

2018 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

Property tax policy inequities limit educational opportunities 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 local taxpayers can provide to support their local schools. Through increased equalization—state aid in local school levies—this inequitable property tax burden can be reduced. The following measures must be enacted:

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

- Increase state aid in low-property wealth school districts for local school operating and building bonds levies by increasing the equalizing factors for the referendum, debt service and lease levy equalization programs.
- Index all tiers of the operating referendum equalization to inflation, like the indexing of debt service and long-term facilities maintenance levies, so the effectiveness of this state aid will not erode over time.

ADEQUATE FUNDING

Although not a major funding year, continued equitable 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. This is a statewide problem that requires statewide solutions rather than more grants and narrowly-delivered programs that benefit isolated sets of districts. To close this opportunity gap, SEE recommends the following actions:

- Increase the basic formula by at least an additional 1% for the 2018-19 school year. Recent increases in the vital basic formula have done little to make up for the significant loss of buying power due to inflation over the past two decades.
- Provide funding to offset any increase that school districts must pay into the teacher retirement account (TRA).
- Increase the state's share of special education funding and reexamine the new special education funding formula to address unintended inequities among districts. The amount of revenue school districts must divert from their general fund to pay for mandated but unreimbursed special education services is not sustainable and jeopardizes the quality of public education in Minnesota.
- Include a constitutional amendment on the 2018 election ballot asking Minnesotans if they support an increase to the state sales tax by 1% dedicated for E-12 public education. Each district's school board would locally control the funding to meet their district's educational needs such as reducing the unfunded cost of special education services (known as the cross subsidy), decreasing the reliance on property taxes, addressing technology initiatives, strengthening broadband access, and upgrading facilities or equipment.
- Oppose measures – particularly increases in tax credits and tax deductions for private school tuition – that reduce resources available to support students in public schools.
- Provide districts with additional equalized board-approved referendum authority to help maintain programs.

POLICY RELIEF

Policy that diverts resources of time or money is an equity issue for the lowest-funded school districts. Districts must have local control to manage limited resources to provide the best possible education for all students.

- Allow school districts to use increases in compensatory funding where most needed to meet the needs of their students.
- Allow school boards to renew existing voter-approved operating referendum as was the law prior to the mid-1990s.
- Eliminate the school levy ballot language, "BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE. " when an expiring bond combined with a proposed referendum increase reduces or does not increase total school levy property taxes.
- Remove the cap on Pathway II early learning scholarships to maximize preschool access for low-income families, particularly in rural Minnesota.
- Find a legislative solution that allows high school teachers teaching concurrent enrollment courses to continue to do so after the Higher Learning Commission enforces the requirement that teachers have 18 college credits in the content area.
- Eliminate the redundant requirement where students must pass 30 out of 50 questions from the naturalization test as this information is already part of the state's required curriculum.