



2006 Debate Minnesota Education Background Information

Funding. According to a study by the National Education Association (NEA), the U.S. average per student expenditure for public elementary and secondary schools in 2003-2004 fall enrollment was \$8,248. New York had the highest per student expenditure with \$12,325, and Utah the lowest with \$5,091. Minnesota ranked 19th with \$8,821.

During school years 2002-2003, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, the basic component of Minnesota's general education formula was level at \$4,601 per pupil unit. The 2005 Omnibus Education Funding Bill increased funding to Minnesota schools by \$800 million over the following two school years. Of that amount, the bill dedicated \$470 million toward the formula, increasing it to \$4,783 for 2005-2006 and \$4,974 for 2006-2007, a 4 percent increase each school year. Some other major highlights of the 2005 bill included funding for Q Comp; gifted and talented; Get Ready/Get Credit; and to school districts to help cover excess special education costs.

70 percent classroom proposal. A 2005 proposal would require all school districts to spend at least 70 percent of expenditures directly on classroom instruction. Classroom expenditures were defined as regular instruction; teacher-to-student interaction and instruction; teacher salaries and benefits; vocational instruction; and special education. If enacted, an estimated \$112 million would be redeployed from school district administration to classrooms. The proposal did not pass.

Teacher salaries. According to a study by the NEA, the average teacher salary in Minnesota ranked 20th out of the 50 states for the 2003-2004 school year. This amount was 97 percent of the national teacher salary average.

In 2005, Minnesota enacted Q Comp, an alternative teacher compensation program. Q Comp's supporters see it as a way to advance the teaching profession by providing structured professional development and evaluation, as well as an alternative pay schedule that compensates teachers based on performance, not just seniority. Q Comp is voluntary and adds another \$260 per student in participating districts. As of August 2006, 23 school districts opted to participate.

Graduation rate. Minnesota's overall graduation rate for 2004 was 89 percent, according to the Minnesota Department of Education. However, American Indian, Hispanic, and African American students had graduation rates of 64, 55 and 64 percent, respectively.

Graduation standards. During the 2003 and 2004 legislative sessions, the state developed graduation standards for math, reading, science, and social studies. It will be several years before these standards will be incorporated into the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) system. Currently, the MCAs are based on standards included in the previously developed state graduation standards. Scores on these tests are used to grade schools by awarding "stars" for levels of proficiency and annual score growth.

Non-public school aid. Minnesota provides state funding to private schools (both religious affiliated and non-religious affiliated) for support services, special education, and transportation. Parents who send their children to private schools also are eligible to receive tax credits for certain investments in their children's education and are allowed to deduct a portion of their children's tuition from their state income taxes. Minnesota generally has been considered a leader in providing support to non-public schools.

Charter schools. Minnesota passed the first charter school law in the nation in 1991. Currently, 136 charter schools operate in Minnesota. The amount of state aid sent to support a student in his/her resident district follows the student to the charter school for operational purposes.

Choice programs. Minnesota has long been an innovator in providing students with a variety of educational options. In addition to charter schools, Minnesota also has: an open enrollment program that allows students from one public school district to attend another district; area learning centers; the post-secondary enrollment options program and the Get Ready/Get Credit program, which both allow high school students the opportunity to obtain college course credits.

Declining enrollment. Public school districts range widely in size, from 67 students in Pine Point to over 42,000 in St. Paul. According to a report by the State Auditor, from 2001-2005, enrollment declined 2.3 percent statewide, but in districts with less than 1,000 students, enrollment declined 9.5 percent. There continues to be a significant population migration away from rural areas and toward metro areas.

Changes in student demography. Minnesota's schools are increasingly diverse. According to 2005 data from the Minnesota Department of Education, 7 percent of the statewide student population does not speak English as its first language and is limited in English proficiency. There also are more students living in poverty, and the Department's 2005 data indicates that 30 percent of Minnesota students qualify for free or reduced price lunches. Neither of these dynamics is limited to the metro area. Districts throughout the state are experiencing growth in both areas.

Special education. The federal government passed Public Law 94-142 in 1975 which required special education opportunities for children with disabilities to be available and committed the federal government to pay 40 percent of excess costs to educate these students. The federal government currently provides approximately 18 percent of funding for special education to states and has never provided the 40 percent. A state auditor's report on public school costs from 2001-2005 showed that one of the fastest growing major programs was special education.

This information is compiled from numerous sources including the Omnibus 2005 E-12 Budget: Appropriations—Chap. 5, 1st SS; Rankings & Estimates, NEA Research June 2005; and Financial Trends of Minnesota School Districts and Charter Schools, June 2006, Minnesota State Auditor.



**2006 Debate Minnesota
Potential Education Questions**

1. What do you see the education challenges to be in your district, or across the state? Are there particular issues which concern you that you want to work to resolve? What are they and what do you propose as a response?
2. Although the 2005 Legislature significantly increased funding to K-12 education, many believe schools are under-funded, and/or rely too heavily on local levies. Do you believe the state needs to increase funding for schools, and if so, how much is needed and how do you propose to accommodate that need?

Possible follow-up questions:

- Do you support the 70 percent in the classroom proposal?
 - Do you support Q Comp?
 - In 2001, the state provided property tax relief by taking on full responsibility for funding the general education formula. This cost the state approximately \$1 billion per year. The Legislature did not identify a permanent way to fund this commitment and some would argue that the state's commitment to this policy has eroded. Do you still support this policy, and if so, what is your strategy to help the state meet this revenue commitment?
3. One of the greatest challenges facing us is defining what an adequate or comprehensive education should include. Minnesota's Constitution, Article 13, Section 1, states that it is the duty of the Legislature to establish a general and uniform system of schools.

Do you believe that an adequate education includes opportunities for advanced placement, the arts, gifted and talented programs, technology, foreign language, and co-curricular activities? How should these programs be paid for in public schools? How much should parents pay out-of-pocket in the form of fees for their child's education?
 4. Another challenge facing our schools is measuring success or failure. The Legislature has chosen to use standardized tests as a way for parents and the public to hold schools more accountable. Do you believe the use of standardized tests, such as the MCA system, presents an accurate picture of how schools are doing? What changes, if any, would you make to Minnesota's testing requirements?