

Executive Director of Student Services
Board Update
April 2025

Collaboration: Working together to achieve more collectively.

- DASH & TESA: We are continuing our collaboration with member districts and internally to support the growth in our programs. Administrators will meet with South St. Paul on April 2nd to explore classrooms where we will host our new elementary DASH classrooms. Due to increasing enrollment in TESA and decreasing enrollment in DCALS, the two programs have been exploring different classroom spaces that could support the needs of both programs.

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

- Intakes: From 2/24/25 through 3/21/25 (20 school days), ISD 917 offered intakes to 11 students, or 13% of the students on the combined setting IV programs waitlist.

11 students from 4 of the nine-member districts were offered intakes. (Randolph currently has zero students on the waitlist.) Districts 194, 199, and 271 were each offered multiple intakes with 271 receiving 5 intake offers.

Of the 11 intakes that have been offered from 2/24 through 3/21:

- All 11 intakes offered have been scheduled
- 5 intakes have successfully been completed (45% of the intakes offered between 2/24/25 - 3/21/25)
 - There were 11 total completed intakes during the timeframe of 2/24-3/21, with 6 having been scheduled prior to 1/27
- 0 (Zero) families/districts outright declined intake due to the student's need to change or a student has moved out of the member district
- There was 1 student swap requested during this period

From (2/24/25-3/21/25) there were 31 new Setting IV/III referrals. 2 of these referrals have already started in a 917 program. 10 of these referrals have been placed on a waitlist. Of the 19 remaining referrals. 8 have observations and teacher interviews scheduled for placement determination. The remaining 9 referrals have not responded to observation requests as of 3/21/25.

Finally, **14** new students physically began school in ISD 917 setting IV programs from 2/24/25 to 3/21/25, and **7** more students are expected to start the week of 3/31/2025.

Innovation: Ongoing improvement of programs and services.

- Family engagement: This year, our setting IV programs prioritized family and community engagement by hosting a variety of events in place of traditional conferences. These gatherings provided opportunities for students to showcase their learning, families to connect with staff, and our school communities to come together in a positive and supportive environment.

Events included open houses to welcome families into our buildings and introduce them to staff, community gatherings with food and outdoor activities to encourage informal connections, and academic showcases that highlighted student projects and achievements across subjects like literacy, science, and the arts. These family engagement nights featured interactive activities such as bingo, hands-on learning experiences, sundae bars, and art projects, creating meaningful opportunities for participation.

By offering a variety of engagement opportunities, our programs have strengthened family-school connections and increased participation. We look forward to continuing and expanding these efforts in the years ahead!

Stewardship: Managing financial and human resources carefully and responsibly.

- DCALS: We have been working to address a decline in enrollment and correspondingly, a decline in revenue for our DCALS program. Unfortunately, to address the magnitude of the declines in enrollment and revenue, we need to make reductions in staffing. Many staff were provided options for reassignments. Some opted to accept these while others made the decision to resign. We did have to move forward with unrequested leaves of absence for a few other staff. As part of the process, Michael, Mark, and I met with all secondary staff in February and shared enrollment and revenue data. The same team met individually with all staff in secondary when it came time to provide notification of the reductions. We continue to be available to staff as they work through processing the impending changes affecting DCALS.

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

- District Update: If you did not have the opportunity to read the latest District Update, you can access it [here](#).

Integrity: Aligning our actions with our values and beliefs.

- Ukeru: Ukeru implementation continues to move forward as planned! Our most recent Ukeru equipment order was delivered on March 12th and Central Intake Coordinator, Justin Hoelscher, and Mental Health Coordinator, Jen Petersen, delivered the appropriate pads and shields to our three ECSE classrooms at Pine Bend Elementary, Riverview Elementary, and Pond Early

Learning Center on March 17th & 18th. With all ECSE having been trained on February 24th, having access to full classroom sets of pads, and ongoing coaching from trainers Justin and Jen, our ECSE classrooms now have everything they need to implement Ukeru with fidelity.

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

- Social/emotional learning curriculum: In collaboration with the District's Tier 1 Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum Committee, ISD 917 has chosen new Tier 1 SEL curricula for the 2025-26 school year. Classrooms in the IDEA, TESA, and TEA programs will be working from the [Character Strong](#) curriculum, while students in SUN, CASE, and some D/HH classrooms will be working with the [Everyday Speech](#) curriculum. Students in grades K-5 also have access to additional SEL materials through the EL Open Up curriculum they use for literacy. The chosen SEL curricula will assist teachers in structuring lessons and learning activities, while also helping students set group- and individual goals in the domains of Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making. Each of the chosen curricula was selected due to features such as engaging content, cultural responsiveness, virtual platforms, and relevance to students' strengths and needs.

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

- Mobility Matters: In March, Janel Vrieze, work-based learning teacher in the TESA program, had the privilege of speaking at the *Mobility Matters* event in Burnsville, MN, hosted by Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA), the National League of Cities (NLC), the City of Burnsville, and Enterprise Mobility. The event provided a critical platform for discussing the importance of collaboration at the federal, state, and local levels to address the mobility gaps that affect various demographics.

Public transportation plays a pivotal role in our communities, not only as a vital service that facilitates the daily commute for millions of Americans but also as a cornerstone of economic vitality. With over 430,000 people employed in the public transit sector, the industry supports millions of jobs and contributes significantly to the U.S. economy. 77% of federal funding for public transit flows into the private sector, underscoring its vital role in supporting companies across the country.

It's clear that strengthening partnerships and fostering innovation in transit is essential to creating a more inclusive, sustainable, and successful future for all. To learn more about the event, please visit [this link](#).

Diversity: Appreciating and valuing everyone's unique selves.

- New administrators: We are excited to announce that we have offered positions to AJ Boehmer as the Assistant Director/Principal for the TEA and ECSE TEA programs, Steph Betley as the Assistant Director of the TESA programs, and Jeanne D'Aloia as the Assistant Principal/Special Education Coordinator for Deaf/Hard of Hearing and Itinerant Programs. We are also in the process of hiring for the Assistant Principal/Special Education Coordinator for the TESA program and Principal for Secondary Programs (DCALS, CTE, and the JSC). While change can be hard, we enjoy having new leaders in the district to share ideas and diverse perspectives.