

St. Cloud Area School District 742
Board of Education
2019 Legislative Platform

Adopted by the District 742 School Board on January 16, 2019

The Constitution of the State of Minnesota, in Article XXIII, section One states:

“The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state”.

St. Cloud District 742 is a unique district with 61.5% free/reduced lunch (State average is 37.2%), 20% special education (State average is 15.7%) and 24% EL student populations (State average is 8.3%). These demographics present challenges to our district that make it difficult to provide a quality education for all our students without adequate funding. Yet, District 742 continues to focus work toward the World Best Workforce Goals of:

- All children are ready for school
- All third-graders can read at grade level
- All racial & economic achievement gaps are closed
- All students are ready for career and college
- All students graduate from high school

With those goals in mind the District 742 Board of Education wishes to focus our legislative platform on the following areas of greatest concern and we urge the Governor and Legislators to:

Goal #1: Eliminate the Special Education Cross Subsidy.

- **Increase special education funding to a point that fully funds the state share of the cross-subsidy.**

Background: Special Education

Minnesota continues to fall woefully short of fulfilling its obligation to adequately fund mandated special education programming. Consequently, school districts are forced to re-direct funds meant for regular classroom instruction to pay for mandated special education programs. Larger cities and regional centers typically have much higher special education populations and therefore much larger special education cross subsidies. These large cross subsidies disproportionately affect these school districts, causing disproportionate funding in regular classroom programming from district to district, statewide. While general formula increases help all districts, they do not help to eliminate the disproportionality of programming caused by mandated and underfunded special education costs.

In St. Cloud, the Special Education budget is \$35,632,043. Despite every effort to make our Special Education program more efficient and cost-effective, our cross-subsidy for the 2018-19 school year is expected to be \$10,591,363.00. As a Regional Center, our special needs population continues to grow. Addressing the special education cross-subsidy is vital to the financial health of District 742!

Statewide, the shortfall in funding special education to state standards is now at about \$1.5 billion for the biennium, and it is scheduled to rise substantially over the next several years.

Goal #2: Adequately Fund Education

- Increase the Basic Formula by 3%'
- Index the Basic Formula to the rate of inflation
- Increase funding for Gifted & Talented Programs from \$13 to \$39 per pupil

Background: Funding

Adequate and stable funding is essential to ensuring equitable academic outcomes for our students. According to Association of Metropolitan School Districts research, the basic education formula would be \$550 per pupil higher today if it had simply kept pace with inflation since 2003.

Gifted & Talented Programs are currently funded at \$13 per pupil. We support the efforts of the Minnesota Educators of Gifted & Talented (MEGT) to increase that amount to \$39 per pupil so as to provide accelerated programs for all students who qualify.

Goal #3: Increase Funding for school-based pre-kindergarten programs and fully fund all required program components.

- Preschool education is a critical educational strategy to ensure **all** children are ready for kindergarten.
- St. Cloud has qualified for both Voluntary Pre-K and School Readiness Plus funding. Pathway II Scholarships have played a critical role in providing the opportunity for our three-year-old children to attend Preschool classes.
- Both VPK and School Readiness Plus are scheduled to sunset at the end of the 2018-19 school year.
- The waiting list for our 3-year old Preschool classes is 85 students. The waiting list for our 4-year old Preschool classes is 196 students.
- At the very least; continue to fund the VPK and School Readiness Plus programs developed in the 2016 and 2017 Legislative sessions at current levels.

Background: Preschool

During the 2016 legislative session, a VPK grant program was enacted for 4-year old's, based on free/reduced lunch eligibility. MDE received 184 applications, with just 74 districts approved due to limited funding. St. Cloud was one of those 74. The School Readiness Plus program was created during the 2017 session. St. Cloud was approved as one of just 30 districts (182 applied) to receive these funds.

School-based early learning programs provide the highest likelihood of success in preparing children to enter kindergarten with the skills, behavior and knowledge needed to progress and flourish.

Goal #4: Oppose Legislation directed toward diverting public education dollars.

- Legislation that would establish any type of voucher system for private schools that uses general fund dollars should not be supported.
- Legislation that would provide a tax credit for donating to a scholarship fund that would provide scholarships to private schools should not be supported.

Background: Vouchers/Tax Credits

Research has documented that vouchers and tax credits go primarily to those who have already enrolled students in the private school system and wealthy families. Furthermore, they take funding out of the State General Fund so that less money is available for public education.