

Education finance panel begins walk-through of omnibus E-12 education bill

By Pratik Joshi, Session Daily
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Chae Lee, a senior at Minnetonka High School, describes her school experiences during a March 4 press conference where the DFL announced its \$1.15 billion, E-12 education finance and policy proposal.

photo/Paul Battaglia

Increasing learning opportunities for all to help eliminate opportunity gaps and racial disparities in education is a central focus of the omnibus education finance and policy bill.

Among its provisions would be the creation of a voluntary prekindergarten program for eligible 4-year-olds from low-income families and kids who are vulnerable. The bill would also make significant investments in special education and English-language learner programs, and provide additional support personnel to help students deal with mental health issues, especially in the post-COVID-19 environment.

The House Education Finance Committee received a walkthrough of the delete-all amendment to HF4300 on Monday. Rep. Jim Davnie (DFL-Mpls), the committee chair and bill sponsor, said public testimony would be taken Tuesday with a bill vote Wednesday.

The budget target for E-12 education is \$1.15 billion in new spending in fiscal year 2023 and \$2.12 billion in the following two fiscal years, yielding an increased support for education opportunities of \$3.28 billion over the next four years, Davnie said at a Monday news conference.

02:12 - HF4300 (Davnies) Omnibus E-12 education supplemental finance and policy bill.

-Walk-through of the delete-all amendment.

Runs 1 hour, 30 minutes.

“We have heard from parents, teachers, students, school administrators, locally elected school board members. They have told us that now is the time to invest in Minnesota schools, because every child deserves the world class education that we have the resources to provide,” Davnie said.

It's about building relationships with students, providing schools the resources they need and relevant curriculum for learners. Using meaningful strategies to engage students and keeping them in classroom would go a long way to promote academic success, he said.

The proposal would provide \$475 million to fund 1,100 new student support personnel in schools to take care of students' social, emotional, and physical health; invest \$1.4 billion in closing the special education deficit and \$272 million in removing English language learner deficit across Minnesota schools by 2026, Davnie said.

The bill would modify the goal of the literacy aid program to require evidence-based reading instruction through a multi-tiered system of support by 2027. It would require a focus on reading skills of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, oral language, and vocabulary and reading comprehension skills. It would also provide early childhood educators the necessary training in the science of reading.

Goals for increasing the percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in the state would be established and a course in ethnic studies would be required for high school graduation. Many home-educator groups have said the latter is an infringement of parents' right to educate their children.

Other notable provisions in the bill would:

- prohibit dismissal of a student in kindergarten through grade 3 unless nonexclusionary discipline measures have been exhausted and there is an ongoing serious safety threat to the child or others;
- require a district or charter school that receives student support personnel aid to hire student support staff to conduct mental health screenings on students in kindergarten through grade 12;

- require the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to identify teacher shortage areas; to include in the 2023 teacher supply and demand report the number of teacher openings by school district for teachers with licenses in specified fields;
- require the Department of Education to develop a foundational blueprint for a statewide computer science program for elementary and secondary schools, in consultation with the Computer Science Education Task Force;
- increase the base funding for Minnesota Math Corps for fiscal year 2024 and beyond;
- modify existing after-school community learning program grant language, remove eligibility for child care centers and authorize the Department of Education to award grants to community or nonprofit organizations, American Indian organizations, tribal nations, political subdivisions, libraries, or school-based programs that offer a broad array of academic enrichment activities during non-school hours;
- increase the adult basic education maximum contact hour rate from \$22 to \$28;
- require sign language interpreters employed by a school district to have one of two statutorily required credentials, including a Certified Deaf Interpreter certification;
- provide students in grades 4-12 access to menstrual products at no charge;
- require school administrators renewing a license to have at least two hours of mental illness training, including at least one hour of suicide prevention training and one additional hour on specified topics;
- require the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to adopt rules requiring any teacher renewing a teaching license to demonstrate professional development in the cultural heritage and contemporary contributions of American Indians, with emphasis on Minnesota tribal nations;
- prohibit a postsecondary institution participating in Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act from requiring a faith statement for a PSEO student during the application process or basing an admissions decision on a PSEO student's race, creed, ethnicity, disability, gender, or sexual orientation or religious beliefs or affiliations;
- create an eight-member legislative work group to identify the appropriate student eligibility metric for calculating compensatory revenue;
- require charter schools to be free to a resident of Minnesota, and to prefer Minnesota residents over out-of-state residents in enrollment; and
- allow the board of a school district and a nonpublic school to mutually agree to a written plan for transportation of nonpublic students.

The bill's companion, SF4113, sponsored by Sen. Roger Chamberlain (R-Lino Lakes), awaits action by the Senate Education Finance and Policy Committee.