

EDUCATION FUNDING

SCHOOLS REALLY ARE STARVING, BUT THERE'S HOPE

Try to imagine a year when educators came back to school and found smaller class sizes than the year before, or a stipend that actually covered the out-of-pocket costs of setting up a classroom, or enough education support professionals to meet the needs of every student.

It's not easy. For more than a decade, the state's investment in public schools has declined after accounting for the rising costs of goods and services. The failure of Congress to pay its share of the growing costs of providing for students with special needs has only compounded the problem.

The result is increasing class sizes, soaring activity fees, educators donating more of their own money and fewer electives like art, music and technical education. Inequality is also growing because districts must ask local taxpayers to make up the difference with levies, but not all levies are the same and not all voters approve them.

There was a time when education was the state government's highest priority and Minnesota schools were among the best funded in the nation. There are still some leaders in the Legislature and Congress with the right priorities, but we need more of them. The 2018 elections are our chance.

FOUR THINGS TO KNOW

- The state sends districts an average of \$1,200 less per pupil than it did in fiscal year 2003 after adjusting for inflation, according to the North Star Policy Institute.
- 330 districts, or 93 percent, now receive less per-pupil aid from the state than they did in 2003.
- The Legislature has shifted the cost of paying for good schools to local taxpayers. School property tax levies are higher today than in 2003 in 97 percent of Minnesota school districts.
- The failure of the federal government to pay its share of special education costs means Minnesota taxpayers will pay an extra \$750 million a year.

TAKING CHARGE

- The governor and members of the state House and Senate make the decisions about how much revenue to raise and how much public money to invest in public education.
- The governor's budget sets the terms of the debate on education spending. The governor can veto budgets that don't invest enough in education, or invest in the wrong programs.
- The failure of Congress to pay its share of the state's special education costs forces state and local taxpayers to pay more. We must elect representatives and senators who will do better.



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