

November 2017  
vol 15 ♦ no 2

## School District 192: Farmington Area Public Schools Gateway Academy Students Tackle Real-World Challenges through Hands-On Projects

### November 3, 2017

#### Board of Directors Meeting

7:00 a.m.  
Grand Hall,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

### November 17, 2017

#### Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.  
Lexington Room,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

### December 1, 2017

#### Board of Directors Meeting

7:00 a.m.  
Grand Hall,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

### December 15, 2017

#### Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.  
Lexington Room,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

How can we, as engineers, develop a mode of transportation that reduces the use of fossil fuels? How can we, as a community, help victims of Hurricane Harvey? These are only a couple of the driving questions that students at Gateway Academy, a District 192 choice school, asked when they began this school year. Personalized learning is more than a catchphrase in District 192. Innovative, personalized learning is an integral part of the strategic plan that shows up throughout the district, but nowhere more so than Gateway Academy.

“We all have a spark — something that ignites our curiosity and drive to learn. Gateway Academy was designed to help students find and follow their sparks,” said District 192 Superintendent Jay Haugen. Any student in grades 5-8 who has a driving curiosity and a desire to tackle real-world challenges may choose to attend Gateway Academy. There students work to find their spark and advocate for the direction of their own education by asking driving questions, identifying challenges and solving them. Gateway students complete hands-on projects, collaborate with local and global organizations and dedicate time to serving in the community.

### Are We There Yet?

To kick off the school year, students asked how they could develop transportation that reduces the use of fossil fuels. To answer this driving question they explored current transportation options that are fueled by alternative energy, including meeting with a local

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Gateway Academy students designed and built their own models of vehicles that run on alternative energy.

## 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

This month's research article on the special education cross-subsidy helps explain why school districts continue to face budget challenges and why they are so reliant on local operating referendums to provide basic programming for their students. While state policymakers approved a two percent per year increase in the basic funding formula during the last legislative session, no progress was made toward addressing the special education funding shortfall.

The [September newsletter](#) provided an overview of the important referendum questions on the ballot this fall. I encourage Minnesotans to educate themselves about their local referendum questions and to contact their school officials if they have any questions. In addition, many school districts have important school board elections. Again, I urge voters to do their homework and examine the candidates' positions on important education issues. Most importantly, exercise your right to VOTE on November 7!

*Steve Adams, school board member from Hopkins Public Schools, is chair of AMSD.*

# Gateway Academy Encourages Students to Drive their Own Education Journey

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organization of Tesla owners. They were able to explore the electric cars, see them in action and ask questions. Then the students set out to design their own modes of transportation fueled by alternative energy sources. Through this project students gained skills and knowledge in several content areas including math, science and literacy. More than that, they were able to apply their knowledge to a real-life challenge and work on something that mattered to them on a personal level.

## Hurricane Harvey Relief

Gateway Academy regularly engages in service learning projects such as cleaning up parks, visiting care centers and conducting food drives. When Hurricane Harvey struck, the students felt an immediate and personal need to help those who had suffered from the storm. They planned and hosted several fundraising events, including selling hot chocolate, a pajama day and a hat day, to raise over \$1,000 for schools, classrooms and students affected by the hurricane.



A group of local Tesla owners and enthusiasts visited Gateway Academy to teach students about alternatives to fossil fuels.



Gateway Academy students hosted a Hat Day fundraiser at Dodge Middle School to raise money for victims of Hurricane Harvey.

## Personal Projects

While Gateway students often work in groups, they also complete personal projects throughout the school year. These projects are shared with the public at Project Showcases, where students answer questions and receive feedback about the work they've undertaken. Project topics range as widely as the student's interests and personalities. Some have chosen to study ciphers and crime scene forensics, others have focused on the origins of ballet. Students use the many tools available to them to create interactive presentations, whether that be a hammer and nails or a 3D printer. "My children look forward to going to school much more now that they know they're allowed to really focus on their strengths and find their sparks in things that really interest them and take them farther," said Roger Nord, a parent of two Gateway Academy students.

The mission of Farmington Area Public Schools is to ensure each student reaches his or her highest aspirations. For some this

means following a traditional education model. For other students it means being a part of a multiage classroom, engaging in a flipped classroom model, or undertaking a project-based learning approach. Gateway Academy offers students a variety of choices and encourages them to drive their own education journey. For more information about Gateway Academy, please visit <http://gwa.farmington.k12.mn.us>.

*This month's member spotlight was submitted by Sally McConnaughey, communications generalist, Farmington Area Public Schools.*

**AMSD Members:** Anoka-Hennepin School District, Bloomington Public Schools, Board of School Administrators (Associate Member), Brooklyn Center Community Schools, Burnsville-Eagan-Savage, Columbia Heights Public Schools, Eastern Carver County Schools, Eden Prairie Schools, Edina Public Schools, Elk River Area School District, Equity Alliance MN (Associate Member), Farmington Area Public Schools, Fridley Public Schools, Hopkins Public Schools, Intermediate School District 287, Intermediate School District 917 (Associate Member), Inver Grove Heights Schools, Lakeville Area Public Schools, Mahtomedi Public Schools, Metro ECSU (Associate Member), Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnetonka Public Schools, Mounds View Public Schools, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District, Northeast Metro Intermediate School District 916, Northwest Suburban Integration District (Associate Member), Orono Schools, Osseo Area Schools, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, Richfield Public Schools, Robbinsdale Area Schools, Rochester Public Schools; Rockford Area Schools, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools, Roseville Area Schools, Shakopee Public Schools, South St. Paul Public Schools, South Washington County Schools, SouthWest Metro Intermediate District (Associate Member), Spring Lake Park Schools, St. Anthony-New Brighton Independent School District, St. Cloud Area Schools, St. Louis Park Public Schools, St. Paul Public Schools, Stillwater Area Public Schools, TIES (Associate Member), Wayzata Public Schools, West Metro Education Program, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools and White Bear Lake Area Schools.

# Special Education Funding Shortfall Strains School District Budgets

The recently released Special Education Cross-Subsidies Fiscal Year 2016 Report shows that the special education funding shortfall continues to exert tremendous pressure on Minnesota school district budgets. The special education cross-subsidy is the collision of federal and state mandates and inadequate state and federal funding. More specifically, the cross-subsidy is the difference between what school districts spend on mandated special education services and the funding provided by the state and federal governments. To cover the shortfall, school districts are forced to redirect funds meant for regular classroom instruction.

While the governor and legislature provided a two percent per year increase in the basic formula in the 2017 session, no new special education funding was approved. Consequently, school districts will need to use a portion of the formula increase to cover the growing special education cross-subsidy.

The cross-subsidy report is required by state law and is annually submitted to the Minnesota Legislature. The report includes a breakdown of the cross-subsidy for every Minnesota school districts, as well as offering future projections.

Key findings in the [Special Education Cross-Subsidies Fiscal Year 2016 Report](#), include:

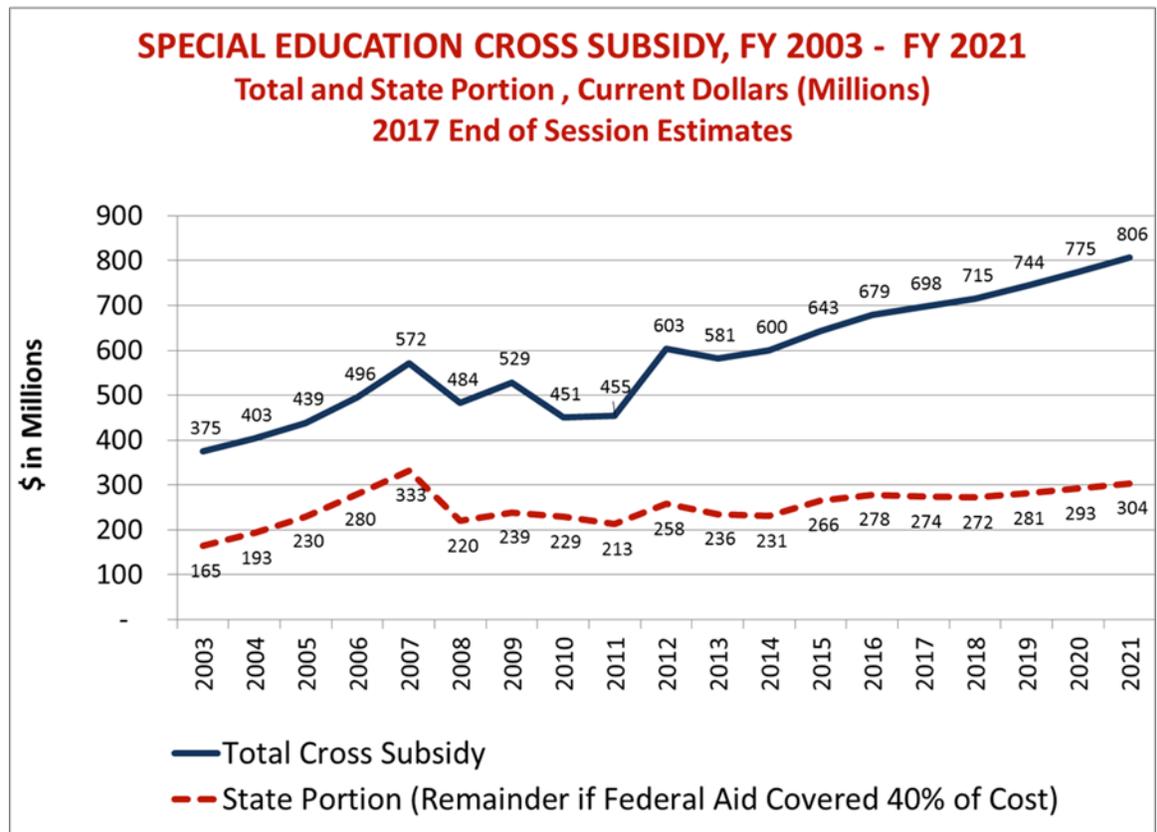
- Special education costs exceeded state and federal special education aid by \$679 million, or approximately \$731 per weighted pupil in FY 2016;
- The cross-subsidy is projected to grow to \$698 million by FY 2017 and \$806 million by FY 2021; and
- The cross-subsidy for AMSD member school districts in FY 2016 was \$425 million or \$964 per weighted pupil. For district-specific information, visit the [AMSD web page](#).

There is a common misperception that the special education cross-subsidy is primarily a federal issue. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Congress set a target for the federal contribution to special education spending equal to 40 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure of the excess cost of educating special education students. However, in FY 2014 Congress was providing just 16 percent of the cost.

It is important to note that even if the federal government had met its goal of covering 40 percent of the cost in fiscal year 2016, Minnesota’s cross-subsidy would still have been \$278 million. Figure 1 shows both the total cross-subsidy and the portion that would remain even if Congress met its 40 percent goal. At a minimum, the State should work toward covering the portion of the cross-subsidy that would remain even if the federal government met its goal.

It is incumbent upon state policymakers to develop a strategy to address this ongoing budget issue. Minnesota school districts will continue to face budget challenges as long as the special education cross-subsidy persists.

**Figure 1: Special Education Cross Subsidy**



Source: Minnesota Department of Education, Special Education Cross-Subsidies Fiscal Year 2016