

September 2020
vol 17 ♦ no 11

September 11, 2020
Board of Directors Meeting
7:30 a.m.
Conducted via ZOOM

September 25, 2020*
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m.
Room 301
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

October 2, 2020*
Board of Directors Meeting
7:00 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

***Information will be distributed about whether these meetings will be held in person or remotely.**

St. Cloud Area Schools Open in Hybrid Learning Model

As school districts across the state prepare to return to school this fall in an ever-changing COVID landscape, questions surrounding health and safety, learning models, and logistics have been forefront in their planning. St. Cloud Area School District engaged staff, students and families around these critical issues, seeking input on back-to-school scenarios. One of the biggest questions for all stakeholders was clear: *what will school look like?*



New teachers are welcomed to a new school year and hybrid schedule.

Hybrid Model

St. Cloud Area Schools will open in September in a hybrid learning model as determined by state guidelines and local health data, as well as informed by the input of staff, students and parents. With health and safety as a top priority and quality instruction as a guiding principle, district administration worked throughout the summer on scheduling a combination of in-person learning—that will limit capacity to no more than 50% on a bus, in a classroom, cafeteria, or school—and distance learning. Most students will attend school in-person two days a week and three days online, with students assigned to attend on a Monday/Wednesday or Tuesday/Thursday schedule. The district's

youngest learners, (Preschool – Grade 2) as well as early multi-lingual students and some Special Education students, will attend Monday – Thursday. All students will participate in distance learning on Fridays.

The elementary hybrid model structures learning so that students receive direct instruction while in person and engage in activities that will enhance their learning while at home. In-person learning days will focus on literacy and math for grades 3-5 students while also providing students with a specialist (art, music or physical education) every day. Interactive, hands-on and collaborative activities that can be done safely will be prioritized. On at-home learning days, students will log into Seesaw and join their teacher and classmates at a designated time each day for a morning meeting. Following the meeting, they will complete assignments and activities through Seesaw or through activities their teacher has assigned during the in-person days.

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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 has again released an informative, non-partisan [Election Guide](#) to help citizens concerned about public education engage in the electoral process. I encourage you to read the guide and share it with friends, colleagues and candidates. Much attention is on the presidential election but this is also an important state election with all 201 legislative seats on the ballot. Those who are elected will make critical funding and policy decisions that impact our schools including establishing the level of funding our schools will receive for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years. One way to have a positive impact on the 2021 session is to engage legislative candidates this fall to educate them about the issues and challenges facing our schools. Thank you in advance for engaging your local legislative candidates and advocating for our students.

Curtis Johnson, school board member, Roseville Area Schools, is chair of AMSD.

Schools Will Look Different, but Feel the Same

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This year in secondary schools, students will attend three classes daily, with classes lasting approximately 120 minutes. When attending school in person, students will receive instruction from their teachers, collaborate with peers, do hands-on learning activities and get individualized support. On the days when students are learning at home, students will complete assignments and activities through Schoology. Regardless of whether students are at home or in person, students will follow their daily schedules and be present, virtually or physically, at the start of each class.

Schools Will Look Different

In the hybrid plan, learning environments will be adapted to accommodate social distancing with 50% capacity. Furniture may be removed to ensure safe spacing. Common areas such as cafeterias and media centers may serve as classrooms. Movement around the school and student interaction, such as at passing times, recess and meals, will be limited to reduce congestion and avoid large student gatherings. Hallways may become one-way to ease traffic flow.

Adults and students will wear masks—on the bus and throughout school buildings. When arriving at school, everyone will be screened before entering the building whether arriving by bus, car, drop-off or walking. Signage throughout the school will remind staff and students to wash their hands, keep 6' apart and limit numbers. Cleaning and disinfecting between classes and bus routes will be standard procedure.

Schools Will Feel the Same

Although school will begin this fall in an entirely different way than previous years, what remains the same is the dedication of teachers and support staff to see that all students feel welcome and have the opportunities and support they need to succeed. When attending school in person, students will interact with their teachers and classmates, eat lunch with friends, connect with their counselors and advisors, and participate in activities. Face-to-face interactions, including group participation, will be maximized on in-person days. The culture of learning also will remain the same with schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and social emotional learning experiences in place.

Student Perspective

Tech High School senior Grace Roeder admits she's relieved to go back to school in the fall, even in a hybrid learning model she has never experienced. "It's a bit nerve-racking not knowing what your senior year will look like," she says, "but I'm grateful to the administration for figuring this out."

Roeder looks forward to working with others in person and being able to ask her peers a question when she's confused. She also looks forward to her leadership roles in National Honor Society, Debate, Speech and other activities.

"We have high hopes and are [already] planning," she says. One thing she's learned from last spring is, "you work with what you have and go with the flow."

Teacher Perspective

9th grade science teacher at Apollo High School, Karina Sebastian, is looking forward to returning to class in a hybrid model. "I'm so excited to get to see my students, even in a reduced capacity. I have missed the casual conversations, the laughter and the energy that they bring to my classroom." Sebastian sees hybrid as "the best of both worlds."

"In addition to the necessity of creating a safer learning environment," she says, "hybrid allows us to have face-to-face time which is so important for maintaining strong student relationships and doing hands-on learning activities. Hybrid also gives us the opportunity to continue to develop the 21st century learning skills and independence that started last spring."

Perhaps Superintendent Willie Jett says it best when anticipating this fall. "The start of our school year will be like no other. And we can't wait to get started!"

This month's member spotlight was submitted by Tami DeLand, Director of Community Engagement and Communications, St. Cloud Area School District.



Device Deployment Day at Kennedy Community School brings smiles behind the masks.

Report Highlights Higher Cost of Living, Wages in Metro Area

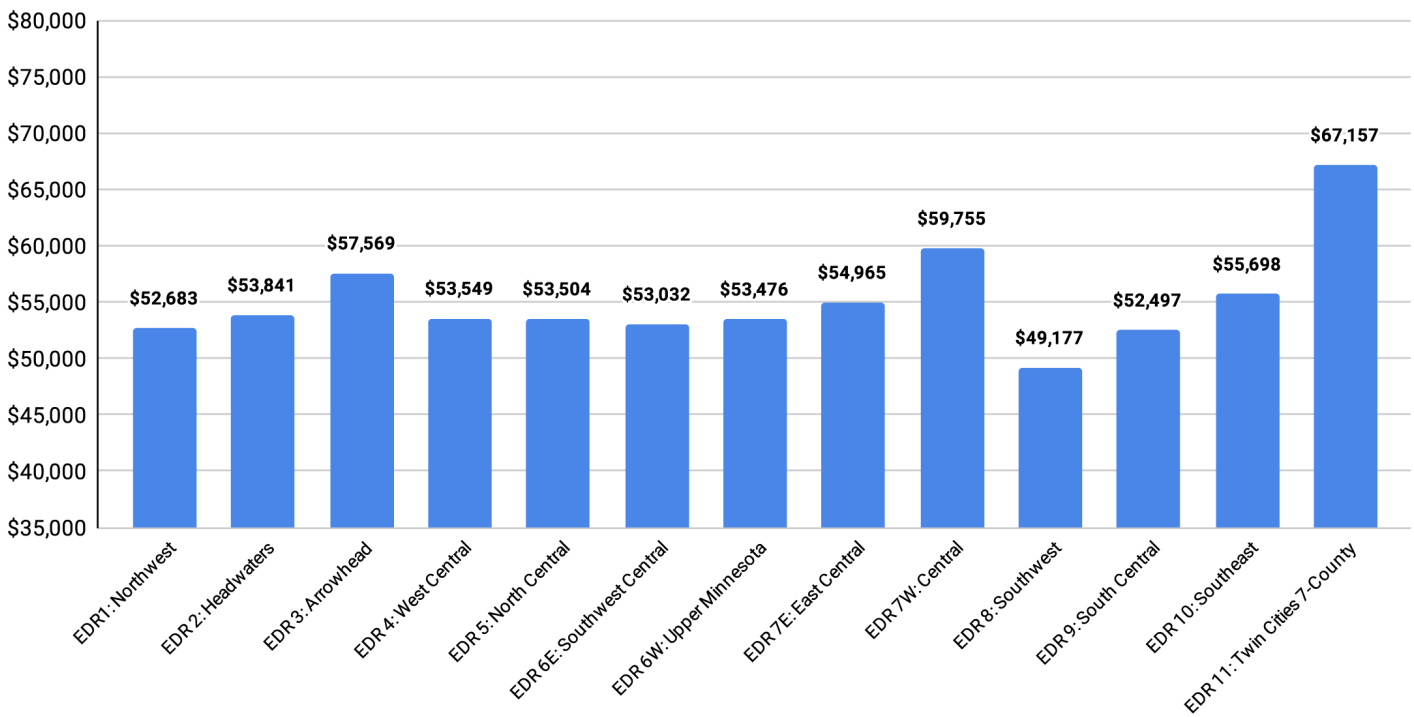
A new report from [The Center for Rural Policy Development](#) highlights the significantly higher cost of living in the metropolitan area. Not surprisingly, the higher cost of living translates into higher salaries in the metro area. The higher salaries are consistent for virtually all professions in both the private and public sectors. The report demonstrates that even though rural residents generally have lower salaries, those salaries stretch much further given the lower cost of living.

The report notes, “The range in the estimated cost of living around the state can be surprising. For our hypothetical household, the adults would need to average nearly \$20 per hour to meet the cost of living around the Twin Cities seven-county metro, but only about \$14 per hour in southwest Minnesota. In north central and northeastern Minnesota, the hourly wage needed is a bit higher, between \$16 and \$18 per hour.”

The higher cost of living and higher wage scale means school districts in metropolitan areas pay significantly higher wages to their teachers and other staff. Considering that personnel costs account for 75 percent or more of a school district’s budget, this clearly presents a major financial challenge for metropolitan area school districts.

As the chart below shows, the average salary of a teacher in the metropolitan area in 2019-20 was just below \$70,000 — almost \$20,000 higher than school districts in the northwest and southwest portions of the state. Unlike many other states, Minnesota’s education funding system does not recognize geographic labor cost differentials. Consequently, school districts that face significantly higher labor costs are forced to rely on voter-approved operating referendums to cover the higher cost.

Minnesota Teachers Average Salary by Economic Region FY2019-20



Source: Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2020.

The reliance on voter-approved referendums creates inequities among school districts and property taxpayers. Property taxpayers in school districts with lower property wealth have to shoulder a greater burden to provide a similar level of funding in a school district with greater property wealth. This makes it more difficult for school districts with low property tax wealth to pass referendums leaving these districts with fewer sources to cover similar labor costs.

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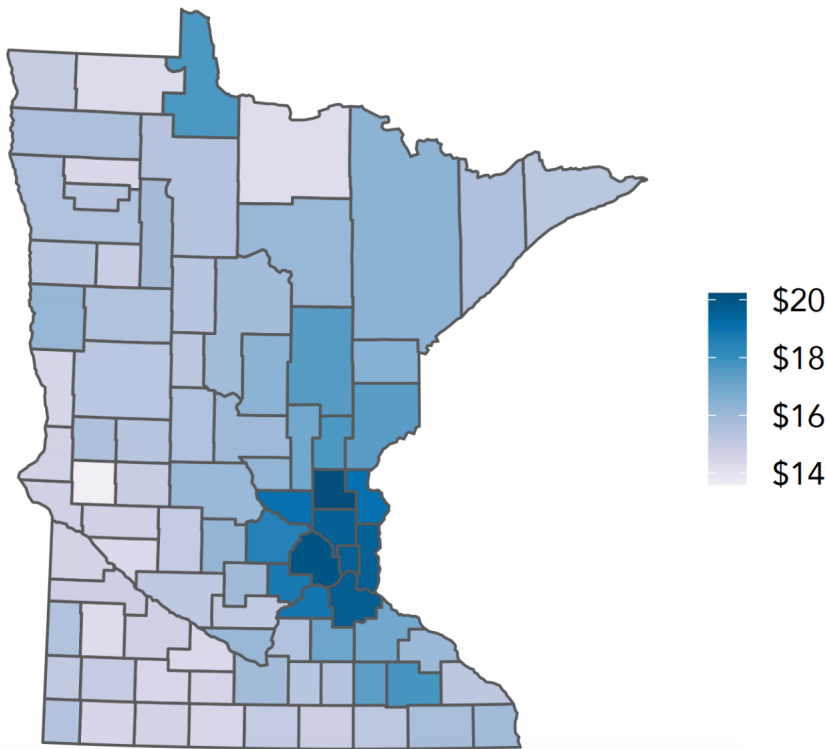
Previous Reports Have Recommended Addressing Labor Cost Differential

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Geographic labor cost differences is not a new issue. A 2009 [study by Hamline University](#) researchers noted “areas with relatively higher costs of living have to pay higher salaries to attract school employees, thereby increasing the cost of operating schools and districts.”

Similarly, in 2014 researchers from the University of Minnesota, Dr. Nicola Alexander, Hyunjun Kim, & Samantha Holquist, published a [comprehensive study](#) showing the wide geographic disparities in the cost of labor across Minnesota and the impact that disparity has on the purchasing power among school districts. Strikingly, the report noted a 41 percent difference in costs faced by school districts in regions that command the highest and lowest wages.

2019 Hourly Wages Needed to meet cost of living



Graphic from the Center for Rural Policy and Development report: “A brief discussion: Wages can go further in Greater Minnesota.”
View the full report at: <https://www.ruralmn.org/>

The cost of living study from the Center for Rural Policy and Development comes as a School Finance Working Group, appointed by Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker, works to develop recommendations to reform Minnesota’s education funding system. At the start of their work, the group established [10 Education Funding and Levy Equalization Principles](#) to guide their work. The second principle notes that basic funding should be supplemented by revenue sufficient to cover added costs related to unique district characteristics which vary among schools and districts. Geographic labor cost differentials clearly fall into that category.

A similar School Finance Working Group, formed in 2012, [proposed to recognize regional labor cost differentials](#) by rolling a portion of referendum revenue into a new location equity levy. The recommendation was partially implemented by the Legislature in 2013 and that provided some temporary relief by lessening the reliance on the operating referendum and increasing equalization. However, basic education revenue and equalization funding has lost considerable ground to inflation since then leaving metro area school districts to continue to rely on voter-approved referendums to cover their higher labor costs.

A subcommittee of the current working group has recommended adding a component to the current funding system to account for geographic wage disparities. The proposal would add [“Location Adjustment Revenue” to offset the higher cost of labor in some school districts](#). While the proposal would rely primarily on local property taxpayers, it would be a step toward reducing reliance on voter approved referendums. The Working Group is scheduled to complete its work by the end of the month.