



March 24, 2020

Dear Legislative Colleague,

Thank you for your work during this very challenging time. Hopkins Public Schools is working very hard to implement the Governor's executive orders to apply social distancing parameters within and across schools, and move to at-home distance learning. We are simultaneously providing meals to families in need, as well as mandated child care for Tier 1 emergency workers. There is a cost burden for us thus, we want you to know about the significant funding challenges these rightful demands place on districts.

We appreciate legislation that was passed to address some issues that directly impact schools during this time, but want you to be aware of the following areas that have yet to be addressed:

- **While districts will continue to receive general education revenue, Community Education (CE) programs will not. As a result of school closure, CE will lose \$2.4 million in funding that comes from program fees.** The budget cannot absorb the expense of mandated child care. CE departments across Minnesota ceased all revenue-generating programs on March 17 and shifted all staff to provide free emergency care beginning March 18, 2020.
- **Community Education (CE) faces a \$1.3 million shortfall while** providing essential services to our Hopkins community. Districts are expected to continue to pay CE staff to provide that essential care. If this situation continues until June 30, it will cost Hopkins \$1.3 million without new revenue streams.
- **In Hopkins, CE is continuing to provide essential support during this time of uncertainty.** Hopkins CE staff are leading the outreach and support efforts for our district and community, identifying and responding to the needs of families, organizing volunteers, partnering with local agencies, providing food security, supporting social workers and counselors, and meeting basic needs, such as hygiene. ***We want to continue these fundamental efforts and to do so, we need help from the legislature.***
- **Nutrition Services faces a daily loss of \$18,525 in revenue.** Meal fees, ala carte food, concessions, catering and vending sales, which normally help cover costs of labor, equipment and food, are lost during this time. This daily rate of loss does not factor in food loss/waste or fuel for meal delivery.
- Federal reimbursement for the Summer Food Service Program is roughly \$4.00 per lunch, which is about equal to what we receive for most student meals served under the National School Lunch Program. This only covers 15% of our revenue.
- In Hopkins, it is essential to pay our nutrition services staff - more than \$10,000 per day - as we provide meals to our most vulnerable students through meal delivery at accessible locations throughout the district. ***We need help from the legislature to continue this essential work.***

While these members of Hopkins Public Schools are providing essential care services during this time of crisis, their compensation is not at that level.* Most of these care providers (CE and Nutrition Services) are our lowest-paid workers and are extremely vulnerable during this time. We need your help to avoid staffing cuts in critical school staff who are providing such valuable service.

***An additional note to understand our context and financial dilemma: In Hopkins, we are also trying to think through whether we can afford to offer our essential employees "premium pay."** Premium pay circumstances exist in most collectively bargained contracts when certain staff members are "called back" to buildings to perform work functions when other staff are directed not to.

A significant factor causing confusion to districts is MDE's official use of the term "school closure." This language in their 29-page handbook titled "School Closure Guidance for Public School Districts and Charter Schools" is not helpful, as it makes it more difficult for districts to identify this time period as a transition or transformation of learning delivery and other services versus a "closing" of schools. Most collective bargaining language refers to a "closure" of schools as a trigger for any premium pay.

Presently in Hopkins, we are experiencing conflicting messages when our staff are mostly directed to stay home and perform duties as directed by their supervisor, while other staff are directed to report to buildings and provide essential services as part of an executive order. This causes confusion amongst our staff members, as some feel they are being "forced" to report to schools while all other staff are given the latitude to provide their services remotely. Staff members providing childcare and nutrition services have been requesting they be compensated at their premium pay level (1.5x daily rate).

The premium pay dilemma will become exacerbated if we begin a shelter-in-place order while still providing meals or childcare services. Should this occur, we definitely will have an even stronger executive order that directs staff to stay at home with no choice to come in while requiring "essential" staff to come in to provide childcare or nutrition services. Should this occur, our budget will be forced to reconcile paying staff at the premium pay levels.

We anticipate the coronavirus will put a financial strain on our communities. School districts, Community Education and Nutrition Services departments need to have confidence that their efforts to provide stability for students and staff do not harm their budgets.

As you move forward to further address the impact COVID-19 has on our state, please provide assistance so we can continue to provide these essential services to our communities.

Thank you for your work and do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions.