

June 2019
vol 16 ♦ no 9

Wayzata’s Unified Classes and Club Open Hearts and Minds

June 7, 2019 Executive Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.
Room 304
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

July 12, 2019 Executive Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.
Room 304
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

August 9, 2019 Board of Directors Meeting

7 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada
<https://goo.gl/maps/EG2bcsS9zuK2>

August 23, 2019 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.
Room 304
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

It started as an idea nobody was certain would work – a class that included both students with disabilities and those without. On paper it seemed simple enough, after all Wayzata Public Schools has plenty of students on both sides of the equation.

But would a class that collaborates students with and without disabilities actually succeed?

If the class was to be offered, would students sign up? Would the students get along with each other? Would everybody understand the curriculum?

While all of the scenarios played out, it was the students who quickly showed that the unified classes not only work, but they are meant to be.

“I was part of the first group to take the class,” said Wayzata senior Mimi Schrader. “After I took it, I was like, ‘This is so cool.’”

Schrader was part of that first unified physical education class during the 2016-17 school year. She was a sophomore at the time and paired with a student with special needs. Because it was a unified gym class there were a lot of different ways the course could be structured to accommodate everybody in the class. For example, tennis nets and basketball rims were lowered so each student in the class could play and compete at their own level. Schrader was a starting guard for the Wayzata Girls Basketball Team and will tell you, the class both challenged and changed her.

But not only did she change—a wave of transformation happened across the entire high school.

“Before the class, you would see kids with special needs sitting by themselves during lunch with empty chairs around them,” said Schrader. “Now they sit everywhere with their new friends, but that was just the start.” Schrader wanted to do more, so she helped setup a club at school—Club Unified Students (US).



Wayzata’s Club US was created to develop meaningful relationships between students with and without disabilities both in and out of school.

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

I would like to thank all of the AMSD board members, staff, parents and concerned citizens who took time to advocate for our students and our schools during the 2019 legislative session. While we didn’t achieve all we hoped for, several AMSD priorities were included in the Omnibus E-12 Education bill that was recently signed into law by Gov. Walz. A 2 percent per-year increase in the basic formula, special education funding and reform, retention of voluntary prekindergarten seats, and school safety funding were all included in the bill. I was especially pleased that AMSD’s persistent advocacy for addressing the special education cross-subsidy paid dividends. Much work remains in this area but significant and positive gains were made that we can build on moving forward. Thank you again for your commitment to public education and have a great summer!

Stephanie Levine, school board member from West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan, is chair of AMSD.

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Unified Course Offerings a Success in Wayzata Public Schools

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Club US was created to effectively do more not only in school, but out of school too. The club is for students who have an interest in developing meaningful relationships between students with and without disabilities to help spread acceptance and ensure everybody feels included and welcome at school. Along with having an interest in creating authentic inclusion activities, the greater mission was to change how students interact with each other every day.

“Before my sophomore year, I didn’t really know any of these students,” said Schrader. “And now I see them in the hallways all the time and say ‘hello,’ it makes my day and it also makes their day. We also plan weekend outings like going to Sky Zone, going to the movies and bowling.”

Schrader, along with special education student Joey Sueker, served on the student board of Special Olympics Minnesota.

Last summer the two delivered the keynote speech at the National Student Council Conference where they talked about the importance of inclusion. This past fall, Club US also received the “Outstanding Unified Champion School” award given by the Special Olympics of Minnesota at its Distinguished Service Awards banquet.

But despite all of the accolades beyond the classroom, the greatest achievement may be happening at Wayzata High School. The unified gym class now regularly fills during registration and because of that, unified classes have expanded to include art and culinary courses.

“For some students, this is the first time they’ve ever cracked an egg,” said Laurie Sonstegard, Wayzata family consumer science teacher. “Or it’s the first time they’ve used a liquid measuring cup for measuring, so those are skills that we introduce and hope to advance.”

Sonstegard and her art and culinary colleagues saw the success that was happening with unified students during physical education and wanted to implement the same type of opportunities in their classrooms.

“This class is my favorite class,” smiled Sueker. “I appreciate it a lot, it’s a lot of fun and it’s helping everybody.”

For even the most astute chef, the kitchen can be a dangerous place, so concessions are made to help accommodate all students. Instead of using typical metal utensils, plastic ones are substituted and can do the job just as well. Menu items like fruit salads, pancakes and nachos are foods that all of the students are able to make without a lot of assistance.



Unified course offerings at Wayzata High School are growing and now include culinary and art in addition to physical education. Wayzata’s three middle schools are also strongly considering adding unified offerings in the future.



Wayzata High School students Joey Sueker and Mimi Schrader, pictured left and middle, have been leaders in sharing the message about the importance of inclusion across the state.

“Students really enjoy working together as a team. We hear lots of laughter, lots of smiles, lots of positive energy and it doesn’t feel like it’s two groups of kids, it’s one group of kids working together as a team,” explained Sonstegard.

Like the unified gym class, the unified culinary and art classes are now seeing an increase in student interest and registration for their classes. To this point, the unified classes are only available at the high school, but that’s about to change too. Seeing the success at the high school level, Wayzata’s three middle schools are in discussions and strongly considering similar unified program implementation at their schools.

When the concept of a unified class was first considered, nobody was certain it would catch on. It appears the only uncertainty these days is which class is next to call itself inclusive and unified. The ultimate goal for the unified movement is to continue to create a culture shift that encourages acceptance of everyone, regardless of their ability.

“Because everyone’s a person. Everyone has feelings and to not feel included is something that nobody wants,” said Schrader. She is a senior and graduates this year. Schrader was a star on the basketball team and even played in the state tournament, but said the coolest thing and the one thing she will miss the most about high school is Club US.

“When I come back,” smiled Schrader, “I’m excited to see where this is and how it’s grown.”

This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Jeffrey DeMars, communications specialist, Wayzata Public Schools.

E-12 Education Bill Signed Into Law

2% Increase in Formula; Special Education Funding and Reform; VPK for 2 More Years, and More

The Minnesota Constitution makes it “the duty of the Legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools.”

Accordingly, education accounts for more than 40 percent of Minnesota’s state budget — and the final 2019 E-12 Education bill, which was signed into law by Gov. Tim Walz on Thursday, May 30, appropriates \$20.1 billion for public education from a total budget of \$48.4 billion for the next biennium.

Getting there was not easy.

With Minnesota having the only divided Legislature in the country, the significant divide between the DFL-led House of Representatives and the Republican-led Senate in 2019 was not surprising. The differences were apparent in virtually every area of the state budget including E-12 Education.

The House’s initial omnibus E-12 Education bill proposed a \$900 million funding increase and a comprehensive list of policy changes. The Senate’s omnibus bill, meanwhile, was much more modest, both in terms of funding and policy proposals.

Near the end of the session — when the Senate and the House came together as a Conference Committee to negotiate a final bill — it became clear the respective chambers were not going to agree easily.

And that’s just one reason the regular 2019 Legislative Session ended without a final budget agreement — requiring a one-day Special Session beginning Friday, May 24.

But while the media focused on the all-night Special Session marathon for the final budget votes on Saturday, May 25, the reality was the E-12 Education budget was largely decided nearly a week before, on the last day of the 2019 session.



Gov. Tim Walz and legislative leaders announced the final budget deal on Sunday, May 19, 2019, at the Capitol.

That was the day Gov. Walz, Speaker of the House Melissa Hortman and Majority Leader Paul Gazelka struck a deal on the major provisions of the E-12 bill. Following that agreement, the E-12 Conference Committee, led by chairs Rep. Jim Davnie and Sen. Carla Nelson then put the finishing touches on the \$543 million bill.

The key provisions in the bill include: a 2 percent per-year formula increase; increased funding and reform of the special education formula; VPK/School Readiness Plus funding for two more years; school safety and some property tax equalization in the tax bill. The final bill includes little in the policy arena beyond some requirements related to dyslexia screening, testing for lead in water and some reductions in required special education paperwork.

E-12 EDUCATION BILLS – MAJOR SPENDING CATEGORIES FY 2020-FY 2021 Biennium - State Appropriations

GENERAL FUND				
\$ in Thousands	Governor	House	Senate	Agreement
General Ed Formula	520,536	520,536	96,113	388,815
Special Education Aid	90,691	120,248	-	90,691
Voluntary Prekindergarten	47,095	47,095	-	46,786
Early Learning Scholarships	-	25,670	44,500	4,500
Safe Schools	17,280	24,370	74,523	[30,000]*
Referendum Equalization	-	21,290	[14,850]*	[10,000]**
School Building Bond Ag Credit				[9,810]**
Other Aids and Grants	17,388	127,114	21,107	13,338
State Agencies	24,921	27,437	(3,748)	15,234
Less Revenues, Transfers & Cancellations	(6,466)	(13,760)	(20,995)	(16,364)
Total Increase over Base	711,445	900,000	211,500	543,000

* Contingent on general fund closing balance for FY 19

** In Tax Bill

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Source: Minnesota Department of Education

Several AMSD Priorities Addressed

Heading into the 2019 session, the AMSD Board of Directors identified a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring equitable academic outcomes — high levels of achievement — for all students. Here’s how the final numbers broke down with regard to key [AMSD Priorities](#):

- **Formula Increase:** The final bill included a General Education Formula Funding increase of 2 percent per year.
- **Special Education:** An increase in special education funding of just under \$91 million. Adds a new component to the special

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Special Education Cross-Subsidy Reduction Aid Included

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education formula — cross-subsidy reduction aid — equal to 2.6 percent of unreimbursed costs for FY 2020 and 6.43 percent of the cross-subsidy for FY 2021 and later. The bill also reduces the portion of unreimbursed special education costs billed back to the resident district from 90 percent to 85 percent in FY 2020 and 80 percent in FY 2021 and later.

- **Teacher Shortage / Diversity:** The bill includes an additional \$750,000 per year for mentoring, induction and retention incentive program grants for teachers of color, and a one-time increase of \$99,000 in FY 20 for the Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color grants.
- **Early Learning / Pre-K:** Full funding to continue the 4,000 VPK/School Readiness Plus seats for two more years.
- **Safe Schools:** One-time safe schools supplemental aid of approximately \$30 million to be distributed statewide on a per pupil basis. The safe schools aid is one-time and is contingent upon a positive closing balance on June 30.
- **Local Optional Revenue / Equalization:** The final E-12 education bill simplified the calculation of Local Optional and Referendum revenue but did not address equalization. However, the Omnibus Tax Bill includes \$9.4 million for referendum equalization.
- **Paperwork Reduction / Mandates:**
 - ◊ **Special education paperwork:** The final bill included three areas related to reducing special education paperwork — regarding prior written notices, conciliation conferences and IEPs — to potentially reduce paperwork unless requested by the parents of a student.



E-12 Education Conference Committee Chairs Sen. Carla Nelson and Rep. Jim Davnie negotiated through the final day of the 2019 legislative session on Monday, May 20, 2019.

The following priorities identified by AMSD were not addressed in the 2019 omnibus E-12 Education bill:

- **English Learner Revenue**
- **School Board Renewal of an Existing Referendum**
- **Local Board control of School Calendar**

Additional links:

- **Full summaries of the bills, tax tracking, district runs and more:** <https://www.amsd.org/2019session/>
- [Read the full Omnibus E-12 Education bill](#)
- [MDE Presentation to the AMSD Board of the Omnibus E-12 Education bill](#)



Moments after the adjournment of the 2019 Minnesota Legislature on Monday, May 20, 2019.