

School District 197  
West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools  
Regular Meeting  
Monday, May 5, 2025  
Mendota Heights City Hall, Council Chambers

A meeting of the School Board of Independent School District 197 was held on Monday, May 5, 2025 beginning at 6:00 p.m. pursuant to due notice.

The meeting was called to order by current Chair Larsen at 6:00 p.m. The following School Board members were present: Tim Aune, Marcus Hill, Sarah Larsen, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Jon Vaupel and Randi Walz. Superintendent Peter Olson-Skog was also present. Student Representatives Nawal Hassan and Patrick Bohmbach were present.

Also present for the meeting were: Peter Mau, Assistant Superintendent; Sara Lein, Director of Special Education; Cari Jo Drewitz, Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment; Tye Michaels, Director of Human Resources; Mark Fortman, Director of Operations; Sara Blair, Director of Communications; and Lisa Grathen, Director of Community Education.

**Agenda**

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

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

*The motion carried (7-0).*

**Consent Agenda**

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

- Approval of the April 21, 2025 School Board Regular Meeting Minutes
- Approval of Personnel Recommendations
- Approval of Annual Designation of Identified Official with Authority for the Minnesota Department of Education
- Approval of Resolution of Support for the 2025-2026 Safe Routes to School BOOST Grant
- Final Reading of Policy 416, Drug and Alcohol Testing
- Final Reading of Policy 418, Drug Free Workplace/Drug Free School
- Second Reading of Policy 535, Service Animals in the Schools
- Approval of Field Trip for Two Rivers High School Boys Basketball
- Approval of Bid Award for Milk and Dairy Products
- Approval of Award for Food Service Paper and Supplies for the FY2025-2027 School Years

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

*The motion carried (7-0).*

## **Listening Session Report**

Board member Vaupel stated that one individual attended the Listening Session to talk about options for reducing food waste.

## **Recognitions**

Superintendent Olson-Skog introduced three groups of students for recognition. Several students were featured in this year's Confluence literary publication. Confluence is an annual publication that features writing and art from School District 197 fourth-grade students. All submissions focused on this year's theme: *Adventure in Every Draft*. Elementary Curriculum Coordinator, Katie Quinlan, introduced the following students: Moreland's Liam Schindeldecker (Meanings of Explore) and Maysa Farah (The Enchanted Tree); Garlough's Ramona Saenz-Wilhelm (Tiger Island); Somerset's Leif Arneson (Tree) and Noelle Steele (The Outdoors); Pilot Knob's Manhaa Moien (Into the Emerald Deep) and Sahasra Medarmittla (Letters); Mendota's Charlee Gunia and Quinn Bietz (Cabybara Life).

Several Two Rivers High School students recently passed the state-recognized bilingual and multilingual seals test. This year, nearly 20 students in grades 11 and 12 demonstrated proficiency in German and Spanish. The district had more Platinum Bilingual Seals awarded than ever before, each earning four college credits. Every other student who took the test earned at least three college credits. The Bilingual and Multilingual Seals, officially recognized by the state of Minnesota, celebrate students' ability to communicate in multiple languages. Students recognized were: Alessandra Valadez-Ochoa; Alexa Flores; Angelo Jaime Aguirre; Ashley Avalos Muro; Celin Mena Rivera; Elissa Reynoso Flores; Emma Mercer; Isabelle Espinoza Hernandez; Jesus Enriquez Camacho; Jonathan Mata-Jaimes; Leandro Serrano; Leyda Mejia Alvarenga; Maite Pollex; Malena Carrasco-Medina; Marbella Sevilla; and Shirel Tovar Arellanos.

Student School Board Representatives, Patrick Bohmbach and Nawal Hassan, were honored for their service on the School Board this past school year.

## **Student Representative's Report**

Student Representative Nawal Hassan presented the student report. The Early Learning Center hosted a parent meeting. Elementary students took the MCA math and reading tests. Mendota Elementary hosted a Project Fair and Art Show, and students participated in Tree Week and Banana Day. Pilot Knob students participated in an Earth Day all-school clean-up day. Somerset hosted a project fair. Middle School students took the MCA math and reading tests. Friendly Hills hosted a 2SLGBTQ+ Parent/Guardian Group meeting. Two Rivers students celebrated Senior Decision Day with many students sharing their post-secondary plans. The high school hosted the Teen Lit Con, which showcased multiple authors and creative artists. Students hosted a polar plunge for charity. The annual musical "Mean Girls" was a huge success. Over the next couple of weeks, students will be taking many AP exams, and music concerts will take place. The Senior Awards ceremony will be held on May 21, which gives students the opportunity to earn scholarships based on their achievements. ALMAS is hosting a Mexican Folklore event on May 24, with students showcasing their dancing skills. Graduation will be held on June 1.

## **Superintendent's Report**

Superintendent Olson-Skog presented his report. Schools are hosting end-of-year activities, students and schools are receiving awards and recognitions, and preparations for the 2025-2026 school year are underway. The high school hosted Senior Decision Day. This event is for all seniors, whether they're going on to a 4-year or 2-year college, military service, joining the workforce, or taking a gap year, recognizing that every student's journey after high school is unique and valued. Somerset hosted a Project Fair + STEM Night, where students proudly shared their creative projects. Moreland hosted their annual Moreland Made, a learning showcase featuring over 100 pieces of student artwork and hands-on activities. Mendota's annual Craft & Bake Sale showcased a wide array of impressive student-created crafts and baked goods. This month, the district will

celebrate the child nutrition staff for School Lunch Hero Day, the administrative assistants for National Administrative Professionals Day, and the teachers for Teacher Appreciation Week. The two student school board representatives – Patrick Bohmbach and Nawal Hassan – were recognized for their outstanding reporting on behalf of students at all grade levels in the school district this past year and were presented with a \$500 scholarship to be applied towards their college tuition.

### **Equity Advisory Committee Update**

Peter Mau, Assistant Superintendent, and Kevin Sheridan, Educational Equity Coordinator, presented an update from the Equity Advisory Committee. The role of this committee is to advise district administration on matters related to the equity focus area of the Strategic Framework. Membership has increased in size and representation and includes staff, students, families, and representatives from 2SLGBTQ+, East African, Jewish, Muslim, and the School Board. The committee has continued to build community with various activities. Increased updates have been provided to the committee about targets and other initiatives such as supporting Native students with professional development for all licensed staff, offering school menu options for religious diet needs, partnering with historically Black colleges and universities, offering a course in Ojibwe, and offering the Youth Ambassadors program culminating in the Equity Summit. Other highlights include revised considerations for winter holidays; provided observations using the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Tool after a Mendota visit; offered recommendations for updates to the equity policy; and provided a forum for groups to share on various topics. At the last meeting, members shared their recommendations that will help support the work on the committee for SY25-26.

### **Strategic Framework Equity Implementation Target Update**

Peter Mau, Assistant Superintendent, and Kevin Sheridan, Educational Equity Coordinator, presented an update on the Strategic Framework equity implementation target, “build equitable systems and support throughout the district”. Membership is representative of our community in terms of role (students, staff, families), location (our various schools and district departments), and demographics (race, gender identity, and more). The seven equity commitment areas include:

- Diverse classrooms and schools
- Staff quality and diversity
- Resource allocation
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
- Schools and Classrooms
- Student Leadership and Voice
- Family and community partnerships

This year, equity training was provided to all non-licensed staff. This training reinforced why equity work is so important in education. District staff were offered the opportunity to learn a new language. 79 staff showed interest in that and were offered a six-month subscription to the online learning app. The AmazeWorks curriculum in PreK-4 was fully implemented. The final two cohorts of teachers were trained last summer and received support this school year as they began teaching the lessons. Nutrition Services has regularly offered menu options for religious diet needs to be more reflective of the diversity of our student population. In regard to student leadership and voice, the number of student ambassadors was increased to at least four to attend the *Beyond Our Walls Equity Summit*.

### **Early Learning Advisory Committee Update**

Laurie Hume, Assistant Director of Early Learning, presented an update on the Early Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC). By law, the school district must have this advisory committee. The ELAC is a group of volunteer parents and staff members who assist in promoting the goals of the district’s early learning program through a variety of efforts. They work to enhance public awareness of the programs available to families, organize events for legislative advocacy, and advise on early learning curricula and programs. Membership

includes staff and parents. Meetings are held both in-person and virtually to accommodate families. Topics over the past year included a review of the Amazeworks curriculum, emergency procedures, Conscious Discipline, community resources, Technology and Young Children, and a review of the Science of Reading. Future goals include increased volunteer opportunities for families and for families to interact with each other.

#### **Special Education Advisory Committee Update**

Rachel Johnston, Special Education Coordinator, presented an update on the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). By law, the school district must have this advisory committee. The SEAC works to increase the involvement of parents of children with disabilities in making recommendations regarding special education policies and programs. Membership includes staff, parents, and community representatives. 21% of the district learners have IEPs. Staff serve students from birth to age 22 in 13 different disability categories. Topics and events over this past year included an overview of Special Education, information from Dakota County on the Special Education Plan from birth until graduation, and information on “Find Love Safely,” which is a personalized matchmaking service for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. At their May 20 meeting, staff will gather topic ideas to incorporate into next year’s meetings.

#### **Action Item – Approval of FY26 Health and Dental Insurance Recommendations**

Tye Michaels, Director of Human Resources, presented the FY26 health and dental insurance recommendations. The Labor-Management Committee (LMC), which includes union leadership, a School Board representative, and district administration, meets throughout the school year with support from the district’s benefits consultant, One Digital, to review health and dental insurance. As of last month, the medical plan claims are running at 90% of expected year-to-date, up from 84% at this time last year. Claims have increased 23% year-over-year. Due to inflation and COVID-related costs, the fund balance has been depleted and is projected to reach zero or a negative balance once all expected claims are paid. The LMC recommends a 14% premium increase next year to cover plan costs and rebuild the fund balance, and the administration agrees. Dental claims are running at 120% of funding year-to-date. Total paid claims are up 7% compared to this time last year. The LMC recommends a 5% premium increase next year to cover plan costs and stabilize the fund balance, and administration agrees.

*It was moved by Mr. Hill and seconded by Mr. Aune to approve a 14% increase to medical premiums and a 5% increase to dental premiums.*

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

*The motion carried (7-0).*

#### **Action Item – Approval of Friendly Hills Middle School Ventilation Project Change Order**

Mark Fortman, Director of Operations, presented a change order for the Friendly Hills Middle School ventilation project. The School Board accepted the bid for this project in August of last year. The cost was significantly lower than the original projection. The project was to be a 2-year project, and the administration intended to bid out phase 2 next fall for a summer 2026 piping replacement. Though this change order will increase the cost of the current project by \$218,421.85, it will also eliminate the need for the phase 2 project, estimated to cost an additional \$2 million. Administration worked with the design team and identified an alternative process that will enable the project to be completed this summer.

*It was moved by Ms. Steele and seconded by Mr. Schwab to approve Change Order #03 from CM Construction for \$218,421.85.*

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

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

**Action Item – Approval of Heritage Middle School Ventilation Project Change Order**

Mark Fortman, Director of Operations, presented a change order for the Heritage Middle School ventilation project. The School Board accepted the bid for this project in August of last year. The cost was significantly lower than the original projection. The project was to be a 2-year project, and the administration intended to bid out phase 2 next fall for a summer 2026 piping replacement. Though this change order will increase the cost of the current project by \$197,355.84, it will also eliminate the need for the phase 2 project, estimated to cost an additional \$2 million. Administration worked with the design team and identified an alternative process that will enable the project to be completed this summer.

***It was moved by Mr. Vaupel and seconded by Mr. Hill to approve Change Order #03 from CM Construction for \$197,355.84.***

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

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

**Adjournment**

***It was moved by Mr. Schwab and seconded by Mr. Hill to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 p.m.***

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

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

The next regularly scheduled School Board meeting of Independent School District 197 will be Monday, May 19, 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