

Leaders FORUM

Winter 2012

Congratulations... Jeff Olson is MASA's 2013 Superintendent of the Year

“Dr. Olson is truly a student-centered superintendent. He has been, and will continue to be, a role model for all educators in the state of Minnesota. Dr. Olson works in a collaborative fashion with the Saint Peter community to provide every student with an educational experience that will prepare the student for his or her future.” - Gary Amoroso, MASA Executive Director

The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Superintendent Jeffrey J. Olson, Superintendent for Saint Peter Public Schools, the 2013 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year.

“I am truly honored and humbled to have been selected,” said Olson. “I believe that the superintendents of Minnesota play a key role in shaping the future of our state by working to ensure that each and every student we serve reaches her or his fullest potential and graduates from our schools career and college ready. It is a privilege to represent this group as the Minnesota Superintendent of the Year.”

As the Minnesota honoree, Superintendent Olson 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 21 - 23, 2013 in Los Angeles, CA.

Superintendent Olson has been with Saint Peter Public Schools since 1975, and has served as superintendent since 2003. With an



Jeffrey Olson
Superintendent
St. Peter Public Schools

enrollment of 1,893 students, the Saint Peter Public School District is located 60 miles southwest of Minneapolis, in the Minnesota River Valley. The district serves students in five locations and is an AdVancEd District Accredited School System, the first district in Minnesota to receive district-level accreditation. The Saint Peter Public School District is a place where “Learning Matters.” Olson explained, “This recognition would not possible without the hard work and support of the students, staff, administrators, board of education, and citizens of the Saint Peter School District. The collective work we have done to meet our vision that ‘Learning Matters’ and to successfully meet the needs of the students in our school system has been very exciting.”

Principal Paul Peterson, Saint Peter High School, nominated Superintendent Olson for the Superintendent of the Year Award. “I have had the privilege of working with Dr. Olson for the past nine years during my time as the high school principal, and can state,

Jeff Olson...
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Advocacy & Community

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It's Hard To Leave the Beaten Path

The temperatures are dipping and holiday songs fill the air. As we move towards winter break, I hope that each of you is experiencing a successful 2012-2013. While we will always face challenges, please remember the impact that you have on your school community!

As you may recall, the theme of our Fall Conference was "Innovation: It starts with a vision". Our spring conference will carry forward this theme. From experience, I know that it can be very challenging to move a system forward when things appear to be going well. Respectable levels of student achievement and content parents can provide us with a false sense of achievement and security.

I'd like to share a brief story adapted from Brain Power that illustrates this point. A group of managers got lost in the woods. Undaunted, they organized into several teams and began hacking a path through the dense under-growth. Hours passed, but the managers were cheerful-they had become an efficient "operating unit" and were proud of their achievement. In fact, one of them decided to climb a tree to survey just how far they'd come.

But the woman shouted down, "Stop! We're heading in the wrong direction. We'll have to change course." The managers shook their heads in disbelief and defiance, while one man spoke up for the teams: "But we can't stop now! We're making great progress!"

This wasn't the first group to learn that it's hard to give up what you do well, even if it's no longer relevant. As education leaders, each of us must continually reassess the direction that our organization is moving. By creating the vision that our communities embrace, we will be empowered to lead the process of innovation focused on increasing the achievement levels of ALL of our students.

The Spring Conference will be held on Thursday and Friday, March 14th and 15th at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest. As a continuation of our fall conference, we are excited to announce that we will expand the use of technology to continue to offer our members a high quality professional development experience. I look forward to your participation in this exciting event.

As always, please contact me at 651.319.1211 if I can be of assistance to you.



Gary Amoroso
Executive Director
Minnesota Association of
School Administrators

"As education leaders, each of us must continually reassess the direction that our organization is moving."

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Associate for Leadership Support

Aimee Ranallo
MASA, 1884 Como Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108
(651) 645-6272
(866) 444-5251
FAX (651) 645-7518
aranallo@mnasa.org

Executive Director

Gary M. Amoroso, Ph.D.

Professional Development Director

Mia Urick

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



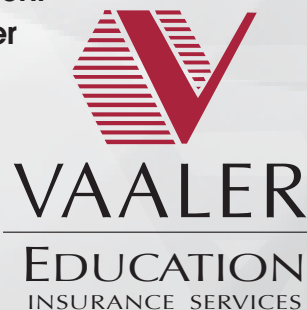
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Bruce Vaaler
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Casey Holland
Minneapolis
cholland@vaaler.com



Tim Skarperud
Grand Forks
tskarperud@vaaler.com



Heidi Whalen
Grand Forks
hwhalen@vaaler.com



Scott Bueligen
Sioux Falls
sbueligen@vaaler.com

Legislative News...

What do the Election Results Mean for the MASA Platform



Valerie Dosland
EWALD
MASA Lobbyist

The 2012 election brought another shift of control of power in the Minnesota Legislature. DFLers regained control of both the House and Senate, after losing both chambers just two years ago. For the first time in 22 years, Minnesota will see one-party control over the policy- and budget-making functions of the state. Democrats now hold 39 seats in the Senate and House Democrats hold 73 seats. Overall, nearly one-third of the Legislature is made up of new

legislators. However, familiar faces are returning after being away from politics for some time. Most notably, former House Education Finance Chair, Alice Johnson, will be returning as a first-term Senator.

With the election now past, the new DFL Majority, led by Sen. Tom Bakk and Rep. Paul Thissen, will begin to organize – new committee structures and committee chairs will be announced in the coming weeks and member committee assignments will likely be announced mid-December.

The 2013 legislative session is the beginning of the new two-year biennial session. The Governor and the Legislature will be focused on passing a two year biennial budget, which includes addressing an estimated \$1 billion deficit for

"For the first time in 22 years, Minnesota will see one-party control over the policy - and budget - making functions of the state."

the next biennium.

While it is too early to fully know the impact the election had on MASA's legislative priorities, we expect the Governor and the DFL-controlled Legislature to consider education finance reform and how to pay back the education aid payment shift as top priorities. Other issues likely to be addressed include what to do with integration revenue, anti-bullying prevention, and possible changes to teacher and principal evaluation requirements (most likely the provision to require 35% of evaluation to be based on test results).

However, issues MASA opposed in the past are likely off the table now -- vouchers, mayoral control, and parent-trigger laws. And, movement on other issues MASA supports might be more difficult. It is unlikely that tenure or PELRA reform will be considered. In addition, we will likely be fighting efforts to reinstate the January 15th contract settlement deadline.

The 2013 session begins January 8 and is expected to go until mid-May. Now is a great time to develop or strengthen your legislative relationships so please do reach out to your newly elected legislators, congratulate them on their election, and offer to be a resource to them on education funding and policy issues.

Please watch for the 2013 MASA Legislative Platform, which will be distributed to MASA members, educational organizations and legislators, the last week of December. MASA encourages you to use the platform as a tool when meeting with representatives and your community.

Time to Renew!!



Supporting Your Association and Your District...

In 2012, nearly 180 Minnesota school districts used MASA's Jobsite to find candidates for their open positions.

In 2013, could the MASA Jobsite help your district build your team?

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Jeff Olson...

Continued from front cover

without hesitation, that he is the finest educational leader I have encountered in my professional career” said Peterson. “There are countless reasons he is an excellent candidate for the Superintendent of the Year, including his educational vision, courage to develop and implement innovative programming, and his commitment to developing emerging leaders.”

Spurred by the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top grant competition, more than a dozen states have passed laws to reform how teachers and principals are evaluated. Dr. Olson and his administrative team developed and implemented an annual evaluation process for all teachers in the district. In addition, Dr. Olson initiated a new principal evaluation process based on the model developed by the Minnesota statewide task force. In July 2012, The Saint Peter Public School District then modified the model due to the district’s participation in the State of Minnesota Principal Evaluation Pilot Program. Dr. Olson explained, “Principal performance measures will focus on standardized test results, the integration of technology to transform learning by teachers, and student discipline data as a measure of the effectiveness of the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) plan at each building level.”

Both the teacher and principal evaluation tools are designed to support Dr. Olson’s expectations that all students will gain a minimum of one year’s growth for each year spent in their school system. “Regardless of Race to the Top, No Child Left Behind, or any state-developed waiver system, this is a commitment to student learning that each school must guarantee to its students and families,” said Dr. Olson.

During the summer of 2006, Dr. Olson challenged the administrative team to confront the brutal facts related to the academic performance of the district’s low-income students. This challenge resulted in the District Summer Academic Program, a comprehensive program that includes: the “Read

and Feed” summer nutrition program that provides free lunch to children as well as various learning activities; the “Summer Reads” program that provides two reading VISTA tutors to work in summer schools; the “Area Learning Center Summer School” that provides supplemental reading support to at-risk K-6 students; and the “Community Education Reading Academy” which is a theme-based book club experience for students in grades 3 - 6. Olson is pleased to share, “The results of the District Summer Academic Program are very positive. Over a six-year period, we have closed the achievement gap in reading from 23 percent gap between overall and free/reduced lunch proficiency, to a 12 percent gap in 2011, and a 10 percent gap in 2012.”

Across the nation, school districts are again facing significant cuts to their budgets. Superintendent Olson has taken numerous actions to address shortfalls in funding for the Saint Peter Public School District. Dr. Olson has worked with the Saint Peter Board of Education to implement comprehensive plans to secure additional referendum dollars from local taxpayers, resulting in the successful passage of operating general fund levies in 2005 and 2011, and the successful passage of a capital projects levy in 2009.

In an effort to re-think how the school district provides high quality services, Dr. Olson has also successfully cultivated local and regional partnerships with the City of Saint Peter, local colleges, and local school districts.

Superintendent Olson received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota, his master’s degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato and his bachelor’s degree from Concordia College in Moorhead. Before becoming Superintendent for the Saint Peter Public School District, he served as the curriculum director and high school principal. Dr. Olson is an active member of MASA, serving on multiple committees and previously as President on the Board of Directors. Currently, Dr. Olson is serving as President-Elect of the MASA Foundation Board of Directors. In 2007, Dr. Olson received the MASA Kay E. Jacobs Memorial Award.

“I believe that the superintendents of Minnesota play a key role in shaping the future of our state by working to ensure that each and every student we serve reaches her or his fullest potential and graduates from our schools career and college ready.”

–Jeff Olson

Superintendent Olson 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.*

If you are interested in nominating a superintendent for the 2014 Superintendent of the Year, please watch for nomination materials in July of 2013.

Regional Leadership.. Region 2's Legislative Advocacy Model



John Cselvoszki
Superintendent
Sleepy Eye Public School

Over the past several years, Region 2 battled the challenge of getting our voice heard as a complete group at both the state and federal levels. Through some intentional planning, as well as some trial and error, we believe we have come up with some methods that work well for us.

First at the federal level, we have come to the conclusion that it is best to invite our Representative, Tim Walz, to attend a January meeting at the Service Co-op when the legislature is not in session. Everyone in our region understands that due to the demands of a legislator's schedule, we must be flexible and the January meeting is planned with less notice than we might be used to. Remarkably, we have at least 75% attendance!

During this hour long meeting, Representative Walz brings us up to speed on what they are working on in Washington D.C. and then takes some time to listen to our concerns. We are careful to be respectful of his time. We believe

this helped us to build our relationship with Representative Walz, and has given us a strong and supported voice at the legislature.

It has always been a challenge to find a time when all of us can break away to share our views and concerns at the Capital. MASA's scheduled Region 2 Capital Visit gives us the motivation to make it a priority for our region to visit with our own legislators and, when possible, visit the legislative leaders. Attendance has varied from high to low due to schedule conflicts, or the feeling that we see our representatives regularly in our communities.

Last year, Region 2's Chair Kevin Wellen, made a change from our previous strategy. He called and requested appointments for himself and a couple of fellow superintendents to meet with the Senate Majority Leader, the Speaker of the House, and the Chairs of the Education Finance Committee and Senate Education Committee on the scheduled Region 2 Capital visit date. Every one of them made time in their schedule to meet with us. When word got out to the Region that these meetings were set, attendance more than doubled. When meeting with the legislators, we



keep MASA's two or three legislative goals at the forefront and include one or two of our regional goals. As a group, we were impressed at the level of attention we received from each of the legislators and their staff. In between these meetings, plenty of time was available for each person to schedule time with their own legislators.

We also recommend to our members that they invite their local legislators to visit a school board meeting each year. This provides members an opportunity to stay connected locally and on a regular basis, instead of just when we are looking for a specific policy change.

The final "take-home" we would like to leave our membership with is that legislators truly want to hear from superintendents, and more importantly, that they do actually listen.



Kevin Wellen
Superintendent
NRHEG Public Schools



Jennifer Anderson-Tuttle, LEED AP - jtuttle@dlrgroup.com - 612/977-3500 - dlrgroup.com

School Boards...

School Board Elections and Workshops

Twice in the last four years the Brainerd Public Schools have held "School Board Orientation" forums immediately prior to the opening of the candidate filing period. This orientation was developed to assist in recruitment of high-quality school board candidates. Superintendent Steve Razidlo was asked to share his district's experience while developing and presenting this effective orientation.

Twice in the last four years, the Brainerd Public Schools have taken two hours on a late summer night to invest in the community members who are thinking of a run for the School Board by offering a "School Board Orientation." We used the opportunity to gather prospective candidates together with current Board members to discuss and promote the hopes we have for school board membership while also sharing the experiences of the incumbent board members. Our forums were scheduled where board functions occur; they were scheduled after the supper hour; and the press was notified and invited. The coverage we had following the first orientation in 2009 was dramatic and positive; we had the great fortune of recognizing a sixteen year veteran of the board who spoke eloquently to themes of compromise, hard work, and searching for the greater good.

Our meeting began with introductions and a walk through the planned agenda. Leaning on Minnesota School Board Association materials was easy, especially after their staff put together a brief, concise presentation entitled "Running for the School Board" (available to any district upon request). To this brief presentation we added other MSBA texts, resources, and samples of MSBA policy like Model Policy 209 -- Board Ethics. Candidate orientation is a vehicle for speaking our high expectations. It has also been a reference point for initial conversations clarifying the role of a school board member. This discussion--so important for the health of every school board and administrative team--began safely and proactively in that meeting.

After the MSBA materials and discussion we moved naturally to the definition of the Board's meeting schedule, the committee structure and officer roles, and the definition of important liaison roles assigned to members of the school board. Current board members are great teachers, and I believe the orientation event affirms their wisdom and honors their service. Discussion of the true time commitment it takes to be an effective board member was invaluable, and especially authentic coming from a nine-year veteran of our board. Cost to family life came up as a true concern for some prospective candidates. Discussion of the value and satisfaction felt by board members came out in the discussions as a factor outweighing all concerns. Incumbents spoke about the realities of governance, including moving forward after board disagreements. In the end, the meetings finished when the guests exhausted their questions.

On both occasions, some of the prospective candidates never filed for office. On both occasions, candidates filed who did not attend the orientation. In Brainerd, candidate orientation has a place in the recruitment of high-quality school board candidates.



Steve Razidlo
Superintendent
Brainerd Public Schools

MASA Foundation Grants Available!

The MASA Foundation will provide up to 10 grants to members this year for professional development experiences that you would not be able to access through your district or that are unique learning opportunities. Grants can range from \$500-\$750. To apply, simply submit a one page summary of your intended experience and either mail or fax it to the MASA offices or email Gary Amoroso, and the Foundation Grant Committee will consider it in a timely manner.



What We Are Reading is an online resource offering information, inspiration, and conversation about books. Each month, the blog will feature a

book, including a review, complete with book notes and discussion questions. Are you looking for a book study resource for your leadership team? Teaching a class that may benefit from being part of this conversation? Simply love to read and reflect? Here is a blog site for you!

President's Perspective...

Speak on Behalf of Minnesota's Students



Jim Hess
MASA President &
Superintendent
Bemidji Area Schools

In the fall of 2005, the Bemidji School Board received a challenge to a book that was used in ninth grade English classrooms from a conservative element in our community. According to the challenge, the book contained, "Foul language and gross disrespect... throughout the entire book." The book made reference to a rape and attempted rape that, according to the challenger, "violates the rights of many ninth grade students who have not been previously exposed to foul language, gross disrespect for others, and sexual perversion."

It further stated the teaching of the book requires "students to 'plumb the darkness' of rape through this book," and declared the book an "assault upon the minds of our children."

The District Challenged Resources Committee was charged with reviewing the book and making recommendations to the school board regarding the book, *Speak*. Committee members examined the book for foul language and found the language reflective of an average high school-age student. The rape and attempted rape scenes were carefully crafted, vaguely described, and deliberately brief and non-specific. The committee recognized the literary value of the novel and its strong appeal to today's young people. Committee members found the book to have a powerful, genuine voice in the first person narrative. The book read almost like a journal or diary, with its honesty of expression and perspective. Committee members appreciated the symbolism, the vivid imagery, and the positive theme of overcoming difficulties and becoming assertive.

This past administrative episode seems relevant today on several levels. Initially, I see an increasingly vocal and polarized population which often results in conflict and struggles for control of educational decisions. This divide reaches local school boards as issues have moved from what is in the best interest of the students to bitter partisan politics, personal attacks fueled by tightly held values or beliefs, or an alarming distrust of public servants and institutions. Conflicts of this nature are seldom resolved by a majority vote and often resurface at the next important crossroad. We need only look to the question of what constitutes adequate school funding and how deeply divided elected representatives have addressed the issue (90-10%, 73-27%, 70-30%, 60-40%). I seldom hear, "How are the children?" in conversations involving legislators and school finance.

On another level I see how current, thoughtful, and well-constructed policies and procedures can help districts withstand contentious, misguided public challenges. Since

this incident, when I submit names recommended for appointment to board standing committees, such as the Challenged Resources Committee, I am careful to review the list of appointees to be sure they represent our broad school community and not a narrow special interest group. Whenever possible I include students who can help keep discussions in proper perspective. In fact, as the board struggled with the request to ban the book *Speak*, a student representative's remarks and insight carried the day and helped persuade undecided board members to deny the challenge and allow the continued use of the book.

"Let's find our strongest, most powerful, and genuine voices to speak about the future, to speak about learning, and to speak about children."

Speak, by Laurie Halse Anderson is about the need to find our powerful, genuine voice in turbulent times. As school leaders we are in unique positions of knowledge, trust, and responsibility. We know the needs of our students, schools, and communities through our daily work and experience. We have been selected by schools boards, parents, and community members to be in a position of great responsibility, and quite often one of the most highly respected and compensated jobs in our community. Each day our decisions affect the lives of hundreds of children, parents, dedicated staff members, and community leaders. There is no one better suited to speak on behalf of our students and schools than the members of MASA! Let's find our strongest, most powerful, and genuine voices to speak about the future, to speak about learning, and to speak about children.

Speak was a 1999 National Book Award finalist and a 2000 Honor Book of the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature, sponsored by the American Library Association. It was also an Edgar Allan Poe Award Finalist, Winner of the Golden Kite Award, an American Library Association Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults, an ALA Quick Pic, a Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year, a Booklist Top Ten First Novel of 1999, a BCCB Blue Ribbon Book, the SLS Best Book of the Year, and a Horn Book Fan Fare Title. *Speak* has also been used at various colleges and universities as a selection in classes to prepare teachers in training as to how to teach literature to high school students.

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MASA is excited to introduce its new member service, the eMarket. The eMarket is a place for members to post their district's gently used furniture, equipment and supplies for sale. Contact Jeanna for more information or to post items.



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CONTACT

Daniel Moll
AIA/CID/NCARB/LEED™AP
763.525.3249
dmoll@atsr.com
www.atsr.com

Legal Issues...

Discipline for Off-Duty Use of Social Media: How Long is an Employer's Reach?



Greg Madsen
Education Law Attorney
Kennedy & Craven, Chartered

Can a school district justifiably discipline or discharge a teacher for posting an inappropriate picture or making negative comments about students on a personal Facebook page? A review of recent cases involving discipline of teachers for off-duty social media use shows how the courts balance their First Amendment right to free speech and the right of schools to be free from conduct that disrupts the educational environment.

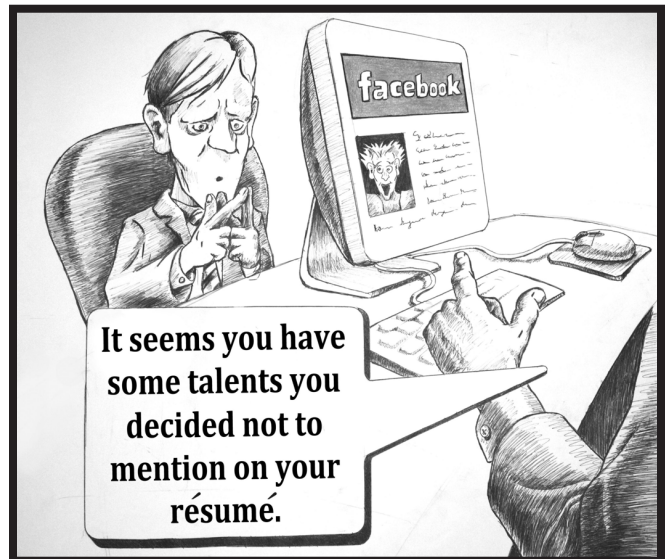
What employees do away from work and on their own time is normally of no concern to their employers unless there is a nexus or connection between an employee's private conduct and the impact on the employer's legitimate interests. In a school setting, the right of public school districts to govern the off-duty conduct of its employees is often recognized as greater than that of other employers. Educators are seen as role models for the students they educate and in the communities in which they live.

This higher standard of conduct to which educators are held has resulted in a longer reach for school districts in imposing discipline for off-campus conduct—as long as the school can show that the off-duty conduct called into question the educator's fitness to teach or had a negative impact on the school community.

In addition to the nexus requirement, a school seeking to discipline or discharge an employee for off-duty social media use needs to consider whether such speech is protected by the First Amendment.

Not all off-duty speech by public employees is constitutionally protected. Generally, only when a public employee speaks as a citizen—outside the scope of employment—on a topic of “public concern” is the speech protected. “Public concern” means speech about any political, social or community issue; it does not include purely personal speech such as a grievance or dispute about a work rule. Stated another way, there is no First Amendment right for a public employee to engage in “free, uncensored artistic expression . . . on matters trivial, vulgar or profane [because generally] only political speech is given significant weight.” *Berger v. Battaglia*, 779 F.2d 992, 999-1000 (4th Cir. 1985)

Only after a public employee shows he or she was speaking about a matter of public concern that was not made as a



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part of official job duties will a court consider whether the resulting discipline was justified. The courts then will balance an employee's interest as a citizen speaking on “matters of public concern” and an “employer's interest in promoting efficiency of public services performed” in judging the employer's justification for the discipline. *Pickering v. Board of Education*, 391 U.S. 563, 568 (1968).

Several court decisions involving sanctions against educators for off-duty and off-campus social media use demonstrate that schools have great latitude in imposing discipline as long as a nexus and “just cause” exists, and as long as they are not imposing a penalty for constitutionally-protected speech.

In *Snyder v. Millersville University*, 2008 WL 5093140 (E.D. Pa. Dec. 3, 2008), a Millersville University student who was fulfilling a student-teaching degree requirement made students aware of her personal MySpace page. The page included a picture of the student teacher wearing a pirate hat and holding a plastic cup with the caption “drunken pirate.” She also included a comment on her page that was critical of her student-teaching supervisor who had given her some poor reviews. The high school judged her postings to be unprofessional and inappropriate, and concluded she had not satisfactorily completed the student-teaching program. As a result, the University awarded her a degree in English instead of Education. Her First Amendment claim was rejected because the speech on her MySpace page was of private, not public, concern and was therefore not protected.

Off-Duty Social Media...
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Off-Duty Social Media... Continued from Page 10

In *Spanierman v. Hughes*, 576 F.Supp. 2d 292, 297 (D.Conn. 2008), a federal court upheld the nonrenewal of a probationary teacher's contract for using a MySpace page to communicate with students "about homework, to learn more about the students so he could relate to them better, and to conduct casual, non-school related discussions."

The Spanierman court rejected the teacher's First Amendment challenge, holding that, except for a political poem, the "speech" on his MySpace page was not on a matter of public concern. Instead, the court found that the teacher's exchanges with students over MySpace "show[ed] a potentially unprofessional rapport with students, and the court [could] see how a school's administration would disapprove of, and find disruptive, a teacher's discussion with a student about 'getting any' (presumably sex), or a threat made to a student (albeit a facetious one) about detention."

The day after a New York City elementary school student drowned during a field trip, a 15-year teacher at another school posted on Facebook that "[a]fter today, I am thinking the beach sounds like a wonderful idea for my 5th graders! I HATE THEIR GUTS! They are the devil's spawn." An investigation not only confirmed the offensive posting, but revealed the teacher had tried to create an alibi by convincing a friend to lie and take the blame. After the

teacher was discharged by the State Education Department, she appealed.

In *Rubino v. City of New York*, 2012 NY Slip Op. 50189(u), the judge, despite rejecting the teacher's First Amendment claim because her speech did not relate to a matter of public concern, found that the teacher's unblemished 15-year record warranted giving her another chance: "While her reference to a child's death is repulsive, there is no evidence the postings are part of a pattern of conduct or anything other than an isolated incidence of intemperance." The judge vacated the penalty imposed and remanded the matter to the State Education Department to decide an appropriate penalty short of discharge. In June 2012, the Department imposed a two-year suspension without pay, concluding the teacher's "Facebook comments and subsequent cover-up warrants a significant penalty."

"This higher standard of conduct of which educators are held has resulted in longer reach for school districts in imposing discipline..."

School districts may impose discipline or discharge on teachers as a result of their off-duty and off-campus social media postings, if they can show a clear nexus between the content of the postings and the teacher's lack of fitness or a negative impact on the school community—and as long as the speech at issue is not constitutionally protected. In sum, school districts must recognize that their disciplinary reach has legal limits, which may be contractual, statutory, or constitutional.

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. Greg Madsen is an education law attorney with the law firm of Kennedy & Graven, Chartered. For more information, please contact him at (612) 337-9305 or www.kennedy-graven.com. © Greg Madsen (2012). Used by permission.

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Tim Palmatier, tpalmatier@kennedy-graven.com
Susan E. Torgerson, storgerson@kennedy-graven.com
Maggie R. Wallner, mwallner@kennedy-graven.com

Real Estate & Business

Michael Norton, mnorton@kennedy-graven.com

Construction

Peter Mikhail, pmikhail@kennedy-graven.com
James M. Strommen, jastrommen@kennedy-graven.com

Finance and Bond

Stephen J. Bubul, sbubul@kennedy-graven.com
Martha Ingram, mingram@kennedy-graven.com
Sarah J. Sonsalla, ssonsalla@kennedy-graven.com

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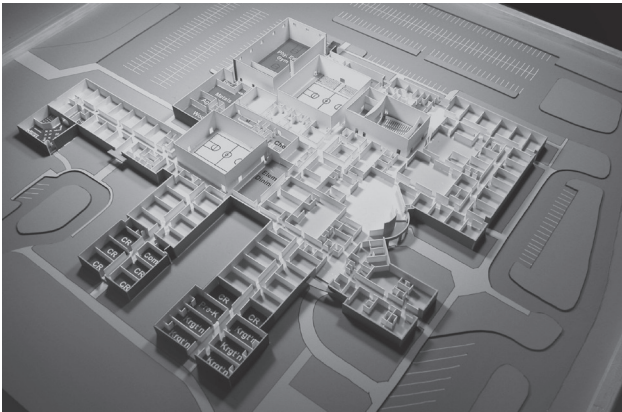


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Congratulations...



Dr. Wendy Shannon accepting her 2012 MASA Polaris Award, presented during the conference.



Wayne Kazmierczak, MASA's 2012 Richard Green Scholar, presenting his work during the MASA Fall Conference.

Congratulations...

Communication...



Surveys, Message Testing and Voter Targeting in School Referendum



Don Lifo, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President &
Public Education Group
Director
Springsted Incorporated

Just one year after a painful election loss and budget reductions measured in the millions, a Minnesota school district found itself back on the ballot seeking approval for an increase in property taxes to help fund school programs and head off a second round of draconian cuts. The political stakes were high for the school board and superintendent; the stakes were even higher for the thousands of students whose educational futures hung precariously in the balance.



J. Bradford Senden, Ph.D.
Managing Partner
Center for Community
Opinion

Anticipating a substantially larger voter turnout in the upcoming election, district officials needed to probe—more precisely than in the past tax elections—exactly what demographic groups would most likely go to the polls and support the referendum and how to best communicate with different groups. Message testing and voter targeting, within the context of a scientific survey, became critical components in building a foundation for success.

These strategies have been paramount in consumer research

and marketing for decades. Traditional direct-mail marketing strategies—transformed in recent years by exponential advancements in technology—now slice and dice with the precision of an executive chef, measuring their ingredients with such exotic tools as “neural networking” and “regression analysis.” These new technologies allow marketers to predict with greater accuracy than ever who will buy their products and what message will resonate with consumers.

Frustrated with the slow pace of adopting these sophisticated strategies in the political arena, Hal Malchow chides in *The New Political Targeting* (Campaigns and

Elections Magazine), “While commercial marketers stepped boldly into the sunshine of information and knowledge, political marketers have remained mired in the shadows of instinct and misinformation.” In this particular case, the district’s leaders were determined to come out of the shadows by harnessing the power of more sophisticated survey and analysis methodologies.

Peeling Back the Onion

Harnessing that power begins by exploring the responses from a well-designed scientific, random-sample survey completed for the district as part of its preparation for a return to the ballot. In this challenging case, our exploration utilized the classification tree features of *SPSS* for Windows.

This analytical tool was developed to make it easier to better identify groups, discover relationships between groups and predict future events. In such an analysis the software is asked to evaluate survey questions by exploring how demographic differences influenced survey responses.

Survey respondents were initially presented with the following general question:

This fall the district will ask voters to approve an increase in its existing operating levy. The proposed referendum will raise \$9 million in new funding for the district. This will result in a property tax increase of approximately \$230 per year for a home with an assessed value of \$240,000, which is the average assessed value of a home in the district. This increase translates into a cost of \$19 per month. Would you favor or oppose such an increase?

When the classification tree analysis was applied to the responses to this question, it had access to all the demographic characteristics of the voters interviewed as part of this survey. The classification tree tells us that the greatest demographic difference in voter responses is found between men and women (the first branch of the tree). As is true in most tax elections, women are more supportive of the district’s proposed tax increase.

Surveys...
Continued on Page 15

Surveys...

Continued from Page 14

The second set of branches in the classification tree tell us that the area of the district in which the voter lives is second most important demographic variable. For example, men living in a specific city within the district are significantly more supportive than other men in other areas, whereas women in the oldest parts of the district are less supportive than women in newer sections.

After the presentation of the initial general question, voters interviewed for the survey were given detailed information about the tax proposal the district was considering. Each voter was then asked the following informed benchmark question:

Now that you have heard more information about the district's need to ask for an increase in its operating levy, I want to see if this information has changed your opinion. One reminder first: the average assessed value of a home in the district is \$240,000. Would you favor or oppose such an increase knowing that it will raise \$9 million in new funding for the district and result in a property tax increase of approximately \$230 per year—or \$19 per month—for a home with an assessed value of \$240,000?

The classification tree generated from the responses collected after presentation of this information is very different. Gender is no longer the most significant demographic characteristic. Now a voter's age is the most important factor. Age has replaced where men live as the most important factor among male respondents. Gender is important among younger voters, with women much more supportive of the district's tax proposal after information has been presented. Among voters older than 48, the area of the district is important. Even after information has been presented, the district's proposal has very little support among older voters in the oldest residential area of the district.

Exploring the responses to these questions using *SPSS* for Windows helps focus the campaign's message and voter-contact efforts. In this example, the campaign will need to do more than just provide information to the older voters in the oldest areas of the district. Depending on the number of voters in this group and their voting history, the campaign will need to develop a unique approach to this "microtarget" group.

Classification tree analysis can also be used to test how different types of voters respond to statements in support of the district's tax proposal. In this survey, for example, voters were asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: "Investing in the quality of the local public school is essential if we are to maintain a safe, thriving, and vibrant community."

Not surprisingly, voters overwhelmingly agreed with this statement with 92% strongly agreeing or agreeing. Generating a classification tree from these responses,

however, reveals significant differences in intensity based on geography and age. The number of voters strongly agreeing with this statement was significantly higher in three of the cities within the district. In those areas, agreement with this statement was more intense, among voters younger than 66. Therefore, making this statement as part of an argument for the district's referendum will have its greatest impact among younger voters in three geographic areas.

Rather than simply relying on faith as to whether such an argument might work, we also tested the statement: "Investing in quality schools enhances the value of homes and businesses within the district. The classification analysis makes it clear that age is the most important factor in determining which voters will have the strongest positive reaction to this statement. Voters 38 years or younger are more likely to strongly agree with this statement than are voters older than 38. In the oldest communities, in contrast, just as many older voters say they disagree with this statement as those who say they strongly agree with it. It would be important, therefore, for the campaign in support of the district's proposal must target younger voters with this key message.

Research to Practice

As the number of school-age families continues to shrink and voters are increasingly tightfisted with their hard-earned dollars, passing new school referenda is becoming more difficult. The politics of talk radio and the impact of a variety of instant-messaging technologies also contribute to an increasingly difficult landscape. This election context is one that is unlikely to respond well to the strategies of the past.

Hal Malchow's exhortation to step out of "the shadows of instinct and misinformation" and into the "sunshine of information and knowledge" is demonstrated by message-testing and voter targeting strategies outlined here. Analyzing the feasibility of the tax proposal with a well-designed, scientific, random-sample survey and then using sophisticated analytics to test voters' responses to arguments and elements of the potential tax proposal provide the district and campaign with invaluable information.

In the case of this Minnesota school district, with data-driven planning and effective campaign strategies, a devastating loss was followed with a solid victory and the needed funding for its teaching and learning mission.

This article was adapted from a piece originally published in *School Business Affairs*, ASBO International, December 2010.

Don E. Lifto, Ph.D., is senior vice president and director of the Public Education Group at Springsted Incorporated, a public finance advisory and consulting firm based in St. Paul, Minnesota. He and Senden are authors of *School Finance Elections: A Comprehensive Planning Model for Success*, 2nd edition. Email: dlifto@springsted.com

J. Bradford Senden, Ph.D., is managing partner for the Center for Community Opinion, which specializes in survey research and data preparation needed to win tax elections. Email: brad@communityopinion.com



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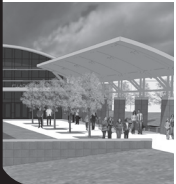
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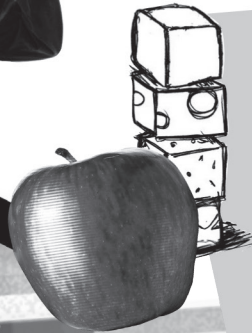


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Get involved today and learn how to implement Fuel Up to Play 60 in Minnesota schools by visiting FuelUpToPlay60.com



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Invest MN..

This is the Time

The window of opportunity to effectively advocate for your schools is open now.



Shari Prest
Ark Associates

The door of the election season has closed, hopefully shutting out the contentiousness of partisan politics. In Minnesota, the governor and the majorities of the house and senate will share some fundamental governing and policy principals. The people have voted and expressed their individual wills in a collective decision.

And when a door closes, windows sometimes open.

This election represents more than a majority for one perspective or the other; it opens the window to new opportunities to develop consensus about what is most important for the future of Minnesota. In almost any scenario, high quality public education tops the list of importance but is rarely driven by long-term, consistent vision and support. Today, school leaders have the opportunity to impact public perceptions and legislative policies about our schools and their critical role in the social and economic wellbeing of our state.

All too often, we just wait to see what the outcomes at the Capital will be. All too often, we allow the media to create and shape the stories about our learners and our schools. All too often, we want something when we go to our stakeholders and lawmakers. At other times marketing, public relations and communications are moved to the back burner while we deal with day-to-day management issues and until we face a crisis.

You are the educational leaders: the most experienced, the best educated and most insightful witnesses to what our schools are, what they need, and what they can become. As a group, no one else comes close. You have front row seats to our students' accomplishments and challenges. You see the relevance of technology and facilities in the efficacy of education. You connect regularly with teachers in classrooms and hear their stories about class size, student outcomes, and external influences. You are able to put those stories in the broader context of public education mandates, funding, policies, equity and goals. You are the torchbearers for Minnesota's constitutional commitment to public schools:

“The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools

throughout the state.” (Minnesota State Constitution, Article XIII, Section 1)

Look for the open windows and capitalize on the opportunities they present. Make this the year that you will meet with more parents, present to more groups, explore new technologies for communications, write more articles and letters, partner more with community groups, establish closer relationships with legislators, work more closely with businesses, learn more about your students, and become more accessible to all stakeholders.

Take Stock

- Go to InvestMN at www.mespa.net or www.mnasa.org or www.massp.org and complete the “Taking Stock” quiz to rate yourself as a public relations representative of public schools.

Be prepared:

- Know and understand the legislative goals of your professional organization.
- Prepare specific and accurate talking points and materials about your specific school/district.
 - What's good (accomplishments, recognition, support)
 - What's not good (challenges or disappointments)
 - The current status (how your school/district compares academically, financially, etc.)
 - Direction (where the school/district is heading and the goals or action plans that are in place to get it there)
 - Benchmarks (how and when you will measure and communicate progress)
- Gather representative stories about your school community.
- Identify areas to seek input and/or feedback.

Map out the journey

- Assemble a list of contacts and communications (be creative).
- Identify the methods of communication for each target area.
- Develop a calendar and share it with someone else that will hold you accountable.
- Be open to new or additional communication opportunities as they present themselves.
- Identify benchmarks for your communication goals.
- Determine evaluation criteria for public relations success.

Move forward (or as Nike™ would say, “just do it!” Remember, you aren't likely to make progress unless you progress.



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Insights...

The State of the Superintendency in Minnesota



John Eller
Educational Administration & Leadership Program Director
St. Cloud State University

Background of the Study

In the spring and summer of 2012, MASA worked with Dr. John Eller of St. Cloud State University to conduct a state-wide survey of Minnesota Superintendents. This study was designed to gather information about superintendents in relation to the following:

- Gain information about superintendents related to demographic issues such as years of experience, gender, district size, etc.
- Understand the level of job satisfaction reported by Minnesota Superintendents
- Gain information about the major tasks performed, the amount of time devoted to these tasks, and the professional development needs of superintendents
- Understand the nature and strategies of those superintendents who are able to improve instructional leadership and student achievement in light of budget pressures and reductions

Superintendents were sent a link to a Survey Monkey site where they were asked to respond to a variety of questions. During the period of the study, 224 or about 71% of the superintendents in the state responded.

In the initial analysis of the information, Dr. Eller developed frequency charts outlining the major responses of the superintendents. The highlights from some of these charts will be featured in this newsletter. In future newsletters we will explore additional information from this study.

Demographics of Minnesota Superintendents

Gender

Superintendents were asked to list their gender on the survey. The responses to this question are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1 The gender of superintendents who responded to the survey

Please select your gender		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Female	15.2%	34
Male	84.8%	190
<i>answered question</i>		224
<i>skipped question</i>		4

Out of the 224 superintendents who responded to the survey, 84.8% were male and 15.2% were female.

Years of Experience

Participants were asked to list the number of years they have served as a superintendent including both in and out-of state experiences.

Superintendents who responded to the survey reported a variety of levels of experience as superintendents. The table below indicates that the largest group is in the 4-7 year range followed by the group with 8-12 years of experience. The smallest experience group in this study reported having 21 or more years of experience. The remainder of the data is listed in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Number of years served as a superintendent

Please select the response that best describes your total experience as a superintendent		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
0-3 years	18.8%	42
4-7 years	26.8%	60
8-12 years	22.8%	51
12-20 years	18.8%	42
21 or more years	12.9%	29
<i>answered question</i>		224
<i>skipped question</i>		4

Retirement Plans

Superintendents responded to a question that asked them to anticipate the number of years they planned to work before retiring. The results for this question are outlined in Table 3 below:

Table 3 Anticipated Retirement Time (in years) for superintendents

Please select the response that best describes when you plan to retire from the superintendency		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
0-3 years from now	34.1%	77
4-7 years from now	23.5%	53
8-12 years from now	16.8%	38
More than 12 years from now	25.7%	58
<i>answered question</i>		226
<i>skipped question</i>		2

The largest group (34.1 %) reported that they plan to retire within the next 3 years. Another group of superintendents (23.5%) indicated that they plan to retire within the next 4-7 years. Another fairly large group (25.7%) reported that they plan to work more than 12 years before retirement.

State of the Superintendency...
Continued on Page 21

State of the Superintendency... Continued from Page 20

District Size

Another question on the survey asked superintendents to define the size (in student population) of their districts. The results of the responses is outlined in Table 4 below:

Table 4 Size of School Districts Serve in by superintendents

Select the response that best describes the size of the district that you currently lead.		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Less than 500 students	22.0%	50
Between 500-1,500 students	40.1%	91
Between 1,500-2,500 students	13.2%	30
Between 2,500-5,000 students	13.2%	30
Between 5,000-10,000 students	7.0%	16
Greater than 10,000 students	4.4%	10
<i>answered question</i>		227
<i>skipped question</i>		1

A majority of the superintendents who responded to the survey (40.1%) reported that they work in districts with student populations between 500-1,500 students. The next largest group (22%) reported that they work in districts that serve less than 500 students. The remainder of the superintendents responding to the survey said they work in districts larger than 2,500 students.

Task Focus for Minnesota Superintendents

The superintendents in the study responded to a question that asked them to rate the time they spent on various leadership tasks. The percentages were calculated for tasks that required a moderate to major amount of time. The top 5 tasks reported were:

- Budget and management (80% spent a moderate or major amount of time)
- Board member relations (74.4% spent a moderate or major amount of time)
- Employee relations (68.7% spent a moderate or major amount of time)
- School improvement planning and implementation (66.6% spent a moderate or major amount of time)
- Community relations (62.2% spent a moderate or major amount of time)

Level of Job Satisfaction Reported by Respondents

Minnesota superintendents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the job. The levels of job satisfaction are reported in Table 5 to the right:

Table 5 Various Levels of Job Satisfaction Reported by superintendents

Please rate your general satisfaction with the following:					
Answer Options	Very dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Moderately satisfied	Very satisfied	Response Count
Enjoyment with the position as superintendent	3	26	89	106	224
Satisfaction with your performance as a superintendent	2	6	126	90	224
Ability to be an instructional leader	8	48	118	50	224
Satisfaction with the amount of personal time you are able to take as a superintendent	44	84	69	26	223
<i>answered question</i>					224
<i>skipped question</i>					4

A majority (89.4%) of superintendents reported that they were either moderately or very satisfied with the position of superintendent. A large majority (96.4%) reported being moderately or very satisfied with their own performance as a superintendent. Fewer (75%) reported that they were moderately or very satisfied with their ability to be an instructional leader. Finally, only 42.6% of the superintendents reported that they were either moderately or very satisfied with the amount of personal time they are able to take as a superintendent.

Professional Development Needs Reported by Minnesota Superintendents

Respondents to the survey reported on the areas they felt they needed additional professional development. The top 5 areas (where respondents rated the need as moderate or great) are reported below:

- School improvement planning and implementation (50% rated this as a moderate or great need)
- Strategic planning (46.2% rated this as a moderate or great need)
- Supervision of principals and other administrators (45.2% rated this as a moderate or great need)
- Student achievement improvement monitoring (44.7% rated this as a moderate or great need)
- Interpreting student achievement data (43.1% rated this as a moderate or great need)

Summary

Information related to the some of the demographic characteristics, task focus, levels of satisfaction with the job, and training needs expressed by respondents to the state-wide MASA superintendents' survey were reported in this article. This information provides a brief overview of some of the characteristics and perceptions of the position. Obviously, more analysis is needed related to some of the relationships between the variables and some of the reasoning behind the findings. We thought it would be interesting to present you with some of the initial information related to this study. In future newsletter articles, we will provide more in-depth information and begin to analyze additional responses and trends.

Association News... Welcome! **New MASA Members**

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Dan Anderson, Superintendent, Maple River Schools

Mary Anderson, Executive Director of Elementary
Curriculum, Innovation and Leadership,
Stillwater Area Public Schools

Randi Anderson, Director of Teaching & Learning,
South Washington County Schools

Terri Anderson, Director, Naytahwaush Community
Charter School

Benjamin Barton, Superintendent, Caledonia Area
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Tammy Berg-Beniak, Interim Superintendent,
Pine Island Public Schools

Jeff Bertrang, Superintendent, GFW Schools

Kim Carlson, Director of Community Education,
Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools

Ann Clark, Director, SE-Metro Center of Excellence,
SE Service Cooperative

Ed Crawford, Ass't. Superintendent, Duluth Schools

Kimberly DeWitte, Elementary Principal,
Belle Plaine Public Schools

John Dotson, Superintendent, BOLD Public Schools

Suraya Driscoll, Superintendent, Fisher Public School

Barbara Duffrin, Director of Educational Programs,
Farmington Area Public Schools

Jeff Elstad, Superintendent, Byron Public Schools

John Eustice, Superintendent, Nicollet Public Schools

Daniel Frazier, Superintendent, Litchfield Public Schools

Catherine Gallagher, Director of Teaching & Learning,
Eastern Carver County Schools

Evan Gough, Superintendent, Blue Earth Area Schools

Bradley Harper, Superintendent, MN State Academies

Steven Heyd, Superintendent, GHEC Public Schools

Robert Huot, Superintendent, Paynesville Area Schools

Robert Indihar, Superintendent, Moose Lake
Community Schools

Russ Johnson, Superintendent, Eagle Valley School District

Alexis Leitgeb, Superintendent, Ely Area Public Schools

Margaret Litts, Isle Public Schools

Mark Lundin, Superintendent, Norman County East School

Ytve Matson-Prafke, Special Programs Administrator,
Saint Peter Public Schools

Jeff McGonigal, Associate Superintendent,
Anoka-Hennepin School District

Wade McKittrick, Superintendent, Wabasso Public Schools
& Milroy School District

Mark Messman, Superintendent, Eden Valley-
Watkins Schools

Mark Nohner, Superintendent, Fosston School District

Peter Olson-Skog, Director of Teaching & Learning,
Roseville Area Schools

Jodi Otte, Principal, Chisago Lakes School District

Laurie Putnam, Ass't. Principal, St. Cloud Area Schools

Mike Redmond, Executive Director of Secondary
Curriculum, Innovation & Leadership,
Stillwater Area Public Schools

Nancy Remmert, Curriculum & Instruction Coordinator,
Eden Prairie Schools

Matt Schoen, Superintendent, Delano Public Schools

Randal Smasal, Director of Teaching & Learning,
Edina Public Schools

Richard Spicuzza, Deputy Superintendent,
Mounds View Public Schools

Joseph Stangler, Director, Elk River Area School District

Save the Date!
MASA/MASE
Spring Conference 2013
March 14-15
Minneapolis Marriot Northwest
Brooklyn Park, MN

Registration materials will be
available on the MASA Website
the end of December.

Nominations Open!

Nominations are open until January 14, 2013 for the MASA offices of:

2013 - 2014 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 "Outstate" districts (Region 1-8) are eligible.

In addition, candidates must:

- be a MASA member, in the "active" category
- be a practicing administrator
- have five years of successful administrative experience in Minnesota
- be committed to MASA and its goals
- have time available to represent MASA for three years (2013-2016)

Accountabilities of this office include:

- participate in MASA Executive Committee and Board meetings
- assist the President in providing general leadership to the organization
- perform all duties of the President, in absence of the President
- recommend appointments of all standing committee members, including Chairs-Elect

The **Component Group Representatives** to the MASA Board serve a three-year term. The elected Representatives will replace the Component Group Board Representatives that is completing their term June 30, 2013. Available component group representative positions are as follows:

- **Superintendent Component Group Representative to the MASA Board of Directors for Region 1, Region 8, and Region 9**
- **Greater Minnesota Central Office Component Group Representative to the MASA Board of Directors (Must be from Region 1-8)**
- **Central Office Component Group Representative to the MASA Board of Directors (Region 9)**

The **AASA Regional Governing Board Representative** represents 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, 2013.

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 in the Members Only section on the MASA Website (www.mnasa.org). Fill out your nomination and return it to the MASA office via mail or fax by January 14, 2013. You may also email your nomination to aranallo@mnasa.org.



2013 AASA National
Conference on Education™
Where Education
Leaders Unite
Los Angeles, CA • February 21-23 2013

Plan to join us for the Minnesota Breakfast sponsored by
The Horace Mann Companies!
Saturday, February 23, 8 - 9 am • JW Marriot - LA Live
Reservation information for the Minnesota Breakfast is
available online at mnasa.org.
See you in Los Angeles!

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 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 Website (www.mnasa.org).

Nominations are due by January 14, 2013.

Calendar of Events...

2012...

December

24-25

MASA Offices Closed

31

MASA Offices Closed

2013...

January

1

MASA Offices Closed

February

21 - 23

AASA National Conference on Education
Los Angeles, CA

March

13

MASA Board of Directors Meeting
Marriott, Brooklyn Park

13

MASA Great Start Workshop IV
Marriott, Brooklyn Park

13

At Ruth's Table
Marriott, Brooklyn Park

14 - 15

MASA/MASE Spring Conference
Marriott, Brooklyn Park

29

MASA Offices Closed

May

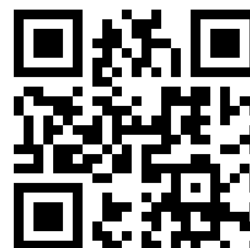
27

MASA Offices Closed

June

20-21

MASA Board of Directors Retreat
The Depot, Minneapolis



Stay Connected to MASA!

Follow MASA your way! Whether you like traditional Websites, blogging or social media, you can stay connected to the Minnesota Association of School Administrators!



MASA Web site: www.mnasa.org



Facebook: In search box, type MASA-
Minnesota Association of School
Administrators



Twitter: @MNAssocSchAdm



Gary's Typepad Blog: Voice of MN
Education

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