

Board Minute – How Are Students Counted?

When we talk about school enrollment, it is natural to assume that counting students is simple. If 1,000 students attend school, then the district must be funded for 1,000 students. Minnesota school finance is more complicated than that.

The number of students physically enrolled is important, but state funding is generally based on Average Daily Membership, or ADM, and then adjusted through several formulas depending on the age, grade, program, and services a student receives.

ADM measures the portion of the school year that a student is enrolled. A student enrolled for the entire school year will generally generate 1.0 ADM. A student who enrolls halfway through the year would generally generate approximately one-half of an ADM. Simply looking at the number of students sitting in classrooms on one particular day does not tell us exactly how many students the state will ultimately recognize for funding purposes.

Attendance also matters because extended absences can eventually affect whether a student remains enrolled for ADM purposes. Students fully enrolled in a district-operated online school, such as Thunder Online Academy, are also counted through the district's regular ADM process.

Once ADM is determined, Minnesota applies pupil-unit weighting factors. For students in grades 7 through 12 receive a 1.2 weighting factor is applied.

Early childhood students receiving special education services through an IEP can also generate ADM even though they are not yet traditional K–12 students. Their count is based on the amount of assessment and educational service they receive.

Online courses provided to a student who is enrolled elsewhere are considered supplemental online instruction and are funded differently. This occurs when a student remains enrolled in one school district but takes an individual online course from another approved provider. That system uses a separate calculation that includes a .88 adjustment.

Some students also generate additional funding because of the services they receive. Students identified as English Learners or receiving special education services remain part of the district's regular ADM count, while those services may also generate additional state or federal funding through separate formulas.

LPGE also works with students attending St. Mary's through shared-time programming. These students attend a nonpublic school but receive part of their instruction through public-school programming. Their shared-time ADM is based on the portion of instructional time for which they are enrolled in eligible public-school programming.

The basic idea is that students drive school funding, but Minnesota does not count every student exactly the same way for every purpose. Grade level, length of enrollment, special education services, other factors can all affect the final calculation. Understanding ADM and pupil units provides a good starting point for understanding why even relatively small changes in enrollment can have a meaningful impact on a district's overall revenue.