

Provide Adequate Funding for Special Education

Fact Sheet

Position:

Provide adequate and stable funding for special education, with a focus on state level responsibility.

Background Information:

- Minnesota's funding commitment to educate students with disabilities has historically been strong. However, there is increasing concern that too much of the cost to educate students with disabilities is borne by local school districts.
- Schools are mandated by the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to provide a free and appropriate education for all students needing special education services. The federal government currently only funds 17% of the cost although Congress had promised to fund 40%.
- In the early 1990's a concerted effort was made to increase the state's share of special education costs by implementing a growth factor into the funding formula. In 2003 the growth factor was repealed.
- Due to the repeal of the growth factor and not fully funding special education, the "cross subsidy" started to increase. The "cross subsidy" is that amount of money that has to be moved from the regular education budget at the school district level to cover the increasing costs of special education. In 2007, he grew to \$530 million; in the same year, the state legislature provided an additional \$329 million to decrease the cross subsidy. This provided some relief, but the subsidy has continued to grow.
- The state is also not paying its fair share for special education staff costs. The state should be paying 68% of salaries for special education and other essential personnel, but they currently only pay around 61%.

To make the funding system more equitable and relieve stress on local districts, the state should fully fund special education.

Reasons to Support:

- All children deserve a quality education and communities need to work together to achieve this goal. Many families have children in both regular and special education.

- States and localities don't have the ability to limit their special education programs to the funding available, and are required by federal law to ensure that every student receives a free and appropriate public education.
- Changing demographics will require businesses to tap into students and adults with disabilities to address future workforce needs. It is important that these students acquire the education and skills needed to fill Minnesota jobs.
- While providing a quality education to some students with disabilities may be considered expensive, the alternatives are far more expensive.
- Shifting more costs to educate students with disabilities to local school districts is a contributing factor to the financial stress faced by many districts.
- Implementing local levy options for special education might be helpful in some local districts but many communities aren't able to pass a levy for this purpose. Some might be able to pass a separate levy but the net effect is minimal.

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