Bloomington Public Schools
Dream Believe Achieve

Legislative Priorities 2026

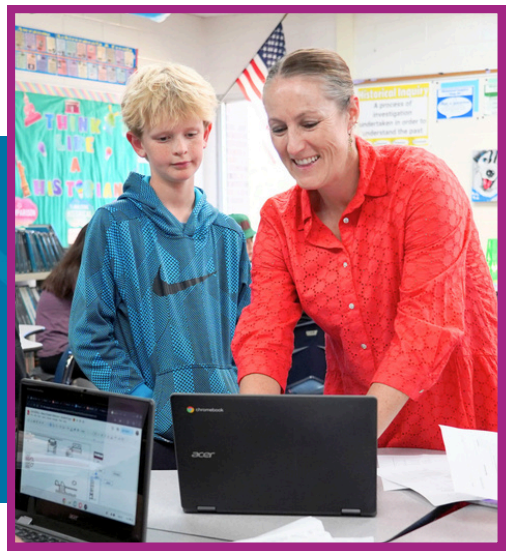
The Bloomington School Board appreciates the Minnesota Legislature's engagement on public education issues. However, new mandates and long-standing statutes that remain unchanged pose growing challenges in implementing policies that effectively serve today's students. Bloomington Public Schools urges legislators to prioritize education policy reforms to modernize assessments, improve student and staff safety, and update instructional and accountability frameworks to reflect current educational practices and student needs.

Education Policy

- **Provide funding and policies that support student and staff safety, including secure firearm storage requirements**
- **Replace Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) with the ACT as the standardized test for high school students**
- **Allow remote testing options for equitable access to state assessments**
- **Modernize instructional time and seat-time requirements to meet the needs of today's students**

Education Funding

- **Fully fund Special Education services**
- **Fully fund English Learner (EL) programming**
- **Increase optional location funding per pupil in 2027 and into the future**
- **Fully fund extended time programming**



Bloomington School Board Legislative Committee:
Heather Starks, Committee Chair | Tom Bennett, Board Chair | Matt Dymoke, Board Clerk

2026 Legislative Priorities: Education Policy

Student and Staff Safety

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to prioritize school safety by providing necessary funding for secure facilities, staff training, and student support services. In addition, state policymakers should strengthen requirements for secure gun storage.

Background

Promoting public awareness for secure firearm storage is integral to school safety, and at this time there is no requirement to add this effective prevention strategy to our toolbox. Access to unsecured firearms affects the broader community, and gun violence in one school affects all schools.

Rationale

Unauthorized access to firearms is a major source of gun violence. This is particularly true when it comes to school gun violence among children and teens. The perpetrators of school gun violence are most often students or recent graduates. According to the US Secret Service, about 76% of school shooters under the age of 18 get their guns from the home of a parent or close relative. This is based on a US Secret Service analysis of nearly 40 years of school violence. Access to unsecured firearms also contributes to unintentional gun violence among children and teens. Every year, nearly 360 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. That's roughly one unintentional shooting per day. One-third of suicides and unintentional deaths can be prevented by securing guns. While millions of responsible gun owners follow recommended storage practices, an estimated 54% do not secure their firearms locked and unloaded. An estimated 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm.

Everytown for Gun Safety, the National Education Association, and the American Federation of Teachers has released a comprehensive set of proven effective solutions to intervene and prevent school gun violence, and responsible firearm storage is an essential component to any effective strategy to keep schools safe. Everytown's Be SMART for Kids Campaign (BeSmartforKids.org) is a proven model for safe gun storage that can be used by public officials and members of the community to build awareness of the importance of secure firearm storage. Child Safe (projectchildsafe.org) is another resource that could be used in conjunction with Be SMART for Kids.

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2026 Legislative Priorities: Education Policy

Alternative Assessment: Replace the High School MCAs with the ACT

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to eliminate the mandatory use of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) in math and reading at the high school level and adopt the ACT as a statewide standardized test for high school students. The ACT measures a wider range of skills, including English, mathematics, reading, science, and writing, which are essential for college and career success. High school students are often more focused on other high-stakes assessments, such as the ACT and AP exams. As a result, they may not be as invested in the MCAs, leading to lower participation rates and less accurate results.

Background

The current MCAs in math and reading at the high school level are a one-size-fits-all approach that does not accurately reflect the diverse needs or interests of all students or what students should know and be able to do. As a result, they may not be as invested in the MCAs, leading to lower participation rates and less accurate results. In 2025, statewide high school participation rates for the MCAs in math and reading were 75% and 85%, respectively. Unfortunately, Bloomington Public Schools fared worse - with only 69% of students taking the MCA in math and 81% taking the MCA in reading. Several states have already recognized the limitations of traditional state-developed standardized tests at the high school level and have moved to adopt the ACT as a more comprehensive and relevant assessment.

Rationale

Bloomington Public Schools conducted research into the plausibility of using the ACT as a measure of student learning and achievement in high school. The study found strong alignment between the ACT and the Minnesota Academic Standards, particularly in mathematics where nearly all items aligned with high school standards. While some minor discrepancies in depth of knowledge (DOK) were noted, the overall alignment and distribution of items were consistent with MCA expectations. Similarly, in English Language Arts, all items aligned with Minnesota standards, and the coverage of substrands and skills was comprehensive. Minor exceptions in DOK and categorical concurrence were identified, but the overall alignment and item distribution were in line with MCA expectations. By adopting the ACT as a statewide standardized test, Minnesota can join other states that currently use the ACT to meet federal requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This will provide a more equitable and relevant assessment for high school students - motivating them to excel, and offering an additional opportunity to showcase their knowledge and skills for college and career success, while also reducing the overall testing burden.

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2026 Legislative Priorities: Education Policy

Remote Testing

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to authorize and support secure remote testing options for Minnesota students, ensuring equitable access to state assessments and reducing barriers caused by illness, transportation, mobility challenges, or unique learning needs.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of reliable digital assessment platforms capable of delivering secure, proctored remote testing. Many states have since modernized their assessment systems, permitting remote administration under defined security, identity verification, and accessibility standards. Minnesota currently lacks statutory clarity that would allow districts to use remote assessment options, even in cases where doing so would increase access, reduce make-up testing burdens, and support students with health or mobility limitations.

Advances in online proctoring, device-based security controls, and digital accommodations have made remote assessment more secure and standardized than at any previous time.

Rationale

Allowing secure, state-approved remote testing would expand equitable access for students who face barriers to in-person assessments—such as illness, transportation challenges, extended absences, or disabilities—while reducing the significant instructional time lost to repeated makeup sessions. Remote testing also ensures continuity during weather events or other disruptions, provides greater flexibility for students who need specific environments or health-related accommodations, and lessens operational strain on districts. Clear statewide standards, technology requirements, and identity-verification protocols are essential to ensure consistency, fairness, and validity across all schools.

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2026 Legislative Priorities: Education Policy

Flexible / Seat Time

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to modernize Minnesota's instructional time and seat-time requirements by providing districts with clear statutory flexibility to design competency-based, personalized, and innovative learning models that better meet the needs of today's students.

This flexibility should allow districts to award credit based on demonstrated mastery rather than time spent in a classroom, to offer variable schedules that support student well-being, and to use blended, online, experiential, and career-connected learning without facing compliance barriers tied to outdated time-bound requirements.

Background

Minnesota's current instructional hour and seat-time statutes were designed for traditional, time-based schooling models that no longer reflect how students learn best. Over the past decade, and especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, schools have adopted more personalized, flexible, and technology-enabled learning approaches. Students increasingly participate in concurrent enrollment, PSEO, work-based learning, online or hybrid coursework, credit recovery, and alternative pathways to graduation.

Rationale

Modernizing Minnesota's instructional time requirements would align state law with the realities of contemporary learning and provide districts the freedom to build responsive, student-centered systems that help all learners meet academic standards, graduate on time, and successfully transition to college, career, and community life.

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2026 Legislative Priorities: Education Funding

Special Education Funding

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to create statutory language that recognizes and fully funds Special Education services for birth through age 22 so we may use previously expended cross-subsidy money to support student learning, intervention and mental health needs in an effort to help students be ready for kindergarten, reading at grade level by third grade, and graduate on time and with a viable post-graduation plan.

Background

Special Education services are an important, yet underfunded mandate. Our students with special needs are coming to us with ever more complicated and expensive programming needs. Bloomington Public Schools spends roughly $12 million of general fund dollars every year to cover the unfunded cost of our special education programming. This is essential and legally mandated programming.

Rationale

Even though the state increased special education funding significantly over the past two years, it is still only 50% funded. In the meantime, we have seen an increase in the number of students receiving special education services post-pandemic: 21% in BPS. Not only are the number of students needing services rising, but the complexity of needs has increased as well. That typically involves high-cost programming. Fully funding special education would allow our district to direct previously expended funds to keep class sizes reasonable, fund mental health supports, and stabilize our finances in general.

English Learner Funding

Bloomington Public Schools urges the Governor and Legislature to create statutory language that recognizes and fully funds English Learner (EL) programming from age 3 through grade 12 so districts can provide more early intervention and programming in an effort to help students be ready for kindergarten and reading at grade level by third grade.

Background

We currently receive funding for each English Learner student, preK through grade 12. We also receive EL concentration funding based on an MDE formula. Bloomington's current EL cross-subsidy amount is $3 million this school year.

Rationale

Similar to Minneapolis and St. Paul, Bloomington provides temporary housing for a large number of newly-arrived immigrants. While we welcome these families and students to Bloomington, they require intensive English Language Services, along with additional supports to be successful in school. In the 2023-2024 SY we enrolled 212 students in BPS who are new to our country. Full funding for English Learner staffing and programming for grades pre-K-12 would allow BPS to increase services, particularly at the early childhood and primary grade levels. This would increase the likelihood that our Multilingual Learners will be ready for kindergarten, and reading well by the third grade.

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2026 Legislative Priorities: Education Funding

Local Optional Revenue

Bloomington Public Schools asks the Governor and Legislature to increase the optional location funding by $276 per pupil for 2027 and increase the total $1,000 per pupil unit by inflation for 2028 and into the future. Any additional funding above the current $724 would be equalized 100% with state aid and not impact local taxpayers.

Background

After the passage of the 2025 school finance legislation, real per pupil school district aid in FY 2024 was $1,420 or 19.0% less than in FY 2003. State funding is not keeping up with inflation. E-22 basic funding continues to not meet the basic needs of local school districts' students and families. This has become an even greater challenge attributable to the loss of learning due to the pandemic and new unfunded mandates in the 2023 and legislative session for summer unemployment and additional sick and family leave.

Rationale

Districts across the state continue to make reductions year after year to balance their budgets. This has become more and more difficult with increases in student needs. The state needs to increase funding for basic needs. A school district's local optional revenue equals $724 per pupil unit. Local optional revenue is available to school districts only, and is not available to charter schools. Local optional revenues consist of two tiers - the first tier of $300 per pupil is equalized at $880,000 per pupil (the same equalizing factor that existed when this tier was included in operating referendum revenue). The second tier of $424 per pupil is equalized at $510,000 per pupil for fiscal year 2024 and later. For fiscal year 2021 and later, there is no longer any connection between local optional revenue and operating referendum revenue.

Extended Time Revenue

Bloomington Public Schools asks the Governor and Legislature to create statutory language that recognizes and fully funds Extended Time programming, through the revising of MN Statute 126C.10 making extended time revenue equal to basic general education revenue, so that districts can provide high quality extended-day and extended-school-year programming to students in grades 1-8.

Background

We rely on the Extended Time formula allowance to fund the majority of this programming and it has not increased since 2015, leaving a 30% gap between extended time and general education revenue for 2025. Meanwhile, there have been significant increases in the number of students needing this support and operating costs continue to increase. Districts, including BPS, do not have additional funds for the programming. Without a change to the Extended Time formula, districts will be forced to reduce or eliminate this vital programming.

Rationale

Increasing the Extended Time formula allowance to be equal with the general fund education formula is in alignment with the original intent of the statue. These formulas were equal back in 2005. The requirement of license teachers in both school and extended time programming results in similar programming costs, the funding is no longer at all similar.

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