



## Legislative Action Coalition

### 2022 State Legislative Platform for Public Education

**WE LEARNED A LOT DURING 2021.** New words crept into our collective vocabulary: pandemic; unprecedented; personal protective equipment; distance learning. New ways of interacting with friends, neighbors, and businesses became routine: social distancing; self-quarantine; essential workers. Uncertainty became normal. **Minnesotans turned to community institutions, including schools, for models of resilience as we all pivoted multiple times and persevered. Schools stepped up** to support not only students, but families as well.

**We learned a lot during 2021.** We discovered that we could feed our students and families with free, nutritious meals. We learned that we could teach our scholars while they remained out of their classrooms. We were reminded that public schools are the cornerstone of our communities.

Moving forward into 2022, Hopkins Public Schools seeks to **Strengthen and Simplify** the strategies that worked best during 2021. We ask the Governor's office and the Minnesota Legislature to partner with us to accelerate innovation and expand services for our scholars and their families.

### OUR PRIORITIES FOR 2022

#### **FULLY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS**

so all Minnesota families have equitable access to healthy meals, contributing to overall community health and food security.

#### **ELIMINATE COMPENSATORY FUNDING QUALIFICATION**

based on free and reduced-price lunch applications and move toward community eligibility for essential education services.

#### **SUPPORT YOUR INVESTMENT IN REIMAGINE MINNESOTA**

to ensure that public education remains - as written in our state Constitution - a "Duty of the Legislature."

#### **EMPOWER LOCALLY ELECTED SCHOOL BOARDS**

to do the job to which they were elected. Grant Local Control to renew existing operating referenda, set school calendars, allow flexible and innovative spending priorities.

#### **PROVIDE FAMILIES WITH SECURE, SUSTAINABLE EARLY EDUCATION FUNDING**

for Pathways I and II Early Learning Scholarships, School Readiness Plus, and Voluntary Pre-K.

#### **DIRECT THE MN DEPT OF EDUCATION TO UPDATE AND REFORM**

outdated and cumbersome requirements for scholars and teachers including mandated "seat time" requirements, and restrictive teacher licensing procedures.

#### **EXPAND AND STABILIZE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS**

and services by increasing and stabilizing funding, resources and access.

#### **STABILIZE EDUCATION FUNDING AND LINK THE BASIC FORMULA TO INFLATION**

to provide a consistent funding stream that allows school districts to engage in long-range planning.

# Universal School Meals



## WE LEARNED A LOT DURING 2021

We learned that the state must **FULLY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS** so all Minnesota families have equitable access to healthy meals, contributing to overall community health and food security.

In the best of times, many families struggle to gain access to quality nutrition in their communities. It is often through school meals that students enjoy food security. The Federal government has recognized this unique position of public schools to provide the necessary food security in our communities during this time of economic upheaval by continuing to renew the extension of the Summer Meals program throughout the school year since the pandemic impacted school districts across the nation in 2020.

The success and necessity of this extension are reflected in the Universal School Meals Program Act ([Summary](#)) which is moving through both the US House and Senate and has support from local and national education organizations. As public education leaders, we also support this bill. Indeed, we see a crisis developing where the shortfall in school nutrition funds will be debilitating if funding is not provided for the essential educational benefit. Other states - [CA](#) and [ME](#) - have met this pending crisis by including funds for Universal School Meals in their state.

**We urge our partners in the US House and Senate to pass the Universal School Meals Program Act** while asking the MN legislature to explore state-specific needs such as reimbursement rates and alternative funding streams, like the Dept. of Health and Human Services, for universal school meals in the state of MN.

**Impacts on school districts if this issue is not addressed will be immense.** In Hopkins we are looking forward to the following impacts when the summer meals extension ends: Moving from our current model back to a fee-based program may cause hardships for a lot of families who are benefiting from the current meal option.

Currently we are being reimbursed at a higher rate per meal through SSO (Seamless Summer Option) in comparison to the NSLP (National School Lunch Program) reimbursement rate. Under SSO Hopkins receives \$2.4625 in reimbursement funds for breakfast, \$4.3175 for Lunch and \$1.0200 for Snack. If we go back to NSLP reimbursements, funds will be substantially less - \$.37 for lunch, \$.33 for breakfast.

**Since meals are currently free, we have seen an uptick in student participation in our nutrition program.** Once families are required to put funds back into their lunch accounts, some may choose to bring meals from home because of the added expense, resulting in less participation. And school districts expect negative lunch balances to grow.

Moving away from SSO and returning to NSLP would give districts less flexibility around how meals are provided, the type of meal and number of components that need to be served to be a reimbursable meal, meal requirement times, eligible participants, and meal patterns would all be affected.

**Parents and school districts experience the undue burden of applications.**

It is imperative that we have a robust school nutrition program that does not rely on parents paying fees, nor parental applications for food benefits. Such a vital program to community health cannot be a fee-based program, as those programs rely solely on the economic security of families. Eliminating fees for school meals would alleviate many of the issues we see in nutrition programs (lunch shaming, confusion

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navigating the system, fear/stigma associated with the application, undue paperwork, and administrative burden on districts and families) and increase access to food security across the state.

**Therefore we ask the state legislature to allocate the funding needed for districts to pay off family meal debt.** The Education Omnibus Bill - 1065 addressed symptoms of our current system while not solving the real issue. Our nutrition programs are not fully funded and therefore cannot absorb the costs associated with providing meals to those families unable to pay for them.

To alleviate some of the fiscal burden on districts before Universal School Meals is enacted, **we advocate for an increase in the income level which qualifies families for Free and Reduced meal benefits** while also recognizing that this does not address the main issue of placing the burden on families and districts to complete applications for an educational benefit. Therefore, we urge the legislature to explore different mechanisms to identify need.

School Nutrition programs are fundamental to education. The research is clear: educational outcomes - manifested as better reading and math scores, lower grade retention rates - improve significantly when students experience food stability. Very few people contest the benefits of the school nutrition program. Where we fall short is investing in this shared value.

For too long we have relied on a system of meal benefits that is not working, requiring parents to fill out applications while ignoring the fact that **it is the only educational benefit in our public school system for which students must pay**. State Education Commissioner Heather Mueller said, "We know that hunger can negatively impact a student's ability to learn, and quite simply, no child deserves to be hungry - " especially in our schools. Our lunchrooms are an extension of the classroom and set students up for academic success." This fee for meals results in a deterioration of the crucial relationship between schools and families by placing districts into the position of debt collector. Providing funding would alleviate that pressure, as districts have a resource for paying off family meal debt.

**Fully funded school nutrition programs are a great equalizer.** Even those students who "qualify" for free and reduced programs are reluctant to participate due to stigma. (In Hopkins, we saw our Universal Breakfast program grow from 10-12% participation to 45-50% participation when we shifted to breakfast in the classroom offered to all students.)

Shifting our model to a fully funded one has other benefits to districts. It saves money, allowing more dollars to go to quality food because it stabilizes the nutrition budget and staffing resulting in less administrative burden within the program.

In order to keep our school nutrition departments responsive and robust, we must shift our model from the uncertainty of fee-based revenue to the stability of fully funded programs. Our families need to know that they have access to quality nutrition regardless of their current economic or application status. And our staff need to know that they can continue providing quality nutrition to the families they serve. Minnesotans need to know that their tax dollars are supporting the future health and prosperity of the state.

Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to FULLY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS so that all Minnesota families have equitable access to healthy meals, contributing to overall community health and food security through supporting and passing two bills that would provide this essential educational benefit to all MN families - **a full universal meals bill that was introduced in the House last session ([HF1729](#)) and a bill expanding CEP (Community Eligibility Provision) across the state (HF1985/SF1902).**



## Compensatory Funding

### WE LEARNED A LOT DURING 2021

We learned that we need a more **ACCURATE METHOD FOR COMPENSATORY FUNDING** that eliminates the undue burden on families and school administration imposed by the education benefits applications.

School districts in Minnesota rely on submitted free and reduced lunch applications, or education benefit forms, to determine the amount of compensatory dollars a district will receive. Compensatory dollars can be used for direct instructional services, remedial instruction, for example, reading, math, and staff development.

**Districts across the state have increasingly experienced a reduction in educational benefits applications** - the application for free and reduced-price lunch. It's been a decade-old problem, growing to a larger problem in recent years, and the issue became more complicated during the COVID pandemic.

There are direct and indirect reasons for the reduction in applications. Even while the economy improved, the reduction in applications is still unexplained, especially in schools with large numbers of immigrant students. Principals have reported that children, including children from immigrant families, who are legal citizens, or whose families have legal status, won't fill out the lunch application for fear that it would impact their ability to get a green card to work or their permanent status to remain in the US.

### **Parents and school districts experience the undue burden of applications.**

Districts across the state have seen a reduction in our Education Benefits application. MARSS data from school years 2018/19 (a "normal" year) comparing numbers to school years 2020-21. In school year 2018/19 Hopkins had 36.6% of families fill out applications. The percentage in the last two years of completed applications has fallen to 26.3%. We know this drop in completed application has a large effect on our compensatory and Title grants that are also calculated based on F/R applications. **Hopkins Public Schools has lost close to 1 million dollars in revenue due to less applications being completed.**

We urge the state legislature to sever education funding streams from this application and devise a new model. Several already exist - Medicaid, Community Income Index, Income Tax, etc. Legislation should be crafted to sever school funding from these applications and devise a new model for calculating need-based funding. [Here's a link](#) to a tool that explains alternatives to meal applications for compensatory funding. [Other options to applications exist](#). You can select MN to see what we already do, or look into other states' solutions. [Here are other models](#) used when a state and/or district adopts the [Community Eligibility Provision \(CEP\)](#).

Administration spends resources helping families navigate this process. **In Hopkins we have two staff members who devote approximately 200 hours to this work.** This does not include the other staff members who assist families through this complicated and ongoing process.

The current method of computing compensatory revenue based on free and reduced-price lunch, or educational benefit applications, is antiquated and unreliable. There are multiple influences that can impact the computation of compensatory revenue.

In districts where immigrant populations make up a higher percentage of the student population, eligibility is also being affected by parental fear of losing opportunities to gain a green card or citizenship status. Because school districts do receive direct certification data from State or local agencies, these families are also hesitant to apply for and receive other public funding, such as SNAP, that provides food for students and their families. Losing meal funding support at school, as well as in their homes, will put students at a disadvantage for learning and development.

**Another reason for undercounting is there is a long-held belief that many parents or guardians do not apply for free and reduced lunch because they don't want the stigma associated with the free and reduced label.** For many reasons, families may experience financial hardship at one time or another; their pride, fear of being labeled, or the perception or embarrassment of not taking care of the family can cause parents or guardians not to apply for benefits.

Because the free and reduced percentage is used for a variety of other funding streams, the impact of undercounting the students who qualify is also compounded. Therefore, utilizing free and reduced-price lunch, or educational benefit applications, is not a consistent nor accurate portrayal of the need for compensatory revenue.

**Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to ELIMINATE COMPENSATORY FUNDING QUALIFICATION based on free and reduced-price lunch applications and move toward community eligibility for essential services.**



## WE LEARNED A LOT IN 2021

We learned that students need us to **SUPPORT YOUR INVESTMENT IN** the work of **REIMAGINE MINNESOTA** to ensure that public education remains, “as written in our Constitution, “a Duty of the Legislature” of this state, and that “The

legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state.”

Minnesota has always been a pioneer in education, and we can't fall behind. The state's evolving demographics and changes in our world call for us to reimagine what schools look like. We need to take steps to transform school culture in order to make our schools places where all of our scholars will thrive.

**The work has already begun: our time and treasure is best spent on actualizing the statewide goals of Reimagine Minnesota.** This work, underway by AMSD (Association of Metropolitan School Districts) for several years, ([AMSD overview](#)) offers a comprehensive action plan to support student growth and learning in the 21st century.

**Hopkins Public Schools supports ReimagineMN.** Many of the proposed strategies of Reimagine MM are already being implemented to varying degrees, but need the full policy and financial support of the legislature. We ask that you fully invest in those recommendations, as our Minnesota Constitution ensures.

**We are working toward realizing these nine Reimagine MN strategies. We ask you to join us.**

1. Cultural Competence for Teachers - continued teacher training must be funded; professional learning plans focused on equity; wellness resources important for teachers
2. Personalized Education (emphasize acceleration vs. intervention) - resources needed for learning pathways, differentiation, etc.; redefine seat time; students should not be defined by a test score
3. Culturally Inclusive Curriculum and Standards - opportunity through Social Studies standards update; re-evaluate standard assessments, provide resources for new curriculum and scholar focused areas of interest/learning pathways
4. Recruit and Retain Staff of Color - engage higher education institutions; support alternative pathways for teacher licensure
5. Elevate Student Voice - student voice and choice leads decisions
6. Adult Behaviors (eliminate negatives; provide support) - more social workers, counselors, mental health professionals and restorative practitioners needed in schools

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7. Build Bridges between School and Community support and address students' life challenges: nutrition, mental health; continue to fund COVID mitigations; flexible academic support systems
8. Shared Understanding of Equity - implement proactive district/inter-district strategies and metrics that disrupt racial bias in the education system
9. Statewide Funding - public education budgets **must be tied to inflation**; end the transfer of public money to private schools (support services, transportation, nursing staff); do not allow vouchers to private schools; equity for all students: **fund what is mandated**, reduce the need for local levies

**Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to SUPPORT YOUR INVESTMENT IN REIMAGINE MINNESOTA to ensure your Constitutional duty to establish a general and uniform system of public schools.**

# Empower School Boards



## WE LEARNED A LOT IN 2021

We learned again that **THE MINNESOTA LEGISLATURE MUST UPDATE AND REFORM** outdated and cumbersome requirements for school boards.

Key among these outdated requirements is the limitation that requires school districts to conduct an

election to renew an existing voter-approved property tax levy **even if it is at the same level and would not result in a tax increase**. Expenses related to these referendum renewal elections, such as printing and mailing the mandated informational materials, can run into the tens of thousands of dollars. (For the Hopkins district, it usually runs about \$30,000). These are resources that could otherwise be allocated to staff or programs that would benefit students.

Such a mandated requirement seems unnecessary, as such referenda typically receive approval 100% of the time. Here are the statewide results of referenda on renewing operating levies over the past eight years.

Additionally, public opinion surveys conducted by the Morris Leatherman Company over the past several years have consistently shown a strong majority of Minnesotans support allowing locally-elected school boards to renew an existing school referendum without a re-vote. The support is broad with majorities of both Republicans and Democrats expressing support. This would be a change that legislators could make that would meet with near-universal approval from constituents.

YEAR	APPROVAL
2014	18 of 18 approved
2015	22 of 22 approved
2016	14 of 14 approved
2017	20 of 20 approved
2018	8 of 8 approved
2019	10 of 10 approved
2020	12 of 12 approved
2021	15 of 15 approved

Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to **EMPOWER LOCALLY-ELECTED SCHOOL BOARDS TO DO THE JOB TO WHICH THEY WERE ELECTED: GRANT LOCAL CONTROL** to renew existing operating referenda, set school calendars, allow flexible and innovative spending priorities.





## WE LEARNED A LOT IN 2021

We learned that we must **PROVIDE FAMILIES WITH SECURE AND SUSTAINABLE EARLY EDUCATION FUNDING.**

Brilliant futures begin in early childhood where the foundation for life-long success is laid. School-based early learning programs provide the highest likelihood of success in preparing children to enter kindergarten with the skills, behavior and knowledge needed to progress and flourish. Yet **our innovative programs are constrained by insufficient and unpredictable funding streams.**

Partner with us to make early childhood funding consistent, streamlined and predictable. Hopkins funds its innovative early childhood programs through a braided funding model. The various funding mechanisms: Pathways I and Pathways II, School Readiness, School Readiness Plus (SRP) / Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK), parent fees (and sometimes Child Care Assistance Programs, or CCAP) places a burden on our staff to satisfy redundancies in the system as they meet the requirements of multiple funding streams and agencies. Our blended model addresses the need for students to have predictable and high quality care and education “and still we see that a full day of care to accommodate working parents is sometimes out of reach financially.

To ensure quality early learning models that serve all families we ask that you help us:

- Streamline funding by consolidating our multiple revenue vehicles into one dependable, sustained revenue stream (Pathways I and II, School Readiness, SRP, VPK, CCAP)
- Enable access to financial supports for families in a simple, streamlined application process to increase access for our most vulnerable families
- **Ideally, move toward universal access for all 3 and 4 year old preschool students, without an income or risk eligibility requirement**
- Make all School Readiness-Plus funding and Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten permanent so that schools can rely on those dollars for program consistency and staffing
- Ensure that School Readiness funding continues to be available to allow school districts to continue to meet the needs of at-risk 3-year old

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- Acknowledge the Parent Aware and DHS certification requirements that school districts have already set and maintained, whether these preschool programs are funded by School Readiness Plus or Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten dollars
- Address the teacher shortage, attract teachers of color to this field, and retain the early childhood staff we currently have by continuing to provide alternative pathways to teacher licensure, keep the current tiered system and ensure that all licensed teachers are compensated at the same rate
- Ensure sufficient funding for prekindergarten programs' essential components including licensed teachers, support staff, transportation and sufficient classroom space.

**Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to PROVIDE FAMILIES WITH SECURE AND SUSTAINABLE EARLY EDUCATION FUNDING FOR PATHWAYS I AND II EARLY LEARNING SCHOLARSHIPS, SCHOOL READINESS PLUS, AND VOLUNTARY PRE-K.**



## Update & Reform

### WE LEARNED A LOT IN 2021

We learned [THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION MUST UPDATE AND REFORM outdated and cumbersome requirements for scholars and teachers.](#)

The structure of education in Minnesota is based on antiquated past practices. The time is now, on the heels of COVID, to move the educational experience forward to a structure that better reflects the world we are currently living in and for the future. One such way to move the educational experience forward is to change from a “seat time” model of kids sitting in a classroom for X amount of time [Carnegie Unit] to a model where instruction is ever-changing in location, format and time.

Legislation to reflect the needed change in educational practices will improve the education experience and outcomes for all students. We ask the MN Legislature to support [SF 1441](#) and HF 1644, as introduced, to allow school boards and districts the authority and flexibility to redesign schools for the future:

- Redefine “instructional hours” to accommodate where, when, and at what pace learning occurs
- Redesign assessments to complement individualized learning
- Redesign online learning opportunities to provide real-life post-secondary and work experiences

The current system uses a division of labor model to deliver chunks of instruction in regular time segments. This model does not mirror the structure of our society nor in the college and career pathways we are preparing students to enter. This system was not designed to consider a myriad of pathways to success for ALL learners. Since the creation of this antiquated system there have been advances in understanding of how students learn, how different learning models motivate students in different ways, child development, the importance of strong relationships, and the role of social emotional well-being in success.

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Today, the Carnegie Unit is under intensifying criticism from educators and education policymakers who want to make student performance more transparent and the delivery of education more flexible. We see the Carnegie Unit as a significant impediment to the changes schools seek and we advocate for innovations that support transparency and flexibility, including competency-based education models.

**Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to DIRECT THE MN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO UPDATE AND REFORM outdated and cumbersome requirements for scholars and teachers including mandated “seat time” requirements and restrictive teacher licensing procedures.**



### WE LEARNED A LOT IN 2021

We learned that the state must **EXPAND AND STABILIZE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS** and services by increasing and stabilizing funding, resources, and access.

- Stabilize funding for mental health in the schools by shifting the source of funding from grant-based (Mental Health in the Schools Act of 2013 (s. 195) through statute 245.4889) to budget-based
- School-Linked mental health is a very successful program and Hopkins benefits from these community partnerships; however additional support is needed in our schools to address the increasing mental health needs of our students and staff
- Reliable funding would allow increased positive outcomes for the community
- Educate families and staff on the importance of mental health so that students experience wrap around care and can immediately identify struggling students
- Innovate ways to incorporate mental health awareness and knowledge into the educational curriculum across grade levels, expanding our SEL offerings and curriculum while providing targeted supports for students in need

### **Increase access to mental health supports by addressing the parental consent laws for youth.**

This law restricts the support that schools can provide to students and has immediate safety impacts for schools and our communities. Pass the minor consent law ([HF375](#)) which rectifies this situation.

Now more than ever we need to tend to the holistic well being of our students. **EXPAND and STABILIZE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS** and services by increasing a stabilizing funding, resources, and access.



## WE LEARNED A LOT IN 2021

We learned that we must **STABILIZE EDUCATION FUNDING AND LINK THE BASIC FORMULA TO INFLATION** to provide a consistent funding stream that allows school districts to engage in long-range planning.

Public education in Minnesota needs a **new mechanism** that adequately funds our school districts and gives locally-elected school boards the authority to make the decisions that reflect the needs of their communities. In accordance with the 2020 Commissioner's School Finance Working Group, the general education formula must be increased by 3% annually for the next biennium, and increases thereafter should be indexed to inflation.

### **Constitutional Obligation**

The founders of Minnesota believed that an educated electorate was indispensable to a republican form of government. To that end, Article 13, Section 1, of the Minnesota state constitution specifies that it is the "duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools" and that they be funded by "taxation or otherwise." Section 2 specifies that no public aid be given to schools that teach "doctrines, creeds or tenets of any particular Christian or other religious sect."

### **Evolution of School Funding**

Under the "Minnesota Miracle" of 1971, the legislature gave school districts the ability to levy, with voter approval, for additional property tax revenue to cover general operating costs. Under Governor Ventura, a plan was set in place to shift the primary source of education funding back to the state. Unfortunately, the legislature failed to follow through and the state's share of funding for

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general education steadily declined from 70% in 2003 to approximately 53% today, and the ability of districts to levy for their share has been restricted. **Making school districts rely on property taxes for some basic educational needs has also resulted in inequities between districts with high property values and those with lower property values.**

Because state funding has failed to keep up with inflation, school districts today receive \$658 less in state aid per student than they did in 2003 on an inflation-adjusted basis. Based on 2019 enrollment, that means that Hopkins receives roughly \$4.4 million dollars less this year than we received in 2003, even as our educational needs have increased.

**The 2% annual increase that has become standard in the last few years is inadequate** to keep up with inflationary cost increases experienced by school districts, which has resulted in widespread and persistent cuts to education budgets across the state. Because of this, Hopkins Public Schools is requesting that the general education formula be increased by 3% annually for the next biennium and that increases thereafter be indexed to inflation to provide school districts with a dependable and predictable source of revenue.

### **Reduce Mandates**

We ask the legislature to repeal unnecessarily restrictive mandates that increase administrative expenses and limit the ability of locally elected school boards to address the unique needs of their students and community. We also ask the legislature to provide the necessary funding for mandate compliance if additional mandates are imposed.

**Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to STABILIZE EDUCATION FUNDING AND LINK THE BASIC FORMULA TO INFLATION to provide a consistent funding stream that allows school districts to engage in long-range planning.**