

# CONNECTIONS



News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

October 2022

Volume 20

Number 1

## RPS Online Provides Flexibility in Meaningful and Connected Way

**October 7, 2022**

### **Board of Directors Meeting**

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center  
NE Metro 916  
Little Canada

**October 28, 2022**

### **Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

**November 4, 2022**

### **Board of Directors Meeting**

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center  
NE Metro 916  
Little Canada

**November 10, 2022**

### **Annual Conference**

8 a.m. - 3 p.m.

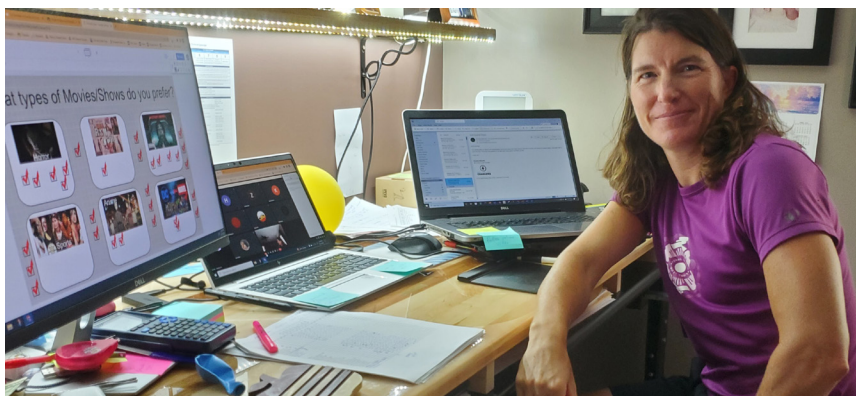
Minneapolis Marriott  
Northwest

**Register here:**

[https://www.amsd.org/  
reimagine2022/](https://www.amsd.org/reimagine2022/)

Rochester Public Schools (RPS) Online is a K-12, synchronous-first, online learning community available to students across the state of Minnesota. Now in its second year as a state-approved online learning provider, RPS Online offers both comprehensive and supplemental online learning to students and families who have experienced success in and wish to continue learning online.

*RPS Online High School science teacher Molly Cochran shows her desk set up and how she teaches her students.*



In addition to a full complement of academic and related support services, including special education, multi-language learning, gifted and talented, school counseling, and social work, RPS Online will be launching a menu of non-academic opportunities for students to engage in and build community. These opportunities include student clubs and organizations as well as both virtual and in-person community events. The RPS School Board recently approved a new Strategic Plan that in its implementation, one of the focuses is to create communities where all students think and feel they belong.

"We know that there are students and families both in Rochester and across the state of Minnesota who are searching for a more flexible learning environment to meet their learning needs and we are confident that RPS Online can

*Continued on page 2*

This month's newsletter highlights one of the most vexing issues impacting school district budgets — the severe cross-subsidy (shortfall) in the special education program. The failure of the state to provide the necessary funding for special education programs has stressed school districts' budgets for years. In recent years, a growing cross-subsidy has developed in the English learner program. Despite a record surplus in the 2022 legislative session, lawmakers failed to approve funding to address these shortfalls. I hope AMSD members will make sure the legislative candidates running to represent your district understand how critical it is for our students and communities that these shortfalls are addressed in the 2023 session. Our advocacy starts now!

**From the AMSD Chair, Crystal Brakke, Richfield Public Schools Board Member**



# Creating Communities Where Students Feel They Belong

Continued from page 1

provide that flexibility in a meaningful and connected way,” said RPS Online Principal Brandon Macrafcic.

The flexible learning environment is not only beneficial for the students. Some of RPS Online’s teachers specifically chose to teach for RPS Online because they were seeking the flexibility in their own lives.

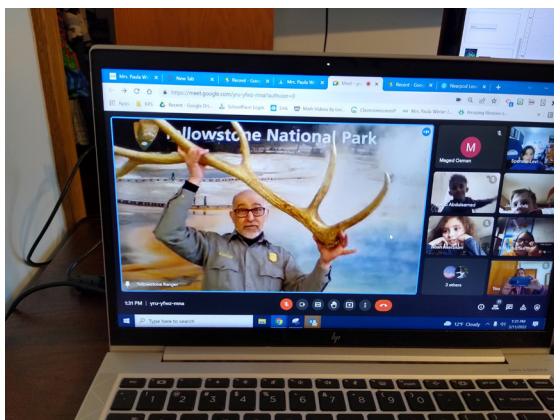
“I wanted something with the flexibility to work from home, and I have a passion for technology and integrating systems into every day teaching to make learning more effective for the students, and more accessible to the teacher,” said Philip Giarratana who teaches special education classes for middle school students. “It’s also worked wonders for my confidence to be in a familiar surrounding all day and still engage in the profession I love, especially since I also struggle with a high degree of social anxiety.”

For fifth grade teacher Kim Hill, the flexibility allowed her to better support her students. “Working online has allowed me flexibility to schedule additional support sessions for students who need just a little more instruction,” said Hill. “I find it easier to individualize the instruction in this setting and I have been able to support students who in the past have struggled. Since our whole class is online it is also easy to find background supports as students need them in real time.”

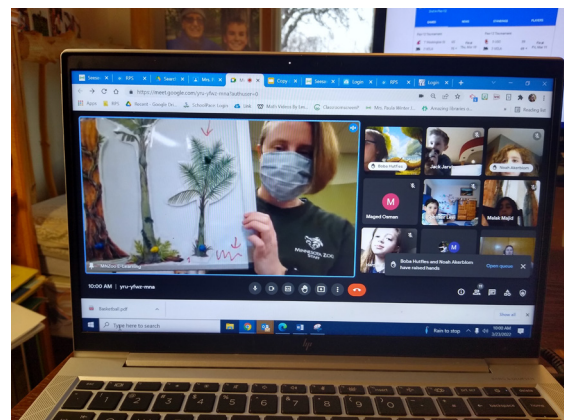
New to RPS Online high school for the 22-23 school year are online World Language classes in Spanish (2 levels), French (4 levels), German (4 levels), and Latin (4 levels). These courses, as well as any other high school courses, can be taken on a supplemental basis, where students attend most of their day in-person at their home high school and join one or more classes at RPS online.

While students and families can always choose to individually enroll in RPS Online, districts currently without an online learning option who are interested in exploring one can enter into an inter-district agreement with Rochester Public Schools. Winona Area Public Schools recently partnered with RPS on such an agreement that allows students to remain a student in their home district, but take classes through RPS Online. The courses are taught by RPS Online teachers using the RPS curriculum. Home districts retain the state funding for online students and pay an agreed-upon tuition to RPS.

District and/or school leaders interested in discussing a possible partnership with RPS Online should contact Brandon Macrafcic, RPS Online Lead Principal, at [brmacrafcic@rochesterschools.org](mailto:brmacrafcic@rochesterschools.org) or 507-328-3119.



*Students participating in virtual field trips to Yellowstone National Park (left) and Minnesota Zoo (right).*



*This month's member feature was submitted by Mamisoa Knutson, Director of Communications, Rochester Public Schools.*

# Special Education Cross-Subsidy Will Sharply Increase in FY2022 Without Action by State

The special education cross-subsidy has become so dire that more than a dozen of the state's leading public education advocacy organizations, including AMSD, rallied at the Capitol in May to urge the Legislature and Governor to use a portion of the historic state budget surplus to fulfill their obligation to fully fund these important special education services. Yet, at the end of the 2022 session, despite a state surplus estimated at \$7 billion, the Legislature failed to approve any new funding to address the cross-subsidy. The cross-subsidy refers to the difference between what school districts spend on important and mandated special education services beyond the funding provided by the state and federal governments for those services.

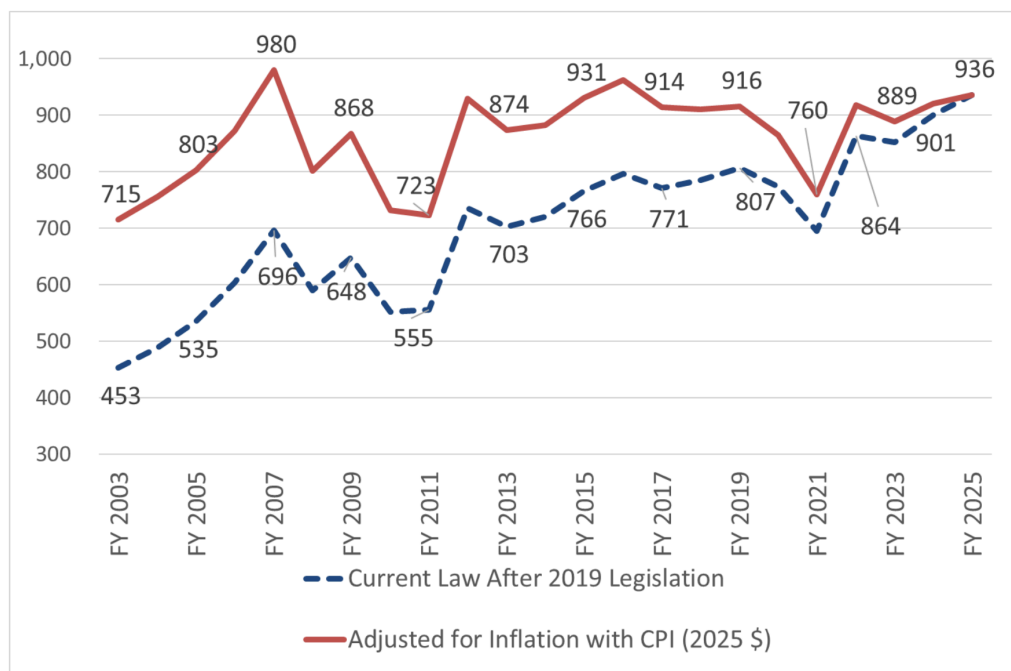
In August, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) released the FY2021 Special Education Cross-Subsidy Report. Minnesota Statute requires the MDE to annually submit a report to the Legislature showing the amount each district is cross-subsidizing special education costs with general education revenue.

MDE calculated the final statewide cross-subsidy for FY2021 at \$591 million. This is a decrease from \$673 million FY2020 but it is a temporary decline due to lower expenditures on special education services during the pandemic when there was a disruption in services. **The cross-subsidy statewide is projected to skyrocket to \$748.6 million in FY2022.**

All students are impacted by the state's failure to fully fund essential special education programs and services. As the chart below shows, MDE projects that the per pupil cross-subsidy will rise to more than \$900 by FY2024. The full cross-subsidy report and AMSD specific cross-subsidies can be found using the links below:

- [LINK: View the FY2021 Special Education Cross-Subsidy Report](#)
- [LINK: View the FY2021 AMSD Special Education Cross-Subsidies](#)

## Special Education Cross-Subsidy Per Pupil (ADM)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education  
2021 Special Education Cross-Subsidy Report