

School District 197  
West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools  
Regular Meeting  
Monday, November 10, 2025  
Mendota Heights City Hall, Council Chambers

A meeting of the School Board of Independent School District 197 was held on Monday, November 10, 2025 beginning at 6:00 p.m. pursuant to due notice.

The meeting was called to order by current Vice-Chair Vaupel at 6:00 p.m. School Board members present: Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, and Randi Walz. School Board members absent: Sarah Larsen. Superintendent Peter Olson-Skog was present. Student representatives Rhys Walsh and Evangeline Fuentes were present.

Also present for the meeting were: Peter Mau, Assistant Superintendent; Cari Jo Drewitz, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Sara Lein, Director of Special Programs; Brian Schultz, Director of Finance; Sara Blair, Director of Communications; Lisa Grathen, Director of Community Education; and Dave Sandum, Director of Technology.

**Agenda**

*Agenda items 6 and 7 were re-ordered. The site report from Somerset Elementary was canceled and will be rescheduled for a future meeting.*

*It was moved by Ms. Steele and seconded by Ms. Walz to approve the agenda as amended.*

*Aye: Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, Randi Walz*

*Nay: none*

*The motion carried (6-0)*

**Consent Agenda**

*It was moved by Mr. Schwab and seconded by Mr. Aune to approve the consent agenda items as amended:*

- Approval of the October 20, 2025 School Board Regular Meeting Minutes
- Approval of Personnel Recommendations
- Approval of Gifts to the District
- Approval of FY24 Audit
- Approval of July 2025 Treasurer's Report
- Approval of July 2025 Accounts Payable Report
- Approval of August 2025 Treasurer's Report
- Approval of August 2025 Accounts Payable Report
- Approval of September 2025 Wire Transfers Report
- Approval of October 2025 Wire Transfers Report
- Second Reading of Policy 501, School Weapons Policy
- Final Reading of Policy 503, Student Attendance

*Aye: Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, Randi Walz*

*Nay: none*

## ***The motion carried (6-0)***

### **Listening Session Report**

Two individuals were present for a general discussion about district updates.

### **Student Representatives' Report**

At the elementary level, Mendota hosted a third-grade performance of *The Three Little Pigs* with Story Book Theater and is collecting grocery gift cards to support families in need; Somerset students are participating in a Read-a-Thon; and Pilot Knob is preparing for a *Feed My Starving Children* service event. In the middle schools, Heritage students enjoyed a visit from the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District, both schools participated in National Walk and Bike to School Day, and classes took field trips to Dodge Nature Center to learn about bees, navigation, and teamwork. At Two Rivers High School, Sada Gustafson broke her own diving record, and several students and teams qualified for state tournaments in Cross Country, Tennis, and Diving. The National Honor Society hosted a successful blood drive, the high school showcase welcomed incoming 8th graders, and students in the Youth Leadership class began service projects volunteering throughout the district.

### **Recognitions**

Ava and Stella, members of the Somerset Elementary Spanish Club, along with their advisor, Stephanie Quick Espinoza, shared a presentation about the club's origins and purpose. The club was created to support students' educational growth and cultural development and now includes 24 students in grades 2-4 who meet weekly, with plans to expand membership to younger students. Club activities include exploring cultural traditions and foods, engaging in open conversations about identity and family connections to Mexico, playing Lotería, and finding ways to continue learning and strengthening their Spanish language skills. Members emphasized the strong sense of belonging the club fosters within the school community.

American Indian Education Coordinator Nell Barri shared updates about the Native Student Group along with two of the group's members, Aubrey and Clara. Highlights included sharing information about the upcoming Native American Heritage Event on November 19th which will feature food, dance, games, poetry, and drumming. The student group recently decorated the library in honor of Native American Heritage Month and spoke to the growth of the club and the positive impact that it has had on students' sense of belonging and cultural identity. Goals of the club included getting more Native students involved and starting an after-school club for all interested students to join and learn more about Native culture and traditions.

### **Superintendent's Report**

The Superintendent recognized November as Native American Heritage Month and highlighted the district's American Indian Education Program serving over 160 students. Two Rivers High School is participating in Direct Admissions Minnesota, through which seniors have already received automatic admission notifications from more than 50 state colleges and universities. Middle school updates included new electives: "Medical Detectives" at Friendly Hills, where students conducted hands-on labs culturing bacteria, and "What's Happening at Heritage," where students produce multimedia stories, including coverage of a farm-to-school tasting project supported by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's 'First Bite' Grant. Families with children turning five by September 1, 2026 were invited to Kindergarten Showcase events this week across all five elementary schools, with dates available at [isd197.org](http://isd197.org). The Superintendent also acknowledged uncertainty from the federal government shutdown and noted the district is sharing resources on meal distribution and financial assistance in the community newsletter.

### **College and Career Readiness Focus Area Update**

The presentation focused on expanding and sustaining opportunities to improve student outcomes through curriculum alignment, college and career integration, and student support initiatives. Key objectives included

implementing the Ojibwe language course in 2025-26, aligning Warrior Seminar curriculum, integrating career planning into personal finance, and conducting a 5-12 counseling program review. Additional goals highlighted reducing barriers for underrepresented students via focus groups, smoother transitions between grade levels, and developing AI guidelines for classroom use. Direct student supports include new middle school electives, diverse college visit options, family training on Naviance, and new technology support systems such as a student help desk and repair workshop. Career and Technical Education (CTE) expansion plans feature a new CAPS course in *Natural Resources, Sustainability & Food Systems*, a career and college center, and an advanced computer science course planned for 2026-27.

### **Special Education Unified Program Highlight**

Sara Lein, Director of Special Programs, and Jennifer Miller, Special Education Supervisor, joined by TRHS teachers/Unified Club advisors Karen Erickson and Michelle Muller and Unified PE teacher Kyle Earnest, presented an update on the district's Unified programming. They reviewed the program's origins - beginning with a PE curriculum review and launching a Unified Club in 2022, followed by the first Unified PE course in September 2022 - and highlighted student-led activities and fundraising, including Polar Plunge totals of ~\$1,700 (2024) and ~\$2,000 (2025). Current offerings include an 80-member Unified Club with monthly before-school/Warrior Time meetings; two sections of Unified PE each semester (57 students in fall, 43 in spring) with community-based experiences; and a Unified Foods class piloted in spring 2025, with another section planned for next spring. The team also noted the October 7, 2025 Unified Club Flag Football Invitational at TCO Field (with Special Olympics and partner schools). Looking ahead, plans include holiday service projects, an April Autism Awareness campaign, a Unified basketball tournament, and exploration of Unified opportunities in middle school and additional coursework.

### **Site Report: Friendly Hills Middle School**

Presented by Principal Chris Hiti and Associate Administrator Kira Fischler, the report highlighted a vibrant and inclusive school culture, emphasizing opportunities for every student through clubs, EmpowerED programs, and music participation. Student leadership and service were celebrated through the Student Council, Future Cities team, and Yearbook Club. The report showcased technology initiatives including SmartPass, TalkingPoints, and Student Support Time to improve communication and academic tracking. Looking ahead, the school outlined its school-wide reading campaign with partnerships with Dakota County Libraries, classroom and free libraries, and events such as Read-A-Thon and Battle of the Books. Pride initiatives like Warrior Rallies, Warrior Tickets, and Spirit Weeks were featured, along with new courses - Medical Detectives, Myths and Legends, and Coding - reflecting a continued commitment to innovation and student engagement.

### **Adjournment**

***It was moved by Mr. Schwab and seconded by Mr. Hill to adjourn the meeting at 7:58 p.m.***

***Aye: Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, Randi Walz***

***Nay: none***

***The motion carried (6-0)***

The next regularly scheduled School Board meeting of Independent School District 197 will be Monday, November 24, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. It will be held in the School District 197 District Office Training Room, 1897 Delaware Avenue, Mendota Heights. *Please refer to the district website for possible changes to any meeting times/locations.*

Upon approval by the School Board, official minutes will be available at the District Office, 1897 Delaware Avenue, Mendota Heights, and on the district website. The full meeting materials are available for public inspection at the administrative offices of the school district and on the district website.

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Sarah Larsen  
School Board Chair

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Jon Vaupel  
School Board Clerk