

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

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

**April 8, 2025
4:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 4:32 p.m. by Vice Chair Ward.

2. ROLL CALL

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

Staff: Superintendent Thein, C. Long, S. Dahlke, S. Gray Akyea, T. Sager, A. Collins, E. Wacker, J. Danielson, K. Morris, S. Schmitt de Caranza, H. Nistler, N. Páez, K. Kimani, C. Green, P. Pratt-Cook, Y. Vang, A. Kunz, B. Schmidt, C. Anderson, J. Williams, T. Walker, J. Grathwol, L. Olson, D. Abrams, C. Landreau, L. Bolopue

Community: M. Wall

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF THE MAIN AGENDA

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

4. SUPERINTENDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Superintendent Thein noted that:

Late yesterday (April 7), the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) sent a response to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) per the ED's recent "Request for Certification" regarding compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Per this legislation, "[n]o person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

In its response, MDE affirmed that the state "has consistently complied with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations and continues to do so." MDE Commissioner Willie Jett explained further that: "There is nothing unlawful in the principles underlying programs that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion," and, "In Minnesota, we believe every child—of every background, zip code and ability—deserves access to a world-class education."

He thanked Commissioner Jett and our partners at MDE for their leadership during this time and for their unwavering commitment to ensuring that every student and educator has the support they need to be successful. A letter was also sent to all SPPS staff and families to ensure the District's commitment to a safe and secure learning environment and for all to be treated in an equitable and respectful manner. He highlighted that he is proud to be a part of this organization and supports the values, and will continue to do that as a school district.

Director Henderson echoed the thanks to the Superintendent and the Board and Administration, and that we are clear about our work, and to support all students and families, and that will not change anytime soon.

5. 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: UPDATE

Superintendent Thein introduced Jim Grathwol, District Lobbyist, to present this report.

The House Finance Committee targets were reviewed, as well as Senate targets. The fiscal parameters of the 2025 legislative session have been set, and were also shared, including the Governor's recommendations, the House budget targets, and the Senate budget targets. Information was also provided on the commentary on the Governor's Budget and House and Senate targets, with fiscal information on the Governor's recommended spring and the Governor's recommended cuts. Information was also shared about the commentary on the Governor's Budget Recommendations, and House and Senate Budget Targets. The SPPS 2025 legislative session fiscal priorities were also reviewed, including to retain the fiscal gains made in 2023-2024, and the new finance priorities for FYs 2026-2027 and beyond.

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Allen requested information on the charter school special education reduction and the impacts to SPPS. Response: Charter schools are able to bill back their excess special education costs to the residential district. If a child is enrolled in a charter school, and that school has insufficient funds in their special education formula, they are able to bill back to the resident district, which originally arose due to an excess of special education costs for a levy in the 90s, and a remnant of the property tax footprint in the formula.
- There was also discussion about the Supreme Court rulings on teacher programs at University of St. Thomas, and the funding for Grow-Your-Own programs.
- Director Franco thanked Mr. Grathwol for the update, and requested an overview of policy changes. Response: There are additional funding proposals for the READ Act, including bilingual support, as well as an initiative for more AEDs to be more widely distributed. There is also continued conversation on the school cell phone policy, as well as discussion about the federal fiscal displacement in the Medicaid program. An update was also provided on the early session proposal to repeal the Ethnic Studies requirement by Republicans, and the constitutional amendment to divert new revenue to tax cuts, and the testimonials against both. The strong support of Ethnic Studies was noted, with the Chair and students testifying for it, and a good learning moment for the Legislature.
- Director Franco also requested information about the other bills that SPPS has organized in support of and to testify in support of or against besides the education formula components since we are

located in the capital city. Response: We did speak against eliminating Ethnic Studies, and against the forecast diverting revenue over 5%, as well as the pension bill.

- Director Franco also noted the strong interest being a part of the organization at the legislature, and requested information about the other opportunities for our community and students to support at the capital, since we are geographically, the closest school district for our young people to be involved with legislative activities. Response: Ethnic Studies was the main area for student support with students from SPPS.
- Director Carrillo noted questions about the general sense about tariffs and the impacts to the state budget with adjustments or risks that are involved. Response: We don't have answers yet, but the presidential administration is creating disruptions. We will keep the Board informed of the disruptions, and the energy to rally folks to speak to specific issues.

5. 2025-26 SCHOOL CHOICE SEASON

Superintendent Thein introduced Jackie Turner, Executive Chief of Administration and Operations, to present this report.

With the presentation was information on the lottery preparation and projections, admission priorities, and lottery facts. The lottery was completed on March 17, 2025, and 7,196 PreK-12 students participated, with the main grades being Kindergarten, Pre-K, Grade 6, and Grade 9. Within the Kindergarten lottery, 1,116 students participated, and 98.5% received their 1st or 2nd choice, with 16 placed on a waitlist. Within the Grade 1-12 lottery, 4,788 students participated, with 95% receiving their 1st or 2nd choice or reserved seat and 5% were placed on a waitlist with no acceptance.

Schools with a waiting list, not including Pre-K, include:

- Horace Mann (8)
- Obama Montessori (26)
- Capitol Hill (104)
- Highland Park Middle (76)
- Highland Park Senior (96)
- Open World (173)

Inspiring updates were also noted at the elementary level with Horace Mann and Obama Montessori, middle school programs with all 6-8 middle schools, Capitol Hill, and Open World, and high schools with Central and Open World Learning.

Information was also shared about Pre-Kindergarten, and the 1,292 families that participated, with 300+ on the waiting list, the Head Start partnership at Bruce Vento, Eastern Heights and Highwood Hills, and the Nature Pre-K Community Education Program.

Ongoing recruitment efforts were also reported, including targeted recruitment, summer events, and the consideration of satellite sites around the city throughout the summer months.

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Franco requested information on the rationale behind deriving an enrollment strategy in coordination with Obama and OWL, as opposed to Humboldt. Response: The families that are looking and applying to these schools are looking for an open experience that provides the small,

unique nature of OWL - not the comprehensive, larger high school experience. Obama will be a Montessori-modeled school with the Montessori educational experience and pedagogy, whereas Humboldt is the traditional 6-12 high school. While OWL is not identified as Montessori, most students who will be enrolled at Obama Middle will have the Montessori experience. Also, Humboldt has not struggled with enrollment, as it is a city-wide choice for families with a Language Academy program.

- It was also noted that Humboldt is full based on capacity, which is typical for that site. With new programs, the District helps them to get off the ground, like Obama Middle and the new Karen program, with additional recruitment and healthy support. We are also using the waiting list to strategically recruit students to Obama Middle as there may not be as many students from the feeder schools.
- Director Franco also requested information on Humboldt and if it is full based on allocations or physical capacity. It is full based on both allocation and physical capacity, with more details on schools with a reduced allocation.
- Director Franco encouraged embedding the desirable components of certain programs if proving to be successful, particularly if they are in close proximity.
- What is the difference between the fee-based PreK and SPPS PreK? Response: SPPS PreK is a district program, whereas the nature-based fee-based program is a childcare program with high-quality learning from Community Education. Those students enrolled in the fee-based childcare do not have a reserved seat in kindergarten as the SPPS PreK students do. The nature-based PreK is an opportunity for families who do not qualify for targeted services, and has licensed teachers and lesson plans. They spend 75% of the time outdoors with experimental learning for 3-4 year olds, with half day and full day options, as well as extended care options. It's a fundamental belief that students learn more outdoors, and we also partner with the State to ensure the curriculum is aligned.
 - Director Valliant noted details about implementing aspects of the nature-based PreK into the SPPS PreK program, and the differences in the quality of the education aspects. Response: We are looking to provide a similar experience at Bruce Vento in the fall of 2026, while we need to finish construction and the outdoor learning area.
- Director Carrillo requested clarification on the lottery. Response: There were 7,196 students with applications, and that was about 400 students less than last year.
- Director Vue requested information about the target numbers for enrollment. Response: The projection for October 1 is 2,489 students for kindergarten, which is an area where there is higher capacity and we want to recruit more, since there is ample space to accommodate more students, as will be highlighted by the Use and Utilization Study that is set to be presented at an upcoming meeting. The targets for 6th grade of 2,210 and 9th grade at ,637 students were also discussed.
 - He also noted that we create school choice to provide opportunities for the community on where to enroll their students, as well as to inform about the strategies to stabilize enrollment and we know in the transition years, that families either stay or go. If what we are doing is successful, how are we replicating that? Is 7,196 students enough to be seen as a base to stabilize enrollment? Response: We want to see that kindergarten number much higher - by at least another few hundred students. There will also be data presented by the demographics study for the Facilities Master Plan and the potential capture rate and where we are as a district.
- Director Carrillo requested information on the priority to capture as many kindergarten students as possible, and if we are in the position to be flexible to admit students at all sites and then determine sections, while being careful to avoid combination classes, and the value in increasing the capture rate and longer-term health at the cost of trade-offs. Chief Collins provided information that there are 113.5 kindergarten sections, with excess capacity of 350 students, and working collaboratively with Operations and Administration on physical capacity of buildings. The other aspect is engrained within collective bargaining, and determination of class sizes, but knowing that some students may not join.

We need to be careful in pulling staff from other sites, due to the vacancies then left in the other school and how they want to compete for similar opportunities and resources to be competitive. It's a very dynamic process from May-August with looking at sections and talking with families.

- Director Carrillo also encouraged the consideration of satellite sites for recruitment efforts, as families may be in transitions over the summer, and encouraged recruitment at sites where students are will help us overall.
- Director Vue requested information about data on the applicants, including area, demographics, language spoken, race, etc. in order to identify who is not applying and how to address them in different ways and inform us of who did not apply.
- Director Ward requested information about the rate of those who received their first choice with the rate in the high 80s, and specific information for all grades will be lower, but for kindergarten, the first choice rate is high.

6. POLICY UPDATE

- a. Policy 420.00: Students and Employees with Sexually Transmitted Infections and Diseases and Certain Other Communicable Diseases and Infectious Conditions

Superintendent Thein introduced Becky Schmidt, Director of Health and Wellness, to present this report.

This originally arose over public concern that students and staff of the school district be able to attend the schools of the district without becoming infected with serious communicable or infectious diseases, including, but not limited to, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), Hepatitis B, and Tuberculosis. School boards were advised to adopt measures effectively responding to health concerns while respecting the rights of all students, employees, and contractors, including those who are so infected.

The rationale for the proposed amendments to this policy were also reviewed, and included that the policy was last updated in 2008, and to review the necessity of the content in the policy, and to consider rescinding the policy.

A link to the proposed changes was included in the presentation.

Per MSBA/MASA Model Policy 420, ““School districts are not required by statute to have a policy addressing these issues. However, Minnesota Statutes section 121A.23 provides that school districts must have a program that incorporates the provisions contained in this policy.”

Comparisons to other school districts were also reviewed, and includes those districts with a Policy 420.00, and districts with no Policy 420.00.

The language proposed to be removed and the justification of the proposed changes were also reviewed.

The full presentation can be found in the BoardBook.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Henderson requested a high level overview of the rationale to rescind this policy versus rewriting it. Response: The world has changed a lot since 17 years ago, there is a dramatic increase in the rights of students and employees, and it is now unheard of to deny access to a student or staff member without an extremely valid reason, and the ultimate premise of the policy

doesn't fit with the current times. One positive from COVID-19 is the online learning availability for students.

- It was also noted that one of the main reasons for a policy is to cover areas that are not protected or covered by legal resources, and this content is covered within the rights of students and the rights of staff by statute, and wanting to reinforce STI education embedded into curriculum, and the main reason is that the information is protected elsewhere under legal statute.
- Director Henderson appreciated the opportunity to see where a policy may not meet the moment and the mark, and conversations on transmitted diseases are rooted in fear, and if we move forward without fear, we will be healthier. It was also noted that another takeaway from COVID was the fear around communicable, respiratory and airborne viruses, and the majority within the policy was bloodborne, which is low risk if the individuals are following precautions. We understand there was a need for this policy years ago, but we have come a long way since then.
- Director Vue requested information about the process for rescinding a policy. General Counsel noted that it would follow the same three-reading process.
- Director Franco noted that it is important for policies such as this to be accessible in other ways, and there will be times in which to implement a policy not required by law. How are families finding information in this policy? Response: Families are reaching out to staff at school and the health office to ask questions, with resources online as well about when students are recommended to not come to school.
 - Are there other means in which to receive the information? Response: There are situations where a family member has said their doctor has advised them to stay home for five days, and the health office will advise to follow their doctor's recommendations.
- Director Ward noted that within their governance model, there was a suggestion for less policies, but sometimes we do need a policy to state what we are doing, and they do not provide different direction than by law. With the current federal administration, are we confident we will not find these protections going away and this policy may be necessary? Response: The premise of the policy is to allow students and staff access, and Section 504 and the ADA are not going away. They are anti-discriminatory laws, and there are multiple other layers of anti-discrimination law as well.
- Overall, the Board approved moving this policy update to the three-reading process.

b. Policy 516.01: Immunizations

Included in the presentation was the rationale for the proposed amendments to this policy, including that the policy was last updated in 2008, and to ensure we are implementing best practices to minimize transmission of communicable diseases for both staff and students.

Immunization requirements were also reviewed, including that:

- Minnesota Statute 121A.15 requires that all students in public schools be fully immunized or have a notarized statement exempting them from immunizations while enrolled in school
- Law first enacted in 1967 due to measles outbreaks
- Immunizations protect students from childhood communicable diseases; thereby reducing illness, absenteeism, and permanent health conditions that may impact the ability to learn
- Goal is to remove barriers and connect families to resources to improve compliance, thereby reducing the spread of disease
- Connection to resources leads to better health outcomes and establishing ongoing care

The required school vaccines in Minnesota were also shared.

Data on vaccinations at the Student Placement Center were also presented.

The SPPS Immunization Procedure was also shared, including that in January 2021, Health and Wellness implemented a consistent, Districtwide immunization compliance procedure and overall compliant rate was around 82%. By January 2022, our immunization compliance was at 99% with a slight exception of dips at the beginning of the school year, we have maintained a 99% compliance rate since then. The end goal of our procedure is to connect families with healthcare professionals to not only receive their required immunizations but to establish ongoing care.

The proposed language revisions, including a link to the draft of changes to the policy, was also shared, and includes adding a Purpose and General Statement of Policy, and minor revisions to the context to include history of disease, adult students, and homelessness exemptions. The proposed language revisions and justification for each were also reviewed.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Ward noted a complaint often heard about vaccinations is that SPPS is not strict enough, but SPPS is not allowed to be more strict than the State? Response: Correct, we could not do more than the State in terms of requirements.
- Director Carrillo requested clarification on the 80 notary services in the presentation, and that those are families with conscientious objections - not including those that may be immunocompromised who cannot take certain vaccines.
- He also requested information on the outreach, should those families change their minds and want to receive vaccines. Response: There is a nurse at the Placement Center, and there is also a waiver form to inform families of the risks of not being vaccinated. There is also targeted outreach to families who are not immunized and when there is an outbreak of a communicable disease, to inform them of the outbreak in the community and educate them on the risks. Some families do decide to get vaccinated.
- There is also targeted outreach in vaccine-preventable communicable diseases, and for those who so sign a conscientious objection to advise them to speak with their health care provider.
- Has the current approach been more successful than an exclusionary approach? Response: Yes, the process focuses on resources and education first and the end goal is never to exclude, and we want to provide education and resources to families through letters, emails, texts, phone calls and every form of communication to reach out to families to give them the resources needed.
- Director Vue thanked the work of the health and wellness team for their work and relationships with families to educate to a 99% compliance rate, and the positive spin on language is a wise decision.
- Overall, the Board is comfortable with moving this policy revision to the three-reading process.

7. BOARD COMPENSATION

Director Ward introduced this item, including the previous discussion amongst himself and other board members about a full-time Board, which according to Minnesota law, the Board is able to do. SPPS would have been only the second district to have a full-time Board, with LA Unified as the other. This would have been an expansion of the role, with the capacity to be more active and do more as full-time members.

The recommendation from the Governance and Operation Committee is to increase the board compensation with an inflationary adjustment each year in alignment with the increase for staff in contract negotiations. This would enable the Board to receive annual adjustments, instead of a larger increase throughout multiple years.

The pay rates of members of other elected offices were also reviewed, including those of the Mayor, City Council member, and Ramsey County Commissioners.

SPPS is second in terms of compensation of the Board, at \$18,000/\$20,000 for each board member/Chair, behind Minneapolis Public Schools. Compensation for other districts with similar rates, including Red Lake and Anoka-Hennepin, were also discussed.

The number of school boards in the United States were also shared, with about 60% of them being unpaid. There were once up to 100,000 school districts, with about 13,000 now due to consolidation.

Minnesota statute states that school boards can set their own compensation, and there would need to be a resolution or vote of some sort for this item.

QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- Director Carrillo, noted that as a member of the Governance and Operation Committee, the group weighed the pros and cons of this decision, including a pro that, in general, school boards are poorly paid in respect of other public official positions. A con is that there are budgetary issues and a need to explain to the community about the rationale for this item.
- Director Allen agrees with the idea of an increase for the cost of living, as opposed to a bigger increase after multiple years.
- Director Henderson requested information about examples of other governmental bodies that have enacted a COLA increase.
- A board member noted that if the rate of pay is not increased, the Board is essentially working overtime and at a discount based on the number of hours per week.
- Director Ward noted that in terms of a budgetary impact, it would be about an extra \$6,000 in total.
- Director Vue noted that service on a school board is also subject to the labor market, and there are talented folks in the community who do not want to serve due to the pay. If pay is kept where it is, those who want to do the job and do it well may not choose to serve on the Board.
- Director Henderson questions if this is the right time, and not wanting to put the Board in a position to do something for themselves, but not others due to financial impacts. It feels important to make the position marketable, and there is also always a need for more to do this work.
- It was noted that in seeing the pay of other governing bodies and as a community member to value the work of the Board, do the work and importance of the role.
- Director Allen noted the cost of living in the city, and in order to get to a living wage, she provided the calculations of about 20 hours at \$17.30.
- The timeline of this decision was also discussed, including at an upcoming Regular Meeting, with the Executive Committee to discuss further.
- Director Carrillo recommended that if this change should take effect, that it should be done prior to the fiscal year end, so it is included in the next fiscal year. He also suggested a presentation with the pros and cons, research of board compensation, and other districts with a COLA adjustment for governing bodies.
- Director Franco agreed about the nature of the work and there is more time and effort than compensated for. He also noted that for himself, there are a lot of aspects in his life that allow him to do this work, including time. If the current assumption is 4%, or about \$600, and an annual conversation moving forward, that right now in this financial state, that he could not vote in support of a raise based on his own situation. Director Henderson also noted that she could not support this.
- Board members noted it makes sense to continue to conversation, but there are hesitations.

- Director Allen requested information from other districts that are similar in terms of culture and demographics, as that is a major role in the responsibilities to engage with the community.
- The consensus is to continue the conversation, with more work to be done, including research of other districts, and the Executive Committee to consider the timeline for this item.

8. DISCUSSION OF SPECIAL MEETING ON TUESDAY, APRIL 29, 2025

Director Ward noted this is a follow-up from the March 18 Regular Meeting where Director Carrillo noted this would be a good check-in time for board members on the FY26 budget, and if there are requests for additional information, including in preparation for the Special Meeting on Tuesday, April 29, 2025.

This meeting is not required by law, and is different than the format of the Truth in Taxation Hearing. The Board requested that a presentation by Administration be included to update the Board and community, and an opportunity for the community to provide feedback.

The Board also noted the discussion if they want to respond to members of the community, and the practice around this, including feelings when the Board does not respond, but simply listens. Ideas included to respond to the top themes of feedback, and to respond at the following Committee of the Board meeting in May. Director Carrillo noted it would be appropriate to ask clarifying questions of speakers at the meeting, so there is not a confused understanding. Director Allen suggested receiving the feedback, end the meeting, then process and reflect, and at a different meeting (the following Committee of the Board) to talk through the feedback as a Board.

Superintendent Their provided his experience in past special meetings regarding the budget.

The time limit of the presentation, public comment timing, and overall meeting was also discussed.

Director Henderson noted that three minutes per speaker is recommended, in order to keep the cadence with public comment at Regular Meetings. Five minutes will be allotted for those speaking with an interpreter. Director Ward suggested not a time limit on the number of speakers, so that anyone who attends to speak is able to provide comments. If there is a pause in the number of speakers who have spoken, public comment will end, and there will be verbiage to help, including that speakers will be asked to sign up by a specific time, and all who have requested to speak will be able to.

The draft agenda will be a presentation by Administration, board questions, public comment, and then adjournment. Reflections will occur at the following meeting.

Chief Turner recommended to read the public comment statement at this meeting as well.

Director Vue noted that the Board needs to be upfront about what they will do with the information with clear expectations, including impact to both this budget cycle, as well as future budget cycles.. The reflection piece also needs to be helpful to answer questions, while considering the larger decisions and implications. It also needs to include clarification on misinformation or misunderstandings.

Director Franco requested a way to record direct questions, and post the responses on the budget webpage. There was also discussion about where questions should be directed, so that all board members are not asking clarifying questions. Director Henderson noted they will work out the procedural details. It was also suggested that our Board Administrator follow up with those asking questions at the meeting.

Board members also noted that there will be additional engagement on the budget in the fall of 2025 for that budget cycle as well.

9. ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:26 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:

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