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From Panic to Proficiency: MSBA’s Ongoing Commitment to Equipping School Board Members for Effective Governance

By Linda Leiding, MSBA President and Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial School Board Member

Panic is that overwhelming fear that strikes people in the face of real or imagined danger. Shortly after being elected to the school board, the superintendent explained the complexities of school finances. He showed me a one-inch-thick binder and indicated that each page represented a different fund category. The panic began to set in. However, after that, I attended MSBA Phase II training. The training significantly increased my understanding of the role of a school board member, good governance policies and practices, and school finances. While the panic did not completely dissipate, the class significantly improved my confidence as I assumed the role of school board member.

In Minnesota, MSBA is the go-to organization for school board members. One of its strategic initiatives is Board Development – empowering school board members to become informed elected officials and demonstrate an understanding of school governance. To meet the objective, MSBA provides numerous training opportunities that address the role of school board members, complying with open meeting laws, and managing budgets and finances. Phase III provides insight into becoming a high-performing board. Phase IV provides guidance on policy and involving the community. Over the past few years, MSBA has added several additional opportunities for school board members, including the virtual Coffee & Conversation, the virtual Board Chair Chats, and its Third Thursday Webinar Series.

MSBA staff members recognize the need for ongoing board development to equip members with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective governance. They are committed to providing the training and information in the manner that best meets the needs of its members, including in-person meetings and classes and virtual options such as webinars and Zoom meetings. Over the next few years, MSBA will review all training opportunities to determine if there are gaps in the training and develop new opportunities to address the gaps. In addition, the MSBA staff members are embarking on a plan to provide training in a manner that will continue to meet the needs of all adult learners.

Looking forward, MSBA is committed to continuous improvement and ensuring that all school board members are able to govern effectively. So, whether you are in your first term or are a veteran school board member, if you ever have questions or feel that tinge of panic, please remember that the MSBA staff members are there to answer your questions and provide information that will decrease the panic and increase your confidence to govern effectively. MSBA will continue to ensure that all school board members, regardless of their experience, have the tools and confidence to make informed decisions that lead to student achievement across Minnesota.

Linda Leiding, MSBA President and Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial School Board Member. Direct questions to Linda at lleiding10@gmail.com.
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This article is a collaborative effort between the St. Anthony-New Brighton School Board and the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District. St. Anthony-New Brighton has approximately 1,900 students and 350 staff members. Located between Minneapolis and Roseville, the district serves a diverse student population with varied backgrounds, languages, and cultures.

School boards have a unique and powerful role in transforming a district’s educational system. However, as a school board member or supportive staff to the board, it can seem like day after day, and year after year, attaining the goals we once set for ourselves and for the district starts to become more distant and unattainable.

So, what stands in the way?
Organizational change poses significant challenges. As we initiate change, new complexities emerge, emphasizing the need for effective infrastructure to guide the transformation. People are central to this process, facing obstacles rooted in old habits and traditional views of education. When education focuses on efficiency rather than actual learning, teaching is reduced to a game. This hinders genuine learning and instead teaches students how to play the system.

School board work is further complicated by community resistance to change and competing priorities. Maintaining organization and focus is crucial in navigating these distractions.

Financial constraints add another layer of difficulty. For example, our community overwhelmingly passed a levy in November 2023, despite the considerable tax burden on individual households, aimed at closing the inflationary gap.
What does St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools stand for?
The goal of our district is to ensure the success of all learners, foundationally meaning ending disparity, disproportionality, and predictability in student outcomes. This is the dream and the promise of public education.

What is the school board’s role in that change?

Establish and maintain common contextual understanding

At St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools, our board governs by setting the direction and the district staff develops and implements a plan. We affectionately note our board’s first policy, Policy 1.1, which states:

“We believe that the school exists for the benefit of the students and society. Consistent with the ideals of democracy, the school should provide the opportunity for each student to discover and develop his interests and abilities for a useful and happy life in our society. This school shares this responsibility with the home, church, and other community institutions.”

This policy established the same thinking our community survey confirms 61 years later as community goals and expectations for the school district.

Develop guiding principles

In 2014, the board established district guiding principles by updating the district mission, vision and values following an extensive world café-styled engagement process. Upon hiring our superintendent, she immediately began to work with the St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools Teaching and Learning team and the board to operationalize student success.
The board passed a portrait of a graduate, which we call Success Metrics.

St. Anthony-New Brighton defines success as a student who:

• Has acquired academic skills and life skills to positively contribute to society,
• Has a love for learning,
• Is able to meet the social-emotional needs of themselves and others and,
• Can become a thriving citizen.

Many school boards adopt a portrait of a graduate – this isn’t revolutionary work. However, this was revolutionary for our district by connecting thoroughly defined success metrics to effective instruction and using that to implement system transformation.

The district developed logic models aligning with the board’s success metrics, integrating teaching and learning, district guiding principles, and equity assessments to create common understanding.

Create a teaching and learning system

Superintendent Renee Corneille led a teaching and learning team, involving staff, administrators, and board members in a deep dive into the research and science of learning. This required unlearning and relearning established notions.

Key questions explored:

• What is the historical context of our current system?
• Why is the system structured as it is?

Realizing that every system yields its designed results, the focus shifted to making teaching rigorous, relevant, and rooted in developmental relationships.

While the process spanned 2018-2024, marking a rapid shift for the district, it became evident that both the board and the system required education on the necessity of this change. The board committed to success metrics, modeling their use in the transformation process.

Recognizing the need for deep learning to comprehend the governance implications, the board allocated dedicated meeting times and work sessions for board professional development to understand success metrics. More recently, the board actively participated in sections of teaching and learning staff professional development to grasp operational requirements for policies, budgets, and superintendent supervision and support. Continuing to understand this work is currently a multiyear goal for the board.

Do intentional assessments to understand current issues

The board created action plans by directing the superintendent to conduct two distinct inquiries for a comprehensive view of student learning. One was on a comprehensive needs assessment focused on teaching and the other was an equity review of student experience. These ongoing evaluations enrich our nuanced understanding of teaching and learning. We actively contributed to contractor selection, survey design, conversations, classroom observations, data reflection, and collaborative efforts in developing governance recommendations, all processed during dedicated professional development time.

Determine the budget

The superintendent gathered feedback from staff, community members, and students on their experiences at St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools. The data underscored the need for system change, with the school community’s input considered crucial. The board reviewed operational plans, teaching and learning strategies, and success metrics, asking for cost estimates for idea implementation and creating a budget.

Prioritizing student education, the board invested in staff to support transformative change. The budget reflects this commitment to a student learning-centered model, shaped through data and co-creation.

Ongoing budget work involves collaboration with the superintendent and business office on developing enrollment forecasts, writing grants, and understanding legislative formulas. The board shares findings and questions with MSBA and legislators, and communicates these with the community.

Provide excellent policy review and governance models

The board ultimately brings all of the previously listed elements together for effective governance. This emphasizes adherence to the governance model, teaching our students, staff, and community members where to ask questions and how to be involved through our teaching and learning committee. We give direction to the superintendent to enhance our governance, especially around output metrics and evaluating inputs. The board’s policy committee works with administration and staff to ensure that the supports needed for transformation are embedded within policies.

Support the Superintendent

The board has one employee to hire, supervise and evaluate. Superintendent Corneille has an audacious
dream for public education and she is building on the good work of others while setting a new course, demanding that we stop avoiding difficult transformative change and proudly commit to see it through. In addition to setting up deadlines, we also encouraged the superintendent to shift from convincing the board of the need for change (setting up dominos) to implementation (knocking over the first domino).

What next?
The district is actively implementing transformative changes, with the board regularly assessing the superintendent’s adherence to the plan. Drawing from experiences during COVID-related school changes, we apply those lessons in our efforts. We evaluate and monitor success metrics goals, inputs, and acknowledge and adjust if needed.

Our geographically small district shares commonalities and challenges with other statewide districts. As part of a national education system evolving for the 21st century, we emphasize opportunities and access to academic success for all students.

Close partnership between the board and Superintendent is crucial for this transformation. We strive to meet the superintendent’s expectations, fund, advocate for, and support her plans through governance. Success in this endeavor would fulfill the promise of our education system and indeed, our country, despite the challenges public education faces. We remain confident in our ability to succeed in this transformative process. We will succeed.

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Helping Principals Grow

Principals are essential to a district’s success — how can their supervisors help?

By Dr. Peter Olson-Skog, Superintendent of West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan Area Schools

We all remember the teacher who made a difference in our lives. How about a principal? According to research, principals make nearly the same difference as teachers (Grissom et al., 2021, Marzano et al., 2005, Wahlstrom et al., 2010). While their impact is not felt as directly by students, it is more widespread.

Specifically, students in a school with a highly effective principal will grow approximately three months more per year (in both math and reading), than students in a school with an ineffective principal (Grissom et al., 2021). Grissom’s team goes on to argue that there is no better return on investment than helping principals grow as leaders. The question is how.

That was the question that drove my research. In a study of four districts, I interviewed the superintendents, principals, and any other district office staff who were directly responsible for supervising principals. I was probing to find the attributes and actions that were present in a relationship between a principal and their supervisor that helped principals grow. From the principal perspective, “What can your supervisor do to help you grow as a leader?” From their supervisor’s perspective, “What do YOU do that truly helps principals grow?”

I found a great deal of agreement and, in their agreement, a number of very specific actionable recommendations. I also found some fascinating differences. My findings only included themes found across both principals and supervisors in all four districts. However, the depth to which a particular theme was discussed and the frequency it was mentioned among principals, in contrast to their supervisors, provided some important insights.

Trust is foundational, but how do you create it?

While the need for leaders to establish trusting relationships is found over and over in leadership literature, this study gave insight into how principals and supervisors believed trust is built. And, while supervisors discussed the need for trust, principals were the ones who described in the most detail how it is built (and torn down) and described in the following.

Knowing principals as individuals and adapting accordingly

It is important to principals, more than supervisors may realize, to know them deeply (both on a professional and personal level). If a supervisor cares to find out and then remember what is going on in the principals’ lives, principals experience a couple of things (at least). First, a
sense of caring. Second, if combined with individualized follow-up, a sense of being understood. For example, when a supervisor knows your interest in running, and asks if you would be interested in leading district-wide effort to improve mental health through physical activity, it demonstrates a knowledge of your strengths and offers new leadership opportunities based on that strength.

Or, imagine you mention to your supervisor that your mother recently entered a memory care unit and that you are the primary caregiver helping her make the transition. If your supervisor checks in with you about it a week later, you experience caring. If they extend a deadline, you experience understanding. Actions like these establish trust very quickly and are remembered by principals for years.

**Be a consistent, caring human**

Here again, supervisors and principals agree on a set of personality traits for supervisors that will enable principals to open up and trust their supervisors.

- **Be consistent:** A favorite quote from my interviews was, “I don’t want to guess which version of my boss will walk through the door each day.” Supervisors must strive to have consistent expectations and approaches to their work. It is hard to trust someone when you can’t reliably predict how they will react.

- **Be caring** - As mentioned, this can be shown through a supervisor’s individualized knowledge of principals. It can also be shown through recognizing accomplishments. Another frequently mentioned recommended action to demonstrate care was showing up and listening. Principals and supervisors agree that supervisors need to spend time in schools. For principals, especially when done informally and without an agenda, this demonstrated care. They want their supervisors to see them in action, understand the realities of their job firsthand, and ask for ways they can support the principal.

- **Be vulnerable and authentic:** Supervisors need to admit mistakes. They need to admit when they don’t know something. They need to admit when they are stressed and nervous, but also proud and relieved. Why? Because mistakes are necessary for growth, as is curiosity and the belief that you have things to learn. When supervisors fail to acknowledge their fear, mistakes, or lack of knowledge, they are modeling that the prerequisite experiences and emotions for growth are “not allowed” or at least not encouraged.

Once the foundation is built ...

Supervisors must strive to take the actions and have the attributes described above for principals to trust and open up. Without this foundation, supervisors’ efforts to help principals grow as leaders will be met with compliance at best. From this foundation, principals and their supervisors agreed on a host of other actions that would help principals grow and, when done well, further deepen trust. They include:

- Establishing clear expectations
- Spending time learning together
- Create systems for coaching and feedback
- Creating systems in the central office to
  - Align expectations
  - Mobilize support quickly
- Providing new and shared leadership opportunities at the district level

**Co-creation**

What is co-creation and why is it bolded?

In this context, co-creation is simply choosing to build district systems from the ground up with principals. It’s bolded because it was mentioned with a high degree of frequency and intensity in my interviews. And, of all the bulleted items above, it is one of the most transformative I have seen in my practice. For those reasons, it is the one I will spend the rest of the article discussing.

District office leaders can leave principals out of planning for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they feel principals are too busy, or shouldn’t leave their building. Sometimes principals will tell district office staff the same thing. Sometimes there is a looming deadline and efficiency takes precedence over collaboration. Nonetheless, in my research and experience, it is worth everyone’s time and any costs to the speed of implementation. This is most certainly true when the system will require the principal to play a key role (which they often do).

One specific and glaring example from the interviews was the definition of instructional leadership. Oftentimes, districts will have a rubric that attempts to create a common understanding and language around what it means to be an effective principal. In districts where principals played no role in selecting the rubric, let alone assist in creating it, they often couldn’t tell you what it is or even where to find it.

Through co-creation, principals will ensure that the given system is feasible and sustainable. Additionally, principals will inform how the system must adapt to
the individual needs of their school. The sum of which will increase the likelihood that principals will implement the system as designed with fidelity. In other words, they are more likely to follow through on a plan they helped create. And, ending where we began, it will establish more trust and openness to growth.

**A few key takeaways for school board members:**

- Invest in leadership development, in particular systems and people who will help your principals grow as leaders.
- Ensure those who are charged with supervising principals are afforded time to develop trusting relationships with principals.
- When you hear about a system in which principals play a key role, ask, “How did we involve principals in developing this system?”
- Ask, “What do we expect of principals? How did we decide? Are our expectations sustainable? If not, what are we doing to address it?”

Failing to invest in your principals’ development will limit your students’ growth. It is akin to using power tools to build your house, except for your manual screwdriver. Doing so will slow down everything else. Research has not only told us that we need to buy a power drill, but also where and how to use it. Time to get to the hardware store.

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What motivates you at work?
Opening session of the Leadership Conference: When the JROTC Color Guard and the student talent perform, I remind myself, “These kids are why we do the hard work.”

What were the last books you read?
“Lessons in Chemistry” by Bonnie Garmus and right now I’m reading “Think Again” by Adam Grant.

What’s your favorite film of all time?
This is a hard one. Probably “The Parent Trap,” both versions.

What song would you say best sums you up?
“Ironic” by Alanis Morissette: it reminds me that we can plan all we want but you never know how it’s going to turn out. And sometimes it’s for the better.

What skill would you most like to learn?
Speed reading. I love to read, but I’m terribly slow.

What makes you the proudest?
Our kids. Each has their own unique skills, challenges, personalities, and amazing accomplishments. It’s wonderful being a part of their journey.

What was one new experience you’ve tried that was completely unknown or uncomfortable to you at the time you tried it?
Running for the school board. I had helped a friend of mine with her campaign, and then she asked (told) me to run for the following election. I ran, won, served, and was offered the position at MSBA. Completely changed the trajectory of my career.

What is on your bucket list?
It’s silly but driving the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile. The drivers are called “Hotdoggers,” and the passenger is riding “shotbun” instead of shotgun.

What’s an essential part of your daily routine?
My husband and I walk the dogs every evening after supper. It’s great exercise and an opportunity to disconnect from everything else and talk about our day.

If you could only eat one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be?
My Mom’s roast, potatoes, carrots, and gravy.
When you initially ran for school board, you likely did so because you wanted to make a positive difference for your students, staff, and district. When people volunteer in schools, it’s typically because they want to make a positive difference, too. However, many people have difficulty volunteering during the school/work day or committing long term. Thankfully, there are some fun ways that you can encourage families and community members to get involved and support your schools.

Conference meals

One way to show appreciation for staff is by providing meals for them on conference nights. Your PTO/PTA groups may already coordinate these, but — if not — then you or a small group of volunteers could organize it for your school. These meals are much appreciated by staff and make a big difference since conference days may be 12 hours long. You make a list of food you need and people sign up to provide them. I recommend SignupGenius.com, a free and user-friendly resource for both you and your volunteers. Having it online also makes it easier for you and others to share it on social media and via email. People drop off the items at the school and volunteers help set up everything, serve, and/or clean up. You can offer catered or home-cooked ones – I’ve always offered home-cooked ones with themes like a “Taco Bar,” “Soup, Salad, & Breadsticks Bar,” or “Home-Cooked Favorites.” We even offered a dessert bar during a dedicated “Staff Appreciation Week.” By offering themed meals, you can reuse some of the printed materials and decorations each year, and volunteers say they prefer knowing exactly what is needed. Please note that these meals cannot be funded by school district funds.

Chalk up notes of appreciation

Another way to celebrate your staff during appreciation weeks is to encourage volunteers,
including students, to write notes of appreciation on the school sidewalks using chalk. You could leave a small, covered bin with sidewalk chalk for people to write positive messages so that the staff are greeted by kindness and reminded that they are loved every day. You could put a note on the box explaining its purpose. Hint: if you lightly spray the messages with hair spray, they will be more water-resistant and last longer.

**Positivity Project**

We can all use more positivity in our lives, so I started the “Positivity Project” in St. Michael-Albertville Schools to share positive messages on the bathroom stalls. Students, staff, parents, and community members have helped paint 100-plus student and staff bathroom stalls in most of our schools since 2019! These uplifting and encouraging messages brighten everyone’s days and add artistic flair to the bathrooms. The process I created to work within our spaces involves tracing designs (using chalk tracing paper and colored pencils) onto the bathroom stalls and then coloring them like a giant coloring book (using Sharpie Oil-Based Markers); a full-color picture of the design is posted next to the stall to make it easier for volunteers and help with color coordination among the stalls. We sealed the stalls with clear acrylic spray. All of this was done during breaks and weekends to simplify the logistics. Students submitted and voted on quotes for the stalls, then I purchased picture designs. Teachers recommended students who were artistic and mature enough for the project (since the markers are fairly permanent) and adults of all ages and abilities jumped in to help. It was awesome to see everyone working together to spread positivity in our schools, including the wonderful custodians who helped in many ways. Students showed pride in and took ownership of their work; this is likely why the stalls have held up well over the years. Local businesses generously donated food for the volunteers. You could create a wish list of needed supplies to save money, too (our district didn’t need to pay anything). This fun project has a long-lasting impact everywhere it is implemented.

**School supplies for students**

We all want everyone to start — and continue — the school year with a smile. Unfortunately, school supply costs have increased like everything else. However, even a small group of people can help provide students in need in their school (or district, depending on the size) with all the supplies they need to succeed in school. You can reach out to one of your schools and ask if they have any school supply needs, since many schools provide replacement supplies throughout the year, or students who need help. They could tell you the student’s grade, sex, and favorite colors/characters (optional), then you would assign a number to that student (no identifiable information would be shared). You would pull up the supply list for that particular grade and share it with a volunteer who wants to “adopt” that particular student. The volunteer would then purchase all the supplies on that student’s list, tag the bag with the student’s number, drop them off at the school or the volunteer coordinator’s home. The wonderful thing about this project is that people of all ages and abilities can participate and learn that everyone can make a difference even through something as small as a pencil. You will be amazed at how quickly you’ll find people eager to help, even if you just email friends or post on social media. In 2016, I asked if there was interest in helping provide all the school supplies for students in need.
in our district. Many people wanted to volunteer, so I created a Facebook group. Families emailed me if they required assistance, and we helped 48 families in our first year. By 2018, I created a website, www.ProjectPencils.com, and added an online form to make it easier. Individuals, businesses, and organizations have loved helping each year and say that they have been blessed by the experience, too. The joy and sparkle in the eyes of children when they receive their new supplies and backpack is one of the most beautiful things I’ve witnessed. We helped 669 Wright County students in 2023 (167 from our district alone)!

Before you hyperventilate, please start with just one school or a small number of students. If you get enough volunteers or interest, you can expand as you are able. But just know that helping even one student will make a powerful impact: you’ll give each student and family one more reason to smile and one less reason to worry.

Clothing donations

If you’re looking for simpler projects that encourage kindness, elementary schools can typically use spare clothing in case of accidents and winter gear for students in need. You can start a collection — after checking with your schools — and you are certain to find many people will want to help. When I have asked people for these items, they have gone above and beyond to provide items, including winter clothing for 54 students.

One great aspect of these difference-making opportunities is that volunteers can commit as much as and when they are able. They accommodate a variety of schedules. Some people may want to donate items or money and others would rather give their time. Either way, volunteers will learn about some of your schools’ needs, see how they can make a difference, and help your students, staff, and district in the process – all without using limited district funds. You will get a closer look at the students, staff, and families we serve as board members and see the “why” for everything we do.

If you would like more information, including documents with details, about any of these projects, please email me at hollees@mystma.org. I am happy to share anything you need. Have fun creatively engaging your community to help and support your schools!

Hollee Saville is a St. Michael-Albertville School Board Member. Direct questions to Hollee at hollees@mystma.org.
MSBA President Linda Leiding welcomed the membership to the 2024 MSBA Leadership Conference, which was held January 11-12 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Leiding serves on the Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial School Board.

Code.org Director of Policy Hannah Weissman co-presented the Leadership Conference’s Opening Session keynote address, “Computer Science and AI: Opportunity and Creativity,” along with Code.org CEO Hadi Partovi (who participated remotely). Weissman is a graduate of St. Paul Central High School.

The Roseau Jazz Band, under the direction of Chris Barnes, entertained conference attendees during the Opening Session of the Leadership Conference.

MSBA staff member Gail Gilman presented her “Increase Your Board Team’s Performance with MSBA’s School Board Self-Evaluation” roundtable session in the Exhibit Hall.

Several schools from the Northern Minnesota Robotics Conference presented a hands-on demonstration as part of the School Excellence Showcase held in the Exhibit Hall. This was one of 10 programs that were displayed during the School Excellence Showcase.
Upsala Area School Board member Dean Peterson (center) was honored for his active 30 years of school board service during the Leadership Conference Recognition Luncheon. MSBA President Linda Leiding and MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind presented Peterson with certificate.

The 2024 MSBA All-State School Board is comprised of (clockwise from top left): Cheryl Polzin (Wayzata), Pat Medure (Grand Rapids-Bigfork), Cathy Nathan (Rochester), Wendy Felton (South St. Paul), Vicki White (Walker-Hackensack-Akeley), and Laura Oksnevad (St. Anthony-New Brighton).

MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind honored outgoing MSBA Past President Michael Domin (Crosby-Ironton) with an award during the Recognition Luncheon. MSBA also recognized the following outgoing MSBA Board Directors: Jeanna Lilleberg (Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City), Nicole Hayes (Anoka-Hennepin), Michelle Yener (North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale), Julie Domogalla (East Central), and Jim DeVries (Mahnomen).

Robbinsdale Area School Board member Sharon E. Brooks presented Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Superintendent Theresa Battle (left) with the Minnesota School Board Directors of Color and Indigenous Fellowship’s Lighthouse Award. Fridley School Board member Abdisalam Adam also received a Lighthouse Award and Roseville Area School Board member Rose Chu earned the Marny Xiong Legacy Award.

Tyler Brakken (Win-E-Mac) earned the MSBA Rising Star Award, which is bestowed upon an up-and-coming school board member serving in their first term.

Robbinsdale Area School Board member Sharon E. Brooks presented Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Superintendent Theresa Battle (left) with the Minnesota School Board Directors of Color and Indigenous Fellowship’s Lighthouse Award. Fridley School Board member Abdisalam Adam also received a Lighthouse Award and Roseville Area School Board member Rose Chu earned the Marny Xiong Legacy Award.
2024 LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE SCRAPBOOK

2024 MSBA Honor Roll

MSBA All-State School
Pat Medure ................................................................. Grand Rapids-Bigfork
Cathy Nadler ............................................................. Rochester
Wendy Felton ............................................................... South St. Paul
Laura Oksnevad ......................................................... St. Anthony-New Brighton
Vicki White ................................................................. Walker-Hackensack-Akeley
Cheryl Polzin .............................................................. Wayzata

MSBA Rising Star Award
Tyler Brekenken .......................................................... Win-E-Mac

MAA Minnesota Superintendent of the Year
Joe Gothard ................................................................. St. Paul

Service Awards – 30 Years
Dean Peterson ............................................................. Upsala Area

Service Awards – 20 Years
Matt Frigge ................................................................. Byron
Bob Brintingham .......................................................... Cannon Falls Area
Jennifer Reyes ............................................................. Cass Lake-Bena
Lori Berg ................................................................. Chicago Lakes
Deb Ristau ................................................................. Fillmore Central
Shelley Bremsotch-Topness ............................................ Fillmore Central
Frank Duresky ............................................................. Kellihier
Anthony Schwing .......................................................... Lake Benton
Monte Nelson ............................................................. Little Fork-Big Falls
Michael Bash ............................................................... Orono
Kimberly Zol-Boldesthok .............................................. Pequot Lakes
Michael Hamann .......................................................... Perham-Dent
Joel Albright ............................................................... Rosemount-Apple
Amy Kelly ................................................................. St. Francis Area
Jody Bauer ................................................................. Tracy Area
Philip Rosendal ........................................................... Wabasha-Kellogg

President’s Awards
Awarded to members who have earned 300 points or more from MSBA training programs.
Megan Morrison ........................................................ ACGC
Nicole Hayes .............................................................. Anoka-Hennepin
Suzanne Wing ............................................................. Ashby
Ruthie Dallas ............................................................... Brooklyn Center
Jill Foland ................................................................. Duluth
Gail Theisen ............................................................... Forest Lake Area
David Marty ............................................................... Grand Rapids-Bigfork
Eric Morken .............................................................. La Crescent-Hokah
Steve Sorenson .......................................................... Madelia
Kitty Gogins ............................................................... Roseville
Kristi Peterson ........................................................... Shakopee
Lori Stein ................................................................. Walker-Hackensack-Akeley

Directors’ Awards
Awarded to members who have attained 100 or more points of attendance at MSBA training programs within the past four years of their term(s).
David Klett ................................................................. Albert Lea Area
Angie Krebs .............................................................. Alexandria
Erin Heers-McArdle ..................................................... Anoka-Hennepin
Cece Kroc ................................................................. Austin
Carl Dostal ................................................................. Badger
Stephanie Ferrin ........................................................... Barnum
Russell VanDenheuvel ................................................ Bertha-Hewitt
Amanda Lawrence ..................................................... Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose
Charles “CJ” Strehl ..................................................... Eden Prairie
Kyle Christensen ........................................................ Farmington Area

Leadership Development Certificates
Awarded to members who have completed the Phase I, Phase II, Phase III, and Phase IV workshops.
Carol McAlister ........................................................ Austin
Jenny Frenzel ............................................................. Bemidji Area
Janelle Bright .............................................................. Berth-Bertha-Hewitt
Jean Ashbaugh ............................................................ Bertha-Hewitt
Keith Bauch ............................................................... Bertha-Hewitt
Matt Blashack ............................................................. Bertha-Hewitt
Sarah Baumgartner ................................................... Bertha-Hewitt
Kevin Tiefel ............................................................... Bertha-Hewitt
Connie Gelle ............................................................. Braham Area
John Swanson ............................................................. Braham Area
Brian Luthens ........................................................... Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stuart
Amanda Lawrence ..................................................... Cambridge-Isanti
Mark Solberg ............................................................. Cambridge-Isanti
Jennifer Penzenstadler ................................................ Chisago Lakes
Jessica Medearis ........................................................ Columbia Heights
Roman Cooner .......................................................... Columbia Heights
Michelle Pettway ......................................................... Cooke County
Rena Rogers .............................................................. Crookston
Marcia Meine ........................................................... Crookston
Tommy Sabian .......................................................... Crosby-Ironton
Tonya Kelly ............................................................... Dawson-Boyd
Charles “CJ” Strehl ..................................................... Eden Prairie
Steve Bartz ................................................................. Eden Prairie

Karen Gabler ............................................................. Edina
Jen Harris ................................................................. Fairmont Area
Linda Moore .............................................................. Faribault
Curt Rebelein ............................................................. Forest Lake Area
Mark Schroeder .......................................................... Grand Rapids-Bigfork
Carissa McMillan ....................................................... Greenway
Mark Zuzek ............................................................... Hastings
Sarah Gabard ............................................................ Hibbing
Lori Opitz ................................................................. Holdingford
Patrick Meier ............................................................ Holdingford
Steven Adams ............................................................. Hopkins
Nicole Johnson ........................................................... Hutchinson
Garrett Luhens .......................................................... Hutchinson
Sarah Larsen ............................................................. Inver Grove Heights
Troy Schultz .............................................................. Jackson County Central
Joan Olson ................................................................. Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton
Sherri Daschner ........................................................ Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton
Stacey Stout .............................................................. Mahtomedi
Helen Lehti ................................................................. Maple Lake
Samantha Lange ........................................................ Milaca
Michael Remus ........................................................ Minnetonka
Casey Root ................................................................. Monticello
Dave Marquardt .......................................................... Moorhead Area
Keith Vogt ................................................................. Moorhead Area
Lorilee Bergin ........................................................... Moorhead Area
Amy Schultz .............................................................. Mora
Jennifer McNamie ....................................................... New London-Spicer
Del Brouwer ............................................................. New London-Spicer
Laura Nelson .............................................................. New London-Spicer
Corey Butler ............................................................. Northfield
Claudia Gonzalez-George ........................................... Northfield
Pat Theuer ................................................................. NRHEC
Todd Madsen ............................................................ Orono
Wendy Lundgaard ........................................................ Orono
Ronald Spanier .......................................................... Paynesville Area
Jon Karger ................................................................. Pelican Rapids
Wes Young ................................................................. Pierz
Nicki Linsten .............................................................. Pine River-Backus
Terese Bjornstad ........................................................ Red Wing
Rachel Marshall Schoenfelder ....................................... Red Wing
Karen MacLaughlin ..................................................... Rochester
Jamie Hillstrom .......................................................... Rockford Area
Jenny Kneeland .......................................................... Rockford Area
Blanca Vining ............................................................. Rosemount-Apple
Michael MacQueen ................................................... Roseville
Troy Schultz .............................................................. Wadena-Deer Creek
Mary Carlson ............................................................. Wrenshall

Minnesota School Board Directors of Color and Indigenous Fellowship Awards
Theresa Battle ........................................................... Burnsville-Eagan-Savage
Abdisalam Adam (Lighthouse Award) ................................ Frayde
Rose Chu (Marilyn Xiong Legacy Award) ................................ Roseville Area
Closing Session keynote speaker Ben Rudrud — accompanied by the Woodbury High School Choir — told school officials to be the power of encouragement for students during his “Positive Relationships and the Power of One” presentation.

MSBA President Linda Leiding introduced Shakopee School Board member Kristi Peterson (left) as MSBA’s President-Elect during the Closing Session.

The Woodbury High School Choir, under the direction of Tony Streng, provided the student entertainment during the Closing Session of the Leadership Conference.

MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind conducted the business session during the Closing Session of the conference.

MSBA staff member Joel Stencel paid a visit to the Ehlers booth in the Exhibit Hall during the Leadership Conference. Ehlers was one of our eight generous conference sponsors in 2024. Visit https://mnmsba.org/workshops-events/msba-leadership-conference/#sponsors to get a look at all of our conference sponsors this year.
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The READ Act’s Impact on Minnesota Schools
Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota organization provides deep dive into literacy legislation

By Rachel Depa, Decoding Dyslexia Board Member

As Minnesota school districts are beginning to sort out the details of The READ Act, there seem to be more questions than answers. Concern and frustration were a common theme among superintendents and school board members who met with board members from Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota at the Minnesota School Board Association’s Leadership Conference this past January. Members of Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota and their literacy coalition have been working with legislators at the forefront of the literacy conversation for nearly a decade in hopes of improving the declining literacy rates in Minnesota schools. Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota is looking to support teachers and school districts through this transition.

Most school board members are familiar with the premise of The READ Act; however, why it exists and what it entails may be less familiar. The READ Act is the culmination of years of legislative work between the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), legislators, and stakeholders. Throughout the last decade, stakeholders and advocacy groups have lobbied the Legislature with concerns and potential solutions regarding Minnesota’s literacy rates. Slow progress had been made over the years, but never enough to make a sweeping change in Minnesota classrooms.¹ Evidence of this can be seen in Minnesota’s most recent literacy rates on the Nation’s Report Card. At a low not reached since before 1998, only 32% of Minnesota’s fourth graders read proficiently or above. Minnesota saw its biggest increase in students reading below a basic reading level, which climbed to 39%. Numbers are even more concerning when looking at data for students of color and students in the National School Lunch Program.² While Minnesota’s continued decline in numbers is concerning and has given rise to this most recent legislation, the crisis surrounding literacy is decades old and nationwide.

In 2000, the National Reading Panel was assembled to find an answer to combat the nation’s reading crisis. The panel was assigned to research how children learn to read and how to best teach reading. This panel, in theory, should have effectively put an end to the “Reading Wars” that pitted two different methodologies against each other and left over half of the nation’s students below proficient.³ This may have happened had the results of the 18 months

of research done by the National Reading Panel been acted on at the time. The study confirmed that students need systematic and explicit instruction in the areas of phonemic awareness phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. For over 20 years, the report has been out with research offering potential solutions to the nation’s literacy crisis, a dramatic shift in how students currently are taught to read.

School board members, until recently, had no tangible reason to understand the difference between “balanced literacy” and the “science of reading.” Since school boards operate in a governance role, their interest rightly focused on the results rather than the process that brought those results. If students were not learning to read overall, what was being done to improve? If there were areas of deficit, how were they being addressed? The READ Act changes the role of the board member in literacy in that it attaches the Literacy Incentive Aid directly to the requirements of The READ Act. Literacy Incentive Aid is part of the district's budget, and oversight of the financial affairs of the district belongs to the school board. These dollars, under The READ Act, can be used for specific purposes, such as training teachers (and the substitute teachers required to cover classrooms if training is done on a school day) in a program approved by MDE, employing or contracting with a Literacy Lead, and purchasing materials for evidence-based instruction. Is The Read Act a piece of legislation that is insurmountable and out of touch as some believe, or is it an investment in long-term gains?

Minnesota’s READ Act attempts to make sweeping changes in literacy, reduce education costs, improve overall student outcomes, and return Minnesota to a leader in education. However, the cost of educating Minnesota students, especially those in need of additional resources, continues to outpace funding. Referred to as the “cross subsidy,” administrators and education lobbyists have begged for funding to offset the rising costs of special education against their desire to truly help their students who are in the most need. The READ Act aims to reduce some of these costs by giving general education teachers the training studies have shown will impact not only the 15-20% of the student body that has dyslexia but also improve the reading abilities of struggling and proficient readers in the classroom. With a goal of effectively instructing students before the need for special education arises, schools should see an impact in both their budgets and the success of their individual students. If successful, this would allow for limited special education resources to be focused on students who need them most.

The READ Act was written for all students; however, it does have practical implications for students with dyslexia. Dyslexic students who qualify for special education do so under the category of Specific Learning Disability (SLD). This is the largest category, representing 32-33% of all special education students. While historically under-diagnosed, dyslexia accounts for 80% of all learning disabilities. Dyslexic students, diagnosed or not, often struggle with reading and, if unable to make some gains, fall behind until they are evaluated and placed in special education. In 2022, MDE reported 36,911 students were identified under the SLD category as their primary disability, costing schools on average $11,003 per student. When combined with students who were in special education for multiple disabilities including SLD, Minnesota schools paid more than $430 million to remediate just those students in special education. This does not include the cost to remediate students who never qualified for special education and were receiving Basic Skills, Title 1, Reading Corps; working through the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process; brought to Student Support Services (SST); or the cost of both successful and failed IEP evaluations and
classroom interventions. As one can see, Minnesota schools could no longer afford to continue down the same path they were on. The rest of the nation was moving forward with the Science of Reading, and Minnesota was watching test scores fall along with its status as a leader in education.  

As the literacy crisis continued to loom in Minnesota, there was one state that was making gains in literacy that had traditionally cemented its place at the bottom of the rankings. As Mississippi began to make significant strides in reading proficiency, those charged with addressing the literacy crisis took notice. How had Mississippi fourth graders, who were more than a year behind, made such huge gains? They were investing in their greatest resource, teachers. Mississippi was doing what the National Reading Panel told America 20 years prior. That resulted in the “Mississippi Miracle,” with Mississippi gaining 10 points in 2019 on the Nation’s Report Card (NAEP), the only state to make significant gains. Mississippi began training all their teachers in “Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling” (LETRS) in the 2014-2015 school year. This switch took time, buy-in from teachers, and the support of administrators. The success in Mississippi, combined with other efforts, helped to pass similar legislation across 37 states.

Districts are voicing concerns that the READ Act is more well-intentioned legislation in a never-ending list of unfunded or underfunded mandates from the state. One example, the change in literacy aid mentioned earlier, requires this aid now be spent on a new initiative pulling funding from somewhere else. As districts look at the cost of implementation, they question from where the funding to pay teachers during training will come. Regardless of which program a district chooses, it is a significant investment on the part of teachers that schools should be able to pay teachers for.

There were unknowns regarding the actual costs of some mandates included in the 2023 Education Omnibus and how they would impact schools of varying sizes and tax bases. Concerns surrounding the cost of mandates were brought up prior to its passage and summarily dismissed due to the size of the funding accompanying the legislation. While schools remain appreciative of the increased funding in 2023, the harsh reality is that the increased mandated spending in other areas has resulted in schools needing to ask for more money for implementation with the support of MDE.

Districts should be looking to their lobbying organizations and MDE to help reduce and eliminate future training costs by placing training at the foot of higher education. The Legislature can dictate what Minnesota’s teacher preparation programs provide to their students to make them eligible for licensure in Minnesota. If teacher preparation programs provide this training before graduation, schools will receive teachers ready to enter the classroom fully prepared to teach all their students, not just some.

As members of Decoding Dyslexia Minnesota, we want school board members to know that a lot of what is in the READ Act is work your district has already been doing. It is not new legislation. The dyslexia screening bill, local literacy plans, interventions for those not reading at grade level, a dyslexia specialist at MDE, and alternative instruction requirements are still there either in their entirety or in some cases simplified. If your school is concerned about the timeline, reach out to MDE and work through it. If you are looking for more information or resources, feel free to contact us through our website at www.decodingdyslexiamn.org. We welcome the opportunity to partner with you to find answers.

Rachel Depa is a Decoding Dyslexia Board Member. Direct questions to Rachel at racheld@decodingdyslexiamn.org.

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During eight years of covering the Des Moines School Board in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I reported on the most contentious issues of the day – school desegregation (“forced busing”), declining enrollment (school closings), and a movement to promote “fundamental schools.”

Growing up in a household with a mother who was a teacher, a father who periodically threatened to run for the school board, and two sisters who subsequently became teachers, I felt I was born for this beat. In fact, covering education was a dream for me.

For one thing, reader interest was always high and remains so. Few, if any, topics seem more important to parents (and grandparents) than schools and the curricula. School board members, superintendents, and educators no doubt know this immutable fact from encounters they’ve had with upset parents.

For one thing, reader interest was always high and remains so. Few, if any, topics seem more important to parents (and grandparents) than schools and the curricula. School board members, superintendents, and educators no doubt know this immutable fact from encounters they’ve had with upset parents.

Another draw for me: front-page placement of my stories was almost guaranteed. Nearly every story I wrote on desegregation landed on the front page, usually above the fold, whether or not the story deserved it. Editors, I decided, would get hooked on an issue and beat it to death. I used to make bets with the city hall reporter that I would have more front-page stories. I won nearly every week.

Yearly school board elections turned into a marathon. In those days, we did many in-depth pre-election stories that detailed candidates’ views on issues. Each year, I would be surprised that I hadn’t worn my fingers down to the knuckles because I had to produce so many stories. Stories were long. Often, eight candidates would vie for two or three board seats.

And one guy, Harry Burt Wagoner, Jr., who championed fundamental schools, ran for a board seat eight years in a row. He lost each time, usually landing at the bottom of the pack. The strange thing was his name became so well-known that toward the end of his attempts some voters thought he was an incumbent.

But I must say hearings on school closings were the most contentious and heartbreaking. Parents would rail about the deeply felt and painful loss if their school closed. Often, these schools (usually outdated and old) had a rich heritage. Generations of families in those neighborhoods had passed through their doors. They fought valiantly and took the loss personally. But school administrators could always justify their reasoning for closing a particular school with data and resulting cost reductions. Invariably, the board would see the necessity and close the school.

Bill Doherty
Melinda Voss

The Braver Angels Way
Cross-partisan group can help board members manage difficult conversations, establish productive relationships with colleagues and constituents

By Melinda Voss, Braver Angels, Co-Chair of Minnesota Steering Team

Braver Angels

The Braver Angels Way
Cross-partisan group can help board members manage difficult conversations, establish productive relationships with colleagues and constituents

By Melinda Voss, Braver Angels, Co-Chair of Minnesota Steering Team
A New Era of Divisiveness

So, given all that, one would think current education controversies of the day in Minnesota would seem “normal.” Far from it. What’s clearly different these days is the current political context in which Minnesota school board members, superintendents, and educators operate. As Bill Doherty, a University of Minnesota professor of family and marriage therapy, puts it: “Our national life, from local schools to cities, towns, state legislatures and Congress, has increasingly become a zone of disrespect and hostility, resulting in paralysis in public policy and divisiveness in our communities and even our families.”

Consequently, many citizens have lost trust in institutions, making it more difficult for locally elected officials to govern effectively or even discuss issues among themselves in public without encountering attacks from their base if they acknowledge the other side or encourage compromise.

The Braver Angels Approach

So, how can school board members, superintendents, teachers, and other education officials – operating in this toxic atmosphere – carry out their responsibilities of serving the public interest and educating the precious next generation? And how can they deal with constituents who disagree and with colleagues who disagree?

Braver Angels offers some practical answers for a way out of this mess. Led by volunteers, Braver Angels is a national, cross-partisan nonprofit. The group offers free workshops to upgrade listening and speaking skills, topic workshops, community gatherings, debates, and book and film discussions, among other things. Meetings are conducted using The Braver Angels Way.

The idea is to create various forums – online and in person – so people with differing views can come together to express their views in a way the other side will listen and understand. The seemingly simple act of listening to the other side goes a long way.

What’s important to understand is that Braver Angels is not out to change anyone’s mind about the issues but to change people’s view of the other side. Instead of resorting to stereotypes about the other side, Braver Angels activities offer systematic and ongoing opportunities for citizens to practice democracy, to better understand various views, and to establish productive relationships among people who disagree. I believe the result would be an increased sense of community, more neighborliness and – surprise, surprise – even common ground on occasion.

Minnesota has one of the most active Braver Angels memberships with six local alliances (or chapters). The state steering team and each alliance follow a key Braver Angels principle that leadership is balanced among those who lean Red (conservative) or lean Blue (liberal). Thus, each group has a co-chair of each political leaning. Braver Angels also works to grow local alliance memberships that are balanced. Currently, the state steering team is on a mission to attract more members who lean Red, particularly from rural areas.

Alliances are in Ely, Owatonna, western Minneapolis suburbs, Minneapolis, Twin Cities East Metro (Washington and Ramsey counties), and the Duluth area. Interest in forming alliances is growing in Rochester and other parts of the state. For more information about joining or starting an alliance, contact mn-coordinators@braverangels.org.

The Braver Angels Way

We state our views freely and fully, without fear.

We treat people who disagree with us with honesty, dignity and respect.

We welcome opportunities to engage those with whom we disagree.

We believe all of us have blind spots and none of us are not worth talking to.

We seek to disagree accurately, avoiding exaggeration and stereotypes.

We look for common ground where it exists and, if possible, find ways to work together.

We believe that, in disagreements, both sides share and learn.

In Braver Angels, neither side is teaching the other or giving feedback on how to think or say things differently.

How to Join Braver Angels

Website: https://braverangels.org

Membership is $12 a year. All Braver Angels activities are free, though donations are encouraged and gratefully accepted. Donate to Minnesota Braver Angels (80 percent goes to the state alliance).
Managing Difficult Conversations

Braver Angels works every angle. Programs are available for citizens, elected officials, and religious institutions. Last May, Braver Angels co-founder Doherty and former legislator JoAnn Ward led workshops in four parts of the state for members of school boards, city councils, county commissions, and township boards and staff. They filled up quickly.

Sponsors for the workshop, “Managing Difficult Conversations with Constituents,” included the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA), the Association of Minnesota Counties, the League of Minnesota Cities, and the Minnesota Association of Townships.

“Our partnership with Braver Angels has provided value to our school boards,” MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind said. “Building trust, respect and relationships is essential to a strong, high-performing school board. The Braver Angels have helped our school boards understand the importance of the unity of their purpose. This important building block needs to be a foundational element for any high-performing school board. After all, unity of purpose is the heart of school board leadership.”

In the workshop, participants learned and practiced what Braver Angels call the LAPP method: Listen, Acknowledge, Pivot and Perspective. In most cases, practicing these steps expands or reinforces what participants already knew. However, it’s not always easy to do and using LAPP takes practice.

As one participant, Angie Krebs, a member of the Alexandria School Board, said: “I have always understood the importance of making sure that those who disagree with you feel that they have been heard. However, the Braver Angels workshop added tools to my toolbox for improving my active listening skills and just being overall more thoughtful in my conversations.

“It seems so simple,” Krebs said. “But paraphrasing or summarizing what the person has said to you really does demonstrate to the individual that you understand what they have said. It goes far beyond an affirmative headshake or simply saying that you understand.

“Also, finding something to agree about with the individual, even if it is just a very small part of what they have said and bringing that back into the conversation later puts focus on that shared belief and helps that person be more likely to listen to my viewpoint as well,” Krebs said. “These were my biggest takeaways and things that I have been more intentional about putting into practice in my conversations since the workshop.”

Though she noted that conversations overall have become easier the further that the pandemic recedes into history, Krebs said: “When constituents feel appreciated for bringing a concern to you and also feel that they truly have been heard it can only lead to improved communication in the future and, most importantly, trust.”

For Krebs, being an effective school board member requires valuing engagement with the public and that often entails having difficult conversations. “The ability for school board members to hear multiple perspectives and understand how our policy and governance work impact those we serve is important.

“These contentious times have brought about more engaged parents and community members, and I believe that we can all agree that that is a good thing. Collectively, we all want what is best for students and to make sure that they have what they need to succeed,” Krebs said. “Respectful and civil conversations can lead to finding common ground and partnering to ensure those goals.”

Melinda Voss is a state coordinator for the Minnesota Braver Angels Steering Team. After 26 years as a reporter for the Des Moines Register and Tribune, she moved to Minnesota, co-founded the Association of Health Care Journalists, and later became the public relations director of what was then called the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system. Retired in 2012, she lives in St. Paul near three of her six grandchildren who attend St. Paul Public Schools.
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Telemedicine in schools? Virtual nursing services to support local staff? Back in 2015, these ideas were new and just starting to influence the delivery of care in schools.

I must admit, when I was recruited to lead a virtual school nurse service at Avel eCare seven years ago, I was somewhat skeptical. At the time, I had just finished up a stint working for a collection of North Dakota schools in an eight-county region, providing training and consultation to ensure public health programs met the needs of the population. I had found my passion in school nursing but was unsure how this profession was going to translate into a virtual setting. Then, I saw our program in action. By deploying a mobile telemedicine cart equipped with high-tech peripheral devices, our team of certified school nurses were able to help treat student health needs from hundreds – if not thousands – of miles away. After witnessing the immediate impact our services had for schools and districts both big and small, I knew we were onto something special.

In the years since, the School Health program has expanded to serve nearly 140 schools spread across 12 states — Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming — and our team has grown accordingly. We added (and continue to add) nurses with the right expertise to ensure we can provide coverage at each of the sites for the entire school day.

Depending on the needs of the school/district, our team can support students either in primary or extender care models. As primary, our nurses serve as the school nurse — supporting school staff in caring for chronic conditions, writing care plans, and attending IEP/504 meetings. We also take care of urgent needs including calling the parent and charting into the student information system. In the extender model — schools with an existing school nurse — our team becomes a partner to the existing health team. We support the nurse on the ground with our services and can amplify their coverage footprint and ability to serve multiple buildings/schools.

Managing Chronic Conditions

Telemedicine is beneficial not only for the treatment of students’ acute injuries and illnesses, but also for the long-term management of chronic health conditions. Diabetes in children is on the rise, and there is increasing responsibility on school staff to help these students manage their condition – tracking blood sugar, administering insulin, and other diabetes-related tasks. Avel eCare School Health puts a registered nurse in the room virtually to support these students and staff. Our nurses have the training and expertise to help manage these chronic conditions and offer peace of mind to staff and parents that students will have the support they need to stay in school.

Our experience in helping students manage diabetes is what led to us partnering with JDRF, the Helmsley Trust, and Avera Health to launch the T1D Demonstration Project. This study looks to address disparities in access to school health care by helping students with type 1 diabetes. Ultimately, our goal with this project is to leverage our virtual services to help T1D students stay in school and help minimize the
need for parents to take time from work to respond to their student’s T1D needs.

**Collaborative Care**

You might be wondering – does Avel eCare replace our existing school health services? Will their team replace the relationships my staff has already formed with students? Let me put these concerns to rest. Our whole model is built on a “partners in care” approach. Our school health team of pediatric-trained nurses is there to augment your staff, not replace. We believe, through forming strong partnerships and relationships with school staff, we can meet student health needs and foster a healthy and productive learning environment for both the children and the staff.

Avel not only serves small, rural school districts – we also partner with larger districts to help meet student health needs. For example, one district we serve has nearly 20 school buildings full of students that all have health needs at one point or another. They have a team of school nurses who – before Avel – had to rotate between buildings. When talking to these nurses, they let us know how they appreciate having a virtual nurse partner because we help them stay in their respective school buildings attending to student needs. To them, having the nurse on camera helps to decrease the school staffs’ anxiety and gives them the peace of mind of having a partner in care. A partner who can help call parents. A partner to bounce ideas off. A partner who can help ensure the highest quality care possible.

Want to learn more about Avel eCare School Health and partnership opportunities? Please contact Cathy Niklason by email at catherine.niklason@avelecare.com or visit https://www.avelecare.com.

Sheila Freed is the Avel eCare School Health Director for Avel eCare based in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. She leads a team that provides School Nursing services on a virtual platform to nearly 140 schools in 12 states. She received her BSN from the University of Wyoming and is a Johnson and Johnson School Health Leadership Fellow. She is also a Certified School Nurse. She is a passionate advocate for providing school health services to children no matter where they live and committed to helping onsite nurses fill in the gap in care for their students. Direct questions to Sheila at sheila.freed@avelecare.com

Avel eCare offers the largest and most comprehensive virtual health networks in the world, partnering with more than 800 health care systems, rural hospitals, outpatient clinics, long-term care facilities, schools, and skilled nursing facilities to deliver innovative telemedicine care and services to support both clinicians and patients. Learn more by visiting Avelecare.com.

MSBA hired Christy Smykalski as its new Administrative Assistant to Board Development in August 2023.

Christy grew up in New Prague, Minnesota, where she eventually graduated from high school. After marrying Eric Smykalski in 2001, she moved to Le Sueur in 2002.

Christy worked at Allina Medical Clinic until she opened her own licensed childcare out of their family home in Le Sueur. She spent more than 12 years as a licensed childcare provider.

Later, she took a position at Le Sueur-Henderson Public Schools as the Administrative Assistant to the Dean of Students/Activities Director and the Administrative Assistant to High School Counselors.

Christy and Eric have three “wonderful” children. Melanie is a freshman at Winona State University pursuing a degree in Elementary Education and Child Advocacy Studies. Kaylee is a senior at Le Sueur-Henderson High School and plans to attend Minnesota State University - Mankato in the fall. Benjamin is a freshman at Le Sueur-Henderson. Ben plays baseball and hockey, which “keeps the family running.”

Also, the Smykalski family has three dogs: Bella, Murphy, and Tucker.

“If we are not at one of our kids’ activities, we enjoy camping as a family and going to my Mom’s cabin on Leech Lake,” Christy said. “We enjoy fishing, grilling, and campfires – and also enjoy family game nights and movie nights. Family is my biggest hobby!”

Meet MSBA’s Newest Staff Member: Christy Smykalski
For school districts, budget season is in full swing! For this issue’s Ask MSBA column, we provide answers to a few common questions relating to fund balance and budgeting.

**Question: How does fund balance relate to cash balance?**

The fund balance numbers reported on a school district’s financial statements reflect the net of a school district’s assets and liabilities. For example, money owed to the school district by the state or federal government is included as an asset; likewise, money the school district owes to another organization is reflected as a liability.

Therefore, it is critical to understand a school district’s fund balance does not correlate to a school district’s cash balance. While fund balance is a good reflection of the overall financial health of the school district, cash balance reflects a school district’s ability to pay its bills. For cash flow purposes, the staff in the district office monitor the breakdown between cash and non-cash assets.

**Question: Does a school board have flexibility when spending funds?**

Maybe. It is important to remember there are different “buckets” of money.

Some revenues come from the state as “categorical revenues.” These funds must be spent according to specific guidelines. For example, Long-Term Facilities Maintenance Revenue can be spent on deferred maintenance of existing facilities but cannot be spent on remodeling existing facilities or the construction of new space. Rules specific to each categorical revenue determine how any unspent funds are handled; in most cases, unspent funds remain in a “bucket” and are restricted to future spending in that category.

Fund balances are broken down into five categories established by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB): restricted, committed, assigned, non-spendable and unassigned. Unassigned fund balance provides a school board with the most spending flexibility.

**Question: What is the right amount of fund balance?**

Great question! While GASB 54 requires school districts to have a fund balance policy, school boards set the fund balance targets in their policy based on the needs and priorities of the school district. Typically, fund balance targets are set based on either a certain percentage of the annual budget or a certain number of months of operating expenses. Review MSBA Model Policy 714 – Fund Balances for additional information.

The fund balance policy should be reviewed, along with current fund balance levels, as part of the budget process. If the fund balance is at risk of falling below the targets, efforts should be made to strengthen the fund balance through a surplus budget. If a budget deficit is being projected, the impact on the school district’s ability to meet its fund balance target should be considered. Finally, when school districts are preparing to issue bonds, having a fund balance at or above the fund balance target will result in a better bond rating.

**Conclusion**

It is important to understand the relationship between fund balance and cash balance. Cash outflows for payroll and accounts payable cycles and cash inflows from state aid payments follow reasonably predictable schedules related to cash flow needs; however, external forces (example: a pandemic) can cause unexpected challenges. A healthy fund balance can provide a safety net but does not guarantee adequate cash flow, especially when unexpected events arise.

Tiffany Gustin is Associate Director of Management and Insurance Trust Services. Direct questions to Tiffany at tgustin@mnmsba.org.
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Understandably, Minnesota school board members, staff, and E-12 advocates focus upon the Minnesota Legislature as it develops and enacts new laws (“statutes”) that will impact Minnesota’s school districts. In 2023, the Legislature passed a wide array of statutes addressing broad topics, such as reading education, online instruction, teacher preparation, and school district administration. Statutory enactments typically lead Minnesota’s education community to take the steps necessary to comply with the new laws.

But new statutes are only part of the process. Frequently, new statutes will lead Minnesota departments and agencies (hereafter “departments”) to develop rules that provide direction on implementing the laws. The Minnesota Revisor of Statutes defines a rule as “a general statement adopted by an agency to make the law it enforces or administers more specific or to govern the agency’s organization or procedure.”

Minnesota’s rulemaking process involves several key steps. First, Minnesota’s departments maintain a rulemaking docket, which informs stakeholders of the rules that the department is thinking of proposing. Second, the department must solicit public comments for 60 days on the subject matter that a possible rule might cover. Third, after the 60 days pass, the department must publish a notice of proposed rules if it plans to go forward. This stage includes preparation of a statement of the need for and reasonableness (SONAR) regarding the proposed rule.

Fourth, when the SONAR process is complete, the department must publish notice of the proposed rule in the Minnesota State Register. Fifth, if 25 or more people submit a request, the department must conduct a public hearing on the proposed rule. An administrative law judge (ALJ) conducts the public hearing, at which the department and the public may testify and raise questions. The ALJ may determine that the department has not met all the legal and procedural requirements. If the chief ALJ agrees, the department may not adopt the rule until the corrections are made. If the ALJ or the chief ALJ approves the proposed rule, the department may submit the rules to the governor and take final rule adoption steps.

Currently, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is involved in the rulemaking process related to social studies standards (Minnesota statute requires that Minnesota’s academic standards are reviewed and revised on a 10-year cycle). MDE explained:

During the 2020-21 school year, the Minnesota Department of Education began the process of reviewing and revising the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies. The 2021 Minnesota K-12 Social Studies Standards (Commissioner Approved Draft) is now available (see http://tinyurl.com/bj9w7jb). The 2021 Academic Standards in Social Studies are going through the rulemaking process at this time.

The next step of the statutory rulemaking process is that MDE will draft the Statement of Need and...
Reasonableness (SONAR), which has traditionally taken 14-17 months. The full statutory rulemaking process can take up to 24 months.

The statutory rulemaking process for the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies is not complete until the Notice of Adoption is published in the State Register. Each content area includes an implementation date in the adopted rule language. If adopted, the proposed K-12 Academic Standards in Social Studies will be implemented in the 2026-27 school year.

The impact of rules on academic standards is stated in the MDE document’s second sentence: “School districts and charter schools are required to teach these standards to ensure that all Minnesota students have access to high-quality content and instruction.” Readers interested in learning more about MDE’s rulemaking process and its active rulemaking projects can find more information here: https://education.mn.gov/MDE/about/rule/rule/index.htm

The Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) has completed several rulemaking projects in recent years. These include rules on teacher preparation and tiered licensure. PELSB provides information on its rulemaking process and current/recent rulemaking projects here: https://mn.gov/pelsb/board/rulemaking

MSBA closely monitors and participates in state rulemaking processes involving MDE, PELSB, and other state departments whose work may impact Minnesota’s public schools.

Terence Morrow is MSBA’s Director of Legal and Policy Services. Direct questions to Terence at tmorrow@mnmsba.org.
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