

# CONNECTIONS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

June 2024  
Volume 21  
Number 9

## Engaging Community Voices

**June 14, 2024**  
**Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting**  
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

**July 26, 2024**  
**Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting**  
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

**August 2, 2024**  
**Board of Directors Meeting**  
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.  
Quora Education Center  
NE Metro 916  
Little Canada

**August 23, 2024**  
**Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting**  
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of education, one thing remains constant: the pivotal role strategic planning plays in shaping the future of our schools. At the heart of the process is community engagement and the transformative power it holds.



Strategic planning can be a daunting task. It demands meticulous planning, commitment and, perhaps most importantly, a willingness to engage in difficult conversations. Yet, it is within these interactions that we see real progress in our schools.

In January, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) set out to update its own strategic plan. A large group of more than 50 Core Team members, comprising a diverse mix of parents, students, staff, community members, city leaders and school board members, began working together to form a draft that identifies key priorities and defines the roadmap for learner success in PLSAS. In addition, we held community engagement meetings February - April to gather input from an even wider audience.

Hundreds of comments were gathered, reviewed, and synthesized into overarching themes that were again reviewed by the Core Team. As you can imagine, there was a wide variety of ideas, many of which not everyone could agree with. Still, in the realm of education, where diverse perspectives converge, embracing these difficult conversations is not merely an option but a necessity. Whether it's addressing disparities in academic achievement or confronting systemic inequities, these discussions are where meaningful change happens.

At the end of every Core Team meeting, we ask the group what their key take-aways are. After our April meeting, we heard things like, "The Core Planning

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I want to express my gratitude to the AMSD board members, staff, and community members who advocated for our students and schools during the 2024 legislative session. It was made clear from the start of the session that 2024 was not a funding year, and policymakers' focus would be on policy issues and a bonding bill. Despite this, two of AMSD's top priorities, additional funding, and increased flexibility to successfully implement the Read Act, were approved. AMSD members played a significant role in achieving this outcome! We have also laid the groundwork and built momentum around critical issues for the 2025 session. Thank you once again for your commitment to public education, and I hope you have a great summer!

***From the AMSD Chair, Marcus Hill, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Board Member***



# Difficult Conversations are Where Meaningful Change Happens

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Team leaned into tough/robust conversations,” “Space was provided for differing opinions/values/perspectives to be openly expressed and respected,” and “Trust is growing in the Core Planning Team.”

We have also learned that amid the challenges lie opportunities for celebration. Throughout our process, one of the questions we asked stakeholders was what they believe is going well in PLSAS. Through these discussions we were able to witness the triumphs that arise when our communities unite in pursuit of a common goal. From the milestones of student achievement to innovative programs, these moments are also guiding our strategic goals forward.

What we have also found to be an important part of effective strategic planning is our capacity to listen. In the pursuit of educational excellence, we recognize that the solutions to our most pressing challenges do not reside solely within the confines of our boardroom or administrative offices. Rather, they are embedded within the lived experiences of those we serve.



*Community members of the Strategic Plan Core Team met from January to May to help shape a strategic plan for School Board review.*

Engaging community voices is not merely a checkbox on the strategic planning agenda; it is a fundamental principle that supports our commitment to inclusive governance. By fostering partnerships with parents, students, staff, and community members, we not only cultivate a sense of ownership but also gather the collective feedback needed to bring meaningful change.

Moreover, the benefits of community engagement extend far beyond the confines of the planning process itself. When stakeholders see their voices reflected in the practices of their schools, trust is fostered, relationships are strengthened, and a sense of belonging is realized.

Now in the final stages of our strategic planning process, the school board will take action in June on a new plan to unveil to all stakeholders leading into the 2024/25 school year. By leaning into difficult conversations and amplifying community voices, we know we will pave the way for a future where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

For more information, visit [www.plsas.org/strategicplan](http://www.plsas.org/strategicplan)

*This month's member feature was submitted by Dr. Michael Thomas, Superintendent, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools.*

# Session Concludes with Modest Supplemental Funding

The 2024 legislative session concluded shortly before midnight on Sunday, May 19 amidst partisan rancor over a combined omnibus tax and supplemental funding bill. The Omnibus Education Finance and Policy Bills had cleared the House and Senate prior to the last day with modest investments focused on the Read Act.

AMSD welcomed MDE Government Relations Director Adosh Unni and Director of School Finance Cathy Erickson to the AMSD Board of Directors meeting on May 24 to share an overview of the Omnibus Education Finance and Policy Bills that were adopted in the 2024 session. The MDE overview can be found on the AMSD website here:

- LINK: [View the MDE Presentation on the 2024 Legislative Session](#)



*MDE Government Relations Director Adosh Unni makes a point during his overview at the AMSD Board of Directors Meeting on May 24 of the Omnibus Education Finance and Policy Bills that were adopted in the 2024 legislative session.*

Two of AMSD's key [Legislative Priorities](#) for the 2024 session, additional funding and flexibility to ensure a successful implementation of the Read Act, were included in the Omnibus Education Finance and Policy Bills. Importantly, the deadline to complete the required staff training was extended by one year which will provide the time needed to ensure a successful implementation.

The Education Finance Bill includes \$43 million in FY24-25 with \$18.046 million of that total ongoing funding. The bulk of the one-time funding is targeted toward the Read Act and the ongoing funding is for the additional Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Program, increasing the number of VPK slots from 7,160 participants to 12,360 in FY25, and continuing funding for the compensatory pilot projects.

More than \$31 million is allocated to school districts, cooperative districts, and charter schools to compensate teachers for completing the required training under the Read Act. In addition, \$35 million that was approved in the 2023 session for curriculum was modified to allow school districts to use the funding on any of the allowable uses under literacy incentive aid to implement the Read Act.

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# Student Teaching Stipends, Apprenticeship Program Approved

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Another AMSD priority, extending the hold harmless for compensatory funding beyond FY27, was also included in the Omnibus Education Finance Bill.

AMSD proposed legislation, [HF 4117/SF 4184](#), that would have amended local optional revenue (LOR) to address several priorities. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Matt Norris and Sen. Heather Gustafson, would have increased LOR from \$724 to \$920 per pupil to recover ground lost to inflation, linked LOR to the basic formula, increased LOR and referendum equalization, and allowed school districts to recover costs related to unemployment insurance and the Paid Family Medical Leave program. While the legislation did not advance this year, AMSD members provided compelling testimony before the House and Senate Education Finance Committees and raised awareness about the importance of addressing these issues next year.

Another priority issue, increasing flexibility with instructional hour requirements to allow school districts to establish personalized, competency-based learning opportunities for students, was addressed in [HF 3363/SF 4188](#). The bill, sponsored by Rep. Mary Frances Clardy and Sen. Heather Gustafson, was not included in the final omnibus bill but AMSD members again provided compelling testimony and built momentum for the 2025 session.

A long-standing priority for AMSD members has been to address the teacher shortage and increase the diversity of the educator workforce. The Omnibus Education Finance bill included investments in two initiatives toward that end. The Education Finance Bill appropriated \$6.543 million for a Student Teaching Stipend Pilot Program, for eight teacher preparation programs to provide stipends to student teachers placed in Minnesota schools during the School Year (SY) 24-25.

The Legislature also allotted a little more than \$1 million to a Special Education Apprenticeship Program for \$250,000 grants to Intermediate School Districts 287, 288, 916, and 917 for special education registered apprenticeship program costs. An additional \$1 million was allocated in FY25 for the Office of Higher Education (OHE) Aspiring Teachers of Color Scholarship Program.

Following last year's legislative session which saw expansive new requirements and expectations for school districts, AMSD urged legislators and the Governor to refrain from enacting new mandates in the 2024 session. AMSD members made it clear they need time and space to ensure successful implementation of the new programs. While the new expectations adopted in the 2024 session are relatively modest, there are several new requirements:

- **School Cell Phone Policies.**

School districts must adopt a School Cell Phone Policy by March 15, 2025. The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) and the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) must collaborate to develop best practices.

- **Paraprofessionals.**

For the 2024-25 school year only, the required number of hours of training for paraprofessionals is reduced from eight to six. Consultation with the union representative for paraprofessionals is also required before planning required trainings, and districts are also required to pay for test materials and fees for paraprofessionals employed during the SY23-24 that have not yet passed the test or met the requirements of the competency grid.

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# Cell Phone Policy, Mental Health Instruction Among New Requirements Adopted

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- **Health Standards.**  
Health standards will be shifted from being locally developed to statewide academic standards, with local health standards remaining in place until statewide health standards are ready to be implemented in the classrooms.
- **Mental Health.**  
Starting in SY26-27, school districts and charter schools must provide mental health instruction. In addition, districts must excuse absences for appointments conducted via telehealth, and provide access to space for a student to receive mental health care through telehealth.
- **Access to Library Materials and Rights Protected.**  
Commonly referred to as the book banning prohibition, public libraries in Minnesota must not ban, remove, or otherwise restrict access to a book or other material based solely on its viewpoint or the messages, ideas, or opinions it conveys. Librarians may not be terminated or discriminated against for complying with this statute. Library governing boards, including school boards, must adopt a policy that establishes procedures for selection of, challenges to, and reconsideration of library materials.
- **Language Access.**  
Requires districts to develop a board-approved language access plan. This policy will be publicly discussed and adopted at a school board meeting and can be tailored to fit the needs and access for the community. This plan must also be reviewed every two years and updated as appropriate.
- **Post-Secondary Enrollment (PSEO).**  
Adds a secondary notification date by which a student must enroll in a PSEO or rigorous coursework class per school year and requires districts and postsecondary institutions to annually report the participation rates of pupils enrolled, as well as requires school boards to adopt a weighting grade point average policy for postsecondary coursework as for concurrent enrollment coursework.
- **Coach Contracts.**  
Requires that school boards must provide a written notice to a coach whose contract the school declines to renew for the following school year no more than 60 days after the end of regular season activity.

All links to the Omnibus Education Policy and Finance Bills and summaries, as well as other bills with provisions impacting school districts, can also be found on the 2024 Legislature page of the AMSD website at <https://www.amsd.org/2024session/>.



*Minnesota Department of Education Director of School Finance Cathy Erickson provides some details at the AMSD Board of Directors Meeting on May 24 regarding the Omnibus Education Finance Bill passed by the 2024 Legislature.*