

February 2021  
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## Project SEARCH Provides Education and Training to Help Students Excel in the Workplace

**February 5, 2021**

**Board of Directors**

**Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

**February 26, 2021**

**Executive/Legislative**

**Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

**March 5, 2021**

**Board of Directors**

**Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

**March 26, 2021**

**Executive/Legislative**

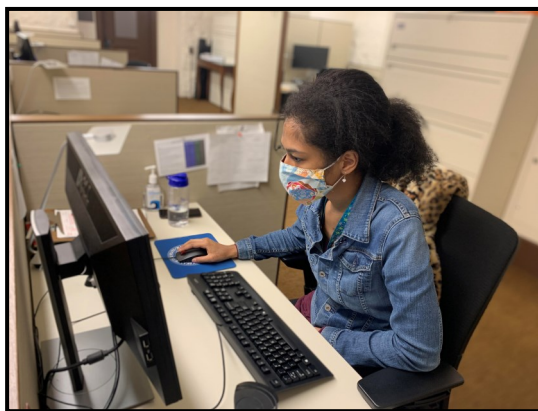
**Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

**Meetings will be conducted remotely until further notice and instructions will be sent prior to each meeting.**

### What is Project SEARCH?

Project SEARCH is an innovative employer-driven program designed to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities. It was developed at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in 1996 by Susie Rutkowski and Erin Riehle. While working at the Children’s Hospital Emergency Department, Erin recognized that a significant portion of their patient population had a developmental disability, yet rarely were those individuals hired as employees. She connected with Susie, a special education director, to create a systematic approach to train and acquire jobs for individuals with disabilities.



Sinai Thao, current Project SEARCH intern, completing data entry at the Governor’s Office.

### Project Search in Minnesota

In 2009, Project SEARCH started in Minnesota. There are currently nine host businesses, with all but two based in the Twin Cities. Per the Project SEARCH requirements, each host business must partner with four organizations (school district, a rehabilitation services organization, county social services, and a follow-along provider) to fully support their interns. The Minnesota Department of Education has also partnered with Project SEARCH since the beginning.

### About Project SEARCH interns

Project SEARCH interns are chosen annually through a rigorous application process. This process includes completing an application, a hands-on skills assessment, and an interview panel. A group of 8-10 interns

is selected per school year based on their eligibility and potential to gain competitive employment skills.

As of 2020, 256 interns have participated in and completed the Project SEARCH program in Minnesota. Of those 256 interns, 75% have acquired competitive, integrated employment. This outcome is a stark contrast to the 19.3% of people with disabilities employed throughout the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 2019). The significantly higher success rate can be directly attributed to the collaboration between educational and staff funded agencies, interns and their families, and the host business in recognizing the untapped potential of this demographic to our workforce.

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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 was pleased to see that the “Due North Education Plan” released by Governor Walz and Lt. Governor Flanagan, is nicely aligned to the Reimagine Minnesota plan developed by AMSD superintendents in 2016. The Governor noted that the Due North plan was also informed by the recommendations from the Governor’s Education Roundtable and the School Finance Working Group in addition to the MN Department of Education’s Strategic Plan. You can find all three reports here: <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/about/plan/>

If you are not familiar with the [Reimagine Minnesota](#) collective education plan, I encourage you to review it on the AMSD website. You will find the history of the plan, videos, presentations and more. Most importantly, let’s continue our work building an education system that ensures an equitable and excellent education for each and every Minnesota student.

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

# Project SEARCH Interns Acquire Competitive, Marketable, and Transferable Skills

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Part of the Project SEARCH model's success comes from the involvement of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS). VRS is a state-funded program designed to support people with disabilities to prepare for, find, and keep a job. Each intern has a VRS counselor who meets with the intern's team regularly. The team shares updates on the intern's skill progression and develops a realistic, attainable employment plan for after graduation. In addition, the community partner works to make a seamless transition from the world of education to the world of work as the intern begins the process of applying, interviewing, and obtaining a job.

After graduation, VRS continues to work with the intern until they have demonstrated stable employment for 90 days. Once the intern has shown the ability to maintain employment, their VRS case is closed. If the intern has qualified for a county worker, then the community partner can continue supporting the intern with funding to maintain employment. Access to a county worker often means access to long term funding and support both in employment and independent living.

## District 622 Project SEARCH-State of Minnesota

District 622 (North St. Paul - Maplewood - Oakdale) assumed the Project SEARCH-State of Minnesota (PS-SOM) coordination role from the Forest Lake School District in 2019, working with the Project SEARCH instructor, skills trainers and various supervisors throughout the Capitol Complex. Since 2015, PS-SOM internships have involved several departments including the Governor's Office, Veterans Services, Military Affairs, Facilities Management, among others.

Interns participate in three, ten-week internships throughout the Capitol Complex to acquire competitive, marketable, and transferable skills. Project SEARCH's goal is for each intern to graduate at the end of the year with a job that is sixteen or more hours per week, earning a competitive wage, and working in a fully integrated setting.

Department representatives attend a monthly leadership meeting to discuss past interns' successes, collaborate on behalf of current interns, and strategize on recruiting for next year. Frida Alvarez, Diversity Recruiter, and Equal Opportunity Officer from DEED, said, "Project SEARCH is an incredible team to partner with! They bring intention and inclusion into their programming and aim to provide the best for students and employers participating."

As with most educational institutions, PS-SOM has adjusted to the COVID-19 pandemic. This year's interns began the year in their classroom at the Veterans Service Building participating in internships at the Governor's Office, Grounds Crew, and Facilities Management. Job tasks included document scanning, data entry, filing, sanitizing, cleaning restrooms, and grounds maintenance. Internships were shortened to allow all interns to participate in an internship throughout the school year. As COVID-19 numbers increased, PS-SOM switched to distance learning for December 2020 and the first week in January 2021.

Currently, PS-SOM interns meet four times a week at the District 622 Education Center. While not able to participate in a traditional internship, interns have been developing skills in other ways. Working with District 622's Adult Basic Education, three interns have begun pursuing their Microsoft Office Specialist Certification. Other interns are studying for their drivers' permit, ServSafe Food Handler Certification, and Basic Computer Skills through NorthStar Digital Literacy. Project SEARCH interns will complete one hundred hours worth of mailing and paperwork for a special project for the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources in the coming weeks.

Throughout this unusual school year, interns have continued to meet and exceed their expectations both in and out of internships. Katie Borne, Project SEARCH instructor, noted, "This is truly a year like no other, and the tenacity and resilience interns have demonstrated throughout the year will be a remarkable asset to our State's workforce."

[Hear more about Project SEARCH-State of Minnesota right from the interns.](#)

*This month's member spotlight was submitted by Katie Borne, Project SEARCH Skills Instructor, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District 622.*



Denys Rivera-Landaverde, current Project SEARCH intern, mowing the lawn in front of the Minnesota State Capitol while interning as a ground crew worker.

# Governor Releases Biennial Budget Proposal

Gov. Tim Walz released his biennial budget recommendations to the Legislature on Jan. 26. The Governor proposes an increased investment of more than \$662 million for E-12 Education for the 2022-23 biennium. He proposes an additional \$150 million in one-time funding in the current fiscal year, half of which would come from federal stimulus funds, to address enrollment decline related to the COVID-19 pandemic and expanded summer learning opportunities.

Many of the Governor's budget proposals are in alignment with the [2021 AMSD platform](#), including: formula funding increases; addressing the special education cross-subsidy; English learner funding; teacher of color recruitment/retention; enhanced referendum equalization and one-time funding to mitigate the impact of pandemic related enrollment losses and provide additional summer programming in 2021.

The next step in the budget process will be the February Budget and Economic Forecast which is due out at the end of February. Following the release of the forecast, the Governor will adjust/revise his budget as needed and the House and Senate majorities will commence with developing their respective budgets.

Details of the Governor's proposed education budget with regard to AMSD's platform are listed below. The one-time state and federal funds are directed as follows:

- **COVID-19 pandemic funding.** To address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor proposes one-time funding to address the following:
  - \$25 million to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 related enrollment decline by enhancing declining enrollment revenue;
  - \$20 million for summer early learning opportunities for 4 and 5 year olds;
  - \$1 million to expand student mental health and well-being support;
  - \$5 million for community partnerships to develop mentoring/tutoring programs;
  - \$10 million for field trips and hands-on learning;
  - \$6 million for summer college for high school graduates; and
  - \$10 million for Adult Basic Education Programs.

In addition, the Governor's proposal directs \$78.347 million in one-time federal pandemic relief funds toward:

- \$57.5 million to expand the number of teachers teaching summer programs so that all districts and charter schools can provide in-person academic instruction and support during summer 2021;
- \$15.947 million to support school age care and youth programming;
- \$2.4 million to cover the cost of the extension of the application deadline for the free and reduced-price lunch program; and
- \$1.5 million for schools/entities that aren't eligible for the Title 1 formula distribution.

Key provisions in the Governor's 2022-23 biennial budget include:

- **Basic Formula Increase.** An increase to the basic school district funding formula of 1 percent the first year of the biennium (FY 22), and 2.5 percent the second (FY 23). The per-pupil formula would increase by \$66 in FY 22, and by an additional \$166 in FY 23. The formula increase accounts for \$301 million of the proposed biennial increase.
- **Special Education Cross-Subsidy / Hold Harmless.** The Governor proposes an increase of \$72.7 million for special education to prevent the statewide cross-subsidy from increasing over the biennium.
- **Teacher Recruitment and Retention.** To address the critical shortage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers, the Governor's proposed budget includes:
  - \$10 million for a statewide teacher mentoring program;
  - \$4 million to expand the Grow Your Own teacher education program; and
  - \$8 million for educator career pathways.

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## Governor Proposes Funding to Address Growing Shortfall in English Learner Program

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- **Voluntary PreK.** The Governor’s proposed budget would permanently fund the 4,000 VPK seats that are scheduled to expire at the end of this fiscal year, and provides \$40.9 million for FY 22-23 and \$43 million for FY 24-25.
- **Levies and Equalization.** The Governor’s budget includes \$93 million in FY 23 to enhance and simplify property tax equalization for the LOR (Local Optional Revenue), referendum and debt service levies, by collapsing the current two tiers of equalization levels to one.
- **English Learner Funding.** The Governor proposes an increase in EL funding of \$13.6 million to reduce the EL cross-subsidy. As the chart below shows, insufficient funding for the English Learner program has forced school districts to subsidize the program with general education revenue by an increasing amount over the last decade.
- **Student Support Personnel.** The Governor proposes \$46.964 for the biennium to support schools in hiring additional student support services personnel.
- **Full Service Community Schools.** The Governor has recommended \$10 million for FY 22-23 and \$10 million for FY 24-25 for full-service community schools, and additional grant program funding for Indian Education, Ethnic Studies, and rural school districts.

The budget documents are available on the Minnesota and Management and Budget website using the links below:

### 2021 Governor’s Minnesota Budget Recommendations

- [LINK: Governor's Recommendations by Agency](#)
- [LINK: Summary of Changes - General Fund](#)
- [LINK: Summary of Changes - Non-General Fund](#)

### Additional Documents

- [General Fund Balance Analysis - Detail](#)
- [General Fund Balance Analysis - Summary](#)
- [General Fund Pie Charts](#)
- [General Fund Balance Financial Summaries](#)
- [Healthcare Access Fund Statement](#)
  
- [VIDEO: Watch the Governor’s announcement](#)

