

# AMSD

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# CONNECTIONS

News and Updates from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

## AMSD Calendar

**OCTOBER 6, 2005**

**Legislative Committee Meeting, 7 a.m.**  
**TIES Building, St. Paul**

**OCTOBER 13, 2005**

**Board of Directors Meeting, 7 a.m.**  
**TIES Building, St. Paul**  
Don Lifto, Superintendent from Northeast Metro District 916, will present research results on getting out the vote in school elections.

**FEBRUARY 17, 2006**

**AMSD Conference Controlling Health Care Costs**  
More information will be forthcoming.

## AMSD's Mission

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



**Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts**



Intermediate District 287's new Bren Road Education Center offers students a welcome learning environment.

## Bren Road Education Center: New Building, New School Year, Fresh Start, a Bright Future...

On September 6, the Bren Road Education Center opened its doors for the first time to welcome students, parents, and staff to a brand new building and start of the 2005-2006 school year. As students entered the building on their first day of school, there was an overwhelming feeling of excitement, anticipation, and relief in the air. Excitement about all of the novel sights and smells of a new building; including freshly painted walls, recently laid carpet, matching furniture, the aroma of an improved breakfast and lunch program, and the familiar faces of returning students and staff. Everyone shared anticipation about navigating a new environment, learning new faces, and wondering about all of the changes yet to be discovered. Above all else, there is a sense of relief that the students at Bren Road Education Center have a new chance, an opportunity for success, and a bright future!

The students at Bren Road Education Center often come to the programs with a history of oppositional

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## From the Chair

As chair of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts, it was my distinct pleasure to present the annual AMSD Friend of Public Education awards to two very deserving legislators at our September board meeting. Both Senator Linda Scheid and Representative Doug Meslow passionately advocated on behalf of metro students and made a tremendous difference in securing increased funding for schools during the past legislative session.

As each of the legislators received their award it was clear how meaningful the award was to them and how much they respected AMSD as an organization. Representative Meslow said, "If somebody would have asked what award I would most like to receive this would be the one. I am truly honored to be a part of what was a really good year for public education." Senator Scheid expressed similar feelings, "I am truly flattered to receive the Friend of Public Education Award. This is my passion and I feel I was actually able to make a difference this year."

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## Gallup Poll Reveals Support for Public Schools, Concern About Under Funding

In September, *Phi Delta Kappa* published “The 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes toward the Public Schools.” The poll revealed that Americans have a high level of support for the current public school system but believe it is under funded. The results also show a continued decline in support for school vouchers and a strong belief that charter schools should be held to the same accountability standards as regular public schools.

For the sixth year in a row, lack of financial support was listed as the number one problem facing public schools. Responding to the open-ended question, “What do you think are the biggest problems the public schools of your community must deal with?” 20% of respondents mentioned lack of financial support. Lack of funding has been among the top problems mentioned for the past 15 years and this year it received almost twice as many mentions as the next

closest concern (overcrowded schools).

The pollsters also report that Americans express a “high level of support” for their local public schools. Fifty-seven percent of public school parents give their community schools an A or B grade. The survey also found that the public’s preference for improvement is through reforming current public schools rather than finding an alternative system. The researchers conducting the survey note, “the public does not want change to come at the expense of existing public schools.”

As indicated in past *Phi Delta Kappa* surveys, school vouchers continue to lack majority support. Fifty-seven percent of respondents oppose allowing parents and students to choose a private school to attend at public expense. Furthermore, support for school vouchers has actually declined by 8% since 2002 (see chart below).

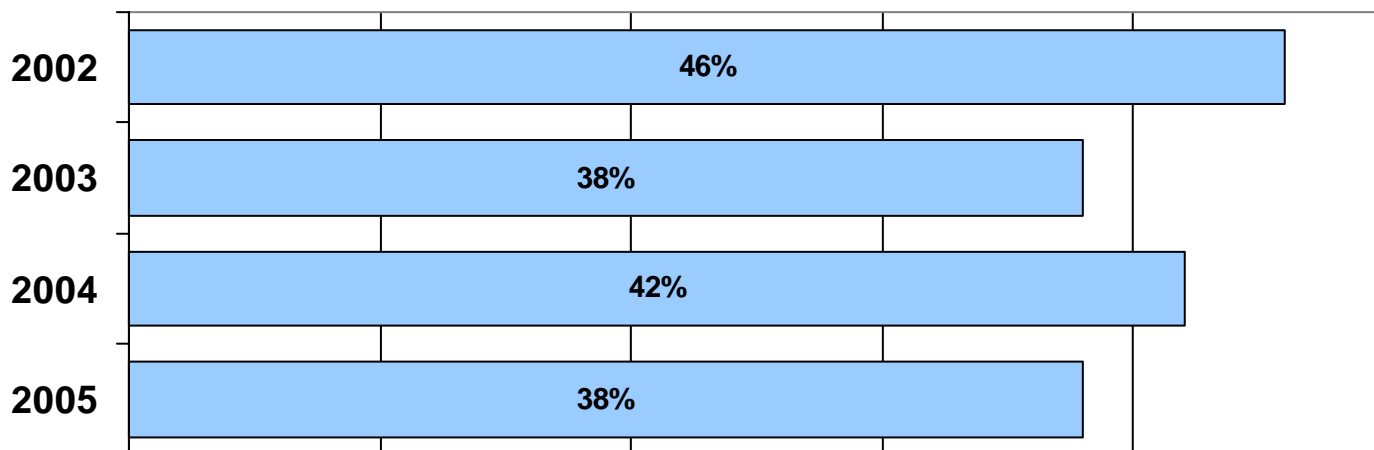
Although a plurality of the public

supports charter schools (49% favor, 41% oppose, and 10% don’t know), citizens strongly believe that charter schools should be accountable in the same way as regular public schools. Eighty percent of respondents expressed this view. Moreover, a majority of respondents (65%) opposed charter schools if funding them meant reducing funds for regular public schools.

Clearly, Americans support our public schools and are concerned that policymakers have not provided adequate funding for public education. “Americans understand that providing quality educational opportunities to our citizens through our public schools is integral to our collective success,” notes AMSD Chair Carol Bomben. “It is also clear from the survey that Americans expect their elected representatives to be good stewards of our public schools.”

*Full survey results can be found in the September 2005 issue of Phi Delta Kappa.*

### Percent of Respondents that Support Private School Attendance at Public Expense



## Bren Road Education Center...

behavior, unsuccessful interactions with others, and, in some cases, neurobiological disorders and developmental delays. Almost all students have significant special education needs in the area of emotional and behavior functioning. Many have chemical abuse and/or mental health issues or a history of involvement with the juvenile courts. The staff at Bren Road work to build relationships with students by engaging in respectful interactions with them. Initially, this may result in infrequent or brief contact with students, if this is what is considered comfortable for them.

Each of the students in the Bren Road programs has a unique story. They have struggled to be successful in large high

schools because they have particular needs that are often unidentified. Given the right environment, appropriate support, positive relationships with adults, and opportunities to give and receive mutual respect, they can be successful in an academic setting. One student, "J," was repeatedly suspended from his regular high school due to anger control problems. At Bren Road, he has taken an interest in woodworking and takes pride in the Adirondack chairs and tables that he makes for cabin owners and others who want a comfortable and stylish look to their outdoor furniture.

The Bren Road Education Center provides the right environment for its student population. The

building design includes individualized "pods" or the "schools within a school" concept for the different programs housed there. Individualized instruction in reading, writing, and math is provided with an eye towards preparing students to pass state level proficiency tests. Experiential learning labs including science, art, and independent living labs provide students with hands-on learning activities and vocational experiences.

Each student's home district supports the placement at Bren Road and the Intermediate District 287 staff members closely collaborate to ensure a successful transition to community schools and to the community at large. The educators and community

partners genuinely care about each student that walks through the door. They create a welcoming, academically engaging, respectful, and fun learning environment. They continually work to support student needs by building relationships and becoming familiar with individual student assets and strengths. In providing the essential components necessary for student success, the Bren Road Education Center offers the student population a new chance to achieve a bright and successful future.

*This month's district spotlight was submitted by Ellen Teelucksingh, Char Myklebust, and Janet Joslin from Intermediate District 287.*

## From the Chair...

Congratulations and thanks to Senator Linda Scheid and Representative Doug Meslow for their commitment and work on behalf of public education!

*Carol Bomben, board member from Eden Prairie Public Schools is chair of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.*



Representative Doug Meslow accepts the AMSD Friend of Public Education Award from Chair Carol Bomben.



Senator Linda Scheid accepts the AMSD Friend of Public Education Award from Chair Carol Bomben.

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.