

Ensuring an Equitable and Excellent Education for All

DRAFT AMSD 2019 Legislative Platform

Minnesota's future prosperity and ability to compete in the global economy is directly tied to successfully closing our racial and economic opportunity and achievement gaps while accelerating achievement for all students. Over the next two decades, millions of Baby Boomers throughout the nation will retire and leave the workforce, creating an unprecedented number of job openings. The looming workforce shortage comes as Minnesota and the nation are experiencing a major demographic transition.

While just six percent of our oldest residents (age 65+) are people of color, 31 percent of Minnesota's youngest residents (age 0-4) are children of color. The number of students eligible for English learner and special education services has risen significantly in recent years. The number of students living in poverty is at a record high and we have a growing number of homeless students. At the same time, Minnesota has significant racial and income-based disparities in employment, health care, home ownership and educational outcomes. It is imperative that we eliminate these racial and economic gaps and ensure every student graduates from high school ready for college or career.

Attaining this goal will require bold leadership and additional resources not currently provided by the State. It will also require that state policymakers and educators do things differently and think creatively with the bold leadership that was previously a Minnesota hallmark.

The AMSD Board of Directors has identified a series of recommendations to help Minnesota reclaim its place as a national leader in education by addressing its racial and economic disparities and ensuring equitable academic outcomes – high levels of achievement - for all students.

Stabilize Funding

Adequate, equitable and stable funding is essential to ensuring equitable academic outcomes for our students. Toward that end, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Increase the basic formula allowance by 3 percent per year and index the formula to inflation in future years;
- Increase special education funding to lower the state portion of the cross-subsidy by 50 percent over the next four years;
- Allow locally-elected school boards to renew an existing operating referendum;
- Index Local Optional Revenue to account for geographic wage differentials;
- Provide the school trust lands director the authority to maximize earnings from the school trust lands to benefit the trust beneficiaries – Minnesota's public school students.

Support Strategies to Help Close Opportunity and Achievement Gaps

We must strengthen and increase support for underperforming student groups to ensure every student graduates from high school ready for career or college. To address disparities and meet the needs of underserved students, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Increase funding for the English learner program to eliminate the shortfall;
- Create incentives and alternatives to attract, develop and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas;
- Expand the Extended Time Program so school districts can extend the school day, week and/or year to help struggling students succeed;
- Increase funding for school-based pre-kindergarten programs and fully fund all required program components;
- Provide more flexibility with state required assessments so school districts can offer assessments that more accurately measure student college or career readiness.

Ensure Safe Schools

To preserve public assets and ensure safe and secure learning environments for students and staff, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Increase the Safe Schools Levy for school districts and intermediate school districts to allow districts to hire additional counselors, social workers and other school support staff;
- Remove the per-pupil limit and expand the allowable uses of Long-Term Facilities Maintenance Revenue to allow school districts and intermediate school districts to enhance safety through security modifications to buildings, including remodeling and additions to existing space.

Increase Taxpayer Equity

Property tax levies play a critical role in funding education programs and facilities. However, these levies have widely varying impacts on local property taxpayers depending on the property wealth of the school district. These disparities should be addressed in the Omnibus Tax Bill. Specifically, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Increase equalization of the operating referendum, debt service and local optional levies;
- Oppose taxpayer subsidies of private education through vouchers, tax credits or scholarships.

Enhance Local Control

One size fits all mandates stifle innovation and creativity. Locally elected school boards are in the best position to work with their students, staff, parents and communities to address local needs and challenges. Specifically, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Refrain from enacting new unfunded mandates and reduce existing mandates and burdensome paperwork requirements;
- Expand the innovation zone law to allow school districts to try new instructional models, personalize student learning, and increase collaboration with post-secondary institutions and businesses;
- Allow locally-elected school boards to establish the school calendar that best meets the needs of their students and families.