



Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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May 25, 2023

To: AMSD Board of Directors

From: Scott Croonquist

RE: Annual Report

After a decade of divided legislative control, the 2022 election brought major changes to the political landscape with Democrats taking full control of state government. Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan handily won reelection while Democrats maintained narrow control of the House and flipped the Senate by winning a one seat margin. This was the first time one party had full control of state government since the 2013-14 biennium. A big difference this time around was a \$17.5 billion state budget surplus.

In addition, there was a huge turnover of lawmakers with 47 new House Members and 24 new Senators in the 2023 Legislature. We also had new chairs of the House and Senate education committees after several long serving legislators did not seek reelection. With so many new legislators and new committee chairs, one would have assumed that the first weeks of the session would have been spent conducting overview hearings and letting the new lawmakers get oriented. The exact opposite happened. Almost immediately, the new majority caucuses began to push through their expansive agenda. The pace around the Capitol in January was what we normally expect when the committee deadlines are approaching in March and April. In my 33 years working around the Capitol, it was far and away the fastest start to a legislative session and it didn't really slow down until the session adjourned on May 22.

Based on campaign promises and the budget surplus, it was very predictable that we would see significant new funding proposed for education. It was also easy to forecast that there would be numerous new mandates and programs proposed. However, the number and scope of the proposed new mandates was breathtaking.

Amidst the disappointment over the adoption of some of the new mandates and PELRA changes, it is easy to forget that most of the priorities on our platform were included in the Omnibus Education Bill, including the long-time AMSD priorities of allowing school boards to renew an operating referendum and linking the formula to inflation. AMSD has led the way in advocating for allowing locally elected school boards to renew a referendum. When we first brought the issue forward many years ago, there was very little support among legislators, or even among the other education organizations for that matter. We gained a little support each

year and were finally able to get it across the goal line this year thanks to the persistent advocacy of AMSD members. Linking the formula to inflation should add stability to what has historically been a very unstable education funding system. Beginning in fiscal year 2026, school leaders will know the minimum formula increase for the next school year in February.

Significant progress was also made on another major AMSD priority - reducing the special education and English learner cross-subsidies. The shortfalls in these programs have become increasingly onerous and the progress made this session provides welcome relief. Additional grant funding was also approved to help diversify the teacher workforce and address staff shortage areas - another platform priority over the last several sessions.

It is also easy to forget that we successfully opposed several other significant mandate proposals that would have had a severe impact on school district budgets including:

- Statutory class size limits
- Mandatory increased prep time
- Minimum salary of \$25 per hour
- Minimum employer contributions toward health insurance premiums

We spent a considerable amount of time and effort trying to educate legislators about the impact these proposals would have on school districts in addition to the proposals that were adopted such as making adult to student ratios a term and condition of employment. AMSD members also spent an extraordinary amount of time convincing legislators that they needed to provide funding to cover the cost of making school hourly workers eligible for unemployment compensation over the summer months. In the end, historic funding, and historic new mandates and PELRA changes, were adopted.

Preparation for the 2023 legislative session began last August when we conducted our annual survey of AMSD board members and district staff to identify funding and policy priorities. The feedback gathered from the survey was collected and synthesized for the AMSD Legislative Committee. The legislative committee used the information to draft a [legislative platform](#) that focused on strengthening and stabilizing funding, enhancing school safety, increasing mental health support, closing opportunity gaps, spurring innovation, and diversifying the educator workforce and addressing staff shortage areas. The platform was streamlined into more specific priorities when the board adopted conference committee priorities at the April meeting:

AMSD Conference Committee Priorities 2023

- Increase the basic formula by 5 percent per year for the next two years and then index the formula to inflation;
- At a minimum, increase special education and English learner funding to reduce the cross-subsidies in those programs by 50 percent and 75 percent respectively over the next two years;
- Allow locally elected school boards to renew an existing operating referendum;
- Provide funding, without a district match, to allow school districts to hire counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses, and chemical dependency counselors;
- Provide funding to cover the cost of making school hourly workers eligible for unemployment compensation;

- Make funding for the Voluntary Pre-K program permanent and expand access to school-based pre-kindergarten programs;
- Include the Read Act to provide resources and training for staff in evidence-based, structured literacy instruction;
- Increase funding for programs to attract, develop, and retain teachers, particularly teachers of color and teachers in shortage areas; and
- Refrain from enacting any unfunded mandates and to honor the historical role of school boards and their administrators to govern and manage their school districts.

As you can see from the summary chart, almost all of our priorities were addressed in the final Omnibus Education Bill: <https://www.amsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/2023-Education-Omnibus-Bill-Comparison.pdf>.

Below is a recap of other activities and events from the past year.

Superintendent and School Board Member Zoom Meetings

We continued to convene and support regular AMSD superintendent Zoom meetings. The Zoom calls were initiated during the pandemic and continue to be highly valued as evidenced by the 30 – 40 superintendents regularly in attendance. The meetings provide a time and space for the superintendents to share information, discuss current challenges, strategize solutions, and support each other.

We also held several Zoom meetings for AMSD school board members during the year to provide an opportunity for them to connect with each other and share information and ideas on topics of interest. A new approach this year was for board members to volunteer to host a meeting and share information about a topic of interest. The board members who participated found the meetings informative and helpful.

AMSD Election Guide

We once again produced a comprehensive election guide which included information about education funding and policy issues as well as tips on holding effective candidate forums and sample questions to ask legislative candidates. The guide has been an effective tool in educating political candidates about important education issues and engaging our member districts in the electoral process.

Reimagine Minnesota – Together We Make a Difference

Our Reimagine Minnesota work continues to serve as a touchstone. We continued our work with the MN State High School League and other education organizations on the initiative to address the racial harm incidents that students from our member districts have experienced during school activities. Paula Forbes and her team were engaged to conduct a series of regional meetings for students throughout the state that culminated in a statewide student conference hosted by Osseo Area Schools Supt. Cory McIntyre and his team at Park Center High School. You can read the report using the link below:

<https://www.amsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Final-MSHSL-Summary-Report.pdf>

Legislative Session Preview

More than 200 superintendents, school board members and district staff joined Gov. Tim Walz, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, MN Department of Education (MDE) Commissioner Willie Jett, and more than two dozen state legislators on Jan. 6 for the AMSD Legislative Session Preview — the annual event that highlights AMSD’s legislative platform and key education issues for the upcoming legislative session. The 2023 event, held at the Quora Education Center, featured remarks from Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan about their education priorities for the session. AMSD superintendents Stacie Stanley of Edina Public Schools and Joe Gothard of Saint Paul Public Schools joined AMSD Chair Crystal Brakke in presenting AMSD’s 2023 Legislative Platform, which the AMSD Board of Directors approved in December.

Gov. Walz and Lt. Gov. Flanagan used the preview to announce that they would be proposing linking the education funding formula to inflation — a long-time AMSD priority that had just moments before been emphasized by Supt. Gothard. The annual preview provided an opportunity for legislators to hear the priorities of AMSD member school districts and discuss important education issues. Chair Brakke, Supt. Stanley, and Supt. Gothard each emphasized the importance of stabilizing the education funding system and providing school districts with the flexibility to address their unique needs and challenges.

The preview concluded with a legislative panel discussion that featured Rep. Cheryl Youakim, Rep. Ben Bakeberg, Sen. Mary Kunesh, and Sen. Michael Kreun, who each outlined some of their education priorities for the 2023 session.

AMSD Day at the Capitol

We were thrilled to welcome over 100 school board members, superintendents, district staff, parents, and students at AMSD’s Day at the Capitol on March 8. A packed room heard updates from the chairs of the House and Senate Education Finance Committees – Rep. Cheryl Youakim and Sen. Mary Kunesh. There was tremendous energy in the room, and it was wonderful to witness AMSD members meeting with their local legislators, attending committee meetings, and walking the hallways of the Capitol building.

Annual Conference

More than 160 people attended the 2022 AMSD-Metro ECSU Conference, “Creating Community, Connections & Culture,” on Nov. 10. This was the first year that Metro ECSU (now BrightWorks) co-sponsored the conference with us, and it went very well. We plan to partner with them again at next fall’s conference and other events.

Kevin Kling kicked off the conference with a topical and humorous take on the importance of resiliency. The conference included engaging breakout sessions such as a presentation from Eastern Carver County School leaders sharing how they have addressed racial incidents within their schools and communities, and a screening of the film “Resilience” followed by a panel discussion with students.

All presentations from the event can be found on the event webpage along with photos from throughout the conference and presentations.

https://www.amsd.org/reimagine2022/?mc_cid=1dcf88047f&mc_eid=9b1bda2810

Board of Directors Meetings

AMSD Board of Directors and committee meetings continue to be conducted in a hybrid format with the option to attend in person or participate remotely via Zoom. Below is a summary of the board meetings over the past year:

- Last August, we heard an overview of PELSB's *Elevate Teaching* initiative from Roseville School Board Member Dr. Rose Chu. We also had a panel discussion featuring several AMSD members who shared an overview of the work of their legislative action coalitions. Steve Adams and Catherine Callahan of the Hopkins LAC, Supt. Mary Kreger and Tony Taschner, of the District 196 LAC, and Julie Greene from the Edina LAC each shared an overview of how their respective LAC is organized and some of the activities and strategies they have found effective.
- In September, we were pleased to hear from Dr. Bill Morris and Peter Leatherman from the Morris Leatherman Company who shared an informative overview of their most recent polling data. Peter and Dr. Morris have graciously shared polling data with AMSD board members for several years at our September board meeting.
- We heard a compelling presentation from Dr. James Densley, Professor and Department Chair of the School of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice at Metro State University and Co-founder and President of The Violence Project at the October meeting.
- In November, we heard an overview of the Together We Make a Difference initiative from Dario Otero and Robin Francis of Forbes Solutions. The board also approved updates to several of AMSD's standing position papers and reviewed a draft of the 2023 legislative platform.
- Jon Alfuth & Anne Olson from KnowledgeWorks shared a presentation, *Transforming for Tomorrow*, at the December meeting. The legislative platform and updates to several position papers were also approved during the meeting.
- The January meeting was used for our annual legislative session preview which is described earlier in this report.
- Our guest speakers in February were Adosh Unni and Cathy Erickson from MDE who shared an overview of the Governor's education budget recommendations.
- Rep. Laurie Pryor and Sen. Steve Cwodzinski, the chairs of the House and Senate Education Policy Committees, were the guest speakers at our March meeting and they shared an overview of the status of significant education issues at the Capitol. We also heard a presentation from AMSD Consultants Kris Amundson and Lori Grivna who shared some tips on effective legislative advocacy in preparation for AMSD's Day at the Capitol.
- At the April meeting we heard an overview of the Read Act from Rep. Heather Edelson, Sen. Erin Maye Quade, and MDE Assistant Commissioner Bobbie Burnham.
- On May 5 we heard an update on the legislative session from Rep. Mary Frances Clardy, Rep. Ben Bakeberg, Sen. Clare Oumou Verbeten, and Sen. Jim Abeler.
- Adosh Unni and Cathy Erickson from MDE are returning for the May 26 meeting to share an overview of the 2023 Omnibus Education Bill.

New AMSD Member

We were pleased to welcome Mankato Area Public Schools to AMSD this year! AMSD now has 52 members – 46 school districts and six intermediate/cooperative districts. Our member school districts enroll over 50 percent of Minnesota's public-school students.

AMSD Team

I am grateful for our team working on behalf of AMSD members. AMSD Office Manager Kimberly Jansa and Communications Director Troy Melhus continue to provide valuable services to AMSD board members and school district staff. Kimberly is the glue that holds the AMSD office together and keeps everything running smoothly. Troy has mastered the art of conducting hybrid meetings to allow AMSD members the option to attend in person or participate remotely. We are also fortunate to have excellent legislative consultants in Kris Amundson and Lori Grivna. They are highly respected at the Capitol and provide valuable assistance covering committee hearings, meeting with legislators, and assisting with strategy development and drafting of advocacy materials. We also work closely and coordinate lobbying efforts with Intermediate School Districts Lobbyist Valerie Dosland, Minneapolis Schools Lobbyist Josh Downham, and Saint Paul Schools Lobbyist Jim Grathwol.

Member Services

Below is a list of some of the services the AMSD team provides to our members:

- The AMSD website continues to be the hub of our communication efforts and provides comprehensive information for our member school districts. Kimberly and Troy keep the website updated with relevant and timely material. The website also makes it easy for AMSD members to advocate and engage in the legislative process. The advocacy page includes a list of the legislative districts and legislators for each AMSD member school district as well as a contact list for legislative leaders, members of the pertinent legislative committees as well Minnesota's congressional delegation.
- Comprehensive and timely email updates are consistently cited by our members as a highly valued service. The updates provide important and timely information and include links to resources, legislation, presentations, and recorded video of legislative hearings and board meetings. We also use the email updates to deliver legislative alerts and calls to action when we need the voice of AMSD members at the Capitol.
- Kimberly continued our work with the Board of School Administrators to enable us to offer continuing education credits for our board meetings and our annual conference.
- We are always happy to support the activities of local legislative action coalitions. I had the opportunity to speak to some of our member district LACs over the past year and am always happy to do so.
- The Connections Newsletter continues to be a tremendous resource and serves as a vehicle to share success stories in our member school districts, highlight new research, and advocate for AMSD's legislative priorities throughout the legislative session. The newsletter is distributed in electronic format to all AMSD school board members, superintendents, district staff, legislators, legislative staff, and members of the media.

Voice For Metro Schools

AMSD is the voice for metropolitan and regional center school districts. Over the years, AMSD has led the charge on a wide variety of issues including allowing school boards to renew an existing referendum, linking the formula to inflation, addressing the special education and English learner cross-subsidies, diversifying the educator workforce, enactment of the local optional revenue program, and allowing referendum questions to increase referendum revenue by inflation. In 2018, AMSD initiated and led the effort to use

the pension adjustment mechanism in the funding formula to make sure AMSD members had their increased employer cost covered when the pension stabilization legislation was passed. The importance of that effort was highlighted this session when pension legislation was adopted that will again increase the employer contribution to TRA. The legislation we successfully lobbied for in 2018 established a precedent that was followed this session to ensure each school district's increased pension contribution will be covered.

We also have a great working relationship with the other education organizations, and we often coordinate lobbying efforts to present a unified front whenever possible. For the last several years we have communicated as we were developing our respective platforms to unite around top priorities to the greatest extent possible. For example, last year all the major education management associations advocated listing reducing the special education cross-subsidy as their top priority and this year we all had a five percent, per year formula increase as a unifying theme.

AMSD members, working together, continue to play a leading role in shaping state education policy and building support for public education among policymakers and the public. It is an honor to work with AMSD board members and your outstanding school district staff. Thank you!