

2016 Legislative Platform

Funding

Fill gaps in the current funding system.

Even with the increases provided during the 2015 Legislative Session, noticeable and profound gaps exist in the education funding system. To remedy this situation, SEE recommends the following measures:

- Create a program for districts that receive categorical and referendum revenue per pupil unit below the state average that will narrow the gap between districts at the top and bottom of this funding continuum.
- Increase the state's share of special education funding. The amount of revenue diverted from districts' general funds to pay for unreimbursed special education costs exceeds \$600 million for the current school year. These unreimbursed special education costs must be reduced.
- Provide additional funding to cover the proposed employer increases to the Teacher Retirement Account (TRA) to prevent the shift of dollars from the classroom.
- Eliminate the cap on the alternative compensation appropriation, also known as Q-comp, allowing all districts to become eligible to receive revenue under this program.

Alternatively, create a separate

revenue stream for districts not participating in the alternative compensation program to help meet the comparable costs associated with the state-mandated teacher development and evaluation program.

- Increase funding for career and technical education ensuring that all students have access to programs that will fit their future plans.
- Provide funding for technology to include both devices and infrastructure. Fully equalize the capitol project levy.
- Fully fund the concurrent enrollment program.
- Update the transportation sparsity formula to reflect the true costs of district transportation.

Increase the basic formula

The 2% increase in the basic formula for each school year in the current biennium enacted by the Legislature in 2015 was a welcome occurrence. However, this increase did nothing to make up for the significant loss of basic formula buying power due to inflation over the past twenty years. As a result, many school districts will still need to cut programming without more basic formula revenue. The state's strong economic performance has provided the Legislature with the opportunity to add another 1% to the formula for 2016-17 school year.

Tax Relief and Reform

Address school tax provisions in the tax committees.

Tax provisions related to education funding are a large part of Minnesota's overall property tax framework. Many of these provisions provide tax relief to low-property wealth districts. These initiatives are tax policy and tax fairness issues and should not be in competition with provisions that directly provide revenue to school districts.

Make building bonds and operating levies more affordable to taxpayers in low-property wealth districts.

Great progress was made on school facilities funding during the 2015 Legislative Session, as the centerpiece recommendation of the Facilities Finance Working Group was adopted. SEE urges adoption of the following equalization proposals in 2016, some of which are recommendations from the Working Group.

Increase the equalization factor for debt-service equalization and index to inflation.

Increase the Tier 2 equalization factor for the referendum and index to inflation.

Equalize the capital projects levy and the lease levy.

Continue to address the impact of agricultural and seasonal/recreational property.

The impact of agricultural and seasonal/recreational property has reached a level that makes it difficult for many property taxpayers in school districts with high concentrations of these types of property to support local levy questions.

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Policy

Take steps to alleviate the 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. Continue to streamline teacher licensure requirements to get more high quality teachers into the classroom and provide financial incentives to attract more individuals to the teaching profession.

- Create tuition assistance programs for both existing teachers and students in teacher preparation programs.
- Provide financial support for paraprofessionals to earn a teaching license.
- Increase time for student teaching assignments to an academic year with pay.

Protect the concurrent enrollment program.

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.

Ensure quality early learning programming in Minnesota.

SEE understands that quality early learning opportunities are instrumental in preparing children for kindergarten, particularly for at risk children. With limited funding, School Readiness programming currently serves a number of at risk 3-5 year olds in public schools with documented success. If Minnesota moves to add voluntary universal preschool as an early learning strategy, SEE members want to partner with the Governor and Legislature to develop high-quality preschool programming through careful planning and attainable goals. It is far easier to build quality from the start than to try to improve quality after achieving full universal coverage.

The state's capacity to build and maintain high-quality preschool programming requires realistic solutions to many of the known challenges including:

- Funding – provide an adequate and sustainable funding source where preschoolers are weighted the same as children in kindergarten. If the instructional days are increased or the staff ratios decreased, the preschool weighting must be proportionally increased. Additional funds should provide students with access to necessary classroom equipment and facilities through capital funds, and services such as special education, English learner, transportation and other support programs. 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.
- Flexibility – allow school districts to offer a variety of preschool opportunities to meet the needs of their local children and families.
- Space – lack of space will prevent universal availability 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. For many districts, building capacity through local partnerships is not an option as quality private early learning alternatives do not exist.
- School Readiness – continue programming for the 3-5 year-olds not served by universal preschool.
- Leadership – to ensure quality preschool programming, school leaders need to provide quality professional development for staff. Thus, expanding access to teacher development and evaluation funding to all districts is vital.

SEE Districts

- Albany
- Albert Lea
- Annandale
- Anoka-Hennepin
- Austin
- Belle Plaine
- Big Lake
- Braham
- Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose
- Byron
- Cambridge-Isanti
- Cannon Falls
- Centennial
- Chisago Lakes
- Dassel-Cokato
- Delano
- East Central
- Elk River
- Faribault
- Forest Lake
- Fridley
- Hastings
- Hinckley-Finlayson
- Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted
- Hutchinson
- Jordan
- Kasson-Mantorville
- Kimball
- Lake City
- LaCrescent-Hokah
- Litchfield
- Maple Lake
- Medford
- Melrose
- Milaca
- Monticello
- Mora
- New London-Spicer
- New Prague
- North Branch
- Northfield
- Owatonna
- Paynesville
- Pine City
- Pine River-Backus
- Princeton
- Prior Lake-Savage
- Rockford
- Rocori
- Roseau
- Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan
- Royalton
- Rush City
- Sartell-St. Stephen
- South St. Paul
- St. Francis
- St. Michael-Albertville
- Stewartville
- Tri-City United
- Waconia

Associate Members

- St. Croix River Education District
- Resource Training & Solutions
- SW Metro Educational Cooperative