

St. Cloud Area School District 742 Board of Education 2025 Legislative Platform

(Adopted by the District 742 School Board on January 8, 2025)

The Constitution of the State of Minnesota, in Article XXIII, section One states:

“The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state”.

St. Cloud District 742 is a unique district with 69.9% free/reduced lunch (State average is 43.4%), 22.9% special education (State average is 17.6%) and 22.5% EL student populations (State average is 9.2%). These demographics present challenges to our district that make it difficult to provide a quality education for all our students without adequate funding. Yet, District 742 continues to focus work toward the World Best Workforce and Civic Readiness (CACR) Goals of:

- All children are ready for school
- All third-graders can read at grade level
- All racial & economic achievement gaps are closed
- All students are ready for career and college
- All students graduate from high school
- To prepare students to be lifelong learners

With those goals in mind the District 742 Board of Education wishes to focus our legislative platform on the following areas of greatest concern, and we urge the Governor and Legislators to:

Goal #1:

Eliminate the Special Education Cross Subsidy and English Language Learners (EL) Cross Subsidy.

- Increase special education funding by 25% each year to reduce the State special education cross-subsidy over the next four years.
- *Eliminate the EL Cross Subsidy*

Background: Special Education

Despite recent efforts during the 2023 legislative session, Minnesota continues to fall woefully short of fulfilling its obligation to adequately fund mandated special education programming. Consequently, school districts are forced to re-direct funds meant for regular classroom instruction to pay for mandated special education programs. Larger cities and regional centers typically have much higher special education populations and therefore much larger special education cross subsidies. These large cross subsidies disproportionately affect these school districts, causing disproportionate funding in regular classroom programming from district to district, statewide. While general formula increases help all districts, they do not help to eliminate the disproportionality of programming caused by mandated and underfunded special education costs.

In St. Cloud, the Special Education budget is \$48,731,149, and our EL budget is \$6,683,769. Despite every effort to make our Special Education program more efficient and cost-effective, our cross-subsidy for the 2024-25 school year is expected to be **\$9,216,907**. This is roughly equal to \$996 per student. Our EL cross-subsidy is expected to be **\$3,683,847**, which is roughly equal to \$398 per district student.

As a Regional Center, our special needs population continues to grow. Addressing the special education cross-subsidy is vital to the financial health of District 742. Now is the time to plug this gap and own up to Minnesota’s promise for ALL our students!

Goal #2:

The Legislature should direct the Legislative Auditor to Evaluate the Performance and Accountability of Charter Schools including:

- The impact charter schools have on school segregation
- Whether charter schools should be exempt from state laws or rules that pertain to public schools
- Whether the State should reimburse school districts for the actual cost of providing transportation and special education services to charter school students.
- Whether the \$1 billion in funding dedicated to charter schools deprives our public schools of vital funding to support all students. Charter schools are not part of the constitutionally mandated Uniform System of Public Schools, yet they are funded by state taxpayers.

Background: Charter Schools

The first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992. The motivation behind the charter school movement was for charters to serve as labs of innovation and develop models that could be replicated in school districts throughout Minnesota. Today, charter schools consume over \$1 billion in education funding and most charters perform below the average of traditional public schools in math and reading proficiency.

The St. Cloud school district is directly affected by charter school performance. Using MCA test scores, local charter schools are performing at more than a 10-point deficit when compared to the St. Cloud Public School District in Math and Reading. All local charter schools perform substantially lower than St. Cloud Schools. Students who attend K-6 (8) charter schools and then enroll in St. Cloud secondary schools come to us significantly behind academically. The St. Cloud district incurs additional costs including remedial education to bring these students up to grade level.

Finally, The Star Tribune’s investigative series revealed that weak oversight has allowed many charter schools to fall short of their promise to deliver better educational outcomes for students.

Goal #3:

Find a better Means of Assessing Student Progress than the Current MCA Tests

- The “cultural and socioeconomic bias” of standardized tests has been well-documented.
- The only thing that standardized tests have been proven to measure accurately is the affluence of the family of the student taking the test.
- Local media publish and compare the standardized scores of local schools, often without the detailed explanation needed for a full understanding of the scores. As a result, the students most intended to benefit from these tests are often most hurt by the comparison of schools and school districts.

Background: MCA Tests

There are many reasons why the State system of standardized testing, especially MCA test, should not be used to rank the quality of our schools. Kids from middle class, upper middle class, and wealthy families do better on standardized tests. Students, schools, and districts with high poverty do poorly. Groups of students, especially those new-to-country, living in poverty, or with special needs are often categorized as “failing students”.

The result has been flight from public school systems to private or other public schools located in higher socioeconomic neighborhoods, which bring with their socioeconomic status the “appearance” of better teaching. Improper use of MCA scores leads to degraded communities, causes property values to drop, and drives students out of their home schools, which in many cases increases segregation. Meanwhile, the loss of state funding for students who open-enroll out leaves fewer and fewer resources available for those students most in need. The continued annual drudgery of MCA testing is harmful to the community, to our teachers, and above all, to our students.

Goal #4:

Continue Unemployment Funding.

- *Either continue State Funding for expanded unemployment benefits or allow districts to have levy authority to provide such funding*

Background: Unemployment Funding

The last legislative session provided unemployment benefits for eligible educational staff, which allows individuals to stay in education from one school year to the next and helps avoid a great absence of qualified

educational support staff for a variety of vital positions. However, one-time funding for these benefits will run out within the next year if a permanent source is not enacted.

We support this unemployment program; however, it is vital that either the State continue to fund this program or that school districts be allowed to levy for it. Otherwise, the funding will have to be taken from funds meant for providing direct educational benefits to students.

Goal #5:

We Oppose the Following Legislation

- Legislation that would establish any type of voucher system for private schools that uses general fund dollars.
- Legislation that would eliminate the inflation factor for public education.
- Legislation that would change the Compensatory Fund formula for districts in calculating students eligible for free/reduced lunch designation

Background: Vouchers/Tax Credits

Research has documented that vouchers and tax credits go primarily to those who have already enrolled students in the private school system and wealthy families. Furthermore, they take funding out of the State General Fund so that less money is available for public education.

The 2023 legislative session provided an inflation factor for future education funding. It is vital that school districts can count on this inflationary increase to cover basic costs for education, including staffing costs.

St. Cloud receives approximately \$21 million in Compensatory Funding, directed toward schools with large percentages of students from families facing economic hardships. Eligibility for this funding has been determined through applications made to the county for social services and applications made to the school district due to economic hardships of the family. It is vital that both of these application processes remain intact, or District 742 could face a significant loss in educational (compensatory) revenue.