



Legislative Action Coalition

2021 State Legislative Platform for Public Education

Under the current public health safety restrictions, Minnesota school districts have been charged with the monumental task of educating students from a distance, supporting families with essential meals and services, supplying computers and internet to every household, while also balancing the health and wellness concerns of parents, teachers, and staff. The expectations have never been higher and the resulting financial responsibilities of school districts are now more challenging than ever. We are at a crossroad. This is a unique opportunity - brought on by a pandemic - for a do-over. Let's seize this chance to **ReMake** public school for the 21st Century, and to unleash every child's potential. In Hopkins Public Schools, we seek collaboration with the Governor's office and the Minnesota Legislature to help us meet the essential needs of our community with the appropriate funding to accomplish this.

ReStart: a new beginning

Public education in Minnesota needs a **ReStart** that adequately funds our school districts and gives locally-elected school boards the authority to make the decisions that reflect the needs of their communities. In accordance with the 2020 Commissioner's School Finance Working Group, the general education formula must be increased by 3% annually for the next biennium, and increases thereafter should be indexed to inflation.

ReDefine: reexamine, reevaluate, especially with a view to change

In order to meet the needs of the whole child, schools must **ReDefine** education from a deficit-based model to a strength-based one. This means delivering services that support, engage, and educate all learners, removing barriers to mental health care, and elevating critical supports necessary for personalized learning. Fully fund the programs that make this possible - special education, gifted and talented, early education, english language learners, and mental health in the schools.

ReThink: think again, reassess, make changes

Schools are acting as one-stop service providers for families. **ReThink** how we provide social safety nets, quality nutrition programs, and wellness supports with the goal of serving and stabilizing entire families, not only students. Streamline and integrate funding between social services and school districts, and creatively partner with corporate Minnesota to invest in the educated workforce they desire.

ReBoot: start anew or make a fresh start

The creativity and flexibility of our teachers and paraprofessionals is profoundly evident as they pivot between in-person, distance, and hybrid models. The job is not easy and the need is urgent. We must **ReBoot** the educational landscape by recruiting, training, and retaining culturally competent teachers with multiple pathways to licensure, latitude in hiring substitute teachers, and generating a robust school culture that mentors and empowers teachers and students with diverse lived experiences.

ReImagine: reinterpret with a refreshed or new viewpoint

Minnesota has always been a pioneer in education. Minnesota's evolving demographics and changes in our world demand we **ReImagine** what schools look like. Create new, and expand existing, funding streams for safe and secure schools, differentiated learning experiences, teacher development, and restorative justice practices.

Anything but REPEAT:

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

ReEvaluate and **ReStructure** statewide school funding to prioritize learning **for the 21st Century**, not the 19th. Equity, access, and opportunity for **all** students does not require a new amendment to the state constitution, but rather an unwavering commitment to educate all MN public school students **now**. The work has already begun: our time and treasure is better spent on actualizing the statewide goals of **ReImagine Minnesota**.

HOPKINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ReStart



A NEW BEGINNING

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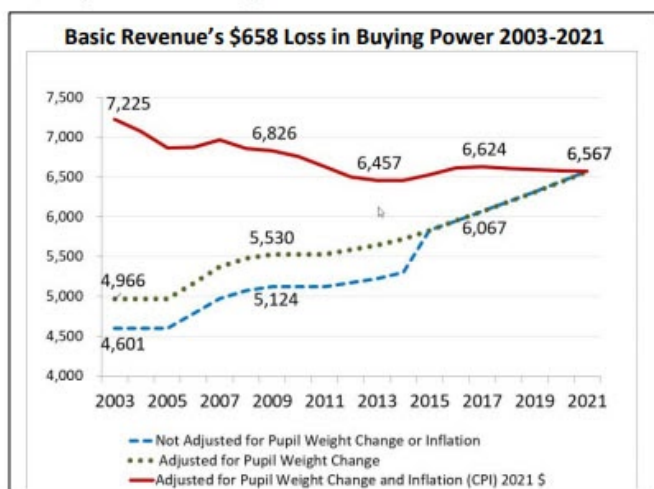
Constitutional Obligation

The founders of Minnesota believed that an educated electorate was indispensable to a republican form of government. To that end, Article 13, Section 1, of the Minnesota state constitution specifies that it is the "duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools" and that they be funded by "taxation or otherwise." Section 2 specifies that no public aid be given to schools that teach "doctrines, creeds or tenets of any particular Christian or other religious sect."

Evolution of School Funding

Under the "Minnesota Miracle" of 1971, the legislature gave school districts the ability to levy, with voter approval, for additional property tax revenue to cover general operating costs. Under Governor Ventura, a plan was set in place to shift the primary source of education funding back to the state. Unfortunately, the legislature failed to follow through and the state's share of funding for general education steadily declined from 70% in 2003 to approximately 53% today, and the ability of districts to levy for their share has been restricted. Making school districts rely on property taxes for some basic educational needs has also resulted in inequities between districts with high property values and those with lower property values.

Because state funding has failed to keep up with inflation, school districts today receive \$658 less in state aid per student than they did in 2003 on an inflation-adjusted basis. Based on 2019 enrollment, that means that Hopkins receives roughly \$4.4 million dollars less this year than we received in 2003, even as our educational needs have increased.



The 2% annual increase that has become standard in the last few years is inadequate to keep up with inflationary cost increases experienced by school districts, which has resulted in widespread and persistent cuts to education budgets across the state. Because of this, the Hopkins Legislative Action Coalition is requesting that the general education formula be increased by 3% annually for the next biennium and that increases thereafter be indexed to inflation to provide school districts with a dependable and predictable source of revenue.

Reduce Mandates

We ask the legislature to repeal unnecessarily restrictive mandates that increase administrative expenses and limit the ability of locally elected

(over)

school boards to address the unique needs of their students and community. We also ask the legislature to provide the necessary funding for mandate compliance if additional mandates are imposed. An example of a recent unfunded mandate is the Wage Theft law that requires all organizations, including those covered by collective bargaining agreements “like school districts” to provide numerous written notices to employees whenever they are hired, promoted, redeployed, given salary increases, etc.. Compliance with the Wage Theft law has resulted in increased costs for compliance without any compensating funding.

Local Control

Each school district faces unique needs which depend on a variety of factors including demographics, geography, and district size. Locally-elected school boards are in the best position to work with their staff, students, parents, and communities to address local needs and challenges. As such, school boards should be given the authority to set their own school calendars, to start the school year before Labor Day, if desired, or to implement a year-round school calendar without getting prior approval from the Department of Education. Likewise, locally-elected school boards should be allowed to mail referendum notices before the start of early voting and to publish official notices and meeting minutes on their website rather than in a local newspaper.

Elected school boards should also be given the authority to approve previously-approved operating levies without having to submit them again to voters. This legislative requirement to submit already approved levies to a public referendum has proven to be an expensive and unnecessary exercise as, statewide, 100% of those levies have been re-approved by voters from 2014 to our most recent election this year in 2020.

Year	Approval
2014	18 of 18 approved
2015	22 of 22 approved
2016	14 of 14 approved
2017	20 of 20 approved
2018	8 of 8 approved
2019	10 of 10 approved
2020	12 of 12 approved

No other taxing authority in the state has this requirement imposed upon them, not even the unelected board of the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District. The Hopkins LAC urges passage of HF 116 (Authored by Freiberg, Youakim, and Elkins, among others) and SF 109 (Authored by Rest and Latz and others) to allow school boards to renew expiring levies without referendum.

Because school funding is so fragmented, school districts are subject to spending oversight that is unique among other local government entities. Every source of funding except general education funding has its own rules and regulations which must be adhered to and reported on. For example, before school districts can spend any money from their long-term facilities maintenance fund (LTFM), expenditures need to be pre-approved by the state. Not only does this add to the length of projects, it often results in curious situations such as when an internet cable is an acceptable expenditure but the conduit in which it is contained is not.

Some school district functions, like student mental health services, are funded through a series of grants of various lengths. Those grants have to be applied for and each has its unique reporting requirements, taking additional staff and time. Other programs, like early childhood education, are funded by various state and federal sources which each have their own application and reporting requirements.

Public education in Minnesota needs a **ReStart** that adequately funds our school districts and gives locally-elected school boards the authority to make the decisions that reflect the needs of their communities.

ReDefine



REEXAMINE, REEVALUATE, ESPECIALLY WITH A VIEW TO CHANGE

In order to meet the needs of the whole child, schools must **ReDefine** education from a deficit-based model to a strength-based one. This means delivering services that support, engage and educate all learners, removing barriers to mental

health care and elevating critical supports necessary for personalized learning. Fully fund the programs that make this possible - special education, gifted and talented, early education, english language learners, and mental health in the schools.

- Fully Fund Special Education as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to all students. **Hopkins experienced a \$7.1 million shortfall in 2019**
- Provide immediate and stable resources for school-linked mental health services as well as proactive student-focused initiatives such as wellness centers, in school meditation and conflict resolution training. Having access to mental health is even more important now as our families grapple with the dual pandemics of COVID and systemic racism
- Schools are required to identify students who meet Gifted and Talented educational criteria, but the state does not provide adequate funding to teach those students. **In Hopkins we receive only 10% of the funds needed to fully engage students in gifted and talented curriculum**
- English language learners enrich our school communities. Yet the state does not provide adequate funding to meet their needs, **resulting in a cross subsidy of \$1,392,909 in Hopkins**. We urge the legislature to fully fund our linguistic scholars and the programs that serve them
- To ensure quality early learning models that serve all families, we ask that you join us in crafting **a bold new piece of Early Learning legislation** that ties all of the disparate funding streams together, simplifies funding sources, and eliminates unnecessary barriers to early learning for all Hopkins families by:
 - Ensuring flexible funding for early childhood programs so students enter classrooms that represent the full diversity of their community
 - Streamlining the financial aid application for parents to increase access for our most vulnerable families. It is currently three pages of instructions for an 11-page application

- Permanently funding School Readiness-Plus so that schools can rely on those dollars for program consistency and staffing
- Addressing the teacher shortage, attract teachers of color to this field and retain the early childhood staff we currently have by providing alternative pathways to teacher licensure, keep the current tiered system and create a statewide starting rate of pay ensuring that **all** licensed teachers are compensated at the same rate
- Streamlining the system for meeting Parent Aware requirements by acknowledging the high standards school districts have already set and continue to maintain



ReThink

THINK AGAIN, REASSESS, MAKE CHANGES

Schools are acting as one-stop service providers for families. **ReThink** how we provide social safety nets, food stability, and wellness supports with the goal of **serving and stabilizing entire families**, not only students. Streamline and integrate funding

between social services and school districts, and creatively partner with corporate Minnesota to invest in the educated workforce they desire.

- Creatively partner with corporate Minnesota to invest in the educated workforce they desire: incentivize endowments, internships, visiting lecturers/professionals
- Streamline and integrate funding between social services and school districts
 - Robust mental health and wellness services for students are needed now more than ever. Increase access and provide secure supports for families by **stabilizing funding for Mental Health in the Schools**
 - **Fully fund school nutrition programs**, providing food security and increasing educational outcomes across the state, pass HF 4075, but go further in supporting families by eliminating the free meals application, innovating other ways to assess community need for additional educational funding, etc
- Consider the potential for community schools and year-round schools to serve and stabilize entire families, not only students, so they can sooner move beyond the need for social service
 - **Remove legislative barriers** (like school year calendar restrictions, Carnegie Units and truancy laws) so that schools can innovate to meet the unique needs of all families in their communities



START ANEW OR MAKE A FRESH START

The creativity and flexibility of our teachers and paraprofessionals is profoundly evident now as they have had to pivot between in-person, distance, and hybrid learning models. The job is not easy and the need is urgent.

We must **ReBoot** the educational landscape by recruiting, training, and retaining culturally competent teachers with multiple pathways to licensure, latitude in hiring substitute teachers, and generating a robust school culture that mentors and empowers teachers and students with diverse lived experiences.

- Maintain multiple pathways to licensure in the tiered licensing system to create a larger pool of candidates:
 - Minnesota's 2018 adoption of a tiered licensure system and the establishment of the Professional Educator and Licensure Standards Board (PELSB) was an **important first step** for school districts to attract high quality candidates from other states, including states with larger populations of diverse teachers
- Ensure that Minnesota students have access to qualified teachers from around the US/world, by creating incentives and alternatives to **attract, develop and retain teachers**
- Reimagine a culturally responsive teaching workforce in Minnesota:
 - Recognizing the global pandemic of racial injustice, we need systemic strategies for **teacher training**
- Protect newly-hired teachers, particularly Black, Indigineous, and People Of Color, from dismissal simply due to a lack of seniority
- Provide funding for additional professional and culturally responsive training for paraprofessionals (and all) staff



REINTERPRET WITH A REFRESHED OR NEW VIEWPOINT

Minnesota has always been a pioneer in education, and we can't fall behind. Minnesota's evolving demographics and changes in our world call for us to **ReImagine** what schools look like. Create new

and expand existing funding streams to allow for safe and secure schools, differentiated learning experiences, teacher development, and restorative justice practices.

We need to take steps to transform school culture in order to make our schools places where all of our scholars will thrive. The work has already begun: our time and treasure is better spent on actualizing the statewide goals of **Reimagine Minnesota**.

- Create a task force at the Minnesota Department of Education to write an **ethnic studies curriculum**, with funding attached, that may be implemented at schools across the state
- Reform state standards away from an outdated Euro-Centric model, to better align with accurate and cultural history
- Let districts pilot year-round school to alleviate the pressure, stress, and demands put on staff and scholars
- Increase mentorship, development, recruitment and retention of our diverse workforce through stabilizing and increasing the funding streams established through statutory grants
- Infuse Safe and Secure Schools grants with the flexibility needed to fund restorative justice practices in our schools, chemical counselors, social-emotional curriculum and wellness supports
- Move away from antiquated educational goals to create pathways for individualized learning that support **students' goals** and honors their voices
- Ensure equitable access across the state to resources and opportunities that will support differentiated learning for differentiated abilities

Anything but REPEAT



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state constitution, but rather an unwavering commitment to educate all Minnesota public school students **now**.

- **Redefine** student success metrics based on competency, not credits; use the best tools available instead of what's always been done
- Fund what is mandated, and mandate only what is **beneficial to students**
- **Stop** funding via one-time grants and stop-gap puddles of money with limited first-come-first-serve availability
- Identify funding needs and shortfalls and strategize to ensure stable, sufficient funding to educate all learners
- Zip code should not determine student opportunity: **reduce** the need for local levies by indexing state aid to inflation
- Allow for flexibility and/or redistribution of funds in school budgets: for example, allow long-term maintenance funds to be used for repairs, as determined by the locally elected school board