

ELECTION ISSUES GUIDE









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A MESSAGE FROM THE AMSD BOARD CHAIR

The COVID-19 pandemic has crystallized the reality that our public schools are the center of our communities. From delivering academic and technical instruction to providing child care to distributing meals to meeting the social and emotional needs of students, it is clear that our communities rely on our public schools. Given the enormous role our schools play in the lives of our students and families, it is critically important to find out where candidates for public office stand on specific policy and funding issues that impact public education.

This guide details important issues facing PreK-12 public education in Minnesota and will help you understand some of the challenges facing school districts. This guide:

- Outlines recent legislative action
- Provides information and tools to evaluate candidates' positions on education issues
- Offers sample questions to pose to candidates to hold our elected officials accountable

The pandemic has also exposed the racial inequities in our current education system. We must do better. AMSD superintendents have been leading the Reimagine Minnesota initiative to address our racial disparities. However, ensuring that each and every student receives an equitable and excellent education must be the collective responsibility of state policymakers and educators. Minnesota's future prosperity depends on our ability to meet the challenges facing our students and families including:

- Language barriers
- Growing economic insecurity



Increasing special education needs

Our public education system must continually adapt to educate a workforce in an economy that requires workers who are nimble, lifelong learners and adept communicators. Our future, our kids, our economy and our democracy are all strengthened by a strong public education system.

We encourage you to share this guide with candidates and community members in your district — we hope it will help you understand the expectations that have been placed on our public schools and the critical role policymakers play to ensure every child reaches their full potential.

AMSD Board Chair Curtis Johnson is a school board member from Roseville Area Schools.

AMSD ELECTION RESOURCES

A MSD urges citizens concerned about public education to become familiar with the local issues and challenges in their school district. AMSD is also available to political candidates to assist with answering questions related to education policy and funding issues. Please contact Scott Croonquist, AMSD executive director, at 612-430-7811 or scroonquist@amsd.org with questions.





EXPECTATIONS FOR **PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Federal and state policymakers have established ambitious goals and expectations for our public schools including ensuring that each and every student is college and career ready upon graduation from high school. This is a goal we must strive to reach to ensure Minnesota has the highly-educated workforce we need to compete in the global economy. State policymakers must provide adequate, equitable and sustainable resources so our schools can meet the ambitious goals and expectations they have established including:

- All students are prepared for Kindergarten.
- All students achieve reading proficiency by the end of third grade.
- Achievement gaps are closed among racial and ethnic groups of students, students living in poverty, and students receiving special education services.
- All students graduate from high school.
- All students graduate prepared for college or career.

2019-20 FACTS ABOUT MINNESOTA EDUCATION

K-12 Enrollment: 893,203

2019 Graduation Rate: 83.7 percent

Percent of Students Eligible for Free or

Reduced-Price Lunch: 35.8 percent

Students Receiving Special Education

Services: 16.6 percent

Percent of English learners: 8.5 percent Homeless: 1 percent

Achieving these goals requires a sustained commitment by state policymakers including addressing critical issues such as:

- Increasing the basic formula by at least the rate of inflation each year.
- Providing the funding necessary to deliver important and mandated special education and English learner programming.
- Increasing referendum equalization to address property tax and funding disparities.
- Creating incentives and alternatives to attract and retain teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas.



RECENT LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION ACTION

Why is it important to become informed about political candidates in your community? Those who are elected will make critical policy and funding decisions that impact your schools and your community. The following investments and policy changes were approved during the 2019 and 2020 sessions:

2020

COVID-19 legislation.

Legislation passed in the 2020 special session included several provisions related to the COVID-19 pandemic to try to mitigate negative impacts on students, staff and school districts including:

- For the 2019-20 school year, the required number of days of service for probationary teachers was adjusted to reflect the number of canceled days due to closures for COVID-19 related reasons.
- Requires the Commissioner of Education to prioritize CARES Act funding to schools to help districts comply with Governor's Executive Orders related to K-12 schools. This includes:
 - \$140 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ESSER) funds to be used in areas such as increasing access to



technology for K-12 students to assist their learning; summer school programming for students who need support over the summer months; and wrap-around supports like those students would receive in a full-service community school. \$43 million in the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) fund to be used on services such as access to supports to reduce child care costs for working families who are essential workers; increased funding for emergency child care grants to expand relief and supports for those remaining open to care for children of essential workers, including school-age programs who help meet the needs for care during the summer; and flexibilities for family child care providers serving lower income working families to continue to fund absent days. (cont'd)



RECENT LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION ACTION

2020

COVID-19 legislation (cont'd).

- Updated state testing and Achievement and Integration funds to reflect canceling of MCAs and enrollment changes.
- Allowed districts to code special education staff as special education costs even when they are not providing special education services.
- Gave the Commissioner the authority to provide districts with aid equal to their share of unspent state nutrition aid, recalculate career and technical aid, adult basic education aid and nonpublic pupil transportation aid.

School districts were also directed to provide free child care for essential workers through the end of the 2019-20 school year, as well as continue essential meal programs for students and families. Child care and meal programs are primarily funded through fees and that source of revenue came to a halt when school districts were directed to implement distance learning. While the federal government did provide some Coronavirus Relief funding to cover some of these costs, the funding was not sufficient causing additional budget challenges for school districts. **Referendum notices.** Extended the timeline for sending the required referendum notice from 30 to 45 days prior to the election, to align the delivery of referendum notices with the start of early voting.

Mandate on compensatory funding/ extended time. Repealed requirements that an increasing share of compensatory revenue be set aside for extended time activities.

Mental health training. Mental illness training required for teachers with a Tier I and Tier 2 license to expand critical awareness on student trauma and needed supports.

PreK discipline and expulsion. Districts are required to exhaust nonexclusionary discipline resources — including referrals for needed support services, parent education, home visits and other supportive education interventions — before allowing a disciplinary dismissal for PreK students, and then limit expulsions and exclusions. This is significant legislation, given that data has repeatedly shown children of color are disproportionately disciplined.



RECENT LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION ACTION

2019

Formula Increase.

• General Education Formula Funding increase of 2 percent per year for a cost of just under \$389 million.

Special Education.

 Increased special education funding by just under \$91 million. Added a new component to the special 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 legislation also reduced the portion of unreimbursed special education costs billed back to the resident district.

Voluntary PreK.

Provided funding to continue the 4,000
 VPK seats for 2 more years at a cost of just under \$47 million.

Safe Schools.

 One-time safe schools supplemental aid of approximately \$30 million, approximately \$34.70 per FY18 AADM for each school district.



Referendum equalization.

 The 2019 Omnibus Tax Bill included \$9 million for referendum equalization to increase the Tier 2 equalizing factor from \$510,000 to \$567,000.

While these were significant accomplishments, important work remains. Because this most recent legislation did not tie the basic funding formula to inflation, and the Special Education Cross-Subsidy continues to challenge districts, education funding remains critical. English learner programs are severely under-funded. In addition, our school districts continue to depend on revenue from operating and technology referenda for resources needed to provide students basic programs and opportunities needed to succeed.



EDUCATION FUNDING

The complicated nature of the education funding system can lead to an inaccurate picture of the state of funding for school districts in Minnesota. Some examples include:

Pupil and program growth.

 The Minnesota Legislature passes education spending bills once every two years. But how that amount is spent year-over-year can vary greatly — and can lead to a grossly distorted view of education funding.

Most education programs are funded on a per-pupil basis. In other words, when the number of students served in our schools increases, the amount the state spends on education increases. That's why an overall increase in state spending does not necessarily translate into additional revenue for every school district. Likewise, when students in a given district are in need of services, such as special education or English learner, those districts receive additional funding for those students.

Categorical funding.

• While general funding is often distributed to school districts with few strings attached, categorical funding comes with explicit direction on how they must be



spent. Increases in funding for specific programs, such as preK, can be very beneficial and provide opportunities for students, but generally cannot be used for other general education purposes.



EDUCATION FUNDING



Unfunded mandates.

 Sometimes, the legislature passes laws imposing new requirements on school districts — but then does not provide funding to pay for those mandates.
 Examples include the principal and teacher evaluations requirements, and the Health Insurance Transparency Act.
 While these are important issues, school districts have had to use existing general education revenue to pay additional costs to implement the new programs and mandates. The following six education funding facts provide some context to the school funding climate in Minnesota per the points above.

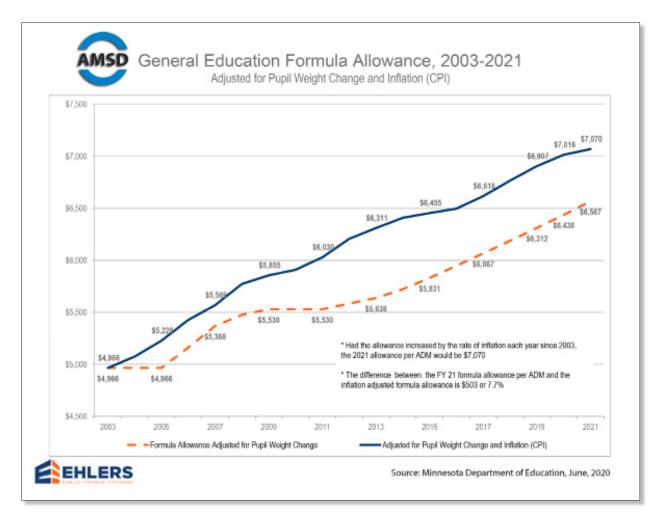
The data highlights the funding trends and helps explain some of the cost drivers challenging school districts' budgets.

It also helps explain why school districts have been making budget adjustments in recent years that include layoffs, increased class sizes and higher activity fees.



EDUCATION FUNDING

THE BASIC EDUCATION FORMULA CONTINUES TO LAG BEHIND INFLATION

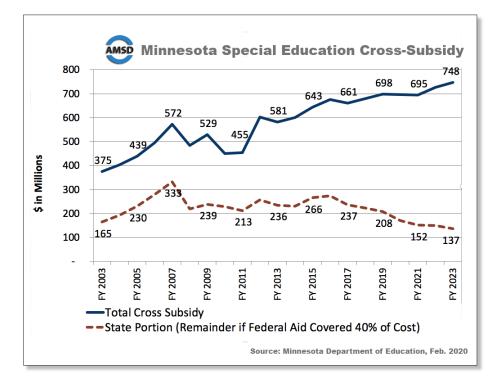


Basic education revenue is the primary source of general operating funds for school districts. Between 2003 and 2020, the basic formula has lost ground to inflation. The basic funding formula would be \$503 per pupil higher for 2021 if it had simply kept up with inflation.



EDUCATION FUNDING

THE STATE FALLS FAR SHORT OF PAYING FOR ITS SPECIAL EDUCATION MANDATES



In 1975, the federal government passed landmark legislation requiring states to provide a "free and appropriate education to special education students." This historic legislation ended years of discrimination against students with physical and cognitive disabilities. However, the state and federal governments have never provided the funding necessary to serve our special education students. Consequently, school districts are forced to use money meant for regular classroom instruction to make up the difference. That difference is known as the "cross-subsidy." According to the Minnesota Department of Education's FY2018 cross-subsidy report data, special education costs exceeded state and federal special education aid by almost \$441 million for AMSD member districts (Source: BBP data). The statewide cross-subsidy was \$698 million in FY 2019 and is projected to grow to \$748 million by FY 2023.

There is a common misperception that the crosssubsidy is strictly due to the failure of the federal government to meet its obligation. As the chart above shows, the cross-subsidy is projected to be \$152 million in FY 2021 even if the federal government met its goal of covering 40 percent of the cost.



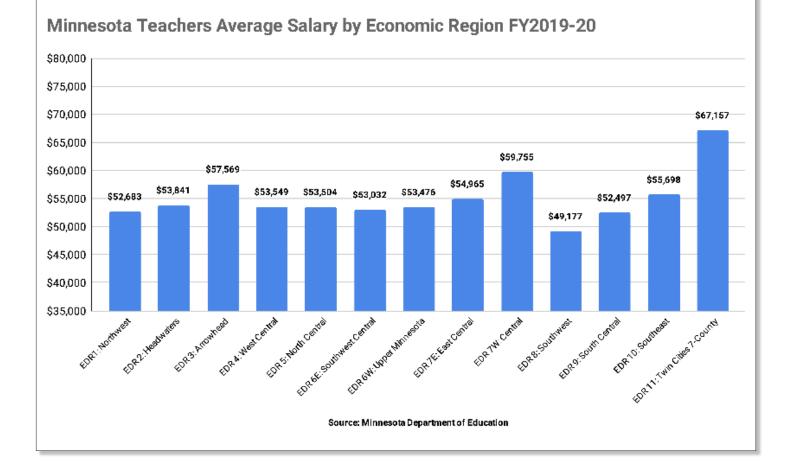
EDUCATION FUNDING

GEOGRAPHIC OPERATING COST DIFFERENTIALS

Metropolitan school districts face significantly higher labor costs than their rural counterparts. Unlike many states, Minnesota's education funding formula does not recognize the geographic wage differentials.

A 2014 University of Minnesota study showed that there is a 41 percent difference in costs faced by school districts in regions that command the highest and lowest wages.

Consequently, metro school districts are heavily reliant on passing operating referenda to provide basic programs and services for their students. However, these referenda have a widely different impact on local property taxpayers depending on the property tax wealth of the school district.





EDUCATION FUNDING

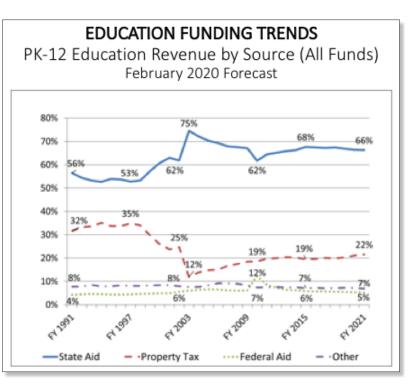
THE SCHOOL PROPERTY TAX SYSTEM IS INEQUITABLE

Minnesota's education funding system is based on a state and local partnership to provide the resources and opportunities our students need throughout their preK–12 experience. This is what prepares them to graduate from high school ready for college or career.

Local property taxes provide about 21 percent of the revenue for Minnesota school districts – a level that has been fairly constant for several years. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, the State share of education revenue has risen from 62 percent in FY 2011 to a projected 67 percent in 2021.

Districts rely on school levies just to maintain current programs or to reduce budget cuts. Operating referenda provide resources for basic, essential services and programs for students. School districts also rely on capital projects referenda to provide the technology their students need in today's digital world and capital bond referenda to build and maintain safe and secure facilities for students, staff and the public.

Because Minnesota's education funding system does not recognize the significantly higher labor costs between regions, metro districts are heavily dependent on voter-approved operating referenda. This reliance creates inequities for



school districts, students and taxpayers.

Homeowners who live in comparably valued homes, and who pay similar amounts in property taxes, do not always generate a similar level of funding for their school district. Some school districts generate three and four times more than other school districts due to variations in property tax base. Districts with more commercial/industrial property are able to spread out property taxes and reduce the tax burden on their homeowners. It is vital that the Governor and legislators address funding and property tax disparities.



EDUCATION FUNDING

THE STATE IS NOT PROVIDING SUFFICIENT RESOURCES TO EDUCATE OUR ENGLISH LEARNERS

- According to the Department of Education's special population report, there were more than 76,000 students who were eligible for English learner services in Minnesota in the 2019-2020 school year. More than 60 percent of these students attended school in an AMSD member school district. Statewide, the percent of English learners has increased from 6.5 percent to 8.5 percent since 2003. The statewide number of students who were English learners grew from 3.2 percent in 1997-98 to 8.5 percent in 2019-20 according to the Minnesota Department of Education.
- Data from the Minnesota State Demographic Center in 2020 finds that 11.7 percent of Minnesotans speak a language other than English at home.
- In 2018-19, AMSD school districts spent more than \$129 million on services for English learners but received just \$36 million in English learner funding. In other words, AMSD school districts redirected nearly \$93 million in general education revenue to provide important services to English learners.

MORE STUDENTS HAVE SIGNIFICANT NEEDS AND CHALLENGES REQUIRING SCHOOLS TO PROVIDE MORE SERVICES

Economic disparity.

 Student eligibility for the free and reduced price lunch program is based on family income.
 For FY 2020-21, a student from a family of 4 is eligible for the program if the family income is at or below \$34,060 (130 percent of the federal poverty level). A student from a family of 4 qualifies for the reduced price lunch program if family income is at or below \$48,470 (185 percent of the federal poverty level).

English proficiency.

• Students who are English learners or do not speak English as their primary language at

home often need translation or additional resources in classrooms.

Homelessness.

2015-2016 was the first year the Minnesota
 Department of Education started tracking
 Homeless students for school districts.

Special education IEPs.

 Special education students have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and receive individualized instruction based on unique goals and objectives.



QUESTIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES

EDUCATION FUNDING

- What are your education budget priorities for the upcoming budget session?
- Do you believe the education funding formula should recognize the higher cost of labor in the metropolitan area?
- Do you support increasing operating referendum equalization to address these inequities?
- In the coming year, school districts will be forced to spend almost \$700 million of funds meant for regular classroom instruction on mandated special education programs. Will you support significantly increasing special education funding to reduce the cross-subsidy?

VOUCHERS

- Do you support vouchers, expanded tax credits or other taxpayer subsidies for non-public schools?
- Should non-public schools that receive taxpayer funding be required to comply with state mandates, held accountable for how taxpayer dollars are spent and be open to all students?

LOCAL CONTROL AND WORKING WITH LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD(S)

- If elected/re-elected, how will you work with your local school district(s) to address critical education funding and policy issues?
- Do you support granting levy authority to locally-elected school boards to help stabilize education funding?
- Do you support allowing locallyelected school boards to renew an existing operating referendum by a majority vote of the school board after a public hearing?
- Do you support reducing mandates and encouraging innovation for school districts?
- Do you support allowing locally-elected boards to establish the school calendar that best meets the needs of their students and families?





WHERE DO YOU START?



- Meet with your superintendent(s).
- Meet with school board members.
- Review the AMSD resources included in this guide.
- Attend community candidate forums.
- When candidates call or knock on your door, ask questions.
- Write or call local candidates and ask them about their position on education issues that matter to you.
- Become involved with your local Legislative Action Coalition or Parent Teacher Organization.
- Stay active during the legislative session and contact your local leaders on issues that impact your school district.

MOST IMPORTANTLY: VOTE



ELECTION **RESOURCES**



LEGISLATIVE RESOURCES

- Minnesota House of Representatives: <u>http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/</u>
- Minnesota Senate: http://www.senate.mn/
- Republican House Caucus: <u>https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/Caucus/</u> <u>Home/GOP</u>
- Republican Senate Caucus: <u>https://www.senate.mn/caucus/republican</u>
- DFL House Caucus: <u>https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/Caucus/</u> <u>Home/DFL</u>
- DFL Senate Caucus: <u>https:www.senate.mn/caucus/dfl</u>

CANDIDATE INFORMATION

- League of Women Voters: <u>http://www.lwvmn.org/</u>
- MN Secretary of State: <u>http://www.sos.state.mn.us/</u>
- Candidate Filings: <u>http://candidates.sos.state.mn.us</u>



ADDITIONAL **RESOURCES**

AMSD WEB RESOURCES

- AMSD Legislative Session Information: <u>https://www.amsd.org/2021session/</u>
- AMSD Research & Charts: <u>https://www.amsd.org/document-library/</u> <u>research-statistics/</u>
- AMSD Recommended Education Reports: <u>https://www.amsd.org/document-library/</u> <u>education-reports/</u>
- AMSD Reimagine Minnesota Plan: <u>www.amsd.org/reimagineminnesota</u>



AMSD POSITION PAPERS

- Position on Assessment: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-assessment</u>
- Position on Charter Schools: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-</u> <u>charters</u>
- Position on Compensatory Revenue: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-</u> <u>compensatory</u>
- Position on Early Childhood Education: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-</u> <u>earlyeducation</u>
- Position on Employee Health Insurance: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-</u> insurance
- Position on English Learner Funding: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-</u> englishlearner
- Position on Facilities Funding: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-facilitiesfunding</u>
- **Position on Guns on School Property:** <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-guns</u>

- Position on Mandates and Local Control: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-</u> <u>mandates</u>
- Position on Special Education: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-specialeducation</u>
- Position on Vouchers: <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-vouchers</u>
- **Position on Tiered Licensure:** <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-paper-</u> <u>tiered-licensure-for-teachers/</u>
- **Position on Referendum Renewals:** <u>https://www.amsd.org/doc/position-paper-</u> <u>school-board-renewal-of-an-operating-</u> <u>referendum/</u>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Minnesota Department of Education
 <u>http://education.mn.gov</u>
- Boards, Working Groups and Task Forces: <u>https://education.mn.gov/MDE/about/adv/</u>
- Parent and Educator Data Center: <u>https://education.mn.gov/MDE/Data/</u>



REMAGNE MINNESOTA

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WORK OF AMSD SUPERINTENDENTS TO ADDRESS EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

- In March 2016, a group of metropolitan school district superintendents met to discuss the future of education in Minnesota. The superintendents agreed the state Constitution entitles all students, regardless of race, gender, or economic background, to attend a school that provides an equitable and excellent education that allows them to reach their full potential.
- In the backdrop of the discussions was the 2015 Cruz-Guzman v. State of Minnesota lawsuit. The suit alleges that Minnesota's system of education is not "adequate" under the state Constitution based on the segregation of students of color and students living in poverty in Minneapolis and Saint Paul schools. The plaintiffs are seeking remedies that could include busing, or the creation of a single metropolitan school district.
- Unwilling to wait for a lawsuit that could take several years, such as a similar lawsuit filed in 1995, the superintendents felt a sense of urgency—and collectively proposed a proactive education plan to create lasting equity and excellence for all students.
- The superintendents believed that educational leaders, collaborating with their students, parents, staff and communities, have the best understanding of the challenges and barriers that must be overcome.
- The superintendents asked the Association



of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) to form an ad-hoc committee to facilitate the development of the collective education plan. From January-May of 2017, AMSD conducted 12 community conversations throughout the metropolitan area. More than 3,000 students, parents, staff, business leaders, cultural leaders and community members attended the gatherings garnering more than 10,000 responses, suggestions and comments related to what could and should be done to ensure all students receive an equitable and excellent education.

 Following the community conversations, the superintendents convened teams of teachers, principals, curriculum experts and equity leaders to synthesize all of the data and input that had been gathered. The synthesis workshops led to the development of three overarching recommendations:





EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

- Effective, diverse stakeholders who use trusting relationships to create welcoming classrooms, schools and communities that meet the needs of all students and families.
- Personalized relevant education and youth development that guarantees access to rigorous learning and eliminating predictability based on race.
- Equitable resources (time, talent, funds) aligned to student needs that enable every school to "see all students" and "serve all students."
- The final phase was to develop the specific strategies needed to achieve the goals. The superintendents assembled teams that collaboratively developed nine strategies, with extensive stakeholder input to employ consistent language, visions and goals for minimizing disparities and improving access, equity and opportunities for all students.
- Since that time, Reimagine Minnesota has hosted multiple professional development opportunities for school districts, school staff, students and community members. Events have included forums on staff recruitment/retention, building community bridges, cultural competence and more.
- In summer 2019, the Minneapolis Foundation approached AMSD to begin a collaboration to provide qualitative and quantitative research to support the tenets of the Reimagine Minnesota strategies. The result was a University of Minnesota report, as well as a foundation event in December 2019 to develop action steps to achieve better equity in education.
- In October 2019, Reimagine Minnesota collaborated with Forbes Solutions and the Minneapolis Foundation again to

help present "The Student Conference," which sought student voice to inform the strategies and ways AMSD districts could further the Reimagine work.

- The result of that conference led to a report that focused on changes needed to the education to ensure equity by 2030.
- In June 2020, the Reimagine MInnesota again collaborated with the Minneapolis Foundation and Forbes Solutions, to produce "Reimagining Education in the midst of COVID-19," a digital conference designed to address the challenges with distance learning as it relates to equity.
- The collaborative nature of the vision demonstrates that multiple school districts can work together and identify strategies to improve access, equity and opportunities for all students.
- Reimagine Minnesota recognizes each district is independent and has unique needs and challenges, and it is not a one-size-fits-all solution to address the identified challenges.
- School leaders need to continue to work collaboratively and share ideas and best practices.
- Educational leaders and educators need to challenge traditional approaches to education to ensure equity and excellence for all students.
- Accomplishing this vision will require bold leadership from our state policy makers and resources not currently provided by the State.



MEMBER DISTRICTS

Anoka-Hennepin School District • **Bloomington Public Schools** Brooklyn Center Community Schools • Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191 • Columbia Heights Public Schools • Eastern Carver County Schools • Eden Prairie Schools • Edina Public Schools • Elk River School District ISD #728 • Equity Alliance MN • Farmington Area Public Schools • Fridley Public Schools • Hastings Public Schools • Hopkins Public Schools • Intermediate School District #287 • Intermediate School District #917 • Inver Grove Heights Schools • Lakeville Area Public Schools •

Mahtomedi Public Schools • Metro ECSU · 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 • 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 • Spring Lake Park Schools • St. Anthony-New Brighton Independent School District • St. Cloud Area School District 742 • St. Louis Park Public Schools • Saint Paul Public Schools • Stillwater Area Public Schools • Wayzata Public Schools • West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan School District • Westonka Public Schools • White Bear Lake Area Schools

ABOUT AMSD

n existence since 1974, AMSD currently represents 42 greater metropolitan area school districts. 5 intermediate/ cooperative districts and 2 integration districts enrolling more than half of all public school students in Minnesota. The mission of AMSD is to advocate for metropolitan school districts and advance legislation that supports student achievement. AMSD helps greater metropolitan area school districts articulate challenges and needs to state policymakers. AMSD's members include urban, suburban and regional



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center school districts. Because of its broad-based membership, AMSD is in a unique position to identify the needs of metropolitan area school districts and seek meaningful policy changes to help districts meet those needs.

