



JOIN THE FIGHT FOR EDUCATION JUSTICE
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Student Demands for Grand Rapids Public School 2024-25 Budget

Context

The Student Association for Leadership and Transformation (SALT) is a group for youth led by youth building power for real improvements in our schools and daily experiences. We represent Grand Rapids Public School (GRPS) students and have listened to a multitude of students, staff, and families and captured information regarding student challenges and youth-driven vision for the GRPS district.

As SALT students, we call on GRPS to show a commitment to investing in a quality education and thriving school environment for us. Our experience with education is closely tied to the experience of our teachers. According to the Grand Rapids Education Association (GREA), there were more than 130 vacant classroom positions this year, and unqualified substitutes were used for a total of some 12,000 days to cover these vacancies. This results in more than 10% of GRPS students not getting qualified teachers for all or some of their day. Based on current and projected funding numbers, we believe GRPS can afford to increase pay for teachers, resulting in an improved experience for all of us. Below, we have provided recommendations for quality staffing processes and compensation, equitable curriculum, and increased transparency between students and the GRPS district.

SALT Priority Recommendations | School Year 2024-25

Immediately increase the Grand Rapids Education Association staff and teacher salary to the county average.

Community Asks for GRPS Administration and GRPS Board of Education:

As GRPS students, many of us have been impacted by the teacher shortage in recent years. To feel supported, we need consistent teachers who can develop an engaged learning environment and build long-term relationships with us. Right now, teacher pay in GRPS is low compared to other districts, which makes it hard to maintain current teachers, much less replace folks who are retiring or fill vacancies. Increased compensation would encourage more qualified, certified, and culturally appropriate teachers to want to work in GRPS, and help create a positive experience for us. It would also support both the mental health of us as students and our teachers- teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. We want to learn in an environment where our teachers are cared for so they can better care for us.



Terminate the virtual learning contract with Elevate K-12 and invest in certified teachers.

Community Asks for GRPS Administration and GRPS Board of Education:

Many of our peers fell behind during the COVID-19 pandemic with virtual learning. Currently, about \$5M is being spent on virtual teachers and staff monitoring the classroom that should be re-invested in long-term qualified staff and educators. We need in-person teachers who can understand the local context of our schools and help us feel connected to our school community. We need teachers who have classrooms we can stop by between classes or after school for one-on-one support and advice, which isn't possible with virtual teachers.

Implement 1 hour daily of non-core instruction (i.e. PE, music, art, language) for elementary students.

Community Asks for GRPS Administration and GRPS Board of Education:

When we were in elementary school, we loved going to specials like gym and music. We believe all GRPS elementary students deserve access to these kinds of learning opportunities because they allow us to express ourselves in different ways- ways that can't always be captured with a pen and paper. These classes help us discover our skills and passions, build community with other students and learn to work together and resolve conflicts, and support our confidence early on. This time also allows our teachers to have planning and preparation time, which helps them feel less overworked and more able to help younger students learn.

Immediate transparency of the GRPS and GREA bargaining process.

Community Asks for GRPS Administration and GRPS Board of Education:

SALT students have noted how in other districts and places community members are allowed to attend the conversations, which we think is a great idea for community and district engagement. We have noticed that we aren't often included in decisions that impact our learning and school experience- and neither are our families or other adults in the community who care about us. We would like to see union negotiations be more public, so that everyone can understand how these decisions are being made. We know that transparency and accountability are values that GRPS would like to model, and this is an example of a way that could happen, and would also be an important learning and advocacy opportunity for us as students. Transparency on the GREA and GRPS bargaining process enables student and community support around district decisions and promotes community engagement and accessibility.