

Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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News Release

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Dr. Jeffrey Olson Receives MASA Polaris Leadership Award

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Dr. Jeffrey Olson, Interim Executive Director of the Minnesota Valley Education District, the recipient of the 2020 MASA Polaris Leadership Award. Dr. Olson will be honored for his exemplary school leadership and a lifetime of achievement in education and the wider community at a statewide recognition ceremony at the 2020 MASA Fall Conference, September 28-29.

Polaris, the “North Star,” themes this award because, just as exemplary administrators serve as definitive leaders, Polaris is constant and unmoving in the sky. A navigator’s benchmark, the star marks “true north,” the fundamental direction that defines east, west and south. With this award, Dr. Olson is recognized for qualities such as professional courage, creation of a legacy of excellent leadership, fostering innovation, contribution through example and mentoring, exemplary conduct reflecting integrity and bearing emulation, and significant tenure in each position supporting district vision and affecting positive change.

Dr. Olson has 45 years of experience in education administration, consulting, and teaching. He served as Superintendent of Saint Peter Schools for 11 years and returned to the role as Interim Superintendent for the 2019-20 school year. Dr. Olson has spent his entire educational career with the St. Peter Public Schools. Prior to the superintendency, he served as a High School Principal, Curriculum Director, and a Teacher/Coach. Dr. Olson is also the President of True North Consulting Partners, LLC and during his time away from Saint Peter Public Schools he also was a consultant for the Minnesota School Boards Association.

As a high school principal in Saint Peter, Dr. Olson facilitated the move from a seven-period day to a modified block schedule. The new schedule allowed for students to earn 32 rather than 28 high school credits and started the process of moving to a more student-centered approach to teaching and learning.

During Dr. Olson’s time as superintendent, he led efforts to close the achievement gap in reading from a 23 percent gap between overall and free/reduced lunch proficiency to a 10 percent gap. The district also implemented a comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation tool centered on a commitment to students and families that all students gain a minimum of one year’s growth for each year spent in their school system. One area of emphasis was the creation and implementation of the Southern Minnesota Agri-Science Academy and the Health Occupations Academy that was designed to provide rigorous, real-world and hands-on learning experiences for students.

Dr. Olson implemented the Saint Peter Public Schools Leadership Development Plan in 2010. This plan is focused on teacher leadership opportunities, providing leadership training for teachers to become principals, and providing incentives for principals to become superintendents. This leadership development plan is still in use in Saint Peter today.

During his time as interim superintendent, Dr. Olson helped develop a pilot program to more fully implement the St. Peter Graduate Profile, put in place plans to offer a School-Based Enterprise Course called “Saints Manufacturing,” expanded the programs and services provided by the Saint Peter Area Learning Center, and establish a Social-Emotional Learning Plan centered on equity, the mental and chemical health needs of students, and safety and security.

On a regional level, Dr. Olson served as an instructor of an experiential principal licensure program through Minnesota State University, Mankato in 2014-2015. Members of the cohort gained credit for completing administrative duties within their home school districts. Dr. Olson has been a frequent presenter for the MASA Great Start Cohort for new administrators.

Dr. Olson has been an active member in MASA during his superintendency and into his retirement. He served as MASA President in 2010-11 and as a member of the MASA Board of Directors. Dr. Olson was a member of the MASA Legislative Committee and the MASA Foundation Board. He is currently a member of the Professional Assistance Team.

Dr. Olson's community involvement has included the First Lutheran Church-Finance Committee, Saint Peter Rotary Club, School/City/Gustavus Adolphus College Committee, Saint Peter Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Saint Peter Area Child-Care Task Force, and the Saint Peter Economic Development Advisory Committee.

Dr. Olson has received numerous awards through his career. His award highlights include: 2013 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year, 2013 Minnesota State University, Mankato Alumni Achievement Award, 2009 MASA Administrator of Excellence Award, 2007 MASA Kay E. Jacobs Memorial Award, and the 1998 MASSP Southwest Division Principal of the Year.

Dr. Olson received his doctorate and education specialist degrees from the University of Minnesota. He earned a master's degree from Minnesota State University Mankato and a bachelor's degree from Concordia College in Moorhead.

MASA is grateful to Ehlers for their ongoing support of the Polaris Award. Ehlers is an independent municipal financial advisory company that has served public sector clients since 1955.

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