

Don Helmstetter is 2007 MN Superintendent of the Year

The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Dr. Don Helmstetter, Superintendent for the Spring Lake Park Schools, the 2007 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year.

As the Minnesota honoree, Dr. Helmstetter is a candidate among other state winners for National Superintendent of the Year, to be announced at the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) convention, March 1 - 4, 2007 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Superintendent of the Year nominees are evaluated on how each candidate demonstrates:

- Leadership for learning—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication skills—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism—consistently upgrading his or her administrative knowledge and skills, providing professional development and opportunities for other members of the education team, and motivating others.
- Community involvement—active participation in local community activities and understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

Dr. Helmstetter was selected for this honor by a panel of representatives from a variety of Minnesota education organizations. “Don Helmstetter is a skilled school leader. He has had experience leading school districts in both rural Minnesota and the metropolitan area,” says MASA Executive Director, Dr.

Charles Kyte. “Don knows how to motivate the community, teachers, and his administrative team to work together in the best interest of the children of his district. We are proud to have Don represent Minnesota’s superintendents as the Minnesota Superintendent of the Year.”

Dr. Helmstetter has been superintendent for the Spring Lake Park Schools since 1997. With an enrollment of 4,500 PreK through 12th grade students, Spring Lake Park serves its suburban community from the cities of Blaine, Spring Lake Park and Fridley in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. The district considers itself and its school community to be “personal in size, extra-large in opportunity.” The mission of the Spring Lake Park Schools is “High expectations, high achievement for all. No excuses.”

Spring Lake Park School Board Members nominated Dr. Helmstetter for the Superintendent of the Year Award. “Don Helmstetter is one of the greatest role models in this school district, school community and state,” says the Jim Amundson, School Board Chairperson. “He is repeatedly described as (someone) with passion, professionalism, commitment, collaboration, hard work, vision, open communication, intellect, sensitivity, integrity and compassion. Noted scholar and futurist Joel Barker has said, ‘A leader is someone you choose to follow to a place you wouldn’t go to by yourself - the future.’ Don Helmstetter is such a leader and we have all followed as he has led us to a much brighter future.”

Dr. Helmstetter is especially noted for his ability to create and support an environment for learning. In the

nomination process for this award, Dr. Helmstetter was asked how he has used research to strengthen public education in his district.

“It was through the use of effective schools research and a commitment to the principles of continuous improvement that (we) were able to make strides toward the strengthening of public education,” Dr. Helmstetter responded. “By creating a culture of collaboration... our district is able to ensure that students are not only taught, but that they are learning. According to Richard DuFour, this concept - ensuring that students learn - is the first of three “big ideas” that represent core principles of professional learning communities. This shift from a focus on “teaching” to a focus on “learning” has enabled our schools to respond to each student when he/she experiences difficulty in learning. A second big idea from DuFour’s model is a “culture of collaboration.” Time is provided within the teacher work day for staff to work together to analyze and improve classroom practices. The focus on results (what students learn) is DuFour’s third big idea for the successful implementation **2007 MN Superintendent ... page 3**



Don Helmstetter

inside ...

Positioning MASA for 2006	2
The MN Promise	4
Gearing Up	6
Crime Prevention	8
Welcome New Members	10
Reviewing Hiring Practices.....	12
Reshaping the Pattern	14

LEADER'S notes

Positioning MASA for 2006 and Beyond



by **Kathy Leedom,**
MASA President
and
Superintendent,
Willmar Schools

Goals, objectives, metrics, outcomes –whatever the term, we need them, want them, and have them as we move forward with an aggressive plan for MASA this year. Your MASA

Kathy Leedom

Board of Directors spent considerable time discussing, listening, supposing, articulating, and concluding that we do indeed want to be a sought-after voice regarding education while at the same time serving our membership in a stellar fashion. To that end, collectively we came up with the concepts outlined below as our strategic roadmap for the year.

The first strategic goal in this year's plan is to provide exceptional member support for MASA members. We plan to carry this support out in part through high quality conferences and workshops that are centered on well-developed, timely themes. If you attended the fall conference at Madden's you experienced a great mix of speeches and workshop sessions that are assisting us in "Sparking the Vision" for education in our respective districts as well as throughout the state of Minnesota. Member support is also carried out through "Great Start"

workshops for new or newer superintendents as well as a new collection of workshops for mid-career school leaders. In addition, we are embarking on a Greater Minnesota School Leadership Program made possible by a grant from the Blandin Foundation that is focused on developing timely leadership capacity for those who participate. Exceptional member support is also directed very personally to members who are experiencing emotional, legal, and operational challenges that require the support and expertise of your MASA organization.

Our second goal is to serve as a "Link Organization" for other organizations that are interested in collaborating on behalf of educational interests in Minnesota. We will approach this linking by seeking coalitions with other PreK-12 educational based entities. Furthermore, we plan to be ready to serve as a potential conflict mediator in areas that are unique "hot buttons" in areas such as school funding and health insurance. In addition, our plan focuses on encouraging progressive policy and legislative initiatives in political, educational, and advocacy arenas.

The third goal is to be a clear voice for PreK-12 education. Our plan calls for listening, communicating, and promoting positions within our membership. Also, the plan references coalition building with other education audiences as well as

promoting progressive educational positions that surface from a variety of venues. All in all, our MASA voice is being tuned up to both inform and persuade the public through the media, opinion pieces, and MASA communications that touch appropriate political leaders at all levels.

Projecting progressive reform messages rounds out our strategic planning as the fourth goal. These messages will likely include the areas of adequate funding, wellness, academic rigor and relevance, use of technology, and high expectations for all students. The group agreed that the "voice" we develop in Goal 3 must include not only pressing ideas of today but also progressive messages that will position us to be effective tomorrow.

Clearly, MASA has developed a plan, and we are already working that plan on behalf of all members in our organization. One great aspect of our organization is that we all have an opportunity to be a part of working this plan through our leadership, involvement, and participation. We are proud to be servant leaders in a helping profession that yearns for each of us to make a positive difference in the world. Together we "spark the vision," implement our goals, and ultimately make a meaningful difference for students and education in Minnesota! •



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Reservation information has been emailed!

All of us here at MASA would
like to wish you

Happy Holidays



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2007 MN Superintendent of the Year ... Continued from page 1

of professional learning communities.”

Dr. Helmstetter was asked what recommendations would he make to Congress on the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Law.

“The broad goal of NCLB is to raise the achievement levels of all students, especially underperforming groups, and to close the achievement gap that parallels race and class,” Dr. Helmstetter responded. “I agree with the goals of NCLB, however the law is altogether too prescriptive, which creates a one-size-fits-all approach. That said, I offer the following recommendations: NCLB should allow for flexibility for assessing the special education students that is consistent with each student’s Individualized Education Plan. NCLB should allow states more flexibility in determining “Highly Qualified” teachers. NCLB should also recognize all teachers as “Highly Qualified” only when they have completed a solid program of preparation. NCLB should provide financial and other incentives to recruit and prepare highly qualified teachers and to distribute them to the schools where they are most needed. Because of the size differences among school districts, NCLB should grant states more flexibility in determining a more realistic minimum student participation rate. NCLB should also provide states with more flexibility in determining sanctions against school districts. Finally, NCLB should be fully funded, to allow schools to accomplish all that leaders hoped and dreamed could be accomplished as a result of this important legislation.”

Dr. Helmstetter was asked what he sees as the barriers to public school reform and how has the pressure for reform changed his role as a superintendent.

“There are many barriers to reform: changing demographics, school-age readiness, limited staff development opportunities, and additional funding to fully support special education, early childhood, and all-day kindergarten programs,” Dr. Helmstetter stated. “While these barriers are significant, this fact remains: public schools throughout

the national have made gains to reduce or remove each of these barriers. They have demonstrated that, in spite of sometimes daunting political and social constraints, our public schools will always be successful. As our district’s mission states: ‘High expectations, high achievement for all. No excuses.’ All children will learn. There is no other option.”

Dr. Helmstetter also highlighted the most significant change he has observed during the last twenty years that has had a profound impact on the superintendency. “The most profound impact ... has been the ever-increasing demand for the superintendent to actively engage local, state, and national representatives and governing bodies.” Dr. Helmstetter continued, “Superintendents have led the efforts to improve the level of learning for all students. They have made progress on closing the achievement gap, provided more students with post-secondary education opportunities, and they have also overseen an increase in the test scores on virtually all of the myriad of success indicators established for schools. Public school students have become (remained) international competitors, public schools have grown stronger, and superintendents have helped to achieve all that while frequently spending more time interacting with the public than they have with members of their own families,” says Dr. Helmstetter.

Dr. Don Lifto of Springsted, Inc. says, “Don Helmstetter (excels) at all four of the National Superintendent of the Year criteria - leadership for learning, communication skills, professionalism, and community involvement. He has consistently embodied these qualities in both his professional and personal life. Don is an individual of exemplary character, consistently exhibiting high moral and ethical standards...a passionate and committed educator, contributing well beyond his role as a public school superintendent...and he possesses extraordinary communication skills through both the spoken and written words.”

Minnesota Assistant Commissioner of Education Dr. Mary Ann Nelson praises Dr. Helmstetter’s leadership. “Don Helmstetter is a recognized and highly respected state leader,” says Assistant Commissioner Nelson. “His study of leadership requirements and the resulting impact upon job stress generated significant interest amongst his peers. Don Helmstetter is a classy leader and one who would bring great honor to this prestigious award.”

The Minnesota School Boards Association Executive Director Robert Meeks highly recommended Dr. Helmstetter for this award.

2007 MN Superintendent ... page 7

LEADER'S toolbox

The Minnesota Promise – Where Do We Go From Here?



Charlie Kyte

by Charlie Kyte,
Executive Director,
MASA

On October 6, the twenty-five school superintendents working to develop the MINNESOTA PROMISE paper presented their work to 250 citizens at the Humphrey Institute at the University of

Minnesota. Their overriding message was that Minnesota needs a “common vision” for education as we move forward. They stressed that we needed to move away from the herky-jerky set of policies that has guided us politically in the past. The MINNESOTA PROMISE paper identified eight traits that would support a strong common vision for education in our state.

The audience at the Humphrey Institute consisted of leaders of the major foundations of Min-

nesota, representatives of business, senators and representatives from state government, university and collegiate leaders as well as representatives of all of the education organizations. During the public discussion phase of the presentation, many citizens commented upon the need for a common vision and articulated their views on the traits that were identified.

Working with the University of Minnesota and the Minneapolis Foundation, MASA is now developing a plan to move the MINNESOTA PROMISE discussion forward. We hope to engage more members of MASA in developing an action plan. We also hope to solicit the participation of many of those who were in the audience at the Humphrey Institute on October 6 in this effort as well. We have a commitment from the University to help guide this effort and we have received support and encouragement from the Robins, Kaplan, Miller and Ciresi Foundation.

The ongoing work will involve a greater number of MASA members. With the help of the University of Minnesota we hope to invite MASA members from across the state to participate in one of eight study groups, aligned with each of the identified traits. These groups could consist of twelve to fifteen members each, including representatives of MASA, other education associations and members of our involved citizenry. In each case, the groups could identify strategies to actualize their specific trait at the state public policy level, the school district level and at the school building level. This work will then be presented to educators and to the legislature within just a few months. The discussion will focus on helping us all to create a common vision for public education. •

Minnesota's Promise World-Class Schools, World-Class State

We must create a coherent system of education in Minnesota--from the capitol to the classroom--that prepares every student for success in the global Information Age. The world-class system we envision can be characterized by eight traits:

- 1. There are many academic roads, but all are rigorous and all lead to higher education**
- 2. Educational investment starts early**
- 3. Learning takes as much time as it takes**
- 4. Great educators have great support**
- 5. Data and research inform teaching and improve learning every day**
- 6. Funding is predictable and sufficient to produce world-class performance**
- 7. Services for students with special needs emphasize outcomes, not processes**
- 8. Global citizenship is a core academic subject**



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Gearing Up for the Minnesota Legislative, and US Congressional Sessions



Charlie Kyte

by **Charlie Kyte,**
Executive Director,
MASA

Education will be at the forefront of the agendas of the Minnesota Legislature. There is a concern across the state about the well being of our K-12 education systems and also

over the reliance on property taxes to attempt to fund these systems. At the national level, the discussion will begin in earnest about the reauthorization of the National Education Act. It is unclear at this time if it will continue to be called the No Child Left Behind Act or if we will return to the traditional name of the "Elementary and Secondary Education Act." In either case, major revisions to this national legislation are in store.

In Minnesota, every MASA member can play a vital role. That work starts now with contacts prior to the legislative session with newly elected legislators. In every school

district, legislators need to be invited to meet with teachers, parents and administrators. In addition, every school superintendent in the state should be arranging to have coffee with his or her new senators and representatives. The key message that should be delivered is "how can I help you to be successful in your job, at the legislature." Build the working relationship now so your voice can be heard later when critical education legislation is being debated.

Also, plan to participate in the MASA Day at the Capitol scheduled for Wednesday, March 7, 2007. We will be inviting special education directors and business managers to join us at the capitol to help drive home the need for significant changes in education funding to the members of the legislature.

MASA members also have an opportunity to influence what will occur on national education legislation. We were told by AASA, our national organization, that Minnesota has the strongest Federal

Advocacy Committee at the state level in the nation. Our Federal Advocacy Committee is arranging meetings with each of our eight congresspersons at a number of locations across the state. Watch for information in your area as these meetings are set up. Look for an opportunity to attend so you can participate in helping them with their discussions at the national level regarding education legislation. Smaller groups of MASA members will be meeting personally with Senators Coleman and Klobuchar.

We will be sending a delegation to Washington D.C. next April consisting of a member of the Federal Advocacy Committee from each of our eight congressional districts. We will meet not only with all of the congresspersons and senators but also with the staff members that shape the work of the education committees in the US Senate and Congress. Finally, we will seek a meeting with US Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, to let her know our thoughts on where we should go **Gearing Up ... page 13**

November 7 Election Changes the Landscape of Governance

by **Charlie Kyte,**
Executive Director, MASA

When the votes were finally counted, late in the evening of November 7, we came to realize that there would be significant changes in the governance structure in the State of Minnesota and nationally. In each case, the Democratic Party will control the Minnesota Legislature and the US Congress. The Republican Party will be represented by a Minnesota Governor and US President. Everyone is talking a good game of non-partisanship at this stage and we are hopeful that the two parties will find a way to put aside their differences and begin to work together for the common good. We believe that

Minnesotans, and many of the citizens of the United States, are tired of partisanship and are ready to see our government leaders work together.

In Minnesota, both Governor Pawlenty and the democratic controlled legislature must recognize that people want strong education systems, reasonable rates for college tuition and good roads. They are willing to pay a reasonable level of taxes in order to get them. Most Minnesotans are not interested in far right or far left issues. If either the governor or the legislature moves in those directions it will spell trouble for them in the future. There is hope they will find a way to work together.

The key leaders in Minnesota will include Governor Pawlenty, Speaker of the House Margaret Kelliher, Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller, Senate Education Finance Chair Leroy Stumpf, and House Education Finance Chair Mindy Greilling.

The No Child Left Behind Act will begin its reauthorization process in 2007. It is likely that we will see many proposed amendments and changes, but no definitive action until at least 2008 or possibly 2009. However, the beginning stages of this discussion are very important and Minnesota will have players at the table. •

Morris Bye Memorial Award Presented to Superintendent Barbara Devlin

Barbara Devlin, Superintendent for the Richfield Schools, has received the Morris Bye Memorial Award from the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA). The Bye Award is presented annually to a superintendent with a minimum of twenty years of successful administrative experience serving Minnesota public schools. The recipient must demonstrate strong educational leadership and a lifelong commitment to the development of all students, and foster innovations in education that enable students to develop personal skills and values such as perseverance, responsibility, and leadership.

Dr. Devlin has been the Superintendent of the Richfield Schools for 11 years, following 7.5 years as Superintendent of Elementary School District 45, Villa Park, IL. Prior positions include service as Coordinator and Director of Personnel and Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services in the Minnetonka Public Schools and Coordinator of Educational Services for the Metropolitan Educational Cooperative Service Unit.

Devlin stated, "Throughout my administrative career, my mission has been to work with and through others to make a positive difference for children and youth." As a superintendent of two school districts characterized by socio-economic

and racial / ethnic diversity and a significant LEP population, Devlin added, "I have worked to nurture an environment that is welcoming and supportive, and to employ and develop staff with high expectations and a commitment to help ALL students learn."

Dr. Devlin's leadership focus of fostering a positive and supportive environment for learning includes data-driven, results-oriented school improvement planning for all schools, linked to the NCA accreditation process, use of research-based curricula / programs such as Reading Recovery and balanced literacy, a pre-school program to boost school readiness, all-day kindergarten, after school and summer learning programs, and increased challenge opportunities, including more courses for college credit and advanced placement at Richfield High School.

Devlin has worked to cultivate community collaborations, including support for school attendance and values education from Richfield R.E.A.D.Y. – Richfield Residents Encouraging Asset Development in Youth, environmental education through Woodlake Nature Center, and expanded access to technology through the Best Buy's Richfield Kids Technology Initiative. On a regional basis, Dr. Devlin chairs the board of directors

for the Hennepin South Services Collaborative, which serves as a catalyst for collaborative planning and services for children and families in South Hennepin County. Devlin also chaired regional planning groups in areas of school attendance and school readiness, which spawned initiatives that are still underway within Hennepin County.

In 1994, Dr. Devlin was named Illinois Superintendent of the Year and was one of four finalists for National Superintendent of the Year. In 2004, Dr. Devlin received the Administrator of Excellence Award for MASA Region 9. Dr. Devlin is an active member of MASA, currently serving as chair of the MASA Legislative Committee and as treasurer for MASA Region 9.

Dr. Devlin holds a bachelor's degree from Gustavus Adolphus College in Saint Peter, Minnesota, a master's degree from the University of Massachusetts and a doctorate degree from the University of Minnesota.

The Morris Bye Memorial Award was created in 1988 by the family of Morris Bye to recognize the efforts and important work of superintendents throughout Minnesota. Bye was a former MASA member who served as Superintendent in the Anoka School District from 1943 to 1964.

As advocates for children, MASA's mission is to establish the statewide agenda for children, serve as the preeminent voice for public education, and empower members through quality services and support. •

2007 MN Superintendent of the Year ...Continued from page 3

"Dr. Helmstetter exhibits a true concern for and commitment to public education and has worked closely with his school board members to consistently offer their students the best education possible," says Mr. Meeks. "(He) is able to communicate with the public in a manner that reflects positively on his school district."

Dr. Helmstetter holds a doctoral degree in education administration from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; a licensure in educational administration, a master's of education degree in secondary counseling and guidance

and a bachelor of arts in English and Psychology from Mankato State University. Before becoming Superintendent for the Spring Lake Park Schools, he was Superintendent for the Blue Earth, Trimont and Martin County West Schools, a High School Principal with the Trimont Schools, a Counselor and Chemical Education Coordinator for the Fairmont Schools, and a High School Teacher and Coach for the Fairmont, Pipestone and Herman Schools.

MASA is a professional organization whose mission is to establish the statewide agenda for children,

serve as the preeminent voice for public education, and empower members through quality services and support. MASA members are school superintendents, directors of special education, central office school administrators, regional administrators, and higher education administrators and professors from throughout Minnesota.

Springsted Incorporated, public finance advisors, is sponsor of the Minnesota Superintendent of the Year program. ARAMARK Education and the American Association of School Administrators are cosponsors of the National Superintendent of the Year award program. 2007 marks the twentieth anniversary of the National Superintendent of the Year award program. •

LEGAL issues

Crime Prevention in Schools: Balancing Security Interests With Student Rights



Charles E. Long

by Charles E. Long
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Gregory S. Madsen

The United States Supreme Court has recognized for almost four decades that students "do not shed their constitutional rights...at the school house gate." *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Community Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 506 (1969). At the same time, state and federal laws also provide students

with legal rights that impact school administrators' security and safety planning. The resulting challenge for school officials is how to protect students and staff while honoring their rights and maintaining an appropriate educational environment.

Constitutional Search and Seizure Issues

Exercising supervision and control of students may implicate Fourth Amendment search and seizure issues. In examining challenges to school officials' monitoring activities, courts balance students' legitimate privacy interests against the legitimate need for school officials to maintain order, discipline and safety.

In 1985, the United States Supreme Court established that a school search must be: (1) justified in its inception and based upon reasonable suspicion of violation of school rules, and (2) reasonable in scope. *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 469 U.S. 325 (1985). Useful factors to consider when determining whether

to search and how broad the search should be include: the student's age, history and school records; the seriousness and pervasiveness as a school problem of the infraction; the urgency of the situation; and the reliability of the information upon which the reasonable suspicion wrongdoing is grounded. Reasonable suspicion requires more than a mere "hunch" or "feeling." It is grounded in common sense conclusions and expectations about human behavior.

Minnesota law makes clear that school lockers are, at all times, the exclusive property of the school district. School officials may search lockers for any reason, at any time, without notice, without student consent and without a search warrant. Minn. Stat. § 121A.72. Personal possessions within the locker may be searched only if school officials have a reasonable suspicion the search will uncover evidence of violation of law or school rules. *Id.* As soon as practical after the search of the student's personal possessions, school authorities must provide notice of the search unless such notice would impede an ongoing investigation by police or school officials. *Id.*

To take advantage of this broad authority to search school lockers, the school district must adopt a policy relating to locker searches and disseminate it to students and parents in the same means as other policies are disseminated. *Id.* Students must also be provided with notice of this policy when they are given the locker. *Id.*

Courts usually uphold searches by school officials of student belongings, including backpacks, purses, coats, and duffel bags. The search must be based upon a reasonable suspicion that a school rule or law has been or will be violated and the search of the student's belongings

could reasonably be expected to produce evidence of the violation.

Searches of student automobiles are governed by the same reasonable suspicion standard as searches of other student belongings. However, such searches are likely to be controversial and may prompt litigation. School officials may protect themselves by adopting a policy notifying students that they are permitted to park on school premises as a matter of privilege, not of right. In exchange for the privilege to park on school premises, the student agrees to abide by all school rules and agrees that his/her vehicle may be inspected whenever a school official has reasonable suspicion to believe that illegal or unauthorized materials are contained inside. It should be noted that merely looking through car windows may not even constitute a search.

The use of drug-sniffing dogs to conduct general searches of the outside of student lockers and/or cars has been upheld on the theory that a person does not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in the air surrounding an inanimate object in a public place. Simply stated, this type of "sniff" is not a search.

However, courts have treated a sniff search of a student by a dog somewhat differently. Courts have recognized that persons can have a reasonable expectation of privacy in "personal space" that does not permit invasion by a dog sniff search in a school unless the search is based upon an individualized suspicion supported by specific articulable facts.

Strip searches are, by far, the most intrusive type of search. As such, they are subject to the highest scrutiny and are rarely upheld. School districts should exercise

Crime Prevention ... page 11

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Crime Prevention...Continued from page 8

extreme caution in determining whether to conduct a strip search. Preferably, they should not conduct them at all.

Pat-downs are generally considered to be less intrusive than strip searches if they consist of a pat-down of non-private areas, *i.e.*, no touching of the genital areas, inner thighs, buttocks, or breasts. The less intrusive a search, the more likely the intrusion will withstand constitutional scrutiny. However, even pat-downs are not fool proof. Touching of intimate areas may constitute criminal sexual conduct under Minnesota law.

Random Drug Testing

The United States Supreme Court, in 1995, upheld a school district policy authorizing random drug tests of students who participate in athletic programs. *Vernonia Sch. Dist. v. Acton*, 515 U.S. 646 (1995). The Court determined that, by go-

ing out for the team and voluntarily subjecting themselves to a degree of regulations higher than those imposed on students generally, student athletes automatically have a reduced expectation of privacy. The Court also determined that the search of student athletes by means of random urinalysis testing was relatively unobtrusive in light of the importance of deterring student drug use.

The Supreme Court revisited this issue in 2002. In a 5-4 decision, the Court extended the scope of its previous decision to allow random drug testing for all middle and high school students participating in competitive extracurricular activities. *Board of Educ. of Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 92 of Pottawatomie Co. v. Earls*, 536 U.S. 822 (2002). The plan the Court approved required students to take a drug test prior to participating in an extracurricular activity, to agree to random drug

tests during the activity, and to submit to a drug test any time upon reasonable suspicion. The Court emphasized that the test results were used only to direct the student to treatment and counseling, and criminal sanctions were not imposed.

Conclusion

Although school officials have broad authority to conduct student searches when "reasonable suspicion" exists, conducting searches in a manner that recognizes the legal limits will help school officials properly balance student rights and a school's interest in maintaining a safe school environment.

This article is intended to provide general information with commentary. It should not be relied upon as legal advice. If required, legal advice regarding this topic should be obtained from district legal counsel.

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Reviewing Hiring Practices & Avoiding Pitfalls

by Nancy Rajanen
Executive Director of Human Resources,
Robbinsdale Area Schools

Developing a standard process for hiring of employees is one of those tasks that is on the "When I Get Time" pile. Unfortunately, it moves to the "Urgent" pile when a District is challenged on their hiring practices, or charged with a discrimination claim. In order to avoid this situation, several simple strategies can be implemented.

1. Review the Application Form

Whether the form is electronic or hard copy, you are responsible for the content of the application. Make sure that the form is free of any reference to age (birthdate), marital status, or ethnicity.

The initial application form or information sheet needs to let employees know that all hiring is dependent upon the results of the background check.

Be sure that you ask individuals if they are a veteran, and require that they provide a DD214 if they are seeking Veteran's Preference status.

2. Review your posting or advertising

process

You might be surprised to find out that some of your principals or supervisors fill positions without posting. Even if your collective bargaining agreements don't require that you post positions, you should make an effort to advertise openings in order to avoid claims of discrimination. Candidates who feel that they didn't even have a chance to apply will have a powerful argument if the position is filled without seeing who is in a qualified pool of applicants.

3. Review the Interview Process

Take a good look at the questions. Are there certain standard questions that the District wants to ask of all employees? Do the interview questions match the job description?

A good option to consider is adding a question at the end that states, "You have heard a description of the position. Is there any reason you could not fulfill the essential functions of the job?" This type of

question will allow you to avoid any claims under the Americans with Disabilities law, by requiring candidates to tell you whether or not they can perform the primary responsibilities of the position.

Remind all interview teams that the ultimate decision is yours, as the administration. It is true that the input of a variety of interview team members is valuable. However, the final hiring decision needs to be yours. In addition to the interview, you will need to do extensive background & reference calls, and consider the fit with others at the work site.

4. Support Your New Employee

Be sure an orientation process is available that supports the new employee. Remember, you may know the job, but they don't. Be supportive and give them plenty of resources to succeed!

Good Luck! •

Attention, Members!


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See you there!

MASA Awards Recognize Outstanding Leadership



Administrators of Excellence Award
Kay E. Jacobs Award
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Morris Bye Memorial Award
Richard Green Scholars Program

Each year, the MASA/MASE Spring Conference provides an opportunity to recognize outstanding members who are dedicated leaders and advocates for children and Minnesota education. We encourage you to consider nominating yourself or a colleague for recognition. Nominate someone who you feel reflects the qualities of a leader who is committed to education and who is an exemplary representative of MASA.

Information packets with award nomination forms will be emailed to all members. Award background information is also available on the MASA web site (www.mnasa.org).

Nominations are due by January 15, 2007.

MASA Recognizes Leadership and Service Congratulations Award Recipients!



MASA service pins and certificates were presented at the 2006 Fall Conference. We proudly recognize these MASA members for their years of leadership as administrators or superintendents.

30 Year Superintendent (Gold Pin with Sapphire):

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Chris Richardson, Superintendent, Northfield Schools

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Carl Wahlstrom, Superintendent, East Metro Integration District 6067

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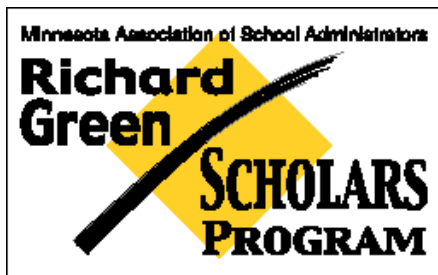
Jan Ormasa, Director of Special Services, Hopkins Schools

Gearing Up ... Continued from page 6

with national education legislation.

To help shape our direction and to help AASA to shape their direction, we arranged to have Mary Kusler, one of the lobbyists for AASA, meet with our Federal Advocacy Committee. She had the opportunity to hear from thirty school leaders on the positive and negative effects of NCLB, and their recommendations for what should be done for the future. This focus group will help AASA as they shape their national agenda and as they work at the US Capitol.

Influencing education policy, be it at the state or national level, begins at home. The strength of MASA lies in the willingness of individual members to meet with Minnesota legislators and with our national elected officials. We hope that each MASA member will do his or her part to help begin this. In the end your efforts help to provide adequate funding and wise policy for K-12 public education. •



call for proposals



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MASA's Richard Green Scholars Program honors the scholarly work and professional development of Minnesota school leaders through the award of an annual recognition for the research, writing, and presentation of one paper reflecting the practice of excellent school leadership.

Each winter, MASA members are invited to submit summary proposals for papers.

A subcommittee of the MASA Executive Development Committee will select the Richard Green Scholar based on the submitted paper proposals.

The scholarship recipient will be announced at the MASA Spring Conference, and the recipient will present his or her paper at the MASA Fall Conference.

The Richard Green Scholar will receive a recognition plaque, a \$1,000 award, and conference tuition and lodging for the Fall Conference.

Call for Proposals

- Papers must reflect the work of one author who is a member of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators.
- Proposals should clearly demonstrate that the paper will:
 - ✓ contribute to the curriculum of the annual Fall Conference with content pertinent to the practice of excellent school leadership
 - ✓ present information that is technically sound
 - ✓ present original material that has not been previously published
 - ✓ not be commercial in nature and not promote specific companies or products.
- Proposals should contain enough information to allow the selection committee to accurately assess the content of the paper and presentation. Proposals should be around 500-1,000 words and should include:
 - ✓ an appropriate title
 - ✓ a description of the nature of the work upon which the paper is based (research, literature review, original analysis, etc.)
 - ✓ a statement of the objective(s) of the paper
 - ✓ a summary of results/observations/conclusions
 - ✓ a summary of the importance of this work to the practice of educational leadership.
- Each proposal should include a cover sheet that includes the author's:
 - ✓ Name
 - ✓ Position title
 - ✓ Employing organization
 - ✓ Contact information (address, phone number, fax number, and email address)
 - ✓ A statement acknowledging that the author agrees, if selected, to present this paper at the next MASA Fall Conference (one hour presentation) and allow the paper to be copied and distributed.
- Proposals may be submitted via:
 - ✓ Mail: MASA • 1884 Como Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108
 - ✓ Email (pdf files only, please): members@mnasa.org
 - ✓ Fax: 651-645-7518
- The deadline for submitting 2007 proposals is February 5, 2007.

The Richard Green Scholars Program was named to honor former Minneapolis Superintendent Richard R. Green, who modeled innovation and distinction in the child-centered practice of exemplary school leadership.

How I Handled ... Promoting Positive Principal & Teacher Relationships

by Mr. Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director, Lakes Country Service Cooperative

At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, we engage our members in many opportunities to build positive administrator/teacher relationships. Our Manager of Educational Services, Pat Anderson, has worked with local school leaders and teachers to implement the Danielson model of teacher improvement. The "Three Minute Classroom Walkthrough" provided training for teams of teachers and principals working toward high standards in teaching/student learning without becoming an evaluation method which has an outstanding capacity to foster positive relationships. A Title II Part D grant is providing teachers of mathematics opportunities to work with their peers on improving strategies and methods for teaching geometry, probability and statistics.

Recently our NCLB/Academic Standards Consortium led by Barbara Hexum, had the opportunity to participate in a Schools Mentoring Schools grant for the Minnesota Department of Education. The grant focused on instructional coaching, teacher evaluation and mentoring as more than a buddy system. A mentor teacher stated that, "The teachers I work with are so excited to have an extra hand in investigating activities for student learning. We have gained momentum in aligning our curriculum 6-12, making data driven decisions and reflecting on our instructional strategies."

Lakes Country Service Cooperative continues to yearn for improved mentorship opportunities for our member schools. We are currently pursuing a leadership academy and additional programs for the future.

by Dr. Marcia Ziegler
Superintendent, St. Michael-Albertville Schools

I was asked the question: What do you do to mentor/coach principals and teachers to work towards positive working relationships? I don't know if I have the answer but I believe we all continue to learn. The following are some points I have learned from people that I have worked for in the past.

Promoting positive relationships by actively listening to the ideas and concerns of others is one of the most important aspects in building relationships. The ability to listen—listen to others and learn. A leader makes everyone feel like they are working together toward the common goal. A leader should delegate responsibility and empower others to work at appropriate jobs. School leadership does not reside with an individual but with a team. Honesty and integrity need to be attributes of an effective leader. Provide an enthusias-

tic and supported atmosphere where others are valued and appreciated. Care about others and give credit, recognition, and gratitude for a job well done.

A former superintendent once told me not to make hasty decisions. Although there may be times when you have to act quickly, most of the time you are able to obtain background for your decisions. Communicating the reasons for the decision is vitally important to all the constituents. The effective leader has everyone working with them and not for them. Finally, my Grandmother lived her life by doing something for another each day without any thought of something in return. So be considerate of others and always work as a team. Thank you to all the "leaders" that have taught me throughout my educational career.

by David Bottem
Superintendent, Barnum Schools

A positive working relationship among administration and staff is created and maintained when everyone understands and agrees on a common objective and its implementation. In our district, the school board's educational goals are shared with the entire staff on the first workshop day of the school year. The principals and teachers then meet and discuss the board's broad goals and together determine how they are to be achieved. The process of working as a team toward a common purpose creates trust and a positive working atmosphere, as well as an increase of mutual respect. What is the result? The school board's objectives are met, and the school's administrators and staff are a more cohesive unit. •

2007 Officer Nominations Coming Soon!



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nominations forms.

Study Finds FBI Criminal Database Search Ineffective for Employment Background Checks

By **Tim Landsberger**
Director, The McDowell Agency, Inc.

Background Checks seek to repel criminals from the classroom, but school districts are struggling to determine how to best detect criminal records. Many school districts throughout the state of Minnesota have commissioned private background screening firms to handle this important task. One question that has been raised is how effective the FBI Criminal Database is.

The National Association of Professional Background Screeners recently commissioned a study to evaluate the accuracy and completeness of the FBI criminal search.

The results were shocking. The study found that in a significant percentage of searches, the FBI database returned erroneous or incomplete information.

The study conducted by Craig N. Winston, an assistant professor of criminal justice at Sonoma State University found that the FBI data lacks the proper identifiers to credibly link a criminal hit with the subject of the investigation.

Another finding was the large number of missed records and false positives generated. For example, when analyzing a sampling of 93,274 background checks in the state of

Florida, Winston's search revealed that the database missed 11.7 percent of the criminal records it should have identified. Even worse – of the more than 10,000 criminal records found, 5.5 percent of them were falsely attributed to those who were not convicted of a crime.

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) compels employers to use the most up to date and accurate information when screening applicants for employment. The most complete and accurate information exists at the county level.

NAPBS Co-chair Jason B. Morris says, "If employers are granted access to the FBI's data, they can easily be lulled into the false sense of security that they are availing themselves of the most accurate and comprehensive search available. As a result, they could be opening themselves up to increased risk in the workplace and litigation from wronged job applicants," he concludes.

Results from this comprehensive study can be found at www.napbs.com.

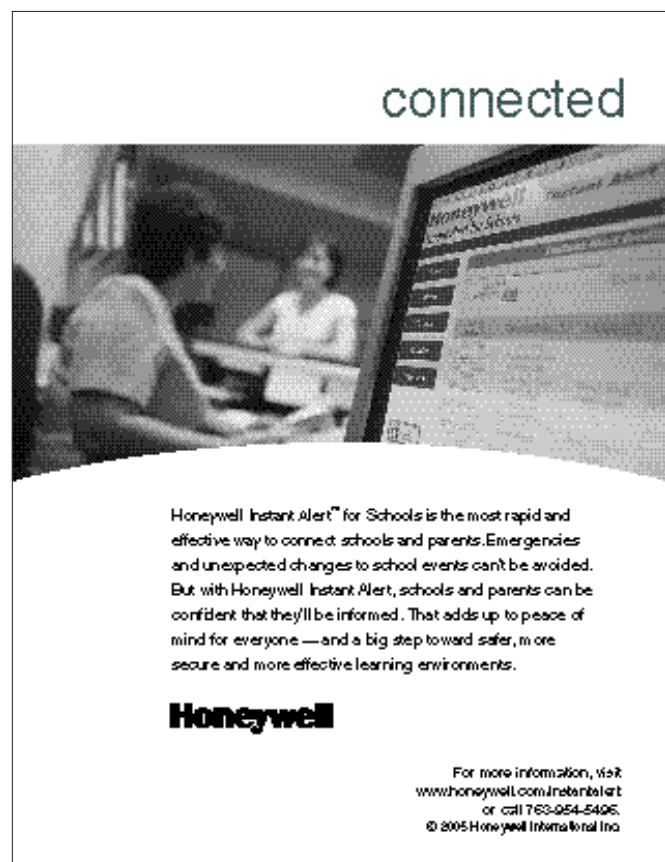


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Reshaping the Pattern of School Funding

by Greg Vandal
Superintendent, Sauk Rapids-Rice
Schools and
Facilitator, P.S. Minnesota

P.S. Minnesota, an unprecedented coalition of education organizations and parent groups, was introduced to MASA readers by Association of Metropolitan School Districts Executive Director Scott Croonquist in the last edition of this newsletter. Croonquist, along with counterparts Brad Lundell of Schools for Equity in Education, Sam Walseth of the Minnesota Rural Education Association, and this author, were presenters at the MASA fall conference at Madden's where information on the P.S. Minnesota initiative was released. This coalition is solely dedicated to securing a system of school funding in Minnesota which is rationally linked to student achievement.

The group, with research support provided by national school finance expert John Myers, has both been studying the cost of adequacy in Minnesota and developing a formula framework to deliver the resources

necessary so that Minnesota's children can achieve. At a major policy forum in early December, P.S. Minnesota representatives reviewed both that framework and Myers' recent study of funding adequacy in Minnesota.

The P.S. Minnesota school finance framework contains five important elements. A learner component funds schools on a per-pupil basis with rational adjustments made in accordance with individual student needs. A second component addresses the unique characteristics of school districts including such elements as school size, labor cost differentials, and population patterns. District support services such as transportation and building maintenance are a part of component three. The fourth major element of the formula provides limited school board and voter discretion to school districts for use with local targeted initiatives. Finally, the funding

framework offers a mechanism for equalized access to building construction dollars.

Not all of the P.S. Minnesota proposal has been cut from new cloth. Indeed, some of the pieces of this patchwork quilt are recognizable in Minnesota's current system of funding. However, the existing quilt has been purposefully reassembled with new pieces added. The result should adequately address the needs of children and school districts across the state. If fully implemented, a pattern of student achievement will emerge which will assure Minnesota's place as a global educational leader. •

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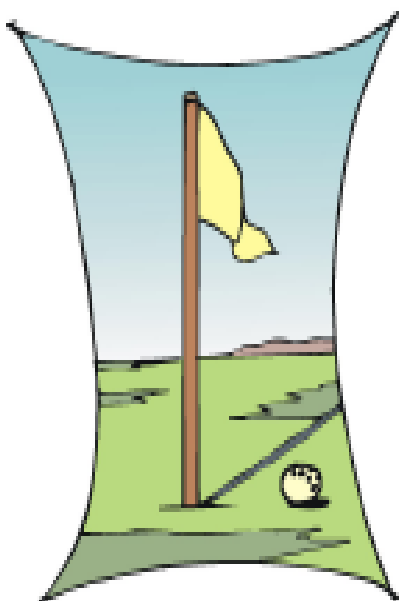
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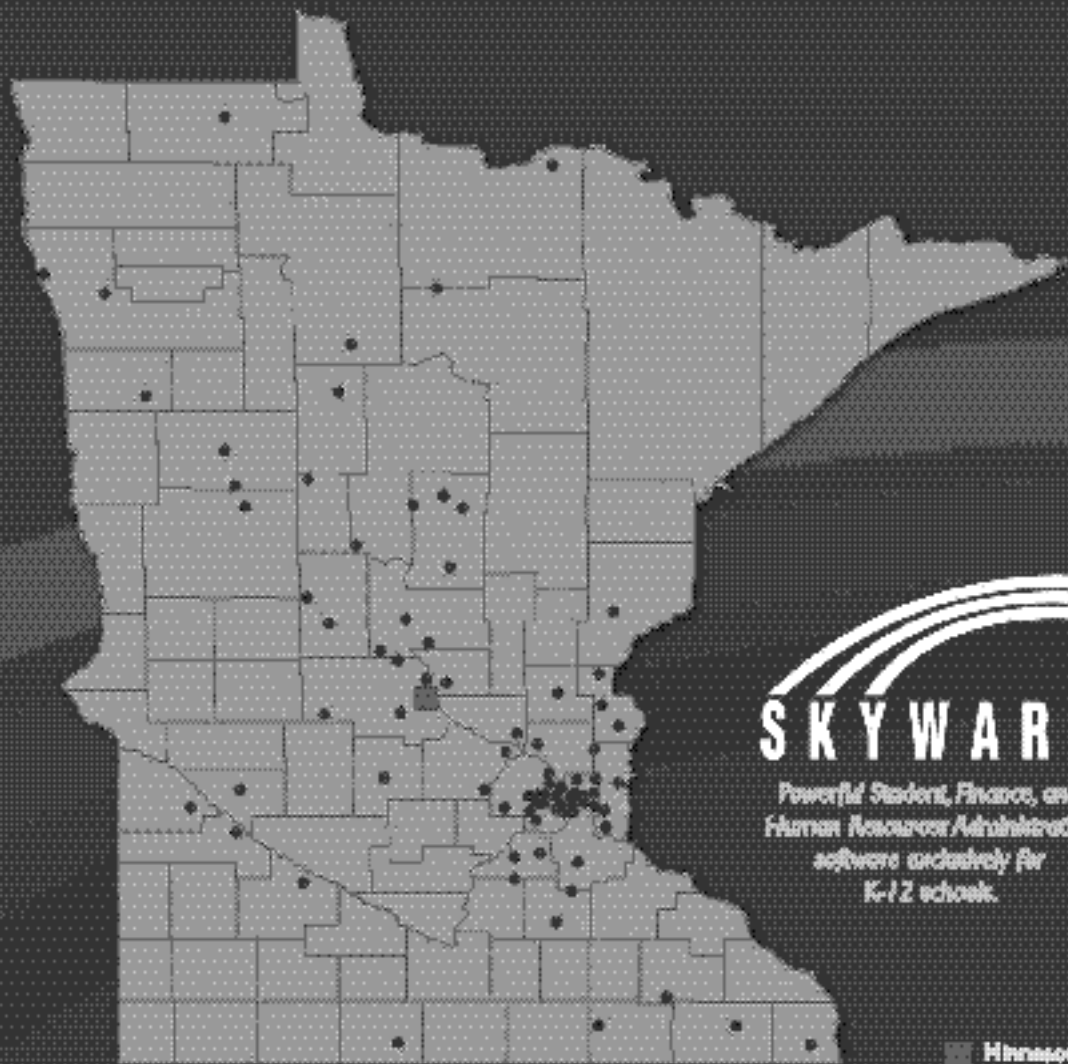
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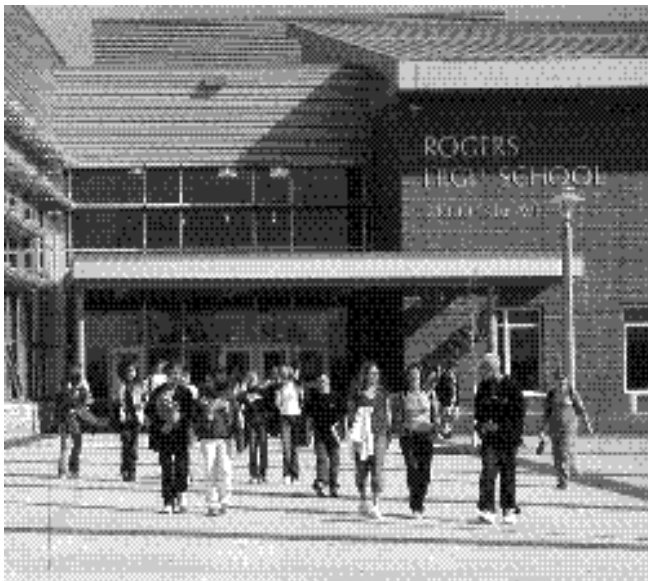
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Calendar 2006 - 2007

December 25 and 26
Winter Holidays
 MASA Offices Closed

2007...

January 1
Winter Holiday
 MASA Offices Closed

January 10
Great Start Workshop IV& Year 2 Cohort III
 Hyatt, Minneapolis

January 11-12
MSBA Winter Convention
 Minneapolis Convention Center, Minneapolis

February 16
MASA Foundation Board Meeting
 MASA Offices, St. Paul

February 9
Newsletter Submissions Due

March 1-4
AASA National Convention
 New Orleans, LA

March 14
Great Start Workshop V & Year 2 Cohort IV
 Sheraton Bloomington Hotel, Bloomington

March 14
MASA Executive Committee Meeting
 9:30 - 11:30 am
MASA Board of Directors Meeting
 1 - 5:30 pm
 Sheraton Bloomington Hotel, Bloomington

March 15-16
MASA & MASE Spring Conference
 Sheraton Bloomington Hotel, Bloomington

April 6
Spring Holiday
 MASA Offices Closed


May 11
Newsletter Submissions Due

May 28
Spring Holiday
 MASA Offices Closed

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