

**Executive Director of Student Services**  
**Board Update**  
**December 2024**

**Collaboration:** Working together to achieve more collectively.

- Tours with NE Metro 916 and Intermediate District 287: We have recently hosted groups from both NE Metro 916 and Intermediate District 287 at Alliance Education Center to tour and discuss our experience implementing Ukeru. We talked about how we see this approach fitting into our larger student and staff strategies in the long-term.

Additionally, part of the teaching and learning team met with the three other intermediates to discuss how we could innovate our professional development. We discussed a possible calendar alignment so that staff across intermediates could meet and receive specialized training for the unique roles and programs that intermediates support. We look forward to the continued collaboration and sharing of ideas across the intermediates!

**Empathy:** Considering and respecting the perspective and needs of member districts, students, families and staff.

- International teachers: Recently, ISD 917 hosted a session for member districts as well as others that were interested regarding the steps we've taken to hire, welcome, and onboard international teachers. In addition to special education leaders, human resources professionals as well as other support staff attended. Special thanks to Lauren Kelly, Dr. Brooke Peterson, Amy Swaney, and Julie Illa for sharing their efforts on behalf of ISD 917.

**Innovation:** Ongoing improvement of programs and services.

- Calendar Options Exploration Committee: In November the first meeting of the Calendar Options Exploration Committee was held. Members set norms, reviewed purpose, and then began exploring statute and developing questions. We set some next steps including exploring research, developing mock calendars, and organizing our questions. We look forward to continued work together to explore options with our school year calendar to better meet the needs of students and staff.

**Stewardship:** Managing financial and human resources carefully and responsibly.

- Budget adjustments: Our education leadership team has completed steps to update their FY25 budgets. Moving forward, Mark Johns and I are meeting to review both staffing as well as expenditure budgets as work is done to prepare everything for board approval.

**Communication:** Multi-dimensional, transparent conversation focused on sharing information and creating a positive learning and working environment.

- District Update: Our monthly District Update was sent on November 21st. Click [here](#) to read the latest issue.

**Integrity:** Aligning our actions with our values and beliefs.

- Core Value Student Committee: With the introduction of Story Circles three years ago our students and staff were provided with an outlet to hold meaningful and impactful discussions. Out of these discussions we learned that the students wanted to lend their voices to the continued development of our community as an ALC. This year Don Williams (North-social studies) and Adam Ghormley (CTE) have started the process to put together a Core Value Student Committee. They started this process 3 weeks ago with Story Circles in our advisory classes to identify students interested. They are currently meeting with these students and will have a group together after our Thanksgiving break. We will have a group at North and at Main. The purpose of the group will be to support and inform decisions made regarding our ALC and our students.

**Personalization:** Building on the strengths and addressing the unique needs of individual students.

- CORE program update: We continue to plan for implementation of the CORE program, a program that will serve students from our member districts as an alternative to expulsion. Currently, we are finalizing costing, and having an agreement reviewed. We will follow this with obtaining commitment from our member districts. At this time, we are planning a January 28, 2025 start date.

**Equity:** Intentionally providing opportunities while removing barriers at all levels of the organization.

- Unified Schools division of Special Olympics MN: We had representatives from the Unified Schools division of Special Olympics MN come out last week to facilitate a presentation and discussion about expanding the Unified Champion Schools program at ISD 917. The group that met consisted of ISD 917 staff including DAPE teachers, special education school counselors, social workers, as well as the directors of teaching and learning and social/emotional learning. We are looking at ways to increase collaborative socialization and wellness opportunities between students in special education and their non-disabled peers, as well as between ISD 917 students with more significant disabilities and our students who are less impacted by their disabilities.

**Diversity:** Appreciating and valuing everyone's unique selves.

- Safe Zone: The Safe Zone Project provides training and discussion materials for individuals and organizations who are committed to creating more informed, affirming, and inclusive environments for people who are lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, non-binary, queer and/or who hold other diverse gender and/or sexual identities. A staff person might decide to "opt in" to a 2-hour Safe Zone training for any number of reasons, including:

- To explore the concepts of gender and sexuality in a supportive educational space
- To build awareness and knowledge about people who hold LGBTQ+ identities and the issues they navigate in their personal, community, and professional lives
- To build skills and contribute to creating more equitable and affirming spaces and systems
- To signal to students and staff at ISD 917 that you're actively endeavoring to create an environment that is actively supportive and inclusive of LGBTQ+ folks

Safe Zone training is open to all staff members of ISD 917 and everyone is welcome to participate. We anticipate beginning to offer *in person* training sessions beginning after winter break. Currently, we are collecting names of interested staff and based on this information will create a training schedule for winter and spring of 2024. Meanwhile, in December, our Safe Zone trainers will train the BAKE Squad as well as the BCBA team.