

CONNECTIONS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

May 2023
Volume 20
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May 5, 2023
Board of Directors
Meeting

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

May 19, 2023
Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting

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

May 26, 2023
Board of Directors
Meeting

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

June 9, 2023
Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting

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

Challenging Tradition, Inviting Brilliance: St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools Gives Power Back to Students

St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools, located in St. Anthony, is focusing on increasing the rigor and relevance in their classrooms to promote a greater love of learning and to give power back to the students.

Proficiency-based grading, which focuses on student learning, growth and mastery of skills rather than traditional letter grades, has seen major success at the district's middle school. By 2025, the district will roll out this new grading model to the entire district. Right now, staff at the middle school are already engaging in this work, and it's having a profound impact on students.

"I realized that every kid that comes in here has brilliance and is gifted. It's my responsibility to help facilitate that and produce abilities that use their brilliance," said John Mitsch, 6th grade math teacher at St. Anthony Middle School.

When students come to Mr. Mitsch's classroom, they aren't greeted with a traditional learning set-up. They split up into small groups and tackle problems on their own while the teacher serves as a facilitator who answers students' questions. Students work together to find the right answer and the lesson is open to all different levels of comprehension.



John Mitsch, 6th grade math teacher, uses the beginning of class to teach math concepts and then lets the students break out into small groups to apply the concepts together.

Continued on page 2

Will state policymakers take advantage of a once in a lifetime opportunity to strengthen and stabilize our education funding system? Members of the Omnibus Education Bill Conference Committee will make that determination over the next several days. Long time AMSD priorities – linking the formula to inflation, allowing locally elected school boards to renew an existing referendum, and significantly reducing the special education and English learner cross-subsidies are all on the table. It is critical, however, that lawmakers don't create new cross-subsidies and unfunded mandates as they work to reduce existing funding shortfalls. This month's research article outlines the key issues that will be decided this week. Your voice matters – let it be heard!

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

Centering Learning, Not Compliance

Continued from page 1

"I no longer have questions about how to get a grade up. It's more about 'how do I learn this and how do I do better?' Students used to be chasing the grade and not learning. We're finally getting them to chase the learning," Mitsch said.



Students work in small groups while the teacher walks around the classroom assisting them.

Unlike traditional letter grades, which are often subjective and include measures unrelated to learning objectives (like extra credit and turning in work late), this model measures what a student can do and how well they can do it. This allows students to see where they excel and where they need to focus their efforts to improve.

"Moving to a model of schooling where students receive instruction at their level and are required to grow has become a game changer. Our teachers are centering learning, not compliance," said Dr. Renee Corneille, Superintendent of St. Anthony - New Brighton Schools. "This shift is not only more rigorous, but also more equitable for students."

In a traditional model, the teacher demonstrates and the student mimics. By focusing on mastery and growth of the standards and skills, rather than simply achieving a specific overall grade, students are encouraged to take risks, learn from mistakes and strive for continuous improvement. This approach creates a positive learning environment that encourages students to take ownership of their education and become more engaged in the learning process.

"When explained in a way of students helping other students, parents connect that we're developing independent learners that can problem solve and think and know where they are," Mitsch said. "The student has the power to identify their strengths and weaknesses."

How this looks in each grade book may differ across the board. Certain factors like GPA may still be needed at the high school level as students plan their post-high school options. There also may be differences based on what is developmentally appropriate for students.

Proficiency-based grading gives families more detailed information about their child's progress. For example, rather than only receiving a single letter grade, families can see a breakdown of their child's proficiency in different areas, allowing them to better understand their child's strengths and weaknesses and provide targeted support.

St. Anthony - New Brighton Schools believes in the brilliance of each student, embracing them with audacious love and uncommon trust. We seek to acknowledge our students' strengths, encouraging them to thrive and letting them shine.

"To get rid of the old system feels good because kids aren't identifying as an "A" student anymore," said Mitsch.

This month's member feature was submitted by Liz Anderson, Communications Specialist, St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools.

Legislative Session in Homestretch

With less than three weeks to go before the end of the legislative session, conference committees are working to reconcile the differences between the respective bills of each chamber, after which the final bills go back to the floor for final up-or-down votes.

The House and Senate have passed their respective Omnibus Education Finance and Policy bills, as well as other key bills — Omnibus Labor Policy, Paid Family Medical Leave, among others — many of which include provisions that impact public education.

While the House and Senate Omnibus Education and Omnibus Labor Policy bills have many similarities, there are key differences.

Among AMSD's key priorities or areas of concern:

General Education Formula. AMSD advocates for a formula increase of 5 percent per year and linking the formula to inflation. The House bill increases the allowance by 4 percent for FY24, 2 percent for FY25, and then indexes the formula to inflation beginning in FY26. The Senate bill increases the General Education Formula Allowance 4 percent in FY24 and 5 percent in FY25 — but does not link the formula to inflation.

A 5 percent per year formula increase is needed to allow school districts to fund current programs and commitments and meet budget challenges that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and historic inflation. Linking the formula to inflation is critical to stabilizing the funding system.

Special Education Cross-Subsidy and English Learner Revenue. AMSD continues to push for increasing special education and English learner funding to reduce the cross-subsidies by 60 percent. The House bill currently proposes to fund 48.7 percent of the special education cross-subsidy; the Senate increases special education cross-subsidy reduction aid to 40 percent for FY24, 47.3 percent for FY25 and 60 percent for FY26 and later. For the English learner cross-subsidy, the House proposes increasing funding for the base EL formula from \$704 to \$1,000 per pupil in FY24 and would permanently eliminate the cross-subsidy by FY27; the Senate also proposes to increase the base EL formula from \$704 to \$1,000 per pupil in FY24 and then reduce the cross-subsidy by 75 percent by FY26 and later.

Unemployment Compensation. The House and Senate Omnibus Education bills both propose to make school hourly workers eligible for unemployment compensation during the summer months effective May 28, 2023, but do not provide funding. Furthermore, the bills prohibit school districts from using the existing unemployment levy to cover the cost. School leaders are also very concerned that the May 2023 effective date jeopardizes their ability to staff programs this summer.

AMSD and other education organizations are urging legislators to fund the program and delay the effective date until August 1 to help ensure school districts are able to offer programs this summer. A failure to provide funding for this new mandate would have the effect of creating another cross-subsidy as school districts would be forced to use general fund dollars to cover the cost.

Labor Policy. The House Omnibus Education Bill and the Omnibus Labor Policy Bills — [HF1522](#) (Nelson) / [SF1384](#) (McEwen) — include several provisions that would affect public education, including:

- Making class size/staffing ratios terms and conditions of employment subject to collective bargaining; (a floor amendment deleted this from the Senate bill)
- Reducing the number of days of teaching service a probationary teacher must annually complete during the probationary period;

Continued on page 4

AMSD Members Urged to Contact Legislators

Continued from page 3

- Requiring the adoption of e-learning days to be negotiated with teachers; and,
- Granting unions additional access to employee data.

AMSD is strongly opposed to expanding the terms of conditions of employment and believes this would be a significant infringement of inherent managerial rights and negatively impact the ability of locally elected school boards and their administrators to effectively govern and manage their districts.

Renewal of a Referendum by School Boards. A long time AMSD legislative priority is to allow locally elected school boards to renew an existing operating referendum. Both the House and Senate propose allowing a school board to renew an expiring referendum one time if the per-pupil amount of the referendum is the same as the amount expiring and the term of the renewed referendum is no longer than the initial term approved by the voters. The districts must also hold a meeting allowing public testimony on the proposed renewal.

Additional provisions of note in the omnibus bills include:

PreK Seats. AMSD supports making funding for the Voluntary Pre-K program permanent and expand access to the program. Both bills would make permanent the funding for the 4,000 PreKindergarten seats. The House bill also proposes to add and permanently fund an additional 5,200 seats.

Teacher Shortage and Diversifying the Workforce. A top AMSD priority is to increase funding for programs to attract, develop, and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas. Both bills include increased grant funding to attract and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas. In addition, AMSD advocates for maintaining multiple pathways to licensure in the tiered licensure system. The House bill would close a successful pathway from Tier 2 to Tier 3 while an amendment on the Senate floor removed this language keeping that pathway open.

Student Support Personnel Aid. The pandemic greatly exacerbated mental health challenges facing our students. The House and Senate bills include student support personnel aid to help school districts hire new counselors, social workers, and other support personnel to help address the mental health needs of students.

NOW is the time to reach out to the members of the conference committee, legislative leaders, Gov. Walz and Lt. Gov. Flanagan, and your local legislators to advocate on behalf of AMSD's legislative priorities. Your voice matters!

- [LINK: View the AMSD 2023 Legislative Priorities \(Updated April 2023\)](#)
- [LINK: Contact Information: Omnibus Education Finance Bill Conference Committee](#)
- [LINK: View a full 2023 Education Omnibus Bill Comparison chart](#)
- [LINK: Proposed PELRA Changes](#)