

Westside Community Schools Legislative Priorities for the 2021 Legislative Session

BACKGROUND:

- Westside Community Schools enrolled 6,049 PK-12 students in the 2019-20 school year.
- 35% of Westside's enrollment qualifies for free or reduced priced meals, 33% of enrollment lives outside of district boundaries, and 14% of students qualify for special education services.
- The 2019-20 Westside Community Schools budget was \$75.9 million.
- Approximately 55% of Westside's budget comes from property taxes.
- Nebraska ranks 19th in the country in per pupil spending.
- Nebraska ranks #2 in the country in percentage of school district spending in the classroom.

LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS:

WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SUPPORTS THE CURRENT SCHOOL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES AND PROCESS.

- K-12 education in the Metro area is already competitive because there are many strong school districts providing plenty of choice.
- Smaller school districts increase local control for area residents.
- Local control allows school districts to ensure neighborhood schools and tailored learning models for its students.
- Current law already provides a voluntary process among locally elected school boards to consolidate if desired.

WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SUPPORTS A SCHOOL FINANCE MODEL THAT IS PREDICTABLE AND SUSTAINABLE WITHOUT LIMITING THE CURRENT LEVY AUTHORITY.

- Nebraska ranks 49th in the country in percentage of state funding for funding K-12 education.
- Westside supports efforts to bring more state funding to the K-12 state aid formula.

- The Legislature changes the state formula annually to adapt to the state fiscal outlook. This leads to school district budget unpredictability.
- Budget unpredictability undermines a school district's ability for long-term planning.

WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SUPPORTS THE CURRENT NET OPTION ASPECT IN THE STATE'S FORMULA.

- Net option funding is critical for Westside to educate all students desiring to attend Westside Community Schools.
- Host districts of net option students do not receive the benefit of the property tax authority associated with those students.
- Net option funding allows students many choices of which school to attend – without net option funding, students would lose that choice.

WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS OPPOSES FUNDING TO ANY ENTITIES NOT SUBJECT TO THE SAME ACCOUNTABILITY AND STANDARDS AS NEBRASKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

- State funding to Nebraska K-12 public schools is already at a low level.
- **Any new funding directed at K-12 education should go to the underfunded public education system.**
- The State should not seek to shrink the amount of dollars available for school funding, via tax credits or vouchers, to incentivize an alternative K-12 system that is not similarly accountable to the State as are public K-12 schools.
- Any K-12 entity receiving public dollars, or benefitting from the state foregoing tax revenue, should be subject to the same requirements of public-school districts.
- Students are already afforded school choice today because of the net option program.