

Schools for Equity in Education (SEE)

2009 Legislative Platform



Minnesota's Constitution, Article VIII, Section I states that "... it is the **duty of the legislature** to establish a **general and uniform system of public schools**. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a **thorough and efficient system** of public schools **throughout the state.**" SEE believes that the current level and distribution of funding fails to meet the constitutional mandate and is depriving Minnesota students the high-quality education system they need and deserve because of its:

- 1) **Inadequacy of funding;**
- 2) **Inequity in educational opportunity,** and
- 3) **Inequity in taxpayer effort.**

These issues must be corrected this session. **Today's children cannot postpone their education until economic times are better.**

The constitutional guarantee is of particular importance to SEE districts because our low property wealth reduces our ability to access referendum revenue. **This inequity has limited student opportunities and placed unfair burdens on taxpayers in SEE districts.**

THE NEW MINNESOTA MIRACLE – HF 2

A study initiated by the Governor's office in 2003 and continued by a nationally-recognized education funding expert concluded that base-level spending for Minnesota's E-12 system is *at least* \$1 billion less than needed to ensure all students can meet mandated standards.

Legislation using this study as a benchmark was introduced late in the 2008 session. SEE strongly supports its re-introduction during the 2009 session and strongly supports resulting legislation with the following improvements:

- ◆ **Phase-in of new funding to eliminate the more than \$1 billion funding gap** beginning this year and accompanied by annual inflationary increases in the basic general education funding formula over the next six years.
- ◆ **Promotion of greater taxpayer fairness** by increasing the equalization factors for all levies, especially the referendum levy equalizing factor that has not been adjusted since 1993. Using equalization, the property taxes on two levies of equal size paid by taxpayers in different districts with equal property values should be the same.
- ◆ **Reduction in funding disparity** between the highest and lowest revenue districts. The gap between students at the 95th and 5th percentile of basic, referendum and equity revenue, currently 25%, should be reduced to 15%.
- ◆ **Creation of a new funding system** that eliminates reliance on the referendum levy for all school districts. This is vital to ensuring equity in educational opportunities and tax burdens throughout Minnesota.

While the legislature addresses the inadequacy in Minnesota's education funding system, solutions cannot be allowed to make the system more inequitable.

THE TIME IS NOW

Reform must be linked with immediate revenue increases. Per pupil revenue has dropped in real terms since the 2002-03 school year, while property taxes have increased in real terms. The legislature cannot continue on a track where reform is discussed in the abstract while new money is funded through the outdated funding framework.

In this session, we need:

- ◆ New revenue that corresponds to inflation, specifically the Implicit Price Deflator for State and Local Government Purchases (which is currently 4.8% annually), without taking away any of the current one-time revenues allocated to school districts in the 2008-2009 school year.
- ◆ Freedom from current mandates that provide little, or no, assistance to students' educational benefits and a moratorium on new mandates from the Legislature or the Minnesota Department of Education.
- ◆ Immediate efforts toward reduction in the funding gap and disparities in taxpayer burdens by capping further levy increases and providing increased equalization.