



## Legislative Priorities 2024 January 22, 2024

### 1. **School Finance/State Aid – Special Education Funding**

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to create statutory language that recognizes and fully funds Special Education services for birth through age 22 so we may use previously expended cross-subsidy money to support student learning, intervention and mental health needs in an effort to help students be ready for kindergarten, reading at grade level by third grade, and graduate on time and with a viable post-graduation plan.

#### **Background**

Special Education services are an important, yet underfunded mandate. Our students with special needs are coming to us with ever more complicated and expensive programming needs. Bloomington Public Schools spends roughly \$12 million of general fund dollars every year to cover the unfunded cost of our special education programming. This is needed, essential and legally mandated programming.

#### **Rationale**

Even though the state increased special education funding significantly last session, it will only be funded at 50% in 2024. In the meantime, we have seen an increase in the number of students receiving special education services post-pandemic. Not only are the number of students needing services rising, but the complexity of needs has increased. That typically involves high-cost programming. Fully funding special education would allow our district to direct previously expended funds to keep class sizes reasonable, fund mental health supports, and stabilize our finances in general.

### 2. **School Finance/State Aid – English Learner Funding**

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to create statutory language that recognizes and fully funds English Learner (EL) programming from age 3 through grade 12 so districts can provide more early intervention and programming in an effort to help students be ready for kindergarten and reading at grade level by third grade.

#### **Background**

We currently receive funding for each English Learner student. We also receive EL concentration funding based on an MDE formula. This is for preK-12 students. Bloomington's current EL cross-subsidy amount is \$3 million this school year.

#### **Rationale**

Like Minneapolis and St. Paul, Bloomington is a metro area city that provides temporary housing for a large number of newly arrived immigrants. While we welcome these families and students to Bloomington, they require intensive English Language Services and other supports to be successful in school. Through November 2023 we have verified 80 students who are attending our schools while being temporarily housed in Bloomington. Many of those students are with us for a significant portion of the school year; even when they move from temporary housing they often remain enrolled in our district. Full funding for English Learner staffing and programming, grades preK-12, would allow Bloomington Public Schools to increase services, particularly at the early childhood and primary grade levels and increase the likelihood that our Multilingual Learners will be ready for kindergarten and reading well by third grade.

### 3. **School Finance/State Aid – Basic Formula Allowance**

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to increase the basic formula allowance by 2% for FY 25 to help us address staffing shortages, ESSER funding running out, student and staff mental health supports, declining enrollment and interrupted learning recovery efforts.

### **Background**

We rely on the state basic formula allowance to fund the majority of our operations. While the state did give a generous 4% and 2% increase last session, it also significantly increased our operating costs with additional unfunded mandates. Also, inflation continues to run higher than 4%. Like many districts, enrollment in Bloomington has fallen since before the pandemic and without an adequate state basic formula allowance we will be forced to cut much needed programs and services to avoid statutory operating debt.

### **Rationale**

Increasing the basic formula allowance by 2% for FY 25, combined with the already approved with future year increases tied to inflation will allow us to budget more effectively, cover costs that increase due to inflation, meet our obligations, maintain needed student support services, and stabilize our fund balance.

## **4. School Finance/State Aid – READ Act**

Bloomington Public Schools asks the Governor and Legislature to fully fund the implementation of the READ Act and adjust the timelines to ensure successful implementation.

### **Background**

Last year the legislature approved the READ Act. While Bloomington Public Schools is supportive of the READ Act, the law, as passed, does not include a realistic timeline nor adequate funding to get staff training completed and ready to implement.

### **Rationale**

Like many districts, Bloomington is struggling to find the time and money to complete staff training in time to meet the requirements of the new law. Without legislative relief, we will need to take precious instructional time away from students in the classroom to complete staff training. We will also be forced to use general funds to cover training costs which exacerbates the financial issues raised in our previous platform statements.

## **5. Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) – Update Accountability Measurement**

Bloomington Public Schools urges the legislature to discontinue the current practice of including the scores of students whose parents/caregivers choose to opt out of MCA standardized testing in the North Star academic achievement calculation for school accountability. These opt-out scores are currently counted the same as scores of students who are “not proficient,” which penalizes schools with high opt-out rates. We propose the legislature modify the calculation to only include scores of students who actively participate in the MCA assessments. In addition, it is also recommended that the legislature explore strategies and make recommendations to increase MCA participation and provide alternative accommodations or options to ensure that the state of Minnesota meets the non-participant requirement under ESSA, thereby preventing any impact on the state’s receipt of Title I funds.

### **Background**

Our schools are publicly evaluated, in part, based on our MCA assessment results. Creating a more equitable system that refrains from penalizing districts like ours for having a higher-than-average number of students who opt out of the assessments will enable us to present a more accurate public representation on how our students are progressing academically.

### **Rationale**

Bloomington has a higher than state average percentage of students whose families have chosen to opt out of MCA testing, which is permissible under state law. Our research indicates that Bloomington students choosing to opt out are those who would likely demonstrate proficiency on the MCA reading, math, and science assessments. Their decision to opt out negatively impacts our overall accountability scores, and we have limited control over the opt-out decision-making process.

## **6. Student and Staff Safety**

Bloomington Public Schools asks the Governor and Legislature to direct School Districts to develop a plan to share information with student families concerning the importance of safe and secure firearm storage and how it is integral to student and staff safety.

### **Background**

Promoting public awareness for secure firearm storage is integral to school safety, and at this time there is no requirement to add this effective prevention strategy to our toolbox. Access to unsecured firearms affects the broader community, and gun violence in one school affects all schools.

### **Rationale**

Unauthorized access to firearms is a major source of gun violence. This is particularly true when it comes to school gun violence among children and teens. The perpetrators of school gun violence are most often students or recent graduates. The New York Police Department compiled information on active shooter incidents from 1966-2016, and analysis finds that 795 of active shootings in schools involved shooters who were school aged and were a current student or recent graduate of the school. The overwhelming majority - 76% of firearms used in school gun violence incidents - are obtained from the shooter's home, the homes of relatives, or the homes of friends. Access to unsecured firearms also contributes to unintentional gun violence among children and teens. Every year, nearly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. That's roughly one unintentional shooting per day. One-third of suicides and unintentional deaths can be prevented by securing guns. While millions of responsible gun owners follow recommended storage practices, an estimated 54% do not secure their firearms locked and unloaded. An estimated 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm.

Everytown for Gun Safety, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers has released a comprehensive set of proven effective solutions to intervene and prevent school gun violence, and responsible firearm storage is an essential component to any effective strategy to keep schools safe. Everytown's Be SMART for Kids Campaign ([BeSmartforKids.org](http://BeSmartforKids.org)) is a proven model for safe gun storage that can be used by public officials and members of the community to build awareness of the importance of secure firearm storage. Child Safe ([projectchildsafe.org](http://projectchildsafe.org)) is another resource that could be used in conjunction with Be SMART for Kids.

## **7. Unemployment Insurance**

Bloomington Public Schools asks the Governor and Legislature to create a permanent state funding stream for unemployment insurance of unlicensed employees.

### **Background**

Recent legislation which allows for hourly/unlicensed employees to file for unemployment benefits when school is not in session has a limited amount of funding dedicated to cover the costs. Once that dedicated funding runs out, BPS will be required to fund the unemployment insurance costs. We estimate that cost to be roughly one million dollars.

### **Rationale**

Given the unfunded mandates approved in the last legislative session along with the sunset of federal ESSER funding, decreasing enrollment, and pandemic learning needs, having to use general funds to pay for a large increase in unemployment insurance will cause our school district to make further cuts in the future. We believe the state should fund this mandated program.

*The board also endorses the priorities/platforms of the Minnesota School Boards Association, the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, and the Minnesota Association of School Administrators*