



Legislative Action Coalition

2023 State Legislative Platform for Public Education

OUR PRIORITIES FOR 2023

STRENGTHEN AND STABILIZE FUNDING

- Reform and stabilize education funding and link the basic formula to inflation
- Reform and stabilize Early Education funding
- Eliminate Compensatory Funding qualification



SUPPORT STUDENTS

- Expand and stabilize mental health supports
- Fund public school nutrition programs
- Eliminate the Special Education Cross Subsidy

RESTORE LOCAL CONTROL

- Support your investment in ReImagine Minnesota
- Update and reform cumbersome requirements for school boards
- Audit MN Department of Education



Now is the time!

HOPKINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Strengthen and Stabilize Funding

REFORM AND 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.

2023 SESSION UPDATE: UNFINISHED

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. With your help, we can reshape school finance and reduce the burden on local property taxpayers.

Last year, the Minnesota House approved more than \$3 billion in new education spending over two years for urgent needs including student mental health services and attracting more teachers of color, among other priorities. However, the House and Senate never reached a compromise and no education spending bill passed last year's legislative session.

NOW IS THE TIME! In 2023, we ask the Legislature to:

- **Increase the basic formula allowance** by 5% per year and index it to inflation;
 - **Fully fund the special education and English learner programs** to eliminate the cross-subsidies;
 - **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; and
- Provide the necessary funding** for mandate compliance if additional mandates are imposed.

REFORM AND STABILIZE EARLY EDUCATION

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.

2023 SESSION UPDATE: UNFINISHED



NOW IS THE TIME to serve all families, we urge the Legislature to:

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- Streamline funding by consolidating our multiple revenue vehicles into one dependable, sustained revenue stream;
- Enable access to financial supports for families in a simple, streamlined application process to increase access for our most vulnerable families;
- 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 funding permanent so that schools can rely on those dollars for program consistency and staffing;
- Support the Governor’s proposal calling for funding for 6,000 pre-K spots;
- Address the teacher shortage, attract teachers of color to this field, and retain 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.



ELIMINATE COMPENSATORY FUNDING QUALIFICATION

Minnesota public schools need a more accurate method for compensatory funding that eliminates the undue burden on families and schools imposed by the education benefits applications.

2023 SESSION UPDATE: UNFINISHED

Currently, school districts in Minnesota rely on submitted free and reduced-price 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. The current method of computing compensatory revenue based on free and reduced-price lunch, or educational benefit applications, is antiquated and unreliable.

NOW IS THE TIME to sever education funding streams from this application and devise a new model:

- Several successful models already exist - Medicaid, Community Income Index, Income Tax, etc.
- Craft legislation to sever school funding from free/reduced meal applications and devise a new model for calculating need-based funding.
- **Parents and school districts experience the undue burden of applications:**
 - In 2018/19 we had 36.6% of families fill out applications. The percentage in the last two years of completed applications has fallen to 26.3%, but we know that the NEED has only

increased. This drop in completed applications 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 fewer applications being completed.
- 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.

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 or accurate portrayal of the recipients of compensatory revenue.

HOPKINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Support Students

EXPAND AND STABILIZE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS and services by increasing and stabilizing funding, resources, and access.

2023 SESSION UPDATE: UNFINISHED

NOW IS THE TIME to tend to the holistic well-being of our students. We urge the **2023**

Legislature to immediately prioritize student health and safety:

- **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;
- Reliable funding benefits the entire community with increased positive outcomes;
- Educate families and staff on the importance of mental health so that students' experience wrap-around care, and struggling students are more quickly identified;
- 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 law 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.

FUND PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS so all Minnesota families have equitable access to healthy meals, contributing to overall community health and food security.

2023 SESSION UPDATE: FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAM DISCONTINUED; HOPKINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS EXPERIENCING \$4,000 SHORTFALL PER MONTH FOR SCHOOL MEALS

In the best of times, many families struggle to access



quality nutrition in their communities. It is often through school meals that students enjoy food security. The Federal government recognized this unique position of public schools to provide the necessary food security in our communities by continuing the Summer Meals program throughout the 2020/21 and 2021/22 school years when the pandemic impacted school districts across the nation in 2020.

NOW IS THE TIME to support MN families by providing robust and healthy school nutrition programs that are stable and fully funded.

Hopkins is experiencing the following impacts since the summer meals extension ended:

- Moving from our current model back to a fee-based program has caused hardships for a lot of families who benefited from free meals.
- We were 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 received \$2.4625 in reimbursement funds for breakfast, \$4.3175 for Lunch and \$1.0200 for Snack. Since going back to NSLP reimbursements, funds are substantially less. - \$.37 for lunch, \$.33 for breakfast.

Since meals became free, we have seen an uptick in student participation in our nutrition program. Now that families are required to put funds back into their lunch accounts, participation is dropping, resulting in school districts' increased negative lunch balances. We are currently experiencing a \$4,000/month shortfall.



Last year the MN School Board Association passed two resolutions, one in support of fully funding school nutrition programs and the other releasing MN families (and school districts) from the undue burden of completing applications for educational benefits. These issues intersect and are pushing districts across the state toward a financial cliff.

According to MSBA, schools across the state have lost \$300 million in compensatory funding during the pandemic due to a reduction in the number of families who were unable to complete "free/reduced lunch" applications. The reasons for this vary. However, the real issue is that this

method for measuring actual needs in a district is inaccurate and places the onus on families. It has never worked and needs to change.

In addition to this funding that school districts have not received - essentially dollars that the state has "in surplus" - our reimbursement for Universal School Meals from the federal government is running out. It would cost the state an additional \$180 million per year to feed children when they are at school. As you can see, the amount of money - \$300 million - that the state is holding onto from compensatory funding, would more than cover the costs to it of feeding our state's children. The research is clear - children who are fed in school do better academically and socially.

The Governor's Office and legislators across the state recognize the importance of addressing this issue. Hopkins Public Schools urges the MN Legislature to **FULLY FUND PUBLIC SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS by expanding access to CEP across the state and supporting HF1729 this legislative session**, so that all Minnesota families have equitable access to healthy meals, contributing to overall community health and food security.

Restore Local Control



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.”

2023 SESSION UPDATE: UNFINISHED

Minnesota has always been a pioneer in education, and we can’t fall behind. Minnesota’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.

NOW IS THE TIME to fully invest in this work! We urge the 2023 Legislature to support ReImagine MN’s nine strategies:

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) - happened during COVID and needs to continue; redefine seat time; students should not be defined by a test score
3. Culturally Inclusive Curriculum and Standards - golden opportunity through Social Studies standards update; re-evaluate standard assessments
4. Recruit and Retain Staff of Color - engage higher education institutions; support alternative pathways for teacher licensure
5. Elevate Student Voice - redefine seat time and student choice
6. Adult Behaviors (eliminate negatives; provide support) - more social workers, counselors, mental health professionals needed in schools; more teachers of color
7. Build Bridges between School and Community - support and address students’ life challenges: nutrition, mental health; fund COVID mitigations; flexible academic support systems needed

- 8. Shared Understanding of Equity - implement proactive district/inter-district strategies and metrics that disrupt racial bias in the education system

UPDATE AND REFORM OUTDATED AND CUMBERSOME REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

2023 SESSION UPDATE: UNFINISHED

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 costs about \$30,000). These are resources that could otherwise be allocated to staff or student programs.



NOW IS THE TIME to renew existing voter-approved property tax levy in 2023!

Such a mandated requirement seems unnecessary, as such referenda typically receive approval. Here are the statewide results of referenda on renewing operating levies over the past 9 years.

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
2022	13 of 14 approved

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.



DIRECT THE LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR TO AUDIT THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN AN EFFORT TO UPDATE AND REFORM outdated processes, procedures, and testing which have become disconnected from reality, including cumbersome and inefficient reporting requirements, mandated “seat time” vs. online learning, barriers to hybrid learning, restrictive teacher licensing procedures, and many more.

2023 SESSION UPDATE: UNFINISHED; Hybrid learning not available in MN public schools

The structure of education in Minnesota is based on antiquated past practices. **NOW IS THE TIME to move the educational experience forward to a structure that better reflects the world we are currently living in and for the future.**

Legislation based on the Legislative Audit should reflect much-needed changes in educational practices, improve student buy-in, overall education experience, and outcomes.

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

Current MDE systems use an outdated division of labor model to deliver chunks of instruction in regular time segments. This model does not mirror the structure of our society, nor 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.

A Legislative Audit would shine a light on these gaps and on the outmoded current MDE reporting requirements which create duplicative paperwork for school districts, which forces teachers and aides out of their classrooms to “check the boxes” and spend arduous time on out-of-touch reports and assessments.

There is intensifying criticism from educators and education policymakers who want to make student performance more transparent and the delivery of education more flexible. We believe a Legislative Audit of the Minnesota Department of Education would reveal significant impediments to the changes schools seek and we advocate for: innovations that support transparency and flexibility, including competency-based education models.