

AMSD Calendar

OCTOBER 12, 2007

Board of Directors

Meeting, 7 a.m.

TIES Building, St. Paul

Guest speaker: Emily Lawrence, Legislative Director Office of Congresswoman Betty McCollum

NOVEMBER 9, 2007

Executive/Legislative

Meeting, 7 a.m.

TIES Building, St. Paul

NOVEMBER 16, 2007

Board of Directors

Meeting, 7 a.m.

TIES Building, St. Paul

SAVE THE DATE!

JANUARY 23, 2008

AMSD Winter

Conference,

Roseville Radisson

"Addressing the Achievement Gap After Seattle and Louisville"

AMSD's Mission

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



**Association of
Metropolitan School Districts**

Edina Public Schools reaches out to Somalis



Mary Streier, a school readiness coordinator for Edina Public Schools, spends some time playing games with Somali students during a Somali Adult and Family Literacy Outreach Program class.

District partners with community

Several years ago, Mary Streier, a school readiness coordinator, noticed a slight increase of Somali students at the Edina Family Center, but not enough to account for Edina's growing Somali population. She and other English Language Learners (ELL) teachers attempted to adjust the disproportion by stuffing the backpacks of Somali students with Early Childhood information.

Time passed and enrollment rates did not change. It became clear to Streier that a complex set of socioeconomic issues underscored the low enrollment she was witnessing in the classroom. She identified three core barriers rifting Somali families from the community and the school district: communication, transportation and limited financial resources. Using this knowledge as her blueprints, Streier began sketching what would become the Somali Adult and Family Literacy Outreach Program (SAFLOP).

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From the Chair

In real estate, "location, location, location," is often touted as the most important aspect of a home's value and a commonly held assumption is that the desirability of a certain location has a lot to do with that location's school district. In fact, that assumption is backed up by several national studies and surveys.

The 2004 National Association of Realtors® Profile of Home Buyers and Sellers showed that one in five Americans bought in a specific neighborhood because of the quality of the schools in that neighborhood. The idea that the quality of public schools has an influence on where people choose to buy homes isn't just anecdotal and neither is the real value that good schools add to homes. In fact, each 5 percent increase in student test scores equals a 2.5 percent jump in housing prices, according to UCLA economist Sandra E. Black in her 1997 study, "Do Better Schools Matter? Parental Valuation of Elementary Education."

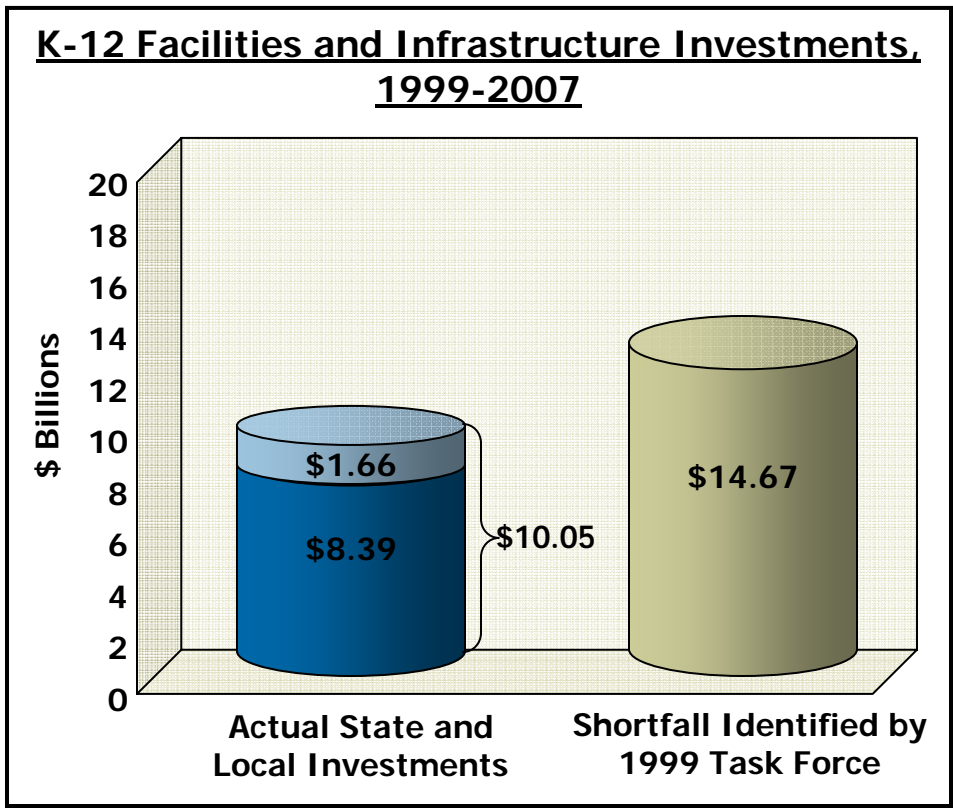
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School facilities needs estimated at \$4.6 billion

For the last two months, the state of our public infrastructure has assumed a justifiably heightened place in discussions among federal, state and local policymakers. In their most recent report card of American infrastructure, the American Society of Civil Engineers gave the nation's bridges a "C" grade, noting that the cost of eliminating bridge deficiencies is \$9.4 billion per year for the coming 20 years. The same report awarded U.S. schools a "D" grade, noting that deferred maintenance in our schools nationwide has been estimated as high as \$268 billion.

Minnesota lawmakers have, with mixed success, attempted to address the issue of school district infrastructure before. Programs including operating capital, alternative facilities and deferred maintenance are evidence of these efforts. Still, the magnitude and continuity of the necessary investment begs for much bolder action by our state policymakers.

Nearly ten years ago, a bipartisan, bicameral legislative task force studied the projected demands for public school infrastructure. The K-12 Facilities and Infrastructure Task Force produced a report in January, 1999 and cited research released by the then-Department of Children, Families and Learning, which found a \$4.6 billion unmet facility need in the coming ten years. The report recommended steps including additional funds for the operating capital program, an increase in the debt ser-



vice equalization factors, and expanding participation in the alternative bonding program.

While incremental progress has been made in these areas, the size and scope of unmet facilities needs remains unchanged after adjusting for inflation.

AMSD analysis shows that State policy changes have resulted in significant state and local investments in K-12 infrastructure since 1999 – about \$1.6 billion - but has still fallen well short of the task force recommendations. After accounting for the impact of inflation since 1999, unmet facilities needs for Min-

nesota schools remains at the same \$4.6 billion figure that was identified in 1999.

The good news is that \$4.6 billion in 2007 dollars is a smaller amount than \$4.6 billion in 1999 dollars. The bad news is that this is a conservative analysis. The reality is that ignoring or delaying deferred maintenance compounds costs at an alarming rate, much faster than the rate of inflation used in this analysis. It is very likely that the cost of restoring school infrastructure to safe, functional use is even greater than the \$4.6 billion this analysis indicates.

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

Instructor co-writes grant to help immigrants adjust

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Bridging the gap required a fusion of resources.

"I could not do it alone," Streier emphasized. "A specific program that addressed all three barriers was essential to meeting the needs of the Somali community."

Streier partnered with Valerie Burke, a family services collaborative coordinator for the Edina Resource Center, and Mary Jo Bayliss of Volunteer Connections. Streier and Bayliss co-wrote a grant to the Edina Community Council. Once approved, the grant would help immigrants adjust to their new communities.

After the Community Council approved the grant, Streier eliminated the problem of transportation by scheduling classes at a community room in Park Apartments, a building heavily populated by Somalis. However, Streier still had doubts about SAFLOP's success.

"Communication was a big concern," she admits. "I did not know how to make the Somali community aware of the program."

Around this time, Streier met and quickly partnered with a Somali

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**Mary Streier
School Readiness
Coordinator**

woman who was eager to serve as an interpreter. The two took their efforts door-to-door and personally asked Somali tenants if they would attend SAFLOP classes.

"I just kept knocking and asking the same question over and over again: 'Are you interested?'" Streier says with a laugh.

They were interested. SAFLOP currently hosts bi-weekly classes that are well attended. A variety of organizations have collaborated to develop a helpful syllabus for participants. Trained volunteers teach ELL classes. The Edina Family Center contributes its time and talent

through parent-education and early childhood classes. In addition, the Edina Resource Center serves as a powerful ambassador by providing adults with information on how to do everything from apply for a library card to establish citizenship. Pre-school enrollment among Somali students is now on the rise thanks to a scholarship that allows qualifying families a reduced rate.

SAFLOP's core mission is to assist immigrant families and ease a difficult transition. Over the next couple of years, Streier hopes to expand the program.

"We need additional teachers, staff members and funds to keep this going over the next couple of years," Streier explained.

A simple question about enrollment has led Streier to her life's work.

"I see people's lives change, and that is really gratifying work," she said. "I just love being a part of this global village."

This month's member spotlight was submitted by Jolene Goldade, Communications Manager for Edina Public Schools.

From the chair: Link between school quality and increase in real estate values is affirmed in several academic studies

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Black's innovative research isolated the value parents place on school quality and has shaped subsequent studies on the influence the quality of schools has on housing values. In 2003, Thomas J. Kane of UCLA, Douglas O. Staiger of Dartmouth College, and Gavin Samms of Kennedy School of Government used Black's modeling technique and

found that there is an 18 to 25 percentage point difference in value between a home assigned to a school in the bottom 5 percent versus on in the top 5 percent. ("School Accountability Ratings and Housing Values," January 2003.)

The correlation between school quality and home values is one of many arguments in favor of the passage of school referendums. The

research is clear that maintaining strong schools with quality educational programs enhances home values. Whether or not a homeowner has a child in the school system, supporting local school referenda is a sound investment.

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