

PTO Community Meeting

Special Meeting with Dir. Lori Norvell

10/7/2026

Hiawatha Gymnasium

6:00-7:30

Attendance: Over 110 people in the room, in addition to attendees on Zoom

Agenda	Facilitator	School Board and Community Discussion Notes
1. Welcome and Ground Rules	Abby A	None
2. School Board Introductions	Dir. Norvell (Lori)	<i>Message from the note-taker: I've paraphrased, but kept the word choice and voicing as close as I could to the original statement without access to a recording or transcription software. Where appropriate, brackets [] indicate added context for clarity. Where I am decently confident I have a direct quote, this is indicated with quotation marks "" and blue text.</i> • Thank you for being here, for inviting me • Call me Lori • Former MPS teacher and MPS parent • Proponent of public schools, so important in our community • There's a lot of concern and fear and emotions • "It is not my intention to vote for anything that closes Hiawatha Howe, whether it is two sister schools or one merged school." • Do not want to have an elementary school desert • My goal is to hear you • I attended the MPS meeting at South last night – that was hard, tough, heard people speak from their heart. I know the staff is taking that in, bringing us [School Board] back that information, but it is good for us to hear it directly too. • I'm hearing you from phone calls and emails, currently responding to phone calls this week, haven't gotten back to emails yet. This is a part time job, I have 3 others as well.
3. PTO Board Compiled Questions	Abby A	Q: What did the Board request from the District and did the District deliver on it? Lori's response: • Resolutions ○ Nov/Dec 2023 – start of the Transformation process ○ Oct 2025 – definition on and next steps, extended the deadline due to Metro Surge ○ June 2026 – come up with options for the optimal school experience for every school in Mpls • Timeline of Nov 10, 2026 was driven by the last day parents have to make a decision about school choice for enrollment. We didn't know what they would come back with, open to whatever it meant to give

		students the optimal experience. • Right now, some smaller schools don't have access to things that bring kids to school – music, art, phy. ed. Or there's an instance of a school that doesn't generate enough per pupil to pay for the services provided, so that school is subsidized by the schools that have more black and brown students. • "We aren't there yet with these plans." • "We hear a lot of comparisons to the CDD." • None of these are perfect or near perfect. "If I had to vote on one of them, I wouldn't. They all have flaws." • We asked at the last Board meeting if we can take parts from two different proposals, district said yes, so "we actually have unlimited number of possibilities." Q: Who then drives that creating. You want to take these pieces from these different plans. Who makes Plan 4? How does that work with the timeline? Should we expect the vote will be delayed? Lori's response: • "We don't have anything to vote on. No one has put forth a resolution." • The job of the Board is governance. We direct the work of the superintendent. No one else. As a board collectively we direct her work. So if I want her to do something, I have to get other board members on board with that. • The work of the District, the daily work. That's their work. [Told a story from her early Board days about how someone clarified that they don't want a Board member making a decision about reading curriculum, because that is not the role of the Board] • Business meeting is planned for this coming Tuesday, believe there is time on the agenda for discussion around Transformation. We can't all meet unless it is a public meeting, that is MN State Law. We could say these plans are not suitable, but it must come out of discussion. Q: So are you looking for a specific proposed plan from the District and a resolution to vote on? Lori's response: • Usually one of us [School Board members] would write the resolution. I haven't seen that yet. • "As of right now, we don't have anything to vote on. These were proposals put out for community feedback." Q: What is helpful to you in your role, what do you want to hear from us? We can speak to anything we want to, but what do you need from community to support decision-making? Lori's response: • "I know you all love your community; I do too." I also know you have really good ideas. People have emailed interesting ideas, e.g., turning a school into a childhood early learning center, the importance of walk zones for our youngest learners. • I'm here for everything, for ideas. As long as we're all being friendly, I'm here for it. Q: Given you're not running for re-election, what can we reasonably
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		ask of you in your role? What can you deliver regarding this Transformation? Lori response: • “I’m trying to show up and do the best I can for the next 2 months.” • My values are KIDS FIRST. It’s what I started with 4.5 years ago. Not just the kids here in D5, it’s all the kids. Including equity, that’s also best for all our kids. • When this started, we were looking at disparities, testing, and learning of brown and black kids compared to our predominantly white schools. Looking at social emotional learning support. For some kids, the only thing that brings them to school are classes like art, music, or phy. ed. That’s when we started talking about Transformation years ago. The pieces that aren’t working for everyone. Kids would get to a certain point along their pathway, then they can’t go further [with a class]. We lose kids at the transition years, like middle school. Q: What’s your understanding of the District’s budget? Lori’s response: • With the new staff, we have recovered funds we wouldn’t have had. I was under the impression that we needed to do something or we would have severe cuts again. “I just received info that we aren’t in a dire situation for next year as we had anticipated.” • Though some of it we don’t know – we’re still waiting for the site count and staffing adjustment. That hasn’t happened yet for this year, so it’s hard to predict for next year. • The team helped recover money. It has helped with Special Ed and ESL funding that we have been losing for years. That’s money we lost for our kids for years. Makes me sick to think about what we could have been doing.
4. Open Floor Questions	Moderated by Abby A	See summary below.
5. School Board Closing Reflections	Dir. Norvell (Lori)	Skipped – ran out of time.
6. Wrap up / Next Steps	Abby A	Q: How many School Board members have to vote for a resolution to go through? Lori: It takes 5 people. Lori: Friday night MPS, come to the pathway meeting at Roosevelt.

Summary of Open Floor Discussion:

Twenty-three community members spoke, all in-person, including current and former parents, students, teachers, and neighbors. Any personally identifying names or references have been removed (except for a few heartfelt comments about Principal Walker). **This summary does not attempt to capture the depth of the personal stories shared in the room or the long list of teachers and staff recognized for the impact**

they've had on our kids. Speakers and attendees were brought to tears several times during the proceedings (this notetaker included).

Key themes from community feedback

Why we love this place and community

- The school is an anchor for the neighborhood.
- "Everyone is there for each other."
- Kids who struggled at other schools are thriving here – how would this plan affect kids who are thriving now?
- Heartless to break these kids apart after everything they've been through.
- The school isn't perfect but families love it and trust it.
- Didn't plan to come here, but after several nervous school visits, daughter walked out of orientation declaring "this is MY school."
- It's more than a building – "you lose a lot more than the schools"
- We've stayed here because of the principles and staff. This is the first school I've been to where they know every kid's name.
- This school "saved my family's life."
- You close our schools, we lose a great principal.

Bike-ability and walkability is about more than transportation

- Making little kids cross Hiawatha takes away their independence.
- They come in with rosy cheeks, ready to learn, practically rolling home in the winter snow.
- At least 100 kids rode the bike train this morning. We ride every day of the year, rain/snow or shine (regularly 20+ folks). If the school community gets split, the bike train ends. Not safe crossing the highways.
- If you want to improve retention in the transition to middle school, expand the walk zone around middle schools.

Damaged trust in the District, and people are already talking about leaving

- These plans are disastrous. Does the District have a damage control plan? People are already talking about leaving. Our schools have been tainted.
- 18% of the students left during the CDD.
- The attrition estimates provided are pure fantasy.
- This rollout killed trust in the District.
- It seems like equity language is being used in a way that pits communities against each other. "Don't belittle our minds, we can see what is happening."
- Several speakers mentioned they were considering leaving (or their former students did leave, during CDD) the District for charter schools or St. Paul Public Schools.

Slow down and do it right

- So much has changed since Transformation planning began. "Things change while we plan, and sometimes that means walking away from things we've been planning over the years."
- At a recent community meeting, there were options for 1, 2, 3, and "try again". Every post-it landed on "try again."
- A care practitioner compared this situation to a patient in critical condition. "Don't just act, because you could push them over the edge."

- Look at each school one by one and to see the kids as people, not “packages” to be moved from one school to the next.
- It takes years to build relationships and community. Kids would be separated from friends they’d had for years.
- There may be real reasons to consider dual-campus mergers, but the district skipped asking these communities and went straight to closure.
- This week’s District growth projections by neighborhood shows more than 20% growth in Longfellow, and growth in several other neighborhoods as well, just a few with single-digit decline. Why aren’t we talking about growing resources instead of closing schools?
- Can we phase changes in?

Specific requests

- “Tell my daughter’s story.”
- Talk to the District about governance. They should be making decisions alongside people in the building, the ones who understand the impacts of those decisions.
- Turn the narrative on MPS – start telling positive stories about the schools.
- Prioritize input from families that are already here first.
- Participants asked Dir. Norvell to commit to delaying the vote, to commit to bringing a resolution to delay the vote, to engage with each dual-campus community about whether and how they may want to merge before making decisions about it.

Commitments and acknowledgements from School Board Representative Lori Norvell

Verbal commitments from Dir. Lori Norvell include:

- She will not vote to close Hiawatha-Howe.
- She will take back the feedback that decisions should involve the staff and leaders in the building.
- If she “had to vote on one of them, [she] wouldn’t. They all have flaws.”

Acknowledgements from Dir. Lori Norvell include:

- She agreed that changes could be phased in.
- She acknowledged that the feedback has been overwhelmingly against moving forward.
- She said the issues will not be resolved by November 10.
- She agreed that none of the three options are perfect or near perfect. “We aren’t there yet with these plans.”
- She expressed that there are ideas about adding a dual language Somali pathway or Afrocentric pathways for bringing families back.

Did NOT hear explicit commitment to the following items raised or requested:

- She did not commit to trying to delay the vote or timeline.
- She did not commit to crafting or collaborating to develop a resolution to delay the vote.
- She did not commit to voting on a resolution that no schools close for the 2027–28 school year.
- She did not commit to conducting or directing the District to conduct any particular school-based engagement processes (e.g., to engage with each dual-campus community before making determinations about school-specific closures or mergers).