

December 2019  
vol 17 ♦ no 3

## December 6, 2019 Board of Directors Meeting

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

## December 13, 2019 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

## January 10, 2020 Board of Directors Meeting

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

## January 31, 2020 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

## AMSD's Mission

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



Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts

## Collaboration Drives Success of Mahtomedi's Wellness Initiative

During the 2018-19 school year, Mahtomedi Public Schools engaged teachers, staff, students, and community members in a process to develop a new strategic plan. One of the key components identified to realize our new mission is that "We will ensure the social and emotional well-being of each student with an emphasis on mental wellness." Simultaneously during this time, students were inspiring adults to action. A peer-to-peer mental health awareness program at Mahtomedi Middle School led by students Grace Newman and Teri Schifsky took place. Our Student Leadership Council at the High School worked on initiatives to reduce the stigma of mental health and gathered students for an all-school assembly where they heard from peers and alumni about their stories of remarkable resilience in working through mental health challenges. Each story was unique as was their journey to recovery. Their vulnerability in coming before their peers gave messages of hope that "it will get better" and that others are ready and willing to help you because "you are not alone." The combination of these events put in motion the call for collaboration and our community answered the call with unwavering support.



Grace Newman and Teri Schifsky, students at Mahtomedi Middle School, organized and facilitated a Mental Wellness month for their peers during the 2018-19 school year. The students were recognized for their achievement by Principal Mike Neubeck and the Mahtomedi School Board.

Mahtomedi's greater community demonstrated their commitment to mental wellness through the Mahtomedi Area Educational Foundation (MAEF) Fund-A-Need (FAN). Each year, as part of the Legacy Night celebration, the MAEF Board of Trustees selects an innovative educational proposal that has the potential to impact students of all ages. At the annual Legacy Night, MAEF raised over \$56,000 to assist the district in providing mental health supports through the Zephyr Wellness Program. The funds now support the school district's goal to improve mental wellness for all Mahtomedi students through a community conversation series, staff development to support student wellness, and co-located mental health services in all of our school buildings.

Collaborating with the professional experts in the Twin Cities and in our own community have strengthened the community conversation series we've brought to families and educators this year. We worked with our own staff and those in Washington County to discuss the difference between age-appropriate expected behaviors and common behavioral signs that may benefit from professional mental health support and how to access mental health support in Washington County

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## From the Chair

Thank you to everyone who attended AMSD's annual policy conference on November 13. The theme of the conference, "Building Community Bridges" was based on one of the strategies in the Reimagine Minnesota Roadmap. As this month's research article highlights, we were honored to have two excellent presentations including a panel of parent evaluators who shared their experiences, challenges and successes in implementing the Minneapolis School District's innovative Parent Participatory Evaluation program. It was a great learning experience for all who attended!

I encourage AMSD members and legislators to mark your calendar for AMSD's annual Session Preview which will be held on Friday, February 7 from 7:30 - 10 a.m. at the Quora Education Center in Little Canada. Further details will be forthcoming. Happy Holidays!

*Andrea Cuene, school board member, Wayzata Public Schools, is chair of AMSD.*

# Mahtomedi Public Schools: Supporting Student Wellness

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and at Mahtomedi Public Schools. We had staff from the Minnesota Department of Health and our own School Resource Officer discuss with educators and families the impact of vaping on student wellness and presenters reviewed common questions, what to do if you think your child is engaging in the behavior, and how to seek support. Starting in January 2020, our speaker series will include presentations on social media self-regulation, substance use, emotional support for well-being, and empathy. We've also partnered with our nutrition services as well as local restaurants to provide meals during these events, our Community Education staff and our Student Leadership Council students provide childcare, and we offer Continuing Education Credit to our educators who attend the information sessions.

Collaborating with North Homes Children and Family Services has made it possible for our district to offer mental health services in all four of our school buildings, giving access to students in early childhood through 12th grade. Only three months into the school year and close to 70 students district-wide are currently accessing mental health services or in the process of receiving services, which means that students are now able to access mental health services during the day instead of at another time or not at all. Families use their health insurance or medical assistance to pay for the services and funding through the MAEF grant is used to help families who need additional support for paying for services.

During the 2018-19 school year, we conducted a mental health survey with district families and 80 percent of the families who responded to the survey said they would access mental health services if it was offered in our school buildings. Families indicated that they were not accessing mental health services because of waitlists, schedules, child refusal, and insurance issues. Respondents to the survey shared the following:

- "Finding appropriate providers is extremely difficult. In addition, trying to schedule appointments outside of school adds stress to an already stressful situation."
- "Currently, my child does not have a mental health diagnosis and does not need these services. However, I think this is important support to have at the school. It will help her classmates that do have needs and also will be available should she develop needs for mental health support."
- "I have often wished this was possible, as adding in driving to appointments to homework-filled evenings for a kid who is already struggling hasn't worked for us."

We know that students may experience mental health related-issues at any point during their e-12 education and we wanted to support our educators and staff with training and skills to respond to those issues. All elementary licensed staff and para-professionals at Mahtomedi Public Schools have received training in adverse childhood experiences and the trauma-informed classroom, secondary staff will be trained in January 2020. Professional Learning Communities at the district's elementary schools have teams of 12-14 staff members who are working on discussing the impact of trauma on learning and exploring strategies to provide appropriate supports to students.



Mahtomedi High School students participated alongside 1,200 metro public school students to share their voices about the future of education at the Minnesota Student Conference on October 21.



Close to 100 families and staff members from Mahtomedi Public Schools gathered on October 15 to discuss mental health. Members of the Mahtomedi High School Student Leadership Council assisted in the free childcare program so parents could attend the event.

Intentional action on wellness issues in our district demanded collaboration within and outside our school community. This collaboration has driven the success of the initiative thus far and has served to inspire more ideas and ways we can support our students, staff, and community. Inspired by the conversation and format of the AMSD-sponsored Student Conference, students at Mahtomedi Public Schools will soon engage in student-facilitated conversations about wellness topics. In addition to engaging students, the next step in the program will be to explore more ways to support the mental health of staff.

"The Zephyr Wellness Program has shown us that exploring our staff's mental health needs is just as critical and we look forward to finding new ways that we can expand to reach staff," shared Director of Student Support Tony Pierce. "When we started our wellness initiative, it was in response to what our community, students and staff had identified at the time. We knew once we started, and our collaborations grew and deepened, more voices would be included to define how we ensure staff and student wellness. We look forward to exploring what's possible with this

program in the future." shared Barb Duffrin, Superintendent at Mahtomedi Public Schools.

*This month's member spotlight was submitted by Alice Seuffert, Communications Specialist, Mahtomedi Public Schools.*



# 2019 Conference: Communication is Key

Use plain language to explain complicated financial matters. Avoid business jargon like “productivity” and “deficits.” Be prepared to answer “why” your school district is making a choice — the why always coming back to: for the local children.

These were just a few suggestions on how to simplify school budget communication to parents, from [Dr. Marguerite Roza](#), a leading national expert on public K-12 education finance. Dr. Roza, who holds a PhD in education economics and leads the [Edunomics Lab on Education Finance](#) at Georgetown University, specializes in research on quantitative policy analysis, particularly in the area of education finance. Prior to her work at Georgetown, she was a Senior Economic Advisor to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and is the author of the highly regarded education finance book, “Educational Economics: Where Do School Funds Go?”

Roza was the keynote speaker at the annual AMSD policy conference on Wednesday, Nov. 13, which drew more than 130 education leaders, parents and community leaders to the University of Minnesota’s Continuing Education Conference Center in Saint Paul.

The theme of the conference was “Building Community Bridges,” [one of the nine key strategies in the AMSD Reimagine Minnesota plan](#).

Dr. Roza’s message — that simplifying school budget communication can increase public transparency and support for local schools — couldn’t come at a more important time. New requirements under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandate that all states and local school districts report per-pupil expenditure data at the school level. Specifically ESSA Title I, Part E states:

“The per-pupil expenditures of Federal, State, and local funds, including actual personnel expenditures and actual nonpersonnel expenditures of Federal, State, and local funds, disaggregated by source of funds, for each local educational agency and each school in the State for the preceding fiscal year.”

While Dr. Roza said several states are still preparing this data, she noted Minnesota per-school spending is currently available on the [Minnesota Department of Education website](#) — which the [Edunomics Lab also explains in detail](#) as well.

Dr. Roza shared effective key messaging tips that break down barriers to understanding district budgets: How to effectively focus on student impact, how to keep the conversation local, and how communicating specific dollar amounts can demonstrate that the districts are being thoughtful in their budget choices.



Dr. Marguerite Roza, professor of education economics with Georgetown University, speaks at the AMSD annual policy conference on Nov. 13, 2019.



Celina Martina, executive director of engagement and external relations for Minneapolis Public Schools leads a panel discussion with Chief of Accountability, Research and Equity Eric Moore and Minneapolis parent Sarah Washington.

Simplifying school budgets isn’t the only ingredient in the recipe for public support, of course — which was the other key point of this year’s conference, from Minneapolis Public Schools: “Parents as Partners.”

In 2018, MPS embarked on a new initiative called “parent participatory evaluation” to specifically improve its engagement — and communication — with parents from the Somali, Native American, African American, Hispanic, and Hmong communities in Minneapolis. The effort proved to be such a success that it was [featured in Education Week magazine](#) one year later.

Four of the parent evaluators from these communities (Jerry Lee, Sarah Washington, Dulce de la Rosa, and Mahamed Cali), along with Minneapolis Supt. Ed Graff; Chief of Accountability, Research and Equity Eric Moore; and Celina Martina, executive director of engagement and external relations for MPS, shared the successes as well as challenges of this engagement effort.

The discussion opened with the panel members introducing themselves speaking in their native languages, without translation —

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## 2019 Conference: Engagement, Communication Can Build Community Bridges

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Minneapolis Public Schools' parent evaluators Mahamed Cali and Dulce de la Rosa take questions during the panel discussion about Minneapolis Public Schools' community engagement efforts.

before they followed up with introductions in English several minutes later.

While the panelists were then able to communicate to the audience in English for the remaining discussion, the intentional lack of an opening translator emphasized one of the panel's greatest points: That communicating with audiences in a way that their audiences understand is critical to building positive relationships — and that districts need to adapt to differences in language and culture if they want to build community support.

The discussion continued for more than 90 minutes, with the panelists reinforcing how community involvement is already leading to systemic change in Minneapolis.

Ultimately it's about making a longstanding commitment to your community, said Supt. Graff.

"They are our critical supporters," Graff said, referencing parents and the panel. "They are the people who are saying we want to work together and we support you. It's our kids you're talking about, and our community."

A link to a full recording of the Minneapolis presentation is available on the AMSD website:

<https://www.amsd.org/mps2019conference>

Additional material is also available on the site at:

<https://www.amsd.org/conference2019/>

Response to the half-day conference was overwhelmingly positive.

"Implementing Dr. Roza's recommendations is a great start," wrote one respondent to the post-conference survey.

"We need to get out in the community and listen! Ask great questions and use the answers to drive real decision making."

Or put another way, when asked: "What actionable steps can school districts take to build bridges to the community?"

"Host engagement opportunities that are driven by what the community needs and wants—not what is convenient for the school district."



Minneapolis Public Schools' parents Sarah Washington, Jerry Lee, Mahamed Cali, and Dulce de la Rosa interacting with conference attendees.



More than 130 education leaders, parents and community leaders attended the AMSD policy conference on Nov. 13.



Supt. Michael Munoz of Rochester Public Schools asks a question during the panel discussion with Minneapolis Public Schools about community engagement.