

AMSD Position on Transportation Funding

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts supports the creation of a categorical program to reimburse school districts for the costs of transporting students to and from school consistent with state transportation, school choice and special education mandates.

AMSD BELIEVES

- Full funding for between-building and/or multi-district special education transportation should be provided, and such costs should remain in the transportation budget rather than special education.
- Transportation of special education students, charter school students, and non-public school students is not a fully funded mandate for school districts and the State needs to fulfill its responsibility to move these students.
- Transportation funding was “rolled in” to the general education formula starting in the 1996-7 school year, creating difficulty in oversight and tracking of dollars. Transportation funding needs to be removed from the general education formula, as its cost structure and pressures are distinct from other district programs.
- The State has neither funded nor authorized districts to levy for funds to pay for transportation expenditures and underlying mandates. Funding needs to be adequate, transparent, and allow for overall cost trends as well as shorter-term cost pressures related to energy.
- A bus acquisition program, separate from a district’s general fund, needs to be authorized, and “green fleet” incentives should be incorporated into transportation funding.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the 1996-7 school year, Minnesota school districts received transportation revenue and transportation sparsity revenue, based on separate formulas. In the last ten years, transportation revenue was merged into the general education formula, complicating policy analysis and budget tracking for transportation costs.

School districts operate transportation programs under a range of requirements. For example, the state does not require students living within two miles from school to be eligible for fully funded busing, unless the route involves physical hazards such as a highway. With open enrollment, districts have elected to provide unreimbursed busing to many students living well within the two-mile threshold, and state policy needs to recognize these competitive and safety demands.

While state law largely dictates for whom and how school districts provide transportation services, the State neither fully funds these activities nor authorizes districts to levy for them. The result is that school districts are exposed to variables outside of their control, including the extent of open enrollment, size of special education enrollment, private school and charter school busing needs, as well as the fluctuating capital and operating costs of maintaining a busing fleet.

The State should assume responsibility for financing transportation costs for charter and non-public school students. Statewide, school districts transported over 35,000 charter school students and over 57,000 non-public school students in the 2008-9 school year.



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