

February 2022

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Number 5

Orono's Unified Program Stands on the Pillars of Character

February 25, 2022 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

March 4, 2022 Board of Directors Meeting

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

March 25, 2022 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

April 8, 2022 Board of Directors Meeting

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

The jerseys and orange t-shirts say it. The activities on Unity Day celebrate it. But it's at the regular club meetings and sporting events that you really feel the heart and passion behind Orono Schools' Unified program, which began in 2013 with student participation in a Unified basketball tournament. Unified Sports, an integral part of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, joins students with and without intellectual disabilities on the same sports teams to build inclusion. The guiding principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.



For Orono High School (OHS) senior Morgan McPherson, who serves as president on the Special Olympics Student Board of Directors, Unified is a mindset. "Unified is all about inclusion—and not just during our meetings or events. You see it in the hallways and when you walk through the lunchroom. If you see a Unified friend sitting

alone, you invite them to your lunch table. And that's a mindset to me. Making sure everyone belongs."

"School can be stressful," said junior Bradley Walker, co-vice-chair of the OHS Unified Club. "Having a club meeting or practice after school puts a smile on my face." In the days leading up to a sporting event, Unified friends enthusiastically approach Bradley in the hallways. "They ask, 'Are you going to be there?'"

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The recent rise in inflation has impacted individuals, private businesses, nonprofit organizations, and school districts. Losing purchasing power to inflation is nothing new for our school districts. As the graph in this month's research article shows, the general education formula allowance would be \$798 per pupil higher next school year if it had simply kept pace with inflation since 2003. The loss of purchasing power, coupled with chronic shortfalls in special education and English learning funding, has left Minnesota with an education funding system that relies heavily on voter-approved operating referendums. The projected budget surplus offers state policymakers a once in a generation opportunity to stabilize education funding. We need the advocacy of AMSD members in the 2022 session to make it happen!

From the AMSD Chair, Kelsey Dawson Walton, Osseo Area Schools Board Member

Orono Unified Promotes Respect and Inclusion for All

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They are super excited to know that we'll be supporting them at the game. Unified is beneficial for everyone."

Orono's Unified program stands on the Six Pillars of Character that are deeply embedded in the culture at Orono through the Character Counts! program: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. Distinguished as a National District of Character by the Character Education Partnership in 2013, Orono consistently strives to weave character into student life.

"I see Unified and Orono's Character program intersecting in many ways," said junior Charles Kraus, who serves as chair of the OHS Unified Club. "The pillars of Respect, Caring and Citizenship are all intertwined heavily with the Orono Unified Program and its values. Orono Unified promotes respect and inclusion for all, regardless of ability."

Michelle Swenson, an OHS mathematics teacher and advisor for the Unified Club, has watched the program grow from a small basketball team, started by former Orono school counselor Katie Dorn, to a multi-sport, districtwide effort at all grade levels. "Over the years we have slowly added opportunities, like flag football, track, bowling, dance and soccer," said Michelle. "We started with the sports, added the Unified Club, then added Young Athletes and Unified Juniors. Unified Juniors in grades 3-5 introduces students to the sports we play and gives them a chance to get to know the leaders and coaches."

Before Unified, some students with disabilities struggled with a sense of belonging and had a difficult time with group projects. "Now everyone knows the kids," said Michelle. "Unified has helped our students without intellectual disabilities understand and be more accepting. Unified has helped students build the character traits we teach through the pillars. They get to see it in action." Student engagement has increased over the years with 50-100 students now attending club meetings. While all student "players" are welcome to join the teams, there are far more "partner" applicants than space available. Those students still participate as fans, supporting their teams at every event. "And when they leave here, students continue to be involved," said Michelle. "In 2013, two students started the program at the University of Minnesota; in 2018, another started the program at Texas Christian University."



To learn more about the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools® program, please visit <https://www.specialolympics.org/our-work/unified-champion-schools>

Danny Striggow, OHS Class of 2020, is enrolled at the University of Minnesota and plays Division 1 football for the Golden Gophers. "I got started with Special Olympics and the Unified movement in eighth grade," Danny said. "I was lucky enough to participate on a few Unified Sports teams with the high school kids even though I was in middle school. In high school, I was club chair senior year and also served as vice president of the Student Board of Directors for Special Olympics Minnesota." That year, Danny and his classmates hosted the first Unified Basketball State Tournament. "It was a special experience," he said. Danny now serves as a student athlete ambassador for Special Olympics Minnesota. Through this role he is engaging in promotional activities and getting the U of M football community involved in the Unified movement. Danny said, "I am able to make this a priority because of how involved I've been in the past. Working with Special Olympics Minnesota has almost become natural at this point."

This month's member feature was submitted by Lyssa Campbell, Director of Communications, Orono Public Schools.

Governor's Supplemental Budget Includes Significant Investments in Education

The November State Budget and Economic Forecast projected a [\\$7.7 billion surplus](#). In the wake of that forecast, Gov. Tim Walz is proposing significant new investments in E-12 education that would help school districts and students recover from the pandemic. The Governor's proposal includes more than \$785 million in FY 2023 and \$1.7 billion in the 2024-25 biennium for E-12 education including:

- A 2 percent formula increase in FY 23;
- Funding to lower the cross-subsidies in the special education and English learner programs back to the 2019 levels;
- Increased access to PreK through a mixed delivery model;
- Expanded early learning scholarships to serve an additional 10,000 children;
- Increased funding for the Grow Your Own teacher training program;
- Universal free breakfast and lunch to any students attending a school participating in the national school breakfast and lunch programs;
- \$77 million over the next three years for schools to hire additional school support personnel;
- Intermediate School Districts Mental Health Innovative Grants;
- \$26 million over the next three years to expand inpatient mental health beds for children and \$10 million annually to implement a mental health screening and referral system in schools.

The Governor's proposal also includes initiatives to address the shortage of substitute teachers, para-professionals and bus drivers.

- [LINK: View a Summary and Overview of the Governor's Proposals](#)
- [LINK: View a Full Breakdown of the Governor's Budget from the MMB](#)

Several of AMSD's legislative priorities to stabilize the education funding system have been introduced including:

[HF2949](#) - introduced by Rep. Sandra Feist (DFL-New Brighton) would link the general education formula to inflation. As the recently updated graph on the following page shows, the general education formula allowance, the most important funding stream for our public schools, would be \$798 per pupil higher in FY 23 if it had simply kept pace with inflation since 2003. School districts have been forced to rely on voter-approved operating referendums to make up the difference. The reliance on referendums has created an unstable and inequitable funding system.

One of the factors contributing to the formula losing ground to inflation was a policy decision adopted in the 2002 legislative session to remove an estimate of inflation in state expenditures from state budget forecasts. Rep. Jennifer Schultz (DFL, Duluth) has introduced [HF2577](#), legislation that would reinstate the requirement that an estimate of inflation in state expenditures be included in the state's biannual budget forecasts.

Bills have also been introduced to address the growing cross-subsidies (shortfalls) in the special education and English learner programs:

[HF 2657](#) - sponsored by Rep. Dan Wolgamott (DFL-St. Cloud) would eliminate the special education cross subsidy and [HF 2944/SF 2932](#), sponsored by Rep. Kaohly Her (DFL-Saint Paul) and Sen. Bill Weber (R-Luverne) would phase-out the cross-subsidy in the English learner program over the next four years.

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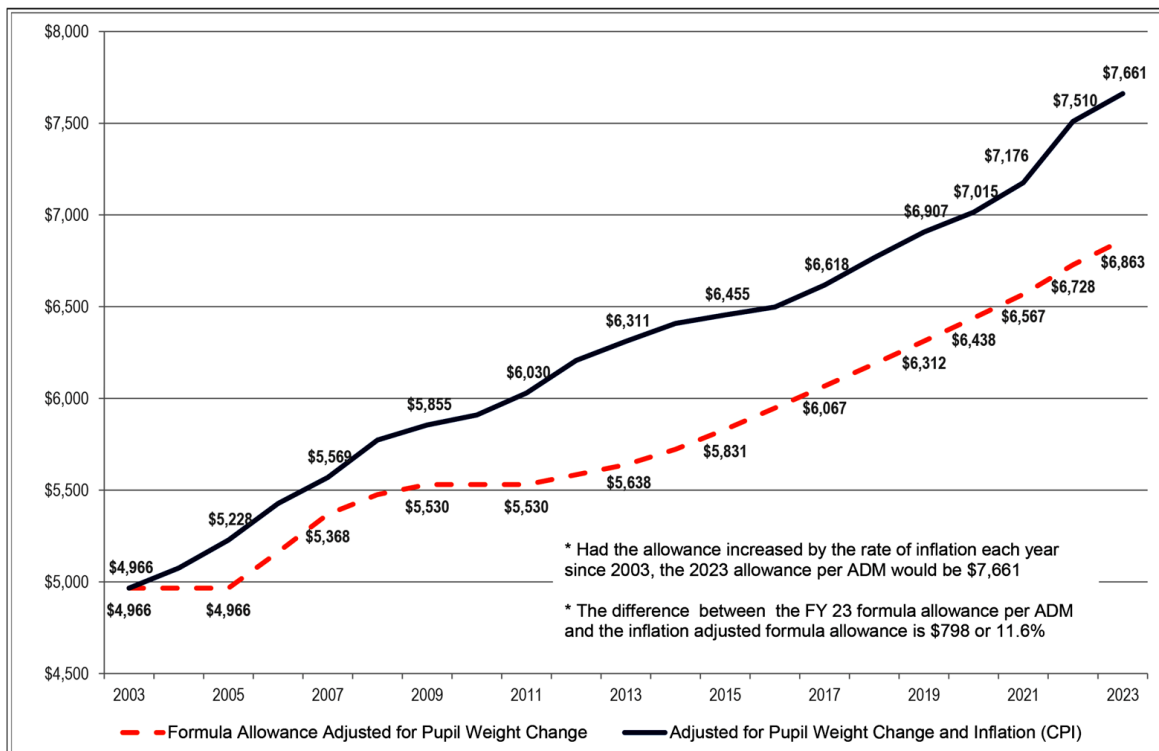
AMSD Priorities to Stabilize Funding Introduced

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The historic budget surplus offers state policymakers the opportunity to stabilize Minnesota's education funding system and reduce the reliance on voter-approved operating referendums, by indexing the general education formula allowance to inflation and eliminating the shortfalls in the special education and English learner programs. Further information about AMSD's legislative priorities and advocacy resources can be found using the links below:

- [LINK: AMSD Legislative Platform](#)
- [LINK: Position Papers](#)
- [LINK: What is the Special Education Cross-Subsidy?](#)
- [LINK: State Leaders Contact Information](#)
- [LINK: State Representatives by AMSD District](#)
- [LINK: Senators by AMSD District](#)

General Education Formula Allowance, 2003-2023 Adjusted for Pupil Weight Change and Inflation (CPI)



Source: MDE Inflation Estimates, January 2022



Association of Metropolitan School Districts



** In 2001, state policymakers eliminated the statewide general education levy and committed to funding education with income and sales taxes. In 2002, lawmakers passed legislation prohibiting an estimate of inflation in state expenditures from being included in state budget forecasts. The graph above shows that the general education formula allowance, the most important funding stream for our schools, has lost \$798 per pupil to inflation since those policies were adopted.