

journal

minnesota school boards association

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What's Right in Public Education? Our Students!



Jules Rotter



Obioma Osuji



Jocelyn Brown

Learn more
about these students
and district successes
across Minnesota inside
this issue!



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Listening to Lead: Students as Partners in Governance

By Kristi Peterson, MSBA President

Across Minnesota, school board tables are where some of the most important decisions about our communities are made. Budgets are approved, policies are shaped, and visions for the future of our schools take form. Yet too often, one of the most important perspectives is missing from that table: the voices of the very students our decisions impact every day.

Student voice is an essential component of effective governance. More than 130 public school districts in Minnesota have students serve as an ex-officio member of their school board. When students are invited into the conversation, school boards gain real-time insight into how policies play out in classrooms and hallways, success of curriculum implementation, and support of extracurricular activities. While data can tell us what is happening, students help us understand why. They bring lived experiences that no report or presentation can fully capture, whether it is the realities of mental health challenges, the impact of scheduling changes, or how safe and supported they feel in their schools.

In May, I had the privilege of celebrating with three student school board members who were selected as recipients of the 2026 Robert E. Meeks Student School Board Member Scholarship. It was a powerful reminder of the talent, thoughtfulness, and leadership our students bring to the table. For me, it was a great reminder of “My Why” behind being a school board member. These

students are not only representing their peers, but they are also contributing meaningfully to board discussions, asking important questions, and helping shape decisions affecting their schools and communities. Their recognition as scholarship recipients underscores the value of their voices and the impact they are already making.

Including student voice strengthens decision-making. Boards are tasked with serving the best interests of all students, and that responsibility becomes clearer when students themselves are part of the dialogue. Their perspectives often challenge assumptions, highlight unintended consequences, and push adults to think differently. That kind of feedback leads to better, more thoughtful outcomes.

Beyond improving governance, elevating student voice is a powerful investment in civic engagement. When students see their opinions are valued and can influence real decisions, they begin to understand their role in a democracy. They learn how systems work, how to advocate respectfully, and how to engage in meaningful dialogue with community leaders. These are life skills that shape informed, active citizens. It also provides a glimpse into the future, and the future is bright with these dedicated student leaders.

There are many ways school boards can authentically incorporate student

voice. Some districts include student representatives on the board, providing them with a platform to share perspectives regularly. Others create student advisory councils or host listening sessions with their peers to gather input on specific issues. The approach may vary by district, but the commitment must be genuine. Students should not feel like they are being heard as a formality. They should see their contributions matter and influence outcomes.

It is also important to seek out diverse student perspectives. Not every student's experience is the same, and boards must be intentional about including voices which reflect the full breadth of their communities. This means creating opportunities for students of different backgrounds, abilities, and experiences to participate instead of just those who are already comfortable speaking up.

The work of a school board is ultimately about students. As school board leaders, we often talk about preparing students for the future. One of the most meaningful ways we can is by trusting them with the present. Inviting students to the table sends a clear message: your voice matters, your experiences are valued, and you are a partner in shaping your education.

Kristi Peterson is the MSBA President and a Shakopee School Board member. Contact Kristi about this article at kristi.peterson@mnmsba.org.

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Prior Lake High School's Obioma Osuji – pictured with MSBA President Kristi Peterson and MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind – was one of three students to win the MSBA's Robert E. Meeks Student School Board Scholarship in 2026. Photo courtesy of Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools

Showing the Way

Students from Prior Lake-Savage Area, Tri-City United, and Waterville-Elysian-Morristown are recipients of 2026 MSBA Student School Board Scholarship awards

Compiled by Bruce Lombard, MSBA Associate Director of Communications and Member Engagement

Every year, school boards across Minnesota make decisions that shape the lives of thousands of students. But the best decisions don't happen in isolation. They happen when student voices are genuinely part of the conversation.

"The primary role of school boards is to advocate for student success," said MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind. "There is no better way to get input as a board member than getting it directly from a student representative."

Since 2009, MSBA has honored students through the Robert E. Meeks Student School Board Scholarship.

Named for former MSBA Executive Director Bob Meeks, the award provides \$3,000 for each recipient toward postsecondary education — and recognizes the young people who show up at the board table not just to observe, but to contribute.

In 2026, MSBA awarded the scholarship to three remarkable students: Obioma Osuji (Prior Lake High School), Jules Rotter (Tri-City United High School), and Jocelyn Brown (Waterville-Elysian-Morristown High School). Each was selected from a pool of more than 50 applicants statewide — and each exemplifies what it means to lead with purpose.



Obioma Osuji: Prior Lake student wants decisions made with students, not just for them

There is a meaningful difference between making decisions “for” students and

making them “with” students. Obioma Osuji, who served as a student school board representative for Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, understands that difference — and has worked to close the gap.

Throughout his tenure, Osuji took a data-driven approach to student representation. Rather than simply reporting on school happenings at board meetings, he created student-led surveys to gather real insights and bring them to the table in a way board members could act on.

“These weren’t just ‘check-the-box’ exercises; they were strategic tools designed to gather raw, honest feedback on district initiatives,” Osuji wrote in his scholarship essay. “By presenting this data to the board, I moved student concerns from the realm of anecdote to the realm of evidence. Whether discussing curriculum changes or facility improvements, I ensured the board was making decisions with the students, rather than simply for them. This approach shifted the power dynamic, fostering a culture where students felt their lived experiences were a formal part of the district’s record.”

“Obioma does not simply report events; he synthesizes student voice and connects it to district-level priorities,” noted then-Prior Lake-Savage Area Superintendent Dr. Michael J. Thomas. “His presence strengthens our board’s ability to remain student-centered in its conversations.”

Osuji’s leadership extended well beyond the boardroom. He served as Student Council President and Treasurer, chaired the National Honor Society, and lettered in both football and volleyball.

My role as Student Council President allowed me to execute governance on a grassroots level,” Osuji wrote. “Managing a seven-person executive board and a sixty-person

Five Questions with Obioma Osuji

What made you interested in serving as a student representative on the Prior Lake-Savage Area School Board — and what did you hope to accomplish?

What interested me in becoming the student representative was an incident that occurred four years ago. A social media post released on the internet sparked a period of racial tension in Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, and it negatively affected many students’ school experiences. From that moment, my hope was to one day be a voice loud enough for students facing these problems, so I can try to make Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools a better place than it was when I arrived.

What was the most important lesson or knowledge you took away from your service on the school board?

The most important lesson I took from my service on the board is that you have to make hard decisions in life. At the end of the day, decisions on the board come down to a “yes” or “no.” There will also be heavy consequences for the decisions you make. The results may be positive or negative, but nevertheless, you have to trust your gut and make choices that will impact many people. That is why it is very important to be thoughtful with your decision-making and see things from multiple perspectives.

What was the most challenging issue the school board faced during your service — and how did the school board ultimately handle it?

The biggest challenge the board faced this year was budget cuts. Many staff positions in the district had to be cut, alongside funding for academic programs, athletics, and activities. The board handled this issue by gathering a lot of community feedback — seeing what the community had to say about the cuts — and then trying to determine what to keep and what to cut. In the end, the board decided to go through with these cuts, with a 4-to-3 vote proving how polarizing and divided this issue was.

What profession are you hoping to pursue after college?

After college, I hope to pursue a career in corporate finance or wealth management, with the ultimate goal of becoming a CFO or a financial advisor.

In your scholarship application essay, you stress the importance of good governance. Could you see yourself running for school board in your future?

I could definitely see myself running for the school board in the future. This experience as a student representative has opened my mind to the perspectives of everyone involved in education. Whether it is administration, teachers, or students, I truly believe I have the knowledge to piece everything together and make a school district a better place for all. My mother is a teacher, so the importance of education was instilled in me from a young age. Not everyone in the world has the opportunity for an education, so it is very important to me to help improve school districts and provide a world-class education.

MSBA STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP



Tri-City United High School's Jules Rotter was one of three students to win the MSBA's Robert E. Meeks Student School Board Scholarship in 2026. Pictured with Rotter is MSBA President Kristi Peterson, MSBA Board Director Mike Pfeil and MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind. Photo courtesy of Tri-City United Public Schools

council required a different kind of 'governance' — one focused on culture and community impact. We focused on highlighting the 'triple threat' of student achievement: arts, academics, and athletics. By ensuring that the district celebrated the lead performer in the school play with the same fervor as the star quarterback or the National Merit School, we helped foster a more inclusive "Laker Pride."

Osuji also co-founded Prior Lake High School's Pickleball Club — growing it from 15 to 175 members — and pursued college coursework through PSEO at Normandale Community College, earning a 3.878 GPA, Dean's List honors, and membership in the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society.

"Obioma's leadership is rooted in service and character," noted Prior Lake-Savage Area School Board Chair Amy Bullyan. "He brings credibility, empathy, and purpose to every role he undertakes. His ability to listen carefully, synthesize diverse perspectives, and communicate effectively in a governance setting distinguishes him well beyond his years."

This fall, Osuji plans to attend the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management and major in Finance and Accounting.

"[Obioma] is a scholar, a servant-leader, and a principled young adult who will continue to make meaningful

contributions wherever his path leads," added Superintendent Thomas. "I am confident his future will reflect the same commitment to excellence and service he has demonstrated in Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools."



Jules Rotter: Tri-City United student helped build student representation from the ground up

When Jules Rotter became one of Tri-City United High School's founding student school board representatives, there was no road map. She helped write one — and then made sure others could follow it.

Rotter didn't just step into a role. She helped build it from the ground up and later trained her successor, so the position would endure long after she graduated. That combination of initiative and foresight runs throughout her record.

"I believe my presence on the board has made a meaningful impact," Rotter wrote in her scholarship essay. "By consistently bringing forward student concerns, seeking clarification on behalf of my peers, and modeling respectful dialogue, I helped normalize student participation in district governance. Students now recognize that their voices have a pathway to

decision-makers. Administrators and board members have gained clearer insight into how policies are perceived by those most directly affected."

Jules served in Student Council all four years — as Treasurer, Vice President, and President — while also holding roles as Freshman Class President, Senior Class Treasurer, ARTeam Co-President, and Business Professionals of America Secretary. She is a National Honor Society and FFA member, and launched TCU's first pop tab drive. She maintained a 3.96 GPA and lettered academically for eight consecutive semesters. She was also active in blood drives: organizing seven, donating at six, and volunteering at 11.

This spring, she qualified for State in BPA's Website Design Team event and, in January 2026, represented TCU on a student panel at the MSBA Leadership Conference where she advocated for more student representatives on school boards and stressed the importance of student voices, according to Tri-City United School Board Member Hilary Birdsell.

"Whether encouraging her peers or speaking to adults at a statewide event, Jules shows initiative, responsibility, and the ability to make a real impact," Birdsell noted.

In her scholarship essay, Rotter reflected on what authentic student voice actually requires — noting genuine representation sometimes means raising hard issues, not just delivering good news. She led an effort to reinstate graduation cords at TCU, and even when the outcome fell short of what students hoped, her peers recognized she had been willing to fight for them.

Outside of school, Rotter launched "Homemade with Love, Jules," a licensed cottage baking business that celebrated its 130th order in June 2026.

"Jules leads by action and example and clearly understands the responsibilities of public service," Birdsell added. "Jules Rotter is an

Five Questions with Jules Rotter

What made you interested in serving as a student representative on the Tri-City United School Board – and what did you hope to accomplish?

I was interested in serving as a student representative because I wanted to make sure students had a voice in decisions that affect THEM! As students, we experience the impact of school board decisions every day, so I thought it was important our perspectives were part of those conversations. I hoped to act as a connection between students and the board by sharing student feedback, bringing attention to issues that matter to us, and helping board members understand what life is really like in our schools!

What was the most important lesson or knowledge you took away from your service on the school board?

The most important lesson I took away from serving on the school board was that there is always more to a decision than what people see on the surface. Before joining the board, I didn't fully realize how much time, research, and discussion go into every decision. I learned school board members have to balance the needs of students, staff, families, and taxpayers while keeping the district's long-term goals in mind. It showed me the value of considering multiple perspectives before forming an opinion.

What was the most challenging issue the school board faced during your service – and how did the school board ultimately handle it?

The most challenging issue the school board faced during my time as a student representative was the operating referendum. It was especially difficult because it failed twice, which was disappointing for many people who had worked hard to communicate the district's needs to the community. What stood out to me was how the board handled those setbacks. Even though the results were not what they had hoped for, they remained positive, professional, and focused on supporting the students. Watching them navigate through a difficult situation with resilience and a long-term perspective taught me a lot about leadership and the importance of staying focused on your goals, even when things do not go your way.

What profession are you hoping to pursue after college?

After college, I hope to pursue a career in business management and marketing. I want to be a leader with a strong focus on positivity! I love working with people, leading, and finding creative ways to solve problems which is what drew me to the business field. I am excited to see where my degree takes me!

In your scholarship application essay, you wrote, "From the very first meeting, I realized that effective governance requires more than simply making decisions, it requires listening, collaboration, and a commitment to the needs of those you serve. What began as an exciting new initiative has evolved into one of the most formative leadership experiences of my high school career." ... Could you see yourself running for school board in your future?

I definitely could see myself running for the school board in the future. Serving as a student representative gave me a firsthand look at how important school boards are to a community and how much they can influence students. This experience showed me how rewarding it can be to be involved in your community, and it grew my interest in leadership and public service that I will be working to continue throughout my life.

MSBA STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP



Waterville-Elysian-Morristown's Jocelyn Brown was one of three students to win the MSBA's Robert E. Meeks Student School Board Scholarship in 2026. Pictured with Brown is MSBA President Kristi Peterson, MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind and MSBA Board Director Mike Pfeil. All three 2026 scholarship winners plan to attend the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. Photo courtesy of the Waterville-Elysian-Morristown School District

outstanding young leader who brings vision, dedication, and heart to everything she does."

This fall, Rotter will attend the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, where she plans to double major in Business Analytics and Marketing with a minor in Management Information Systems.

"I can state without hesitation that Jules has outstanding character," noted Brian Mikel, Rotter's Social Studies Teacher at Tri City United High School. "The skills, work ethic, and responsibility she has developed over her lifetime are definitely apparent when you talk to her and spend time around her."



Jocelyn Brown: WEM student made history — and then made sure her successor was ready

At Waterville-Elysian-Morristown (WEM) High School, Jocelyn Brown didn't just earn a place in history — she used it to make things better for whoever came next.

Brown holds a unique distinction in WEM history: she was the first student ever appointed to serve as

a student representative on the school board. Rather than simply fill the role, she helped define what it could be — then mentored her successor to ensure the position would thrive beyond her time.

"Serving as the student representative to the WEM School Board has been one of the most meaningful leadership experiences of my high school career," Brown wrote her in scholarship essay. "I was the first student ever appointed to serve on the board in my district, which meant the role did not yet have a clear structure or expectations. Working with board members and administrators, I helped establish how a student representative could effectively participate in meetings, communicate with students, and contribute to board discussions. My goal was not only to represent students during my term, but also to build a strong foundation for future student representatives."

Brown's approach to board service was described as grounded, composed, and solution-oriented. She served in FFA, FCCLA, Student Council, and Minnesota Honor Society, was selected to attend Minnesota Girls State in 2025, and worked as an MN DNR Level I Watercraft Inspector — educating boaters about aquatic invasive species. She also volunteered with the WEM Youth Football Association.

Academically, Brown maintained a 3.95 GPA while completing college coursework through PSEO at South Central College and the University of Minnesota, earning a spot on the U of M Dean's List for three consecutive semesters.

"I do not think you will find a better student candidate or representative than her," noted Josh Smith, Brown's Social Studies teacher, praising her curiosity, collaboration, and drive to keep learning.

"What began as a single act of service turned into a reliable volunteer I could count on," noted Gary Michael, a WEM School Board Member who has known Brown since seventh grade. He added her board contributions were "grounded, respectful, and solution-oriented – with confidence and composure beyond her years."

This fall, Brown will study Business Analytics at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Thanks to credits earned through PSEO, she is on track to graduate in spring 2027 and plans to pursue law school thereafter.

"Jocelyn is intelligent, resilient, and highly capable," Michael added. "She balances academic excellence with leadership and service, demonstrating both strong character and a genuine desire to make a difference. I am confident she will continue to excel and positively impact any institution she joins."

Thank you to the MSBA Board of Directors' Student Scholarship Committee for their work in selecting this year's recipients. Of Minnesota's 331 public school districts, more than 130 have a student school board representative, bringing student perspectives directly to governance.

Five Questions with Jocelyn Brown

What made you interested in serving as a student representative on the Waterville-Elysian-Morristown School Board – and what did you hope to accomplish?

I was interested in learning how government works in a school district, how roles interact with each other, and overall, how a school district is ultimately able to function logistically and financially. I wanted to be able to take away an exceptional experience, knowledge, skills, and connections, which I did. I wanted to accomplish the establishment of student representatives on the school board for the district. My goal was to build the role, establish expectations for both sides, and set an example for future students on the board and throughout the district for years to come.

What was the most important lesson or knowledge you took away from your service on the school board?

I took away three lessons: doing the right thing isn't always easy; great leadership is knowing when to follow others; and smart leaders know when to speak and when to listen. I had a lot of thoughts and opinions to share on behalf of students, but realized there is never a simple solution to a problem on a school board. There are always at least two sides to every story, and decision-makers need to consider that every single time they act. I also understood that there was a lot I didn't know, including policy, legislation, past events, culture, history, practices, and the reasons why things are the way they are. I had to quickly learn what a school board truly is, how they work, what they did in the past and why, before I could share an opinion with merit that could be taken seriously. I found that in a room with people who know more than you, the best thing you can do is silently observe to learn, ask questions, and provide feedback in the right way at the right time. I think the silent leadership I practiced allowed me to have a voice that carried a lot of weight, which was heard when it mattered.

What was the most challenging issue the school board faced during your service – and how did the school board ultimately handle it?

Our district has been faced with financial challenges due to a declining enrollment trend that started in 2014 and has persisted to today. We had to make the extremely hard decision to close one of the two buildings that was a part of the district to relieve financial and operational strain on the district, which was affecting course offerings and student outcomes. It was a controversial decision that created pushback from the community, so it was difficult to proceed with the process. In my opinion, it was the right thing to do for students in the long run, but it wasn't easy for the board to do.

What profession are you hoping to pursue after college?

I hope to work as a strategic human resources analyst to serve the needs of a company's internal workforce while simultaneously working toward completing business objectives efficiently, effectively, and ethically. I could also imagine myself having a huge involvement with legislation in my role.

In your scholarship application essay, you wrote, "this experience has given me a deeper appreciation for good governance and the role thoughtful decision-making plays in supporting student success." Could you see yourself running for school board in your future?

I could certainly see myself as a member, probably as a treasurer, if possible, on a school board. I would love the opportunity to improve or maintain an excellent financial system that helps students get a quality education. I think I would be especially motivated to serve when I have kids or my brothers have kids, which I think will happen in the next 10 years.



Marguerite (née Haggerty) Winter was one of two recipients of the MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship back in 2011. A graduate of Cannon Falls High School, Winter currently works as an Associate Human Resources Director at broadhead, a marketing agency headquartered in Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of Marguerite Winter

2011 MSBA Scholarship Winners: Where Are They Now?

The lessons of local government still resonate for Cannon Falls graduate Marguerite (Haggerty) Winter

By Bruce Lombard, MSBA Associate Director of Communications and Member Engagement

Marguerite (née Haggerty) Winter, a graduate of Cannon Falls High School, received the MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship in 2011.

After high school, Winter enrolled at the University of Minnesota where she lived on the St. Paul campus. Having been a longtime participant in FFA and 4-H, she became involved in many ag business extracurricular activities. She utilized work-study from her financial aid package for a part-time job in the university's admissions office, had an internship at CHS, Inc., and worked at a restaurant on the weekends.

In 2015, Winter earned a Bachelor of Science in Business from the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota.

She parlayed her degree into her "dream job," an Associate Human Resources Director position at broadhead, an independent marketing agency headquartered in Minneapolis.

"I've worked at broadhead for 11 years ... it is an agency that focuses on clients in the agriculture, transportation, food, and healthcare sectors," Winter said. "It is a Minnesota company



As part of her job at broadhead, Winter does student resume coaching. Photo courtesy of Marguerite Winter

and has about 150 employees. I'm responsible for all things HR: recruiting, hiring and onboarding, employee learning and development, performance reviews, compensation and benefits, compliance, and payroll. I'm very proud to work for broadhead and the great people there."

Winter initially started in broadhead's summer internship program.

"The company has been very successful and has doubled in size since I originally joined," she said. "It has been very rewarding to be a part of the change and growth."

Winter has fond recollections of her time in Cannon Falls – including her time as student representative on the Cannon Falls Area School Board calling it one of the most valuable experiences she had in high school.

"I was initially intimidated to interact with the board members, but they were thrilled to welcome me to the table and remain people I look up to today," Winter said. "I am especially appreciative of Board Member Brenda Owens and Superintendent Todd Sesker for writing my recommendations for the MSBA scholarship 15 years ago. Taking that scholarship to the University of Minnesota was impactful for my success and it was very meaningful to have the support."

She says the best memory from her school board involvement was the successful passing of the Cannon Falls



Also honored in 2011: Maraki Ketema

Maraki Ketema, a graduate of White Bear Lake Area High School, was MSBA's other 2011 scholarship recipient.

Following high school, Ketema majored in both computer science and neuroscience at Carleton College in Northfield.

Ketema is currently a Principal Product Manager for Microsoft.

Due to scheduling, Ketema's full profile was not available for this issue. MSBA wishes her continued success.

MSBA STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP



Marguerite Winter's family includes her husband, Joe, and her son, Daniel (2). Marguerite and Joe are expecting a second child later in 2026. Photos courtesy of Marguerite Winter

Area School District's \$21 million building referendum bond.

"I'm really thankful for my hometown community for passing that referendum and proud to enjoy the facilities whenever I return today," Winter said.

During the referendum campaign, Winter was tasked with giving a presentation.

"I described our current lunchroom experience, practicing my trombone in our current music room, utilizing the gym and locker rooms as a student athlete," she said. "I didn't ask for extravagant upgrades or compare it to other school districts; I allowed the audience to step into my shoes for a typical day and envision for themselves how the addition of spaces such as an auditorium and new music classrooms, a fieldhouse, and new cafeteria and lunchroom commons would improve the daily experience of children in our community and they could take pride in being able to provide that. It was very successful, and the board ended up asking me to attend community information events for voters ahead of the referendum and recorded my presentation into a video that they could share with the community."

During her time as a student school board rep, Winter said the biggest lesson was learning firsthand about the impact of local government and community involvement – and that it still resonates with her today.

"In a small town like Cannon Falls, the school district is an integral part of our local economy," she said. "MSBA members from other rural areas know that the school district can be one of the largest employers in town. School board decisions impact individuals and the overall health of communities.

Financial decisions the board makes such as hiring a local business to snowplow the parking lot or the cafeteria buying bread from the local bakery vs. a national food-service provider are important. Being the student representative and witnessing this firsthand taught me a lot about consciously choosing to invest in our local community, and that is part of how we can successfully go back to the community and ask them to continually support our school. It is an important give-and-take relationship and vital to choose to do good for our neighbors."

In 2016, she met Joe Winter, who had moved into the other side of the duplex she was renting in St. Paul. In 2026, they celebrated their five-year wedding anniversary.

She and Joe currently live in White Bear Lake with their two-year-old son, Daniel. The Winter family will add another member as they are expecting their second child later in 2026.

"I'm looking forward to meeting the new baby and making memories as a family of four," she said.

Now, 15 years removed from her time as student rep, Winter hasn't ruled out serving on a school board someday.

"I still feel new to the White Bear Lake community, but I will say a major driver of us choosing to move here as newlyweds in 2021 was because of the community's investments in the public school," she said. "It was on the top of my mind that in November 2019, White Bear Lake Area voters passed the largest successful school bond referendum in Minnesota history. That was proof to me that this community was passionate about their public school's success and was somewhere I would want to live."

MSBA STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP

Another lasting impact on her time on the board was the importance of voting.

"Even though I wasn't of voting age when I was a student representative, it helped me learn as a teenager the importance of participating in local elections every year," Winter said. "I even made sure to vote absentee for the Cannon Falls Area School Board election when I was a new 18-year-old in my first semester at the U of M! Making plans to vote in local elections, especially for years without major campaigns driving voter turnout, is extremely important and that civic lesson is something I'll carry with me forever."

On a final note, Winter added: "Thank you to MSBA for offering the scholarship and to school board members all across Minnesota for mentoring student representatives. Your impact can be lifelong!"

Bruce Lombard is the MSBA Associate Director of Communications and Member Engagement. Direct questions or comments about this article to blombard@mnmsba.org.



Marguerite Winter was thankful for winning the MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship in 2011. "Taking that scholarship to the University of Minnesota was impactful for my success and it was very meaningful to have the support," she said. Photo courtesy of Marguerite Winter



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MSBA SPOTLIGHT

Dave Klatt

Albert Lea Area School Board Member

MSBA Board Director – Director District 1 (Southeast Minnesota)

What is a "fun fact" about you that would surprise most people?

I was a head college baseball coach.

What is your favorite outdoor activity in Minnesota?

I enjoy hunting with my son and now my grandson.

What was the most recent book you read?

"The Road to Purpose" by Kenneth Behring.

What is the No. 1 item on your bucket list?

To retire healthy, travel with my wife, and do anything we desire during those years.

What is your favorite film and/or TV series?

I have watched every episode and season of "Survivor."



What do you like best about being a school board member?

I truly enjoy helping the school thrive and watching our students' activities.

If you could have dinner with any person – living or deceased – who would it be and why?

Both of my parents passed away several years ago, so I would love to dine with them.

What is your favorite band or musician?

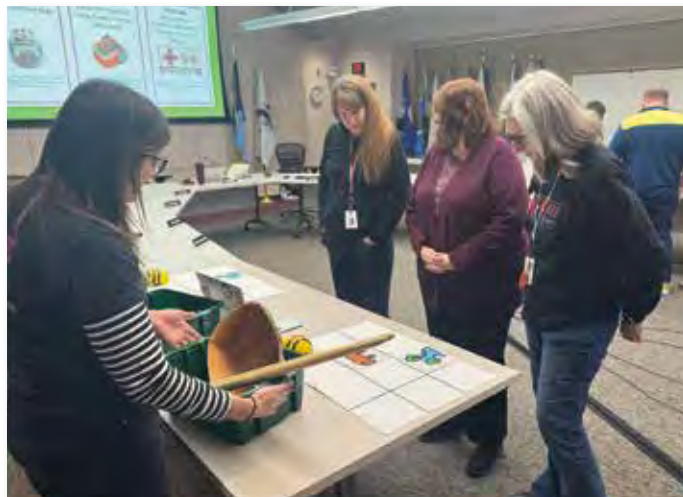
The band Chicago.

What personal accomplishment makes you the proudest?

Watching my children and grandchildren become successful and helping others do the same.

What is the best part of serving on the MSBA Board of Directors?

The in-depth knowledge I have gained by learning how MSBA is such a big part of our schools and being able to bring those experiences back to help our local school board make decisions to improve our district.



Bloomington School Board members Heather Starks and Dawn Seigauf engage in CS/AIE lessons and activities after a board presentation on the CS/AIE project. Photos courtesy of Bloomington Public Schools

When Computer Science Honors Community: Bloomington's American Indian Education + CS Collaboration

By weaving American Indian knowledge systems into computing lessons, Bloomington educators are showing that culturally grounded learning benefits every student in the classroom

By Alexandra Holter, Whitney Determan, Emilee Vlasin Milde, Lee Nelson, Hiedi Hecker, and Clarissa Seidl, Bloomington Public Schools

In Bloomington Public Schools, computer science (CS) class is more than coding; it's a place where students practice relationships, responsibility, and belonging. This year, our elementary computer science specialists partnered with our American Indian Education (AIE) program to co-design lessons that honor American Indian education standards through the pillars of our CS program — skills, equity, and joy.

The collaboration brings together elementary CS specialists, AIE coordinators, and grade-level teachers. What makes this work stand out is the shared design process: educators across departments learning from each other, checking accuracy together, and building classroom experiences that connect computing to culture, land, and community.

Why this integration matters

In elementary school, students form early beliefs about who "belongs" in different subjects. When learning is abstract or detached from community, many students — particularly those from groups historically marginalized in STEM — decide early that computer science "isn't for me."

Our AIE + CS work challenges this narrative. While this partnership directly affirms the identity and brilliance of our Native students, the benefits extend to every learner in the classroom. By grounding technology in American Indian knowledge systems — which naturally reflect patterns, systems, cycles, and cause-and-effect — we move computer science out of the vacuum and into the real world.

When we anchor computing in meaningful, culturally grounded contexts, we do more than teach "coding steps"; we broaden the definition of who a scientist is. This approach creates an entry point for all students who have been told, explicitly or implicitly, that STEM is not their domain. Students begin to see technology not as a neutral tool, but through an ethical lens of impact, responsibility, and long-term community thinking. In this environment, belonging isn't an afterthought, it's the foundation.

How we do it: A Year of Collaborative Design

The partnership follows a clear, active progression throughout the school year to ensure the integration is both authentic and sustainable:

- **September — Build Direction:** Educators across departments brainstorm and establish shared goals. We prioritize building relational trust between CS specialists and AIE coordinators before a single line of code is written.
- **Fall — Deepen Content Knowledge:** Teachers immerse themselves in professional learning. This includes attending AISES (American Indian Science and Engineering Society) conferences and participating in Indigenous Science PLCs facilitated by Freshwater in partnership with the University of Minnesota.
- **November — Design Integrated Lessons:** At our elementary sites, AIE staff provide foundational resources while teachers and CS specialists co-create lessons. We weave state standards together so that computer science and Indigenous knowledge reinforce one another rather than compete for instructional time.
- **December and beyond — Implement and Support:** Classroom teachers lead instruction with hands-on support. CS specialists and AIE coordinators review content for accuracy in real-time, ensuring a continuous loop of feedback that keeps the learning grounded and culturally responsive.

What students experience: computing connected to land, seasons, and place

The integrated lessons bring AIE standards and computer science together in concrete, age-appropriate ways. A few examples include:

- **Kindergarten:** Students explore relationships to land and water while practicing sequencing and direction-based programming with "Blue Bot's Journey."
- **Second Grade:** Students learn how knowledge of the natural world informs design decisions, programming a robot through a purposeful "seasonal camp journey."
- **Third Grade:** Students combine creative computing with place-based learning, using Makey Makey and Scratch to locate the 11 Tribal Nations of Minnesota and explore tribal sovereignty.

Across these experiences, students practice computational thinking while engaging social studies standards in a way that emphasize relationships and respect.

Early outcomes: Stronger belonging

We are seeing the powerful impact of culturally responsive, integrated instruction. This work functions as both a mirror and a window: for our Native students, it is a mirror reflecting their culture as a source of scientific and technological strength. For all other students, it is a window into a more inclusive definition of what a "computer scientist" looks like.

Key results include:

- **Increased Engagement:** Students connect more deeply to lessons tied to story, place, and meaning.
- **Teacher Confidence:** Educators feel better supported because content is co-developed and vetted by specialists.
- **Ethical Thinking:** Students are growing into responsible digital citizens who consider the long-term impact of technology on their community.

Scaling districtwide and building toward secondary

This is only the beginning. Next steps include a proposed districtwide K-5 implementation through social studies, continued connection with the American Indian Parent Advisory Committee (AIPAC), and opportunities to share learning through broader events. We also plan professional learning for teachers in summer 2026 with a longer-range goal of planning secondary expansion.

In a time when public education is asked to do more than ever, this collaboration is a reminder of what's right: educators working across roles, honoring community knowledge, and designing learning that helps every student see themselves as capable, curious, joyful, and connected.

Alexandra Holter is the K-12 Computer Science Coordinator for Bloomington Public Schools. Direct questions about this program to Alexandra at aholter@isd271.org.





AVID for Athletes Advisor Lizzie Winkelman and Athletic Director Justin Reese celebrate with their Fridley High School state champion track and field athletes. Photo courtesy of Fridley Public Schools

AVID Scholar Athletes: Where Academic Success Fuels Athletic Dreams

Fridley High School's innovative program is helping student-athletes build the academic foundation to compete — and succeed — at the next level

By Lizzie Winkelman, AVID for Athletes Advisor; Justin Reese, Athletic Director; and Lori Andler, Senior Officer of Finance, Fridley Public Schools

At Fridley High School, student-athletes are learning that success on the field starts in the classroom. Through an innovative program called AVID Scholar Athletes, students are building the academic skills, confidence, and mindset needed to reach their goals — both in sports and in life.

For many young athletes, the dream of competing at the next level drives their motivation. Yet the reality is clear: fewer than 10 percent of high school athletes continue to college athletics, and academic eligibility remains one of the biggest barriers. At Fridley Public Schools,

educators saw this challenge not as a limitation, but as an opportunity.

"We knew our students had the talent and the drive," said Elizabeth Winkelman, Spanish teacher, AVID Site Coordinator, and Head Track and Field Coach. "What they needed was a structured way to connect their athletic goals with academic preparation."

That idea led to the creation of the AVID Scholar Athletes course, developed by Winkelman in partnership with

Activities Director and Head Football Coach Justin Reese. Together, they designed a program that blends AVID strategies with athletics, helping students build the habits and skills needed for long-term success.

Winkelman and Reese bring deep experience and credibility to this work. Winkelman has spent more than a decade supporting students as both a teacher and coach, most recently leading Fridley's track and field team to a state championship. Reese, recognized as Minnesota Football Coach of the Year, has coached multiple sports and led teams and individuals to state-level success. Both have worked closely with student-athletes and saw a consistent pattern: talented students missing opportunities due to gaps in academic readiness.

"We saw too many students with incredible potential lose out on college opportunities," said Reese. "We wanted to change that."

The turning point came when Winkelman attended the AVID National Conference and learned about a model that integrates academic strategies with athletics. The approach focuses on WICOR — Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, and Reading — while also incorporating leadership development, sports psychology, and wellness. The concept aligned perfectly with Fridley's vision.

By early 2025, the AVID Scholar Athletes course launched with a group of students selected for their commitment to athletics, interest in postsecondary education, and need for additional academic support. From the start, the program centered on a simple but powerful idea: academic success is not a backup plan — it is the foundation for every future opportunity.

Inside the classroom, students engage in meaningful and practical learning experiences. They study sports psychology to better understand mindset, resilience, and performance under pressure. They analyze their own strengths and areas for growth, then set SMART goals that connect their daily habits to long-term outcomes. They build organization and study skills that support success across all classes.

The course also emphasizes whole-student development. Students participate in workouts, reflect on their physical and mental wellness, and learn how discipline and consistency apply both in sports and academics. This integrated approach helps students see themselves not just as athletes, but as learners and leaders.

One of the most impactful elements of the course is the Personal Leadership Playbook. Each student creates a comprehensive portfolio that captures their goals, growth, and plans for the future. They present these playbooks to teachers and administrators, strengthening their communication skills

and taking ownership of their journey.

The results are already making a difference.

In the program's first year, 80.95% of participating students increased their GPA. Attendance also improved, reflecting a stronger sense of engagement and accountability. Students are showing up, staying focused, and taking pride in their progress.

More importantly, students are shifting how they define success.

"I used to think sports were my only path," one student shared. "Now I know my grades are just as important. This class helped me see that I have more options."

That shift is exactly what Fridley educators hoped to see. By connecting athletic ambition with academic preparation, the program helps students open doors that might otherwise remain closed. Whether they pursue a two-year college, a four-year university, a trade, or a career, they leave with a stronger foundation.

The program continues to grow. Fridley High School plans to expand AVID Scholar Athletes into multiple sections, including grade-specific courses. A future senior-focused course will guide students through college applications, scholarships, and the NCAA Eligibility Center. The school is also building partnerships with community organizations to provide more exposure to college and career pathways.

At its core, AVID Scholar Athletes reflects what is right with public education. It is driven by educators who see potential in every student and are willing to innovate to meet their needs. It connects learning to real-world goals. It builds relationships, accountability, and a sense of belonging.

Most importantly, it ensures students are prepared for whatever comes next.

At Fridley High School, the message is clear: success is not defined by a single outcome. It is built through preparation, perseverance, and opportunity. Through programs like AVID Scholar Athletes, students are not just chasing dreams — they are building futures.

Direct questions about AVID Scholar Athletes to Lori Andler, Senior Officer of Finance, at andler@isd14.org or Liz Jensen, District AVID Director, at ejensen@isd14.org.



Nathan Jacobson (right), an assessment coordinator at St. Cloud Technical and Community College, helped a high school senior fill out his FAFSA during the Future 100 event in fall 2025. Photo courtesy of the St. Cloud Area School District

Future 100: Empowering the Post-Graduation Journey

St. Cloud Area's initiative is removing barriers, mobilizing the community, and giving every senior a confident next step

By Tami DeLand, Former Director of Community Engagement and Communications, St. Cloud Area School District

Future 100 is a signature initiative of St. Cloud Area School District designed to ensure every student leaves high school with a clear and confident plan for their future. By bringing the community directly into the schools, the district partners with high school seniors to create practical, actionable post-graduation plans while strengthening connections with higher education institutions, community, and workforce leaders across the Greater St. Cloud area.

What began as a single event in 2024 has grown into a year-long commitment to seniors at Apollo High School, Tech High School, and McKinley Area Learning Center.

Future 100 is grounded in three commitments:

Vision: Every student graduates with a defined

postsecondary plan.

Support: Students explore options aligned to their interests and aspirations with the expectation that each will apply to a local (or other) college or university, connect with a local employer, or pursue military service.

Empowerment: Students leave high school with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to make informed decisions about their future.

A defining feature of Future 100 is its elevation of all pathways. Two-year colleges, four-year universities, technical programs, military service, and direct workforce entry are all presented as valued and viable options.



A high school student meets with industry partners and higher education partners during the Future 100 event in fall 2025. Photo courtesy of the St. Cloud Area School District



Sarah Dean (left), Director of Community Engagement for Scouting America Central Minnesota Council, speaks with a high school senior during the Future 100 event in fall 2025. Photo courtesy of the St. Cloud Area School District

Each October serves as a concentrated month of action. During this month, seniors:

1. Apply to local colleges, including St. Cloud Technical & Community College, St. Cloud State University, and College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University.
2. Meet with military recruiters to explore service opportunities.
3. Connect directly with local employers in fields aligned to their interests.
4. Submit applications to additional preferred institutions.

Significantly, local higher education partners waive application fees during the October events, removing a barrier that can discourage students from taking that first step.

By bringing admissions representatives, military recruiters, and employers directly into school buildings for structured one-on-one meetings, the district removes logistical challenges and accelerates momentum. Students move from intention to action with applications submitted, interviews scheduled, and commitments underway.

Future 100 extends beyond exploration and application to include robust community mentorship. Volunteers provide one-on-one assistance, small-group mentoring, and career exploration conversations. These interactions offer more than technical guidance — they provide encouragement, professional insight, and networking.

Community organizations such as Greater St. Cloud Development, Rotary, United Way, and Boys & Girls Clubs mobilize volunteers to support the initiative, reinforcing the belief that preparing students for life after graduation is a shared responsibility.

The work continues into January with structured FAFSA completion support and financial aid guidance. Follow-up throughout the spring ensures students finalize enrollment, employment, or enlistment plans.

Future 100 is also aligned with the district's broader commitments to academic excellence, collaboration, and belonging. Students engage in meaningful decision-making and choose coursework with future goals in mind. Higher education institutions, employers, civic organizations, and school staff operate as true partners. Every student's pathway is respected and supported.

By positioning post-graduation planning as a shared endeavor, the district reinforces the idea that public education is both a personal and community investment.

At St. Cloud Area Schools, postsecondary success is not left to chance. It is intentionally designed, collectively supported, and thoughtfully measured. By ensuring every graduate has a clear plan — whether in higher education, military service, or the workforce — Future 100 strengthens individual opportunity while supporting the long-term vitality of the region. It is what becomes possible when a community aligns around a simple but powerful commitment: every student, every pathway, fully supported.

Visit <https://www.isd742.org/departments/communications/more/future-100> to learn more about Future 100.

Tami DeLand is the former Director of Community Engagement and Communications for the St. Cloud Area School District. Direct questions about Future 100 to Superintendent Laurie Putnam (laurie.putnam@isd742.org) or Director of PK-12 Education Anna Willhite (anna.willhite@isd742.org).



SICK President of R&D and Product Management Andreas Lautemann addresses Bloomington Public Schools students and industry professionals during the Bloomington Empowers Networking and Leadership Conference hosted by Sick Sensor Intelligence on February 20, 2026. Photo courtesy of Bloomington Public Schools

Bloomington Empowers: Bridging Students and Industry Through Purposeful Connection

Bloomington Public Schools initiative brings students and professionals together to build skills, relationships, and career pathways

By Rebecca Reyes, Business Education Teacher, Bloomington Public Schools

Across Minnesota, educators are finding innovative ways to prepare students for the future. At Bloomington Public Schools, business educators Melissa Schroeder, Eric Roesler, Rebecca Reyes, and Dan Gasner from Kennedy and Jefferson High Schools are doing exactly that through a program called Bloomington Empowers.

On February 20, 2026, Bloomington Empowers (BE) came to life in a powerful way. Eighty high school business students from Kennedy and Jefferson participated in the BE Networking and Leadership Conference,

joined by 24 industry professionals representing fields such as health care, engineering, finance, technology, marketing, manufacturing, and more. The goal was simple but meaningful: create a space where students and professionals could learn from one another and build a genuine community of understanding.

This year's conference was hosted by Sick Sensor Intelligence, whose team opened their doors and provided students with a bright, modern, and professional space. Walking into the space immediately shifted the tone —



Eighty high school business students from Kennedy and Jefferson High Schools gathered with 24 industry professionals at the Bloomington Empowers Networking and Leadership Conference on February 20, 2026. Photo courtesy of Bloomington Public Schools

students weren't just attending a school event; they were stepping into the world they are preparing to join.

Throughout the day, students practiced how to "own their space" — a focus on confident body language, clear communication, and professional presence. These skills were put into action as business professionals volunteered their time to sit down with students for real, unscripted conversations. Not mock interviews. Not formal presentations. Just honest dialogue. Those moments are where the magic happens. Professionals gain insight into how today's emerging generation thinks, what they value, and how they approach work. Students walk away with a clearer picture of the careers that exist in their areas of interest — many of which they have never heard of until that day.

For Bloomington's business educators, this experience is the result of intentional relationship-building and a shared belief that strong schools are built through strong community ties. Kennedy and Jefferson business programs demonstrate Bloomington Public Schools' Career and Technical education initiatives, creating events to ensure students aren't just learning business concepts in a classroom — they're building real skills and real relationships with the industries they hope to enter.

The result is a community strengthened through understanding. Students learn that professionals are real people with real pathways. Professionals get a window

into the talent, curiosity, and potential sitting in our classrooms. Our schools reaffirm that career and technical education is not only preparing students academically, but also connecting them to the world they're about to enter. Bloomington Empowers shows what's possible when schools and industry collaborate with purpose: students are not only prepared for the future — they're connected to it.

Perhaps the most exciting part is this is only the beginning. Bloomington Empowers is intentionally built with growth in mind — more partners to involve, more students to reach, and more opportunities to help young people explore their future with confidence. As we look ahead, the program aims to expand its network, deepen its industry collaborations, and continue creating spaces where students and professionals connect with purpose. The momentum is real, and the vision is long-term: to keep strengthening the bridge between education and industry so every student can see themselves in the future they're working toward.

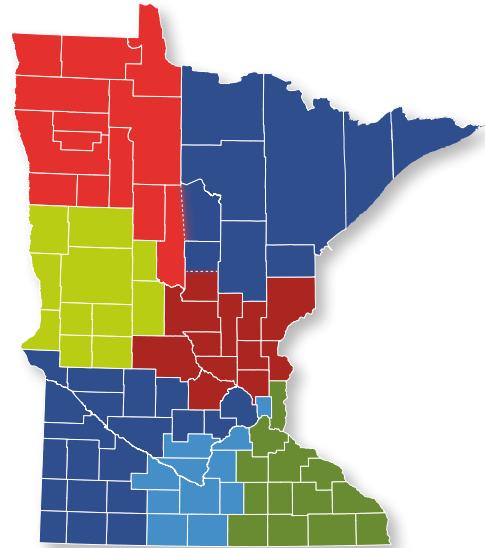
Rebecca Reyes is a Business Education Teacher at Bloomington Public Schools. Direct questions about Bloomington Empowers to Rebecca at rreyes@isd271.org.



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MSBA SPOTLIGHT

Maria Shinabarger

MSBA Charter School and Project Specialist

What is a “fun fact” about yourself that would surprise people?

I have a lifetime Audible listening history of 39 months and 15 days. That’s around 28,440 hours of listening time, which is either impressive or concerning, depending on how you look at it.

What is your favorite thing to do in Minnesota?

I love spending the day at the Carver Park Reserve Dog Park in Victoria. It has almost 30 acres of off-leash area for dogs and their people to explore.

I enjoy walking the trails, being outside, and watching my Jack Russell swim in the pond like he’s training for the Olympics.

What is your favorite book or book series?

I am a die-hard Harry Potter fan. I was introduced to the series in my middle school language arts class, and it really started my love of reading. I still probably read the full series three times a year, which feels completely reasonable to me.



What do you enjoy most about working with public school board members?

As an import to Minnesota, it has been amazing to get to know the state through its school board members. They bring different experiences and perspectives to the work, and I’ve enjoyed learning from them.

If you could have dinner with any person – living or deceased – who would it be and why?

My Grandma Dorothy. She passed away in 2006, and I would love to ask her all the questions I didn’t know were important when I was younger.

What is your favorite band or musician?

Matchbox Twenty. I have seen them live five times.

What is the No. 1 item on your bucket list?

When I was in college, I took an art history course and learned about the Roden Crater. It’s a land art project by James Turrell that transformed an extinct volcano into a naked-eye observatory. I’ve wanted to see it for about 20 years, but I haven’t made it there yet, so it’s still at the top of my list.

What is the best part about being a staff member at MSBA?

I truly enjoy getting to work with each and every MSBA staff member. They are one-in-a-million: supportive, thoughtful, and dedicated. MSBA is the kind of place where people show up for one another, and I feel very fortunate to be part of that team.



Facilities Usage by Outside Entities: Is It Covered?

By Tiffany Gustin, Director of Management and Insurance Trust Services

School buildings are public buildings. In this Ask MSBA, we address frequently asked questions related to facilities usage by outside entities.

Can school buildings be used by outside entities?

Yes! Minn. Stat. 123B.51, subd. 2 allows school boards to authorize the use of school facilities, as long as the use “will not interfere with [the facilities’] use for school purposes.”

What non-school groups use school facilities?

There are many examples, including but not limited to churches, parent-teacher organizations, community non-profit organizations, alumni groups, businesses, booster clubs, and other youth organizations such as 4-H, Junior Olympic (J.O.) Volleyball, Cal Ripken Baseball, and many more.

School buildings are public buildings. Can outside entities be charged a rental fee?

Yes. The same statute that allows outside use of school facilities allows schools to charge rental fees, recover custodial and supervisory costs, and require deposits or surety bonds along with the repair of all damage caused by the outside entity’s use. MSBA Model Policy 902 – Use of School District Facilities and Equipment addresses community use of school facilities and equipment.

Fee schedules should be presented for review and approval by the school board. An established fee schedule ensures outside entities are treated consistently; however, the fee schedule can establish different fees for different types of entities, such as non-profit versus for-profit entities.

How would an outside entity inquire about using a school facility?

Outside entities should follow the established procedure to request use of a school facility. This procedure will vary by school district.

Are these events hosted by outside entities in school facilities covered by the school district’s insurance?

Maybe. This question should be carefully considered by school leaders. It is best practice, as outlined in MSBA Model Policy 902,

to require a certificate of insurance from the outside entity to ensure there is coverage for any damage, injuries, or other liability. If the outside entity does not have coverage, the school’s insurance policy may be called upon to cover these costs.

An outside entity would like to use our school’s facilities, but they do not have an insurance policy. Are any options available through the Minnesota School Boards Association Insurance Trust?

Yes! To address these and other unique needs, the Minnesota School Boards Association Insurance Trust has partnered with the Marsh McLennan Agency and AMBA CampusConnexions to provide a coverage option for non-school groups. The Tenant User Liability Insurance Policy (TULIP) is an event-based, competitively priced coverage option designed to address coverage obligations required by Minn. Stat. 466.04.

Any member of MSBA may provide outside entities a link to the TULIP website. A link to the website can be available on the MSBA member’s website where outside entities can learn more, apply online, make payments, and obtain their Certificate of Insurance via the AMBA CampusConnexions website.

About MSBAIT

The mission of the Minnesota School Boards Association Insurance Trust (MSBAIT) is to help MSBA members protect their precious people, property, and financial assets through various risk management-focused solutions and options, allowing members to focus on their mission, educating Minnesota students. The Tenant User Liability Insurance Policy (TULIP) is one of several specialty products designed specifically for Minnesota schools in cooperation with the Marsh McLennan Agency.

Tiffany Gustin is MSBA’s Director of Management and Insurance Trust Services. Contact Tiffany about this column at tgustin@mnmsba.org.



I'm a Minnesota Kid.



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Mark your calendars!

September 2, 2026, is *"I'm a Minnesota Kid" Day* at the Minnesota State Fair.

More details to come!

Want more information?

Contact Erica Allenburg at:
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MinnesotaKidsRise.org

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MSBA's Vendor Directory helps connect school districts with the products and services they need. The directory is always at your fingertips. You'll find it printed in the back of every Journal magazine as well as on the MSBA website at www.mnmsba.org. Most listings in the web version of this directory include a link so you can head instantly to a website or email address. The directory includes everything you need to know to contact a company quickly—phone numbers, fax numbers and addresses—in an easy-to-read format. If you have a service or product you would like included in this directory, please contact Erica Nelson at 763-497-1778 or erica.nelson@ewald.com.

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MSBA's Model Policy Charts a Course for AI in Schools

By Terence Morrow, MSBA General Counsel

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming education, creating both opportunities and challenges for Minnesota's K-12 schools. Recognizing this shift, the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) introduced Model Policy 625: Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in early 2026. This policy provides school board members with a practical governance framework to ensure AI is used ethically, safely, and effectively to support student learning.

At its core, Policy 625 emphasizes that AI in K-12 schools should enhance — not replace — human teaching and decision-making. The policy promotes a “human-AI-human” approach, ensuring educators remain responsible for instructional choices and student outcomes. While AI tools can assist with tasks such as drafting content, analyzing data, or personalizing learning, the policy makes clear that professional judgment and human oversight are essential.

A central focus of Policy 625 is maintaining academic integrity. As AI tools become more accessible, Minnesota school boards should establish clear expectations for appropriate use by both staff and students. The model policy seeks to support boards' work. It reinforces that student work should remain original, with AI used as a support rather than a substitute. When AI contributes to work product, proper attribution is expected, helping students develop ethical habits that will extend beyond the classroom.

Data privacy and security are critically important considerations when using AI. Policy 625 requires schools to implement safeguards to protect personally identifiable information and other sensitive data. School boards should expect that only approved AI tools are used and that these tools meet established privacy standards. The policy also highlights the importance of training staff and students to recognize risks such as bias, misinformation, and data misuse.

Equity is a key principle for AI use. Policy 625 encourages schools to provide fair and consistent access to AI tools, avoiding disparities that could widen achievement gaps. School board members play an important role in ensuring access, resources, and training are distributed equitably so all students can benefit from emerging technologies.

Model Policy 625 outlines age-appropriate expectations for AI use. Younger students in grades K-5 are limited to highly structured, teacher-guided interactions that build foundational understanding. Middle school students are introduced to AI with clear guardrails and a focus on digital citizenship. High school students are given broader access, paired with increased accountability, to prepare them for college and careers in which AI will be commonplace.

Finally, Policy 625 stresses the importance of ongoing oversight. As AI technologies evolve, schools must regularly review practices, update guidance, and provide continuous training. Superintendents are tasked with leading this work, but school boards set the direction by adopting policies that balance innovation with responsibility.

For Minnesota school board members, Model Policy 625 serves as a roadmap for thoughtful AI governance. By aligning innovation with ethical standards, privacy protections and equitable access, boards can ensure AI becomes a tool that strengthens education rather than disrupts it. Thoughtful implementation today will help prepare students for a future where AI is an integral part of learning and work.

Terence Morrow is MSBA's General Counsel. Direct questions or comments about this column to tomorrow@mnmsba.org. This column was prepared with AI assistance.

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- August 20 ----- Third Thursday Webinar
- September 1 & September 15 ----- Coffee & Conversation (virtual)
- September 9 ----- Board Chair Chat (virtual)
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