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Rep. Igo explains legislative consequences for school districts

Rep. Spencer Igo Grand Rapids, MN
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On November 7, many of you will head to the polls to vote “yes” or “no” on three separate ballot questions asking residents to approve two operating levies and a capital projects levy for the ISD 318. As a former student and graduate of Grand Rapids High School, this school district is incredibly important to me and prepared me and many of my classmates for a lifetime of success.

No matter how you vote on November 7, I wanted to take a moment to share with you how decisions made in St. Paul have had a negative, financial impact on school districts around the state. Decisions made by legislative leaders and the Governor are forcing many districts, including ISD 318, to ask residents to raise their property taxes to cover budget shortfalls.

Heading into the 2023 legislative session, many of us believed that the state’s nearly \$18 billion budget surplus would give lawmakers the chance to provide significant tax relief to Minnesotans while investing in the things that matter most to all of us. Top of this list are strong and vibrant schools that teach students the basics of reading, math, science, and more.

Unfortunately, legislative leaders in St. Paul approved a funding package this year that puts many school districts in a worse financial situation despite the \$2.2 billion increase in education spending.

The problem lies with the 65 mandates that have denied schools the flexibility they need to address district-specific needs.

This has been overwhelming for districts, like ISD 318, as they struggle to meet requirements related to discipline, curriculum, and the costs associated with the unfunded mandates.

Frankly, it has been frustrating to watch this play out because many of the issues that the mandates are trying to solve have often been addressed at the local level. Schools like Grand Rapids already do a great job educating students. They consistently have some of the best test scores in the region and state. In fact, recent data shows that ISD 318 was able to



raise reading proficiency rates by an average 16% for grades K-5. Now, they are left scrambling to cover budget shortfalls because of the decisions made in St. Paul.

Sadly, it seems that many of my colleagues believe that Minnesota students would be better served by the legislature becoming what is essentially a state-run school board instead of allowing local leaders to make decisions impacting their schools.

There was a better path forward, one that would have provided schools with the flexibility that they were looking for. In fact, I was proud to vote in support of an alternative plan that would have given ISD 318 an additional \$2.6 million in direct, per pupil funding without any of the burdensome mandates that are causing such financial hardship. By listening to superintendents, teachers, administrators, and school boards, we could have made sure that local officials did not have to ask you to raise your property taxes. Instead, the suggestions and pleas of local school officials were rejected at every turn as the majority and Governor took a “my way or the highway” approach to legislating this year.

No matter how you choose to vote on November 7, I encourage you to keep in mind that decisions made in St. Paul have a significant downstream impact on local taxpayers. Burdensome mandates at the state level are making life more difficult for our schools and now all of us will likely have to pay the price.

Rep. Spencer Igo

Grand Rapids, MN

