

May 2021
vol 18 ♦ no 8

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.

June 11, 2021

Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.
(Hybrid Meeting)

July 16, 2021

Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.
(Hybrid Meeting)

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

Hastings Creates Equity Action Planning Team

On the heels of the death of George Floyd in May of 2020, the Hastings School District, like many districts around the state and nation, wrestled with how to respond. Given a "mostly White" school district (more than 83% of our student body identifies as White and our faculty and staff are even less diverse), district, school, and teacher leaders acknowledged that a focus on personal growth was an important place to begin. To that end, staff was invited to engage with colleagues across the district using one of eight texts as a guiding resource. Nearly half of our teaching staff participated in the initiation of the systems-wide equity work that would begin in the Fall of 2021.



Guided by the newly seated superintendent, Dr. Bob McDowell, the district took steps to create and solicit members for an Equity Action Planning Team. This group would serve as the catalyst for the first district-wide focus on equity. The 23 members were selected to offer a balanced representation of schools, grade levels, experience, and expertise. Dr. McDowell welcomed with these words: "My vision is that together, we will collectively design, deliver, and be champions of anti-racist actions and systems to actively provide a safe and supportive place for all our current and future students to learn. This is our call as a school district: to be anti-racist and equity-focused. We must ensure that

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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

Conference committee negotiations are under way and your voice is needed! Key proposals on the table would greatly stabilize the education funding system. The House Omnibus Education Finance bill would link the basic formula to inflation by 2026. It is difficult to overstate how impactful this would be in stabilizing our funding system. In addition, bipartisan legislation sponsored by Rep. Cedrick Frazier and Sen. Zach Duckworth, to allow locally elected school boards to renew an existing referendum by a vote of the school board, is alive for consideration in the conference committee. These two changes would arguably be the most consequential changes to Minnesota's education funding system in many years. Please contact the conference committee members, legislative leaders and your local legislators to advocate for these game changing provisions that would benefit students across the state. Your voice matters -- let it be heard!

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

Team Has Worked to Articulate and Support a Systemic Change Plan

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all our students feel welcome and supported and that the burden of pushing back on systemic racism does not fall primarily onto the shoulders of our students of color.”

Since October, under the leadership of Jenn Reichel, Director of Teaching and Learning, and Gabriel Moreno, Equity Coordinator, the team has met every other week and has worked to develop their growth plan and articulate and support a systemic change plan. Among the most meaningful personal growth work that the team has engaged in has been participating in the Intercultural Development Inventory and partnering with Gabriel Moreno for individual debriefs. One of the team members frequently reminds the group of Maya Angelou's important words, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better." This message and the intentional focus on personal growth outlined in the IDI debrief drives individual work.

In addition to the individual equity development the team members have engaged in, they have been diligent in supporting colleagues in all roles across the district to take additional steps on their journey. The group began by articulating and sharing common understandings of three essential concepts in equity work (race, ethnicity, and culture). Following each meeting, the group synthesizes a summary that team members share with colleagues in their building. This personalized distribution of the summary is seen as effective by team members and staff across the district.

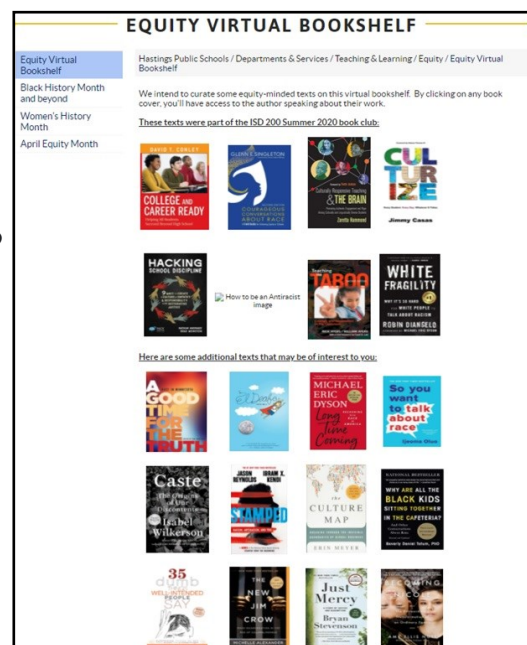
In February, the team championed Black History Month with an information campaign. Staff across the district were invited to engage with 2-3 communication blasts per week coupled with resources that could be used immediately or curated for later reference. In preparing, the group articulated its commitment to February (Black History Month) as a catalyst for action and deliverables and affirmed the importance of not tokenizing February but rather ensuring that any initiative connected to Black History Month must continue. As a result, team members worked collaboratively to deliver eight Women's History Month messages in March, eight equity-focused messages in April, and plan to wrap up May with eight messages highlighting contributions by Asian/ Pacific Islanders. The intent, as was shared with staff in one of the post-meeting summaries, is to invite staff to consider how they acknowledge the contributions of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color throughout the year with in various courses and with all students. How do you ensure these diverse voices are heard in all our classes? Following each month, the staff is invited to share their feedback about the content and frequency. One high school special educator shared, "Thanks for putting in the effort to do this! Great opportunity for all of us to take a step forward and be better!"

Since January, the team has curated dozens of resources for staff and community on their [Equity website](#). During Black History Month, the team curated dozens of resources, including podcasts, texts, and even Minnesota-based black-owned businesses that staff could choose to support. The group has also begun to add to its virtual bookshelf - a page that houses suggestions for texts partnered with short video or audio files that offer viewers a taste of the concepts or views of the author.

The group was eager to grow their understanding and leadership and, as a result, opted to partner with the YMCA's Equity Innovation Center and are participating in an 8-session course, "Transforming Workplace Culture." Among the various topics, the team is most interested in learning about developing cultural agility, implicit bias, and better understanding anti-racism. Equity Action Planning Team member Katie Nye shares, "This committee has helped me to ensure that each day I am including something with my students to open their eyes up to more than their own world or perspective. It is so easy to get stuck in the day to day, and I really think that this has helped to broaden both me as a person and my teaching, along with the worldview of my kids. I continue to look for projects and learning opportunities that open up to a broader world."

The team would like to wrap up this article similar to how each meeting summary is closed - with an action step. This one was shared following our February 10th meeting: As you think about how we support all of our students to find success, we invite you to think about and respond to these questions: In what ways do we serve as gatekeepers or access-givers to our students? In what ways might we unintentionally cause students to feel like they need "permission" to access opportunities? In what ways have we intentionally worked on abandoning practices like these? What "hidden curriculum" exists in your school district? Under what circumstances do we expect behaviors from students that are not explicitly taught? And how might we react when students don't follow the "unwritten rules"?

This month's member spotlight was submitted by Jennifer Reichel, Director of Teaching and Learning, Co-facilitator of the Equity Action Planning Team, Hastings Public Schools.



AMSD Legislative Committee Adopts Conference Committee Priorities

The 2021 legislative session is quickly winding down. The constitutionally mandated date of adjournment, the first Monday following the third Saturday in May, falls on May 17 this year. The House and Senate have each approved their respective omnibus budget bills and conference committee have been appointed to reconcile the differences in the bills.

The Omnibus Education Finance Conference Committee has been named, and will be co-chaired by Sen. Roger Chamberlain (R-Lino Lakes) and Rep. Jim Davnie (DFL-Minneapolis). Additional members of the committee are Senators Justin Eichorn (R-Grand Rapids), Zach Duckworth (R-Lakeville), Gene Dornink (R-Hayfield) and Chuck Wiger (DFL-Maplewood) and Representatives Ruth Richardson (DFL-Mendota Heights), Laurie Pryor (DFL-Minnetonka), Hodan Hassan (DFL-Minneapolis) and Ron Kresha (R-Little Falls).

The AMSD Legislative Committee has approved a list of [Conference Committee Priorities](#) for inclusion in the final E-12 Education Bill that will allow school districts to help their students recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, close opportunity gaps, and address our unacceptable racial disparities. To achieve these goals, it is imperative that House and Senate leaders agree on a \$750 million budget target for the E-12 conference committee. That is the funding level needed to address the following priorities:

COVID-19 Recovery

Yes, the federal government has provided significant funding to address many of the challenges facing school districts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. But the fact is that many school districts suffered significant, unanticipated enrollment declines that had major budgetary impacts. The federal dollars are addressing some needs, including technology acquisition, internet connectivity, personal protective equipment, cleaning supplies and summer learning, but it is imperative that the state provide strong and sustainable funding. To help school districts recover from the pandemic, state policymakers should:

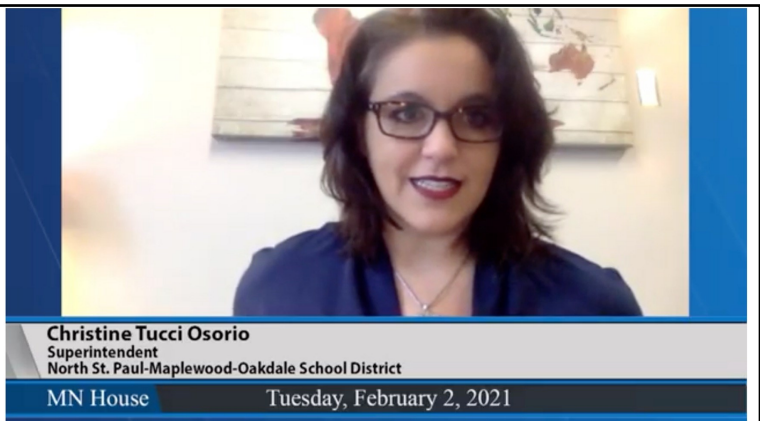
- Allow school districts to use the greater of the FY 20 or FY 21 pupil count or, at a minimum, enhance the declining enrollment formula;
- Extend authority for school districts to offer distance learning at least through the 2021-22 school year;
- Streamline the process to obtain a short-call substitute teaching license so that districts can adequately staff urgent needs.

The Legislature also needs to address the priorities below to stabilize the funding system and invest in programs that will allow each and every student to reach their full potential.

Funding Stability

Even before the pandemic, the state's education funding system was unstable and unpredictable. Conference committee members should:

- Increase the basic formula by 2 percent per year for the next two years and **index the formula to inflation**;
- Link local optional revenue to the formula;
- At a minimum, increase special education funding to a level sufficient to prevent the cross-subsidy from growing and develop and implement a plan to close the cross-subsidy;
- Allow school boards to renew existing operating referendums following a public hearing;
- Refrain from enacting any new unfunded mandates.



Anoka-Hennepin Supt. David Law and North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale Supt. Christine Tucci Osorio shared an overview of Reimagine Minnesota earlier in the session.

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Strong and Stable Funding Critical to Closing Opportunity Gaps

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Address Opportunity Gaps

To close opportunity gaps and address our unacceptable racial disparities, the conference committee should:

- Increase funding for the English learner program to close the funding shortfall and link the EL formula to the basic formula allowance;
- Expand programs and incentives to attract, develop and retain teachers of color;
- Maintain multiple pathways to licensure in the tiered licensing system;
- Provide permanent funding for the 4,000 VPK seats that will otherwise expire.

Taxes

Property tax levies play a critical role in funding education programs and facilities. These levies have widely varying impacts on local property taxpayers depending on the property wealth of the school district. To address taxpayer and education funding disparities and support public education, the conference committee should:

- Increase equalization of the operating referendum, local optional revenue and debt service levies to enhance taxpayer equity;
- Oppose taxpayer subsidies of private education through vouchers, savings accounts, tax credits or scholarships.

AMSD members and public education advocates can contact the members of the conference committee, legislative leaders and their local legislators using the contact information below:

[LINK: Contact the 2021 Omnibus Education Finance Bill Conference Committee](#)

[LINK: Contact the Governor, Senate and House Leadership](#)

[LINK: View the Conference Committee Schedule, Summaries and Side by Side Comparision](#)

[LINK: View the final AMSD Conference Committee Priorities](#)

