

**MINNETONKA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT #276**  
**District Service Center**  
**5621 County Road 101**  
**Minnetonka, Minnesota**

**Summary of January 18, 2024 Study Session**

The School Board of Minnetonka Independent School District #276 met in study session at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, January 18, 2024 in the Community Room at the District Service Center, 5621 County Road 101, Minnetonka, Minnesota. Chairperson Meghan Selinger presided. Other Board members present were Sally Browne, Kemerie Foss, Patrick Lee-O'Halloran, Dan Olson, Michael Remucal, Chris Vitale and Superintendent David Law, ex officio.

**REVIEW OF POLICIES**

General Counsel and Executive Director of Human Resources Anjie Flowers led the discussion. She explained that the recommended changes to these policies are being driven by recent legislative action. She also gave a review of the policy revision process, for the benefit of the new board members.

- #417: Chemical Use – updates are recommended because of changes to Policy 418: Drug Free Workplace. We are focusing on consequences for violations. The new language is compliant with new disciplinary standards specific to non-exclusionary practices.
- #709: Student Transportation Safety - updates are recommended because of new requirements for pedestrian, bicycle and school bus safety training. There are different requirements at each academic level. Accommodations are also available for those students who would need them.
- #719: Food & Nutrition Services - updates are recommended because of changes to the cost of meals for students. The language reflects that students are now entitled to one free breakfast and one free lunch per day. There are also new requirements for family notification of low account balances.
- #613: Graduation Requirements – updates are recommended because of changes in graduation requirements. MHS Principal Jeff Erickson noted that the courses will be ready to go for the Fall 2024 term.

Board members agreed to the recommended changes for all. Board member Vitale noted that the District's membership in MSBA provides sample policies and policy templates. Chairperson Selinger thanked Ms. Flowers and all who had worked on these policies. She noted that they would be brought back to the February 1 regular meeting for approval.

## **CITIZEN INPUT**

Chairperson Selinger extended an invitation to members of the audience who wished to address the Board on any topic. She also read the guidelines for Citizen Input, for the benefit of those who wished to speak.

The following individuals then addressed the Board:

- District resident Alexej Abyzov addressed the Board regarding the District's World Languages program and his desire that Russian be offered as part of the curriculum
- District employee Stephanie Brondani read the following prepared statement:

*Madame Chair, Superintendent Law, Members of the School Board,*

*Thank you for allowing me to speak tonight. My name is Stephanie Brondani, and I have been a parent, community member, and reading intervention teacher in the district for many years. In my current role, I am a Teacher Instructional Coach, working with teachers at every level, from Kindergarten all the way through the SAIL program.*

*In my coaching role, I have the privilege of stepping into the classrooms of hard working, dedicated teachers and watching them do their magic with students. I also have the opportunity to meet with them multiple times during the year to learn about them and their teaching lives, as well as support them in the ways they want to grow and develop professionally. As a result of this work, I have a much broader view of what it's like to be a teacher in Minnetonka.*

*We are well known for being a very desirable school district due to our excellent teachers and the many outstanding offerings we provide for students. This excellence has also escalated the responsibilities and demands on teachers year after year. As proud as we are to be teachers in Minnetonka, we feel the stress of these expectations. The Board's vision document illustrates just how much is expected of us. In the document's own words one can see that:*

- *Teachers must be current on the latest educational research methods*
- *Must demonstrate commitment, enthusiasm, effectiveness and professionalism*
- *Must address emotional and developmental issues of our students during the learning experience*
- *Must innovate, inspire, excel, and use our empathy, enthusiasm, patience, communication skills and classroom management to create a positive, supportive, respectful and disciplined atmosphere where academic and personal achievement can flourish*
- *Must present curriculum and facilitate learning in compelling and innovative ways that result in high levels of student engagement and*

*academic achievement*

- *Must connect with students and their parents and families, and compel the best from each student*

*As I said, a lot is expected. In my meetings with teachers, I hear about the concerns they have for their students who are struggling with more mental health issues than ever before. I see how hard they work, and how willing they are to sacrifice their own personal time to prepare innovative lessons, and keep up with grading. Teachers routinely work beyond their contract hours, and many spend significant time doing school work on the evenings, weekends, and during breaks. They do this because they are consummate professionals and want to do the best job they can for their students. Many are exhausted, and some struggle to make ends meet financially. I'm concerned about the number of teachers who are teaching an overload schedule or have a second job because their teacher salary isn't enough to support their families. I'm concerned about the number who have indicated they are near their breaking point and may need to leave teaching. It is critical to understand that we teachers look at our compensation package, with healthcare costs continuing to rise, and a salary that is not keeping up with inflation, and we do not feel valued. It's very hard to sustain the kind of effort and energy that excellent teaching requires, that our students deserve, and that the school board envisions, when we are concerned about finances.*

*I respectfully request that you reconsider the amount allocated for our teacher salaries to close the gap on what we need to keep up with inflation - what we need to be able to focus our efforts on continuing to provide the excellent education we are known for in Minnetonka. Thank you.*

- MHS student Tali Parker spoke regarding her concerns about weighted grade requirements, specifically the requirement that students must pass the AP Test to receive a weighted grade. She asked the Board to remove the requirement.

### **FURTHER DISCUSSION ON WEIGHTED GRADES**

Superintendent Law noted that Minnetonka's Policy 626: Secondary Grading and Reporting Pupil Achievement, was created to "establish effective grading and reporting practices that reflect a student's academic achievement of the course standards." One of the topics covered in this policy is "Grade Weighting" defined in policy as: "the assignment of a greater value to the letter grade's numeric point value to reward a student for completing the Advanced Placement (AP) and/or International Baccalaureate (IB) course(s) and taking the national/international AP and IB assessments in the spring." This policy was modified and adopted in June of 2016 and included the following criteria for weighted grading:

*"International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses use different, weighted scales to differentiate between IB/AP and regular courses. All Advanced*

*Placement and International Baccalaureate courses shall be weighted +1.0 if the student earns a C- or higher, the courses have been determined to meet the standards of rigor established by the District, and the student successfully achieves a “3” or higher for Advanced Placement courses or a “4” on an International Baccalaureate assessment. For courses that are beyond the rigor of AP and IB, students must earn a C- or higher in the course and achieve a C- or higher on the end-of course exam to receive grade-weight status.”*

At the time this policy was created, this criteria was selected with the belief that students would be more engaged in their coursework because they were expected to perform well on the AP or IB assessment. Since the policy was implemented, the majority of students enrolled in these courses have earned a weighted grade. There are concerns that some students choose not to take these rigorous courses because they are required to perform well on the AP or IB assessment in order to earn the weighted grade. There are also concerns that the policy punishes students who do not perform well on assessments.

After a first discussion at the November study session, the district conducted a survey of teachers, counselors, parents and students about this policy. Superintendent Law noted that a summary of those surveys would be presented tonight with an opportunity for School Board members to discuss this information and suggest next steps for this policy. Executive Director of Communications JacQui Getty then presented the survey results. Highlights included the following:

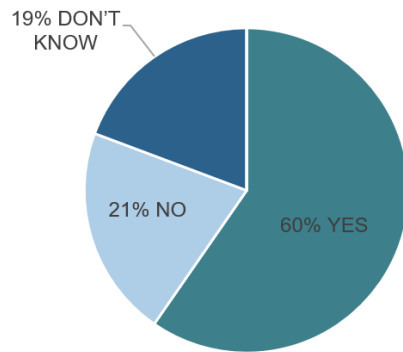
### Surveys on Grade Weighting for AP/IB Courses

- » Input sought on current MHS practice for grade weighting for AP and IB courses, including national assessment and numerical score requirements
- » Survey distributed to MHS parents on December 6, 2023 and closed on December 15. **760 Parents** completed the survey
- » Survey distributed to MHS AP/IB teachers and counselors on December 6, 2023 and closed on December 15. **57 (of about 100) MHS AP/IB teachers & 7 (of 10) MHS counselors** completed the survey
- » Student survey sample distributed to MHS parents on December 10, 2023 for review. This optional survey was given to MHS students December 18-20, 2023. **865 MHS students** completed the survey
- » Survey sent to MHS' college admissions contacts. **88 colleges responded**
- » Full results of parent/student/teacher surveys were coded and shared with District leadership and with School Board. Presented January 18, 2024 at Study Session.



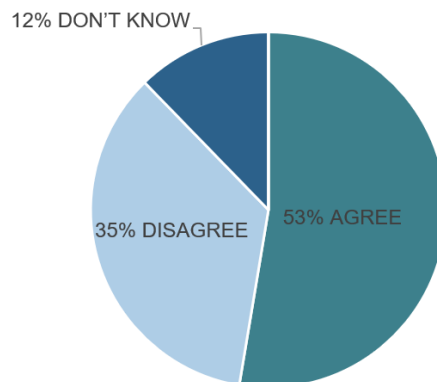
## AP/IB Teacher Survey Results

Assessment Increases Focus, Effort, Engagement



## AP/IB Teacher Survey Results

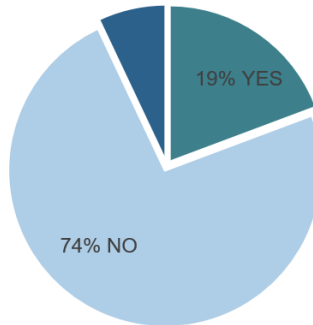
Numerical Score Indicates Student Mastery



## AP/IB Teacher Survey Results

Should Assessment Requirement Be Removed

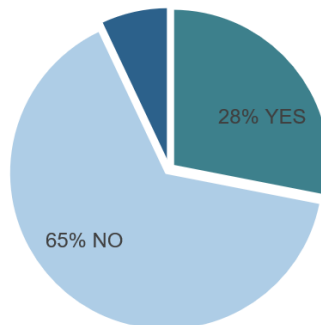
7% DON'T KNOW



## AP/IB Teacher Survey Results

Should Minimum Score Requirement Be Removed

7% DON'T KNOW



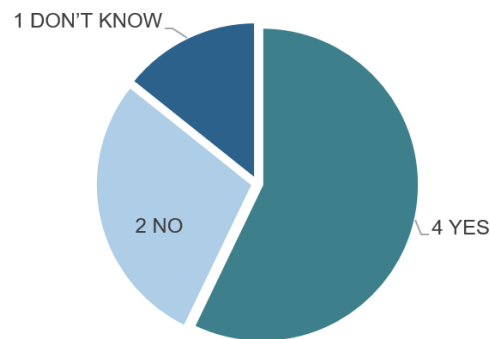
## MHS Counselor Survey Results

Should Assessment Requirement Be Removed



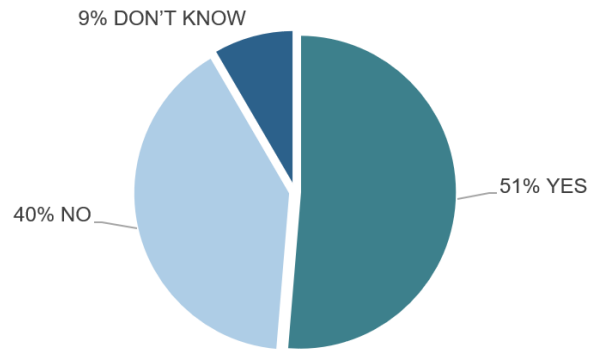
## MHS Counselor Survey Results

Should Minimum Score Requirement Be Removed



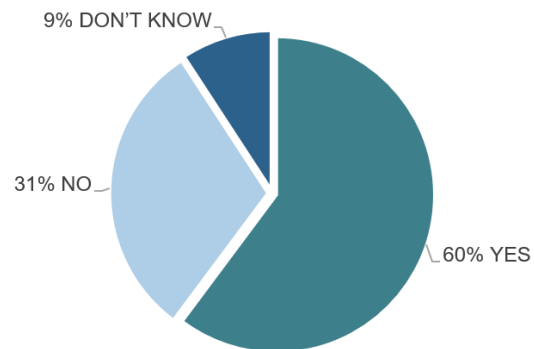
## Parent Survey Results

Should Assessment Requirement Be Removed



## Parent Survey Results

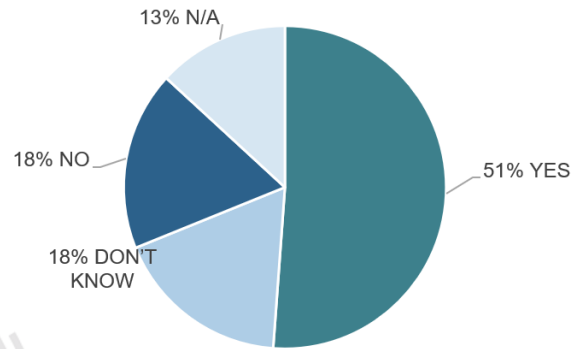
Should Minimum Score Requirement Be Removed





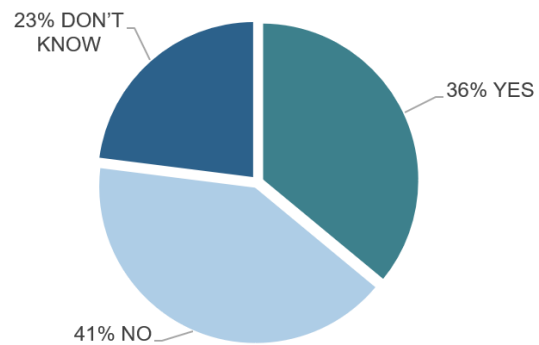
## Student Survey Results

### Assessment Increases Focus, Effort, Engagement



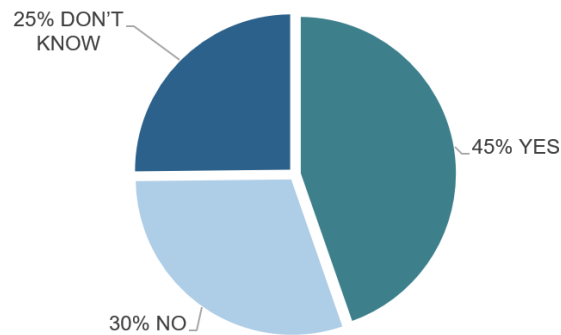
## Student Survey Results

### Should Assessment Requirement Be Removed



## Student Survey Results

Should Minimum Score Requirement Be Removed



## Additional Thoughts from Students

- » 35% Just Taking AP/IB Course Should Be Enough to Earn Weighted Grade
- » 27% Change It/Do Not Tie Grade to Assessment or Numerical Score
- » 22% Do Not Change It/Keep Things As They Are
- » 17% Keep the Assessment/Adds to Rigor of Course
- » 6% Focus on the Grade in the Course to Earn Weighted Grade
- » 5% Concern about Weighted Grades in General

136 of 865 commented



## Colleges' Input on Grade Weighting for AP/IB Courses

88 responses to a question about how colleges/universities use our weighted GPAs in their review process.

Many colleges said they will look at the GPA provided by the high school and use that in the context of the high school GPA for the senior class to understand the student's standing in the class. The student's cumulative GPA, along with the classes a student has taken, and the grades received in those classes, are what many colleges focus on. The cumulative GPA gives colleges a broader understanding of the overall high school academic performance.

- » 23 stated they would use the weighted GPA listed on a student's high school transcript. Of those 23, four stated they would recalculate the GPA, and one said they would use the weighted GPA but that the rigor of the curriculum would be what they focused on
- » 34 said they would prefer to see an unweighted GPA alongside of a weighted GPA. Of those 34, 11 said they would recalculate the GPA
- » 42 said they would recalculate the GPA, and most of them said they would only use the core classes the student took in their recalculation



In the discussion that followed, Board members and Superintendent Law made the following points:

- Teachers think the testing requirement has value – parents and students are split
- The class experience and experiencing the rigor is reason enough to get the weighted grade – survey is useful information and background, but it doesn't change his opinion that we should not require a student to obtain a certain score on an AP exam – we should change the policy to remove the test requirement (Board member Lee-O'Halloran)
- Very few districts have this requirement (Supt. Law)
- We want to challenge our students as much as possible and create as few barriers as possible (Board member Olson)
- This policy was changed in 2016 with the goal of increasing student engagement – has that happened? What does that look like? (Board member Browne)
- If students are taking the assessment, you would think they would want to do well on it – if we still have them take the test, would that maintain the engagement? (Chairperson Selinger)
- Maybe we still have them take the test, but not penalize them for a low score (Chairperson Selinger)
- Many districts show weighted and unweighted grades side by side on a student transcript (Chairperson Selinger)
- Every year, there are students who don't earn a weighted grade, but they pass the AP exam with a 3 or better (Supt. Law)
- Policy language could be changed to read "student must earn an A or B in the class OR earn a 3 or better on the test to receive the weighted grade" (Supt. Law)

- Or – student needs to earn the grade in the class and at least take the test (Supt. Law)
- We need to be more clear to families that scholarships are available to cover the exam fees (Chairperson Selinger)
- We could require that all students take the test – and they either do well on the test or do well in the class (Board member Olson)
- Data is surprising – thought it would be clearer – we need to listen to the teachers on this – current requirement is adding to the excellence (Board member Vitale)

Superintendent Law recommended changing the policy to state that the student either needs to earn a good grade in the course or pass the AP exam to receive the weighted grade. He said he believed that the teachers would be supportive of this change, as it will still require much effort from the students to earn the weighted grade. Chairperson Selinger said that the students need to fully understand the benefits of taking and passing the AP exam. After further discussion, it was agreed to present the recommended policy changes to the Board at the February 1 regular meeting.

### **FURTHER DISCUSSION ON MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM REVIEW**

Associate Superintendent Amy LaDue, MME Principal Pete Dymit and MMW Principal Freya Schirmacher led the discussion. They thanked the Board for the opportunity. Dr. LaDue began by noting that the review addresses the five priorities identified and discussed at the November 16 School Board Study Session. These priorities include:

- creating a more flexible master schedule;
- differentiated academic support;
- dedicated social and emotional learning time;
- the evaluation and expansion of exploratory and elective options emphasizing student choice; and
- opportunities for teacher professional learning and collaboration

This proposal addresses these five priorities in two phases.

#### **Phase I:**

- Implement a modified block master schedule to provide greater flexibility
- Integrate all Immersion courses into the regular daily schedule, untethering them from advisory
- Restructure Academic Support options to include integrated intervention and extension, along with flexible support
- Create dedicated Social and Emotional Learning time for all students

#### **Phase II:**

- Evaluate and expand Exploratory and Elective options that emphasizes student choice
- Opportunity for students to pursue strengths and interests
- Intentionally provide bridges to HS signature programs in 8<sup>th</sup> grade

#### Phase I and II:

- Ongoing professional development starting Spring 2024
- Provide essential professional learning, curriculum development and enhanced opportunities for collaboration
- Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration
- Focused preparation for SEL integration
- Collaboration and planning for all new courses

#### Next Steps

- Meet with middle school staff to discuss details of model implementation
- Collaborate on schedule details with the MTA
- Develop communications, registration and staffing plans related to implementation of new schedule
- Consider initiating a comprehensive facilities study to assess current and future needs at the middle level

In the discussion that followed, Board members were enthusiastic about the proposed changes and offered their support. Board member Foss noted how impressed she was by all the research that has been done up to this point. Board member Vitale noted the importance of implementing this project in stages, with teacher professional learning and collaboration along the way. Board member Browne asked about pulling out students and how that affects students who are on IEPs. Principal Dymit said the goal is to flexibly group students who need more support by content and unit, and the new scheduling structure will allow us to do more of that. Chairperson Selinger wondered if this would be an opportunity to identify students who need more support but aren't on IEPs. Principal Dymit responded yes, saying that this would be an opportunity to try other assessments.

Chairperson Selinger noted that the modified schedule recommendations would be brought back to the February regular meeting for approval.

#### **DISCUSSION ON PROPOSED ENROLLMENT CAP INCREASE**

Superintendent Law noted that tonight's discussion would be an opportunity for the School Board to discuss the administrative proposal to raise the enrollment cap set by the Board from 11,100 in person K-12 students to 11,250 as part of the solution to ensure long term financial stability. He noted that Minnetonka has been the beneficiary of families' strong desire to attend our schools, to the benefit of our programming for all students. He noted that open enrolled students bring more funding into the district than they cost, and this additional revenue has helped us balance out the underfunding from the state over the

past decade. The current proposal is to add approximately 10 students per grade level, across the district. No additional staffing will be needed. The additional revenue from those students will help to reduce possible budget cuts in the future.

Superintendent Law noted that 86% of the district's elementary classrooms were below the target range at the beginning of the school year. Generally speaking, we have open seats in every elementary classroom currently. The goal is to disperse the impact across the district.

In the discussion that followed, it was emphasized that this proposal, if adopted, would be carefully monitored throughout the year and evaluated. The Board would have the authority to roll the number back if they felt that the increased number was detrimental. Superintendent Law also noted that the district was about to commence a comprehensive facilities study, and that would be discussed at the February study session.

Board member Selinger said that increasing the enrollment cap would be better than having to cut staff in the future. She noted that this item would be brought back to the February regular meeting for further discussion and possible approval.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Board adjourned to the first of two closed sessions this evening at 8:10 p.m.

/cyv