

May 7, 2019

Dear E-12 Conference Committee Chairs Davnie and Nelson,

Thank you for your work and dedication to public education and students across the state. As you work through the conference process, MREA asks you to keep in mind the unique needs and solutions rural education is seeking to advance educational opportunities for students.

Rural schools and their students are highly dependent on state aid. Rural schools lag metro schools by an average of \$683 per pupil in combined Operating Referendum Revenue and Local Optional Revenue. Rural schools lack the tax base and household incomes to make up that difference.

As a result, we ask that you include this funding in the final E-12 conference committee report:

- Rural schools are highly dependent on the formula and 3% and 2% matters greatly;
- Rural schools with School Readiness Plus (SR+) need state funding to continue to offer this opportunity in their communities; and
- Rural schools with high Special Education cross subsidies need to have the cross subsidies frozen and even reduced with cross subsidy reduction aid in the House Bill.

We also ask you to include in the final E-12 conference committee report the following specific items which affect rural school districts and cooperatives' ability to provide educational opportunities for students:

Cooperative Facilities for High Need Students

The House bill contains language from HF 1980 (SF 1999) giving school districts more tools to address the deferred needs of their cooperative facilities. Rural schools utilize cooperatives to provide specialized instruction and facilities for high need students whereas metro schools utilized the Intermediate districts. The House bill provides cooperatives with comparable support that Intermediate district members can provide through lease levy and LTFM authority.

This language also provides additional options for funding cooperative facility needs, and the fiscal note for this legislation shows a minor \$139,000 levy impact.

Initiated in 2017, we're hopeful the legislature can provide the needed tools these provisions provide rural cooperatives.

Northwest Partnership & Statewide Partnership for CE Credentialing

The Senate bill eliminates current year funding for this innovative collaboration between Lakes Country Service Cooperative and MN State Moorhead. The NWP is helping high school teachers attain the graduate credits they need to continue teaching concurrent enrollment college courses in the high school setting.

The House bill would extend the NWP funds into the next biennium, allowing them to expend these funds for two more fiscal years. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) has indicated they will be back in



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2022 to review the status of concurrent enrollment staff credentials. Continuing this program will help our faculty members meet their requirements and retain concurrent courses with post-secondary credits for students.

Please support the House position on NWP & Statewide Partnership funding.

Safe Schools Funding for students served by Educational Cooperatives

The House and Senate bills contain safe schools funding for school districts, charter schools and Intermediate districts. However, both bills treat differently students who are served by educational cooperatives rather than their metro Intermediate counterparts -- the House with a third of the funding for Intermediates and the Senate with no funding at all. Educational cooperatives serve many students in setting 4 programs. It's very concerning the legislature would value the safety and well-being of these students and staff less than those served in the metro area.

We ask for parity in Safe Schools funding between the Intermediates and students served by educational cooperatives.

Special Education Paperwork Reduction measures

Significant work was presented by the New Ulm school district to show how certain changes to special education law can reduce the amount of paperwork special education teachers are currently doing. While the Senate includes some of the proposed changes, we request you include the full set of changes that are carried in the House bill including the stakeholder work group on Prior Written Notice.

Rural CTE Consortia

The House bill codifies the funding for the rural CTE consortia. The Senate bill sunsets funding for these initiatives in 2022. While two regions of the state have CTE consortia in the works, the other regions of the state, administered by their regional Service Cooperative, want to meet local demand for CTE educational opportunities.

Please support the House position on funding and codifying the rural CTE consortia.

Innovative mental health grants

The House bill provides funding for innovative mental health grants provided by Intermediates and cooperatives serving setting 4 programs. Mental health needs are great in rural Minnesota and supports are not always accessible.

Please support continued funding for these programs.

Breckenridge PSEO

Both the House and Senate enable Breckenridge to contract for PSEO with the North Dakota State College of Science which is within four miles of Breckenridge HS. This is a unique situation among our border cities and will provide opportunity for MN youth for learning in cutting edge, high tech CTE fields without reducing concurrent education opportunities Breckenridge has with Minnesota State's M State's community college.

Please support this opportunity for Breckenridge students.



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LTFM in Growing School Districts

The House bill provides a floor for the building age index and Long Term Facility Maintenance Funding (LTFM) for growing school districts which are adding instructional square footage. The floor is the building index the year prior to the year that the district facility footprint increased because 80% of the previous space is continued to be used. The building index effect of reducing the building age when new square footage is added assumes that new spaces are replacing older spaces. That is not the case in districts which are increasing in enrollment.

Please support the House position to enable districts with growing enrollments to effectively maintain their growing facility footprint.

Karlstad Sparsity Gap Funding

The Senate bill provides two years of elementary sparsity funding for the Tri-County School District in Karlstad, MN. MDE provided elementary sparsity funding in error for FY '17 and '18, then realized its error and stopped the funding. The district has had to make cuts in FY '19 affecting secondary science and support services for students as a result. The soonest the district can ask its voters for an increase in operating referendum revenue to replace this revenue will be this fall, but the funding will not be realized until FY '21.

We ask you support this "bridge funding" to allow the district to ask voters to replace these funds or have more time to downsize the district offerings.

Sincerely,



Fred Nolan, Executive Director

CC: Representatives Youakim, Sanstede, Pinto and Urdahl
Senators Eichorn, Weber, Jasinski and Wiger



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