

February 2010
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AMSD Calendar

February 5, 2010

Board of Directors
7:00 AM—9:00 AM
3rd Floor Cafeteria,
TIES Building, St. Paul

February 26, 2010

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

March 5, 2010

Board of Directors
7:00 AM—9:00 AM
3rd Floor Cafeteria,
TIES Building, St. Paul

March 26, 2010

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

April 9, 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**

New Students and Families Welcomed at Schoolink Welcome Center in St. Cloud

Bienvenidos! Zoo siab tos txais! Nej tuaj los!

No matter what the language, “Welcome!” is an eagerly anticipated phrase all newcomers to a community want to hear. For the past three years, the *Schoolink* Welcome Center of the St. Cloud Area School District has extended that invitation to all families new to our district.

The *Schoolink* Welcome Center began in 2006 as a response to a jointly led school district and community committee. Convened to address ways to support newcomers to the area, the need for a Welcome Center had long been the topic of discussions, both in the district

and with various community groups. Marj Hawkins, Director of Community Relations in District 742, remembers the urgent need. “Given the size of our district and the number of new families enrolling each year, we simply had to find a better way to help families transition to their new school settings.”

While not a new idea in some school districts, for St. Cloud, a centrally located, “one stop” place for families to enroll their children was, at first, not an easy sell. Schools felt very comfortable with the enrollment procedures that had been in place for years. This process consisted of families going to each school their children would attend to fill out paperwork and register their students. Why change something that seemed to be working “just fine?”

However, in a district as large as St. Cloud where school attendance boundaries are not always clear-cut, finding the correct site could be a challenge for new families. If they went to the wrong school, it meant stopping by yet one more building before their children could be enrolled. Certainly an inconvenience for all, it was, more importantly, an additional hurdle for families with limited access to transportation services.

In addition, while registration procedures were, in general, the same at each of the 14 sites in our

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From the Chair:

With the 2010 legislative session now underway, it is critical that school officials, parents and concerned citizens pay attention to what is happening at the Capitol. Many state policymakers have indicated that they expect cuts to education to be on the table as they work to balance the budget. The Governor and legislators need to be reminded that our schools have already been greatly impacted by the unallotments and payment delays. Further cuts will only compound the budget cuts that school will have to make.

I urge you to sign up to receive action alerts on the AMSD web site and to communicate with your local legislators throughout the session. Your involvement truly does make a difference!

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

Schoolink Welcome Center Benefits St. Cloud

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district, there was little consistency or communication between schools as to information gathered or given out. For the families, this resulted in filling out the same form multiple times or hearing different messages regarding important school district information. For the school district, it meant a possible loss of revenue when how quickly students could begin attending school varied from site to site or forms (such as the one for free and reduced lunch) were not completed by families who qualified for such services.

A new wave of limited English speaking students early in 2005 heightened the need for a better process. With parents often times unable to speak or write in English, communication between schools and families was limited and completion of the registration process was frustrating for everyone!

With community and school board backing, plans were developed during the 2005-2006 school year to open the doors to a Welcome Center the following fall. Key district leaders met to determine location, staffing and budget of the new center using limited resources.

“We thought it best to start small and meet the initial needs of needs of families enrolling their children,” states Marj Hawkins. “This meant that our Welcome Center would focus on three areas: consistent and efficient registration of students, appropriate placement at all of the school sites, and pertinent information regarding our schools and community.”

“While the idea of a “Center” may conjure up thoughts of a large spacious area and numerous staff to meet and greet families, that is not the case for our Welcome Center,” says Sue Doering, current *Schoolink* coordinator. “While the size of our center is small, our priority is extending a genuine ‘welcome to St. Cloud feeling’. We can do that with just one or two people by providing the best customer service we can.”

Located in the middle of St. Cloud at the Roosevelt Early Childhood building, the Welcome Center started off with one desk, a table and filing cabinet. Coordination duties were assigned to a teacher already on special assignment and a new staff person was hired from the Somali community. “The first year was definitely challenging!” says Sue Doering. “The learning curve was very steep!

During the first year of operation, the Welcome Center staff worked diligently to streamline the registration process and number of forms requiring duplicate information. With a bi-lingual staff person, many of the Somali families enrolling their students in schools, now had an interpreter available to help with the translation of registration materials. A language assessment process was developed to help place limited English proficiency students and provide better information to schools regarding their language skills. However, the Welcome Center was still seen as an option for families to go to for registration. This created some confusion among district employees and community members. People questioned, “WHO is suppose to go to the Welcome Center? Is it just for ELL students... or for everyone?”

“We wanted to show that a centralized registration center and process made a difference; that the Welcome Center should be THE place where everyone should enroll their students,” says Hawkins. “Collecting data was an important part of making our case.” In just one year, there was a noticeable increase in compensatory dollars for the St. Cloud school district. This was due in part to more free and reduced lunch forms being returned and having families qualify for this assistance. Welcome Center procedures were directly credited for this increase.

At the beginning of the 2008 school year an additional staff person was hired; a receptionist/secretary who could quickly and efficiently enter new student information electronically. This addition garnered the support of the Welcome Center by school secretaries, counselors and transportation personnel. Staff could now see how services offered at the Center eased their own work responsibilities.

“Each year, we look to expand our services,” says Sue Doering. “We are always asking ourselves, what else can we do to help new families and our district as a whole?” To answer that question, in just three years, the Welcome Center has added to its enrollment responsibilities the facilitation of Kindergarten registration, Kindergarten Early Entrance Assessment, and MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) testing for new students. Housing the new district ELL coordinator at the Welcome Center site now provides additional translation services in Spanish for families and throughout the year, a representative from the medical community is available on or off-site of the Welcome Center to answer and assist families in finding a medical provider in their new community.

“Something as simple as proper placement at a site means that schools are ready to meet the instructional needs of students as soon as they walk through the door,” Doering said. “Starting students and their families off on a welcoming note makes a HUGE difference in helping them build a positive and supportive relationship with our schools... something that we all benefit from!”

This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Susan Doering, Communications Specialist and Coordinator of the Schoolink Welcome Center, St. Cloud Area School District.



Online Learning—Minnesota’s Future?

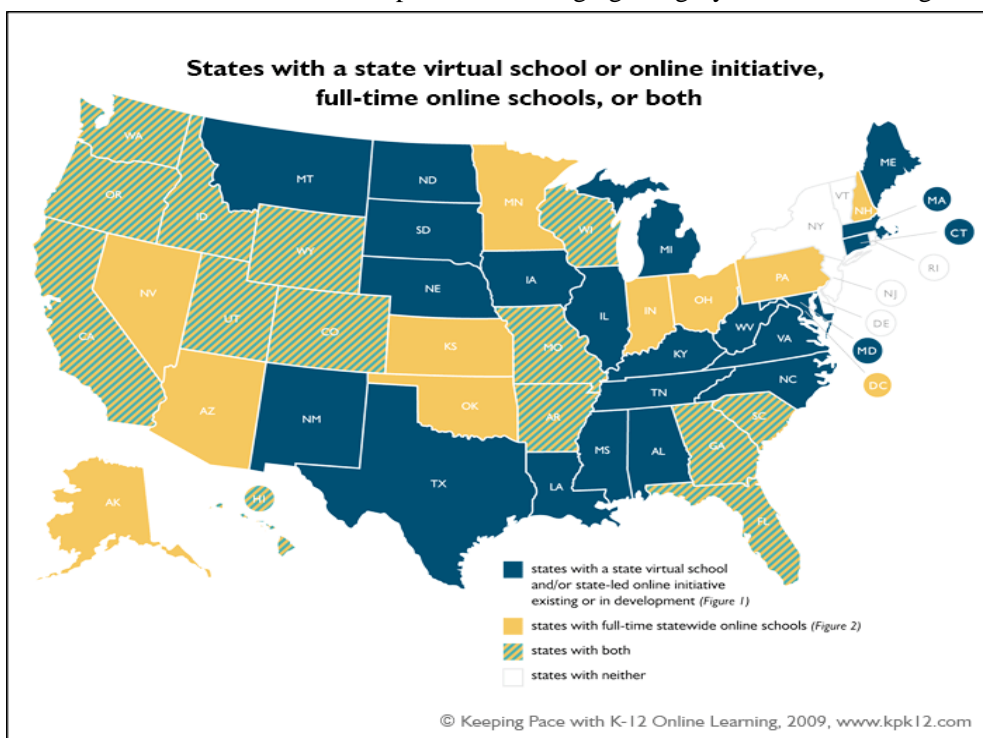
AMSD’s recent conference - *Online Learning: Fad or Future?* - showcased exciting local and national online learning initiatives. The keynote was delivered by Gary Lopez, the executive director of the Monterey Institute, a non-profit that is focused on providing open source, online curriculum. Mr. Lopez provided a broad overview of the current state of online learning and the availability of open source options.

Following Mr. Lopez’s presentation, a panel of Minnesota practitioners shared their experience providing online learning opportunities. Conference attendees were amazed at the number of online learning opportunities already available in Minnesota. This was followed by a panel that highlighted additional online resources available in Minnesota, including the Minnesota Learning Commons. The afternoon session included a panel of superintendents and district staff that reacted to the earlier panel discussions and also addressed some of the challenges school districts face in moving forward with online initiatives including the lack of sufficient resources to start up new online programs.

The conference concluded with a panel that included Assistant Commissioner Karen Klinzing, Rep. Denise Dittrich, Rep. Mark Buesgens, Sen. Geoff Michel and Sen. Kathy Saltzman. The state policymakers discussed some of the policy implications and challenges involved with establishing online education programs. At the same time, there was broad agreement that it is important that Minnesota policymakers continue to study online learning opportunities and explore how such initiatives can increase student achievement.

It is clear that online learning options are increasing at a very fast rate. According to a recent report from the organization, *Keeping Pace with K12 Online Learning*, the number of online learning students in the United States has increased by 47% over the past two years. In addition, *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning’s*, “Annual Review of State Level Policy and Practice,” shows a number of interesting trends across the country. Excerpts from the report include:

- State virtual schools now exist in 27 states. An additional six states offer state-led online learning initiatives that provide tools and resources to districts across their state, while not providing the full suite of centralized services that the state virtual schools offer. Together the state virtual schools provided roughly 320,000 course enrollments (one student taking on semester-long course) in for-credit courses in school year 2008-09.
- The number of states with full-time online schools is growing. There are now 24 states and Washington, D.C. with these schools operating statewide and several states in which full-time online schools are available to some, but not all, students in the state. About 175,000 full time students attend these online schools.
- Online programs run by a single district, for students in that district, represent an emerging category of online learning activity. Limited data are available for district programs, but existing data points and anecdotal evidence suggest that the number of district programs is growing rapidly.
- The exact number of students taking online courses is estimated at slightly above one million based on surveys by the Sloan Consortium. This number is consistent with *Keeping Pace* findings.
- Online learning opportunities have spread to more states than ever before. *Keeping Pace* now counts 45 of the 50 states (plus Washington D.C.) as having a state virtual school or online initiative, full-time online schools, or both (see map at right).



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Research shows online learning gaining momentum across country

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You can download the complete report at: <http://www.kpk12.com/download.html>

The US Department of education also released an interesting report this last fall entitled: *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning -- A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies*. This offers an analysis of existing research and provides an interesting perspective on the current state of online learning in the U.S. The major conclusions of the report show evidence for increased student engagement and achievement using various online learning models. However, the strongest evidence seems to support a blended approach:

- “In recent experimental and quasi-experimental studies contrasting blends of online and face-to-face instruction with conventional face-to-face classes, blended instruction has been more effective, providing a rationale for the effort required to design and implement blended approaches. Even when used by itself, online learning appears to offer a modest advantage over conventional classroom instruction.”

You can download the complete report at: <http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf>

Online learning is gaining a great deal of momentum across the country. Minnesota is positioned well with a number of resources in place to help school districts make online learning options available to their students. Many educators believe that online learning will transform the way students and teachers learn in the future. Minnesota cannot afford to sit on the sidelines and watch as the national online movement grows. At the same time, it is important that policy decisions be based on evidence and research and that we follow best practices to ensure that we act in the best interest of our students.

The following sites offer a perspective on the national online learning environment:

INACOL	http://www.inacol.org/
Keeping Pace	http://www.kpk12.com/
Monterey Inst	http://www.montereyinstitute.org/
Hippocampus	http://www.hippocampus.org/
NROC	http://www.montereyinstitute.org/nroc/
Florida virtual Schools	http://www.flvs.net/Pages/default.aspx
K12	http://www.k12.com/

Existing state programs and resources include:

Minnesota Learning Commons	http://mnlearningcommons.org/index.php
Edina's emath	http://www.edinamath.info/
Minneapolis Online	http://online.mpls.k12.mn.us/
Minnesota Virtual Academy	http://www.k12.com/mnva/
SOCRATES	http://www.projectsocrates.org/socrates.html
Northern Star Online	http://www.district287.org/index.php
http://www.district287.org/index.php?submenu=nso_home&src=gendocs&ref=teachLearn_NSO_Overview&category=TeachingLearning_NSO	

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.