

Good Morning Madame Chair and fellow committee members...

My name is Kristi Peterson. I currently serve as the school board chair for Independent School District 720, Shakopee Public Schools. I am also a board member for Southwest Metro Intermediate District #288 and serve as a Board of Director representing Director District 13 for the Minnesota School Board Association. I am also a proud graduate from Ellsworth Public Schools, a very small Minnesota Public School district.

I am here this morning to urge the passage of House File 18 which will fully-fund the Special Education cross-subsidy in all of our public schools across Minnesota.

As a school board member, it is my responsibility, and that of our school board, to ensure that all of our students have an equal opportunity to a quality education. I don't think anyone here disputes the importance of Special Education. I think we all agree there is tremendous value in providing high quality services to our students with special learning needs.

In my district, we are seeing younger students with more profound learning challenges than we've seen before. This school year, 15.8% of K-12 students in Shakopee Public Schools receive special education services.

Again, I don't think anyone here disputes the importance of providing quality services to our students with special needs. In Shakopee, we are very proud of our educators, teachers, support staff and leaders who are doing great things to support our students with special needs.

My concern, and that of my school district, is how we've been underfunding Special Education, and then making up the difference by expecting districts to shift funds from general education to cover the shortfall. This reality is known as the Special Education cross subsidy.

This school year, Shakopee Public Schools will spend \$20 million dollars to provide special education services to our students. We are currently budgeted to receive \$10.7 million in special education revenue, leaving our district with an estimated \$9.5 million shortfall. Currently, the only way to correct this shortfall is to use general education revenues to cross-subsidize the special education services.

HF 18 corrects this substantial, ongoing school funding problem by fully funding Special Education services.

In recent years, the cross subsidy has meant that Shakopee has not been able to provide the mental health specialists and counselors to meet the growing mental health needs of our students, our curriculum implementation cycle has been slower than we'd like, and it has been financially impossible to update our elementary literacy programs. These are just a few areas where the persistent underfunding of Special Education and the cross subsidy have limited our district's ability to provide services to all students. It's time to correct this situation.

If Special Education in our school district was to be fully funded, ALL 7,800 students in Shakopee Public Schools would benefit. Shakopee could hire additional interventionists, which have provided really good student learning results in our district, helping to get students back on track. We could also fully implement literacy programs for students in grades K-3, hire counselors and mental health specialists, and make sure we maintain reasonable class sizes across our district.

The situation in Shakopee Public Schools is not unique. Nearly every school district in Minnesota currently faces the challenges coming from persistent underfunding of Special Education and then cross subsidizing this shortfall with general education funds. Correcting this problem via HF18 will have a positive impact on all students across the entire State of Minnesota.

On behalf of Shakopee Public Schools and all school board members that I represent as a board of director for the Minnesota School Board Association, I ask you to support the passage of House File 18. The time is now. Let's make this a reality!