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School Leaders Celebrate Equitable Transportation Funding Included in 2023-24 State Budget

State Budget Shows Strong Support for Students, Schools

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. – With the highest-ever per pupil funding, increases in special education, preschool expansion and more, the recently announced State budget includes significant investments in education and students, and a considerable allocation dedicated to improving equitable funding in school transportation.

For the first time, the budget includes \$125 million to support districts with school transportation expenses, something Rep. Betsy Coffia has championed since beginning her tenure representing the 103rd District, which includes all of Leelanau County, roughly half of Grand Traverse County and a small portion of Benzie County.

Dr. Nick Ceglarek, superintendent of Northwest Education Services – the intermediate school district covering Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Leelanau counties – said the State budget supports the initiatives a lot of schools throughout the state are looking at, from mental health or teacher retention, to making sure hungry students are fed at school.

“The transportation funding is a significant benefit for schools in our region, as it will provide financial reimbursement for transportation costs, allowing districts to prioritize that funding in other ways,” Ceglarek said. “By addressing school transportation funding in her first standalone bill, Rep. Betsy Coffia has demonstrated a commitment to education and her ability to get results. This has been a priority for her since she took office, and her voice has been heard in Lansing. I know school leaders in our region and across the state will benefit from her leadership on this issue.”

The transportation funding supports districts with large, sparsely populated geographical footprints that generally experience higher transportation costs than districts with more students in a smaller area. Typically, transportation expenses are paid from districts’ general funds, which are largely supported by pupil headcounts. By providing reimbursement for those expenses, schools will be able to prioritize funding for other needs, such as direct support and resources for students in the classroom, mental health initiatives, employee wages, facilities improvements and more. The amount of funding districts will receive is to be determined through a formula that accounts for the number of riders per square mile within a district.

While Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has yet to sign the budget, it is widely reported that her support is nearly certain.

The State budget also includes a 5% increase in the per pupil foundation allowance, bringing the total amount a district receives per student up to \$9,608, the highest it's ever been.

Some additional investments include:

- \$72.3 million to expand the Great Start Readiness Program for 4-year-old children from four days per week to five, and from 30 to 36 instructional weeks in the year.
- \$160 million to provide free meals to help ensure fewer children are hungry, more children are healthy and more children are able to focus on their schoolwork; and \$2.5 million to forgive all meal debt of families who have been unable to pay for school meals this past year.
- \$140 million increase for special education.

To view more highlights from the budget, see this [message from the Michigan Department of Education](#).

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