

AMSD

CONNECTIONS

News and Updates from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

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AMSD Calendar

April 17, 2009

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

April 22, 2009

Legislative Committee
Deadline to Act on
Omnibus Appropriation
and Tax Bills

April 24, 2009

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

May 1, 2009

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

May 7, 2009

Conference Committee
Deadline to Report
Omnibus Appropriation
and Tax Bills to the
Floor

AMSD's Mission

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



Association of
Metropolitan School Districts

Hybrid courses that teach tech savvy skills gaining in popularity



Bloomington's Jefferson High School is now offering a class in which students attend a combination of traditional classes and internet instruction.

New Bloomington class is part "virtual," part traditional classroom instruction

Bloomington Jefferson High School students are gaining an edge on 21st Century skills, but they are learning in cyberspace, rather than sitting inside a classroom.

Jefferson has adapted the traditional classroom setting with a new type of course where students have the option of sitting in class for part of the week and spending the rest of "class time" engaged online, whether at school or home, in the library or the local coffee shop.

These "hybrid" courses were initiated to familiarize students with the latest in technological communication including blogs, wikis, social networking communities and Web sites. They help to prepare the young minds of today for a technologically advanced and demanding society of tomorrow, while including components of face-to-face

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From the Chair

AMSD's work at the capitol has been extremely challenging this year. As lawmakers have struggled to balance the budget, we have encouraged them to take a long-term approach – funding education as a strategy to help Minnesota emerge from the economic crisis being felt around the nation.

We will soon have all of the budget proposals on the table. Governor Pawlenty proposed increased funding for education by expanding the Q Comp program and implementing a "pay for progress" component to the funding formula. The Senate has proposed a "share the pain" approach to balancing the budget that cuts funding for all state programs by seven percent. Even with the offsets from the federal stimulus funding, the Senate bill cuts funding for education by \$273 per pupil (ADM) in FY 2010 and \$272 per pupil in FY 2011. The House plan will be unveiled next week and is expected to hold education funding flat by making extensive use of aid payment and property tax recognition shifts.

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The testing debate: Measuring graduation readiness

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002, states and school districts throughout the country have worked toward meeting the requirement that all students achieve proficiency on state assessments. Several questions have generated a great deal of discussion across the country. What does it mean to be proficient? Should a single test determine whether or not a student is granted a diploma? How do we best measure student progress?

Minnesota is no exception. Debate this legislative session has centered on the current Graduation-Required Assessment for Diploma (GRAD) test. Assessment experts predict that a large portion of the 2010 graduating class will not pass either the math or reading GRAD test, and, therefore, not be granted a diploma. Under current state law, even if the student has met all other state and local requirements and has a strong grade point average, he or she cannot be granted a diploma unless the GRAD has been passed.

Educational accountability and testing are always hot topics, and this year is no exception. There seems to be a consensus that changes to the GRAD assessment are needed and, in fact, an agreement has been reached on a short-term solution to address the fear that a large number of students would be denied a diploma next year. However, Governor Pawlenty has indicated he will not support changes to the current GRAD test unless agreement is reached on a long-term solution to replace the GRAD.

The business community continues to lobby for a high stakes test as a requirement for graduation. The AMSD Board of Directors has adopted the position that there should be multiple paths for a student to earn a diploma and a single test should not determine whether or not a student graduates from high school. The current system where the math GRAD is not given until 11th grade is particularly onerous as a student who fails that exam has little time for remediation before the end of his or her senior year.

End-of-course exams are being explored as one part of a possible solution. Another topic getting some discussion is computer adaptive testing. Like most assessment issues, there are advantages and disadvantages to each of these proposals.

On March 23, the MDE brought together representatives from four states: Idaho, Massachusetts, Virginia, and Oregon. This group includes two states (MA and VA) with end-of-course exams and two states (OR and ID) with computer adaptive tests. Much of the full day's

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End-of-Course Assessment	
PRO	CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students tested at end of course while material is still fresh. Closely aligned with state standards. Measures quality and consistency of courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May increase testing time. Not well suited for English classes. Requires financial investment to create new tests.

Computer Adaptive Assessment	
PRO	CON
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test adapts to individual students. Provides nearly immediate feedback of results. Allows for more detailed analysis of student strengths and weaknesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased demand on computer labs. Requires large "item" bank (questions). It is challenging to have these approved for NCLB requirements.

States Currently Administering End-of-Course Assessments	
College and Career Readiness Courses	Introductory Courses Only
AR, CA, HI, IN, NY, OK, UT, VA	GA, LA, MD, MS, MA, NC, SC, TN

States Planning End-of-Course Assessments	
College and Career Readiness Courses	Introductory Courses Only
AZ, CT, KY, MD*, MA*, MI, NJ, MN, OH, PA, RI, TX	DE, FL, MO, WV, WA

* In addition to their current end-of-course assessments, MD and MA are planning college and career ready end-of-course assessments in Algebra 2.

Research: Assessment tests

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discussion revolved around the challenges involved in implementing the new assessments.

Across the country, end-of-course exams seem to be gaining momentum with 16 states currently utilizing them and another 17 planning to do so.

One thing is clear. It is hard to find one assessment solution that will meet all the competing interests involved in educational accountability. The debate will certainly continue for some time. In the end, which testing format is used will likely be less important than how we, as a state, answer these questions:

- What is the “cut score” for passing?
- What happens to those who do not pass the test?
- Do we allow an alternative path to a diploma?
- How much remediation will be provided?
- Are we going to allow locally elected school boards to exercise local control?
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Proposals are being discussed at the legislature to address the immediate concerns with the GRAD test as well as a long-term solution. We will continue to monitor this issue and provide updates as needed.

From the Chair: Action needed now as '09 session nearing its end

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It is critical that AMSD board members educate their staff, parents and concerned citizens about the proposed budget plans and the impact budget cuts would have on our schools. Over the next few weeks, the Governor and legislators will be making decisions that will have a tremendous impact on our schools' ability to offer a quality education. Whether it is funding, mandate relief, a mandatory health insurance pool, deciding which students can be granted a diploma, etc., legislators will be making decisions that impact our students. We have to make our voices heard in order to ensure that short term solutions don't affect our long-term ability to provide an excellent education for Minnesota students.

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

Bloomington courses can be tailored to student's needs

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instruction. The course format is becoming increasingly popular with some schools across the nation adapting entirely to a hybrid concept.

Hybrid courses were first adopted last year and offered to sophomores, juniors and seniors. They have become a huge success, according to John Weisser, technology coordinator at Jefferson, and the point person in developing hybrid courses.

Weisser said, “Hybrids break the barriers traditional schools get criticized for with too much seat time, and offer a logical alternative for education that is happening anywhere, at any time.”

Weisser expects hybrid courses will become more popular at Jefferson with more traditional courses converting to a hybrid format. Currently, the 1,700-student high school offers eight hybrid courses in all major subject areas, including Language Arts, Math, Media, Art and Science.

Elizabeth Boeser, a Jefferson teacher, has had tremendous success with the new courses.

“Hybrid courses are tailored to every kind of learners' needs, and most students who have taken one or more hybrid course have really appreciated them. The online based format also lends itself the opportunity for me to spend more time with individual students both inside and outside of the classroom giving my students a greater opportunity for success in school,” said Boeser.

Boeser is a semifinalist for the 2009 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Award, one of the most prestigious recognition programs to honor excellence in education. Ten finalists were selected in late March, and the teacher of the year will be announced May 1.

This month's member feature was submitted by Rick J. Kaufman, Executive Director of Community Relations, Bloomington Public Schools.

AMSD Members: Anoka-Hennepin, Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Burnsville, Columbia Heights, Eastern Carver County, 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 (Associate Member), Wayzata, West Metro Education Program, and West St. Paul