



Board of Education Column

By Robin Nelson, Board of Education

Governmental Affairs Committee Update

The 68th session of the North Dakota legislature begins January 3, 2023 and is scheduled to adjourn no later than April 28, 2023. The Fargo Board of Education's Governmental Affairs Committee is charged with actively participating in the session and advocating on behalf of Fargo Public Schools. We are aware of a number of bills that will be introduced this session that impact public education.

The [Board-approved legislative priorities](#) are contained in a guiding document that will be used for communication and working with legislators. The priorities are grouped into two categories: Positive School Culture and Safety; and Education Funding.

Positive School Culture and Safety

A desired result of the FPS strategic plan is to provide an environment that is physically and psychologically supportive for students and staff. The Board acknowledges that students may not be ready to learn until physical, mental and behavioral health barriers are addressed; however, traditional education models are intended to educate, not provide medical treatment. Therefore, we will seek adequate funding and supports to provide a well-rounded education with consistent access to mental health and wrap-around services.

Education Funding

Special education funding allocations continue to fall well below the federal intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Larger metropolitan areas such as Fargo tend to have a wider array of services; consequently, attracting families with students who need extra help. When special education is underfunded, those dollars are taken from other district resources.

Families who have English learners are also attracted to larger communities due to availability of services. Fargo Public Schools accommodates 94 different languages, and the student population is comprised of 7.4% English learner students. Various learning barriers must be solved in order to progress academically.

North Dakota's K-12 education funding formula includes a mill levy deduct mechanism. The amount of the 2022-23 Weighted Student Unit (WSU), commonly referred to as per-pupil funding or per-pupil guarantee, is \$10,237; however, Fargo Public Schools receives \$7,973 per WSU due to the mill levy deduction.



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FPS dedicates 80% of expenditures to employee salary and benefits. The current job market is extremely competitive and is affecting retention of not only certified teachers, but also positions such as custodial, support staff, food services, facility maintenance, and business services. While the State is generously considering offsetting property taxes via education funding, we are encouraging our legislative body to remember the effects of inflation and the competitive job environment as they discuss the K-12 funding formula.

The School Board has a page on its website dedicated to legislative work, [available at this link](#). The Governmental Affairs Committee will closely monitor the upcoming session and advocate for our district and students in Bismarck.

