

School District 197
West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools
Regular Meeting
Monday, December 8, 2025
Mendota Heights City Hall, Council Chambers

A meeting of the School Board of Independent School District 197 was held on Monday, December 8, 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. School Board members present: Sarah Larsen, Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Marcus Hill. School Board Members absent: Jon Vaupel, Randi Walz. Superintendent Peter Olson-Skog was present. Student representatives Rhys Walsh and Evangeline Fuentes were present.

Also present for the meeting were: Peter Mau, Assistant Superintendent; Sara Lein, Director of Special Programs; Brian Schultz, Director of Finance; Sara Blair, Director of Communications; Lisa Grathen, Director of Community Education; Tye Michaels, Director of Human Resources; Mark Fortman, Director of Operations.

Agenda

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

Aye: Sarah Larsen, Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Marcus Hill

Nay: none

The motion carried (5-0)

Consent Agenda

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

- Approval of the November 24, 2025 School Board Regular Meeting Minutes
- Approval of Personnel Recommendations
- Approval of November 2025 Wire Transfers Report
- Approval of Field Trip for Two Rivers High School Nordic Ski Team
- Second Reading of Policy 905 Advertising

Aye: Sarah Larsen, Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Marcus Hill

Nay: none

The motion carried (5-0)

Student Representatives' Report

Student Representatives Rhys and Evangeline delivered their monthly report, sharing highlights from schools across the district. Elementary schools engaged in numerous activities, including successful fundraisers at Pilot Knob, Veterans Day assemblies at Garlough and Mendota, and cultural learning experiences at Moreland featuring Ojibwe teachings and arts residencies. Middle school updates included Friendly Hills' collection of more than 600 pounds of food for a local food shelf, Heritage's collaboration with the University of Minnesota Biology Department, and 8th-grade transition tours at Two Rivers High School. At the high school level, students and community volunteers packed more than 50,000 meals during the annual Border Battle Harvest

Pack event, and the school launched a new service club, Beads for Humanity, benefiting St. Jude Children's Hospital. Additional high school achievements included 153 students earning AP Scholar recognition, a successful fall play, and ongoing Kiwanis service activities. The report concluded with a preview of the upcoming districtwide Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service event scheduled for January 19, 2026.

Recognitions

The Board recognized two student groups: the Garlough Student Council and fall season state-level student-athletes from Two Rivers High School. Members of the Garlough Student Council were introduced by Counselor Sarah Orman, who described the group's leadership work supporting schoolwide initiatives, kindergarten classrooms, assemblies, and student-led committees. The Board then honored Two Rivers athletes who advanced to state competition, beginning with the boys' and girls' cross-country team members, followed by girls' tennis state qualifiers Olivia Kanavati and Amelie Williams, and girls' diving qualifier Sada Gustafson, who earned a fourth-place finish at state. Students from the state champion Dakota United Hawks CI Soccer team were also recognized for their accomplishments, including All-Tournament selection Oran Hill. The recognitions concluded with an acknowledgment of Abel Alem, named Second Team All-State in boys' soccer.

Superintendent's Report

Peter Olson-Skog, Superintendent, provided a report highlighting several recent activities and celebrations across the district. Eighth-grade students participated in tours of Two Rivers High School to experience high school life and begin planning for their transition to high school next year. He also noted ongoing efforts to support student transitions at earlier levels, including musical choices opportunities for 4th graders and preparations for kindergarten registration. Fall-season achievements in sports, activities, and clubs were recognized, with appreciation expressed for students' commitment and for staff support. In addition, the district celebrated National Special Education Day, honoring special education staff for their work on behalf of students with disabilities.

Site Report: Moreland Arts & Health Sciences Magnet School

Principal Rob Sahli, joined by Moreland students, provided the annual site report highlighting the school's mission and focus on creativity, healthy living, and active learning. This year's theme, *Be You! What makes you different makes us strong!* was showcased through images that demonstrated student engagement and a sense of belonging. The presentation emphasized arts integration across all grade levels and highlighted partnerships with organizations including Puppets on Parade, Scott Stafford Dance, Opera for the Young, and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. New community connections with the Minnesota Wild and Vikings were also highlighted, along with the SPARKS program, which offers student-selected exploratory learning days. Looking ahead, Moreland will continue efforts to strengthen literacy outcomes for English Learners, partner with families through LEAP, and further increase belonging for both students and staff.

Site Report: Garlough Environmental Magnet School

Principal Libby Huettl presented the Garlough site report, highlighting the school's mission to use the natural world to enrich student learning and inspire learners to understand, connect, and care. Enrollment and staffing data on page 4 illustrate the scope of the GEMS community, including 415 students, 18 sections, specialized programs, and numerous animal-learning partners. Points of pride included a 17% increase in reading fluency and the opening of a new natural playground that supports outdoor learning and play. School-wide themes such as bird studies, an author visit, I Love to Read Month, and a whole-school field trip were also showcased. Looking ahead, the principal shared initiatives including new GEMS awards focused on effort and kindness, expanded SEL small groups using Character Strong resources, and continued opportunities for student voice through the GEMS leadership framework.

Social-Emotional Learning Focus Area Update

Sara Lein, Director of Special Services, presented an update on the district's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) implementation targets for 2025-2026. The report outlined three focus areas: explicit SEL instruction, adult SEL, and aligned community partnerships, as depicted in the framework visuals on pages 2-4. Staff highlighted ongoing SEL instruction in the Branch Out Transition Program, including units on self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making, with pre- and post-assessment data demonstrating student growth. The Board also heard examples of adult SEL practices occurring across buildings, including professional development, wellness initiatives, and culturally responsive instructional practices that support staff capacity. In addition, the district has provided trauma-informed training and safe-space strategies to School Age Care staff to ensure alignment with school-based SEL systems.

Truth-in-Taxation Public Hearing

Brian Schultz, Director of Finance, presented the annual public hearing on the district's proposed property tax levy for taxes payable in 2026, as required under Minnesota law. He reviewed state constitutional and statutory requirements governing public school funding, emphasizing that the legislature sets revenue formulas, tax policy, and maximum levy authority for school districts. The presentation outlined the ongoing gap between the state's General Education Formula Allowance and inflation, noting that the FY 2025-26 per-pupil allowance of \$7,481 would need to increase by an additional 19 percent to keep pace with inflation since 2002-03. Schultz also reviewed the district's current-year budget, including total revenues of \$128.8 million and General Fund expenditures of \$104.9 million for 2025-26. The proposed 2026 levy reflects a \$315,041 decrease (0.8%) from the prior year, with explanations for category-level changes and examples of estimated tax impacts for typical residential properties. The hearing concluded with an opportunity for public comment.

Action Item: Approval of Final Property Tax Levy for Taxes Payable 2026

Brian Schultz, Director of Finance, presented the recommendation for adoption of the final 2025 payable 2026 property tax levy. As outlined in the background memo dated December 8, 2025, state law requires school districts to certify their final levy to the county auditor by December 29 and permits the final levy to be equal to or lower than the proposed levy, except for voter-approved add-ons. The administration recommended adopting a final levy totaling \$39,496,396.22. This amount represents a 0.8% decrease from the prior year, primarily due to enrollment fluctuations and a larger debt excess reduction compared to the previous year. The proposed resolution authorizes the School Board Clerk to sign the certification document for submission to the county auditor.

It was moved by Mr. Schwab and seconded by Ms. Steele to approve the Final Property Tax Levy for Taxes Payable 2026 as presented.

Aye: Sarah Larsen, Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Marcus Hill

Nay: none

The motion carried (5-0)

Action Item: Approval of 2025-2027 Agreement between ISD 197 and Administrative Assistants

Tye Michaels, Director of Human Resources, presented the tentative 2025-2027 contract settlement with Teamsters Local 320, representing approximately 60 Administrative Assistants. The agreement, already ratified by the union, includes salary increases of 1.25 percent effective July 1, 2025, and 1.75% effective July 1, 2026. A new longevity payment of \$0.70 per hour for employees with five continuous years of service will begin July 1, 2025. Beginning July 1, 2026, insurance plan adjustments include revised copays, updated deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums for both single and family coverage, and increases in prescription rates, while the district's contribution levels remain unchanged at 95% for single and 80% for family coverage. The report also noted minor language updates to the contract.

It was moved by Mr. Hill and seconded by Mr. Aune to approve the 2025-2027 Agreement between ISD 197 and Administrative Assistants as presented.

Aye: Sarah Larsen, Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Marcus Hill

Nay: none

The motion carried (5-0)

Action Item: Approval of 2026-2029 Superintendent Contract

Board Treasurer Byron Schwab presented the tentative 2026-2029 superintendent contract settlement for Dr. Peter Olson-Skog. As noted in the background memo, this agreement reflects a smaller overall package percentage increase than any other settled or tentative employee agreements and is recommended for Board approval. Key contract changes include reduced district contributions to health insurance premiums, aligning cost-sharing levels with those negotiated in the teachers' contract, as well as updated copays, deductibles, out-of-pocket maximums, and prescription rates. Salary schedule increases of 1.25% in 2026-27, 1.5% in 2027-28, and 1.5% in 2028-29 were outlined. Additional modifications include phasing out severance and replacing it with a longevity stipend, along with updated contract language recommended by MSBA and MASA.

It was moved by Ms. Steele and seconded by Mr. Schwab to approve the 2026-2029 Superintendent Contract as presented.

Aye: Sarah Larsen, Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Marcus Hill

Nay: none

The motion carried (5-0)

End-of-Year Report on 2025 School Board Goals

Board Results Committee Chair Byron Schwab presented the end-of-year update on the 2025 School Board Goals, which span January through December 2025. The report outlined progress on four development-focused goals, including deepening the Board's understanding of Native American culture, educational equity, accessible community engagement opportunities, and the expectations and non-partisanship responsibilities of Board members. Topic 1 was completed earlier in the year, Topic 4 is underway, and scheduling for Topics 2 and 3 will continue into the next cycle. The Board also reviewed its goal to evaluate and refine the Superintendent Evaluation Rubric, determined that updates were warranted, and initiated a pilot of the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) model as a potential replacement. A training session with the Superintendent and the full Board is planned to support continued implementation.

Summary of 2025 Board Self-Evaluation

Board Results Committee Chair Byron Schwab presented the annual summary of the School Board's 2025 self-evaluation. As described in the report, Board members completed the evaluation by November 6, 2025, and results were compiled across five competency areas, each rated on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The Board reported especially strong performance in competencies related to ethics, values, and moral leadership, with 100 percent of members indicating strong agreement. Additional strengths included high-functioning collaboration, strong communication with the Superintendent, and effective, mission-driven governance practices. No single area of improvement was identified by a majority of the Board, though members noted their ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and alignment with future board goals.

Adjournment

It was moved by Mr. Schwab and seconded by Mr. Hill to adjourn the meeting at 8:06 p.m.

Aye: Sarah Larsen, Tim Aune, Byron Schwab, Morgan Steele, Marcus Hill

Nay: none

The motion carried (5-0)

The next regularly scheduled School Board meeting of Independent School District 197 will be Monday, January 12, 2026 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.

Sarah Larsen
School Board Chair

Jon Vaupel
School Board Clerk