

November 2020  
vol 18 ♦ no 2

## Fridley Middle School's Peer-to-Peer Peacemaker Program is Building Leaders

The middle school years are a critical time for growth and development in young students. Along with advancing in their academics, students at Fridley Middle School have several opportunities to learn and develop leadership skills that will continue to serve them beyond their primary school years. Capitalizing on research-based strategies on the collective power of peer influence in young lives, the school's Assistant Principal Christopheraaron Deanes has developed a program that challenges students to think outside of the box - while teaching them lifelong skills of analysis and critical thinking, mediation techniques, and the importance of contributing to the greater good.



Fridley Middle School Assistant Principal Christopheraaron Deanes leads a peacemakers training session during students' WIN enrichment time.

Through the newly implemented peacemakers program, a trained group of 7th and 8th student leaders are helping their younger peers, 5th and 6th grade students, to work together to resolve everyday disputes - bringing arguments and disagreements to a mutually beneficial understanding.

Students collectively worked on an IMPACT STATEMENT for the peacemakers group, created for the purpose of stating the program's intention and what they are doing to make a positive effect in their school community. "The *Restorative Youth Leaders* are building *Restorative Practices* in our school by facilitating mediations with 5th and 6th grade students. We believe that

we, as leaders here at Fridley Middle School, have the power to navigate the culture of our school with our peers and accept ownership of leading our generation in building empathy and equity."

For 8th grader Estevan Castano, who is a member of the group, there is a sense of pride when he contributes to positivity in the school. "I'm really proud to be a peacemaker," said Castano. "We learn to better understand people socially and emotionally, and help sort out feelings, which can help you think about your own. It's given me a new perspective. Being part of this makes me feel accomplished and happy to be helping others in my school."

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### November 20, 2020\* Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.  
Room 301  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

### December 4, 2020\* Board of Directors Meeting

7:00 a.m.  
Quora Education Center  
NE Metro 916  
Little Canada

### December 18, 2020\* Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m.  
Room 301  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

**\*Information will be distributed about whether these meetings will be held in person or remotely.**

## 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

While there will be many new faces at the State Capitol in the 2021 legislative session, the preliminary election results show that the overall picture will change very little. Republicans retained their majority in the Senate and Democrats kept control of the House of Representatives - albeit by narrowed margins. Prior to the election, Republican controlled the Senate 35 - 32 and the Democrats controlled the House 75 - 59. Those margins have been reduced to 34 - 33 and 70 - 64 respectively. I encourage AMSD members to reach out to your newly elected legislators to congratulate them on their election and invite them to join you for AMSD's [2021 Session Preview](#) which will be held on Friday, January 8 from 8 - 10 a.m. The preview will be held remotely via Zoom. Further details will be shared in the coming days. Thank you in advance for your continued advocacy for our schools!

*Curtis Johnson, school board member, Roseville Area Schools, is chair of AMSD.*

# Peer Mediation Builds Student Conflict Resolution Skills Through Real-life Practices

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The program's purpose is to build and empower student leaders, allow students to take ownership of their school, and teach the skills to resolve conflict and come to a collective agreement.

"The focus on restorative practice isn't possible as an approach without student buy-in," said Deanes, who spearheaded the program this past fall. "The goal of the peacemakers' program is to allow students to build social capital with peers. As leaders here at Fridley Middle School, they have the power to navigate the culture of our school with peers, accept ownership of leading their generation, and building empathy and equity."

That empathy piece, Deanes added, is essential. "Empathy is a key part of being a responsible, kind, caring student at school, or anywhere in the community. It allows people to not only understand how someone is feeling, but also letting others know that we care about and value them."

During students' WIN (What I Need) enrichment time, the group meets once a week to learn mediation skills and methods through a curriculum written by Deanes, who has extensive experience in restorative practices in educational settings. With guidance from Nancy Riesteberg, School Climate Specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education, Deanes designed programming tailored to fit the needs at Fridley Middle School.

"Our older students *want* to be leaders, we just need to encourage, empower and support them," said Deanes. "We want to give our students the understanding that they can do something better for their peers."

During training sessions, students review mediation questions and how to ask them, how to unbiasedly approach situations, and learn how to practice patience, empathy and kindness while facilitating a mediation.

Typically, disagreements at school stem from miscommunication, misunderstanding, or misperception - and can oftentimes benefit from peer-to-peer mediation. In the restorative peacemakers model, two trained peacemakers help two younger peers resolve their issue and come to a collective agreement, under the supervision of an adult advisor. The effects are two-fold: 5th and 6th grade students are able to talk and think through their conflicting issues, discuss the dispute and resolution with an older, but close-in-age peer who may relate to the situation, and take responsibility for their actions. All the while, the 7th and 8th grade peacemakers are benefitting - taking ownership of their school, building leadership skills, pride and confidence, and rising to their highest potential.

According to 7th grade student Dream Robinson, working on the peacemakers team has boosted her self-confidence, while contributing to the school as a whole. "Honestly, it makes me feel so good to know that I'm helping solve problems for other people," said Robinson. "It makes me feel like a better person. I feel good knowing that I can solve issues, and it helps me solve my own sometimes."

Eighth grader Zoe Diederich echoed a similar sentiment. "It's empowering to have the opportunity to help students solve their issues and fix problems," said Diederich. "And I feel like I see the benefits around our school with the peacemaker team - there's just more kindness around the entire school."

Additionally, peer mediation builds student conflict resolution skills through real-life practices. Mediation skills come alive with power and relevancy, as solving real conflicts encourage the transfer of skills to life outside of school.

"The program is new and we are excited to see it continue to grow," said Principal Amy Cochran. "Students who are participating are not only learning how to help others, but they're building skills within themselves that they apply to their own lives. It's an incredible opportunity for our students to take on that leadership role, feel the pride of being a peacemaker, and think differently."

*This month's member spotlight was submitted by Jael McLemore, Director of Communications and Community Relations, Fridley Public Schools.*



The Fridley Middle School Peacemakers team. Top row, l to r: Patricia Anthony-Kugmeh, Estevan Castano, Dylan Loven, Zoe Diederich, Chloe Williams. Bottom row, l to r: Mercy Jargbahson, Kormasa Jallah, and Dream Robinson.

## School Finance Working Group Releases Comprehensive Funding Recommendations

The School Finance Working Group, convened by Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker a year ago, has presented its plan for reforming Minnesota’s education funding system. The plan, “80-20-10: Bringing Equity to Minnesota’s School Finance System,” is designed to bring equity to Minnesota’s school finance system and address the significant, and chronic, underfunding of Minnesota public schools.

The recommendations are the result of work by the 24 education leaders, parents and community members who served on the working group and dozens more who served on various working groups on specific issues. The working group was charged to identify the most impactful education funding challenges facing Minnesota schools. The group presented its findings, and recommended solutions, to Commissioner Ricker on Nov. 5.

In its report, the group recommends 46 separate strategies and investments that it believes would create more equitable funding streams for school districts across the state. North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale Supt. Christine Osorio and Cheryl Johnson, executive director of the Goodhue County Education District served as the group’s co-chairs. “We all collectively believe it’s time to prioritize education funding in Minnesota,” Osorio told the group in its final meeting, held remotely. “We know the state’s financial situation is very different from when we first convened. We are well aware there may be some who think this is not feasible. But this report is comprehensive, and this is a snapshot that addresses our needs at this point in time.”

Once given its goal to identify the major obstacles to adequately fund education, the group broke its priorities into three general buckets:

- Immediate budget challenges (such as short-term funding for Community Education; nutrition services; short-term construction costs for health safety concerns, etc.);
- Budget challenges likely to face districts in Fall 2020 (regardless if schools resumed in person or via distance learning);
- Longer-term budget challenges that will arise directly from the crisis, such as future investment in technology, additional distance learning challenges, mental health supports and more.

The group then broke into several subcommittees to study 10 “pressure points” in greater depth — specific categories including the basic formula; cross-subsidies; funding streams that are not equally available to all school districts; property tax equalization and school finance system complexity.

Originally the group had planned to rank and prioritize its findings, but the group in its October vote decided to include all of its findings in the final report.

The School Finance Working Group’s recommendations couldn’t come at a more critical time. The report notes that education funding has lost considerable ground to inflation over the last two decades:

- General education basic revenue has lost 10 percent (\$658 per student) of its buying power compared to Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjusted inflation since 2003;
- State and local education revenue as percent of Minnesotans’ personal income has fallen from 4.4 percent in 2000 to 4.0 percent in 2021 and projected to decline to 3.9 percent by FY 2023. As a result, total state and local revenue for preK-12 education will be \$1.959 billion lower than it would be if the FY 2000 investment of 4.4 percent of personal income had been maintained;
- Since 2000, Minnesota has fallen from 17th to 19th in states’ ranking of educational spending per pupil, from 104.2 percent of the national average spending per pupil to 103.1%, and the average teacher salary has fallen from 95.2 percent to 94.3 percent of the national average.

The report’s title is founded in the group’s strongest overall consensus, which identifies “80-20-10” as reducing school districts’ reliance on state aid for basic revenue from 100 percent to 80 percent and establishing a board authorized levy, Local Education Revenue (LER), for the remaining 20 percent. The “10” refers to the percent of basic revenue that school districts could raise through local, voter-approved referendums.

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# 80-20-10 Proposal Would Stabilize Education Funding

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Basic revenue, also known as the formula allowance, is the largest component of general education revenue. The report notes that the single greatest decline in educational funding over the past 20 years has been the 10 percent (\$658) loss in general education basic revenue’s buying power compared to CPI adjusted inflation since 2003.

To address that specifically, the 80/20/10 proposal suggests that:

- Beginning in FY 23, the state should redefine basic revenue to include a state funded formula allowance and Local Education Revenue (LER) replacing the current Local Optional Revenue (LOR) and a portion of the current referendum allowance. The LER would be levied on referendum market value (RMV) and be equalized at 150 percent of the state average RMV per Resident Pupil Unit;
- 80 percent of new basic revenue would come as state aid through the basic formula allowance and 20 percent would be from the new LER. The LER would combine \$917 PPU of each district’s referendum allowance and the current \$724 PPU from LOR for a total allowance of \$1,641;
- The current referendum cap of \$1,780 would be reduced by the \$917 leaving a new standard cap of \$863 or 10 percent of basic revenue;
- Remaining referendum revenue would be equalized up to 125 percent of state average RMV per RPU, calculations for tier 1, 2 tax base replacement and LOR is eliminated;
- The standard cap would be indexed at 10 percent of basic revenue and increase when basic revenue exceeds \$8,630;
- Equity and transition revenues would be equalized at 125 percent;
- Operating capital would be equalized at 300 percent of average ANTC/student;
- The overall change in net property tax levies statewide would be zero, with a goal to minimize redistribution of levy burdens.

The 80-20-10 components are critical, the group agreed, along with several other key factors affecting education budgets which the group identified directly including:

<b>Basic Revenue Recommendations</b>	<b>Proposed Revenue Increases</b>	<b>Proposed Aid Increases</b>	<b>Proposed Levy Changes</b>
Redefine Basic Revenue	\$ 204,745,442	\$ 440,719,376	\$ (236,117.934)
Inflation for FY 21 & 22	\$ 345,395,287	\$ 308,089,256	\$ 37,311,032
Estimated FY 23 Investment	\$ 550,140,729	\$ 748,808,632	\$ (198,806,902)

Source: Minnesota Department of Education

### **Geographic cost and location differentials.**

The working group report also stresses the importance of addressing cost differences related to geographic location and district size. An important aspect of equity is the equalization of purchasing power related to labor cost differentials associated with geographic location. The report highlights research showing that uneven labor costs have the effect of uneven purchasing power with school districts in higher cost labor markets unable to purchase the same level of educational resources for the same fiscal effort.

Also important, the group determined, was the need to better fund smaller rural schools that are not able to achieve the economies of scale that larger districts realize. The working group notes that the distance between towns with schools has grown, forcing students to be on a school bus for a long period of time.

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# Plan Would Account for District Size and Geographic Cost Differences

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Small Schools Revenue Recommendations	Proposed Revenue Increase	Proposed Aid Increase	Proposed Levy Increase
Small Schools Revenue	\$ 12,851,236	\$ 4,805,867	\$ 8,045,370

Source: Minnesota Department of Education

To address these geographic related issues, the group recommends increasing Small School Revenue (SSR), and creating Location Adjustment Revenue (LAR), a new component of general education revenue, based on a Geographic Cost of Education Index (GCEI) and funded through an equalized levy.

Location Adjustment Revenue (LAR) Recommendation	Proposed Revenue Increases	Proposed Aid Increases	Proposed Levy Changes
LAR Annual Revenue	\$ 191,310,070	\$ 33,474,371	\$ 157,835,700
Referendum Adjustment Offsetting LAR	\$ (115,587,342)	\$ (12,216,401)	\$ (103,370,940)
Net LAR Revenue	\$ 80,594,203	\$ 26,129,443	\$ 54,464,760

Source: Minnesota Department of Education

### Cross-subsidies.

The report proposed to reduce significant cross subsidies in the special education and English learner programs which have long been severely underfunded by the state and federal governments. This underfunding causes school districts to redirect funds meant for general instruction to cover the shortfall.

According to the report, the special education cross subsidy is projected to grow to an average of \$843 per ADM in FY 2023 under current law. The English learner cross-subsidy is likewise challenging for school districts and the cross-subsidy has grown substantially over the years as the formula is based on fixed amounts per student which have not kept up with inflation.

### Facilities, Levies and Maintenance.

In 2015 the Legislature created Long Term Facility Maintenance Revenue (LTFMR) to support school districts' deferred maintenance and health and safety needs — but that funding came with stipulations. LTFMR could not be used for the construction of new facilities, for the purchase of portable classrooms, to finance lease purchase agreements, for energy-efficiency projects, or for violence prevention and facility security, or other minor security needs.

Districts must submit 10-year plans to MDE for approval, and have authority to bond against future LTFMR. The LTFMR allowance increased for three years from FY 2017-2019 and is now capped at \$380 per pupil. Twenty five of the largest school districts in the state were eligible for the Alternative Facilities program prior to the adoption of the LTFMR program. These districts also submit 10-year plans, but are not capped with a \$380 per pupil allowance, which has led to a large gap between the 25 largest districts and all other districts in funding for facility maintenance.

With the goal to close the gap between Alternative Facility eligible districts and all other districts within three years, the group recommends making all school districts eligible for LTFMR based on the district's 10-year facilities plan approved by the commissioner without a limit on the amount that can be raised without voter approval, consistent with current practice for the 25 districts operating under the former Alternative Facilities program.

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# Eliminating Opportunity Gaps is Focus of School Funding Plan

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## Achievement/Opportunity Gaps, racial equity, and racial equity aid.

While the group focused on addressing achievement and racial equity throughout the report, several recommendations are aimed at specifically closing the opportunity gap including:


- Compensatory Education Revenue, which is calculated for schools based on the number of students at the site eligible for free or reduced-price (FRE) meals, is often directly proportional to the percentage of students of color and measurable opportunity gaps. Compensatory revenue was reviewed by the Legislative Auditor in 2020 and the group concurred with the recommendation that the Legislature should consider broadening the factors that determine eligibility for compensatory revenue to mitigate the downsides of using prior-year counts of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch.
- Racial Equity Aid, which would address significant achievement gaps that have been linked directly to a lack of resources available to schools. (The report notes, for example, that high poverty nonwhite schools get \$13,813 per student while high poverty white schools get \$14,322 per student). The group recommends closing this opportunity gap with a significant investment to expand services for students of color and American Indian students.
- The group also recommends increasing scholarships to recruit more teacher candidates of color and American Indian teacher candidates, noting that more than one-third of Minnesota’s students are students of color or American Indian students, while 96 percent of teachers are white. The report notes that research has shown significant positive impacts of having teachers that reflect their students.

The report also includes recommendations to increase funding for full-service community schools, trauma-incentive aid, expanding early learning, and in general improving staff recruitment, retention and development.

The group estimates an investment of \$2.755 billion is needed to address its full recommendations, but ends on this note:

“While \$2.755 billion is a big investment, it is 4.6 percent of Minnesotans’ total personal income. Minnesotans supported education with 4.6 percent of personal income as recently as 1997 and exceeded that from 1992 through 1996 with investments ranging from 4.7 to 4.9 percent. This level of investment is not out of reach. It is not even outside our recent history.”

[LINK: View the School Finance Working Group report](#)



**Association of Metropolitan School Districts**  
**AMSD Referendum Elections**  
Results | November 3, 2020

School District	Referendum	Pass / Fail
Fridley Public Schools	Capital Projects levy for maintenance, technology	PASS / 67-33%
Orono Schools	Capital Project Levy / Technology	FAIL / 51-49%
Shakopee Public Schools	Operating Levy	FAIL / 54-46%