



SCHOOL REPORT



A MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. ERIN RATHKE

As we close out another school year, there is much to celebrate across Eastern Carver County Schools. From joyful moments in classrooms to milestone achievements on the stage, field, and beyond, this year has been a powerful reminder of what's possible when a community comes together in support of its students.

WE'VE SEEN STUDENT SUCCESS AT EVERY LEVEL, FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL. OUR SMALL SCHOOLS CONTINUE TO SHINE, OFFERING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS AND BIG OPPORTUNITIES.

This year also marked our very first State of the Schools Address, celebrating as one community where we've been and looked forward to where we're going—together.



One of the most exciting moments of the year has been the incredible engagement around our Portrait of a Graduate. Over 1,000 people have participated so far, with more than 10,000 pieces of feedback rated by other survey takers. This is community visioning at its best, and your input helps define our dreams and aspirations for our students as they experience ECCS.

At the same time, we know that challenges lie ahead. Like many districts, we are carefully evaluating how to ensure financial stability. We're exploring the potential for a future operating referendum—not just as a financial solution, but as a commitment to creating a more predictable, sustainable future for our students, staff, and families.

We know the strength of ECCS comes from all of us working together. The "ECCS difference" is real, and it shows up in countless ways that make our schools feel like home. It's in our commitment to smaller schools, where students are known, seen, and supported. It's in the deeper relationships that our staff intentionally build with every learner and every family. It's in our belief that every student deserves access to rich opportunities. It's why we continue to operate two comprehensive high schools, ensuring personalized experiences and expanded access to academics, activities, and leadership opportunities. These aren't extras—they are part of what makes learning in ECCS unique, responsive, and deeply human. Preserving that difference will take continued community partnership, and we are grateful to be on this journey together.

Thank you for being a vital part of this journey. Thank you for showing up and helping us dream bigger for our kids. I am grateful to call this district home, a place where students are known, relationships matter, and our communities carry the torch forward together. I know our future is a bright one!

In Partnership,
Dr. Erin Rathke
Superintendent

POTENTIAL OPERATING REFERENDUM

At the April 21 school board meeting, Executive Director of Finance and Operations David Brecht and Chief of Staff and Executive Director of Strategic Communications Celi Haga presented a budget planning and revenue options report. The report, which reviewed the district's financial position, cost containment strategies to date, and potential avenues to generate revenue, was a precursor to a board decision this summer on a potential operating referendum.

Earlier this year, the board directed district staff to move forward with a cost containment plan that targeted \$5 million in cuts for Fiscal Year (FY) 25-26, \$4 million in cuts for FY26-27, and \$4 million in cuts in FY27-28. The initial \$5 million in cuts were approved earlier this year as part of budget assumptions for next school year. Executive Director Brecht walked through the impact of those cuts on the fund balance, as well as budget revisions approved in March. Every single one of these cuts is difficult, and the loss of positions and programs will be felt by the entire district community, especially our students.

Also presented were early draft strategies for the additional \$8 million in cuts necessary in FY26-27 and FY27-28 should no additional revenue be added to the budget. These proposed strategies are not final, and consideration would go through the same engagement process used earlier this year should they be necessary. Without additional funding, these cuts represent significant impacts to ECCS programs and staffing.

THREE POSSIBLE PATHS FORWARD

- 1 No referendum or a referendum failure. In this scenario, the board would have to move forward with proposed cost containment strategies.
- 2 An operating referendum at roughly \$500 per pupil that would postpone cost containment for several years but do little else.
- 3 An operating referendum of \$742 per pupil, the maximum per pupil it is allowed to ask for from the community. This would both minimize the need for cost containment and allow for investment in things like additional elementary gifted and talented services and high school mental health support.

"Our community made the choice long ago to invest in smaller schools - two high schools, three middle schools, and seven elementary schools," Haga said. "That's part of what makes us so special, those opportunities kids have, on the stage, in sports. The relationships our students have with all of the staff in the buildings set us apart. Our elementary music programs, our media specialists, that's the ECCS difference. The potential cuts touch all of those areas, which is why this conversation is so important."

If the board decides to go out for a referendum at the \$742 per pupil level, it would bring almost \$7 million a year in new revenue to the district. The tax impact on a \$500,000 home - the average home value for our district - would be \$23 per month. They will vote at their July meeting, with a community survey and other stakeholder engagement planned between now and then.

Visit eccs.mn/financialfuture for more information about the ECCS budget and potential referendum.



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