

AAPSNews

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Issue No. 34, May 2, 2011

Skyline student represents Ann Arbor with GenerationOn

Longtime volunteer one of 10 chosen around the country

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

When she was a fifth-grader, Malaika Worsham's mom encouraged her volunteer for Meals on Wheels. She was somewhat reluctant and shy, she said, but serving meals to seniors in need turned out to be a way of life for this Skyline High School sophomore.

"My family's big into volunteering," she said. "I worked over Thanksgiving in the fifth-grade delivering food to the elderly with a group. It definitely let me know there's more out there in the world.

"Now I see why she did it. I thank her for it."

Worsham was recently selected by the national Points of Light Institute's GenerationOn program as one of 10 students from around the country for its inaugural National Youth Advisory



Malaika Worsham, a Skyline High School sophomore, is one of 10 students around the country selected by the Points of Light Institute as a representative of GenerationOn -- which encourages volunteerism among youth.

Council. Students range in age from grades eight to 11 and represent both public and private schools.

She was encouraged to apply last winter by a family friend because of her volunteering efforts, and was selected this spring. The 10 council members spent a long weekend in Washington D.C. to meet and get the program started.

See GenerationOn, page 2

Budget plan for 2011-12 cuts millions

May 6 legislative forum planned, public asked to bring their ideas

From AAPSNews Service

Long-term changes to public school funding must be made at the state level to allow local districts to continue to operate in a healthy manner, Ann Arbor Public Schools Interim Superintendent Robert Allen said during a special budget forum.

Allen warned that unless legislators in Lansing change the way schools are funded, the problem will persist year after year. "You can't cut your way of a structural deficit," said Allen, who serves as the district's operations and finance chief -- a position he

See Budget, page 8

May 3 special ed millage renewal

Washtenaw County voters head to the polls Tuesday to consider a special ed millage renewal. If the measure fails, the district must use \$5.8 million of General Fund money for mandates, [See page 2](#)

Ballot language

WASHTENAW INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT SPECIAL EDUCATION MILLAGE RENEWAL PROPOSAL

This proposal will allow the intermediate school district to levy the special education millage previously approved by the electors. *“Shall the limitation on the amount of taxes which may be assessed against all property in Washtenaw Intermediate School District, Michigan, be increased by .9850 mill (\$0.9850 on each \$1,000 of taxable valuation) for a period of 7 years, 2011 to 2017, inclusive, to provide funds for the education of students with a disability (the above is a renewal of millage which expired with the 2010 tax levy); the estimate of the revenue the school district will collect if the millage is approved and levied in 2011 is approximately \$14,000,000?”*

Tuesday election asks voters to renew millage for special education

From AAPSNews Service

The Washtenaw Intermediate School District seeks renewal of a special education millage on Tuesday, May 3. The renewal is for seven years that would run from 2011-17.

If approved, the proposal would renew a 0.985 mill special education millage. Voters first approved the millage in September 2004 for 1 mill, which has been reduced due to the impact of the Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment.

The millage renewal would bring in \$14 million countywide, of which \$5.8 million would come to the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Polls open at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m. and voters cast ballots at their regular municipal polling places. Voters in Michigan are required to show photo identification at the polls.

To locate a polling place, take a look at a personal ballot and more, visit: <https://webapps.sos.state.mi.us/mivote>

Some facts about this millage renewal:

- Local schools are required to provide special education services

for students with physical, mental or emotional disabilities up to age 26.

- Today, nearly 7,000 students or about 1-in-7 throughout Washtenaw County, receive some kind of special education service, with most receiving help overcoming learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, and some having to cope with more severe physical, mental or emotional problems.

- In the Ann Arbor Public Schools this year, 2,093 students are receiving special education services of the 16,569 total student population.

- State and federal funding has not kept pace with increased costs, which means that mandated special education funding must come from a voter-approved millage or local school district general fund budgets, thereby reducing funding available for general education programs for all students.

- The May 3 renewal would help maintain programs for students with special needs, leaving more funds in the schools' general operating budgets to provide service for all students.

GenerationOn, from page 1

GenerationOn is a global service movement that encourages volunteerism. As part of the Council, the 10 young leaders will help to develop and execute GenerationOn's key initiatives, and serve as an ambassador for the next 18 months.

During her time in the capital, she learned leadership training, team building and spent time with Neil Bush, chairman and CEO of Points of Light Institute, as well as other executives. She was interviewed by NBC in her role as an ambassador for GenerationOn and is part of a team creating a documentary service project about veterans, according to her mom, Sherri Smith. On their last night in Washington, D.C., the student leaders attended a tribute to former Pres. George H. W. Bush, who created the Points of Light Institute.

Smith said she is proud of her daughter and what she has accomplished at a young age. "I think it's a wonderful legacy for our family," Smith said. "She's setting the path for the two little ones (Worsham's siblings) and she's a great example for teens.

"She cares about the people around her."

As part of Worsham's role, she will reach out to Skyline High School and the community to encourage others to participate in this new youth movement through service projects.

She and the other team members plan to meet over the summer and will have conference calls to discuss progress around the country.

"I will be trying to promote youths to volunteer – to tell

them that you can do it without adults. You don't have to be an adult to make a difference."

She hopes to generate a high school rivalry of sorts in Ann Arbor over the coming year, she said: She wants to have a cross-town canned food drive next fall as a GenerationOn project.

Worsham has big plans for her future. She wants to be a plastic surgeon, something she was inspired to do when learning about Operation Smile, an international program that helps children with cleft palates get pro-bono surgeries. She is planning to enroll in the Early College Alliance @

Eastern Michigan University in the fall, which will allow her to continue her high school education while earning college credit and move her closer to her goal of medicine in a shorter time.

She is presently enrolled in the Business, Marketing and Information Technology Magnet program at Skyline and is involved with the school's Forensics Team where she does oratory, is part of the Student Action Senate, is a member of the Skyline Debate Team and also volunteers with the American Red Cross where she assists with community blood drives.

Why is volunteering so important? "You don't know who you can meet," she said. "It shows you how different people live. It also brings joy to your life. It's a joy."

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'(Volunteering) shows you how different people live. It also brings joy to your life.'
– Malaika Worsham, Skyling High School sophomore

C-SPAN honors Pioneer video project

3 juniors receive recognition at showing, awards presentation

View the award-winning Pioneer student video here: <http://news.a2schools.org/?p=4522>

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Three Pioneer High School juniors were honored this month for their work in creating and documenting a video about the Stadium Boulevard bridges as part of the C-SPAN 2011 StudentCam Competition.

Rosanna Neuhausler, Ryan Murphy and Jack Wissman received awards for being one of 75 student-produced videos honored throughout the country in the contest for their project called "Stadium Bridges." The winning entries were originally announced in March and can be viewed at studentcam.org.

The video includes the students' explanation of the bridges, the problem and plans to repair them, the federal government's involvement and an interview with Ann Arbor City Councilwoman Margie Teall.

Debbie Lamb, coordinating producer for C-SPAN was on hand for the awards ceremony and viewing of the video, which can be found online with other student works at the C-SPAN website. Families and other Pioneer students were part of the awards day.

"They did a great job of incorporating the interviews – I liked the (video) shots," Lamb said.



Debbie Lamb, C-SPAN coordinating producer, recently visited Pioneer High School where she honored three students for their work on "Stadium Bridges," a student-produced video as part of the 2011 StudentCam Competition. Rosanna Neuhausler, Ryan Murphy and Jack Wissman created the video which was among 75 videos honored around the country. It discussed the problem with the bridges, on which many Pioneer students travel to-and-from school every day.

"They showed the importance of how this situation has impacted the community and how the federal government plays a role."

The topic of this year's contest addressed just that: "Washington D.C. through my Lens," and had students show how a federal government decision can have direct impact on a local level, Lamb said.

A total of 1,070 entries were received for the 2011 contest, involving 1,400 students in grades 6-12 across 40 states and Washington, D.C.

Wissman said the trio Pioneer chose the topic after considering the impact that Stadium Boulevard has on the school. "It's really a key road," he said. "Most students travel on it to get to school."

Murphy noted, "there's a lot that needs to be done with it." He said the three worked well

together to help the idea gel.

Neuhausler said she did much of the technical work of putting the video together, while her partners wrote the script and produced the content. She said filming the Stadium Bridges took a lot of work and time; it took the three students about 20 hours of total time to produce the film, she said.

The project was awarded \$250 from C-SPAN that the three students will divide.

Pioneer teacher Tracey Van Dusen was also lauded during the short ceremony for her support of C-SPAN and involving her students in programs that help them understand their government such as the video competition. She competed several years ago to be awarded a C-SPAN fellowship and also became a C-SPAN ambassador.

Other Pioneer students were recognized for their work, which was also entered in the competition. They included:

- Nate Carillo, Kevin Zhang and Jacob Winick for a film on the auto bailout
- Jan Wu, Don Yoon Choi and Guan Lun He for a film about education reform
- Jack McKarns, Ruohao Li and James Boyd for a film about immigration
- Garrett Kessler, Garrett Halpert and Mac Moore for a film about federal stimulus money in Ann Arbor.

The 2012 topic for the C-SPAN contest has been selected, Lamb said. Students can be thinking about how they will take a provision of the U.S. Constitution and illustrate why it's important to them.

DonorsChoose.org project brings new reading area to Thurston classroom

By Casey Hans
AAPSNews Service

Allison Zolad, a first-grade teacher at Thurston Elementary School, has reached her goal of getting a bookshelf and cozy reading rug for her classroom, thanks to a project she posted on DonorsChoose.org.

A second-year teacher in her first year in Ann Arbor, Zolad said she first found out about DonorsChoose.org when she taught at a Detroit charter school last year. This year, she was able to organize her project, post it, and get community support for more than \$1,000 in donations and DonorsChoose.org gift certificates that were put toward the project.

A recent donation of such certificates from the Ann Arbor District Library came after the library purchased 13 copies of the movie "Waiting for Superman" for their collection and got the gift certificates.

"As a result of our normal purchase of materials for our collection, AADL was happily surprised to receive several gift cards from DonorsChoose," said library spokesman Tim Grimes. "Since these gift cards . . . are meant, not for public libraries, but for local schools, AADL was pleased to pass the gift cards on to Thurston Elementary School." Grimes said Thurston was the one public school in the Ann Arbor district participating in DonorsChoose at the time of the donation.

Zolad said the remainder of the money came from some parents, some Thurston alumni and even some strangers who found the project online and donated.

How the program works, is that teachers can put together a wish list, go to the site and shop to determine what they want and how much it will cost and post the project to begin publiciz-



ing it. The projects are posted for six months; if the dollar goal is not reached, DonorsChoose.org allows the organizer to do a lesser project. Zolad said it took her about 45 minutes to put her project together and post it.

The website focuses on public school classrooms. Interested teachers can set up an account once their school is listed, and then sign up to get points which can go to projects. Zolad said other teachers are asking for things such as field trips and tech supplies.

Zolad said once her goal was reached, DonorsChoose.org shipped the rug and bookcases directly to her classroom. "The kids were so excited when we got it," she said. "They love the carpet, especially."

Zolad also purchased durable metal bookcases to replace the older, wooden ones that were taped together and falling apart. "I believe that providing a large selection of books is the best way to encourage students to read," she said in her

explanation online.

With the new items, a rug with primary colors, numbers and letters is the centerpiece of the classroom, surrounded by bookshelves. The classroom library is overflowing with books, many of which Zolad has collected over the past five years. She said she has about 1,600 student books for students.

The 25 students in Zolad's class are diverse, representing a wide range of cultures and speak five different languages. She explains that students are just grasping letter-sound relationships and reading beginning chapter books.

"The kids here are just so excited about school," she said. "At this young age, they learn so quickly – I've seen a lot of measurable progress."

Zolad, 24, is a Farmington native. She became interested in teaching while working at the Farmington YMCA as a teenager and went on to study education in college.

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State Rep. Mark Ouimet answers questions of a middle-level English as a Second Language class at Stone High School. Students studied government before Ouimet's visit.

**VIDEO: Visit to ESL class
online at news.a2schools.org**

Civics lessons for adult ed students

State Rep. Mark Ouimet visits ESL, GED classes in Ann Arbor

From AAPSNews Service

State Rep. Mark Ouimet visited adult education programs in Ann Arbor this month, attending both a GED class at Mallets Creek Branch of the Ann Arbor District Library and also an English as a Second Language class at Stone School.

He said it was a particular treat to visit Stone, where the ESL adult program is based. "Both of my kids went to school here," he said. The class he visited was a middle-level adult ESL class, where students have progressed in their speaking and understanding of the English language.

Students taking classes this term hail from a wide variety of areas of the world including China, the Middle East, Korea, Italy, Ecuador, Taiwan, Japan, South and Central Americas and Turkey, among others.

Ouimet told students he

'It is important to look at education of the whole person.'

– Sharman Spieser, Adult Education Director

worked as a bank teller, eventually moving into the political arena to serve on the Ann Arbor City Council and the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners before being elected to the state House of Representatives.

"I've been involved in politics on and off my whole life; it's something my family's always looked at in terms of participating in the community... we always felt it was very important," he told students.

He also served as the chancellor of Northwood University in Midland, where he said there

was a large international community of students.

Sharman Spieser, adult education director, said she appreciated Ouimet's visit to the Adult Ed program and his willingness to learn about the educational needs of the Ann Arbor community.

"It is important to look at education of the whole person," she said. "We need to support learning from infancy through adulthood, pre-school through post secondary and beyond, if we are going to have thriving communities where everyone contributes."

Students researched the state legislature and state government before Ouimet's visit and were able to ask him questions.

About 75 percent of the ELS class work in the community or have spouses working here, said ESL teacher Odette Petrini. Many also have children in the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Home building students earn first place at state SkillsUSA competition

The Ann Arbor Student Home Building Industries Program is home to the State champion gold medal winning builders. Ann Arbor students placed first in the SkillsUSA "TEAMWORKS" competition in Lansing over the weekend of April 16-17 and will go on to compete at the National level in Kansas City in late June.

Winning Huron High School seniors on the team included: Aaron Wyse, general contractor and mason; Jose Tavarez, carpenter; Sergie Aviles, electrician; and Dillon Davis, plumber. They won both the presentation and construction portions of the event to take top honors.

The students competed as building contractors to present an extemporaneous business plan and the following day constructed a frame structure with functional plumbing, electrical and masonry components in a seven-hour cooperative effort, according to teacher and program adviser John Birko.

The students were awarded tool prizes and a \$1,200 travel voucher from Lowes for their trip to Kansas City. (Photo courtesy, John Birko)



Peace Center celebrates 40 years of family help

Students of all ages are nurtured, assisted with schoolwork

By Annabel Weiner
AAPSNews Service

Everyone is part of the family at Peace Neighborhood Center, where the staff, students, donors and volunteers are part of the organization that nurtures students and helps them with academics.

Peace Center is celebrating its 40th year of helping the community. The center was initiated by Ann Arbor residents because of misunderstandings that came about between people who were on opposite ends of the economic scale. To release tension and to solve conflicts, Peace Neighborhood was formed. The center has evolved over the years and has added many more programs.

Today, Peace Neighborhood Center serves students in grades kindergarten through 12. There is a Monday-Wednesday program for middle school students and a Tuesday-Thursday program for elementary school students. Many of the students middle school and elementary school, are picked up from their school by Peace Neighborhood staff and, when they arrive, they are given the option of eating a full meal.

After their meal, they have organized activity time. The activities are different for elementary and middle school students. On Mondays, the organized activity for middle school students is attending a girls' group or a boys' group. Girls have one group called Sisters Together Achieving Real Success, or STARS, and the boys group is called Rising Suns.

In these groups, they talk about things like their dreams and goals for the future. On Wednesdays they



have college preparatory activities, such as learning about the financial aid processes and having speakers come in.

On Tuesdays, elementary school students have the chance to join a club of their choice that they stay in for the whole year. The clubs offered are music, dance, strategy games, kitchen science, and building. On Thursdays they meet according to grade level (first-graders meet together, second graders meet together... etc.) and work on skills such as cooperation and team work. After these activities both age groups have the chance to work with volunteer tutors on homework and skills that they need help with.

Although it is Peace Neighborhood Center's priority to serve economically or socially challenged families, they also help families who are better off. They understand that even if some families do not have economic or

social problems, they still have needs.

Children Services Coordinator Terri Strom is in her 13th year working at the center. She started when she was a graduate student in the University of Michigan's social work program. Her children are also a part of the Peace Neighborhood family and attend the programs.

Strom coordinates activities for elementary students and works with volunteers.

"Part of what we do is provide some advocacy and support to parents for kids who maybe need more assistance in school if they're behind academically or are having behavior issues in school," she explained. "We'll work with parents and the teachers and social workers at the schools to help them come up with plans and help reinforce that (at the Peace Neighborhood Center.) We do a lot of different things than just the programs that the kids come to."



Above, Terri Strom and her son Moses, who attends Peace Neighborhood programs.

At left, Emily Cornelius does her homework during tutoring time.

Peace Center will celebrate its 40 years with a block party from 5-8 p.m. on Thursday, June 23 on the center's front lawn.

(Photos courtesy: The Communicator Online)

Strom said she is impressed by how resilient the children are and said she loves seeing students become successful.

"Working here at Peace we see a lot of children who have to deal with a lot of things ... that are hard," she said. "If it's drug use by their parents or parents being incarcerated, or abuse by family members or in their families. Just a wide range of things that kids have to deal with, and it's amazing to see how resilient they are and how they keep going and how you still see them grow and change and become beautiful young people."

Annabel Weiner is on staff at The Communicator, Community High School's student print and online publication (<http://the-communicator.org/>). This story was originally published in The Communicator online and is reprinted with permission.

School Bells

For more news and achievements in the Ann Arbor Public Schools, visit www.a2schools.org/aaps/admin.super/this_week for "This Week in the Ann Arbor Public Schools" from our superintendent.

Pioneer top GRAMMY Signature School

Pioneer High School has been selected as the National GRAMMY Foundation Signature School for 2011. The announcement was made by the GRAMMY Foundation, according to Robin Bailey, fine arts coordinator for the Ann Arbor Public Schools Pioneer will receive \$15,000 for the honor.

"We are proud of these very dedicated student musicians and

their excellent music instructors," she said. The instructors include: David Leach, Performing Arts Department chairman; Jonathan Glawe, Orchestra; Steve Lorenz, Choir; Nancy Waring, Band/Music Theory and Technology; and Rochelle Martinez, Piano and Guitar.

A concert honoring these Pioneer students and music staff will be at 8 p.m. May 26 at Hill Auditorium.

Created in 1998, the GRAMMY Signature Schools program recognizes top U.S. public high schools that make a commitment to music education during an academic school year. Each of the 36 GRAMMY Signature Schools will receive a custom award and a monetary grant. The top seven schools are designated Gold recipients. The best of the Gold recipients is named the National GRAMMY Signature School.

Survey data posted on partnership

Survey data from the Mitchell-Scarlett partnership survey is now available on the school district's website. (www.a2schools.org)

The district is creating the K-8 campus between Mitchell Elementary School and Scarlett Middle School in Ann Arbor through a partnership between the Ann Arbor Public Schools and the University of Michigan School of Education.

After reviewing data, Ann Arbor Public Schools officials determined that the district would move forward with the partnership for the 2011-12 school year, but would not reconsider a balanced calendar until the 2013-14 school year. The decision was made in order to put a system in place for measuring and evaluating teacher performance

in the program and to introduce enrichment intersessions for students during school breaks. A number of enrichment activities are planned for the inaugural 2011 school year for interested families.

Recycling event slated for May 7

An E-Waste Recycling Event will be hosted on Saturday, May 7, from 9 a.m.- 2 p.m. at Pioneer High School. Recycle e-waste such as computer systems, monitors, speakers, printers, wires/cables, modems plus more at no cost.

This drive-through, drop-off event is co-sponsored by the University of Michigan Office of Campus Sustainability and Apple. Visit www.a2schools.org for more information including a list of materials accepted.

1,300 students enjoy Pioneer's 'Seussical'

From AAPSNews Service

About 1,300 youngsters flooded into the Schreiber Theater at Pioneer High School last week to experience the magic of Dr. Seuss and the Pioneer Theatre Guild's spring production of "Seussical the Musical."

They came from elementary schools around the Ann Arbor district for a special, youth production of the show, based on the beloved works of Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss.

Pioneer Theatre Guild Producer Susan Hurwitz said the group has always brought plays and musicals to the stage with students in mind. "In all of our shows, we bring in a big, educational component," she said.

The Guild works with Pioneer High Schools students to encourage a love of theater and works with theater students from the University of Michigan who direct,



Elementary students from around the district enjoyed a 90-minute production of "Seussical the Musical," a Pioneer Theatre Guild production that ran through May 1.

get hands-on experience.

"These kids are great role models. They're hard-working," she said. High school students learn not only about on-stage skills, but also sound and technical aspects of theater production.

Hurwitz said the Guild brings in local playwrights and historians to talk about the various plays, their setting and what life was like during that time. "We always try to make every show relevant – give them context," she explained. "We try to make it well-rounded. They understand the roles they're playing and the history of the times."

The Pioneer Theater Guild has

VIDEO online at a2schools.org

produced such popular children's musicals as Beauty and the Beast, the Wizard of Oz, Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory and High School Musical as well as plenty of adult fare including Carousel, Hair, Miss Saigon and Oklahoma. They have a full season of productions each school year.

The Guild involves between 200 and 250 students for each performance, Hurwitz said. She noted that the Pioneer Theatre Guild is the second-largest extra-

curricular activity at the school.

One popular event put on by the Pioneer Theatre Guild is "Future Stars," an American Idol-style event that brings youthful talent to the stage and allows the audience to vote on their favorites.

This is the ninth year the Guild has sponsored the event, which draws upwards of 5,000 people to Pioneer for the performances and finals. This year, the finals were sold out, Hurwitz said.

Budget, from page 1

will return to on July 1 when new Superintendent Patricia Green takes the helm. “You’re going to cut your school district to a point where it won’t be attractive to the community.”

He encouraged the community to get involved with the issue during two budget sessions where he laid out the district’s financial situation and explained that it faces a \$15 million deficit going into the 2011-12 year that begins on July 1.

He shared a plan to save \$14.4 million and said the district is searching for another \$683,000 in cuts or new revenues; those attending the budget forums were asked for their ideas. The Ann Arbor Board of Education must adopt a balanced budget by June 30.

Allen noted that the proposed savings do not include the impact from the May 3 special education millage renewal election, which represents \$5.8 million to Ann Arbor. A loss of this countywide initiative would create a larger deficit, as more dollars would be taken out of local General Fund for these mandated services.

“If everyone of us does not vote ‘yes’ on May 3, we are in a much more drastic situation,” noted Amy Pachera, a parent and member of the county millage committee, who spoke to the group Monday night.

The district’s budget plan would reduce 79 positions including: 70 teaching posts, three paraprofessional positions and one support position at central office and moving one administrative post to IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) grant funding. It would also reduce and combine four administration positions, moving one principal over Abbot and Wines elementary schools and another over Angell and Pittsfield elementaries.

The proposed plan includes a

May 6 roundtable

A public roundtable session about state school funding with The Ann Arbor Board of Education and area legislators is scheduled.

When: Friday, May 6 from 5:30-7 p.m.

Where: Pioneer High School cafeteria.

What: The sessions will include a history of AAPS budget, Gov. Rick Snyder’s budget implications, ideas for reform and public commentary. Public comment time will be limited, so those wishing to speak are asked to sign up in advance at 734-994-2232.

Other: The event will be telecast on CTN Education Channel 18.

total of \$7.1 million in reductions from instructional support services, \$2.142 from operational expenses, \$1.6 million savings in wages and benefits already negotiated and \$1.275 in other districtwide expenses. It also projects \$1.3 million in new revenue from 170 new students in the district’s Schools of Choice program and from projected public parking fee increases at Pioneer High School on football Saturdays.

“With the structural deficit, we will find ourselves, year after year facing greater reductions,” Interim Deputy Superintendent for Instruction Lee Ann Dickinson-Kelley told parents. “If funding changes in the state of Michigan, some of the proposals in front of you can change or be done differently. At this point in time that is not the case. We’re trying to balance the budget as best as we know to do.”

The Ann Arbor Public Schools has cut \$34 million from its operating budget in five years, including \$18 million in

the present fiscal year. Some of the lost staffing positions have been covered without layoffs in the past due to retirements; the district has lost 262 positions over the five-year period, Allen said.

“Eighty-five percent of our costs are in people,” he explained. “We’ve been able to achieve most of this through attrition. That gets harder and harder every year.”

About 100 members of the community and school officials who facilitated small group discussions attended each of the sessions, held Monday and Thursday evenings last week.

From the small group breakouts came suggestions that the district involve more parents in discussion of elementary school principal pairings and that Ann Arbor look to other districts that have done creative things with less. There were also concerns about cuts to high school bus service and how it would impact low-income families who are not close to a public bus line or have no carpooling options. Concerns were also raised about proposed changes to noon-hour supervision, about the number of teaching positions proposed for reduction and that cuts might impact the desirability of the district.

Suggestions for more revenue included more corporate sponsorships, creating a standardized list of supplies and equipment to save money, better marketing of good things in the district, better customer service training for employees and privatizing some positions to alleviate rising retirements costs. It was also suggested that assistant middle school principals be shared, that the district’s Schools of Choice options be further expanded and that additional partnerships with universities be pursued. More distance learning was also suggested.

One parent noted that the

district needed to consider more “open education,” saying that there is a demand in the community at elementary and middle school levels for programs such as those at Ann Arbor Open @ Mack and Community High School, which often have waiting lists and lotteries for enrollment.

Dickinson-Kelley addressed the proposed pairing of principals, saying that the sharing of principals will be challenging, but noting that the district would increase office support and have a pool of teachers for greater flexibility at the schools.

“I am enormously proud of our schools ... our teaching staff and our administrative staff” as the district works through the process, she said, adding that the current school funding climate “is going to require that we care for each other ... because those resources are pretty tight.”

Two Ann Arbor school advocacy groups are also sending e-mail blasts relating to the school funding problem. Michigan Parents for Schools has an action alert up that allows residents from throughout Michigan to send messages to the governor, state senator and their state representative all in one step. Visit their website at www.miparentsforschools.org.

The Ann Arbor PTO Council Advocacy Committee is also alerting parents about school funding, asking them to pass out fliers, make calls and contact legislators to let Lansing hear from local parents on funding issues. Visit them from the parents’ section of the AAPS homepage: www.a2schools.org.

Editor’s Note: Comments will be compiled from budget sessions and put up on the district website www.a2schools.org. Watch the main home page for updates.