

CONNECTIONS



News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

April 2024
Volume 21
Number 7

Empowering Voices, Shaping Futures: A Journey with South St. Paul Public Schools

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

May 17, 2024 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

May 24, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

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

In a dynamic educational landscape, South St. Paul Public Schools (SSPPS) stands committed to understanding and meeting the evolving needs of its learning community. With a determined focus on listening to the voices of its stakeholders, the district embarked on a transformative journey to understand their desires and aspirations for the future and the experience they expect in South St. Paul Public Schools.



Superintendent Dr. Zambreno is shown working with students at one of our elementary schools. This is one of the many workshop sessions district and school leaders engaged in with our students to hear their voices and learn what their desired daily experiences are at South St. Paul Public Schools.

Engaging with Purpose

Leadership from South St. Paul Public Schools embarked on a quest to dive deep into the hearts and minds of students, staff, and families. Through immersive workshops and heartfelt conversations, they sought to understand what each group shares in their desires for their daily experiences within our school community.

At the heart of this work lies the concept of "[Desired Daily Experiences](#)" — a guide that is driving the district's path towards excellence. These experiences summarize the collective desires of students, staff, and families, painting a vivid picture of their ideal school environment and experience.

Student Engagement and Success

Students expressed a strong desire to feel seen, heard, valued, and safe in a fun, engaging, challenging and supportive learning environment. SSPPS acknowledges and commits to the vital role of a positive and inclusive atmosphere in fostering active participation and academic achievements among students.

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The 2024 legislative session is already winding down. In this month's newsletter, the research article provides an outline of the Governor's supplemental budget proposal and the joint supplemental budget targets agreed upon by the Governor, House, and Senate Leaders. The agreement includes a small allocation for education. As the session comes to a close, it is crucial for AMSD members to speak up and advocate for our priorities. I encourage you to contact your local legislators and request that they avoid enacting new mandates or requirements. Please ensure that they understand we need time and space to implement new programs successfully. Thank you for your assistance in advance!

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



A Journey of Collaboration, Empowerment and Continuous Improvement

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Staff Satisfaction

Similarly, staff emphasized the importance of feeling respected and appreciated in their roles within the district. SSPPS is dedicated to meeting the needs of staff members, fostering a work environment where every individual feels valued and supported, ultimately contributing to higher job satisfaction and retention rates.

Partnership with Families

SSPPS recognizes the critical partnership between home and school in ensuring student success. We know when families feel valued, respected, and informed about their child's education, it builds trust and they are more likely to be actively involved in their child's learning journey.

Pathway to Packer Promise

With the knowledge gained from the [Desired Daily Experiences](#), SSPPS began mapping out the "Pathway to Packer Promise." This visionary roadmap focuses on promising to deliver on the core priorities identified by stakeholders.

- **Feeling Safe at School:** Recognizing safety as paramount, the district underwent a comprehensive overhaul of its safety protocols, fostering a culture of preparedness and vigilance.
- **Amplifying Student Voices:** SSPPS prioritizes student input and engagement at every level of decision-making. Through initiatives like Student School Board Representatives, Principal and Superintendent Advisory Councils, Elementary Ambassadors, and various Affinity Groups, SSPPS ensures student voices are heard and valued, shaping the direction of the district's initiatives.
- **Family Partnership:** SSPPS is continuing to build and increase family partnership through various advisory committees, dedicated student-family connect times, and family events and activities throughout the district. Bringing all of the critical players together to promote a sense of belonging and unity but also provide families with valuable resources, support networks, and opportunities for meaningful engagement in their child's education.
- **New Academic Model:** Exciting changes are also underway as SSPPS transitions to a new academic model tailored to meet the diverse needs of its students. In this new academic model, SSPPS is working to ensure that learning is not just challenging, but also exhilarating, by creating dynamic learning pathways that offer both on and off ramps for course exploration, allowing students to tailor their educational journey to their unique interests and aspirations. Our team of dedicated social workers, counselors, and psychologists work collaboratively to weave a safety net of support, ensuring that students feel valued, empowered, and equipped to overcome any obstacles they may encounter on their educational journey.

As SSPPS continues its journey of collaboration, empowerment, and continuous improvement, it remains committed to delivering on the Desired Daily Experiences of its learning community. By understanding and addressing the needs and expectations of stakeholders, SSPPS strives to enhance overall performance, promote equity and inclusion, and create a nurturing environment where every student can thrive. Together, with students, staff, and families, SSPPS is dedicated to shaping a future where every voice is heard, every dream is nurtured, and every child is empowered to reach their fullest potential.



During the roundtable event, district staff heard from more than 100 students about their school journey and what we could do to enhance their experience.

This month's member feature was submitted by Lisa Brandecker, Manager of Administrative Services and Communications, and Danette Childs, Communications Specialist, South St. Paul Public Schools.

Joint Supplemental Budget Targets Allocate \$43 Million for Education — Just \$18 Million in Ongoing Funding

While the February State Budget and Economic Forecast [projected a \\$3.715 billion surplus](#), expectations of a funding boost for education were quickly tempered with news that current state spending is projected to outpace revenue by almost \$1.5 billion in the 2026-27 biennium. While that would still leave a balance of more than \$2.2 billion in the 2026-27 biennium, an uncertain long-term economic outlook has left state policymakers cautious about new spending commitments.

Still, education leaders remained hopeful that Gov. Tim Walz and legislators would approve supplemental funding for E-12 education for the second half of this biennium to help school districts address historic inflationary cost increases as well successfully implement the myriad new programs and requirements adopted in the 2023 session.

However, the Governor recommended little to no additional funding for education in his 2024 Supplemental Budget Recommendations. A detailed chart of the Governor's supplemental budget recommendations can be found [here](#):

- [Governor's Supplemental Budget Recommendations](#)



Students testifying at the Minnesota Senate Education Finance Committee during the 2024 legislative session.

Not long after the Governor released his recommendations, Speaker Melissa Hortman and Majority Leader Erin Murphy announced they had reached an agreement with the Governor on supplemental budget targets that do propose a modest level of supplemental education funding.

Specifically, the joint agreement allocates \$43 million for education spending for the 2024-25 biennium. The agreement also sets spending targets for the 2026-27 biennium with an education target of \$18.05 million. In other words, \$18.05 million of the new funding approved this session can be a permanent increase and the remainder must be one-time under the agreement.

The joint agreement also includes a target of \$34.37 million for the Children and Families Committee and \$31.458 million in one-time funding for Educator Pensions, presumably for a one-year TRA employee contribution holiday of .5 percent. The Governor proposed \$15.7 million for a one-year .25 percent TRA employee contribution holiday and the joint agreement doubles the amount.

- [LINK: View the Joint Budget Targets](#)

Attention now turns to the House and Senate Education Finance Committees which will develop their respective supplemental budget bills.

The AMSD Legislative Committee recently approved a list of [2024 Session Priorities](#) — a streamlined version of the 2024 Legislative Platform — and is encouraging all AMSD members to advocate to their

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AMSD Priorities: \$100 Per Pupil in One-Time Funding; No New Mandates

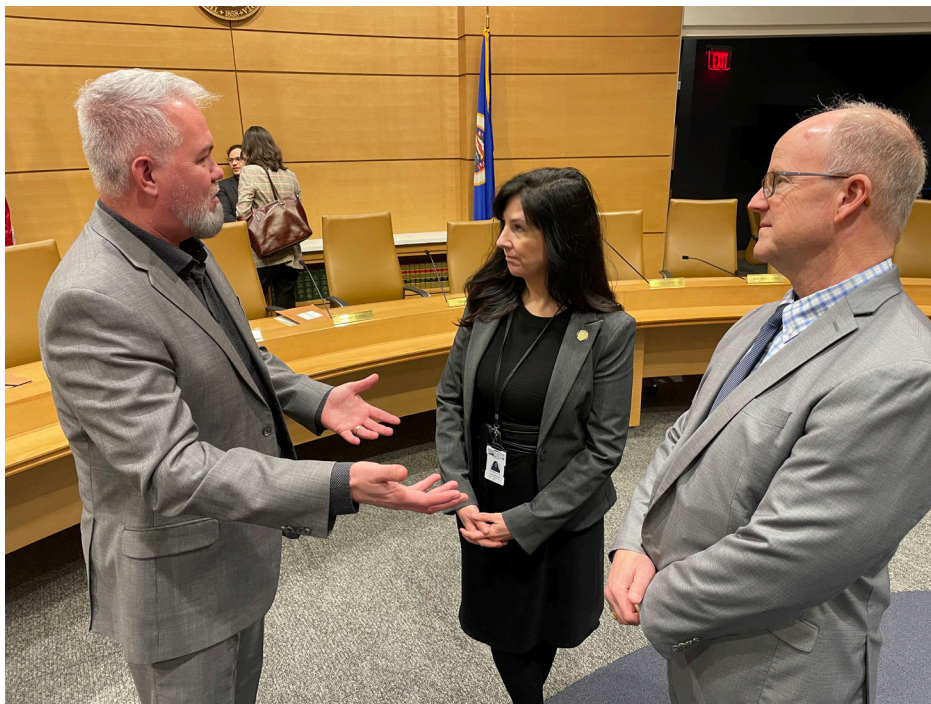
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local legislators over the final weeks of the session. The recently agreed to joint budget targets notwithstanding, a key recommendation is to urge legislators to approve \$100 per pupil in one-time aid to support a successful implementation of the Read Act and other programs and requirements approved in the 2023 session. The priorities also include a plea to lawmakers to refrain from enacting new mandates in the 2024 session. A number of new requirements have been proposed and AMSD members are urging legislators to provide some breathing room, so school board members, administrators, teachers, and staff have an opportunity to implement the new programs and requirements previously adopted.

The latest updates on the 2024 session, as well as contact information for legislators and more, can be found on the AMSD 2024 Session website at <https://www.amsd.org/2024session/>.

AMSD members can also find contact information for legislators and more below:

- [LINK: Contact your local Senators](#)
- [LINK: Contact your local House Members](#)
- [LINK: Contact the Minnesota Legislature Leadership](#)



Mounds View Supt. Chris Lennox and AMSD Executive Director Scott Croonquist speak with Sen. Heather Gustafson (DFL-Vadnais Heights) following a Minnesota Senate Education Finance Committee meeting during the 2024 legislative session.