

February 2020
vol 17 ♦ no 5

Equity Alliance MN: Get to Know Us

February 28, 2020
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m.
Room 304
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

March 6, 2020
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

March 17, 2020
AMSD Day at the Capitol
8 a.m.
Room 316
State Capitol
RSVP to
kjansa@amsd.org

March 27, 2020
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m.
Room 304
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

Barack Obama once said, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.” Such is the core tenet of Equity Alliance MN, located in Woodbury. We are an organization geared towards changing the landscape of equity in Minnesota, starting with the achievement gap for children of color. Armed with a team of intelligent, licensed staff, and with their hearts and minds resolved to change the educational ecosystem, we have put together a diverse list of student programs and professional development aimed at getting the rest of Minnesota as excited as we are about improving educational equity.



The Equity Alliance MN team. From left to right, Executive Director: Sebastian Witherspoon, Business Analyst: Kathy Miller, Operations Manager: Janine Stammer, Professional Development Specialist: Regina Seabrook, Administrative Specialist: Jasmine Carroll, Student Programming Specialist: Heidi Fransen, Professional Development Specialist: Chris Devine, Professional Development Specialist: Dr. Marcellus Davis

Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) Approved Professional Development:

In a state making groundbreaking strides towards closing the achievement gap for students of color, Equity Alliance MN is proud to offer Professional Development that is approved by the State of MN’s Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB). The Cultural Competency training fulfills the requirements for relicensure for Tier 1 teachers, as well as new teachers. The session can be offered to the district as a whole, or individual staff can register to attend a session hosted at Equity Alliance MN each month.

Equity Audits:

In the interest of making educational facilities across the state of Minnesota more equitable, Equity Alliance MN has embarked on the exciting task of creating a complete, comprehensive

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AMSD’s Mission

To advocate for state education policy that enables metropolitan school districts to improve student learning.



Association of
Metropolitan School Districts

From the Chair

AMSD Executive Director Scott Croonquist and I had the opportunity to meet with retired Supreme Court Justice Alan Page and Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank President Neel Kashkari about their proposal to amend the State Constitution to guarantee the right to a quality public education for every student. We were joined by representatives of MSBA, MASA, MREA, SEE and the MN Association of Charter Schools. Everyone in the room agreed the current system is not meeting the needs of each and every student and the status quo is not acceptable. An engaging discussion followed about the proposed amendment and whether it would ensure the resources and changes needed to achieve the goal of eliminating the existing opportunity and achievement gaps based on race and socioeconomic status. Everyone left the meeting committed to continuing the conversation and bringing forward recommendations that they feel would strengthen the proposed amendment. Toward that end, please share your ideas with me or Scott and we will carry them forward. Thank you!

Andrea Cuene, school board member, Wayzata Public Schools, is chair of AMSD.

All About Equity Alliance MN

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Equity Audit to help clients identify the gaps that exist within their districts, as well as the things they are doing well.

Our equity audit is designed to be a full-circle process that begins with a comprehensive assessment of the district, which includes building and classroom walkthroughs, focus groups, surveys, and community conversations. All data is collected and aggregated and is presented in the form of an Executive Report, which informs districts of the educational equity gaps that currently exist within their system. It also provides recommendations on what steps are needed to be taken to begin to narrow these gaps.

Our equity audit is fully customizable to any institution including school districts, educational facilities, places of business, and independently owned organizations.

Student Programming:

Students are at the heart of everything Equity Alliance MN does. A wide variety of student programs allow for many opportunities for students to learn, grow, and develop confidence in their identities. EA-MN doesn't just offer programs such as *Lovin' the Skin I'm In* and *Synergy: Social Justice*, which are designed to provide students with a sense of self, but they also offer completely customizable after school programming that a district can host in their schools and community. They also offer a variety of summer programs such as Kindergarten Readiness Camp and Middle School Business Innovation Academy, which partner students from a variety of districts and provides students with new skillsets and prepare them for school and rigorous coursework.



Members of Equity Alliance MN's Youth Executive Board at the first ever open space technology youth summit, Nothing About Us Without Us.

Youth Summit: Nothing About Us Without Us:

Equity Alliance MN hosted a youth-centered, open space technology conference in October, 2019, with the theme "Nothing About Us Without Us." The conference, which was planned by Equity Alliance MN's Youth Executive Board, brought over 120 students together from seven different districts and allowed them the opportunity to determine the topics they wanted to discuss. Session building happened live and included topics such as "Use of the 'N' Word," and "Cultural Appropriation." Students then picked areas to take action on in their districts, which included "Ethnic Studies" and "Student Advisory for School Boards." Student feedback on their experiences at the conference were that the conference made them feel validated, that they enjoyed spending time with students from other cultures and hearing their opinions, and that they learned how to "ensure change happens."

Equity Alliance MN looks forward to hosting another youth-centered conference in the future.

Student Ethnic Studies Research Experience:

Equity Alliance MN will be bringing students out of the state of Minnesota on their version of the Civil Rights Tour, titled the "Student Ethnic Studies Research Experience," or "SESRE" for short. One of the pioneers of tour has tailored the experience to Equity

Alliance MN and will be taking a group of students from within our member district cohort to a variety of important civil rights landmarks across South Carolina, Alabama, and Tennessee. The students will not only grow deeper through their experiences, but also use important research skills to develop their own curriculum. The three-phase process is designed to provide students with practice in key areas of development for post-secondary education, as well as allow them the opportunity to effect real change in their districts through curriculum that they develop with the aid of a professor from the University of Minnesota. In Saturday meetings both leading up to, and after the seven-day landmark tour, students will develop important skills such as research, leadership, student advocacy, critical thinking, collaboration and communication, among others. In success, the experience will expand to include African American, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American strands of the experience. Planning is already underway and the bus is set to embark in March of 2021.

Equity Alliance MN offers a yearly membership as well as services for purchase and is excited to announce that enrollment for membership, or the individual purchase of any of the above listed programs, is now open! All interested parties should contact the Operations Manager at jstammler@ea-mn.org. If you are interested in learning more about the organization, you can read our most recent newsletter at <https://www.smores.com/p97t8-the-alliance> and visit the website at www.equityalliancemn.org.

This month's member spotlight was submitted by Jasmine Carroll, Administrative Assistant, Equity Alliance MN.

2020 AMSD Legislative Preview Brings Legislators and Education Leaders Together



Nearly 160 education leaders, legislators and staff turned out for the annual AMSD Legislative Preview on Feb. 7 to discuss the 2020 legislative session. The event, which included remarks from Commissioner of Education Mary Cathryn Ricker and a panel of legislators, precedes each session. The event brings together metro area legislators and education leaders to discuss important education issues and provides legislators the opportunity to hear a presentation of the AMSD platform.

The preview also allows member districts to communicate with legislators how the platform issues affect their districts directly.

While the AMSD Board of Directors recognizes that the 2020 session is not a budget-setting session, the board also believes it remains critical that state policymakers understand that Minnesota’s education funding system is not providing adequate, equitable or reliable resources for its schools.

AMSD unveiled its [2020 Legislative Platform](#) in December, based on surveys with AMSD member school districts. Districts agreed the key areas to address in the 2020 session include:

- Stabilize education funding
- Ensure safe and modern school facilities
- Reduce mandates and enhance local control
- Enhance taxpayer equity

These points were further detailed by three AMSD superintendents who provided context to show how their districts are directly impacted by state policies.



Supt. Mary Kreger of Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan urged lawmakers to address the inconsistent state funding of Minnesota’s school districts.



Supt. Astein Osei of St. Louis Park talked about the importance of providing funding for safe and modern school facilities.



Supt. Sandy Lewandowski spoke about the impact of mental health needs and trauma on students and staff at Intermediate District #287.

Supt. Mary Kreger of Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan spoke about the significant challenges that come with inconsistent state funding - funding that doesn’t keep pace with inflation, as well as underfunding the mandated growing costs of special education and English learner funding. “As a result of these growing cross-subsidies and less-than-inflationary funding for the general education formula, districts have two options: cut programs and services for students or ask voters to increase their local property taxes to make up the difference.”

Funding was a theme echoed by Supt. Astein Osei of St. Louis Park, who talked about the impacts of mandates on every school district’s financial stability. While AMSD districts are working to reduce discipline disparities, and while many do provide training and development for staff and their paraprofessionals, he urged caution to legislators from enacting "one size fits all" solutions and urged legislators to provide the resources needed to address these and other important issues.

He also emphasized the importance of funding for safe and modern school facilities. One-time funding this session could be the

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2020 Legislative Preview

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start, he said, but “we need permanent funding to address the shortage of school support staff to address the mental health and trauma needs of our students.”

Supt. Sandy Lewandowski continued that theme - emphasizing with several points of data from District #287 - the growing impact of student mental health and trauma issues on school districts. Public schools have become the de facto mental health system for the state, she said.

“The current magnitude of student needs is the highest I’ve seen in my 40 years in education, and the responsibility of public schools to provide the range of services these students need is unprecedented.”

The preview wrapped with a legislative panel that featured Reps. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins), Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton), and Sens. Carla Nelson (R-Rochester) and Chuck Wiger (DFL-Maplewood).

Youakim is the chair of the House Education Policy Committee, and Erickson is the ranking minority member. Nelson is the chair of the Senate Committee on E-12 Finance and Policy, and Wiger is the ranking minority member for the DFL.



Legislators (from left) Rep. Sondra Erickson (R-Princeton), Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins), Sen. Chuck Wiger (DFL-Maplewood), and Sen. Carla Nelson (R-Rochester) appeared on the panel.

[Link: View the AMSD Platform](#)

[Link: View the presentation](#)



Minnesota Commissioner of Education Mary Cathryn Ricker spoke to the AMSD Board of Directors, legislators and guests.



AMSD Executive Director Scott Croonquist welcomed nearly 160 education leaders, legislators and staff.