

October 2020  
vol 18 ♦ no 1

**October 30, 2020\***  
**Executive/Legislative**  
**Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m.  
Room 301  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

**November 6, 2020\***  
**Board of Directors**  
**Meeting**

7:00 a.m.  
Quora Education Center  
NE Metro 916  
Little Canada

**November 20, 2020\***  
**Executive/Legislative**  
**Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m.  
Room 301  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

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

## New Learning Environments at Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools Meeting Needs of Students During the Pandemic

COVID-19 has changed how we educate students in ways we could never have imagined. At Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS), flexibility is key as we implement our new learning models with safety requirements, while ensuring student’s individual learning needs continue to be met.

Back in 2017 when the community approved two school funding requests to add staff and space for our growing enrollment, we never could have predicted just how well the design of our new learning environments would serve us in today’s world of educating students during a pandemic.

From flexible furniture and movable walls, to outdoor classrooms, our spaces are meeting the needs of students by ensuring they can collaborate while maintaining a safe social distance.

The newly opened Hamilton Ridge Elementary was designed specifically to meet the individual learning needs of students. The guiding principles shaped the design to include classrooms with movable walls, furniture on wheels to make learning flexible on a daily basis, and areas where students can easily convene in small groups to work, while also including areas for individualized learning. In addition, there are plenty of windows to allow daylighting throughout the building.



Hamilton Ridge Elementary students find spaces to work during independent learning time.

Another new design feature that has been installed at Hamilton Ridge as well as Prior Lake High School (PLHS) are “learning stairs,” which are not only functional stairs but also serve as informal seating space. The versatile nature of the learning stairs offers flexibility where students in today’s environment can spread out and socially distance, while still being able to connect with one another either formally through project-based learning, or informally with one another.

*Continued on page 2*

### 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

In addition to the presidential race, congressional races, and all 201 state legislative seats, three AMSD school districts have important referendum questions on the November ballot. It is sometimes difficult for school leaders to break through all of the political advertising to make sure their citizens have the information they need about their school referendum questions. If you have questions or need additional information about your local referendum, I urge you to contact your local school officials. If you have a school board election, I encourage you to find out where the candidates stand on important education issues. In addition, you can find important election information in [AMSD's Election Guide](#). Most importantly, please exercise your right to VOTE!

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

# Spaces Conducive to Collaboration, Communication, Creativity and Critical Thinking

*Continued from page 1*

PLHS has undergone major renovations with new classroom additions, a secure front entrance, an expanded kitchen, and parking lot, and a four-court activity center. Moving forward, work continues on the PLHS cafeteria expansion and a second, three-story classroom addition, both set to be complete this winter. Many of the new PLHS classrooms were constructed with a removable wall that opens directly into collaborative spaces with flexible furniture which compliments collaborative work.

Bridges Area Learning Center, our alternative high school, opened in 2019. This building was designed specifically for flexible use and student choice, with open spaces, flexible furniture, and opportunities for collaborative student learning and socialization, including academic and social/emotional learning areas that are conducive to all styles of personalized student learning. One of the highlights of the building is the makerspace patio area which allows outside access for our students and a dedicated space designed for hands-on creativity.

Two of the Bridges classrooms have sliding glass doors allowing for open meeting spaces and now overflow options if the room is at 50% capacity for Hybrid learning. The common areas that make up the spaces in between the flexible classrooms, along with the cafeteria, are large, open and bright, designed for student collaboration. In this time of COVID-19, these spaces are now fundamental learning areas that allow for social distancing as well.

PLSAS is known as an E-STEM district (Environmental Education, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). Problem solving and hands-on projects are central to E-STEM, and whether it's in our nature-based preschool program or at our high school where students are maintaining a vegetable garden, a great deal of learning happens outdoors.



*Jeffers Pond Elementary 1st grade students learn outside, "sit-spot" style, for a lesson on the seasons. Students sketched and colored their versions of a nearby tree in late summer.*

With the safety requirements due to COVID-19, outdoor learning spaces are more important than ever before. Throughout PLSAS, teachers have created outdoor classrooms to promote learning while social distancing.

One example is at Jeffers Pond Elementary where teachers received professional development on safety and sustainable outdoor learning at the beginning of the school year. From there, teachers developed classrooms with an identified "sit-spot" outside the building. The sit-spots include a variety of seating options, such as tree stumps, grass, sit-upons or other plastic flexible seating. Classrooms have weather-resistant wagons to haul student and teacher supplies, and large, portable whiteboards are being tested by some teachers this fall at their outdoor classrooms.

In addition, both Jeffers Pond and Redtail Ridge Elementary have newly constructed kindergarten classrooms on the main level with doors that re-direct student passage away from classrooms and provide direct access to outside learning.

WestWood Elementary, La ola del lago at Grainwood, Hidden Oaks and Twin Oaks Middle Schools have each taken advantage of new multi-purpose rooms that allow flexible space for project-based learning, co-teaching, meetings, student collaboration and small-group instruction.

Our students live in a fast-paced and ever-changing world full of choices. At PLSAS, we want our classroom environments to keep pace with the world we live in and be conducive to open collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking.

It's hard to predict how the rest of the school year will unfold amidst the pandemic but it is our hope that our flexible indoor learning

spaces and outdoor classrooms will help students adapt and serve them well in the months and years to come.

*This month's member spotlight was submitted by Kristi Mussman, Director of Communications, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools.*

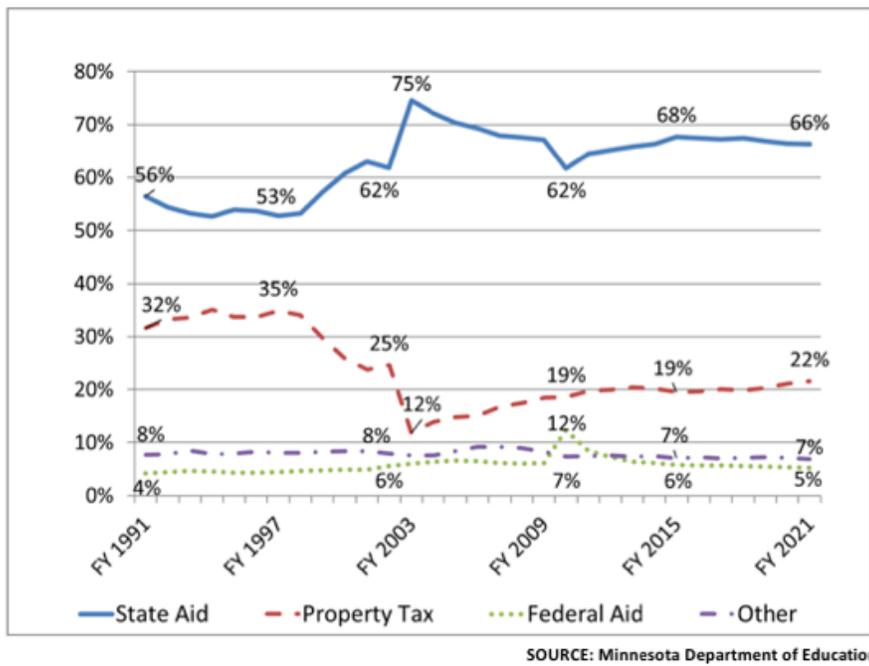
# Referendum Revenue Provides Critical Resources

Three AMSD school districts have important referendum questions on the ballot on Nov. 3. The ballot questions include renewing or increasing capital project levies and a request for a new operating levy. The chart on page 4 outlines the three AMSD member district referendum questions and includes links to the school district website or additional detailed information about the referendum questions. Voters are encouraged to contact their local school officials if they have questions about their local referendum.

## Why referendums are necessary

While the state provides the largest share of operating costs for school districts, revenue from referendums deliver critical resources necessary for basic programming. As the chart below shows, local property taxes provided more than 20 percent of the revenue for Minnesota school districts last year while the state provided more than 65 percent, and federal funding accounted for 5 percent. In fact, nearly all Minnesota school districts have an operating referendum in place — a clear sign of the importance of this source of revenue. Metropolitan school districts are particularly reliant on voter-approved referenda because Minnesota, unlike many other states, does not account for regional variations in operating costs. As a result, metro area school districts depend on the operating referendum to cover market-driven labor cost differentials.

**EDUCATION FUNDING TRENDS**  
 PK-12 Education Revenue by Source (All Funds)  
 February 2020 Forecast



Minnesota voters understand that education funding is really a state and local partnership. This is evident in the outcome of every referendum renewal election since 2014. Over that six year span, all 92 referendum renewals that have gone to voters have been approved.

School districts also rely on capital project referendums to provide the technology their students need to succeed in our digital economy, while bond referendums are needed to build and maintain safe and secure facilities for students, staff and the public.

While the governor and legislators approved a 2 percent per-year formula increase in the 2019 legislative session — the reality is that it was not sufficient to cover inflationary costs faced by school districts and make up for years of underfunding. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the budget challenges faced by school districts.

Minnesota schools are bracing for the projected statewide deficit of \$2.3 billion for the current biennium and a shortfall of \$4.77 billion for the 2022-23 biennium.

Revenue received from voter-approved referendums is one of the few avenues available to school districts to provide the resources their students need.

## Operating Referendum Renewal Rates

Year	Approval
2014	18 of 18 approved
2015	22 of 22 approved
2016	14 of 14 approved
2017	20 of 20 approved
2018	8 of 8 approved
2019	10 of 10 approved

Continued on page 4

# Important Referendum Questions on the Ballot

Continued from page 3

## AMSD Referendum Elections November 3, 2020

District	LEVY	OVERVIEW / ballot language
<a href="#">Fridley</a>	<b>Capital Projects levy for maintenance, technology</b>	<p><b>Renewal of Expiring Capital Project Levy Authorization</b></p> <p>The board of Independent School District No. 14 (Fridley Public Schools) has proposed to renew the school district's existing capital project levy authorization of 5.47% times the net tax capacity of the school district. The money raised by the capital project levy authorization will be used to cover costs related to deferred maintenance and renovation projects at various sites and facilities, technology devices, and technology infrastructure. The proposed capital project levy authorization will raise approximately \$1,016,000 for taxes payable in 2022, the first year it is to be levied, and would be authorized for ten years. The estimated total cost of the projects to be funded over that time period is approximately \$10,160,000. The projects to be funded have received a positive review and comment from the Commissioner of Education.</p> <p>Shall the renewal of the capital project levy authorization proposed by the board of Independent School District No. 14 be approved?</p> <p>BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING TO RENEW AN EXISTING CAPITAL PROJECTS REFERENDUM THAT IS SCHEDULED TO EXPIRE.</p>
<a href="#">Orono</a>	<b>Capital Project Levy / Technology</b>	<p><b>Revoking Existing Capital Project Levy Authorization; Approving New Authorization</b></p> <p>The board of Independent School District No. 278 (Orono Public Schools) has proposed to revoke its existing capital project levy authorization of 2.539% times the net tax capacity of the school district and to replace that authorization with a new authorization of 4.516% times the net tax capacity of the school district. The proposed new authorization will raise approximately \$1,988,720 for taxes payable in 2021, the first year it is to be levied and would be applicable for ten years. The estimated total cost of the projects to be funded over that time period is approximately \$19,987,203. The money raised by the proposed authorization will be used to provide funds for the replacement and maintenance of core technology infrastructure to improve teaching and learning.</p> <p>Shall the school district's existing capital project levy authorization be revoked and the new capital project levy authorization to fund technology proposed by the board of Independent School District No. 278 be approved?</p> <p>BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.</p>
<a href="#">Shakopee</a>	<b>Operating Levy</b>	<p>The Board of Independent School District No. 720, Shakopee, has proposed to increase its referendum revenue authorization by the following amounts for taxes payable in the years specified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$400 per pupil for taxes payable in 2021;</li> <li>• An additional \$300 per pupil for taxes payable in 2022;</li> <li>• An additional \$200 per pupil for taxes payable in 2023;</li> <li>• An additional \$100 per pupil, for taxes payable in 2024.</li> <li>• The total tax increase of \$1,000 per pupil will continue for taxes payable in 2025 to 2030.</li> </ul> <p>The proposed new referendum revenue authorization would be applicable for ten (10) years, commencing with taxes payable in 2021, unless otherwise revoked or reduced as provided by law. Shall the increase in the revenue proposed by the Board of Independent School District No. 720 be approved?</p> <p>BY VOTING "YES" ON THIS BALLOT QUESTION, YOU ARE VOTING FOR A PROPERTY TAX INCREASE.</p>

## University of Minnesota's Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rodriguez Receive AMSD's 2020 Friend of Public Education Award



**C**urtis Johnson, Chair of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, center, presents the 2020 Friend of Public Education Award to University of Minnesota faculty Dr. Nicola Alexander (left), a professor of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development and the Interim Associate Dean College of Education and Human Development, and Dr. Michael Rodriguez, professor and Campbell Leadership Chair in Education and Human Development, and Interim Dean, College of Education and Human Development.

The AMSD Friend of Public Education award recognizes their dedicated support of public education and outstanding research in areas of great importance to the member school districts of AMSD.

The AMSD executive board awarded the honor to Dr. Rodriguez and Dr. Alexander in recognition of their research in support of AMSD's Reimagine Minnesota educational equity work, which is focused on ensuring that each and every Minnesota student receives an equitable and excellent education. Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rodriguez have also trained countless school administrators and served as mentors to educators across the state.

Dr. Alexander and Dr. Rodriguez received the honor at the Friday, Oct. 2 AMSD Board of Directors meeting.