AMSD's Mission

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

AMSD

Association of Metropolitan School Districts

Fridley Public Schools' Stevenson Elementary School Nurtures Early Enthusiasm for Computer Coding

A whirlwind of digital activity was brewing December 8, as more than 500 Stevenson Elementary students were introduced to an Hour of Code, the computer programming movement flourishing across the country.

Hosted by Code.org, the program is 'dedicated to expanding access to computer science, and increasing participation by women and underrepresented students of color – with a vision that every student in every school should have the opportunity to learn computer science.'

An eye opening experience full of endless possibilities for Fridley's Stevenson Elementary School students in an Hour of Code.

Principal Daryl Vossler began the implementation of Hour of Code last summer based on a conversation with a parent. "This parent said, 'I'm a coder; I do computer programming. There are no African Americans in coding. I went to the University of Minnesota and was the only one in my class, and I am also the only African American at the company where I work,'" said Vossler.

Vossler signed up for a coding class and enlisted Stevenson teacher Dianne Rae to also participate in the required training. Rae shared, "At the training I learned about Code.org and decided to use their curriculum for my after school coding class, which is for 2nd graders and is called Code Camp."

Realizing the opportunity was bigger than just one grade level, Rae submitted a plan and application to bring Hour of Code to Stevenson in mid-November. Then, during an all-school assembly coinciding with Computer Science Education Week, the entire student body was introduced to the plan.

Of Rae's enthusiasm for the project, Vossler said, "She is carrying the pack. It's not me

From the Chair

School choice proposals have gained significant attention at both the federal and state level since the 2016 election. Secretary-Designate Betsy DeVos is an avowed school choice advocate with a history of advocating for vouchers, tax credits and for profit charter schools. At the state level, legislation has been introduced that would establish a new program using donations eligible for state income tax credits to create school choice scholarships for qualifying K-12 students to attend private schools. In addition, the bill would extend the existing K-12 education tax credit to private school tuition and index the credit amount and income thresholds to inflation. The legislation, HF 386/SF 256, would reduce state general fund revenue by an estimated $35 million. AMSD has a long standing position in opposition to diverting public funds for vouchers or tax credits for private school tuition. In addition, a report by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy summarizes the shortcomings of state subsidies for private education. I encourage AMSD board members to share your concerns about this legislation with your local legislators.

John Vento, school board member from Robbinsdale Area Schools, is chair of AMSD.

Students Exposed to Coding at Stevenson Elementary Through Hour of Code

anymore, it's her. She has taken this thing and ran with it."

To assist in training students, professional programmers and high school students volunteered their time. Among the programmers was Kirt Anderson, a senior project manager for Stone Technologies based in St. Louis, Missouri.

"I was reading an article, and it was amazing how many kids in American schools were introduced to computer science by the time they graduate, versus China where the same number of kids have been introduced to computer science by the end of first grade," Anderson said.

Kirt Anderson works with 4th graders during Hour of Code.

"What our kids know today is apps; they know Facebook, they know Instagram. For me, if we're going to continue American manufacturing, it's not about electrical engineering anymore – it's all software driven now. For every 10 kids at this age that start to learn code, we just have to hope that half of them trend toward manufacturing." Anderson said. Adding that "it's estimated we'll be 90% short of the necessary jobs by 2025. There are enough electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, civil engineers out there. Software engineering? We are so hopelessly short of what we need going forward," he said.

Kindergarten teacher Kim Dolezal works with her students in the Stevenson Elementary Schools' computer lab during Hour of Code.

At Stevenson Elementary, many of the children who were exposed to coding for the first time through the Hour of Code, enjoyed the activities.

"One of our young girls told her mentor that Hour of Code was her favorite part of her day and students really had to think, but they liked it!" said Rae.

Colton Ranstrom, a Fridley High School junior who sees computer security or video game programming in his future, was excited to volunteer and help the younger students learn.

"I already knew what the Hour of Code was and it's a really cool thing. I thought it would be enjoyable to help kids begin the process of learning how to program. It's something I always wanted to do and thought I could help them know how to do it," he said.

Since its inception in 2013, Code.org has introduced coding to over 8 million students nationwide. The non-profit also has an incentive program, whereby it chooses one school in each state per year to receive $10,000 worth of computers for taking part in Hour of Code.

For Rae, the outcome will be easy to monitor. "I am totally convinced that our district is on the right path by looking into having computer science as part of our daily curriculum. Computer science nurtures problem solving, logic and creativity. By starting students early, they will have a foundation for success in any 21st century career they choose."

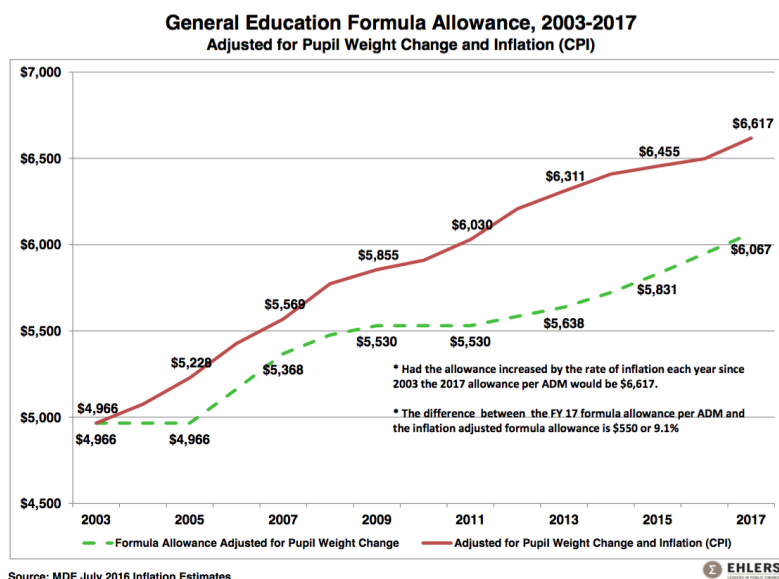*This month's member spotlight was submitted by David Webber, communications specialist, Fridley Public Schools.*

Stevenson Elementary School Principal Darryl Vossler works with a young computer enthusiast.

Governor Dayton Proposes $604 Million Investment in E-12 Education

On January 23, Governor Dayton delivered his State of the State address to a joint session of the Legislature and offered the first glimpse of his E-12 education budget proposal, "I will propose 2 percent increases in the per-pupil aid formula for each year of the next biennium. They are expensive, costing $371 million. Some people will say we can't afford to make those investments. I say, we can't afford NOT to. Frankly, I wish we could afford to do more."

The next day, the Governor unveiled a $604 million E-12 education package for the 2018-19 biennium including a two percent per year increase in the general education formula allowance. The Governor's budget proposal would increase the per pupil formula by $121, from $6,067 to $6,188 in FY 2018, and by an additional $124 to $6,312 in FY 2019.

Investments in the general education formula allowance are critical. The formula allowance has not kept pace with inflation since the Legislature eliminated the general education levy and assumed primary responsibility for funding education in 2003. In fact, the formula allowance would be $550 per pupil higher in the current school year if it had simply kept pace with inflation since 2003. The AMSD 2017 Legislative Platform calls on legislators and the Governor to increase the basic formula by at least 2.5 percent per year over the next biennium and index it to inflation in the future.

General Education Formula Allowance, 2003-2017
Adjusted for Pupil Weight Change and Inflation (CPI)

* Had the allowance increased by the rate of inflation each year since 2003 the 2017 allowance per ADM would be $6,617.

* The difference between the FY 17 formula allowance per ADM and the inflation adjusted formula allowance is $550 or 9.1%

Legend: - - Formula Allowance Adjusted for Pupil Weight Change   — Adjusted for Pupil Weight Change and Inflation (CPI)

Source: MDE July 2016 Inflation Estimates

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During his State of the State address, the Governor recognized the significant needs and challenges students have and the demands those needs place on public schools. "The demands on our public schools from our ever-more diverse populations continue to grow. As I said earlier, our schools' abilities to meet those growing needs – and to provide every student from every background with what she or he needs to become a successful adult – are crucial to their individual successes and to our state's better future."

AMSD Members: Anoka-Hennepin School District, Bloomington Public Schools, Board of School Administrators (Associate Member), Brooklyn Center Community Schools, Burnsville-Eagan-Savage, Columbia Heights Public Schools, Eastern Carver County Schools, Eden Prairie Schools, Edina Public Schools, Elk River Area School District, Equity Alliance MN (Associate Member), Farmington Area Public Schools, Fridley Public Schools, Hopkins Public Schools, Intermediate School District 287, Intermediate School District 917 (Associate Member), Inver Grove Heights Community Schools, Lakeville Area Public Schools, Mahtomedi Public Schools, Metro ECSU (Associate Member), Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnetonka Public Schools, Mounds View Public Schools, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District, Northeast Metro Intermediate School District 916, Northwest Suburban Integration District (Associate Member), Orono Schools, Osseo Area Schools, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, Richfield Public Schools, Robbinsdale Area Schools, Rochester Public Schools; Rockford Area Schools, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools, Roseville Area Schools, Shakopee Public Schools, South St. Paul Public Schools, South Washington County Schools, SouthWest Metro Intermediate District (Associate Member), Spring Lake Park Schools, St. Anthony-New Brighton Independent School District, St. Cloud Area Schools, St. Louis Park Public Schools, St. Paul Public Schools, Stillwater Area Public Schools, TIES (Associate Member), Wayzata Public Schools, West Metro Education Program, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools and White Bear Lake Area Schools.

Special Education Cross-Subsidy Exceeds $660 Million Dollars

One of the greatest areas of need is in special education funding. The special education cross-subsidy – the amount by which mandated special education expenditures exceeds federal and state special education revenue – results in tremendous budget pressures for school districts. According to the latest special education cross-subsidy report, special education costs exceeded state and federal special education aid by over $660 million. AMSD's Legislative Platform calls on legislators and the Governor to reduce the state share of the special education cross-subsidy by 25 percent (approximately $69 million). The Governor proposes to invest $40.173 million - $18.6 million in FY 2018 and $21.5 million in FY 2019 – in the next biennium. Other key provisions in Governor Dayton's E-12 education budget proposal include:

SPECIAL EDUCATION CROSS SUBSIDY, FY 2003 - FY 2019
Total and State Portion , Current Dollars
February 2016 Forecast

- $74.8 million increase in the voluntary pre-kindergarten program to serve an additional 6,000 students over the next two years.
- $20 million increase in debt service equalization to assist school districts with low property tax wealth in providing adequate facilities for their students. AMSD is advocating for an increase in both debt service equalization and operating referendum equalization to enhance taxpayer and education funding equity.
- $68 million to cover the proposed increase in the employer contribution to the Teachers Retirement Association to stabilize the pension fund.

The Governor's proposal is the first step in the budget development process. The Governor's proposed budget is based on the November forecast, while legislative leaders will wait until the February state budget forecast is released before establishing their respective budget proposals. Legislative leaders have established committee deadlines to guide the work of the policy and finance committees. The first and second policy committee deadlines are March 10 and March 17 respectively. The deadline for the omnibus fiscal bills, including the Omnibus E-12 Education Finance Bill, is March 31.

AMSD Chair John Vento thanked Governor Dayton for his continued commitment to public education, "We applaud the Governor's ongoing commitment to Minnesota students and his proposal to significantly invest in our public schools." Vento urged legislators to at least match the level of investment proposed by the Governor and noted that AMSD members will continue to advocate for a 2.5 percent increase per year in the formula allowance and reducing the state share of the special education cross-subsidy by 25 percent.

Summaries and district runs of the Governor's budget proposal are available on the 2017 Legislative Session Page on the AMSD web page.