



Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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AMSD Conference Committee Priorities 2021

The E-12 Education proposals from the Governor, House and Senate each include provisions that can help Minnesota students recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, close opportunity gaps to accelerate growth for students of color and other historically underserved students, and stabilize Minnesota's education funding system. AMSD urges the Governor and House and Senate leadership to adopt a budget target of \$750 million to allow the members of the Education Finance Conference Committee to draw on the strengths of each proposal and address the following priorities:

COVID-19 Recovery

The pandemic resulted in many school districts experiencing a significant, unanticipated enrollment decline that has had a major impact on school district budgets. To help school districts recover from the pandemic and meet the needs of each and every student, AMSD urges the conference committee to:

- Mitigate the impact of the pandemic related enrollment decline by allowing school districts to use the greater of the FY 20 or FY 21 pupil count or, at a minimum, enhancing the declining enrollment formula;
- Address the disparities in the allocation of the federal COVID relief funding to ensure all school districts are able to offer summer programming opportunities to address unfinished student learning and meet the mental health needs of students;
- Extend authority for school districts to offer distance learning through the 2021-22 school year to meet the needs of students and families; and
- Streamline the process to obtain a short-call substitute teaching license to align with the Tier 1 licensing requirement to teach a class in a career and technical education or career pathways course of study.

Stabilize Funding

Even before the pandemic, the state's education funding system was unstable and unpredictable. To stabilize the funding system, the conference committee should:

- Increase the basic formula by 2 percent per year for the next two years and **index the formula to inflation;**

- At a minimum, increase special education funding to a level sufficient to prevent the cross-subsidy from growing in the next biennium and develop and implement a plan to close the cross-subsidy;
- Link local optional revenue to the formula allowance;
- Allow locally elected school boards to renew an existing operating referendum following a public hearing and opportunity for public testimony; and
- Refrain from enacting any new unfunded mandates.

Close Opportunity Gaps

To close opportunity gaps and address our unacceptable racial disparities, the conference committee should:

- Increase funding for the English learner program to close the funding shortfall and link the EL formula to the basic formula allowance;
- Expand programs and incentives to attract, develop and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas;
- Link extended time revenue to the formula allowance;
- Maintain multiple pathways to licensure in the tiered licensing system; and
- Provide permanent funding for the 4,000 voluntary prekindergarten/school readiness plus seats that will otherwise expire.

Tax Priorities

Property tax levies play a critical role in funding education programs and facilities. These levies have widely varying impacts on local property taxpayers depending on the property wealth of the school district. To address taxpayer and funding disparities and support public education, the conference committee should:

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