

# CONNECTIONS

News and Updates from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

## AMSD Calendar

**November 4, 2008**  
**Election Day!**

Don't forget to vote

**November 7, 2008**  
**Executive/Legislative**  
**Committee Meeting,**  
7:30 a.m., TIES Building,  
St. Paul

**November 14, 2008**  
**Board of Directors**  
**Meeting,**  
7 a.m., TIES Building, St. Paul

**December 5, 2008**  
**Executive/Legislative**  
**Committee Meeting,**  
7:30 a.m., TIES Building,  
St. Paul

**December 19, 2008**  
**Board of Directors**  
**Meeting/Legislative**  
**Session Preview**  
8 a.m., TIES Building, St. Paul

**Save the Date!**  
**January 26, 2009**  
**AMSD Winter**  
**Conference,**  
8 a.m., TIES Building,  
St. Paul. Further details  
coming soon.

## AMSD's Mission

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



**Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts**

## Minneapolis residents to vote on Strong Schools/City referendum



**Minneapolis Public Schools has a goal of preparing every student for college. Passage of an operating levy is necessary to continue current programs and implement strategies to drive achievement.**

The Minneapolis Public Schools district is one of 52 statewide putting forth an operating levy this election season in an economic climate that challenges city residents to examine their values and priorities. District staff have been focused on the crucial task of providing the public with accurate information about the proposed referendum.

Currently, Minneapolis Public Schools receive \$30 million per year in property tax revenue from a referendum passed in 2000 that will expire next year. The 2008 Strong Schools Strong City referendum, if approved, would provide Minneapolis Public Schools with \$60 million per year for eight years to help drive achievement results for all students. Funds would support education essentials to:

- Improve early reading skills so every child is reading at grade level by third grade (first you learn to read, then you read to learn).
- Enhance our math and science programs so every child is ready for algebra by eighth grade and ready for the future upon graduation.

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## From the Chair

November 4 is right around the corner and with it an opportunity to put local and state representatives in office who are committed to supporting public education. In addition, residents in several metro area school districts will also be voting on an important school operating referendum election.

I encourage everyone to do some homework prior to November 4. AMSD has created a voters' guide to serve as a resource for anyone concerned about the future of public education. The Voters' Guide can be accessed at <http://www.amsd.org>.

The 2009 legislative session will be critical for our public schools, with the state facing significant budget challenges. Who we elect on November 4 will have a tremendous impact on the outcome of the 2009 legislative session. Your active involvement in the electoral process is needed more than ever this year!

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

# Many factors contribute to stormy weather for education

Education in Minnesota has been buffeted by a series of gales over the past decade. Changing student demographics, increasing expectations, rising energy costs, and inadequate and inconsistent funding have made for rough sailing. As we look to the future it is important to understand the current climate.

## Demographics

Students of today are more likely to be non-white, receive free or reduced lunch, have limited English proficiency, and/or receive special education services. These trends have presented significant challenges as well as opportunities for our schools. (See chart at right.)

Special education, for example, began in this country with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Since IDEA's inception in 1975 the Federal government has not come close to funding this groundbreaking mandate. Similarly, the Minnesota Legislature has not proven to be a reliable partner in providing the resources necessary to meet the requirements set forth in the IDEA. The state made an effort to fulfill its funding obligation in the 2007 session but as the graph below clearly shows, this effort was short-lived. In the current year, it is projected that Minnesota school districts will

Statewide Numbers	97-98		07-08		Change
	Population	%	Population	%	
White	722,345	85.5%	630,489	76.4%	-9.1%
Non-White	122,063	14.5%	194,294	23.6%	9.1%
Free & Reduced Lunch	222,284	26.3%	262,056	31.8%	5.4%
Limited English Proficiency	26,936	3.2%	62,626	7.6%	4.4%
Special Education	93,362	11.1%	106,637	12.9%	1.9%

spend \$569 million meant for regular instruction on mandated special education services.

## Increasing Expectations

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) established unprecedented expectations for our public schools. NCLB requires that **all** public school students – students with severe disabilities, English language learners (ELL), new immigrants, etc. - test at proficient levels by the 2013-14 school year. Many experts contend that as we approach 2014, virtually every school in the country will be identified as failing to meet AYP.

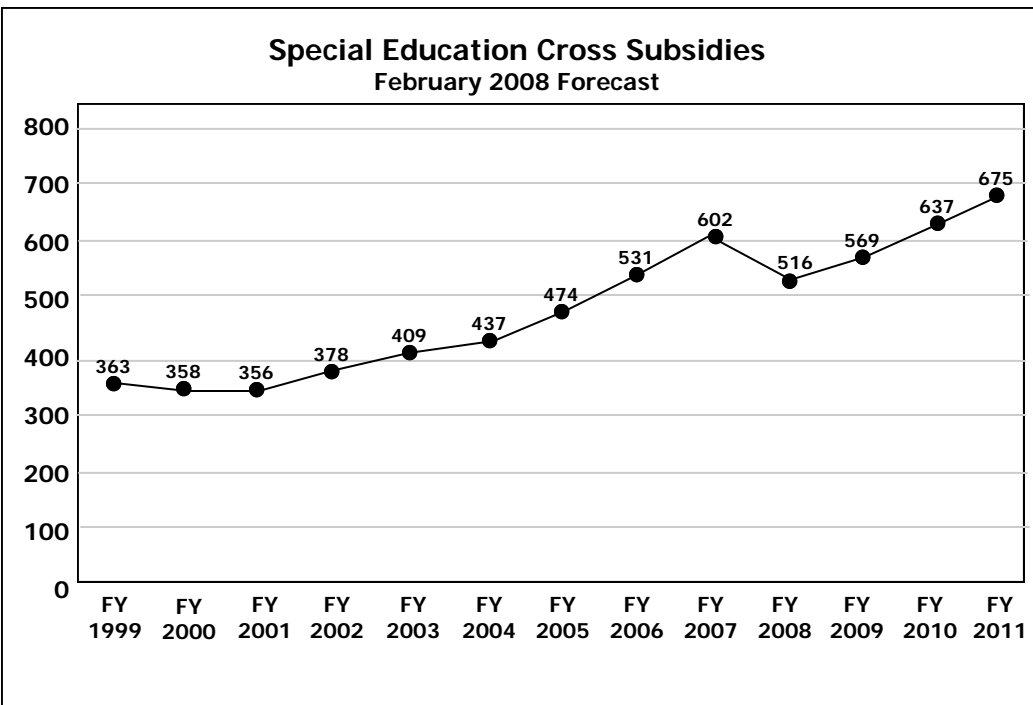
## Energy Costs

As costs rise for building utilities, and transporting students, school districts are forced to find money from existing funds. Some districts in Minnesota have seen significant budget pressures. This includes one district that now employs a 4 day week to mitigate these issues.

## State Education Funding

Education makes up a large portion of the State budget. Over the past 10 years the State has often found itself short on revenues. From 2002-2005 the net formula allowance to fund k-12

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# Minneapolis committed to high achievement for all students

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- Provide up-to-date technology and textbooks so every child has the learning materials he or she needs to succeed.
- Manage class sizes in a renewal of the last referendum.

If the referendum levy is not approved, the current levy will expire, so the district would need to cut an additional \$30 million from the annual budget – on top of other cuts needed due to other financial pressures. More cuts could mean layoffs of up to 350 teachers and class size increases of up to 10 students per classroom. It would also seriously jeopardize the district's ability to support other education essentials and implement its strategic plan.

Minneapolis district communications efforts have been focused on print, web, email and mail pieces, and the district has used a referendum website - [www.mpls.k12.mn.us/referendum](http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/referendum) - as a repository for re-

sources that schools, parent groups, neighborhood associations and other interested parties can use for their own instruction or for wider distribution. All of the district's messages focus on the core principles of the referendum request – driving achievement for all students, spending referendum dollars on education essentials, emphasizing accountability for both finances and results.

Minneapolis Public Schools had been fortunate in the enthusiasm and dedication of the independent citizens' committee organizing referendum advocacy efforts. This group mobilized hundreds of volunteers to engage daily in outreach throughout the Minneapolis community through presentations, house parties, phoning and other personal connections.

This is a time of great challenge, both locally and nationally. As a country, we are facing tough economic times. Families are worried about paying for food, gas and health care. Businesses are worried about

making payroll. Non-profits are worried about meeting the needs of their communities. The issues we face are important, and they require our best thinking.

This is also a time of progress and promise in our school districts statewide and in Minneapolis. More families are choosing to send their students to the Minneapolis Public Schools, with schools across the district successfully attracting and retaining more students than projected. Minneapolis students are doing well in some areas – winning academic awards, being profiled for their successes in the media and serving as role models for other students. Unfortunately, the district also has students who are not doing so well.

The district cannot rest until all Minneapolis Schools students are achieving at high levels and graduate ready for college.

*This month's member feature was submitted by Communications Associate Emily Lowther of Minneapolis Public Schools.*

## Research: Education funding reform could ease rough climate

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schools was frozen. This meant no increase for three years and continued belt tightening in all districts. According to Minnesota 2020, 80 percent of Minnesota school districts have seen a drop in real per pupil revenue since 2003.

### What should we expect of our State leaders?

It has been many years since state policymakers have undertaken a major overhaul of Minnesota's education funding system. The various formulas have been tweaked many times over the years to address short-term goals or political situations. Unfortunately, over the past decade it seems our policymakers have been more reactive than proactive. However, there are strong signs that the politi-

cal climate is changing. The New Minnesota Miracle proposal, developed by a bi-partisan legislative task force, offers the kind of bold, comprehensive funding reform we need.

The pressures of the past decade have caused schools to become increasingly efficient. As we move to the next decade it is critical that we work proactively to address the changing landscape in education. The New Minnesota Miracle provides an excellent map to chart a new course through the storm. In trying times it is even more important to have a clear map to a brighter future. If Minnesota is to compete in the world marketplace we must find a way to ensure school districts produce highly qualified graduates. The New Minnesota Miracle would establish the solid foundation needed to move us forward.

**AMSD Members:** Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Burnsville, 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, Wayzata, West Metro Education Program, and West St. Paul