

Association of Metropolitan School Districts 2009 Legislative Funding Priorities

The Association of Metropolitan School Districts Board of Directors urges the Governor and Legislators to work together to structurally balance the state budget in a manner that recognizes the vital role public education plays in educating our future workforce. Today's economy requires that every student graduate from high school prepared to enter a post-secondary education or training program. Our ability to compete nationally and internationally is dependent on building a highly-educated workforce.

The time has come for the Governor and Legislature to reform our education funding system as outlined in HF 2/SF 348. This legislation promotes innovation, increases transparency, greatly reduces reliance on local operating referenda and identifies the resources necessary to help each student meet federal and state performance expectations. The new funding system should be phased in over time and in a manner that treats school districts equitably.

Minnesota faces an historic budget challenge that will require bipartisan cooperation. State policymakers need to act strategically in both the short-term and the long-term if Minnesota is to successfully emerge from the recession with the educated workforce we need to compete in the global economy.

To balance the state budget, the AMSD Board believes that all options must be on the table including state tax increases, a statewide salary freeze for public employees and/or implementation of a system of binding arbitration. In addition, reducing unnecessary state mandates and providing flexibility in how school districts use various revenue streams would provide welcome relief. The AMSD Board of Directors has established the following priorities for the 2009 legislative session:

- Adopt a schedule to phase in the education funding reform framework outlined in HF 2 and SF 348.
- Education accounting shifts should be used minimally and only as a last resort. Such shifts result in real cuts to our schools and provide only a one-time savings for the state.
- Repeal or temporarily waive prescriptive mandates such as the staff development set aside and the maintenance of effort requirement for the safe schools levy. Oppose any new unfunded mandates such as a statewide health insurance pool for school employees.
- Establish a center for educational research to provide policymakers with the data and analysis needed to make sound decisions on emerging education issues.
- Repeal the prohibition of starting the school year before Labor Day.
- Eliminate the GRAD requirement and replace it with a system that provides multiple paths for students to obtain a diploma.
- Increase charter school accountability to ensure financial solvency and academic rigor. Prohibit, for a period of 2 years, a new or existing charter school from locating within one mile of a public school site that has been closed.