

Fixing a Formula that's Broken

It's time our kids had an education funding system that works for them.

1. What's the education funding study that everyone is talking about?

A group of education organizations has commissioned John Myers, a nationally recognized education funding expert with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (APA), to study **how much it costs to make certain that Minnesota's students meet state and federal performance standards**. The study will determine this cost using an approach often referred to as standards-based funding. The idea is to examine the cost of delivering the necessary programs and services which will permit our students to perform at required achievement levels.

Here's another way to look at this study: if the state is going to build a new highway, it would provide potential contractors with the specifications and standards to which the state wants the highway built. Construction companies would then cost it out and give the state bids for completing the project based on these standards. This is essentially what the Myers/APA study will do for our schools. It will cost out the level of funding required for all kids to reach the high standards set for student achievement by state and federal mandates. If we want to hold schools accountable, it makes sense that districts should have the resources required to do the job.

2. What has the study found so far?

In December 2005, three Minnesota education organizations issued a report by John Myers that found a nearly **\$1 billion funding gap** between the investment Minnesota has been making in education and what is required in order for students to meet the state's mandated academic standards. The report, "Determining the Cost of Education in Minnesota," used data from the Governor's Education Funding Reform Task Force Report which was issued in 2004. The Governor's Task Force made several key recommendations; however, it stopped short of estimating the cost of educating students to state and national standards.

Since the release of the report in December 2005, Myers has been commissioned by a larger coalition of education organizations to complete a more comprehensive analysis using more recent data and additional research methodologies to confirm his findings. This report is expected to be released later this summer.

3. Why is this information important and how will it be used?

Myers' initial work confirms what many have suspected for years: **Minnesota's current investment in its schools falls short** of what is required to ensure all students have the opportunity to achieve state and federal standards. The study advocates a different approach to funding schools than what has been followed in the past. Like many states, Minnesota determines its school funding formulas largely on the basis of total available revenue. There is no rational basis for determining and linking the state requirements to its investments in education. Current funding does not reflect the dollars needed to pay for standards-based reform, which the federal government and most states—including Minnesota—have decided is the best way to improve K-12 education.

4. Our current education funding system is not only inadequate, it's broken.

The information generated by the study will be used to educate legislators, key policy makers, and the public about the need to reform our education funding system in Minnesota. **If we are serious about improving achievement for all students, then this report will be useful in identifying the resources needed for this goal to be met.** It will also help us engage state leaders in a discussion on not only the funding required for higher achievement, but the need for a new funding model.

5. What can you do?

Stay tuned. Watch for the release of the funding study report later this summer and be prepared to engage in meaningful conversations with legislative candidates on this important topic.

For more information, please visit these websites:

www.amsd.org

www.mnrea.org

www.schoolsforequity.org