

2017 Legislative Platform

SEE MISSION STATEMENT

All public school children must have equal access to a high quality education regardless of where they live in Minnesota.

TAX RELIEF AND REFORM

Current property tax policy reduces educational opportunity for many students throughout Minnesota.

Without significant commercial and industrial development to expand the tax base and lower the overall taxpayer cost, the cost for school levies falls heavily on the local home and small business owners in low-property wealth districts. This reduces the amount of revenue that districts can access from local taxpayers to support their students' needs. Through increased equalization—state assistance in local school levies—this inequitable property tax burden must be reduced. The following measures should be enacted to help remedy the current situation:

- Increase state assistance to low-property wealth school districts for local school operating and building bonds levies by increasing the equalizing factors for the referendum equalization and debt service equalization programs and indexing equalization to inflation.
- Approve the remaining recommendations of the School Facilities Finance Working Group issued in February, 2014. Correcting the current imbalance in the property tax burden on the capital projects levy and lease levies by equalizing these levies is a top priority.
- Ease the impact on school levies from agricultural and seasonal/recreational property. The burden on these classes of property has reached a level that makes it difficult for local taxpayers to support school levy questions in districts with high concentration of these types of properties.

Funding for property tax relief related to school levies should be part of state tax policy with resources coming the tax committee budget target and not the education budget target.

ADEQUATE FUNDING

Equitable state investments in public education will provide a high-quality education for all students and help lessen—but not eliminate—the reliance on voter-approved levies. Education funding has not kept pace with either inflation or the rising expectations for student achievement. Low-property wealth districts are unable to pass levies to make up for inadequate state funding, which has created wide disparities in educational opportunity. To close this opportunity gap, SEE recommends the following actions:

- Increase the basic formula by at least 3% in each of the next two years. Recent increases in the basic formula have done little to make up for the significant loss of buying power due to inflation over the past two decades.
- Increase the state's share of special education funding. The amount of revenue school districts must divert from their general funds to pay for mandated but unreimbursed services exceeds \$600 million per year. It is crucial that this shortfall in state funding for special education be funded.
- The legislature passed a new teacher development and evaluation (TDE) law, which began in the 2014-15 school year. Provide funding for *all* districts to participate in the state's alternative compensation—QComp—program to pay for the ongoing cost of the teacher development and evaluation mandate. Additionally, flexibility must be given to districts currently participating in QComp to allow funding to be directed towards TDE.
- Create a program for districts that receive categorical and referendum revenue below the state average that will narrow the gap between high- and low-revenue districts.
- Continue state efforts to expand access to high-quality broadband services.

EDUCATION POLICY

Pure education policy does not have a cost to the state but many times costs school districts substantial resources. The following policy issues are equity issues to SEE districts that have emerged as critical concerns. Policy must be implemented so SEE's metro and outstate districts are able to provide the same high quality opportunities to their students no matter the zip code.

EARLY LEARNING

SEE understands that quality early learning opportunities prepare children for kindergarten, particularly for at-risk children. Research is mixed on whether universal preschool provides long-lasting benefits in student achievement. However emerging research indicates that in the states where children experience lasting benefits, a very well-resourced, quality-driven program is the top priority. **If universal preschool is to be further expanded, the state must address the many challenges including:**

- Funding – provide an adequate and sustainable funding source where preschoolers are weighted the same as children in kindergarten at 1.0 for full-day programs and 0.6 for half-day programs. Additional funds should provide students with access to necessary classroom equipment and facilities through capital funds. In addition, the mechanics of transporting 4-year-old children may require different types of buses, more buses and additional routes, which will necessitate additional resources.
- Space – lack of space will prevent equitable preschool opportunities and can be addressed through a board-approved, fully-equalized facilities levy that gives districts flexibility in leasing versus building decisions.
- Classroom teachers – create a plan to ensure the availability of qualified classroom teachers.
- Quality assurance of partnerships – provide financial incentives for school districts to work with and strengthen local child-care providers through shared curriculum and staff development to assure that all children will be kindergarten ready. However, for many districts, building capacity through local partnerships is not an option as quality private early learning alternatives do not exist.

TEACHER SHORTAGE

The teacher shortage was once limited to a few specific curricular areas and not widely experienced throughout the state. Over the past decade, that situation has changed dramatically and teacher shortages loom both across the curriculum and around the state. Lower funded districts and districts in outstate Minnesota struggle to recruit and retain quality teachers.

- Streamline teacher licensure requirements to get more high quality teachers into the classroom.
- Provide financial incentives to attract more individuals to the teaching profession.

CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

The decision made by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to require high school teachers to have a master degree in the content area if they are to teach concurrent enrollment classes will decimate the successful and popular program in Minnesota. SEE strongly supports legislative efforts to ease this requirement.

- Expand opportunities for those seeking to teach concurrent enrollment courses to find affordable, assessable and time-sensitive options to earn the credentials necessary to continue these programs in the event the HLC does not soften its position on this matter.
- Work with the HLC to allow teachers currently teaching concurrent enrollment courses to continue to do so.