Association of Metropolitan School Districts
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Position on Student-Centered Learning

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts supports policies that enable the creation, scaling, and sustaining of student-centered learning environments.

AMSD BELIEVES

- All students deserve access to a personalized and relevant education that is rooted in meaningful relationships and thoughtful learning experiences, regardless of race, income or geography.
- Certain state education laws and rules can create barriers for schools and districts seeking to develop and scale student-centered learning environments.
- Appropriate statutory and regulatory flexibility gives schools and districts the ability to create student-centered learning environments responsive to local needs.
- Policy flexibility should be balanced with appropriate guardrails to ensure equitable learning experiences.

BACKGROUND

- Student-centered learning seeks to create meaningful and personalized experiences that prepare students for future success. By student-centered learning, AMSD means environments that guarantee rigorous course offerings, create workforce and postsecondary relevant learning experiences, advance culturally competent curriculum and instructional programs, establish diverse and culturally sustaining learning opportunities, encourage flexibility in where and when learning takes place, and support student and adult development strategies. AMSD also includes related terms like mastery-based learning, competency-based learning, personalized learning, and proficiency-based learning in its definition.

- Student-centered learning can positively impact student outcomes when implemented effectively. Research on student-centered learning has found that students in high quality competency-based environments can catch up more quickly when they are behind, demonstrate higher levels of engagement, and can exhibit higher academic performance. Evidence directly from schools and districts suggests that students in personalized learning courses can see larger math and English growth and that competency-based environments can positively impact postsecondary enrollment.[1]

- Student-centered learning has guided AMSD's approach to education for almost a decade. In 2018, AMSD released a vision for a reimagined K-12 system in Minnesota that was informed by more than 3,000 students, parents, and educators. This vision had student-centered learning at its core and centered its call for reimagining education around the state's racial disparities.[2]

- Interest in student-centered learning has continued to grow across the state since the vision's release. Organizations like Education Evolving and EngageMN are working to advance student-centered learning statewide. Increasing numbers of AMSD districts are pursuing student-centered practices. And multiple statewide surveys recently completed by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)[3] and AMSD[4] highlight the broad interest across the state in student-centered practices. AMSD's survey identified Minnesota's assessment system, the state's instructional hour definition, calendar requirements, and data and compliance reporting structures as potential barriers to preparing students for future readiness through student-centered learning experiences.

- Minnesota legislators have also filed several bills to advance student-centered learning over the past decade. Policymakers passed innovation zone legislation in 2017 with the intention of giving districts flexibility to create innovative education programming (HF2, 2017). In AMSD's experience, the program has been underutilized because of constraints inherent in its structure. The state also established a Future Assessment Design Working Group in 2017, which made a number of student-centered recommendations.[5]

Approved by the AMSD Board of Directors, October 2025

AMSD Position on Student-Centered Learning

AMSD's members have identified several key areas for potential legislative action. They include the following:

- **Creating a Culture of Innovation.** Minnesota can build on its existing policies to encourage and support schools and districts to pursue student-centered learning. AMSD believes that Minnesota's Legislature should define key terms and definitions like "instructional time" in ways that are inclusive of all educational experiences that take place in a student's life and delegate freedom to local districts to design innovative learning experiences. The state can also develop a student-centered legislative policy taskforce to study existing policy structures in-depth to identify where barriers exist and recommend how they could better support student-centered learning.
- **Empowering Educators.** Educators must ultimately be trusted to implement personalized learning practices in their classrooms. As Minnesota advances its work in other areas, policymakers should continue examining how to use existing policy tools, networks, funding, and research to ensure classroom practice aligns with student-centered learning best practices. The state should also provide sufficient financial resources to support planning and implementation at the school and classroom level.
- **Reimagining Assessments.** State assessments and related accountability systems provide direction to schools and districts. Minnesota should consider how to more deeply integrate student-centered learning practice into its existing systems. The state should begin by establishing a legislative pilot program for districts to test and evaluate student-centered assessment approaches in non-ESSA required subjects. This would empower districts to explore innovative assessment opportunities that could inform future changes to the state's assessment system. More broadly, the Legislature should revisit the Future Assessment Design Working Group recommendations from 2017 and leverage existing state expertise to develop a strategy for an assessment system that better supports student-centered learning.

KEY FACTS AND STATISTICS

- The Education Futures Council, formed by the Hoover Institute, released a report, Ours to Solve, Once — and for All, highlighting the importance of redesigning our education system to put students at the center.
- The Carnegie Foundation acknowledges that the reliance on "seat time" as a primary indicator of learning outcomes is becoming increasingly inadequate for the 21st-century economy.
- A 2023 MDE Landscape study found that Minnesota is home to a motivated community of practitioners wanting to implement student-centered learning. That same study identified the importance of MDE providing implementation resources to help advance student-centered practices.
- A 2023 AMSD statewide survey found that school calendar requirements, state assessment systems, the state's instructional hour definition, teacher training and licensure programs, and MDE's data compliance and reporting structures were the top five policy barriers identified by respondents.
- A national study by REL Central found that many students in competency-based environments and who were behind academically in math and reading performance were able to catch up to their peers more quickly than in a traditional system.[6]
- A RAND Corporation study of personalized schools showed modest gains of three percentage points in math over peers in traditional schools. These gains were seen in both high and low-performing students.[7]

Other State Examples:

- Instructional Time Definition Examples: https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/evidence-learning-states-instructional-time-attendance-policies/
- South Carolina Office of Personalized Learning: https://personalizesc.ed.sc.gov/pd/
- Trends in K-12 Assessment and Accountability Innovation: https://knowledgeworks.org/resources/emerging-trends-k12-assessment-innovation/

ENDNOTES

References

[1] https://knowledgeworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/data-library-presentation-slides-knowledgeworks.pdf.
[2] https://www.amsd.org/shared-files/13120/?Report_ReimagineMinnesota_Full_Report_Final.pdf.
[3] https://region10cc.org/assets/documents/CBE-landscape-study.pdf.
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