

CONNECTIAMS DNS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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Stillwater Area High School Provides Focused Academic Support for Students

March 25, 2022
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

April 8, 2022
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

April 29, 2022
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

May 6, 2022
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

The classrooms of Stillwater Area High School (SAHS) are abuzz on a Wednesday afternoon, even after the final bell has rung. Nearly one third of the school's 2,800 students are staying after school to catch up on learning, make up missed assignments and tests, or get the extra support they need to be successful. It's all part of a response to address learning loss that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Students have had many disruptions to their learning and had to navigate several different learning models," said Principal Rob Bach. "We need to meet them where they are and give them the time and attention they need to get back on track."

The high school is running a shortened class schedule each Wednesday to provide office hours at the end of the school day. Students who are in need of academic support remain at school to meet in-person with teachers or in small groups with classmates. Lunch is served before office hours begin and students are able to catch a bus home at the end of the day as usual. This ensures everyone has access to the help they need and that no barriers exist for students.

During a recent office hours session, groups of kids met with a social studies teacher to review a lesson and ask questions. Down the hall, students sat quietly in an English classroom making up a test. In a science lab, several groups of students huddled together around lab stations helping each



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The legislative session is moving quickly with the first committee deadline just over two weeks away. Important decisions will be made in the coming days as legislative leaders determine their funding priorities. The \$9 billion state budget surplus provides state policymakers the opportunity to address the financial challenges outlined in this month's newsletter, but legislators need to hear from you. Contact information for state policymakers and other advocacy resources can be found here: <https://www.amsd.org/2022session/>. Your voice matters!

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

Office Hours Offer Flexibility and Time to Collaborate

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other complete assignments while the teacher met one-on-one with kids to answer their questions. In math classrooms, students had the opportunity to ask for help and work through math problems with classmates and teachers.

"I think students are just overwhelmed with being back in school, having six classes to deal with at once and being in school for a whole day," said Allie Schlagel, a SAHS junior who spent her first two years of high school bouncing between distance, hybrid and in-person learning. "I get more done during this time and can get more help and questions answered. And when I don't need to be here it's a great opportunity to hang out with friends and be social again."

Office hours are designed for the approximately 30 percent of students who are earning a 70 percent or lower in any given class this year. Teachers communicate with families to let them know when they'd like a student to stay after school for support. For those who are caught up in school, the early dismissal allows them flexibility and time to complete their assignments and collaborate with classmates. With parent or guardian permission, they can even leave campus to study at home, go to work, or enjoy free time.

"It lessens the likelihood of kids falling through the cracks, even in terms of mental health," said Katie Barre, an English teacher. "I have more opportunities to connect with kids who might need extra support. We can't tackle kids in the parking lot and make them stay. But we can throw out this net and catch as many as we can."



Learn more online at sahs.stillwaterschools.org/officehours.

Not a new idea

For many years, SAHS staff has been focused on building personal relationships with students and giving them the extra support they need - academically as well as socially and emotionally. In 2017-2018 the school adopted the BARR (Building Assets Reducing Risks) program, which creates small learning communities and gives teachers time to meet weekly to discuss the needs of their shared students. The school also offered Flex Time during the week to give students time to catch up on homework, meet with teachers, or participate in clubs or activities.

When the pandemic began, Flex Time morphed into office hours as a way to support students as they moved between hybrid and distance learning. Teachers were available online every Friday to connect virtually with students. When students came back to school in-person this fall, staff kept office hours in place as a way to help kids re-engage in learning.

"There have always been some who struggle to focus and get things done in the classroom," Barre said. "We're just seeing more of that now with the pandemic. I don't call them struggling students. There are just some students who are still adjusting to normal and need that extra support."

This month's member feature was submitted by Carissa Keister, Stillwater Area Public Schools Communications Director.

With Record State Budget Surplus, School Districts Face More Than \$230 Million in Shortfalls

As school districts work to help their students recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, a new survey of Association of Metropolitan School Districts members projects a combined budget shortfall of more than \$230 million for the 2022-23 school year.

The survey, conducted in February, shows the shortfalls are broad with 35 of 45 AMSD members projecting a shortfall with the budget gap ranging from \$500,000 to almost \$60 million. A few districts have not yet completed their budget projections, and some recently secured additional revenue through the approval of an operating referendum or are experiencing growing enrollment improving their financial position.

The survey assumes no new revenue will be approved in the 2022 legislative session and excludes one-time federal COVID relief funding. The federal funding has provided critical resources during the pandemic to address a variety of challenges — including technology, transportation costs, personal protective equipment, school-age care, school nutrition programs, COVID testing and more — but this funding is one-time and does not continue into the future.

Significant factors contributing to the projected shortfalls are the chronic underfunding of the special education and English learner programs and the failure of the general education formula to keep pace with inflation over the last two decades.

Specifically:

- Special education is underfunded by \$780 million in the current fiscal year. That means that, on average, Minnesota school districts are diverting \$824 per pupil from their general fund to cover the shortfall.
- Similarly, the English Learner program is underfunded by more than \$146 million in the current school year. Here again, school districts are covering this funding gap with funds meant for general classroom instruction.
- As school districts are forced to use general fund revenue to cover the shortfalls in the important special education and English Learner programs, the general education formula has fallen significantly behind inflation since 2003. In fact, the formula would be \$798 per pupil higher if it had simply kept pace with inflation over that time span.

The 2021 E-12 funding bill included formula increases of 2.45 percent and 2 percent for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years respectively. While that represented the most significant formula increase in 15 years, it does not keep pace with accelerating inflation rates. In addition, the 2021 bill did not provide sufficient funding to keep the special education cross-subsidy from growing and did not address English learner funding. The Governor and Legislators can stabilize Minnesota's education funding system by fully funding the special education and English learner programs and indexing the formula to inflation.

- LINK: [View the results from the AMSD survey](#)

AMSD Board Adopts 2022 Legislative Priorities



Minnesota's education funding system is not providing adequate, equitable or reliable resources for our schools. The state budget surplus offers state policymakers the opportunity to stabilize the funding system and help students recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The AMSD Board of Directors urges the Governor and Legislature to address the following priorities:

Stabilize Education Funding

- Increase special education and English learner funding to eliminate, or greatly reduce, the significant cross-subsidies (shortfalls) in these important programs;
- Index the general education formula and local optional revenue to inflation;
- Allow locally elected school boards to renew an existing operating referendum; and
- Increase equalization of the local optional revenue, operating referendum, debt service levies, and long-term facilities maintenance revenue levies.

Support Student Mental Health and Personalize Learning

- Provide resources to school districts and intermediate districts through the Safe Schools levy, state aid, and grants to address the mental health needs of students;
- Allow school districts to implement a competency-based education model in lieu of seat time requirements to allow for personalized learning opportunities for students; and
- Modernize the online learning law to expand opportunities for students.

Increase and Diversify the Educator Workforce

- Create new pathways to licensure for substitute teachers and maintain multiple pathways to teacher licensure in the tiered licensing system;
- Invest in rigorous teacher induction and mentoring programs; and
- Expand incentives to attract, develop and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas.