
GRAND RAPIDS
AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience Readiness Excellence

GRAND RAPIDS
AREA SCHOOLS

Resilience ✦ Readiness ✦ Excellence





FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

GRAND RAPIDS
AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience ✦ Readiness ✦ Excellence

Dave Cowan,
School Board Chair



FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

Charge:

- Examine the current situation within GRAS
- Provide feedback, from each individual's perspective, on Grand Rapids Area Schools' public education priorities
- Discuss options for ensuring these priorities can be delivered, cost effectively, for the long-term benefit of all residents

FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

Meeting 1 Recap:

- Group purpose and dynamics
- Shared district information and community survey data
  - discussion
- Shared student academic data and opportunities
  - discussion
- Feedback
- Homework

FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

Meeting 1: School District background and data

Meeting 2: School Finance in Minnesota and in Grand Rapids Area Schools

Meeting 3: District challenges, opportunities, and discussion

Meeting 4: Consensus workshop to determine priorities and prepare recommendation for the board.

FORWARD Norms

Be Respectful

Be Responsible

Be Safe

Be Kind



BIGFORK HUSKIES

H HONEST	TELL THE TRUTH BE EXCUSE FREE OWN YOUR BEHAVIOR USE YOUR OWN THINGS ASK PERMISSION
O ON IT!	HAVE MATERIALS WITH YOU STAY ON TASK LOOK/LISTEN/PAY ATTENTION
W WILLING	PARTICIPATE TAKE RISKS TRY MISTAKES ARE OK
L LEAD	TREAT OTHERS KINDLY HELP OTHERS USE ENCOURAGING WORDS STAND UP FOR OTHERS WALK AWAY WHEN NEEDED

FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee



Welcome & Introductions

Table Introductions

- Share your name
- Share your connections or perspectives you bring to the table

GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence

FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

Agenda:

- Homework Harvest
- School finance in MN
- Feedback activity
- School finance in GRAS
- Feedback activity

FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

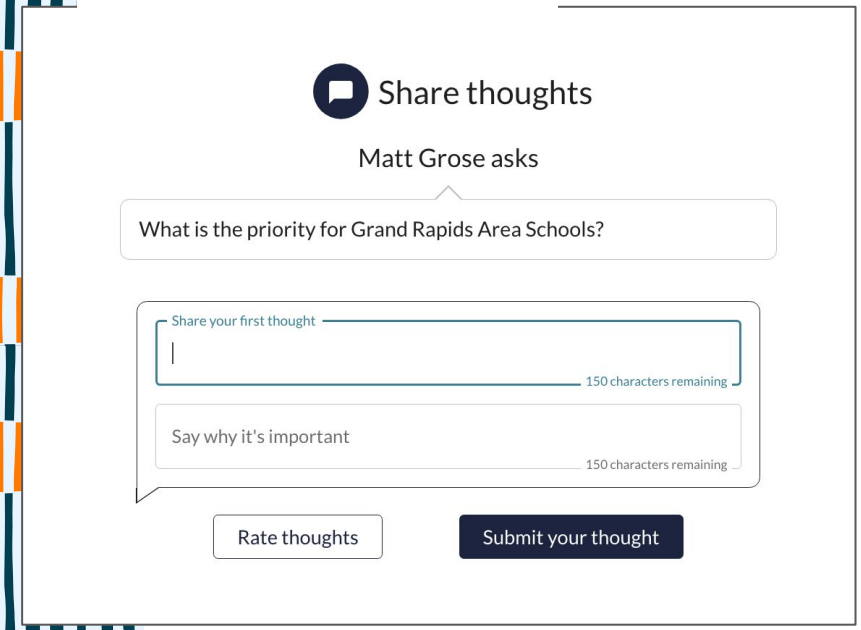
Homework from last time:

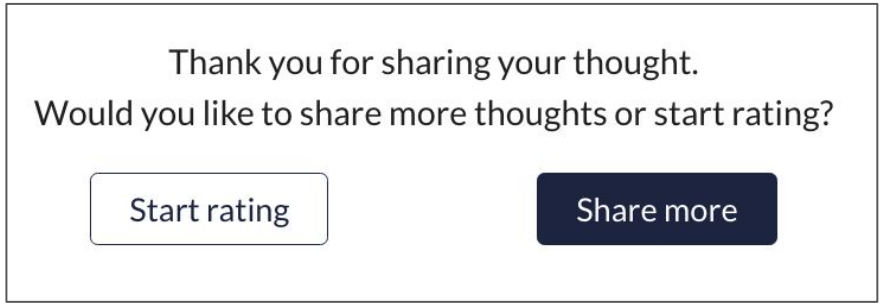
1. Answer the question: "What is the most important priority for Grand Rapids Area Schools?"

2. Tell 3 people about the meeting

3. Ask them the question: "What is the most important priority for Grand Rapids Area Schools?"

1. Aim your cell camera at the QR code and follow the link. If you have questions, raise your hand and someone will come help.
2. Submit all the thoughts - yours and the people you talked to.





FORWARD

Community Advisory Committee

Feedback from last meeting

MEETING 1: Feedback on the information shared on District Information and Community Survey Results

- **Trust & Transparency:** Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening trust through clearer communication and transparency around decisions.
- **Information & Perception**: Most people get information from friends and family, not media, contributing to gaps between data and public perception.
- **Student Needs & Equity**: New awareness of high needs—nearly half of families qualifying for free/reduced lunch, about 23% of students on IEPs, and concerns about equitable access, including for American Indian students.
- **District Scale & Complexity**: Many were surprised by the size of the district, 9 sites, staffing structure, flat enrollment over decades, and the complexity of serving a large geographic area.
- **What Comes Next**: Strong interest in who responded to the survey, clearer explanations of how funding can and cannot be used, broader community engagement, and how this information will be used to rebuild trust.

MEETING 1: Feedback on the information shared on Student Achievement Data and Student Opportunities

- **Assessment & Measurement**: Strong concern that MCA results alone are an imperfect "ruler"—with calls for better local benchmarks, growth measures, and clearer understanding of opt-outs, accommodations, and what scores do (and don't) represent.
- **Results & Reality**: Low proficiency rates (around 50% overall; ~47% in math) were sobering, yet many were encouraged that GRAS performs above the state average and has strong graduation rates.
- **Equity & Context**: Participants emphasized poverty, special education, opt-out impacts, and attendance as critical factors, with concern that standardized testing does not fully reflect student learning or equity across communities.
- **System Constraints**: Ongoing challenges include funding limits, class size, staffing, chronic absenteeism, and demands on teachers, all while working within state and federal requirements.



School Funding in Minnesota

School Funding In Minnesota

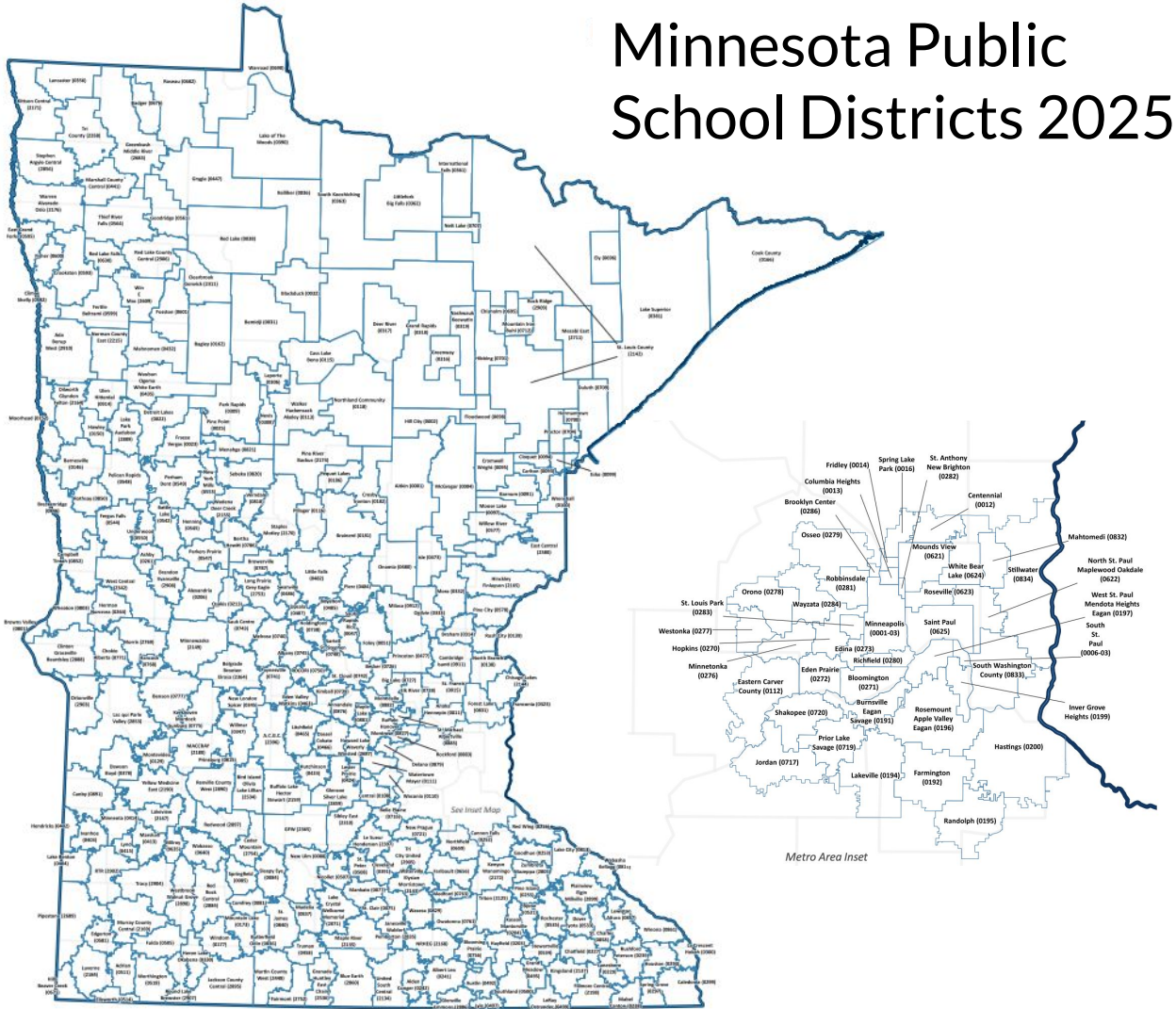
- Public education is a Constitutional responsibility of the State of Minnesota

MINNESOTA CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE XIII: MISCELLANEOUS SUBJECTS

Section 1. Uniform system of public schools. 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.

Minnesota Public School Districts 2025

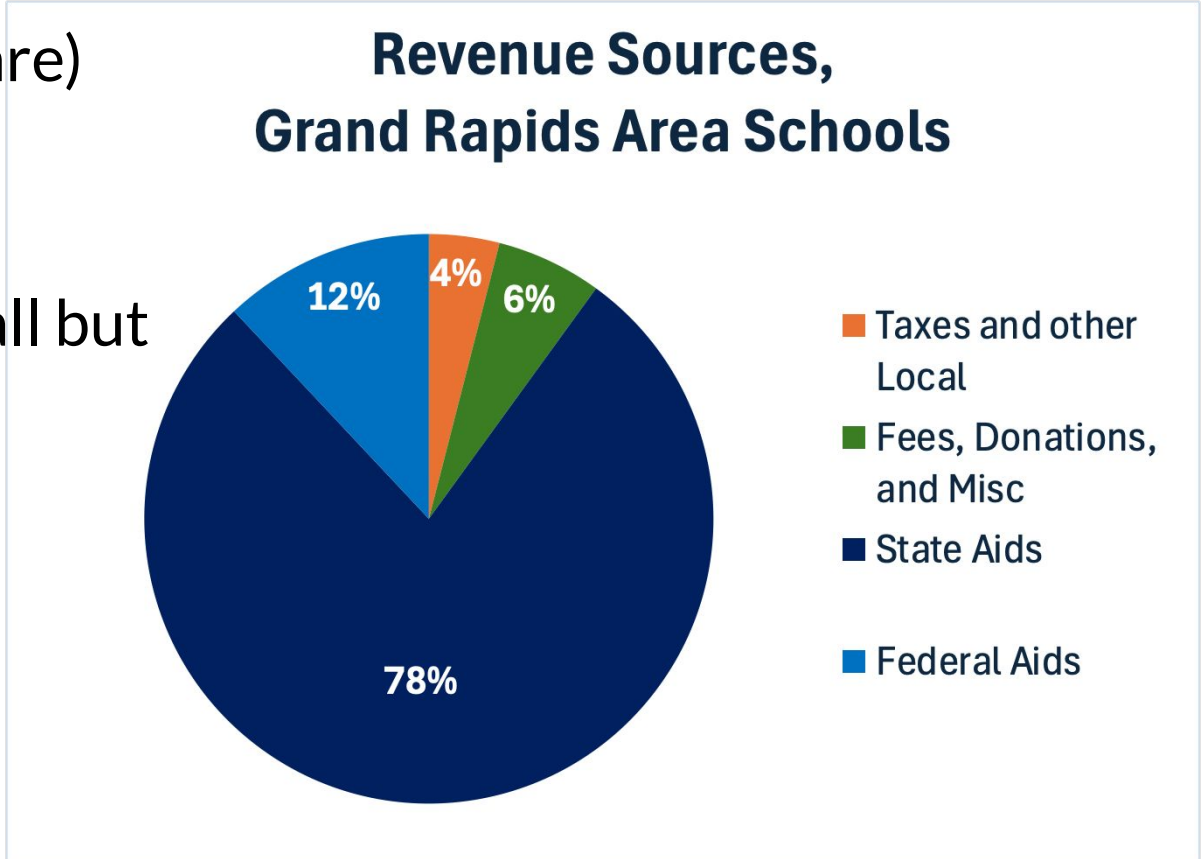


School Funding In Minnesota

- Public education is a Constitutional responsibility of the State of Minnesota
- Schools are operated locally (Independent School Districts), but funded through state laws and rules
- The system tries to balance fairness, local control, and student needs

Where School Funding Comes From

- State aid (largest share)
- Local (taxes, fees, donations)
- Federal funding (small but targeted)



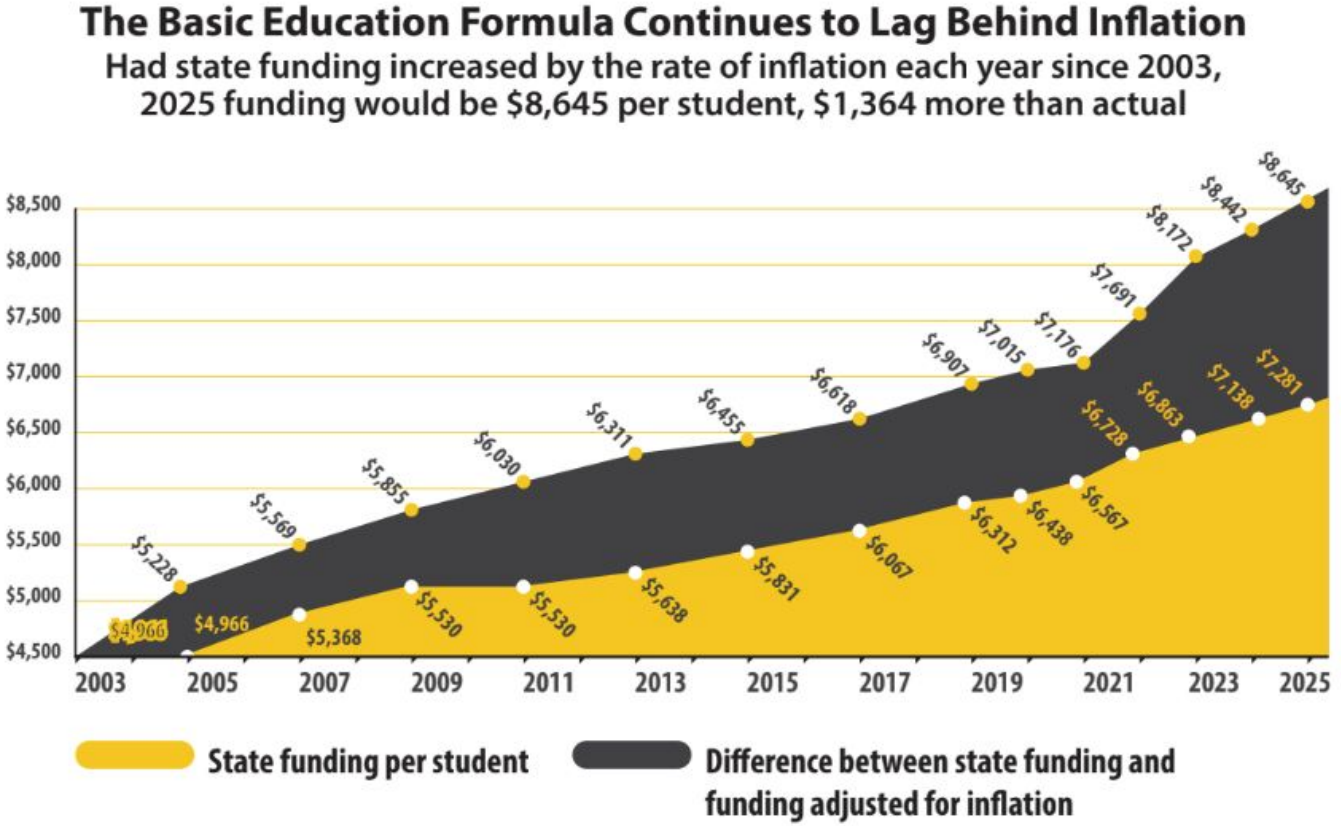
What “Per-Pupil Funding” Really Means

- Legislature typically allocates a General Education Formula amount per student during their budget cycle.

Fiscal Year	General Ed Formula per student	Percent over previous year
2027	$7,683	2.7%
2026	$7,481	2.7%
2025	$7,281	2.0%
2024	$7,138	4.0%
2023	$6,863	2.0%
2022	$6,728	2.5%
2021	$6,567	2.0%
2020	$6,438	2.0%
2019	$6,312	2.0%
2018	$6,188	

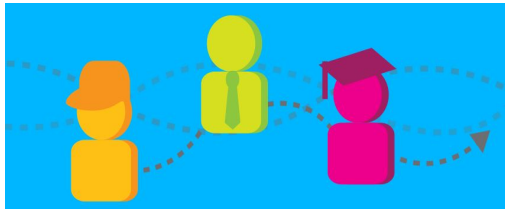
Increases Don’t Keep Pace

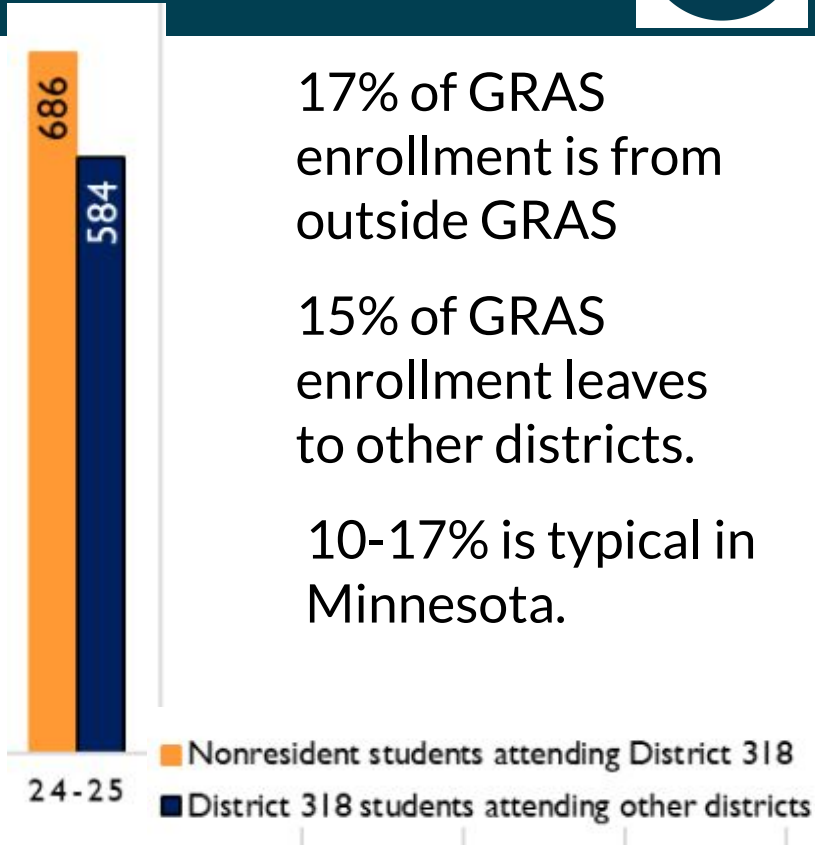
State funding increases for schools have not kept pace with inflation for 20+ years



What “Per-Pupil Funding” Really Means

- Legislative increases
- Funding follows students
  - → Another public school district
    In person or online
  - → Charter school
  - → Private school
  - → Post Secondary Enrollment Options





17% of GRAS enrollment is from outside GRAS

15% of GRAS enrollment leaves to other districts.

10-17% is typical in Minnesota.

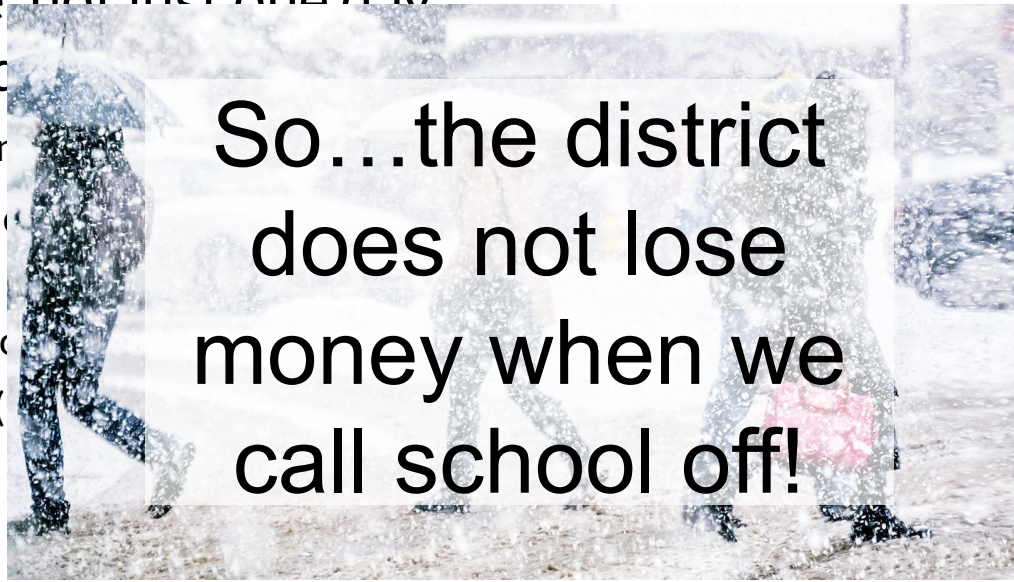
What “Per-Pupil Funding” Really Means

- Change over time
- Funding follows students
- Not all students generate the same amount
  - Older vs younger
  - Educational setting (alternative, part-time, PSEO)
  - Students with disabilities
  - English Language Learners
  - Free/reduced lunch

Grade	Weight
PK-6	1.0
7-12	1.2

How Minnesota Counts Students

- Students are counted over time, not just one day
- Not based on attendance; based
  - Average Daily Membership (ADM): Average
  - Resident ADM: Students who live within the
  - Weighted ADM (WADM) / Pupil Units: ADM
    and specific student needs, forming the core
  - Extended ADM: Additional ADM generated (
    programs.





General Education Revenue:
The main funding engine

- Primary source of operating funds
- Supports staff, classrooms, and daily operations
- Formula-driven and statewide
- Although “general” it is not the same for each district.



General Education Revenue:
The main funding engine

Gen Ed Funding Component	Percent of State Gen Ed Revenue	Number of Eligible Districts
Basic Education	67.4%	329
Basic Skills	9.9	327
Local Optional	6.0	328
Operating Capital	2.1	328
Pension Adjustment	1.5	329
Transportation Sparsity	1.0	318
Equity	1.0	328
Extended Time	0.4	139
Declining Enrollment	0.3	229
Sparsity	0.3	103
Transition	0.3	198
Small Schools	0.2	167
Gifted and Talented	0.1	329
Options Adjustments	0.02	33

Restricted vs. Unrestricted Funding

Unrestricted Funds



- Can be used flexibly across programs
- Supports overall district operations
- Allows districts to prioritize based on local needs
- Includes General Education Revenue

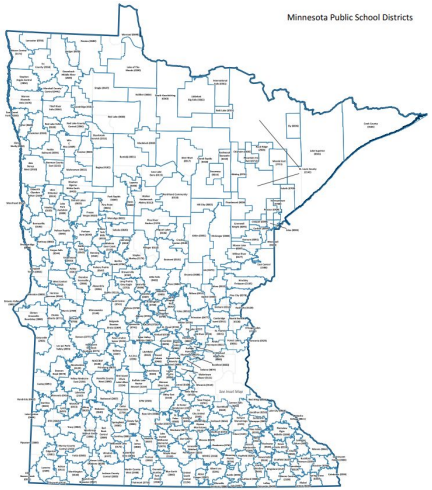
Restricted Funds



- Must be spent for specific purposes only
- Cannot be redirected to other needs
- Often comes with detailed compliance requirements
- Includes basic skills, nutrition, facilities, federal programs, etc.

Uniform? Why Districts Are Funded Differently

- Student needs and demographics
- Property tax base
- Voter decisions
- Location and enrollment patterns
- Geographic size and transportation distance
- Enrollment growth or decline

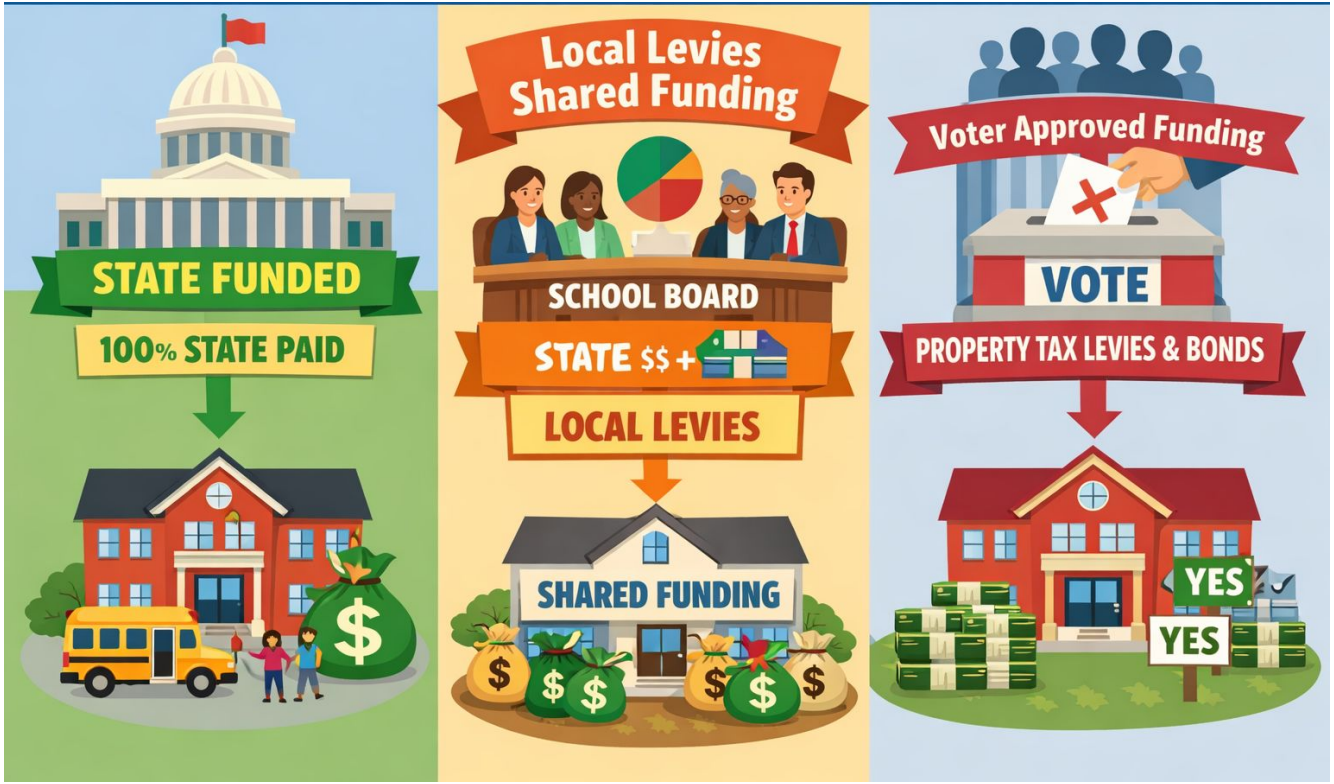


State Aid and Local Property Taxes

- Some funding is fully state-paid
- Some funding is shared with local levies that are voted on by the school board
- Some funding is determined by voters
- “Equalization” is intended to reduce property wealth differences

State Aid and Local Property Taxes

"Equalization" is intended to reduce property wealth differences



Local Levies

School Board Approved

- Authorized and capped by law (different than county/city)
- Limited in size and scope
- Approved annually in December
- Includes things like: facilities maintenance, school safety, health and safety, general operations, retiree benefit obligations.

Voter Approved

- Typically hear about three types of referendums (votes)
  - Building Bond
  - Operating Referendum
  - Capital Projects Levy
- Each affects taxpayers differently
- Optional and locally approved
- Create differences between districts
- Layered on top of state funding

Special Education Funding

- Services are required by law
- Costs vary widely by student
- State and federal funding does not fully cover costs

IDEA
Individuals with Disabilities Act

What Are Mandates?

- Services required by law
- Unfunded mandates are required but without full funding
- Common in public education
- Must be provided regardless of cost
- Examples: summer unemployment, library personnel, READ Act

Questions?

GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence

Your Turn: Feedback



GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence



ThoughtExchange results

GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence

Findings from Homework:

The priority for Grand Rapids Area Schools centers on providing quality and equitable education, reducing class sizes, and retaining qualified teachers and staff. There is a strong emphasis on offering diverse electives and opportunities to prepare students for future success. Financial transparency and stability are crucial, alongside fostering strong community relationships and engagement. Addressing mental health support, discipline, and reducing teacher burnout are also highlighted. The district aims to create a supportive, safe, and inclusive environment that aligns with Minnesota standards, ensuring all students, including those in Bigfork, receive a comprehensive educational experience.

PARTICIPATION
Breakdown of Participation



31
Participants



59
Thoughts



618
Ratings

WORDCLOUD
Top Rated



THOUGHTS
Key Thoughts

Quality education for students Our students are our future.

4.3 ★★★★☆ (11)

Ranked #1 of 59

Teacher support When we support teachers we support students

4.2 ★★★★☆ (12)

Ranked #2 of 59

Ensure we are maintaining and providing the best opportunities possible to the students and staff in our district Proving opportunities to our students allows them to succeed and thrive as they start figuring out their life.

4.2 ★★★★☆ (11)

Ranked #3 of 59

THOUGHTS
Education

Quality education for students Our students are our future. 4.3 ★★★★☆ (11)

Quality education 4.2 ★★★★☆ (11)

To provide an excellent education to all of our kids. 4.2 ★★★★☆ (11)

THOUGHTS
Opportunities

Ensure we are maintaining and providing the best opportunities possible to the students and staff in our district Proving opportunities to our students allows them to succeed and thrive as they start figuring out their life.

4.2 ★★★★☆ (11)

Excellence in academic opportunity All students deserve the best!

4.2 ★★★★☆ (11)

Meeting needs of all students. Kids have all the opportunities

3.9 ★★★★☆ (9)

THOUGHTS
Prepare

To ensure that my children are receiving instruction aligned to Minnesota standards and are being fully prepared for their future beyond school. This matters because strong communities and a healthy workforce require educated, thoughtful, and resilient individuals.

4.1 ★★★★☆ (11)

Educating and providing our children opportunities to grow into successful members of society. All students have gifts and dreams and adults and systems provide the conduit.

4.1 ★★★★☆ (10)

Preparing students for the real world

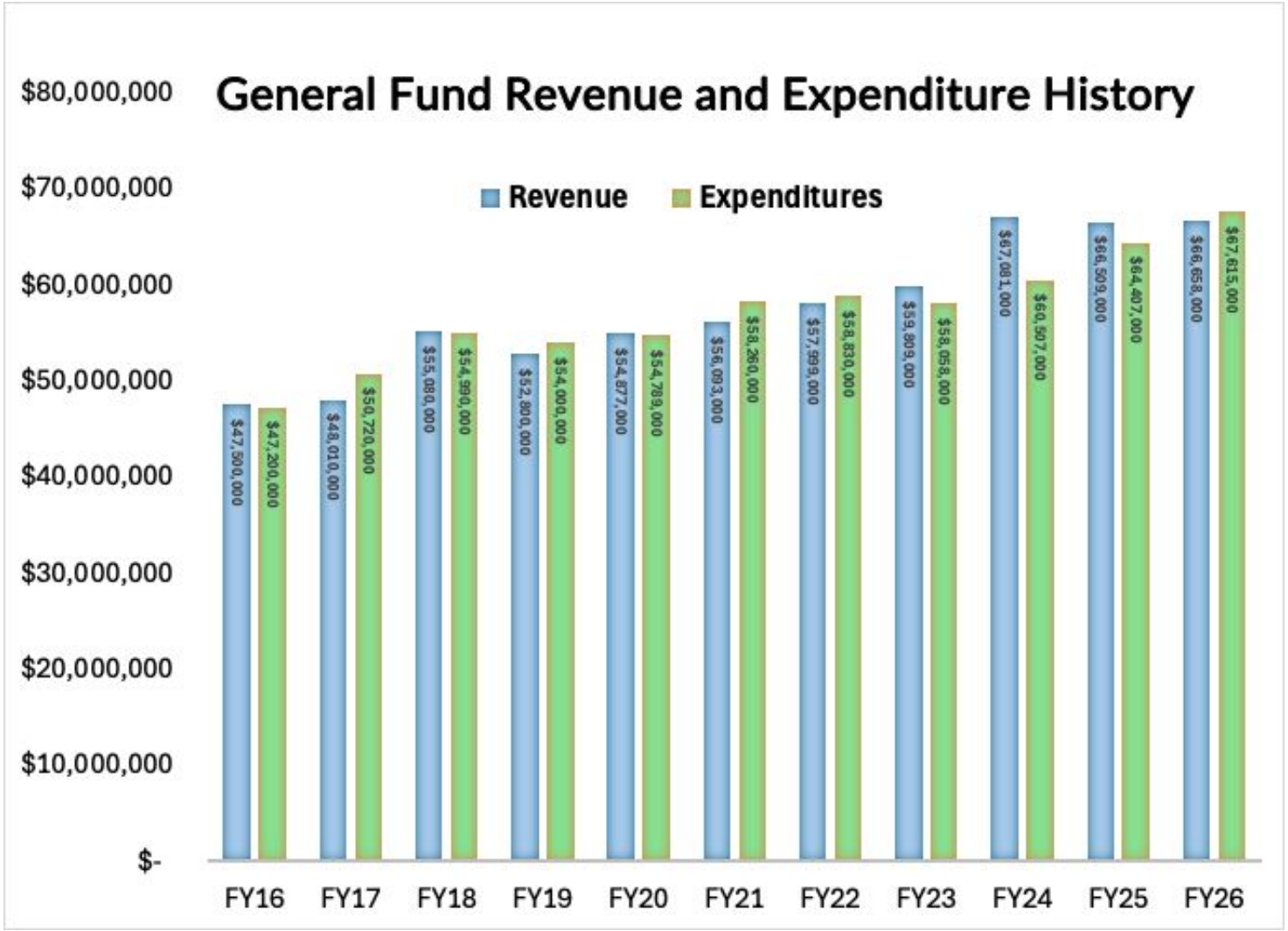
3.9 ★★★★☆ (12)

THOUGHTS
Community

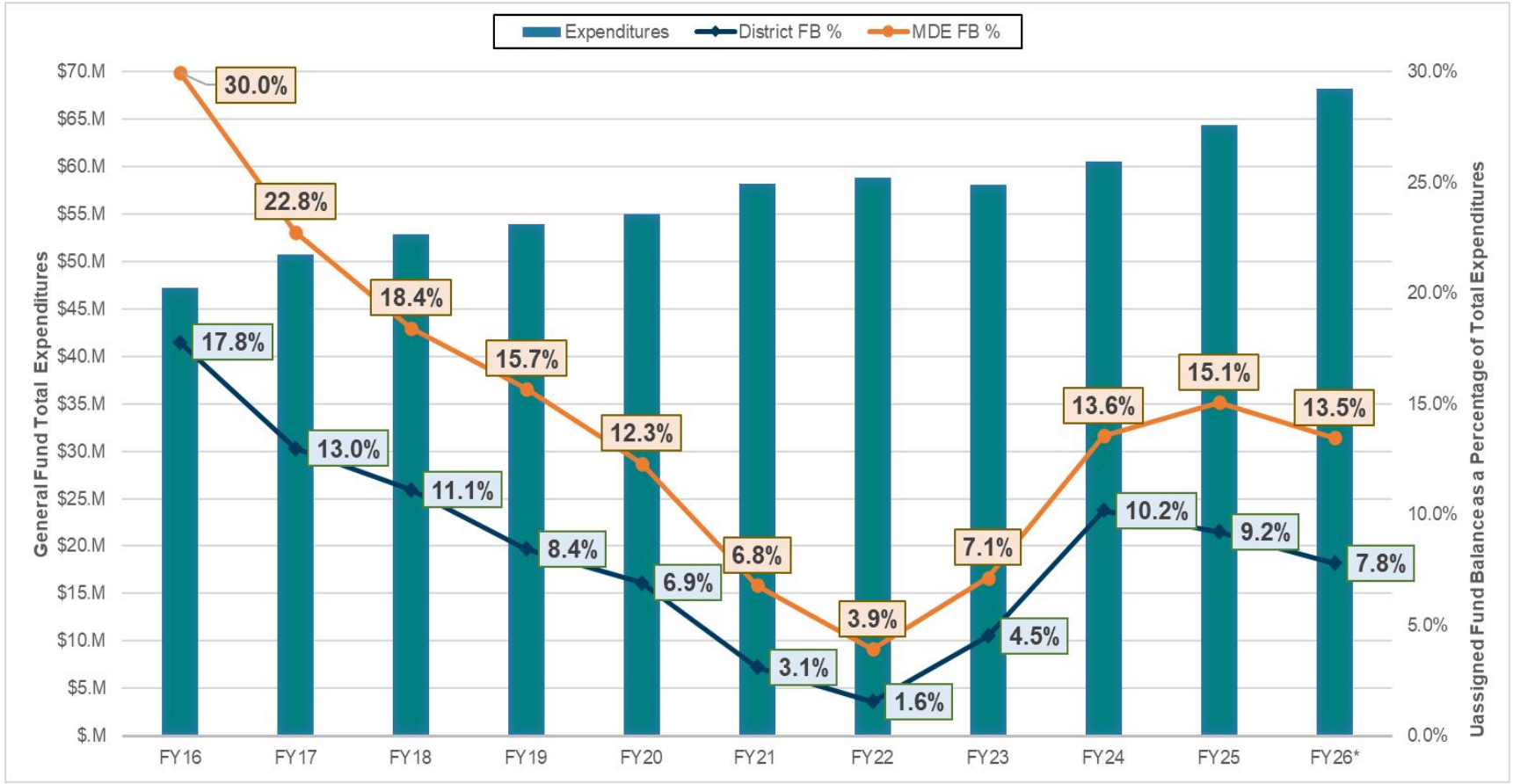
Retaining teachers and staff It provides continuity for students and helps our greater community	4.0	(12)
Bringing community into the schools and building relationships	3.9	(12)
Retain teachers in the district. Capacity and community building.	3.9	(12)

Funding in Grand Rapids Area Schools

GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence

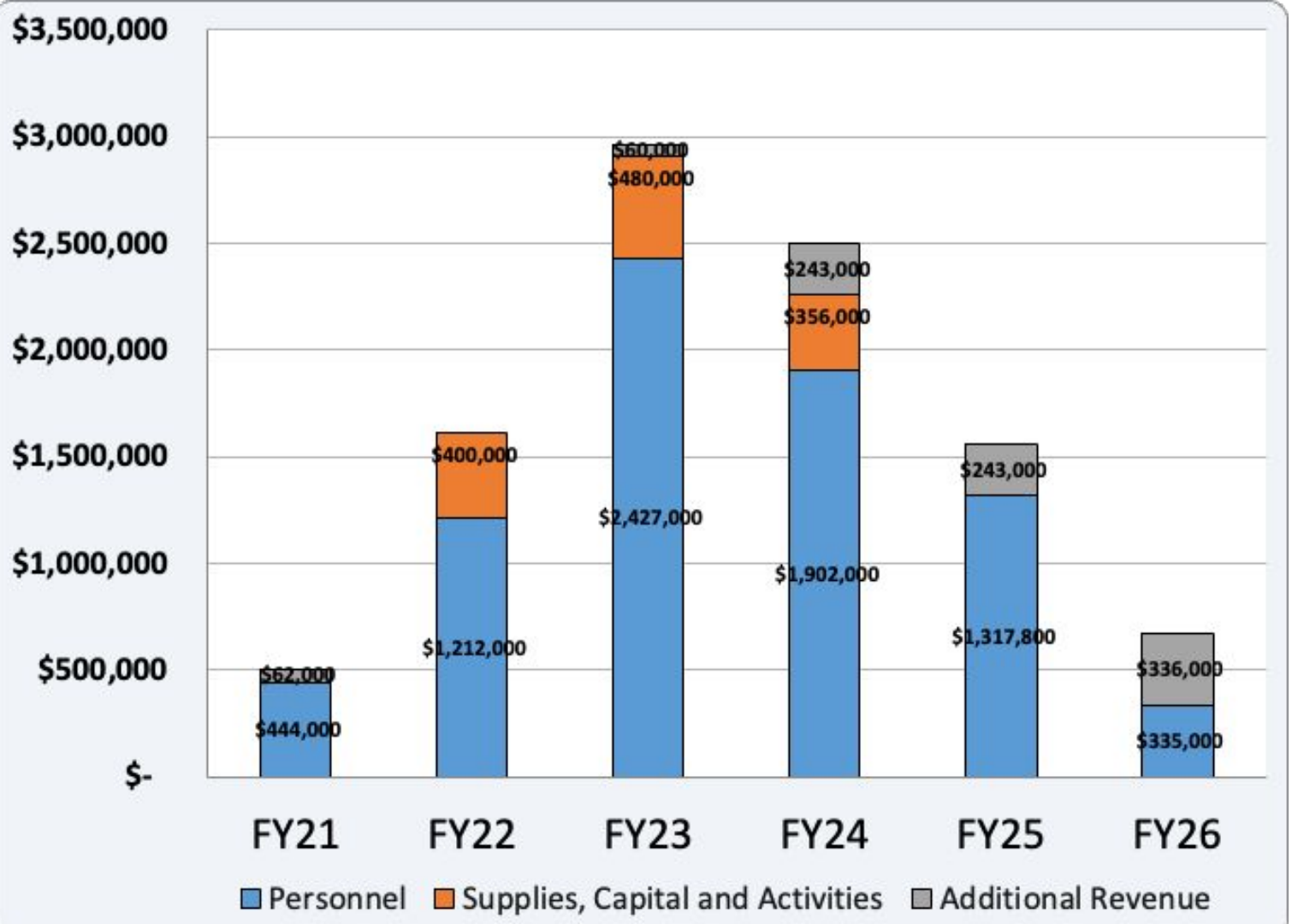

General Fund Revenue and Expenditure History
Revenue
Expenditures
$80,000,000
$70,000,000
$60,000,000
$50,000,000
$40,000,000
$30,000,000
$20,000,000
$10,000,000
$-
$47,500,000
$47,200,000
$48,010,000
$50,720,000
$55,080,000
$54,990,000
$52,800,000
$54,000,000
$54,877,000
$54,789,000
$56,093,000
$58,260,000
$57,999,000
$58,830,000
$59,809,000
$58,058,000
$67,081,000
$60,507,000
$66,509,000
$64,407,000
$66,658,000
$67,615,000
FY16
FY17
FY18
FY19
FY20
FY21
FY22
FY23
FY24
FY25
FY26

General Fund – Fund Balance



* Budget

Budget Adjustments/ Reductions FY21-FY26



Budget Reductions/Adjustments FY21 - FY26

	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	Totals
Personnel	$444,000	$1,212,000	$2,427,000	$1,902,000	$1,317,800	$335,000	**$7,637,800**
Supplies, Capital and Activities		$400,000	$480,000	$356,000			**$1,236,000**
Additional Revenue	$62,000		$60,000	$243,000	$243,000	$336,000	**$944,000**
Total	$506,000	$1,612,000	$2,967,000	$2,501,000	$1,560,800	$671,000	**$9,817,800**
FTEs	4	18.4	29.5	19.3	9.6	3.8	**84.6**

Impact of Budget Adjustments

- Improved Fund Balance from low of ~2% to 9.2%
- Balanced budgets FY23, FY24, FY25
- Standard and Poors (S&P) credit rating and assessment improvement
- Clean audits; not considered a high-risk auditee



Context: What does this mean?

- Comparing school districts is challenging - no two districts are truly alike.
- We've identified districts to compare to based on enrollment, free/reduced and special education populations, regional center status, location, etc

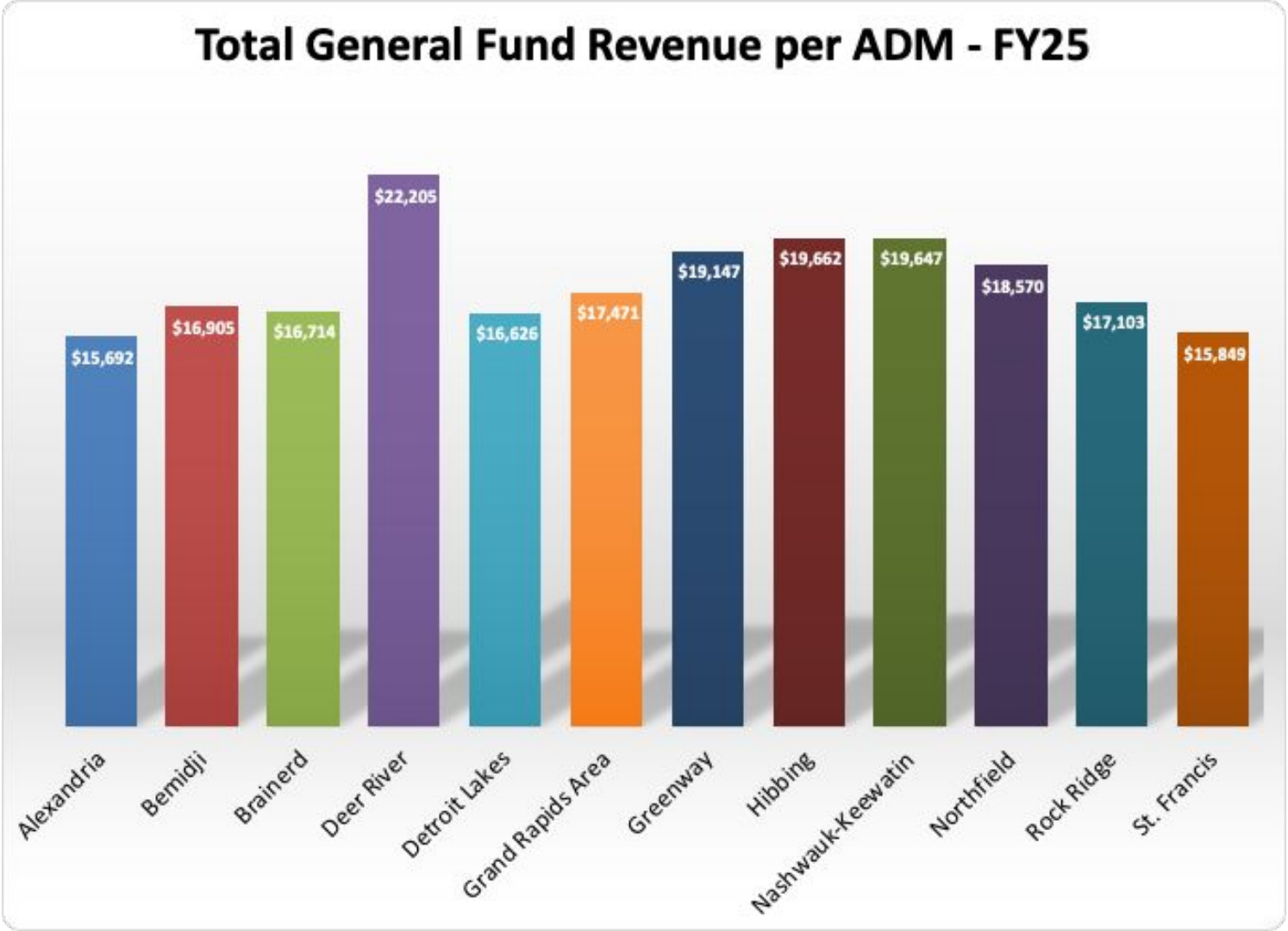
Context: What does this mean?

- Alexandria
- Bemidji
- Brainerd
- Detroit Lakes
- Hibbing
- Northfield
- St. Francis
- Rock Ridge
- *Greenway*
- *Deer River*
- *Nashwauk-Keewatin*

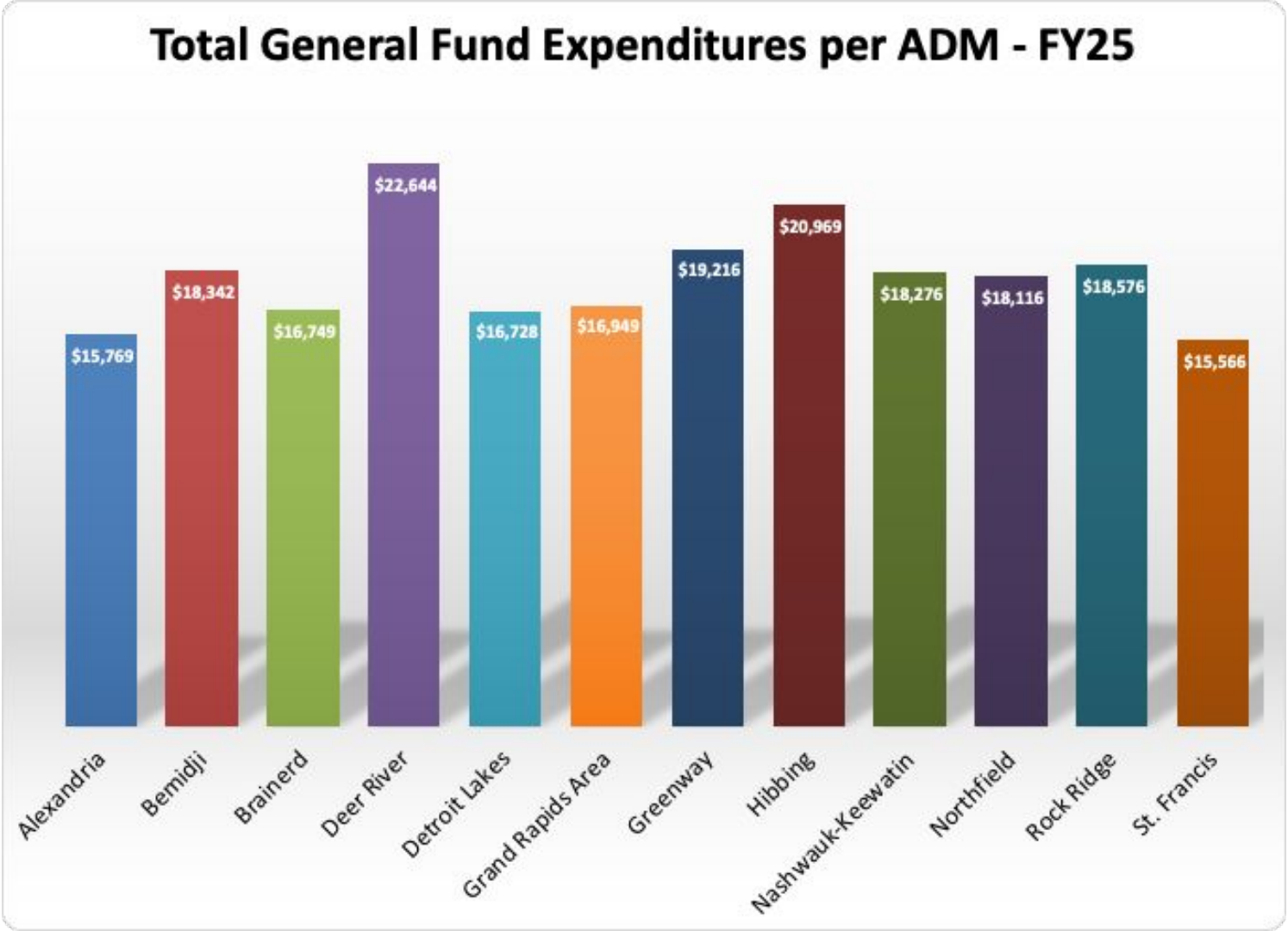
Similar demographics, regionality

Itasca County

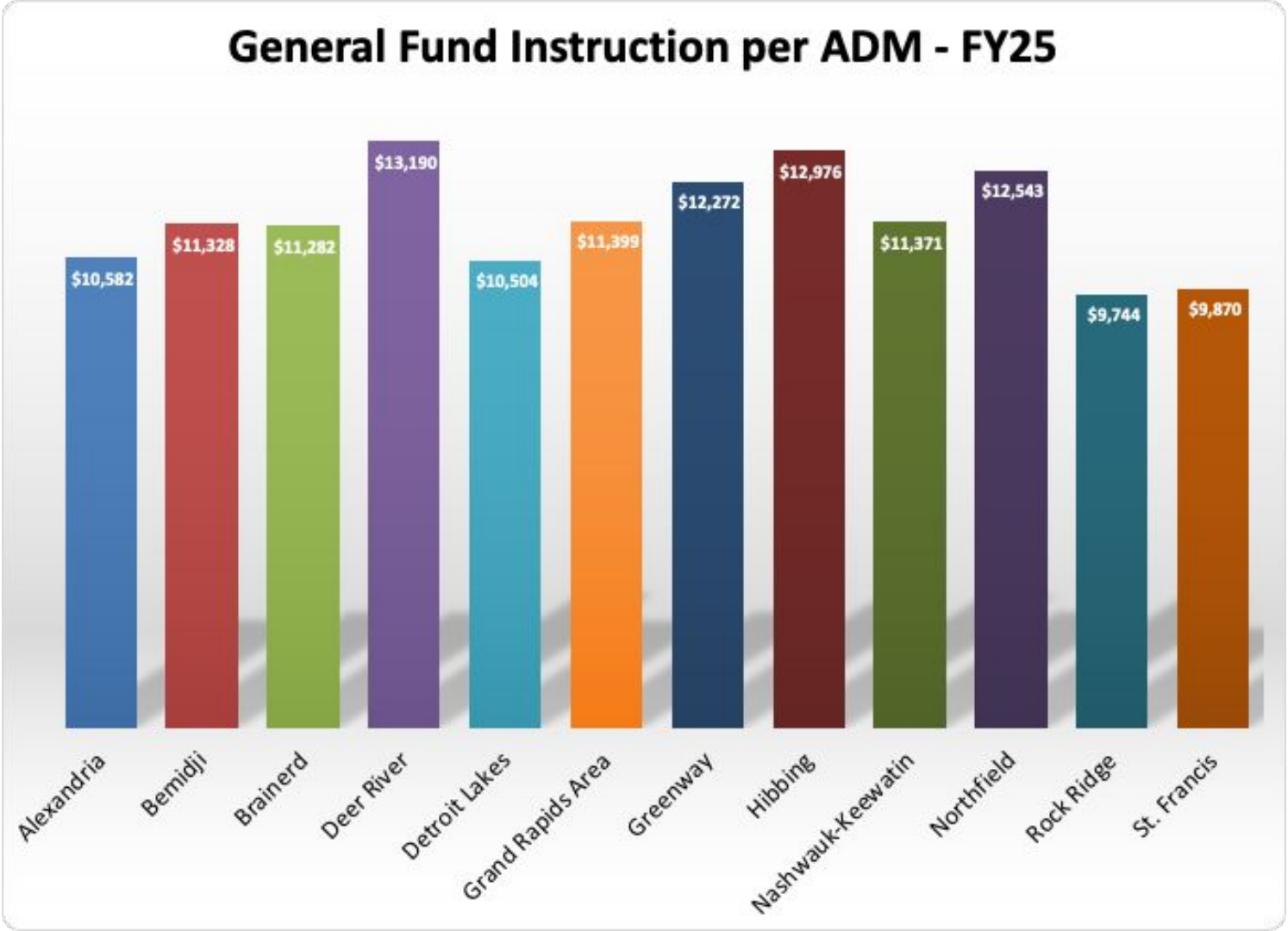
Total General Fund Revenue per ADM - FY25



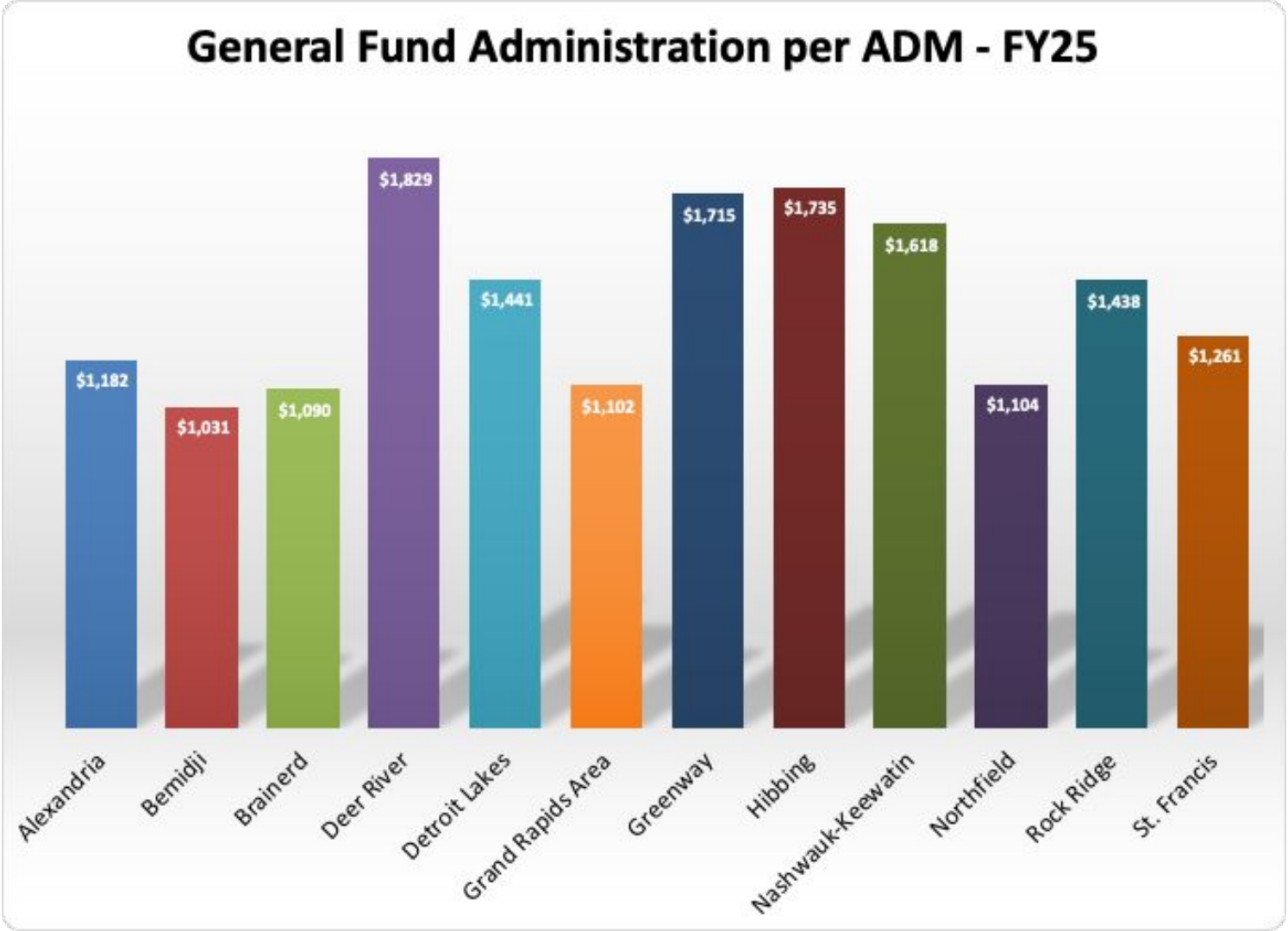
Total General Fund Expenditures per ADM - FY25



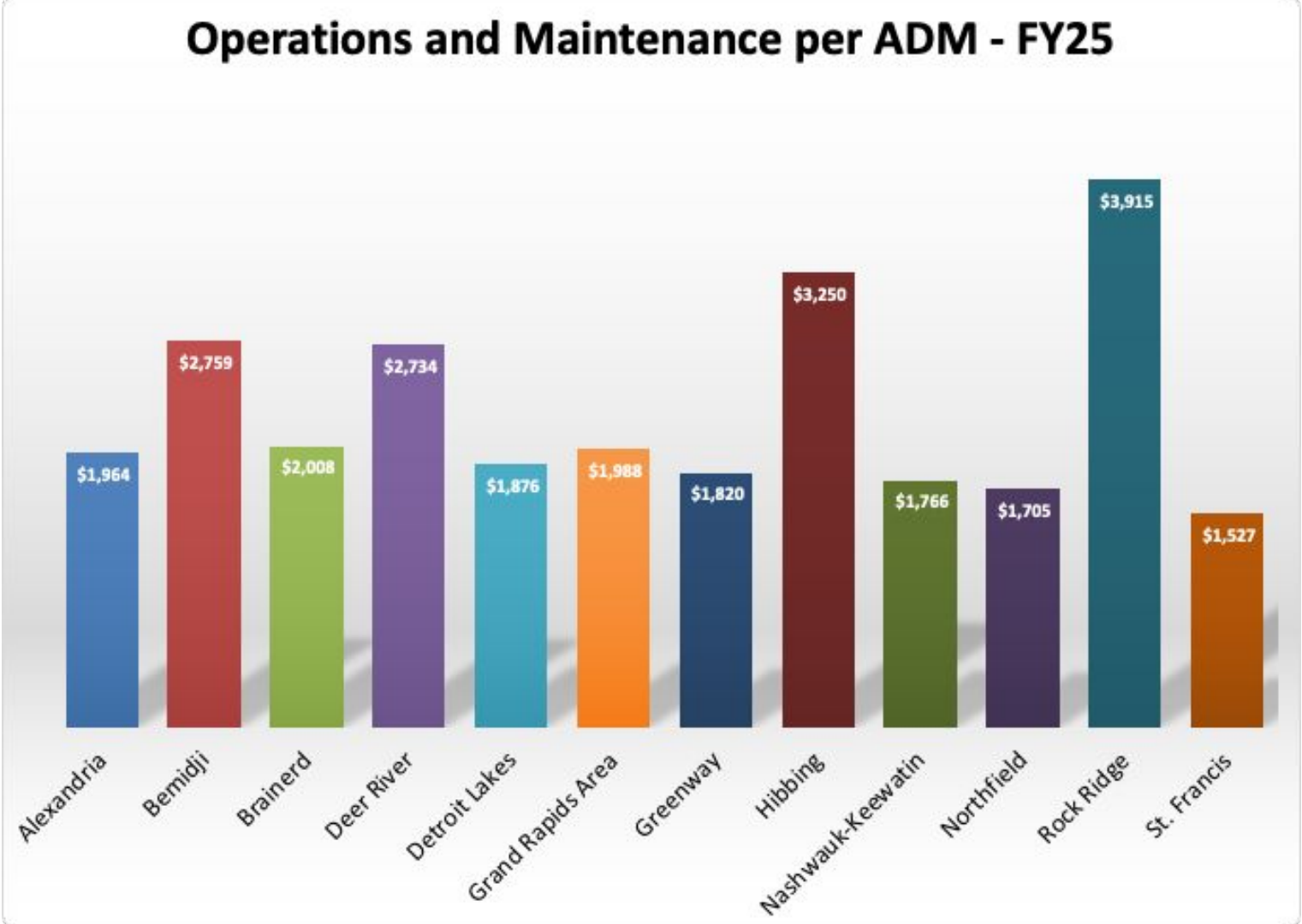
General Fund Instruction per ADM - FY25



General Fund Administration per ADM - FY25



Operations and Maintenance per ADM - FY25



Your Turn: Feedback

GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence

Feedback Questions

- What is one thing you learned about the Grand Rapids Area Schools financial situation?
- What question(s) do you have about the Grand Rapids Area Schools financial situation?

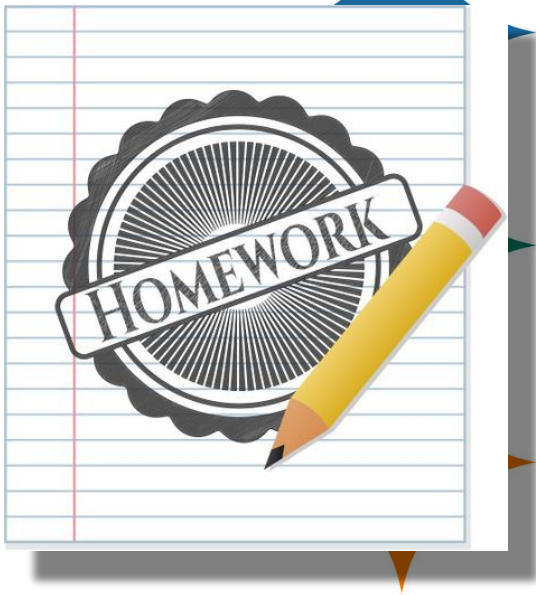


Next Steps & Homework

GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence

Next Steps & Homework

- Meeting #3 is scheduled for February 26, 2026
- Homework
  - Email will be in your inbox right after you leave with a link to a two-question survey.



Thank You!

GRAND RAPIDS AREA SCHOOLS
Resilience · Readiness · Excellence