The World Turned Upside Down
COVID-19 and Student-Centered Leadership
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CALENDAR

MAY 2020
14–15........MSBA Board of Directors’ Annual Meeting
20 ..............Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting
25 ..............Memorial Day (No meetings)

JULY 2020
4..............Independence Day (no meetings)

AUGUST 2020
9.............MSBA Board of Directors Meeting
9.............MSBA Summer Seminar Early Bird Workshop (Minneapolis)
10 ..........MSBA Summer Seminar (Minneapolis)
10 ..........MSBA Learning to Lead — School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop (Minneapolis)
11 ..........MSBA Leadership Foundations — School Finance and Management: Phase II (Minneapolis)
11 ..........MSBA Charter School Board Workshop (Minneapolis)

MSBA thanks arts instructor Tara Hager and her students from Hawley High School for sharing their art in this issue.

COVER ART:
Hayden H.

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.
We are Poised to Lead

By Kirk Schneidawind, MSBA Executive Director

The pace with which the COVID-19 pandemic has spread throughout our world, nation, and state has been remarkable. The capstone events of your high school seniors — senior awards, prom, and graduation, were just around the corner. A global pandemic, which disrupted every facet of our lives, including our state’s public school system, was not supposed to be part of this plan. The caps and gowns, the friends and family, and the final laughs with classmates are moments that last a lifetime.

In the face of all this, our governor has made Minnesota’s public school system MISSION CRITICAL. While other states have made plans to close, our state and school leaders have developed a plan to continue to deliver a distance learning program for our 850,000 public school students.

I have been in absolute awe as our school boards and superintendents work through the challenging governance, leadership, and management issues. The genuine concern our members have demonstrated for their students, parents, and communities has been a great thing to observe. The courage, spirit, and determination with which this unprecedented challenge has been met has become a great source of pride.

While our school leaders and staff were building their distance learning plans and programs, the federal government has passed three relief bills, the Minnesota legislature has moved on two relief bills, and the governor has issued 29 executive orders with the Minnesota Departments of Education and Health providing daily guidance on each of these orders related to health, employment and financing.

Our public schools have risen to the challenge early and often during the crisis, serving hundreds of thousands of free meals during the development and implementation of their distance learning plans. They have created safe places for children whose parents are on the frontline saving the lives of our friends, family, and community members. And, yes, our school districts built a mission critical distance learning plan in less than two weeks for all of their students.

No one knows exactly what our economic and educational landscapes will look like when we come out of this phase. We know they will look much different.

We know that not every lesson plan will be perfect, not every Wi-Fi connection will be solid, and engagement through a device is never going to equal the personal touch our teachers provide. We also know that our school districts will not waste this opportunity. They will adapt and build on everything they have learned, as challenging as it has been, to make future learning opportunities better for each of their students.

While quadratic equations will get solved and beautiful essays will be crafted, for our students and school leaders, we hope the larger lessons of perseverance, creativity, and humanity will be the dominant headlines as we look back on this event.

Our state and school district leaders have learned much during this crisis. As we begin to think about what is ahead of us in the short- and long-term, from what we have witnessed, I am confident that our public schools are poised to lead. We should all be proud.

Congratulations to the Class of 2020!

Contact MSBA Executive Director
Kirk Schneidawind at
kschneidawind@mnmsba.org.
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The COVID-19 pandemic has turned the life of a school board member — and everyone in the nation — upside down.

With the declaration of a pandemic and Governor Tim Walz’s executive orders, most school boards are now finding a new normal of meeting electronically by phone or other means. Teaching has gone to distance learning. And questions of how to do graduation ceremonies and other student rites of passage are being configured.

Meeting electronically

Though a few boards may meet in a large room with desks spread out at least six feet apart to conduct business, most boards are meeting electronically, whether that is by Zoom meetings, Skype meetings, or simply dialing into a telephone conference call. The keys to electronic meetings are:

- Everyone at the site and everyone calling in must be able to hear each other.

- At least one school board member, superintendent, or the district’s legal counsel must be present at the meeting site.

- All votes must be conducted by roll call.

One of the biggest issues is how to keep transparency and maintain a public forum period at electronic meetings. Some boards livestream their meetings, which makes it easy for the public to view board actions. However, many boards do not have access to livestreams. In that case, MSBA recommendations can include:

- Recording your meetings so the public can listen to them at a later time.

- Making the electronic meeting available to a representative of the public, such as the media representative.

- Allowing people to monitor the meeting from a remote location — such as a gymnasium with social distancing seating with six-foot distancing marked for anyone who wants to attend.
And for boards still wanting to maintain some form of public forum, an email address could be established where the public could send their concerns to the board as a whole for consideration or simply comments about the board proceedings.

Student rites of passage

Seniors have sacrificed in-person learning, socialization, and usual rites of passage such as prom, sports and co-curriculars, band, choir, theater, and more.

It’s doubtful that many of these events will happen, though some schools have been thinking of different ways to hold graduation:

• Postponing graduation until August or a time when COVID-19 cases have fallen.

• Finding a large parking lot and having a “drive-in” graduation, where students are called up one by one, leave their car, and walk across the stage to pick up a diploma.

• Doing a “virtual graduation” where students make a 1-minute video of a message to their class. The messages are sent into school officials and played during a virtual ceremony.

Learning from a distance

Since March 30, schools have been doing distance learning. Teachers and all school district staff moved mountains to implement distance learning plans in just two weeks. Those plans helped students graduate on time. Those plans were reviewed from an equity lens so all could have access. With a federal waiver, the usual MCA testing was waived for this year. And the seniors taking AP classes were able to take the tests electronically.

School districts also rose to the challenge of providing meals to students throughout the pandemic, knowing that learning can’t happen if students are hungry.

Looking ahead

As schools prepare for the 2020-2021 school year, all are prepared to expect a second wave of COVID-19, whether that means a return to distance learning or a mix of in-person and distance learning.

Funding for schools, which earlier this year looked solid as the state had a $1.5 billion surplus, is now in question as the surplus has dwindled and the state is using its reserves. Questions of an economy bounce-back complicate issues of funding for schools in the next biennium.

But one known factor is the resilience of public schools and public school boards to do whatever it takes to educate students. In this upside-down pandemic world, schools have helped bring a sense of normalcy back until normal can return.

Contact Greg Abbott at gabbett@mnmsba.org.
COVID-19 and Student-Centered Leadership

By Katie Klanderud and Paula O’Loughlin, MSBA Board Development Team

Across our nation, school communities are facing the most unprecedented time in the 21st century. There are no district policies or even state statutes that can provide all the answers that are being asked. While there are numerous factors that currently lie beyond our control, there is one element boards can control, and that is how they lead.

Focusing on what is best for our students’ academic, social, and emotional wellbeing should always be top of mind, but is arguably now more important than ever before. School districts are undoubtedly hearing from families who are feeling anxious, scared, and unsure of what to do. During these times of such uncertainty, our students and families need and deserve a high-functioning, high-performing school board team which has a laser-sharp focus on the needs of all learners.

Get back to the basics

1. Trust one another — This isn’t a time to doubt the decisions of your fellow board members, your superintendent, and staff. You hire good people and you don’t take on the position of school board member for fun (or the money!), but for the students and your community.

2. Put away the baggage — We all have times of disagreement. Let’s set it aside and work towards what’s best for all. You don’t have to hold hands and sing songs around the campfire, but decide what is most important right now and focus. For teams which have been struggling, this is going to test you and can bring out the best or worst in you. You decide.

3. Communicate, communicate, communicate — Keep one another informed, and along with your superintendent, move forward with a consistent message. These times are confusing and uncertain for everyone. Clarity builds trust with your team, staff, and community.

Your leadership is being tested. Now is the time for all school board members to work with their superintendents in the most collaborative, supportive, and positive way possible. Let’s set an example.

Learn to lead with the best YOU.

Your MSBA staff is here to assist you in any way we can. Thank you for the critical work you do for Minnesota’s students.

Contact Katie Klanderud at kklanderud@mnmsba.org and Paula O’Loughlin at poloughlin@mnsmba.org.
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A School Board Member’s Vision for Education: Success Depends on Making Education Relevant AND a Priority

Diversity and funding will continue to be key to future of education

By Abigail Alt

The future of education depends on our collective priorities and on making our system and the learning relevant for our learners. One component of our future success in educating the next generation is school districts’ ability to establish creative partnerships which engage students, business, and community service organizations. Ensuring that our teachers and staff reflect the communities we serve is a second element which, while currently in process, will be a key indicator in connecting students’ gifts and talents with workforce needs and growing our local economies. Finally, our state and federal governments must fulfill existing fiscal...
responsibilities to school districts, while respecting local school board control in deciding how best to serve each school district’s unique community of learners.

We find ourselves in a time when there is a known workforce shortage, with many people underemployed, and with companies seeking employees who possess the requisite balance of “soft” skills and a willingness to receive additional training to effectively support the unique needs, culture, and bottom line of the organization. Conversely, I have learned from business partners that companies increasingly recognize the need to be flexible and incorporate the next generation of highly talented, skilled, and diverse workers as change agents within existing corporate cultures. In 20 years, businesses, students, and, by consequence, our local and state economies, will continue to grow and flourish as we seek innovative opportunities for connection and shared learning between local businesses and schools.

**Partnerships are necessary**

Career and college readiness now includes an intentional connection between Pathways, career academies, CTE programs, concurrent enrollment, internships, externships, and the real needs of local businesses and municipalities. We have already lived through a time of crushing student debt. For the foreseeable future, one can reasonably expect that this recent past, combined with the Minnesota Department of Education’s tracking of the World’s Best Workforce in our schools, will continue to encourage individualized career and college readiness among our youth to find their passion and strengths and optimize their preparedness for a job or career with an eye on balancing necessary debt with realistic earning potential five to 10 years after certification, graduation, etc. Regardless of lagging state and federal funding of education, these partnerships and opportunities will be crucial in ensuring that we capitalize on the gifts, talents, and creativity of our youth while helping them to avoid crippling debt in the process.

**Prepare for a more diverse education world**

As to the make-up of our student body, the U.S. census now projects that our nation will become “minority white” in 2045, while many of our schools and districts are already experiencing this. The onus is on our schools, currently governed, administered, and taught by a cadre of predominantly white middle-class educators, to understand how best to serve all of our students. This clearly includes our students of color, multilingual students, and students who live in poverty who are, to date, underserved by schools across our state. Based on current work designed to broaden adult educators’ outlook beyond the dominant culture, review curriculum and course content, and recruit and retain a diverse workforce, progress is within reach. Our work as school board members will continue to include an intentional focus on educating all, shifting paradigms to be more inclusive of varied perspectives and experiences, while monitoring and encouraging the diversification of both staff and teachers.

We can expect to see increased representation and diversification of school staff through a variety of ways: through grow-your-own programs; as a result of postsecondary support, scholarships, and programming; and via authentic support groups and
networks for staff of color at all levels. The degree to which we diversify school staff will depend, in part, on our ability to demonstrate that a career in education provides security and fulﬁllment in ways that other professions do not. We will continue to grapple with what we need to do as a state and as school boards to change this reality. I would suggest that this goes beyond increases in salary and beneﬁts for educators. School boards will increasingly deliberate on how strategic and ﬁnancial planning, policy implementation, and reporting structures feed a work and learning environment which welcomes and supports all — adults and students alike. Teaching, this noble profession, is, in light of census projections, one important piece in the puzzle of individual and economic growth in the next 20 years.

Future success will also depend on today’s students witnessing the welcoming and support of an important cohort of “ﬁrsts” in many school districts statewide: Latinx, First Nation, East African, LGBTQ, and adults with special needs as school board members, superintendents, administrators, and teacher leaders, for example. This is not meant to suggest that Minnesota has not made progress to date in this area, nor is it meant to suggest that we lack compassionate, skilled professionals who embrace our work of educating all. However, as I look around the room at various multi-district meetings and have the opportunity to meet and learn from other board members and administrators statewide, I do believe that we can and will do better, and with greater consistency, breadth, and longevity. Success in this vein means that students can see themselves in such roles, and that the voice of people from underrepresented groups are in the decision-making process.

Ours is a complex and multifaceted system, as well as an intricate network of interdependent factors which all strain together to impact the next generation of citizens. Our children’s ability to access a solid education, to identify their own skills and passions, then translate this knowledge into a successful career and civic life relies on many contributing factors. Some factors are controlled by the individual, many are not. As a state and as a nation, our government has committed to certain levels of funding to educate all K-12 students, with local school boards held accountable for serving the unique needs of our students, families, and community. Sadly, we continue to live in a time when state and federal commitments are not met.

Funding must reﬂect education as our highest priority

Each year in Minnesota, we continue to hear about a budget surplus. Yet the general education formula lags behind annual inﬂationary increases. Our current funding has not recognized the changing and increased needs for mental health services, substance use and abuse services, social services, increased English language services, and family outreach. Special education funding is so severely underfunded that the money used by school districts to fulﬁll moral and statutory obligations to our most vulnerable learners is stifling districts’ ability to balance our budgets. Federal funding of our special education programs is no different. There is no reason to believe that school board advocacy in this vein with elected ofﬁcials at state and federal levels will diminish in necessity between now and 2040.

We live in a state and a nation which offer many opportunities for students and their families to achieve ﬁnancial stability and civic engagement. Given what we know about population growth and diversity in the coming decades, achievement and opportunity gaps among students will be steadily closed at the local level, with school boards leveraging available resources to best serve the unique needs and people in our communities.

The degree to which we are successful depends on three things: our ability to overcome disconnects with workforce development; our ability to deconstruct established practices and beliefs which serve the few and not the many; and the state and federal governments’ willingness to step up and meet existing ﬁscal obligations to our students, while simultaneously supporting local school boards in addressing the needs of our own unique school communities.

“Our work as school board members will continue to include an intentional focus on educating all, shifting paradigms to be more inclusive of varied perspectives and experiences, while monitoring and encouraging the diversiﬁcation of both staff and teachers.”

Abigail Alt is the chair of the Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School Board and the ﬁrst recipient of MSBA’s Rising Star award. To comment about her essay, you can reach her at aalt@isd191.org.
Roseville Area Schools was named one of the first-place winners of the 2020 Magna Awards for its Engaging All Students Through Relevant Curriculum Program.

Now in its 26th year, the Magna Awards program is sponsored by the National School Boards Association’s flagship magazine, the “American School Board Journal.”

This is the third year that the Magna Awards recognized school districts and their leaders for their efforts to bring educational equity to their students.

Roseville Area Schools has been working for over a decade to close the significant gaps in opportunities and outcomes for its diverse student population. After several years of enhancing Culturally Responsive Teaching skills, on November 18, 2016, the school district had a wakeup call that galvanized students and the community. A few months before, a black man (Philando Castile) was shot by police in a routine traffic stop in the district. This deeply disturbed everyone, and a large group of high school students decided to act. They staged a walkout and presented their demands at the Minnesota Department of Education located nearby. Half of their demands related directly to curriculum. District administrators met with the students and committed to working on the missing narratives.

Within six months, the district began using an Equity Curriculum and Instruction Compass co-created with consultant Marceline Dubose. The initial focus has been on curriculum, with the Engaging All Students Through Relevant Curriculum Program. Its objective is to de-center dominant narratives and expand learning to include traditionally absent narratives and to make the learning materials reflective and relevant to the diversity of perspectives, histories, and identities in the student body and society.

The work is proceeding in all grades, from kindergarten to high school seniors. K-6 has mainly focused on revising all social studies units. For example, in second grade, the unit studying good citizenship now includes a culturally and racially rich array of figures. In fourth grade, students look at the U.S. government and then compare it to tribal government. The work in the middle and high school has been applied broadly across subject matter. Some examples include shifting from only the dominant narrative to a multi-ethnic perspective in covering American history (retitled American Histories); adding American history through an African American lens course as an option to meet the U.S. history requirement; creating a more diverse literature experience in language arts classes with greater representation of different races, cultures, gender, etc.; using skin color to study genes and evolution in biology; and shifting in math classes from academic examples to real-life scenarios.
Removing barriers

This program gives students a context within which they can develop into engaged, motivated, and self-regulated learners. The key impetus came from students, with underserved students’ voices strongly represented. They believed curriculum was key to what needed to change. It needed to reflect their racial and ethnic communities, histories, and leaders, and build connections to their lived experiences.

Evidence of success

Through helping to improve attention and engagement, this program has contributed to the growth in students graduating from high school and a narrowing of race-ethnicity gaps. From 2014 to 2018, the four-year graduation rate increased by 1 percent, ending with 88 percent of students graduating in four years. Because the gains were concentrated among students of color, the graduation gap between white students and students of color narrowed 112 percent. The district and nearly all race-ethnic groups currently outperform the state of Minnesota.

Contact Roseville Area School Board Chair Kitty Gogins at kitty.gogins@isd623.org for more information about this program.

More about the Magna Awards

The Magna Awards — supported by Sodexo, a leader in delivering sustainable, integrated facilities management and food service operations — honor districts across the country for programs that break down barriers for underserved students.

An independent panel of school board members, administrators, and other educators selected the Roseville Area and the other winners from more than 100 submissions.

“Focusing on equity requires school leaders to think differently and creatively,” said Thomas J. Gentzel, NSBA Executive Director and CEO. “The 2020 Magna Award-winning districts showcase the amazing and innovative work going on in public schools to ensure students are supported and provided with the tools and opportunities needed to succeed.”

Roseville Area was a recipient in the 5,000 to 20,000 student enrollment category. Visit https://nsba.org/News/2020/Magna-Awards for the complete list of award-winning school districts.
Worthington student Adam Koller and Eastern Carver County student Lucy Browning have been named recipients of the 2020 MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship.

More than 100 school districts have student school board members on their board, giving direct input on issues that affect their learning. The MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship Committee reviewed nearly 30 applications and narrowed the applicants to two $3,000 winners.

Adam Koller (Worthington)

Many student school board members learn much from seeing how public school boards work. But Adam also made big, long-lasting contributions to the board and the district.

Worthington School Board Chair Lori Dudley wrote how Adam took a look at the district vaping policy and wanted to make some changes. “We asked him to take his ideas to the school administration and come back to us with a report,” Dudley said. He did. And because of his initiative, the district will be working toward more chemical awareness for all students and more information on treatment options for student addiction, said Superintendent John Landgaard. Adam’s work, he said, focused the policy more on how to be proactive in helping students instead of simply providing consequences for breaking the policy.

Dudley also mentioned how Adam’s insight on the district’s building referendum, with his focus on how lack of space and over-crowded classrooms affects students’ learning and schedules, helped gain community support to pass the measure. “He shared insight on the conditions of crowded cafeterias, hallways, and stairs and how it impacts the student body,” Dudley wrote. “He was a valuable resource to us as we compiled facts and relayed to the public the need for a positive referendum vote.”

Adam isn’t ready to stop there, either. He’s spending his last few meetings to push for new high school start times, pushing them from 7:55 a.m. to 8:25 a.m. starts in response to research that later start times and more sleep help students perform better in school.

“My role really challenged me to think beyond myself and think of what things would benefit the entirety of our diverse
Adam wrote in his scholarship application. “With vaping, I felt it was a two-pronged issue: discipline and addiction. And therefore, we needed a two-pronged solution – disciplinary action but also treatment.”

MSBA scholarship committee members said his focus on policy changes and the process reflects a big part of a school board member’s job. “And the things he advocated for and changed will stay there long after he leaves,” said committee member Zuki Ellis.

Many committee members also looked at Adam’s accomplishments for being on the board one year and said those contributions might be more impactful than many elected board members who had been on their board several years.

Worthington also had a threat on social media against the school. Adam proposed the need to inform students on how to report those threats against the school if they hear or see them on social media. “We are now addressing this in our annual ALICE training (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate), where students learn about what to do in case of an active shooter in the school.”

Adam has several academic excellence awards, is involved in track and field, orchestra, marching band, and served in the National Honor Society and Student Council. He has also worked in the summer for H2O on the Go and the YMCA.

“Our board is welcoming, kind and intelligent, and their commitment to making our school district better has been an inspiration to me,” Adam wrote. “Because of their example, I hope to serve on a school board or some other service board some day in the future.”

Lucy Browning
(Eastern Carver County)

As a student school board member, Lucy Browning has seen adults yelling, swearing, name-calling, and using blatantly false information to get their points across. “While hearing residents speak, I genuinely listen and seek to formulate a grace-filled response reflecting empathy and dignity toward the speaker,” Browning wrote in her scholarship application.

With her district facing racial tensions that have caught the attention of state and national news coverage, a failed referendum, and other challenges at school, Lucy hasn’t been afraid to leap out of her comfort zone to hear voices in the student body and school that might be passed over.

Eastern Carver County Board Chair Jeff Ross said Lucy has had a front-row seat to witness the process of policymaking, compromising, and making difficult but necessary financial decisions. “It has been an honor to sit with adults who are so truly invested in the next generation and want nothing more than to champion us on,” she said.

Contact Greg Abbott at gabbott@mnmsba.org.
Teaching through tragedy

Did you miss Dr. Joe Erardi’s Sourcewell webinars on school safety? It’s ok. You can now watch them on demand. Dr Erardi, retired superintendent from Newtown, CT., shares his powerful story from the December 2012 Sandy Hook tragedy during two recorded presentations.

We are proud to partner with Dr. Erardi to help you keep your students safe. In these videos, Dr. Joe teaches school leaders how to you’ll learn best proactive practices, the importance of safety-related partnerships, and the critical need for updated and understandable safety information in your school district.

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Why should a school district develop a strategic plan?

First and foremost, school boards — based on Minnesota Statute 120B.11 — are required to adopt a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan designed to support and improve teaching and learning. Second, school boards are responsible for clarifying the school district’s purpose by developing belief statements, a mission statement, and a vision statement to guide the school district. Finally, school boards convey the school district’s direction by setting clear and well-crafted goals and objectives.

How does a school district benefit from doing this work?

A good strategic plan builds strong board team (school board and superintendent) relationships by clearly stating expectations, helps to align community values with school district operations, drives the school district to a continuous improvement process, provides clarity for the school district’s staff, and enables performance monitoring and evaluation. In the end, strategic planning ensures that the district knows “which way to go” in order to provide high-quality education for ALL the students it serves.

What can MSBA do to help districts in strategic planning?

First, MSBA will conduct planning and preparation activities designed to provide the school district with the knowledge needed to set the strategic plan in motion. This phase involves the development of a timeframe for the process, providing a recommendation for the recruitment and selection of a Strategic Planning Committee, identifying methods to gather feedback about the school district, and ensuring that the process meets the requirements of the World’s Best Workforce. Second, MSBA will provide several methods of gathering stakeholder input on the strengths and opportunities for improvement of the school district. Third, MSBA will conduct four meetings with the school district’s Strategic Planning Committee. The meetings will provide the committee with the results of stakeholder-related engagement activities, provide a report from the superintendent of schools on the “State of the School District,” and result in the creation of a Strategic Planning Governance Document that is designed around specific goals and objectives reflecting the beliefs, mission, and vision of the school district.

How much does the MSBA Strategic Planning Service cost and how do we get started?

MSBA customizes the Strategic Planning Service based on the specific needs of the individual school district. A base fee is then determined for MSBA’s Strategic Planning Services and includes MSBA staff/service provider time, travel and expenses, all materials, follow-up reporting, and ongoing assistance.

Contact Gail Gilman, MSBA Director of Strategic Planning and Board Leadership, at 800-324-4459 (ext. 130) or ggilman@mnmsba.org.
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Writing an article in March 2020 on school board policy and legal matters for Minnesota’s school board members encounters challenges. Reading the same article in May 2020 will undoubtedly invite readers to reflect upon how much the K-12 education landscape has changed between March and May — and to begin to consider how these experiences can fundamentally alter how we engage in school board governance in the future.

The ways in which Minnesota’s school boards, and other public bodies, conduct meetings is an early indicator of transformations likely to last. As the COVID-19 pandemic spread, school boards quickly shifted to remote meetings in order to protect health. Administrators and staff have learned ways in which public accountability and transparency can be continued — and, indeed, enhanced — through livestreaming on YouTube or elsewhere, using platforms such as Google and Zoom, and adding social media streams as multiple means of communication. One particularly positive factor was school boards’ commitment to maintain public comment opportunities for their meetings.

The use of technology in the course of distance learning will alter education permanently; a similar technological leap is expected for Minnesota’s school boards. The experience of remote meetings offers insights into the ways in which boards can communicate with the public. It is certain, and it is good, that Minnesota’s school boards will be able to build upon the lessons gained in recent months.

Turning to school district policies and practices, Minnesota’s school boards have begun to consider their local policies through a new lens that the pandemic imposed. As districts launched distance learning, the technological gaps that exist in every community received sharp attention. School traditions, such as awards for perfect attendance, will likely receive reconsideration. Long-term budgeting, graduation requirements, elections, mandatory testing, teleworking, special education, third-party contracts for transportation, food, and other services: this is a short list of the myriad concerns on which MSBA will be working with school boards to review, reconsider, and redevelop.

MSBA has a strong tradition of supporting Minnesota’s school boards in policy development, adoption, and implementation. The COVID-19 pandemic illuminates the critical role of local governance in times of emergency and stress. School board members, staff, and administrators know the conditions, needs, and resources of their community. Policies that leverage this knowledge and reflect these communities are a fundamental tool, especially in times of crisis.

From March 2020 on, MSBA learned every day about ways in which school boards met the challenges and how we can offer even more support going forward. I look forward to continuing our work together on the policy and legal matters that face our schools and our students.

Contact Terry Morrow at tmorrow@mnmsba.org.
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