

March 30, 2021

Dear Adosh,

We are pleased to provide you with thoughts on the recent allocation of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars to the state of Minnesota. Thank you for being open to feedback from the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA), the Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD), the Minnesota Association of Business Officials (MASBO), and the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA). The addition of ARPA funds for the state and school districts will be extremely helpful in meeting the needs of students, their families, staff, and the communities served by our public schools.

In reaching out to members with a request for how best the ARPA dollars might be allocated by the state, the following key messages were received:

- **Flexibility** is essential for school leaders and school board members to determine the specific needs of their school districts and to respond accordingly. Allowing school leaders and school board members to have discretion on how to use the ARPA dollars will enable them to address the most pressing needs of their unique school districts and to avoid needs going unmet. Many costs have been incurred due to COVID-19 and those are still hanging in the balance. These leaders know how to best utilize the additional resources provided. The more general the criteria for use of the ARPA funds, the better.
- Over the last year many school districts experienced substantial **declining enrollment**, and are now in the midst of budget reductions due to this loss of revenue. Additional funding is needed to fill this gap and maintain programming.
- **Timing** is critical. First, it is imperative that school districts and school boards receive guidance and allocations immediately. Time is of the essence when it comes to planning programming in the summer months ahead and for the 21-2022 school year. Perhaps, of greatest importance during the budget reduction process is not laying off staff who can assist with incomplete learning and might otherwise be retained with the ARPA funding stream. In addition, districts must have adequate time to spend the funds, and be able to spend them at the same time as the previous two rounds. It will take years to fully address the far-reaching challenges caused by pandemic, and flexibility must be given on when the funds are utilized to best meet these challenges.
- There is a desire for a new **equitable** method of allocating funds to school districts aside from the current 90% flow-through according to Title I formulas. We understand there is no flexibility with the current federal formulas; however, this method does not deliver equitable amounts of funding for all school districts. A new model that perhaps blends Title I amounts with student enrollment, or something else to achieve greater parity among districts, intermediate districts and cooperatives is necessary. Use of the ARPA funds to address this discrepancy is something we would like considered.

- School districts will continue to experience **additional costs related to COVID-19**, including PPE, cleaning supplies, and upgrades to mechanical systems to improve air quality. Funding is needed to keep school buildings safe for all students and staff.
- Funding for **extended time** and **distance learning** will assist school districts as they work with students who have incomplete learning and those who have thrived in a distance learning model. School districts want to have both, and will need additional funding to sustain and advance their extended time and distance learning models to provide even better opportunities for students.
- Investments in **technology** including devices, hotspots and curriculum will be required for this development. Some school districts will cooperate with others and need resources to create yet another new learning model.
- **Mental health, social-emotional needs** have been revealed in even greater numbers than during pre-pandemic times. The ability to utilize ARPA funds to reconnect with students, provide counseling, support, and caring environments would be very helpful for school districts across the state. The ability to go beyond school-based mental health programs to provide on-site therapy would also be very beneficial for students.
- Adequate funding is needed for **sufficient staff** to maintain current staffing levels and accommodate the learning recovery of students. It will be critical that state funding be provided to fill in behind the federal funds so that staff are able to be retained when the federal funds are expended. There will also be continued demand to meet the **professional development** needs of all staff. From PPE requirements to welcoming students back to the classroom there will be new ways of doing and new ways of teaching that must be learned.
- **Re-engaging** those students and families disenfranchised throughout the pandemic will demand resources. Increasing family engagement is critical to the success of every student.

Again, thank you for contacting us. We appreciate and value the work of the Minnesota Department of Education throughout this pandemic. The guidance and support has now resulted in most every student in Minnesota the opportunity to return to in-person learning. Together we have worked through some of the most challenging situations of our lifetime while remaining focused on what is best for students, staff, families, and communities. We look forward to partnering with you in the future.

Sincerely,

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