

Westside Community Schools Legislative Priorities for the 2025 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, 35% of our current enrollment lives outside of district boundaries, and 15% of students qualify for special education services.
 - Out of our 2,048 students that came to us through option enrollment, 14% are identified as Special Education.
 - Of our 942 students identified as Special Education, 286 (30%) came to us through option enrollment.
- Our 2024-25 general fund budget is \$99 million.
- Our Board of Education has reduced our overall tax levy for six years in a row.
- Our 2024-25 overall tax levy is 29 cents lower than it was in 2019-20.
- Our 2024-25 total tax request in local property tax dollars is LESS than it was in 2021-22, 2022-23, or 2023-24.

LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS:

WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SUPPORTS LEGISLATION THAT WILL HELP WITH RECRUITING AND RETAINING HIGH QUALITY STAFF (NEW THIS YEAR)

- Recruiting and retaining high quality educational staff remains a top priority. While we plan to continue to strategically and efficiently use our own local resources, we remain in support of statewide initiatives in this important area as well.

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 continues to support efforts to bring more state funding to the K-12 state aid formula like we have had since 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 hope lawmakers will allow our new funding formula that began in 2023-24 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.