

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

**COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD MEETING
360 Colborne Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102**

**October 8, 2024
4:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Vice Chair Ward.

2. ROLL CALL

Board of Education: U. Ward, H. Henderson, E. Valliant, J. Vue, C. Franco, Y. Carrillo, C. Allen

Staff: Superintendent Thein, C. Long, S. Dahlke, S. Gray Akyea, T. Sager, K. Thao, A. Collins, E. Wacker, S. Schmitt de Caranza, K. Kimani, B. Schmidt, D. Abrams, D. Moser, P. Pratt-Cook, Y. Vang, K. Arzamendia, P. Norwig, G. Carlson, C. Anderson, J. Turner, L. Bolopue

Community: J. Brodrick, E. Cardwell, M. Boyd, D. LeGault, N. Nielsen, A. Ratwik, Y. Mgeni, T. Rein, K. Thompson, J. Borman, I. Hurvitz, M. Jakel, J. Sigmund, V. Negaard, N. Schultz, K. Arndt, C. Cass, T. Bopp, N. Parker, F. Borgeson, B. Robb, J. Magnuson, A. Wachter, I. Cruzen, B. Schrankler, N. Cameron, L. Garnett, J. Kvalbein, A. Erbes, P. Donaldson, A. Schilling, S. White, M. Braun, M. Celbv, T. Moher, D. Driscoll, N. Hendrickson, B. Dorgan

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF THE MAIN AGENDA

MOTION: Director Carillo moved approval of the Order of the Agenda with one change - to move the agenda item, Retiree Health Insurance to precede the Superintendent's Announcements. The motion was seconded by Director Henderson. It passed by acclaim.

MOTION: Director Ward moved approval of the amended Order of the Agenda. The motion was seconded by Director Henderson. It passed by acclaim.

4. SUPERINTENDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

5. RETIREE HEALTH INSURANCE

Superintendent Thein welcomed members of the Benefits Team to present this information, including an overview, timeline, options, and recommendation. The overview included information that as on January

1, 2025, HealthPartners facilities will no longer accept UnitedHealthcare insurance, and further details on the role of SPPS in this. SPPS is not a decision-maker in this situation; it impacts approximately 2,300 SPPS retirees and thousands of people throughout the state; SPPS has been monitoring this situation; SPPS is currently under contract for our retirees for one more year with UnitedHealthcare; and a temporary resolution is needed as SPPS will go out for bid early next year for retirees effective January 1, 2026.

The timeline of events was also reviewed.

Considerations, including the plan options, network differences, and cost comparisons, were also discussed. A cost comparison of retiree medical plans was also shown.

Options for a resolution were presented:

- Continue to offer Medicare Advantage plan only
 - Retirees would no longer have access to HealthPartners medical providers or clinics for 2025
 - Cost: there is no additional cost to the district outside of our annual increase.
- Offer Medicare Advantage plan and one Medicare Supplemental plan
 - Retirees would be able to retain access to HealthPartners providers and clinics if they so choose; they would need to pay out of pocket for premium costs in addition to the coverage differences.
 - Cost: Up to \$3.5 million, depending on how many retirees choose the Supplemental Plan option

District funding options were also proposed, including:

- Use district's general fund - unassigned fund balance
- Increase district's levy for cost
- Use reserved Other Post Employee Benefits (OPEB)

The leading recommendation is to offer Medicare Advantage Plan and one Medicare Supplemental Plan - Plan B for retirees, and the funding option to use reserved Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) account.

The full presentation can found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Board members requested further information on the total costs noted within the presentation. Response: While some retirees have different amounts and different contracts, the general amount that the district will cover per retiree is \$300, and the retiree would then pay the remaining \$87.16.
- Do we need to report these to the state auditor? Response: Yes, it would be part of our reporting process, and part of the UFARS auditing procedure for the standard reporting mechanisms.
- Director Franco requested further information on the OPEB trust fund and the current status of the account, as well as what the \$3.5M used for this item could potentially mean for future implications. Response: The fund is currently at about \$54M, so with the potential \$3.5M deduction, it would be a little more than \$50M. It remains viable and healthy in coordination with the current legislation and levy authority. There are actuarial studies every two years with an update as well.

- Director Vue requested information on the usage of the OPEB trust. Response: It is designed specifically for other post employee benefits, including retiree insurance. The trust document does have specific language to abide by and ensure we are using it appropriately and in an allowable manner, in consultation with our outside counsel.
- Director Carrillo requested information on the sustainability of the OPEB trust and risk assessment. Response: We do an RFP every 2-3 years for retiree insurance, and we also consult with others on the marketplace. There have been recent changes, including pharmacy benefits. A schedule of RFPs is important to evaluate plans and to be fiscally responsible. Dr. Thein noted that costs will dissipate as well over a period of time.
- Director Franco requested information on the guarantee to retirees that they can continue to use HealthPartners providers within their network as United Healthcare and HealthPartners continue to negotiate. Response: This is also a newer concern among insurance companies, and they continue to negotiate, and costs may vary for each person. One of the components of the RFP process is a disruption report, and going forward, we will be asked provider contracts with other vendors and disruptions. This recommendation is for the calendar year 2025.
- More details were also requested on the presentation information and that variables still exist.
- Director Henderson noted protection for our members in the future and is very glad that this item does not require a tax levy, as many retirees are also homeowners, and the additional stress. She noted we need to be thoughtful to leverage the semblance of power at the state level, and to continue to hold insurance providers accountable for options that work for retirees across the state, and is very grateful for the work being done.
- More information was also provided on the timeline, with October 15th as a deadline for our Benefits and Communications teams to send information to retirees, and for them to sign up prior to open enrollment and send to United Healthcare for new insurance cards prior to the end of the year for care beginning January 1.
- Director Allen thanked everyone for their work and resolution. She noted that a tax levy would be a great burden on our elders, and believes that our history lies with our elders and their stories, and they need to stay healthy as long as possible in order to thrive as a community in Saint Paul.
- Director Ward thanked those who contacted the Board, and is grateful to Administration for their work, especially Chief Pratt-Cook and Superintendent Thein. This is frustrating to see a private insurance company doing something that harms a lot of people it serves. He is nervous for another insurance company to be a “bad actor” and thinking about an appropriate way to respond.

MOTION: Director Ward moved to approve that In the event that HealthPartners and UnitedHealthcare do not reach an agreement to maintain the current service arrangement by midnight on October 15, 2024, the Saint Paul Public Schools Board of Education approves the district to take all necessary steps to offer Medicare Advantage plan and one Medicare Supplemental plan (Plan B) to impacted retirees for a one-time, one year (plan year 2025) benefit option using the restricted Other Post Employee Benefits (OPEB) account to pay for the cost, up to approximately \$3.5 million, depending on how many retirees choose to use this one-time, one-year benefit option. If HealthPartners and UnitedHealthcare come to an agreement to maintain the current service arrangement after midnight on October 15, 2024, the District may seek to terminate its offer to provide the Medicare Advantage plan and Medicare Supplemental plan, if allowable and feasible. The motion was seconded by Director Allen.

The motion was approved by roll call vote:

Director Carrillo	Yes
Director Franco	Yes

Director Valliant	Yes
Director Henderson	Yes
Director Ward	Yes
Director Vue	Yes
Director Allen	Yes

6. ASSESSMENTS AND CONSISTENT ATTENDANCE: SY23-24

Superintendent Thein then welcomed Kara Arzamendia, Director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment to present this report.

Information included in the presentation included MCA/MTAA SY2023-24 results by trend, grade level proficiency, and demographic group proficiency; ACCESS 2.0 SY2023-24 results with meeting targets by grade level and proficiency by grade level; consistent attendance SY 2023-24 by trend, grade level, and demographic group. Graphs showing this information were provided.

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Franco noted his experience at Humboldt and the number of students taking the ACCESS tests, and if the proficiency rates noted in the presentation include the students who choose not to test or opt out of testing. Response: The proficiency rate includes students who test, and does not include students who do not complete the test, opt out, or refuse. It was also noted that the ACCESS test is a long test and there are four components, and it is not uncommon for students to not complete a domain due to absence or attendance.
- More information on the ACCESS test was also provided, including that the four domains are reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and there are heavier weights for domains based on if they are producing or receiving information. It's unusual to develop all four domains at the same level at the same time, so the results are unsurprising because that is the way that acquiring a language works.
- It was noted that the math and reading proficiency rates by grade level are based on MCA scores. The lower grades tend to score higher than upper grades.
- The importance of teachers and belief in students that they can succeed in subjects such as math was noted, and is an important conversation for the Board and community to address.
- More information was requested on the results from 5th grade and 10th grade in reading scores. Administration noted that there have been investments in new curriculum and methods within the district, and there typically is a dip as it is being implemented for the teachers to learn the new curriculum, and it is new for students, and is a slower implementation. For math, it is the first year of implementation of the new K-12 curriculum of HMH and SAAVAS, with results to be presented at an upcoming board meeting. For the 5th grade results, it could also be related to the first grade that was in-person for learning through the COVID pandemic.
- Director Henderson noted that math instruction builds upon lessons and becomes more difficult throughout the grades. How do we find students who are maybe struggling and get them caught up so they can succeed? Response: There are check-ins and informing of teachers for small group instruction and independent work. More information was also provided on the check-ins for students and teachers.
- Director Allen requested information on rigor and how it is determined - whether it is state standards or curriculum. Response: Materials are aligned to teach the benchmarks of the state standards, which are made every 10 years and state what students should be able to know and

do. Curriculum helps us to do that with hands-on materials and software. There is a wide range of learners, and teachers differentiate based on their classes.

- Director Allen also noted the importance of social-emotional learning, and room for growth for students, especially when there are tragedies in the community, and space for students to deal with that trauma, instead of being swept to the side to meet standards. There needs to be a way to give teachers that information, and room for variations for students who may fall behind when events occur in the community and address them immediately.
- Director Franco noted he is interested in learning more about the implementation of the curriculum and strategies to utilize it, as well as layers of support for students to catch up in real time.
- The READ Act and Carryall programs were also discussed, with multi-tiered systems of support. Tier 1 is provided to all students. Tier 2 is our WINN program. The Tier 1 and Tier 2 phonics programs were also discussed to learn the code of reading, with narrative assessments to ensure that skills are built within small groups, and independent work time. There are also screeners through FAST and Carryall, with every parent notified at report card time if a student needs additional support in reading, and ways both families can help and teachers, and talk about it at conferences.
- Director Carrillo noted a data request for families who pay for tutoring for their students and to see the discrepancies, and what programs can bridge the gap for students.
- Director Vue noted attendance rates for communities of color, as well as ESL learners.
- Administration noted that the presentation was meant to be outcomes-based and consistent attendance is an indicator of the accountability system, and is a concern of urban school districts, especially since the pandemic.
- It was noted that students more likely to meet or pass targets are based on the last assessment they had, and the ACCESS test timeline may be two to seven years long, and the tracking of students. If a student qualifies for ESL services, their progress is measured in a yearly testing process. Students and families may opt out.
- As the test progress, they become more linguistically complex and more complex situations within the test. The grade bands at 5th and 6th grade have a new test and are significantly more difficult than the elementary tests.

7. SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH: BWP - COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Superintendent Thein then welcomed consultants from BWP to present this information.

The community engagement objectives were reviewed and included:

- To identify perceived strengths and challenges of SPPS
- To identify desired qualities and characteristics of the next superintendent
- To build community understanding and support for the superintendent search process
- To invite broad community engagement in the search process

Community engagement data was reviewed with conversations and surveys. Survey results were also shown and discussed, including the role of the respondent, three most significant strengths of SPPS, three most important skills for the next superintendent, three most important characteristics of the next superintendent to exhibit, and importance of different items for the next superintendent. The items rated as extremely important are academic outcomes, classroom experiences, experience in budgeting, finance and fiscal stewardship, strategic planning, experience in advancing racial equity with demonstrated success, and experience as a superintendent with a proven record of success. Results of the question

related to the three most important issues or concerns facing SPPS in the next five years were also reviewed.

Information regarding the language affinity groups survey response summary was also discussed, with the survey questions and responses from affinity groups of the Hmong community, Karen community, Somali community, and Spanish-speaking community.

Data from engagement conversations was also presented, with the questions posed to participants as:

- What are the strengths of SPPS?
- What are the greatest issues, concerns, and challenges facing SPPS?
- What experiences, qualities, and characteristics will the next superintendent need to possess and demonstrate?

It was noted that recorded responses from approximately 622 participants in meetings or emails were documented, and data was analyzed for themes and patterns. Prominent responses were included in the report.

Strengths of the district include committed staff, diversity, diverse programs and services, student support, partnerships, and community pride. Challenges, issues and concerns of the district include academic outcomes, school/district collaboration, budget and finances and facilities, enrollment, staff diversity and cultural competency, school safety and labor relations.

Next, BWP reviewed the building of the Leadership Profile, which was organized into three areas - SPPS Strengths to Build Upon, SPPS Challenges to Address, and Essential Leadership Qualities. The data on which the Leadership Profile is built was also reviewed, including interviews with board members, focus groups, open forums, and an online survey. The Profile Overview was then presented, with the draft Leadership Profile indicating that the incoming SPPS superintendent should enhance the district's strengths while tackling its challenges. To achieve this, the superintendent must possess personal qualities and values that foster relationship-building throughout the district and encourage collaborations with community organizations to better support students. The next superintendent should also demonstrate qualities and characteristics that are essential leadership qualities, including:

- Instructional leader
- Culturally competent
- Equity advocate
- Trust builder
- Relationship builder
- Experience in similar districts
- Communicator
- Politically skilled
- Committed

Updates on the SPPS process were then provided with specifications presented at the October 8th board meeting, recruitment and assessment process through November 18th, and the selection timeline, with a target goal of December 20th for the Board to identify the final candidate, and January 21st for the Board to appoint the new superintendent.

The full Community Engagement Report can be found in the BoardBook, as well as the full presentation on this agenda item.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Ward requested further information on the percentages of respondents, and some did not respond to the question in the survey. More information was also provided on the importance of an item within the report and included in the survey, as well as those related to labor relations. The consultants did conduct listening sessions with unions and we all work to serve our students.
- It was noted that comments regarding the leadership profile should be forwarded to Chair Henderson from board members and it will be adopted in its final form at the October 22, 2024 Regular Meeting.
- Further information was also provided on the “experience in similar districts” as noted in the report for the Superintendent Search, and it was a measure of an urban district, similar enrollment size, similarities in demographics and moving students forward academically. The complexity of languages in the school district were also noted, with the hundreds of languages spoken by students and families in SPPS. BWP also noted that those interested in the position must also research SPPS and the community to see if their skill sets match, as SPPS is unique and they must know SPPS and care about SPPS.
- Director Allen requested details on the movement of academic outcomes for students, and the indicators to show the academic needle is moving for the knowing and understanding of information by students. Response: We will look at standardized testing, graduation rates, exclusion and discipline reports, and attendance.
- Discussion also focused on the ways to view an anonymous list of applicants. BWP noted that any candidate selected is guaranteed for two years or they will redo the search at no cost, and they do not want to bring forward a candidate who is not going to be successful. It’s also important to maintain confidentiality and can also be complicated because of state statute. They intend to build trust with the Board and community to bring the best candidates forward and in the best interest of the community. Director Franco noted questions about the Board viewing the larger pool of candidates and an anonymous list of those candidates to the search task force.
- For the leadership profile, how will it be used to screen candidates? Response: BWP will be looking at the candidate’s application, references, and paperwork to support the match of the leadership profile. It is rare to match 100%, but they aim for about an 80% match. There will be a rubric used that is consistent with all interviews with notes about exceeding, meeting, or not meeting the expectations, and will be objective in that way. The interview questions will be designed around the leadership profile. Questions will be behavior based, including, for example, how they addressed improving student performance in a previous district, and evidence-based examples. Board members noted that one aspect missing in the leader profile is around goals and strategic planning, and that it needs to be added. Director Henderson also noted it will be important to distinguish the work of candidates in what they inherited or championed, and then impacts of that work. The consultants also noted that the Board and Superintendent Search Task Force will be able to align priorities on the list and prioritize candidates based on values.
- Director Henderson also noted it will be important to provide encouragement to candidates who are women or people of color because diversity in leadership is so important. A candidate may not believe they have all the qualifications, but have some, and it will be important to encourage them to apply.
- It was also noted that some aspects of the qualifications are weighted higher than others.
- It was reiterated that the consultants are looking for an 80% match.
- The timeline for edits to the leadership profile were discussed, with feedback due by 10/15 and a full discussion on 10/22 at the Regular Board of Education meeting.
- A possibility of small groups to discuss was also noted, with concerns about a walking quorum and serial meetings. Chair Henderson is always available to have conversations with board members as well.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Director Ward thanked interim board secretary, Xue Yang, for her wonderful work. She stepped into a situation that is not an easy job with a lot of moving pieces, and she did an amazing job and he thanked her for her work and help. Ms. Yang noted that it was a wonderful time and a good experience in learning insights into the responsibilities of Administration. She is a former student of SPPS and a parent, and she was able to work with the district from a different perspective and has great respect for everyone and their role. The Board and Ms. Yang also welcomed Sarah Dahlke back to the role of Board Secretary.

Director Ward moved to adjourn the meeting. Director Henderson seconded the motion. It passed by acclaim.

The meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

10. WORK SESSION

The Board then conducted a work session regarding a review of the proposed budget policy and B.I.G.G: Board Initiated Goals Governance.

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:

Sarah Dahlke, Assistant Clerk, St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education