

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

**Summary of December 14, 2023 Study Session**

The School Board of Minnetonka Independent School District #276 met in study session at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, December 14, 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.

**CITIZEN INPUT**

Chairperson Wagner extended an invitation to members of the audience who wished to address the Board on any topic. The following individuals then addressed the Board:

- District employee Melanie Mozingo addressed the Board regarding the district's long-term financial stability, and asked that the Board keep the teachers in mind when discussing the long-term budget. She asked that teachers be paid fairly.
- District parent Greg Hicks addressed the Board regarding the MDE's recent ruling regarding asynchronous learning.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM PROPOSAL**

Associate Superintendent for Instruction Amy LaDue, MME Principal Pete Dymit and MMW Principal Freya Schirmacher presented this item to the Board. Dr. LaDue noted that over the past month, the middle school principals, in collaboration with the teaching and learning department, have developed a comprehensive middle school program proposal based on the findings from the program review presented to the School Board at the November 16<sup>th</sup> study session. This proposal integrates the information gathered, including stakeholder feedback, during the program review completed over the past ten months. It also addresses the five priorities identified and discussed at the study session:

- Creating a more flexible master schedule
  - Allows for continuity for Math and Language Arts instruction between Day A/Day B schedules
  - Immersion courses untethered from advisory in 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> grade
  - Creates potential space for increased elective opportunities
  - Allows flexibility with teacher instructional time with advisory incorporated into daily instructional minutes
- Differentiated academic support
  - Integrated intervention/extension opportunities
  - Essential academic success skills

- Flexible, data-driven support opportunities
- Allows students additional academic and/or SEL support without losing access to electives
- Promotes student agency and ownership of learning
- Dedicated social and emotional learning time
  - Mixed grade-level configurations for SEL time to foster middle school community and student belonging
  - Focus on bridging transitions, from elementary to middle, and middle to high school
  - SEL times includes the application of evidence-based curriculum and resources
  - All teachers are trained to instruct SEL curriculum
- Evaluation and expansion of exploratory and elective options emphasizing student choice
- Opportunities for teacher professional learning and collaboration

MME Principal Pete Dymit noted that some of the big wins in Phase I include the solving of the immersion problem regarding advisory, the differentiated support without losing access to electives, the dedicated SEL time within the teacher contract time, and targeted academic success skills for incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders and outgoing 8<sup>th</sup> graders.

The discussion then turned to Phase II of the proposal, which would take effect in the 2025-26 school year and beyond:

### Dedicated SEL Time

- Mixed grade-level configurations for SEL time to foster middle school community and student belonging
- Focus on bridging transitions, from elementary to middle, and middle to high school
- SEL times includes the application of evidence-based curriculum and resources
- All teachers are trained to instruct SEL curriculum

### Evaluate and Expand Exploratory/Elective Courses

- Wider variety of elective courses including choices within core content areas
- Opportunity to offer immersion intervention and extension or additional immersion electives
- Opportunity for students to learn more about strengths and interests
- Intentionally provide bridges to HS signature programs in eighth grade

### Teacher Professional Learning and Collaboration

- Ongoing professional development starting in Spring 2024
- Dedicated time for collaborative planning for all stages of implementation
- Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration
- Focused preparation for SEL integration

- Collaboration and planning for all new courses

### Next Steps

- Solicit additional feedback from the Middle School Program Review Committee on the proposal and its logistics
- Finalize the financial implications
- Consider initiating a comprehensive facilities study to assess current and future needs at the middle level

In the discussion that followed, Board member Vitale noted the importance of determining the financial implications of the proposal, and referenced a neighboring district that is seeking to alter their current schedule as a way to address their budget shortfall. He also noted the importance of working together with staff on these potentially big changes. Vice Chair Selinger said she loved how the proposal levels the playing field and is set to be implemented in stages. She asked how soon administration would need to know if scheduling changes were to be approved for next year. Superintendent Law answered that the Board could approve any scheduling changes at its February regular meeting. Board member Lee-O'Halloran noted that he approved of the recommended changes and said they have been needed for a long time at the middle schools.

### **LITERACY UPDATE**

Dr. Ladue, Director of Curriculum Steve Urbanski and Literacy Coordinator Alyssa Rutherford led the discussion. They shared the following information with the Board in advance of the meeting:

Each year, the School Board establishes annual, actionable goals for the Administration that align with the vision and direction for the District. This year as a component of the District Goal: Excellence in Student Learning and Support, an action step was developed aimed to:

*increase opportunities for improved academic outcomes for all students while additional efforts to improve student literacy at all levels and in all content areas as measured by student performance on standardized and benchmark assessments.*

Further, this goal outlines that *the District will implement an updated literacy plan, which will be shared with the community.* This plan will incorporate requirements of the READ legislation, new State English Language Arts (ELA) standards, and will span from early childhood through grade twelve.

The purpose of this report is to update the Board on District literacy efforts and the next steps for development and implementation of an updated E-12 literacy plan.

## **READ Legislation**

The Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act, known as The READ Act, was key new legislation included in the Omnibus Education Bill and signed into law by The Governor in May 2023. This legislation replaced the Read Well by Third Grade legislation which was one of five goals outlined for districts in the World's Best Workforce legislation. The goal of The READ Act is that every Minnesota child reads at (or above) grade level every year, beginning in kindergarten, and to support multilingual learners and students receiving special education services in achieving their individualized reading goals. It is the goal of Minnetonka Schools to ensure each and every child develops a high level of literacy proficiency as well.

Since its enactment, Minnetonka Schools has been taking steps to ensure the action steps for the Board's literacy goals are in alignment with this legislation and that teachers responsible for reading instruction are becoming well-versed in evidence-based reading instructional practices. By the 2026-2027 school year, districts must provide evidence-based reading instruction through a focus on student mastery of foundational reading skills, oral language, and reading comprehension skills.

The legislation modifies literacy requirements for districts in the areas of the local literacy plan, leadership, professional learning, assessment, and literacy curricular resources. Additionally, the READ legislation strongly encourages districts to adopt a Multi-Tiered System of Support framework. Minnetonka Schools is in the second year of the three-year MTSS implementation plan which aligns with processes outlined in the legislation.

## **District Literacy Plan**

School districts in Minnesota have been required to develop and implement a local literacy plan in support of the World's Best Workforce goal of all students reading at grade level by third grade, also known as Read Well by Third Grade. District literacy plans are required to include multiple components encompassing assessment, progress monitoring, intervention identification and implementation, parent notification and professional learning. Each year in June, Minnesota school districts must update and post a Local Literacy Plan along with submitting this plan and literacy assessment data for kindergarten through third grade students to the Minnesota Department of Education under the Read Well by Third Grade (RWBTG) legislation.

With the passing of the READ Act, the District will be revising the Local Literacy Plan using updated guidance and requirements from the Minnesota Department of Education anticipated in March of 2024. Districts will be required to use this template for their local literacy plan and submit these plans by June 15, 2024.

## **District Literacy Lead**

By August 30, 2025, the READ legislation requires districts to employ or contract with a literacy lead who will collaborate with district administrators, facilitate the district's

implementation of the READ Act, and support teacher implementation of structured literacy.

In the spring of 2023, the District hired a District Literacy Coordinator. This position was designed to provide leadership in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the E-12 literacy framework across all curricular areas and programs, including Immersion. The Literacy Coordinator supports the curriculum review and evaluation process for ELA and will continue to support the review process in all aspects of literacy across content areas with alignment to state academic standards. The position also provides leadership in the identification, implementation and evaluation of instructional practices, delivery models, resources, and assessments, ensuring alignment of literacy practices to the Minnetonka MTSS framework. This includes providing resources, guidance, and support for differentiated literacy instruction, intervention, and extensions to meet the needs of all learners. In addition, the Literacy Coordinator is developing, coordinating, and delivering professional learning for teachers, principals and other school and district staff, serving as a resource for principals, leadership teams and PLCs to support building level literacy practices, initiatives, and systems.

### **Professional Learning**

The READ Act requires in-depth professional learning for evidence-based reading instruction via a program approved by the Minnesota Department of Education. Training must be completed by specific dates based on teacher roles. The Minnesota Department of Education continues to further define these requirements and as they provide more clarity, the District will continue to make appropriate adjustments.

#### *Minnesota Department of Education Phase 1 of Professional Learning*

The READ Act divides educators into two phases for completion of required professional learning. Educators identified in the first phase must complete their learning by July 1, 2025. They include:

- PreK Classroom Teachers
- K-3 Classroom Teachers
- K-12 Reading Intervention Teachers
- PreK-12 Special Education Teachers responsible for reading instruction
- Curriculum Directors
- PreK-5 Instructional support staff who provide reading instruction
- Employees who select literacy instructional materials for a district

Minnetonka Schools has expanded the list to include additional personnel to best meet the needs of students and teachers. The additional staff deemed essential in this first phase are listed below.

## *Minnetonka Schools' Phase 1 of Professional Learning*

- Early Childhood (EC) Classroom Teachers
- Grade 4-5 Classroom Teachers
- EC-Age 21 Special Education Teachers responsible for reading instruction and support
- K-5 English learner teachers
- EC-5 Administrators

## *Minnetonka Schools Professional Learning Plan for Literacy*

The READ Act tasked the MDE, in partnership with CAREI, to identify at least three professional development programs that focus on the five pillars of literacy and the components of structured literacy by August 15, 2023. Although the programs were identified and posted on the MDE website, the MDE has not yet finalized contracts with the vendors and registration has not yet been made available to districts.

Minnetonka Schools aligned professional learning this fall for Minnetonka's Phase 1 teachers to the topics of research and evidence-based practices that will be included in these three programs. This provided teachers the opportunity to begin their professional learning ahead of the requirements and ensure their teaching practices align with what research says is best for teaching literacy. The following topics were covered during the first two professional learning sessions for Minnetonka's Phase 1 teachers:

- What the Science of Reading is and is not
- Brain research, including the four-part processing model
- How reading and writing are connected in the brain
- Models of Reading such as the Simple View of Reading, Scarborough's Rope, and the Five Pillars of Literacy (Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension)
- Writing, including the Simple View of Writing, and the graphomotor area of the brain and how it is tied to the language areas of the brain
- Data Literacy and Assessment, including using Oral Reading Fluency data to determine the needs of students and make instructional decisions
- An overview of the components of Structured Literacy (explicit, systematic, sequential, and diagnostic)
- An overview of the components of language (phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics)
- Research on dyslexia and the role of schools in identifying characteristics of dyslexia
- How word recognition automaticity (orthographic mapping) leads to fluent reading and writing including how spelling is connected to reading
- Instructional practices to support foundational skills and language development in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, morphology, and multisyllabic word recognition

Additionally, time was provided for teachers to share their expertise, reflect, and collaborate with their PLC as an initial step toward application of their new learning. Throughout the professional learning sessions, best practice instructional and literacy strategies were modeled so teachers could envision ways to infuse engagement and literacy strategies in their classroom instruction.

Beginning with the upcoming professional learning day on January 2, 2024, Minnetonka Schools will work with CORE Learning, an approved state provider, to offer a customized professional learning session that will serve as an onramp to the state required learning. This session will be designed to honor the previous learning the staff completed this fall. Further, it will bridge to the next topics outlined in the Minnesota approved course. Additionally, it is expected that the State will require teachers to demonstrate their learning at the end of the professional learning series; therefore, each session will include a spiral of the most essential concepts and content to ensure teacher mastery.

The Minnesota Department of Education anticipates that the approved professional learning contracts will be available in early January. The District will evaluate these at that time and design the plan for the remainder of this year and next year to complete all required learning by the July 1, 2025, deadline.

### *Minnetonka Schools' Phase 2 of Professional Learning*

Professional Learning Phase 2 requires all other teachers responsible for reading instruction to be trained by July 1, 2027. Specifically, the guidance from the MDE identifies these educators as needing the yet-to-be-identified approved programs for reading instruction. Because Minnetonka Schools strategically included more teachers than required by the MDE guidance, the list below is limited to those not yet included in Minnetonka's Phase 1.

- K-5 Specialists (art, media, music and phy ed)
- 6-12 Classroom Teachers responsible for reading instruction
- 6-12 Teachers who work with English learners
- 6-12 Instructional support staff who provide reading support
- 6-12 Administrators

Although the Minnesota Department of Education has not yet identified professional learning for Phase 2, Minnetonka Schools is taking steps to ensure that all teachers have access to professional learning opportunities that develop their skills for disciplinary literacy instruction. For this reason, the January 2, 2024, professional learning day will feature disciplinary literacy. The specific learning outcomes for that day include:

- Understand the difference between Content Area Literacy vs. Disciplinary Literacy
- Demonstrate the use of strategies, and provide time to embed them in authentic contexts

- Understand ways of building stamina for deep reading and reading of complex text vs. surface processing of text

Additionally, time will be provided for teachers to share their expertise and model the ways each of them read and respond to the text types prevalent in their discipline. For instance, technical reading is not the same as narrative reading. Teachers will leave the session with low prep and authentic methods of providing students with opportunities to read, write, and discuss in every classroom every day.

### *Additional Literacy Related Professional Learning*

Beyond the READ Act required professional learning, additional literacy training has been provided for the K-5 reading specialists. Facilitators from PRESS (Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites), which is housed in the Minnesota Center for Reading Research, a subsidiary of CAREI (the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement) at the University of Minnesota, provided a workshop in Tier 2 interventions, progress monitoring, and data-based decision making. The purpose of this workshop was to expand the resource repertoire of diagnostic tools, efficient evidence-based interventions available in both English and Spanish and revisit the data-based-decision-making process.

Furthermore, a four-hour synchronous webinar on literacy will be provided for all Minnetonka paraprofessionals, regardless of their roles. Minnetonka is partnering with the Lee Pesky Learning Center for this webinar called "What Works in Reading Instruction: Tips for Paraprofessionals." As a learning organization, Minnetonka believes all educators, including paraprofessionals, must have an understanding of how children learn to read and the best ways to approach reading instruction. Understanding how reading works and how to support its development will ensure a literate and successful community.

### **Assessment**

The READ Act requires school districts to adopt and implement a K-3 universal literacy screener from the list of Minnesota Department of Education approved tools. Screening tools approved by the MDE include subtests to measure foundational reading skills as well as characteristics of dyslexia. By Fall of 2024, all districts must align their universal screening with the READ Act. FastBridge Early Reading (K-1) and CBM Reading (1-3) are among the tools approved to meet these requirements.

Currently, Minnetonka Schools utilize the FastBridge screening assessments with students in Kindergarten through Grade 5.

**FastBridge Early Reading:** This assessment is administered to Kindergarten students in the Fall, Winter, and Spring to help teachers identify student needs in the areas of Concepts of Print, Onset Sounds, Letter Names, and Letter Sounds. Additionally, starting in Winter, students are assessed on the skills of Word Segmenting, and Nonsense Words.

FastBridge CBM Reading: This assessment is administered to students in Grades One through Grade Five. They complete the Reading CBM Fluency Benchmark assessment in Fall, Winter, and Spring. With this assessment, students read out loud for one minute while the teacher tracks words read and records any errors.

Beginning in the Fall of 2024, The District will further align its universal screening with the READ Act based on the requirement that students in Grade One complete the FastBridge Early Reading assessments. The District will continue fall CBM Reading with students in Grade One based on their literacy development.

After students complete the FastBridge assessments in the Fall, the data are analyzed by K-5 teachers during their annual district-led data retreats. Interventionists review the data of students who may be at risk in Reading. Students identified as at risk may be further assessed, typically by a school reading interventionist, to identify specific needs and align instruction to respond to those needs.

To ensure parents are notified of their student's progress in reading, FastBridge Fluency results are shared with elementary school families during parent teacher conferences each year in October. Additionally, the assessment results are loaded into the Skyward Student Information System (SIS) for parents and teachers to view after each assessment window.

### **Approved Resources**

Starting July 1, 2023, when a district purchases new literacy curriculum, literacy intervention, or supplementary materials, those materials must be approved, evidence-based, and designed to ensure student mastery of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

In partnership, CAREI and the MDE, must identify by January 1, 2024, at least five evidence-based literacy curricula and supporting materials and post them on the MDE website. These identified resources will be evaluated by the District Elementary English Language Arts Curriculum Committee to determine which are the best fit to meet District identified literacy needs. Additional State supports and options related to resource acquisition and identification are outlined below.

- **Reimbursement:** A process for reimbursement of approved evidence-based structured literacy curriculum and supporting materials and intervention materials purchased after July 1, 2021, by districts, charter schools and cooperatives will be developed and communicated on the MDE website. Guidance on this process will be forthcoming.
- **Reconsideration:** The MDE and CAREI must provide districts an opportunity to request reconsideration for approved curricula and professional learning programs and must publish the request for reconsideration procedures on the department website. The request must demonstrate the curriculum or professional learning

program meets the requirements of the READ Act, is evidence-based, and has structured literacy components. Guidance on this process will be forthcoming.

### **Curriculum Review Process**

The District is committed to continuous improvement. The goal of the curriculum review process is to advance the quality of curriculum and instruction and to promote excellence in student performance using the best possible instructional practices and resources. Aligning with the release of the new Minnesota Academic Standards in English Language Arts (ELA), the District's ELA curriculum review process will support the full implementation of new standards by the 2025-26 school year.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) completed the rulemaking process for the new Academic Standards in English Language Arts at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year. Academic Standards in English Language Arts address areas of literacy, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, spelling, listening, speaking, and viewing, and instruction is designed to meet these grade level standards. In addition, the MDE released test specifications for the new Reading Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, the MCA-IV, at that time.

During the 2023-24 school year, District curriculum review committees, made up of department chairs, expanded chairs, administrators, and literacy leaders, have reviewed the new ELA standards and test specifications, identified essential learnings, and engaged in evidence-based literacy training. Literacy training has focused on the shifts in the new standards, including the increased emphasis on foundational reading, as well as the broader literacy training highlighted earlier in this report. In addition, these curriculum review teams have begun identifying gaps in existing units and resources, which will ultimately inform future recommendations.

This work will continue throughout the 2023-24 school year. As the MDE and the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) finalize a list of evidence-based literacy programs and supporting materials, curriculum review teams will also identify instructional resources for future pilots and implementation.

### **District Plan Moving Forward**

As the Minnesota Department of Education continues to provide guidance on requirements and options to meet the legislative requirements of the READ Act, Minnetonka Schools is prepared to respond in order to continue to develop, refine, and implement the District E-12 Local Literacy Plan.

Ms. Ladue, Mr. Urbanski and Ms. Rutherford also shared the following information with the Board via a powerpoint presentation:

## District Literacy Plan

Under Read Well by Third Grade:

- Each school district in Minnesota was required to develop and implement a local literacy plan
- Plan aligned to and in support of World's Best Workforce
  - All third grade students can read at grade level
- Plans must be updated annually, shared with MDE and posted on district websites



## District Literacy Plan

Under the READ Act:

- In March 2024, MDE will provide districts with a template for the local literacy plan to ensure plans are consistent with the READ Act
- Plans must use this template, be posted to a district's website, and be submitted to the Commissioner of Education by June 15, 2024



## Efforts During the 2023-24 School Year

- District literacy lead
- Other roles to support literacy
- Professional learning
- Assessment and data literacy
- Approved resources and curriculum review



## Professional Learning

- READ Act required professional learning
  - Three approved providers were identified in August
  - Phase I educators: contracts and logistics in process
  - Phase II educators: requirements and providers continue to be refined
- District designated 4 days for professional learning during the 2023-24 school year
- Literacy related professional learning is being provided systemwide



## Professional Learning

- Elementary/Phase I Group
  - What the science of reading is and is not
  - Brain research: reading, writing, orthographic mapping
  - Models of reading such as the Simple View of Reading, Scarborough's Rope, and the Five Pillars
  - Structured literacy: explicit, systematic, sequential, diagnostic
  - Responsive instruction for a variety of learners
  - Components of language: phonology, orthography, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics
  - Instructional practices to support foundational skills and language comprehension



## Professional Learning

- Secondary/Phase II Group
  - Strengthening Professional Learning Communities
    - Essential learnings
    - Formative assessment and instructional responses
    - MTSS
  - Disciplinary literacy vs. content area strategies



## Additional Professional Learning

- Paraprofessionals
  - Live, 4 hour webinar “What Works in Reading Instruction: Tips for Paraprofessionals”
- Reading Specialists
  - PRESS Tier 2 evidence-based interventions
  - Data-based decision making



## Assessment and Data Literacy

- Current benchmark assessments/universal screening
  - FastBridge Early Reading - Kindergarten (Fall, Winter, Spring)
  - FastBridge CBM Reading - Grades 1-5 (Fall, Winter, Spring)
  - NWEA MAP Reading (Fall, Spring)
- Required for 2024-2025 school year
  - Further align universal screening with the READ Act
    - Requirement that grade one complete FastBridge Early Reading
- Data literacy and teacher instructional responses



## Literacy Approved Resources and Materials

- In partnership with CAREI, MDE must identify by January 1st a list of at least five evidence-based literacy curricula and supporting materials
  - K-5 resources only at this time
- MDE guidance will inform the ELA curriculum review and development process for grades K-5



## Curriculum Review

- K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 teams analyzed new ELA standards and identified essential learnings
  - Shifts in standards
  - MCA-IV test specifications
- Literacy learning for all team members
- Identifying gaps in existing units and resources to inform future recommendations
- K-5 team is looking forward to the guidance regarding curricular resources from the MDE and CAREI in January



# District Plan Moving Forward

- Maintain District commitment and focus on literacy
- Develop and implement updated District literacy plan
  - READ legislation
  - ELA curriculum review
- Continue professional learning in evidence-based reading instruction
- Continue ELA curriculum review process
- Deepen implementation of the District MTSS framework



In the discussion that followed, Board members asked questions about the timeline for the implementation of the new state standards for English/Language Arts and how it affects this work. Mr. Urbanski answered that the standards have been approved, and more information will be coming from the state with regards to the timing of the implementation. Vice Chair Selinger expressed appreciation for the addition of administrators to the Phase I training, noting that this will help with teacher observations and evaluations.

## **DISCUSSION ON BOARD LEADERSHIP POSITIONS, BOARD MEETING DATES and COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS for 2024**

The Board discussed who would be willing to fill the positions of Board Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer and Clerk for 2024. They also discussed and finalized the 2024 board meeting dates, study session dates, and their committee assignments for 2024, with Superintendent Law noting that this would all be approved at the January regular meeting.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The Board adjourned the Study Session at 8:15 p.m.

/cyv