

CONNECTIONS

News from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

September 2025

Volume 22

Number 11

Career Pathways, Partnerships Pave the Way

September 5, 2025

**Board of Directors
Meeting**

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

September 26, 2025

**Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

October 3, 2025

**Board of Directors
Meeting**

7 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

October 31, 2025

**Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**

7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.

Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

Operating a forklift, piloting a flight simulator and administering CPR are not skills that most people possess. High schoolers in Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) can not only learn these skills but earn industry certifications in them during the school day, thanks to a unique set of programs made possible through a wide array of community and business partnerships.

The SPPS Career Pathways program allows students to explore high-wage and in-demand careers through college and career curriculum, personal learning plans, stackable credentials, certifications and work experiences. Organized into four career fields — science and medical, human services, innovative and emerging technologies, and business and communications — these pathways are open to students at any of the district's seven comprehensive high schools, with specific offerings at smaller magnet and alternative schools.



New this fall, the **operating engineers pathway** is a partnership with the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49 for students interested in learning how to operate heavy equipment. A new "sandbox" is being built adjacent to the union hall to allow for hands-on learning. High school seniors can enroll in four rigorous courses and receive high school, articulated college and apprenticeship credits.

At Johnson Senior High School on St. Paul's East Side, a new-and-improved aerospace lab debuted this summer with support from 3M and Heart of America. Eleven state-of-the-art flight simulators and industry-standard equipment allow students to learn on tools that mirror those used by professionals. From coding and robotics to welding and drone operation, students in the **aerospace and engineering magnet program** develop technical skills that translate directly to modern careers.

"Aviation opens up a world of exciting jobs beyond just flying planes. It takes effort and heart, but our classes and field trips help you find that passion within you," Johnson aerospace students Romeo and Touvue said.

Continued on page 2

There are many important elections on the ballot this fall. In addition to three special elections to fill legislative vacancies, fifteen AMSD member school districts have 21 important referendum questions on the ballot. This month's research article provides an overview of the ballot questions. In addition, 21 AMSD member districts have school board elections. You can find a listing of the school districts with board elections and the candidates who filed [here](#). Let's all encourage voters to engage in the electoral process, do their homework, and get out and vote! Finally, I hope you all have a great start to the school year!

From the AMSD Chair, Jim DeMay, Mounds View Board Member

Students Receive Technical Training, College Credits, and Certifications

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SPPS students interested in the medical field have multiple exciting options. In partnership with the Saint Paul Fire Department and Century College, students can receive real-world training and nine college credits on their way to becoming a state-certified **Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)**. Another partnership with St. Catherine's University prepares students to become a **Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)**, encompassing 75 hours of state-approved training, five college credits and preparation for the required competency exam.



Julius, a 2025 SPPS graduate, earned his Certified Nursing Assistant and Emergency Medical Technician certifications as a high school senior.



3M and Heart of America provided funding and support to build a new, state-of-the-art aerospace lab at Johnson Senior High School this summer.

"There's not many high school students that can experience giving CPR to a mannequin in class or giving ventilation with the proper [bag-valve-masks]. Or doing ride-alongs with the St. Paul Fire Department. I think it's pretty cool that I can leave high school and find a good paying job and help my family in case of a medical emergency," said Julius, a 2025 graduate who completed both the EMT and CNA programs his senior year.

But that's not all. Other trades, including **automotive maintenance, welding, construction, and finishing trades** such as painting and drywall are all at students' fingertips. Some courses take place at SPPS schools, with others being offered at local job sites.

In addition to earning high school and college credits and professional certifications, SPPS students can also earn income while gaining real-life work experience. The district's homegrown **Earn As You Learn** program allows 9-12th grade students to earn a \$100 stipend for completing online certification courses in Microsoft Office, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), first aid/CPR, FAA remote pilot certificate, and many more. Since launching the program five years ago, students have earned over 2,100 industry-recognized certifications.

"I have come out of this program with an official business certification for Microsoft Excel, which handles spreadsheets and other data. This is certainly a very strong piece for a high school student to have on a resume, and this might allow me to get a job that I otherwise could not have gotten," one student shared.

A partnership with the City of Saint Paul's Right Track program gives students access to paid internships during the spring semester. Since starting the program in 2021, over 620 SPPS students have completed work experiences with more than 100 employers in fields including business, human services, technology, science and medical. The 3M STEP internship with Right Track allows upwards of 20 students to work with researchers and scientists each spring and summer to experience STEM in action and explore STEM careers.

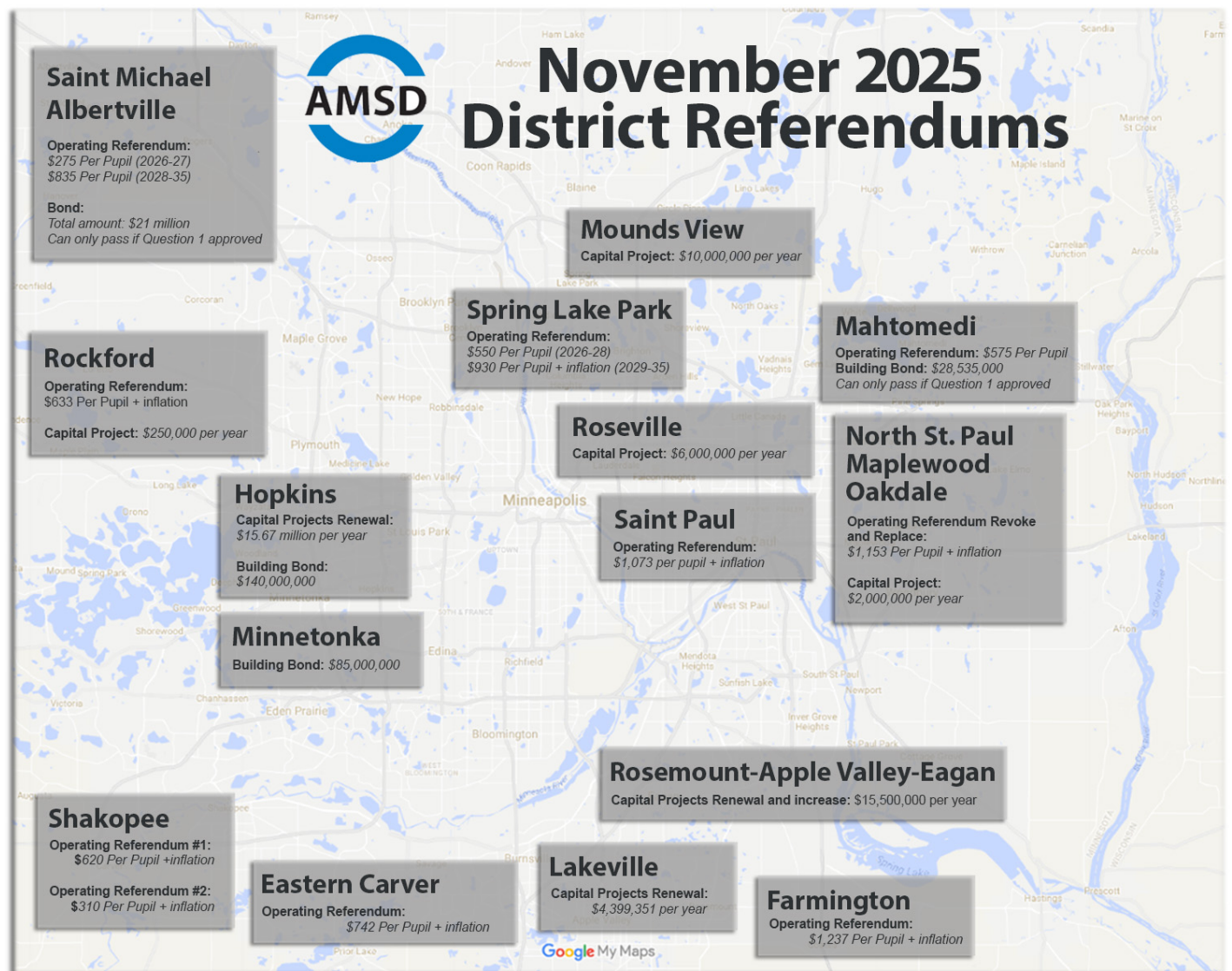
No matter what pathway a student chooses to pursue, one thing is clear: With dedicated teachers, motivated employers and generous partners paving the way, Saint Paul Public Schools students have the support they need to pursue their dreams and change the world. Learn more at spps.org/careerpathways.

This month's member feature was submitted by Saint Paul Public Schools Career Pathways Staff.

Fifteen AMSD Districts on the November Ballot with Referendums

Fifteen AMSD school districts will have 21 referendum questions on the ballot on Nov. 4 — a significant number that speaks to the financial challenges Minnesota school districts face as costs continue to outpace funding provided by the state.

This year's ballot questions include operating referendum requests, capital project levy renewals or increases, and bond questions. A [chart](#) on the AMSD website outlines the AMSD member district referendum questions and includes links to the school district websites where detailed information about the referendum questions can be found. Voters are encouraged to contact their local school officials if they have questions about their school district's referendum.



Why referendums are necessary

The most important source of financial support for school districts comes through the General Education Program. There are several components to the General Education Program with the vast majority provided by basic revenue — often referred to as the basic formula. Basic revenue accounted

Education Funding: A State and Local Partnership

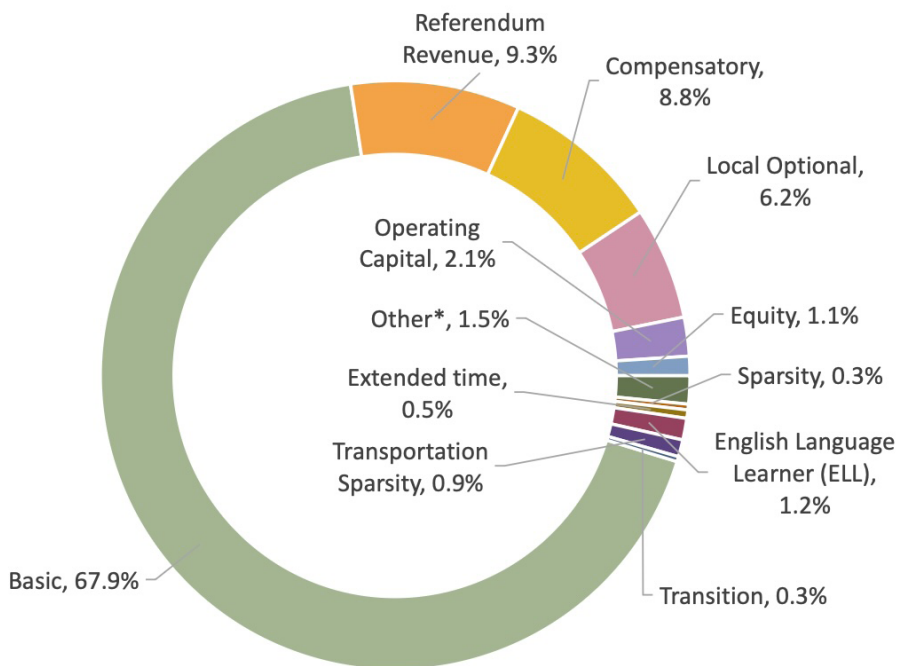
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for 67.9 percent of general education revenue in FY25 and is used to pay for employee salaries and benefits, supply costs and other operational costs. The basic formula has been badly eroded by inflation over the last two decades. Had it kept pace with inflation since 2003 it would have been \$1,364 per pupil higher in the 2024-25 school year.

The federal government provides a very modest share of education funding and even that level could drop following adoption of the federal budget this fall. Falling federal revenue and state funding that fails to keep pace with rising costs elevates the importance of local operating referendums in providing the resources school districts need to serve their students.

Education funding in Minnesota has long been a State and local partnership. As illustrated in the graph below, two key local levies, voter approved referendum revenue (9.3 percent) and local optional revenue (6.2 percent), provide more than 15 percent of general education revenue. Local optional revenue, like the basic formula, has lost considerable ground to inflation since it went into effect in 2014. If it had simply kept pace with inflation since 2014, it would be \$250 per pupil higher in FY25.

General Education Program Components (FY 2025)



Seven of the AMSD districts going to voters this fall are seeking Capital Projects referendums, which are commonly used to ensure safe and secure school buildings and to provide the technology students need to succeed in our digital economy. The State does not provide a dedicated funding stream for technology.

Major building projects are also funded primarily at the local level, and four districts are going to their local voters for building bonds. The State provides limited funding for deferred maintenance and equipment purchases but new construction, additions to existing buildings, and major renovations are generally financed by the sale of bonds following the approval of a bond referendum by the voters.

By law each district going out for referendums of any type are required to provide detailed information about the referendums and projects, as well as provide an estimate of costs and the impact on homeowners in the district. The ballot language for the 2025 election is available on the [MN Secretary of State's website](#). Voters can access their sample ballots by entering their address and zip code. Voters are also encouraged to visit their school district website and talk to their local school officials for more specific details and information about their proposed referendums.