

# AMSD

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# CONNECTIONS

News and Updates from the Association of Metropolitan School Districts

## AMSD Calendar

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

**October 23-24, 2008**  
**Region: Law, Policy and the Future of the Twin Cities**  
Sponsored by the U of M Law School's Institute on Race and Poverty in cooperation with AMSD and the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities  
U of M Law School,  
Walter Mondale Hall, Rm. 25,  
Minneapolis  
Register at [www.irpumn.org](http://www.irpumn.org)

## AMSD's Mission

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



**Association of  
Metropolitan School Districts**

## Elk River School District builds levy campaign around number

*"115" represents dollars, volunteers and volunteer hours necessary for success*

Our School Board, like many throughout Minnesota, has approved a ballot question for Nov. 4. Our request to the voters is to renew an existing levy. As the levy does not raise taxes, one could assume this is an easy sell to the voters. It isn't for us in the ISD 728 Elk River Area School District.

As Superintendent of Elk River Area Schools one of my priorities is addressing challenges from the past that are catching up to us today. These are hurdles we need to clear so we have the trust, respect and support of voters on Nov. 4.

Our challenges are numerous. Yes, we have a faltering economy that is wreaking havoc on us. We're not getting adequate funding from either the federal or state governments, yet we have mandates to meet. Many of our expenses are beyond our control, such as rising fuel and energy costs. These challenges are not any different from other districts. Where we may be different is our need to address decisions made years ago.

We have a debt service levy that will increase in the coming year. This is coming at the same time we are communicating that our levy renewal does not include new taxes! We are also working to build trust with communities that have not always respected this school district. And we are addressing inequality in the quality of our facilities...an issue that I am consistently reminded of when I am in communities with schools needing urgent upgrades.

So, what is our approach for this year's campaign?

Regardless of the outcome on Nov. 4, we are emphasizing that this election affects every student in our district.

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**Supt. Mark Bezek**

## From the Chair

The 2009 Legislative Session will be here before we know it, but there is an important date in November that will have a great impact on the session before it even starts.

On Tuesday, November 4, voters will decide who will represent them in the Minnesota House of Representatives. Many citizens will also be asked to support their local schools by voting for a school referendum question on the ballot.

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts has a tool, the Voters' Guide, to help citizens make informed choices on Election Day. The Guide can be accessed at AMSD's website, [www.amsd.org](http://www.amsd.org), and I encourage everyone to take advantage of this valuable resource. The Guide contains background information about school referendums and the New Minnesota Miracle as well as talking points and sample questions for voters to use with candidates.

Going into the session, the state will most likely be facing a budget shortfall. As a result the vote on November 4 is extremely important. First, we need to elect representatives who recog-

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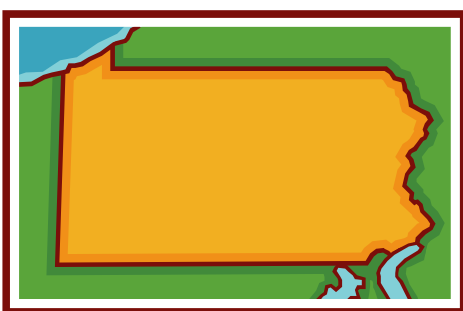
## A tale of two states...

### Adequacy study in Pennsylvania results in new funding formula; Minnesota's adequacy study recommendations in need of action

#### PENNSYLVANIA

In July 2008, Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell signed his state's new education budget. This included \$275 million (an increase of 5.5 percent) in additional basic education aid.

"Under the new formula, some districts this year could receive as much as a 20 percent increase in fund-



ing," said Gerald L. Zahorchak, Pennsylvania's Secretary of Education. The law assures that no school district will get less than a 3 percent boost.

"The formula change is the most dramatic thing that has happened in my 30 years of being an educator here in Pennsylvania. It levels the playing field."

The spending plan also means further relief to property owners because it increases the state's share of school funding and lessens school districts' reliance on property taxes as a revenue source.

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*"The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state."*

**Section 1 of Article XIII  
Minnesota Constitution**

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"Because the state – for several decades – has failed to pay its share, the burden has unfairly fallen to local taxpayers," Gov. Rendell said. "Legislative leaders on both sides of the aisle are to be commended for recognizing that, even in difficult economic times, funding our schools is a must if we are to ensure our children continue on a path to success."

"We now begin a better way of funding our schools – a system where fairness is the benchmark, accountability is the norm, and academic success for all students is the end result," the Governor said. "The General Assembly has taken a major step forward by setting a goal in law to meet the state's commitment to adequate school funding over the next six years."

The distribution formula is based largely on the findings of a 2007 Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates, Inc. (APA) Costing-Out Study, which indicated that Pennsylvania was under-funding public education by more than \$4 billion in order for students to meet federal and state performance expectations. The increase in basic education funding represents the largest dollar increase in the program since 1991.

#### MINNESOTA

APA completed a similar costing out study for Minnesota in 2006. APA first completed the work of Gov. Tim Pawlenty's education finance reform task force that was established in 2004. Using the data gathered by the consultants hired by the Minnesota Department of Education, APA determined that the State of Minnesota needs to increase funding for K-12 education by about \$1 billion per year if our students are to meet the requirements established under the No Child Left Behind Act.



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## From the Chair: Election Day to set stage for '09 session

*(Continued from Page 1)*

nize the importance of public education and are willing to make the tough decisions necessary to ensure our schools have the resources they need to educate ALL of Minnesota's students. We need lawmakers who have the foresight to recognize that improving education will create long-term, positive change in the future of Minnesota's economy. The Voters' Guide will help citizens discern which candidates support education funding reform.

At the same time, many districts will be depending on taxpayers to approve referendums. Once upon a time, referendum elections were for extras – for programs or activities that went beyond core academic offerings. Unfortunately, that has not been the case for many years now. Referendum revenue is now used to provide the basic, core programming our students need if they are to meet federal and state performance expectations. Currently, 90 percent of districts rely on voter-approved operating referendums and for some districts, revenue from voter-approved referendums makes up 20 percent of their general fund budget. If districts fail to get the support of voters, they will undoubtedly be forced to make drastic cuts to budgets that are already lean.

Citizen support and knowledge is a critical factor in any successful referendum campaign as well as in selecting legislators who are supportive of education. Getting citizens engaged in the election will help to get them mobilized for the upcoming session which is sure to be challenging but also holds promise for true education funding reform.

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

## District targets messages to diverse communities it serves

*(Continued from Page 1)*

We abandoned traditional themes and chose "115 ways to support our students." The 115 represents the \$115.90 per student, or a total of \$1.6 million, that we will either retain or lose Nov. 4. We are also using the "115" theme to permeate every part of our campaign. As two examples, the school-based parent chairs are recruiting a minimum of 115 volunteers to donate a minimum of 115 minutes (less than two hours) to help. By including the number, we are making this personal to a student, and in our conversations throughout the district, this approach is working.

Conversely, while we are focusing on the individual, we are expanding this to our four very diverse communities. This is not about competing for dollars, but about investing in our youth and our communities. We are developing targeted messages to mothers of pre-schoolers, families without children, singles, senior citizens, faith-based groups, government, real estate agents and businesses. Our greater message is that our success is our community's success.

We have our work cut out for us. We don't have an easy sell to our voters. We're in a sprint toward Nov. 4 and we have many hurdles to clear, but we have a clear focus and we believe we'll succeed. We're building trust, respect and support with our voters, but first and foremost, we are keeping our priorities where they should be...on each and every student.

*This month's member feature was submitted by Supt. Mark Bezek and Manager of Communications Casey Mahon of Elk River Area School District.*

## Research: Minnesota lawmakers could learn from Pennsylvania's leaders

*(Continued from Page 2)*

APA went on to verify the results of the data collected by the Governor's task force by deploying two additional research methodologies. Each methodology came to a similar conclusion: Minnesota needs to invest an additional \$1 billion per year in our public schools if our students are to have a reasonable chance of meeting

federal and state performance expectations.

We can continue to study the issue, but it seems clear the needs are not going to go away. A better course of action would be to follow the example set by the policymakers in Pennsylvania who exhibited exemplary leadership and the will to get the job done. The future of our state depends on it.

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**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

## AMSD honors three with Friend of Public Education Award

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts recently presented Rep. John Benson, Rep. Carol McFarlane, and Sen. Kathy Saltzman with the Friend of Public Education Award. AMSD created the Friend of Public Education Award to recognize individuals who support AMSD's legislative initiatives and advocate for public education.



**Sen. Kathy Saltzman thanks the Board for choosing her as one of the Friend of Public Education Award recipients.**

"AMSD appreciates these legislators' strong advocacy for increased education funding and their efforts to address key issues such as unfunded mandates," said Pat Gleason, AMSD Board of Directors Chair.

All three Friend of Public Education honorees are in their first terms. Rep. Benson (DFL, 43B), who represents the Hopkins, Minnetonka and Wayzata school districts, serves on the E-12 Education Committee and K-12 Finance Division. Rep. McFarlane (R, 53B) represents the Mounds View and White Bear Lake school districts and she serves on the K-12 Finance Division and the Disparities in Student Support and Service Subcommittee. Sen. Saltzman (DFL, 56) represents the Mahtomedi, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale, South Washington County and Stillwater school districts and she is a member of the Education Committee and the E-12 Education Budget Division.

These legislators have been unwavering in their support of public education. All three have signed on as authors of the New Minnesota Miracle proposal which would simplify the education funding system and make the critical investments we need to help all students reach their full potential. They have also worked to eliminate unfunded mandates on school districts and pushed hard to make sure that the higher cost of doing business in the metropolitan area labor market is recognized in a new funding formula.

*"AMSD appreciates these legislators' strong advocacy for increased education funding and their efforts to address key issues..."*

**Pat Gleason**  
AMSD Board of Directors Chair



**Rep. Carol McFarlane accepts her award from AMSD Chair Pat Gleason.**



**Rep. John Benson (center right) is congratulated by Gleason (center left) and district representatives including (from left) Intermediate School District #287 Supt. Sandy Lewandowski, Hopkins School Board Member Yvonne Selcer, Wayzata Supt. Chace Anderson and Minnetonka Supt. Dennis Peterson.**