

## AMSD Calendar

**JANUARY 11, 2008**  
Executive/Legislative  
Committee Meeting,  
7 a.m., TIES Building,  
St. Paul

**JANUARY 23, 2008**  
AMSD Winter  
Conference,  
"Integration, School  
Choice and Student  
Achievement,"  
8 a.m. to noon  
Roseville Radisson  
Keynote speaker: Richard  
Rothstein, Economic Policy  
Institute

**JANUARY 25, 2008**  
Board of Directors  
Meeting, 7 a.m., TIES  
Building, St. Paul

**FEBRUARY 11, 2008**  
Executive/Legislative  
Committee Meeting,  
7 a.m., TIES Building,  
St. Paul

## AMSD's Mission

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



Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts

## Robbinsdale Area Schools Legislative Action Coalition builds partnerships between residents and legislators

Robbinsdale Area Schools has long enjoyed excellent relationships with the state legislators who represent the residents of the school district. While the actions of past legislatures and governors have resulted in revenue not keeping pace with inflation over the last decade, local legislators have been strong partners with Robbinsdale Area Schools to bring about positive change on behalf of public schools.

The recent defeat of a district levy referendum has generated additional interest and participation in the Robbinsdale Area Schools Legislative Action Coalition, or LAC, an organization created several years ago to serve as an active advocate for sound educational public policies at the state and federal levels.

"The purpose of the LAC is to give district residents, parents, students and business owners an opportunity to become engaged in pursuit of legislative actions to positively impact our school district," said LAC chair Brad Scheib. "We have sponsored many trips to the capitol, sponsored discussion sessions in our district with elected officials to share our legislative priorities, served as a resource for lawmakers who want input on draft legislation, and helped connect local community members to the state level."

State Senator Ann Rest has appreciated the persistence and commitment of the LAC. "LAC members are at the Capitol on a weekly basis to check in with us. We especially like seeing parents and administrators and board members and yes, students as well, coming together to talk about what's best for our school district," she said.

Efforts of the coalition in the past year have focused primarily on the need for increased funding. While this will continue to be important, Scheib said the organization "will also try to increase our awareness and under-

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## From the Chair

When the 2007 legislative session adjourned, there was a common understanding among the governor and legislators that it would be critical to provide supplemental funding for public education during the 2008 session. It was widely acknowledged that while the 2007 Omnibus E-12 Education Funding Bill included many excellent provisions, it fell short of fully funding the state special education formula and provided just a one percent increase for the basic formula for the 2008-09 school year.

The importance of supplemental funding for our schools has not diminished, despite the state's budget forecast released in November showing a significant budget shortfall. A survey of 37 metro area school districts conducted in December shows a combined funding gap of almost \$75 million for the 2008-09 school year under current law. The AMSD Board of Directors has adopted a focused legislative platform aimed at addressing that projected funding gap. Specifically,

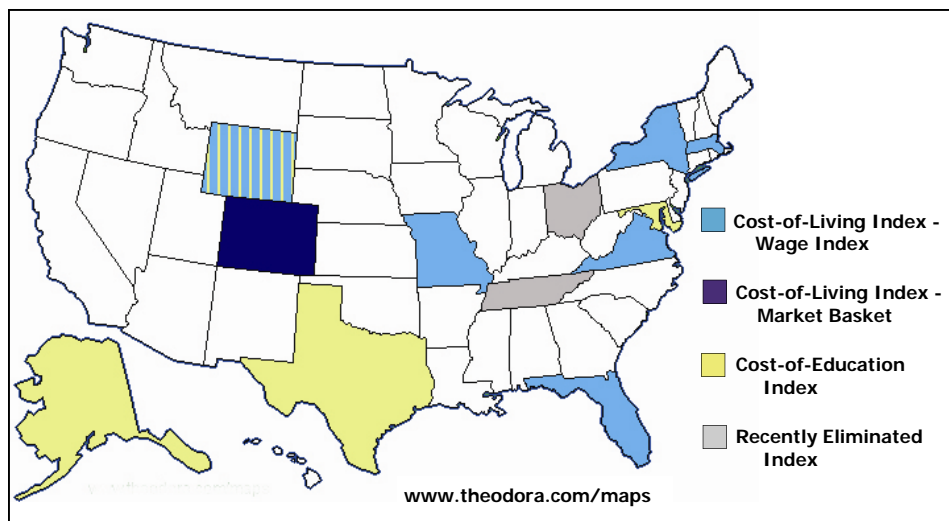
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# Graduate student examines the use of geographic cost indices in state education funding formulas

Joanie L. Lofgren, a candidate for a master's degree in public policy at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, recently completed a paper titled, "Implementation and Use of Geographic Cost Indices in State School Funding Formulas." Ms. Lofgren's research provides additional evidence that geographic cost indices are an important component of an adequate and equitable education funding system.

Her research included data collected on the cost of education and the cost of living indexes across the U.S. and performing extensive analysis of 10 states that had explicit geographic cost indices in use as part of their school funding formulas. She studied existing literature, conducted surveys, and interviewed a number of people involved in the implementation of the various Cost Indices. The states from which data was collected is illustrated in the map accompanying this article.

Three states, Massachusetts, Missouri, and New York, were analyzed in detail. In Massachusetts, the Wage Adjustment Factor (WAF) began as a part of the Education Reform Act of 1993. The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) oversaw and funded two years of research that resulted in a proposal that included a new foundation formula. In 2005, Missouri passed legislation to change its school funding formula from tax-rate driven formula to a student-needs driven formula that included the addition of the Dollar Value Modifier (DVM). There was a significant division on the new formula based on geographic regions. New York instituted its Regional Cost Index (RCI) as a part of comprehensive school



finance reform in 2007. The RCI was a product of a many years of work to address funding and cost disparities.

Ms. Lofgren drew many conclusions as a result of her research of the case studies as well as the literature and the broader review of states with geographic cost indices. It was found that geographic cost indices are often introduced as part of a comprehensive school finance system reform. Eight of the ten states implemented geographic cost indices during comprehensive reform of their school finance system.

Lofgren found that general recognition of differing regional costs is necessary but, in and of itself, is not a sufficient condition to address differing regional costs. While states may recognize the cost differences, it alone does not ensure reform. Not surprisingly, school districts in metropolitan and rural areas often have differences of opinion about how to implement a geographic cost index. However, Lofgren found that these differences have been overcome in other states.

Interestingly, coalitions have not played a role in the passage of geo-

graphic cost indices. Massachusetts, Missouri, and New York did not have a coalition behind the change in their states. Even so, coalitions continue to try to push reform in other states. Currently, a broad coalition in Ohio is forming to support a new geographic cost index to replace one that was recently phased out in that state.

It is also interesting to note that seven of the ten states that use geographic cost indices base their formulas on a cost-of-living approach rather than a cost-of-education one and that all of the states in the study adjust cost indices over time to reflect changing trends and costs.

Ms. Lofgren's research shows that there is recognition across the country that the cost of delivering educational services varies across regions. Implementing a geographic cost index often occurs during a broader funding reform process. This is especially pertinent in Minnesota where support continues to build for overhauling the current funding formula.

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# Referendum results spur increased community involvement

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standing of the complex education funding system in Minnesota that seems to be failing many school districts across the state."

The referendum results have inspired a renewed activism among residents determined to maintain the long tradition of educational excellence in Robbinsdale Area Schools. Nearly 500 community members have signed up to receive LAC updates this year, up from approximately 250 last year.

District resident Jon Miners was one of several community members driven to join the steering committee of the LAC. "Our public schools are

the heart and soul of our community," Miners said. "The support we give them is tangible evidence of our commitment the future, so it was very hard for me to accept the results of the referendum as the last word on the subject. When (part-time LAC staff member) Andrea Wiley asked me to join the Legislative Action Coalition, I was eager to help out."

Most encouraging of all is the hands-on involvement of district students. After the referendum, Robbinsdale Armstrong High School junior Josh Villa joined the LAC steering committee. "To have students, parents, and other members of

the community talk directly to state legislators will have a profound impact on state education policy," he said.

In the long run, Robbinsdale's Legislative Action Coalition seeks to work together with the district's strong and supportive legislators to improve funding in the short term while bringing about deep and lasting structural changes to put education on a firm and reliable foundation once and for all.

*This month's member feature was submitted by Jeff Dehler, Communications Director at Robbinsdale Area Schools.*

## From the Chair: 2008 Legislative Platform

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AMSD's platform calls on the governor and legislature to increase the basic formula allowance by an additional two percent to keep pace with inflationary cost increases and to fulfill its obligation to fund the state special education formula. These are not extravagant proposals – they would simply help mitigate significant staff layoffs and program reductions for many school districts.

The AMSD platform also urges our state policymakers to protect and preserve school buildings and infrastructure and invest in technology that improves student achievement. It is critical that school districts have the ability to preserve public assets and ensure the safety of students and staff. Nearly ten years ago, a bipartisan, bicameral legislative task force produced a report showing \$4.6 billion in unmet facilities needs for Minnesota school districts. Taking into account investments made since then and accounting for inflation, the unmet facilities needs for Minnesota schools remains at the same \$4.6 billion figure that was identified in 1999.

It is time to take stock of our priorities. Minnesota earned its reputation as "the state that works" by meeting these challenges head on and by making strategic investments in our human capital. We can no longer live off the blood, sweat and tears of previous generations. AMSD board members stand ready to work with the governor and legislators to restore our commitment to public education.

AMSD's 2008 Legislative Platform can be viewed at [www.amsd.org](http://www.amsd.org).

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

## Cost indices study

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Ms. Lofgren's findings are consistent with the recommendations included in a report conducted by Augenblick, Palaich and Associates for P.S. Minnesota. The APA report notes that, "it is widely recognized that cost of living differences can have a significant impact on the ability of school districts to provide equivalent education services."

AMSD will continue to keep this issue at the forefront of our discussions with state policymakers. A Legislative Funding Task Force is currently studying the P.S. Minnesota report and developing recommendations to present to the Legislature.

Ms. Lofgren's full report can be found on the AMSD web site at <http://www.amsd.org>. Her report (and many others) are located in the research section of our site.

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**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