

AMSD

CONNECTIONS

News and Updates from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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AMSD Calendar

JANUARY 19, 2006

Board of Directors Meeting, 7 a.m.

TIES Building, St. Paul

Guest speakers will be Senator Ann Rest, Assistant Majority Leader and Representative Steve Sviggum, Speaker of the House.

FEBRUARY 17, 2006

AMSD Conference Controlling Health Care Costs

8:00 a.m.— Noon

Keynote speaker will be former United States Senator David Durenberger. Registration information coming soon!

AMSD's Mission

To advocate for state education policy that enables metropolitan school districts to improve student learning.



**Association of
Metropolitan School Districts**



Representatives Mike Charron and Steve Simon are thanked for their participation in the AMSD Parent Advocacy Workshop by Executive Director Scott Croonquist and Chair Carol Bomben.

Advocacy Workshop a Success!

To gear up for the upcoming legislative session, AMSD held an advocacy workshop on January 6. The purpose of the workshop was to provide member districts with new ideas and strategies to use in their local efforts to build community support and persuade legislators to make public education a top priority. AMSD sponsored a similar workshop in 2004.

Members of the Hopkins Legislative Action Coalition (LAC) started things off by sharing what they have learned and found to be successful over the 13 years they have been in existence. Barbara Klaas, Eileen Harvala and Yvonne Selcer shared their insights about how to organize advocacy efforts, build relationships with legislators and get parents and the business community involved. For example, Selcer shared her secret for getting busy parents involved. "Start by asking them to coordinate just one project or event," she stressed. "Then once they say yes and are successful, ask them to coordinate just one more event. It works!"

Three other AMSD districts shared their experiences and successes in building their advocacy efforts. Parents and staff members from Minnetonka, Robbinsdale and St. Paul provided updates on what has happened in their

(continued on page 3)

From the Chair

Remember the Governor's proposal last year to mandate that school districts spend 65 percent of their expenditures directly on classroom instruction—the "65 percent solution"? Well, here we go again. Now it is being called the "70 percent solution".

The difference in the new version is that some expenditures—transportation, food service, tuition and community service—are entirely excluded from the calculation. The new calculation would continue to treat instructional support services and pupil support services entirely as non-classroom expenditures. Of course, this means that counseling and guidance services to students and expenditures on libraries, media center activities and computer labs do not count as classroom instruction. Educators, parents and students know full well that these are important instructional components of a quality education.

Under the new definition, only 67 Minnesota school districts

(continued on page 3)

2006 Platform Focuses on Making Schools Top Priority

Even though 2006 is not a budget-setting year, it is still an important legislative session for public education. "A lot of positive progress was made during last year's session, but we can't stop now," said Carol Bomben, AMSD chair. "The Governor and Legislature need to build on the progress made during the 2005 session and make our schools a top priority." The AMSD Board of Directors has approved a legislative platform that offers a road map for state policymakers to move Minnesota forward by addressing critical issues facing public education. The platform focuses on stabilizing education funding, eliminating the readiness gap and maintaining local control.

Stabilize Education Funding

Although money provided to schools during the 2005 session provided a welcome relief, it did not restore substantial cuts made during the 2004-2005 biennium. It also did not address unfunded mandates put in place by the State, or the increases facing districts in energy, healthcare and other operating costs. Specifically, AMSD is advocating for the Governor and Legislature to:

- Fully fund all state special education mandates
- Provide supplemental funding to address energy cost increases
- Enhance technology funding to ensure that school districts have the necessary, hardware, software, and staff training to implement on-line testing by 2009
- Require the Department of Education to conduct a study and present recommendations to the Governor and Legislature by November 1, 2006 for amending the basic funding formula to account for market-based labor cost differentials

Make Our Schools a Priority

2006 Legislative Platform



ASSOCIATION OF
METROPOLITAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS



Eliminate the Readiness Gap and Enhance Student Achievement

AMSD believes the State should invest in high quality learning readiness programs to ensure that all children enter kindergarten and first grade prepared to learn. Specifically, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Ensure that all Minnesota children from birth to age five have access to high quality child care and education experiences provided through Head Start, School Readiness, Early Child Education and high quality child care programs
- Provide funding for voluntary, full-day kindergarten through state aid or school board levy authority

Provide Local Control for Employee Health Care

To help school districts continue to provide quality, cost-effective health care for their employees, the Governor and Legislature should:

- Continue to allow school districts to have local control and flexibility to design benefit plans that meet the needs of their employees
- Amend state law to clarify that a change in the provider network of a group insurance contract offered to school district employees does not in itself constitute a reduction in the aggregate value of benefits offered by the district under the Public Employees Labor Relations Act

The 2006 legislative session starts March 1. For more information and updates prior to and during the session, visit the AMSD web site at www.amsd.org, or call the AMSD office at 651-999-7325 .

Advocacy Workshop...

districts over the past year and a half since the last AMSD advocacy workshop.

"We had a fabulous freshman year," said Cathy Maes and Lisa Wagner of Minnetonka. Their advocacy group, CASE (Community Action for Student Education) was very successful in developing relationships with legislators and getting results. The group developed the O.P.A.L. strategy to make a difference with legislators. "O" is for offering assistance, "P" is for presence and perseverance, "A" is for asking questions and "L" is for listening closely.

Bob Wittman of Robbinsdale thanked Hopkins for their help in getting their legislative advocacy group

organized. Robbinsdale focused their efforts on building relationships with their local legislators. "By the end of the session, our legislators said we were a force to be reckoned with," stressed Wittman. St. Paul parent Jennifer Armstrong also shared the perspective of NEAT, the St. Paul Network of Education Action Teams. NEAT is an independent, citywide association of parents, parent organizations and community members working together to support public education in St. Paul. Unlike the other districts represented, NEAT operates completely independently and does not receive direct support from the St. Paul Public Schools.

Attendees also received information and resources from parent leaders Mary Ceconi of Parents United for Public Schools and Sharon Erickson Ropes of the Minnesota PTA. Robbie LaFleur, director of the Legislative Reference Library, provided a very informative presentation on navigating the legislative web site. Workshop attendees were amazed at the resources

available to the general public on the site.

The workshop concluded with Representatives Mike Charron and Steve Simon sharing their perspectives about how to best build relationships and effectively communicate with legislators. "Constituent contact really does matter and is given top priority," stressed Simon. Charron agreed, "Talking to constituents is the highlight of my day." Simon also shared the following points to consider while advocating on behalf of public education:

- Try to persuade
- Try not to threaten
- Don't bend the truth and acknowledge downsides if they exist
- Make sure messages are not canned, be creative
- Be concise and use a minimum amount of paper
- Small groups of 2-4 people visiting are better than large groups when building relationships
- Try to balance parochialism with the big picture

For more information about the resources presented at the advocacy workshop, call the AMSD office at 651-999-7325.

From the Chair...

would be directing the required 70 percent of their expenditures on direct classroom instruction. The fact of the matter is that the average Minnesota school district spends only 5 percent of its expenditures on administrative costs – less than most private sector businesses.

The so-called "70 percent solution" seems to be a solution in search of a problem. Let's hope our state policymakers will focus their time during the legislative session on issues that will actually make a positive difference for our students.

Carol Bomben, board member for the Eden Prairie Public Schools, is chair of the Association of



"By the end of the session our legislators said we were a force to be reckoned with," shared Bob Wittman of Robbinsdale at AMSD's advocacy workshop.

AMSD Offices Move

Over the winter break, AMSD moved offices from the third floor to the first floor of the TIES Building in St. Paul. The new suite number is C-107. AMSD's phone and fax numbers will remain the same. Stop by and visit us in our new space!

Members of AMSD include: Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Burnsville/Eagan/Savage, Chaska, East Metro Integration District 6067, Eden Prairie, Edina, Elk River, Fridley, Hopkins, Intermediate District 287, Inver Grove Heights, Mahtomedi, Minneapolis, Minnetonka, Mounds View, North St. Paul/Maplewood/Oakdale, Orono, Richfield, Robbinsdale, Roseville, Shakopee, South St. Paul, Spring Lake Park, St. Anthony/New Brighton, St. Louis Park, St. Paul, Wayzata, West Metro Program-Joint Powers School District 6069 and West St. Paul.