

**MINNETONKA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT #276**  
**District Service Center**  
**5621 County Road 101**  
**Minnetonka, Minnesota**

**Summary of November 16, 2023 Study Session**

The School Board of Minnetonka Independent School District #276 met in study session at 6:05 p.m. on Thursday, November 16, 2023 in the Community Room at the District Service Center, 5621 County Road 101, Minnetonka, Minnesota. Chairperson Lisa Wagner presided. Other Board members present were Mark Ambrosen, Katie Becker, Patrick Lee-O'Halloran, Michael Remucal, Meghan Selinger, Chris Vitale and Superintendent David Law, ex officio.

**VANTAGE PUBLIC POLICY – STUDENT PRESENTATION**

Associate Superintendent Amy LaDue led the discussion. She explained that students in the VANTAGE Public Policy course had researched the question: What should the District consider when developing a policy regarding AI use in the District? After conducting primary and secondary research on four stakeholder groups' perspectives (teachers, students/parents, administrators, and collegiate-level), students split into six teams to develop a presentation with their team's recommendation. These impressive presentations were delivered to a panel of judges that included administrators from MHS and the District, who ultimately selected a team to present to the School Board at a study session.

The winning team then shared their recommendations with the Board. They noted that the main issue is that AI technology is brand new, and rapidly developing. Other states across the country have released guidelines for AI use, but Minnesota has not yet. Districts are left to figure things out on their own. The recommendation from the student team is that the District establish a comprehensive policy, with input from administrators, staff and students, with clear guidelines to optimize AI utilization while safeguarding against potential misuse. They also shared student and teacher survey data regarding the use of AI.

Chairperson Wagner thanked the students for the presentation and noted that this was just the beginning of the discussions on this topic.

**CITIZEN INPUT**

Chairperson Wagner extended an invitation to members of the audience who wished to address the Board on any topic. She also read the guidelines for Citizen Input.

The following individuals then addressed the Board:

- Minnetonka parent Colleen Lockovitch spoke regarding her concerns about the District's Nutrition Services program.
- Minnetonka parent Tim Wilkinson spoke regarding his concerns about class sizes in the Spanish Immersion program at Minnewashta.
- Minnetonka parent Donavon DesMarais spoke regarding his concerns about class sizes in the Spanish Immersion program at Minnewashta.
- Minnetonka parent Ann Senn spoke regarding her desire for Chris Pears and Brent Veninga to be recognized for their contributions to the District's VANTAGE program.
- MHS student Tali Parker spoke regarding her concerns about weighted grade requirements, specifically the requirement that students pass the AP Test to receive a weighted grade.
- District parent Tara Lee Stone spoke regarding her concerns about weighted grade requirements, specifically the requirement that students pass the AP Test to receive a weighted grade.
- District parent Matthew Stone spoke regarding his concerns about weighted grade requirements, specifically the requirement that students pass the AP Test to receive a weighted grade.

Chairperson Wagner thanked the individuals for their comments.

#### **DISCUSSION REGARDING NAMING OF FORUM OF VANTAGE/MOMENTUM BUILDING**

Superintendent Law led the discussion. He explained that the Minnetonka Foundation had recently committed \$250,000 to support the technology used in the new VANTAGE/MOMENTUM building's Forum. After receiving several nominations to recognize this gift, and with support from the Foundation's Board of Directors, the recommendation is to name the Forum room at the new VANTAGE/MOMENTUM building the "Minnetonka Public Schools Foundation Forum" or the more commonly used "Foundation Forum."

In the discussion that followed, Board members were supportive of this recommendation. Board member Vitale noted that he had recently attended a meeting of the Foundation Board, and all the Board members were enthusiastic about this. Chairperson Wagner noted that this item would be brought back to the December 7 regular meeting for approval.

#### **REVIEW OF FY23 AUDIT**

Executive Director of Finance and Operations Paul Bourgeois noted that the audit of the Fiscal Year 2023 Financial Statements has been completed by the auditing firm of CliftonLarsonAllen LLP and is being readied for acceptance and approval by the School Board at the December 7 School Board Meeting. He introduced Lance Lauinger, CPA of CliftonLarsonAllen, who reviewed the Basic Financial Statements in the audit for the Board, prior to final approval of the complete audit report which will be on December 7.

Upon approval, the audited financial statements will be filed with the Minnesota Department of Education as required by statute.

Mr. Lauinger shared the following points from the Executive Audit Summary and Management Report:

*Audit Opinion – the financial statements are fairly stated. We issued what is known as a “clean” or unmodified audit report.*

*Yellow Book Opinion – No compliance issues were reported in our review of laws, regulations, contracts, and grants that could have significant financial implications to the District.*

*Internal Controls – One material weakness in internal controls was noted. This was related to a material adjustment for \$529,934 in retainage payable which was not properly accrued into fiscal year 2023.*

*Single Audit – as part of the Single Audit we tested the District’s compliance with all direct and material requirements of major federal programs (Child Nutrition Cluster, Special Education Cluster, and Education Stabilization Fund). We noted two material weaknesses with regards to procurement and suspension and debarment in the Child Nutrition Program and Special Education Program.*

*Legal Compliance – we noted one item of noncompliance with regards to Minnesota Legal Compliance, related to the prompt payment of bills.*

*Enrollment – for fiscal 2022-23, MPS had an estimated total adjusted average daily membership of 11,240.18 (or 12,301.24 adjusted pupil units). For fiscal 2021-22, MPS had an estimated total adjusted average daily membership of 11,223.23 (or 12,269.68 adjusted pupil units).*

*Fund Balance – the District’s General Fund unassigned fund balance decreased by \$387,712 during Fiscal 2022-23, decreasing from \$19,237,087 to \$18,849,375. Total fund balance of the General Fund decreased by \$652,590 ending at \$26,836,674 as of June 30, 2023. The ending unassigned fund balance represents 11.08% of General Fund expenditures. A District’s fund balance is an important aspect in considering the District’s financial well-being since a healthy fund balance represents things such as cash flow, a cushion against unanticipated expenditures, enrollment declines, funding deficiencies, aid prorations at the state level and similar problems.*

*Budget to Actual – Total revenues on a net basis in the General Fund were \$714,676 (or 0.43%) more than the budgeted amount while total expenditures were \$2,233,098 (or 1.33%) more than had been budgeted. The net effect of the actual budget variances, including transfers in and other financing sources, was a decrease to total fund balance that was approximately \$294,550 less than the decrease that had been reflected in the*

*District's budget. On a budget this large, these variances reflect excellent budget development, monitoring, and outcomes, and are consistent with prior year variances.*

Mr. Lauinger also shared information regarding the District's financial trends, historical enrollment data, average daily membership and pupil units, and historical expenditures per student. He shared information and updates from the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) that relate to school districts. He noted that beginning in fiscal 2015, the District was required to implement GASB Statement No. 68, which significantly impacted the District's ending net position because of recording the District's estimated share of the respective unfunded liability for the statewide pension plans for TRA and PERA.

Mr. Bourgeois noted that the Audit would be presented to the District's Finance Advisory Committee on November 28, and the full Audit would be brought back to the Board for approval at the December 7 meeting.

Chairperson Wagner asked that Board members contact her or Superintendent Law before December 7 if they have any questions on the Audit.

### **MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM REVIEW**

Associate Superintendent for Instruction Dr. Amy LaDue, MME Principal Pete Dymit and MMW Principal Freya Schirmacher led the discussion. They explained, by way of background, that the last significant review of the middle school program had been conducted in 2007. This review resulted in significant changes to the middle schools, including the creation of honors level courses in all four subject areas, new courses supporting students in math, reading and organization skills, and multiple new elective courses with more flexibility for 8th graders when registering. These changes were highly successful and were seen as critical to MME and MMW emerging as nationally recognized middle schools.

In the fifteen years since this review, the middle schools have seen the additions of the Navigator program, Spanish and Chinese Immersion programs, and a considerable increase in open enrollment. Accommodating these changes has required significant shifts in the existing middle school program and, collectively, these shifts have created new challenges as the middle schools strive to best meet evolving student needs and District goals.

On March 23, 2023, middle school and district leaders proposed that the District engage in a comprehensive review of the current middle school program, including opportunities for student, family and staff voice and engagement. The Board supported that recommendation, and the program review process began in April of 2023.

The focus for the process has centered on the student experience considering social and emotional development, student interest and strengths, the student knowing themselves as a learner, and providing opportunities for choice and ownership.

A robust review process has occurred during the past six months. This process has included stakeholder surveys and focus groups, gathering information about program structures from regional and national peer schools, and best practices for middle school programming. A program review committee was convened to analyze all the information gathered and develop themes and priorities. Additionally, all middle school staff had multiple opportunities throughout the process for information sharing and feedback loops.

The presenters then shared the following information regarding themes, opportunities and next steps:

## Whole Child Development/SEL Themes

- Need for a regular, designated SEL time/Advisory where all teachers can be invested and engaged
- Need for structured, consistent SEL lessons, including planful staff development to ensure effective delivery and high engagement levels
- Differentiated SEL interventions to address MTSS tier 2&3 needs
- Dedicated time to foster connections and relationships between students and staff
- Differentiate SEL topics for developmental and transition needs



## Core Academics - Themes

- More dedicated time in math and reading, especially grades 6-7
- Advanced math placement is criteria-based in most peer districts, with 2 to 3 options per level
- More self-select opportunities for advanced course at higher grades in peer districts
- Academic Support/"What I Need" time daily in all peer districts including intervention and extension



## Electives/Choice - Themes

**PE & Music/Fine Arts** - Some level of requirement in all grades; alternating days.

**Health** - Varying requirements; not required at every grade level

**Tech Ed** - Variety of course focuses, required in grades 6 - 7; optional in grade 8.

**World Language** - frequently a required exploratory class at grades 6 - 7, and an elective at grade 8.

**Art** - Variety of course options; variety of required versus choice

**FACS** - Various "mini/skinny" units offered with topics unique to each grade level, (business development, career exploration, study skills, and relationships, etc.)

**Study Skills** - Grade 6 requirement, in some districts

**Elective choice** - Progressively increases from grades 6 - 8, with some choices within required electives



## Schedule Structure - Themes

- Some version of a “modified” block schedule in most districts
- Additional time frequently dedicated to reading/ELA
- Not dependent on a uniform bell schedule and class length
- Separate advisory and academic support in all peer districts for all students, most commonly offered in the morning
- Electives alternate using an A/B schedule
- Modified block schedules frequently use a skinny schedule for electives, interventions and extensions
- Minnetonka Immersion program is unique with no peer comparisons



## Whole Child Development/SEL - Opps

- Options to separate SEL time from academic support time
- Mixed grade configurations of SEL time to foster middle school community
- Potential of co-advisory groupings
- Focus on bridging transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school
- Dedicated staff to manage and prepare SEL lessons
- All teachers are trained to instruct SEL curriculum



## Core Academics - Opportunities

- Provide a block schedule or increase number of periods to allow more flexibility and options
- Increase literacy support, including intentionality with literacy across the content areas
- Collaborative planning time for like courses/grade level teams
- More opportunities for self-selected/flexible extension & support
- Provide daily, flexible student-centered time



## Electives/Choice - Opportunities

- Literacy interventionist
- “How to be a middle schooler” course
- Collaboration/integration of elective courses
- Targeted support program integrated into the middle school day
- Offer wider variety of elective courses including choices within in requirements
- Opportunity to offer immersion intervention and extension
- Intentionally provide bridges to HS signature programs in 8th grade



## Priorities for Future Planning

- Flexible Schedule – schedules need to be differentiated – to support the learning needs of all students
- Differentiated Academic Support – as part of the core – focused academic support or extension – WIN (What I Need) Time – middle schoolers need choice and options
- Dedicated Social-Emotional Learning Time – time to address the whole-student well-being – self-advocacy – this will support success in high school and beyond
- Exploratory/Elective Courses – more opportunities for experiences that aren't a full semester – minis or skinnies – helps students develop their passion and interests
- Teacher Training and Collaboration – both in planning and within the work

## Facilities Comparisons with Other Districts

- Significant differences in student spaces/square feet
- Significant differences in types of large group spaces – performing arts, large group gathering spaces, flexible teaching and learning spaces
- More flexible furniture and spaces

## Next Steps

- Develop the draft proposal for Middle School Program innovations and improvements – building off of identified priorities
- Solicit additional stakeholder feedback on the Middle School Program proposal
- Request consideration for a focused middle school facilities study that ensures space aligns with the program design and priorities

In the discussion that followed, Board members thanked the presenters for the comprehensive review and said that it was exciting to begin this process and see where it would go. Vice Chair Selinger inquired about the possibility of using advisory time for school-wide seminars, and was told that yes, that could be done. Principal Dymit noted that other metro middle schools have Language Arts every day, and also a literacy class for struggling readers. Students that are on the level could use that time for seminar. "Having a dedicated reading block would be huge," he said. Vice Chair Selinger noted that when the Board had done their listening sessions at the middle schools last year, the immersion students commented on their missed advisory time and how they hoped this could be remedied. Board member Remucal wondered if block scheduling would require more staffing and was told yes, but Principal Dymit noted that there are currently inefficiencies in our immersion scheduling now, which could be remedied with a block schedule.

Chairperson Wagner thanked the presenters and said that she and the Board looked forward to additional discussions on this topic at future board meetings.

## **REVIEW OF NEW COURSE PROPOSALS, CHANGES AND DELETIONS**

Director of Curriculum Steve Urbanski and MHS Assistant Principals Emily Rosengren and Alex Hinseth led the discussion. They explained that tonight's discussion concerned courses that would be offered during the 2024-25 academic year. They said that the proposals have been reviewed by department chairs, program leads, building administration, district administration, the District Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee, and the Student Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee. Courses that are approved by the School Board will be included in the Skipper Log and available to students as they register for the upcoming school year. Course development and implementation funds will be allocated for each course based on sufficient enrollment.

### **COURSE PROPOSALS**

The following proposals respond to programmatic needs that have been identified by the respective departments, programs, and administration.

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Grade(s)</b>
Applied Mathematics—MOMENTUM	10-12
CIS Principles of Microeconomics—VANTAGE	11, 12
Earth Science	9
Engineering 3-D Computer Modeling—Tonka Online	9-12
Fashion Design II	9-12
Flight Training I: Private Pilot Operations—MOMENTUM	10-12
Flight Training II: Instrument Pilot Operations—MOMENTUM	10-12
Forensics II	11-12
Guitar Ensemble 2	9-12
Health Sciences II—VANTAGE	12
Human Performance—Minnetonka Research	10-12
IB Philosophy Standard Level	11, 12
Interior Design II	9-12

### **COURSE REMOVAL LIST**

Over the past three years, the following courses have not reached minimum student enrollment or have been replaced by a new course. Building and District administration will continue to monitor courses that have not run for subsequent years.

<b>Course Removal</b>
Textiles and Applied Design
Outdoor Experience

## COURSE TITLE CHANGES

Departments have recommended revising two course titles to reflect the content of the courses more accurately.

Proposed Title	Current Title
Child Development and Education	Child Development
VANTAGE Computer Science	VANTAGE User Experience (UX) Design

Chairperson Wagner noted that this item would be brought back to the December 7 regular meeting for approval.

## DISCUSSION ON WEIGHTED GRADES

Superintendent Law led the discussion. He shared the following information below, in italics, with the Board prior to tonight's meeting:

*Minnetonka District Policy 626: Secondary Grading and Reporting Pupil Achievement, was created to “establish effective grading and reporting practices that reflect a student’s academic achievement of the course standards.” One of the topics covered in this policy is “Grade Weighting” defined in policy as: “the assignment of a greater value to the letter grade’s numeric point value to reward a student for completing the Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) course(s) and taking the national/international AP and IB assessments in the spring.” This policy was modified and adopted in June of 2016 and included the following criteria for weighted grading:*

*“International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses use different, weighted scales to differentiate between IB/AP and regular courses. All Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses shall be weighted +1.0 if the student earns a C- or higher, the courses have been determined to meet the standards of rigor established by the District, and the student successfully achieves a “3” or higher for Advanced Placement courses or a “4” on an International Baccalaureate assessment. For courses that are beyond the rigor of AP and IB, students must earn a C- or higher in the course and achieve a C- or higher on the end-of-course exam to receive grade-weight status.”*

*At the time this policy was created, this criteria was selected with the belief that students would be more engaged in their coursework because they were expected to perform well on the AP or IB assessment. Since the policy was implemented, the majority of students enrolled in these courses have earned a weighted grade. There are concerns that some students choose not to take these rigorous courses because they are required to perform well on the AP or IB assessment to earn the weighted grade. There are also concerns that the policy punishes students who do not perform well on assessments.*

*After receiving several communications from the community over the past few years, the School Board is taking the opportunity to discuss this policy and potential next steps in response to the questions from the community.*

Superintendent Law noted that one of the primary functions of school boards is policy setting and governance. Boards set policies that meet the needs of their communities. Policy 626: Secondary Grading and Reporting Pupil Achievement, was created by the Board, and the question this evening is whether the policy is reflective of the community. Superintendent Law said that the Board could leave the policy as is, or could revise it. He also said that students, teachers and parents could be queried as to whether the policy reflects what they want, or not. He also noted that there are strong feelings on both sides of this issue, and not everyone will be happy with the direction the Board chooses.

In the discussion that followed, the following points were made:

- There is a need to start a conversation on this topic and then see how it progresses
- Need to know how many students actually receive the weighted grade
- Some students take the AP Test but do not take the corresponding course
- Some students are not good test takers
- The Board wants as many students as possible to engage with the highest rigor
- Need to meet students where they are
- Higher education is moving away from standardized testing
- Existing policy puts a lot of weight on “did you take the test”
- A number of students do not get the weighted grade because they do not pass the test
- Some colleges award scholarships based on weighted grades
- The language in the policy that refers to the AP Test requirement could be stricken
- There is a need to increase enrollment in AP and IB courses – is the test requirement a hindrance to that?
- It is a slippery slope to change requirements mid-year
- Other metro districts do not have this requirement
- Counselors pull data and update grades after the class is complete – is this practice labor-intensive?
- Does this requirement create internal competition at MHS?
- Board members would like to hear from the teachers and counselors regarding this
- The original thinking regarding this policy language was that a weighted grade from Minnetonka would mean more because of the national test requirement – and students would stay more engaged throughout the course
- Is the testing requirement actually a deterrent to students registering for the courses?
- Do teachers perceive that the testing requirement drives up engagement?
- Can we contact colleges and ask how they look at weighted grades?
- The rigor of the course would not change if the policy is changed
- Do area college counselors look differently at a weighted grade from Minnetonka?

Superintendent Law thanked Board members for the thoughtful discussion and said this would be discussed further at the Board's December study session.

### **REVIEW OF 2024 LEGISLATIVE POSITION STATEMENTS**

Executive Director of Finance and Operations Paul Bourgeois led the discussion. He noted that each year, the Finance Advisory Committee works with District administrative staff and the citizens lobbying group Community Action for Student Education (CASE) to develop a platform of position statements for use in communicating District priorities to legislators during the subsequent legislative session.

The 2024 Legislative Position Statements focus on the need for the Legislature to provide sufficient funding for key funding formulas that are the backbone of programmatic stability for Minnetonka ISD 276. Key points include the following:

- Increase the FY25 Basic Formula Revenue by 2% to 4% to Combat the Effects of Inflation
- Increase the Special Education Cross Subsidy by an Additional 10% to 54%
- Approve Third-Tier Local Optional Revenue to Give School Boards Added Local Control to Offset Basic Formula Funding Shortfalls and Reduce the Impact of the Great Disparity in State - \$362 Per Adjusted Pupil Unit
- Increase Operating Referendum Cap for FY25 and Thereafter to Reduce the Impact of Disparities in State Aid - \$750 Per Adjusted Pupil Unit

Chairperson Wagner noted that this item would be brought back to the regular meeting in December for approval.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Board adjourned the study session at 9:45 p.m.

/cyv