Education

2026 Legislative Platform

Introduction

The Constitution of the State of Minnesota, Article XIII, Section 1, 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 is a unique district serving a student population that includes 69.9% Free and Reduced Lunch (State average 43.4%), 22.9% students with IEPs (State average 17.6%), and 22.5% English Learners (State average 9.2%). These demographics present challenges that require strong, equitable state investment to ensure every student receives a high-quality education.

District 742's work is guided by our Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness (CACR) Goals:

- All children are ready for school.
- All racial and economic achievement gaps are closed.
- All students are ready for career and college.
- All students graduate from high school.
- All students are prepared to be lifelong learners and engaged citizens.

With these goals in mind, the District 742 Board of Education urges the Governor and the Legislature to support the following priorities:

Goal #1: Eliminate the Special Education Cross-Subsidy

- Increase special education funding to reduce or eliminate the state special education cross-subsidy over the next four years.
- Recognize that large and regional districts bear a disproportionate share of special education costs and require targeted support.

Background:

Despite new investments during the 2023 legislative session, Minnesota continues to fall short of adequately funding mandated special education services. As a result, districts must redirect general education funds to cover required special education costs. Districts with high special education costs suffer from disproportionately large general education revenue shortfalls.

In St. Cloud, the special education budget is \$48.7 million, with a cross-subsidy of approximately \$9.2 million, equal to roughly \$996 per student which is then reduced from the general education fund. Addressing the special education cross-subsidy is vital to maintaining equitable and high-quality educational opportunities for all students.

Goal #2: Strengthen Oversight and Accountability of Charter Schools and the Use of Public Funds

The Legislature should ensure strong oversight and fiscal accountability in the operation, authorization, and funding of charter schools. Specifically, we urge policymakers to:

- Evaluate the use of public funds in charter school operations, including mechanisms that allow private entities to construct, lease, or modify public education facilities and then profit from those arrangements.
- Require transparent reporting on charter school expenditures, facility ownership, and management contracts, ensuring that public education dollars are used solely for the benefit of Minnesota students.
- Assess whether current laws provide sufficient accountability for academic outcomes, financial stewardship, and equitable access for all students.
- Review the overall impact of charter schools on the state education budget and the constitutionally mandated uniform system of public schools.

Background:

Charter schools were initially established to serve as innovative partners within the public education system. However, increasing evidence points to inequities in accountability and

funding transparency, particularly where private entities own or manage facilities and receive financial benefit from public funds.

Greater state oversight is needed to ensure that the annual funding for charter schools is directed toward improving student outcomes and supporting equitable access to quality education. Strengthening financial transparency and accountability will help ensure that all public education investments remain focused on students, not profit.

Goal #3: Find a Better Means of Assessing Student Progress than the Current MCA Tests

- The “cultural and socioeconomic bias” of standardized tests has been well-documented across decades of research — and Minnesota’s own data continues to confirm it.
- The 2025 Northstar Accountability Results graph (shown above) illustrates the correlation clearly: as the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals increases, average MCA reading proficiency declines. This pattern appears across nearly every public and charter school in the state.
- In other words, MCA test results measure poverty rates at least as accurately as they measure academic achievement.

Local Impact:

Local media often publish and compare the standardized test scores of area schools without explaining the underlying socioeconomic factors. This leads families to make enrollment decisions based on incomplete or misleading data. Ironically, the very students these tests were intended to help are the ones most harmed by public ranking and comparison.

Background on MCA Tests:

There are many reasons the current system of standardized testing — especially the MCA — should not be used to rank the quality of our schools. The data show that:

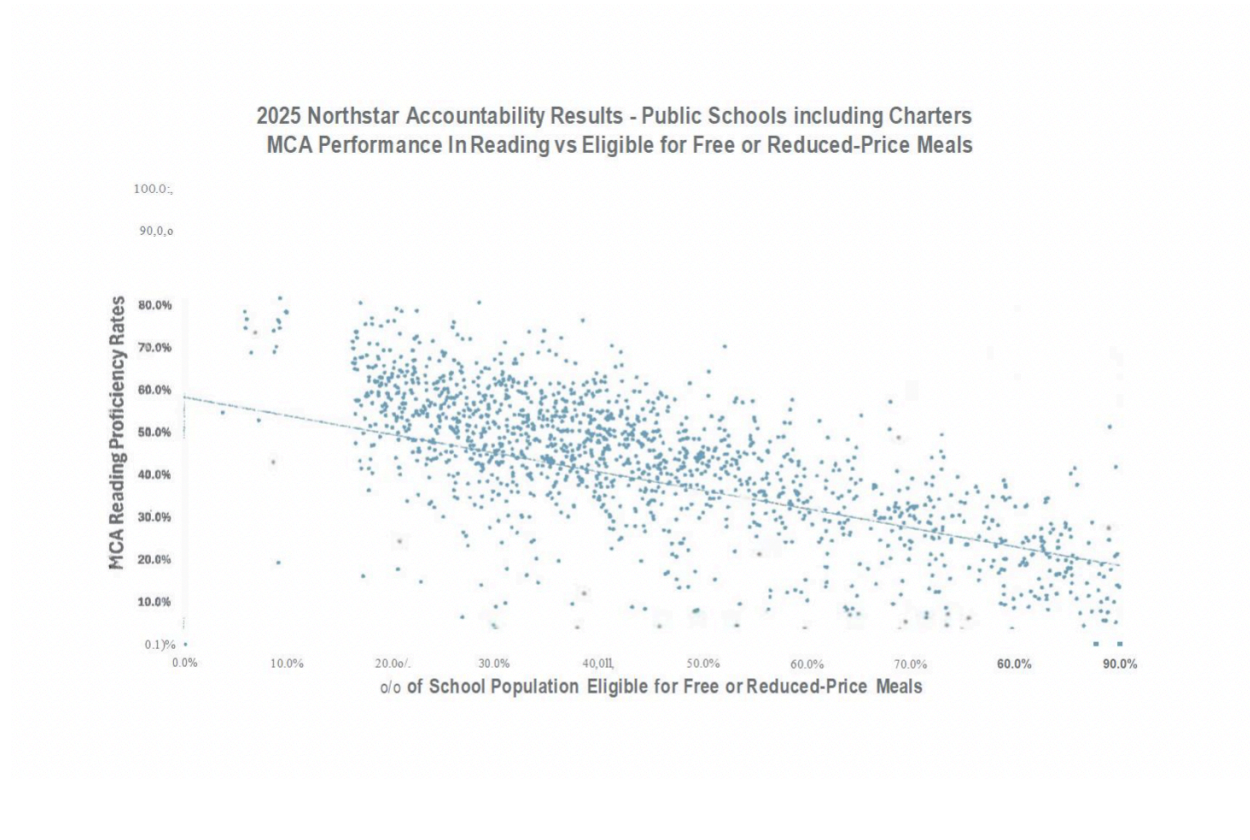
- Students from middle-class and affluent families consistently outperform peers from lower-income backgrounds on standardized tests.
- Schools with higher percentages of low-income, new-to-country, or special-needs students are often labeled as “failing,” regardless of the progress they make.

The Consequences:

- Misuse of MCA data fuels open enrollment and “school flight,” pulling students and resources away from community schools.
- This process drives segregation, lowers neighborhood property values, and weakens local investment in public education.

- Meanwhile, the annual ritual of MCA testing continues to drain instructional time and morale from teachers and students alike — without providing meaningful insight into growth or learning.

We must move toward assessments that measure what matters: growth over time, problem-solving, and readiness for life beyond school — not a family's income level.



Goal #4: Support Full-Funding of Recently Mandated Employment Policies

- Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML): Ensure that implementation of the state's newly mandated PFML program includes adequate funding and flexibility for school districts to manage staffing and fiscal impacts.
- Unemployment Insurance for Educational Support Staff:
 - Change or align unemployment benefit requirements with appropriate state funding support or grant districts levy authority to meet this obligation without reducing classroom budgets.

Background:

The Legislature's 2023 expansion of unemployment benefits for eligible educational staff helped retain essential employees, but funding was one-time only. Without repeal, continued or flexible support, the cost of this program will come directly from general education funds. Permanent funding, or local levy authority, is needed to sustain these essential positions and services.

Goal #5: Protect Equitable and Sustainable Public Education Funding

We support legislative action that ensures public education funding remains strong, equitable, and focused on serving all Minnesota students. We respectfully urge lawmakers to:

- Maintain the integrity of the state's investment in public schools, ensuring that public dollars are used to strengthen the education system that is open to any child.
- Preserve the inflation factor for public education funding to keep pace with rising costs and maintain staffing and program stability.
- Protect and enhance compensatory education funding formulas so resources continue to reach students who need them most.

Background:

Minnesota's public schools are the foundation of our communities, serving students from every background and circumstance. Any reallocation of public education funds should be carefully considered to ensure it does not diminish opportunities for students who rely on the comprehensive support, programming, and accountability structures of the public education system.

Maintaining the inflationary adjustment for public education is essential to sustain core operations amid increasing costs. St. Cloud Area School District currently receives approximately \$21 million in compensatory funding, targeted to schools serving higher proportions of students from families facing economic hardship. Protecting this funding is critical to advancing student achievement, supporting mental health, and ensuring equitable access to opportunity.

Conclusion

The St. Cloud Area School District 742 Board of Education remains steadfast in its commitment to provide every student with access to a safe, supportive, and high-quality education. We urge

the Governor and Legislature to act collaboratively to ensure equitable and sustainable funding for all Minnesota students, today and for generations to come.