

AMSD Calendar

SEPTEMBER 14, 2006

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

SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

Board of Directors
Meeting,
7 a.m.
TIES Building, St. Paul

SEPTEMBER 22, 2006

Minnesota Education
Summit sponsored by
the Alliance for Student
Achievement:
*Minnesota Schools:
Does Public Policy
Reflect Public Values?*
Minneapolis
Convention Center —
8:45 a.m.— 3:30 p.m.

AMSD's Mission

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



Association of
Metropolitan School Districts



Dodge naturalist Pete Cleary helps Garlough kindergartners gather data for a late-winter math project centered on charting the thickness of pond ice. Back in the classroom, students will compare and contrast changes in the depth to changes in the temperature.

District 197 students head “Into the Woods”

Environmental Magnet scheduled to open next fall

A rigorous curriculum focused on environmental science, math and technology is being developed at Garlough Elementary School in West St. Paul, thanks to a partnership between School District 197 and the Thomas Irvine Dodge Nature Center. Garlough is located directly across the street from the nature center’s 320 acres of prairies, hardwood forests, lakes, wetlands, hiking trails, working farm, orchard, and bee apiary.

The magnet project evolved because Garlough, one of the district’s five elementary schools, was declared a racially isolated school (65 percent of the students are minorities and more than a third are English Language Learners). The primary goal of the district’s first magnet school is to attract and retain a student population more closely reflecting the demographics of the district as a

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From the Chair

In this month’s *Connections* I would like to provide an update on what has been happening with the school funding study initiative. AMSD has been integrally involved in all aspects of this initiative that ultimately focuses on convincing state policy-makers that the school funding model must be redesigned to allow our schools to meet the requirements and expectations set forth in the state academic standards and federal No Child Left Behind law. Federal and State lawmakers have enacted broad accountability mandates and increased expectations for our public schools in recent years but have not modernized our funding formulas to reflect those new expectations.

Many AMSD board members have given their time and talents to serve on one or more of the funding study committees. AMSD Executive Director Scott Croonquist has been involved in nearly all aspects of the initiative and has played a key leadership role in developing a public relations campaign to raise statewide awareness that our schools need to be

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Public School Students Equal to and Outperforming Counterparts

Recent studies are all coming to the same conclusion: public school students are performing equal to or better than their charter and private school counterparts.

Two substantive studies recently released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirm this. These studies evaluated the standardized test results of fourth- and eighth-graders in private, public and charter schools. The findings dispel the notion that, as systems, private and charter schools deliver higher levels of student achievement than traditional public schools. These studies come on the heels of a major Columbia University study (citation below) which arrived at similar findings.

The first study, a comparison of public and private schools, attracted local media attention following its publication in July. Examining over 5,500 public schools and 530 private schools for samples of math and reading test data for grades 4 and 8, the study analyzed raw results, then adjusted the results using a range of critical variables. Adjustments were based on student and school variables ranging from poverty, mobility, teacher experience, percentage of students who have a disability or are learning English, and more standard variables such as gender, region, race or ethnicity. In all, the test data for over 165,000 students inform the study.

The grade 4 results indicate that when adjusting for factors described above, the mean NAEP mathematics score for public schools is higher than for private schools. The study found that a comparison of reading scores between the groups did not indicate a significant difference. In grade 8, mean reading scores for private schools are slightly higher when adjusted for student and school variables, but the adjusted mean math scores are comparable. The authors of the study note that the variance among students is much more significant than among schools. The study urges policy-makers to pursue ways to accelerate progress of struggling students in the public and private systems, rather than emphasize whether to approve additional subsidies to move students from public to private schools.

The comparative analysis of public and charter schools was written by the same authors and employs the same modeling method. The charter school analysis focused on grade 4 student data only, using scores from 150 charter schools and over 6,700 public schools. The study builds on a growing body of academic literature designed to evaluate the merits of charter schools as an alternative to traditional public schools. The NAEP findings indicate that in both math and reading, traditional public school test data show higher mean scores on an unadjusted and adjusted basis. In reading, the traditional public school mean is 5.2% higher without adjustment, or 4.2% higher when adjusted for student and school variables. In math, traditional public schools score 5.8% (unadjusted) and 4.7% (adjusted) higher than charter schools.

With growing numbers of charter schools, and more data becoming available due to technology and the passage of time, studies like the NAEP will continue to be extremely useful in guiding policy-making on the national and state levels.

National Center for Education Statistics, "A Closer Look at Charter Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling," August 2006. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006460>

National Center for Education Statistics, "Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling," July 2006. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006461>

Bifulco and Ladd, "The Impacts of Charter Schools on Student Achievement: Evidence from North Carolina," forthcoming in *Education Finance and Policy*. Available at <http://www.educationnext.org/unabridged/20054/60.pdf>

Roy and Mishel, "Advantage None: Re-Examining Hoxby's Finding of Charter School Benefits," Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper. Available at <http://www.epi.org/content.cfm/bp158>

Lubienski and Lubienski, "Charter, Private, Public Schools and Academic Achievement: New Evidence from NAEP Mathematics Data," Columbia University. Available at http://www.ncspe.org/publications_files/OP111.pdf

Copies of all research materials are available through the AMSD office.



Early experiences with the natural world have been positively linked with the development of imagination and a sense of wonder. Garlough kindergartners now experience regular hands-on learning at Dodge Nature Center.

net will succeed on multiple levels," Haugen said, adding that early experiences with the natural world have also been positively linked with the development of imagination and a sense of wonder.

The combined resources and staffs of Garlough and Dodge are committed to offering students a world-class education that prepares them for success in school, in life, and as stewards of the earth. Kindergarten classes are piloting the new curriculum this school year, and the entire staff at the PK-4 school is working to integrate curriculum and projects in preparation for the official magnet opening in September of 2007. Kathleen Lundgren, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) science/environmental education specialist for grades K-16 before her recent retirement, is helping the joint staffs develop a nature-based curriculum that aligns with best practices in education. The extensive staff development and curriculum writing are being funded by an MDE grant.

"At Garlough, learning transcends the classroom as we develop a community of self-motivated, enthusiastic, environmentally focused learners," Lundgren said.

This month's member spotlight was submitted by Gloria Gritz, District 197.

whole (30 percent minority). "Although we considered several other themes for Garlough, the partnership with Dodge was a natural fit," said Jay Haugen, District 197's superintendent.

In addition, Haugen cites a growing body of research that documents the detrimental effects for children when they are disconnected from nature, including problems such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and childhood obesity. Studies show that children who learn in an outdoor environment score higher in math and science and are more productive, he said. Other studies have provided convincing evidence that the way people feel in pleasing natural environments improves recall of information, creative problem solving, and creativity.

"We believe our environ-



During a spring open house, student guides wore camouflage vests sewn by students at the district's Henry Sibley High School. Backpacks hold binoculars, measuring devices, charting tools and other gear needed to extend the classroom into the natural world.

made a top priority. *P.S. Minnesota: Public Schools are not an afterthought* is the name of the campaign that is a unique and unprecedented outreach effort dedicated to finding solutions for our students' educational needs rather than focusing on problems.

Work continues on developing a new funding model that meets the needs of all students and incorporates the costs of ensuring that all students have the opportunity to meet state and federal performance expectations. The ultimate goal is to educate Minnesotans, especially state policy-makers, about the importance of modernizing our education funding formula and investing the resources required to ensure ALL students have the opportunity to succeed.

Stay tuned for more information about the *P.S. Minnesota* campaign and find out how you can help make a difference!

Jane Eckert, school board member from St. Anthony/New Brighton, is chair of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.

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.