

CONNECTIONS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

April 2026
Volume 23
Number 7

CHPS Community Rallies For Students Amid Operation Metro Surge

April 10, 2026 **Board of Directors** **Meeting**

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

April 13, 2026 **AMSD/MASA Region 9** **Day at the Capitol** [LINK: View Details for](#) [Day at the Capitol](#)

April 24, 2026 **Executive/Legislative** **Committee Meeting**

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

May 1, 2026 **Board of Directors** **Meeting**

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

Columbia Heights Public Schools (CHPS) was deeply impacted by Operation Metro Surge (officially lasting from Dec. 1, 2025, to Feb. 12, 2026), with many district families afraid to come to school, and staff afraid to come to work for fear of being stopped and/or detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Throughout Operation Metro Surge, CHPS responded with unprecedented support for students, and the local community responded with unprecedented collaboration with the district to meet the extensive needs for food, resources, rent support, transportation for students and patrolling around schools. Public Early Childhood through Grade 12 school systems provide a critical nexus for communities, not just educationally, but also as a trusted source for accessing many community resources. This has never been truer than during the time of the Operation Metro Surge.

Columbia Heights Public Schools serves Columbia Heights, Hilltop and Southern Fridley. The entire district, approximately 3 ½ square miles, experienced the heavy and oppressive presence of immigration agents during the surge. While the presence and threat have eased up since mid-February, its ripple effects will be long-lasting.



*Donations of food at Valley View Elementary
(photo credit: CHPS)*



*Community
Safety Patrols
at Columbia
Heights High
School (photo
credit: CHPS)*

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With just six weeks remaining in the 2026 legislative session, it is crucial for AMSD members to speak up and advocate for our [priorities](#). One of those priorities, approving a constitutional amendment ballot question to increase distributions from the Permanent School Fund, is highlighted in this month's newsletter. I hope to see many of you at our AMSD/MASA Region 9 Day at the Capitol on April 13 as we advocate for our students and our schools. Thank you in advance for making your voice heard!

From the AMSD Vice Chair, Alison Sherman, Stillwater Board Member

Schools & Communities Undaunted Under Pressure

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*Liam Conejo Ramos
(photo credit: Ali Daniels)*

ICE was an intimidating presence throughout the community, causing fear, stress and desperation. ICE agents stopped many students, families and staff on their way to or from school. Agents detained seven students, and six students were sent to the detention facility in Dilley, TX, with their parents. Dozens of parents of CHPS students have been detained. For example, at Valley View Elementary, 30 parents have been detained, not to mention numerous other family members. One student, Liam Conejo Ramos, was taken on Jan. 20th with his father after they returned home from his PreK-4 school day at Valley View Elementary. They were returned on Feb. 1, and their family is currently in the process of appealing the denial of their asylum case. Other students and their parents' time in Dilley ranged from one to eight weeks, during which they had no access to education and experienced poor living conditions.

Many families have spent months inside their homes with their windows covered with blankets, not daring to leave to go to work or school. In January, there was a significant drop in school attendance and fear on the part of some staff to travel to or from work. CHPS responded by creating, in a very short amount of time, an online school which the district called Virtual Heights

2026 for the 3rd Quarter, Jan. 27 through March 27. At its peak, there were 900 out of 3,400 students enrolled in online learning. As the number of agents decreased, most of the elementary students returned to in-person learning during March. All Virtual Heights 2026 students will return to in-person learning on April 7; however, CHPS has lost approximately 150 students who have left the district over this period.

Each school, including the early childhood and adult basic education programs, responded to family needs for food, rent assistance, medical care and legal resources. So many bags, boxes and crates of food were delivered by individuals, groups and organizations to the schools, with neighbors and people of goodwill sorting, distributing and delivering food to houses. School staff helped families fill out DOPA (delegation of parental authority) forms and helped them connect to many other resources. The school district staff have worked closely with community members who have been outside of the schools at each arrival and dismissal, monitoring for safe passage of students and staff.

CHPS has never been more resolute in the district's mission to provide "worlds of opportunity for each and every learner — all belong and all succeed." The district always knew there was strong support from the local community, but this has been shown in more tangible and relational ways over the past few months. Of course, educators love their students and families, but never has that been more expressed in word and deed.

There continues to be strong concern about the ongoing safety of students, staff, families and community. The road ahead is long with many challenges today and tomorrow. The harm caused by Operation Metro Surge is deep, educationally, emotionally, and economically. The district is undaunted and believes that by continuing to weave together the resources, creativity and collaboration of many people and organizations, CHPS will come out of this with an even more vibrant, strong and diverse community.

This month's member feature was submitted by Kristen Stuenkel, Director of Community Education and Communications, Columbia Heights Public Schools.

AMSD Urges Legislature to Amend Constitution to Increase Permanent School Fund Payments

If the Legislature acts, Minnesotans could vote on a Constitutional amendment this fall that would increase school district funding from the state's Permanent School Fund — a top priority for AMSD.

The Minnesota Legislature is considering a ballot question to amend the State Constitution this fall that would increase the funding schools receive from the Permanent School Fund (PSF). The PSF — a constitutionally established trust dating back to Minnesota's statehood — can be traced back to as early as the 1700s when the country's founding leaders, during westward expansion, created a framework for states to share profits from mineral rights on public lands to fund public education. Revenues are invested by the State Board of Investment and distributed to school districts by the MN Department of Education.

While much of the initial land granted to the state in the 1800s has been sold over the years, Minnesota's Department of Natural Resources still manages about 2.5 million acres of school trust land, with proceeds from land management activities such as timber sales, mining, and land leases annually added to the fund. Minnesota law currently allows only the interest and dividends earned on the Fund to be distributed to schools, often resulting in small and unpredictable payments.

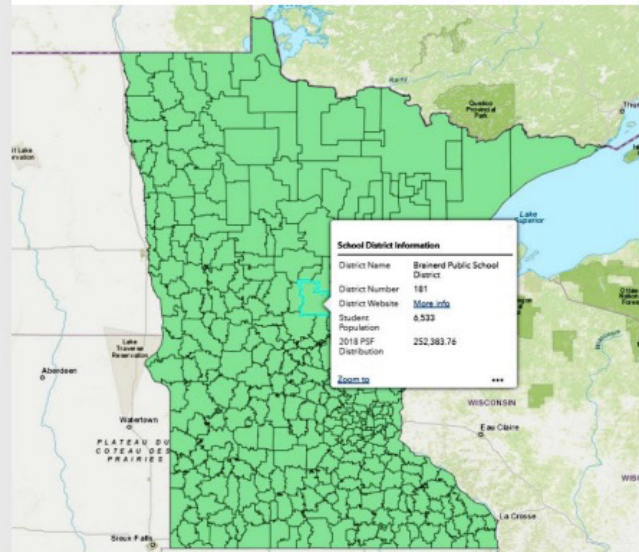
Revenue Generation & Distributions

Annual Gross Revenue Generation



\$28 Million

FY25 - Distributions



\$58 million distributed statewide

Governor, Legislators Must Act to Mitigate Staff Layoffs and Program Cuts

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But that could change under legislation being considered in the 2026 session. [HF3900](#) (Igo) and [SF3593](#) (Kunesh), would put a question to amend the State Constitution on the ballot this fall. If passed, Minnesotans could vote in November to increase the distribution of proceeds from the Fund, from the current approximately 2.5 percent each year to 4.5 percent of market value (PMOV) using the three-year average value of the Fund. The Constitutional amendment, the bills' authors say, would increase and stabilize the amount school districts annually receive.

The legislation is based on a [report from a 2024 Task Force](#), which recommended the changes. Denise Dittrich, director of government relations for the MN School Boards Association, served on the task force and led efforts to modernize the Permanent School Fund when she served in the Legislature. She noted that the task force found the current constitutional and statutory framework restricts and limits the state's ability to disburse funds, and recommended the state adopt a market value-based distribution model, like modern endowments. Most endowments, the report notes, distribute between 4 to 5 percent of their average value — nearly double the state's current distribution rate.

The report also highlighted that strong returns over the last 10 years have helped double the Fund's value — and more than triple its value over the last 15 years — growing from \$675 million at the end of FY10 to \$2.3 billion at the end of FY25. An estimated \$58 million was distributed to schools statewide in FY25.

The report estimates the Constitutional amendment could “nearly double near-term distributions while still achieving long-term growth of the Fund.” The AMSD Legislative Committee has identified the **Permanent School Fund Constitutional amendment as a key priority** in the 2026 legislative session to provide additional resources for our schools without an increase in taxes.

“In the wake of the significant [\\$223 million in budget shortfalls](#) facing AMSD member districts next year and beyond, the proposed Constitutional amendment could provide badly needed funding for our schools,” said AMSD Vice Chair Alison Sherman.

AMSD members are urged to reach out and advocate to their [local legislators](#) and [legislative leaders](#) to pass the Constitutional amendment ballot question in the 2026 session as a stand alone bill.

- [Office of School Trust Lands Presentation](#)
- [Office of School Trust Lands Handout](#)
- [State Board of Investment Presentation](#)
- [Permanent School Fund Task Force Report](#)
- [PSF Endowment Calculation](#)

- [LINK: Contact Information for AMSD Legislators by School District](#)
- [LINK: Contact Information for Minnesota State Legislative Leaders](#)