

March 2017  
vol 14 ♦ no 6

## Columbia Heights Public Schools: American Indian Education is a Priority

### March 3, 2017 Board of Directors Meeting

7:00 a.m.  
Grand Hall,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

### March 24, 2017 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.  
Lexington Room,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

### April 7, 2017 Board of Directors Meeting

7:00 a.m.  
Grand Hall,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

### April 28, 2017 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.  
Lexington Room,  
TIES Conference Center  
St. Paul

The Columbia Heights Public School District has made supporting American Indian students a priority. By taking a multifaceted approach, the District is making strides in family and community connections, professional development, inclusive curriculum and a 100 percent graduation rate for American Indian students two years in a row.

The intensive focus on American Indian issues began by first seeking out learning opportunities for school officials. District staff attended the Native Studies Summer Workshop for Educators (NSSWE) Conference in 2014. During the conference, connections were made to local and national American Indian experts who were recruited to help educate more staff within the District. In addition to annual attendance at NSSWE, Columbia Heights Public Schools staff reached out to the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Humanities Center and the Indian Land Tenure Foundation for support in how to best accurately and effectively support American Indian students and families.

Family outreach began by reviewing student enrollment files and reaching out to families identifying as American Indian.

Previously, this District hosted a Pow Wow through a joint council with Fridley and Spring Lake Park Public Schools, but the families wanted to increase family engagement throughout the school year beyond the one event. This District's parent committee was reinvigorated when David Larsen, a Dakota elder, was hired to support students and families. Mr. Larsen began offering monthly American Indian family events at schools, which included seminars on the history and importance of the sweat lodge, proper uses of tobacco and harvesting maple syrup.

As American Indian parent engagement began to flourish, Columbia Heights Public Schools staff worked to provide professional development to build a system of inclusive curriculum. In the summer of 2015, 30 teachers volunteered to participate in professional development offered



The District hosts Pow-Wows to celebrate Native American contributions. Among those participating was this CHPS elementary student and his uncle.

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## AMSD's Mission

*To advocate for state education policy that enables metropolitan school districts to improve student learning.*



Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts

## From the Chair

The state budget forecast released on February 28 projects a budget balance of \$1.65 billion for the 2018-19 biennium providing a golden opportunity for state policymakers to make critical investments in our public schools. The Governor and legislators have sufficient resources at their disposal to provide a 2.5 percent per year increase in the basic funding formula and reduce the growing special education cross-subsidy by 25 percent as outlined in the AMSD's Session Priorities. AMSD board members stand ready to work with state policymakers on these and other important issues such as enhancing referendum and debt service equalization, addressing the teacher shortage and diversifying the teacher workforce. We must work together to make sure all of our students have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

*John Vento, school board member from Robbinsdale Area Schools, is chair of AMSD.*

# American Indian Education Curriculum Implemented in Columbia Heights Public Schools

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by local American Indian experts. During the workshop, the overarching goals of inclusive curriculum were established: first, we want American Indian students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum; and secondly, we want all students to learn about American Indian topics in content areas such as English Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Art and Physical Education. With guidance, the teacher teams began adding authentic American Indian resources and lessons into their units of study.

That fall, the entire District leadership team participated in a “Bdote” (“Where the two waters come together, otherwise referred to as B’dote, is the center of Dakota spirituality and history. This is where the Dakota people began.” Sheldon Wolfchild, Lower Sioux Community of Dakota) field experience offered by the Minnesota Humanities Center. Among the day’s activities was visiting an American Indian burial grounds and understanding the background of a sculpture in St. Paul. Later in the school year all District staff were provided professional development from the nationally renowned author Dr. Anton Truer from Bemidji State University. Staff read his book, “Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians, but Were Afraid to Ask.” Since 2015, Columbia Heights Public Schools continue to provide ongoing professional development for teachers and staff on American Indian topics.



Dr. Anton Truer, a Native American professor and author, addressed all Columbia Heights Public Schools' employees prior to the beginning of the school year.



Students examine the contents of a learning trunk.

One of the outcomes of all of the professional development is the inclusive curriculum project. A team of District and elementary school staff developed grade-level American Indian learning trunks. Grade levels selected a topic and worked with experts to choose artifacts and realia to make the trunks “come alive” for students. For example, the fifth-grade trunk’s topic is “buffalo.” Inside the trunk are books, real buffalo bones, skin and fur along with items made with buffalo leather. Each trunk includes literacy lessons so students can connect their reading and writing to the American Indian topic.

In second grade, students learn about American Indian perspectives on seasons. They work with the District Garden Specialist to learn about and select native plants to grow in the outdoor classroom, then they get to taste wild rice. The second grade trunk includes such items as different types of wild rice, a winnowing basket, rice knockers, a model canoe and many books. For the 2016-2017 school year, all elementary classrooms are implementing the American Indian trunks' inclusive

curriculum. The trunks travel between schools.

At the secondary level, English and Social Studies teachers are beginning the work of American Indian inclusive curriculum lessons and resource exploration. One high school class had the opportunity to take their learning of Minnesota American Indians outside of the classroom by studying original texts at the Minnesota History Center on the mass hanging of 38 Dakota men in Mankato in 1862. The students then took a trip to Mankato, during spring break, to visit the site now called Reconciliation Park. They then visited the Bdote site below Fort Snelling where the wives and children of the deceased were forced to march. This type of on-site, real world learning has lasting impacts, both academically and socially, on students.

*“The world was a library and its books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals that shared, alike with us, the storms and blessings of earth. We learned to do what only the student of nature learns, and that was to feel beauty.”* Standing Bear, Oglala Sioux Chief

The words of Standing Bear remind us of the importance of extending student learning beyond a textbook, beyond the four walls of a classroom and to include multiple perspectives in the lessons. Columbia Heights Public Schools continues to do just that through increased American Indian family and community connections, continued professional development and inclusive curriculum.

The District also has a portion of its website dedicated to American Indian Education ([www.colheights.k12.mn.us/aie](http://www.colheights.k12.mn.us/aie)).

*This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Zena Stenvik, director of teaching and learning, and Jane Riordan, English language and family involvement coordinator, Columbia Heights Public Schools.*



Columbia Heights High School students read original documents detailing the hangings of 32 Indian men on Dec. 16, 1862 in Mankato, MN.

## Private School Tax Subsidies Advance Despite Research Showing They are Ineffective

Proposals to provide significant tax subsidies to private K-12 education have passed through the education policy and finance committee in the House and Senate and are under consideration for inclusion in the Omnibus Tax Bill in each body. The proposed legislation would incentivize donations to foundations that award scholarships to students attending private schools and extend the current K-12 tax credit to private school tuition. The bills are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

Legislation Subsidizing Private K-12 Education 2017	
Bill Numbers and Authors	Bill Information
<a href="#">HF 386: Kresha/SF 256: Chamberlain</a>	Creates a new program making donations to foundations that award scholarship to qualifying K-12 students eligible for a state income tax credit. Extends the existing K-12 education tax credit to include expenses spent on tuition. Indexes the existing K-12 education tax credit amount and income threshold to inflation.
<a href="#">HF 387: Knoblach</a>	Increases the maximum K-12 education deduction from \$1,625 to \$2,600 for each child in grades K-6, and from \$2,500 to \$3,900 for each child in grades 7-12, effective in tax year 2017. Extends the K-12 education credit to non-public school tuition, increases the maximum credit from \$1,000 to \$1,500 per child, increases the income at which the credit begins to phase out from \$33,500 to \$47,500, and decreases the rate of the phase out, effective in tax year 2017. Adjusts the maximum deduction, maximum credit, and the income level at which the credit begins to phase out annually for inflation, beginning in tax year 2018.

Source: House Research, 2017

### Minnesota Is Not Meeting Constitutional Obligation to Public Schools

Some proponents of taxpayer subsidies for private K-12 education argue that Minnesota already offers subsidies to private pre-kindergarten providers and private higher education institutions so why not subsidize private K-12 education? One compelling answer to that question is that state legislators have a constitutional duty to our public K-12 schools. Article XIII; Section 1 of the Minnesota Constitution states, *“The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state.”*

Despite the constitutional mandate, multiple measurements show that the State is not meeting its obligation. The general education formula, the primary method of funding public education, is \$550 per pupil (8.5 percent) less than it was in FY 2003 in inflation adjusted (FY 2017) dollars. Mandated special education expenditures exceeded the funding provided by the state and federal government by \$643 million in FY 2015. The special education funding shortfall is projected to grow to \$680 million by FY 2016 and \$719 million by FY 2019. Likewise, the funding shortfall in the English learner program was over \$95 million in FY 2016.

The proposed private school tax subsidies would make it even more difficult for state policymakers to fulfill their constitutional obligation to fund our public schools. Tax credits reduce state revenue, which means fewer resources would be available to address the funding shortfalls described above. As the chart on page 4 shows, the proposed legislation would reduce available

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**AMSD Members:** Anoka-Hennepin School District, Bloomington Public Schools, Board of School Administrators (Associate Member), Brooklyn Center Community Schools, Burnsville-Eagan-Savage, Columbia Heights Public Schools, Eastern Carver County Schools, Eden Prairie Schools, Edina Public Schools, Elk River Area School District, Equity Alliance MN (Associate Member), Farmington Area Public Schools, Fridley Public Schools, Hopkins Public Schools, Intermediate School District 287, Intermediate School District 917 (Associate Member), Inver Grove Heights Community Schools, Lakeville Area Public Schools, Mahtomedi Public Schools, Metro ECSU (Associate Member), Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnetonka Public Schools, Mounds View Public Schools, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District, Northeast Metro Intermediate School District 916, Northwest Suburban Integration District (Associate Member), Orono Schools, Osseo Area Schools, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, Richfield Public Schools, Robbinsdale Area Schools, Rochester Public Schools; Rockford Area Schools, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools, Roseville Area Schools, Shakopee Public Schools, South St. Paul Public Schools, South Washington County Schools, SouthWest Metro Intermediate District (Associate Member), Spring Lake Park Schools, St. Anthony-New Brighton Independent School District, St. Cloud Area Schools, St. Louis Park Public Schools, St. Paul Public Schools, Stillwater Area Public Schools, TIES (Associate Member), Wayzata Public Schools, West Metro Education Program, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools and White Bear Lake Area Schools.

## Public Opposes Private School Subsidies

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general fund resources by up to \$41 million per year by FY 2020. On top of that, the proposed private school tax subsidies would automatically increase by inflation each year thereafter.

**Figure 2**

Minnesota State Revenue Impact of Tax Subsidies for Private K-12 Education				
	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
<a href="#">HF 386: Kresha/SF 256: Chamberlain</a>		-\$10.4 million	-\$40.7 million	-\$41.1 million
<a href="#">HF 387: Knoblauch</a>	-\$24.2 million	-\$24.4 million	-\$24.9 million	-\$25.2 million

Source: Minnesota Department of Revenue, February 15, 2017

### Minnesota Offers Extensive School Choice Options

The tax subsidies to private K-12 education are touted as a means of choice for students. However, Minnesota offers students and families extensive public school choice options including charter schools, open enrollment, dual credit programs, shared time, online learning, alternative learning programs, magnet schools and home schooling. In addition, Minnesota taxpayers subsidize private schools by providing financial assistance to support private school transportation, special education, textbooks, counseling and nursing services.

### Research Does Not Support Public Subsidies for Private K-12 Education

Supporters of the tax subsidy bills claim the proposals offer an opportunity to close the achievement gap and help struggling students. However, research does not support these claims. Numerous studies since the 1990s have found that students receiving private school vouchers do not outperform students who remain in their public schools.

- In 2015, a report from the bipartisan Center for Tax and Budget Accountability found that none of the independent studies of the voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Washington, D.C. revealed any statistical evidence that children who utilized vouchers performed better than children who remained in public schools.
- In 2016, two reports were released touting the positive impacts vouchers have on educational outcomes. The reports were reviewed by the National Education Policy Center, which concluded, “Both reports are marred by a number of serious problems and errors,” and “the manifold serious flaws of each report undercut the trustworthiness of their conclusions and negate any utility for policymakers.”
- In 2013, the Wisconsin State Department of Instruction released enrollment figures for its voucher program expansion and revealed that only 21% of those students receiving a voucher attended a Wisconsin public school the previous year; 73% already attended a private school the previous year. During the fall of 2014, a review by the Wisconsin State Journal released findings showing that since 2004, Wisconsin taxpayers had paid \$139 million to private schools subsequently banned from their voucher system for failing to meet requirements related to finance, accreditation, student safety and auditing. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that the voucher program in Wisconsin will cost taxpayers \$245 million in the 2016-17 school year.
- On February 23, 2017, the *New York Times*, published an article citing three recent reports about vouchers and how they may actually harm students who receive them, citing the following from the reports.
  - \* Indiana: “In mathematics, voucher students who transfer to private schools experienced significant losses in achievement.”
  - \* Louisiana: “Public elementary school students who started at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile in math and then used a voucher to transfer to a private school dropped to the 26<sup>th</sup> percentile in a single year.”
  - \* Ohio: “Students who used vouchers to attend private schools have fared worse academically compared to their closely matched peers attending public schools.”

### Public Funding Requires Public Accountability and Accessibility

State taxpayers expect that any institution that receives public funding will be held accountable for how those funds are expended and will follow all applicable state laws and regulations. Likewise, Minnesotans expect that taxpayer dollars will be used at schools that are accessible to ALL children, including children with special needs.

### Public Opposed to Private School Subsidies

Last, but not least, the American public is overwhelmingly opposed to private school vouchers. In 2015, the Phi Delta Kappa (PDK)/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes toward the Public Schools showed that only 31% of Americans favor allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense. Minnesotans are likewise strongly opposed to private school vouchers. A public opinion survey conducted by the Morris Leatherman Company in August of 2016 shows that over 60% of Minnesotans oppose vouchers/tax credits for private/religious schools.