

# CONNECTIONS



News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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Number 6

## Working Toward Proficiency with Competency-Based Learning

### March 22, 2024 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

### April 5, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

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

### April 26, 2024 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

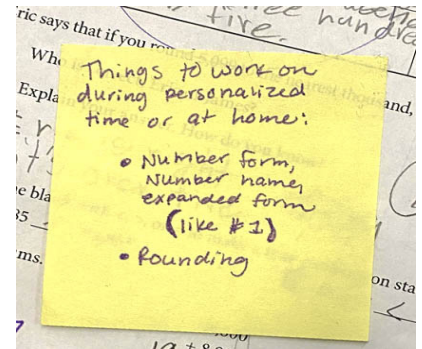
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.  
Anderson Center  
Bethel University  
Arden Hills

### May 3, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

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

A sticky note on the 4th grader's math work shares her thoughts on what she needs to practice. The class is working on problem-solving — one of four math competencies. Student and teacher discussed choices and align on a plan for next steps. With each opportunity to practice, she gets closer to proficiency.

The sticky note provides a glimpse into how a competency-based approach is showing up at the elementary level in Spring Lake Park Schools. While we're working toward proficiency with competency-based learning throughout the K-12 experience, for the 2023-2024 school year, it's most visible in elementary areas like Language Arts, Math and Science.



Competency-based learning is providing learners flexibility to demonstrate their mastery of academic, career and life competencies. Instead of just spending a set amount of time on a particular topic, students are learning in order to apply learning in authentic ways.

A helpful analogy has been the teen learning to drive a car — a competency-based approach. Essential concepts are taught in a classroom. Students take a test to get a permit. Then, they learn with a teacher behind the wheel. After that, comes practice. Finally, the student takes a behind-the-wheel test to demonstrate what they can do. Proficient drivers get a license.

### The basics

Competency-based learning is one of four components of Spring Lake Park Schools' approach to [personalized learning](#). *Academic competencies* align to different academic subject areas (like math and science) and Minnesota state standards. *Career and life competencies* are skills and mindsets needed to be successful like communication and collaboration.

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The presence of so many AMSD members at this week's annual Day at the Capitol was truly inspiring! The research article featured in this month's newsletter underscores our member districts' ongoing financial challenges. The recently released state budget forecast, projecting a \$3.7 billion surplus, presents a valuable opportunity for state policymakers to allocate additional funds to assist our districts in managing rising costs and successfully implementing the new programs and requirements enacted last year. As the 2024 session enters its final two months, we need to continue to advocate for the welfare of our students and the success of our schools.

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



# Consistency Helps Support Depth in Learning

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Competencies represent the most critical and enduring concepts from each content area. There are 4-8 competencies in each content area, each with specific criteria. The competencies are consistent from kindergarten through grade 12 and become more complex as a student grows. K-12 competency rubrics help learners see their learning progress.

Student learning is facilitated so students can take more time on components they find difficult and go faster through the ones they understand quickly. After practicing, students show their learning through tests, projects, or other applications and produce examples that show what they know.

## Addressing gaps, fueling self-direction

In Catie Russell's fourth grade classroom, students understand the learning goal and self-reflection — via sticky note — helps guide their next steps in learning. "How school has gone in the past, there are gaps for students," says Catie. "If students can try to identify it in themselves, and then we provide choices and support to practice and learn, I think that is so helpful and we can reach more kids." Self-assessment also motivates students internally and lays the foundation for self-direction and ownership of learning fourth graders are ready for. "When making choices on what to work on, they can clearly see which topics need more practice," she says.

## Gaining depth over time

Des Gillis teaches science to K-4 students. She facilitates learning for three science competencies: systems and structures, patterns and cause and effect. She's seeing how the consistency K-12 helps support depth in learning.



"Each grade level is learning the concepts through scientific phenomenon," she says. "I may tell Kindergarteners - This is a pattern. Third and fourth graders recognize patterns when we're discussing a specific phenomena. While the overarching theme is the same for everyone, more complexity starts to build."

Teachers are also excited for the potential connections between subject areas and how they might engage students' individual interests with opportunities for deeper learning.

"When we work on patterns in science, we also talk about what it looks like in math," says Des. "Or, what a pattern looks like in nature. When we look at snowflakes, we are seeing a symmetrical pattern. Making connections as we move through units, we can deepen learning across content areas."

## Informing next steps

The transparency to learning goals and progress isn't just for students and teachers, but for families, too. In first trimester report cards, families saw more information than ever — noting learning progress as *beginning*, *in progress* or *proficient* for each competency criteria at their student's grade band. This level of information helps focus next steps and prevent gaps. "We're all still very much working toward proficiency with competency-based learning," says Melissa Olson, director of curriculum and instructional practices. "We're practicing and applying what we are learning to the design of learning experiences that support deep learning that kids can apply to life. We're excited about what we're seeing and hearing."

Learn more online about Spring Lake Park Schools approach to [personalized learning](#).

This month's member feature was submitted by Erika Taibl, Executive Director of Communications, Marketing and Outreach, Spring Lake Park Public Schools.

# AMSD Districts Face More Than \$317 Million in Shortfalls

Despite the significant funding increase approved in the 2023 legislative session, a new survey shows more than 70 percent of AMSD member districts face a combined [budget shortfall](#) of more than \$317 million for the 2024-25 school year. The survey, conducted in February 2024, asked member districts to project the gap between their anticipated revenue and expenditures for the 2024-25 school year assuming no additional funding is provided in the 2024 legislative session.

A confluence of factors has created a challenging fiscal environment for school districts despite the significant overall funding increase.

- **Historic inflation and staffing shortages.** While inflation has declined from historic highs in 2022, significant increases in utilities, transportation, food, supplies, insurance, and other costs have had a major impact on school district budgets. At the same time, school districts have responded to historic staff shortages by significantly increasing salaries in several job categories to fill vacancies and settle employment contracts.
- While the 2023 education bill provided a significant **overall** increase in funding, two critical funding streams continued to lose ground to inflation. The bill increased the basic formula by 4 percent for the 2023-24 school year and 2 percent for the 2024-25 school year — short of projected inflation over the same period. Likewise, local optional revenue (LOR), another critical funding stream, has not been increased since it went into effect in 2014. The basic formula and LOR comprise 75 percent of school districts' general education revenue — the funding stream that is the most flexible and is used to pay staff salaries, transportation, and other general operations.
- Historic new expectations, programs, and requirements for school districts were included in the education bill, and numerous other bills, in the 2023 session. AMSD supported many of the new requirements, but they come with increased costs — both monetarily as well as significant staff time. Some of the new requirements were funded, some partially unfunded, some temporarily funded, and others came with no funding.
- The significant federal resources that were approved in response to the global pandemic are winding down over the next year, creating a looming fiscal cliff for school districts. While the federal funding is coming to an end, the needs of our students continue.

The collective shortfall would be even higher had several districts not passed local referendums the last two years. In Rochester Public Schools, even with a one-time \$10 million donation from the Mayo Clinic, the district is facing a shortfall of more than \$9.2 million.

The impact of these shortfalls will be significant. School districts are required to maintain balanced budgets and locally elected school boards, working with their administrators, staff, and communities, will make the necessary adjustments to balance their budget.

The Anoka-Hennepin School District is facing a deficit of an estimated \$24 million and is considering using fund balance, administrative cuts, program cuts, and staff layoffs to balance their budget, said Supt. Cory McIntyre.

"Budget reductions and realignment have already started with central office personnel and program reductions effective June 30, 2024, impacting the 2024-25 school year budget," Supt. McIntyre said. "This will reduce administrative support by approximately 45 positions — equal to a \$5 million reduction of the potential \$30 million needing to be reduced. These adjustments aim to lower the impact of

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# AMSD Calls for Supplemental Funding

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reductions at school sites for the 2024-25 school year.”

Anoka-Hennepin faces these challenges in the wake of just settling a new teacher contract in February, after several months of negotiation. Several other AMSD districts were still negotiating teacher contracts at the time of the survey — with at least five headed to mediation.

The Minnetonka Public School District is facing a deficit of more than \$6.5 million. “Our school districts need assistance to address inflation and to successfully implement the new programs and requirements that were adopted last year,” said Supt. David Law.

AMSD is calling on state policymakers to approve supplemental funding for school districts in light of the [Feb. 29 announcement from the Minnesota Office of Management and Budget](#) that the FY24-25 biennium is projected to end with a \$3.7 billion surplus.

[AMSD's legislative platform](#) outlines several proposals that could mitigate the projected shortfalls and help districts successfully implement the Read Act and other new programs and requirements approved in the 2023 legislative session.

“AMSD greatly appreciates the substantial funding increase approved by the Governor and Legislators in the 2023 session and their commitment to advancing education. At the same time, extraordinary cost pressures, staffing shortages, and historic new expectations and requirements for our schools have created a challenging fiscal environment,” said AMSD Chair Marcus Hill, a member of the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan School Board.

**“ We will have to consider all options, including using fund balance, administrative cuts, program cuts, and staff layoffs. ”**

—Supt. Cory McIntyre,  
Anoka-Hennepin School District



*Minnetonka Supt. David Law testified before the House Education Policy Committee on Tuesday, March 5, about the district's commitment to the READ Act, and the need for additional funding and flexibility with timelines to ensure a successful implementation.*



# AMSD, MASA Region 9 Gather at Capitol to Advocate for Public Education

More than 100 AMSD members turned out for the AMSD / MASA Region 9 Day at the Capitol on Tuesday, March 5. AMSD annually hosts the Day at the Capitol to encourage members, students, and education leaders to meet with legislators, attend committee hearings, and advocate for public education. House Education Finance Committee Chair Cheryl Youakim, Senate Education Finance Committee Chair Mary Kunesch, and Reagan Greene, education policy advisor to Gov. Walz and Lt. Gov. Flanagan, spoke to the attendees to kick off the day.



*Rep. Cheryl Youakim (DFL-Hopkins) speaks to a gathering of AMSD and MASA members in a meeting room at the State Capitol, updating the members about the latest work of the House Committee on Education Finance, which she chairs.*



*Sen. Mary Kunesch (DFL-New Brighton), chair of the Senate Education Finance Committee, updates AMSD and MASA members about important education issues under consideration in the 2024 session.*



*Dan Armagost, Executive Director of the Southern Minnesota Education Consortium testifies on behalf of AMSD and several additional education organizations in support of HF3983, sponsored by Rep. Peggy Bennett (R-Albert Lea), which would expand eligibility for special education teacher pipeline grants.*



*Jill Stewart Kellar, Asst. Director of Career and Technical Education at NE Metro Intermediate District 916 testifies about CTE consortiums in the House Education Finance Committee while Rep. Ron Kresha (R-Little Falls) listens on.*



*Several students from AMSD districts testified about their high school experiences in the basement hearing room of the State Office Building during the House Education Finance Committee hearing chaired by Rep. Cheryl Youakim.*