

## **Westside Community Schools Legislative Priorities for the 2024 Legislative Session**

### **BACKGROUND:**

- Westside Community Schools has approximately 6,200 students enrolled this year.
  - 36% of Westside's enrollment qualifies for free or reduced priced meals, 34% of enrollment lives outside of district boundaries, and 15% of students qualify for special education services.
- Our 2023-24 general fund budget is \$92 million.
- Our Board of Education has reduced our overall tax levy for five years in a row. Our 2023-24 overall tax levy is 13.8 cents lower than it was in 2022-23, resulting in an ask of \$1.3 million less from local property taxes than the prior year.

### **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.**

- Westside supports efforts to bring more state funding to the K-12 state aid formula like we have for 2023-24.
- 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, like we have for 2023-24. We hope lawmakers will allow our new funding formula to work for a few years to see how it operates before massive new changes are made.

**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.
- Net option funding is a critical piece of the current formula that positively impacts numerous communities across the state, to include many rural areas.

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

- 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.