

School District 197  
West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools  
Regular Meeting  
Monday, September 22, 2025  
ISD 197 District Office, Mendota Heights, MN

A meeting of the School Board of Independent School District 197 was held on Monday, September 22, 2025 beginning at 5:00 p.m. pursuant to due notice.

The meeting was called to order by current Chair Larsen at 5:00 p.m. The following School Board members were present: Tim Aune, Sarah Larsen, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, and Randi Walz. Superintendent Peter Olson-Skog was present. Student representatives Rhys Walsh and Evangeline Fuentes were present.

Also present for the meeting were: Cari Jo Drewitz, Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Sara Lein, Director of Special Programs; Tye Michaels, Director of Human Resources; Dave Sandum, Director of Technology; Mark Fortman, Director of Operations; Lisa Grathen, Director of Community Education; and Scott LeSage, Director of Finance.

**Agenda**

***It was moved by Ms. Steele and seconded by Mr. Aune to approve the agenda as presented.***

***Aye: Tim Aune, Sarah Larsen, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, Randi Walz  
Nay: none***

***The motion carried (7-0)***

**Consent Agenda**

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

- Approval of the September 8, 2025 School Board Regular Meeting Minutes
- Approval of Personnel Recommendations
- Approval of Two Rivers High School Girls' Hockey Field Trip
- Approval of Gifts to the District
- Administrative Review of Policy 701, Establishment and Adoption of School District Budget
- Administrative Review of Policy 701.1, Modification of School District Budget
- Final Reading of Policy 527, Student Use and Parking of Motor Vehicles; Patrols, Inspections, and Searches
- Final Reading of Policy 534, Unpaid Meal Charges
- Approval of June 2025 Accounts Payable Report
- Approval of June 2025 Treasurer's Report
- Approval of July 2025 Wire Transfers Report
- Approval of August 2025 Wire Transfers Report

***Aye: Tim Aune, Sarah Larsen, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, Randi Walz  
Nay: none***

***The motion carried (7-0)***

**Comments to the School Board**

There were no comments to the School Board.

### **Approval of Preliminary 2025 Payable 2026 Property Tax Levy**

The Board reviewed detailed information regarding the proposed 2025 Payable 2026 Property Tax Levy, which must be certified in preliminary form by September 30 under state law. Presentations from the Finance Department outlined how levy amounts are determined, noting that changes in state legislation, property market values, pupil counts, and district expenditures all contribute to annual increases or decreases. The materials also provided an overview of the district's funding sources and tax base definitions, including Referendum Market Value (RMV) and Net Tax Capacity (NTC), which are used in different portions of the levy. Comparisons with neighboring districts highlighted that School District 197 maintains one of the stronger commercial-industrial tax bases in the region, contributing significantly to levy capacity and reducing the overall burden on residential taxpayers. While the district has one of the higher voter-approved operating and capital project authorities, it remains a comparatively lower-taxing district due to this strong tax base.

The administration recommended that the Board adopt the preliminary levy at the "Maximum" amount to allow flexibility as the Department of Education finalizes figures. The Truth in Taxation hearing is scheduled for December 8, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at Mendota Heights City Hall, where the final levy will be considered.

***It was moved by Ms. Steele and seconded by Mr. Schwab to approve the Preliminary 2025 Payable 2026 Property Tax Levy to the Maximum.***

***Aye: Tim Aune, Sarah Larsen, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, Randi Walz  
Nay: none***

***The motion carried (7-0)***

### **2024-2025 World's Best Workforce Annual Report**

The 2024-2025 Annual Report highlights strong progress across School District 197 in academic achievement, equity, and student engagement. Notable gains were reported in reading proficiency, particularly following the implementation of the Minnesota READ Act, with more kindergarten students reaching grade-level benchmarks and third-grade literacy rates improving. Math achievement also had some gains and there are plans to implement a new curriculum. The district ranked first among comparable districts in reading, and second in math. Graduation rates reached 90%, surpassing the state average, with achievement gaps by race showing signs of narrowing. Beyond academics, participation in athletics, activities, and clubs remained high, reinforcing the positive connection between involvement and student success.

The district's strategic goals continue to focus on readiness from early childhood through postsecondary pathways. Early childhood programs expanded screenings and family education, while secondary initiatives increased access to rigorous coursework (courses where students earn college credit for a course taken at the high school) and industry certifications such as ServSafe. Social-emotional learning and equity remain central priorities, supported by new curriculum and staff training. District leadership emphasized that success goes beyond standardized tests, centering on curiosity, resilience, and community partnerships that prepare every student for future careers and college. Collectively, these outcomes reflect a district-wide commitment to equitable opportunities, high expectations, and strong support systems for all learners.

### **2025-2026 World's Best Workforce Annual Plan**

The 2025-2026 Strategic Implementation Plan was presented, which continues to focus on three key areas: social-emotional learning (SEL), equity, and career and college readiness. SEL efforts include expanding the Character Strong curriculum, developing tools to support executive functioning, and integrating wellness into programs across grade levels. Additional initiatives will strengthen practices, provide direct instruction on emotional well-being, and engage families through a new SEL guide. These strategies are designed to create supportive, culturally responsive school environments, and ensure that students develop essential skills for well-being, relationships, and academic achievement.

Equity and college readiness remain central priorities. Planned actions include launching an Ojibwe language course, increasing staff training on culturally responsive teaching, implementing sliding-scale student parking fees, and enhancing opportunities for historically marginalized students in internships, certifications, and leadership roles. The district also aims to broaden access to rigorous coursework, expand middle school electives, implement direct admissions, and strengthen career pathways through CAPS programs and technical certifications. Together, these initiatives reinforce the district's commitment to equitable systems, closing achievement gaps, and preparing all students for postsecondary success.

#### **First Reading of Policy 414, Mandated Reporting of Child Neglect or Physical or Sexual Abuse**

The policy, last reviewed in October 2022, was updated to align with the MSBA model policy, including adjustments to definitions, reporting procedures, and legal references. Notable updates include revisions to the definition of “threatened injury” to reflect Minnesota statute, relocation and clarification of other definitions, and language changes to ensure inclusivity by replacing “he” and “she” with “their.” The policy also underwent review using the District's Four-Way Equity Test to ensure consistency and fairness in application.

This policy will be brought back to a future meeting for a second reading.

#### **First Reading of Policy 503, Student Attendance**

Policy 503 was reviewed and updated to align with the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) Model Policy. Changes include minor wording adjustments, clarification regarding excused absences to explicitly include religious holidays, and retention of district-specific language emphasizing collaboration with families and county agencies to support attendance rather than focusing on grade reductions. The updates were informed by recent legislation, the MSBA model, and application of the Four-Way Equity Test.

This policy will be brought back to a future meeting for a second reading.

#### **Adjournment**

*It was moved by Mr. Vaupel and seconded by Mr. Schwab to adjourn the meeting at 7:32 p.m.*

*Aye: Tim Aune, Sarah Larsen, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel, Marcus Hill, Randi Walz  
Nay: none*

*The motion carried (7-0)*

The next regularly scheduled School Board meeting of Independent School District 197 will be Monday, October 6, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. It will be held at the City of Mendota Heights Council Chambers, 1101 Victoria Curve, Mendota Heights, MN. *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