

# Minnesota Legislature likely to steer clear of major new investments in schools in 2024

By: Anthony Lonetree. *Star Tribune*. 2/15/2024.  
[Article Link](#)

Minnesota schools won \$2.2 billion in new funding the last time the Legislature met, but as lawmakers reconvened this week, the 2024 legislative session thus far carries little hope of a splashy education encore.

Restraint instead is the message, and it's been heard by education advocates, who nonetheless plan to continue to push for additional revenue as district budgets are squeezed.

"We educate the children and we won't quiet our voices," said St. Paul Public Schools Superintendent Joe Gothard, who serves as board president of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators.

The voices are welcome, and the needs will be heard, but much of the help to be offered may have to wait until next year, said state Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, who chairs the House Education Finance Committee.

Gothard and others, while thankful for a boost in per-pupil aid and funds to help cover special education and English-language learner costs, say the new money did not make up for years of underfunding and, in many cases, left districts like St. Paul still having to dip into rainy-day funds to balance 2023-24 budgets.

They would like an additional 2% on the basic per-pupil aid formula -- the funding stream they deem most flexible and that is used to pay staff salaries, transportation and other general operations. The cost: \$160 million, according to the Minnesota School Boards Association.

"We understand that's probably going to be an uphill battle," Scott Croonquist, executive director of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD), said Monday.

Looming over this year's legislative funding requests is a potential shortfall in the state's next two-year budget. That forecast, which was released in November, is to be updated at the end of February, giving hope to some groups -- early-education and child-care advocates among them -- that prospects may brighten and new investments still might be possible.

But the consistent message from lawmakers has been: "There's no money," said Matt Shaver, policy director for the education advocacy group EdAllies.

For that reason, he touted last week the potential value of a modest \$1 million increase in a fund that pays prospective educators to student teach. Most are not paid during those 12-week programs -- a significant barrier to people who are looking to change careers or come from diverse backgrounds.

"We don't have enough teachers of color in the pipeline," Shaver said.  
Pushing for more

On Wednesday, the House Education Finance Committee heard about the launch of a program to bolster the ranks of special education teachers -- work made possible by last year's sweeping education bill. On Thursday, the panel is expected to be updated on the new universal free meals program and the Read Act, which is changing the way children learn to read.

Bob Indihar, executive director of the Minnesota Rural Education Association, said that the Read Act, and its requirements to train teachers in the new instructional methods, has been a major point of discussion during the past year, and will need some fine-tuning this session.

"We're looking at how it can get paid for long term, how to fulfill timelines and finding time to train the personnel," he said via email Monday.

On Wednesday, Youakim singled out the Read Act as a potential beneficiary of one-time funding.

Croonquist said AMSD is pursuing permanent funding for a new program allowing hourly workers to tap into unemployment insurance during the summer. It has been credited with helping districts retain bus drivers and other employees, but is limited to one-time funding through 2025. Last summer, districts paid out about \$40.5 million in benefits, leaving about \$95 million to spend this year and next.

The 2023 session provided a major lift to early childhood advocates by enabling more low-income families to access quality child care or preschool programs. Early learning scholarships that for years stood at \$70 million were raised to about \$196 million a year in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Efforts ensued to expand the scholarships to middle-income families this session at a potential cost of about \$500 million. Then came the November budget forecast.

Ericca Maas, director of policy and advocacy for Think Small, which administers the scholarships in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, said this week the group will continue to promote a middle-income expansion, even with legislators preaching austerity.

"That tension is how the system works," she said.

# Why \$2B in new school funding is leaving Minnesota districts scrambling for cash

By: Beth Hawkins. *MinnPost*. 2/13/2024.

[Article Link](#)

This story first appeared at The 74, a nonprofit news site covering education. Sign up for free newsletters from The 74 to get more like this in your inbox.

When the Democratic "trifecta" in control of Minnesota's House, Senate and governor's office announced last spring's K-12 education finance bill, there weren't enough superlatives in the thesaurus to fuel the sound bites. The more than \$2.2 billion in "new" spending on public schools was "historic." The number of initiatives funded was "sweeping," the predicted outcomes for students and teachers "life-changing." [<https://educationminnesota.org/news/press-release/walz-signs-historic-labor-and-education-bills-into-law/>]

Now, district leaders statewide are scrambling to explain to their communities that, in fact, they are facing massive cuts. In many places, balancing the budget will mean layoffs or school closures.

Like their counterparts throughout the country, Minnesota school systems are facing the one-two punch of the end of COVID recovery aid and enrollment losses -- in many places, going back years -- that means less per-pupil state money. School funding experts call this a fiscal cliff.

"That is No. 1 with a bullet on any superintendent's whiteboard," says Kirk Schneidawind, executive director of the Minnesota School Boards Association.

The state's second-largest district, St. Paul Public Schools projects a \$150 million deficit for the 2024-25 academic year. Minneapolis Public Schools anticipates a \$116 million shortfall. Even the most prosperous Twin Cities suburbs are stuck explaining the disconnect to families who moved there for their well-funded schools.

The confusion among members of the public who think the schools are awash in cash has real consequences, says Schneidawind. Last year, half of school system funding referenda failed at the ballot box, depriving districts of millions more.

Billions in new state funding and a fiscal cliff: How can both be true? Here are four critical -- and much misunderstood -- aspects of the looming crisis.

More Money, More Strings

With Democrats in control of the Capitol for the first time in more than a decade and a \$17 billion surplus in state coffers, most policymakers assumed the question wouldn't be whether education would see a spending boost in 2023, but how big it would be and how the pie would be divided.

"My messages to families, to students, to teachers, to support staff is, 'This is the budget for many of us who taught for decades, this is the budget we're waiting for,'" Gov. Tim Walz, a former teacher, said at the start of the session, according to the Star Tribune newspaper. "This is the transformational moment."

As he signed the education finance bill into law in June, Walz called it "The Minnesota Miracle 2.0" -- a reference to a sweeping school finance reform measure of the 1970s that earned then-Gov. Wendell Anderson a photo on the cover of Time magazine.

Yet even before the ink on Walz's signature was dry, school leaders were bemoaning the fine print. In the end, the change to the basic revenue formula increased per-pupil funding from \$6,863 in 2023 to \$7,281 in 2025.

Eight months later, they're still doing the math, but the Minnesota School Boards Association, the Association of Metropolitan School Districts and others estimate that up to half the \$2.2 billion had already been earmarked for as many as 65 new mandates, ranging from free meals for all students to menstrual products in school restrooms.

Lawmakers also extended unemployment insurance to cover bus drivers, some substitute teachers, cafeteria workers, classroom aides and other seasonal workers. This made Minnesota the first state to mandate this benefit for hourly employees, but it was unclear who will pay the premiums in the long term.

After a grueling fight, the legislature allotted \$135 million to pay for the first year of unemployment insurance premiums, promising to revisit funding in the future. District leaders were only partly appeased, noting that even if the state subsidized the premiums going forward, the employees who typically staff summer programs could choose not to.

Nearly \$75 million is allotted to help fund a new law requiring science-backed literacy curriculum and instruction. There is \$45 million for new school librarians, \$15 million to support "full-service" schools -- which provide health and social services to families -- and money for new ethnic studies materials, Naloxone and efforts to retain teachers of color.

Funding for K-12 education, which makes up nearly a third of the state budget, is \$23.2 billion for fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

Welcome though the money and new benefits are, says Schneidawind, districts will still have to scramble to cover some costs. Part

of the difficulty of calculating just how much that will be is that school systems keep discovering new ways that the costs are showing up. The private companies that supply substitute teachers, for instance, are passing along their new state benefit costs.

Most likely, the cavalry is not coming. Like many state legislatures, Minnesota's meets on a two-year calendar. Last year was the current cycle's budgeting year; when the 2024 session begins Feb. 12, lawmakers will focus on capital and infrastructure bonding bills.

#### How 'New Money' Becomes a Cut

Every year, after the legislative session gavel to a close, lawmakers of both parties go back home to boast that they boosted K-12 spending by adding to the state's general fund. They rarely mention that school funding has, by many calculations, not kept up with inflation.

One way this has traditionally been accomplished is by cutting or not increasing funding for services paid for out of other parts of the budget, such as special education and English learner instruction. School districts must then divert the "new" money to make up the shortfalls, in what's referred to as a cross-subsidy. For the current fiscal year, Minnesota schools are spending \$750 million just to fill the special education funding gap -- by far the largest.

Districts have long pushed to end the practice, which many say may aid officials' re-election efforts but has cloaked a steady erosion of state funding. With a budget surplus estimated at \$17.5 billion, lawmakers last year said it was time to fully fund the cross-subsidies.

Gov. Tim Walz, however, only wanted to reduce the special education gap by half, preferring to spend more on required paid family leave and other new programs. In the end, though, that didn't happen. The funding set aside to offset special education losses was reduced to cover just 44% of the gap -- freeing up almost the exact sum needed to cover seasonal workers' unemployment benefits for one year.

The upshot: Historic infusion notwithstanding, Democratic lawmakers say there is still an \$800-per-pupil gap between funding levels 20 years ago and today, adjusted for inflation. That does not reflect recent cost increases in transportation, labor and other areas, says Scott Croonquist, executive director of Minnesota's Association of Metropolitan School Districts.

The Democratic head of the House Education Finance Committee, Rep. Cheryl Youakim defended the outcomes, saying the 2023 increases closed the inflationary gap by one-third. "There has been 20 years of underfunding in education and that can't be turned around overnight," she says. "Our districts still do have needs."

#### Bad News at the Ballot Box

In November, the Rochester, Minnesota, public school system lost a technology funding referendum by 318 votes [<https://www.kttc.com/2023/11/08/rochester-public-schools-referendum/>]. As tiny as the margin was, the impact was tectonic.

The levy would have generated \$10 million a year for a decade, freeing up \$7 million a year the cash-strapped district currently spends on technology to reduce class sizes and stave off the impact of falling enrollment. In short order, Superintendent Kent Pekel announced that the district had no choice but to close three schools and cut transportation costs by changing attendance boundaries.

Three weeks later, the Mayo Clinic stepped forward [<https://www.kttc.com/2023/12/20/mayo-clinic-donating-10-million-rochester-public-schools/>] with a \$10 million donation intended to stave off the pain -- but only for a year. District leaders will use that time to prep for a do-over, hoping 2024's presidential election draws more voters than the referendum did and that a majority will agree to the tax.

When Pekel took over as superintendent in July 2021, he realized that years of eroded state funding was only one factor wreaking havoc on his budget. The district had been adding staff but losing students for a decade, albeit at a slower rate than many school systems. Instead of using federal COVID aid to close the gap, which would have postponed the fiscal reckoning, he cut \$7 million in 2022 and \$14 million last year.

In addition to the technology levy that failed at the ballot box last fall, the district depends on revenue from a larger operating levy. If it can't get that approved, Rochester leaders will have to find another \$10 million to cut in 2024 and \$17 million in 2025.

According to the school boards association, voters rejected half of operating levies on the ballot throughout the state last year. Perhaps anticipating this, lawmakers last year allowed districts to renew levies once without going to the voters. Schneidawind anticipates 50 school systems will take advantage of the new law this fall.

#### The Other Postponed Reckoning

Pekel is one of a few Minnesota superintendents who decided not to use pandemic relief funds to close pre-existing budget gaps. Many districts spent large swaths of their COVID recovery aid staving off tough issues posed by declining enrollment. Faced with a competitive labor market, many boosted educator pay. For example, despite years of shrinking enrollment, Minneapolis Public Schools added 400 jobs.

In addition to explaining to families and staff about the imminent loss of federal funding, many districts must now grapple with how to communicate why the boost in state aid won't head off cuts.

Next door to Minneapolis, the Robbinsdale Area School District is predicting it could end the current fiscal year \$2.1 million in the red and may need to cut \$17 million to balance the books next year. This can't be accomplished without layoffs.

In January, school board member Kim Holmes acknowledged that decisions by the board and district leadership will make balancing the budget especially painful.

"We misstepped," the suburban news site CCX Media quoted Holmes as saying. "This board misstepped, the administration misstepped. If we weren't tracking historical decreased enrollment -- and one of the biggest things they told us not to do with [COVID] dollars was hire positions -- and we did it. So we have to come out and take some ownership."

# School resource officers at top of Minnesota lawmakers' education to-do list

By: Elizabeth Shockman. *Minnesota Public Radio (MPR)*. 1/26/2024.

[Article Link](#)

Following a historic legislative session that delivered a big boost in K-12 funding, Minnesota lawmakers say the coming session for schools will be one of adjustments around literacy, school meals, civics education and school resource officers.

Gov. Tim Walz has already promised to revisit state law limiting use of force in schools after police agencies in several districts pulled school resource officers last year over what they described as ambiguities in the law. Those changes are a priority for Republicans.

"It's important that we figure out how to get those resource officers back in the schools and we make sure we get some of those de-escalation and security issues handled so it's not all falling on the teachers," said state Rep. Ron Kresha of Little Falls, the lead Republican on the House Education Finance Committee.

DFL committee chairs have said they want to go over allocations for the universal school meals program, literacy efforts, student mental health needs and school transportation. They're also looking for ways to address teacher shortages.

"We have to make sure that we actually have teachers," said state Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, who's also a substitute teacher. "Most districts are struggling to find teachers. In general, as a sub, I see that every day when I click on and see how many openings there are."

Policy focus follows the money

Last session the DFL-majority Legislature dedicated close to \$23 billion to the state K-12 education budget, with sweeping investments in raising the per-pupil formula, launching a change in the way reading is taught and spending on libraries, school support staff and menstrual products in school restrooms.

"We just want to continue on with the momentum that we built from the previous session, and bring things to a higher level of completion in this next session," said House Education Policy Committee Chair Laurie Pryor, DFL-Eden Prairie.

Pryor and other lawmakers said they've spent the past few months touring the state, listening to students, parents, teachers and school leaders. What they've heard has been a mixed-bag of appreciation for new spending and policy, and requests for changes.

"We passed that legislation, and much of the funds, you know, are in the schools already. And we're hoping to hear how those dollars best met the needs of our students especially," said Senate Education Finance Committee Chair Mary Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton.

Much of the work this year, in a non-budget cycle will focus on policy changes, like adjusting a bill passed last year that makes civics education a graduation requirement.

"The school districts came forward after session and said, 'Is there a way we can align the implementation and push it back a year so it jives with the implementation of the social studies standards?' And it was kind of like, 'Well, yeah, we can delay it a year if it really helps you,'" said Senate Education Policy Chair Steve Cwodzinski, DFL-Eden Prairie.

"We've got a few little things like that, that we're going to be tweaking and clarifying this next session," he added.

Other K-12 committee heads said they wanted to look at policies to address library needs and book banning attempts, update levy equalization on the formula and review reports on how new legislation that grants unemployment insurance to hourly workers has affected school district budgets.

'Hopes and dreams'

Republican education committee leads, in addition to wanting a focus on sufficiently funding the READ Act literacy legislation, have also raised concerns about how last session's education-related legislation placed financial burdens on districts.

"Our schools are spending too much time complying with new bureaucratic funding mandates to that don't focus on academics and learning," said state Sen. Jason Rarick, R-Pine City. "We've all heard from education leaders the new mandates are eating into the new funding and have left districts with fewer resources for what students really need."

While not a budget year, Twin Cities area districts will advocate for more money in the per-pupil formula, said Scott Croonquist, head of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.

"The vast majority of our districts are still in precarious budget situations," he said, noting the end of aid that flowed to schools during the pandemic. "Many are going to be looking at budget challenges, if not shortfalls, heading into next school year."

Croonquist's organization also expects to ask for policy changes to allow districts to offer school credit for apprenticeships that happen outside the classroom.

"We want to clarify the law in that area to make sure that when students are engaged in those kinds of experiences, that they can still gain credit, you know, and earn the requirements that they need to graduate," Croonquist said.

Education committee heads said they are scheduling hearings and hoping students, families, teachers and school leaders will speak up about what they want to see get done this year.

"We love it when students testify," Cwodzinski said, adding that lawmakers want to hear how students are doing and how COVID-19 has affected their education. "We want to know what their hopes and dreams and desires are as citizens and what we can do to make their K-12 experience richer than it hopefully already is."

# Some police are leaving Minnesota schools. It comes down to a two-letter change in state law.

By: Briana Bierschbach, Eder Campuzano. *Star Tribune*. 9/22/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Confusion continues to swirl around a new law that restricts the ways school resource officers in Minnesota are allowed to restrain students, as the first month of the new academic year wraps up around the state.

Gov. Tim Walz, DFL legislative leaders and representatives of key law enforcement groups all said in prepared statements Thursday that a meeting on the issue the night before brought progress in resolving issues around a recent law change that has led to SROs being removed from schools. On Wednesday, the Attorney General's Office had sought to clarify the language and usher officers back on school campuses.

Minnesota Republicans and metro-area law enforcement officials have repeatedly called for a special session to amend the new provisions, which were included in the sweeping education bill Walz signed in May.

While the governor has signaled his openness to calling a special session in order to alter the law, some DFLers and education advocates have pushed back, saying the restrictions are essential in ensuring student safety.

Here are some common questions about the law:

What is a school resource officer? And what do they do?

Minnesota school districts contract with local law enforcement agencies to place police officers and sheriff's deputies in schools. School resource officers are typically charged with providing classroom lessons on topics such as conflict resolution and drug use prevention and enforcing state and city laws on school campuses, but not district disciplinary policies. Those officers and deputies are usually placed in middle and high schools, though they'll sometimes teach lessons to fifth-grade classes on elementary campuses.

The Anoka-Hennepin School District's previous contract with the Anoka Sheriff's Office, for example, required deputies assigned to its campuses to establish relationships with students and staff and coordinate investigations of school-based crimes with the district and sheriff's office. These agreements also typically come with a price tag. During the 2020-21 school year, Anoka-Hennepin paid the Anoka County Sheriff's Office about \$104,000.

What changed in the law?

The substitution of one two-letter word for another in state law has led most of Minnesota's police chiefs, county attorneys and sheriffs to interpret the new statute as preventing them from restraining students unless those students pose a physical threat.

Previously, the statute said an "agent of the district" -- which includes law enforcement officials placed in schools under contract with a district -- "may use reasonable force when it is necessary under the circumstances to restrain a student or prevent bodily harm or death to another." The education budget bill took the "or" after student, and turned it into a "to." Police chiefs, county attorneys and insurers have interpreted that change to mean that officers stationed in schools may only restrain students if they're about to inflict harm on themselves or others.

"An SRO cannot restrain a student until that split second when it becomes a threat or it is to prevent bodily harm or death," Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association Executive Director Jeff Potts said during a news conference in mid-September.

Over the last few weeks, police chiefs and county attorneys have pointed to the two-word change as the primary source of confusion over when they're allowed to intervene when students break the law but don't pose a physical threat. Officers have reported not knowing how to handle trespassers or vandals on school campuses.

As Potts gestured to a group of officers that had been pulled from schools in the days leading up to the news conference, he said the two-word tweak in state law was the linchpin for the events of the last few weeks.

"If that 'or' were still in the statute, I think they'd be back in schools," Potts said.

Imran Ali, legal counsel for the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association, said police departments are also upset because the law effectively creates two tiers of law enforcement officers working within the same department -- those bound by the new rules and those who aren't -- and increasing liability for SROs.

"SROs will now be forced to react to situations in ways that are contrary to their training and department policy, leading to unsafe situations for students, staff, and the SROs themselves," Ali said. "SROs also face increased risk of civil and criminal liability because of the uncertainty in the law."

Why was the change proposed?

Some student education activists and a large group of DFL legislators have said the law change adds needed protections for



students and is clear the way it is. The law restricts the use of prone restraints, or "any form of physical holding that restricts or impairs a pupil's ability to breathe or ... communicate distress."

Advocates note the ban on prone restraints brings the new law in line with restrictions the Legislature previously placed on the way school staff may restrain students enrolled in special education programs.

"I think it's just a matter of making sure all of the adults in our schools have the tools they need to make them safe and successful places," said DFL Rep. Cheryl Youakim, who chairs the House Education Finance Committee.

Are there other legal interpretations of the change?

Attorney General Keith Ellison weighed in with an advisory opinion in late August and an updated version on Wednesday. He said interpretations that the law change restricts SROs "from engaging in any physical contact to address non-violent behavior" are not correct, they "simply must avoid the restraints identified."

"If a student is misbehaving in a way that does not and will not harm that student or anyone else, professionals in schools still have many tools at their disposal," reads the supplemental opinion.

In a recent letter to city and law enforcement officials in her district, DFL House Speaker Melissa Hortman wrote there is only "one standard for use of force by peace officers regardless of their role," and the Legislature did not change that statute.

How many SROs have been pulled from schools?

There's no centralized tally of how many law enforcement agencies have suspended their school resource officer programs, but an unofficial count kept by the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association had the number at about 40 as of Wednesday.

Walz on Tuesday said about 60 agencies are operating on a "hybrid" model. Several law enforcement agencies that have pulled officers from school campuses say they've instead moved them to assignments patrolling surrounding neighborhoods in order to maintain a presence among the district.

Three large metro-area districts -- Minneapolis, St. Paul and Hopkins -- haven't had armed police patrol their schools since 2020.

Why is there a push to come back to St. Paul for a special session?

The Minnesota Legislature is not scheduled to come back to St. Paul again until Feb. 12. Republicans in the House and Senate have said that's too long to wait to tackle the issue, especially as more officers are being pulled from districts.

What is the proposed legislative fix?

Republicans in the minority in the Legislature have proposed legislation that would repeal the changes made last session, as well as a related requirement to record how often restraints are used in schools. Top GOP leaders have said they're also open to tweaking the language, rather than a full repeal.

What is the governor saying about the possibility of a special session?

Walz has said he's open to calling lawmakers back to tackle the issue but he hopes further clarification on the intent of the law will satisfy concerns from law enforcement agencies to get officers back in schools without having to return to the Capitol.

"In an age where everybody is under the microscope, especially when it comes to policing and use of force, there's a nervousness there," Walz said this week. "I believe all police agencies want to be back in those schools, they want to be doing their jobs."

# Republicans call for special session to repeal physical restraint ban in schools

By: Michelle Griffith. *Minnesota Reformer*. 8/30/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Minnesota Republicans sent a letter

[[https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSEGOP/2023/08/30/file\\_attachments/2599398/Special%20Session%20Request%208](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSEGOP/2023/08/30/file_attachments/2599398/Special%20Session%20Request%208)

to DFL Gov. Tim Walz on Wednesday urging him to call a special legislative session after numerous law enforcement agencies pulled officers from schools because of a new law that restricts officers from using certain types of physical restraints on students.

House and Senate Republicans, flanked by law enforcement leaders during a Wednesday news conference, said the large education bill passed by Democrats earlier this year has created confusion among police and opened them up to potential lawsuits if they use any amount of physical force in certain situations.

Under the law change, police officers assigned to schools -- called school resource officers (SROs) -- cannot use prone restraints, meaning placing a student in a face-down position.

In addition, the law

[[https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2497&version=0&session=ls93&session\\_year=2023&session\\_number=0&type=ccr](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2497&version=0&session=ls93&session_year=2023&session_number=0&type=ccr)

says they cannot "inflict any form of physical holding that restricts or impairs a pupil's ability to breathe; restricts or impairs a pupil's ability to communicate distress; places pressure or weight on a pupil's head, throat, neck, chest, lungs, sternum, diaphragm, back, or abdomen; or results in straddling a pupil's torso."

Officers working in schools may use these kinds of restraints, however, "to prevent imminent bodily harm or death to the student or to another."

Republicans say it's a problem if a school resource officer can only intervene in a conflict once it escalates to the point of there being imminent bodily harm.

"I want to know that there is a school employee that can step in before we are talking about bodily harm or death with one of our students or one of our staff," said House Minority Leader Lisa Demuth, R-Cold Spring.

The changes only apply to officers who have contracts with school districts, so officers who are called to the school aren't bound by the new restrictions. That means officers employed by the same law enforcement agency could be bound by different use of force policies.

On Tuesday, Walz on WCCO Radio said a special session regarding the new law change wasn't needed at this time.

"Those officers, we need to make sure that they and the students are safe, but we also need to make sure that we're not using excessive force to break up a fight, and I think that was the intent of the law," Walz said.

Shortly after the press conference, House and Senate DFL education committee chairs released a statement saying Walz's administration "is working diligently to ensure districts and law enforcement have the guidance they need to do their jobs effectively."

The DFL education chairs, Sen. Mary Kunesch of New Brighton, Sen. Steve Cwodzinski of Eden Prairie, Rep. Cheryl Youakim of Hopkins and Rep. Laurie Pryor of Minnetonka, did not immediately respond to the Reformer's questions about whether they believed the law needed to be changed at all.

School districts reported [<https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/groups/educ/documents/basic/cm9k/mdcx/~edisp/prod071027.pdf>] over 10,000 physical holds during the 2021-2022 school year, according to the Minnesota Department of Education. Over 2,000 of those were students with disabilities.

The Department of Education defines a physical hold as interventions intended to limit a child's movement, but it doesn't track how many of those are prone holds.

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison issued an opinion

[[https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Communications/2023/docs/Opinion\\_SchoolDiscipline.pdf](https://www.ag.state.mn.us/Office/Communications/2023/docs/Opinion_SchoolDiscipline.pdf)] last week clarifying the law, and he noted that reasonable force may be used to prevent bodily harm or death. What is considered "reasonable" force varies on a case-by-case basis, Ellison said in his opinion.

The League of Minnesota Cities, which insures all but nine cities in the state, issued guidance on Monday about the new changes in a memo outlining some scenarios where the use of force is lawful.

For example, officers are not allowed to physically stop a student who is throwing lunch trays on the floor and shouting, according to the League of Minnesota Cities. Officers would be able to use force, however, if a student is breaking glass with a metal bar because it could result in physical harm, according to the League of Minnesota Cities' analysis.

"The authority to use force for the sole purpose of restraining a student has been removed from the law," the memo states. "Thus, force cannot be used where the only justification is to control the behavior of a student who is damaging property, causing a disturbance, or is acting out in a way that does not pose a threat of death or bodily harm."

Mendota Heights Police Chief Kelly McCarthy said she believes the many cities will follow the League of Minnesota Cities' guidance since it's their insurance provider.

McCarthy, former chair of the Minnesota Peace Officer Training and Standards Board, said she believes panic around the law change is political.

"I think the hysteria is partisan," McCarthy said.

Sen. Zach Duckworth, R-Lakeville, said he and Sen. John Hoffman, DFL-Champlin, drafted a bipartisan bill that would repeal the new restraint language.

"We're asking for the governor's help ... before school starts," Duckworth said. "This is timely. This is urgent. It's unacceptable ... to wait six months or more to solve an issue that has immediately impacted school districts."

# 2023 legislation that will have an immediate positive impact on students

By: Joe Nathan. *ABC Newspapers.com*. 6/6/2023. Commentary/Opinion  
[Article Link](#)

Four legislators gave me sometimes surprising responses when I asked them what laws approved this year would have the most positive impact on young people. Their answers offer helpful insights about how students and adults can have an influence on the Legislature.

Sen. Steve Cwodzinski, DFL-Eden Prairie, offered examples of immediately impactful legislation that students helped pass. He praised three high school students who approached him several years ago, describing the embarrassment some high school students have when they don't have menstrual products in schools. "It took three years, but this year the bill passed," he said. As of Jan. 1, 2024, all Minnesota public schools must provide free access to menstrual products for menstruating students grades 4-12. The Legislature allocated several million dollars to support this. Here's a link to a Minnesota House hearing on this issue in which students from Hopkins and Eagan testified: <https://www.house.mn.gov/sessiondaily/Story/17529>.

Cwodzinski also cited new high school graduation requirements. Beginning with next year's ninth graders, all students must pass a civics and a personal finance class before graduating. He thinks these classes can provide vital information and hopes these courses will feature "hands-on" active, project and service-learning opportunities.

Rep. Laurie Pryor, DFL-Minnetonka, chairs the Minnesota House K-12 Education Policy Committee. She's very pleased that "we listened to experts who can help us turn the corner on where we stand with literacy. Millions of dollars were allocated for curriculum development and training on research-based approaches to teaching reading." Pryor emphasized that the state will "track progress to measure the impact of this funding." She also cited support for early childhood programs in public schools and expansion of early childhood programs beginning in July 2025.

Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, chairs the House K-12 Education Finance Committee. She told me: "We've been talking about two things for 20 years. We finally did them. Specifically, we indexed education funding to inflation, and we significantly increased support for districts and charters to provide services for students with special needs." She believes these two actions will help educators more effectively serve students throughout the state.

Here's one other valuable idea that the Minnesota Legislature approved, which I'm mentioning because of an upcoming application deadline. Earlier in the spring, I wrote about legislative efforts to expand the number of Minnesota students learning construction skills as they built homes for families with low incomes and/or experiencing homelessness. Legislators heard from participating young people that these programs were immensely useful and gratifying. Educators across the state wrote legislators that they want to create more similar, opportunities.

So legislators passed two different laws to help more students participate in construction for low-income family homes.

The first involves more money for YouthBuild (see <https://tinyurl.com/55rw85yk>). Rep. Matt Norris, DFL-Blaine, was chief author in the Minnesota House. He told me that he is "delighted that legislators recognize these programs are 'a triple win' - for the students who gain these skills, for the low-income families who will get high quality permanent housing, and for the state's economy as a whole, with more well trained workers."

The Minnesota Department of Economic Development plans to issue \$600,000 for YouthBuild programs, with the largest grant available being \$150,000. The application deadline is June 30. More information is available here: <https://tinyurl.com/ta5fmz75>.

I'll share more information this summer about a second legislatively funded opportunity in this area.

These are outstanding examples of laws that will have a positive impact. It's also good to see legislators willing to work, sometimes over several years, with educators, families and students to help improve and expand learning in Minnesota.

Joe Nathan, Ph.D., formerly a Minnesota public school educator and PTA president, directs the Center for School Change. Reactions welcome: [joe@centerforschoolchange.org](mailto:joe@centerforschoolchange.org) or [@JoNathan9249](https://twitter.com/JoNathan9249) on Twitter.

# Minnesota Legislature passes sweeping education bill: 6 ways it will impact state's schools

By: Eder Campuzano. *Star Tribune*. 5/18/2023.  
[Article Link](#)

More than \$2 billion in new spending. Updated graduation requirements. Mandates on how schools teach children to read.

The Legislature has sent a sweeping education bill to Gov. Tim Walz that partially delivers on a raft of promises DFLers made on the campaign trail as they sought to take control of state government.

Ahead of the House vote Tuesday, the chair of the Education Finance Committee, Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, said that the legislation will "ensure that the learning environments in our schools serve all of our students and that our teachers, principals and administrators have the tools to meet our students where they're at."

Republicans lauded provisions requiring high schoolers to pass a civics class to graduate and revamping the way children learn to read. But they also took issue with the legislation, arguing that despite a record funding boost, the cash has too many strings attached.

"This bill puts mandates over money. It puts mandates over students and it takes away local control," Rep. Jeff Backer, R-Browns Valley, said during the House debate. The House passed the bill on a party-line vote, while one Republican joined Senate Democrats in passing the bill around 5 a.m. Wednesday.

Here are some top provisions in the education bill that will become law when Walz signs it as expected, plus one that already made headlines this year.

## More money

Superintendents and school boards have long lamented the growing gap between what it costs to provide state and federally mandated special education and English language services and the funding provided.

Lawmakers this year pledged to cover half the shortfall in special education and about \$80 million for English language learner programs over the next two years. All told, Minnesota schools will see \$2.2 billion more over the next two years after legislators struck a deal that increases funding by 4% in fiscal year 2024 and a 2% boost the following year with subsequent increases tied to the rate of inflation.

Legislators also set aside \$120 million over two years for a new mandate requiring districts to pay unemployment insurance to hourly employees who don't work during the summer.

"It's the biggest historic investment in education above base that we've ever done," Youakim said.

Total K-12 education spending -- \$23.2 billion in the next two years -- is nearly a third of the state budget.

## Reading reform

Nearly half of Minnesota's public school students can't read at the appropriate grade level, according to the latest state testing data. The Read Act, included in the education bill, requires districts to adopt a local literacy plan from among three programs approved by the state Department of Education. Until now, districts were on their own in developing their approach to reading.

The bill provides \$35 million for districts to train their teachers in those programs, as well as another \$35 million to reimburse schools for materials bought since 2021 that don't meet the state's criteria.

The revamp will put a greater emphasis on phonics, vocabulary and phonemic awareness -- or how words are made up of a series of sounds -- as some curriculum vendors and reading programs that came into fashion in the mid-1990s have come under intense scrutiny.

This centralized approach marks a shift for Minnesota, which comes on the heels of at least 31 other states mandating schools to adopt "evidence-based" instruction on the topic. Ohio and Oregon lawmakers are considering versions of the legislation Minnesota passed.

## Free menstrual products

Schools will be required to stock bathrooms with pads, tampons and other menstrual products to curb what Rep. Sandra Feist, DFL-New Brighton, calls "period poverty." She asked lawmakers to earmark \$2 per pupil, about \$2 million per year, for the measure.

Feist began working on the legislation two years ago when a freshman at Hopkins High School told her about classmates who routinely stayed home when they're running low on pads and tampons. That student, Elif Ozturk, is now a junior and testified in support of the provision.

"We cannot learn when we are leaking," Ozturk said.

#### Active shooter drills

The Legislature effectively banned Minnesota schools from simulating active shooter situations on their campuses during class, barring officials from conducting those exercises if more than half of the enrolled students are in the building.

Sen. Erin Maye Quade, DFL-Apple Valley, credited that provision in the education bill in part to the demonstrations teen activists mounted last year in the aftermath of the shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, that killed 19 children and two teachers.

Districts are still required to conduct school lockdown drills, but must give families at least 24 hours notice when possible and have teachers host a cooling down conversation afterward. The legislation also requires schools to provide students with one hour of violence prevention training per year. The Minnesota Department of Education must also establish a statewide model for those drills by July 1, 2024.

#### New course requirements

Minnesota's high school class of 2028 will need to pass courses in government and citizenship and personal finance before they're eligible for a diploma. Rep. Hodan Hassan, the Minneapolis Democrat who sponsored the legislation, said only 7% of the state's high school students choose to take a personal finance class. Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City, lamented to a House education panel that more Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 can name a judge on "American Idol" than name either of the state's U.S. senators.

"We've been in a civic slide to failure for 50 years," he said.

The education bill also requires school districts to develop an ethnic studies curriculum and allow students to take a course on the topic to satisfy their social studies requirement.

#### Free school meals

Democrats pushed through as a standalone education bill a measure Rep. Sydney Jordan, DFL-Minneapolis, has been working on for the last four years. Starting this fall, every student enrolled in a Minnesota school that participates in the national School Breakfast Program will receive free breakfast and lunch.

Parents previously had to prove eligibility by filling out an income form. And this school year, the state began automatically enrolling students whose families qualified for Medicaid.

"This just makes sense," Walz said during a signing ceremony at Webster Elementary in northeast Minneapolis. "This is the assurance that no one falls through the cracks because a busy parent didn't fill out a form."

The estimated cost of the free school meals program is about \$200 million a year.

Staff writer Ryan Faircloth contributed to this report.

# Here's what's in the giant education bill that passed the MN House and Senate

By: Josh Verges. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. 5/18/2023. Commentary/Opinion  
[Article Link](#)

Minnesota schools will see a surge in state funding, along with new course requirements, teacher diversity grants and changes to reading instruction, under legislation that will become law with Gov. Tim Walz's signature.

The compromise education budget that passed the House on Tuesday and the Senate early Wednesday morning will increase school funding by \$2.26 billion, or 10.8 percent over the current biennium.

Much of that comes through 4 percent and 2 percent increases to the per-student state aid formula and extra money to close the gap between revenue and spending on students with disabilities and those learning English.

Schools also won ongoing increases to the per-student formula with a new provision that will tie future funding hikes to inflation, subject to a 2 percent floor and 3 percent ceiling.

"This is going to provide funding stability for Minnesota schools," education finance committee chair Sen. Mary Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton, said before dawn Wednesday, as her party worked around a conflict in one lawmaker's schedule in order to get the bill passed on a 35-32 vote.

## Republican opposition

All but one Republican in the House and Senate voted against the bill as members complained of new mandates for schools that will consume some of their new funding.

Those include the removal of statutory language that has made hourly school workers ineligible for unemployment benefits during the summer; although lawmakers set aside \$135 million to cover those new payments, that left less money for other education priorities.

Sen. Andrew Mathews, R-Princeton, was among the Republicans voting to send the bill back to the conference committee that found a compromise between the House and Senate education plans.

"This bill has come back with less money per pupil and more mandates," he said.

Sen. Zach Duckworth, R-Lakeville, was among those complaining of a provision that will make it harder for certain teachers to get a permanent license, saying it would hurt efforts to increase teacher diversity.

## Money for mandates

However, the bill does include some \$50 million for recruiting and retaining teachers of color, said Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, House education finance chair.

Kunesh dismissed the notion that the bill's unfunded mandates will harm schools.

"This is an increase like we have never seen before," with \$2.26 billion in new money in the next biennium and another \$3.2 billion in the two years that follow, she said. Given all that money, "I don't believe there are any unfunded mandates in this bill."

Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said the bill "contains funding and policy that will be life-changing for students and educators -- if the money is spent correctly at the district level."

## Funding details

Specific provisions in the bill include:

- \$663 million to reduce the gap between special-education revenues and spending. State aid for that purpose would grow from 6.4 percent of each district's special-education cross-subsidy today to 44 percent next biennium and 50 percent in fiscal year 2027.
- \$87 million in the next biennium and \$171 million after that to close the English learner cross-subsidy as per-student aid grows from \$704 to \$1,775.
- \$75 million to improve reading instruction, mainly through teacher training and new instructional materials.
- \$64 million for school support personnel, such as nurses, counselors, social workers and psychologists, and double that amount in future bienniums.
- \$45 million in dedicated funding for school libraries, which is a first for the state.
- \$30 million to prepare more special-education teachers, where a shortage has left schools using hundreds of teachers whose licenses don't comply with federal disabilities laws.
- Continued funding for 4,000 preschool seats that were due to expire, plus an additional 3,000 seats in fiscal year 2025 and 2,200

more the following biennium.

#### Policy changes

Schools also must contend with a flurry of policy changes in the new legislation, including:

- Students entering high school in 2024 and later will have to pass classes in civics and personal finance in order to graduate.
- School districts must begin offering courses in ethnic studies by 2026, first in high schools, and a year later in elementary and middle schools.
- Schools are not to use exclusionary discipline unless the student presents an immediate danger or the school already has tried an alternative.
- Schools can't use American Indian symbols or names as mascots without permission from the state's 11 tribal nations.
- In a welcome policy change for districts, school boards will be allowed to renew their existing operating referenda - which increase property taxes to boost local school funding - one time without going to voters.



# Minnesota Senate and House pass \$2.2 billion in new school funding

By: Elizabeth Shockman. *Minnesota Public Radio (MPR)*. 5/16/2023.  
[Article Link](#)

Updated: May 17, 7:34 a.m. | Posted: May 16, 5:50 p.m.

The Minnesota House passed an education spending and policy bill Tuesday -- followed by the Senate on Wednesday morning -- that puts more than \$2.2 billion in new spending toward K-12 education over the next two years, but opponents said it also includes new mandates that many schools will have difficulty carrying out.

The bill increases the per-pupil funding formula by 4 percent in 2024 and 2 percent in 2025 with increases tied to inflation at a maximum of 3 percent in following years. That will bring the formula up to \$7,281 per pupil by 2025, as compared to the \$6,863 per pupil the state currently spends.

It increases the amount the state contributes to the general education formula, adds new money for libraries, school support staff, menstrual products in school restrooms, changes to reading instruction, an ethnic studies requirement and full-service community schools, bringing the total spent on K-12 up to \$23 billion.

The House passed it Tuesday by a 70 to 62 vote along party lines. The Senate passed it Wednesday morning 35-32.

"With this proposal we make historic investments in our schools. We ensure that the learning environments in our communities work for all of our students and that our teachers, principals and administrators have the tools they need to meet students where they're at," said Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, who chairs the House Education Finance Committee.

The bill seeks to address shortages schools face when it comes to funding special education and English language learning programming -- also known as cross-subsidies.

Schools are required to run these programs for their students, but the state only pays for 6.4 percent of special education costs and 28 percent of English learner costs. Under the bill, the state will increase payments to cover 44 percent of special education costs by 2024 and 50 percent of costs in 2027. English learner funding will increase to cover 87 percent of costs as compared to the 28 percent currently paid for.

Addressing the cross-subsidy and tying funding to inflation is something Minnesota school districts have been advocating for for years. But Scott Croonquist, who is executive director of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, worries that the bill doesn't go far enough to address districts' concerns.

"School leaders greatly appreciate the significant investments -- especially addressing the major shortfalls in the special education and English learner programs and linking the formula to inflation," Croonquist said. "At the same time, the bill includes numerous new mandates and the formula increase falls short of the historic inflationary costs our school districts are facing."

Rep. Patricia Mueller, R-Austin, worried the bill set too many requirements for schools without sufficiently funding them.

"More money means more control. It means more mandates. The bill that you have in front of you has at least 65 mandates that will be put on our schools," Mueller said.

The bill includes new spending on libraries -- \$8 million over a biennium for regional libraries and \$45 million for school libraries.

There is also over \$100 million put aside to help schools hire and pay for more support staff -- school nurses, counselors, mental health workers and other personnel. And \$15 million goes to support full service community schools, with priority going to schools that already receive state grants or schools identified as "low performing" by federal standards outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Lawmakers wrestled over a provision that would require schools to pay hourly workers unemployment for the months they aren't in school -- most commonly over the summer. Districts raised concerns about the cost to schools, as well as worries that the change would make it difficult for them to staff summer programs.

Tony Taschner is the communications director for Apple Valley-Rosemount -- the third largest school district in Minnesota.

"We're going to be paying people not to work when we've got opportunities to work ... that's not helpful in terms of schools being able to staff the best they can. There's work during the summer," Taschner said. "Some of the four percent and two percent on the formula that might be coming to districts is going to be eaten up by unfunded increase in unemployment."

In an effort to address concerns, lawmakers set aside \$135 million as a one-time appropriation that could be used to reimburse districts paying unemployment with promises to analyze the cost and make adjustments in the future.

Some of the new spending -- \$74.6 million -- will go to the so-called READ Act, which is meant to change the way reading is taught

in Minnesota elementary schools. The money will pay for new curriculum, teacher training and two Minnesota Department of Education literacy specialist positions.

Another \$3.5 million will go toward funding the cost of supplying schools with menstrual products in restrooms and naloxone -- an anti-overdose drug. And \$6 million will be spent on ethnic studies grants meant to improve school access to ethnic studies curricula as well as helping schools retain racially and ethnically diverse staff -- measures that accompany a requirement that schools begin offering ethnic studies courses by the 2027-2028 school year.

# House passes K-12 education bill that features \$2.2 billion funding boost, contentious policy changes

By: Steve Abrams. *Session Daily*. 5/16/2023.

[Article Link](#)

The education finance and policy agreement returned from conference committee has House DFLers ecstatic.

"With this proposal, we make historic investments in our schools," said Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins). "We've had over 20 years of underinvestment in our schools. And while we cannot change that overnight, or even in one biennium, this bill is an awesome start."

Youakim and Sen. Mary Kunesch (DFL-New Brighton) sponsor HF2497 that calls for \$23.2 billion in K-12 education spending next biennium, an increase of \$2.26 billion, or 10.2% over base.

[MORE: View the spreadsheet [[https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/GTW8YHmMVUuSM8T6uRx\\_7Q.pdf](https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/GTW8YHmMVUuSM8T6uRx_7Q.pdf)]]

The House repassed the bill, as amended by a conference committee [<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2497&type=ccr&session=ls93&version=0&format=pdf>], 70-62 Tuesday. It now heads to the Senate, and likely, the governor.

House conferees won the fight on many of their top funding priorities. Most remarkably, the basic funding formula -- the main mechanism through which the state funds K-12 education -- would be indexed to inflation starting in fiscal year 2026. The bill's language details certain parameters [<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2497&type=ccr&session=ls93&version=0&format=pdf#d2098689e905>] that would limit the annual increase to between 2% and 3%, with Youakim touting this budgetary feat.

Prior to this automatic increase kicking in, the funding formula would be raised by 4% in fiscal year 2024 and 2% in fiscal year 2025 at a cost of \$705 million.

Sitting at a mere 6.43% in recent years, special education cross-subsidy aid is due to skyrocket. Districts could expect to have 44% of this annual shortfall covered through fiscal year 2026, then ramp up to 50% starting with fiscal year 2027. The cost in the upcoming biennium would total \$663 million.

Plans to extend unemployment insurance to hourly school workers are in the conference committee report as well, with the bill committing \$135 million to reimburse districts for this new expense.

A huge bite is due to be taken out of the English Learner cross-subsidy, as the bill would earmark \$87 million next biennium in this funding area; \$81.7 million would go toward pre-Kindergarten education, preserving 4,000 pre-K seats in danger of disappearing and establishing an additional 5,200 seats in fiscal year 2025; and a statewide overhaul of literacy education is set to net \$75 million [<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=HF2497&type=ccr&session=ls93&version=0&format=pdf#d2098689e15669>].

Other notable appropriations would include:

\$74.4 million for student support personnel aid and workforce development, to attend to students' mental, behavioral, and physical health needs;

\$45.2 million for school library aid;

\$37 million for Grow Your Own teacher grants, designed to increase the size and diversity of the teaching workforce;

\$30 million to establish a special education teacher pipeline;

\$24.3 million for building safety and cybersecurity grants;

\$15 million for full-service community school grants;

\$9.9 million to cover 35% of the transportation sparsity aid cross-subsidy, up from the current rate of 18.2%; and

\$2 million to kickstart construction of gender-neutral bathrooms.

The bill also calls for a plethora of policy changes, especially in regard to measures long sought by American Indian educational advocates, such as:

prohibiting schools from using Indian symbols or names as mascots, unless all 11 of the state's tribal nations sign off on an exemption request;

replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day on the school calendar; and

adding Indigenous education to the state's academic standards during the next 10-year review.

Additional changes are also primed for the classroom.

Civics and personal finance courses would be required for high school graduation, effective with students beginning ninth grade in the 2024-25 school year. Holocaust and genocide studies would be embedded in the social studies curriculum beginning with the 2026-27 school year, while a directive for schools to offer ethnic studies courses would be phased in throughout the decade.

Moreover, substantial modifications are planned for active shooter drills, a mandate is included for schools to carry menstrual products and opiate antagonists, and all school employees are set to receive full pay and benefits on e-learning days.

Finally, a contentious provision forbidding higher education institutions participating in the postsecondary enrollment option program from requiring faith statements of applicants is in the amended bill, garnering condemnation on the House Floor as a discriminatory attack on religious freedom from several Republican members.

Republicans were sharply critical of many other aspects of the conference committee report, too.

"The bill that you have in front of you has at least 65 mandates that will be put on our schools," said Rep. Patricia Mueller (R-Austin). "This is a transformational bill. The problem is it doesn't transform the way we need it to be."

She took issue with the expanded power of the Department of Education over locally elected school boards, which she believes ought to be in the driver's seat for setting educational standards and making funding decisions instead.

Other members criticized the expansion of unemployment insurance as fiscally irresponsible and the READ Act as insufficient in addressing the state's intensifying literacy crisis.

# Minnesota DFL legislators strike deal to give schools \$2.2 billion funding boost

By: Ryan Faircloth. *Star Tribune*. 5/13/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Minnesota legislative negotiators struck an education spending deal Friday that would tie future school funding increases to the rate of inflation, help cover the rising cost of special education services and address districts' concerns about the cost of a new mandate.

Democrats' education budget agreement includes a 4% funding increase for schools in fiscal year 2024, a 2% increase in 2025 and annual inflationary boosts capped at 3% afterward. Their bill also includes more than \$300 million per year to help cover schools' special education costs, and more than \$60 million a year to fund a new mandate requiring districts to pay unemployment insurance to hourly school-year workers between academic terms.

"It's the biggest historic investment in education above base that we've ever done," said House Education Finance Committee chair Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins.

All told, Democrats' education bill would increase school funding by \$2.2 billion over the next two years.

The money to fund the unemployment insurance change was a last-minute addition that wasn't included in either chamber's original education budget bill. It was added after administrators from some of the state's largest school districts raised concerns about the previously unfunded mandate taking away from their overall funding increase.

Mark Stotts, director of finance and operations for the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan school district, told the *Star Tribune* earlier this week that the unemployment insurance change could have cost his district up to \$5.8 million annually.

Scott Croonquist, executive director of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, said Friday that he was relieved to see the state pick up the cost of the unemployment insurance expansion.

"We feel better, certainly," Croonquist said. "We are still worried, though, whether or not there are going to be enough incentives for people to want to work summer school ... Are we going to be able to hire the staff we need?"

Youakim said hourly school-year workers should never have been excluded from unemployment insurance eligibility, calling it a "fairness issue."

"We still don't understand why these folks, even if you want to consider them seasonal, are one of the only ones carved out of unemployment," she said.

Some school districts have similar concerns about the cost of a proposed new state paid family and medical leave program, which would impose a 0.7% payroll tax on employers and employees.

Stotts said the payroll tax for that program could cost Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan -- the state's third largest school district -- \$1 million a year if the district splits the cost with employees.

John Morstad, executive director of finance and operations for Osseo Area Schools, estimated the paid family and medical leave program could cost his district \$3 million-plus annually. For comparison, Morstad said the 4% funding increase that state schools are poised to get in 2024 would amount to \$8 million-\$9 million more for Osseo Schools.

"I'm concerned about the fact that there are a whole lot of new mandates that basically wipe that out," Morstad said earlier this week, before legislators opted to fund the unemployment insurance expansion.

State Sen. Zach Duckworth, R-Lakeville, criticized Democrats for imposing new mandates that he said school districts didn't ask for.

"What they asked us for was a modest increase to the funding formula, an increase to the funding that we're willing to provide for the special education ... and then little to no other additional mandates," Duckworth said.

House Speaker Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park, said the funding increase Democrats are offering school districts will far outweigh any cost associated with new state mandates.

"The things that we are looking at are not going to have as dramatic an impact as the substantial increase in funding that we are allocating to education," she said.

The special education funding included in Democrats' bill could free up tens of millions of dollars for large school districts. State school districts are expected to collectively face an \$811 million shortfall [[https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/6xiw7Cit6E\\_VLzY9doPDoA.pdf](https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/6xiw7Cit6E_VLzY9doPDoA.pdf)] for their special education services this year, with costs far surpassing revenue, according to the Department of Education.

Districts are required by law to maintain special education services, but the government has long offered only a fraction of the money necessary to provide those services. As a result, districts have used money from their general funds to cover the difference, squeezing their overall finances.

Under the DFL's education funding agreement, Minnesota would commit to covering roughly half of that steep statewide shortfall. The state aid would greatly reduce each school district's special education deficit.

The bill also allocates more than \$40 million per year in 2024 and 2025 toward a similar, though much smaller, deficit for English language learner services.

"We're optimistic that this could be an unprecedented year for funding Minnesota schools," said Tom Sager, executive chief of financial services for St. Paul Public Schools, whose \$42 million special education shortfall would be nearly cut in half.

Staff writer Jessie Van Berkel contributed to this report.

# Education bill would overhaul Minnesota school shooting drill policies

By: Eder Campuzano. *Star Tribune*. 5/12/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Active shooter simulations would effectively be barred in Minnesota schools under a provision in a sweeping education bill moving through the Legislature.

Instead, school districts would be required to provide students with at least one hour of violence prevention training per year and adopt a uniform standard for active shooter drills.

The distinction, Sen. Erin Maye Quade, DFL-Apple Valley, said during the education conference committee meeting Tuesday, is that simulations are "basically full-scale drills that can mimic what an active shooter situation can look like."

The practice has long been criticized for the traumatic effects it can have on students.

"Right now, in statute, we don't differentiate between active shooter drills and active shooter simulations," Maye Quade said. "This really just puts some guard rails, definitions and guard rails around what's an active shooter simulation, what's an active shooter drill."

The conference committee unanimously adopted the provisions. The education bill must be voted on by the full House and Senate before heading to Gov. Tim Walz for his signature.

Maye Quade credited the breadth of the restrictions in part to student input. Last year, hundreds of students from across the metro area rallied at Gold Medal Park in the aftermath of the shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas, that left 19 children and two teachers dead. Their demands included a call for legislators to tighten restrictions on the way schools conduct active shooter drills.

Sen. Zach Duckworth, R-Lakeville, said parents in his district weren't keen on their children participating in demonstrations that simulated an active shooter situation, preferring lockdown drills instead.

"The concern was, and hearing from parents, they may not want their children there if the simulation is occurring rather than a drill," he said.

Former educators on the conference committee also chimed in to explain how drills affected their students. Sen. Mary Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton, a retired teacher, said simulations in elementary schools sometimes consisted of police officers entering school buildings and jiggling door handles and looking into windows to ensure children aren't visible in the classroom.

"It really does have an adverse effect on our students," she said.

Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, said that she's done drills with students from kindergarten through 12th grade, and even older students have a tough time returning to their school routine afterward.

"We do fire drills all the time in the name of school safety. And you can do that without lighting a hallway on fire," she said. "That's basically the difference."

The education bill would require the Minnesota Department of Education to establish a statewide model for the safety drills by July 1, 2024. Those models would be updated every two years and require districts to solicit student input before implementing them locally.

Minnesota law does not require school districts to conduct active shooter drills. Rather, schools are required to conduct five lockdown drills per year. Those drills, as instructed by the state Department of Public Safety [<https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/hsem/mn-school-safety-center/Documents/Lockdown.pdf>], require teachers to clear hallways and shepherd students into classrooms.

Current law also requires five fire drills and one tornado drill per school every academic year.

The education bill would bar districts from conducting an active shooter simulation during regular school hours if more than half of enrolled students are in the building, effectively banning them.

The legislation would also require districts to provide at least 24 hours' notice to families before an active shooter drill and mandate that schools set aside time afterward for teachers to discuss it with students and provide them with time to process the experience.

Youakim said it was common for students to sob after a drill or remain quiet for the rest of the day, adding that it was essential for educators to have a "come back and re-center ourselves" conversation with kids afterward.

"I think that's one of the most important parts of this bill," she said.

# Needed investment in Minnesota kids

By: Editorial Board Star Tribune. *Star Tribune*. 4/22/2023. Editorial  
[Article Link](#)

Minnesota DFL legislators and Gov. Tim Walz agreed to devote an additional \$2.2 billion to K-12 education over the next two years -- a significant 10% increase. Now lawmakers are hashing out how those funds should be spent.

The biggest-ticket items in the increase would rightly boost the general education per-pupil amount. And the increase would wisely raise funding for special education and English-language learning, consuming more than half of the proposed additional spending.

This week, House members approved an education measure that increases the general education formula by 4% the first year and 2% the second. It also indexes that formula to inflation, with a cap of 3%. The Senate version under discussion calls for a 4% increase in the first year and a 5% in the second. There should ultimately be a compromise between those percentage hikes.

Bill author and House Education Finance committee chair Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, has called the increased funding "transformational."

"With divided government, we underfunded our schools year after year and had to compromise away things that we value," Youakim told an editorial writer. "We certainly can't completely turn around 20 years of underfunding in one session, but this bill is a good start toward closing opportunity gaps in our schools."

As included in the House and Senate versions, the final bill should address the steep statewide deficit for special education. School districts are required by federal law to offer those services, but the federal government has never fully funded them. The state Department of Education (MDE) estimates Minnesota districts will collectively have an \$811 million shortfall between their special education costs and revenue this year.

Districts have been forced to take funds from general education to cover that difference, so that additional state assistance would free up more dollars for their general operating budgets.

The two bills also sensibly cover a similar though much smaller deficit for English-learner services, with the House covering 100% of the gap by 2027 and the Senate covering 75% by 2026. In addition, proposals in the bills to permanently fund about 4,000 current spots for preschoolers and expand that opportunity to at least another 5,000 kids should also be approved.

Other policy provisions that require students to take civics and personal finance courses to graduate -- and to study genocide, the Holocaust and ethnic studies -- also merit approval. We trust education leaders, teachers and parents to use this material to better prepare Minnesota students for adulthood.

Many Republican lawmakers agreed that the per-pupil funding amount should be increased. But they criticized the DFL plan, arguing that it does not emphasize improving academic achievement and creates mandates that will be burdensome for districts to meet. Those criticisms are not without merit.

We'd also agree with Republicans and education leaders who oppose a provision requiring staffing decisions and class sizes to be part of collective bargaining. Those decisions, in our view, should be left to district management.

The House passed its education package Thursday, and the Senate is expected to approve its version next week. Both will be the basis for conference committee discussions in the coming weeks before the Legislature adjourns on May 22.

The welcome funding increases for young learners, made partly by the state's \$17 billion surplus, can advance the goal of providing a high-quality education for more Minnesota students and improving classroom achievement.



# House passes massive K-12 education funding, policy package

By: Michelle Griffith. *Minnesota Reformer*. 4/20/2023.

[Article Link](#)

House Democratic-Farmer-Labor members on Thursday passed a bill that would provide over \$2.2 billion in additional funding for Minnesota schools.

The bill would increase education spending by 10% to \$23 billion -- about 30% of the proposed \$72 billion state budget for fiscal years 2024-2025. The bill's advocates say the massive education budget is necessary to implement a slew of policies that will lessen disparities among students, increase test scores, attract diverse school staff and make Minnesota schools some of the best in the nation. The bill passed the House 70-60, with Republicans in dissent.

The legislation's Senate companion -- which has some differences -- still needs approval from the upper chamber. The two DFL-majority chambers will need to work out differences in a conference committee, a joint session of House and Senate members, who would draft a final version with provisions from both chambers.

The bill would significantly increase school funding, with a special emphasis on special education, English language learner students, and school support staff like counselors and school social workers.

Hopkins Democratic Rep. Cheryl Youakim, chief author of the House bill and chair of the Education Finance Committee, said the Legislature will make a historic investment in education.

"We have had 20 years of underinvestment. We're not going to be able to turn that around in one biennium, but this bill takes a really good crack at it," Youakim said at a press conference before the House floor vote.

Here are some of the provisions in the House bill:  
Increase in funding formula

The general education funding formula, which determines how much money goes to each district, would go up 4% in fiscal year 2024 and then by 2% in fiscal year 2025. After that, the formula would increase annually with inflation.

The funding formula is the primary source of funds for Minnesota schools and is distributed to districts based on the number of students, as well as the district's student profile. (A district with more students in poverty receives more money, for instance.) Districts would receive \$7,138 per student in fiscal year 2024 under the bill, which is up from the current \$6,863 per student.

The bill would increase funding formula spending by \$704 million for fiscal years 2024-2025 and by \$1.3 billion the following two years.

The provision puts a 3% cap on the amount the formula can increase annually. House Democrats throughout the session have been mulling how much the education formula should increase. At one point Rep. Zack Stephenson, DFL-Coon Rapids, authored a bill that would have boosted the formula by 20%. This would have increased per-student spending from \$6,863 to \$8,236.

The House and Senate appear to be at odds over the formula right now, with the Senate proposing a 4% increase in fiscal year 2024 and a 5% increase in fiscal year 2025. The Senate education bill, however, does not tie funding to inflation in the following years.

Reducing 'cross subsidies'

School districts for years asked for more funding to reduce their special education and English learner "cross subsidy" -- a term used around the Capitol referring to school districts paying for special education and English learner programs from their general funds because of inadequate state and federal funding.

This often causes districts to ask residents in their local area for property tax levies to help defray the rising cost of special education and English learner costs.

The House education package proposes increasing the state's share of special education funding for school districts from 6% to 48% -- costing Minnesota about \$730 million in fiscal years 2024-2025. Many districts asked for a full elimination of the cross subsidy.

Rep. Dan Wolgamott, DFL-St.Cloud, this session introduced a bill to increase the state's share of special education cross subsidy funding to 100%, but the bill stalled.

The bill also proposes eliminating the cross subsidy on English learner programs by 2027, with state funding increasing annually and costing over \$272 million in fiscal years 2026-2027.

A slew of policy changes

In addition to increasing spending, House Democrats are proposing multiple policy changes, including a mandate for collective bargaining with teachers unions to include class sizes, student testing and personnel-student ratio.

In other words, districts would have to negotiate with teachers over key policies -- with significant fiscal implications.

The bill also expands unemployment benefits to non-licensed staff; requires schools to provide menstrual products to students in grades 4 through 12; and bans schools from expelling students in kindergarten through third grade, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

"This bill puts mandates over students," said Rep. Peggy Scott, R-Andover, on the House floor Thursday. "With these mandates and expanding bureaucracy, many districts will actually have more difficult budgets than they are experiencing now."

The education bill has drawn criticism from some school administrators who worry the additional requirements -- coupled with the paid family medical leave schools would have to provide if Legislature passes it this session in which schools would contribute 0.35% of payroll to -- would eat up the majority of their funding.

At a meeting last month, which was first reported by the St. Paul Pioneer Press, Stillwater Superintendent Michael Funk told his school board that he was disappointed with the Legislature's education bills.

"I think this is potentially one of the most damaging sessions I've seen since I've been a superintendent," Funk said.

Youakim, the bill's chief author, disputed that the bill has unfunded mandates, noting the increases in the general education funding formula.

The House was still debating the bill as of late Thursday afternoon.

# House passes education bill that would appropriate \$2.2 billion in new funding for MN schools

By: Steve Abrams. *Session Daily*. 4/20/2023.

[Article Link](#)

State aid for K-12 education is primed to dramatically increase in the coming biennium.

The omnibus education finance bill would make appropriations of \$23.2 billion, a 10.6% increase over base spending or \$2.22 billion in raw dollars.

Both parties agree that schools desperately need this funding boost. However, they disagree on how to allocate this money, with dueling perspectives heard on the House Floor Thursday.

In the end, DFL priorities won out, and HF2497 was passed, as amended, on a 70-60 party-line vote. The 327-page bill now heads to the Senate.

Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins), the bill sponsor, argues this infusion of state dollars represents an historic investment in Minnesota schools after 20 years of underfunding.

"Our proposal stabilizes school funding, supports the health and well-being of our students, works on equity and innovation in our schools, increases career pathways and connections with our local communities, as well as building up and diversifying our workforce," she said.

Republicans fiercely disagree, laying out their case against the bill during a pre-session press conference.

"The DFL bill focuses on mandates, micromanaging our schools, restricting student discipline, ... and closing pathways to licensing, leaving our schools with fewer teachers," said Rep. Paul Torkelson (R-Hanska).

He advocated for a delete-all amendment unsuccessfully offered by Rep. Ron Kresha (R-Little Falls), which would "provide funding and flexibility, local control, innovation, and a focus on literacy."

This 45-page proposal spurred an impassioned floor debate but ultimately failed along party lines. Among its key provisions, the amendment would have:

- raised the basic funding formula by 5% in fiscal year 2024 and 5% in fiscal year 2025;
- covered 50% of the special education cross-subsidy and 70% of the transportation sparsity aid cross-subsidy;
- provided \$250 million to revamp literacy education based on the "science of reading";
- distributed \$110 million in safe schools aid; and
- mandated civics for high school graduation.

But this educational plan was not to be. Instead, the House handed a diploma to the bill brought forth to the chamber, which includes the following major appropriations:

- \$730 million to cover 47.8% of the special education cross-subsidy;
- \$705 million to increase the basic funding formula by 4% in fiscal year 2024 and 2% in fiscal year 2025, while pegging future increases to inflation (subject to a 3% cap);
- \$85.3 million to permanently expand pre-kindergarten education to 12,360 seats statewide;
- \$85 million to hire and train more student support personnel to attend to students' mental, behavioral, and physical health needs;
- \$81.8 million to reduce much of the English Learner cross-subsidy, with a statutory goal of its elimination by 2027;
- \$73.2 million to overhaul literacy education;
- \$65.9 million to pay paraprofessionals and special education instructors for preparatory time, professional development, and orientations; and
- \$60.4 million to nearly double funding for American Indian education.

The bill would also make numerous smaller scale appropriations, such as:

- \$47 million for a tripling of investment in Grow Your Own grants, designed to increase the size and diversity of the teaching workforce;
- \$35 million for student safety and cybersecurity measures via the safe schools revenue program;
- \$25 million for after-school programming;
- \$22.4 million for full-service community school grants;
- \$20 million for the development of a special education teacher pipeline;
- \$14 million for a 21.8% reduction of the transportation sparsity aid cross-subsidy;
- \$4 million for a newly established Office of the Inspector General to bolster grant-funding oversight;
- \$3.6 million for menstrual products and opioid antagonists, which the bill mandates schools now carry; and
- \$2 million for the construction of gender-neutral bathrooms.

[MORE: Download the spreadsheet; change items -- ]

## Policy portion

The bill incorporates the omnibus education policy bill, which would alter the educational landscape in the following noteworthy ways:

mandating Indigenous education for all students and replacing Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day on the school calendar;  
adding civics and personal finances courses to the high school graduation requirements, while embedding genocide studies and ethnic studies in the social studies curriculum;  
allowing Tier 1 teachers to join a union and place class sizes, student testing, and student-to-personnel ratios under the "terms and conditions of employment" to be negotiated during collective bargaining;  
phasing out the Tier 2 to Tier 3 experience licensure pathway; and  
severely limiting the use of suspension, expulsion, and recess denial as punishments for elementary school students.  
Finally, the unemployment insurance system would be expanded to include hourly school workers, such as bus drivers and cooks, allowing them to collect this benefit during the summer break.

In addition to Kresha's delete-all amendment, Republicans offered another 10 amendments, touching on hot-button issues such as literacy, nonexclusionary discipline reforms, and ethnic studies. However, only two of these amendments were adopted: clarifying language around the civics graduation requirement and disciplinary measures for students suspended for violent conduct.

One rejected amendment generated a prolonged debate about religious freedom.

Offered by Rep. Jim Nash (R-Waconia), it would have struck language from the bill to prohibit postsecondary schools participating in the postsecondary enrollment option program from requiring applicants submit a faith statement.

Republicans argue this provision is prejudiced against faith-based higher education institutions; DFLers contend the current state of affairs is discriminatory towards high school students applying to these programs.

# Why a \$2.2B state funding hike isn't enough for some school leaders

By: Josh Verges. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. 4/16/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Minnesota school leaders cheered last month when top DFL lawmakers announced plans to increase biennial spending on education by \$2.2 billion in their next budget.

But the mood among superintendents and school board members has soured in the weeks since as they've calculated the potential costs of a range of progressive policy changes intended to benefit school employees.

"A lot of folks had high hopes that with the united government in place, we'd get some things done at the Legislature this year," Stillwater Superintendent Michael Funk told his board late last month as the Legislature's omnibus education bills were being published. "Unfortunately, I think this is potentially one of the most damaging sessions I've seen since I've been a superintendent."

The Minnesota School Boards Association last week urged members to speak out against a House provision that would force districts to negotiate class sizes and staffing ratios with teachers unions. The group warned it would "bankrupt school districts by requiring hiring of additional staff and the need to create additional classroom space for smaller classes."

The House and Senate also want to remove statutory language that makes nonlicensed school workers ineligible for unemployment benefits during the summer. Democratic-Farmer-Labor leaders initially said the state would pay for it, but the education bills contain no money for the mandate.

Separate from the education bills, school leaders are watching a paid family and medical leave proposal that would impose new costs on all employers.

Scott Croonquist, executive director of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, said his members don't mind that policy, but they'd rather the state pay for it.

"If you start to add on these new mandates, then pretty soon we're going to have school districts that are continuing to face budget challenges, even in this time when we have a record budget surplus at the state level," he said.

GOP criticism

In a letter to lawmakers, Rochester school board members last week said those three proposals -- along others that are not expected to become law, such as higher employer health insurance contributions and a \$25 minimum wage for school workers -- would cost the district roughly twice as much money as the House and Senate have offered in new revenue.

"The funding, while significant and historic, is not sufficient to pay for the costs," said Sen. Carla Nelson, R-Rochester.

Sen. Jason Rarick, R-Pine City, the top Republican on the Senate education finance committee, said in an interview that his party's education plan is much simpler. It raises the per-student formula by 5 percent each year -- more than the Senate DFL's 4 percent and 5 percent or the House's 4 percent and 2 percent -- while also sending more money for special education, literacy, property tax relief and safety.

"We would not be doing these other mandates," Rarick said. "Kids are behind in math and reading, and we should get caught up before we do any of these others."

Rarick said a survey of school business officials opened Republicans' eyes to the potential costs of the DFL proposals.

"My big worry is we're going to invest this new money into schools and ultimately we're going to create bigger deficits," he said.

DFL response

DFL lawmakers wave off those concerns.

"This is a very robust bill. It's got the highest targets that we have ever had in our state with 4 (percent) and 5 percent," Sen. Mary Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton, chair of the education finance committee, said of the Senate's omnibus bill. "We're pretty confident that within this budget that we put together, we have funded all of the requirements with all of the resources that we've put in front of them."

Education Minnesota agrees. The state teachers union on social media has been labeling as "misinformation" complaints that the proposed policy changes will impose an undue financial burden on school districts.

Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, the House education finance chair and a substitute paraprofessional, defended the policy proposals in an interview.

Districts won't have to pay more in unemployment benefits as long as they offer hourly workers comparable jobs during the summer, like in summer learning and child care programs, she said. And adding class sizes to collective bargaining is better for

districts than writing ratios into statute, as some lawmakers wanted to do, she said.

As for paid leave, Youakim said, not having that provision in law has forced a largely female profession to take unpaid time off and plan pregnancies around the school calendar.

"I find it interesting that the folks that are complaining about this, the administrators, already have that provision in their contracts," she said.

Youakim said that even with the mandates school leaders oppose, the House omnibus education bill would stabilize education funding by providing the largest formula hikes in two decades and tying future per-student increases to inflation.

"The bottom line is, the money is there," she said.

# Minnesota education bill would let schools apply for cybersecurity grants

By: Becky Z. Dernbach. *Sahan Journal*. 3/30/2023.  
[Article Link](#)

A proposal in the Minnesota Legislature could help K-12 schools recover from cyberattacks. But experts say it may not do much to prevent the attacks in the first place.

The \$2.2 billion House education omnibus bill [[https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/W01xP9C\\_Mkmb5yMOwHsGqQ.pdf](https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/W01xP9C_Mkmb5yMOwHsGqQ.pdf)], which was unveiled Monday, would allocate \$35 million in one-time grant funding for school districts and charter schools to address school safety issues, including both building security and cyber security.

The bill comes on the heels of several high-profile school safety incidents. The St. Paul Public Schools community is reeling from a fatal stabbing inside a high school in February, in which a student is accused of killing his classmate, 15-year-old Devin Scott. And the country is grieving yet another mass school shooting, this time at a private Christian school in Nashville. The funds would allow Minnesota schools to pay for building upgrades to enhance school safety.

This year, for the first time, the Legislature's school safety grants would also allow funding for cybersecurity. It's an issue that has received increased attention in Minnesota since a February ransomware attack on the Minneapolis Public Schools, which the district has described as an "encryption event." The attacker later released [<https://www.the74million.org/article/days-after-missed-ransomware-deadline-stolen-mn-schools-files-appear-online/>] personal information of current and former staff and students on the dark web. Minneapolis Public Schools has said [[https://its.mpls.k12.mn.us/mps\\_systems\\_data](https://its.mpls.k12.mn.us/mps_systems_data)] it is working closely with the FBI, reviewing the data, and contacting affected individuals.

According to cybersecurity firm Emsisoft [<https://www.emsisoft.com/en/blog/43258/the-state-of-ransomware-in-the-us-report-and-statistics-2022/>], at least 45 school districts nationally experienced ransomware attacks in 2022—including Minnesota's Independent School District 728 in Elk River.

Governor Tim Walz's budget proposal [<https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/documents/budget/2024-25-biennial-budget-books/governors-recommendations-january/education.pdf>] explained that the Legislature allocated \$25 million to school safety grants for violence prevention and building security in 2018 [<https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/MNMDE/bulletins/210a829>]. The same day the Minnesota Department of Education opened the grant application process, the agency received nearly 1,200 applications requesting more than \$250 million. Walz proposed \$50 million for school safety grants this year, and broadened the grant criteria to include cybersecurity.

"Cybersecurity in general for the last few decades has gotten more and more important," said Representative Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins), the House Education Finance Committee chair. "Our public schools, just like our cities and counties: Everybody has the same types of threats for the information and data that's out there."

Districts and charter schools could use the school safety funds for cyber insurance premiums and associated costs with obtaining the insurance. The bill would also allow school districts to use existing school safety funds for cybersecurity.

But experts told *Sahan Journal* that providing grant funding for cyber insurance would not solve the issues that make school districts vulnerable to cyberattacks.

Doug Levin, the director of the K-12 Security Information eXchange, a national nonprofit dedicated to school cybersecurity, described the Minnesota bill as a "positive step."

"There's no question that schools need support," Levin said. "But I think that school districts in the state would be better served by a more coherent strategy for building the long-term capacity of schools to better defend themselves."

Soumya Sen, an associate professor of information and decision sciences at the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, said that training is the key to addressing cybersecurity challenges.

"While using the funds for security facility improvements and upgrading or patching systems can be useful, the key problem the schools need to address is that most cybersecurity incidents are a result of human negligence, and the lack of training to avoid phishing and scamming attempts," Sen said in an email to *Sahan Journal*. Training staff, students, and others with access to the school's computer systems on data security would be a better solution than using insurance to limit the damage, Sen said.

Levin, the director of the K-12 Security Information eXchange, raised concerns that the grants would provide one-time funding, though cyber insurance is an ongoing cost for districts. And he noted that insurance helps districts recover after a cyberattack has already happened; it doesn't prevent the attacks.

"There are attacks every day against organizations that are much, much better resourced than schools," he said. "So it's not just money. It's not just going out and buying a better firewall or better anti-virus software that's going to make a difference. Some of what's going to have to change are policies."

While school districts might use different technological platforms, they have similar cybersecurity needs, he said. Centralizing

technical expertise in regional hubs could be more efficient than trying to hire or train a cybersecurity expert in each district.

Levin would also like to see the state look at cybersecurity reporting laws, like California passed last year.

Required reporting could help schools learn from districts that have suffered ransomware attacks, and take preventative measures, he said. Reporting laws can also make sure districts have to notify people affected by data breaches in a timely manner. "Parents, educators, other school staff, students themselves, can't take steps to protect themselves if they don't know that their information has been exposed."

Youakim, the education finance committee chair, said that the House education omnibus bill focuses on increases to school funding.

More than 80 percent of the House education budget goes to increasing the funding formula, indexing it to inflation, and tackling the "cross-subsidies" that have long eroded school budgets, Youakim said. State and federal governments require school districts to provide services for English-language learners and special education students, but do not reimburse them. These cross-subsidies cost some districts tens of millions of dollars annually. Advocates have said that funding the cross-subsidies would free up districts to spend on other needs. The House proposal would fully fund the English language learner cross-subsidy starting in fiscal year 2027, and cut the special education cross-subsidy in half.

"We had a lot of pent-up need. We were underfunded for two decades," Youakim said. "It's just about having to prioritize within a budget."

The Senate education omnibus bill does not currently allocate funding for school building security and cybersecurity grants. The House and Senate versions must be reconciled in conference committee before the Legislature votes on a final education bill.



# Education committee approves DFL budget proposal along party lines

By: Steve Abrams. *Session Daily*. 3/30/2023.

[Article Link](#)

[<https://youtu.be/K1LLwaCBpJs>]

The omnibus education finance bill has officially graduated.

Following a brief discussion Thursday, the House Education Finance Committee approved HF2497, as amended [<https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/cUP-e0u2v0GG4RF6ZXH7MA.pdf>], on a 11-7 party-line vote. The bill now heads to the House Taxes Committee.

Prior to adopting the delete-all amendment outlined yesterday, the committee accepted five additional DFL-sponsored amendments, with the most substantive being a five-page sponsor's amendment brought forth by Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins).

Most of it contains technical fixes but notable changes include:

a thorough job description of the proposed mental health services lead at the Department of Education; \$300,000 for an ethnic studies specialist at the department; and a \$3.1 million reduction in recommended funding for full-service community school grants, bringing the total allotment to about \$25 million.

Rep. Heather Edelson (DFL-Edina) and Rep. Laurie Pryor (DFL-Minnetonka) were responsible for the others, with each offering [[https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file\\_attachments/2452063/H2497A5.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file_attachments/2452063/H2497A5.pdf)] two [[https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file\\_attachments/2452061/H2497A1.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file_attachments/2452061/H2497A1.pdf)] friendly [[https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file\\_attachments/2452064/H2497A7.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file_attachments/2452064/H2497A7.pdf)] amendments [[https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file\\_attachments/2452062/H2497A4.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file_attachments/2452062/H2497A4.pdf)].

Edelson's made minor changes to the article on literacy and affirmed nonunionized charter schools would be eligible for funding to compensate special education teachers for the completion of due process paperwork. Pryor's clarified the high school science standards to explicitly mention earth science and extended the prohibition on seclusion-based punishments through grade 3, as strongly urged by many testifiers. However, schools would have until Dec. 31, 2024, to put the ban into effect.

Rep. Ron Kresha (R-Little Falls) unsuccessfully offered a contrary delete-all amendment [[https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file\\_attachments/2452067/H2497DE3.pdf](https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/MNHOUSE/2023/03/29/file_attachments/2452067/H2497DE3.pdf)] representing Republican priorities, specifically greater local flexibility to utilize funding increases made possible by the budget surplus. A trimmed down proposal of 45 pages, the amendment would have:

raised the basic funding formula by 5% in fiscal year 2024 and 5% in fiscal year 2025; covered 50% of the special education cross-subsidy; provided \$250 million to revamp literacy education based on the "science of reading"; distributed \$72 per student in safe schools revenue to local districts and charter schools, double the current rate; and mandated civics for high school graduation, while leaving genocide studies, ethnic studies, and personal finance courses on the cutting room floor.

But this educational program was not to be. Instead, the committee gave its stamp of approval for a \$23.2 billion budget (with \$2.2 billion in new spending), which would make the following big-ticket allocations:

increase the basic formula by 4% in fiscal year 2024 and 2% in fiscal year 2025, while pegging future increases to inflation (subject to a 3% cap);

reduce 47.8% of the special education cross-subsidy and eliminate the English Learner cross-subsidy by 2027, at a cost of nearly \$730 million and \$81.8 million this biennium, respectively; spend \$85.3 million to permanently expand pre-kindergarten education to 12,360 seats statewide; and appropriate \$73.2 million for an overhaul of literacy education.

Additionally, public schools would have to supply menstrual products and naloxone (to counteract opioid overdoses) to students at a cost of \$3.6 million, and the construction of gender-neutral bathrooms would be jumpstarted with an allotment of \$2 million.

As previously reported, the bill also incorporates the omnibus education policy bill [[https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/5KAqQ3tF-E\\_mreHP-LtllA.pdf](https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/5KAqQ3tF-E_mreHP-LtllA.pdf)], which would alter the educational landscape in the following noteworthy ways:

mandate Indigenous education for all students and replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day on the school calendar; add civics and personal finances courses to the high school graduation requirements, while embedding genocide studies and ethnic studies in the social studies curriculum;

allow Tier 1 teachers to join a union and place class sizes, student testing, and student-to-personnel ratios under the "terms and conditions of employment" to be negotiated during collective bargaining;  
phase out the Tier 2 to Tier 3 experience licensure pathway; and  
prohibit postsecondary schools participating in the postsecondary enrollment options program from requiring a faith statement from applicants.

Pryor is most excited about tying the basic formula to inflation and is already looking forward to the next session.

"That is a gamechanger and that is historic," she said. "Then these discussions that we've had in an abbreviated way, I think that we can really flesh out and talk about where our innovation will be going forward."

# DFLers in the MN House, Senate plan to spend \$2.21B in new money on education. Here's where it would go.

By: Josh Verges. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*. 3/30/2023.

[Article Link](#)

The Minnesota Legislature's education budget bills call for big increases to general funding formulas, plus dedicated money for school support staff, literacy initiatives, after-school grants and building a more diverse teacher workforce.

In budget targets announced last week, top lawmakers said they intend to spend \$2.21 billion more on education in the next biennium than in the current one.

"We've had over 20 years of underinvestment in our schools. While we cannot change that overnight, or even in one biennium, this is an incredible start," Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, the house education finance chair, said Wednesday.

Differences on spending, policy

While the majority DFL's leaders in the House and Senate education committees mostly agree on priorities, their spending bills contain significant differences on spending and policy.

The Senate bill unveiled this week would increase per-student state aid by 4 percent and 5 percent in the next two years, at a cost of \$913 million. The House bill follows Gov. Tim Walz's proposal of 4 percent and 2 percent increases.

However, the House bill would tie future formula increases to inflation while the Senate would not. School district leaders have long sought those built-in increases, saying they'd make it easier to plan.

In addition to the formula hikes, both chambers want to send huge amounts of money to schools based on how much they spend on English language learners and special-education students. School leaders say they don't get enough state and federal revenue for those students, so they have to divert funds intended for everyone else.

The House bill would reduce by half the so-called special-education "cross-subsidy" with \$730 million in new biennial funding. The Senate would spend \$653 million on the same effort, cutting the cross-subsidy by 40 percent, but their bill would keep chipping away at the funding gap with another \$1.08 billion in fiscal years 2026-27.

Both bills would eventually eliminate the English learner cross-subsidy. The House wants to spend \$82 million on it this biennium and \$272 million the next, while the Senate would spend \$143 million and \$253 million.

"This is a grand slam," St. Paul Public Schools lobbyist Jim Grathwol told Senate education finance committee members Wednesday. "These are stunning investments."

Counselors, teacher diversity

There's also plenty of money for schools to hire - or retain if they're being paid with expiring federal grants - more counselors, social workers, school psychologists and nurses. The House bill calls for \$75 million over the biennium for these support staff and the Senate \$49 million, with those amounts doubling in 2026-27 in both cases.

The House is looking to spend \$94 million, and the Senate \$52 million, on "Grow Your Own" grants for partnering school districts and teacher-preparation programs to get more people licensed to teach. These grants sometimes are geared toward people of color, but the House (\$10 million) and Senate (\$9 million) bills also have separate line items for teacher-of-color grants.

"We know that students learn better when they see themselves in the adults they work with every day," Education Commissioner Willie Jett said.

Pre-school, literacy

Without legislative action, 4,000 state-funded voluntary preschool seats that date to the Mark Dayton administration are set to expire. The House bill would spend \$85 million next biennium and \$155 million after that to expand the program to 9,200 seats. The Senate bill would spend \$40 million just to maintain the 4,000 seats but would also spend \$271 million expanding early-learner scholarships for low-income families.

Ericca Maas of Think Small, which advocates for early childhood programming, said that even with those scholarships, only one-third to one-half of the 31,000 low-income youngsters who need quality child care would get it.

Both chambers are intent on ensuring schools are using proven practices, such as phonics, for teaching kids to read and write. The bills - \$73 million in the House and \$41 million in the Senate - would invest in teacher training and curricular materials and require schools to screen for reading problems in kindergarten.

Other grants

Other proposed spending areas include:

After-school program grants (House \$25 million, Senate \$40 million);

Grants for full-service community schools, which make school buildings one-stop shops for a range of services that support young families (House \$27 million, Senate \$15 million);  
Grants to revitalize American Indian languages (\$15 million both chambers);  
Paid orientation for paraprofessionals (House \$16 million, Senate \$14 million but doubling the following biennium);  
Stocking schools with menstrual products (about \$3.5 million both chambers).

Where they differ

There are some areas where the two chambers disagree.

The Senate wants \$59 million in dedicated state aid for school libraries for the first time, while the House has nothing for that. The Senate also wants \$20 million for Head Start and \$8 million for grants that take aim at achievement gaps.

Meanwhile, the House wants \$50 million to buy time for special-education teachers to complete due-process paperwork, plus another \$10 million in transportation money for sparsely populated districts and \$2 million in grants for gender-neutral bathrooms.  
Policy changes

Besides all the spending, several new education policies are being considered in the House bill and in a separate Senate education policy bill. They include:

- Requiring high schools to offer a course in ethnic studies.
- Explicitly making "class sizes, student testing, and student-to-personnel ratios" subject to collective bargaining by teachers unions.
- Banning schools from using American Indian tribes as mascots.
- Letting school boards renew existing referenda without going to voters.
- Prohibiting schools from suspending or expelling students before the fourth grade unless there's an ongoing safety concern.
- Stopping schools from punishing students by withholding recess.

Both the House and Senate education finance committees plan to meet Thursday morning to consider amendments to their bills before legislative leaders from both chambers work toward a compromise.

Clarification: This article has been updated to clarify that the Senate is considering new education policies in a separate bill.

# Minnesota Democrats' education bills offer more money for schools, set new graduation requirements

By: Ryan Faircloth. *Star Tribune*. 3/30/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Minnesota House Democrats would tie school funding increases to the rate of inflation and help cover the rising cost of special education and English learner services under their education budget bill released this week.

Democrats in the Minnesota Senate are taking a slightly different approach, giving schools a bigger funding increase over the next two years but not guaranteeing inflationary boosts into the future. They would put more money toward covering school districts' special education costs.

The DFL-controlled Legislature started rolling out its spending bills this week after Gov. Tim Walz and legislative leaders struck a deal to increase the state's budget by nearly \$17.9 billion over the next two years, including a \$2.2 billion hike for education. The House and Senate must hash out spending and policy differences before they adjourn May 22.

"We've had 20 years of underinvestment in our schools. While we can't change that overnight, or even one biennium, I think this bill is an incredible start," said Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, chair of the House Education Finance Committee.

The House education bill would increase general education funding by 4% in fiscal year 2024 and 2% in 2025 before indexing future appropriations to inflation. The Senate's bill would give state schools a 4% bump in 2024 and a 5% increase in 2025.

Speaker Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park, described the House education budget as one that could have "generational impact." School districts would no longer have to plead with lawmakers for funding to offset inflation, she said.

Democrats in both chambers want to help cover a steep statewide deficit for special education services. The Department of Education estimates that the state's roughly 330 school districts will collectively have an \$811 million shortfall between their special education costs and revenue this year.

School districts are required under state and federal law to maintain special education services, but the government has offered only a fraction of the money necessary to provide them. Districts have long had to pull from general funds to cover the difference, squeezing their overall finances.

The House Democrats' bill would cover 47.8% of the gap starting in fiscal year 2024 and onward. Senate Democrats would take a phased approach, covering 40% of the shortfall in 2024, 47.3% in 2025 and 60% in 2026 and onward.

The two bills would also cover a similar though much smaller deficit for English learner services, with the House covering 100% of the gap by 2027 and the Senate covering 75% by 2026.

"We put the dollars in the best places at this time to have the biggest impact on our students," said Sen. Mary Kunesch, DFL-New Brighton, who chairs the Senate Education Finance Committee.

The House and Senate education committees heard public feedback on their budget bills Wednesday. Several of those who testified, including Education Commissioner Willie Jett, told Kunesch's committee they'd like the Senate to link future education funding increases to inflation like the House bill does.

Doing so would allow school districts to "more confidently budget and educators to more securely plan for the next year," said Jett, who spoke on behalf of the Walz administration.

Kirk Schneidawind, executive director of the Minnesota School Boards Association, said in an interview that covering part of the shortfall for special education services would also help free up money for school districts.

Youakim said she will fight to include the funding measure tied to inflation in the final bill, but Kunesch said she's not convinced that's the best approach. Tying future school funding hikes to inflation would be costly now, she said, leaving less money for pressing needs. It could also put the state in an uncomfortable position down the road if economic conditions are unfavorable.

"If anything should go wrong and we already have this security for education, that's great for education. But what about the rest of the costs of doing government and doing business in Minnesota?" Kunesch said. "All of those other committees, all of those other budgets, would really suffer at the hands of education."

Rep. Ron Kresha, R-Little Falls, shared similar reservations.

"Anytime you try to tie the hands of future legislators, you create problems," said Kresha, the GOP lead on the House Education Finance Committee. "We can't predict what the economy is going to be like."

The House and Senate have several weeks to smooth out their differences. Kunesch said she's optimistic they'll end up with a "really good final product."

Democrats previously were able to quickly agree on another major education bill regarding universal school meals, which Walz signed into law earlier this month.

"If I could've walked out of here with just universal meals and indexing the formula to inflation, I'd feel pretty good about our session," Youakim said.

#### New graduation requirements

In their education policy proposals, House and Senate Democrats would make classes on personal finance and civics new requirements for high school graduation. Additional provisions included only in the House bill would require school districts to offer courses on ethnic studies and the Holocaust.

Also included in both bills are policies that would allow school boards to renew expiring referendums, require districts to offer free menstrual products to students, and prohibit American Indian mascots in public schools unless they've been granted an exemption by the 11 federally recognized tribal nations in Minnesota.

The mascot exemption would be denied if any of the tribes oppose it.

"If a school wants to use either the image or the name or any kind of connection to our Indigenous people ... they need to work with their tribes to get that permission," Kunesh said.

Kresha said he doesn't think the mascot issue should be up to the Legislature.

"We have school districts that are working with our local populations," he said. "That's where that conversation should happen."

# DFL unveils K-12 education budget bill that proposes \$2.2 billion in new spending on schools

By: Steve Abrams. *Session Daily*. 3/29/2023.

[Article Link](#)

With this proposal, we make historic investments in our schools.

Those were the words of Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins), chair of the House Education Finance Committee, while introducing the omnibus education finance bill. The bill calls for \$23.2 billion [<https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/6OGKfEuunkSoyi7-POBWvg.pdf>] in spending this biennium, which equates to an 11.2% increase over base appropriations.

"We've had over 20 years of under-investment in our schools," Youakim said. "While we cannot change that overnight, or even in one biennium, this is an incredible start."

She argues the DFL proposal will stabilize school funding, support the health and well-being of students, foster educational equity and innovation, and build up and diversify the state's workforce.

The price tag comes close to the budget recommendations of Gov. Tim Walz, though his administration sought an additional \$470 million [<https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/osg9rEqL1k6d7zx7aHnDow.pdf>] in state funding.

The committee held a walkthrough of the delete-all amendment [[https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/W01xP9C\\_Mkmb5yMOwHsGqQ.pdf](https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/W01xP9C_Mkmb5yMOwHsGqQ.pdf)] to HF2497 Tuesday and took public testimony Wednesday.

The 314-page amendment combines appropriation amounts, the omnibus education policy bill (with a few revisions noted below), and additional provisions taken from dozens of bills heard during this whirlwind session. Markup and final committee action is expected Thursday.

Let's get you prepared for that hearing with a look into the current state of the education budget proposal.

## Major appropriations

Schools primarily receive state aid via the basic formula - and that funding formula would see a significant boost at a cost of over \$700 million. The bill calls for a 4% increase in fiscal year 2024 and a 2% increase in fiscal year 2025, while tying future increases to inflation starting in fiscal year 2026 (subject to a 3% cap).

The special education cross-subsidy, long an albatross around the neck of local districts, would see a huge injection of cash. Almost 48% of this perennial shortfall would be paid by the state annually, up from 6.43% and amounting to nearly \$730 million for fiscal years 2024-25. Meanwhile, the English Learner cross-subsidy would be gradually reduced and then disappear completely by fiscal year 2027. The cost this biennium would total \$81.8 million.

Department of Education aid for teachers and other school staff clocks in at \$360 million, a 45% increase over base spending. Noteworthy items in this bucket include:

\$85 million to hire and train more student support personnel to attend to students' mental, behavioral, and physical health needs; \$47 million to nearly triple the investment in Grow Your Own grants, designed to increase the size and diversity of the teaching workforce;

\$20 million to develop a special education teacher pipeline;

\$6 million to revive a dormant teacher residency program [<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/122A.68>], instead of funding a proposed pilot program; and

\$416,000 to cultivate heritage language and culture teachers.

Funding for the department itself would total \$84 million, not quite double the previous biennium.

In the wake of the Feeding Our Future scandal, grant-funding oversight would be beefed up via \$4 million for a newly established Office of the Inspector General and \$1.6 million for auditing resources. Another \$4 million would be provided to staff an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Center and \$300,000 would cover the salary of a mental health services lead.

Four thousand pre-Kindergarten seats in jeopardy of disappearing would be permanently installed in the education system, while an additional 5,200 seats would gain funding starting in fiscal year 2025. This expansion of pre-K learning would come at a cost of \$85.3 million this biennium.

A \$73.2 million allocation would be included to address the festering literacy crisis. This includes \$40 million to reimburse districts for the purchase of new curriculum materials and \$27.5 million on "evidence-based training on structured literacy" for teachers. Crucially, for those following the session-long debate, the bill does not use the term "science of reading" to describe the new teaching methods.

Funding for American Indian education would nearly double to \$60.4 million, covering \$37.2 million in general aid, \$15 million for

native language revitalization grants, and \$2.81 million for teacher training grants.

Special education teachers and paraprofessionals would begin to receive compensation for individualized education program prep time, mandatory orientations, and professional development, with \$50 million being earmarked for special education instructors and \$15.9 million for paraprofessionals.

Local districts would receive \$35 million for student safety and cybersecurity measures via the safe schools revenue program, while \$27.5 million would be set aside for full-service community school grants, both all-time high funding levels.

Proponents of after-school programming will be very pleased - these programs would be appropriated to the tune of \$25 million. However, advocates of equalization proposals to reduce local property taxes will be disheartened as these provisions failed to make the cut (though there is \$19.8 million to ensure the bill doesn't result in any new property taxes).

The final big-ticket item is a substantial increase in transportation sparsity aid. An allocation of \$10.5 million would cover 40% of this cross-subsidy, up from the current rate of 18.2%.

#### Minor appropriations

While the appropriation sum is comparatively small - \$3.6 million - the real-world implications are big. The bill would mandate all public schools carry both menstrual products and naloxone (which reverses fatal opioid overdoses), at no charge to students. Other noteworthy sub-\$10 million allotments include:

career and technical education aid would remain flat at \$2.3 million but the Rural CTE Consortium would be injected with an additional \$4 million;

\$5 million for implementation of the Building Assets, Reducing Risks program at 18 school sites;

a \$4.2 million increase in aid to regional public libraries;

\$3.5 million to train educators on alternatives to exclusionary discipline;

\$3 million in continued funding to the Sanneh Foundation, which was due to sunset;

\$2 million to kickstart construction of gender neutral bathrooms;

\$1 million for computer science education advancement; and

a bump up of \$630,000 for student-led organizations and a \$440,000 boost to the education partnership program. The former had their request fulfilled; the latter didn't even come close.

#### Notes on the policy omnibus bill

By the start of the 2026-27 school year, schools would have to offer genocide studies and ethnic studies in their social studies curriculum. Meanwhile, students who begin ninth grade in the 2024-25 school year and later would have to complete a half-credit in personal finance to graduate from high school.

Also, the controversial plan to close off the Tier 2 to Tier 3 experience pathway is in the bill, however, current Tier 2 teachers would be grandfathered in.

#### Miscellaneous

A few last odds and ends that need mentioning:

60% of compensatory revenue would have to be allocated at the generating school site and the list of allowable uses for this revenue would be reconfigured;

language is found throughout the bill indicating the DFL plans to extend unemployment insurance benefits to hourly school workers; and

both proposed wage and benefit increases for non-licensed school staff and updates to the school nurse staffing law were left out in the cold.

#### Public testimony

More than 30 individuals, mostly representing advocacy organizations, expressed both gratitude and criticism for the amended bill before the committee, while dozens more submitted written testimony.

The provisions garnering the most approval included increases to the basic formula; reduction of the special education and English Learner cross-subsidies; and the article dedicated to literacy.

Items generating the most disapproval included allowing teacher unions to negotiate class sizes ratios; the curtailment of suspensions for elementary students; and the closing of various licensure pathways.

Finally, three testifiers urged the committee to extend the bill's ban on seclusion-based punishments up to the third grade, thereby matching language found in the Senate's education omnibus.

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#### What's in the bill?

The following are selected bills that have been incorporated in part or in whole into the omnibus education finance bill:

HF8 (Berg)

HF18 (Wolgamott)



HF20 (Greenman)  
HF21 (Vang)  
HF22 (Her)  
HF44 (Feist)  
HF58 (Richardson)  
HF180 (Hanson)  
HF193 (Huot)  
HF320 (Hassan)  
HF345 (Hussein)  
HF362 (Moller)  
HF439 (Norris)  
HF456 (Pérez-Vega)  
HF535 (Frazier)  
HF620 (Youakim)  
HF629 (Edelson)  
HF651 (Hassan)  
HF759 (Lee, K.)  
HF806 (Youakim)  
HF877 (Hill)  
HF1175 (Youakim)  
HF1137 (Sencer-Mura)  
HF1269 (Pryor)  
HF1360 (Clardy)  
HF1457 (Pursell)  
HF1502 (Sencer-Mura)  
HF1547 (Feist)  
HF1589 (Bennett)  
HF1691 (Jordan)  
HF1761 (Clardy)  
HF1875 (Keeler)  
HF2042 (Pursell)  
HF2056 (Her)  
HF2214 (Frazier)  
HF2398 (Acomb)  
HF2918 (Pérez-Vega)  
HF2925 (Kozlowski)  
HF2968 (Hornstein)

[<https://youtu.be/cwPbRj6B710>]

# Minnesota schools in line for big funding year

By: Brian Bakst. *Minnesota Public Radio (MPR)*. 3/29/2023.

[Article Link](#)

It's shaping up as a banner year for schools in the Minnesota budget with billions of new dollars earmarked for education.

The DFL-led House and Senate agree on the overall amount - more than \$2.1 billion in new money for the next two years - but differ on how to spread dollars out.

"We are making investments in our Minnesota students like we've never done before," said Senate Education Finance Committee Chair Mary Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton.

For Minnesota schools, aid amounts from the state depend on multiple factors. The most significant is a district's overall number of students.

A lot of state dollars flow down through the basic per-student formula. This year, it's \$6,863.

Both House and Senate education budget bills would push that amount up by \$275 for next school year, a 4 percent increase.

House Education Finance Chair Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, said it's just a start.

"This year, we're finally going to make a historic investment in education," she said Wednesday. "But 20 years of underfunding can't be made up in one biennium."

It's the second year and beyond where debate over the pot of new money gets tricky.

The Senate plan follows the 4 percent aid boost with a 5 percent bump. In the House proposal, year two brings 2 percent.

But the House bill has a feature the Senate bill doesn't: The funding formula would automatically go up with a measure of inflation for years into the future - capped at 3 percent annually.

Youakim said it's a pivotal item that gives schools something to bank on.

"That stability provides them time to plan time to keep teachers and support staff on into the future and makes it so that they don't have to come up and beg for small percentages on the formula increase that don't even keep up with inflation," she said. "This is a game changer. And when you're in a trifecta, you do things that are game changers."

Willie Jett II, the education commissioner under DFL Gov. Tim Walz, urged senators to add the inflation clause to their bill.

"I think it will come as no surprise that I, that we would also like to keep the conversation alive by making the investment even more transformational by linking the formula to inflation," he said.

Schools also get aid based on the number of children whose first language isn't English, who are on special education plans, who are on buses for long distances and who qualify for other special allowances.

Both bills buy down the amount districts have to divert to cover special education costs.

School administrators used words like "difference maker," "life preserver" and "once in a generation opportunity" to describe the education budget in the works.

Scott Croonquist of the Minnesota Association of Metropolitan School Districts highlighted a provision allowing districts to keep property tax levies intact by a board vote rather than a ballot measure if the levy is largely the same.

"Allowing your locally elected school boards to renew an existing referendum will add a great deal of stability to the funding system," Croonquist said.

Once the two bills get through their respective chambers, it'll be up to a handful of negotiators from each body to forge a compromise. That process could stretch well into May.

Republicans acknowledge the funding boost for schools is all but certain to happen.

Rep. Ron Kresha of Little Falls, who is the ranking member on the House Education Finance Committee, doesn't expect a big fight about the money.

"We have a very robust state surplus. So, of course we knew there was going to be a good target for schools," Kresha said. "But I think what the schools are really struggling to get their arms around is the mandates. I think I've counted over 60-some mandates."

Both bills call for changes around unemployment benefits for school employees. There are restrictions placed on school discipline. Schools would have to provide access to no-cost menstrual products in restrooms. There are expectations around ethnic studies

offerings.

The committee chairs say they also put emphasis on programs aimed at improving literacy, expanding early childhood learning options and attracting more teachers of color. Kunesh said she focused on the long game.

"We looked for ideas and thoughts, what worked, what didn't work and analyzed that information to create this omnibus bill that we've put together because we wanted to make sure it was an A-plus plan," she said.

# House DFL Chair Cheryl Youakim should check her White privilege

By: Bill Walsh. *Capitol Watch*. 3/28/2023. Commentary/Opinion  
[Article Link](#)

After watching Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins) run the House Education Finance Committee last week, it's apparent she doesn't like strong Black women. I'm not sure what else to conclude after watching her selectively admonish two strong Black women who testified against the radical ethnic studies bill heard in her committee.

On Tuesday, Kofi Montzka introduced herself to Rep. Youakim's committee as "an attorney, wife and mom to three boys, two of which are in high school." She then proceeded to give a scathing rebuke of the ethnic studies language in the Governor's Education Finance bill. Montzka said, "Not everything that sounds good, is good" and "We used to have a race-based system and we got rid of it, and now you're all trying to bring it back." In the true spirit of the bill, she divided committee members by race, telling the white Representatives, "I can see why you would support this bill -- it's not your kids being told that they can't succeed. And you get to shed some of your white guilt in the process." She then asked the legislators of color, "How can you support this bill? You made it despite the invisible boogeyman of systemic racism."

When Montzka was finished with her testimony, Youakim chastised her to "Please refrain from what we like to call decorum, and not calling names."

First, that doesn't even make sense. Refrain from decorum? She should have said "keep decorum." Second, why bring up decorum and name-calling after Montzka's remarks? She did not call anyone a name. She criticized the bill language and challenged members of the committee. She made them uncomfortable for supporting something that will take hope away from her Black children. Judge for yourself -- the video of Montzka's testimony has gone viral, with hundreds of thousands of views nationwide.

[<https://youtu.be/fDfhhmM0-s4>]

Two days later, Rep. Youakim had a similar message for another Black woman testifying. "Let's just tone the rhetoric down and tone the name-calling down otherwise I will have to do a correction," Youakim said to Alfrieda Baldwin on Thursday. Baldwin is the Board Chair of Take Charge Minnesota and testified that the ethnic studies proposal creates a hateful and confusing message for mixed race students, let alone Black students. She called the bill a "twisted view of ethnic studies."

This isn't an ethnic studies bill. It is a critical social justice bill that will strip students of their individuality and slot them into the role of either victim or victimizer depending on their skin color.

She didn't call anyone a name. She kept her remarks completely related to the bill. In fact, she used some of her two minutes of testimony to read definitions from the bill. Youakim just didn't like Baldwin's message. And the fact that her message was coming from a Black woman, who is supposed to tow the DFL line on issues such as ethnic studies, made it even worse.

These two testifiers spoke truth to power and were chastised because of it. Rep. Youakim had many people testify in her committee last week, but saved her decorum warnings exclusively for Baldwin and Montzka. The word uppity comes to mind. Follow-up: Walz denies state employee growth in his budget proposal

Last week in Capitol Watch we wrote about the Walz budget proposal adding 2,300 new state full-time equivalents (FTEs) in the major state agencies. Walz was asked about our research by Christopher Magan of the Pioneer Press during a press conference on Tuesday. Magan referenced our work and asked Walz if "his budget proposal" added more than 2,000 new state employees.

[[https://youtu.be/mcA\\_oe4SrI4](https://youtu.be/mcA_oe4SrI4)]

Walz first tried to avoid answering by dismissing American Experiment as the source of the data. "Is it the usual Minnesota think tank who puts that out? Well then, I will dismiss that as it should be dismissed." (Never forget -- they hold you in contempt.)

But then he denies adding thousands of new state employees in his budget proposal by saying the cost of government today is the same as it was in 2002. Really? The state budget for the 2002-03 biennium was \$26.6 billion. Walz's proposed budget for the 2024-25 biennium is \$66.3 billion. The only way Walz can make this ridiculous comparison is by using the bogus Price of Government Index invented by Gov. Arne Carlson back in the 1990s. The price of government is an index that measures state and local government spending as a percentage of personal income. It's a moving target that allows politicians like Walz to claim government spending is not out of control.

The real problem with the press conference wasn't Walz's answer. It was the lack of follow-through by the reporters in the room. The last follow-up question asked at a governor's press conference was answered by a guy named Tim Pawlenty. Walz talks fast, talks loud, talks with assurance and confidence, so the reporters just back off.

The truth is the number of new FTEs added in the Walz budget is way beyond the 2,300 we reported last week. American Experiment interns are working on the final numbers now, since no one else in the media has any interest in holding him accountable.

Does this make you mad? Join us at the Freedom Rally on Tuesday, April 4th at the State Capitol. Let Gov. Walz and the

legislature know what you think of their extreme agenda. The only way to slow everything down is to let them know there is opposition.

Join us on Tuesday, April 4th at 11 AM in the Capitol Rotunda

# Ethnic studies grad requirement is wolf in sheep's clothing

By: Bill Walsh. *Capitol Watch*. 3/6/2023. Commentary/Opinion  
[Article Link](#)

Ethnic studies bill is wolf in sheep's clothing

While most of their peers were in algebra or English class Monday morning, a group of students gathered in the Capitol rotunda to listen to speeches in favor of a bill adding ethnic studies as a requirement for graduation. Samantha Sencer-Mura, a new Democratic legislator from Minneapolis and author of the bill (HF 1502), took to the podium and lamented the fact that she didn't learn about the internment of her Japanese ancestors while attending high school in Minneapolis. Rep. Sencer-Mura and other speakers at the rally talked about the need for all students to "see themselves in the curriculum."

Proponents of ethnic studies are careful to frame the issue in terms of content, not methodology. They claim ethnic studies is about topics like the American Civil War, the civil rights movement or the Japanese internment referenced by Sencer-Mura. And that framing is working with Minnesotans, as our Winter 2023 Thinking Minnesota poll showed narrow support (51%) for the concept of ethnic studies among Minnesota respondents.

If only it was that harmless. In fact, the plain language of the bill makes it clear that ethnic studies is about race and power.

"Ethnic studies" means the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with a focus on the experiences and perspectives of people of color within and beyond the United States. Ethnic studies analyzes the ways in which race and racism have been and continue to be powerful social, cultural, and political forces, and the connection of race to other groups of stratification, including gender, class, sexuality, religion, and legal status.

The bill also tells the Minnesota Department of Education to create a "model curriculum" for ethnic studies and directs school districts to adopt the "model" curriculum or something exactly like it.

The model curriculum must:

- (1) use various forms of pedagogy to meet all students' needs, including participatory or research-based models for real-world connections to the current society;
- (2) include a power, race, class, and gender analysis as part of the course via literature, discussion, classwork, and homework as the analysis relates to ethnic studies courses; and
- (3) include an intersectional analysis of climate, health, food, housing, education, and policy.

The model curriculum prescribed by state law has some very concerning language.

"Participatory models for real-world connections to the current society" will become teacher-led student activism.

"Power, race, class and gender analysis" is the heart of Critical Race Theory -- pitting students against each other based on their race.

"Intersectional analysis of climate, health, food, housing, education and policy." Whoa. We are way beyond teaching about the Japanese internment.

As my colleague Katherine Kersten wrote last week, the real goal of ethnic studies is "to divide and embitter students on the basis of their skin color and group identity, and to dismantle and transform America's fundamental institutions."

When framed this way, Minnesotans don't support ethnic studies. Returning to the Winter 2023 Thinking Minnesota poll, 52% of respondents said they were less likely to support ethnic studies when told it was less about teaching students about different cultures and more about a divisive agenda to disrupt and dismantle America's fundamental institutions. Thirty-one percent were much less likely to support it on those terms.

Social studies standards laid the framework

The fight for radical ethnic studies began well before the 2022 election with the Walz administration's adoption of new academic standards for social studies. American Experiment warned Minnesotans about critical race theory being permanently embedded into the standards with the creation of a new ethnic studies strand, joining history, economics, civics, and geography. The current draft social studies standards are well-positioned to aid teachers in ethnic studies instruction. It's always been part of the larger plan.

Meanwhile, the time kids spend in school has not increased and now ethnic studies will be required learning for all students, from kindergarten through high school. The proposed law usurps the power normally granted to local school boards over curriculum and provides for an expedited rulemaking process, meaning the ethnic studies standards and curriculum could be developed in 60 days with no public input.

If Minnesota schools were leading the nation in math and reading instruction, perhaps there would be time for another requirement, but that's not the case. Only half of Minnesota students are proficient in reading and math.

Democrats are getting arrogant

As the bill sailed through the House Education Committee this week, Jeff Peterson, a citizen and volunteer with the Minnesota chapter of the Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism (FAIR), testified against the radical nature of the ethnic studies bill. When he was finished, Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins) tried to embarrass him by asking about his academic credentials. She then asked a pro-ethnic studies testifier about his credentials as a matter of comparison. It was an arrogant display that had nothing to do with the merits of the bill.

By the way, the pro-ethnic studies testifier was DOCTOR Brian Lozenski of Macalaster College, who proceeded to impress the committee with his curriculum vitae. Readers of Thinking Minnesota may remember Katherine Kersten introducing us to Professor Lozenski and some of his greatest hits in the Spring 2022 issue:

Lozenski was candid about this in an article titled "The Black Radical Tradition Can Help Us Imagine a More Just World," which he wrote in June 2020 during the George Floyd riots. There, he describes the riots as "mass uprisings against racialized state violence," which portend "the inevitable death" of the American "social order that prioritizes vulgar economics." After COVID closings, Lozenski concludes, "Schools need only reopen if they join the social unrest and actively combat the greater public health crisis of systemic racism (emphasis added)."

No doubt Lozenski will be appointed to the Ethnic Studies Working Group established in HF 1502 and charged with writing the model curriculum.

In 2023 Minnesota, Democrats are listening to pointy-headed, radical college professors instead of parent volunteers backed by the highly-credentialed FAIR. The ethnic studies bill will likely be included in the omnibus K-12 Education Finance Bill later this session. School choice can't come soon enough.

# House lawmakers hear appeal to significantly hike spending on school safety

By: Steve Abrams. *Session Daily*. 3/3/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Keeping students safe and sound while in school costs money. School resource officers, school security measures, and mental health counseling services are in high demand across the state.

But the funding level for the safe schools revenue program has remained frozen for around 10 years. Rep. Mary Frances Clardy (DFL-Inver Grove Heights) believes now is the time to increase state aid in this critical educational area.

"School districts do not have the funding for necessary training for staff support or specialized mental health services," she said. Her bill, HF1360, would enable K-12 schools to hire more counselors and improve the security of school facilities.

The House Education Finance Committee laid over the spending proposal, as amended [<https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/jXILd7x2bECE5DEIkoHUJg.pdf>], for possible omnibus bill inclusion on Friday. An exact appropriation request has yet to be determined.

Starting for fiscal year 2024, funding for school districts would triple to \$108 per adjusted pupil unit. The state would be responsible for \$72, while local levies would cover the remaining \$36. A funding minimum would be set at \$100,000 per district.

Cooperative units [<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/123A.24#stat.123A.24.2>] would also see their revenue increased to \$44 per pupil. Charter schools would remain ineligible for this funding.

Peter Olson-Skog, superintendent of the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan district, endorsed the bill on behalf of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.

"Safe schools revenue is truly essential for our schools," he said. "It funds critical roles like therapists, counselors, suicide prevention, and drug abuse prevention."

He notes that self-harm and suicidal ideation is rampant in his district, especially among female students.

The bill would also expand the eligible uses of safe schools revenue to include cybersecurity measures. Testifiers were heartened by this addition, highlighting the rising costs associated with protecting private student data from hackers.

Rep. Samantha Sencer-Mura (DFL-Mpls) referenced recent violence and cybersecurity attacks at Twin Cities schools as evidence of the urgent need for more funding.

However, she cautioned against assuming mental health issues are more prevalent among females or that schools can solve student violence on their own. She argued that male students are hurting as well but simply less likely to report their pain to adults, and that the Legislature needs to pass gun control to keep guns out of schools.

Rep. Peggy Bennett (R-Albert Lea) questioned why charter schools have historically been excluded from this funding stream. Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins) explained that charters don't have the authority to raise local levies, while Clardy assured the committee that a bipartisan proposal is in the works to find a way to direct money to charter schools for increased student safety.

[<https://youtu.be/jPpD9F5vS5Y>]



# Minnesota House committee passes ethnic studies requirement

By: Grace Deng. *Minnesota Reformer*. 2/28/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Minnesota House lawmakers advanced bills on Tuesday adding ethnic studies and personal finance courses to K-12 graduation requirements. Both need to pass several more hurdles before becoming law, however.

The personal finance bill (HF651) [<https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/bills/Info/HF651/93/2023/0>] received unanimous support, but the ethnic studies bill (HF1502) divided DFL and Republican lawmakers. Republicans said they want schools to celebrate diversity, but questioned why the state needs to mandate teaching ethnic studies in schools, calling it a burden on schools. DFL lawmakers said the bill's mandate also comes with funding and resources for teachers to help with that burden.

The Minnesota Department of Education is in the process of adding ethnic studies to Minnesota's social studies standards -- which has stirred controversy in recent years -- though students do not need to meet those standards to graduate. State standards include financial literacy in economics and social studies requirements, but the standards do not require stand-alone courses.

Chief author of the ethnic studies bill, Rep. Samantha Sencer-Mura, DFL-Minneapolis, said the graduation requirement adds an extra layer of accountability. Sencer-Mura said she has spoken with MDE officials, and the agency is against adding the graduation requirement.

Studies show ethnic studies increase academic engagement among students of color and low-income students. Nine states have already passed legislation mandating ethnic studies in K-12 schools, according to the National Education Association.

"When I didn't see myself reflected, and when I didn't see my experience reflected, I started to lose a lot of faith and trust in the school system," Sencer-Mura said. "Students are saying, if there's nothing I'm learning in this building that's connected to my outside life, then what does this place have to teach me?"

Sencer-Mura brought students, teachers and professors of color to testify in support of the bill.

"I haven't felt represented in a long time," said Jocelyn Thepmontry, a sixth grade student at Worthington Middle School with UNIDOS Minnesota, a community organization led by Latino immigrants. "I want to know that my people are important to society."

Brian Lozenski, chair of the educational studies department at Macalester College, said an ethnic studies requirement would help student prepare "to engage with the surrounding world, and to not operate in a bubble."

One person testified against the ethnic studies bill: Jeff Peterson, a volunteer with Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism, an organization which advocates against diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Peterson argued that ethnic studies would "alienate youth" and promote "heightening awareness of group differences."

Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, asked Peterson what his academic credentials are -- he has none -- and compared them to Lozenski, the Macalester professor.

Rep. Patricia Mueller, R-Austin, asked why the bill includes science as a potential subject to focus an ethnic studies course on. Lozenski explained that ethnic studies approaches STEM as "not just a technical approach, but a cultural practice," and gave the example of the field of ethnomathematics, which looks at how different cultural groups approach math.

# Youakim supports funding for Building Assets, Reducing Risks system

By: Seth Rowe. *Sun Newspapers*. 2/21/2023.

[Article Link](#)

The executive director of Building Assets, Reducing Risks and supporters visited the Minnesota State Capitol Feb. 15 to testify during the House Education Finance Committee with Chair Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins) in support of HF 806, a bipartisan bill requesting funding that would allow 30 additional Minnesota schools to implement the BARR system.

Angela Jerabek, the executive director of the educational organization, began working as grant director for the St. Louis Park School District in 2000, according to LinkedIn. Previously, she worked as a St. Louis Park High School counselor beginning in 1993. She helped implement the system designed to provide a team approach to ensuring students do not slip through the cracks when reaching the high school level. She helped found the BARR Center, spreading the system to more than 200 schools. She has written articles for national publications, and presented at a White House "Evidence in Education Roundtable" in 2016. Rob Metz, former St. Louis Park High School principal, serves as BARR's deputy director. Other leaders with ties to the St. Louis Park School District include Carrie Jennissen, associated director of special projects for BARR and former career and college readiness employee for the district, and Brad Brubaker, director of secondary schools for the center and a former social studies teacher and track and field coach for the district. Bob Laney, who helped implement the BARR system with Jarabek when Laney worked as St. Louis Park High School principal, is a trainer, presenter and mentor for the organization.

Jerabek joined Lake Elmo Elementary Principal Stephen Gorde and Instructional Coach Lisa Boland Blake at the hearing.

As described by the organization, "BARR is a strengths-based educational model that provides schools with a comprehensive approach to meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students through the power of data and relationships."

Youakim said at the hearing, "Over the last month, we've heard a lot directly from our schools about the challenges they're facing meeting students' needs, from academic to mental health. We've heard from teachers asking for support and training to and from administrators who want more tools to do the work they have to do for their students."

Youakim said state leaders need to provide educators and students in the state with evidence-based support.

"From the testimony we've heard today from our schools that have used this program, the BARR system is successfully addressing these challenges in Minnesota schools," Youakim said in summarizing comments at the hearing. "With House File 806 we have an opportunity to act now and bring this evidence-based system to additional Minnesota schools. This program is scalable - my favorite word - sustainable, and cost-effective."

For more information about the organization, visit [barrcenter.org](http://barrcenter.org).

- Compiled by Seth Rowe

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# Flurry of school equalization aid proposals clear House committee with bipartisan support

By: Steve Abrams. *Session Daily*. 2/21/2023.

[Article Link](#)

[<https://youtu.be/PLViiw5RH20>]

K-12 schools in Minnesota are funded by a combination of state aid and local property taxes. Some school districts operate in communities that have a low tax base, though, making it difficult to provide comparable services to those available in communities with a high tax base.

In an acknowledgement of the potential education inequities this could cause, the state provides "equalization aid" for school districts to lessen the local taxpayer burden of certain property tax levies.

However, the rates of aid have remained unchanged for many years. Some lawmakers believe now is the time for the state to increase equalization aid under various circumstances.

On Tuesday, the House Education Finance Committee approved three bills pertaining to this issue -- HF879 (as amended [<https://www.house.mn.gov/comm/docs/eEIs-j2Xq0eCxjkFwmBr9Q.pdf>]), HF1271, and HF1396. All three are now heading to the House Taxes Committee.

"Equalization helps level the playing field for the property-poor districts," said Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins). By looking at the value of taxable property within a school district's boundaries, calculations are made to provide state aid, helping some districts shoulder the costs of particular school levies.

Youakim sponsors HF879, dealing with equalization aid in regard to local optional revenue, a subsection of each district's general education revenue. She said local optional revenue rates have remained frozen since 2013, even as inflation has soared. Her bill would both simplify the formula calculation for determining state aid and substantially increase the assistance to local districts.

In fiscal year 2025, districts would receive \$840 per pupil unit as a starting point and would then be equalized at \$880,000 per pupil unit. In subsequent years, the former number would automatically increase in conjunction with any basic formula increases.

Ann-Marie Foucault, superintendent of St. Michael-Albertville schools, noted her district has faced significant budgetary shortfalls in recent years as state funding has not kept pace with inflation. Her district could net another \$845,000 in state aid and hire another 11 teachers if this bill passes.

Youakim also sponsors HF1271, which would increase equalization aid for the operating referendum program. This program empowers local districts to gain voter approval for increasing their general fund revenue beyond the limits set in state statute. Youakim's proposal would increase the equalization factor to 150% of the statewide referendum market value per pupil unit for one tier of this program.

She argues this is necessary because statewide referendum market value has skyrocketed 300% since the equalization factor was first established nearly 30 years ago. The change would take effect in fiscal year 2025 and is estimated to reduce local property tax levies used to raise this revenue by nearly \$90 million per year.

The last bill in the package is HF1396, sponsored by Rep. Amanda Hemmingsen-Jaeger (DFL-Woodbury). It would increase access to, and raise payouts from, the debt service equalization program, which assists low property wealth school districts in paying off debt incurred via new construction building bonds. Her proposal is expected to lower local property taxes by about \$41 million per year beginning with fiscal year 2025.

The trifecta of bills drew bipartisan support, notably from Rep. Nolan West (R-Blaine).

"This benefits people across the state, and I appreciate [how these bills would take] a more statewide approach," he said.

# Sen. Latz and Rep. Youakim drive legislation as committee leaders

By: Seth Rowe. *Sun Newspapers*. 1/26/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Two longtime legislators representing St. Louis Park, Hopkins and a section of Edina find themselves in influential positions this year.

Sen. Ron Latz (DFL-St. Louis Park) is prominently the chair of the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee while Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins) is the chair of the House Education Finance Committee.

Latz is working with Zaynab M. Mohamed (DFL-Minneapolis) on legislation that would increase penalties for a broader range of crimes when they are motivated by bias.

"It would enhance training for police officers and the community to recognize when crimes are motivated by bias, which are particularly pernicious beyond the individual victim," Latz said. "They're really crimes against whole communities that are represented by the particular cultural, religious or gender affiliation of the victim."

The state already has penalty enhancements for hate crimes involving assault, but the legislation would expand the list of applicable crimes.

Latz is continuing to carry gun legislation that would expand criminal background checks when firearms are acquired and would enable courts to confiscate firearms "from people who are exhibiting signs of dangerousness to themselves or others," he said.

Asked whether he expected the legislation to pass this year, Latz responded, "It's never been an easy lift. I don't expect it to be an easy lift now, but we will do everything we can to pass both of them."

DFLers will likely also consider approving laws requiring firearms to be stored with gun locks and requiring gun owners to report firearm thefts, which Latz said could help prevent incidents in which young people obtain their parents' guns, for example.

Latz also anticipates reviewing marijuana legislation on the judiciary committee and as a member of the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee. He is not working directly as an advocate for the bill to more broadly legalize cannabis, but he said he does support it. On the question of whether local governments should be able to prevent the sale of products in their communities, Latz said he believed the law should be uniform statewide. He made an analogy to the Clean Indoor Air Act, which prevents smoking cigarettes or vaping inside bars and restaurants statewide, without the ability for a local government to opt-out.

While DFLers can act without Republican support on most legislation this year, the parties would have to work together if they approve a bonding bill to provide funds for local and state projects. A borrowing bill would require three-fifths of legislators in each chamber to support it.

"I'm hopeful, but we're going to have to find a way to get a strong bipartisan consensus," Latz said.

While many interests are vying for state funding this year given a forecast for a state surplus of \$17.6 billion, Latz cautioned that \$11.6 billion of that is one-time money that could not be used for ongoing expenses. Additionally, he said inflation has an impact of about \$5.5 billion to maintain current levels of service.

"I'm trying to temper expectations," Latz declared. "We don't have gobs and gobs of money to spend."

Some lawmakers hope to change the forecast process so that it factors in inflation along with expected increases in revenues. Politicians from both parties supported the current forecasting method that does not include inflation when considering expenses.

"It was never a good fiscal or budgeting approach, and we've regretted it ever since because everyone has these expectations and everyone gets their hopes dashed," Latz said. "It's kind of a mess."

## Youakim's focus

Meanwhile, Youakim said she is laser-focused on education finance, which makes up 40% of the state's budget.

She said she is working with the education finance teams of the House, Senate and governor's office "to make sure we get our students what they need to learn and have an environment where they feel safe."

Topics include increasing state funding for special education and English language learner programs so that they are not a strain on local school district budgets. Additionally, legislators are considering funding school breakfasts and lunches for all students. Federal funds helped provide meals at no cost to students during much of the pandemic. However, the system in which some students pay full price while others from lower-income households pay a reduced price or no cost has returned. Advocates of free meals for all say it would eliminate a stigma associated with free and reduced-price lunches for some students. The bill cleared the House Education Policy Committee, which Youakim also serves on, before heading to her education finance committee.

Legislators are also considering more funding for mental health support staff in schools through additional counselors, social workers and school nurses.

Youakim is seeking to provide funding to train paraprofessionals and education support professionals in schools. Districts would control the training, which could focus on responding to the cultural, social, emotional and medical needs of students. Youakim has worked as a paraprofessional on and off since 2014 and currently works as a substitute paraprofessional in St. Louis Park and Hopkins.

Discussions on the increase for the formula for state aid overall for school districts are underway. One bill would index the state support for school districts to inflation and would increase the amount by 5% in the next two-year state budgeting period. The bill would add another 5% to the formula in the following two-year period.

However, Youakim said, "These are all proposals that are going to have to work through the committee process."

She is supporting a grant request from Building Assets - Reducing Risks, an organization with ties to St. Louis Park High School that focuses on ensuring teachers build relationships with students.

In another request relevant to constituents, Youakim and Latz are supporting changes to special rules for a Hopkins tax-increment financing district that would give the city more flexibility when it provides city assistance to building projects. The bill would allow the city to spend more money on housing and blight correction in areas outside the official TIF district, among other changes.

Youakim is also supporting a bill that would allow any Minnesotan to file state income taxes for free. Programs the Minnesota Department of Revenue lists online offer free electronic filing for taxpayers with an adjusted gross income of up to \$41,000, a cap that increases to \$73,000 or less for active-duty military members.

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# Seeking to 'fully fund' education, Gov. Tim Walz and DFL lawmakers propose billions in new spending

By: Ryan Faircloth, Eder Campuzano. *Star Tribune*. 1/23/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Minnesota Democrats who vowed on the campaign trail to "fully fund" public education are now revealing what that looks like: billions of dollars in new spending for schools to keep up with inflation and pay for costly special education and English learner services.

Gov. Tim Walz and Democratic legislators are seeking to use their newfound control of state government to make the state's largest-ever investment in public schools. They have a \$17.6 billion budget surplus to tap and no Republican majorities standing in their way.

"My messages to families, to students, to teachers, to support staff is, 'This is the budget for many of us who taught for decades, this is the budget we're waiting for. This is the transformational moment that can happen,'" Walz said last week at a St. Paul Spanish immersion school.

Walz is proposing a more than \$700 million general funding boost for public schools over the next two years and to permanently tie annual increases to inflation. The governor's office estimates that the inflationary increases would amount to a nearly \$1.5 billion funding hike over fiscal years 2026-2027.

His plan would spend another \$722 million over the next two years to help school districts pay for special education services, and about \$200 million a year for schools to offer free meals to all students.

The governor's priorities largely align with those of the DFL-controlled House and Senate, which are pitching similar proposals -- although some legislators have said they want to spend more than Walz proposed for special education.

Republican state lawmakers are already criticizing the cost and scope of Democrats' spending plans.

"Automatically increasing the funding for every school and every student eliminates our ability to target funding to the students that need it the most. It certainly guarantees a future tax hike to maintain this exploding funding in the future," state Sen. Jason Rarick, the GOP lead on the Senate Education Finance Committee, said in a statement.

Rarick added that the free school meals proposal "ignores the already available funding for families who need financial assistance."

Some school leaders say the proposed spending increases are a step in the right direction, even if they don't fully make up for years of smaller state funding bumps that largely failed to keep up with inflation.

"Let's at least recapture some of the ground we've lost to inflation," said Scott Croonquist, executive director of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.

The additional funding is necessary to offer competitive wages for teachers, school leaders said. Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said increasing the state's ranks of educators helps keep class sizes manageable, offering more individual attention for students and improving academic achievement.

"We're not doing students any good when we don't have educators to teach them, to support them," Specht said.

School administrators also are embracing Walz's special education funding proposal, which would help cut a statewide deficit for the services in half.

The Minnesota Department of Education projects that the state's roughly 330 school districts will collectively experience an \$811 million shortfall [[https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/6xiw7Cit6E\\_VLzY9doPDoA.pdf](https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/comm/docs/6xiw7Cit6E_VLzY9doPDoA.pdf)] between their special education costs and revenue this year.

State and federal laws require school districts to maintain special education services but offer only a fraction of the funding necessary to provide them. As a result, Minnesota districts have pulled from their general funds to make up the difference, taking away money that could be spent on other school needs.

That special education funding gap is about \$52 million in the Minneapolis Public Schools, more than any other district. The Minneapolis school board cut about \$27 million this year from its budget after settling a new contract with its teachers union and amid a continued drop in enrollment.

Barring further cuts or increases in revenue, the district is headed for a fiscal crisis in the next few years, according to projections.

"There is no denying that a huge part of why we are in this situation is the decades of chronic underfunding of education by state and federal governments, especially with special education and English language learner services," interim Minneapolis Public Schools Superintendent Rochelle Cox said during a district budget presentation in December.

Some DFL legislators have introduced a bill

[[https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=SF28&version=latest&session=ls93&session\\_year=2023&session\\_number=0](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bills/text.php?number=SF28&version=latest&session=ls93&session_year=2023&session_number=0)] to completely cover the statewide special education funding gap. Legislators have proposed similar funding to cover a smaller shortfall of roughly \$150 million for English learner services.

House Education Finance Committee Chair Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, said she's not yet sure if lawmakers should partly or entirely cover the special-education shortfall, noting its high cost.

"I don't know quite where we'll end up," Youakim said, adding she hopes the federal government will chip in more money. "A lot of the gap is the federal promise."

In the short term, Senate Education Finance Committee Chair Mary Kunesh is pushing to spend about \$500 million in one-time cash this school year to help with special education, school meals, bus services and English language learning expenses.

"This is something that we can bring to the schools in this moment," said Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton, adding that the cash infusion could help prevent teacher layoffs in some districts. "I would like to see this done and done quickly."

Democrats and educators who've called for the state to fully fund public schools said the billions of dollars in proposed new spending may not be enough to meet that threshold.

Walz said he'll consider Minnesota schools to be fully funded when they've closed achievement gaps between students of color and their white classmates and rank near the top of the nation. "I think this will be a moving target," Walz said.

Specht said the criteria for a fully funded school "is dependent on what students need at the time." To her, it means manageable class sizes and buildings that meet all of a student's needs, from academics to mental health supports and free meals.

State Rep. Ron Kresha, the GOP lead on the House Education Finance Committee, said Democrats are constantly moving the target: "There really is no number on fully funding."

Kresha urged Democrats to focus on ways to improve math and literacy scores before they "throw money at" the state's public schools.

"The problem is, we're not talking about academic achievement. We're talking numbers that nobody can quantify," he said.

Staff writer Mara Klecker contributed to this story.

# Walz proposes big increases in school, child care spending

By: Brian Bakst. *Minnesota Public Radio (MPR)*. 1/18/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Declaring he would follow through on a pledge to make Minnesota an attractive place to raise a family, Gov. Tim Walz announced a key slice of his 2023 budget Tuesday with major spending increases for education, child care and per-child tax credits.

"Our budget will ensure that the opportunities are there to make every single school the very best in the nation and every child to succeed for generations to come," Walz said as he announced the plan at Adams Spanish Immersion School in St. Paul.

Education was a dominant theme of his reelection campaign, which ended with the DFLer notching a convincing win for a second term. Less than a month after November's election, he learned the state had a projected \$17.6 billion surplus to use when crafting the next budget.

Walz said he was following through on ideas he remembers discussing with colleagues when he was a classroom teacher, specifically touching on the proposal to have the state cover all student meals as a way to boost nutrition and reduce stigma attached to income-connected subsidies.

"I said 'Well, someday when I'm the governor then we'll fix this and everybody laughed.' Me included," Walz said.

Of his plan in whole, he said: "My message to families, to students, to teachers, to support staff is: This is the budget for many of us who taught for decades, this is the budget we're waiting for. This is the transformational moment that can happen."

The plan would add 4 percent to the per-pupil school funding formula this year and another 2 percent the following year, automatically tying future spending increases to the inflation rate. Walz also wants to provide free meals to all students and bolster spending for special education.

And Walz proposes creating a child tax credit for families with low income that would amount to \$1,000 per child with a maximum credit of \$3,000. The credit would apply to families earning \$50,000 or less.

The governor's plan would expand access to existing child care subsidies and tax credits, which he said would reduce costs for 100,000 Minnesota households. He also proposes expanding public pre-K programs to make them available to nearly 25,000 families.

Walz also wants to create a new Department of Children, Youth, and Families to focus state government on the needs of students and families. The Department of Education would still oversee schools, Walz said, but some functions from the Department of Human Services (DHS), Education and the Corrections Department would go to the new agency.

"We believe this keeps a better eye on things. It lets us have better accountability," Walz said, adding that there are too many blind spots in the current arrangement, particularly with the size and scope of DHS now.

The plan totals \$5.2 billion for the upcoming two-year budget cycle and \$12 billion for the next four years.

The school funding increase alone amounts to more than \$700 million for the current two-year cycle and more than \$1.4 billion over the next two years. The free meals portion costs \$389 million this biennium and \$424 million in the next. Walz is also calling for \$158 million to improve mental health services for youth and students.

It's just part of a budget that the DFL governor will lay out over the next week, and that the Legislature will spend most of the next four months debating.

"The really great thing is that we think a lot alike," said Sen. Mary Kunesh, DFL-New Brighton, who chairs the Senate's Education Finance Committee.

Unlike the governor though, Kunesh's agenda includes a \$500 million immediate infusion for school districts with tight finances so they don't have to wait until a new budget is enacted.

"Those dollars that are in the general fund could be used for a more robust, well-rounded education for the rest of the year, and also give the school districts a moment of relief," Kunesh said.

Walz didn't commit to that, but there's still plenty of overlap in their education priorities.

Republicans weren't as pleased with the Walz plans. They say too much money would go to a status quo system and toward bureaucracy in the creation of a new cabinet-level agency.

"What the governor is putting out is pie in the sky," said Rep. Ron Kresha, R-Little Falls, the top Republican on the House Education Finance Committee. "But what we're seeing in reality with the majority party is a focus on mandates and away from reading and closing the achievement gap. And that's where I think we should be talking right now."

House Education Finance Chair Cheryl Youakim said lifting kids out of poverty is essential to improving achievement.



"Kids don't come in pieces into our schools," said Youakim, a Hopkins DFLer. "If somebody's coming in with food insecurity, and hungry, it's really hard to concentrate on math. And if somebody doesn't know they're going to sleep at night, it's really hard to concentrate on reading."

Like Walz, Youakim didn't commit to a quickly passed school aid bill, but she said school leaders and parents can rest assured a robust aid package for the long term will pass.

"Before we leave this building at the end of session, they know that they have stability in their budgets, and they have something to look forward to and balance your budgets moving forward," Youakim said.

# Expectations and surprises from 2023 Minnesota Legislature's K-12 education leaders

By: Joe Nathan. *Monticello Times*. 1/6/2023.

[Article Link](#)

Recent interviews with four key legislators, revealed some expected, and some surprising, things about how the 2023 Minnesota Legislature will deal with education. K-12 education is one of the two largest items in Minnesota's state budget. Legislators can have a dramatic impact on opportunities available to Minnesota students.

Let's start with a surprise: All four of the (DFL) K-12 committee chairs come from suburbs, as do the two Minnesota House Committee vice chairs. These legislators will have a huge influence.

Minnesota House Education Policy Committee Chair Rep. Laurie Pryor lives in Minnetonka. The vice chair, Josiah Hill, is from Stillwater. Minnesota House Education Finance Committee Chair Rep. Cheryl Youakim is a Hopkins resident. Her vice chair, Rep. Mary Frances Clardy, lives in Inver Grove Heights (though she has been a St. Paul Public School teacher for many years).

In the Senate, the Education Policy Committee chair is Sen. Steve Cwodzinski from Eden Prairie. The K-12 Education Finance chair is Sen. Mary Kunesh, a New Brighton resident. Vice chairs have not yet been named as of Dec. 15, when this column was written.

But even if vice chairs come from greater Minnesota, Minneapolis or St. Paul, the committee chairs have huge power - for example, to decide which issues and which bills the committee will discuss. Chairs also propose to the committee what is and isn't included in the final bill.

I've been working with and learning from the legislators since the 1970s. I've never seen one part of the state have so much power via the committee chairs.

Nevertheless, each of them struck me as caring, concerned and open-minded in the 20-30 minutes we talked.

Their No. 1 priority will be welcome throughout the state: lots more money overall for K-12 education. No. 2 is reducing or eliminating the "cross subsidy" in funding students with special needs and students who don't speak English. The term refers to the difference between the amount of money received from the state and federal government to work with these students and the amount that public schools spend to serve them.

The legislators' priorities in part reflect their work.

Sen. Kunesh has spent more than 20 years teaching in Minnesota public schools. Kunesh, who was a teacher and then library media specialist, described a "serious lack of students' ability to distinguish fact and fiction." She says that school libraries and media centers have a "critical role" in helping students develop these skills. She also emphasized that "some of my best learning came from students." She plans to ensure that her committee listens to educators and students.

So do the three other committee chairs.

Sen. Cwodzinski taught high school social studies courses for more than 30 years. He plans to explore a civics graduation requirement, as well as look for ways to make teaching a more attractive profession. He sees this as about salaries in part, but also about giving teachers more autonomy to organize learning in different ways that will help more students achieve their potential.

House Education Finance Committee Chair Youakim has had professional experience in early childhood and elementary education. She emphasized that "kids don't come in pieces; ... food insecurity, housing instability, and a lack of affordable care make it really hard to learn for some students." She wants to work with other legislators so that schools have more resources to help youngsters and families. Her husband has been a public school math teacher for 27 years and she has a son who's also a Minnesota public school teacher.

House K-12 Education Policy Chair Pryor is a parent and grandparent who feels "honored to be in this position." Increased funding for early childhood education is a big priority for her. And like others, she wants to make the teaching profession more attractive.

Pat Hogan, spokesperson for Minnesota Management and Budget, told me that in the last two fiscal years, K-12 education funding has been about \$23.8 billion. That's exceeded in the state budget only by health and human services funding of more than \$45 billion. The total two-year state budget was approximately \$100.1 billion.

Students and educators will welcome more money for schools. A column next month will describe several ways that the money can be spent to have the most positive impact.

# New laws change car-buying, insurance coverage

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[Article Link](#)

The challenge of buying a used vehicle might involve fewer unknowns thanks to one of several new laws passed during the Minnesota Legislature's 2022 session, which took effect Jan. 1.

The law, sponsored by state Rep. Cheryl Youakim, DFL-Hopkins, and Sen. John Jasinski, R-Faribault, will help buyers seeking older, less expensive, vehicles will find out when the vehicle they're considering has previously been significantly damaged or deemed to be totaled.

The law updates the state's salvage title regulations by creating a "prior salvage" brand. It aims to solve an issue of less expensive vehicles holding a clean Minnesota title, despite incurring damage that costs more than 80% of its value or causes an insurance company to declare the vehicle a total loss. The requirements for a "salvage" brand on high-value or late-model cars -- those costing \$9,000 or more or are five years or newer -- remain the same.

Based on recommendations developed by a Salvage Title Task Force, the law broadens disclosure requirements to include all brands on the title, requires written notice from dealers that must be signed by the purchaser, and clarifies that oral disclosure is not required for online sales.

In-state and out-of-state vehicles will be treated consistently. Motorcycles as well as heavier commercial vehicles are now subject to the same title branding and disclosure requirements as other types of vehicles.

The law also makes clarifying changes for readability of the statutes and to conform to Department of Public Safety titling and branding practices.

## Postnatal care coverage required

One of the new laws taking effect Jan. 1 was actually passed in 2021, and made changes to private and public health coverage. Among its provisions, health plans will be required to cover:

- a comprehensive postnatal visit with a health care provider not more than three weeks from the date of delivery;
- any postnatal visits recommended by a health care provider between three and 11 weeks from the date of delivery; and
- a comprehensive postnatal visit with a health care provider 12 weeks from the date of delivery.

The law was carried by Rep. Zack Stephenson (DFL-Coon Rapids) and Sen. Gary Dahms (R-Redwood Falls).

## Consumers' financial interest comes first

Another new law updates best interest standards in annuity sales to help protect consumers, especially older adults. Insurers can not put their financial interests ahead of the consumer.

According to the new law, when recommending an annuity, insurance agents should follow revised National Association of Insurance Commissioners standards, satisfying four conduct obligations: care, disclosure, conflict of interest and documentation. Under the law:

- producers have a care obligation to know their customer and have a reasonable basis for their recommendation;
- producers have an obligation to disclose their licensing and how they will be compensated for the sale. For example, if they will be paid by commission or an asset management fee;
- producers must avoid and disclose conflict of interest, including sales incentives such as quotas, bonuses, or limited time contests; and
- producers have an obligation to document the basis of their recommendations.

## Franchise renewal date changed

A new law, effective to initial registrations filed on or after Jan. 1, 2023, changes the due date for franchise renewals.

The deadline to renew a business registration will be the anniversary of the initial registration instead of 120 days after the end of the fiscal year.