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## Osseo Area Schools Takes Kindergarten Recruitment Virtual—and Sees Higher Engagement

Every professional can think of an event they manage that's a well-oiled machine—a 6-page Asana checklist creates an event that's nearly identical to what's come before. That was the case for the Osseo Area Schools Kindergarten Information Fair, the district's biggest kindergarten enrollment marketing event of the year, until COVID-19 took that checklist off the table.

Faced with an interactive fall event that couldn't take place in person, District 279's communications team created an innovative virtual approach that has led to higher year-to-date kindergarten enrollment numbers than any of the previous five years. Here's how it happened.

### What worked before

A strength of the in-person fair was its appeal to both adults and children. While caregivers received important information about kindergarten curriculum, the enrollment process and childcare, students enjoyed tactile experiences on the school bus, in the kindergarten classroom and in the lunchroom.

Positive attendee feedback had been rising since 2016 and reached the pinnacle in 2019 when 100% of attendees to the in-person fair believed the information presented was helpful in understanding kindergarten and that the family-friendly activities were either excellent or good.

### What needed work

Despite efforts to attract a representative number of families from across the district (including translated promotional materials, free transportation from a hub location and other forms of outreach), family participation did not reflect the district's racial and socioeconomic diversity.

Though bilingual assistants attended the event and assisted with translation into the district's four most-spoken non-English languages, not all event materials were translated, and it was not possible to assign a translator to each family for the entirety of the event.

Metrics were another challenge. Attendance was estimated based on materials distributed and the number of free school



An advertisement for the Kindergarten Information Fair in Somali. The first bullet reads, "Fully translated."

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### April 9, 2021

#### Board of Directors Meeting

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

### April 30, 2021

#### Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

### May 7, 2021

#### Board of Directors Meeting

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

### May 14, 2021

#### Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

### May 21, 2021

#### Board of Directors 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.**

## 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

It is hard to believe but the 2021 Legislative Session is already winding down with the May 17 adjournment date less than six weeks away. As this month's research article shows, there are vast differences between the E-12 Education budget proposals from the Governor, House and Senate. The Senate E-12 Education proposal does not include an increase in the funding formula and does not address the growing cross-subsidies in the special education and English learner programs. It is critical that AMSD members contact their local legislators and Governor Walz to advocate for [AMSD's Legislative Priorities](#). There is a perception among some legislators that the federal COVID-19 relief funding school districts have received minimizes the need for state funding. Legislators need to understand that the federal funding is one-time funding and does not negate the need for state policymakers to provide stable, ongoing funding for our schools. Thank you in advance for your help!

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

# Enrollment Numbers Increased Significantly After Virtual Fair Became Available

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meals served, which could not account for attendees who had more than one meal or who did not eat at all.

Finally, the nature of a 2-hour event held on a single day meant that families who could not attend had no comparable opportunity to receive the information provided at the in-person fair.

## Putting in the work

The in-person Kindergarten Information Fair had been held for nearly 10 years; there was no precedent for a virtual fair. As it turned out, the to-do list would be just as long.



The Kindergarten Information Fair “map”

The fair itself would be entirely pre-recorded, allowing families to attend when it was most convenient for them—but that didn’t mean it needed to lose the interactive element that families loved. Kindergarten Information Fair kits—which included a kazoo, a blow-up beach ball, a coloring sheet featuring district mascots, a pack of crayons, a Class of 2034 sticker, a kindergarten brochure and an enrollment packet—were sent to 1,700 homes in the district in late fall. The brochure directed families to the virtual fair, where they were greeted by a map of an elementary school and eight welcoming, informative videos.

Music, gym and kindergarten teachers invited children to bounce a ball, play a kazoo and color along using items that had been sent in the kits. How-to tutorials for visiting the school nurse, riding the school bus and beginning the enrollment process joined a warm greeting from an elementary principal to round out the videos.

Every word of text on the page, including in forms and on graphics, was fully translated into Spanish, Somali, Hmong and Vietnamese. All videos were accompanied by translated captions.

## It’s working!

The virtual Kindergarten Information Fair launched on Dec. 1, and enthusiasm remains high. As of mid-March more than 200 families who were not on the district’s initial mailing lists have requested kits, and over 500 families have experienced the virtual fair—just as many, if not more, as participated when the event was held in person.

Attendee zip codes show a far more representative number of families from across the district participated in the virtual fair than had in previous in-person years, and 100% of feedback forms indicate high levels of satisfaction with the information provided and the fair’s family-friendly activities.

In January, February and March, the district’s confirmed year-to-date kindergarten enrollments were higher than in any of the previous five years. “Enrollment numbers increased significantly after the fair became available,” said Enrollment Services Coordinator Jim Greeley. “Although this could be true every year, it was especially satisfying this year as we faced enrollment losses due to the pandemic.”

While an in-person fair may return in the coming years, the virtual element is here to stay. In fact, it’s already been incorporated into spring kindergarten orientation events.

“The virtual Kindergarten Information Fair started as a candidate writing exercise when we were hiring a new communications specialist,” said Barb Olson, director of school/community relations. “With her vision for a virtual fair, Grace Becker not only earned the job, she carried out an event that was responsive to the pandemic, was more accessible and equitable for our community, and delivered the intended enrollment results.”

*This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Grace Becker, Communications Specialist, Osseo Area Schools.*



Each of the Kindergarten Information Fair videos is accompanied by translated captions.

# Omnibus E-12 Finance and Policy Bills Released

With the release of the House and Senate Omnibus E-12 Education Finance and Policy bills, all of the E-12 education budget plans are now on the table. The Governor’s Due North Education plan and budget proposal were released earlier in the session. The House and Senate bills will move to a conference committee after they clear the floor in their respective chambers where the vast differences will need to be resolved by the May 17 adjournment.

There are many similarities between the Governor’s budget proposal and the House bill ([HF 1065](#)). Both propose an increase to the general education basic formula with the Governor proposing an increase of 1 percent for FY 22 and 2.5 percent for FY 23. The House bill includes a 2 percent per year increase over the next two years. The House bill also increases the formula allowance for fiscal years 2024 and 2025 by 0.5 percent per year; and beginning in fiscal year 2026, increases the basic formula allowance by the rate of inflation. The Governor and House proposals both address the growing cross-subsidies in the special education and English learner programs and both would permanently fund the 4,000 voluntary Pre-Kindergarten/School Readiness Plus seats that are scheduled to expire.

The Senate bill ([SF 960](#)), does not provide an increase to the formula and does not address the special education or English learner program cross-subsidies or provide the funding necessary to retain the 4,000 Voluntary Prekindergarten/School Readiness seats. The Senate bill does include one-time revenue of \$60 million in FY 2022 that will be dispersed on a per pupil basis taking into account federal allocations received by school districts.

While the respective bills have significant differences, there are some areas in both bills that address AMSD priorities. Both omnibus bills provide investments in Grow Your Own programs, as well as providing a pause in implementing revised academic standards. With regard to the COVID-19 pandemic learning disruptions, both bills also require that school districts collaborate with families of students with disabilities on student IEPs, and both bills allow school districts to offer distance learning opportunities — although the House bill extends the authority for the 2021-22 school year only.

## Additional provisions in the House bill:

- Holds the special education cross subsidy at the current level by increasing special education cross subsidy reduction aid from 6.43 percent of the cross subsidy to 9.33 percent of the cross subsidy for fiscal year 2022 and 12.11 percent of the cross subsidy for fiscal year 2023 and later;
- Reduces the English learner cross-subsidy by increasing the basic EL formula allowance and the concentration formula and links EL funding to the general education formula allowance beginning in FY 2023;
- Allows school boards to renew an existing operating referendum at the same level.

## Additional provisions in the Senate bill:

- Increases equalization of the operating referendum for fiscal year 2023 and later;
- Provides greater flexibility and local control with the learning year program, an expanded definition of hours of instruction and school board authority to offer a distance learning option for students;
- Establishes Safe Schools aid (on top of the levy), and equalization of the safe schools levy;
- Establishes a short-call substitute teacher pilot program to address the severe shortage of substitute teachers;
- Creates Education Savings Accounts for use at nonpublic schools.

## House Omnibus Education Bill

- LINK: [View a Summary of the House Bill](#)
- LINK: [View the Change Items](#)
- LINK: [View the House Bill District Runs](#)

## Senate Omnibus Education Bill

- LINK: [View a Summary of the Senate Bill](#)
- LINK: [View the Change Items](#)
- LINK: [View the FY22 Senate Bill District Runs](#)
- LINK: [View the FY23 Senate Bill District Runs](#)

