

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

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION - BOARD RETREAT
360 Colborne Street
Saint Paul, MN 55102**

**May 17, 2025
8:30 a.m.**

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:41 a.m. by Chair Henderson.

2. ROLL CALL

Board of Education: H. Henderson, U. Ward, J. Vue, C. Franco, Y. Carrillo, C. Allen
E. Valliant arrived at 9:03 a.m.

Staff: Superintendent Stanley, J. Turner, S. Gray Akyea, P. Pratt-Cook, A. Collins, T. Sager, K. Thao, S. Dahlke, E. Wacker

Community: T. Duran

3. MOTION TO APPROVE THE MAIN AGENDA

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

4. BOARD RETREAT

A. Board and Senior Leadership Development (facilitated by Tracy Duran - Ideate Collaborative)

The Board began the retreat with a portion facilitated by Tracy Duran. Superintendent Stanley noted her experience in working with Ms. Duran. Board members and members of the Senior Executive Leadership Team shared introductions, including their role, tenure in the district and/or relationship to the district, and one item they hope to gain from the retreat. Board members and senior leaders expressed a deep connection to Saint Paul and the district, and shared their optimism for connection in working together as a team to serve our students, families, staff, and community.

The agenda for the retreat included:

- Stage setting: Conversation agreements and communication tools
- Foundation to build organizational health
- Five behaviors of a team
- Understanding our Working Genius

The Board then participated in an activity on their first thoughts, feelings, and memories in seeing photos of the Minnesota State Fair in order to ground the group in sharing different perspectives from the same experience. We cannot assume commonality and intent and move away from assumption. It needs to be discovered, created, and negotiated. Our differences need to be discovered. This can also be transferred to what our students and families need. This is an opportunity to learn about each other.

Within Stage Setting: Conversations Agreements and Communication Tools, the District's values of Achievement, Communications, Continuous Improvement, Collaboration, Accountability, and Inclusive Culture were reviewed, and that our behaviors should align with our values. The cultural implications of language were discussed, with a common goal in this space. Inclusion needs to be created, and for an inclusive culture in SPPS, it begins with this team. Transformational change was also reviewed, with Diversity, Intercultural Competency, and Inclusion.

Conversation agreements to build empathy were also shared, with the overall need to be present. These create a sense of psychological safety and work together to create a safe space. Board members and senior leaders then broke into small groups to discuss their needs for conversation agreements and psychological safety.

Additional suggestions include use of titles in spaces, with further discussion on this topic. A golden rule of "Do unto others as they would like done to them" was noted. There was also further discussion on "two truths can be true", as there can be different perspectives, and exploring the root cause of the two truths. Acceptance was also discussed. Another group discussed "stepping up, or stepping out/back" and sharing the space, which is also rooted in power and to be aware of the space and to know one's own voice, and the inclusion of the voices of others. The environment is also significant in terms of engagement.

Listening three levels deep to build empathy were also reviewed, including listening to the voice in one's head, truly hearing what is being said, and listening beyond words. In listening at the deeper level, connections are made and navigate the differences for the greater good. We need to be willing to listen first. Questions included listening and one's reactions to what is being said, and initial dismissal of another, and how to reconcile that with a pause and wait. Ms. Duren encouraged identification of the goal and collective goal and how to reach the impact of what to learn from other person, and understanding their perspective to move forward, and to leverage their values to shift the conversation. It is about understanding the goal and the outcome to achieve and to learn to pause in a new way. "Do I want to be right or be effective?" is a question on which to reflect.

A tool for asking questions (TRI) was also reviewed, including Transparency, Reciprocity, and Inquiry. The specificity of the "why" for the transparency was noted as important. The strategies to request or receive the information were also noted, and the transparency for the "why" helps to know what information to provide. We need to practice in sharing and collaboration with each other and determining how a partnership looks, and to see a shift in the partnership with alignment and cohesion, and the root cause of issues, and ways to bridge the power dynamic with the superintendent as a bridge. Questions to ask each other and open space and willingness to ask those questions were noted. Regarding the perception of holding data or information, group members noted they prefer to directness in the question (general inquiry or a problem to solve). Personal experiences were shared on the leadership style of the previous leader, and the hope to move forward differently. Group members also shared their experiences in learning about each other through data and information requests, including the quantity and rationale, and ways to move forward on this issue. Board members shared their experience in information presented by Administration and requests to their questions, including the ambiguity of responses and presentation style, and to rebuild the trust and partnership of the Board and Administration. Another board member noted the communication

style of directness in responses. Safety in answering a question was also noted, and the background of the request for information, and self-preservation. One solution would be to use the role of the Board Administrator differently, and to work more interconnective with the Board and Senior Leaders and to prepare presentations with information that the Board wants to receive. This is a “ladder of inference” and asking for information multiple times with different responses, and another time is the last step. It is a cycle we are in, and need to make the decision to come out of that cycle. We need to use these tools so we don’t fall back into the cycle. Dr. Stanley’s goal is to get information to the Board as soon as possible. Board members also shared their personal experiences in working with each other and Administration. Board members noted it’s also helpful to understand the underlying dynamics and rationale of others, including advocating for initiatives and background to the request. Members of Administration also shared their feelings about certain questions and requests for information at public meetings, and the perception of certain experiences at board meetings. Administration shared their responses to this and acknowledge the changes they have noted. The tensions and bridge of the group were also shared, and the productive harmony for the organizational culture that are needed. The process for responses and the tension around that topic were shared, as well as the history of the relationship between the Board, superintendent, and staff, and reporting structure of the Administrative team, and the need for a defined process. A Venn diagram of District Leadership and the trust for Board, Superintendent, and Senior Executive Leaders was also discussed, and the trust for community that comes from the partnership. “Healthy adults equal healthy kids” and that starts with the Board, Superintendent, and Senior Executive Leaders, which then funnels to all adults in the district. Senior Leaders noted their feelings on the overlap within the diagram, and the role of governance and policy, and administrative management, and the core of these issues. The roles of board members in the community and history of board members to be “rubber stamps” and how to be in between to bring community voice in a true and authentic way, and Administration to help support and implement, so that district rises. In conflict about how that looks and those rules, that cannot happen. True progress and change happens in conflict, so “rubberstamping” is also difficult. There needs to be a balance between the Board and Administration, and to model that progress, and to be in agreement about roles. Ms. Duren encouraged talking about difficult conversations, in the public and informally, expectations of the Board from Dr. Stanley and of the SELT team, and come together to work towards progress. Change will always happen; progress is optional. A board member also noted that they hold close is to move as a relational person, and questions that are provided are from others or other groups as part of a board member, and the level could vary from school staff to parent or others, and a layer of protection as a relational person, and that person does not want the question to come from them, and mask and protect the asker. They also noted that a norm of possibilities instead of “that cannot happen or isn’t how it’s been done” needs to be uplifted, and ways to do the work together instead of why it cannot be done as education is a creative, and results-driven field.

The Altitude of Genius was also reviewed, and ways different people approach a project. Levels include:

- Ideation (high altitude – strategic and conceptual thinking)
 - Wonder, Invention,
- Activation (medium altitude – evaluative and motivational)
 - Discernment, Galvanizing
- Implementation (low altitude – practical and operational)
 - Enablement, and Tenacity

The feedback loop was noted as importance, from both the Board and SELT, and how to use that feedback to benefit each other and the district. Members noted learning ways to “nuance” their language to meet the needs of others. We want that feedback, and it’s important. Members expressed the want for others to call out their behaviors, as well as the importance for showing appreciation. For 25% of critical feedback to see

growth to be effective, need to be given positive affirmation for 75% for coaching new leaders and a framework to operate. Board members shared their personal experiences about their own feelings on praise, criticisms received by community, and the performative nature of appreciation when our student outcomes may be struggling, as well as feelings around student outcomes conversations. Board members also shared their beliefs on the disconnects, and the fractures in the relationships of the Venn diagram, and how to address these situations. Real conversations were noted, and actions in the classroom to understand we are held contractually and to review board meetings to see the differences between operations discussions versus classroom actions. We need to simply get the work done, and honest conversations about teacher performance and attendance. Board members agree and thinking in board meetings, noticing the tension as a moment to name the elephant in the room to know what is occurring on a granular level, and to have that conversation in a public forum. What does it look like to publicly acknowledge fault, failure, or other things not great, acknowledged in a way honest, authentic, and addresses movement. Work together to create a culture between two teams that the answer can be shared later in public, and the community to get the honest, data-driven responses to appreciate rather than gaslit by the district. Projections of the problem on a system will be important. It is the job to ensure our students are learning, and ways to have those conversations without faulting a person. The role of BIGG was also noted in ways to achieve and have those conversations. A board member also noted personal performance of those in the classroom, as well as on the system overall.

Within Building a Stronger Foundation, information was shared in organization health and self-reflection, including good-faith engagement, climate, culture and engagement, and stakeholders were noted. A healthy organization has integrity – it is whole, consistent, and complete. Cohesion of the team is built through trust, conflict, commitment, accountability and results, and to explore how each behavior is currently playing out. Trust begins with each of us, and starts internally. Board members and Administration reflected on what is needed for trust, as well as each of the other behaviors. The group then discussed how they feel they are doing as a team, both together as the Board and SELT, and within each group with each other. Results of the data were also discussed. Trust within each group, as well as the group collectively, were also discussed.

The Board also discussed their feelings on their onboarding and welcome to the district, including a desire for SPPS promotional items and other ways to feel welcome.

The results of the DISC assessment were also reviewed, both individually and as a team. The group provided their perspectives on the results.

The Working Genius was also reviewed, including how each contributes to the teams' productivity, and ideal for improving team efficiency, productivity, and project management.

In closing, words to describe this portion of the retreat included "possibility", "contemplative", "growth", "positive", "optimistic", "understanding", "expectations", "hopeful", "open-minded",

B. Board Workshop

The Board then reviewed the upcoming B.I.G.G.: Board Initiated Goals Governance and Resolution to Adopt Student Outcomes Goals, Programmatic Goals, District Relations Goals, and Internal Goals, which will also be discussed and voted upon at the Regular Meeting on May 20, 2025.

Discussion included ways in which these goals will be met and progress toward the goals, efficiencies in tools of measurement, comprehensive data presented in October, suggested changes to the resolution,

schedule of presentations as outlined in the presentation, definition of “passing grade”, further ways to motivate students, and work sessions for shared expectations and public relations strategies.

5. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Director Henderson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Director Franco. It passed by acclaim.

The retreat adjourned at 4:38 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