

June 2009
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AMSD Calendar

June 12, 2009

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

July 10, 2009

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

August 13, 2009

Board of Directors Meeting, 4:30 p.m.,
Northland Inn, Brooklyn Park

August 21, 2009

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

September 11, 2009

Board of Directors Meeting, 7 a.m.,
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**

Orono earns international award for pillar program



The Orono High School Character Counts! leadership students greet and distribute pencils and key chains to students returning to classes September 2.

There's plenty of talk about pillars in Orono Schools lately, but it has nothing to do with an exciting renovation project under way in the district. The pillars are an integral part of a character education initiative that has earned Orono three national awards and the state's first-ever character award.

For the past two years, the district has used Character Counts! in grades K-12. Developed by the Los Angeles-based Josephson Institute for Ethics, it champions the Six

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From the Chair

The 2009 legislative session has concluded but we won't know the full impact the session has on our schools until Governor Pawlenty announces his unallotment plans. The state was left with a projected \$3 billion shortfall after the Governor signed all of the major spending bills but vetoed the Omnibus Tax Bill. The Governor plans to bring the budget into balance using his unallotment authority. While he announced that he does not plan to unallot K-12 education appropriations, he will likely delay payments to schools as part of his budget balancing plan.

While most school leaders agree that payment delays are preferable to direct cuts, it is important to note that payment delays result in reduced revenue for school districts. A previous analysis of the accounting shifts in the Governor's original budget proposal showed that school districts would experience about a \$30 per pupil reduction in revenue through either increased borrowing costs or lost interest income. As school districts adopt their

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A closer look at education spending in Minnesota

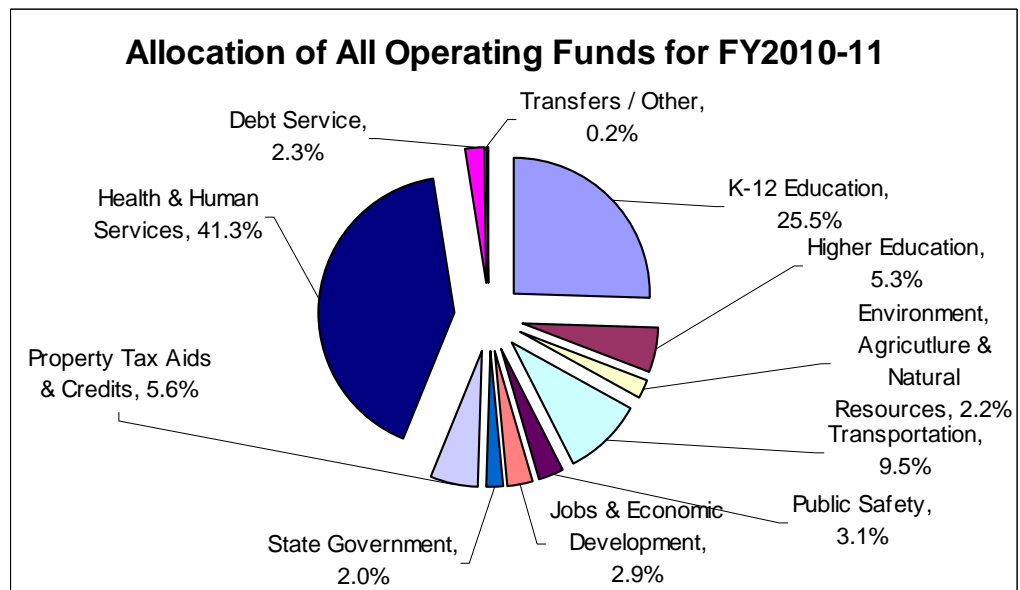
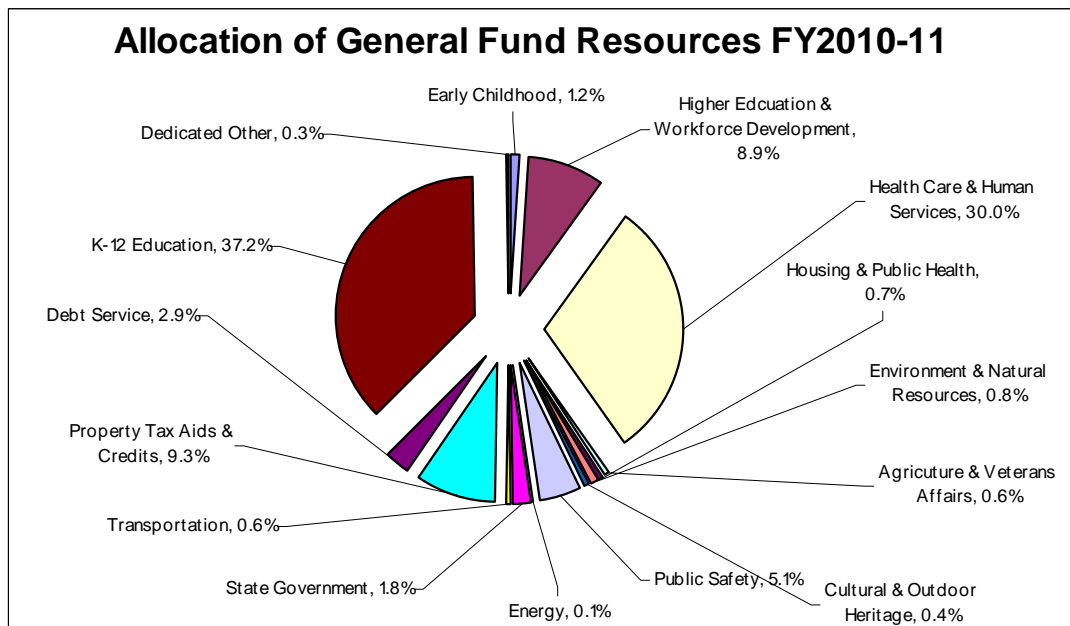
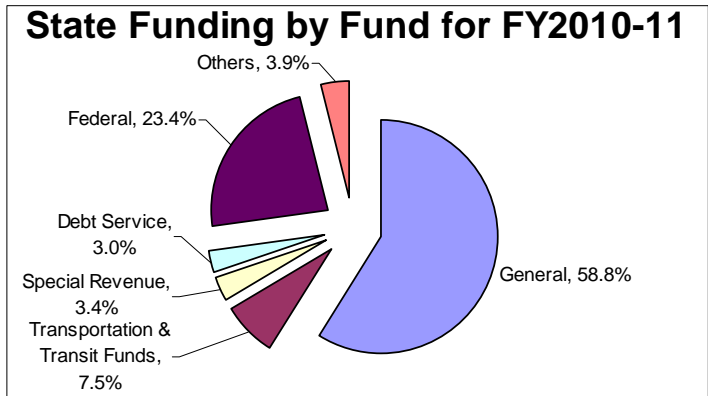
Is K-12 education funding really the biggest part of the state budget? That is the commonly held assumption among state policymakers and the general public. However, a recent report commissioned by Parents United and completed by the Hamline University School of Business shows that assumption is only true if the analysis is limited to the state general fund.

While the general fund is the largest of the state's operating funds, it is projected that it will comprise less than 60 percent of total state spending in the 2010-11 biennium. Additional state operating funds include: a transportation and transit fund, a debt service fund, federal funds, the Health Care Access fund and special revenue funds. The chart on the right "State Funding by Fund for FY 2010-11" shows the percentage of state spending by fund.

The chart "Allocation of General Fund Resources FY 2010-11" confirms that K-12 education does indeed account for the largest share of spending from the general fund. It is worth noting, however, that K-12 education's share of the general fund has been shrinking in recent years and is projected to be at 37 percent of general fund expenditures next biennium -- down from 42.5 percent in the 2006-07 biennium.

An analysis of state spending as a share of all funds paints a significantly different picture. As the graph, "Allocation of All Operating Funds for 2010-11," at right shows, spending on health and human services programs easily replaces K-12 education as the largest expenditure area when looking at all operating funds.

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From the Chair: Revamping funding framework remains crucial

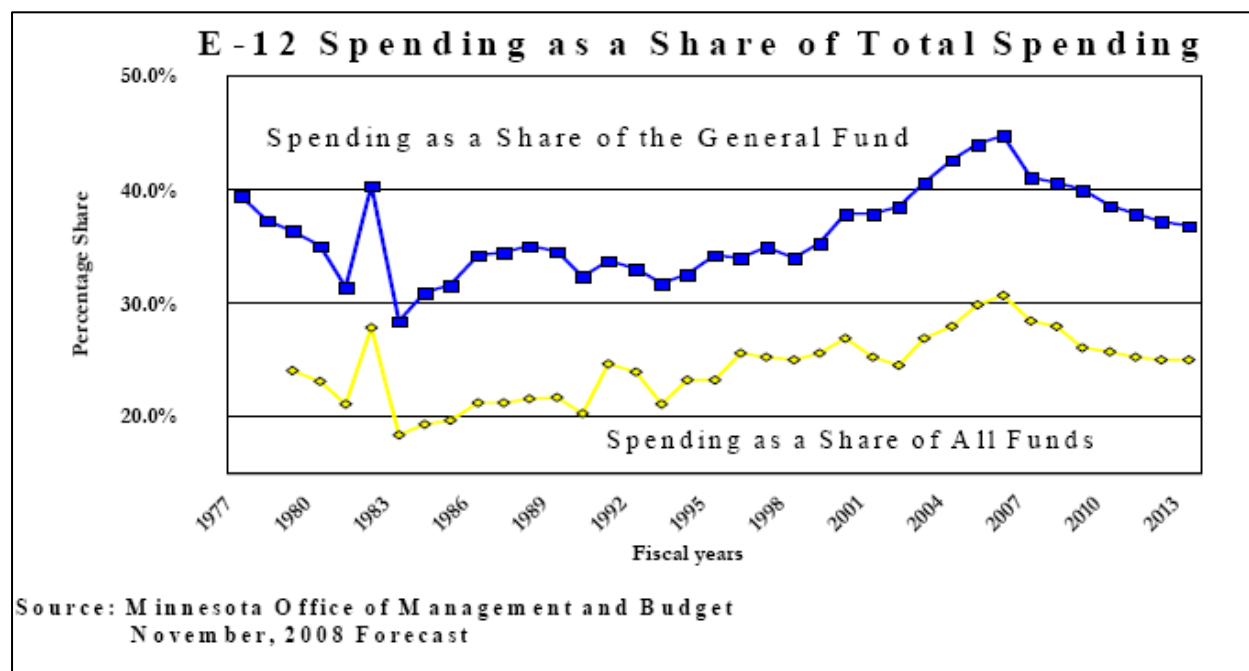
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budgets, it is clear that our schools will be sharing in the pain of digging out from the budget deficit. Program offerings will be reduced, staff will be laid off and fees for students and parents will increase over the next two years.

Adding to the disappointment, a plan to prospectively implement the New Minnesota Miracle funding framework was dropped from the final E-12 Education funding

bill due to a lack of support in the Senate. We obviously have work to do in educating state senators about the benefits of the New Minnesota Miracle funding framework. I encourage AMSD board members to meet with your local senators to help them understand how important it is to move this proposal forward.

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



Research: Education is not biggest expense in the state budget

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The final chart above, “E-12 Spending as a Share of Total Spending,” provides a historical look at K-12 education’s share of general fund expenditures and as a share of all funds. The chart shows that the state’s commitment to K-12 funding has varied over time but has generally declined since 1977. Aside from an anomaly related to a property tax shift in 1982, the 40 percent share in 1977 was not reached again until 2004.

It is important to note, however, that the upward trend since 2001 has much more to do with tax policy than an increased commitment to K-12 education by the state. The major property tax reform enacted in 2001 eliminated the general education levy. This resulted in a substantial portion of K-12 funding being shifted from the local property tax to state revenue sources. While this significantly increased the

share of the state budget going toward K-12 education, it did not lead to a corresponding increase in revenue for schools.

It is important to take a comprehensive look at the state budget inclusive of all of the state’s operating funds to get an accurate picture of the state’s commitment to funding education. It is also necessary to peel away the impact of accounting shifts and take into account major changes in tax policy, such as the elimination of the general education levy, to accurately assess the state’s commitment to fund our schools.

Upon closer examination, it is clear that our commitment to fund our schools has waned since the late 1970’s. At the same time, we expect our schools to deliver more services to a student population that has grown increasingly diverse with greater needs and challenges.

Pillars embodied in the Orono Public School District's culture

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Pillars of Character Education: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship.

In Orono, the pillars are more than just a pleasant graphic; the characteristics they embody have been embedded in the district's culture. Everywhere from classrooms to playing fields, students know and understand the pillars. More importantly, they apply this understanding to effect positive changes throughout their community.



Students from Orono Intermediate School bring the Six Pillars of Character to life during National Character Counts! Week in October 2008.

This year, Orono's Schumann Elementary School was distinguished as a 2009 State School of Character and also received a Promising Practices Award along with Orono Middle School. The Minnesota Schools of Character awards program was created last year by the Center for Academic Excellence in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education. The district and Orono High School were honored the first year of the program.

Schumann and Orono Middle School have also been recognized with national Promising Practices Awards. As part of the National Schools of Character awards program, the Character Education Partnership gives Promising Practices Awards to schools and districts in the United States and elsewhere for implementing unique and spe-

cific strategies in character education. Representatives of Orono will be among those honored during the National Forum on Character Education October 29-31 in Washington, D.C.

Schumann's award-winning practice was "Kids Helping Kids," a service learning project designed to highlight the importance of helping others. Items designed to be cheerful and comforting were created by more than 500 students with the help of school staff and parent volunteers. Items were donated to hospitals for pediatric patients requiring extended stays.

Orono Middle School was honored for "Pledge for Change," a video showcasing 99 percent of the school's 600-plus students making commitments to do better for themselves, their school, community and/or the environment.

"The more progress we make, the more excitement we generate," says Superintendent of Schools Dr. Karen Orcutt. Elementary students recently professionally recorded 'Character Counts,' a song written by a parent about the six pillars. The high school is planning a Char-

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*"The more progress we make,
the more excitement we
generate."*

**Dr. Karen Orcutt
Superintendent of Schools**

Staff, parents, community members, students have embraced initiative

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acter Counts! dance next school year, while the local Chamber of Commerce has expressed an interested in becoming part of the movement.

“What’s particularly exciting to see is how everyone – staff, parents, community members and especially students – has embraced this initiative,” Orcutt adds. “I am so proud to represent a district that recognizes the importance of character education to future success.”

The district’s character education program has been evolving for the past 10 years. Work started through the North Central Association accreditation process and a grant from private donors, and involved staff members only. A grant from MDE helped take the initiative to a new level.

That grant provided funding for staff development, consulting services and materials to create a comprehensive framework for character education within the district that can be modeled by other school districts throughout the state.

Training included “Living Up to the Public Trust” in August of 2007 for teachers, administrators and Board of Education members, as well as local mayors, police officers, clergy and key community members. Also that month, key coaches were trained as trainers in “Pursuing Victory with Honor.”

A full-day Character Summit was held in October 2007 with Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Josephson Institute, as the keynote speaker. All district staff members attended, as did many community leaders. Josephson also conducted a forum for parents and community members, as well as one for middle school and high school students.



Schumann Elementary students record “Character Counts,” a song written by a parent about the Six Pillars of Character.

To ensure that character education remains a vital force in the Orono Public Schools experience, character goals and accompanying action plans were developed by teams from each of the district’s schools and by the district, and embedded in the district’s new Continuous Improvement Plan.



Orono’s Schumann Elementary Principal Dr. Connie Fladeland, left, accepts a State School of Character Award from Commissioner of Education Alice Seagren May 21.

This month’s member spotlight was submitted by Gary Kubat, Director of Communications, at Orono Public Schools.

AMSD Members: Anoka-Hennepin, Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Burnsville, Columbia Heights, Eastern Carver County, 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 (Associate Member), Wayzata, West Metro Education Program, and West St. Paul