2024 Summer Seminar Preview

Effective Leadership for Student Success

Dr. Sonn Sam
“What Happens When We Believe All Young People are Brilliant?”

Dr. Phil Gore
“Governing for Improved Student Success”

Summer Learnin’
Celebrating Student Leaders
Where Are They Now?
MSBA Efforts on Election Bill Will Save Districts Money, Staff Time
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As I write this, the 2024 Minnesota Legislature has completed its business. Thank you to all the school board members, superintendents, students, and community members who advocated for Minnesota public schools during this legislative session. Our legislators indicated that they frequently heard from them regarding critical issues. Your voice was heard — your advocacy matters.

Advocating on behalf of public schools is an essential responsibility for school board members and one of the pillars of the MSBA strategic plan. It provides the opportunity to shape policy, secure resources, and give voice to the aspirations of our students, teachers, and community members. It offers the ability to meet needs and shape the future. It is our chance to effect change for the better and ensure that all students get a quality education.

MSBA is dedicated to equipping its members with information that enables school board members to deepen their understanding of legislative activities and improve their ability to advocate and discuss the effects of issues on school boards and public education. As elected officials, we are uniquely positioned to influence educational policies and legislation. MSBA provides opportunities for school board members to learn about and understand the impact of issues. In turn, we can invite legislators to attend a meeting, send them an email or letter, and share our stories and data to help them understand the impact on our districts.

School boards are encouraged to develop resolutions regarding important issues. The resolutions are presented at the Delegate Assembly, where they are debated and voted on by the delegates. The resolutions become a critical tool for the MSBA Government Relations team to use as a guide to influence legislators regarding proposed legislation. School boards are encouraged to submit resolutions for consideration from June through September. Watch for upcoming information regarding elections for the Delegate Assembly.

Moving forward, it is crucial to maintain our momentum. MSBA provides the resources and opportunities to help board members expand their knowledge. Through our advocacy efforts, we can secure necessary resources and drive meaningful change. School board members are encouraged to stay engaged by participating in MSBA workshops, attending Coffee & Conversation meetings, participating in webinars, and staying informed through newsletters and updates.

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter.” Silence in the face of critical issues affecting public schools is not an option for school board members. Advocacy is about giving a voice to those who cannot advocate for themselves — our students. It is about ensuring that educational policies and practices reflect the best interests of our communities. Thank you for your continued engagement with MSBA and your advocacy efforts. Together, we will continue to make a difference in the lives of Minnesota students. Let’s keep working towards a brighter future for our schools and our communities.

Linda Leiding is the MSBA President and a Lake Crystal Wellcome Memorial School Board member. Direct questions to Linda at linda.leiding@mnmsba.org.
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The 2024 Summer Seminar — “Effective Leadership for Student Success” — is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monday, August 5, 2024, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

High-functioning school boards can increase student success. At MSBA’s Summer Seminar, members can see how they can focus on student learning. Attendees will hear about the relationship between good governance and student achievement – and learn from other boards who are seeing their students soar.

The Summer Seminar will include three knowledgeable featured speakers – Dr. Phil Gore, Dr. Sonn Sam, and Dr. Terry Morrow.

• Dr. Gore – the Chief Learning Officer at Idaho School Boards Association – will present “Governing for Improved Student Success.”

• Dr. Sam – the National Director of Partnerships at Big Picture Learning – will deliver “What Happens When We Believe All Young People are Brilliant?”

• MSBA’s own Dr. Morrow (who serves as the association’s Legal Counsel) will discuss “The Impact of School District Policies on Student Success.”

See Pages 7-10 for more information about these featured speakers and their presentations.

The Summer Seminar will also feature breakout sessions from school districts and MSBA staff. Please see Page 11 for details.

Also, MSBA has some valuable pre- and post-seminar sessions planned. Join the MSBA Government Relations staff for an Early Bird Session, “Strategic Advocacy for Student Success,” at 7 p.m. Sunday, August 4. MSBA’s Denise Dittrich and Kim Lewis will present an interactive workshop designed to equip school district leaders with a thorough understanding of the legislative process and effective advocacy strategies.

MSBA will offer the first two installments of its Learning to Lead Workshop Series.

• The Learning to Lead — School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop is set for 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday, August 5.

• On Tuesday, August 6 (from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.), members can attend the Leadership Foundations — School Finance and Management: Phase II Workshop.

Also on Tuesday, a Charter School Board Member Workshop will be held from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

See Page 11 to learn more about these additional learning opportunities.

Visit https://mnmsba.org/workshops-events/summer-seminar for more information about the Summer Seminar. Advance registration is encouraged, but walk-in registrants are welcome to attend.
What do board members have to do with student achievement? We’re far from the classroom — unless we’re there as a parent, volunteer, or misunderstanding our role. We realize that teachers make a difference when it comes to student learning, and maybe principals do as well. But, what do board members, even superintendents, have to do with student achievement?

Research shows that the leadership of a superintendent and the governance by a school board have a relationship with the likelihood that student learning is improving in classrooms. This research has been ongoing for more than 25 years. Even opponents of school boards are on record as saying that we need to know more about this relationship.

Though far removed from the classroom, the perspectives, knowledge and skills, and actions of school boards can either hinder or support improved student achievement. We do this not by direct impact, but by establishing and supporting a culture of learning. We do this through our high expectations for students, staff, and ourselves. We do this in the ways we govern — what we emphasize, goal setting, monitoring progress, and holding the system accountable through the superintendent.

Consider the impact of asking thoughtful, open-ended questions about how the students are doing. What boards talk about at the dais and in public gets noticed by staff, students, families, and community members. What the board emphasizes gets not only the attention of the superintendent, but also the entire community. When board members make student learning the main thing in their board meetings, planning, and conversations, student learning is likely to be improving. When school boards hold the superintendent accountable for improving student achievement, student achievement is likely to be improving.

Phil Gore’s article continues on Page 8

Summer Seminar Speaker

Dr. Phil Gore – “Governing for Improved Student Success”

Synopsis: Though far from the classroom, research demonstrates a relationship between school boards and student success. Consider ways your board could improve perspectives, knowledge and skills, and actions that support student success. Learn how to lead with a unified plan.

Speaker’s biography: Dr. Phil Gore joined the Idaho School Boards Association (ISBA) in March 2023 as its Chief Learning Officer. Dr. Gore previously served three other state school boards associations: Vermont School Boards Association (as the Director of Board Services), the Texas Association of School Boards (Division Director of Board Services), and the Washington State School Directors Association (Director of Leadership Development Services).

As a former school board member himself, Dr. Gore brings with him more than 20 years of experience in school board development. He possesses skills in group facilitation and training, thought and visionary leadership, relationship building, and advocacy.

As the Chief Learning Officer, Dr. Gore assists ISBA members with all aspects of the Professional Development Program. He leads and supervises ISBA’s Leadership Development Consultants, develops and presents workshops, creates materials for board development, and more.

Visit https://www.idsba.org/blog/welcome-dr-phil-gore-chief-learning-officer to learn more about Dr. Gore.
A problem is that a casual observation from attending some board meetings could leave the observer puzzled or confused about what might be important to the board. They might think it was Killer B’s — budgets, ballgames, buses, bonds. If you ask the casual observer after many board meetings what the meeting was about, the most probable answer could be, “I have no idea.”

It doesn’t have to be that way. Perhaps the greatest power any school board member has is “The Power of the Question.” Asking informed, focused questions about how students are doing is a highly effective tool for guiding the board conversation into what matters most. That statement implies two keys to governing for improved student achievement. Board members need to be knowledgeable about how the students are doing and what it takes to improve achievement. They also need to be focused. Both knowledge and focus can be challenging.

Great governance might be identified by clear priorities, protocols, and processes. Are your board’s priorities clear? Does the superintendent and everyone else involved know what they are? Does your board have shared and written protocols for how it does its work? Are your processes clear and transparent? We can all improve in our focus, alignment, and commitment to improving educational outcomes.

Dr. Phil Gore is the Chief Learning Officer at the Idaho School Boards Association. Dr. Gore will be a featured speaker during the 2024 MSBA Summer Seminar. Contact Dr. Gore at phil@idsba.org.

Summer Seminar Speaker

Dr. Sonn Sam – “What Happens When We Believe All Young People are Brilliant”

Synopsis: Dr. Sonn Sam will explore the transformative impact of truly believing in the brilliance of all young people. Drawing from his extensive experience in educational leadership, including his roles as Chief Innovation Officer, Regional Director, and National Director of Partnerships, Dr. Sam will illustrate how shifting our perspective from a compliance-driven system to a learner-driven system can fundamentally alter the educational landscape. This belief fosters a more inclusive and equitable environment and empowers students to achieve their fullest potential. Dr. Sam will share practical insights and strategies for school board members to implement this paradigm shift in their districts.

Speaker’s biography: Dr. Sonn Sam is the National Director of Partnerships for Big Picture Learning. Dr. Sam began his career with Big Picture Learning in 2003. He began as an advisor, then as a principal, and most recently as Chief Innovation Officer at East Side High School in New Jersey, where he led the Big Picture Academy. In this role, he focused on expanding the internship program, deepening the rigor of internship projects and exhibitions.

Under his leadership, Big Picture Academy has become a staple innovation model within the Newark Public School District, earning praise and recognition from district leadership and school level staff alike.

Outside of Big Picture, Dr. Sam is also a certified Google trainer training students, staff and administration on Google Apps for Education across the United States. Additionally, while pursuing his passion of training and supporting new administrators, Dr. Sam has served as mentor in the New Jersey Leaders to Leaders program.

Visit https://www.bigpicture.org/presenter/sonn-sam to learn more about Dr. Sam.

See Page 9 for an article by Dr. Sonn Sam
The Transformative Power of Believing in the Brilliance of All Young People

Traditional education systems often overlook diverse abilities of each student

By Dr. Sonn Sam, National Director of Partnerships for Big Picture Learning

If you gather educators in a room and ask them to define the purpose of education, you might be waiting a lifetime for one answer. While this question is complex and multi-layered, one of education's fundamental purposes is to nurture every young person's potential.

Our actions are driven by our beliefs, so we must first believe that every learner is brilliant. This raises the question, “What happens when we believe that all young people are brilliant?” The answer to this question challenges traditional educational paradigms and calls for a shift towards a learner-centered approach that recognizes and cultivates the unique talents, potential, and strengths of every learner.

Traditional education systems often operate within a compliance-driven framework, solely focused standardized testing, rigid curricula, and a one-size-fits-all approach. While these systems have their advantages, they often overlook the diverse abilities and potential of each student. By narrowly defining intelligence and success, these models can stifle creativity, motivation, and engagement, leaving many students feeling disengaged and undervalued.

As the child of genocide survivors and an inner-city youth who attended a failing public K-12 system, I’ve experienced firsthand the damaging effects of traditional one-size-fits-all approaches. As a learner who simply learned differently and couldn’t meet the expectations of rote learning, I was made to feel inferior, as if there was something innately wrong with me. At a young age, this led me to believe that “smartness” was hereditary, and I just didn’t inherit that smart gene. Even as a middle-aged man in my 40s, I sometimes struggle with the concept of being smart. I share my story to shed light on the other side of education. When done right, Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” When done wrong, it can leave scars that last a lifetime and affect generations to come.

The good news is that equitable learner-centered education is gaining momentum at both policy and practitioner levels across the United States. Policies have shifted to allow for credit for learning outside the classroom, self-directed learning designations, college and career pathways, innovative programs, and personalized, competency-based education. Practitioners at the district and school levels are innovating and implementing learner-centered systems such as personalization, advisory, real-world learning, interest-driven project-based learning, and authentic assessments.

In Minnesota, for instance, the Department of Education is focusing on student-centered learning, principal training, the expansion of CTE work-based learning, the LEAPS Act, and the Innovation Research Zone Pilot. Emerging practices in the Innovation Research Zone include personalized, competency-based learning, real-world, inquiry-based education, achievement gap and early intervention, secondary-postsecondary partnerships, enhanced professional development, and community involvement. These efforts are building an ecosystem of strategies and structures to cultivate the brilliance of every learner.

In conclusion, the question “What happens when we believe that all young people are brilliant?” invites us to rethink our educational systems and practices. By shifting toward a learner-centered approach that values the brilliance of all students, we can create environments, systems, and paradigms where every learner is empowered to reach their full potential. This transformative vision not only inspires but also provides a practical roadmap for making education more inclusive, equitable, and effective for all young people.

Dr. Sonn Sam is the National Director of Partnerships for Big Picture Learning. Contact Dr. Sam at sonn@bigpicturelearning.org.
**Summer Seminar Speaker**

**Dr. Terry Morrow – “The Impact of School District Policies on Student Success”**

**Synopsis:** School district policies serve a wide range of functions from facilitating district legal compliance to offering a comprehensive resource for the district’s community. This presentation focuses upon a key role for school district policies: supporting student success. We will discuss a set of MSBA model policies and ways in which school boards can enhance student success through policy development.

**Speaker’s biography:** Dr. Terry Morrow is the General Counsel for the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA). Dr. Morrow joined MSBA in 2017 as its Associate Director of Management and Policy Services. He later became the association’s Director of Legal and Policy Services. Dr. Morrow is a former member of the St. Peter School Board and the Minnesota Valley Education District. He served in the Minnesota House of Representatives for three terms and taught at Gustavus Adolphus College for 18 years. Dr. Morrow also served as the Legislative Director and Legal Counsel for the Uniform Law Commission.

At MSBA, Dr. Morrow assists with and provides member support relative to policy, school board/employee relations, labor relations and negotiations, and Master Agreement language and analysis.

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Check out these other opportunities around Summer Seminar!

**All events will be presented by MSBA staff and held at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest.**

### Early Bird Session – “Strategic Advocacy for Student Success”

**When:** 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday, August 4, 2024  
**Presenters:** Denise Dittrich (MSBA Director of Government Relations) and Kim Lewis (MSBA Associate Director of Government Relations)

**Why you should attend:** This interactive workshop is meticulously crafted to empower school district leaders with a comprehensive understanding of the legislative process and effective advocacy strategies. Tailored specifically for those in the education sector, participants will learn how to effectively engage with government officials across local, state, and federal levels. The program focuses on offering practical tools for building strong relationships and providing valuable insights into the intricacies of the political landscape. Attendees will leave equipped with the beginning knowledge and skills to advocate for their schools and students effectively.

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### Summer Seminar Breakout Sessions

The 2024 Summer Seminar will also feature informative breakout sessions from school districts and MSBA staff during the afternoon of Monday, August 5. These sessions include:

- **“From the Boardroom to the Classroom and from the Classroom to the Boardroom – Learn How One School Board is Working to Ensure Student Learning is Front and Center”** by the St. Anthony-New Brighton School District’s Laura Oksnevad (School Board Member), Dr. Renee Corneille (Superintendent), and Dr. Tamika Fuller (Director of Effective Instruction)

- **“School Board Academy”** by the Rochester School District

- **“Strategic Planning – Your Roadmap to Student Success”** by Gail Gilman, MSBA Director of Strategic Planning and Board Leadership

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### Learning to Lead — School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop

**When:** 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monday, August 5, 2024

**Why you should attend:** The Phase I Workshop helps new board members hit the ground running. Phase I covers the role of the school board, the role of the superintendent, the leadership team relationship, and common scenarios facing new board members.

### Leadership Foundations — School Finance and Management: Phase II Workshop

**When:** 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday, August 6, 2024

**Why you should attend:** The Phase II Workshop covers core topics such as the budget, school finance, local levies, policies, significant laws affecting school boards, collective bargaining, and personnel issues.

### Charter School Board Member Workshop

**When:** 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, August 6, 2024

**Why you should attend:** The MSBA Charter School Board Member Workshop offers all three state-required training components for charter school board members: Board’s Role and Responsibilities, Financial Matters, and Employment Matters.
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Board Member, Hastings Public Schools

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Board Member, Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools

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MSBA is a proud member of NASS (the National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers).
Since 2009, the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) has awarded student school board representatives with its Robert E. Meeks Student School Board Scholarship. This award comes with $3,000 for each winner to use toward their postsecondary education.

MSBA awarded the scholarship to three recipients in 2004: Kennedy Gibbs (Farmington High School), Taylor Marshall (East Central High School), and Abigail Schunk (Proctor High School).

Of Minnesota’s 331 public school districts, at least 128 have a student school board member to bring a student voice to the board table. The MSBA Board of Directors’ Scholarship Committee narrowed nearly 50 applications down to three winners this year.

Thank you to the MSBA Board of Directors’ Student Scholarship Committee for their work: committee chair Jon Karger (Pelican Rapids), Milind Sohoni (Wayzata), Mike Pfeil (Truman), Hunter Feldt (Watertown-Mayer), and Heather Naegele (North Branch Area).

Kennedy Gibbs: Farmington student took a deep dive into the job and tried to learn as much as he could

When Kennedy Gibbs was a sophomore at Farmington High School, he was approached by the student council president who said he’d be a great fit for a student school board member position.

“At the time, I didn’t think government was my thing,” Kennedy said. “But I took the time to find out what a school board does, and it was really nice to see how it fits into the full picture of education.”

Kennedy signed up, and staff and members of the school board took notice of his hard work, integrity, curiosity and commitment to the position.

“There were so many times when Kennedy’s insight and thoughtful questions helped our board reach better decisions,” said Farmington Area School Board Chair Hannah Simmons.
After a student died, the family expressed disappointment that the district didn’t do more to reach out to them. The board reviewed its memorial policy, and Kennedy had discussions with other students to get their feelings on what the school should do.

Kennedy was part of the interview process when the board needed to appoint a new member.

He gave suggestions on how to spread the referendum messaging to younger voters.

“He has built meaningful relationships and left a positive impression on so many people because of the way he conducts himself day in and day out,” Simmons said.

For Kennedy, once he took the time to find out how things worked and what the school board does, it all clicked.

“You just have to take the time to learn,” he said. “You can make conversations more constructive. I felt like I could be the bridge between the board and the student council and keep everyone more informed.”

Farmington Area Superintendent Jason Berg said Kennedy put just as much effort into creating a positive school climate as he did with finding ways to help in the community. Kennedy helped as a swimming coach for aspiring young athletes. He was very involved with the Link—an outreach group for at-risk youth in the area. The Rotary also recognized him for the Service Above Self award.

“Kennedy is driven by community service and finds ways to make things around him better,” Berg said.

Kennedy will be off to the University of Minnesota Twin Cities this fall. Once he finds his new community or a job after college in a new town, he said he would consider running for a school board seat.

I gained so much insight on the procedures that educational institutions used,” he said. “Understanding the care and reasoning behind all decision-making has been an eye-opening experience.”

Payton Marshall: East Central student is a firm believer of a civicly engaged community

Payton Marshall had long been an advocate of civic engagement. He was part of the student council and signed up for Boys State, where he took to heart the saying: “Local Government is Sexy.”

Payton said local government is often overlooked. “When we neglect or underestimate the importance of our township, city or county levels, we compromise the very essence of representation in our country’s political system,” he said.

It fueled him to take on a spot as the East Central Area Schools’ student school board member position. He dove in to find out how his local board works effectively. He had a chance to meet Minnesota Education Commissioner Willie Jett.

East Central School Board Chair Julie Domogalla said Payton’s interest in school board service prompted him to see if he could establish a school board candidate forum for upcoming elections.

Payton had heard from people in the community that it was hard to find out much about who was running for school board.
“We gave him some ground rules, and he just took off and put it all together,” Domogalla said. “The leadership was solely his. His tenacity, professional demeanor and integrity allowed the candidate forum to help inform voters.”

As he gets ready to attend St. John’s University in the fall, he said he takes with him experience in dealing with policy work, how governance works, how Robert’s Rules are used for meetings, and how to contribute to a vibrant and civically engaged community.

“I firmly believe that, without a strong sense of community, the foundation for democratic politics becomes precarious,” he said.

Abigail Schunk: Championing student voices in Proctor

With some student government experience already under her belt, two years ago Abigail Schunk applied for the student representative position on the Proctor School Board to become an advocate for her fellow peers.

“My main goal through the position was to provide a voice for the students that didn’t feel heard,” Schunk said. “Additionally, I wanted to create a better connection between the school board members and the students they serve.”

Abigail said she absorbed many lessons and skills during the time with the Proctor School Board. “Of these lessons and skills, two stuck out to me: responsibility and communication,” she said. “I learned these skills through coordinating with my fellow liaisons, being on time to meetings, and voicing my opinion while taking in the board members’ knowledge.”

Her two years of service helped Abigail realize the importance of school boards.

“Each school board member is elected by those living within the district – which gives parents a direct voice in their children’s education,” she said. “Decisions made by the school board can greatly impact a student’s life trajectory as their education is the most valuable aspect of their long-term success.”

In Abigail’s scholarship application, she said the examples set by the Proctor School Board members has created a desire to help others.

“The opportunity to serve on the school board has been one of the best decisions I made in high school,” she said. “I am truly grateful for the people who made this opportunity possible. It has truly changed my life!”

Abigail plans on attending the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota, where she plans to major in Biochemistry – and pursue minors in Horticulture and Cellular Biology. “With this degree I intend to work in fisheries and wildlife biology,” Abigail said.

In his recommendation letter for Abigail, Proctor Superintendent Kerry Juntunen wrote: “Abby is a person of integrity, resilience, and genuine kindness. I am confident that Abby will continue to excel and make significant contributions in any endeavor she chooses to pursue.

Greg Abbott is the MSBA Director of Communications and Marketing and Bruce Lombard is the MSBA Associate Director of Communications and Marketing. Contact them at gabbott@mnmsba.org and blombard@mnmsba.org, respectively.
When Kendra J. Lynn was a student school board member for Cambridge-Isanti, she wrote of how she learned about the importance of public service on a school board and gained an appreciation of what they did.

Fifteen years later, she’s in a public service job, working as a research geologist at the U.S. Geological Survey’s Hawaiian Volcano Observatory in Hilo, Hawai’i.

“I’m realizing that public servants usually are in those positions because they want to be – or are compelled to be – because they are invested in making their communities better,” she said.

Kendra was one of two of the first MSBA Student Scholarship winners. The scholarship helped keep her loans down as she received her undergraduate degree from Winona State University in 2012 – an entire year early thanks to the AP classes and College in the Schools classes she was able to take in high school.

She received a master’s degree in Geology and Geophysics in 2015 and a Ph.D. in 2017 from the University of Hawai’i, Mānoa in Honolulu. In 2023, she finally paid off her school loans and is busy with her job, especially with all the volcanic activity in Hawai’i.

“Since I’ve started this job, we’ve had seven volcanic eruptions among two volcanoes on our island in the past four years,” she said. She’s one of the volcanologists who works to monitor and study volcanoes to better understand how, when, where and why eruptions occur so they can mitigate any damage to communities.
Her specialty is petrology, the study of rocks and minerals and how they form. “I naturally spend a large amount of my time analyzing the samples in the laboratory,” she said. “I also spend a large amount of my time in the field, responding to eruptions but also studying the geology to better understand the volcano’s past eruptive history.”

She said the most interesting part of her job is linking the chemistry of the samples to the signs of volcanic unrest measured before eruptions.

In October 2022, she and her husband, Isaac, had their son, Ross, which has added a little more work-life balance to her occupation.

“So much of my work now, and the work we do as scientists, is done with the goal of better serving our various communities – from local neighborhoods that experience volcanic hazards to the global community of scientists who learn best practices for volcanology from our eruption responses,” Kendra said.

Public service was always a theme with what Kendra did – from her extracurricular activities in school (Student Council, Model United Nations, Girl Scouts) to her current job.

“In the moment, I don’t think I realized that the people who served on the board probably were there because they were passionate about topics related to making their communities better,” she said.

And in her own way, Kendra is working with a passion to make her own community better – and safer.
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Who is your favorite musician or band of all time?
I find it hard to pick one favorite thing for any subject, so for this and other questions in this MSBA Spotlight, I’ll be giving a couple answers. I’m a rock music guy and a couple of my favorite bands are The Black Crowes, The White Stripes, AC/DC, and Motley Crue.

What was the best concert you have attended?
A KISS concert in the late 1990s. Part of the show was in 3D, and it was the first time I had seen 3D really work. We had the worst possible seats in the arena for most live shows, but they were the best seats for 3D.

What’s your favorite film of all time?
Again, I can’t give one answer but the top few on the list would be “Star Wars,” “The Matrix,” “Smokey and the Bandit,” “Iron Man,” and “Back to School.”

What’s your favorite TV series of all time?
Way too hard to pick just one or even a few. I’ve watched a lot of TV over my lifetime.

What is on your bucket list?
Traveling to various locations, such as Washington, D.C., and some countries in Europe, like England, France, and Norway.

What makes you the most proud?
Being honest, kind, and fair to others is what I value most. Those are the three key traits to have, and they can sometimes be the most challenging.

What skill would you most like to learn?
I would like to learn how to swim. I started swimming lessons when I was young but got sick and never went back to finish.

What were the last books you read?
I’m not big into reading books, I more so read articles or short stories. I’m much more into audio/video content.

What’s an essential part of your daily routine?
Coffee and toast in the morning.

If you could only eat one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be?
I’m a sandwich guy and I do eat one about every day. But if I had to pick a real meal, I would have to say northern pike or walleye with some sort of potato.
This year’s election bill contains two provisions that will help save school districts the expense of funding special elections when a board member resigns with less than two years on a term. The bill will also give school districts the option of appointing or leaving a seat vacant if only three months are left on a term before an election. A third benefit is new language that says school districts only need to approve a new combined polling place resolution if one of the polling places has changed.

The most immediate change school election officers should know about is the deadline to notify county auditors of a general election or special election has increased. You will need to notify them 84 days in advance of the election, instead of 74 days in advance.

There is one more responsibility added to the plate of school districts: Paper or electronic voter registration applications must be made available to all students who are eligible to vote or eligible to pre-register to vote.

If you’re having a general election or special election, you need to notify auditors earlier

The new elections law increases the time school districts must notify their county auditor(s) of an upcoming special election for a bond and your general election for board seats. Up until this year, school districts needed to give notice to the county auditor 74 days in advance of the election. This law adds 10 more days of notice: Districts must now give notice to auditors at least 84 days in advance.

That means if your school board approves the general election resolution or a special election resolution, you’ll need to get it on the July agenda or at least early August to meet the August 13 deadline.
Filling a vacancy

Rep. Bianca Virnig (DFL-Eagan) and Sen. Bonnie Westlin (DFL-Plymouth) helped pass a bill that restores the option for a school district to appoint a person to fill a vacancy until the district’s next election cycle. For nearly 80 years, that system worked without any problems. But in 2015, the law was changed so that any time there was a vacancy with more than a year left, there had to be a special election in that calendar year.

That meant districts with even-year elections had to pay for odd-year school board special elections with money out of their own general funds. During the years of COVID, board members resigned in record numbers. During the 2020-2021 school year, more than 80 board members resigned. Each district that needed a special election to fill the position spent an average of about $10,000 or more on those elections.

MSBA provided legislators with information of how more than half a million dollars was spent in one year to pay for board member special elections – elections that were lucky to have a 10% voter turnout.

Citing the cost, the time school staff had to put in to run a special board election and the low turnout, Virnig and Westlin’s bill became part of the elections bill, passed through both Legislative chambers and was signed by the governor. The bill will take effect July 1 for any future vacancies.

“This bill saves districts money that can be better used in the classroom,” said MSBA Director of Governmental Relations Denise Dittrich. “The appointment system reverts the process to a procedure that has been done for decades without any problems.”

An option when a vacancy occurs with three months or less of a term remaining

Two years ago, the Brainerd School Board had a vacancy that occurred with just three months remaining in the person’s term. By law (a 1960 Attorney General opinion by Walter Mondale), the district “shall” fill the vacancy.

The older A.G. opinion also had to mesh with recent legislation that required all appointees to wait 30 days before being seated in case there is a petition to prevent the appointment. With the late vacancy and the 30-day waiting period, the person Brainerd appointed served for one meeting and was done.

Kevin Boyles from Brainerd helped bring a resolution to the Delegate Assembly in 2022, saying the board spent a lot of time and effort to get a former board member appointed so he could serve at one meeting.

MSBA’s Delegate Assembly approved the resolution to give boards an option of whether to appoint a board member if there is a vacancy with three months or less left in the term. This year, as part of Virnig and Westlin’s bill, it was also added to the election bill and approved, giving districts in that situation a choice on whether to fill the vacancy for those last three months.

“This shows the power of school board members bringing their board’s resolution to the MSBA Delegate Assembly,” said MSBA Associate Director of Government Relations Kim Lewis. “The change is common sense, and the Brainerd board and superintendent did a good job of explaining why the change was needed.”

Making it easier to set up combined polling places

Legislation in this session has made it easier for school boards to hold elections in odd years or off the general election in even years.

No longer does a school district have to approve a combined polling place resolution every year when all the polling places are exactly the same as the previous year. Once a board approves the combined polling place resolution, those polling places remain in effect unless there is a change in the polling place locations.

School districts must offer voter registration applications to students

A section of the new law does come with a new requirement for schools: In May and September voter registration applications must be available to all students who are eligible to vote or who are eligible to pre-register to vote.

Note that last year, election law allowed for 16- and 17-year-olds the ability to pre-register to vote. The registration forms can be requested from the Secretary of State’s office.

To respond to this article, you can contact MSBA’s Greg Abbott at gabbott@mnmsba.org.
In 2019, Giddings ISD – a small Central Texas school district – was struggling with outdated meeting planning processes that required a heavy time investment from staff.

At the time, Giddings ISD was using an internal PDF system for organizing and preparing meeting documents. This system, though an upgrade from the paper-based model the district had used for decades, required a high degree of manual maintenance.

District administrators met with the BoardBook team in the spring of 2019 to investigate whether they could gain efficiencies by switching to digital meeting management platform. Later that year, the district rolled out the new system.

**Simpler meeting management**

Giddings ISD’s monthly board meetings call for a high degree of coordination among district staff, but the district’s PDF system made last-minute changes unwieldy, with staff having to copy, scan, and repaginate documents when changes were made.

Assistant to the Superintendent Dana Devoll is responsible for the district’s meeting coordination. According to Devoll, BoardBook’s cloud-based system cuts out the manual work of preparing documents for board meetings. Using the meeting template feature, Devoll can quickly create and modify agendas for recurring meetings.

How a Texas School District Streamlined Meeting Planning by Switching to BoardBook

Board meeting management program is “a huge time-saver and organizer”

*By BoardBook*
“I start the minutes with my template that’s in the system, and it puts the wording at the top the way I want it,” Devoll said. “I can go in and very quickly complete my minutes by finding the agenda item and adding, ‘here’s who made the motion, here’s who seconded it.’”

The new system’s collaboration features have been a boost to productivity as well. With BoardBook, multiple users can edit documents, which means Devoll’s superintendent can make changes to the files with edits visible immediately. Devoll can also quickly and easily share documents and notes with those who need to review.

“The attachments give you the option to select who gets to see – agenda reviewers, anyone with login, the public,” said Devoll. “And in the description box, I can separately give the board a brief overview saying, ‘we discussed this at a previous meeting, here’s what we’re presenting you with.’”

**Enhanced participant experience**

The district’s PDF system was often clunky for participants. Board members had to open multiple attachments on their individual devices, so making sure everyone was on the same page could be a challenge. But BoardBook’s follow-the-leader interface has created a smoother participant experience for members.

“Board members’ Chromebooks are set up so that they are automatically following whoever is leading the meeting,” Devoll said. “It’s so much easier for them. They don’t have to fumble around with papers trying to find where we are, what page are we on.”

Being able to easily search meeting notes and agendas within BoardBook’s system has also helped with meeting productivity. Devoll often uses the system’s search feature to locate text within policy documents and previous meeting agendas, and she can quickly copy and paste into current agendas and meeting minutes when needed.

“I can go back in and look at last year’s agenda versus this year’s and make sure I have all the items that I need,” Devoll said. “It’s just such a huge time-saver and organizer.”

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**Switching with ease**

Though transitioning to a new system can be a challenge, Devoll says BoardBook made it easy to switch. With timely and in-depth support available when needed, Devoll never felt lost using the new system.

“They do conference calls where they take over your screen and show you what they’re doing. And the webinars and training videos are second to none,” Devoll said. “The BoardBook team was wonderful throughout the whole process.”

BoardBook is an MSBA-endorsed product. Visit https://www.boardbook.org for more information. Direct questions about BoardBook to MSBA’s Greg Abbott at gabbott@mnmsba.org.

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During the summer months, the busyness continues, just in different ways. While many classrooms are silent until the fall, summer is the season for facilities projects, classroom moves, purchasing and receiving, fiscal year close-outs, extended school year learning, summer meals, deep cleans, and more.

For this issue’s Ask MSBA column, we provide answers to recent questions on a few summertime topics.

School boards must adopt a budget on or before June 30, effective on July 1 (the start of the fiscal year.) Can it be amended if the assumptions change?

Yes. Budgets can be revised at any time during the fiscal year. The last day to revise the 2024-2025 budget is June 30, 2025.

Can a school district re-assign a teacher to a different classroom?

Maybe. The answer will vary based on the language within the master agreement between the school district and the exclusive representative of the teachers.

How can school districts dispose of obsolete furniture and equipment?

If your school district subscribes to MSBA Policy Services, refer to Model Policy 802 – Disposition of Obsolete Equipment and Material. Obsolete equipment and materials should be sold at a fair price. While school district employees are not prohibited from purchasing obsolete items, the price paid should be the same as what would be paid by a member of the public. Remember that special allowances exist for disposal of computer equipment which can be given to qualifying students.

A member of the school board is relocating and will no longer live in the school district. How do we fill the vacancy?

It depends on the timing of the vacancy. School districts who have school board vacancies can reach out to MSBA for assistance. During the 2024 legislative session, changes to the process were passed and will be effective for vacancies occurring on or after July 1, 2024.

What is the school district’s role in determining whether an individual receives unemployment during the summer?

The school district does not have a role in determining whether an individual receives unemployment. To receive unemployment, individuals apply through an online system made available by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED).

Once an individual applies for unemployment, the school district will receive a letter outlining the employment information provided by the individual.
The school district is asked to confirm the accuracy of the information provided by the applicant. DEED makes the determination based on the information.

Minnesota’s new flag was adopted in May. Are school districts required to fly the state flag?

No. School districts are not required to fly the Minnesota flag. However, MS 121A.11 states, “every public school in Minnesota must display an appropriate United States flag when in session. The flag shall be displayed upon the school grounds or outside the school building, on a proper staff, on every legal holiday occurring during the school term and at such other times as the board of the district may direct. The flag must be displayed within the principal rooms of the school building at all other times while school is in session.”

Conclusion
While your school district’s staff is hard-at-work preparing for the 2024-2025 school year, your MSBA staff is ready to answer your questions regarding human resources, school finance, facilities, elections, and more.

Tiffany Gustin is the MSBA Director of Management Services and Insurance Trust Services. Contact Tiffany at tgustin@mnmsba.org.

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<td><a href="mailto:mhoheisel@rwbaird.com">mhoheisel@rwbaird.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ehlers</td>
<td>Shelby McQuay</td>
<td>3060 Centre Pointe Dr, Roseville, MN 55113</td>
<td>651-697-8548</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ehlers-inc.com">www.ehlers-inc.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:smcquay@ehlers-inc.com">smcquay@ehlers-inc.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISG</td>
<td>Sue Peterson</td>
<td>6465 Wayzata Boulevard, Suite 970, St. Louis Park, MN 55426</td>
<td>952-426-0699</td>
<td><a href="http://www.isginc.com">www.isginc.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:sue.peterson@ISGInc.com">sue.peterson@ISGInc.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Environmental Consultants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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### Fire & Security

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<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arvig</td>
<td></td>
<td>150 Second St. SW, Perham, MN 56573</td>
<td>888-992-7844</td>
<td><a href="http://www.arvig.com">www.arvig.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:answers@arvig.com">answers@arvig.com</a></td>
</tr>
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### Floor Coverings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiller Commercial Floors</td>
<td>Dave Bahr</td>
<td>2909 South Broadway, Rochester, MN 55904</td>
<td>507-254-6858</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hillerfloors.com">www.hillerfloors.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:dbahr@hillercarpet.com">dbahr@hillercarpet.com</a></td>
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### Indoor Air Quality

<table>
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<tr>
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### Insurance

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMC Insurance Companies</td>
<td>Jim Ketterson</td>
<td>7500 Flying Cloud, Ste #670, P.O. Box 1252, Eden Prairie, MN 55344</td>
<td>612-643-4795</td>
<td><a href="http://www.emclns.com">www.emclns.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:James.B.Ketterson@EMClns.com">James.B.Ketterson@EMClns.com</a></td>
</tr>
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### Investigations

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratwik, Roszak &amp; Maloney, P.A.</td>
<td>Jennifer K. Earley</td>
<td>444 Cedar Street, Suite 2100, St. Paul, MN 55101</td>
<td>612-339-0060</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ratwiklaw.com">www.ratwiklaw.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@ratwiklaw.com">info@ratwiklaw.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Labor Relations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
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<th>Email</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy &amp; Graven, Chartered</td>
<td>Maggie R. Wallner</td>
<td>150 South Fifth St., Ste. 700, Minneapolis, MN 55402</td>
<td>612-337-9300</td>
<td><a href="http://www.kennedy-graven.com">www.kennedy-graven.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:contactus@kennedy-graven.com">contactus@kennedy-graven.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Natural Grass Fields

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
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<th>Phone/Fax</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolton &amp; Menk, Inc.</td>
<td>Jay Pomroy</td>
<td>111 Washington Avenue South, Suite 650, Minneapolis, MN 55401</td>
<td>612-416-0220</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bolton-menk.com">www.bolton-menk.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:jay.pomroy@bolton-menk.com">jay.pomroy@bolton-menk.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Plaisted Companies, Inc.
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Personal vs. Official Use for Social Media for Public Officials

By Terence Morrow, MSBA General Counsel

Social media has become an increasingly important tool for school board members to communicate with constituents, share information, and solicit feedback. Challenges can arise for public officials when social media platforms, such as Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), offer opportunities for the public to comment. Some public officials have resorted to blocking, muting, or deleting users or comments that they deem inappropriate, offensive, or irrelevant. This practice, however, has sparked a debate over whether public officials have the right to block the public from their social media platforms and whether doing so violates the First Amendment rights of the blocked users.

The U.S. Supreme Court handed down a decision in March 2024 that addresses these questions. Elected officials have private lives, the Supreme Court stated, and have a First Amendment right to speak about their jobs and exercise editorial control over speech and speakers on their personal platforms. However, questions arise when it is difficult to distinguish between personal and official communication by a school board member or other elected official.

In the Supreme Court case — Lindke v. Freed — the public official used his Facebook page primarily to post personal items, but he did include some public information and responses to people who commented on his page. Sometimes, he deleted comments he felt were “derogatory” or “stupid.” When the COVID-19 pandemic began, he posted about it from a personal and a professional perspective. One Facebook user commented on the posts. The public official first deleted the comments; later, he blocked the individual from posting any comments. The individual sued, claiming that the public official had created a public forum on his Facebook page and that, by blocking anyone, the public official violated the First Amendment.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public officials cannot block comments on their social media page if the official both (1) possessed actual authority to speak on the government’s behalf on a particular matter; and (2) purported to exercise that authority when speaking in the relevant social media posts.

On the first question, the Court focused on whether the official had authority — from law, custom, or usage — to communicate with residents on the city’s behalf. In other words, the question is whether such communication was part of the official’s job.
Second, the official must claim to be posting on the basis of the official authority addressed in Question 1. The Court stated, “if the official does not speak in furtherance of his official responsibilities, he speaks with his own voice.” If the Facebook page included a label stating that the page is personal, the official is entitled to “a heavy presumption” that the posts were personal. Simply resharing information available elsewhere is also more likely to be personal. Other factors, such as designating oneself as a “public official,” can lead to a decision that the social media account is an official one. Determination whether an official’s Facebook page is personal or official is a fact-specific test. Ultimately, the Court did not resolve the two questions: rather, it sent the case back to the lower court to decide using the two-part test.

A final note: the Court distinguished deletion of an individual’s comments from blocking access to the social media account. In cases of comment deletion, courts will focus only upon the official’s posts that included the removed comments. Because blocking operates on a page-wide basis on Facebook, a court would need to look at every post to see whether any were “official” under the two-part test. The Court concluded:

If page-wide blocking is the only option, a public official might be unable to prevent someone from commenting on his personal posts without risking liability for also preventing comments on his official posts. A public official who fails to keep personal posts in a clearly designated personal account therefore exposes himself to greater potential liability.

Terence Morrow is MSBA’s General Counsel. Contact Terence at tmorrow@mnmsba.org.
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