



Robert Dehnert
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January 20, 2026

TO: Finance Committee

RE: Increase in Days for Assistant Director of Special Education

Please consider approving the increase in days for the Assistant Director of Special Education. This increase seeks to transition the Assistant Director of Special Education to a 260-day (year-round) calendar. This adjustment is necessitated by a substantial increase in the student population requiring services, a shift in the labor market requiring year-round recruitment, and an expansion of the Assistant Director's responsibilities to include district-wide compliance.

This increase will cost approximately \$16,550 annually and will be paid for directly or indirectly with Federal Special Education Funds as described in the attached proposal.

If you have any questions, please contact me. Thanks!

Rob Dehnert

Director of Special Services

Request for Program/Budget Addition

Fiscal Year 2025-2026

Return to the Director of Finance & Operations
(attach additional documents if more room is needed)

Please detail the vision of your proposal below:

Proposal for Administrative Calendar Adjustment: Assistant Director of Special Education

Current Status: 245-Day Calendar

Proposed Status: 260-Day Calendar

Fiscal Impact: Approximately \$16,550

Executive Summary

This proposal seeks to transition the Assistant Director of Special Education to a 260-day (year-round) calendar. This adjustment is necessitated by a substantial increase in the student population requiring services, a shift in the labor market requiring year-round recruitment, and an expansion of the Assistant Director's responsibilities to include district-wide compliance.

1. Significant Growth in Student Population

Since 2017, our special education population has grown from **694 to 877 students**. This 26% increase has resulted in a higher volume of:

IEP Management: More complex cases requiring administrative oversight and conflict resolution.

Compliance Monitoring: Increased data reporting and state-level documentation.

Parental Engagement: A higher volume of meetings and consultations that extend beyond the traditional school calendar.

2. Evolution of Staffing Management

In previous years, the district experienced a "hiring season" primarily focused on August. However, current labor market trends have shifted the Special Education department into a continuous recruitment and onboarding cycle.

Year-Round Hiring: Paraprofessional vacancies now occur frequently throughout the school year, requiring the Assistant Director to manage interviews and onboarding in real-time to maintain appropriate classroom ratios.

Supervision and Evaluation: With an influx of staff holding lower-tiered licenses and non-tenured status, the Assistant Director must conduct more frequent, intensive teacher evaluations. Moving to a 260-day calendar ensures these critical performance reviews and coaching sessions are completed without compromising daily operations.

3. Expansion of Departmental Responsibilities

Due to the elimination of the Behavioral Health Supervisor position this fall, the Assistant Director has absorbed several high-stakes responsibilities that require year-round attention:

Homeless Liaison (McKinney-Vento): This role is federally mandated and requires constant availability to ensure students in transition have immediate access to education and support services, regardless of school breaks.

SLP Supervision: Direct oversight of Speech and Language Pathologists to ensure clinical compliance and service delivery.

The Vision: Moving Forward

The vision for this proposal is to ensure operational continuity and instructional quality. By moving to a 260-day calendar, the Assistant Director will have the necessary time to:

Lead Summer Planning: Utilize the 15 additional days to prepare for the upcoming school year, ensuring all staff are placed and all IEPs are ready for Day 1.

Mitigate Burnout: Allow for a more sustainable distribution of the heavy administrative load created by the 26% student growth.

Ensure Regulatory Compliance: Provide the district with year-round coverage for the Homeless Liaison role, protecting the district from compliance risks.

Conclusion The \$16,550 investment is a proactive step toward stabilizing our special education infrastructure. It allows our leadership to move from a reactive "hiring

mode" to a proactive "support and development mode," ultimately leading to better outcomes for our most vulnerable students.

Proposed Funding Strategies

To ensure this adjustment does not negatively impact the General Fund, the Director has identified two viable pathways using Special Education revenue streams. Both options prioritize fiscal responsibility and regulatory compliance.

Option 1: Direct Federal Funding (Zero General Fund Impact)

The district currently receives approximately \$1,000,000 annually in Federal Special Education Revenue. This funding is based on our student "Childcount."

- **The Plan:** Finance the \$16,550 directly through this federal grant.
- **The Rationale:** The district consistently carries over approximately **\$300,000** in unspent federal funds each year. Utilizing a small portion of this surplus ensures the position is fully funded without touching the General Fund.

Option 2: State Reimbursement & Federal Offset (Net Gain to General Fund)

This option leverages the state's reimbursement formula to actually *return* money to the General Fund while meeting federal compliance requirements.

- **The Plan:** Code the \$16,550 salary increase to State Special Education funding.
- **The Reimbursement:** The state reimburses special education costs at a rate of 80%. Once reimbursed, this will net \$13,240 back into the General Fund.
- **The "Swap":** To ensure the General Fund remains "whole" on the initial 20% cost, the district will allocate \$16,550 from Federal Special Education Revenue to pay for existing special education tuition (for Faribault students attending out-of-district).
- **The Result:** This option results in a \$0 cost to the General Fund and a net gain of \$13,240 in state reimbursement revenue. It also increases our "Maintenance of Effort" (MOE), a federal requirement that ensures we are maintaining our level of local support for special education.

Submitted by Robert Dehnert

Date: January 5, 2026

Approved by _____

Date _____

Supervisor Approval _____ Date _____

Send this completed form and any attachments to the Director of Finance & Operations.