

## AMSD Calendar

SEPTEMBER 12, 2008

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

OCTOBER 3, 2008

Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting,  
7:30 a.m., TIES Building, St. Paul

OCTOBER 10, 2008

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

October 17, 2008

7th Annual Education Summit

Sponsored by the Alliance for Student Achievement  
8 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., St. Paul River Centre  
[www.rivercentre.org](http://www.rivercentre.org)

OCTOBER 23-24, 2008

Institute on Race and Poverty Conference

Region: Law, Policy and the Future of the Twin Cities  
U of M Law School, Walter Mondale Hall, Room 25, Minneapolis

## AMSD's Mission

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



Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts

## Opportunities await gifted students at Inver Grove Heights Community Schools



Salem Hills Elementary School is not an average educational setting. Located in one of District 199's three elementary schools is Atheneum; a gifted magnet program for qualified students in grades two through five.

"Seven years ago when we started Atheneum, there were no other programs of its kind," said Erin Boltik, Able Learner Coordinator. "The program has found much success and neighboring districts have taken notice. Currently there are three similar programs in Minnesota that have modeled an educational program after Atheneum."

Atheneum's instructional system ensures a daily delivery of challenging differentiated curriculum in all core areas. Using district-adopted standards as a point of departure, the program provides a well-rounded and rigorous academic experience by incorporating a wide variety of resources. Helping students understand what it means to be gifted is an ongoing aspect of Atheneum. Students spend time exploring a variety of social issues that are associated with giftedness. There is a strong message that being gifted is not a cause for pride but rather to find pride in using one's gifts in a positive and productive way.

A number of factors are taken into account when identifying gifted and talented students in Inver Grove Heights. Students are never placed based on one test score, nor are they ever denied services based on a single assessment. Beginning in the second grade, all district students are evaluated for Atheneum. In all other grades, students can be recommended by a teacher, parent, or through peer- or self-nomination for placement consideration.

## From the Chair

The release of the latest Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results has initiated discussions among legislators, parents, students and the education community. Minnesota has a very aggressive plan to insure that all students meet NCLB proficiency standards by 2014. With nearly half of the schools not making adequate yearly progress (AYP), we are left wondering how the 2014 standard will be met. Parents are trying to understand how their "award winning" school is now on a list that implies that the school is failing.

When you peel back the layers of the AYP results you will find that the vast majority of schools in this state are doing a wonderful job educating students. In many cases with schools not making AYP, one subgroup did not meet the defined standard. For example, a subgroup of special education or Limited English Proficiency students could have come up just short of the proficiency standards on the reading or math test causing the whole school and the entire district to be labeled as not meeting AYP.

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued on page 3)

# Proper funding and student achievement go hand-in-hand

Two topics sure to dominate education policy discussions over the next several months are the “New Minnesota Miracle” proposal and the recent NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress results. The two issues are closely linked.

As more and more schools are identified as not making AYP under the federal No Child Left Behind accountability system, the need to reform our education funding system and invest in programs that target at-risk learners becomes clearer and clearer.

## The New Minnesota Miracle

The original Minnesota Miracle in 1971 addressed public concerns over increasing property taxes and disparate funding levels for schools. The state took over more responsibility for properly funding education and, at least initially, funding increased dramatically.

Over the past 37 years the state’s commitment to funding education has resembled a roller coaster with highs and far too many lows. Since the state abolished the general education levy and assumed a greater responsibility for funding education in 2003, education funding per pupil has actually declined by 4.4 percent on an inflation-adjusted basis. In addition, the funding system has grown increasingly complex and outdated.

In the last few years there have been a number of studies conducted to determine the level of funding that is required to give all students a chance to achieve state and federal performance expectations. A common theme from these efforts is that the current system is inadequate and in need of reform.

The New Minnesota Miracle would simplify and stabilize the funding system while investing in programs that have a proven track record in assisting at-risk students enhance their achievement. The proposal would increase the basic per pupil formula to a level that would cover the “average” student’s basic instructional needs. In addition, the proposal calls for fully funding the state’s share of special education costs, targeting resources to English Language Learners and students in poverty, and accounting for cost differentials that are outside the control of local school districts such as market-based labor costs. In other words, the proposal would allow school districts to target resources and enhance learning opportunities for the students that are not currently making adequate yearly progress and the state’s assessments.

On average AMSD districts would see the following changes:

Funding Component	Increase
Basic Revenue	26.0%
Total General Ed w/Referendum	26.7%

To see how your individual district would be impacted follow this link: <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/fiscal/files/hf4178.xls>

The total cost of the New Minnesota Miracle is estimated to be more than \$1.7 billion. It is, however, designed in a way that allows it to be phased in over time to recognize the realities of the state budget. The proposal provides a blueprint for modernizing Minnesota’s education funding system and restoring our reputation as a national leader in education.

## Adequate Yearly Progress Results

As each year goes by more schools are being identified as not making adequate yearly progress. There are a number of factors contributing to this increase including a major change in 2007 that lowered the threshold for the number of students in a subgroup required for identification. Previously, 32 defined subgroups needed to have at least 40 students to be included in the analysis; in 2007 the group size was reduced to 20.

In 2008, 937 Minnesota schools failed to make AYP: 426 of these schools had only one subgroup fail Math or Reading tests. In some cases if one student in one subgroup fails, the school is reported as not making AYP.

The change in subgroup size disproportionately affects larger districts. Larger districts are much more likely to have more subgroups large enough in individual schools to meet the threshold of 20. In other words, larger schools and school districts have more subgroups that must meet the ever rising benchmarks.

Not Making AYP			
Schools	2007	2008	Increase
7 County Metro Area	42.8%	58.1%	15.2%
Out State>2,000 pupils	39.1%	51.4%	12.2%
Out State<2,000 pupils	27.2%	35.4%	8.2%

(Continued on page 3)

## From the Chair: Reporting system flawed

(Continued from Page 1)

Local communities need to understand these anomalies and the fact that these are “high stakes” tests. Projections show that in the next few years nearly every school in the state will find itself identified as not meeting AYP.

So, what’s a parent to do? Well, as a board member I have learned that the main concern I hear expressed from parents is: How is “my” school doing at educating “my” student? I feel that my purpose is to insure that every student is provided the best possible learning environment allowing them to reach their fullest potential. This approach seems to run contrary to the way AYP reporting is structured.

A better measure of educational performance is how much each student has learned. Currently, there is a great deal of discussion about measuring student growth. Parents want to know that their student is “smarter” at the end of the year than when they started. They expect that 1 year of school should impart 1 year, or more, of growth on the path of learning.

The state, and parents, would be much better served by a reporting system that quantified the ability of our educational systems to effectively insure all students reach their full potential. That would be true accountability.

*Pat Gleason, school board member from Wayzata, is chair of the Association of Metropolitan School Districts.*

## Research: Trend supports funding needs *Schools not making AYP to reach 80% by 2014*

(Continued from Page 2)

Because of this change many more schools, and districts are now identified as not making AYP. The chart below shows AMSD schools for the past 3 years:

AMSD Schools			
Year	Insufficient Data	Making AYP	Not Making AYP
2006	22	301	140
2007	24	220	215
2008	4	156	277

If one subgroup in one school in a district is identified as not making AYP the entire district is listed as not making AYP. Currently, nearly 90 percent of AMSD districts are not making AYP.

AMSD Districts		
Year	Making AYP	Not Making AYP
2006	12	16
2007	11	17
2008	3	25

Most expect this trend to continue. In 2004, a report by the state auditor predicted that more than 80 percent of the state’s elementary schools will not be making AYP by 2014. Each year the passing score required is higher and the percentage of students expected to meet that score is increased.

If schools are to provide the highest quality of education for all students, proper funding is a must. The “New Minnesota Miracle” proposal will give districts the resources they need to help all students reach their highest potential.

AMSD wishes to congratulate this year’s  
**Friend of Public Education Award recipients:**

**Rep. John Benson Rep. Carol McFarlane Sen. Kathy Saltzman**

**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, TIES, Wayzata, West Metro Education Program, and West St. Paul

# Accelerated program allows gifted students to stretch ability

(Continued from Page 1)

Atheneum students are open to the challenges presented to them on a daily basis.

“In Atheneum you get to learn higher-level things,” said one student. “For example, in third grade we get to dissect a sheep’s brain!”

The Atheneum staff understand the educational needs of gifted students and provide an environment that celebrates curiosity, self-direction and a love of learning.

“I feel much better in Atheneum,” said a fourth-grader. “Everyone else is at your same level so you get to do harder things and think, “Wow!””

When students enter Inver Grove Heights Middle School, they are given the option of continuing their paths of gifted learning. The middle school accepts all Atheneum students into all honors courses: Reading, Language, Math, History and Science. This determination is based on the overall academic abilities as represented by a variety of testing data that has been collected for each student.

Students outside of the Atheneum program when reaching fifth grade are offered a Cognitive Abilities Test to identify those who have strengths and talents in specific academic areas. Students who show a need for an



**Atheneum staff provide an environment that celebrates curiosity, self-direction and a love of learning.**

accelerated pace and advanced content are placed in appropriate honors sections along with Atheneum students.

In addition, the district provides a variety of enrichment activities outside of the classroom setting. Word Masters, Math Masters, Peer Leadership Group, Destination ImagiNation and Thinking Cap’s Quiz Bowl are just a few samples of the extracurricular activities for District 199’s gifted students.

Atheneum is the reality born from the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson. “No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.”

Atheneum removes the ceiling of grade level curriculum and instruction and allows students who are ready to take off the chance to rise to higher levels of learning.

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*“I feel much better in Atheneum. Everyone else is at your same level so you get to do harder things and think, “Wow!””*

**Fourth grade student**

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