

August 2009  
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## AMSD Calendar

**August 13, 2009**

**Board of Directors Meeting**, 4:30 p.m., Northland Inn, Brooklyn Park

**August 21, 2009**

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

**September 11, 2009**

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

**September 25, 2009**

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

**October 2, 2009**

**Board of Directors 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**

## Citizen Think Tank

### Blue Ribbon Panel of West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools



**A Moreland Elementary student shows Superintendent Jay Haugen how they are using iPod touches in the classroom to learn about history, science, math and more.**

In the midst of planning a community engagement process to address a budget shortfall for the 2009-10 school year, the West St. Paul–Mendota Heights–Eagan Area Schools felt they also needed to gather community input on the long-term needs of the district.

“We had done a lot of studying on our own, through surveys and focus groups, but most of that was focused on short-term issues,” said Superintendent Jay Haugen. “We were looking for a way to engage the public in looking into the future, knowing that today’s students will face a very different world than the one we live in today and our schools have the responsibility of preparing them for it.”

Given the current realities facing the district -- economic climate, enrollment trends, increasing demands for school accountability and student achievement – the decision was made to establish a citizen group to research and study future directions for the district. In the fall of 2008, Haugen proposed a Blue Ribbon Panel to study a variety

## From the Chair

As summer winds down and we prepare for the start of another school year, I’d like to thank AMSD board members for the opportunity to serve as your chair. It has been an honor and privilege to work with a group of highly dedicated professionals who constantly strive to provide our students with the programs and opportunities they need to succeed in our ever changing world.

To say the past year has been interesting would be a major understatement! Last fall we witnessed a historic election at the federal level and at the local level we saw the vast majority of our members districts’ referendum requests succeed. It was heartening to see our citizens reaffirm their commitment to our public schools. The polls continue to show that Minnesotans support public education and want to see their schools adequately funded.

We faced daunting challenges throughout the legislative session as state policymakers wrestled with an enormous budget shortfall. While it is difficult to feel good about flat funding

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# New Hamline Study Confirms Regional Cost Differences

A recent study by the Hamline University School of Business confirms that school districts located in different regions of the state face varying cost pressures based on differences in regional labor markets. The study, *Regional Cost of Living Differences and Education Spending – An Exploratory Analysis*, looked at a number of factors in Minnesota education finance including how education funding compares to other state programs, the impact of inflation on school district budgets, as well as regional cost pressures.

The study of regional cost pressures used National Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data to analyze regional cost-of-living comparisons across Minnesota. The methodology was based on the BEA estimates of place-to-place price indexes in a November 2008 Survey of Current Business. Using this data the study looks at the differences in regional price levels called regional price parities (RPPs). The study looked at how Minnesota compares to other states throughout the country as well as the how costs vary across Minnesota.

On the whole, Minnesota has a slightly lower cost-of-living than the national average. However, the Twin Cities metropolitan area’s cost of living index is virtually at the national average. The table below shows RPP data for 2005 & 2006:

An alternative approach, the Comparable Wage Index, (CWI) was developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The basic premise of the CWI is that all workers demand higher wages in areas with a higher cost of living or a lack of amenities. By matching Minnesota school districts with local labor market areas, or Metropolitan Statistical Area’s (MSA), the Hamline study identifies the disparities across the state (see table on page 3).

Geographic Area	2005	2006
United States	100.0	100.0
Minnesota	97.5	92.6
Minnesota – Non-Metropolitan		74.6
Minnesota – Metropolitan		97.2
Duluth MN-WI	76.5	74.4
Fargo ND-MN	87.6	95.3
Grand Forks ND-MN	82.1	83.0
La Crosse WI-MN	88.5	86.4
Minneapolis – St. Paul – Bloomington	105.9	99.7
Rochester	95.3	93.8
St. Cloud	89.8	86.8

The Hamline study confirms previous research in this area and supports the need to move forward with establishing a Location Equity Index as has been proposed in the *New Minnesota Miracle* legislation. The data is very clear that Minnesota has distinct wage differences across the state. Delivering k-12 education is a very labor intensive business and higher wages directly translate into higher costs.

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

## From the Chair: Challenges Ahead

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- which is resulting in another round of painful budget cuts for our schools – there is little doubt that the outcome could have been even more painful. AMSD staff and board members played a critical role in staving off cuts to education, enacting legislation that reduces mandates, enhances oversight of charter schools, implements a growth model and provides an alternative path to graduation for students who do not pass the math GRAD. Most significantly, we worked together to advocate for the **New Minnesota Miracle** funding reform legislation and saw it come within an eyelash of passing!

With another major budget shortfall facing the state, it will be more important than ever that AMSD board members develop a unified message to take to our state policy-makers. We need to take that message to our school staff, our parents and interested community members to help them engage in the process and educate our legislators about the challenges facing our schools. By working together we will greatly increase the chances that we can finally move the **New Minnesota Miracle** legislation forward and provide our students with the resources and programs they need to succeed.

Finally, I need to express my gratitude to Scott Croonquist and the AMSD staff for the hard work they do on our behalf and for making this past year so interesting and non-stressful for me.

*Pat Gleason, school board member from Wayzata, is chair of AMSD.*

## Citizen Group Looks at Future of District

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of issues including possible grade configuration, building capacity and educational programming that best prepares students for a competitive global society.

By definition, the term Blue Ribbon Panel is used to describe a group of individuals appointed to investigate or study a given question – in this case, what the West St. Paul – Mendota Heights – Eagan Area Schools should look like in the future. Given that such panels generally have a degree of independence from the governing structure of an organization and as such have no direct authority of their own, the district's Blue Ribbon Panel on the Future of Our Schools operated without influence by district administration or school board. The value of the panel came from the expertise of its members and its issuance of findings or recommendations, which then could be used by district decision-makers at a later date.

In the end, the district's Blue Ribbon Panel, a 16-member advisory team comprised of parents and other community members, worked to identify the challenges and opportunities facing the West St. Paul – Mendota Heights – Eagan Area Schools in its efforts to be competitive and a school of choice in the area.

According to Superintendent Jay Haugen, the Blue Ribbon Panel was more about engaging the community to study an issue, not necessarily coming to specific recommendations.

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## Research: Data shows distinct wage differences across state

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The failure of the current funding formula to recognize these cost differences has resulted in metropolitan school districts being extremely reliant on voter approved operating referenda. It is critical that state policymakers address this inequity and move away from the current situation where metro school districts' ability to offer basic educational programs to their students is dependent upon passing an operating referendum.

Cost indexes for 2005				
MSA	RPP	Relative to State Average	CWI	Relative to State Average
<b>Minneapolis – St. Paul – Bloomington</b> Counties: Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott, Sherburne, Washington, Wright	105.9	108.6%	1.3054	106.8%
<b>Rochester, MN</b> Counties: Dodge, Olmsted, Wabasha	95.3	97.7%	1.2901	105.5%
<b>St. Cloud, MN</b> Counties: Starns	89.8	92.1%	1.1616	95.0%
<b>La Crosse, WI-MN</b> Counties: Houston	88.5	90.8%	1.1568	94.6%
<b>Duluth, MN-WI</b> Counties: Carlton, St. Louis	78.5	80.5%	1.1197	91.6%
<b>Fargo, ND – MN</b> Counties: Clay	87.6	89.8%	1.0739	87.8%
<b>Grand Forks, ND-MN</b> Counties: Polk	82.1	84.2%	1.013	82.9%

# Panel Engages Community in Planning for the Future

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“Such decisions will come later once the school board and district administration have an opportunity to explore the Panel’s findings and compare it with other data we’ve collected over the past year,” says Haugen.

To that end, the school board is planning to discuss the panel’s findings, along with a recent community survey and other data, at an upcoming work-session in August. This information, along with a recently developed strategic roadmap and measures for improvement, will guide the Board’s discussion with district leaders in charting a course for the future.

## Membership

The 16-member Blue Ribbon Panel was assembled through an open application process held in December 2008. Membership was selected to ensure wide representation of the district community and an interest in moving the district forward. In an effort to maintain its independence from district administration, the panel was led and facilitated by two citizen co-chairs, one a resident and retired district principal, the other a city councilwoman and longtime resident and community volunteer.

*“Rarely do we ask our community to act like a think tank, to think big.”*

**Jay Haugen**  
**Superintendent of Schools**

## Process

The Panel met six times from January through June, with each session lasting approximately two hours in length. The first sessions were devoted mostly to “learning.” Panel members shared their perceptions and assumptions about the district. They matched their individual and collective perceptions/assumptions against district data. They also heard a presentation for a local expert about innovative school models from around the country and state. Through these presentations and conversations, members learned about real challenges facing the future of the district, including – stagnant to declining student enrollment, a competitive marketplace, changing demographics, the achievement gap, limited resources, excess building capacity at some levels, lack of specific brand identity, and the need to remain relevant in today’s educational environment to ensure all learners are prepared for a changing world.

Panel members also learned on their own time between meetings. They were able to download district reports and

find additional information about innovative schools on the panel’s wiki website. They shared articles and podcasts from nationally recognized educational leaders and advocates for innovative reform, and held discussions online about non-traditional school offerings and opportunities for student learning.

Following the learning sessions, the panel engaged in scenario exercises where small groups were tasked with creating a vision, structure and instructional program for a fictional school district given a set of parameters. The final meetings were devoted to exploring, analyzing, and evaluating different configurations and program ideas. Panel members synthesized what they learned about district realities and what they learned about possible innovative programming into three key themes recommended for future study – preparing students for a global economy; meeting the needs of a diverse student population; and configuring schools and using facilities effectively and efficiently.

“There were some in the district who were expecting the Blue Ribbon Panel to come up with specific strategies or recommendation, such as closing a certain school or add a certain program,” said Superintendent Jay Haugen. “But in the end, that was not the charge of the panel nor was it realistic given the time they spent together [six meetings].”

Haugen believes the panel was a great first step to engage the community in planning for the future.

“It’s difficult to gather a group of concerned community members together and basically say, ‘here is some data, what should we do?’ Usually we have a specific outcome or goal in mind – like identifying a school for closure or what magnet school focus should be developed – but rarely do we just ask our community to act like a think tank, to think big.”

The approach, while perhaps different from traditional school district community engagement activities, seemed to leave a positive impression on panel members as well.

“Having a Blue Ribbon Panel to get community input was an innovative idea and makes [the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools] stand out from other districts,” said panelist Isis Buchanan. “I think that reaching out to the community for input shows that the district values doing whatever it takes to meet the needs of all learners.”

*This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Susan Brott, Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools.*