

CONNECTIONS



News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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Mounds View's New Flexible Spaces Support Personalized Learning

**October 29, 2021
Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

**November 5, 2021
Board of Directors
Meeting**
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

**November 17, 2021
Annual Conference**
8 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Minneapolis Marriott
Northwest
Register here:
[https://www.amsd.org/
conference2021/](https://www.amsd.org/conference2021/)

**November 19, 2021
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It's been a long time coming.

After years of research, planning and collaboration, Mounds View Public Schools completed a \$165 million construction effort this fall - on time and on budget. The "Keeping Pace with Space" campaign added more than 200,000 square feet and renovated 135,000 existing square feet across 12 schools. And the results are garnering positive reviews from students, staff and parents.

First-grade teacher Molly Welk was part of the design committee that helped shape the new spaces at Island Lake Elementary School. Now that she's finally teaching in one of those completed spaces, she's experiencing the impact it has on her students and on her teaching skills. "There's a higher energy or buzz among staff," she says. "The new spaces are informing all of our teachers on how to use our classrooms to personalize learning."

More than the furniture, the new space provides a major advantage: Flexibility. "It allows me and my students to break up into pairs and into small groups very flexibly, so that students are able to quickly and easily collaborate with one another on projects," says Welk. "As a teacher, the new space really helps me to reflect on some of my practices and how I instruct."



Voice and choice

At Turtle Lake Elementary School, first-grade teacher Emily Scanlon fully embraces the connection between flexible spaces and personalized learning.

"I spend a lot of time talking with my students about what their needs are as learners," she says. "We're not all the same. Now with

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It was so inspiring to hear from a panel of student scholars at the October 1 AMSD Board of Directors meeting. The message from the students was loud and clear - they don't want to go back to the same system we had prior to the pandemic. They affirmed messages we heard during the Reimagine Minnesota convenings - students want to be seen and valued for who they are. A one-size-fits-all model doesn't recognize that what works well for one student, doesn't necessarily work well for another. Their testimony was powerful. If you didn't have the opportunity to hear the students, I encourage you to take a few minutes to listen: [Student Panel Discussion](#)

From the AMSD Chair, Kelsey Dawson Walton, Osseo Area Schools Board Member



Spaces are Making a Significant Difference for Students and Staff

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this new classroom, students are more in charge of their space, and they have the opportunity to express voice and choice in our classroom. It's really exciting."

As with all new spaces in the District, those choices are easily adaptable. Each classroom or adjoining flex space allows for teachers to easily configure their room for different teaching styles or personalized, student-centered goals.

"It doesn't take me spending all day rearranging things to make it happen," says Scanlon. "We can slide a desk together here or there to be a partner. And when students say they want to have some separate space to do an activity, then can slide things apart."

Even her students' parents are fans of the new space. "At conferences, every single parent opened up by saying, 'Oh my gosh! My student has been talking about these amazing spaces. And they were right!'" she says.

A space for each pace

Highview Middle School teacher Lauren Hadden introduces the importance of space and pace in her U.S. history class. Her newly configured classroom is outfitted with high-top collaborative tables, cushioned story steps, individual work desks and lounge-and-learn couches. Some of the most popular options are the wobble chairs - a flexible seating option ideal for students who like movement while they sit without tipping over.

"Students tell me their favorite part of the class is that they can choose to either work with the teacher, a group of students or individually," says Hadden. "And the space makes all choices possible. There's a different seating choice for whatever mood they're in and a different learning pathway that can also fit their mood."

At Irondale High School and Mounds View High School, students are enjoying their flexible learning spaces. Both schools now feature a variety of glass-walled classrooms with extensive flex space adjacent to each. "I've never really had fun in another classroom here before," admits student Spencer Lunquist. "I like these bright colors. This space just has a much better feel to it."

In addition to the learning spaces, both schools renovated their student commons and created fitness centers designed to improve student wellness. Irondale High School introduced a new 650-seat auditorium for performing arts, and Mounds View High School added a four-station gymnasium with a walking track above it.

"Our residents made these improvements possible when they passed the bond referendum four years ago," says Superintendent Chris Lennox. "We want our community to know these spaces are making a significant difference for students and staff."

Images of Mounds View's completed constructions spaces are at moundsvIEWSchools.org/facilities



Many of Mounds View High School's classrooms are easily adaptable, allowing teachers to quickly configure their room for different teaching styles or personalized, student-centered goals.

This month's member feature was submitted by Colin Sokolowski, Executive Director of Public Relations, Mounds View Public Schools.

Teacher Shortages in Minnesota

Minnesota needs more teachers; especially teachers of color.

According to the [2021 Teacher Supply and Demand Report](#): A majority of school districts reported being “somewhat significantly” or “very significantly” impacted by the teacher shortage (70 percent) and substitute teacher shortage (88 percent). The report also showed that just 5.6 percent of Minnesota’s more than 100,000 licensed teachers self-identified as teachers of color, and “the percentage of teachers of color and Indigenous teachers remains significantly lower than the percentage of students of color and Indigenous students in the state.”

Percent of Minnesota Teachers Holding a Tiered License, by Race and Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Tier 1	Percent of Tier 2	Percent of Tier 3	Percent of Tier 4	Percent of All Licenses
American Indian or Alaskan Native	2.55%	2.72%	0.94%	0.95%	1.00%
Asian	3.48%	3.00%	2.18%	0.94%	1.09%
Black, Not of Hispanic Origin	7.07%	6.04%	1.90%	1.24%	1.45%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.12%	0.20%	0.05%	0.04%	0.05%
Hispanic	5.91%	7.07%	2.46%	1.14%	1.41%
Multiple Categories	1.97%	2.25%	0.92%	0.58%	0.65%
White, Not of Hispanic Origin	49.13%	61.78%	50.16%	81.07%	78.27%
No Race/Ethnicity Provided	29.78%	16.94%	41.38%	14.04%	16.08%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers	21.09%	21.28%	8.46%	4.89%	5.64%

Source: 2021 Minnesota Teacher Supply and Demand Report

Despite recent incremental gains in the number of teachers of color in Minnesota, significant progress still needs to be made. Minnesota has an increasingly diverse student population and, research shows, students would benefit from a teacher workforce that reflects the changing classroom.

The report clarifies that the teacher data remains somewhat disparate because of variations in how districts collect their data and a reliance on teacher self-reporting. For example, 17,356 teachers did not provide their race or ethnicity in the last report.

While just 5.6 percent of teachers identified as a teacher of color, more than one third (36.3 percent) of the state’s students in 2020-21 self-identified as students of color according to the Minnesota Department of Education’s [Minnesota Report Card](#)—up nearly

three percent from 2018-19. Nearly 45 percent of the student population in AMSD districts identify as students of color, according to additional data from MDE.

Among key findings of the 2021 Supply and Demand report:

- The highest percentage of teachers of color were Tier 1 and Tier 2 licensed teachers, holding approximately 21 percent of those licenses in each respective category;
- During the 2019-20 academic year, the majority of districts (54 percent) did not fill a position using a teacher holding a Tier 1 License;
- Minnesota continues to lag significantly in the ability to hire and retain racially and ethnically diverse teachers even close to the proportion of students of color and Indigenous students in the state.

Years of research support that teachers of color significantly improve the performance of students of

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While Minnesota is Seeing Incremental Gains in Teachers of Color, Much Work Remains

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color — as well as their white peers.

A [March 2017 study from the Institute of Labor Economics](#), for example, showed that having just one Black teacher in third, fourth or fifth grade reduced low-income Black boys' probability of dropping out of high school by 39 percent. [Additional studies](#) have shown that having a teacher of the same race or ethnicity "may increase test scores and reduce the likelihood of disciplinary issues," while "for white students, diverse learning communities provide exposure to multiple perspectives and can improve their ability to solve problems, think critically, and develop creativity."

These findings and more were reinforced again just earlier this year with the publishing of the Harvard Graduate School of Education book "[Teacher Diversity and Student Success: Why Racial Representation Matters in the Classroom.](#)"

"Many Black and Latino students complete their elementary school years without ever having had a classroom teacher of the same race or ethnicity. These students miss out on the myriad benefits of having a teacher who looks like them," the researchers note.

"These benefits include increased trust, better communication and relationships, higher expectations, and plain old better teaching, all of which translates to better test scores, fewer absences and suspensions, and higher graduation and college enrollment rates."

Specifically for Minnesota, the Supply and Demand Report outlines these challenges and more, noting "The lack of teachers of color is often noted as a key element to a dramatic and persistent achievement gap between [students of color] and white students in Minnesota."

Beyond [AMSD's Reimagine Minnesota work](#), one of AMSD's legislative priorities for several years has been to expand programs and incentives to attract, develop and retain teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas. In the 2017 legislative session, AMSD, along with the other members of the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers (TOCAIT), successfully advocated for significant investments to expand pathways and build support for prospective and current teachers of color, as well as redefine the licensure process.

In addition, a new Tiered Licensure System was adopted by the Legislature in the 2017 session that went into effect on July 1, 2018. It created four different tiered licenses for teachers in Minnesota including additional pathways to licensure.

The following budget session (2019) saw additional modest gains, followed by the 2021 session, which produced significant additional investments. The final E-12 Education Omnibus Bill of 2021 included several provisions supported by AMSD and its TOCAIT partners including an expansion of Grow Your Own grant programs, hiring bonuses to recruit candidates from outside the state and allowing the use of staff development revenue for teacher mentorships.

Much of the allocated funding is "very specifically focused on recruiting and retaining teachers of color," PELSB Executive Director Alex Liuzzi told the AMSD Board of Directors in October.

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Omnibus Education Bill Includes Investments to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color

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Specifically, the final agreement included:

- Teachers of Color Mentoring & Retention Incentive Grants: \$2.254 million per year increase (ongoing);
- Grow Your Own Grants: A \$5 million per year increase (ongoing);
- American Indian Teacher Prep Grants: A \$140,000 per year increase (ongoing);
- Black Men Teach funding: \$750,000 (for fiscal year 2022 only);
- Come Teach in MN Hiring Bonuses: \$200,000 per-year increase (the increase is ongoing);
- Expanded Concurrent Enrollment funding (Intro to Teaching): \$125,000 per year increase (ongoing).
- Teacher Recruitment Marketing Campaign: \$250,000 per year increase (ongoing).

PELSB also continues to refine and streamline its process for recruiting and retaining more teachers through licensure adjustments, Liuzzi said, such as adjusting standards to allow more pathways to teaching.

Still, more needs to be done. And that's not just AMSD and the TOCAIT coalition calling for more change; it's the students themselves.

AMSD's Reimagine Minnesota work specifically included a "[Student Voice](#)" strategy. Student testimony throughout the process made it very clear that students, students of color and white students, place a high value on learning from diverse teachers that reflects the student body.



Highland Park Senior High School senior, Senam Akyea, talking about the need for more teachers of color in schools. Akyea was part of a panel of students from AMSD districts at the October 2021 Board of Directors meeting. (From l to r, Natalia Yureko, Minnetonka Middle School East, Jennifer Garcia Flores, Roseville Area High School, Chidera Osuoha, Osseo Senior High School, Akyea)

Even more recently, at the October board of directors meeting, Saint Paul Public Schools senior Senam Akyea told AMSD Board Members:

"One thing that would make a major difference to students would be having staff and teachers of color in every school," Akyea said. "I feel like students are automatically checking out when teachers don't make an effort to know anything about their ethnic identity, about their sexuality, their gender. So making it a top priority to recruit teachers of color, but also being honest with them and telling them it won't always be easy, won't always be fun, but students are in need. And we need you."

- [LINK: View a full summary of the 2021 E-12 Education Omnibus Bill by House Research](#)
- [LINK: View the full 2021 E-12 Education Omnibus Bill aid appropriation summary](#)