



Dr. Michael Thomas, Superintendent
Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools
Prior Lake American/Savage Pacer
Column run date: March 18, 2023

Stable State Funding + Local Control = Student Success

Recently Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) Board of Education unanimously approved its Legislative Platform containing five priorities we believe will provide the greatest support for student and staff success in our district. The Platform is just one way we as a school district can actively engage with our local legislators to advocate on critical issues facing public education.

The five main areas of the 2023 Legislative Platform center around the following topics.

- Stabilize educational funding
- Address staffing challenges and diversify workforce
- School safety
- Increase mental health support
- Reduce mandates, enhance local control and flexibility

First, we would like to see education fully funded, while keeping up with inflation. While the state has periodically made investments in education, it has not kept pace with inflation over the last 20 years, resulting in a funding gap. If it had, we would have received \$9 million more last year alone.

School districts must also contend with unfunded or underfunded state/federal mandates. One example you may have heard about over the years is what is referred to as the Special Education cross-subsidy. The cross-subsidy is the amount of money that the district pays out of General Education funds for mandates that are not funded by the state for Special Education. In PLSAS nearly \$5.8 million a year is being diverted to Special Education to cover our mandated costs that are not being funded by the state.

School districts across the country - and right here in PLSAS - have been dealing with staffing shortages for the last several years. Our Legislative Platform seeks incentives to recruit and retain high-quality teachers, particularly in shortage areas, along with alternative ways to enter the teaching profession.

The single most important issue is safety. Security and emergency preparedness is vital to the safety and well-being of our students, staff and visitors. While PLSAS does much in this area to protect our students and staff, there currently is not a sustainable funding source to support our Crisis Management Plan or building security systems.

While this school year we are finally feeling more of a sense of normalcy, we also know that many students are dealing with elevated levels of stress and anxiety, and are struggling with mental health problems. That's why it is critical to increase funding through interagency

collaboration for youth in mental health crises and increase funding for mental health providers in schools.

Finally, our Platform opposes any new underfunded or unfunded legislative mandates and provides school districts the flexibility to adapt learning environments for positive student outcomes without loss of current funding, and the ability to make decisions based on local needs.

With the legislature in session working on the state budget, now is a good time to educate yourself on the issues, look at the bills currently being considered and contact our elected officials. You can go to www.leg.mn.gov for updates and contact information.