



TO: School Board Members

FROM: Peter Olson-Skog, Superintendent

DATE: May 18, 2026

SUBJECT: End of Year Update on the 2025-2026 Superintendent Goals

BACKGROUND

This report provides an end-of-year update on the Superintendent’s goals for the 2025-2026 school year. Each goal is aligned to one or more related Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) Standards for Superintendent Evaluations. While the rubrics include four levels, only the highest level, *Highly Effective*, is included in the report below. The goals, approved by the board at their October 10, 2025 meeting, are as follows:

Goal 1

The superintendent will oversee the implementation of operational plans in support of the strategic plan’s focus areas of social and emotional learning, equitable systems and support, and career exploration and preparation.

Goal 1 Related MSBA Rubric:

Standard 1: School District Leadership, Element A, Vision and Planning

Highly Effective Descriptor: Facilitates development of the school district’s short and long-term measurable goals and aligns available resources with the school district’s budget to accomplish goals.

Progress toward Goal 1 was monitored through the district’s implementation targets aligned to the Strategic Framework focus areas of social and emotional learning, equitable systems and support, and career exploration and preparation. A full implementation target update is included as a companion document in the Board packet and provides detailed information by focus area, target, objective, and status.

Across the three strategic focus areas, 62 objectives were identified for implementation during the 2025-26 school year. Of those, 58 were completed or completed for the 2025-26 phase of work. Four objectives were intentionally held over, partially held over, or reconsidered for 2026-27.

The objectives carried forward reflect implementation timing, staff capacity, scheduling realities, and alignment with other major district initiatives. These decisions supported stronger implementation and helped ensure that the work remained connected to student, staff, and system needs.

Specifically, the items held over for next year or under reconsideration include:

- The expanded use of CharacterStrong resources across classrooms and specialist areas, along with the creation and distribution of informational SEL resources for community partners, including coaches, activity advisors, and external collaborators, was held over to 2026-27. This timing allowed the district to prioritize immediate student, family, and staff support needs connected to Operation Metro Surge while maintaining staff capacity for direct support.
- The implementation of evidence-based curriculum and resources aligned to the Science of Reading in special education services was completed for grades K-4, while grades 5-8 will continue into 2026-27. This timing allows the middle school special education work to align with the broader Science of Reading rollout and related implementation work occurring across the district.
- The objective to increase Unified programming and opportunities for middle school students is being reconsidered due to scheduling constraints. The district will continue to assess how best to expand inclusive student opportunities within the middle school schedule structure.

Several objectives also represent annual or ongoing work rather than one-time accomplishments. For example, the review of course sequences for barriers to college credit and industry certification opportunities was completed for this year, while similar review and refinement will continue annually. Likewise, transition planning from Pre-K through postsecondary pathways remains an ongoing area of focus, even though this year's implementation target was completed.

Taken together, the implementation target results demonstrate that the operational plans supporting Goal 1 were completed as intended. As part of the superintendent's year-end goal review, the Board is asked to recognize the implementation targets as completed as intended, including the intentional carry-forward of the items noted above.

In summary, Goal 1 was achieved. The district completed the overwhelming majority of its identified implementation targets, made strategic decisions about the few items that should continue into the following year, and maintained strong alignment between operational work and the Strategic Framework priorities of social and emotional learning, equitable systems and support, and career exploration and preparation.

Goal 2

The superintendent will continue to put in place budget procedures and policies that will enhance long-term fiscal stability, further implementing the cost containment strategy design in FY25.

Goal 2 Related MSBA Rubrics:

Standard 2: School District Finances, Element A, Budget Development and Maintenance

Standard 3: Communication and Community Relationships, Element C, Inform the Community as a Whole

Highly Effective Descriptor, Standard 2: Engages in timely budget planning and actions that consider current and long-range information and data; seeks balance to meet students' current and future needs and be fiscally responsible to community; distributes resources to meet immediate and long-range objectives.

During the 2025-26 school year, the superintendent continued moving the district from short-term budget response toward a more structured, transparent, and long-range financial planning process. This included implementing a cost-containment process for the 2026-27 budget cycle grounded in current financial data, updated enrollment projections, staffing patterns, fund balance targets, and anticipated expenditure growth.

A major focus of this work was helping the organization understand the district's structural budget challenge. Through board updates and public-facing communication, the superintendent connected the need for reductions to the larger reality that district revenues are projected to grow more slowly than expenditures. This included ongoing communication about inflationary pressures, health insurance costs, compensation costs, softening enrollment, a declining fund balance, and the limits of state funding increases.

This work is beginning to show measurable progress toward the Board's stated fund balance target of 8 percent. The district ended the previous fiscal year with an unassigned fund balance of approximately 2 percent. Current projections show the district ending the year at approximately 4 percent, with the 2026-27 budget projected to increase the fund balance again to approximately 5 percent, or higher depending largely on the outcome of pending legislative advocacy. While this remains below the Board's target, it reflects positive movement after several years of fiscal pressure and demonstrates that cost containment, budget reductions, close monitoring, and advocacy are helping stabilize the district's financial position.

In partnership with the finance director and district leaders, the superintendent monitored budget assumptions, prepared for the FY25 audit, developed revised and proposed budgets, and built a clearer understanding of how current-year decisions affect future-year stability. Regular department budget meetings, director check-ins, and cabinet-level conversations supported shared ownership for fiscal stewardship.

The superintendent also led a budget reduction process that balanced fiscal responsibility with the district's commitment to students, staff, and strategic priorities. The district's planned \$2.5 million in reductions represents a significant organizational adjustment, particularly in a people-centered system where most expenditures are connected to staffing and services. These reductions were necessary because expenditure growth continues to outpace revenue growth. In that context, reductions were part of a broader effort to slow the structural gap, preserve essential services, and move the district back toward the Board's fund balance target over time.

The process included targeted conversations with cabinet members, principals, directors, and staff across the district, allowing reduction planning to be informed by role-specific knowledge, school-level context, and districtwide priorities. Principals and department leaders reviewed

structures, staffing, programming, and potential efficiencies. Staff input sessions across multiple buildings and departments provided additional insight into what should be protected for students.

This approach helped ensure that budget decisions were connected to actual implementation realities in schools and departments. It also identified opportunities for savings while seeking to preserve the core student experience, essential services, and strategic priorities.

In addition to the district's formal reduction process, the superintendent continued exploring other strategies to reduce long-term pressure on the general fund, including work related to insurance costs, liability coverage, staffing structures, transportation efficiencies, technology leadership restructuring, and department-level spending patterns.

Throughout the year, fiscal planning remained connected to the district's Strategic Framework and the Board's long-term expectations for financial stability. Budget conversations were framed not only as reductions, but as right-sizing and realignment work necessary to sustain programs and services over time. This included analyzing enrollment trends, reviewing program structures, and considering how to align staffing and resources with the number of students being served.

The superintendent also monitored potential fiscal implications of external developments, including the Mendota Heights municipal campus project, state legislative proposals, health insurance trends, compensatory revenue changes, special education funding, and potential levy planning.

Highly Effective Descriptor, Standard 3: Actively keeps community informed with appropriate, regular communication on a variety of school district topics, issues, and/or concerns, allowing the school board to meet its responsibilities.

A major component of Goal 2 was communication with the Board, staff, families, community members, and legislators. The superintendent regularly updated the Board on enrollment trends, fund balance, budget assumptions, reduction planning, state legislative developments, and potential referendum planning.

Budget communication also occurred through PTA and PTO visits, Parent Ambassador Network meetings, Coffee with the Superintendent, Rotary presentations, the ISD 197 Educational Foundation luncheon, and conversations with community partners. These opportunities helped build shared understanding of the district's financial position and the reasons behind difficult decisions.

Legislative advocacy was also a significant part of this work. The superintendent advocated for the district's fund transfer request, compensatory revenue hold harmless funding, special education cross-subsidy support, school safety funding, and broader education finance priorities. This included testifying, meeting with legislators, coordinating with AMSD, working with other districts pursuing similar authority, and keeping the Board informed as legislative conditions changed.

Taken together, the actions connected to Goal 2 demonstrate sustained, timely, and strategic leadership around long-term financial stability. The superintendent strengthened budget processes, expanded staff and community engagement, supported informed governance, and maintained advocacy for both immediate and long-term fiscal needs.

Goal 3

The superintendent will increase staff engagement and feedback through one-on-one interviews with all district staff within 4-6 years. Each year, this will require approximately 150-200 interviews.

Goal 3 Related MSBA Rubric:

Standard 6: Teaching and Learning, Element E, Culture of Cooperation

Highly Effective Descriptor: Develops and supports open, productive, caring, and trusting relationships among staff; encourages open, productive, caring, and trusting environment among staff; supports open, productive, caring, and trusting environment among staff.

The superintendent completed 139 one-on-one staff interviews during the 2025-26 school year as part of the multi-year commitment to meet individually with all district staff within four to six years. While this total is slightly below the annual target range of 150-200 interviews, it represents substantial progress toward the long-term goal and reflects meaningful direct engagement across the organization.

This progress is especially significant given the broader demands of the year, including budget reduction planning, staff and family support needs, and other leadership responsibilities connected to the same rubric area of building open, productive, caring, and trusting relationships. During the middle portion of the year, time that may otherwise have been used for additional formal interviews was often redirected toward supporting staff, students, and families as the district responded to increased food, housing, transportation, safety, and school attendance needs. That work remained closely aligned to the purpose of Goal 3, even when it did not take the form of a scheduled one-on-one interview.

The interviews included staff from every district site and a wide range of roles, departments, and employee groups. One strategy for sequencing this work was to connect interviews with staff milestone recognition cycles. Because the district recognizes staff in five-year increments, this approach provides a natural structure for completing interviews over time while also adding deeper personal and professional context to staff recognition efforts.

The purpose of these conversations was to build relationships, better understand staff experiences, identify themes across the organization, and create direct communication between the superintendent and employees closest to the daily work of serving students and families. The conversations were designed to help staff feel seen, heard, and valued while also giving the superintendent direct insight into the strengths, needs, and experiences of staff across roles and sites.

This engagement work extended beyond the formal interview process. Staff voice was also gathered through building visits, staff input sessions, Coffee with the Superintendent, budget listening sessions, District Office CARES customer service training, recognition events, and informal conversations. During periods of heightened stress, including the expanded student and family support needs described above and budget reduction planning, the superintendent prioritized direct presence with staff most affected by the work.

Staff feedback informed broader organizational improvements. Themes from interviews and listening sessions helped shape District Office CARES training, service expectations, communication practices, and leadership conversations about responsiveness and follow-through. Feedback was shared with principals and department leaders in ways that focused on themes rather

than individual comments, supporting reflection and improvement while preserving trust and confidentiality.

The superintendent also created new communication loops in response to emerging staff needs. As student and family support needs increased, direct communication with cultural liaisons and staff supporting affected students and families expanded. Cabinet liaisons were connected to buildings to provide support and ensure that frontline staff had a clearer path to district-level problem-solving.

Overall, Goal 3 remained a significant and visible part of the superintendent's leadership during the 2025-26 school year. Although the final interview count was slightly below the annual target range, the superintendent completed 139 formal interviews while also engaging in extensive additional staff support, listening, and relationship-building work. Taken together, this represents adequate and meaningful movement toward the long-term goal and strengthened trust, communication, and organizational responsiveness across the district.

OVERALL SUMMARY

The 2025-26 school year reflected meaningful progress across all three Superintendent goals.

For Goal 1, the district completed 58 of 62 identified implementation objectives aligned to the Strategic Framework focus areas of social and emotional learning, equitable systems and support, and career exploration and preparation. The four items carried forward reflect intentional implementation decisions related to timing, capacity, scheduling, and alignment with other major district initiatives.

For Goal 2, the superintendent continued to strengthen long-term fiscal stability through structured budget procedures, cost-containment planning, department-level budget monitoring, staff and community engagement, legislative advocacy, and transparent communication with the Board and community. This work contributed to projected progress toward the Board's stated fund balance target, moving from approximately 2 percent at the end of the previous fiscal year to a projected 4 percent at the end of the current year, with additional improvement projected for 2026-27.

For Goal 3, the superintendent completed 139 one-on-one staff interviews and continued building direct relationships with staff through a broader set of listening, support, and engagement strategies. This work strengthened trust, elevated staff voice, and informed improvements in district communication, responsiveness, and support.

Together, the work demonstrates strong progress toward the superintendent goals approved by the Board and reflects continued alignment with the district's mission, Strategic Framework, and commitment to caring relationships, equitable practices, and high achievement for all.