

February 16, 2021

Honorable Roger Chamberlain  
95 University Avenue West  
Room 3225  
St. Paul, MN 55155



Dear Chair Chamberlain,

The Minnesota School Boards Association, serving all 333 school districts in Minnesota, and the Association of Metropolitan School Districts appreciate the opportunity to share some comments about SF 960, the Governor's E-12 Education proposals.

Sustainable and predictable funding is a high priority for school board members and administrators and SF 960 makes significant strides toward stabilizing the funding system. With the events of the past year and the impact on the state's economy, we are hopeful for the best and prepared for the worst. The financial hardships our districts have incurred during this pandemic have been more than challenging. We sincerely appreciate the proposed 1 percent and 2.5 percent increases to the funding formula in the next biennium. Our respective legislative platforms advocate for 2 percent increases per year with future increases tied to inflation. Linking the formula to inflation would provide the stability our school districts need to engage in strategic, long-range planning and implement the programs and services our students need to reach their full potential.

When the Legislature reformed the special education funding formula and froze the cross-subsidy during the 2019 session, it provided substantial relief. The special education cross-subsidy is something all our districts grapple with annually. While we would like to see the cross-subsidy come down, we greatly appreciate the proposed funding increase to prevent the shortfall from growing.

Many of our districts have seen an increase in English learners in recent years. The financial and human capital investments our districts have made in this area has increased significantly and the result has been a cross-subsidy, similar to what we experience in special education. The increased investment to reduce the cross-subsidy in the English learner programs is strongly supported.

We also strongly support the proposed increase in levy equalization in the Governor's budget proposal. Property tax levies play a critical role in funding education programs and facilities and the increased equalization will bring greater equity to the funding system. Given that enhanced

levy equalization is property tax relief, we urge you to consider having this provision carried in the Omnibus Tax Bill.

For years we have known the great outcomes of extended time. As we look towards the other side of this pandemic, we know students will need extra supports. Increasing extended time revenue and allowing greater flexibility in ways the revenue can be utilized will go a long way in getting our students to where they need to be.

As you have heard time and time again this session, our enrollment has suffered as a direct result of COVID-19. For many reasons, some students and their families have chosen to leave our classrooms. This unexpected decrease in enrollment has presented a significant financial hardship for many districts. SF 973 would provide some relief from this unanticipated enrollment decline by enhancing the declining enrollment formula for FY 21 and help districts be better equipped to meet the financial obligations incurred during the pandemic.

As you are well aware, the pandemic has presented enormous challenges for students, parents, teachers and other staff, as well as administrators and board members. Accordingly, we believe it is imperative that state policymakers refrain from enacting new mandates in the 2021 legislative session. Our staff needs to focus all of their time and energy on meeting the academic and social and emotional needs of our students. SF 788 includes proposed changes to academic standards, teacher evaluation and teacher licensure. We do not believe this is the time to impose new mandates and requirements when educators are already feeling overwhelmed.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our comments and we look forward to working with you through the session.

Sincerely,

Denise Dittrich  
MN School Boards Association

Scott Croonquist  
Association of Metropolitan School Districts