

September 2023
Volume 20
Number 11

A Unique Focus on Dual Enrollment Courses at Buffalo High School

September 8, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

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

September 29, 2023 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

October 6, 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

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

October 27, 2023 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

Coming from the smallest school in the mighty Lake Conference, Buffalo High School student-athletes are no strangers to an underdog role in competition. In the classroom, however, the opportunities available to them rival any in the state thanks to a unique focus on dual enrollment courses that deftly balance career as well as college preparation. "My impression is that we are an anomaly, a standout in that area," said BHS Principal Mark Mischke.

A survey of course offerings at numerous metro-area schools confirms that statement. Not only do the number of college credit-bearing courses (40) rival and even exceed many of Buffalo High School's larger peers, which tend to favor Advanced Placement (AP) courses over College in the Schools (CIS) offerings. What is truly remarkable is the variety of options available and, in some cases, their practical, vocational orientation.



Instructor Gary Wirkus helps students in the CIS Landscaping class construct a precise mulch bed border at Buffalo High School.

Alongside the typical assortment of advanced math, science, engineering, social studies, English and foreign language offerings, BHS students can also choose CIS classes that are not part of the AP catalogue, like Animal Science, Auto Service & Maintenance, Landscaping, Wood Technology, Mechanical Drawing and Child Development.

Those options reflect a partnership with seven institutions of higher learning, from large four-year

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Students and staff returning for another school year, filled with great anticipation, is always exciting! It is also the time of year that we start to think about legislative priorities for the next session. This month's research article highlights progress made on one of AMSD's top legislative priorities — reducing the special education cross-subsidy. The advocacy of AMSD members was vital to the increased special education funding approved in the 2023 session and is an excellent reminder that your voice makes a difference. The AMSD Legislative Committee has begun the work of developing the platform for the 2024 session and will seek AMSD members' input over the next few months. Please feel free to reach out to me, members of the legislative committee, or AMSD staff with your priorities and ideas as we develop the platform. Thank you for your continued advocacy for our students, and I wish everyone a successful start to the school year!

From the AMSD Chair, Marcus Hill, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Board Member

Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Families Saved More Than \$1.5 Million in Tuition Expenses Last School Year

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universities to smaller technical and community colleges, and the course list's foundation in the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum ensures that all credits earned by BHS students will be accepted by any of Minnesota's state colleges and universities.

The variety also reflects the broader Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District's conviction that a BHS graduate must have the skills necessary to absorb additional training and excel in the next step of their development after high school, whether they choose college or a different path. "The goal is to have challenging coursework in all interest areas, not just where we think it's important, but where their interests lie," Mischke said. "We want to challenge students in each of the areas that they are passionate about."

Providing motivated students with a realistic opportunity to finish most general college courses before high school graduation is one step. The next is to help them see the tremendous intellectual and financial value in voluntarily challenging themselves with more rigorous school work before those classes carry college-level costs. BHS senior Zoe Donofrio said she was initially intimidated by the idea of CIS coursework, but has since embraced the growth those classes require. "I enjoyed the structure and pace of it all," she said. "These classes teach you productivity in things like note-taking, independent work time, work quality, and study effort."

Fellow senior Abigail Urick had the advantage of seeing an older sibling save money and time in college by taking advanced courses at BHS, and decided to follow the same path. "The opportunity to take CIS courses is one of my favorite aspects about Buffalo High School and I'm very grateful for it," she said. "It is rewarding to know that I took a more challenging class and benefited from it in multiple ways. While I'm in high school, I'm also getting ahead in college – that's amazing!"



BHS students have a variety of CIS science classes to choose from.

While many high schools reserve college-level material for juniors and seniors, 12 percent of ninth-graders and nearly 40 percent of sophomores took CIS classes at BHS last school year. Over the past seven years, an average of 66 percent of seniors have participated.

Mischke said that process of registering for a dual enrollment course is another factor that sets CIS classes apart from AP or International Baccalaureate (IB) options, which offer the opportunity to test for college credit but ultimately remain high school classes. "When a student sees they actually have a transcript from St. Cloud State and they've passed college algebra, they realize that they might be capable of more than they may have initially thought."

The financial aspect is significant as well. BHS students earned over 5,000 college credits last school year, collectively saving more than \$1.5 million in tuition expenses. "The preparedness and the savings that come with it are real," said Mischke. "When a student doesn't have money at home to pay for college but gets almost all of his generals done for free, there's a legitimate equity component there. I want to make sure students at Buffalo High School don't sell themselves short in terms of what their opportunities are, and we're creating opportunities that they might not have otherwise."

This month's member feature was submitted by Paul Downer, Communications Coordinator, Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools.

Education Bill Makes Progress to Close Special Education Cross-Subsidy

One of the highlights of the 2023 Omnibus Education Bill was the significant progress made to address the overwhelming special education shortfall. The shortfall is referred to as the special education cross-subsidy because school districts are forced to subsidize the shortfall by redirecting general education revenue to cover the difference.

Addressing the special education cross-subsidy has been one of AMSD’s top legislative priorities for many years. In the 2019 session, AMSD successfully advocated for the establishment of special education cross-subsidy reduction aid. The 2019 bill set cross-subsidy reduction aid at 2.6 percent for FY 2020 and 6.43 percent for FY 2021 and later. While this was a relatively modest effort to address the growing cross subsidy, it set the stage for a significant breakthrough in the 2023 session.

As the chart below shows, the 2023 Education Bill increased special education cross subsidy reduction aid from 6.43 percent to 44 percent for the next three years. In FY 2027, cross-subsidy reduction aid will increase to 50 percent. This came at a cost of \$662.823 million for the 2024-25 biennium and \$821.218 million for the 2026-27 biennium.

E–12 Education Bills Special Education Cross Subsidy

Aid Factor Change:

FY24–26: 44%

FY27: 50%

Increase from FY23 at 6.43%

Cross Subsidy Reduction Aid:
FY24–25: \$662,823,000
FY26–27: \$821,218,000

- The “Initial Cross Subsidy” is defined as:
 - the nonfederal cost of special education, including transportation, minus
 - the state special education aid received after tuition adjustments, minus
 - the general ed revenue attributable to students receiving SpEd services outside of the regular classroom for more than 60% of the school day (portion attributable to instruction outside of the regular classroom).

Source: Minnesota Department of Education, May 2023

The recently released FY 2022 Special Education Cross-Subsidies report shows how important it was for the Governor and Legislature to make this investment. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is required to annually submit the cross-subsidy report to the legislative committees having jurisdiction over K-12 Education on the amount each district is cross-subsidizing special education costs with general education revenue.

As chart 2 shows, MDE calculated the final overall FY 2022 statewide cross-subsidy at more than \$712 million — with more than half (\$477 million) specifically in AMSD member districts. The cross-subsidy was projected to rise to more than \$729 million in FY 2023. Following the passage of the 2023 education bill, MDE projects that the FY 2024 cross-subsidy will decline to \$410.6 million in FY 2024 then slightly

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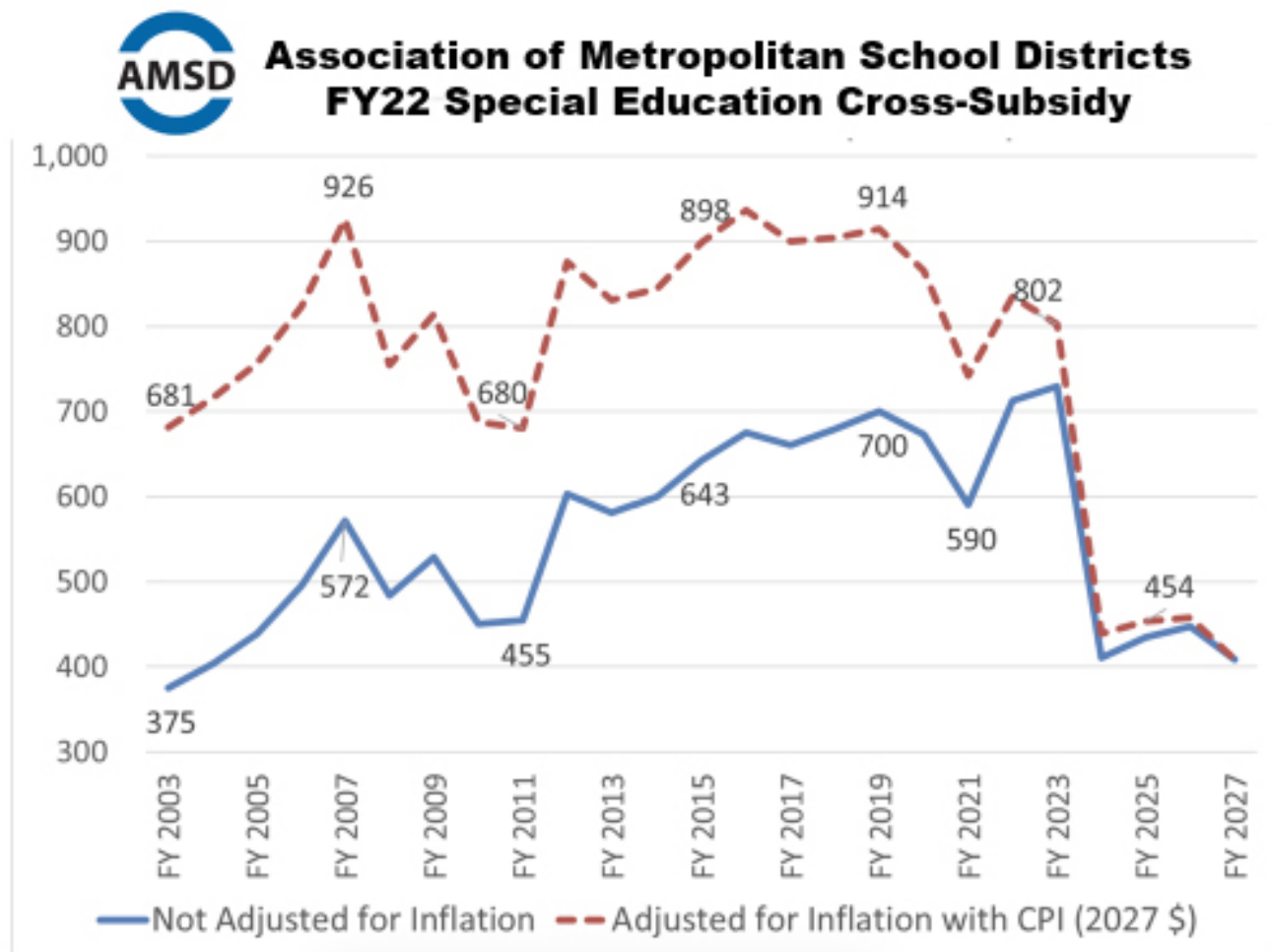
AMSD Members' Advocacy Makes a Difference for Special Education Funding

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increase in FY 2025 and FY 2026 before dropping to \$408.6 million in FY 2027 when cross-subsidy reduction aid increases to 50 percent.

The investments to address the special education cross-subsidy provide some welcome financial relief. At the same time, even after the 2023 education bill is fully implemented a significant shortfall will remain. AMSD members are committed to continuing to work with state policymakers to build on the progress made in the 2023 session.

- [LINK: View the FY2022 Special Education Cross-Subsidy Report](#)
- [LINK: View the AMSD FY2022 Special Education Cross Subsidies](#)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education, July 2023