



Minnetonka Schools Community,

As we enter the first few weeks of the 2024-25 school year, I want to send a warm welcome to all new and returning students, families and staff. Each school year is a new beginning, a chance to explore, learn, grow and succeed. It has been wonderful to reconnect with students while maintaining our theme of Excellence in How We Live, Lead and Learn.

Each year, our School Board reviews input from students, parents, staff and the community to set priorities for the upcoming school year. This process begins with a Board goal planning session in November, and the first draft of the Board's goals are then shared publicly in January. This timing allows District leaders to keep these priorities in mind through the budgeting, staffing, calendaring and planning for the next year. The goals are formally adopted in June.

Our current Board goals fall into three categories: Excellence in Well-being, Connection and Belonging; Excellence in Student Learning and Support; and Excellence in Leadership and Organizational Support. Goals are often multi-year initiatives. Here is a brief summary of the District's priorities for the year ahead of us:

### **Excellence in Well-being, Connection and Belonging**

- Prioritize student mental health
- Create a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment for all students
- Increase bullying prevention efforts in our schools

### **Excellence in Student Learning and Support**

- Increase opportunities for improved academic outcomes for all students
- Improve student literacy
- Expand student academic opportunities
- Improve middle school programming

### **Excellence in Leadership and Organizational Support**

- Ensure long-term financial stability and sustainability for the District
- Address staffing challenges
- Ensure our facilities meet the current and future needs of our students
- Ensure high quality meals
- Build community trust

Updates on the progress of these goals are shared in our communications and at Board meetings throughout the year. We plan to survey staff and parents about these goals this fall, ahead of our 2025-26 Board goal-setting meeting, and we will connect again with parents about the goals in May 2025 when we conduct our annual parent satisfaction survey.

One of the more challenging issues facing our district is a continued shortfall in funding to meet the current and future needs of our students. The increases provided by the State of Minnesota do not keep pace with the costs required to provide the outstanding educational experiences that we want for our students and that families have come to expect from our district. In addition, the District is prohibited from asking our community for additional operational funding due to caps created in legislation.

Another complication is that school finance is unique in that funding streams must be spent on specific items. For example, instruction and staffing funding is separate from funding for buildings, equipment and upkeep. Funds can rarely be shifted from one budget area to another. These combined factors were the driver for making more than \$3 million in reductions heading into the current school year, as well as the need to reduce close to \$6 million in expenses for the 2025-2026 school year.

School Board members, District leadership, parents and students have been active at the State Capitol trying to address these financial challenges and avoid cuts. Unfortunately, thus far, our elected officials have not made the needed investments or changes to support our schools. Advocating for our schools and students will be a top priority this year.

Meanwhile, as prudence requires, we have begun the process of identifying additional cost containment. This will impact many facets of our District. As more than 88% of our District's annual expenses are the cost of employees, with the majority covering the salaries and benefits for classroom and student-facing roles, we will not be able to avoid making reductions that impact instructional programming and staff. Although we will use the priorities our school community has identified and will maintain as much of our high-quality academic programs, student supports and services as possible, with the level of cost savings needed to balance the budget for next year, reductions will be felt by teachers, staff and administration. There will also, therefore, be some impact on class sizes and support for students. The proposed budget-saving measures will be shared with the School Board prior to implementing in fall of 2025.

Another concern in Minnesota and across the nation is students' cell phone use in school. Our district has operated under our existing policy for several years. Stated simply, we prefer that our elementary students do not have phones or smart devices at school and that if their parents desire their children to have this technology, we would like the devices kept out of class. In our middle schools, we ask students to leave their phones in their bag or locker. At the high school, we ask students to put away their phones while in class. Our policies are similar to most school districts in the metro area. Parents play a key role in supporting these guidelines. There is no expectation from the District that any student should have a cell phone at school, and the easiest way to prevent technology from disrupting education is for parents to have their students leave their devices at home. Note that parents who want to get a message to their student are welcome to call the main office. We will be reviewing this policy during the school year with input from students and parents.

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, and its role in education, is also a topic that is frequently brought up in the news and in conversations with the public. Our students have taken advantage of advancing technology to accelerate their learning for decades using everything from graphing calculators to word processing. Now, AI has opened doors we never dreamed of to assist students in their learning. This is an area that our teachers and leaders have been actively working with experts in our state and across the country to better understand. We have updated our student handbooks and guidance for staff to address the topic. In brief, we expect teachers to set boundaries for acceptable use of this technology, and we ask that students adhere to this guidance. Many of our students' future employers are using these tools, and, therefore, we have an obligation to prepare our students for that future and are committed to doing this.

We know that communication is vital and that keeping our school community informed helps to ensure we are a strong, supportive environment for all. This message is intended to provide key information as we start the school year. We will continue to update our staff and families throughout the year about these and other important topics. There is also a [webpage](#) to keep you abreast of the district's financial situation.

Enjoy the first few weeks of another amazing school year.

David Law  
Superintendent of Schools

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