



Association of Metropolitan School Districts

1667 Snelling Ave. N., St. Paul, MN 55108 • 651-999-7325 • fax 651-999-7328 • www.amsd.org

AMSD Position on Special Education

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts supports increased state funding for special education to ensure that all students have the resources and opportunities necessary to achieve state and federal standards.

AMSD BELIEVES

- Special education services provided by Minnesota's public schools are critical to the education and quality of life of students with special needs.
- The reductions in children's mental health services provided by the State and Counties have created a system where public schools are the frontline of children's mental health services.
- A growing number of students are coming to school with increasingly complex special education disabilities and extraordinary mental health needs.
- State special education funding and policy must ensure a safe learning environment for both students and staff.
- Minnesota schools have been leaders in providing extracurricular opportunities to special education students outside of special education funding.

come close to that level of funding. The Special Education Expenditure Project (SEEP) estimates that it costs 1.9 times more to educate the average special education student than the average student without special needs.¹ According to SEEP, the federal government has never funded more than 17 percent of the national average of per-pupil expenditures. Minnesota started providing special education services in the 1950s, twenty years before the federal government mandate.

In March of 2013, the Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) released a comprehensive evaluation report on special education. Among the key findings was that many school districts are diverting state general education aid and referendum revenue to pay for mandated special education costs and that the special education student population in MN has grown by 11% since 2000.²

BACKGROUND

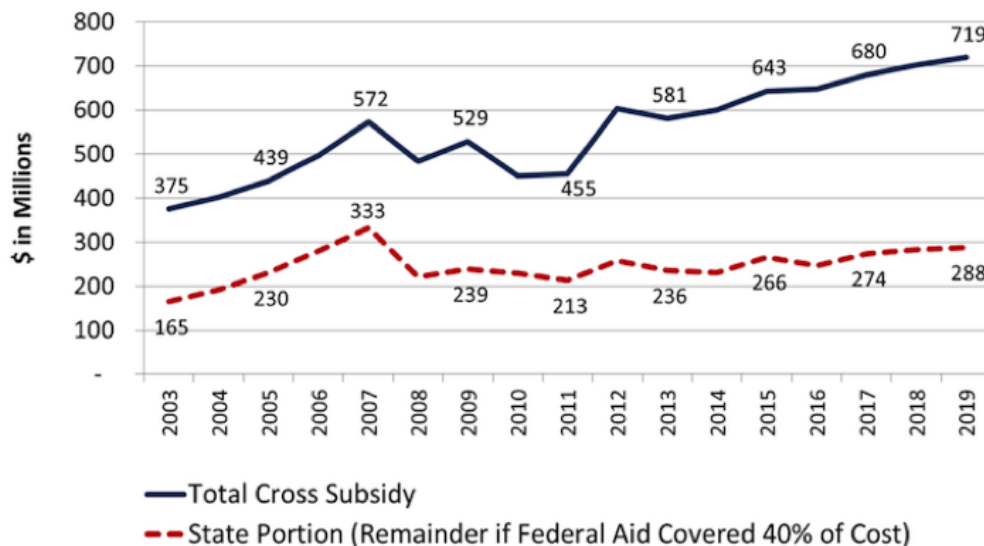
The federal government first mandated special education in 1975 when Congress required states to provide a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment to all children with disabilities from the ages of 3 to 21. While the 1975 law authorized federal funding of "up to 40 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure for each special education student," the federal government has never

The 2013 Legislature made some progress in addressing these findings by approving \$40 million for special education cross subsidy aid and requiring the serving school district to pay 10 percent of the costs for non-resident special education students they serve. Despite these recent actions, the graph on the next page clearly demonstrates that the special education cross-subsidy continues to present enormous budget challenges for school districts.

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Figure 1

SPECIAL EDUCATION CROSS SUBSIDY, FY 2003 - FY 2019 Total and State Portion , Current Dollars February 2016 Forecast



Source: Minnesota Department of Education

The special education cross-subsidy is the result of federal and state mandates, inadequate state and federal funding and the high level of services needed by and delivered to Minnesota’s special education students.³ The Minnesota Department of Education’s FY 2015 cross-subsidy report shows that special education costs exceeded state and federal special education aid by over \$410 million for AMSD member districts. Statewide, the cross-subsidy was \$643 million in FY 2015 and is projected to grow to \$680 million by FY 2016 and \$719 million by FY 2019.⁴ Figure 1, shows the projected special education cross-subsidy from 2013-2019. There is a common misperception that the cross-subsidy is strictly due to the failure of the federal government to meet its funding obligation. However, the special education cross subsidy would exceed \$200 million even if the federal government met its goal of covering 40% of special education costs.

Endnotes

¹ Special Education Expenditure Project, “What Are We Spending on Special Education Services in the United States, 1999-2000?” June 2004, Report funded by the United States Department of Education.

² Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, Evaluation Report: Special Education, available at: <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/ped/pedrep/sped.pdf>

³The special education cross-subsidy refers to the amount of general education revenue that a school district uses to pay for its special education program. In other words, the cross-subsidization estimate describes how much additional revenue a district needs to fund special education at the mandated level and still maintain funding for regular education programs. AMSD uses the adjusted net cross subsidy in its calculations.

⁴ Minnesota Department of Education, “Special Education Cross-Subsidies Fiscal Year 2015: Report to the Legislature.” Available: <http://www.amsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Special-EducationCrossSubsidies-FY2015-Legislative-Report.pdf>