

Leaders FORUM

Winter 2014

Sandra Lewandowski is MASA's 2015 Superintendent of the Year

"Ms. Lewandowski is a strong advocate for the students that she serves. Her constant focus is making decisions based on what is best for her students. Sandy is an outstanding role model for all education leaders in Minnesota."

- Gary Amoroso, MASA Executive Director



Sandra Lewandowski
Superintendent
Intermediate District 287

The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Superintendent Sandra Lewandowski, Superintendent for Intermediate District 287, the 2015 Minnesota Superintendent

of the Year.

"I could not be more thrilled to be the recipient of the 2015 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year Award," said Lewandowski. "It is an affirmation of the success of our students, staff and school board. I am immensely grateful for a job where I can work with passionate public school leaders as they adapt and innovate for the future."

As the Minnesota honoree, Superintendent Lewandowski is a candidate among other state winners for National Superintendent of the Year, to be announced during the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) convention on February 26-27, 2015 in San Diego, CA.

Superintendent Lewandowski was selected for this honor by a panel of representatives from a variety of Minnesota education organizations. 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—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.
- Community involvement—active participation in local community activities and understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

"Ms. Lewandowski is a strong advocate for the students that she serves. Her constant focus is making decisions based on what is best for her students," said MASA Executive Director Dr. Gary Amoroso. "Sandy is an outstanding role model for all education leaders in Minnesota."

Lewandowski...

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*ALL Kids,
EVERY Kid*

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MASA's 2015-2017 Strategic Plan



Gary Amoroso
Executive Director
Minnesota Association of
School Administrators

On December 10 the MASA Board of Directors approved the 2015-2017 MASA Strategic Plan. As the Board crafted the plan, they considered the three years of data compiled by staff and the feedback provided by our membership.

The Board made revisions to the Statements of Belief, Mission Statement, Goals and Strategies. I want to THANK our core planning team for their thoughtful efforts. Following is a copy of the plan.

Statement of Beliefs: a formal expression of the Organization's fundamental values, deep and abiding convictions, non-negotiable ethical principles and moral imperatives.

MASA believes...

- A world-class education for all students is our highest priority.
- Public education is the cornerstone of American democracy.
- Leadership creates a collective responsibility for positively impacting student achievement, opportunity and future success.
- Leaders must continually improve their practice.
- We must eliminate the opportunity, expectations and resource gap that allow the achievement gap to persist.

Mission Statement: a broad statement that identifies why the organization exists... purpose, function, client, market niche.

MASA's Mission

- As advocates of a world class education for Minnesota's children, MASA's members serve as the leading voice for public education, shape and influence the State and Federal education agenda, and empower leaders through high quality professional development, services and support.

Goals: the Organization's desired results stated in terms that are measurable, demonstrable and observable.

Strategies: broad statements that describe how the Organization's resources will be deployed to achieve the mission and objectives.

MASA's Goals and Strategies

By 2017, MASA will coordinate professional learning that meets the needs and interests of each member.

- We will regularly assess the professional learning needs and interests of our membership.
- We will enhance a multi-tiered professional learning platform that actively engages our membership.

By 2017, all members will affirm that MASA is the unifying force for Minnesota public education.

- Through Minnevatel, we will foster relationships with all stakeholders to create and advocate a common public education agenda in Minnesota.
- We will foster committed relationships with all members by reaching out to determine their needs, empower them with a common message, and earn their support in implementing the mission and vision of MASA.

In January we will convene four action teams to create the implementation plan for each strategy. I sincerely hope you consider participating as a member of one or more of the action teams. We need your expertise and passion to ensure that our strategic plan is truly a living document. Look for an email in early January requesting your involvement.

I am thrilled by the organization's growth over the last few years and am looking forward with excitement to the future of MASA!

The *Leaders Forum* is your newsletter and we welcome your input. Please send your ideas or articles to Aimee Ranallo at aranallo@mnasa.org.

Leaders Forum

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Congratulations...



Heidi Hahn, MASA's 2014 Richard Green Scholar.



Jerry Nesland, MASA's 2014 Polaris Award recipient.

MASA honored Heidi Hahn, Director of Special Education, Paul Bunyan Service Cooperative, and Jerry Nesland, Executive Director, Freshwater Education District during MASA's Fall Conference in Brainerd. Congratulations!

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

What Are You Grateful For?



Lynne Kovash
MASA President and
Superintendent
Moorhead Area Public Schools

Social media is a communication tool that allows us to express our feelings and thoughts to all our “friends”. There may be posts that communicate negative comments and news, but many of the posts are very positive and allow us to express ourselves in a very open way. One of the posts that seem to come around every year about this time is one of gratefulness. I have friends that share about their children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents and other adults. Often on those posts I find people expressing their gratitude for educators.

We are fortunate to live in a country where public education is the cornerstone of our democracy. As we have just finished an election and have celebrated Veterans Day, I am also grateful for those who have supported and helped develop a system of education that is constantly changing and looking for the best ways to educate every student in our changing world. I am grateful for those leaders who continually question and ask why we do things the way we do. They challenge our thinking and our systems. They lead us to develop and change to serve all children.

"We are fortunate to live in a country where public education is the cornerstone of our democracy."

I often think about the fact that I am able to express my thoughts to others through the written word in a country where free speech is recognized and appreciated. I don't know the names of my early teachers, but I am so grateful to them for teaching me to read and write. I know my parents were my earliest teachers and encouraged me to learn the most through many different educational opportunities. My mom and dad both graduated from high school and if they had the money or the means, they would have been so grateful for the chance to attend college.

My father went into the military and spent 20 years serving our country. As a family, we moved every few years and often spent years without my dad and worrying if he would come home from Vietnam or other places he had to travel. In all that time, education was so important to my parents. They made sure I worked hard, studied and would be able to go on to higher education. I was a first generation college student and I came from a family that moved every few years. In our educational world today, we often look at those factors as impacting educational success. I was so fortunate to have teachers and family that believed in me and supported me through every move, every new school, every difference in curriculum and the expectations set out in each district.

I started school in an Army school in Germany and I know that I was given a strong education that allowed me to take part in many opportunities throughout my life. I went from Germany to New York, then to Massachusetts, then to Minnesota, then to Illinois, then to Panama and finally, back to Minnesota. Throughout all those moves, teachers and other adults supported me. My public education was the vehicle for me to have those opportunities and to provide an education to an “army brat”. I was so lucky to have a strong support system.

As we review our strategic plan, we need to continue to support public education and realize this is the vehicle that provides all students with opportunities to grow and develop into global citizens. We are a unifying voice for all children – we need to make sure we provide a unifying voice for all of our schools. One of the reasons I am so grateful for our organization is the opportunities for all of us to be able to provide feedback and thoughts on our plans for the future. It is our plan together, and together we can improve education for all children.

MASA Awards Recognize Outstanding Leadership



*Administrators of Excellence Award
Kay E. Jacobs Award
MASA Distinguished Service Award
Richard Green Scholars Program
Outstanding Central Office Leader Award
Polaris Leadership Award*

Each year, the MASA/MASE Spring Conference provides an opportunity to recognize outstanding members who are dedicated leaders and advocates for children in 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. Award nomination material will be emailed to all members. Award background information and nomination materials are also available on the MASA website: www.mnasa.org.

Save the Date!

**MASA/MASE
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ACHIEVING OUR CLIENTS' GOALS SINCE 1947

Collecting & Using Community Opinions



Bruce Miles
Owner
Big River Group

Every year, I receive three or four phone calls from unhappy superintendents from across the Midwest. The reasons for their unhappiness include:

1. An open public meeting that went horribly wrong, and
2. Now there is a threat to their job security.

I commend boards and superintendents for wanting to know what the community thinks on large and small issues. But

remember that there is a small segment of each community that is not capable of, or interested in, displaying the same level of professional demeanor that our board members and superintendents typically deliver when discussing problems. These are CAVE people (Citizens Against Virtually Everything). Let's take a look at three different methods that can be used to safely & effectively collect community opinions.

(Disclaimer: The following text is not designed to suggest methods for collecting community opinions for possible levy or bond elections. I have no experience in that area, and do not suggest that the ideas below will be effective for those purposes.)

Option 1: Better Online Surveys.

After developing & using more than 1,000 online surveys for school districts, I am convinced that the most effective data is qualitative (open-ended questions), not quantitative (numeric scores, Likert Scales, etc.). Respondents will actually respond in full sentences or short paragraphs to open-ended questions such as:

1. What 2 or 3 things are working well within the district?
2. What 2 or 3 things need to be worked on and improved in the district?
3. What do you want the district to be known for 5 years from now (your vision)?

The resulting data will be rich with opinions, and that makes it much easier to tease out opinions, sentiment, and possible misperceptions. On another note, I prefer Constant Contact® over Survey Monkey. The system is easier to use and the data can be exported easier.

Option 2: More Effective Public Meetings.

Meetings that go wrong typically were first conceived as "open public sessions" where citizens can address the larger group with their concerns. That is a recipe for disaster.

Public meetings that result in usable information delivered in a non-threatening way include:

1. A welcome and introduction by the board chair.
2. The superintendent outlining the rationale for the meeting and what information is desired by the board. This begins to set boundaries for the topics.
3. An agenda with directions, action steps, and timelines for each part of the meeting.
4. Small tables or meeting areas where participants can go to discuss specific issues.
5. Closure at the specified time, and an offer to send out, or post, all session results.

Spring Lake Park used these steps in an "open meeting" format to help citizens stay focused and appropriate during meetings to lay the groundwork for improving co-curricular programming. Participants could move around the room and offer their opinions on eight topics ("access", "boosters", "costs and fees", "facilities", etc.). Each station had a facilitator that jotted ideas and notes on a poster-sized sheet. The meeting went very well despite the fact that the overall topic was pretty emotional for some community members.

Option 3: Public Meetings on Issues that Are Currently Causing Conflict in a District.

This is more dangerous territory. In addition to steps 1-5 (above), I have used two additional topics to reduce the chance of inappropriate public participation:

Questions submitted to be read by a facilitator. Recipe cards and pencils are handed out to each audience member when they arrive. After the board chair welcome, and the Superintendent provides rationale, audience members have 5-10 minutes to write questions on the cards and send them to the front of the room to be read by a facilitator. I used this technique on two successive evenings in emotionally-charged rooms with 80+ unhappy citizens in each session. It took the board and superintendent about 90 minutes to answer the questions read by the facilitator.

Then allow for "open mic" comments. After the questions on the cards were answered, we opened up the microphone for questions, and only fewer than 10 people took the opportunity in each of the two sessions! Lesson learned. Had we let those people speak at the beginning of the meeting at "open mic", the meeting would not have gone so well, as they would have stirred it up and made it difficult for a professional atmosphere to be developed in the session. I hope that your efforts to use surveys and public meetings are met with success. Using the above steps will help collect better data, and keep participants safe in the process.

Inclusive Community Conversations



Scott Monson
Superintendent
Marshall Public Schools

I was asked to share my thoughts about an inclusive community conversation in a diverse school district. The request is timely, since we are in the beginning stages of a detailed facilities study that will result in a significant proposal for the future of our facilities. During planning discussions, engaging our diverse group of stakeholders was a key focus identified. Successful planning efforts can be predicated on knowing what a successful

engagement process looks like, developing a detailed action plan including opportunities for measurements and reflection, and communicating often, and in several ways, with stakeholders.

Whether diversity is measured by ethnicity, socio-economic status, or [even] the level of expectations stakeholders have, it is present in all school districts. While the percent of residents who have school age children varies across Minnesota, some estimates indicate that less than one in every seven district residents have that connection to their public school. So, how do we engage the diverse, and often disinterested, populations in our school districts?

Engaging stakeholders, especially in a diverse setting, is difficult. In order for this to happen, we need to believe in the importance of engaging others and getting their input, opinions, and involvement, we need to understand and accept that doing so may not be easy, and we need to not give up (yet not push so hard that it creates conflict). Recognizing it sounds cliché-like or overly simple, engagement must be a priority...if we truly want it to happen, then we must be deliberate in our planning and in our efforts.

While it might be a simple step, developing a comprehensive list of stakeholder groups in the district is a key starting point. That list might include various ethnic groups, booster clubs (sports and fine arts, for example), civic/community organizations, local government entities, private schools, colleges and universities, local non-profit organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, and major employers. Creating that list, along with two or three lead or key contact people for each group, will assist in starting the engagement process.

Once the list is developed, working with key contacts to determine how to best inform, involve, and engage each group is a good starting point. You may find the need

for some sort of “sales pitch” – specifically, why does this particular group want/need to be informed and/or involved? So, creating an introductory conversation inviting people and groups to learn about the particular topic and to provide input to that topic will be helpful. Many districts, including Marshall, have minority advocates who can be very helpful engaging minority families and residents. Depending on the level of involvement that each group of stakeholders wants, you can tailor activities that meet their needs and engage them at the level they most desire. Utilizing the list of key contacts for a periodic “here is what is happening” email update is also beneficial.

I would also suggest utilizing an “inside-out” approach to ensure that ALL STAFF are informed about and involved in discussions taking place to whatever specific process is taking place in the district. During one of the operating levies I was associated with, we realized after the levy passed – but not by as wide of margin as we anticipated – that we had not done a good job of informing our staff members and involving them in the discussions and planning. If staff do not fully understand what is happening and cannot share three to five of the most important (bullet) points during a discussion, then I would argue that we perhaps spent too much time focusing on the communities “outside” our buildings and not enough time on the important ones that exist inside.



"Many of our stakeholders want to be involved, want to be heard, and ultimately want to be advocates for the school district."

Many of our stakeholders want to be involved, want to be heard, and ultimately want to be advocates for the school district. Beginning with a picture of what a successful engagement process looks like, developing a comprehensive list of stakeholder groups, creating and executing a well-developed plan, frequently monitoring progress, and communicating often (and in as many ways) as possible with all stakeholders and stakeholder groups will help a district successfully engage a diverse group of stakeholders during an important process or even simply as a tool to strengthen the district's mission and vision.



The Lens of Potential *A new way to view student labels*



Mary Clarkson
Director of Special Programs
Richfield Public Schools

Recently I had the opportunity to spend some time at an elementary school and met Juan, who was talking to his previous teachers about his school experience, recalling what it was like going to school for the first time. Juan happened to also be a young man of color, with no exposure to a school prior to kindergarten and high levels of separation anxiety. As a kindergartner, his anxiety manifested as significant

behavior issues. He often became violent, ran from the classroom, and spent hours hiding and crying. Now, as a 9th grader, Juan is in honors classes, plays football, and has a steady and strong college bound path. When Juan was speaking to his teachers, he talked about their constant dedication to his success. He shared that his teachers, despite knowing he was experiencing challenges, persisted in providing inclusive, mainstream supports for him. His teachers frequently consulted with one another, worked with the special education team to identify strategies, and had high expectations for him. He constantly experienced his teachers being committed to his academic and interpersonal success, even given his challenges. The teachers viewed Juan as his individual self, not through the lens of color, disability, or socioeconomic status. They viewed Juan as a child with unlimited potential and a shared responsibility to maximize his success. Juan's teachers never gave up on him...never stated that he couldn't or won't...resulting in Juan developing a sense of worth and confidence.

I am sure this is not an isolated experience and we all have success stories similar to Juan's. As I have heard similar stories over and over again, I looked for patterns and themes to replicate successful experiences for all students. This is the story we want all students to tell and teachers to hear.

While there is no one "right" way to achieve this lofty goal, there are intentional actions districts and schools can take to begin changing the way we view educating all students. The first step is changing the language we use and the lens through which we view our students.

Think of the language used when we speak of children who have been identified by a label, "My school has 80% free and reduced so..." "We have a large number of ELL students which impacts..." "Those EBD kids are...". These labels placed on students by schools: special education, ELL, free and reduced, students of color – are inherently viewed from a deficit lens and portray students as out of the norm. Additionally, given the increasingly diverse student

populations in schools we can no longer categorize students into specific educational silos. While such labels provide important information regarding student characteristics, the unintended consequences of labels perpetuate the deficit mind set of educators, our system, and how families and students view themselves.

By merely changing the way we speak about children, we change the filters and lens through which we solution find and strength discover. Instead of seeing challenges, we see opportunities for growth, innovation and potential in learners. Creating educational programs first through the lens of the characteristics of our students identified by our labels – learning environments would naturally be designed to provide rich and robust learning for ALL students.

At the district level, curriculum exploration and instructional materials must include a collaborative process focused on the rich diverse stories of our students. This lens is crucial to ensure students can make connections to their learning.

At a school level, principals can ensure collaboration is an integrated and expected practice across content areas and expertise to foster a school culture that is inclusive and values the rich diversity of all learners. These practices include PLCs that bring the voices of ELL and special education to the table; rich co-planning and co-teaching practices, and the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) structures.

Much of what is recommended are not new practices or concepts. It is, however, a shared commitment to innovation and breaking down silos with intentional and rigorous cross-disciplinary collaborations. This is a fundamental practice in order for districts and schools to succeed in educating all learners to maximize their full potential.

Minnevate!

A Minnevate! project update (July, 2014) is now available for download at: <http://minnevate.mnasa.org/inside/content/uploads/2014/07/Minnevate-28JUL14-interim-update.pdf>

The report contains a summary of the December 3, 2013 launch event as well as summary of the MASA regional Minnevate! meetings from last spring. A final report with an elaborated discussion and recommendations will be released later this year.

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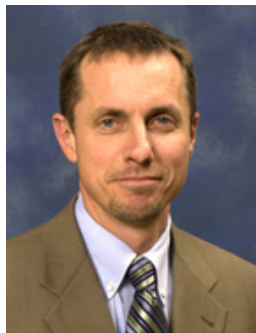
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Better to Give or Receive?

THIS AND OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NEW SCHOOL GIFT LAW.



Tim Palmatier
Education Law Attorney
Kennedy & Graven, Chartered

In the 2014 legislative session, the Minnesota Legislature amended a 20-year old law that prohibits public officials from receiving gifts from “interested persons.” These amendments extended this law to now include certain school officials. The gift law generally provides: “[a]n interested person may not give a gift or request another to give a gift to a local official . . . [and,] [a] local official may not accept a gift from an interested person.”

In other words, school officials may not accept “gifts” from persons with direct financial interest in a decision that the school official is authorized to make.

This change has many school administrators and service providers to the schools (i.e., “interested persons”) wondering what exactly the new law prohibits and permits. Below are some of common questions and corresponding guidance on how to navigate the new law.

Aside from board members, superintendents and principals, what other employees of a school district are subject to the gift ban?

While school board members, superintendents and principals are considered “local officials” and are covered by the law, the new amendments do not specifically state which other school employees are subject to the law. The amendments simply provide that the law also applies to “district school officer[s].” Does this mean that the law applies to business managers, human resources directors, curriculum directors, assistant principals, teachers or support staff? The answer is by no means clear. However, some guidance may be found in the bribery law which, at least in terms of purpose (i.e., to prevent graft and attempts to buy influence), has some correlation to the gift law. Under long standing bribery laws, the definition of a public officer includes:

an executive or administrative officer of the state or of a county, municipality or other subdivision or agency of the state . . . or . . . any other person exercising the functions of a public officer.

Functions of superintendent and principals are, of course, frequently delegated to other administrators, teachers and

support staff. Many of these school officials frequently interact with outside entities/ persons with financial interests in their

decisions. For example: the business director may frequently utilize private accounting services; the HR director may oftentimes consult with outside legal services; the curriculum director may frequently secure contracts with publishers; or the facilities director may frequently contract with outside service providers or suppliers. Even teachers and coaches may be placed in positions where their responsibilities require them to have procurement responsibilities. Until there is greater clarification on the exact reach of the statute, the best course for schools is to assume that the gift law could potentially apply to any employee of the school district—particularly where that employee has the authority to commit public resources.



Does the gift law prevent me from accepting a free lunch and/or free advice from my school attorney, accountant or architect?

You will have to pass on the free lunch. You can take the free advice, but only if it concerns your official duties. Handling a divorce or preparing tax forms would clearly constitute a prohibited gift. In addition to free assistance related to your official duties, the law permits the following gifts to be accepted: services of insignificant monetary value; a plaque or similar memento recognizing individual services in a field of specialty or to a charitable cause; a trinket or memento costing \$5 or less; informational material of unexceptional value; or food or a beverage given at a reception, meal, or meeting if the public official is speaking or answering questions as part of the program.

What is the consequence for violation of the gift law?

Historically, there was no criminal penalty or civil fine associated with violations of the gift law. However, recent changes to a “catch all” statutory provision addressing “prohibited acts” indicates that a violation of the recently passed gift law would constitute a misdemeanor. Every bit as troubling, however, would be the negative branding attached to such a violation. Consequently, school administrators and other officials would be well advised to avoid even the appearance of impropriety in compliance with the gift law.

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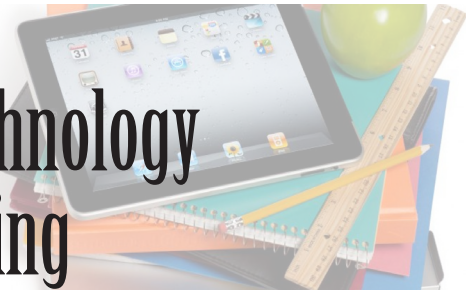
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Building Enduring Relationships and Strong Communities

Thinking Strategically About Technology for Teaching & Learning



Mary Mehsikomer
Technology Integration
Development & Outreach
TIES

For as long as there has been technology in schools, administrators and technology directors have been pressed to answer the question, “how will this improve student learning?” The goal of this article is to present critical factors for you to consider as you make leadership decisions on technology.

Seeing the “big picture”

Technology implementation in schools should never be solely about “what device should I choose?” The real question to ask is what problem am I trying to address and how can technology help me solve it? How can technology provide a more engaging educational experience for our students? Technology tools, whether they are software applications, devices, or hardware infrastructure, are much like the tools in a workbench. Each tool performs a unique function, and you pull one or more of them out of your tool chest to get a job done.



Benjamin Silbergliitt
Director, Software Applications
TIES

This is where the district’s strategic plan comes in. The strategic plan, which should include a technology plan and strong needs assessment, is the best way to focus planning around technology purchases, professional development, and implementation. Doing effective planning to choose the right set of tools for the job at the beginning and implementing them properly will save you considerable time and money.

One of the great new developments in the software world is the increasing “interoperability” of different software solutions. This means that software exchanges information more simply and efficiently than ever before, allowing districts to build a toolset where they can pluck a variety of different, highly specialized software solutions and make them all work together. Gone are the days when you had to purchase one giant, multi-faceted solution from a single vendor.

Because of new innovations in the ease of exchanging data, and in creating shared or single-point authentication and identity management, districts are able to build their own

“composable enterprise” of the best available tools for the job. Devices also provide districts with multiple solutions (i.e., iPads for elementary students, Chromebooks for high school), depending on what you want teachers and students to be able to do. This flexibility, however, brings new challenges. Educators are faced with a “wild west” in the edtech software and device marketplace, with little if any training on how to make technology decisions. Drawing on internal expertise from your technology leadership team, and external expertise from available support agencies can enormously help in the decision-making process.

Leading with data

The pressure on schools to use data effectively has never been greater. Staff need data to support their daily work. Teachers increasingly expect data to be available at their fingertips, as they make thousands of data-based instructional decisions each day. Building leaders need data to ensure the school is running smoothly, which means data on resources such as budgets and staffing needs to be readily available and current. Leaders also need data to provide instructional support to teachers, so they can quickly pinpoint when a student or teacher needs additional support.

In addition to current data for school management, schools need access to systems-level data to help guide longer-term instructional decision making. Questions such as how are our students performing, are there populations that need help, what programs and interventions should be used, and is there an academic return on investment (AROI) are all questions that guide the important resource decisions face.

Effective use of technology means having these data needs in mind from the outset. It isn’t just about providing the tools that help educators do their day-to-day work, it’s also about thinking ahead to the types of questions we are going to need to be able to answer tomorrow, in response to the resource decisions we are making today. For instance, what questions will your school board ask about the AROI of the thousands of dollars you’ve spent on devices for students and teachers? And how will you ensure you are able to confidently answer these questions?

Educators need professional development

Educators not only need to learn about the tools that will be used, but more importantly how the devices and applications can be integrated with curriculum to help students learn. Another big constraint is time, so to the extent possible, educators should be given a flexible range of professional development opportunities. Some ideas include:

Thinking Strategically...
Continued on Page 15

Thinking Strategically... Continued from Page 14

1. Provide multiple venues and times for professional development.
2. Foster professional learning networks within the school.
3. Train a cadre of leaders. Teachers who are enthusiastic about using technology can help guide others who are less sure. This can apply not only to classroom application of technology, but also to creating resource people who can help other teachers use achievement data to differentiate instruction or help others build understanding of concepts such as standards-based grading.
4. Make sure all staff who will work with students are provided training, including paraprofessionals.
5. Leverage the power of collaboration to help teachers with project planning, technology mastery, and provide students and teachers with digital citizenship guidance.

In conclusion, answering some key questions at the beginning of your technology decision-making process will ensure an effective implementation that meets your educational goals:

1. What is the instructional strategy and/or educational improvement you are trying to address?
2. What data will you need to inform your decisions and make adjustments along the way?
3. What professional development will you and your staff need so you can sustain and scale your technology initiative?

Above all, don't forget the best way to lead your school forward with technology is to model effective use yourself.

Lewandowski... Continued from Front Cover

Superintendent Lewandowski has been with Intermediate District 287 since 1979, serving as superintendent since 2005. Located in Plymouth, MN, Intermediate District 287 provides more than 120 programs and services for career, technical, gifted, and special education, as well as online learning options, to 12 Twin Cities' member school districts. Intermediate District 287 is one of only three intermediate districts in Minnesota, currently employing over 800 staff and serving almost 10,000 students.

Superintendent Lewandowski's Board Chair Ann Bremer nominated her for the award. In her letter of nomination Bremer wrote, "Sandy has taken the district from the verge of dissolution to prominence. By focusing on the needs of our students and our staff, and providing for their safety, Sandy has vastly improved the whole district's culture and offerings." Bremer closed her letter with, "No one in our state has been more committed to serving all students. Sandy has given selflessly of her talents to serve the public and produced so many meaningful and long-lasting results."

Under Lewandowski's leadership, the Intermediate District 287 has been systematically emphasizing reading improvement using data-driven strategy, resulting in a district-wide "Culture of Literacy." Lewandowski was the first superintendent in Minnesota to institute a formal district-wide Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program, as well as the first Gateway to College program. Lewandowski's professional development program, "A Better Way," will teach 70 regional school leaders how to implement positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS), social emotional learning (SEL), alternatives to suspension, and culturally-responsive programming.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune recently named Intermediate District 287 a 2014 Top 100 Workplace in Minnesota,

coming in at #29. "At Intermediate District 287, we have created a culture of high performers among principals, teachers and staff. That culture, in turn, promotes success for our students. Everyone in our district has much cause to celebrate," said Lewandowski.

Superintendent Lewandowski received her school superintendent licensure, education specialist degree, and bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota. Before becoming superintendent for Intermediate District 287, she served in a variety of positions for the District including strategic planning facilitator, executive director of student support services, and assistant superintendent. Lewandowski is the recipient of the Minnesota School Public Relations Association (MinnSPRA) Leadership in Communications Award; two Hubert Humphrey for Local Government Innovation Awards; a Crystal Star Award for Excellence in Dropout Recovery, Intervention and Prevention; a Hennepin County Wellness by Design Award; and the TIES Technology Leadership Award.

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Communication Tips for Superintendents



Jerry Ness
Superintendent
Fergus Falls Public Schools

A minimum of 40% of my job is spent communicating and that is probably a low estimate. When I was hired in Fergus Falls in 2006, a key focus for me was to create a positive energy surrounding Fergus Falls Public Schools because the district needed to pass a bond referendum for a secondary school.

I spend the most time on written communications that

are sent out weekly. My best advice is to block out time in your schedule to write. The three key communication pieces I use are:

1. Superintendent Weekly E-News

A weekly email to all district staff. I share notes from the week, what's coming up and my schedule for the next week. My goal is to have it sent by 8 am on Friday morning. The goal is to keep staff informed on school issues and happenings because they get asked questions about the district when they are out in the community.

2. School Board Friday Report

The school board's favorite report I send out is the Friday Report. By keeping the school board up to date on a regular basis, I do not spend a lot of time on the phone with the board members. I do call them if there is an emergency or if something happened where I believe they will get calls.

The purpose of the report is to keep school board members up-to-date regarding the day to day operations. Each Monday morning I start writing the report by listing all the meetings I have during the week in a document. Following the meetings, I write a summary in the document. On the Fridays before a Monday school board meeting, I also write additional background notes on items on the agenda. At the end of my report I have an Important Communications

section where I include emails from staff and key items from MASA, MREA, and MSBA.

3. Weekly Column

Each week, I write a 600 word column for the local newspaper. This is my key communication with the community – I receive positive comments on a regular basis from these columns. They are also posted to the district's website and Facebook page. The main purpose for the column is to frame issues with the community or reframe issues that are not correct.

Connecting with Students and Staff

My office is located in the secondary school by design. I speak at class meetings in the fall, attend a few student council meetings and try to be in the hallways each morning and after school. The students know who I am, which is important to me.

I attend most high school events in the district and special elementary and middle school events such as concerts, plays, musicals, and assemblies. It seems every night I am at a concert or ball game – the kids notice if I'm there or not. We scheduled our twice monthly school board meetings at 5pm so they don't interfere with evening events.

Listening Sessions – during the middle of the year, I meet with every grade level or department that requests a listening session. This is their chance to have my ear. There is no agenda, just me listening and taking notes. I share items with the principals and school board in a summary report.

You won't regret the time and energy you spend communicating with the community, students, staff and school board. I believe the key to building trust is to be straightforward and open about issues when necessary, but overall, use your voice to promote your district and education.



New Twitter Chat for MASA Members! #MNMASA • Sundays @ 8 pm • Starting January 2014

Many of our current members have discovered the power of Twitter Chats through #mnlead, #edtech, #iaedchat and many others. Each of these chats allows participants to share their experiences while also learning from the experiences shared by participating colleagues. #MNMASA will provide our members with opportunities to engage and learn from others in district leadership about the experiences being realized.

Our discussions will take place every Sunday evening at 8:00 pm. Chats will be facilitated by Bill Adams, Superintendent at Janesville-Waldorf-Pemberton (@JWPBulldog) and Teri Preisler, Superintendent at Tri-City United (@TPreisler). Topics will be developed for each week's conversation with future topics coming from those participating in the chats.

Please let us know whether you are interested — go to <https://sites.google.com/site/mnmasatwitterchat> and click on the Twitter Chat Form tab. And for more specifics, please click on the "How To" tab at the above address. We would like to start the chats in January, so visit the site soon!

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Questions? Contact Mary Bettlach at mbettlach@ucpnet.org

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MASA Lobbyist Valerie Dosland's 2015 Legislative Session Forecast



Valerie Dosland
EWALD
MASA Lobbyist

Elections in Minnesota always keep things interesting. While national results trended toward a big night for Republicans, Minnesota once again showed it does not always follow national trends.

The DFL won all statewide constitutional offices, but voters returned control of the state House to Republicans. Republicans captured 11 seats and now have a 72-62 majority. The Democrats held onto suburban swing seats, with the exception of Burnsville/Lakeville. However, all closely watched rural races broke for the Republicans. As a result, the partisan divide is also now largely a metro-rural divide.

Shortly after the election, House and Senate Democrats elected their respective caucus leaders. House Republicans chose Representative Kurt Daudt as Speaker and Representative Joyce Peppin as Majority Leader. House Democrats chose Representative Paul Thissen, the current Speaker of the House, as Minority Leader.

The Senate was not up for election so nothing changes – same leadership, committee structure, chairs and committee make-up.

State budget is improving

Minnesota continues to receive positive economic news although the last few budget updates show that tax receipts have come in as predicted. The July economic update showed the general fund increased by \$168 million more than projected in the February forecast. However, we have to wait until the November forecast (out early December) to learn the numbers that will guide decisions on the state budget.

Looking to 2015

The 2015 session, which begins January 6, is the first year of the biennial legislative cycle. This session the Legislature will adopt the state budget. While it is too early to know the legislative priorities, with a DFL Governor and Senate and a Republican House, expect their priorities to differ. Should there be a budget surplus we are likely to see a division in priorities --whether to fund spending priorities or repeal taxes. All three however have expressed an interest in tackling transportation funding.

Education funding is expected to be part of overall budget discussions. Elected officials will continue to hear about the need for a formula increases and efforts needed to address the achievement gap. Last session we saw some progress on addressing school facilities needs but the big facility funding issues were not addressed. Expect another look at teacher evaluation funding and early childhood education.

Governor Dayton and key policy-makers have also expressed an interest in a number of policy priorities, including reevaluating the testing system. With a Republican House, it is possible some changes could be made to teacher seniority. Expect a thoughtful look at high school to post-secondary alignment.

January will be here before we know it, so your work now with your state legislators is very important. A first step is to congratulate them on winning election and offer to be a resource as we move to the start of session. Remember – your work now strengthens the work MASA is able to do on your behalf at the Capitol.

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We encourage MASA members to stay at the **Marriott Marquis** hotel. The annual Minnesota breakfast honoring our superintendent of the year will be held on **Friday, Feb. 27**. Watch your inbox for breakfast registration and more AASA details.

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Cultural Diversity and the Media

For many educators, we grew up in a time when both print media and television portrayed very stereotypical portraits of family and culture. Very few programs or advertisements showed cultural diversity, and when they did it was target audience specific and often times insulting through omission. For many families, this media exposure to other cultures was their only reference point on diversity. There's no doubt that today's media selections provide children with increased choices in information access. With the inclusion of new media technologies—including mobile phone, social networking, websites, blogging and instant messaging—children may have their value systems shaped through direct and mediated access to these new media, specifically when it comes to diversity. Social networks have provided new opportunities to build relationships with people across the planet or across the street. Kids are gaining social confidence and exposure to multiple viewpoints while engaged in the use of these media, usually during their free time. This is vital because diversity in children's media may have a positive impact on a child's identity development and academic achievement.

Kevin Clark, a professor of learning technologies and the director of the Center for Digital Media Innovation and Diversity at George Mason University encourages educators to look at diversity holistically, being aware of what children hear, see and do. So, the situations that characters are in, what they say, and how they communicate, as well as what they do and what is done to them is just as important as how they look. Television producers, computer programmers, and media giants are beginning to take this work very seriously. Disney has tried to forge ahead in offering diverse families and situations in programming, but is still criticized for perpetuation of stereotypes. Even so, Disney is on the leading edge employing young actors of color as the network continues to diversify its programming.

“Diversity in children's media may have a positive impact on a child's identity development and academic achievement.”

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, (UNESCO) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity stresses the importance of encouraging the production, safeguarding and dissemination of diversified contents in the media and global information networks. To that end, it also encourages promoting the role of public radio and television services to not only create excellent programming but to foster the mechanisms to facilitate their distribution. Since the original declaration in 2004, UNESCO has created a multimedia archive to do just that. UNESCO defines ***Intangible Cultural Heritage*** as:

- Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time
- Inclusive
- Representative, and
- Community Based

To that end, their collection includes items that represent oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. Encourage your teachers and staff to check it out at <http://en.unesco.org/themes/protecting-our-heritage-and-fostering-creativity>



The face of cultural diversity on television and in the media is evolving to become more representative of our society's new "normal". Social media's expanding networks and connections to communities encourage students and parents to access events and viewpoints they may not have considered before. Creating space for dialog about diversity and cultural representation in multiple media contexts will continue to be a high need area in schools over the next decade. We recommend that administrators provide professional development for educators and parent engagement events on these topics and techniques to bring the discussions into the classroom experiences.

*By Jean Strait and Tammie Shepherd Pate,
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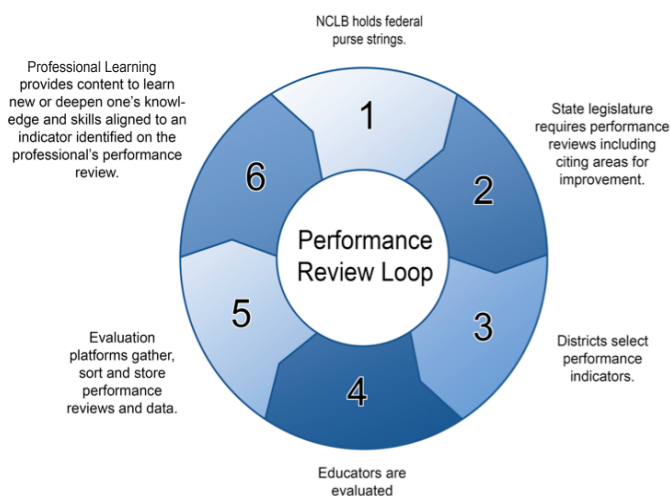
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Three Sea Changes Affecting Licensing, Educators, Performance Appraisals and Professional Development

By Ann Zweber Werner
Founder, Whitewater Learning®

In 1997, after years of steady practices governing the licensing of educators, a sea change occurred in longstanding rules in Minnesota and many other states. The new rules included the addition of competencies in Minnesota and standards or competencies in other states. Each state selected its own, with the majority adopting the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium Policy Standards (ISLLC). But Minnesota, as is often the practice of our state, created its unique set of competencies for administrators. The new adoption added a significantly deeper dimension to licensing, requiring the demonstration of “knowledge, skills, and dispositions” for each competency stated in rule before a panel made up of practitioners and university representatives.

Then, as a result of the No Child Left Behind Act, a second sea change was triggered, causing actions and decisions designed to address principal and teacher performance reviews that include identification of a specific “polisher” or area for improvement to accompany an educator’s evaluation. The “no-pressure-but-no-money-if-you-do-not-feel-any-pressure” model had a domino effect that started at the federal level and, like white water, moved through states and into school districts, finding its way to the classrooms and offices of individual teachers and principals. It has also triggered the development of support systems to facilitate the inherent processes that have evolved. The following buoy symbolizes the concept of a safety preserver and can be applied to all involved.



The federal and state purpose for beefing up performance reviews is to create greater assurance that educator proficiencies will improve on a constant upward trajectory, over time. The end goal is improved student success to support the national NCLB goal of each student being college or workforce ready by graduation from high school.

The last segment of the life preserver is for those being evaluated. It is the “safety net” for teachers and administrators after an evaluation and performance indicator has been identified for improvement. It is really the impetus for the third sea change that must be addressed to close the loop in the evaluation and performance improvement process as demonstrated in the following scenario.

A group of teachers, coaches, union representatives and the principal met to discuss the new teacher-evaluation system on the cusp of implementation. The question presented by the teachers to the principal was, “Now that you will be explicitly putting areas for improvement into our professional evaluations, what is available to help us improve, increase the success of our students, and protect our jobs?”

Though traditional methods of professional development still have a place in the total design of a robust system of providing ongoing learning opportunities for educators, they cannot meet the needs of all educators, all of the time. With individualized performance reviews come the need for personalized life vests for each educator riding the waves of education in its rapidly moving currents of changing student needs and those of a global economy. The language for performance reviews has changed from achieving competencies and standards, still used for initial licensing, to addressing performance indicators as are found in multiple platform options supporting school district performance reviews such as Mods4Edu, Zimco, McRel, Danielson and Marzano, among others. Each provides support but not always the individualized, just-in-time professional development to address the specific indicator identified and documented for the educator as well as those who make employment decisions.

The third wave of change requires a different way of thinking about PD. It must include individualized options with robust specialized content that address higher order thinking and skill development with the intent of mobilizing teachers and administrators to reflect on their feet. It challenges the educator to differentiate classroom content, systems,

Three Sea ...
Continued on Page 27

2015 MASA Elections

Nominations are open until January 12, 2015 for the MASA offices of:

2015 - 2016 MASA President-Elect

The President-Elect serves one year, followed by one year as President and one year as Past President. In the year of presidency, a student from the President's district will receive a \$1,000 scholarship. All members located in the "Greater Minnesota" districts (Regions 1-8) are eligible.

Superintendent Component Group

Representative to the MASA Board of Directors for Region 4, Region 6, Region 7, and Region 9 (2)

The Component Group Representatives to the MASA Board of Directors serves a three-year term representing their region. This Representative will replace the Component Group Board Representative who are completing their term June 30, 2015.

Metro Central Office Component Group Representative to the MASA Board of Directors (Must be from Region 9)

The Component Group Representative to the MASA Board serves a three-year term. This Representative will replace the Component Group Board Representative that is completing their term June 30, 2015.

Greater Minnesota Special Education Component Group Representative to the MASA Board of Directors (Must be from Region 1-8)

The Component Group Representative to the MASA Board serves a three-year term. This Representative will replace the Component Group Board Representative that is completing their term June 30, 2015.

Retiree Representative to the MASA Board of Directors

The Retiree Representative to the MASA Board serves a three-year term. This Representative will replace the Retiree Representative that is completing their term June 30, 2015.

AASA Regional Governing Board Representative

Represent Minnesota on the AASA Regional Governing Board. Representatives must be a joint MASA/AASA member and also have been an AASA member for a least three consecutive years. This representative will replace the representative who is completing his term June 30, 2015.

The Nomination Process:

MASA officers have the opportunity to influence education in Minnesota and serve their fellow colleagues.

We encourage you to nominate yourself or a colleague who you feel would be a strong leader for MASA. If you nominate a colleague, please contact your nominee to ask them whether or not they are interested in running for the position and so that they know you have nominated them!

Nomination forms and the lists of eligible candidates are available on the MASA web site (www.mnasa.org). Fill out your nomination and return it to the MASA office via mail or fax by January 12, 2015. You may also email your nomination to aranallo@mnasa.org.



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What's up with GASB?

An overview of new pension reporting rules from the Retirement Systems of Minnesota

New accounting changes for reporting public pension costs from the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) take effect in 2014-15, and there is concern brewing that the new accounting rules will cause confusion and raise false alarm regarding the financial well-being of public pension plans, including Minnesota's.

The new GASB numbers can be misleading and create a distorted picture of the pension systems' and local governments' long-term financial soundness. Beginning in 2014, GASB changes will require school districts and local governments such as cities and counties to show their share of Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) and Teachers Retirement Association (TRA) pension costs prominently on their balance sheets. Previously, the costs and financial status of Minnesota's pension plans were reported only in the systems' annual reports and regular reports to Legislature. Here's a look at the new rules:

Q. What's new in the GASB rules?

A. Previously, unfunded liabilities were annually disclosed by the retirement systems on their financial statements and to legislative oversight bodies such as the Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement. Now state and local governments and school districts will each have to report their proportionate share of these unfunded pension liabilities as a liability on financial balance sheets. Under the old accounting rules, those government units only disclosed the annual contribution to the pension systems needed to fund the retirement systems and pay off the unfunded liability.

The underlying economics and health of the plans are not affected, but the new standards will require school districts and local governments to report liabilities that had previously not been reported in financial statements. These liabilities have always existed and are not new. Furthermore, the new rules do not change what school districts and local governments owe in annual contributions to the retirement systems. The new disclosures should have no impact on budgeting practices.

Q. Why is GASB requiring employers to show this information?

A. Transparency and disclosure are good, but it's important to provide context for the numbers. The presence on local government or school district balance sheets of a large number representing unfunded pension costs could give the incorrect impression that employers/taxpayers have an immense debt that must be paid immediately. This is not the case. Pension costs are amortized or paid off over long periods. The retirement systems plan for this and work to make sure annual contributions are sufficient to

pay off any pension debt on a schedule. This works much like a homeowner's mortgage. Even though a homeowner might have a \$100,000 unpaid mortgage, there is no expectation that this be paid off in one year. The owner makes manageable monthly payments and pays down the mortgage debt over a scheduled time period. This is what governments and school districts do when they make regular contributions to the retirement system.

Q. Will governments and school districts have to pay more for pensions because of GASB?

A. No. GASB statements will not affect what governments and school districts pay to fund the plans.

Q. How will local governments and school districts get the pension liability information?

A. TRA and PERA will annually calculate and report to each employer unit that unit's proportionate share of unfunded pension liabilities. These unfunded pension liabilities will be reported to the government unit or school district so that they can be shown as liabilities on balance sheets. Employers currently have no comparable reporting requirements in statements, footnotes or schedules. Instead, they report only their annual pension contributions.

Q. Do the new standards establish rules for how government units should fund pensions?

A. No. GASB said it is not within its scope to set standards establishing a specific method of funding pensions or to regulate a government unit's compliance with the funding policy or method it adopts. Funding pensions is a policy decision for government officials or other responsible authorities. In 2013 legislature enacted into law the funding standards the retirement systems have historically used.

Q. Won't people be alarmed if pension costs loom large on employer balance sheets?

A. They shouldn't be. The GASB numbers will be somewhat confusing. The liability amount reported on the employer balance sheet will represent the employer's proportionate share of liabilities and will be paid down by employers' annual contributions to the pension funds over many years. A June 2012 report from the Center for Retirement Research stated: "It would be unfortunate if the press and politicians characterized these new numbers as evidence of a worsening of the (pension) crisis when, in fact, states and localities have already taken numerous steps to put their plans on a more secure footing. ... Policymakers should not let the new numbers throw them off course."

GASB ...

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Three Sea...

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and ways of being to meet the needs of each learner. This is the basis of today's performance review system and individualized plans for improvement. And, to enable our new commitments to each learner, educators must have access to systems that provide easily attainable supports as each rides his or her waves each day. The solutions are complex, requiring:

- Easily accessible individualized online options
- Affordability
- Alignment to performance indicators
- Provision of supports for the streams of learning that are expected in today's vision of education essentials
- Cause thinking that goes beyond initial licensing and the burgeoning instructors "commencement" or beginning into his or her profession.

A new grid that is the amalgamation of performance-indicator concepts included in Danielson, Marzano, McRel, Zimco, and Mods4Edu platform models and aligned with individualized professional development options is available for review at: http://www.whitewaterlearning.org/PROFESSIONAL_COMPETENCIES.html

GASB...

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Q. Will new GASB standards affect municipal bond ratings?

A. According to Pensions & Investments (April 14, 2014): The new GASB standards "will not materially affect the credit ratings of most public plan sponsors. This is because the rating agencies themselves have signaled their understanding that the new GASB reporting rules might be mere window dressing that, ultimately, does not change the already apparent realities of the marketplace. ... The ratings agencies themselves fully recognize that GASB's changes in financial reporting merely disclose in a different manner liabilities that frankly, were already known through different channels."

Q. What do the major bond rating agencies have to say about Minnesota pension obligations and local government units' health?

A. Fitch: "On a combined basis, the burden of debt and unfunded pension liabilities is well below the median for U.S. states rated by Fitch." Moody's: Cited Minnesota's "relatively well funded pension system" as a "credit strength." Standard & Poor's: "Minnesota's pension plans are reasonably well funded relative to those of other states and there have been significant reform measures implemented in the past couple of years aimed at lowering the liabilities. ... "We would expect these changes to improve funded ratios over time."

by Susan Barbieri

Communications Officer, Teachers Retirement Association

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Calendar of Events...

2014

December

24-26

MASA Offices Closed

2015

January

14

MASA Great Start Cohort IV
MASA Offices, St. Paul

15-16

MSBA Leadership Conference
Minneapolis

February

26-28

AASA National Convention
San Diego, CA

March

11

MASA Great Start Cohort V
Minneapolis Marriott NW, Brooklyn Park

11

MASA Board of Directors Meeting
Minneapolis Marriott NW, Brooklyn Park

12-13

MASA/MASE Spring Conference
Minneapolis Marriott NW, Brooklyn Park

April

3

MASA Offices Closed

June

18-19

MASA Board of Directors Retreat
The Depot, Minneapolis

August

4-5

MDE Back-to-School Conference
Minneapolis Marriott NW, Brooklyn Park

September

27-29

MASA Fall Conference
DECC, Duluth

November

18

CLM Fall Conference
Cragun's, Brainerd



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