

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2021

Special Education Funding – Finishing the Work We Started Together

Duluth Public Schools continues to feel the effects of the special education funding gap that occurred in 2016. The House Education Committee heard our story and included the correction in their Omnibus bill during the 2019 regular session, but unfortunately this request, along with many others, was removed during the 2019 special session. The 2020 Legislative session understandably focused on Covid-19, so we keep this important issue on our priority list and look forward to building on the work we have done with legislators to see this issue, and others, as part of a legislative conversation.

- A permanent increase to the District's Special Education base in FY22
- A one-time payment of \$4.5 million to fill the gap that was created by the artificially low base created in FY16 under the new formula
- Additional cross-subsidy aid payment for districts "over the cap" in FY16-FY20
- Support for the School Finance Working Group, facilitated by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), to focus on tuition billing rate adjustments

Support Covid-19 Funding Gap with Enrollment Adjustment

School Districts throughout the state are struggling with current year enrollment losses due to Covid-19. ISD #709 supports using the greater of the current year enrollment or final FY20 enrollment as a basis for FY21 state funding formulas.

Increase Basic Formula Allowance

The basic allowance is a universal district support that impacts every student, every day. As the Legislature grapples with its own budget challenges, creating a sustainable basic formula allowance with metered increases will provide school districts the local control and flexibility to address unique financial challenges in these uncertain times.

- Adjust the FY22 basic allowance to 3%
- Add an annual cost of living increase

Expand Eligible Uses for Long-Term Facilities Maintenance (LTFM) Revenue

School Districts throughout the state struggle to maintain safe and educationally focused buildings and facilities. Limitations in the use of LTFM funding force districts to choose inefficient plans, or, in some cases, not moving forward on critical facility improvements. The following items should be included as eligible expenses through LTFM funding:

- Safety and security
- Energy efficient replacement plans and improvements

- Remodeling costs for career & technical programming
- Replacement of snow removal equipment
- Technology infrastructure

School Based Early Education Programs - for all learners

Investments in early education throughout the state are making a difference for Pre-K learners. Duluth Public Schools participates in the Voluntary Pre-K (VPK) program, but due to the eligibility restrictions, it is not available throughout the District. More flexible revenue uses, along with more opportunities for application amendments and funding collaboration, would be important components to best meet the needs of all early learners.

- Fully fund the expansion of school-based early education programs allowing school district flexibility in implementation and design to best meet the needs of the local community.

Mental Health Professionals

While over half of the schools in Minnesota are benefiting from School Linked Mental Health Services Grant funding, districts like Duluth Public Schools continue to see a gap in funding, with only partial elementary level services covered by the current grant. Expanding this grant, and providing complementary funding directly to districts, will allow greater support to students in need of critical care coordination and provide district staff and families mental health educational opportunities.

- Increase State grants to fully fund mental health professionals on an ongoing basis.

Increase Support for Full-Service Community Schools Model

Full Service Community Schools work to coordinate holistic systems of support to ensure the needs of all students are met. Recognizing the importance of this cooperative investment, Duluth Public Schools was one of the initial districts to develop a service model meant to grow and expand to meet K-12 needs. Additional and adequate funding is needed help Duluth and other Full Service Community School districts address the vital supports for students and families through this collaborative model.

- Provide funding for planning and implementing Full Service Community Schools