

May 2020
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Student Safety Coaches are a Trauma-Sensitive Approach for Highest-Needs Students

Intermediate Direct 287 serves the top one percent of highest-needs students in the West Metro. Many of its students have significant disabilities, unmet mental health needs, and have experienced severe childhood trauma. In Minnesota, almost twice as many Black children (58%) experience trauma compared to their White peers (31%). Children of color are disproportionately impacted by trauma, including race-related trauma, and educators are in a key position to better understand the intersection of race and trauma and help students gain skills needed to heal and succeed.

The shift in student needs led Superintendent Sandy Lewandowski to launch a new direction for District 287, a focus on trauma-sensitive practices. The District is working to change the narrative from "What's wrong with that child?" to "What happened to that child?"

District 287 is on a journey to become one of the first trauma-sensitive and healing-centered school districts in Minnesota. Some of the more significant District initiatives include a partnership with Dr. Bruce Perry's ChildTrauma Academy; the launch of therapeutic teaching classrooms in partnership with the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation; a district



Superintendent Sandy Lewandowski speaks to policymakers about the impact of childhood trauma.

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May 8, 2020 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.
Room 304
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

May 22, 2020 Board of Directors Meeting

7:30 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

June 12, 2020 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.
Room 304
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

These meetings will likely be conducted electronically and instructions will be sent prior to each meeting.

From the Chair

The 2020 Legislative Session is winding down with the May 18 adjournment date fast approaching. It is hard to believe that a few short months ago, state policymakers were discussing how they might allocate a projected \$1.5 billion budget surplus. That surplus has evaporated in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, many school districts have depleted their nutrition and community education funds as they have worked tirelessly to deliver meals to students and provide child care for the children of our health care professionals and other essential workers. At the same time, our teachers and administrators have overcome daunting challenges to create distance learning models to continue to deliver instruction to our students. In the closing days of the legislative session, please join me in encouraging state policymakers to take the necessary steps to stabilize and replenish our funding streams, ensure all students have the ability to access the technology they need to engage in distance learning, and refrain from enacting any new unfunded mandates. Stay well and thank you in advance for your help.

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

AMSD's Mission

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



Association of
Metropolitan School Districts

District 287 Replaced School Resources Officers With Student Safety Coaches

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mobile response team that responds to hundreds of crises each year; and a focus on employee safety and wellbeing as a result of the District averaging 325 staff injuries annually due to student behavior, including almost 40 head concussions last school year.



Keith Dawson (left), Miranda Mitchell (middle), and Don West (right) stand ready to greet and check-in with students at the beginning of the school day.

As part of the focus on trauma responsiveness, District 287 made a controversial decision in 2017 to replace school resource officers with a new role, student safety coaches. The student safety coaches focus on building meaningful relationships with students, taking the "temperature" of students and the building as a whole, proactively addressing issues and behavior, and using restorative practices to help students re-engage after an incident. Most importantly, the coaches support students through challenging behavior before it escalates to needing police intervention.

Educators know that one of the ways students with unique needs communicate is through behavior. The brains of students who have experienced trauma have been impacted in ways that can cause aggressive

behavior, which is most often a response to trauma experienced earlier in life. The behavior they display is a result of their trauma and/or disabilities and is not willful behavior; it is an outcome of a trauma-response.

The student safety coaches are District employees who have years of experience working in Federal Setting IV Emotional Behavior Disorder and mental health settings, and receive specialized training in mental health recognition, de-escalation tactics, Crisis Intervention Team Training, defensive tactics, crime prevention, school safety, security, and A.L.I.C.E.

The model, which focuses on de-escalating students before their behaviors rise to a higher level of concern, matches the District's philosophy of moving away from the tendency to criminalize mental illness. Under this new model, there are fewer arrests and citations, and a reduction in restrictive procedures and staff injuries. As of the 2018-2019 school year, the student safety coaches were able to successfully resolve 95% of all student crises without the need for police intervention.

As a specialized school district dedicated to serving some of Minnesota's highest-needs students, District 287 believes that the traditional school resource officer model is not the best avenue for providing services to a unique student population, namely, students with disabilities and unmet mental health needs. Yet, as educators, we all must grow an understanding of the intersection of race, trauma, student behavior, disabilities, and special education re-calibrate so that schools can meet the needs of today's students.

This month's member spotlight was submitted by Rachel Hicks, Director of Communications and Public Relations, Intermediate District 287.

COVID and the Future of Minnesota Education: A Course to be Charted



A Saint Paul Public Schools ECFE student reads “Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See” with her teacher online.

COVID-19 has changed the conversation of education.

Think back to one year ago, amidst multiple snow days and statewide school cancellations: “distance learning” was a distant goal at best.

But after Gov. Tim Walz announced on March 15 that schools would be required to close to plan for Distance Learning, school administrators and staff sprang into action. Indeed, educators have risen to the challenge of reinventing the way instruction is delivered to students and carried out the directives in the Governor’s Executive Order to deliver meals to students and provide child care for the children of our health care professionals and other essential workers. While the response has been nothing short of incredible, three very distinct challenges and themes have risen for nearly every district in the state.

Technology equity. From access to high speed Internet, to determining what kind of device a student should learn on, there is little uniformity among the state’s school districts. For example, while Saint Paul (a 1:1 district since 2014-15) was able to quickly send more than 30,000 iPads home to nearly all of its students, it took a renewed effort to find a way to get its families online. The issue wasn’t as much access in the capital city as much as it was affordability. SPPS ultimately repurposed some 4,000 “hotspot” devices — originally intended for homeless families and children in transition — for distribution to all families in need to ensure students could actually use the iPads at home.

Meanwhile, in metro districts such as Prior Lake-Savage — where some rural townships on the edges of the district [don’t even have the infrastructure for broadband](#) — district leaders partnered with T-Mobile to provide hotspot access for some 10 percent of their students. The district — which had been 1:1 with iPads and some Chromebooks for grades 8-12 — was also able to redistribute its extra iPads to include students in two additional grades (sixth and seventh).

The reality is that students’ access to the Internet and devices is inequitable — whether because of lack of broadband infrastructure, or due to families not being able to afford the cost.

Mental health support. When the state released results from the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey, [it was very clear that students were asking for more mental health support](#). The COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified this need — not just for students, but families as well.

In Saint Paul, school counselors choose from a menu of ways to reach out to families, from weekly 1:1 Google Chat meetings with students — similar to telehealth sessions and FaceTime chats — to sharing weekly classroom and principal updates.

Prior Lake-Savage deployed its school counselors to reach out to families for its technology survey in an effort to also survey families’ welfare.

“Our focus has been how are students doing, how are families doing, and how are they doing in terms of basic needs,” said Jeff Holmberg, Assistant Superintendent of Prior Lake-Savage schools. “We wanted a point of contact with every family. That was paramount, and it was a district effort.”



A staff member at Prior Lake-Savage hands off a computer through a window earlier this month.

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Schools Deliver Meals and Provide Child Care

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Nutrition and Community-based Services. A significant area of budget strain — and anxiety for school district employees — has come with fee-based programs and services.

Gov. Walz’s Executive Orders required districts to provide no-cost child care to emergency responders and health care professionals — while fee-paying parents were required to keep their children home. Districts kept as many hourly employees as possible on payroll, per additional guidance from the Minnesota Department of Education.

The Minnesota Department of Education recognized the hardships — and budget pressures — this has brought to district budgets. The MDE issued guidance clarifying that the Governor’s Executive Order regarding retaining and compensating school hourly workers does not preclude school districts from making budget-based layoffs of staff and administrators for programs where dedicated funding streams don’t exist, in accordance with applicable local labor agreements.

Likewise, it is no secret that hungry children do not perform well academically — just as it is no secret that schools may oftentimes be the only provider of a healthy meal for a student.

[Nearly 40 percent of Minnesota students in the 2018-19 school year, qualified for the free or reduced price lunch program.](#)



Spring Lake Park nutrition services staff pack meals for students and families.

Deputy Commissioner Heather Mueller spoke to the AMSD Board of Directors on May 1 and she noted that school districts had served nearly 6 million meals statewide, which has “really amplified the impact that schools and districts have in their communities and the role they play in supporting students and families.”

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The CARES Act and ESSR: A first step in addressing the needs of students and families in a post-COVID education model

The CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act was signed into law by President Donald Trump on March 27, and includes funding for state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Act includes nearly \$16.2 billion in new funding for two emergency education relief funds to be administered by the U.S. Department of Education:

- \$2.95 billion for the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund;
- \$13.23 billion for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund.

The total allocation of the ESSR funding for Minnesota specifically is a little over \$140 million based on the FY 2019 Title 1, Part A allocation. The law requires that 90 percent, about \$126 million be allocated directly to LEAs based on their proportion of the 2019 Title 1, Part A allocation. The State allocation is just over \$14 million with no more than \$700,686 available for administration.

The CARES Act requires the Secretary of Education to make applications for both funding streams available “no later than 30 days after enactment” of the law, and applications must be approved or denied within 30 days of receipt of the application.

MDE Deputy Commissioner Heather Mueller informed AMSD members on Friday, May 1, that the MDE is preparing detailed guidance as to how these funding streams can be used, but in short they can be used for:

- Any activities authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, IDEA, the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and the McKinney Vento Act;
- Providing resources for principals and other school leaders to address school-specific needs;
- Activities that address unique needs of low-income children or students, children with disabilities, English learners, racial and ethnic minorities, students experiencing homelessness, and foster care youths, including how outreach and service delivery will meet the needs of each population;

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Fee-Based Programs Strained With Loss of Revenue

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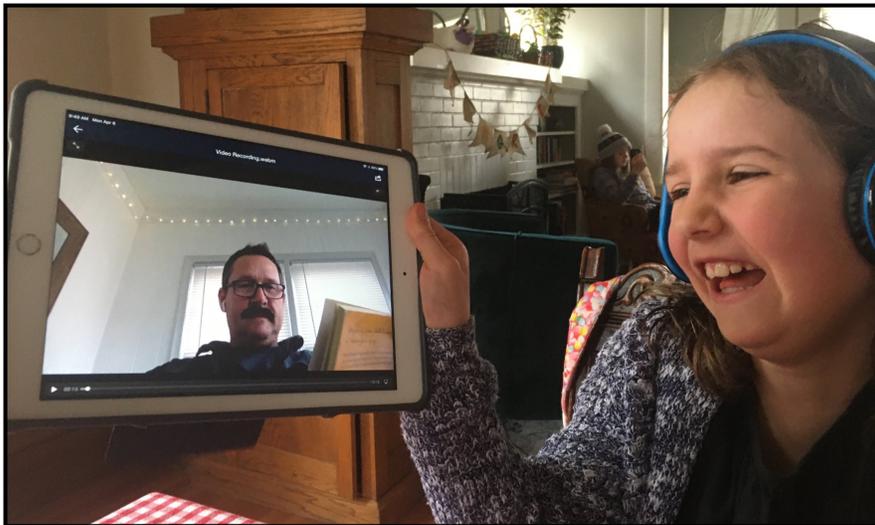
In Saint Paul, the district recently celebrated serving [its 1 millionth meal](#). SPPS has done everything from distribute meals at school bus stops to now providing personal delivery to families' homes. Fortunately for SPPS, the district has been breaking even with USDA and free-and-reduced lunch funding. But not all districts are that fortunate — and fulfilling community needs without reimbursement has left many districts searching for funds.



A school cafeteria lunchroom in North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale served as a de facto warehouse for meals for students and families in the district.

“We know that the fee-based programs are incredibly important in what they do to support school districts,” Deputy Commissioner Mueller told the AMSD board. “The continued care of students of critical care workers and the continued support of meals being served has really given us the

opportunity to take a really difficult time and maybe make it a little less difficult for our students and families.”



A Saint Paul Public Schools parent shared this photo in a Tweet with SPPS, while their daughter giggles at her 4th grade teacher wearing a fake mustache during a video conference.

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- Training and professional development for staff on sanitation and minimizing the spread of infectious diseases;
- Purchasing supplies to sanitize and clean facilities;
- Planning and coordination during long-term closures, including how to provide meals to eligible students, how to provide online learning technology to all students, how to provide guidance on meeting IDEA requirements, and how to ensure other educational services can continue to be provided consistent with federal, state, and local requirements;
- Purchasing educational technology, which could include hardware, software, and connectivity, for students that aids in regular, substantive educational interaction between students and educators, including low-income students and students with disabilities. This could also include assistive technology or adaptive equipment;
- Providing mental health services and supports;
- Planning and implementing summer learning and supplemental afterschool program activities, including providing classroom instruction or online learning during the summer months and addressing the needs of low-income students, students with disabilities, English learners, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children in foster care;
- Other activities necessary to maintain the operation of and continuity of services in LEAs and continuing to employ existing staff.

In addition, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education announced in late April more than \$307 million in discretionary grant funds will also be available for states. The grants will be funded through the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF), authorized by the CARES Act. The funds will be divided into two areas:

- The Rethink K-12 School Models Grant will receive \$180 million;
- The Reimagining Workforce Preparation Grant will receive \$127.5 million.

The Rethink K-12 School Models Grant will be open to state educational agencies and offers three categories:

- Microgrants for families, so that states can ensure they have access to the technology and educational services they need to advance their learning;
- Statewide virtual learning and course access programs; and
- New models for providing remote education.