

January 2022

Volume 19

Number 4

January 28, 2022

**Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Anderson Center

Bethel University

Arden Hills

February 4, 2022

**Board of Directors
Meeting**

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center

NE Metro 916

Little Canada

February 25, 2022

**Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Anderson Center

Bethel University

Arden Hills

March 4, 2022

**Board of Directors
Meeting**

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center

NE Metro 916

Little Canada

Hopkins' Gatewood Elementary Transforms Into an Environmentally-Focused School

Imagine a school that incorporates outdoor learning and holistic education, a place that celebrates empathy, and encourages scholars to be stewards of the Earth. All this while students are building rigorous academic skills that they will need in the real world. These are some of the goals of Vision 2031, and Gatewood Elementary is well on its way.

Under the leadership of Dr. George Nolan, principal of Gatewood Elementary, the school is transforming into an environmentally-focused school. Last year, a state-of-the-art greenhouse was installed, and a naturalist position was created to provide project-based activities and enrichment for all students. Later this year, scholars will welcome a few farm animals to the building grounds to enhance real-world environmental learning.



"We want to capitalize on our strengths and make sure every child who walks through our door will feel loved, and experience learning in a positive way," Nolan said. Nolan worked with his teaching staff to create a vision for Gatewood that provides restorative practices, where students feel welcomed, validated, and affirmed, and where students have a sense of agency through inquiry-led learning. "I want this to be the best elementary school in the area that serves all kids and provides a welcoming and supportive environment," he said.

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We were thrilled to have over 200 legislators, superintendents, school board members, school district staff and MDE leadership in attendance at AMSD's annual legislative session preview on January 7. This month's research article includes links to materials shared at the preview and a link to a recording of the event. If you have colleagues who were not able to attend, please share the link with them. I encourage AMSD members to stay engaged throughout the session. The projected budget surplus offers state policymakers a historic opportunity to stabilize our education funding system. We need your voice and advocacy for our students and our schools!

From the AMSD Chair, Kelsey Dawson Walton, Osseo Area Schools Board Member

There is Space and Place for Students to Wonder

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Learning with a naturalist

When it comes to environmentally-focused concepts, students don't have to look much farther than outside the school's door. Gatewood is unique in that its grounds include woods and trails — a perfect setting for an environmental school. The expansive school grounds have several natural outdoor classrooms, a forest, gardens, a greenhouse, and soon it will be home to goats and chickens.



To lean deeper into Gatewood's natural environment, a new position was developed. Jim Ikhaml, Gatewood's naturalist, is known to students as Mr. Ike. With Mr. Ike, students learn through exploration in nature. Last week, students found basswood and dogwood trees on the school grounds and created art-work made from crayon rubbings of leaves.

Through hands-on learning, students are deeply engaged and invested in the topics and concepts. This type of learning has been at the forefront of the outdoor kindergarten program where teachers use an inquiry-based learning approach inspired by the interests of the students.

Outdoor learning

Students' curiosity and observations of the world around them are driving the learning experiences in the outdoor kindergarten program. A hallmark of this learning is that there is space and place for students to wonder. Teachers bring the resources and standards, but students are deciding the subject matter. For example, earlier this year, kindergartners found a mushroom in the grass. They thought it looked like a flower, so the teacher leaned into their curiosity. They brought out a magnifying glass to inspect the mushroom, measured how tall it was, and observed its color, texture, and its other physical traits.

"It's really the students that ask the questions and then we figure out how to show them how to discover the answers to their questions," kindergarten teacher Ellen Dischinger said. Gatewood's outdoor kindergarten program is in its inaugural year, and it's clear that this approach to learning has garnered parent support.

Building community with holistic learning

With the outdoor and environmental focus at Gatewood, students will see first-hand where their food comes from and they will have an active role in creating it. Every class will have a planter's box where scholars will be in charge of caring for a selection of plants from tomatoes and mushrooms to peppers and spinach.

"How much more holistic can you get than growing the food, preparing the food, then eating the food," Ikhaml said. In addition to teaching, Mr. Ike is creating a culture of awareness around environmental science. At lunch, he is also teaching students about food composting. Scholars are growing in their understanding of what happens to their food waste.

The culture of environmental awareness will continue in the greenhouse where students will start growing native trees. When the trees reach a certain size, scholars will plant them outside. Students will see the trees' growth and impact on the school community over time.

The implementation of experiential and inquiry-based learning techniques through an environmental lens is creating a newfound energy at Gatewood in both the students and teachers. The possibilities are endless. "What we want to do is give every child an opportunity to learn in a different way," Nolan said. "We want to lean in on what are best practices and connected to Vision 2031 so we can ensure kids are getting nontraditional learning that sets them up for success in a global marketplace."

This month's member feature was submitted by Michelle Wirth, Communications Specialist, Hopkins Public Schools.

2022 AMSD Legislative Preview Brings Legislators and Education Leaders Together



More than 180 education leaders — superintendents, school board members and district staff — and more than two dozen state legislators turned out in person or virtually for the annual AMSD Legislative Session Preview on Jan. 7 at the Quora Education Center (Intermediate School District 916) or remotely via Zoom, to discuss priorities for the 2022 legislative session.

The annual AMSD event, which also included remarks from Commissioner of Education Heather Mueller, precedes each session. The event is an annual preview for legislators to hear the priorities of AMSD member school districts — which, collectively, serve more than 50 percent of the public school students in Minnesota.

Three AMSD superintendents — Renee Corneille of St. Anthony-New Brighton, Bob McDowell of Hastings, and Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed of Hopkins — shared [presentations](#) covering AMSD's [2022 Legislative Platform](#), which the AMSD Board of Directors approved in December.

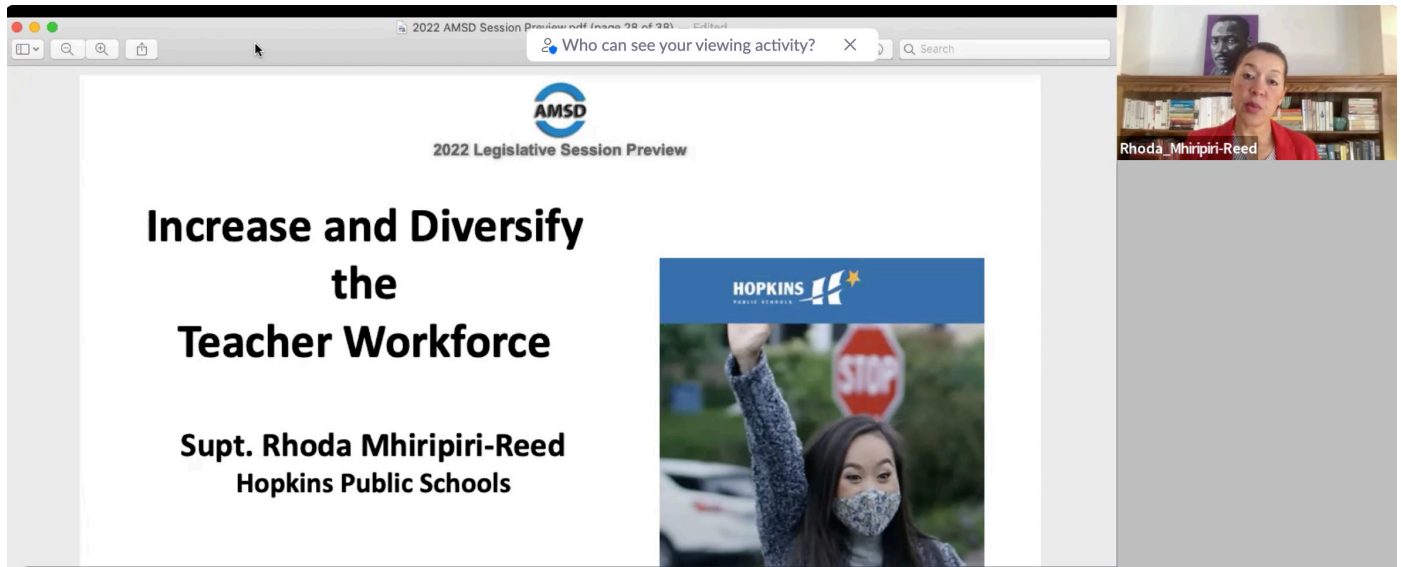
Specifically, the superintendents reinforced the importance of stabilizing the funding system, reducing mandates and enhancing local control, ensuring safe and modern school facilities, enhancing taxpayer equity, addressing the shortage of substitute teachers, bus drivers and paraprofessionals, and diversifying the teacher workforce.

The preview wrapped with a legislative panel that featured Rep. Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton), Sen. Roger Chamberlain (R-Lino Lakes), Rep. Jim Davnie (DFL-Minneapolis) and Sen. Chuck Wiger (DFL-Maplewood).

Davnie is the chair of the House Education Finance Committee, and Erickson is the ranking minority member of the House Education Policy Committee. Chamberlain is the chair of the Senate Committee on E-12 Finance and Policy, and Wiger is the ranking minority member.

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AMSD Superintendents Share 2022 Legislative Priorities



Hopkins Superintendent Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed, St. Anthony-New Brighton Superintendent Renee Corneille, and Hastings Superintendent Bob McDowell delivered presentations on AMSD's legislative platform priorities for the 2022 session.



AMSD Chair Kelsey Dawson Walton, Roseville Board Member Curtis Johnson, and Bloomington Board Member Nelly Korman thanked Sen. Chuck Wiger and Rep. Jim Davnie for their years of service and support of public education. Wiger and Davnie have announced that they do not intend to seek reelection in 2022. (pictured left to right: Johnson, Wiger, Davnie, Dawson Walton, Korman)

- LINK: [View the AMSD 2022 Legislative Preview Presentation](#)
- LINK: [View a PDF of the 2022 AMSD Legislative Platform](#)
- LINK: [View a video of the presentations at the 2022 Legislative Preview](#)