

Bloomington's Marketing strategy: Engaging Realtors to help sell your district

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

September 6, 2019

Board of Directors Meeting

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

September 20, 2019

Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

The need for school marketing is relatively new in public education. A generation ago, parents had few choices: opting to pay for private schools, or sending their children to the neighborhood public school. Homeschooling was uncommon, and charter schools did not exist.

Today's parents not only embrace school choice -- they expect it. School districts are competing with online, charter and private schools, and in many cases with neighboring districts. Schools must recognize we are in a new era of competition, requiring a solid marketing and engagement strategy to attract and retain students.

Following a number of years of flattening enrollment and increasing private and charter school options in or near our community, Bloomington Public Schools' Community Relations team developed a strategy to enhance the school district's reputation and image, and explore how the district might communicate more effectively with key stakeholder groups. Realtors were identified as valuable ambassadors with front-line access to new and prospective families.

We implemented a targeted marketing communications effort using a research-based approach to identify Realtor and homebuyer perceptions about the school district, listened to concerns, provided accurate information and strengthened relationships with this influential group of stakeholders.

The Community Relations team conducted a series of focus group sessions with metro area Realtors who live or list and sell homes in Bloomington. The feedback was an effective method for identifying general trends in perception and attitude.

Focus groups yielded important key takeaways:

- Many area Realtors grew up in Bloomington and attended their neighborhood public schools.



City Manager Jamie Verbrugge (standing left) and Superintendent Les Fujitake highlight city-district collaborations in their welcoming remarks.

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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

I would like to thank AMSD board members for the opportunity to serve as chair over the past year. It has been an honor to work with so many dedicated school board members, superintendents and staff to advocate for our common goals. Coming together with a unified voice on critical issues makes a huge difference for our students, our staffs and our communities.

This month's newsletter provides an overview of one of the issues we have worked on over the past several years — expanding programs and incentives to attract, develop and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas. While we have made some progress over the past two legislative sessions, there is clearly more work to do. AMSD board members will soon receive a survey seeking input regarding legislative priorities for the 2020 legislative session. I encourage you to complete the survey when you receive it so we can build a strong collective platform to bring forward next session.

Enjoy the remaining weeks of summer and best wishes for a great start to the new school year!
Stephanie Levine, school board member, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan, is chair of AMSD.

Engaging Realtors to help sell Bloomington Public Schools

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- Realtors and clients rely on aggregate sites like GreatSchools.org for “rating” information about schools.
- Realtors are not confident the online “rankings” accurately reflect the BPS experience.
- Realtors are eager to promote BPS to clients, but wanted current, easy-to-access information to share with buyers.

Community Partnerships

The Community Relations team approached the City of Bloomington to partner on an event to showcase the community and schools. Sharing the same geographic boundaries presents the district and city with unique opportunities to collaborate on efforts that will benefit the community as a whole.

At the time, the City of Bloomington was embarking on a strategic planning process to assess and improve community image based on research showing that community needs and perceptions had grown and changed a great deal over the past few decades. We were able to leverage their strategic plan, One Bloomington, in our planning and key messages.

The district also worked with the Minneapolis Association of Area Realtors (MAAR) to offer continuing education credits for Realtors. MAAR also helped promote the event through their member education portal.

The goals of the Realtor event were to:

- assess the perception prospective buyers and sellers have of Bloomington Public Schools and the city.
- develop a process, program or method to educate Realtors about our school system and city to better assist agents in responding to client inquiries and questions.
- increase the positive perception Realtors have of Bloomington Public Schools and the City of Bloomington.

Changing perceptions

According to our research, home buyers were still influenced by a decades-old marketing slogan, “Prestigious West Bloomington,” coined by a developer in the ’80s to help persuade buyers to build among the corn fields in the western part of the city.

The perceived east-west divide extends beyond high school rivalry. Available housing in our community reflects the progression of city development with older, smaller homes toward the east graduating to newer, larger homes to the west. With more inventory of affordable homes in central and east Bloomington, we knew we had to help Realtors become familiar with the schools in those neighborhoods.

The collaboration with the city was instrumental in the success of the event. The city and district had a shared interest in attracting new families and showcasing all areas of the community. The Realtor focus groups revealed that schools are the top factor families consider when choosing a new community.

Excellent schools are vital for a healthy, thriving community and help improve and maintain home values. Along with school updates, data from the city assessor and point of sale/inspection tips consistently rank high in the content Realtors find valuable at the event.

Effective tactics:

- The Realtor forum was held in one of our middle schools and included an interactive segment so participants could experience modern day learning firsthand.
- Created a one sheet “House Hunter’s Guide to Bloomington” with fast facts about our schools, class size, enrollment and demographic data.
- Provided tangible take-aways: maps, info sheets, city and district contacts.
- Educated Realtors about the school rating sites.
- Employed a storytelling approach to all the presentations.
- Realtors were added to our community newsletter mailing list.
- Engaged Realtors representing our Somali and Hispanic communities.

Evaluation

In April 2019 we hosted the third biennial Realtor forum, which showed another increase in attendance from the previous forums. Using a continuous improvement model, we have tweaked and improved the planning and format with each event.

We regularly receive positive feedback from Realtors who attend the events. Evaluation of the 2019 event showed that 100 percent agreed/strongly agreed that the information was relevant to their work and 85 percent rated the forum excellent overall.

The ongoing collaboration with the city has had a positive impact on overall community engagement by strengthening relationships and engaging Realtors in creating a thriving community.

This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Kate Martin, Marketing & Communications Manager, Bloomington Public Schools.



Realtors gathered for the third Bloomington Realtor forum in April 2019.

Little Progress in Effort to Increase Teachers of Color in 2019 Session

While the Omnibus E-12 Education bill adopted in the 2019 Special Session included important increases to the base funding formula, special education and voluntary prekindergarten, little progress was made on another important issue -- diversifying the teacher workforce. Minnesota's persistent achievement gap between white students and students of color is well documented. One strategy to close the gap, with proven results, is diversifying the teacher workforce. A [March, 2017 study](#) showed that having just one black teacher in third, fourth or fifth grade reduced low-income black boys' probability of dropping out of high school by 39 percent.

Minnesota students of color made up approximately 34 percent of the nearly 890,000 students in Minnesota in 2018-19 while just 4 percent of the estimated 63,000 teachers in Minnesota self-identified as teachers of color. According to the 2019 Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report, "the percentage of teachers of color remains stagnant while the percentage of students of color continues to grow in Minnesota."



Keenan Jones, a sixth-grade teacher in the Hopkins Public Schools district, and Angelina Momanyi of the Teachers of Color Coalition in Anoka-Hennepin Schools, testified during the 2019 legislative session in support of the Increase Teachers of Color Act, which would provide support to recruit and retain teachers of color and American Indian teachers.

[Link: 2019 Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report](#)

One of [AMSD's legislative priorities](#) has been to expand programs and incentives to attract, develop and retain teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas. AMSD, along with the other members of the [Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers](#), urged state policymakers to build on the gains made in the 2017 legislative session when significant investments were approved to expand pathways and build support for prospective and current teachers of color.

Unfortunately, the E-12 Education Bill approved in the 2019 Special Session included little to build on the success of the 2017 legislation. The bill included a one-time increase of \$99,000 in FY 20 for the Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color (CUGMEC) grant program and \$750,000 per year for grants for mentoring, induction and retention programs for teachers of color.

The \$99,000 one-time increase for CUGMEC will bring the FY 20 appropriation to a total of \$1.099 million, and then the \$1 million base funding level will resume in FY 21.

The goal of this grant is to recruit and support people of color and American Indians to enter into the teaching profession. Note that CUGMEC Grant applications are due by 4:30 p.m. on August 21, 2019. For participating colleges and universities that offer the CUGMEC Program, contact yelena.bailey@state.mn.us. Read more about the [Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color Grant Program](#).

The \$750,000 appropriation for the Teacher Mentorship and Retention of Effective Teachers grants is designated for:

- Paying stipends to mentor teachers, including incentives for racially diverse mentors
- Assisting teachers from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups
- Professional learning community support across schools within and between districts
- Grants supporting licensed and non-licensed educator participation in professional development (workshops and graduate courses) related to closing opportunity and achievement gaps.

The 2019 Higher Education Omnibus bill also included additional grant funding for teachers of color including \$2.7 million per year for teacher shortage grants—\$2.2 million of which is set aside for candidates belonging to a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the teacher workforce. The bill also included \$1 million per year for a new scholarship program for student teachers belonging to racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in the teacher workforce.

Perhaps the biggest thing to happen in the 2019 Legislature with regard to diversifying the teacher workforce is what *didn't* happen: there were no significant changes to teacher licensure.

The Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) began to implement the new tiered teacher licensing system just over one year ago—which offers additional pathways to licensure outside the traditional pathways. Legislation was introduced during the 2019 session that would have greatly restricted the new pathways and impacted the ability of school districts to diversify their teaching ranks but the changes were not included in the final bill.