CONNECTIONS AMSD

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

February 2026
Volume 23
Number 5

February 27, 2026
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

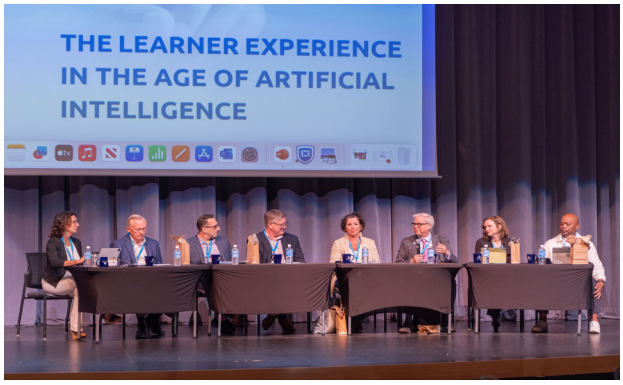
March 6, 2026
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

March 27, 2026
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

April 13, 2026
AMSD/MASA Region 9 Day at the Capitol
MN State Capitol
Details Coming

St. Cloud Area Schools: Leading and Learning in the Age of AI

St. Cloud Area School District 742 is redefining education in the age of artificial intelligence, not by racing to adopt every new tool, but through deliberate, evolutionary work that preserves productive struggle, deep thinking, reasoning, curiosity, and creativity for every student.



Opening panel for the 2024 Minnesota Thought Leaders Summit in the Age of AI. Participants are (l to r): Supt. Dr. Laurie Putnam, CEO of Dayta Marketing Brian Myres, President of StrategicEDU Adam Garry, CEO of Minnesota Business Partnership Kurt Zellers, MN Sen. Mary Kunesh, CEO of K12 Consortium of School Networks Keith Krueger, University of MN Associate Professor of the College of Education and Human Development Dr. Laura Allen, and MDE Commissioner Willie Jett.

Superintendent Dr. Laurie Putnam ignited this vision early, insisting the true challenge isn't keeping pace with technology but reimagining schools to equip students for an unpredictable future. "Bringing about change means bringing people together," Putnam says. Her leadership launched the first Minnesota Thought Leaders Summit in the Age of AI at Tech High School in June 2024, uniting over 200 educators, business leaders, legislators, and partners to shape policy, standards, and curriculum. Keynote speaker Charles Fadel and cross-sector panels sparked rich dialogue; design teams transformed ideas into actionable strategies, including the formation of a Minnesota-wide AI alliance dedicated to fierce, focused collaboration on wise, intentional use of AI, both instructionally and operationally.

The 2025 summit built on that momentum, drawing another 200+ participants for two days of hands-on exploration into how emerging AI technologies can enhance, rather than replace, the human elements of learning. Four core

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Thank you to the nearly 200 AMSD members and legislators who attended the 2026 AMSD Session Preview last week. We were grateful to have some two dozen legislators in attendance including Sen. Jim Abeler, Sen. Steve Cwodzinski, Rep. Patricia Mueller, and Rep. Sydney Jordan serving on a panel and sharing an overview of what they anticipate for the 2026 session. I'd also like to thank Education Commissioner Willie Jett for speaking and for his continued support of our students and our schools. I encourage AMSD members to stay engaged throughout the session and to mark your calendar to attend the AMSD/MASA Region 9 Day at the Capitol on April 13. Your advocacy makes a difference.

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

Piloting Relationship-Building AI Tools and Sharing Lessons Statewide

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insights emerged: let AI handle routine tasks so educators can nurture relationships, creativity, and ethical reasoning; teach students to use AI intelligently and ethically; leverage AI to level the playing field; and balance preparation for emerging careers with mastery of enduring human skills.

This year, Director of Research, Assessment and Generative AI Integration Donna Roper continues to design the district's responsible AI strategy. She developed professional learning pathways, "by teachers for teachers," which included introductory AI courses, "Demystifying AI for Educators," and "Transforming Learning with AI." Roper coordinated a midyear Future Ready by Design learning opportunity for 400 secondary licensed teachers. At the same time, she and Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jason Harris, worked with partners like World Savvy, and the Minnesota Generative AI Alliance for Education (MNGAIA), to ensure its success. The day featured a Changemaker Hub Experience with human-centered learning stations, where small-group discussions among teachers, secondary students, community members and higher ed generated ideas for future-ready schools in St. Cloud.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jason Harris drives secondary-level execution, reminding teams that "85% of jobs our elementary students will hold haven't been created yet." He champions, pilots and supports educators in fostering essential skills amid rapid change. Executive Director Katie Herrboldt supports our advancing work by addressing risks, proactively tackling cybersecurity and deepfakes, always centering equitable access. Innovation Coach Kate Klug elevates teacher and student voices in redesign efforts, drawing on initiatives in literacy and assessment to cultivate collaborative innovation. Computer Science teacher Matthew Stockinger delivers frontline expertise, weaving computational thinking and AI exploration into his coding, chemistry, and science classes. He demonstrates how educators can critically evaluate AI outputs, ensuring tools amplify rather than shortcut reasoning. In addition, a dedicated group of English Learner (EL) teachers and literacy educators—Amanda Seutter, Laura Ergen, Graham Litterst, Ann Lemke, Emily Schmit, Devon Bowker, Dr. Karen Maier, Chelsea Bowker, and Amy Streit—to name a few, ensure multilingual and literacy learners thrive. They adapt AI for accessibility, personalized support, and inclusive engagement, transforming potential barriers into pathways for equitable, culturally responsive learning.

Principal Justin Skaalerud and Apollo High School are piloting relationship-building AI tools and sharing lessons statewide. He advocates for student-centered personalization with equitable access at the core and was a key presenter alongside district colleagues at a national AASA event this year.

These leaders and educators recognize this isn't a race to be first or fastest. It's about steady growth and progress: honoring cognitive depth while igniting curiosity and creativity. The district's Responsible Use Expectations and its Secondary Instructional Vision help guide and advance personalization, teacher empowerment, accessibility, and innovation.

"The question isn't whether AI will be in students' lives, it will," Putnam says. "The question is whether we'll teach the thinking skills that make it empowering. Our choices now decide if AI expands opportunity for every student or widens the gap."

In St. Cloud Area Schools, this collective commitment—from Putnam's vision and Roper's strategy and innovation to Harris's secondary focus, Herrboldt's technology leadership, Stockinger's classroom modeling, Klug's coaching, the ML and ELA team's literacy work, Skaalerud's school-level execution, and the teachers who stepped forward in December—keeps the work profoundly human-centered. Every step forward honors learning that truly prepares students to think, reason, create, and thrive.

St. Cloud Area School District is proud to sponsor the third annual MN Thought Leaders AI Summit on Leading Learning and the Age of AI at Apollo High School on June 15-16 in St. Cloud, once again this year.

This month's member feature was submitted by Tami DeLand, Director of Community Engagement and Communications, St. Cloud Area School District 742.

2026 AMSD Session Preview Brings Legislators and Education Leaders Together

AMSD Board Chair Jim DeMay opened the 2026 AMSD Legislative Preview on Friday, Feb. 6 by acknowledging that this has been an exceptionally challenging year for public officials, educators, students, and families. He noted that we have experienced political violence, including the assassination of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark, and the shooting of Sen. John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette; a tragic school shooting at Annunciation Catholic School, and sustained federal immigration enforcement actions that have seriously impacted our students, schools and communities. DeMay stressed that it is more important than ever that school leaders and legislators work in partnership to ensure our students are safe and they have the support they need to learn and succeed.

Nearly 200 education leaders—superintendents, school board members and district staff — along with state legislators and legislative staff, and Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Willie Jett, turned out for the session preview, which annually highlights the AMSD legislative platform and key education issues for the upcoming legislative session.

This year's preview, held at Northeast Intermediate School District 916's Quora Education Center, featured three AMSD superintendents — Dr. Lisa Sayles-Adams of Minneapolis Public Schools, Dr. Jeffrey Holmberg of Centennial School District and Dr. Kent Pekel of Rochester Public Schools — presenting key priorities for AMSD districts as outlined in the 2026 Legislative Platform.

Sen. Steve Cwodzinski (DFL-Eden Prairie), Rep. Patricia Mueller (R-Austin) and Rep. Sydney Jordan (DFL-Minneapolis) participated in a panel discussion at the AMSD Legislative Session Preview. Sen. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka), right, joined the panel virtually.

Minneapolis Supt. Lisa Sayles-Adams

Supt. Sayles-Adams highlighted special education funding and urged legislators to stabilize special education aid by repealing the contingent $250 million cut to special education cross-subsidy reduction aid scheduled for the 2028–29 biennium. She thanked legislators for their recent investments to increase cross-subsidy reduction aid and noted that backing off that commitment would have negative repercussions on school district budgets.

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Compensatory Revenue, Funding New Requirements Among AMSD Priorities

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Centennial Supt. Jeff Holmberg

Supt. Holmberg thanked legislators for linking the education formula to inflation, but also asked legislators to reduce mandates, restore local control, and fully fund existing requirements including unemployment for hourly workers and the Paid Leave program.

Rochester Supt. Kent Pekel

Supt. Pekel rounded out the presentation providing an update on the Compensatory Revenue Task Force and the complexities task force members are wrestling with as they work to develop recommendations to stabilize compensatory revenue. He stressed the need to extend hold-harmless funding for another year until the task force finalizes its recommendations next fall. He also encouraged legislators to explore ways to strengthen the Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program to ensure rigor and preparation for success after high school.

Minnesota Education Commissioner Willie Jett thanked everyone for their work in support of our students during this challenging time. He stressed the importance of keeping students at the center of our work and noted that it is imperative for school leaders, educators, parents, and policymakers to work together.

The preview concluded with a legislative panel discussion that featured Rep. Patricia Mueller (R-Austin), Rep. Sydney Jordan (DFL-Minneapolis), Sen. Steve Cwodzinski (DFL-Eden Prairie) and Sen. Jim Abeler (R-Anoka) — all leaders on the House and Senate Education Policy Committees. The legislators each outlined some of their education priorities for the 2026 session and reflected on AMSD's priorities.

Commissioner Willie Jett

- 2026 AMSD Legislative Platform
- Presentation: AMSD Legislative Preview
- AMSD Education Facts 2026
- LINK: View a recording of the Preview

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AMSD Members Share Legislative Priorities — Session Convenes Feb. 17

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