

CONNECTIONS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

October 2024
Volume 22
Number 1

Reading, Writing and Digital Citizenship

**October 4, 2024
Board of Directors
Meeting**
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

**October 25, 2024
Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

**November 1, 2024
Board of Directors
Meeting**
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

**November 14, 2024
Annual Conference**
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Minneapolis Marriott
Northwest
Register here:
amsd.org/conference/



An elementary student in District 191 laughs while showing an image of a creature generated by AI.

A new question has begun to show up in the elementary classroom setting with what students see on the screen of their devices or classroom technology: Is this actually real or isn't it?

It's a question that teachers and students in Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191 are beginning to ask more and more as they start to use and understand Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the classroom.

AI is just one of the ways in which technology—established and rising—is being used to educate students beginning as early as kindergarten. Although technology has been used in district classrooms for well over 30 years, the speed and intensity at which new technology is being developed and introduced has increased dramatically. When the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020, the need for technology and ways to improve its use to educate students became a major priority for educators.

"Technology impacted how we educate and how students learn in a very powerful way," said Shonita Harper, a digital learning specialist at Harriet Bishop Elementary School. "This district has jumped on a wave of technology in a positive way, and our students are better for it. The technology we're using makes students more engaged. They're collaborating with each other, listening



Digital Learning Specialist Shonita Harper gives a lesson on artificial intelligence to elementary students in District 191.

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Registration is now open for the annual AMSD/BrightWorks conference on November 14. It promises to be a great day of learning and networking with your colleagues. The theme of the conference is, *It Takes All of Us: Engaging Communities for Educational Excellence*. The keynote address will be delivered by Dr. Darrius Stanley from the University of Minnesota's College of Education and Human Development. The agenda also includes a student panel discussion and compelling breakout sessions from AMSD members. Further details, including registration information, can be found [here](https://amsd.org/conference/). I hope to see you there!

From the AMSD Chair, Laura Oksnevad, St. Anthony-New Brighton Board Member

Teaching Elementary Students to Safely and Confidently Navigate the Online World

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to different perspectives, and they creatively communicate with each other. They're learning how to solve problems collaboratively using digital tools."

The software students use isn't limited to basic word-processing platforms anymore. Beginning in elementary school, students are using Adobe Express, Book Creator, We Video and Tinker CAD. Students have used the software to create their own digital avatars and digital citizen pledges as well as collaborate, get questions answered, creatively solve problems and learn to decipher between actual images or facts and those that AI generated.

Lessons from COVID-19 and the impact on students' mental health led the district to use materials from Common Sense Education (CSE), which promotes the smart and responsible use of technology and digital citizenship. That's a large part of technology lessons, especially in the early grades. Across the district, all students in kindergarten through fifth grade engage in multiple digital citizenship lessons focused on preparing them for a life with evolving technology.

According to Jon Abrahamson, a digital learning specialist at William Byrne Elementary, digital citizenship and responsibility are embedded not just in technology classes but also in grade-level classrooms.

"The big thing for them is digital citizenship. As a school, we see that teaching kids to be good digital citizens is important," Abrahamson said. "They're using technology all the time, and they need to know how to be safe, and how to be a good digital citizen online."



District 191 Digital Learning Specialist Jon Abrahamson discusses safety measures with his students.

District 191 elementary schools and elementary school digital learning specialists were recently recognized by CSE as Common Sense Schools. To earn this designation, staff at the eight elementary schools participated in professional development about digital literacy, taught three digital citizenship lessons across three grade levels and shared multiple digital citizenship lessons with families to strengthen the connection to home.

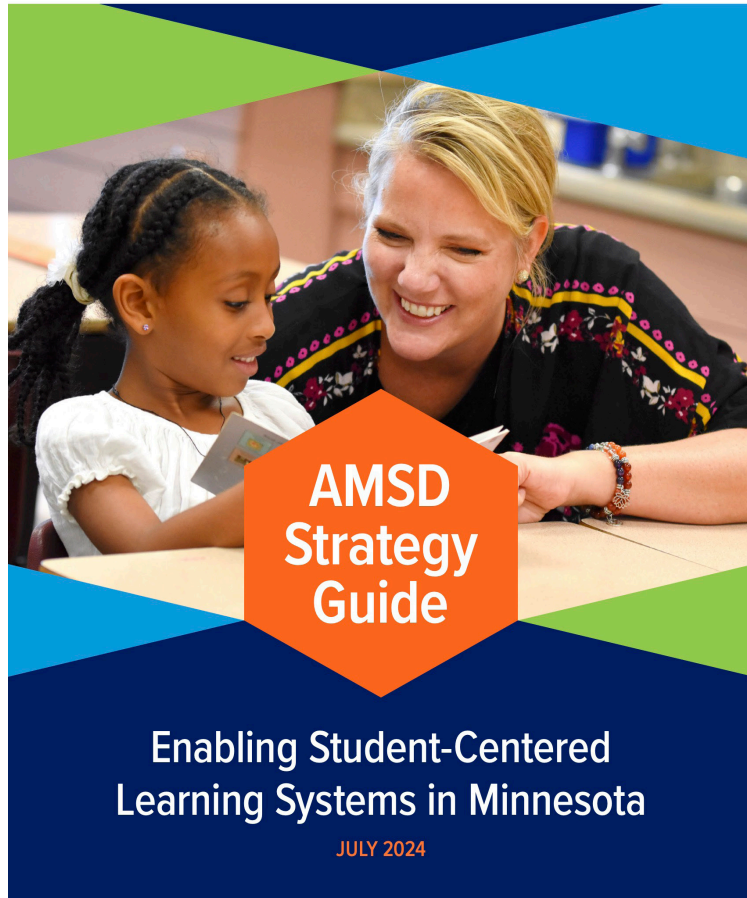
While technology continues to grow at an exponential rate, our elementary students and families are learning the basics of how to stay safe and think critically while using new tools and software.

"This is important because students spend a lot of time on the internet," said Harper. "They need to know what is real and what is not real. They're learning that things are faster. They can go online and find answers they can do the research. But they also have to think critically about what they find. Is it real? We're helping them to answer that question."

This article originally appeared in Wayfinder magazine, published by District 191 and available online at www.isd191.org/blog.

AMSD/KnowledgeWorks Release Student-Centered Learning Strategy Guide

Following more than a year of research, surveys and focus groups with our member districts, AMSD, in partnership with the national education research organization [KnowledgeWorks](#), has released a new strategy guide with research-based suggestions about how AMSD can build on past work to lead and advocate for state-level policy to create and improve student-centered learning opportunities.



[“AMSD Strategy Guide: Enabling Student-Centered Learning Systems in Minnesota,”](#) is a 30-page guide with 13 recommendation and implementation strategies to further the AMSD mission of advocating for member school districts so they can lead the transformation of public education.

The research, funded with a grant from the Minneapolis Foundation last year, is based on multiple interviews, surveys and workshops with AMSD members and other stakeholders over the past year.

Based on that research, the KnowledgeWorks team identified 13 specific recommendations, with details about how each one can advance student-centered learning in Minnesota, along with advocacy/action steps for each as well. The strategy guide also notes alignment to the AMSD [Reimagine Minnesota](#) work and road-map for action released in 2018, which has also helped guide AMSD’s strategic plan.

The recommendations fall into three areas of focus dedicated to expanding and improving Personalized, Student-Centered Learning, that

were identified last year when KnowledgeWorks first developed an [Opportunity Analysis](#) prepared in December 2023:

- **Developing a Culture of Innovation** — building on existing structures to foster a stronger culture of innovation that bolsters personalized and competency-based learning.
- **Developing Policies to Empower Educators** — integrating customized learning opportunities oriented around personalization into pre-service teaching programs and professional development offerings.
- **Improving and Evolving Minnesota’s Assessment System** — creating opportunities for local communities to explore innovative assessment approaches by creating a pilot program and banks of model performance tasks and engaging stakeholders to leverage existing opportunities and create new ones.

Each area of focus delineates specific strategies on everything from the importance of improving funding flexibility, to creating professional development opportunities for teachers, to evolving the state’s assessment system, and more.

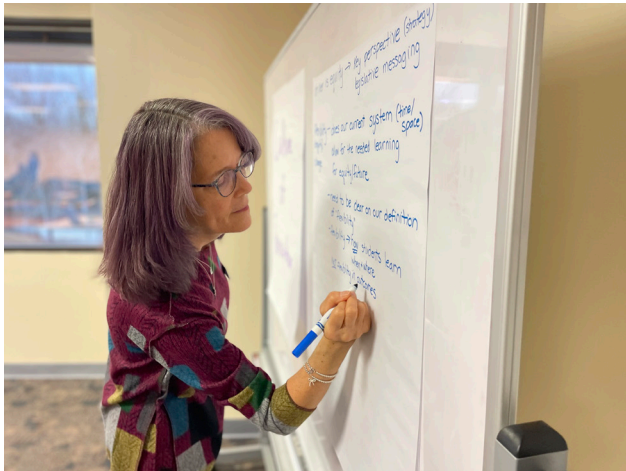
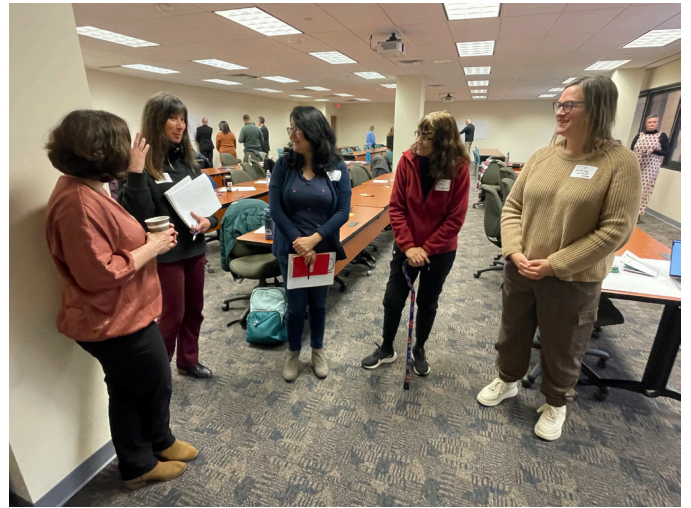
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Advancing Student-Centered Learning

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Following the release of the strategy guide in August, the AMSD Legislative Committee formed a working group of AMSD members, with the goal to identify which strategies and goals require legislative action and should be considered for AMSD's 2025 legislative platform. The working group will forward its recommendations to the legislative committee for consideration and will also develop a policy position paper and explore additional strategies to advance the development of student-centered learning environments to better serve all students for generations to come.

[LINK: View the AMSD-KnowledgeWorks Strategy Guide](#)



AMSD and KnowledgeWorks hosted a workshop in February 2024 to identify student-centered learning priorities based on an opportunity analysis prepared by KnowledgeWorks.

