



## **Budget & Education Working Group**

### **Group A: Special Needs Students and Programs June Meeting Summary**

Below are notes from comments made by the Budget & Education Working Group members.

#### **Narrative:**

The group discussed various challenges and funding disparities in providing special education services, particularly in rural areas and smaller schools. They examine the shortages of special education teachers and paraprofessionals, the impact of inflation on education budgets, and the need for increased federal funding. The group also emphasized underfunded or unfunded mandates, such as gifted education. They suggest potential solutions, including the increased quality educator payments, data collection on special education staffing, and aligning funding with the needed teachers rather than ANB. The group also discussed the complexities of funding for special education programs, including licensing requirements and reimbursement rates for Medicaid. Overall, the conversation highlights the ongoing challenges and frustrations faced by educators in providing adequate special education services and the need for increased commitments and resources from the federal government and state legislatures.

#### **Discussion Points:**

- Federal Funding: What can be done to pressure the federal government to fund IDEA at a higher level?
  - Can ask legislature to request support from federal representatives.
- Teacher Recruitment & Retention
  - Workplace Environment & Workload
    - Safety & Behavioral issues with students: more students are expressing behavioral issues, including violent behaviors. Teachers need assistance for behavioral challenges.
    - Special education teachers more stress: More scrutiny of work from parents, lawyers, administration. They are not equipped to handle some of the extra dynamics without extra assistance. Mental health support.
    - Hard to find special education teachers: Schools utilizing OPI certification: General ed teachers take certificate to become Special education.
      - How many opening for school psychologists?
    - Caseload: Would like to see more information on average caseload number.
      - Caseload limits for special education teachers – how could that affect accreditation? Downsides of caps.
      - Caseload levels exceeded by certain amount it could trigger extra assistance from state. Some type of incentive to assist with caseload.
      - What has been the decrease in paraprofessionals at schools.
  - Teacher compensation:
    - Tie funding to teachers needed at school and less focus on ANB.
    - Hard for schools to compete with one another for teacher salary.
- Increased Costs for schools
  - Unfunded services & mandates
    - Committee could direct study to better identify unfunded and underfunded mandates from state and federal entities.

- Inflation: Inflation effecting the cost of living, utilities costs for schools.
  - Need to have increases in funding tied to real inflation.
- Cost of services:
  - Preschool services: More children in the 3-5yr range are requiring special needs services. Schools pull from general funds to support pre-school services.
  - COOPs: Extra expenses to provide services in rural communities not fully taken into consideration. Costly for COOPs to provide OT, PT, and speech services – reducing services due to cost.
  - Contracting with service providers:
    - Districts contract with hospitals, medical model services cost more.
    - School based model to provide services can be more affordable.
    - Independent contractors for PT & OT, psychologist: Legally they can't independently contract under an educator license.
    - Telehealth – who is utilizing telehealth services?
  - Increase in students with special needs, the numbers of services required for students, and the severity of some disabilities. Special Education supplemental does not cover extent of services needed.
- COOPs:
  - Take unique territory and population coops serve. Not all coops function in the exact same way.
- Revenue Solutions
  - Require some surplus money go to education. Have a trigger or requirement for a percentage of budget surpluses be reserved for education.
  - Leveraging Donations
    - Expand tax credit allowing for dollar-for-dollar tax write off for donations to schools.
- Medicaid reimbursement rates also an area of concern for special education.
- Flexibility for licensed clinical professional counselors.
- Gifted & talented program:
  - How many schools staff their gifted & talented program? Full spectrum of services not provided?
  - Caseload for gifted and talented programs?
  - Gifted & talented may be a good area for schools to be able to share teachers or staff.
- Improve relationship between school districts and community.
  - Community education on how schools are funded and what is needed.