

October 2023
Volume 21
Number 1

Igniting a Passion for Science and Conservation: Mankato's Outdoor Classroom Adventure

October 6, 2023
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

October 27, 2023
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

November 3, 2023
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

November 9, 2023
Annual Conference
8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Minneapolis Marriott
Northwest
Register here:
<https://www.amsd.org/conference2023/>

In Mankato, Minnesota, a unique and transformative educational experience is unfolding for sophomores and juniors enrolled in general biology courses. These learners are not just settling into traditional classroom learning; they're taking their studies outdoors, embarking on a journey through Minneopa State Park. This immersive field trip is part of a collaboration between the school, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPC), and Minnesota State University Mankato's Water Resources Center. In its second year, this partnership continues to ignite a passion for science and conservation among students.

Mankato Area Public Schools' partnership with these organizations offers students a remarkable opportunity to apply classroom knowledge to real-life situations. By stepping into the natural world of Minneopa State Park, they gain insights and experiences that textbooks alone cannot provide.

The field trip is structured around rotating stations, each offering a unique learning experience. These stations cover a diverse range of topics including aquatic life, bison, birds, and prairie grasses. Through this interactive approach, students engage with the park's ecosystem in a holistic manner.



Students at Minneopa State Park during a high school biology field trip, pictured here in the aquatic rotation of the trip.

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As this month's research article notes, 19 AMSD member school districts have important referendum questions on the ballot this fall. The article includes links to the school district website where detailed information about the referendum questions can be found. In addition, many AMSD districts have school board elections this fall. You can see what's on your ballot and find information about how to vote early by mail or in person on the Minnesota Secretary of State's website: <http://www.sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/>. Most importantly, if you have a local referendum, school board or city election, I encourage you to exercise your right to VOTE!

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

Empowering Students to Connect With Nature and Become Future Stewards of Our Planet

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One of the station highlights is the exploration of aquatic life. Students delve into the park's water bodies, donning waders and collecting specimens of aquatic organisms. This hands-on activity not only teaches students about the diversity of aquatic life but also underscores the importance of preserving water quality and ecosystem health.

Minneopa State Park is home to a thriving bison herd. For many students, encountering these animals in their natural habitat is a memorable experience. It offers insights into wildlife behavior, the role of predators in ecosystems, and the importance of conserving endangered species.

Last year, the Mankato Area Public Schools' Mankato East High School introduced a new wildlife ecology class project as part of their existing partnership with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources through the School Forest program. This initiative provides students with hands-on experiences in wildlife conservation and management, further enriching their understanding of ecological principles. Students in the wildlife ecology class also participate in tapping silver maple trees within their school forest. This hands-on experience allows them to learn about tree physiology, forest ecology, and the importance of sustainable forestry practices.



Mankato Public Schools students from Mankato East pouring sap into collection buckets to make syrup.

The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPC) contributes to the field trip by raising awareness about environmental issues. Students engage in discussions and activities that emphasize the impact of human activities on the environment. They learn about pollution control, sustainable practices, and the vital role of conservation in preserving our natural resources.

Minnesota State University Mankato's Water Resources Center adds an academic dimension to the field trip. Students participate in data collection exercises, using scientific tools to measure various environmental parameters. This hands-on research experience fosters critical thinking skills and allows students to engage with university-level experts in water resources and environmental science.

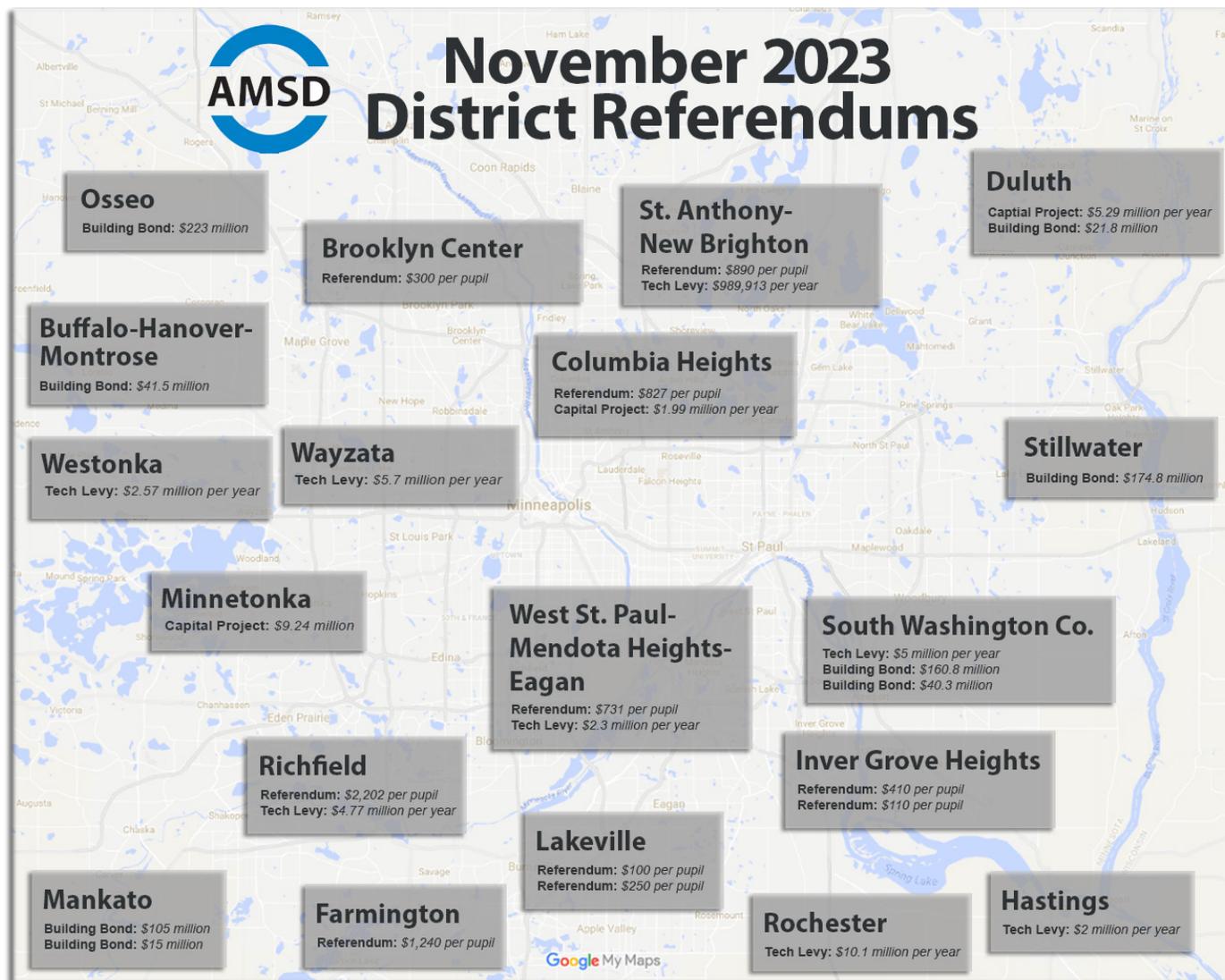
The partnership between Mankato Area Public Schools, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Minnesota State University Mankato's Water Resources Center has transformed the traditional classroom into an interactive, immersive, and inspiring learning environment.

As students explore the natural world, from the intricacies of aquatic ecosystems to the bison in their habitat, they are not just learning about science; they are becoming active participants in conservation efforts. This partnership highlights the care that is needed for the environment to thrive, a sense of responsibility towards preserving it, and the knowledge and skills to effect positive change.

In this collaboration, education transcends the classroom walls, empowering students to connect with nature and become future stewards of our planet. We are proud to partner with local agencies and institutions. They can enhance the educational experience and ignite a lifelong passion for science and conservation in our youth.

This month's member feature was submitted by Melanie Helling, Communications Coordinator, Mankato Area Public Schools.

Nineteen AMSD Districts on the November Ballot With Referendums



Nineteen AMSD school districts have 29 referendum questions on the ballot on Nov. 7 — the most since 2017, when 20 districts had questions before their voters. The ballot questions include operating referendum requests, capital project levy renewals or increases, and/or bond questions. A [chart on the AMSD website](#) outlines the AMSD member district referendum questions and includes a link to the school district website where detailed information about the referendum questions can be found.

Why are referendums necessary?

In short, referendums are an integral component of Minnesota’s education funding system. While the education bill approved in the 2023 legislative session provided a significant overall funding increase and made important progress toward reducing the massive funding shortfalls in the special education and English learner programs, education funding remains primarily a state and local partnership in Minnesota with a modest share of funding from the federal government. The importance of the local component of that partnership is illustrated in the graph below. Two key local levies, voter approved referendum revenue (approximately 9 percent) and local optional revenue (more than 6 percent),

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Historic Inflation Impacts School District Budgets

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provide more than 15 percent of general education revenue.

The most important funding stream, provided by the State, is the basic education formula which accounts for approximately 70 percent of general education revenue. While overall state education spending has exceeded inflation since 2003, the basic formula has lagged far behind the rate of inflation. In fact, the basic formula would be [\\$1,356 per pupil higher today if it has kept pace with inflation since 2003](#). School districts are left to turn to the operating referendum to make up the difference.

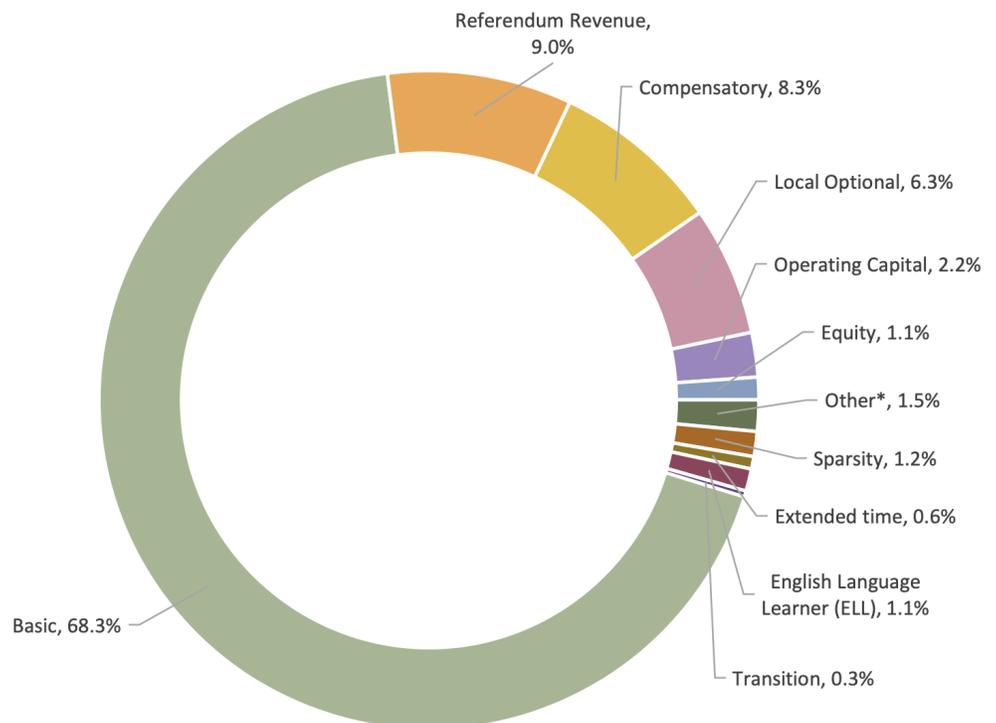
The historic inflation rates experienced over the past few years have had a major impact on school district budgets. While inflation has moderated in recent months, it was running at 9 percent a year ago. At the same time, school districts have faced unprecedented staffing shortages and had to respond by significantly increasing salaries in several job categories to fill vacancies.

Capital projects and bond referendums are critical to meet other financial needs. Capital projects referendums provide school districts with revenue to address needs related to classroom technology, cybersecurity assessments, building security, including cameras, door lock systems, visitor management systems, and emergency response structures. The State does not provide a dedicated funding stream for technology which is so critical to ensuring students have the opportunities they need to reach their full potential and graduate from high school prepared for post-secondary or career.

Major building projects are funded at the local level. The State provides funding for deferred maintenance and equipment purchases but new construction, additions to existing buildings, and major renovations are generally financed by the sale of bonds following the approval of a bond referendum by the voters.

Voters are encouraged to contact their local school officials if they have questions about their school district's referendum.

FY24 General Education Program Components (2023-24 School Year)



*Other includes Declining Enrollment, Small Schools, Gifted & Talented, PSEO, and various other Adjustments.

Source: Minnesota House of Representatives Fiscal Analysis Department, September 2023

AMSD/BrightWorks Annual Conference

Nov. 9



Registration is open for the AMSD/BrightWorks fall policy conference which will be held on Thursday, Nov. 9 at the Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park. The theme of this year's conference is *Embracing Student-Centered Learning and Artificial Intelligence*.

Jon Fila, a 2022 teacher of the year finalist and experienced educator with expertise in using artificial intelligence to enhance student learning opportunities will kick off the conference followed by an engaging panel discussion with educators and students sharing their experience and perspectives.

The conference also includes an outstanding lineup of breakout sessions led by AMSD members who will share their work in implementing student-centered learning initiatives and/or using artificial intelligence to improve student learning. The deadline to register is Friday, Nov. 3.

- [LINK: Register for the 2023 Conference](#)