

HF 984 (Clardy)

Public Testimony Documents



MINNDEPENDENT is the state's largest advocacy organization supporting independent and nonpublic schools and students since 1976.

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2025

OPPOSE GOVERNOR WALZ'S ELIMINATION OF FUNDING FOR NONPUBLIC PUPIL AND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES.

Elimination of this critical funding will decrease services to students in need, increase costs for all schools, and exacerbate the school transportation crisis in Minnesota.

MINNDEPENDENT and nonpublic schools across the state **OPPOSE** Governor Walz's elimination of these important services for the following reasons:

- **Eliminates essential services** to students at a time when the need for student mental health services is increasing across the state.
- **Increases costs to nonpublic schools and their families** by denying students from accessing textbooks and instructional materials.
- **Increases the bus driver and transportation shortage** by threatening student safety, driving up costs for school districts and nonpublic schools, increasing traffic congestion and carbon footprint, and by the loss of efficiencies gained by working with school districts.
- **Denies equitable services to students and families** who rely on these services the most — low income families across the state and students and families in rural areas with limited resources.



SUPPORT GUIDANCE COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES LEGISLATION.

Under the proposed legislation, **MINNDEPENDENT** supports extending services to students in grades K-12. As the recent report from the U.S. Surgeon General makes clear, mental health issues among young people are growing exponentially, and we know that counseling and mental health services are needed to students in all grades, not just grades 7-12.

SUPPORT SAFE SCHOOLS PROGRAM LEGISLATION.

MINNDEPENDENT supports legislation providing a new per student revenue aid allocation to school districts, intermediate schools districts, tribal schools, charter schools and nonpublic schools to ensure all school buildings are safe and secure. With the rise in security threats and mental health challenges, it is important to ensure that all our schools have the resources to protect students and staff.

SUPPORT FIX TO UNIVERSAL MEALS FOR ALL STUDENTS.

The legislation passed in 2023 – the Free School Meals for Kids Program – includes serving nonpublic students when the school participates in the National School Lunch Program. Unfortunately, the program does not include pre-kindergarten programs for nonpublic students fixing this issue and allowing for full participation.

OPPOSE NEW MANDATES.

MINNDEPENDENT opposes new mandates on nonpublic schools.



LEARN MORE: WWW.MINNDEPENDENT.ORG



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Tim Benz, President



MINNDEPENDENT advocates with a focused and united voice so that local and state policy makers will understand and support policies and practices that strengthen Minnesota's nonpublic and independent schools.



BACKGROUND ON INDEPENDENT AND NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS

Total number of schools:	460
Total K-12 student enrollment; 2023-24 school year:	73,143
Percentage of total student enrollment:	8%
Increase in enrollment since 2019-20 school year:	11.4%
On-time graduation rate, 2022-23 school year:	99%



NONPUBLIC AID AND TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS

The Minnesota Legislature first enacted nonpublic pupil and transportation aid programs in the 1970s recognizing that the health and safety of every child is essential and important. The legislature expanded this concept by enacting the Free School Meals for Kids Program in 2023, allowing all students – including nonpublic students – access to free breakfast and lunch for schools participating in the National School Lunch Program.

The nonpublic pupil aid and transportation programs exist to provide state funded access to nonreligious study materials and student support services for nonpublic students. Funding is appropriated directly to school districts for the benefit of nonpublic school students. School districts are reimbursed for the costs of educational materials loaned for nonpublic students and for the costs of providing support services for nonpublic students under these basic categories:

- Textbooks, individualized instructional materials, and standardized tests;
- Health services;
- Guidance and counseling service; and
- Transportation services



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Overview of HF984 (Clardy)
House Education Finance Committee
Tuesday, March 4, 2025

HF984 (Clardy) extends school counseling services to students enrolled in a nonpublic school or in an American Indian-controlled contract or grant school.

Under current law, students enrolled in an American Indian-controlled contract or grant school or a nonpublic school have access to school counseling services in grades 7-12. These services provide students with personal, social development and mental health services in addition to referral assistance. The resident school district provides either staff or will contract for the services. The school district receives reimbursement from the state for the costs.

We know there is an urgency for counseling and mental health services before students enter grade 7 – and we also know the importance of early intervention. According to a report from the White House issued in October 2021, data indicate an increasing number of students are experiencing moderate-to-severe anxiety and depression, even after the pandemic. Suicide rates remain one of the leading causes of death among young individuals between the ages of 10 to 24.

Although emergency room visits for mental health in children has shown some decline overall, 2023 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that nearly all indicators of poor mental health, suicidal thoughts, and suicidal behaviors have worsened over the last 10 years. Approximately 40% of students surveyed experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, 30% experiences poor mental health, and 20% seriously considered attempting suicide. Almost all these indicators have not improved in the last 2 years.

Under this legislation, it is estimated that at least 50% of students enrolled in nonpublic and tribal schools will access school counseling services in grades K-6. Currently, 92% of students enrolled in nonpublic and tribal schools access the school counseling services in grades 7-12.

By passing this legislation, an additional 30,000 students in grades K-6 in nonpublic and tribal schools will receive school counseling services. Based on the fiscal note from 2023, it is estimated this legislation would cost \$5.5 million in FY24-25.

In addition, a significant number of students in Minnesota will attend both a public and nonpublic schools during their education from grades K-12. This legislation helps ensure continuity of counseling and mental health services for students.

There are several organizations supporting this legislation including MINNDEPENDENT, the Minnesota Association of Independent Schools (MAIS), Minnesota Catholic Conference, and the Jewish Community Relations Council.



MAIS Fast Facts

- Non-profit, independent school organization
- 17 schools: Pre-primary, elementary, middle and high schools
- MAIS schools serve over 10,000 Minnesota students and their families
- MAIS schools employ over 3,400 Minnesotans

2025 STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

- Preserve the “independent” status of MAIS schools by opposing proposals that create onerous regulations or unfunded mandates, which have a negative impact on MAIS students, families, faculty and staff.
- Support necessary state funding for nonpublic pupil aid (ie; textbooks, counseling, transportation, health services).
 - Expand nonpublic pupils counseling aid to include students in grades K-6.
 - Allow nonpublic schools to access school safety funding for physical security upgrades.
- Serve as a resource to elected officials involved in E-12 education public policy.

MN Association of Independent Schools (MAIS) is a cohort of 17 independent schools in Minnesota that have achieved, or are in pursuit of, ISACS accreditation. Through the ISACS accreditation process, MAIS member schools hold themselves publicly accountable to accepted standards of quality education, responsible operations and on-going improvement. The mission of MAIS is to support and connect school leadership, faculty and staff while promoting and preserving education independence and choice for MN families and educators.

MAIS School	Location	District
Heilicher Minneapolis Jewish Day School	St. Louis Park	46
Breck School	Golden Valley	43
City of Lakes Waldorf School	Minneapolis	62
Friends School of Minnesota	St. Paul	66
Groves Academy	St. Louis Park	46

Lake Country Montessori School	Minneapolis	62
Many Rivers Montessori	Duluth	8
Marshall School	Duluth	8
Minnehaha Academy	Minneapolis	63
Mounds Park Academy	St. Paul	44
Providence Academy	Plymouth	42
Saint Thomas Academy	Mendota Heights	52
St. John's Preparatory School	Collegeville	13
Shattuck-St. Mary's School	Faribault	19
St. Paul Academy & Summit School	St. Paul	64
The Blake School	Hopkins, Minneapolis	46, 61
Visitation School	Mendota Heights	52

MAIS member schools differ in many ways. They are secular, religious, single-gender, day and boarding schools, and some pedagogically based, but all support providing families with choice in education. Not only do MAIS schools save Minnesota tax dollars, which would otherwise have been spent in educating children in public schools, but MAIS students also represent Minnesota at myriad colleges and universities and often end up giving back to the state in a variety of leadership roles. Additionally, MAIS schools provide a number of vital jobs for adults living in Minnesota.

More about MAIS school communities:

- Total enrollment in MAIS schools for the 2021-2022 school year was over 10,000 students, saving taxpayers potentially \$110,000,000 in state funds required to educate additional students in public schools.
- MAIS schools employ over 3,400 full-time and part-time workers in Minnesota.
- MAIS schools provide health/retirement benefits to 1,400+ employees totaling over \$20 million dollars.

For more information about MAIS and its member schools, please contact Shep Harris at sharris@fredgov.com or 612-219-8531.