

# Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) 2009 Legislative Platform

**M**innesota was once considered a national leader in innovation and commitment to public education. We pioneered best practices in the classroom and consistently led the nation in instructional quality, student achievement and per pupil spending. Fortune 500 companies located here because of our educated workforce. Minnesotans recognized the importance of the investment in public education and strived to ensure all students would have access to similar opportunities no matter where they lived – rural, urban or suburban. Legislative leaders and the governor worked in partnership to ensure that all school districts had adequate, equitable and reliable funding in order to provide the uniform, thorough and efficient system of public schools that is mandated in our State Constitution.

Not long ago, Minnesotans demanded a school system that would provide our children a world-class education and we did it with purpose and vision. We were the brainpower state. Over the last few decades, however, that vision and commitment have vanished. Our system of funding public education is broken and our commitment to invest in our future has diminished. Rapidly rising expectations for our schools have not been accompanied with adequate and reliable funding. Instead, we have a patchwork system of funding that relies on local operating referenda passing in highly politicized elections.

Minnesota is at a crossroads. Federal and state policymakers have established unprecedented expectations for our public schools -- graduating and preparing every student to enter post secondary education. This is a goal we must strive to reach to ensure we have the highly educated workforce we need to compete in the global economy. However, attaining this unprecedented goal will require significant resources not currently provided by the state. It will also require that state policy makers and educators do things differently and think creatively with the bold leadership that was previously a Minnesota hallmark.

***The AMSD Board of Directors has identified four key elements that must be addressed if Minnesota is to reclaim our place as a national leader in education and achieve our goal of preparing every student to participate in post secondary education.***

## **1. Enact a New Minnesota Miracle**

The *New Minnesota Miracle* proposal, which was introduced during the 2008 session, provides a framework for developing a new funding system. This proposal, developed by a bi-partisan legislative task force, includes recommendations developed by the Governor's Education Funding Reform Task Force and P.S. Minnesota. The *New Minnesota Miracle* proposal simplifies the current funding system and identifies the resources necessary to allow school districts to meet requirements established under the No Child Left Behind law.

Importantly, the proposal:

- Sets the basic per pupil formula at a level that allows schools to provide the programming students need to meet state and federal performance expectations
- Funds the state share of special education costs

- Recognizes that students living in poverty and English Language Learners need additional resources to reach mandated proficiency levels
- Recognizes that different school districts face different cost pressures based on their geographic location and their student and staff demographics
- Grants locally-elected school boards levy authority so they can maintain safe and secure school facilities

The AMSD Board of Directors recognizes that the *New Minnesota Miracle* proposal calls for significant new investments in education at a time the State is facing budget challenges. Consequently, the new funding system and necessary investments will need to be phased in over time and in a manner that treats school districts equitably.

## **2. Enhance Teacher Quality**

An issue not adequately addressed in the *New Minnesota Miracle* proposal is the need to establish policies that will allow Minnesota to attract and retain high-quality teachers. The quality of the teacher in the classroom has an enormous impact on student achievement. Minnesota is already facing teacher shortages in certain licensed areas and shortages are expected to grow. The Governor and Legislature should:

- Maintain and enhance the Q Comp program by linking the per pupil allotment to the basic formula to recognize inflationary cost pressures. In addition, the Q Comp funding formula should be modified for Intermediate School Districts so they are able to participate
- Ensure that all school districts have comprehensive teacher induction and mentoring programs and that all teachers are trained to effectively use data to increase student achievement
- Establish more rigorous requirements for admission into teacher preparation programs and review teacher preparation and licensure programs to ensure that each program meets rigorous accreditation standards
- Require training for all educators in the area of cultural competence

## **3. Intensify Efforts to Help ALL Students Succeed**

Students of color and students living in poverty make up a disproportionate share of the students not making adequate yearly progress on the state's assessments. The Governor and Legislature must provide the resources and policies necessary to give these students a chance to succeed. The state should:

- Provide high-quality education experiences for all Minnesota children from birth to age five so they are prepared to enter kindergarten
- Require students not making adequate yearly progress on the state assessments to attend summer school
- Provide funding to add five additional student contact days to the school calendar
- Allow locally-elected school boards to determine their school calendar including the starting date of the school year

#### **4. Create a State Center for Educational Leadership and Research**

Too often, education policy discussions get caught up in partisan debate in the legislative process. In addition, budget cuts over the years have left the Department of Education unable to offer much needed services and information to school district staff.

To fill this void, the Governor and Legislature should establish a non-partisan, independent State Center for Educational Leadership and Research. The Center should be charged with developing and providing professional development for educational leaders, conducting research on emerging education issues and serving as a clearing house to share best practices information. The Center for Educational Leadership and Research could serve the dual roles described below.

##### **An Educational Think Tank and Clearinghouse**

- Conduct research and make recommendations for enhancing the state's accountability system, including developing a growth model to more accurately track individual student and school progress.
- Research and develop recommendations on critical emerging issues such as on-line learning. Develop standards and protocol to ensure uniformity and high-quality online curriculum and instruction.
- Build a data repository that includes information about student performance from early childhood through higher education to help make informed decisions about best practices to increase student achievement.

##### **Developing and Delivering Professional Development for School Leaders**

- Collaborate with post-secondary institutions and existing K-12 structures to create leadership development programs that strengthen the capacity of school leaders to provide all students with the knowledge and skills they need for success in post secondary education and the workplace.
- Review administrator licensure programs to ensure that each program meets rigorous accreditation standards and that school leaders are learning the skills they need to help all students meet state and federal performance expectations.