

## **Westside Community Schools Legislative Priorities for the 2023 Legislative Session**

### **BACKGROUND:**

- Westside Community Schools has approximately 6,200 students enrolled this year.
  - 38% 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.
  - Our 2022-23 budget is \$90 million.
- During the 2020-21 budget year, just over 60% of our total revenue came from local property taxes. (The national average is approximately 30%). Once our audit is complete, we anticipate our 2021-22 revenue profile to look very similar.
- Nebraska ranks 19<sup>th</sup> in the country in per pupil spending.
  - Nebraska ranks #2 in the country in percentage of school district spending that stays 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 (next to last) 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 often 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.
- We encourage lawmakers to further study the positive effects of increasing the SPED reimbursement percentage on all school districts and communities, regardless of size.

**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 our already 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.

**WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ALSO SUPPORTS THE CURRENT BALANCE OF STATE CURRICULAR STANDARDS, WHICH WE BELIEVE PROPERLY WEIGHTS THE STATEWIDE NEED FOR VIABLE CURRICULUM WITH ROOM FOR LOCAL INPUT ON CURRICULUM.**