

January 2026
Volume 23
Number 4

Collaborative Mindset at SouthWest Metro

January 9, 2026 Board of Directors Meeting

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

January 30, 2026 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

February 6, 2026 Legislative Session Preview

7:30 a.m. - 9:45 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

February 27, 2026 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

On a December afternoon at Shakopee Bowl, students from school districts in the service area of SouthWest Metro Intermediate District 288 (SWMetro) gathered for an experience that went far beyond bowling. Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students and educators came together to build friendships, share experiences, and connect with peers. The event offered students a chance to practice communication skills, expand their networks, and feel a strong sense of belonging within a larger community.



Students participating in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing bowling event in Shakopee.

Experiences like this reflect how SWMetro programs build connection, access, and opportunity. By working alongside member school districts and community partners, SWMetro helps create learning environments that support students academically, socially, and emotionally, while preparing them for life beyond the classroom.

What Is an Intermediate District?

SouthWest Metro is one of four intermediate school districts in Minnesota. Together, Minnesota's intermediate districts serve more than 20,000 students each year from over 45 member school districts. Intermediate districts exist to provide specialized programs, professional development and services that are strengthened through regional collaboration.

Across the state, intermediate districts deliver more than 120 specialized services in areas such as special education, alternative learning, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and care and treatment programs in facilities tailored to student needs. Intermediates also innovate in areas like mental health services, adult learning, online education, and itinerant services that

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Happy New Year! I hope you had a wonderful holiday season with your family and friends. It is hard to believe but the 2026 legislative session convenes next month. I look forward to sharing our [session priorities](#) with legislators at AMSD's annual [Session Preview](#) on **Friday, Feb. 6**. The program will include a legislative panel discussion of leaders of the House and Senate Education Policy Committees. I encourage AMSD members to reach out to your local legislators to invite them to this event. Thank you in advance for your support and assistance!

From the AMSD Chair, Jim DeMay, Mounds View Board Member

Collaboration Deepens Understanding and Strengthens Community

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bring specialized expertise directly into member school districts.

Intermediate districts operate on a fee-for-service model, with funding generated through tuition billing, state and federal grants, and levies. Combined, Minnesota's intermediate districts manage an estimated \$250 million in budgets, all dedicated to supporting students, families, and school communities. SouthWest Metro specifically serves 11 member districts and eight associate member districts working with district leaders and the SouthWest Metro School Board to identify areas of high need. Combining resources from member districts leads to fiscally responsible, highly responsive and specialized programming opportunities for students.

Collaboration and Real-World Experience

Cross-program collaboration at SWMetro creates hands-on learning opportunities rarely found outside an intermediate district. Students across departments, including those in setting 4 special education environments, have access to robust in-person and online CTE offerings. This year, the district expanded career pathways by adding an exploratory option for Alternative Learning Center students and piloting a Culinary Artistry course for setting 4 students focused on commercial kitchen skills.



SWMetro Construction Trades students and instructor Jason Wetzel (far left) with the newly installed woodshed for the Culinary Artistry program at Dean Lakes Education Center in Shakopee.

At Dean Lakes Education Center, Construction Trades students from seven member districts collaborated to build a custom woodshed for the Culinary Artistry Pathway's wood-fire cooking curriculum. Culinary students later prepared a meal for the Construction Trades students using produce from the Agriculture Pathway's garden, demonstrating how collaboration across pathways connects learning to real-world applications and shared success.

Building Community

Collaboration also deepens understanding and strengthens community across programs. One example is Dean Lakes Education Center's Annual Winter Fashion Show, which brings together students

in the Transition Program, Career and Technical Education (CTE) students, staff, and community members for a shared learning experience. Transition learners stepped onto the runway as models, participating in a social-emotional learning activity designed to build self-confidence, practice self-expression, and develop comfort presenting themselves in front of an audience. CTE Photography students planned and executed event photography, applying skills in lighting, composition, and event documentation while working directly with live subjects in a professional setting. Staff from multiple programs collaborated behind the scenes to coordinate logistics, coach students, and ensure a supportive environment. Together, these shared roles created an inclusive event that strengthened relationships, celebrated student strengths, and reinforced a culture of encouragement across SouthWest Metro programs.

Extending Collaborative Support

Collaboration is at the heart of how SouthWest Metro serves students, families, and communities. By working alongside member districts and community partners, programs are designed to share expertise, expand access, and create opportunities that no single school or system could provide alone. These collaborative efforts strengthen connections between students and staff, support smooth transitions, and ensure learning experiences are responsive to regional needs. Together, this shared approach builds a system of support that helps every learner feel connected, valued, and prepared for continued growth and success.

This month's member feature was submitted by Wright Braudt, Director of Communications, SouthWest Metro Intermediate District 288.

AMSD Board Adopts 2026 Legislative Platform

**Association of Metropolitan School Districts**

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

2026

AMSD recognizes that the biennial budget was set last session. However, inflation continues to outpace general education revenue, and recent legislative changes have created instability in key funding streams. Safe Schools and Local Optional Revenue have been frozen for a decade, changes to the compensatory formula have created funding cliffs for many school districts, and a contingent \$250 million cut to special education cross-subsidy reduction aid would erase inflationary increases to the basic formula. Given the state's current fiscal landscape, AMSD identifies both immediate and ongoing priorities essential to sustaining high-quality education.



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IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

ENHANCE SCHOOL SAFETY

- Increase the Safe Schools levy to \$100 per pupil for school districts and \$35 per pupil for intermediate and cooperative districts.
- Permit limited removal time within non-exclusionary discipline to support effective reentry planning and maintain safe classrooms.
- Strengthen secure gun storage requirements.

STABILIZE COMPENSATORY FUNDING

- Hold districts harmless from revenue losses resulting from recent compensatory formula changes until recommendations from the Compensatory Revenue Task Force can be implemented.

MODERNIZE PERMANENT SCHOOL FUND DISTRIBUTIONS

- Support a constitutional amendment to adopt a percentage-of-market-value distribution model that provides predictable funding while protecting long-term trust assets.

REEVALUATE MINNESOTA'S ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

- Establish a blue-ribbon commission to redesign Minnesota's assessment system, focusing on balanced, student-centered measures and exploring the replacement of high school MCAs with a nationally recognized college entrance exam.
- Modernize hours-of-instruction requirements so students can earn credit for learning that occurs beyond traditional settings.

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The 2026 legislative session convenes on Feb. 17, 2026. While the AMSD Board recognizes that the biennial budget was adopted last legislative session, the reality is that inflation continues to outpace general education revenue, recent legislative changes have created instability in key funding streams, and some new programs and requirements adopted in recent years have been underfunded or not funded at all.

That background is the impetus behind the AMSD 2026 Legislative Platform approved last month. Identifying AMSD's priorities is no casual matter. Each summer, the AMSD legislative committee begins the process by surveying AMSD Board Members and district staff asking them to share their highest priorities for the upcoming legislative session.

Based on that feedback, the legislative committee drafts a platform reflecting the priorities of our member school districts. In budget years, the platform focuses on funding school districts' needs; and in alternating years, the focus is on policy priorities.

However, with school districts continuing to face budget challenges, the 2026 platform identifies both funding and policy priorities. Several factors have contributed to the challenging fiscal environment. The Safe Schools levy and Local Optional Revenue have been frozen for a decade, changes to the compensatory formula have created a funding cliff for many school districts, and the 2025 education bill included a contingent \$250 million cut to special education cross-subsidy reduction aid.

The Minnesota Management and Budget Office reported in November that the state's short-term fiscal outlook is positive with a projected surplus of \$2.465 billion in the current biennium and budget reserves totaling \$3.771 billion. However, the FY28-29 planning estimates project a structural imbalance of \$2.960 billion. An updated forecast will be released at the end of February and that is the one the Governor and legislators will use to make any adjustments to the biennial budget.

Given the state's uncertain fiscal position, AMSD has identified both immediate and ongoing priorities for consideration in the 2026 session.

Immediate Priorities

Enhancing School Safety.

Ensuring safe learning environments is a perennial priority for AMSD member school districts. The AMSD Board updated its [position paper](#) on this important topic in November. The platform specifically calls on state policymakers to increase the Safe Schools levy to \$100 per pupil for school districts and \$35 per pupil for intermediate and cooperative districts. The Safe Schools levy has been frozen at the same level for over a decade. The platform also advocates for allowing limited removal time within non-exclusionary discipline, as well strengthening secure gun storage requirements.

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School Safety, Assessment Reform, and Compensatory Funding Among Top Priorities

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Stabilizing Compensatory Funding.

Recent changes to how the state calculates compensatory funding has created a funding cliff for many districts. The platform calls on legislators to hold school districts harmless from revenue losses resulting from the formula change until recommendations from the Compensatory Revenue Task Force can be implemented.

Reevaluating Minnesota's Assessment System.

AMSD urges the Governor and legislators to establish a blue-ribbon commission to redesign Minnesota's assessment system, focusing on balanced, student-centered measures and explore replacing the high school MCAs with a nationally recognized college entrance exam. The platform also calls on legislators to provide greater flexibility with current hours-of-instruction requirements to include non-traditional learning opportunities.

Modernizing Permanent School Fund Distributions.

AMSD supports a constitutional amendment to modernize distributions from the Permanent School Fund. Moving to a reliable and consistent allocation model would better allow school officials to budget and plan.

Ongoing Priorities

Stabilizing the education funding system is another perennial legislative priority for AMSD members. To that end, AMSD calls on legislators and the Governor to:

- Repeal the contingent \$250 million cut to special education cross-subsidy reduction aid scheduled for the 2028–29 biennium.
- Increase Local Optional Revenue to \$979 per pupil to restore purchasing power lost to inflation and index it to the general education formula.
- Strengthen the PSEO program to ensure financial stability, academic rigor, student support, and preparation for success after high school.

Likewise, reducing mandates and restoring local control remain high priorities. Specifically, AMSD supports: repealing the requirement that school boards negotiate e-learning days, student testing, and student-to-staff ratios; allowing school boards to renew a capital project levy at the existing rate following a public hearing, and providing a permanent funding for summer unemployment for non-licensed staff, and for employer premiums and substitute staff costs associated with the Paid Leave program.

AMSD Board Members and staff stand ready to work with state policymakers to address these important issues in the 2026 legislative session.

- [Link: View the AMSD 2026 Legislative platform](#)