

# CONNECTIONS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

August 2024  
Volume 21  
Number 10

## Fridley Public Schools Successfully Addresses Staffing Challenges with International Talent

### August 23, 2024 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

### September 6, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

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

### September 27, 2024 Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting

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

### October 4, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting

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



Fridley Public Schools (FPS), like many districts, has struggled to fill vacancies, especially in special education. After various recruitment methods, FPS decided to sponsor teachers through the H-1B visa program. This program enables employers throughout the United States to sponsor international talent that is considered experts in their field in their home country.

Initially, FPS sponsored international talent for special education teacher vacancies and one fifth-grade teaching position.

However, daily substitute vacancies and long-term positions remained a challenge. This resulted in teachers having to work through their planning periods, adding additional students to classrooms, and pulling other staff from their daily duties to cover these absences. Consequently, students did not have optimal learning environments, and our staff felt stretched too thin. Principals also felt stressed, not knowing if we would be able to fully fill the daily/longer-term absences. FPS then began filling building substitute vacancies through international talent.

As the fall progressed, we felt well-staffed in the area of teaching vacancies but struggled with filling paraeducator vacancies, particularly in special education. FPS was able to use an H-3 special education exchange visitor trainee visa to fill all of the special education paraeducator vacancies. During the 2023-2024 school year, the international visa program enabled FPS to have a staffing model that fully filled existing vacancies while significantly helping to address

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I am honored to have the opportunity to serve as the chair of AMSD for the 2024-25 school year and I look forward to working with my AMSD colleagues over the next year. Preparation for the important 2025 legislative session, when the biennial budget will be adopted, begins now. This month's research article highlights AMSD's Election Guide and stresses the importance of engaging in the electoral process. Please share the guide with your colleagues, parents, and community members and urge them to get involved. Thank you for your commitment to the transformation of public education and best wishes for a successful start to the school year!

*From the AMSD Chair, Laura Oksnevad, St. Anthony-New Brighton Board Member*

## FPS Welcomes Diverse International Talent and Expands Special Education Programs

*Continued from page 1*

short-term and long-term absences through coverage by building substitutes.

Our H-3 special education exchange visitor trainee program, as well as our building substitutes hired through our H-1B program, serve as one of our pipeline programs for the “grow your own” initiative. As a recipient of the Adult Pathway Grant, FPS can fund both domestic and international talent to pursue a Master’s in Special Education, covering full tuition and providing housing stipends. Additionally, the Come Teach in Minnesota grant offers \$5,000 for international and domestic teachers of color who move to our district from out of state or out of the country to offset some of their moving costs to come to FPS.

The international talent program has significantly improved services for students with disabilities. With a fully staffed team, FPS expanded programming for students with disabilities. FPS is very excited to open VISTA, a new Setting IV program (Valuing Individual Student Talents and Abilities). Our district was in a position where we had a small number of students that would be best served in a Setting IV program. We were able to re-envision our Alternative Learning Center (ALC) and move it into our high school building. This allowed us to renovate the former ALC into our Setting IV program. We are absolutely thrilled to be fully staffed within our VISTA program and are able to serve students in grades K-12 who are best served in a Setting IV.



For the 2023-2024 school year, FPS welcomed 26 international staff, and we expect an additional 40 international staff joining us for 2024-2025, with representation from

- Philippines
- China
- Ghana
- Zimbabwe
- Brazil
- Nigeria
- Kenya
- India

This diversity enriches and strengthens our commitment to our International Baccalaureate Programme, which serves all PreK-12 students, making it the only district in Minnesota to offer the full IB continuum (PYP, MYP, DP, and CP) for PreKindergarten through Grade 12.

The visa programs that FPS utilizes offer us the ability to eventually sponsor our teachers to become permanent residents. This allows our district to have long-term staffing solutions. Our international talent comes to FPS with many years of teaching experience, most as special education teachers. The majority of our teachers also come to us with Master’s Degrees and beyond in teaching. Our school district and the community of Fridley have embraced our international talent. Our staff helps our talent with provisioning housing for them through donated items, greeting them at the airport, and helping them to settle into life here in Fridley both professionally and personally.

Fridley Public Schools has made significant strides in addressing staffing challenges by leveraging international talent through various visa programs. This innovative approach not only fills critical vacancies but also enriches our educational environment with diverse perspectives and expertise. As we look ahead, FPS is committed to continuing our support for both international and domestic talent, ensuring that our students receive the highest quality education in an inclusive and well-resourced setting. We are proud of our accomplishments and excited about the future as we build a robust and dynamic community dedicated to excellence in education.

*This month’s member feature was submitted by Brenda Lewis, Ph.D., Superintendent, Fridley Public Schools.*

# AMSD Releases 2024 Election Guide

With nearly two dozen Minnesota House members retiring or stepping down in 2024, and with one Senate seat on the ballot in an evenly divided Senate, the November election will determine which party controls each body in the 2025 session. Regardless of which party wins control, there will be many new faces in the House when the Legislature convenes the 2025 session on January 14, 2025.

- [LINK: View the Legislative Retirements compiled by the Minnesota Legislative Reference Library](#)

Those elected will determine the funding level for schools for the next two years, as well as significant education policy issues.

As in years past, AMSD has compiled an Election Guide to provide supporters of public schools — from school board members and administrators to parents, families, candidates, and members of the public — with research, data, and education funding trends.

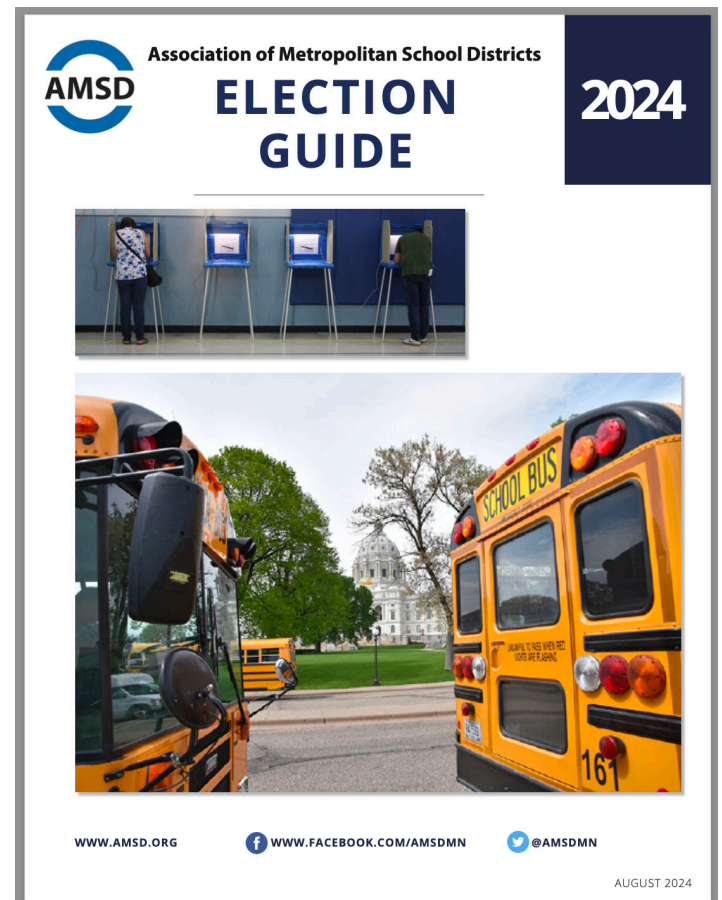
The guide summarizes recent legislative action, as well as provides information to evaluate legislative candidates' positions on education issues, and sample questions to pose to candidates to find out where they stand on important issues and policies.

The guide also addresses the question of why school districts continue to face budget challenges after a significant increase in funding was approved in the 2023 session. A confluence of factors has created a challenging fiscal environment for many school districts:

- **Key funding streams continue to lag behind inflation**
- **Historic new requirements and expectations for school districts**
- **Historic inflation and staffing shortages**
- **A federal funding fiscal cliff**
- **Enrollment fluctuations**

The guide also includes data from the recently released FY23 Special Education Cross-Subsidy Report to the Legislature. The report shows a FY23 statewide cross-subsidy of more than \$726 million — with more than two-thirds (\$497 million) of that total in AMSD member districts. The “Special Education Cross-Subsidy” occurs when school districts are forced to use general fund revenue meant for regular classroom instruction to cover mandated special education costs that are not funded by the state and federal government. The 2023 education bill made tremendous progress toward reducing the cross-subsidy, but a significant shortfall remains.

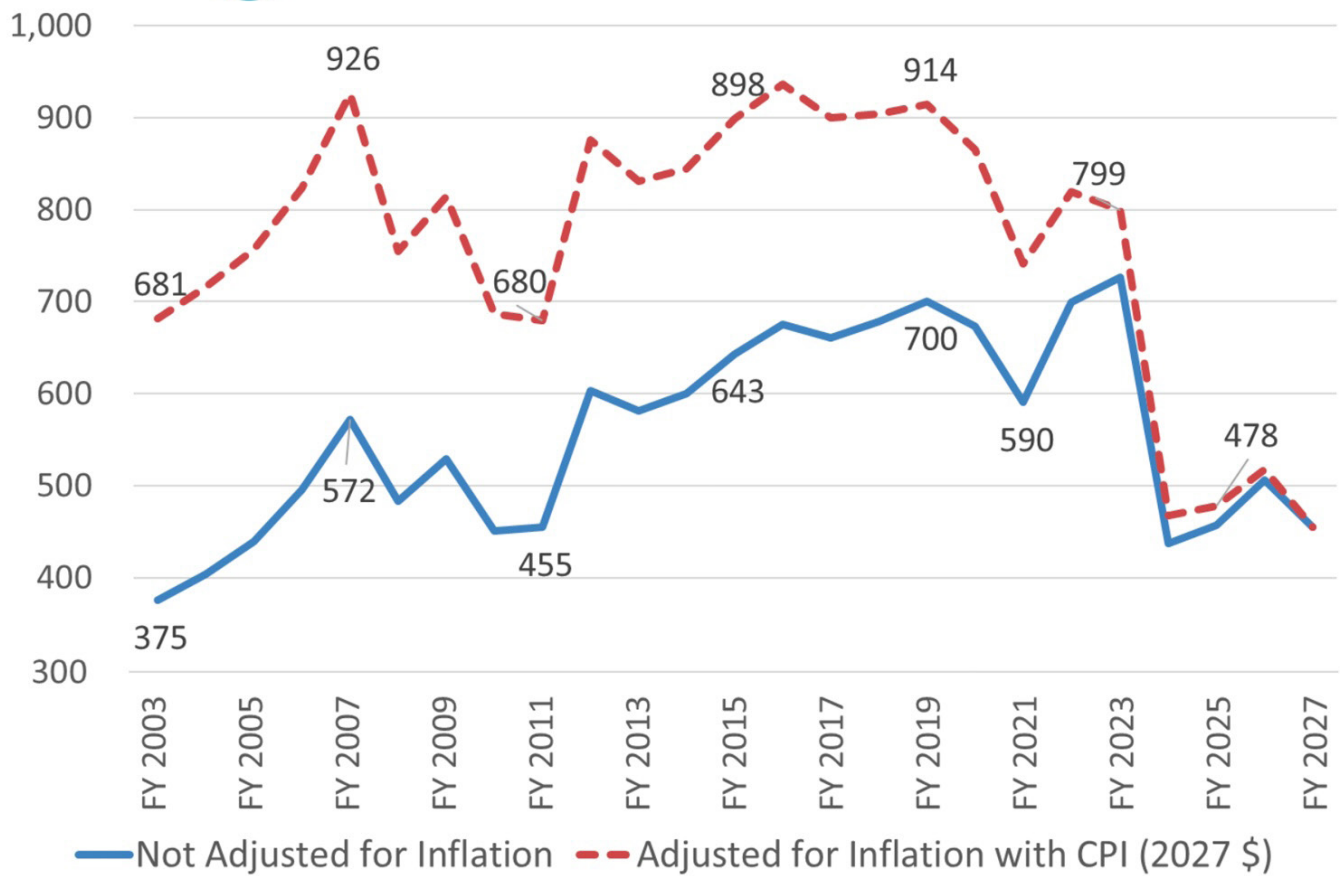
As the graph below shows, MDE projects that the FY24 cross-subsidy will decline to \$437.1 million, then increase to \$506.1 million by FY26, before dropping to \$455.3 million in FY27 when cross-subsidy reduction aid increases to 50 percent.



# Progress Made Toward Reducing Special Education Cross-Subsidy

Continued from page 3

## AMSD Special Education Cross-Subsidy (\$Millions)



Source: Minnesota Department of Education, July 2024

The guide also includes links to AMSD position papers and other legislative resources and research that AMSD uses throughout the session to advocate for our school districts and inform legislators.

AMSD represents 47 greater metropolitan area and regional center school districts, and six intermediate / cooperative districts — collectively enrolling well more than half of all public school students in Minnesota.

- [LINK: View the AMSD 2024 Election Guide](#)
- [LINK: Minnesota Secretary of State Office](#)
- [LINK: View Candidate Filings in Minnesota](#)