

## **February 2025**

The majority of what I'll be sharing in this report comes from things people shared in our student forum meetings in January and before break. We had around 60 people attend our last, so bear with me as I try to convey a lot of information! I can provide more detail on any of these topics, but I'll do my best to keep it at an overview. To begin with, I'll share some updates about our students and activities!

Before winter break, *that* was the biggest thing that students were looking forward to. There is also a lot of anticipation for our upcoming spirit week: Red and Grey Week. March Madness is another upcoming event we're looking forward to! On the Friday before break, Valentine's Day, singing valentines visited classes with some pretty creative performances! Let me know if you want the videos. Boys and girls basketball are both in the midst of their seasons, and both have upcoming games. Our robotics and boys swim teams are also staying busy! Auditions for the spring play are next week, and I'm excited for the show which follows Wendy from Peter Pan!

Now, moving to student feedback! One of the issues I most commonly hear about is the lack of communication from the district to families and students and the lack of opportunities for students to communicate to the district. Yesterday, I encountered a prime example of this. I had an email that I wanted to get to members of the board, so I used the school board's email address provided on the district website. But, seconds after I sent the email, I got an error message saying that students are not allowed to directly contact staff organizations. I hope that this barrier in communication can be remedied soon.

Next, students are really feeling the negative effects of the new schedule and class requirements. Some feel that the shortened class time makes it harder to get work done, and the loss of WIN adds to that issue. The overwhelming sentiment is that the new requirements for ninth through eleventh graders aren't necessary or effective. Many students feel frustrated because we were told the purpose of moving to a seven hour day was to allow more room for electives, especially for students that are in a music and a language. But, the new requirements actually made it more difficult for people to take electives and even requirements in some situations. Students in student forum who have taken 9th grade futures, computer science, and college career life readiness shared that they didn't gain much from these courses. Lessons are inconsistent from teacher to teacher, and students feel that they lost time that could have been spent in a more productive class. They feel that these new requirements create busy work and are a prime example of the district neglecting to ask for student input on decisions that so directly affect them. Because these classes were added so last minute, there doesn't seem to be a well developed curriculum, and to quote one student, "they feel pointless."

On a more positive note, there were quite a few electives added this year that students have really benefited from including ASL and forensic science. There are some really interesting options available to us next year including ethnic studies, fire science, baking, and more. We only wish there was time to take them!

Moving on! In our last committee of the whole meeting, I raised the concern that district surveys sent to students may not be the most accurate way to gather information. In student forum, people shared that surveys are easily missed in inboxes, students don't see the impacts coming from their responses, and the questions can be unclear. There was a lot of excitement about the idea of having some sort of discussion based feedback session to supplement the information gained from surveys. Students also feel that having time built into classes to respond to surveys and making survey links more accessible would also be an improvement. Lastly, students feel that surveys should be anonymous.

Next, after hearing discussion on the violence prevention initiatives being discussed by this board, I asked kids in student forum if they feel that we are adequately prepared for an emergency situation, and the consensus was no. Students want to hear more about what a lockdown would entail and have more discussions about escape routes, especially at the start of the new semester when our classes are new. No one in the discussion was aware that we don't use ALICE anymore, and that's a testament to the lack of information shared with students. I have some more details related to this subject that I discussed with Mr. Flohaug and would be glad to share with you.

One concern raised during our last student forum meeting was a lack of access to up to date information, especially when it comes to textbooks. Our civics textbook is of special concern: someone shared that it is so out of date that they hardly use it. Math books were also brought up in this discussion.

With that, as you heard and saw during the listening session, students are extremely concerned about the reduction in access to our library. I could go on and on about all that it's used for: club meetings, NHS tutoring, sports meetings, access to class materials, space to study or take a breath, access to a printer, and more. I would love to hear some more information about whether the district is utilizing state funding allocated by MN Statute 134.356 which gives all Minnesota school districts additional funding specifically for libraries. The \$16.11 per pupil can be used to cover all of the costs within the library. As shared by Mrs. Knettel, "In the newly adopted Strategic Roadmap, the Duluth Public Schools has also committed to focusing on literacy across all content areas. Decisions reducing student access to reading and research materials and study spaces do not align with these goals." Tomorrow, I'll be speaking to seventh graders at Ordean hoping to encourage improvement in study and behavioral habits. I've already been part of a similar presentation to sixth graders. Middle schoolers are already struggling to develop the skills

they'll need in high school, and reducing their access to their library will make it even more difficult for them to prepare for success in this district. We are all affected by this. Students need and want access to media literacy learning tools and the space provided by the library, so I urge you to remember the fact that this is an opportunity for you to make a decision with students and their daily experiences in mind.

One of my biggest goals is to improve communication. Students were excited about the idea of me writing some sort of a newsletter with summaries of what was discussed at board meetings and in student forum. I discussed this with Mr. Flohaug, and I will work with him to make even more information accessible to students. I also plan to share resources with them about how they can use their voices to get involved.

At the start of the last student forum meeting, I gave a summary of the notes I took at the three school board meetings I attended prior to this one, and people really appreciated that. I think that is a testament to the fact that students really do want to feel like they are being kept up to date. It's as simple as taking two minutes to give a summary and creating a few bullet points. I hope that's something you'd be willing to collaborate with me on in the future. Students especially want more information on budget cuts. That's another discussion I had with Mr. Flohaug and would like to have with any of you!

To conclude, I'd like to share this: the best way to make it seem like you care about student voices is to put your sentiment into action. In my meeting with Mr. Flohaug, we discussed getting information back to students. He shared that often, administration waits to give more information because it can take a long time for decisions to go through the necessary processes and be finalized. This is something that I completely understand, and I would also like to share that what we care most about is being in the loop while decisions are being made. I understand that having more people aware of a situation can put more pressure on it, and not every decision making process can be made public. But, there are still many issues that students want to hear more about even before they're settled on. You have the power to make the final decision whether or not students are aware of the process, and being transparent will actually create more faith in you.

I greatly appreciate this opportunity to speak with all of you, and I'm excited to keep collaborating! Thank you!