

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 625
Saint Paul, Minnesota**

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

**360 Colborne Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102, and**

Available Streaming Online at www.spps.org/boe and Saint Paul Cable Channel 16

**October 4, 2021
5:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by Jeanelle Foster, Chair.

II. ROLL CALL

Board of Education: C. Allen, J. Kopp, Y. Carrillo, Z. Ellis, J. Foster, J. Vue
Superintendent Gothard

C. Long, General Counsel

Chair Foster noted Director Brodrick would not be present at today's meeting.

III. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF THE MAIN AGENDA

Director Foster, seconded by Director Kopp, motioned to approve the main order of the agenda.

The motion was approved by roll call vote:

Director Allen	Yes
Director Kopp	Yes
Director Carrillo	Yes
Director Ellis	Yes
Director Foster	Yes
Director Vue	Yes

The vote was unanimous, 6-0.

IV. ENVISION SPPS UPDATES

Superintendent Gothard began by thanking everyone for joining the meeting to discuss the district's important focus on Envision SPPS. He noted that the Board of Education charged him and the team to

improve the district's long-term outcomes, to ensure all students have access to a well-rounded education. The SPPS standard was one the district could stand by, but not every student experienced that at SPPS. The district wants to ensure that all students have that access and key factors in providing that access include program evaluation and resource allocation. While the district had a huge budget, how the district used the budget was another matter. He mentioned everyone was interested in public education funding and the district must be more strategic and approach things differently, through strategic initiatives that everyone agreed would serve the district's amazing students. He then turned the presentation over to Chief Turner and colleagues.

Presenters:

Jacqueline Turner, Chief Operations Officer

Andrew Collins, Assistant Superintendent

Tom Parent, Facilities Director

Kate Wilcox-Harris, Chief Academic Officer

Craig Anderson, Executive Director, Office of Teaching and Learning

Marie Schrul, Chief Financial Officer

Chief Turner began the presentation by introducing the speakers and welcoming questions and discussion after each presentation. The purpose of the presentation was to provide more information and to respond directly to questions raised by board members in previous meetings. Chief Turner noted that next steps in engaging internal and external stakeholders would be presented at the end.

Assistant Superintendent Collins thanked the board for welcoming him to address questions raised a few weeks ago about fall 2021 enrollment and the demographics of that enrollment. Referring to presentation slides, Chief Collins noted a higher proportion of Asian students (by 17%) were currently enrolled in online instruction than the overall proportion of Asian students in the district, while a smaller percentage of white students were enrolled in online learning than their proportion in the overall student population. For English Language Learners (ELL) students, there was a slight deviation from their percentage in the overall student population. The same pattern was observed among those who qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Assistant Superintendent Collins continued that in terms of student representation in online learning across the district -- Areas A through F -- North End and Northeast quadrants represented the largest number of students enrolled in online learning. This pattern was also present among elementary students. He noted that choice was very important in St. Paul and the focus here was on the students' home address.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Carrillo asked about the concentration of online students in the northeast area and whether that was expected, or was it a surprise? Along the same lines, he asked whether schools there are affected, such as Vento, and how they were coping with those changes.
- Assistant Superintendent Collins noted that when looking at buildings in those areas they had excess capacity, so a teacher may be shifted to help cover online instruction.
- Director Carrillo followed-up by asking whether the administration had an understanding of how many students were transient and thus would return to school after being vaccinated.
- Assistant Superintendent Collins responded by noting it was all speculation at this point. After the first of the year, school choice season would begin and the district would be looking at data about where parents were choosing to attend school next year. Parents make active choices and may choose a different school. Thus, what it would look like in totality, given potential fears around the

Covid-19 variant and other reasons parents may choose a school, was hard to predict and plan for. He noted there could be a shift for some of 1,298 students currently enrolled in online elementary school.

- Director Vue noted his curiosity about online learning and their demographics, and whether there was any plan to target the Asian community to serve them differently.
- Assistant Superintendent Collins mentioned the district was providing a rigorous learning opportunity for core curriculum instruction that followed the established sequence and that at present there were no unique features in online school for a specific theme. However, he noted that if there were feedback, that could be modified. The emphasis this year was to ensure the online curriculum was operational by the start of the school year.
- Director Vue then noted a higher proportion of online learners were also Asian and he wondered whether there was an understanding of why that was the case.
- Assistant Superintendent Collins said the district did not have data to answer that question.
- Director Vue asked whether anyone had asked Asian students about the reason for choosing online learning.
- Assistant Superintendent Collins noted the general understanding that the large demand was in response to the Delta variant and that that was what the district was working through.

Chief Turner followed up by noting the district asked the fundamental question of whether students planned to study online and then the district asked itself whether the district had the capacity to serve them. The answer was yes. The answer to whether the district had room if students returned to classrooms and the answer to that was also yes. She noted the district had room. She also reminded the board that the district did surveys as part of its work with families regarding their needs and concerns. Survey questions included whether access to the vaccine or living in a multi-generational home were factors in choosing to come back to in-person school.

Director Parent continued the presentation by responding to Director Allen's previous questions about costs around school building closure. He noted that they wanted to underscore there were savings to be had. However, those savings were not the driving force of Envision SPPS. He emphasized that the district wanted to reinforce long-term stewardship of long-term community resources and referred to the presentation slide that showed data regarding unused buildings: costs avoided and redirected. Director Parent noted that the district would save some money on utilities, which would constitute small savings per square foot. Redirection of services to elsewhere in the district represented a more efficient use of resources at other sites and a more efficient use of the district's buildings and services. The administration did not foresee Envision SPPS reducing the number of buildings as buildings provide swing space for flexibility among district programs such as during construction projects to create transformational change at other schools. An unused building could accommodate construction at one site to house programs temporarily, with a probable 10% cost-benefit to relocate to an existing building. Every year the district saved on construction, saving money and resources. There were other benefits too. This fact was not a driving force, but the benefit was being contemplated in anticipation of talks over the next several months.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS:

- Director Allen appreciated Director Parent's response to one of her questions, but mentioned that another of her questions was in regard to the cost of maintaining an unused building.
- Director Parent said he would provide that information to Director Allen.
- Director Carrillo then asked a question about swing space whether there was a schedule of projects that needed swing space and their time table for their needs.

- Director Parent noted having that schedule and that the use of swing space required aligning the opportunity to relocate to a site that had the greatest impact possible. Therefore it took time to identify specifics and plans.
- Chief Turner added, in response to Director Carrillo's question regarding upcoming projects, some of those include American Indian Magnet, Ramsey, and other projects.
- Director Parent added that there are several projects such as Cherokee and Highland and a total of approximately 290 some projects in SPPS schools.

Chief Turner noted that in the presentation slide regarding K-12 enrollment from fall 2017 to fall 2021, it was possible to see where choice was greatest in the city. The total number of student choice out of SPPS was 16,000 students, with the largest number during that period located in the North End and Frogtown. This data was used as Envision SPPS recommendations were being prepared. Chief Turner emphasized that this map of student choice alone was a primary reason the district was not seeking to exit any buildings in case they return to the district. Overall, demographic data of student choice do not present distinctive patterns:

- By home language: English=52%, Hmong=22%, Somali=10%
- By Race: Asian=34%; Black=25%, White=20%, Hispanic=10%
- Where do "elsewhere" students attend? Leading school destinations include:
 - Hmong College Prep
 - Community School of Excellence
 - North StP-Maplewood
 - Roseville

Chief Turner further noted Envision SPPS recommendations provided during the Special Meeting on October 11 would be aligned with feedback from parents about why they are making their choices. Families were telling SPPS that they wanted to go to a school that looked like them and where they spoke the same language. The highest enrolled charter schools were one race and/or one language. She noted SPPS was a district that believed in choice while also believing strongly in integration. The district wanted to offer programs to accommodate language preferences and also opportunities to attend very diverse schools. No matter where they lived in the city, they would have that option.

Seeing no questions, Chief Turner turned to focus more directly on the goal of achieving a well-rounded education across the district. Schools considered unsustainable have about 250 students (1-1.5 sections per grade), whereas the vision was for a district where the majority of schools was ideal sized in order to provide a well-rounded education. She noted the district was not in a position to provide a well-rounded education to students in schools that were unsustainable. Those schools did not have enough staff to support a well-rounded education. The next presentation by Chief Wilcox-Harris would provide specific examples of the types of services lost in unsustainable schools. Before turning to Chief Wilcox-Harris's presentation, Chief Turner showed a video: A Well-Rounded Education for All Students:

<https://www.spps.org/domain/16165>

Chief Wilcox-Harris introduced her presentation by mentioning that community members had come to the district in the past seeking proof that SPPS was providing a well-rounded education to their children. She noted that a well-rounded education provided real outcomes, such as the real student outcome cases of a music performance major, a sports broadcasting student, and a student pursuing a career as an OB/GYN physician, each of whom was inspired by their educations at SPPS.

Chief Wilcox-Harris then provided concrete comparisons of the educational experience of a 2nd grader in an unsustainable school and a sustainable school in the district. What was at stake were a student's interests and passions.

Director Anderson then spoke on the role of teaching and learning in supporting a sustainable, well-rounded education. He noted that sustaining SPPS's commitment to a well-rounded education was the district's charge from the strategic plan as well as from the Minnesota Department of Education. He said the district held firm to meeting those goals. The strategic plan also led SPPS to investigate what well-rounded education really meant and to distribute an annual academic program questionnaire to learn more. Through research SPPS came to develop a model in minutes per subject area needed to achieve the well-rounded education goal. (See presentation slide representing the aspirational goal the district is dedicated to achieving.) This model would help SPPS chart its course to a well-rounded education and ESSER funding would help to fill some holes, for example, in art education. He noted SPPS had a few years to work toward that goal.

Next, Chief Schrul spoke about costs and emphasized that subsidizing under-enrolled schools chipped away at the budgets of other schools' programs. Furthermore, birth rates continue to decline in Saint Paul and around the country, leading to an economies of scale impact on program planning. Priority-based budgeting for a well-rounded education was key but unsustainable sites were still maintained in the district today despite under-enrollment. Chief Schrul then showed a slide comparing a large, sustainable elementary school and a small, unsustainable school -- revenues versus expenditures and net gain/loss figures. She also provided information about the growth trend in unsustainable schools in the district over time, given enrollment trends, if nothing were to be done today.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS:

- Director Kopp thanked the presenters and offered that having taught middle school herself it's important to take into consideration what students bring with them from the elementary school experience. Unprepared middle schoolers were often unsparked by their elementary school experience. For her own daughter, her teacher told her daughter that she should have learned about a particular subject/topic in elementary school when she asked whether it would be taught in middle school. Director Kopp noted that neither she nor her daughter knew if that was the case. Regarding optimizing educational experiences for students' benefit, Director Kopp then asked a question about the allocation of teaching minutes and whether those minutes were also better quality minutes and if excellence was the goal.
- Director Anderson said clearly that high quality was the goal and that's why specialists were asked to write the lesson plans. He said it would be wonderful to have specialists teaching too, but the district would support generalists by providing good lessons. In other words, the document presented was a compliance document, but excellence would be so much better.
- Director Kopp noted how powerful the school examples in Chief Wilcox-Harris's presentation were and mentioned teachers may learn from specialists too. Fundamentally, the more caring adults you have in one place the better. These needs were especially great now, while these decisions were difficult. She emphasized the desire to support these investments to strive toward excellence.

Director Vue returned to slides 22 and 23 regarding subsidizing schools and said that this terminology did not mean much to him and wondered how he and newer families in the district would know whether a school was unsustainable and what that really meant.

- Superintendent Gothard cited a few key data points from the presentation including that 16,000 K-12 students do not choose SPPS and that the current allocation of resources and time in the SPPS made achieving a well-rounded education that much more challenging. He added that there had to be a realistic scale at each school to achieve it.
- Chief Wilcox-Harris then contributed that she'd had conversations with community members about Director Vue's question and heard from families that SPPS needs to be direct about what

was actually offered in schools. This was about SPPS's commitment to a well-rounded education for all students and the need for funding and enrollment to do it. She noted how it was possible to see what an unsustainable school could or could not do and the impact of a specific school on education opportunities for children. The goal was to be mindful of flexibility while keeping commitments transparently.

- Director Carrillo then asked how special education was included in these conversations and asked specifically whether classroom sharing across the board for all specialized students.
- Assistant Superintendent Collins answered that, yes, they were included, which would increase access and decrease concentration numbers.
- Director Carrillo asked whether decreasing concentration was a key goal.
- Assistant Superintendent Collins noted the district was considering what shifts would be most beneficial, given where students reside and what programs they qualified for, among other considerations.
- Director Carrillo recalled mention in a previous meeting that special education enrollment was flat or growing, so he wanted community to hear this.
- Director Kopp added regarding special education students that some students may not have a choice but by doing this the district was providing greater access. She thanked Director Carrillo for sparking this conversation.
- Director Anderson noted that special education students were general education students first and that decreasing concentration was better for all.
- Director Ellis summarized the plans saying that what the district was looking at now was to get away from unsustainable elementary schools and to have larger more sustainable elementary schools.
- Chief Turner responded by saying, yes, though the district was aware that there would be some smaller, specialty sites.
- Director Ellis sought confirmation of the school enrollment numbers in this plan.
- Chief Turner confirmed the goal was to have three sections of a grade per school.
- Director Ellis then asked whether three sections would still be considered small.
- Chief Turner: Yes.
- Director Ellis noted that SPPS history had been about unsustainable schools and that her hope was that if the district were going to keep a program open that it would be invested in to become a sustainable program. She said what community were hearing was talk about closing unsustainable programs and that the district would not be investing in small programs to make them sustainable. Community are wondering whether the district had done everything it could do to create a sustainable elementary school. Director Ellis then asked, given the costs reviewed in the presentations, would the district be able to sustain both large and small schools with its budget?
- Chief Turner responded to the first part of the question about sustaining small schools by saying the district had to work with the district's infrastructure it had and that meant having about three sections per grade.
- Chief Schrul added that in response to the question about whether the district could sustain small elementary schools, the answer was the district knew there would be a shortfall and the district had to do something different with programs and staffing because enrollment was not there. She emphasized the district could not sustain what it once had.
- Director Ellis followed-up by asking what could be done to sustain a small school. What might the district have done to support them? She noted this was a question coming to her and that based on what she was hearing that was not a question she could answer now, though she was not sure it would have changed the outcome.

- Superintendent Gothard noted that SPPS was funded per pupil and when the district created the middle school model the district believed it was essential for high school and postsecondary opportunities. However, what has made that really hard was that if that school had 50 fewer students the structure still required that funding without reducing it due to enrollment. He emphasized then the need to create scale to meet educational resource needs to achieve positive outcomes. The same applied to elementary schools to provide the opportunities students deserve.
- Director Allen, similar to Director Ellis, noted that she was very supportive of providing a well-rounded school, but she expressed concerns about the student recruitment process. She said she was trying to avoid the slippery slope of needing to close more schools in 5 years. She asked for more information about the district's plans for recruiting students into those buildings.
- Chief Turner noted she would take that down and respond to it later though she said it wouldn't necessarily take that long. As the district had seen in the middle school model, enrollment grew thanks to new students being added on top of newly retained students. Retention was just as important as recruiting new students and a well-rounded education would meet that need.
- Director Allen recommended shadowing to motivate parents to move students to a particular program.
- Chief Turner: Thank you.
- Chief Foster added that as the board looked to recommendations next week, what did access and opportunities mean. What were the barriers? What were the opportunities? She noted there was a strategic plan in place and that this was where the district had been moving. She said she had seen the planning and the work that needed to be done to achieve great experiences in this district. Listening to community and staff was important and so was doing what the district had to do now in the near term and future for long-term success of this district.
- Chief Turner then presented a slide regarding what would happen if the district did nothing in which enrollment was shown by school in fall 2020 and what it was estimated to be in fall 2024. By 2024 the number of fully funded and well-rounded programs shrank and there was much less stability across the district. She urged the board to take action and reviewed the slide on which next steps were presented and noted that the Envision SPPS website was active:
 - September-December 2021: Inform SPPS building leaders, staff, families, community, partners
 - Board of Education: Recommendations presented on 10/11
 - Work Session: 10/11*, 10/18, 11/1, 11/15, 11/29, 12/13
 - COBs: 10/5, 11/9, 12/7
 - Regular BOE (broadcast/in person, public comment): 10/19, 11/16*, 12/14* = *Possible BOE vote
 - October-November = Virtual community information sessions and meetings with affected school; dates TBD
 - Winter/spring 2021-22: Consult affected school communities about program changes and next steps
 - Involve and collaborate with affected school communities about program changes and next steps
- Chief Turner concluded by saying the purpose of this presentation was to respond to questions raised by the board during the last meeting and that providing a well-rounded education to students was the first priority of the district. She also noted that a comprehensive response would be provided regarding the cost of maintaining a school if it were closed and what investments have been made in unsustainable schools to make them sustainable. Chief Turner also mentioned that a new video including teachers and parents would soon be available. Finally, she added that Director Vue had asked a great question about how parents choose their schools and

said that parents choose schools based on many different considerations. Chief Turner emphasized the need to hold each other accountable about providing a well-rounded education.

- Director Ellis asked for more information about how much it costs to maintain an unsustainable building. Superintendent Gothard noted an important clarification: subsidizing a building refers to the cost of keeping the doors open and NOT about a subsidy to provide a well-rounded education.
- Chief Schrul concurred and said that the -\$900,000 figure on the slide was a one-year subsidy to keep the doors of an unsustainable building open and it did not include the costs of providing a well-rounded education in that building. That one specific school example on the slide was a real example for the board's reference in these discussions.
- Director Carrillo then requested more information about when the final October enrollment counts would be made and when that count would be available.
- Chief Turner noted the enrollment was usually turned in to the state on November 1st.
- Director Carrillo asked whether a count was available to share now.
- Chief Turner: Yes.
- Director Carrillo was hoping to understand where the district stands now.
- Chief Schrul said the official count date was done on Friday, September 24, though the numbers would be updated throughout the fall.
- Director Vue, returning to the matter of maintaining schools with no programs, added it was important to be cognizant of the effect of an empty building on the ecosystem of that neighborhood and the people who live there. Thus it was important to have a clear plan that includes people who live around that area, including businesses that may be impacted by the closure of a school. He sought a clear plan of engagement in relation to these plans.
- Director Kopp requested information about a baseline plan of engagement during next week's meeting that involved groups such as city council and district council members and the business community that considered a collective way to move forward. She noted those engagement plans may vary by school and community.
- Chief Turner referred board members to two slides in the presentation that provided examples of the long-term subsidies of a single school and other impacts on materials and activities such as field trips. An investment of hundreds of thousands of dollars was required to sustain that one school. She then briefly previewed next week's discussion of the investments made in small schools and how the district had tried to invest in them.
- Director Foster contributed that these were personal and emotional communities, so it was important to be clear and very specific so that the language used to discuss these matters was listener friendly. The specificity needed included what engagement would look like, noting that, if he were here today, Director Brodrick would ask: Did we do enough? Director Foster requested hearing during future meetings historical data -- what had been done over the years -- as the board is being asked to make a huge decision and in order to make that decision in a limited time frame the information needs to be clear and concise.
- Superintendent Gothard thanked board members for their time and for this continuous dialogue.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Foster provided a reminder of the Committee of the Board Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, October 5, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. and a Special Meeting of the Board of Education on Monday, October 11, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. Also, that on Monday, October 18, 2021, there would be a Special Closed Meeting of the Board of Education to discuss labor negotiations at 4:30 p.m. and a Special Meeting to discuss Envision SPPS at 5:30 p.m. Finally, there was a Regular Meeting of the Board of Education scheduled for Tuesday, October 19, 2021 beginning at 5:30pm with public comment.

Director Foster, seconded by Director Vue, motioned to adjourn the meeting.

The motion was approved by roll call vote:

Director Allen	Yes
Director Kopp	Yes
Director Carrillo	Yes
Director Ellis	Yes
Director Foster	Yes
Director Vue	Yes

The vote was unanimous, 6-0.

The meeting adjourned at 7:29 p.m.

For clarity and to facilitate research, these minutes reflect the order of the original Agenda and not necessarily the time during the meeting the items were discussed.

Prepared and submitted by:

Brian Hammer

Secretary to the Board (Interim), St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education