

SECTION FIVE: POSSIBLE POLICY SOLUTIONS

Financing special education while meeting the multifaceted needs of students is a complicated issue faced by Minnesota and many other states. Despite the complexities there are a host of possibilities that can help meet the needs of the children in our state. These possibilities include:

- *More emphasis on and funding for prevention/early intervention outside of the special education system.* This includes enlisting and integrating the expertise of local communities, the medical field and public health structures.
- *Consider remedial options other than special education as the program of choice for students with relatively minor learning difficulties.*²¹ Response to Intervention (RTI) is one such example.
- *Pool funding to serve all students in need.*²¹ Qualifying high poverty schools can merge categorical funds from multiple sources (Title I, school wide projects, etc.). Many of the students enrolled in such schools may be in one special needs category or another. Breaking them into silos of service may not be as effective in meeting their needs as combining these categorical funds for use in more comprehensive and well integrated ways.
- *Conduct a broad and comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of various approaches to special education.* As of 2004, not a single state had “linked special education funding to the measured performance of students with disabilities, despite the current federal and state push for increased education accountability.”²¹ Although No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has a provision for measuring results and planning for state improvement, no state has yet tied funding to these things.²¹
- *In setting policies about special education funding, states should look very carefully at the unintended incentives that may be created by the funding mechanism.* For example, possible incentives to enroll more students, or to serve them in certain ways, ensuring that the results align with the states’ intended objectives.²¹
- *Encourage and create incentives for cooperation between districts.* Minnesota already has some examples of this (e.g., District 287, Educational Service Cooperatives, etc.).

Some other possibilities for consideration include:

- *Attend to explicit funding policies around the growing sector of charter schools and incorporate the same conceptual framework as used for non-charter schools.*
- *Examine the relationship between state investments in special education in varying districts across the state and the results obtained by the students designed to benefit from these supplemental revenues.*
- *Attend to issues of early identification (birth to three-year-old) rates and provide additional supports, community incentives, etc. to increase these rates.*
- *Evaluate cost effectiveness of Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services, Response to Intervention and other models of prevention and tiered intervention and expand as appropriate.*

Overarching Special Education Formula Goals

Adequate: How much funding is needed to reach the education goals set for the state’s SE students?

Equitable: Are these funds being fairly distributed based on variations in student needs?

Efficient: Are funds distributed to (1) produce reasonable reporting burden, and (2) foster best practice?

Source: Parrish, Thomas. “Considering Special Education Funding in Nevada: State and National Trends.” State Advisory Committee Meeting. Nevada. 11 Dec. 2008.

CONCLUSIONS

Like all seminars, the 2009 Family Impact Seminar aims to encourage policy makers to think about policy choices related to special education through the lens of how they impact families.

The Family Impact Seminars provide information and perspective to inform policy choices. The questions asked and the options explored during the seminar are intended to encourage policymakers to think more intentionally about the ways policies affect Minnesota families. Now and in the future, Minnesota Family Impact Seminars are here to provide policy makers with a new frame and new information on the issues important to Minnesota families.