

November 2022
Volume 20
Number 2

Roseville Working to Remove the Stigma Around School Meals

November 4, 2022 Board of Directors Meeting

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

November 10, 2022 Annual Conference

8 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Minneapolis Marriott
Northwest

Register here:

<https://www.amsd.org/reimagine2022/>

November 18, 2022 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

December 2, 2022 Board of Directors Meeting

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

With innovative school lunch programs across the state of Minnesota and so many students reliant on school meals as an important source of their daily nutrition, Roseville Area Schools' Nutrition Services Supervisor Angela Richey says it is high time we remove the stigma around school meals. "We need to change the conversation with our kids about school food because the shame starts there," Richey says. To do their part in actively changing the image of school lunches, Richey and her staff have introduced a wide variety of innovative programs – from an emphasis on scratch cooking and staff training to introducing products grown and produced by local farmers, ranchers, and food makers.

"Scratch cooking allows us to dictate ingredients in recipes while adhering to nutritional guidelines set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture," Richey explains. To make some degree of scratch cooking a reality, a focus has been placed on sourcing products, recruiting/hiring/training/retaining kitchen staff, equipping school kitchens with appropriate equipment, developing recipes, and ultimately getting kids excited about new foods. "We need to move beyond the standard 'kid menu' items," explains Richey. "We certainly still include favorites like chicken patties, pizza, macaroni & cheese, and hot dogs,

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Local sweet corn was shucked by student volunteers. This helped with the current labor shortage but also got students excited to see and try it on the menu.

It is hard to believe it is November and one week until Election Day. The policymakers we elect will make consequential decisions that shape the future of public education in Minnesota as they adopt the biennial budget in the 2023 legislative session. AMSD developed a comprehensive [Election Guide](#) to help members evaluate candidates. There are also many school board elections and [eight AMSD member school districts](#) have important referendum questions on the ballot. If you haven't already done so, please remember to VOTE and encourage your family and friends to join you, keeping public education front and center as you head to the polls. Thank you!

From the AMSD Chair, Crystal Brakke, Richfield Public Schools Board Member

Programs Feature Locally Grown and Prepared Products

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but kids of this generation have a more developed palate of worldly cuisine. We want to give them meal options to get excited about!"



Hoyo Sambusas with Somali-style Rice: "Hoyo," which means "mother" in Somali, was founded with the purpose of employing and empowering Somali women. The company hires mothers to handcraft sambusas, which are available throughout the Twin Cities community. In one Roseville elementary lunch line, a Somali student described it to his curious friend as a "Somali hot pocket." This fried pastry is a staple in Somali households but also resonates across many cultures – empanadas, pasties, hand pies, etc.

The training component means that the Roseville Area Schools Nutrition Services Department is training kitchen staff on how to follow recipes and prep ingredients. Recent examples include breaking down whole beef briskets, cutting and roasting delicata squash, and prepping kohlrabi. "Staff are proud to serve scratch-cooked items and they are great at providing feedback about what kids said," explains Richey. "Serving scratch-cooked food creates a sense of ownership over what they served. They are proud to serve the food knowing the effort that went into it."

Among the many initiatives, the department's Harvest of the Month and Minnesota Thursday programs are a hit with students and staff and feature locally grown and prepared products. Harvest of the Month offers students opportunities to try new locally grown vegetables and fruit. "Studies show that the more exposure kids get the more likely they are to try something," explains Richey. "The more they try the more they are likely to like it."

To facilitate access to locally grown and produced food, Richey and Nutrition Services staff members have nurtured a relationship with Good Acre, a local food aggregator that specializes in working with BIPOC farmers, first-generation farmers, and incubator programs. "It's important that we support farmers that represent our student community," says Richey. "We want to support up-and-coming farmers who use sustainable practices and give them an opportunity to have a market in institutionalized food service that they might not otherwise have." According to Richey, the partnership with Good Acre supports staff training as well as efforts to integrate more culturally relevant dishes by facilitating "hyperlocal" food sourcing.



Service with a smile. Our staff pride themselves on creating a connections with the students they serve. Our Nutrition Services staff get a unique perspective in that they see students every day for years!

At the root of all of this work to destigmatize school lunches and provide students with access to locally grown food is the expanding movement pressing for universal free school meals. As the voices supporting universal free school meals increase in frequency and intensity, Richey uses any opportunity to amplify the reasons "why" this is important – from ensuring all children are receiving the same quality of nutrition to improving learning outcomes and reducing the burden on school district staff. All of this while expanding student palates and exposing them to nutritious options on their lunch tray. "We are so disconnected from our food system," explains Richey. "We want the cafeteria to be an extension of the classroom—not just for nutrition education but also for supporting sustainable agriculture and environmental and food justice."

This month's member feature was submitted by Carrie Ardito, Director of Communications, Roseville Area Schools.

English Learner Cross-Subsidy Compounds School District Budget Challenges

When you hear the term “cross-subsidy” you likely think about special education funding. The special education cross-subsidy describes the difference between the revenues school districts receive from the federal and state governments to provide mandated special education services and the amount school districts spend on those important services. The special education cross-subsidy – or funding shortfall – stood at \$591 million at the end of FY2021 and is projected to rise to \$748.6 million in FY2022.

As daunting as the special education cross-subsidy is for Minnesota school districts, it is not the only significant cross-subsidy that impacts school district budgets. Minnesota also has a significant cross-subsidy in its English learner education program. The growing funding shortfall in the English learner program forces districts to use even more money from their general fund to cover the costs for these services.

For AMSD districts, these cross-subsidies, or funding shortfalls, place a tremendous strain on their budgets and increases their reliance on voter-approved operating referendums to make up the difference.

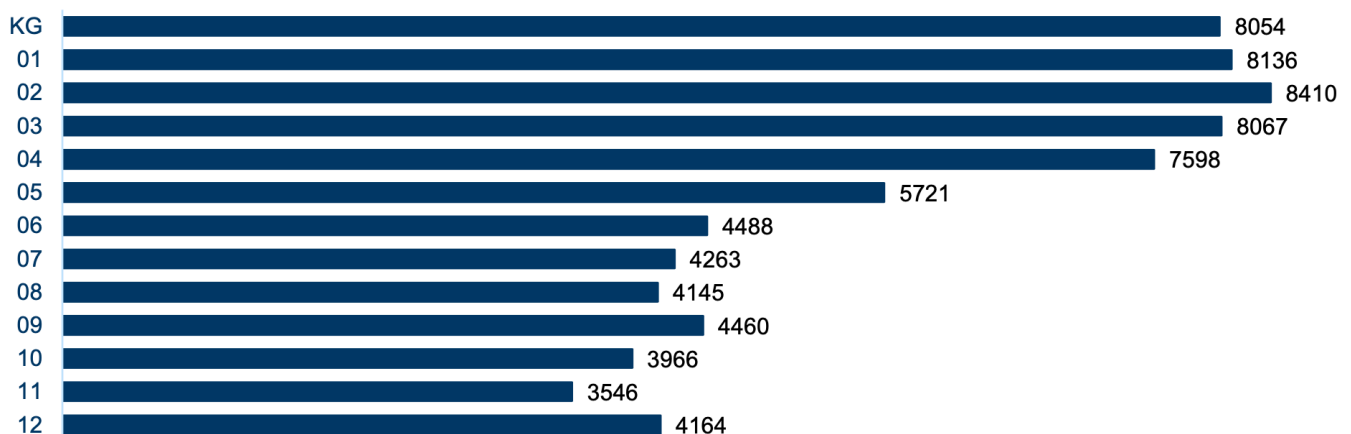
Statewide, the FY2020-21 EL cross-subsidy for public school districts totaled more than \$133.3 million. But with more than 60 percent of the 77,000+ students eligible for English learner services residing in AMSD communities, the EL cross-subsidy topped \$111 million collectively for AMSD districts.

- [LINK: View a Breakdown of AMSD Districts' EL Cross-Subsidies](#)

As seen in the chart linked above, AMSD districts received just \$33 million in funding in FY2020-21 to provide these important and necessary services to English learners but had to spend nearly \$144 million to meet the needs of their students. In other words, AMSD districts had to redirect more than \$111 million from their general funds to cover the shortfall.

And it's not a challenge that is going to go away. According to the [English Learners in Minnesota 2020-21 Report](#) from the Minnesota Department of Education, English learners continue to be the fastest growing student group in Minnesota, with even more students identified as English learners in the lower grades. (See chart below).

More students are identified as English learners in the lower grades



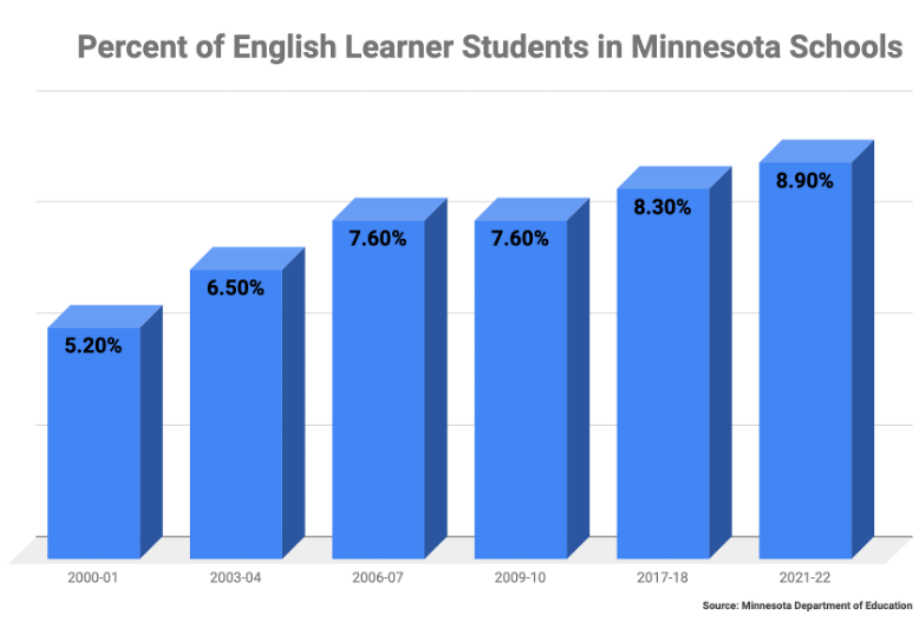
Source: Minnesota Department of Education 2019-2020 Fall EL Enrollment

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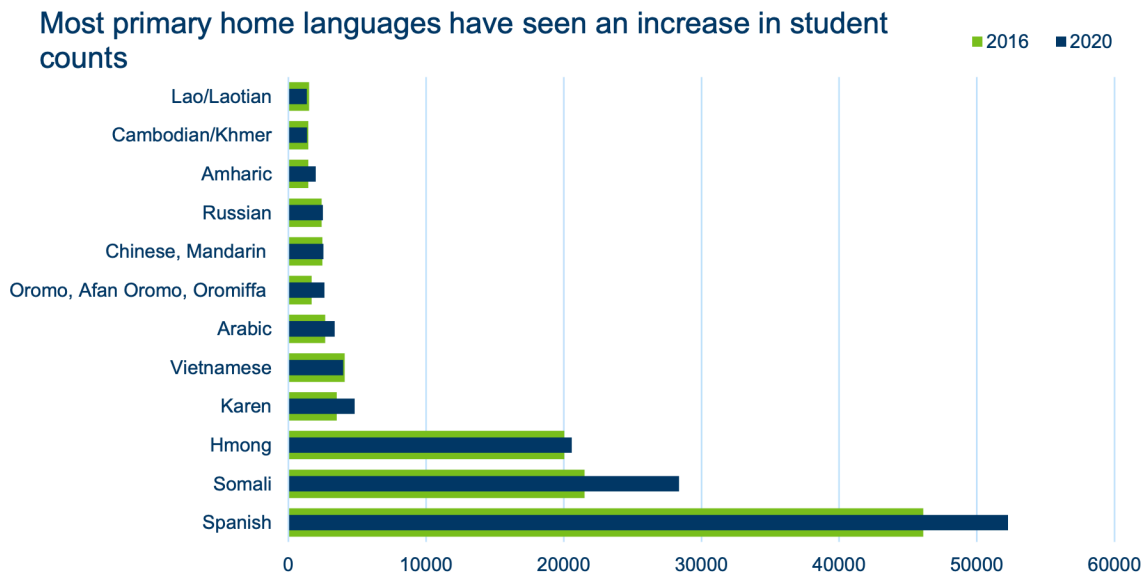
English Learner Population Continues to Grow

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The report also notes English learner populations have shown a steady, consistent growth upward the last 20 years (see chart below), accounting for nearly 9 percent of the overall student population in 2021-22.



Several AMSD member school districts have more than 20 percent of their students eligible for English learner services, including Richfield, Burnsville, Columbia Heights, St. Cloud, and Saint Paul Public Schools. The report also notes that nearly 350 different languages were listed as students' primary home language for 2019-20. The chart below shows that most primary home languages have seen an increase in student counts.



Source: Minnesota Department of Education, Data Reports and Analytics

The Legislature failed to address the growing cross-subsidies in the special education and English learner programs during the 2022 legislative session despite a historic state budget surplus. With the surplus expected to carry over to the 2023 session, it is more urgent than ever that state policymakers provide the funding necessary to eliminate these shortfalls.