

## AMSD Calendar

**April 9, 2010**

**Board of Directors  
7:00 AM—9:00 AM**

Guest Speakers:  
Comm. Alice Seagren  
Rep. Mindy Greiling  
Sen. LeRoy Stumpf (invited)  
3rd Floor Cafeteria,  
TIES Building, St. Paul

**April 16, 2010**

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

**April 30, 2010**

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

**May 7, 2010**

**Board of Directors  
7:00 AM—9:00 AM**  
3rd Floor Cafeteria,  
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**

## Stillwater Area Public Schools Expands Opportunities for Gifted Learners

The top student in class has some company in classrooms across the Stillwater Area Public School District. As part of the district's Gifted and Talented (G/T) initiative, highly gifted students have many opportunities to work together in a variety of challenging, engaging, and academically-stimulating learning environments.

In the past several years, the district has worked to greatly expand opportunities for gifted children in grades 3-9 by offering gifted clustering, as well as honors and accelerated courses. A separate, school-within-a-school was also created to provide enhanced academic enrichment to the most highly gifted students in grades 4-6.

"We believe our G/T opportunities help to inspire, challenge and motivate children to reach new levels of academic success," said Jo Tate, coordinator of the district's gifted and talented programs.



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## From the Chair:

Not surprisingly, the focus of the 2010 legislative session has been on resolving the projected \$994 million budget shortfall for the current biennium. Somewhat lost in the shuffle has been the looming budget deficit facing the State in the 2012-13 biennium.

According to the February budget forecast, the State faces a shortfall of somewhere between \$4.5 and \$7.5 billion in the 2012-13 biennium depending on the assumptions included in the forecast. Clearly, state policymakers will face another daunting budget challenge next year when they must adopt the next biennial budget.

State funding for education was frozen for the current biennium. If the projected budget shortfall holds, our schools could face a continued funding freeze or possibly even reduced funding in the next biennium. The cuts necessary under such a scenario would be devastating to say the least.

The Governor and Legislators can provide a safety valve for school districts by granting locally elected school boards some temporary, limited levy authority until the state budget is stabilized. Because there is a two year lag between when levy authority is granted and when the revenue is received, the Governor and Legislature would need to grant levy authority this session for it to be available for the 2011-12 school year.

It is important that AMSD board members visit with their local legislators to make sure they understand the importance of taking action this session. Waiting until next year to address this issue will be too late and our students will suffer the consequences.

*Jon Tynjala, school board member from Mounds View, is chair of AMSD.*

## Stillwater using clustering to challenge gifted students

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Gifted clusters can be found in every elementary school in the district in grades 3-6. Cluster grouping is the practice of placing several intellectually gifted students together in the same classroom with a teacher who has received additional training in working with gifted students. Cluster classrooms have the same number of students as all other classes and include not only gifted students, but also students with a broad range of abilities. The idea of clustering is to allow high achieving students to learn with peers of all abilities, while also being able to group together for more challenging lessons.

“Differentiation is the key to meeting students’ needs,” said Yoko Cheatham, a third grade cluster teacher at Lake Elmo Elementary. “A lot of times in education we teach to the middle. Clustering allows us to meet the needs of all children, and allow them to work to their potential. We can take the concepts we are teaching and extend them to a higher level and offer opportunities for every student.”

Research shows that clustering students of high ability increases the opportunity for instruction to be delivered at an appropriate pace and level of challenge. When grouped with students of like abilities, gifted students make more educational gains than when they are separated into different classes.

“We’ve seen as much as three times the improvement on test scores when students are clustered,” said Meagan Widner, a fourth grade cluster teacher at Lake Elmo. “The kids enjoy working together and sharing ideas and it is easier for teachers to do more for the G/T students because it’s six or seven kids rather than just one child.”

For elementary students in need of an even more rigorous academic environment, the district offers the GATE program, which is a gifted school-within-a-school program. The classes at GATE include only highly gifted learners who learn together with their academic peers in all core subject areas. The GATE curriculum covers all state and local standards, while incorporating specific units of study designed for high ability learners. There is a strong emphasis on higher-level thinking and concept development.

In addition to clustering and GATE at the elementary level, the district also offers honors and accelerated courses to all junior high students and numerous Advanced Placement and college-level courses at the high school. Honors English is offered in 7-9 grades, and an honors Science course will be available to seventh graders in 2010-2011. Accelerated courses in math are also offered to all junior high students.

To learn more about Stillwater Area Public Schools’ gifted programs please contact Jo Tate, coordinator of gifted and talented programs, at [tatej@stillwater.k12.mn.us](mailto:tatej@stillwater.k12.mn.us) or 651-351-8483.



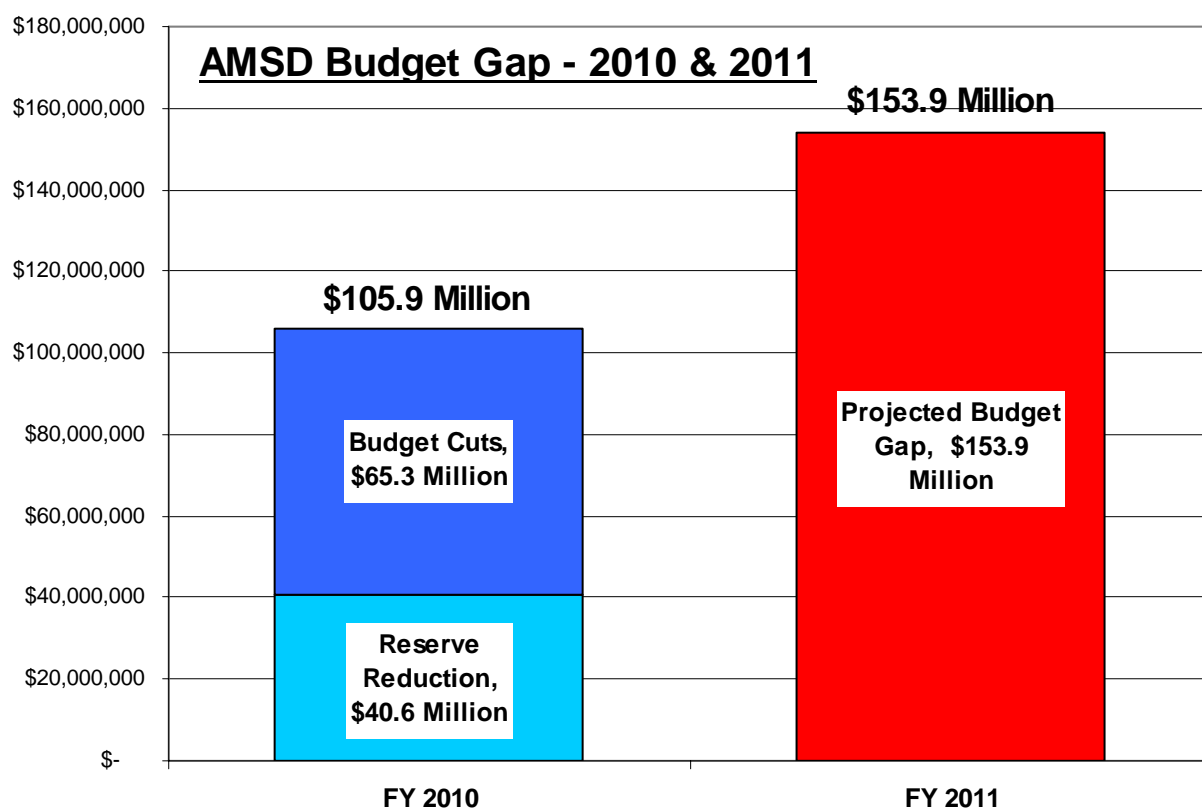
*This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Carissa Nelson Keister, Communications Coordinator, Stillwater Area Public Schools.*

## **Strained School District Budgets Lead to Staff Layoffs**

**A**s this year’s legislative session moves toward closure, it is apparent that school districts will continue to face daunting budget challenges. Unfortunately, this is a familiar story as school boards and school administrators have been grappling with diminishing resources for several years. The failure of the federal and state governments to fund mandated programs continues to force school districts to drain their budget reserves, cut programs and lay off staff.

A survey conducted last fall showed that AMSD member districts reduced their budget reserves by more than \$40 million in addition to making more than \$65 million in budget cuts in the current school year.

A follow-up survey conducted recently shows that AMSD member districts face even greater budget reductions for the 2010-11 school year. The survey asked school districts to project their budget gap assuming the current funding freeze remains in place and no further reductions are made during the 2010 legislative session. As the graph below shows, the combined budget gap for next year for AMSD member school districts is almost \$154 million.



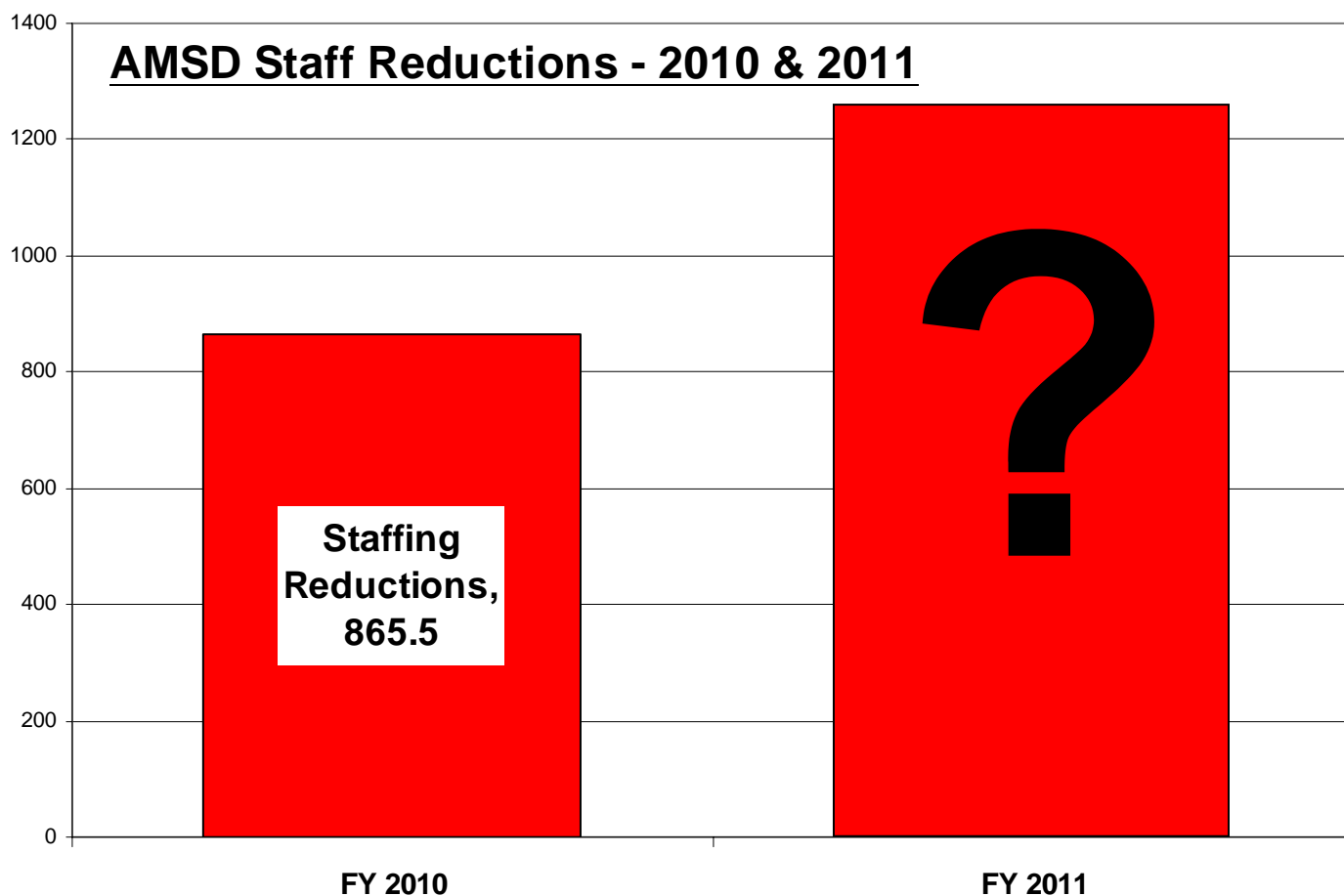
School board members and administrators are in the process of developing budgets for the 2010 -11 school year. Each year the choices are more limited. With budget reserves shrinking, districts will be forced to reduce staffing levels even further. In the current school year, AMSD members cut more than 865 staff.

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## Staff layoffs to increase in 2011

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With a cumulative projected budget gap of \$154 million for next year, AMSD districts are looking at staff layoffs in excess of 1,200. In fact, that number could rise even further as budget reserves have been tapped and can no longer be counted on to mitigate staffing cuts.



It is important to reiterate that these estimates assume no further cuts will be made to education during the 2010 legislative session. Any further reductions to education would exacerbate the projected shortfall numbers for metro school districts and lead to even greater staff layoffs.

**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, Osseo Area Schools, Richfield, Robbinsdale, Roseville, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan, Shakopee, South St. Paul, Spring Lake Park, St. Anthony/New Brighton, St. Cloud, St. Louis Park, St. Paul, Stillwater, TIES (Associate Member), Wayzata, West Metro Education Program, West St. Paul, and White Bear Lake.