

November 2006
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AMSD Calendar

NOVEMBER 2, 2006

Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting,
7 a.m.

TIES Building, St. Paul

NOVEMBER 7, 2006

Don't forget to vote!

Visit www.amsd.org for the
AMSD Voter's Guide

NOVEMBER 9, 2006

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

SAVE THE DATE

DECEMBER 1, 2006

**8 a.m. to noon at the
Sheraton Bloomington**
Policy conference on school
funding sponsored by AMSD
and our partners in the P.S.
Minnesota campaign.

AMSD's Mission

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



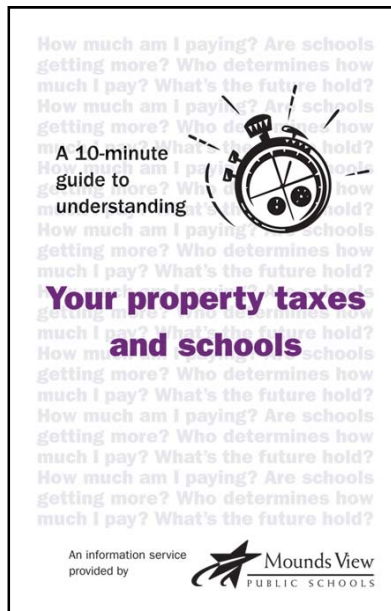
Association of
Metropolitan School Districts

Mounds View School District creates guide for taxpayers

Recent public opinion polls confirm something many of us already knew. Education and taxes are clearly top issues for most Minnesotans today. That's why the Mounds View School District felt it was more important than ever that residents understand the relationship between property taxes and school funding.

"Every day, our schools diligently educate our students. As educators, I think it's also our responsibility to educate our residents – especially when it comes to issues that affect their pocketbooks," stressed Superintendent Jan Witthuhn. That is why Mounds View created, *A 10-minute guide to understanding your property taxes and schools*, this fall as an information service to taxpayers. The guide answers some of the most frequently asked questions about property taxes and schools. Questions like:

- Am I paying more property taxes today than five years ago?
- Are schools receiving more property taxes today than five years ago?
- Who determines how much I pay?
- Why are property taxes increasingly important for school funding?
- What's the future of my property taxes paid towards schools?



**Mounds View's guide answers
frequently asked questions
about taxes and schools.**

From the Chair

I can't emphasize enough the importance of educating voters and candidates on the issues crucial to public education. That is why AMSD developed a [Voter's Guide](#) which is available on our web site and why we co-sponsored several candidate forums with the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities.

If citizens are educated about school referendum requests, they are generally very supportive because they quickly realize funding requests are due to insufficient funding provided by the state. At the same time, if voters elect legislators supportive of public education, the result will be sound state policy and strategic investments in our future.

This month's *Connections* features information on this important topic that I hope you will find useful in the final days before Election Day. It is never too late to encourage voters to get the facts and make informed decisions at the polls. Our future depends on it!

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

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Citizens must do their homework this campaign season

Electoral season can be a noisy affair with competing statistics and data being thrown at the electorate in an attempt to sway voter opinion. Minnesota's complicated education funding formula makes it especially difficult to have a thoughtful and honest discussion about education funding issues.

This year, a number of organizations not ordinarily involved in the education policy discussion have offered their perspective on education funding issues. Among these are the Taxpayers League and, most recently, the Coalition of Minnesota Businesses, an organization comprised of varied business interests and chambers of commerce. Recent publications by these two organizations offer a selected critique of Minnesota investments in public education. Let's consider a couple of key assertions on which these organizations' perspectives seem to have been formed.

“According to the Minnesota Taxpayer’s Association, Minnesota was 13th in per capita spending on K-12 education in 2004.”

In fact, 2004 U.S. Census Bureau data shows that Minnesota ranks 21st among the 50 states and the District

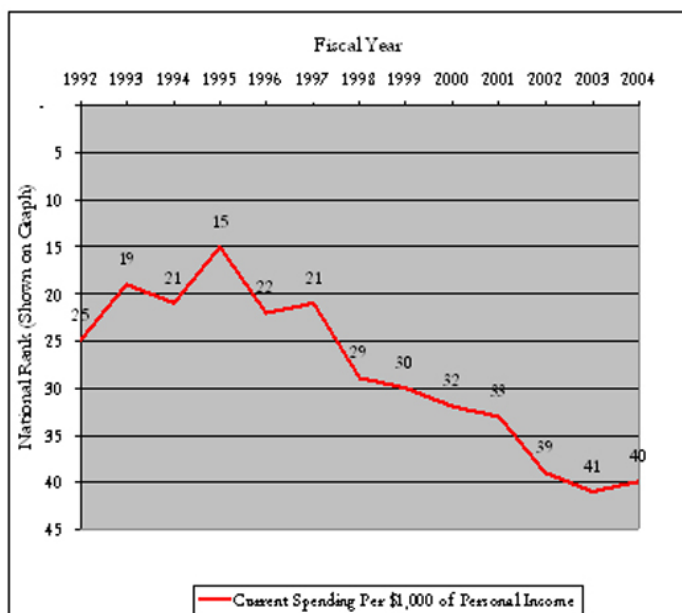
Minnesota's complicated education funding formula makes it especially difficult to have a thoughtful and honest discussion about education funding issues.

of Columbia in K-12 public school spending. Furthermore, Minnesota's rank in K-12 investment as a proportion of statewide personal income has fallen consistently since 1996. By 2004, Minnesota's rank in education spending in proportion to personal income had fallen to 40th, from a high of 15th in 1995.

Of particular interest in the latest Census comparison of the states, Minnesota ranked dead last in terms of the proportion of statewide personal income spent on public school administration. Clearly, any suggestion that Minnesota's public schools spend too much on administration is not based on reality. For more detail on the Census Bureau reports, visit www.census.gov/govs/www/school.html.

The Coalition asserts, “State aid remained flat and school property taxes began to climb in FY04-05 as the Legislature wrestled with budget shortfalls. State aid to schools increased again in FY06 and FY07.”

In fact, state aid to school districts declined by \$540 million, or 8.3%, from FY03 to FY05 in constant FY05



According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, state education funding has been dropping since 1996.

dollars. This decline represents a per pupil drop of \$566 or 7.2%. The Coalition's second claim, that aid increased this fiscal year and last, exhibits a very selective use of data: State aid dropped \$130 million from FY05 to FY06, then rose \$12 million from FY06 to FY07, in current dollars. But between FY05 and FY07, districts experienced a net decline in state aid of \$118 million.

“Top-performing Minnesota school districts spend \$1,400 less per pupil than the worst performing school districts.” – Taxpayers League

In their recent publication, “Getting Results,” the Taxpayers League argues “the school districts that spend more per pupil actually perform worse than those which spend less.” In a world where primary language, poverty, parental support at home, and behavioral or physical special needs do not vary by student, this type of observation may be useful. However, in the real world, the challenges individual students and districts face cannot be ignored.

Take student mobility as a case in point. The Taxpayers League examined test results versus per-capita general fund spending, separating districts into four quartiles by eighth grade average test score. Ten percent of the students in the top-quartile districts are considered mobile by the Department of Education,¹ while 19.2% of the students enrolled in the lowest-quartile scoring districts are mobile. The social and economic challenges individual students face clearly has a significant impact on their

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AMSD honors four with “Friends of Public Education” awards



Award recipient Mary Cecconi addresses the AMSD board, thanking them for recognizing her work and the work of parents through Parents United for Public Schools.



AMSD Chair Jane Eckert presents the Friend of Public Education award to Ward Eames. Eames is the founder of the National Theatre for Children and served on AMSD’s Describing School Finances Committee that developed a simplified financial reporting tool for schools.



Joining Senator Chuck Wiger (center) in celebrating his work for public schools are several colleagues. From left they are North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale Superintendent Patricia Phillips, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School Board Member Cathy Miller, Senator Wiger, Roseville School Board Member Linda McLoon and Roseville Superintendent John Thein. Senator Wiger helped pass referendum inflation language, defended local control and opposed the mandatory health-care proposal.



Eden Prairie Superintendent Melissa Krull congratulates Representative Erik Paulsen for his outstanding work on legislation preserving the autonomy of school districts.

AMSD Members: Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Burnsville, Chaska, East Metro Integration District 6067, Eden Prairie, Edina, Elk River, Fridley, Hopkins, Intermediate District 287, Inver Grove Heights, Mahtomedi, Minneapolis, MSU Mankato Center for Engaged Leadership (Associate Member), 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 Education Program, and West St. Paul

Board hosts gubernatorial candidates at October meeting



Governor Tim Pawlenty

Governor Tim Pawlenty and Attorney General Mike Hatch accepted AMSD's invitation to speak at its October 12, 2006 Board of Director's meeting in the Grand Hall of the TIES Building. Candidates gave brief remarks on the state of education in Minnesota, then opened up the floor for questions from the audience.



Attorney General Mike Hatch

AMSD Member School Districts Seeking Referenda

The following Association of Metropolitan School District members are seeking referenda on Nov. 7:

Brooklyn Center, District 287 - www.brookcntr.k12.mn.us

Burnsville, District 191 - www.isd191.org

Chaska, District 112 - www.district112.org

Elk River, District 728 - www.elkriver.k12.mn.us

Mounds View, District 621 - www.moundsviewschools.org

North St. Paul/Maplewood, District 622 - www.isd622.org

Orono, District 278 - www.orono.k12.mn.us

St. Paul, District 625 - www.spps.org

West St. Paul/Mendota Heights, District 197 - www.isd197.org

Don't forget to vote on Nov. 7!

Mounds View Guide...

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“Because legislators have shifted school funding responsibility away from the state and onto local taxpayers, our residents deserve a clear explanation of the role property taxes play in our schools,” concluded Witthuhn. This booklet also lists resources for residents who would like to seek tax relief through a refund program, and it provides contact information for those seeking more information about taxes.

For more information on property taxes and school funding, visit www.moundsviewschools.org or call 651-639-6205.

Research Notes...

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learning. With the election only days away, it is imperative that all citizens do their homework on issues important to our public schools. Continue to examine the data, ask hard questions and find out the facts about assertions made by various organizations to find out the “real” impact on our students.

(Parents United contributed to this analysis.)

¹ *Mobility figures reflect the Department's mobility categories 1-3; mid-year transfers out are not included.*