

AMSD Calendar

SEPTEMBER 14, 2007

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

SEPTEMBER 18, 2007

Shakopee Regional Meeting, 4-5:30 p.m.
Shakopee High School Lecture Room, Shakopee

SEPTEMBER 19, 2007

Brooklyn Center Regional Meeting, 4-5:30 p.m.
Brooklyn Center High School Media Center, Brooklyn Center

SEPTEMBER 20, 2007

Inver Grove Heights Regional Meeting 4 p.m.-5:30 p.m.
Cahill Court, Inver Grove Heights

AMSD's Mission

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



Association of
Metropolitan School Districts

Diversifying achievement

Nicollet Junior High program prepares students of color for rigorous high school courses

Principal Sue Slater and her teachers noticed something missing from academically-rigorous high school classes. Although the enrollment of students of color in Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191 was approaching 27 percent, the diversity was not reflected in upper level courses at Burnsville High School.

As the principal of Nicollet Junior High School in Burnsville, Slater took responsibility for the absences and decided to do something about it. She realized that preparing students for upper level classes in high school would have to begin at the junior high level.



In order to better reflect the diverse population of Burnsville High School in its honors, AP and College in the Schools courses, 40 Nicollet Junior High School students of color were invited to enroll in honors courses as a way to encourage them to enroll in rigorous high school courses.

“We needed to encourage and nurture our students of color so they would enroll in honors, Advanced Placement (AP) and College in the Schools classes when they get to high school,” she said. Taking those high-level classes in high school would, in turn, help them be more successful later at college and universities.

Slater and her teachers identified students of color who would benefit from the program and invited them into eighth and ninth grade honors classes in social studies and language arts. “These were students with amazing potential who could become academic standouts with

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From the Chair

As our students and educators begin a new school year, we at AMSD are also getting back to work advocating for education policy that will enable our school districts to improve student learning. I am honored to have been elected to serve as AMSD Chair for the 2007-08 school year and I look forward to meeting the challenges that we will surely face in the 2008 legislative session.

Once again, a primary challenge will focus on securing adequate funding for our schools. If the governor and legislators don't improve upon the E-12 funding bill passed in the 2007 session, our school districts will suffer significant cutbacks in 2008-09. As approved by the legislature and the governor, the bill provides a meager 1.37 percent increase for the 2008-09 school year and a portion of that funding is dedicated to special education and other categorical programs. Not surprisingly, nearly 100 school districts across the state will hold an operating referendum election in November – the

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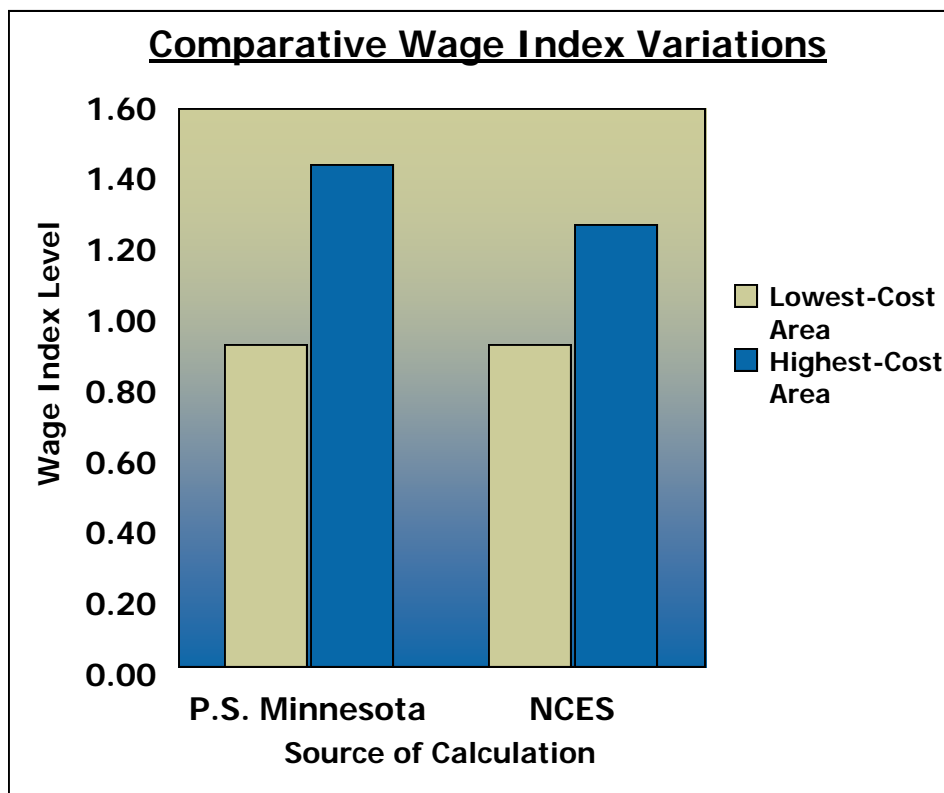
Education cost studies bolster case for LEI proposal

Nearly 100 Minnesota school districts will be asking their citizens to approve an operating referendum this November. The education funding bill approved by the governor and legislature during the 2007 session provides only a 1.37 percent increase for the 2008-2009 school year – and that includes one-time funding, special education funding and categorical dollars earmarked for very specific purposes. Consequently, school districts continue to rely on the revenue provided by an operating referendum just to provide core academic programs for their students.

Metropolitan area school districts are particularly reliant on the operating referendum. Current projections show that in fiscal year 2009 AMSD districts will receive 13 percent of their total revenue from voter-approved operating referenda. By contrast, non-AMSD districts will receive 6.6 percent of their total revenue from operating referenda.

The reason metro school districts are so much more dependent on local operating referenda is that Minnesota’s education funding formula fails to recognize the higher cost of labor in the metro area. Upwards of 80 percent of a school district’s expenditures are related to personnel costs and the simple reality is that a dollar does not go as far in the metropolitan area labor market as it does in other parts of the state. A growing body of research acknowledges the impact of geographic wage and cost differentials.

In 2007, legislation was introduced in the Minnesota House and Senate to establish a mechanism for reflecting the higher personnel costs experienced by school districts operating in the St. Paul/Minneapolis metropolitan area. As introduced



and incorporated into the House omnibus K-12 bill, the legislation would create a location equity index calculated using wage and housing data collected statewide. The index would be updated annually and used to allocate revenue to districts based on their relative housing and labor market costs. Unfortunately, the provision was not included in the final K-12 bill and metro school districts remain heavily reliant on the operating referendum to provide basic educational opportunities to their students.

Disparities in wage and housing costs are an issue that AMSD has for many years worked to highlight and incorporate into state education funding policy. The realities remain clear: Median wages for the seven-county metropolitan area were \$18.41 in 2006, versus a statewide low of \$12.29 in the Upper Minnesota River Valley economic develop-

ment region – a difference of nearly 50 percent. In the latest data available (2005-6 school year), the Minnesota Department of Education reports that the average difference between Greater Minnesota and metro district salaries was 49 percent for superintendents, 35 percent for high school principals and 16 percent for classroom teachers.

Wide variations in housing markets persist as well: Since January 2001, state data indicate that the median housing price in Greater Minnesota counties has remained at a level between 46 percent and 48 percent of the metropolitan median housing price. Just as rural schools have staffing and funding difficulties specific to their geography, metropolitan school districts must reach higher salary requirements to attract and retain quality staff in the classroom and in administrative roles.

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Disparities in labor costs create need for location equity index

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The report commissioned by P.S. Minnesota and released last fall affirms the need for a location equity index. Termed the “location cost metric” in the report, the differential ranged from 0.75 for the least expensive Greater Minnesota county to 1.12 in the most expensive metro county – a variation of 49 percent.

In 2006, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published a study of cost differences among the states as well as within the states, producing results that bolster the case for establishing a location equity index. The study indicates that 38 states have wage level differences exceeding 20 percent from one area to another; 25 of these have differences exceeding 30 percent. In Minnesota, the wage levels in the most expensive county (as measured by the comparable wage index) are 31.5 percent higher than in the least expensive. In the 2005-6 school year, the Department of Education reports that the cost of administration and regular and career and technical instruction statewide was over \$4 billion; over \$2 billion of these dollars were used in the seven-county metropolitan area. The magnitude of the investment involved, and the compelling evidence (both specific to Minnesota and nationally) indicating significant disparities in the cost of labor, present a powerful call for lawmakers to modernize Minnesota’s education funding formula by including a location equity index.

AMSD Members: Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Burnsville, Chaska, East Metro Integration District 6067, Eden Prairie, Edina, Elk River, Fridley, Hopkins, Intermediate District 287, Intermediate District 917 (Associate Member), Inver Grove Heights, Mahtomedi, Minneapolis, MSU Mankato Center for Engaged Leadership (Associate Member), Minnetonka, Mounds View, Northeast Metro Intermediate School District 916 (Associate Member), North St. Paul/Maplewood/Oakdale, Orono, Richfield, Robbinsdale, Roseville, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan, 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

Friend of Public Education Awards

Rep. Greiling and Sen. Bonoff honored



The Association of Metropolitan School Districts (AMSD) presented Rep. Mindy Greiling and Sen. Terri Bonoff with the Friend of Public Education Award on Aug. 16 in recognition of their advocacy for education policy that enables public school districts to improve student learning. “In addition to effective advocacy for education within the Legislature, AMSD appreciated each of their frequent public appearances which helped raise public awareness of the critical need for additional funding for our schools,” said John Malone, AMSD Board of Directors Chair. Malone joined outgoing AMSD Chair Jane Eckert in presenting the legislators with the award.

Districts will need additional revenue in ‘08-’09

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second highest total on record according to the Minnesota School Boards Association.

With that in mind, it continues to be of utmost importance that we communicate our needs to local legislators and the governor. It is critical that they understand how important it is that they support their local school district operating referendum and

that they approve supplemental funding for our schools during the 2008 legislative session. It is state policy that makes school districts reliant on voter approved operating referenda; it should not be too much to expect that our state policymakers support these efforts.

John Malone, school board member from Orono, is chair of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.

Participation builds confidence which leads to success

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support and encouragement,” said Slater.

“It’s all about confidence,” said social studies teacher Kevin Silberman. “We boost the confidence of these students so they can feel comfortable taking rigorous courses and we let them know that we believe they can do it.”

It’s also about skill building. Students are taught pre-AP strategies to develop critical thinking skills, as well as to improve their reading, writing and vocabulary skills.

Slater uses compensatory funds to keep the cohort low — just 20 in each grade — so students can develop positive and caring relationships with the teachers and each other. “Similar to a group of siblings, the students support and challenge each other and grow together as a group,” said Slater. Students in the third and most recent group were 75 percent black (African-American and Somali), 20 percent Asian and 5 percent Latino. Sixty-five percent qualified for free or reduced school meals and five percent were English Language Learners.

Hinda Abdi says the honors classes provided the encouragement she needed. Originally from Somalia, she has lived in this country since the age of two. Just a year ago, she had never heard of AP or honors class. This fall she has enrolled in both at Burnsville High School and feels confident she will do well. “I get this. I can do this,” she said.

Language arts teacher Danielle Christy appreciates getting to know the honors students really well so that “students know we have invested in their lives.”

The investment has paid off. Every one of the students who participated in the honors classes during both eighth and ninth grades went on



As part of the honors language arts course, students performed a modern Shakespeare play. With only 20 students in each grade, the program aims to develop positive and caring relationships as well as to provide the encouragement students need to succeed in more difficult courses.

to take a higher-level class in high school last fall. Slater and her teachers went to the high school last fall to meet with their former students and see how they were doing. Some were stressed about the work load in their classes, but they were hanging in there. Their candid feedback will help the Nicollet teachers continue to improve the honors classes.

Slater, who is known for creating innovative programs, intends to keep the honors program going but she laments that there are no new programs at her school this year. “Normally at Nicollet we have one or two new initiatives each year, but we were unable to do so this year



All of the students who participated in the program continued to take higher-level courses in the next grade. Teachers visited their former students once they reached high school to gather feedback.

because of our limited resources,” she said. “As with many companies, when resources get tight, the R&D activities get trimmed back.”

This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Ruth Dunn, communications coordinator, Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District.