



April 13, 2018

Chair Pratt, Senate E-12 Education Policy Committee

Dear Chair Pratt:

We wish to thank you for the attentiveness with which you conducted your committee hearings and met with multiple groups of our member superintendents.

As a former school board member, we are sure you remember the difficulties in providing a focused, quality education with a balanced budget among all the competing demands on that budget. While you may not have intended it, SF 3086 contains requirements which place demands on the school budgets and staff activities.

Since there was insufficient time remaining for a Local Impact Fiscal Note, we took it upon ourselves to survey our members on the required district policy changes in SF 3086 that appeared to have cost implication. Seventy-two of our member superintendents responded. This represents one-third of membership and these superintendents are responsible for the education of approximately 60,000 students. The purpose of this letter is to bring those survey results to your attention.

As you can see in the table on page two, the estimated Out of Pocket expenses for the two mandates addressed in this survey would be \$11.44 per pupil. In addition, the superintendents estimated the costs of redirecting staff from current tasks to these new mandates would be an additional \$14.93 for a total fiscal impact of \$26.37. This is 21% of the \$124 increase in the formula for the 18/19 school year.

Redirecting staff time impacts rural schools in which all staff are doing multiple roles already. This spreads everyone thinner. As one superintendent put it "this is about priorities. If any of this comes in, something else has to go."

In the context of what do you truly want schools to do, we ask that you significantly scale back the policy requirements in SF 3086 as it moves forward. For example, rather than requiring a dyslexia specific screening for all children, we recommend more targeted language that would require screening for dyslexia for students showing reading difficulties or who are reading below proficiency. This focuses districts on the children who are having difficulty learning to read, something we can all agree is vital.

In regards to implementing non-exclusionary discipline policies and practices, Art. 2, Section 16 requires districts to attempt using alternative services or nonexclusionary disciplinary processes. This creates the mandate, despite Section 15 which states districts "are encouraged" to use nonexclusionary discipline processes. Many of our rural districts do not have in-school suspension or assistant principals to implement nonexclusionary processes because they don't deal with discipline at this level on a regular basis.

We prefer the ‘encourage’ language to be consistent in all sections. It will be both clear on intent and allow for the case-by-case discipline decisions administrators make. Please note this issue in particular has been signaled out by our members and they will be contacting their Senators asking for changes to this language and asking them to keep in mind what is best for all students. As one superintendent put it, “At what point do the rights of other learners take precedence over those who are causing disruption to the learning environment?”

Mandates	# Districts with data	Per APU Out of Pocket Costs	Per APU In-Kind Staff Redirection	Total New and Existing Costs
Dyslexia Screening once between K and grade 2	61	\$8.87	\$5.50	\$14.37
Attempt to implement non-exclusionary discipline policies and practices modifications to the Fair Pupil Dismissal Act	35	\$2.57	\$9.43	\$12.00
Totals		\$11.44	\$14.93	\$26.37*

*26.37 is 21% of \$124 increase in the formula for ‘18/19

We also surveyed our members on the vexing problem of families who for whatever reason are behind in their lunch payments. In these 72 districts, the unpaid debt for this year as of early April is \$304,163. This works out to \$5.07 per all students in these districts. We understand the shaming issue around lunches and the need to feed hungry children, but we ask that you not extend language regarding school lunches to other fees and activities unrelated to school meals as the House Education policy bill currently does.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of these concerns and data. We look forward to working with you as the process unfolds this session.

Sincerely,

Fred Nolan
MREA Executive Director

Sam Walseth
MREA Director of Legislative Affairs

