

# journal

minnesota school boards association

March–April 2021

VOL. 73 ISSUE 5



All-Star Advice

Truths Be Told

A Deep Dive into Changing the State Constitution  
on Education



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# CALENDAR

## MARCH 2021

- 3.....Negotiations Seminar (Part 2)
- 4.....Officers' Workshop (Part 2)
- 5.....Coffee & Conversation (Metro Minnesota)
- 5.....The Friday Chat Room
- 6.....Officers' Workshop (Part 2)
- 9.....Township Election Day (If applicable, no meetings or activities from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.)
- 12 .....Advocacy Month Webinar
- 14 .....MSBA Board of Directors' Meeting
- 18 .....MSBA Webinar Series: The MSBA Insurance Trust
- 19 .....Coffee & Conversation (Southern Minnesota)
- 19 .....Advocacy Month – Extended Friday Chat Room
- 26 .....Advocacy Month – Extended Friday Chat Room

## APRIL 2021

- 2.....The Friday Chat Room
- 7.....Phase III Workshop (Part 1)
- 8.....Phase III Workshop (Part 1)
- 9.....Coffee & Conversation (Central and Northern Minnesota)
- 9.....The Friday Chat Room
- 13 .....Phase III Workshop (Part 1)
- 14 .....Phase III Workshop (Part 2)
- 15 .....Phase III Workshop (Part 2)
- 15 .....MSBA Webinar Series: Legal Issues
- 16 .....The Friday Chat Room
- 19 .....MSBA Insurance Trust Meeting
- 20 .....Phase III Workshop (Part 2)
- 21 .....Phase IV Workshop (Part 1)
- 22 .....Phase IV Workshop (Part 1)
- 23 .....Coffee & Conversation (Metro Minnesota)
- 23 .....The Friday Chat Room
- 28 .....Phase IV Workshop (Part 2)
- 29 .....Phase IV Workshop (Part 2)
- 30 .....The Friday Chat Room

## MAY 2021

- 7.....Coffee & Conversation (Southern Minnesota)
- 7.....The Friday Chat Room
- 14 .....The Friday Chat Room
- 17 .....Legislative session ends
- 18 .....Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting
- 20 .....MSBA Webinar Series: Legislative Session Review
- 21 .....Coffee & Conversation (Central and Northern Minnesota)
- 21 .....The Friday Chat Room
- 31 .....Memorial Day (No meetings)

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*MSBA thanks art instructors  
Hannah Starke, Arnie Hamel,  
Michelle Dietz, Sarah Honeywell,  
and Stacey Ebert – and their  
Columbia Academy and Columbia  
Heights High School students  
(grades 6-12) – for sharing their art  
in this issue.*

**COVER ART:**  
*Alejandro M.S.*

*Contact MSBA's Bruce Lombard at  
blombard@mnmsba.org if you'd like  
to see your students' art displayed in  
a future MSBA Journal magazine.*

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



# Trust and Communication are Key in Getting Through Challenging Times

*By Michael Domin, MSBA President*

What an interesting time we live in. One year ago, school districts across the state shut down due to the pandemic. Districts had to come up with a plan to deliver education in a way for which most were not prepared. It was eye-opening and uncharted territory. We finished the year trying to focus on graduation, not knowing if ceremonies were going to be held on the football field or in the parking lot. The only thing we did know was that graduation would look much different than the year before.

As districts moved into this school year, we still faced uncertainty. We were trying to improve the distance learning from the spring before, but even with technology, we knew it would be difficult. Our student and staff safety came first, while still trying to deliver quality education. Through the many guidelines, face masks, switching learning models, and changes to extracurricular activities, districts adapted to make things work to the best of their ability. Districts became familiar with the word “pivot” – because it is what we have done all this school year.

If you attended the “At-Home Edition” of this year’s MSBA Leadership Conference, you had the chance to listen to our closing keynote speaker, Dr. Phil Gore. Dr. Gore talked about “governing with excellence, in the midst of a storm.” Well, folks, I think this unique time we are in can be compared to a storm. Dr. Gore also talked about lessons that I think every school board member can relate to:

1. Stay together.
2. Use what you have.
3. Trust, but challenge your instinct.
4. Take care of each other.

Dr. Gore told us about his extensive mountain climbing experience and being able to adapt and trust in others. This holds true for school board members. We are “climbing that mountain” right now, and we need to trust in each other to reach the top.

Communication is also a key component to get through times like we are currently experiencing. MSBA is here to support you. MSBA has communicated out all the latest

guidelines, legislative updates, and provided conversations with Governor Tim Walz. Since we can’t “network” in person, MSBA has also provided virtual Coffee & Conversations meetings, which have provided that “togetherness” and given us a nice way to keep connected with our fellow board members.

As we approach the end of this school year, we can look back and say we have learned a lot. Serving through times like this is tough, and it challenges us. Hopefully, we can take some of the changes we all have experienced and turn them into a positive change. I believe Dr. Gore when he said, “Leadership and success require adaptability.” Stay well!

---

*MSBA President Michael Domin is a member of the Crosby-Ironton School Board. Contact Michael at [mdomin@ci.k12.mn.us](mailto:mdomin@ci.k12.mn.us).*

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School boards articulate and pursue a community's hopes for its young people, and hiring your district's leader is a critical part of that pursuit. MSBA will help you hire not only a superintendent, but the **right** superintendent.



**Contact MSBA's Executive Search Service today!**

**Barb Dorn**

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*Majahg B.*

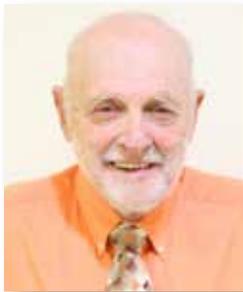
# All-Star Advice

It is more important to be a good listener than to have all the answers.

*By members of the 2021 MSBA All-State School Board*



*Lori Berg, Chisago Lakes*



*Linden Olson, Worthington*



*Kathryn Green, Austin*

At MSBA's School Board Workshop Series and conferences, we know that board members may learn just as much from the board members around them than they do from our sessions. It's part of the reason we have introduction time and conversations over lunch (or breakout rooms during virtual meetings).

In this time of pandemic, those opportunities aren't as abundant for new board members and others. So MSBA asked the members of our 2021 All-State School Board to give their best advice to board members – some advice is for new board members and some advice is to how to best work as a team to solve student achievement gaps.



*Andrea Cuene, Wayzata*



*Deb Ulm, Princeton*



Timothy T.



Peyton T.

## What is your best advice for new board members?

### Lori Berg, Chisago Lakes

During your first few months, take a breath and remember:

- There are many wonderful, dedicated, and smart people working inside and outside your school district who are willing to serve as a resource to you. Respect the roles and knowledge of others and do not be afraid to ask questions. Take advantage of the training opportunities offered through MSBA. The sessions are informative and give you an opportunity to connect with board members from other districts. You cannot do this job alone.
- It is more important to be a good listener than to have all the answers. Focus on what is best for students as you listen to concerns and ideas and assist in bringing about solutions and changes to improve the school district. Show respect to everyone you interact with. You cannot solve every problem immediately, or make everyone happy every time, but you can maintain mutual respect. Listen, consider varying viewpoints, show empathy, and work hard to solve problems and make improvements over time.
- Become familiar with your district's strategic plan and current goals. You will not be able to tackle all perceived problems or accomplish all the goals you brought with you immediately and expect to do it all well. The district goals and strategic plan provide a framework for focusing your time and effort, setting policy, and allocating resources. As you consider issues and make decisions,

ask yourself how they fit into the district's identified areas of focus.

### Linden Olson, Worthington

- Understand that the main roles of the school board are to hire the Superintendent, to set policy and goals, and to oversee that the policies and goals are carried out the way the board intends. Completing the Phase I, Phase II, Phase III, and Phase IV trainings offered by MSBA would be a good start.
- Familiarize yourselves with the strategic plan, mission statement, goals, policies, and other continuing documents of the district. This will help determine if and how items under consideration fit into the overall district plan.
- If you have questions about items on the board meeting agenda, ask other board members or the superintendent for answers. Board members who have been on the board may know the background and, if research is needed for the answer, the superintendent can provide it before or at the board meeting.

### Kathryn Green, Austin

Being a school board member is an incredible honor and responsibility. You have the ability to interact with and impact the youth of your community, cheering them on and being prideful in their accomplishments.

It is hard work rewarded with the knowledge that you can make a difference. Diligent attention to the needs of your district will provide an avenue of hope for the future. Enjoy the journey!



Mae S.



Natalie R.

### **Andrea Cuene, Wayzata**

I think the most difficult concept as a new board member is understanding your district's approach to governance versus management. While MSBA offers good guidance in their training on this issue, it seems each school board has their own traditions, expectations, and norms around governance versus management. The approach taken by your district may have an impact on how you communicate your questions or concerns, how you answer questions from your community, how you design policy, or your strategy to create the change you want to see in your schools.

I found I was more effective once I figured this out, but it is an ongoing question! Is this the work of the board? There is often a lot of gray area, so establishing some common ground and shared understanding of the role of the board is imperative. A good way to begin learning about your board's interpretation of governance versus management is to have coffee with each board member at the beginning of your term. These one-on-one conversations will build your confidence and build the foundation for effective board work.

### **Deb Ulm, Princeton**

- Be yourself: Be true to what you believe is right even when it is not the popular opinion.
- Listen: Be an intentional listener. Listen to your fellow

board members to see other sides to an issue and understand other perspectives.

- Find common ground: Realize first and foremost that everyone on the board has a desire to do what is best for kids.

## **How can boards best work as a team to close student achievement gaps?**

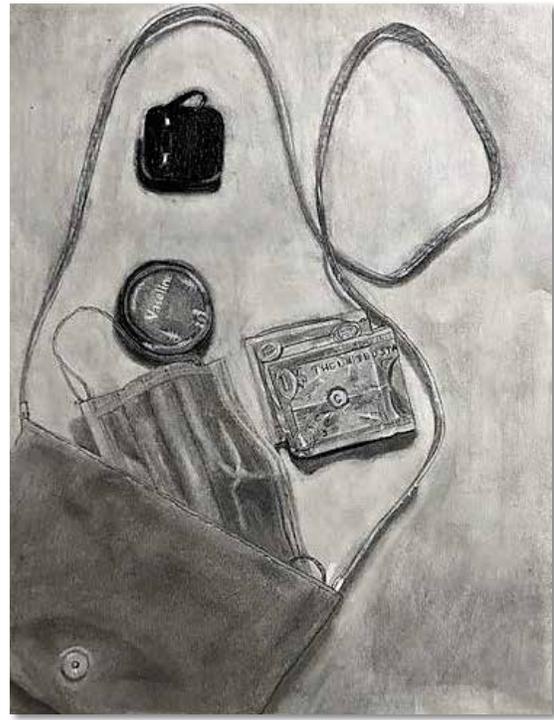
### **Lori Berg**

All children can learn and grow. To help all students find a successful path into their future, schools need to continue to pursue the personalization of instruction, providing academic instruction and intervention based on individual talents and needs. In addition, the persistent achievement gap calls for brave and innovative changes, and local school boards must help lead the way.

Our schools have been structured in much the same way for many years. Schedules, course offerings, curriculums, and the inadequate financial investment in schools have remained fairly constant. Since society benefits when all learners succeed, our school systems need to change to allow for different talents, learning modes, and pathways to successful futures.



*Natalie M.D.*



*Dasy I.*

We need to focus on advancing skills such as problem-solving, communication, and resource utilization, instead of focusing so much time and resources on testing a limited set of skills for all children. These changes require a consistent investment in education, along with the flexibility to be innovative. Schools need to advocate for sustainable and adequate funding so true innovation can occur.

In addition, closing the achievement gap requires districts to hire and retain a diverse and talented group of teachers. Teaching salaries need to be brought into alignment with degreed salaries outside the field of education. The achievement gap cannot be closed until schools are willing to change.

### **Deb Ulm**

The key is in the first half of this question – “work as a team.” When a school board is working as a team, great things can happen. The student achievement gap is a very complex issue, and it will take time and effort to narrow the gap.

- I think boards can work toward closing the achievement gap by keeping the issue on the forefront when making decisions. Circle back and ask yourself – will this help to close or widen the achievement gap?
- Boards also need to educate themselves and understand

what is behind the student achievement gap in their school district. Is it a lack of access to the internet or other resources? Is it a lack of parental involvement? Homelessness? Mental health issues? The list could go on and on, but when issues are identified, boards need to support the solutions to help close the gap for their students.

### **Andrea Cuene**

As a brand-new school board member, it was critical that I work hard to listen and learn everything I could about how things work in my district. That’s not always easy! When newly elected, I remember feeling pressure to take action on my campaign promises and establish my role as a contributing member. But I quickly realized that I did not know what I did not know ... which was a lot!

In addition to listening and learning all I could, it helped to be intentional about building relationships with other board members, the superintendent, and district administrators. Making sure every student has what they need requires a great deal of collaboration, critical thinking, background knowledge, effective communication, and patience. The school board pathway to building these positive outcomes is more successful and more fun when tackled in the context of positive and trusting relationships.

## Linden Olson

- Classroom teachers are the front line for this. Providing resources, including curriculum and professional development opportunities, to help them understand the causes and some of the options and strategies they have that can make a dent in the gap is the first step.
- Involving the community in helping struggling students can also help. Having the school involved by supplying community members with resources and training to help in after-school tutoring or mentoring programs can provide much needed support to some students who may not be able to get help at home or elsewhere.
- Board members can learn about the depth, the causes, and what others are doing to reduce the achievement gap by attending conventions, webinars or/and reading about equity in education.

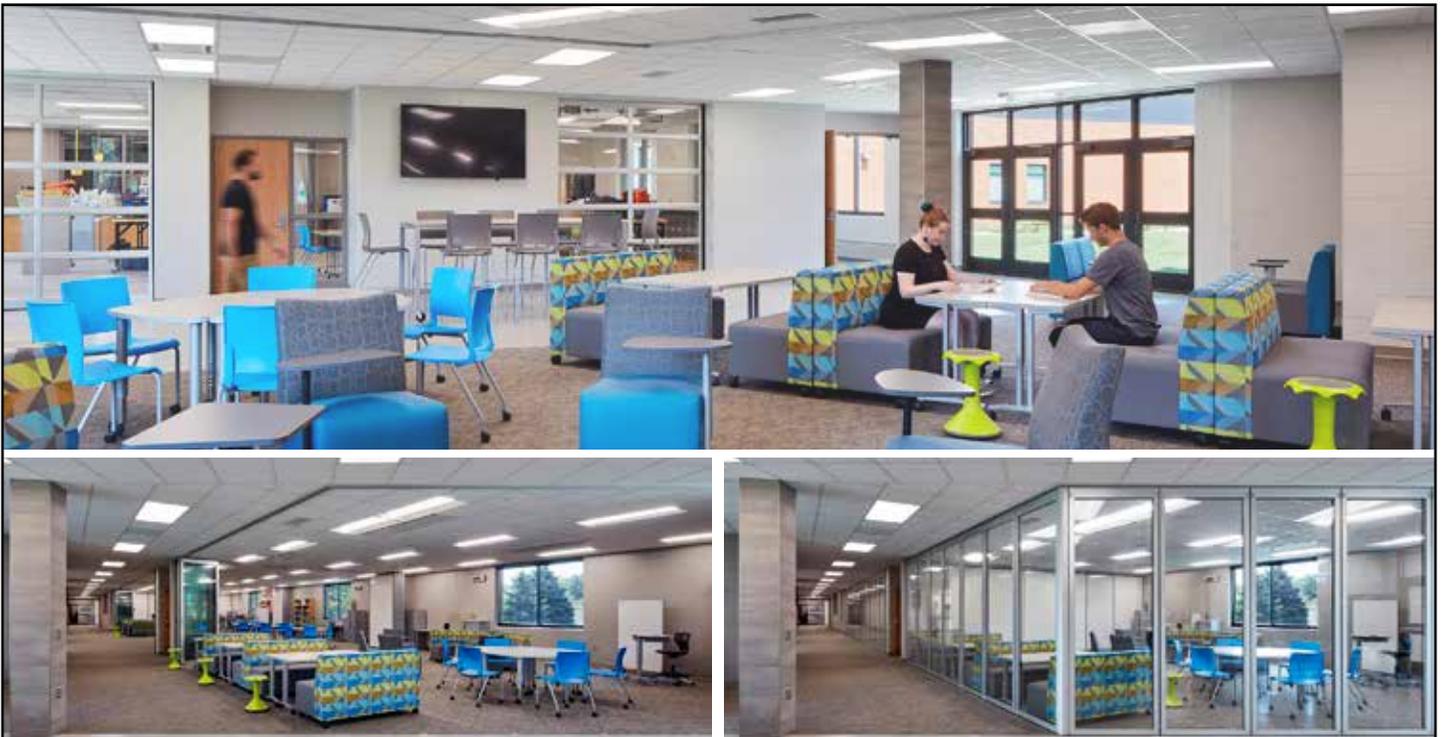
## Kathryn Green

The key to ensure every student has the learning supports they need to achieve is for a school board to have an appreciation for the individuality of your students. Each

one comes to our classes with unique circumstances. Some students have great talents, either apparent or underlying. Those talents can be in academics, the visual and performing arts, industrial, or a combination of them all.

A student's talents can be hampered by specific learning disabilities. Our students come to us with personal circumstances that can distract them from taking full advantage of all we have to offer – poverty, abuse, and neglect, along with family responsibilities. Some hardships a district can help mitigate. Others are beyond our commitment. So be prepared to be nimble and receptive to novel solutions to complex circumstances.

Continually ask questions of your district staff to be able to understand and clarify classic and developing needs that your students have. A school board has to understand and, to the best of their ability, support the plethora of needs in their district. A one size or structure of the educational experience delivered by our school districts will limit the realization of our students' abilities. A school board's job is enormous in scope and satisfaction when each child's talents are realized and achieved.



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# 2021 MSBA Honor Roll

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Andrea Cuene . . . . .	Wayzata
Kathryn Green . . . . .	Austin
Linden Olson . . . . .	Worthington
Deb Ulm . . . . .	Princeton

## 2021 MSBA Rising Star Award

Name	District
Curtis Johnson . . . . .	Roseville Area

## District Award of Distinction

*Awarded to a district having a majority of board members who have received a Directors' or President's Award.*

Menahga Public School District  
Rochester Public Schools

## Service Award – 35 Years

Name	District
Lynn Schurman . . . . .	ROCORI

## Service Award – 30 Years

Name	District
Cheryl Jechorek . . . . .	Brooklyn Center
Julie Peterson . . . . .	Moose Lake
Martha Van de Ven . . . . .	Orono
Dennis Dodge . . . . .	Park Rapids Area
Roy Nelson . . . . .	Red Lake

## Service Award – 20 Years

Name	District
Jim Christianson . . . . .	Badger
Ann Long Voelkner . . . . .	Bemidji Area
Cynthia Nord . . . . .	Blackduck
Christina Wilson . . . . .	Centennial
Robert Rahja . . . . .	Chisholm
Matthew Lemke . . . . .	Fergus Falls
Ken Anderson . . . . .	Foley
Sharon Kipka . . . . .	Foley
Kathy Zelinske . . . . .	Hayfield
Michele Kunz . . . . .	Intermediate District 287
Mike Sugden . . . . .	Kittson Central
Mark Johnson . . . . .	Kittson Central
Dawn Balow . . . . .	Lake City
Colleen Deutsch . . . . .	Luverne
Lisa Anderson-Reed . . . . .	Moose Lake
Karen Ann Kirschner . . . . .	Mora
Reed Engelstad . . . . .	Red Lake Falls
Wendy Felton . . . . .	South St. Paul
Victoria White . . . . .	Walker-Hackensack-Akeley
Maydra A. Maas . . . . .	Westbrook-Walnut Grove

## Leadership Development Certificates

*Awarded to members who have completed the School Board Workshop Series: Phases I-IV.*

Name	District
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Beth Beebe . . . . .	Bloomington

Heather Starks . . . . .	Bloomington
Mia Olson . . . . .	Bloomington
Amanda Reineck . . . . .	Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose
Eric Miller . . . . .	Burnsville-Eagan-Savage
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Melissa Donovan . . . . .	Chisago Lakes
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Jill Lofald . . . . .	Duluth
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Veronica Stoltz . . . . .	Eden Prairie
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David Marty . . . . .	Grand Rapids
Teddy Saxton . . . . .	International Falls
Jackie Horsman . . . . .	Kingsland
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# Truths Be Told

School board members have much to consider when making informed decisions.

*By Paula O'Loughlin, MSBA Associate Director of Board Development*



*Paula O'Loughlin*

In February 2016, tempers flared within families, decades-long friendships became fractured, and breakrooms around the world were suddenly filled with a nonstop cacophony of opinions and assertions to an answer that nearly took down the internet: was the dress blue and black, or was it white and gold?

Even as neuroscientists shared detailed explanations describing wavelengths, color constancy, and reflectance to help us better understand why we each saw what we did,

many of us were simply not having it. It seemed more energy was expended clinging to our own beliefs and considerably less went into seeking to understand the contradictory view. Respective camps doubled down on why their viewpoint was not only the right one, but the only one. Discussions quickly devolved into personal attacks and outright hostility, which only deepened the divide. The aggressive nature of the discourse virtually eliminated any genuine opportunity for people to engage in a productive discussion, let alone a chance to



*Jaely Q.M.*

listen, understand, and learn from one another.

School board members are consistently presented with contradictory beliefs, opposing opinions, and contrasting points of view. Being able to reconcile conflicting narratives is a metacognitive function of our brain's ability to engage in high order thinking that involves extensive and sustained thought about how other people think.<sup>1</sup>

The myriad issues confronting school boards today are profoundly complex, deeply systemic, and often highly politicized. What might happen if we created space for contradictory beliefs, sought to understand them through a lens of compassion and empathy, and utilized our creative and inclusive thinking to make more informed decisions to positively impact more students? Could allowing multiple, opposing views to all stand true help expand our thinking to alter how we see

the issue before us, and even how we see we one another? And could it yield greater outcomes to the critical issues that are before us?

Perhaps the most personal example of this I can share is of my experience as an adoptee. Two contradictory beliefs I have come to hold in equal measure about my adoption is that it is both an enormous blessing and a tremendous loss. I give thanks to God every day for my amazing parents and their unconditional love and support, for all that I have been given, and for the truly beautiful life I have. I also mourn the separation from my Korean parents, the loss of my birth country and its language and culture, and the absence of any knowledge of why I was relinquished and history of where and from whom I came. Allowing each belief to coexist as true has not always been easy, but it has expanded my capacity to love and understand, which

in turn has brought more into my life than I could have ever imagined.

We may never reach consensus on the color of the dress, but we can endeavor to better understand another's belief and seek to listen with the same passion in which we desire to be heard.<sup>2</sup> I believe there is a shared purpose in wanting to support our students so each one may flourish and shine in all their brilliance. It is my fervent hope and belief that the more each one of us can recognize, hold, and understand multiple truths, the greater impact and farther reach we will have to ensure each child is given what they need to live to their fullest promise and potential.

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*Paula O'Loughlin is the MSBA Associate Director of Board Development. Contact Paula at [poloughlin@mmsba.org](mailto:poloughlin@mmsba.org).*

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<sup>1</sup> Kuhn D., "Why Is Reconciling Divergent Views a Challenge?" *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 2020;29(1):27-32. doi:10.1177/0963721419885996

<sup>2</sup> Harriet Lerner



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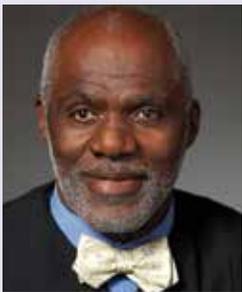


# A Deep Dive into Changing the State Constitution on Education

**MSBA is in the process of establishing focus groups of school board members from around the state to gather information to help formulate our position. The three articles on the following pages highlight some of the issues surrounding a move to change the constitution. Justice Alan Page and Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis President Neel Kashkari focus on why changing the constitution would help. Political Science Professor David Schultz focuses on how there are better things we could do to close achievement gaps. Finally, a group of superintendents have written an article about some changes they'd like to see before a constitutional amendment goes forward.**

## Quality Education Should Be a Civil Right

*By Alan Page and Neel Kashkari*



*Alan Page*



*Neel Kashkari*

The most powerful and positive changes to advance justice in our nation's history have come by amending the U.S. Constitution to establish or expand civil rights. From the First Amendment guaranteeing freedom of speech, religion, and assembly, to the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery to the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote, civil rights have transformed our nation over time.

That is why we propose amending Minnesota's constitution to make education an individual civil right guaranteeing each child a quality public education. By enshrining

education as a civil right in the constitution, we will establish that meeting the educational needs of all children is our state's highest priority for generations to come.

Our Constitution embodies our core beliefs and commitments and is the springboard from which our systems grow. Currently, Minnesota's constitution only guarantees children access to an "adequate" system of public education. What is a system that is on average adequate? It is a system that provides excellent education for some while utterly failing others.

Other states have updated their constitutional education clauses, but

# THE GREAT EDUCATION AMENDMENT DEBATE

Minnesota's hasn't changed since it was adopted in 1857, when slavery was still legal in many states. We shouldn't be surprised at Minnesota's terrible education disparities; our education system is performing precisely as designed — for an era that has long since passed.

We've met with thousands of parents, educators, students, community leaders, and lawmakers, and we've heard many questions about the amendment.

People ask: Aren't we missing the point? They say school performance is driven by socioeconomic forces and family dysfunction and that amending the constitution will not address educational outcomes due to those issues. We disagree.

The notion that we have to solve poverty and "fix" families before we can provide children the education they deserve assumes that poor children and children from dysfunctional families can't learn. Again, we disagree. By making quality public education a civil right, the amendment would elevate our responsibility to teach the children who are in the classroom and not just the children some would like to have in the classroom. It would require us to teach all children — poor children, wealthy children, Indigenous children, children of color, rural and urban children, and children with disabilities, as well as mainstream children. The amendment would drive an individualized approach to learning that is long overdue.

Some worry about equity and ask if it will give courts too much power or only benefit wealthy families. The courts will not decide if there is a right or the contours of that right; the amendment — enacted by the people of Minnesota — would define that right. This argument also ignores the history of civil rights, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, a

case in which a poor family changed the course of a nation. Even though the U.S. Supreme Court abandoned educational equity in *San Antonio v. Rodriguez*, that doesn't mean we have to or should abandon it. Amending Minnesota's constitution gives us the ability to stand up for educational equity.

The power of civil rights is that, if one family fights for change, everyone will benefit. To the question of whether the courts will have too much authority: The courts are always a last resort. They exist to, among other things, protect the rights of individuals.

Some ask if measuring against a uniform standard would exacerbate the challenges that students, families, and teachers alike have with standardized tests. Standardized tests are a measurement tool, not a uniform achievement standard. They are not reflective of what our children need to succeed.

Some ask: How do you define and measure quality? The real measure of quality is in the proposed language, a "quality public education that fully prepares [children] with the skills necessary for participation in the economy, our democracy, and society." Meeting this threshold will require education systems to engage families, educators, lawmakers, businesses, and communities to determine what skills the students they serve need to thrive in our economy, democracy, and society.

This is where families, tribes, educators, businesses, communities, and lawmakers will have to work together to modernize what it is our children need to thrive in today's economy, democracy, and society — one that is much different than it was in 1857.

Others worry this amendment would reduce funding for schools. If anything, this proposal does the opposite. It

makes ensuring quality public schools a paramount duty of the state — meaning the state would have no higher responsibility than supporting quality public schools. Nothing else in the Minnesota Constitution is identified as a paramount duty. Shouldn't quality public education for our children be our state's highest priority? We think so.

Our proposal is a fundamentally different approach to reform. It is not nipping at the edges, nor is it top down. By creating a civil right for all children to receive a quality public education and making fulfilling that right Minnesota's highest priority, our proposal will literally, and finally, put children first. It will finally recognize them as the essential stakeholders they are and require that the system and our educators meet their needs.

Our proposal does not prescribe class sizes, curriculum, or teaching methods. Our proposal leaves it to educators, families, and administrators to decide how best to teach their children and gives them the power to make the changes they know are needed. By focusing on educating each individual child, we can inspire innovations in how we teach, the resources we provide, and the ways we measure progress and engage with children and families. Updating our state constitution can transform our education system over time to one that promotes justice and meets the needs of all Minnesotans today and for generations to come.

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*Neel Kashkari is the president of the Minnesota Federal Reserve. Justice Alan Page is an author and founder of the Page Education Foundation. To respond to this article, you can contact Neel or Alan at [president.kashkari@mpls.frb.org](mailto:president.kashkari@mpls.frb.org) or connect with the independent campaign at <https://ourchildrenmn.com>.*



*Doua Chee L.*

## For a Quality Education Constitutional Amendment, It Must be Improved

*By Jay Haugen, Robert Wedl, Dennis Carlson, and Joseph Brown*



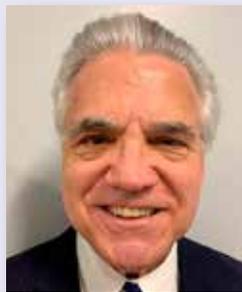
*Jay Haugen*



*Robert Wedl*



*Dennis Carlson*



*Joseph Brown*

We are writing in support of a constitutional amendment to guide education for Minnesota's citizens in the 21st century. After 150 years of a state constitution that merely provides for a "uniform and standard education," we applaud the idea of an amendment that provides each student with the right to a quality education. When reviewing the vision and mission statements of every single Minnesota school, it is clear that is what school boards aspire to as well. But the results show there is work to be done, especially with students of color. We suggest that school boards be bold in fulfilling their missions.

The current constitutional language was adopted when an eighth-grade education was all that most citizens needed. In our then agricultural and industrial economy, livable wage jobs were readily available with

minimal academic skills needed. That was then. It is past time for the constitution to provide a 21st century vision – and also to direct the state to finance it.

Today, most of our growth is with students of color – many of whom are new immigrants. The cultures of the world are coming to Minnesota. While we welcome and learn from our new citizens, we must also close the horrendous achievement gap which exists, in addition to getting more for and from all students. The same system of education of the 19th century and the 20th century won't do that, and neither will continuously setting the same goals.

In 1983, "A Nation at Risk" recognized that change was needed. Ever since, we have been trying to fix the current system. Yet many students are left behind with minimal

# THE GREAT EDUCATION AMENDMENT DEBATE

change in sight. In the 21st century, that is not acceptable. The current system needs revision and that begins with constitutional direction.

The proposed amendment drafted by retired Justice Alan Page and Minneapolis Federal Reserve President Neel Kashkari provides a good direction and a basis on which to have a dialogue. We support making education a civil right; making a “quality” education the vision; adding a purpose for education that learners be able to participate in our economy, democracy and society; expanding the responsibility from only the Legislature to all of government; and making education a paramount state responsibility. We wish for every school board to embrace this on behalf of the children and youth in their jurisdiction.

The above notwithstanding, we believe the amendment must be improved.

## **Get rid of uniform achievement standards**

The proposed language has quality as being “measured against uniform achievement standards set forth by the State.” We think this language will continue a “one-size-fits-all” education which pretends there is one platform for success and one set of knowledge and skills for everyone. This policy is what has put boards, students and educators in a box for so long; it is why no matter how powerful the effort and no matter what we invest, we can find no way to approach success for all, and the gaps remain as entrenched as ever. Just one example – on the high school MCAs, less than 60 percent of students are proficient in mathematics as defined by the state. If our boards really adhered to that standard, our state graduation rate would be at that level. That is the result of “uniform standards” for all. Such standards fit no one.

Some talk about how broken our system of education is. Actually, it is not broken. It was designed to get the results it is getting, and no effort will

ever be powerful enough to overcome it as it stands. It is the system that fails students. What we need is a new system focused on personalizing learning for each student. In *Skeen v. State of Minnesota*, the Supreme Court ruled that indeed Minnesota’s financing of education was adequate because all districts were meeting the low (adequate) state requirements consistent with our constitution. We have a system that works well for some, adequate for others, but doesn’t work for many, nor is it designed to.

## **Move from the Industrial Model to Personalized Learning**

The amendment must define quality in a way that provides the state with the guidance and flexibility it needs to create new systems of education. Quality requires changing from an industrial model based on a single set of discrete knowledge and skills to one that is student-centered and personalized. Quality includes learning models that motivate students allowing each student to develop and use their unique gifts to better themselves and the world.

Imagine the vast array of ways to make a living that are open in the 21st century. Compare this to the relatively narrow range of what even the most comprehensive current education system offers. Students whose strengths, talents and passions align with the school’s menu are supported. But those whose strengths, passions and contributions to society lie outside of school find little support. Yet all are required to meet the numerous expectations of our current system. A 2016 Gallup Poll of about 3,000 students tells us what we already know: Only 34 percent of students in grade 12 said they were engaged with school and that percentage would be even lower were it not for all the students who had already dropped out by grade 12.

A new system of education will motivate every student to create their own learning pathway based on their aspirations bringing themselves and

how they learn into the process. Indeed, students welcome high expectations, and every student has “the sky is the limit” learning potential, but in different areas. Yet we require the same standards for all. Yes, there are things all need to learn such as basic skills, the English language and knowledge to be productive citizens.

We need to put these basics in their proper place – each as one part of a quality education. While accountability is key, we must change it from being based on how all students perform on some common targets to how students perform on their personalized expectations. We must change those targets from MCAs predictive of college success to predictive of the students’ personalized educational goals.

A quality education for all is what is needed now. We suggest that boards, educators and communities believe in their ability to provide a quality education for every student.

We propose that the constitutional amendment must guide us toward a quality education consistent with what we include in this paper. Our most precious citizens, our children and youth, deserve a quality education, not just an adequate one. It is time for Minnesota to lead the way once again.

---

*Jay Haugen is the Executive Director of Ed Visions and a retired superintendent at Farmington Area Public Schools.*

*Robert Wedl is a former Minnesota Commissioner of Education.*

*Dennis Carlson is a retired superintendent of Anoka-Hennepin Schools and Minnesota Transitions Charter School.*

*Joseph Brown is the current superintendent of Fairmont Area Schools.*

*Wedl, Haugen and Carlson facilitate the “Superintendents Innovation Discussion Group.”*



*Majid A.*

## We Need Political Will, Not a Constitutional Amendment

*By Professor David Schultz, Hamline University*



*David Schultz*

Minnesota has a race problem. The death of George Floyd and the reaction to it proves that. Among the persistent racial problems in the state are the educational disparities between whites and BIPOC. Addressing these disparities requires serious public policies and political will, not feel-good symbolic action.

A proposed education constitutional amendment by Minnesota Supreme Court Justice Alan Page and Minneapolis Federal Reserve Board President Neel Kashkari, however well-intentioned, is exactly that

— a symbolic gesture that will not necessarily address the disparities and instead, perhaps, make them worse.

The Twin Cities is one of the most racially segregated metropolitan areas in the nation. The state's racial financial wealth gap is the worst in the nation. The racial incarceration gap is among the worst. There is a persistent racial health care outcomes disparity that is among the worst in America. More than 20 years ago I worked with John Powell at the University of Minnesota and we issued a report documenting the persistent racial and economic

segregation in Minnesota. The recently released House Select Committee on Racial Justice Report to the Legislature catalogues these problems, and also cites the educational disparities in the state. Among so many measures Minnesota ranks among the bottom when it comes to racial issues. The same is true with K-12 education.

Nationally, litigation over educational racial segregation started when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) that separate but

# THE GREAT EDUCATION AMENDMENT DEBATE

equal, was unconstitutional. The hope was this was the beginning of the end to racial discrimination and educational disparities. It was not. It produced massive political fights, white flight, and in some cases, further entrenchment of disparities, partially reinforced by government action that resulted in a new racial segregation that overlapped with class, producing concentrated poverty neighborhoods that aggravated the old segregation. It also led to more litigation.

The Supreme Court exited the battle for educational equality when it ruled in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973) that educational funding disparities did not violate the U.S. Constitution. It also issued several decisions that eased federal oversight or enforcement of desegregation. Reformers shifted their attention to state litigation.

All 50 states have constitutional clauses that provide some guarantee of free public schools. The language varies across states, but like many, Minnesota's original 1857 Constitution in Article XIII, section 1, called for a "general and uniform system of public schools ... throughout the state." This language remains the same today. Litigants have used state constitutional clauses to address educational racial discrimination. Then there was a second wave of litigation to promote equal funding, then a third to demand adequate funding. Nationally and in Minnesota this litigation promoted some gains, but the problems persisted. Perhaps, as Page and Kashkari presume, the problem is the constitutional language — change the law and the state Legislature will have to do something or else the courts will step in.

Lawyers have a lot of faith in the law. We think it is a vehicle of change, that somehow changing the language of law will affect social and political change. In some cases, yes, but America's history with race shows limits

to the law. Racism may be a structural feature of our society that textual changes to the Constitution can only partially change.

The achievement gap is not simply a problem of school funding. It is part of a complex process of racial and economic segregation in housing and neighborhoods. It is also a product of wealth, income, and health disparities. Students of color are more impacted by these problems than are whites. Long ago educators pointed out that school achievement is driven as much, if not more, by non-school factors such as them. It is hard to learn when you are hungry, homeless, or because parents are working multiple shifts or unable to afford day care. The constitutional amendment ignores these issues, taking a narrow view that changing the constitution fixes the schools while ignoring the other determinates of education achievement.

A second problem with the Page and Kashkari amendment is that it measures equal achievement by way of standardized test scores. Overwhelming research already documents the racial and class biases built into these tests. Diane Ravich, one of the most astute education scholars in America, points to how from *No Child Left Behind*, under President George W. Bush, the push for standardized testing has proven to be highly flawed. Teachers are forced to teach to the test and curriculum limits learning to rote activity so that students do well on these exams. There is little evidence that the standardized tests have addressed racial disparities.

The amendment puts all the energy into changing the Constitution, pushing the real problems down the road. The language is not a self-executing amendment, but it will require legislative action to define and achieve "the skills necessary for participation in the economy, our democracy, and society." The language is so vague that it leaves it up to a legislature to conclude almost anything.

In response, supporters of the amendment could argue that if the Legislature punts on the issue, the courts can step in. It is not clear that this approach is desirable, and it leaves policy formulation up to litigation — not a strategy necessarily based on promoting overall sound educational policy. Also, who knows how and what a future Minnesota Supreme Court might conclude. The track record with current state constitutional educational clause litigation can hardly be described as a shining success, regardless of the wording.

Stripping the language of uniformity from the current Constitution does run the risk of opening the door to more privatized education and educational inequities. The Florida Supreme Court in *Bush v. Holmes*, 919 So.2d. 392 (Fla. 2006) used the uniformity clause with language identical to Minnesota's to strike down a voucher system in that state. Take away a uniformity clause and one increases the risk of undermining public schools. All of this is additional to evidence that charter schools have exacerbated segregation, and at best there is mixed evidence that the school choice models have improved educational quality in Minnesota or internationally.

Finally, the amendment takes the pressure off the Legislature to act. Adopt the amendment and send it off to the voters. If they adopt it great but if they reject it — and the odds are against passing constitutional amendments — they can say they tried to do something but the voters said no.

Overall, we do not need a new constitutional amendment to address educational disparities. We need political will and no amendment is going to provide that.

---

*David Schultz is a Professor of Political Science and Legal Studies at Hamline University in St. Paul. You can contact David at [dschultz@hamline.edu](mailto:dschultz@hamline.edu).*



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Old White Hawks logo.



New White Hawks logo.



The new White Hawks mascot.

# So Much More Than a Logo

## Eight hidden benefits of a brand strategy for school districts

By Mary Pat McNeil, MP+G Marketing Solutions

So what is all the fuss about branding? Why would you undertake another strategic process if you've already gone through strategic planning? Aren't your mission and a brand proposition the same thing? You already have your mission, vision, and value statements all wrapped up and communicated to your staff and stakeholders. Technically, you and your school district are good to go for the next three to five years, ready to apply your strategic plan into your day-to-day operations. Or is there more?

Yes, there is more. A brand strategy can benefit your school district — in ways you might not have imagined — and should be a key part of your strategic communications toolkit. Let's take a look at a few quick branding case studies illustrating real-life benefits.

### How Westonka Gained its Edge and Won Over Voters through Strategic Brand Communications

Westonka Public Schools Superintendent Kevin Borg knew there was work to do to prepare for a pending referendum — that was two and half years out. He was relatively new to his position and had inherited a district that was in statutory operating debt. Although parents were fairly supportive, the greater community was lackluster at best about their support of the schools.

Public relations weren't helped by the fact that the local paper was not staffed up to cover student success stories — there was only spotty sports coverage at best — and negative word of mouth suggested their schools didn't stack up to neighboring districts. One rumor went so far as to say their graduates couldn't even get into the University of Minnesota. It didn't matter that none of this was true, but it

also didn't help that their football team hadn't won a game in years. School spirit and community unity needed some work.

The district decided to tell their own story loud and proud. To do this, the district implemented a strategic brand communications campaign based on key messages that reinforced the district's strengths. Westonka distinguished themselves through a new tagline: "Small school advantages. Big school opportunities. Real-life success stories." All of the tactics employed reinforced a point of differentiation from the neighboring districts that we called "The Westonka Edge."

These messages were embedded throughout the district's news stories, website, and in the newly created weekly Constant Contact newsletter. With articles featuring student achievements in academics, athletics, and the arts, along with others that specifically demonstrated district fiscal responsibility, the newsletter was made available to the entire community. The district also updated the athletics logo from an out-of-date, unrefined mark to a dynamic new White Hawks logo and mascot.

Westonka passed that operating levy in 2011 and a subsequent bond referendum in 2016. Over the years, its football team has also improved its record. In fact, today Westonka ranks No. 13 in U.S. News and World Report's Best Minnesota High Schools.

### How Kaleidoscope Charter School Reimagined its Future by Re-envisioning its Brand

Kaleidoscope Public Charter Schools was looking for an edge to set themselves apart from neighboring public and



Old Kaleidoscope logo.



**KALEIDOSCOPE**  
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New Kaleidoscope logo and tagline.



Dynamic new website.

private schools. They knew they needed a clear, consistent message and image — something that would resonate with parents in their target audience and was true to their program offering with a unique style and personality — which became “A Welcoming Learning Environment ... where everyone knows your name.”

They embarked on a brand strategy process that refreshed not only their entire look but provided insight and clarity into who they were and how they wanted to grow. Their brand process helped define what types of students they wanted to attract and what staffing they needed to accomplish their goals. It allowed them to leave behind programming and thought processes that were not in alignment and to focus on areas that reinforced their brand promise. In short, they were able to reimagine the education they wanted to offer, who they wanted to be, and how they wanted to be perceived.

“The brand strategy process helped our administration team define who we are and what differentiates us from other school districts,” said Brett Wedlund, former executive director of the Kaleidoscope Charter School. “Through the process, we got to know what makes us unique in the educational marketplace — developing a brand strategy and identity that truly reflects our personality.”

### How Central Public Schools Plan to Stand Out from the Competition with a Comprehensive Brand Strategy

Central Public Schools in Norwood Young America is setting out to revamp its brand strategy. Fresh off a successful 2019 operating levy and diving into a new strategic planning process this winter, Superintendent Tim

Schochenmaier is also in the first phase of developing a brand strategy for his district.

Located in the fastest-growing ZIP code in the state with housing developments popping up all around and throughout his once sleepy little district, he feels now is a crucial time to create a distinctive brand for his schools. With competitive, high-profile neighboring districts and a local public charter school sometimes more than 4 to 5 miles closer to families in his district than his own buildings, open enrollment makes student recruitment a challenge.

“Defining our personality, our strengths, and our core messages is key to creating a distinctive brand for Central Schools in the marketplace,” observes Schochenmaier. “We need to tell our story not just to attract new students and retain staff, but to help us determine how we grow into what we envision Central Schools can be.” He continued, “In order to tell the Central story, it will be important not just to know what to say but also how to say it. That’s where the strategic brand process comes into play. From initial development to the actual launch, we will learn how to not only talk the talk, but walk the walk and truly begin to bring the Central brand to life.”



Current outdated logo mark.  
New identity coming April 2021.

### Eight Hidden Benefits of Branding or Rebranding Your School

What real-life benefits do these case studies show? Although a new logo design is easily the most visual benefit, equally if not more important are other less obvious gains that can be directly attributed to a well-developed brand strategy.

1. Your well-defined brand strategy reveals all of the ways and places your district comes into contact with your key audiences.
2. A well-crafted brand promise motivates your staff, students, and parents; creating motivated brand ambassadors that help increase school pride.
3. Raised perceptions and increased school and community pride will help boost student retention and staff recruitment opportunities.
4. Your communications plan and tactics will align with your organization’s strategic goals — increasing credibility and trust.

5. What and how you communicate will become evident.
6. Your staff will be able to consistently explain who you are — what makes your school different, what you do best, and what sets your district apart.
7. You will have a clear vision for how you approach programming, operations, hiring, and future growth opportunities.
8. You can easily measure success by benchmarking how perceptions about your district change.

In short, you will be building a resilient brand — a brand that will grow with your organization and withstand the test of time.

### Where is Your District in the Branding Process?

After reading about these other districts' successful experiences with branding, you might want to ask yourself a few questions. Are you looking to:

- Communicate more clearly and consistently?
- Improve recognition? And raise your district's profile?
- Build trust in your district's leadership and fiscal responsibility?
- Create awareness for your student achievements and successes?
- Provide a common narrative for your district?
- Boost school spirit and community pride?
- Better align your operations, programming, curriculum, and staffing with your mission and vision?
- Increase student retention and attract new enrollment?
- Measure your brand and communications effectiveness?

If you answered yes to any of these—and before you update that tired old logo, consider looking into a brand strategy for your district. The hidden benefits of a resilient brand are well worth the investment.

To learn more about the branding process, here are some helpful resources:

- "Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind" by Al Ries and Jack Trout
- "What does your corporate brand stand for?" by Stephen A. Greyser and Mats Urde, Harvard Business Review
- "Building Strong Brands" by David A. Aaker
- "Confessions of an Advertising Man" by David Ogilvy

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*Mary Pat McNeil is a Brand + Content Marketing Strategist for MP+G Marketing Solutions—building resilient brands. Mary Pat can be reached at [mp@mpgmarketingsolutions.com](mailto:mp@mpgmarketingsolutions.com).*

### What exactly is a brand strategy?

A brand strategy serves as a guide (a filter and lens) for organizational decision-making and what and how your district communicates at every touchpoint. When you have a fully developed brand strategy, you will benefit from a complete messaging platform that supports your communications planning and implementation.

### What makes up a brand messaging platform?

- Your brand positioning statement along with messaging components of your brand strategy make up your brand platform.
- A brand messaging platform is essential to have in place before thinking about logo design. These elements will help guide all of your future content development.
- Positioning is the place your district holds in the hearts and minds of your families and prospective families. It is what distinguishes you from your competitors.
- A clear vision of your brand personality will guide your choice of words, actions, colors, and typography.
- Brand touchpoints are all of the ways and all of the places your district comes in contact with your audiences: staff, parents, students, realtors, and community members.
- Key messages provide the framework for what you will say, and sample copy can be used to consistently communicate those messages.
- A tagline is your outward brand statement — a short, memorable phrase that captures your personality and unique selling proposition. It connects your students and families to your brand.
- A style guide outlines the rules of use for your brand elements to protect and keep your branding consistent.



*Kate S.*

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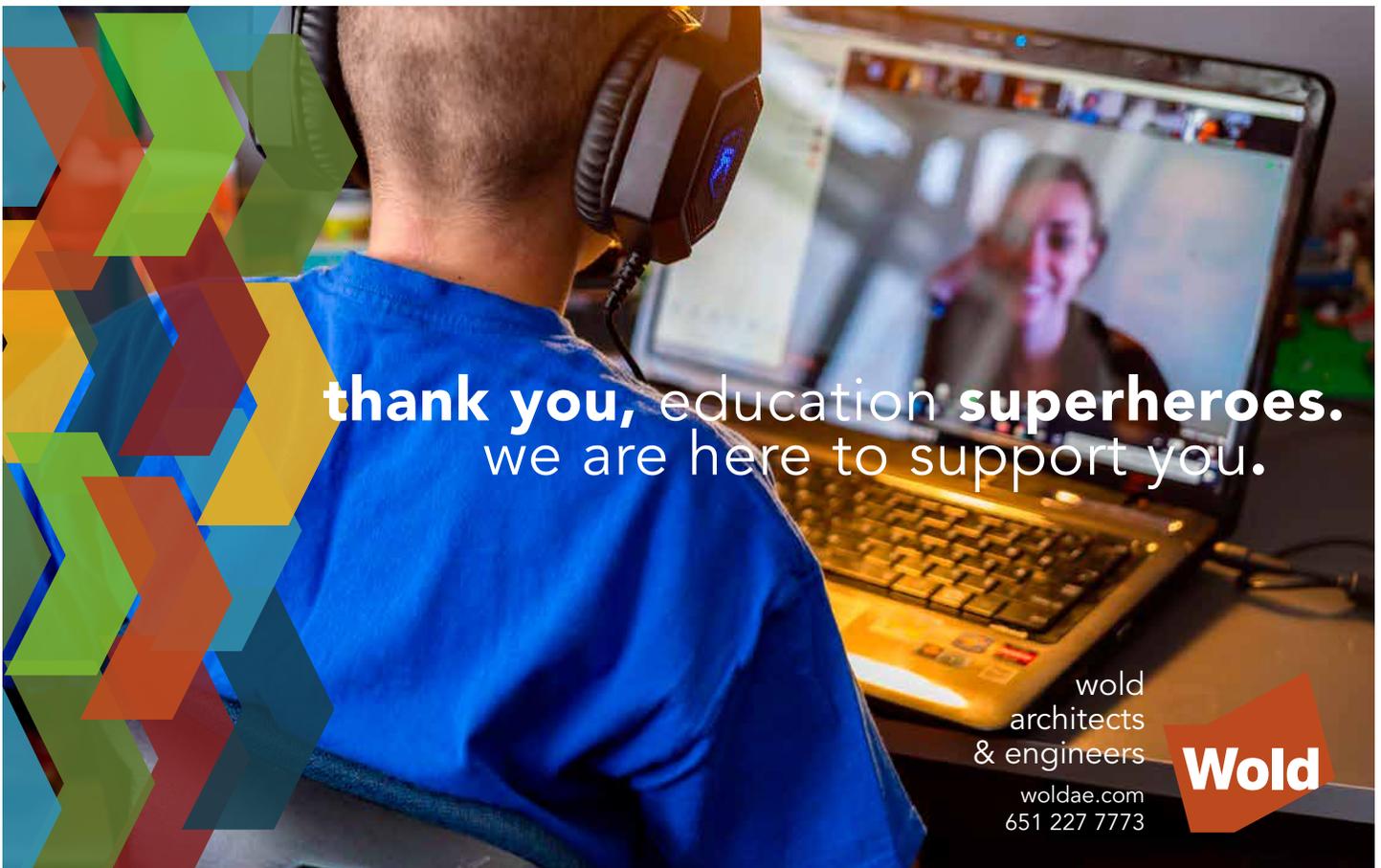


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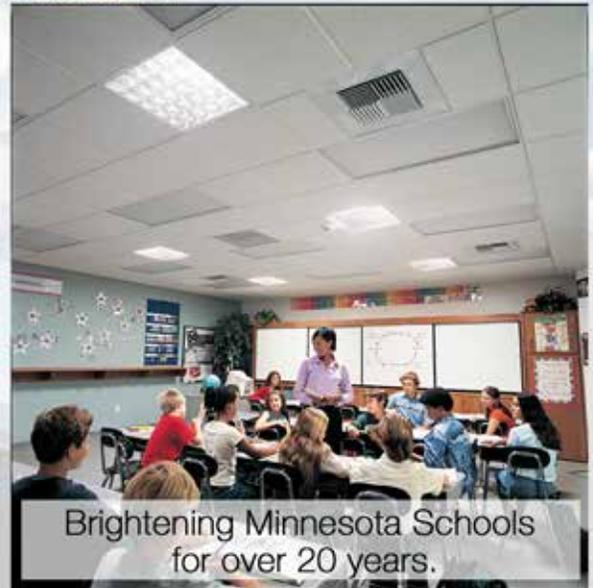
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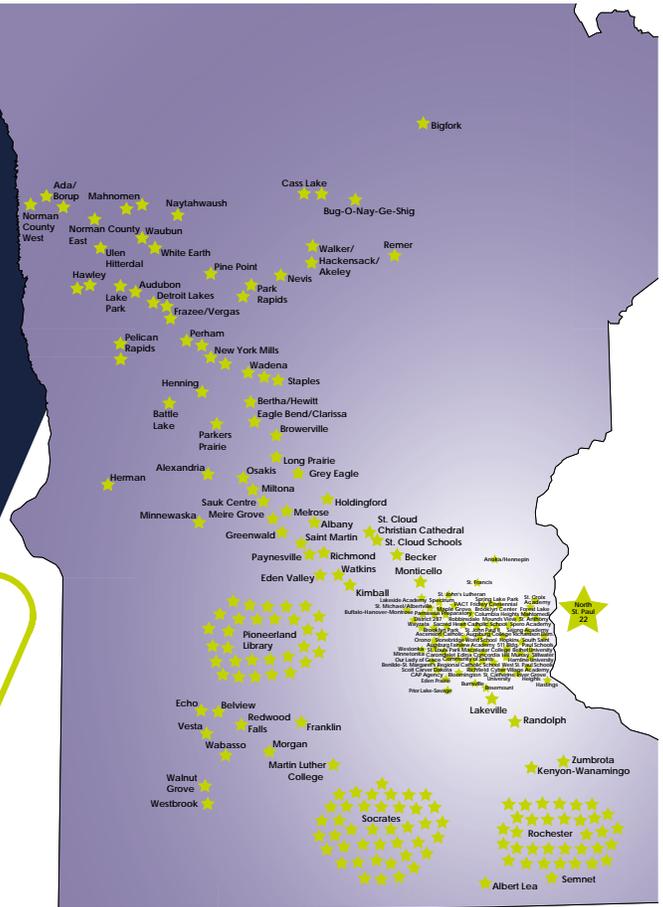
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# An Agenda is Nothing More than a Plan to Efficiently Accomplish the Board's Business

By Terence Morrow, MSBA Director of Legal and Policy Services

School board members and administrators often raise questions regarding board meeting agendas. MSBA/MASA Model Policy 203.5 — School Board Meeting Agenda — explains that an agenda helps “ensure that the school board can accomplish its business as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.” Under this policy, the superintendent and the school board chair collaborate to prepare an agenda, which is circulated to board members before the meeting.

Perhaps the best way to consider an agenda is to think of it as a plan. An agenda has been described as an order of business setting forth the sequence in which a board will handle items during the course of the meeting.

Conceptualizing an agenda as a plan or sequence of items reminds us that an agenda is not intended to be an ironclad document once it is circulated to board members and shared with the public. Like a plan, a meeting agenda may be changed as circumstances demand. A school board meeting agenda is not a legal document. It is the meeting minutes (or “proceedings”) that are legally required and must meet specified conditions.

At a school board meeting's start, it is common for a school board to adopt the

agenda. During this step, one or more board members may move to amend the agenda — to add or to delete items for consideration. Once the agenda is adopted, it can be amended during a meeting only by a two-thirds vote.

While an agenda may be amended at a meeting, board members should keep in mind that staff, students, and the community may not be aware when new items are added to a meeting agenda. Care should be taken to limit agenda amendments to unanticipated items that are noncontroversial or which must be discussed in a timely manner.

It may be best to look at your board's process for adding items to the agenda. In Henry Roberts' world, the board chair works as a servant to ensure all board members are able to ask that items are placed on the agenda before it is sent out.

An exception to the general rules concerning agendas arises under Minnesota law for special meetings. Under Minnesota Statutes 13D.04, a school board wishing to hold a special meeting “shall post written notice of the date, time, place, and purpose of the meeting” (emphasis added). The school board may not amend the agenda for a special meeting to include items that are not within

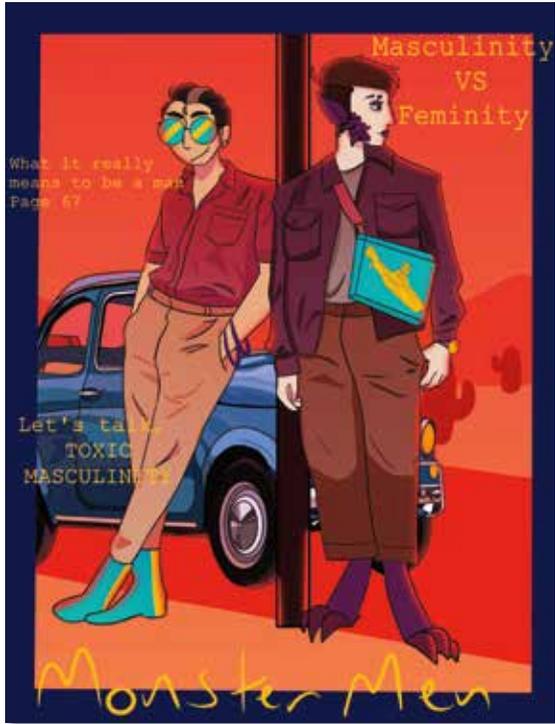
“the purpose” stated in the special meeting notice.

School board meetings often include a consent agenda. MSBA/MASA Model Policy 203.6 explains that a consent agenda includes items that “usually do not require discussion or explanation prior to school board action, are noncontroversial and/or similar in content, or are those items which have already been discussed and/or explained and do not require further discussion or explanation.” Before the vote to approve the consent agenda, a single board member may remove an item for separate discussion and consideration.

Minnesota school boards should consider carefully whether resolutions should be included in a consent agenda. Some resolutions require a two-thirds vote or other supermajority vote of approval. If the consent agenda is approved by a majority, the resolution(s) may not be considered as approved. MSBA's Special Voting Situations chart sets out the situations in which a supermajority vote may be required.

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*Terence Morrow is the MSBA Director of Legal and Policy Services. Contact him at [tmorrow@mnmsba.org](mailto:tmorrow@mnmsba.org).*



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