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As MSBA enters its centennial year in 2020, the changes in public education over the past 100 years are astounding. It wasn’t until the early 1920s that a movement for compulsory public education in the United States began. The high school graduation rate in 1920 was only at 16.8%. For many families, education wasn’t a priority. Many only got an “eighth grade education” and then worked on the family farm or worked out to help support their families. As the movement for compulsory public education gained momentum, MSBA was founded.

With the post-World War I baby boom and more of an emphasis on education, there was an increase in the number of students and a need for more teachers. There was a paradigm shift in education around this time. Due to the war, there was a manpower shortage and lack of a skilled fighting force. That began the progressive education era. Curriculum diverted somewhat from the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Sciences, industrial arts, geography, physical education, and home economics were added. New courses were added to make “better housewives,” focusing on how to keep up a household, cooking, cleaning, and sewing. How times have changed! Individualized learning, reaching the student at their ability level, was also part of the shift.

Fast forward to 1940-1941, the president of the MSBA Board of Directors was John E. Casey, from Jordan. What an honor for me to represent Jordan 80 years later as the president. During Casey’s term, it was an interesting time. The country was recovering from the Great Depression and World War II was underway. I’m sure that MSBA played a great role in supporting children of families whose men and women were heading off to war. Many army recruits were rejected because they could not read or write. There was a shortage of foreign-language speakers and science specialists. Education was in a full-scale crisis due to the war. There was a shortage of skilled workers at home. Many teachers left the profession for better-paying jobs, many in the defense industry or military. In 1946, 75,000 children in America could not go to school due to teacher shortages. Ironically, the teacher shortage that John E. Casey faced in 1940-41 is being repeated today.

After the war, there were significant shifts in education. African-American children and women were not willing to accept the status quo. In the time after World War II, education saw new ideas and technology. World events and social change made a significant impact on the education system. In 1954, due to Brown v. Board of Education, segregation of children in public schools was struck down. Change was slow, arduous, and painful in many ways and is still being felt.

During the 1960s a revolution in education took place. The federal government got more involved and increased federal aid. Like today, there were heated debates about funding for private/parochial schools. History repeating itself.

Diversity was implemented into the curriculum. Teachers were encouraged to empower their students to be “curious learners” rather than rote learners. The civil rights movement was in full swing. Then came the Vietnam War, and the military committed millions of dollars to fund education programs to support their military needs.

The next decades continued to see social and societal changes in education. We experienced many changes in curriculum due to the evolving changes in the work force and innovation. STEM, STEAM, robotics, coding — jobs not imagined a decade before — helped drive changes in what is being taught in the classroom of today.

The role and support that MSBA provided districts during those early years in some ways mirrors the changing times of today. Education is always evolving and boards must be resilient and creative, anticipating what the next new shift will be in education.

We can only imagine the changes that will take place in the next hundred years. Just like John E. Casey, each of us will make our mark in the history of those changes. As much as things change, some things remain the same. Universally, we all want the best possible educational opportunities for our public school students, as did board members of 100 years ago.

Contact Deborah Pauly at dpauly@isd717.org.
**NOVEMBER 2019**

3–4 .......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
5 .......... Election Day (No meetings or activities from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.)
11 .......... Veterans Day (No meetings)
13 .......... Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Annual Meeting
13 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting, Rochester
14 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting, Little Falls
16 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting, St. Paul
18–22 ...... American Education Week
19–30 ...... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Webinar available
28 .......... Thanksgiving Day (No meetings)

**DECEMBER 2019**

6 .......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
6–7 .......... MSBA Delegate Assembly
13 .......... MSBA Learning to Lead – School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop, St. Peter
14 .......... MSBA Leadership Foundations – School Finance and Management: Phase II Workshop, St. Peter
25 .......... Christmas Day (No meetings)

**JANUARY 2020**

1 .......... New Year’s Day (No meetings)
6 .......... Terms Begin for Newly Elected School Board Members
14 .......... MSBA Learning to Lead – School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop, Minneapolis
15 .......... MSBA Leadership Foundations – School Finance and Management: Phase II Workshop, Minneapolis
15 .......... MSBA Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV Workshop, Minneapolis
15 .......... MSBA Charter School Board Member Workshop, Minneapolis
15 .......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
15 .......... MSBA Leadership Conference Early Bird Workshops, Minneapolis
16–17 ...... MSBA Leadership Conference
17 .......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
20 .......... Martin Luther King Jr.’s Birthday Observed (No meetings)

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MSBA thanks Bloomington Public Schools art teachers Ryan Pedersen (Jefferson High School) and Kelly Yackel (Kennedy High School) and their students for sharing their art in this issue.

Special thanks to Bloomington Public Schools Communications Specialist Andrea George.

The Bloomington students featured in this edition earned high marks for their artwork earlier this year at the Minnesota Scholastic Art Competition.

**COVER ART:**

Ava K.

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.
In MSBA’s Learning to Lead – School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop, board members are introduced to the Standards for School Board Leadership, which are built upon the Role of the School Board. The Role of the School Board states: “As the entity legally charged with governing a school district, each school board is responsible to its community for governing efficiently and leading effectively to provide an equitable education, resulting in high student achievement.”

**Equitable education.** What exactly do those words mean and why are they important? How do they impact our role as school board members, and what do we need to know about creating and adopting policies for an equitable education so that all students can achieve? What is meant by “looking through an equity lens” and how is it pertinent to our work as school board members?

As an organization whose strategic plan includes the focus area of “Integration of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Resources,” it is our goal to start from a place of common understanding using shared language to define equity and what is meant by providing all students an equitable education. The Minnesota School Boards Association defines an **equitable education** as “A collective set of conditions where all students are given access to the opportunities, resources, and supports they need to learn and develop to their fullest potential.” An equitable education is achieved when a student’s identity, circumstances or background does not predetermine or predict their educational success. The pursuit of an equitable education begins with the belief that each student, can, will, and shall learn. The pursuit of an equitable education also includes the recognition of historical conditions and institutional and systemic barriers that have prevented access and opportunity for students based on their race, socioeconomic status, ability, and other factors.

**Equity** is giving students what they need to succeed, and as such is the state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair. It is important to note that equity and equality are not the same and should not be used interchangeably. Equality is giving everyone the same resource regardless of need, while equity is giving students access to the resources they need in order to be successful. Consider this example: Equality is giving all students a pair of the same eyeglasses, whether they are needed or not; equity is giving the students who need corrective lenses the right prescription they need in order to see clearly.

A school board member is charged with creating the conditions where all students are supported in their academic, social, and emotional growth and development. Being able to allocate resources in a way that is just, fair, and based on individual student need helps to ensure that all students will have equal access to a high-quality education.

MSBA recognizes that each school district is at a different place along the continuum regarding to how equity is acknowledged, understood, and incorporated into each school system. As districts seek to begin, grow, and/or sustain their equity work, it is important to establish and utilize a plan that can serve as a roadmap for each district’s
individual equity efforts. The following plan developed by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2018) can be used to assist schools as they strive to build a foundation for equity in school practice and structure.

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### The Action Plan includes 7 steps which school leaders can use to pursue equity.

**Grounding each step, school leaders must include and affirm the voices of students, families and communities.** These steps can be approached non-sequentially, except for the last step.

### Define equity for your district and community

Having a clear definition of equity that is shared, understood, and practiced by members of your community sets the foundation for the comprehensive and consistent practice of equity.

### Embed educational equity training into professional development for faculty, staff, and school board

Ongoing professional development is necessary to pursue and achieve equity. School leaders who demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement of their will and skill toward providing an equitable education reinforces that achieving equity is a priority for all students.

### Pursue and practice cultural awareness and proficiency

People, practices, and policies within the system need to acknowledge and affirm the experiences and values of diverse cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnicities, religions, and other factors.

### Analyze policies, procedures, practices with an equity lens

Using an equity lens means making decisions that consider the impact to all students, families, and community members and to ensure that those decisions do not create or exacerbate barriers to opportunity, resources, or supports. The following questions developed by the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (2018) can be used by boards when making decisions or taking action.

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### Identify and understand your district’s demographic data

In order to develop an effective equity-approach that supports the needs of students, families, and communities, it is critical to understand the current demographics of your entire community as well as future demographic trends.

### Analyze your data

An analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data is required to measure success as well as the disparities throughout the district’s programs and practices. Data should not only look at academic achievement, but also student engagement, safety, social connection, as well as existing opportunity gaps between groups of students. Data should also support the process of identifying the barriers that exist within the district.

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### Equity Action Plan: Pursuing and Achieving Equity

#### Action Steps to Build a Foundation for Equity in Your Schools

**Include and affirm the voices of students, families and communities**

Student achievement is linked to the positive engagement of students and families in the education process. Students, families and communities are considered “stakeholders and partners” and serve as essential resources. Their input helps evaluate the effectiveness of school practices, provide context to the experiences of students, and develop necessary and innovative supports to serve the needs of students. School leaders must actively involve stakeholders specifically from communities that face barriers to engagement.

At every step of the action plan, districts should be actively engaging students and families. Their insight is valuable to incorporate equity in school practice and community engagement. Practicing inclusivity and transparency with your community develops trust among stakeholders.

### Identify and understand your district’s demographics.

#### Analyze the data.

#### Define equity for your district and community.

#### Embed educational equity training into all levels of professional development for administration, staff and board.

#### Pursue and practice cultural awareness and proficiency.

#### Analyze policies and practices with an equity lens.

#### Develop an action plan and/or policy to incorporate equity into your district structure.

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### Equity Action Plan: Pursuing and Achieving Equity

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At every step of the action plan, districts should be actively engaging students and families. Their insight is valuable to incorporate equity in school practice and community engagement. Practicing inclusivity and transparency with your community develops trust among stakeholders.
Develop an action plan and/or policy to incorporate equity into your district structure

Equity should serve as the foundation that permeates all aspects of the educational system. Having a clear plan of action is critical to increase knowledge, build capacity, include diverse voices, promote accountability, implement effective practices, produce partnerships, and eliminate barriers to learning. Action plans can serve as a blueprint to moving equity forward in your district, whereas a policy provides the board guidance for embedding equity into the district identity and practices. The success of equity-focused action plans and policies requires stakeholder participation at all levels to ensure that the needs of all students are acknowledged and addressed.

As a leading advocate in public education, MSBA will continue to support board members in governing efficiently and leading effectively to provide an equitable education for all students, resulting in high student achievement for each and every one of our learners.

Contact Katie Klanderud at kklanderud@mnmsba.org and Paula O’Loughlin at poloughlin@mnmsba.org.

Sources:
Maryland Association of Boards of Education
Minnesota Department of Education
National School Boards Association
New Jersey School Boards Association
Pennsylvania School Boards of Education

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Learning from the Past; Leading into the Future

Keynote speakers John Quiñones, Alan November headline Leadership Conference as MSBA turns 100 years old

By Bruce Lombard, MSBA Associate Director of Communications and Marketing,
and Greg Abbott, MSBA Director of Communications and Marketing

Through its Leadership Conference workshops and roundtable sessions over the years, MSBA has striven to offer its members opportunities to become “forward-thinking” with the latest board governance strategies and updates about upcoming critical legal and legislative issues. The 2020 Leadership Conference will continue providing members with sessions that are forward-thinking — along with providing them a chance to look back.

Slated for Thursday, January 16, and Friday, January 17, 2020, at the Minneapolis Convention Center, this year’s conference coincides with MSBA’s 100th birthday.

As part of its 100th birthday celebration, MSBA will pay tribute to its past during the conference. This includes a Centennial Reception set for 1:15 p.m. Thursday, January 16, in the Exhibit Hall at the Convention Center. During this reception, members can chat with former MSBA presidents and executive directors, look at a few memories from MSBA’s first 100 years, and, there will be cake!

Founded in 1920, MSBA is the eighth-oldest school boards organization in the United States.

The 2020 Leadership Conference — “Learning from the Past; Leading into the Future” — will offer nearly 100 timely and informative workshops, skills sessions and roundtable mini-sessions tailored for school board members, superintendents, and other school district staff. So we encourage you to bring your full board team, because this conference has something for everyone.

The conference will also feature two phenomenal keynote speakers — John Quiñones and Alan November.
Quiñones is an ABC News Veteran and the creator/host of “What Would You Do?” Quiñones has emerged as one of the most inspiring keynotes in the speaking world today. His moving presentations focus on his odds-defying journey, celebrating the life-changing power of education, champion the Latino American Dream, and providing thought-provoking insights into human nature and ethical behavior.

November is an international leader in education technology. November has helped schools, governments and industry leaders improve the quality of education through technology. He pushes the boundaries of how to improve teaching and learning. His areas of expertise include planning across curriculum, staff development, new school design, community building, and leadership development.

Learn more about Quiñones on Page 15 and more about November on Page 16.

Pre-Conference Learning

MSBA will again present a number of pre-conference learning opportunities for its membership, including the Learning to Lead — School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop on Tuesday, January 14, and Leadership Foundations — School Finance and Management: Phase II Workshop on Wednesday, January 15. Though any school board member can take these two workshops, they are geared toward new board members in their first term of service.

During the 2020 Leadership Conference, MSBA is offering something new for veteran school board members: the Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV Workshop — which will be held Wednesday, January 15.

The Phase IV workshop focuses on in-depth discussions and examples of a board member’s role as a policymaker and interactive small-group sessions that walk through an actual community engagement activity.

If members don’t have any plans for the evening of Wednesday, January 15, they are encouraged to attend one of MSBA’s Early Bird Sessions at the Minneapolis Convention Center. This year’s Early Bird topics are “The Ins and Outs of Superintendent Evaluation” and “The Poverty Simulation Experience.”

See the “Pre-Conference Sessions” and “Early Bird Sessions” breakout boxes for more information about these learning opportunities.


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If You Go

What: 2020 MSBA Leadership Conference
When: Thursday, January 16, and Friday, January 17, 2020
Where: Minneapolis Convention Center
Why: Learn from timely and informative workshops, skills sessions, and roundtable mini-sessions tailored for school board members, superintendents, and other school district staff.
Tuition: There is no registration fee to attend the Leadership Conference, but we request district staff register board members in advance through the MSBA website.
Hotel: Your district staff can reserve your room online at https://book.passkey.com/go/MSBA2020.
Web: http://www.mnmsba.org/LeadershipConference
Pre-Conference Sessions

Learning to Lead — School Board Basics: Phase I Workshop
When: 6:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, January 14, 2020
Where: Hyatt Regency Minneapolis, 1300 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis
Why: This workshop helps new board members hit the ground running. As an introductory session, it covers the role of the school board, the role of the superintendent, the leadership team relationship, and common scenarios facing new board members.
Tuition: $115 for advanced registrants; $125 for walk-ins
Web: http://www.mnmsba.org/Phase-I-Workshop

Leadership Foundations — School Finance and Management: Phase II Workshop
When: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, January 15, 2020
Where: Hyatt Regency Minneapolis
Why: Presented by MSBA staff and state experts, this workshop includes the training school boards are required to have by state law. The session covers core topics such as the budget, school finance, local levies, policies, significant laws affecting school boards, collective bargaining, and personnel issues.
Tuition: $195 for advanced registrants; $215 for walk-ins
Web: http://www.mnmsba.org/Phase-II-Workshop

NEW! Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV Workshop
When: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, January 15, 2020
Where: Hyatt Regency Minneapolis
Why: This session focuses on in-depth discussions and examples of a board member’s role as a policymaker and interactive small-group sessions that walk through an actual community engagement activity. Also, this workshop will have a segment on dealing with the media and public forums.
Tuition: $195 for advanced registrants; $215 for walk-ins
Web: http://www.mnmsba.org/Phase-IV-Workshop

Charter School Board Member Workshop
When: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, January 15, 2020
Where: Hyatt Regency Minneapolis
Why: Presented by MSBA staff, this workshop covers the three state-mandated areas for charter school board members: governance, employment, and finance. Charter school board members are required to start these workshops within six months of election to a charter school board and complete the workshops within one year.
Tuition: $195 for MSBA Charter Associates ($260 for non-Charter Associates); walk-ins add $20
Web: http://www.mnmsba.org/CharterSchoolBoardTraining
Early Bird Sessions

**The Ins and Outs of Superintendent Evaluation**

*When:* 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 15, 2020  
*Where:* Minneapolis Convention Center Lower Level  
*Why:* Evaluating the superintendent’s performance is one of the board’s most important duties. An effective evaluation process includes prior agreed upon evaluation criteria, form(s), rating scale, if any, and a timeline. Come learn about a framework that board-superintendent teams can use to develop a superintendent evaluation process that includes both performance goals and performance standards.  
*Tuition:* $115 for advanced registrants; $125 for walk-ins  
*Presenters:* Sandy Gundlach, MSBA Director of School Board Services; Barb Dorn, MSBA Director of Leadership Development and Executive Search; and Dave Thompson, MSBA Executive Search Team Service Provider

**The Poverty Simulation Experience**

*When:* 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 15, 2020  
*Where:* Minneapolis Convention Center Lower Level  
*Why:* According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than 560,000 Minnesotans — including 169,000 children under 18 — live in poverty. The Poverty Simulation Experience will help participants conceptualize what it might be like to live in a typical low-income family trying to survive month-to-month. The Poverty Simulation has participants experience a “month” of poverty by taking on the identity of someone living with few financial resources and then handling real life challenges that arise during an ordinary month. Participants are up and moving throughout the simulation, interacting with volunteers who represent various agencies and service providers, such as Social Services or a mortgage company. The session will end with a facilitated discussion, allowing participants to process their thoughts and feelings from this profound experience and discuss how this could impact their work with students and families.  
*Tuition:* $115 for advanced registrants; $125 for walk-ins  
*Presenter:* Whitney Miller-Nichols, Alabama Association of School Boards Assistant Director of Leadership Development

Opening Session Keynote Speaker

**Who:** John Quiñones  
**What:** “Opportunity Through Education: John Quiñones’ American Dream”  
**When:** Thursday, January 16, 2020  
**Where:** Minneapolis Convention Center (Main Auditorium)  
**Why:** Quiñones will celebrate the life-changing power of education — and provide thought-provoking insights into human nature and ethical behavior.

Closing Session Keynote Speaker

**Who:** Alan November  
**What:** “Talk Less, Listen More: Technology and the Future of Education”  
**When:** Friday, January 17, 2020  
**Where:** Minneapolis Convention Center (Main Auditorium)  
**Why:** November will share how school boards can support both educators and families to create the capacity to organize the student’s environment for learning by talking less and listening more.
Opportunity Through Education

John Quiñones: School leaders need to heighten their expectations of their students

Bruce Lombard, MSBA Associate Director of Communications and Marketing


A lifetime of “never taking no for an answer” took Quiñones from that early life of poverty to a 30-plus-year career at ABC News — where he’s served as a reporter and on the anchor desk for television programs like “20/20” and “Primetime.”

Quiñones is best known as the host of ABC’s “What Would You Do?” — a show he created in 2008. “What Would You Do?” is a hidden camera program that examines how people behave in situations that require them to either act or mind their own business.

He has also written two books — “Heroes Among Us: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Choices” and “What Would You Do?: Words of Wisdom About Doing the Right Thing.”

The value of an education

Quiñones grew up in San Antonio, Texas, where both his parents had dropped out of school to work to help their families financially.

“For a while, my family were migrant farm workers — my parents, two sisters and I,” Quiñones recalled. “We went to pick cherries in Michigan and tomatoes in Ohio.”

During one day working in the fields, Quiñones’ father said something that helped change his life forever.

“I will never forget being on my knees on the cold, hard ground at six o’clock in the morning — and my father looking down and saying: ‘John, do you want to do this kind of work for the rest of your life? Or do you want to get an education someday?’

It was a no-brainer for Quiñones. “That made it really easy because I knew I didn’t want to do that kind of back-breaking work the rest of my life,” he said.

What he wanted to do the rest of his life was to be a TV reporter. In high school, he received a big boost when he was selected for the Upward Bound program — which eventually helped him gain acceptance to St. Mary’s University in San Antonio and later to the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in New York.

After graduating from Columbia, Quiñones was hired as a TV reporter in Chicago.

“This is why education is so important to me,” he said. “There’s no doubt in my mind, that I would not be here today had it not been for those opportunities in education.”

Do the right thing

Through his work on the “What Would You Do?” show, some observers have referred to Quiñones as the “face of doing the right thing.” Quiñones has advice on the “right thing” that school leaders can apply toward their students.

“My advice to school board members and superintendents is to heighten their expectations of their students,” Quiñones said. “Don’t presume that they’re not capable … simply because their parents are not as involved as they should be, or because no one else in their family has ever gone to college. Don’t judge your students by the way they dress, certainly not by the color of their skin or the accent in their voice. When I was in junior high school, I went through that when they would tell me, ‘You’ll never make it. You’re not college material.’ They were wrong.”

Most pivotal time for students

Quiñones said he is looking forward to his January 16 keynote presentation at the Leadership Conference. When asked what key message he wanted school leaders to come away with following his keynote address, he put the focus back how they deal with the students.

“I want school leaders to have the highest expectations of their students, regardless of the students’ ethnicity or social status,” Quiñones said. “If these students stumble, I want the school system to be a little more forgiving and to encourage the students to keep trying and to shoot for the stars. Remember, for these students, this is the most pivotal and formative time in their lives. So, give them the opportunities you’d want for your own children.”

Learn more about John Quiñones at https://www.johnquinones.com. Follow him on Twitter at @JohnQABC.

Bruce Lombard is the MSBA Associate Director of Communications. Contact him at blombard@mnmsba.org.
Talk Less, Listen More: Technology and the Future of Education

In the future, Alan November hopes to see more students use social media more ethically and apply critical thinking to web searches.

Bruce Lombard, MSBA Associate Director of Communications and Marketing


November is an international leader in education technology. He began his career as an oceanography teacher and dorm counselor at an island reform school for boys in Boston Harbor. He has been director of an alternative high school, computer coordinator, technology consultant, and university lecturer. He has helped schools, governments, and industry leaders improve the quality of education through technology.

His areas of expertise include planning across curriculum, staff development, new school design, community building, and leadership development.

November was named one of the nation’s 15 most influential thinkers of the decade by Tech and Learning magazine. His writing includes numerous articles and bestselling books. Alan’s most recent book is “Who Owns the Learning?”

The co-founder of the Stanford Institute for Educational Leadership Through Technology, November said he is most proud of being selected as one of the original five national Christa McAuliffe Educators.

Each summer, November leads the Building Learning Communities summer conference with world-class presenters and educators from more than 25 countries.

November said there’s a category of tools that help teachers learn a lot more about how their students learn — and it generally fits into a concept called “making thinking visible,” promoted by prominent Australian education professor John Hattie.

“But Hattie is not technical,” November said. “So, frankly, I’ve developed this toolbox where teachers learn a lot more about how kids learn, which is part of the change in the culture — and a lot of schools are not using that category. It wouldn’t be unusual that it wouldn’t happen at all, and I think it is the most powerful thing we can give teachers.”

As technology continues to shape K-12 education and school board governance, November said he hopes everything will be more globally connected in the future.

“I hope students will be working with people all over the world,” he said. “I hope we will teach the moral high ground of social media. We need to teach the ethics of using social media well, rather than blocking it from them. I hope we will teach children critical thinking on the web, how to validate and question results when they do a web search. I hope we will teach students the opportunity of global publishing — that their work receives feedback from more than their own teacher.”

November said he also wishes families will be a lot more involved than they are now.

“As we connect with families, I hope we think about the whole family, rather than only the children in the school,” he said. “That may be one of the biggest changes of all, that schools develop a family curriculum.”

November said he’d also like teachers to have the opportunity to learn in real time — like staff development opportunities on demand pertaining to exactly whatever teachers are doing at that moment.

Asked what key message he’d like school leaders to take away from his MSBA Leadership Conference presentation, November said, “At a practical level, it would be: ‘Have we underestimated our students managing their own learning?’ For me, there are always two levels. There are the practical level and a philosophical level.”

November continued, “On a philosophical level, it would be: ‘Have we underestimated our students managing their own learning?’ For me, there are always two levels. There are the practical level and a philosophical level.”

Visit https://novemberlearning.com to learn about Alan November’s November Learning website. Follow Alan on Twitter at @globalearner.

Bruce Lombard is MSBA’s Associate Director of Communications. Contact him at blombard@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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There is a plethora of research from the past several decades that link effective teaching practices to improved student learning. While it is encouraging that so much research exists, the challenge for educational leaders is how to ensure that teachers are applying these practices in the classroom. Although it may seem intuitive to identify these practices and provide training on how to implement them, ensuring classroom application of effective practices relates to how teachers think. Recent research has focused on teacher mindframes, which are comprised of individual’s beliefs, thoughts, actions, and results. In their 2017 book, “10 Mindframes for Visible Learning: Teaching for Success,” John Hattie and Klaus Zierer identified 10 mindframes that lay the groundwork for educators’ actions and decisions. These mindframes are founded on the principle that teachers are evaluators, change agents, learning experts, and seekers of feedback who are constantly engaged with dialogue and challenge. Thus, integrating the science of learning into teaching practice requires an understanding of teacher beliefs about learning and teaching.

But, what if teacher beliefs about learning and teaching are inaccurate? A recent survey of more than 200 educators on how students learn found that myths about student learning are prevalent among educators, and that many educators do not have a robust understanding of the principles of learning (Boser,
2019). For example, 77% of survey respondents agreed with the notion that students are either left-brained or right-brained and that this difference influences how students learn — despite the fact that there is no scientific support for it in the research literature. In addition, 97% of educators endorsed the concept of categorizing students into one of several learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.) and then teaching to this style to maximize student outcomes. While students may report that they have different preferences for learning from visual or auditory material, research has proven that these preferences do not impact learning outcomes (Willingham, Hughes, & Doboyli, 2015). In our current educational landscape, many district educators are having conversations about individual and personalized learning as ways to increase student outcomes. It is imperative that these conversations must emphasize the difference between ideas that do not impact student outcomes (like learning styles) and ideas like student prior knowledge that can have a significant impact on student outcomes.

Just as there are myths about student learning, there is also a disconnect between specific research-based teaching strategies and their use in the classroom. For example, retrieval practice which involves students actively trying to recall information that they want to remember is a more effective strategy for long-term learning than simply rereading material. However, only 31% of survey respondents endorsed retrieval practice over rereading when asked which strategy would be the most effective for learning (Boser, 2019). Many researchers have hypothesized various reasons for the disconnect between research and practice.

One hypothesis for why teachers may have difficulty identifying effective learning and teaching strategies is that some teacher training textbooks contain little or no discussion of the large body of learning research. In fact, the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) released a report in 2016 that presented findings of textbooks used in teacher training and whether these textbooks covered fundamental instructional strategies identified by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) practice guide as having strong to moderate research evidence. These strategies included: (1) pairing graphics with words, (2) linking abstract concepts with concrete representations, (3) posing probing questions, (4) repeatedly alternating solved and unsolved problems, (5) distributed practice, and (6) assessing to boost retention. The NCTQ review examined a sample of 48 textbooks used in 48 elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs to determine the extent to which these six strategies were covered. They found that none of the textbooks used in the sample accurately described all six fundamental instructional strategies. In fact, at most, only two of the six strategies were covered in any particular text. Moreover, when strategies were mentioned in textbooks, the discussion may have been as little as one to two sentences in a text that was typically several hundred pages in length (NCTQ, 2016).

While textbooks are important for pre-service teacher training, practicing educators tend to learn about new research in education through professional development and teacher conferences/workshops. Providing accurate information through these channels could be useful ways to dispel some of the widely believed myths and misunderstandings about teaching and learning. As district leaders, we need to continue focusing on providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to improve instruction based on the science of learning. We also need to work to create time and space for professional learning communities to integrate and test their knowledge in the classroom using student outcome data.

At CAREI, we understand that it is sometimes hard to identify research that is empirically validated and replicated over time. CAREI membership is one of the best ways that a school district can stay connected to the emerging knowledge about educational policy and practice. A basic membership involves:

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- Access to “Members Only” section of the new CAREI website where valuable resources will be shared.

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We sincerely hope that you will join our collaboration. You can enroll your district in the District Assembly via the CAREI website at https://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/member-registration.html. In addition, please feel free to contact me at kgibbons@umn.edu if you need help deciphering the research!

Contact Kim Gibbons at kgibbons@umn.edu with any questions or comments.

References


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I’ve been wearing a new pair of glasses lately. Up until a few months ago, I’d only viewed MSBA’s Executive Search Service from the outside in, and what I saw was a well-run, professional, and proven process to help member school districts find their next superintendent. It wasn’t until I became an MSBA employee and immersed in the work itself that I began to see things more clearly. Although my initial impressions were correct (it IS a well-run, professional, and proven process), I also learned about the levels of complexity inherent in superintendent searches, along with the importance of transparency and the power of statutes in doing so.

Not surprisingly, I had lots of questions early on, many of which MSBA receives almost daily from school districts considering a superintendent search. So now that I’ve been here a while, together let’s take a closer look at two of the most common questions MSBA’s Executive Search Service team fields from member school districts, and the answers which significantly clarified my vision on how the search process unfolds.

QUESTION: Must the school board hold their discussions and make all decisions about hiring of the superintendent in public?

ANSWER: Yes. All school board meetings must be held in compliance with the Minnesota Open Meeting Law (M.S. Chapter 13D), including meetings to discuss the superintendent search process, conduct candidate interviews, and to make their final selection of the new superintendent. All interviews are also open to the public, although participation is limited to the finalists and school board members.

QUESTION: When can the names of applicants be released and what information about them can be made public?

ANSWER: Due to the Minnesota Data Practices Act, the names of superintendent applicants must remain private; however, the names of all finalists become public data (“finalists” are those individuals selected to be interviewed by the school board). Applicants are free to disclose personal information about themselves at their own discretion, but the school board can only release an applicant’s name (finalists only), veteran status, relevant test scores, rank on eligible list, job history, education and training, and work availability. All other information on applicants is considered private data.

Keep in mind that neither of these answers is a MSBA directive. They are based on state law, and as your association, MSBA is committed to providing thorough and accurate information to its members. The selection of a new superintendent calls for true clarity of vision, both to define the type of leader your school district is searching for, as well as the process utilized to get there.

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MINNESOTA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION | JOURNAL
A primary responsibility of Minnesota school board members focuses upon school district policies. MSBA/MASA Model Policy 208 — Development, Adoption, and Implementation of Policies — states it well: “Formal guidelines are necessary to ensure the school community that the school system responds to its mission and operates in an effective, efficient, and consistent manner. A set of written policy statements shall be maintained and modified as needed. Policies should define the desire and intent of the school board and should be in a form which is sufficiently explicit to guide administrative action.”

Developing school district policies is a challenging task. For this reason, virtually every Minnesota school district subscribes to MSBA’s Policy Services, which include the model policies developed with the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA). MSBA creates and regularly updates the model policies to reflect recent court rulings and federal and state law changes. At the close of each Minnesota legislative session, MSBA reviews the new laws and revises the Model Policy Manual. The model policy revisions reflecting the Minnesota Legislature’s 2019 statutory changes were published in early September.

At times, school boards consider whether they should draft their own district policy. A caution is appropriate here. For two reasons, school districts should proceed slowly when an individual or organization tells them that they need a “policy.” First, an existing policy often addresses the concern. Districts should contact MSBA to determine whether a model policy is available to resolve the question. Second, the reality may be that an administrative procedure, handbook language, or another approach will accomplish the goal. Procedures, handbooks, and similar district documents set forth the methods, steps, and details needed to implement policy. This is a preferable route given that policy development can be a lengthy process and district policy is less amenable to quick revision than administrative procedures.

In rare situations, a school district may decide to undertake its own creation of a policy when MSBA has not crafted a model policy. For example, local circumstances may lead a board to consider a policy to address its unique circumstances. Alternatively, a school district may find itself ahead of the curve on an emerging issue on which it may be too early for a statewide association like MSBA to develop a standard model policy.

School boards thinking about writing their own policy are strongly encouraged to call MSBA first. This contact will enable MSBA staff to offer guidance and will help MSBA determine whether a model policy should be written. Second, school boards should work with their school district’s legal counsel because district policy has significant legal ramifications. A third step may include review of policies of other Minnesota school districts (reliance on out-of-state policies may be problematic because of differences in state law).

School district policies establish principles of control, operation, and management. Well-written, current school district policies offer many benefits, including providing direction to administration and staff, engaging with families and the community, and fostering efficiency and stability. In fulfilling their policy-related responsibilities, school districts have a supportive partner in MSBA.

Contact Terry Morrow at tmorrow@mnmsba.org.
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Quality, Health & Nutrition, Service & YOU!
At the dawn of a new century, MSBA had kicked off its new webpage, established email communications to go along with phone calls and fax machines, and would be a few years away from setting its Facebook and Twitter accounts.

It was clear very early that tech was booming, and just as students were learning all about computers, online learning and social media, so were a new group of school board members.

MSBA was an early adopter of online learning. In May 2002, there were online courses for Robert’s Rules of Order, Board Officer duties, and many other courses. It turned out that MSBA was a little ahead of the times because the online version of courses were seldom-used. Only recently, when MSBA jumped back into online training through webinars in 2017, have many school board members tapped in to learn about a subject.

Pop quiz: The defining event for the past 20 years in education has been:
a. The No Child Left Behind federal law
b. An emphasis on testing every student
c. Testing math, testing reading, testing science
d. All of the above

If you are proficient, you would have picked answer “d.”

For the past 20 years, Outcome-Based Education, Profiles of Learning and Multiple Measures of Learning all went by the wayside as the education pendulum swung toward the all-important standardized testing regimen.

Teaching in April was transformed into student test prep and test-taking for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments in math, reading, and science.

MSBA responded by pushing legislative measures to make the law more workable in Minnesota, but also by starting a grassroots Ambassador program to help the general public understand some of the problems in the law.

Public schools at the turn of 2000 suffered through a “black hole” governor who created a $1 billion structural budget deficit, followed by a governor who signed a “no new taxes” pledge and held school funding at next to nothing for seven of his eight years in office.

Things changed when Gov. Mark Dayton entered office. Inflationary funding for schools returned and probably the biggest funding change for schools – all day kindergarten – was approved in 2013.

The Association began with an executive director who ran MSBA for more than two decades. But in the 2000s, three different executive directors have served for the past 20 years, along with many new services, such as eClippings, Student School Board Member Scholarships, Superintendent Search services, Strategic Planning Services, and a new rebranding for the Association.

Technology and social media also surfaced as school board members became more tech-centric. MSBA hopped on Facebook and Twitter in 2009. The Association followed up with its own YouTube channel for videos in 2013. In 2016, MSBA started a webinar service for short trainings that school board members could view from the comfort of their home – or during a lunch break. Just this year, MSBA started an Instagram account.

Changes are coming so fast that MSBA has to be adaptable, flexible, and technologically savvy enough to keep reaching school board members in ways they like to communicate. As we close out on our first 100 years of serving school board members, we look to the future with one thing that won’t change: Remaining the Go-To organization where School Board Members Learn to Lead.
Stillwater Area pioneered a move to 1-to-1 laptops in schools—a move that soon spread to districts across the state. Policies that originally banned cell phones from school eventually morphed into how students could use phones/tablets to help research and use new curriculum.

While the expense of adding technology climbed, Minnesota was hit with a governor who was reluctant to invest in schools—what he called “the black hole.” That was followed by years of state deficits with a governor (and many legislators) who signed “no new tax” pledges pushed by the Taxpayers League.

Up until the past eight years, schools during the new century had to find ways to do more with less—or do more with nothing. For most of the Tim Pawlenty administration, funding for schools was a non-starter due to large state deficits and an unwillingness to raise taxes to offset the deficits.

The new century started with then-Gov. Jesse Ventura calling school operating levy ballots a “tax grab.” The results weren’t good for school districts in 2000. But in 2001, the need for money returned with a record 188 school districts going out for some type of operating levy, with 130 districts gaining approval.

The new century also saw the start of education organizations banding together to form groups like The Alliance for Student Achievement. Made up of 10 different education groups, education received a boost from everyone working together on funding, special education, and other issues everyone could agree on.

Barbara Klaas, who was the Alliance Chair and also served as an MSBA President, helped bring together an Education Summit to talk about stable and sustainable funding for schools. “It is my belief that we are stronger and more effective working together than working apart,” Klaas said. “When we cannot agree, we fight among ourselves, dilute the message, and nobody wins.”

It was also the start of the swing toward Adequate Yearly Progress, labeling schools under No Child Left Behind, and testing, testing, and more testing.

TWO DECADES, THREE EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

In 2002, MSBA Executive Director Dick Anderson resigned to take a position at the National School Boards Association. As the Board looked for his replacement, Mike Torkelson was named Interim Executive Director. He served for a year until the Board picked Bob Meeks as its Executive Director in July 2003. Meeks retired in 2013, with the Board selecting Kirk Schneidawind as the Association’s sixth Executive Director.

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS HIT HOME

After Columbine, school shootings happened in schools across the nation. In 2003, it hit home at ROCORI with a school shooting that took the lives of 14-year-old Seth Bartell and 17-year-old Aaron Rollins. The shooter was confronted by gym coach Mark Johnson, who talked the teen into surrendering.

Two years later, a shooter killed his grandfather and his grandfather’s girlfriend, then drove to Red Lake High School and shot 12 people—five were wounded and seven were killed. After being wounded, the shooter then killed himself.

These shootings brought a new emphasis about how all schools need to have plans to keep students safe. Crisis plans were developed, school offices were moved closer to entrances, school crisis drills were implemented, and police liaisons became familiar fixtures in hallways. Community forums were held to ask what everyone could do to prevent shootings from happening again, and what counseling and mental health services students needed. Many groups made separate pushes for gun control that never went anywhere.

Gone were the comments about “It can’t happen in Minnesota” or “It can’t happen in my school.” In the 20 years after Columbine, there have been 240 more school shootings in the United States, not counting the shootings in colleges and universities. More than 300 children have been killed.

Today, after the Parkland, Fla., shootings...
and another round of calls for gun control, the nation is still looking for the courage to implement answers.

**A BIG PLAN WITH NO SUBSTANCE**

Funding for public schools was dealt a huge setback when Gov. Jesse Ventura pushed the state to cover $1 billion more of school funding to offset $1 billion in property taxes that supported schools. The plan also called for the state to raise taxes for the offset. As then-Executive Director Bob Meeks wrote: “The plan was one part candy (property tax relief) and one part medicine (new taxes). The Legislature quickly scooped up the candy and ignored the medicine.”

The result was a zero net gain for schools, a $1 billion state structural deficit just as the state was diving into a recession, and a no-new-taxes ideology that starved education funding with accounting gimmicks.

**NEWS CLIPPINGS GROWS FROM A WAY TO HELP AMBASSADORS TO MSBA’S MOST-READ SERVICE**

The News Clippings Service started in 2003 as a way to keep the 24 school board member Ambassadors informed about what was going on in K-12 education around the state. Some of the issues were used as talking points for the group.

Some superintendents working with the Ambassadors said that the service would be helpful to them as well. So later that year, MSBA set up a News Clipping Service for any school board member or superintendent who wanted to subscribe. In the first year, nearly 1,000 members signed up. Today, the eClippings has about 2,000 subscribers and readership of the eClippings webpage brings 20,000 hits to MSBA’s website each month – by far the most-viewed webpage for the Association.

**THE ERA OF TESTING BRINGS NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND**

In some circles, it was called No Child Left Untested. A couple decades after an under-funded federal IDEA bill was approved, the federal government approved an incursion into school achievement via testing. The intent was to show the disparities among students of color and white students. For Minnesota, it showed like a big, black eye. Nearly two decades after NCLB tests showed huge achievement gaps among students, Minnesota remains a state with a huge achievement gaps, housing gaps, employment gaps, poverty gaps, etc. The federal law was riddled with inconsistencies on how to address the gaps, why special education students had to meet the same grade-level proficiency as other students, and why children who didn’t speak English as their first language had to take tests in English.

As importance in testing every kid every year has dwindled, it provides a yearly reminder that Minnesota has not had much success in closing achievement gaps among students. (See article on Page 46.)

**THE HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT CHANGES WHEN SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE ELECTIONS**

In 2005, 168 school districts held board elections in the odd year and 172 school districts held board elections in the even year. But the federal government passed the Help America Vote Act that year, and school boards ran to even-year elections.

An unintended consequence of the federal act was that schools now had to pay for Automark machines and optical scan equipment and had to do public tests of the equipment. It all added to the cost and increased the time school staff spent trying to run an odd-year election. Today, all but 31 school districts have elections in the even year. For those remaining 31 districts, more are looking to drop the expense and time and lower voter turnout to move to even years.

**GIVING STUDENTS A BIGGER VOICE AT THE TABLE**

In 1993, the Legislature required school districts to have a student representative on their school boards. Three years later, the mandate was repealed. Then-Executive Director Bob Meeks had always liked the idea of giving students a taste of civic responsibility by being a part of a school board. The mandate, though, was a problem.

Meeks and the MSBA Board agreed that having a student seated at the board table gave an insight into some issues that most boards would benefit from having. That spawned the idea for the MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship – a way to recognize students who gained an understanding into what life as a public school board member was like. (See article on Page 48.)

**MSBA JUMPS INTO SOCIAL MEDIA, NEW TECHNOLOGY**

As new board members came into the Association, MSBA found that a growing number were part of Facebook, Twitter and other social media. If MSBA was to remain the Go-To Association, it had to offer information and resources through social media channels as well. In 2009, MSBA started its Facebook page. A couple months later, MSBA launched its Twitter account. Today, we have more than 1,000 followers on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/mnmsba) and more than 4,000 followers on our Twitter account (www.twitter.com/mnmsba). A YouTube channel followed in 2013 (www.youtube.com/mnmsbavideo) and an Instagram account in 2018 (www.Instagram.com/mnnschoolboards).

Changes have included more with electronic delivery of newsletters and event information, instead of postal mail. Today, more members are ditching email to rely on texting. So MSBA is exploring a texting communication method for board members who like to get communications on their phone.

**MSBA’S LOGO – FROM A BELL TO A TORCH TO A GRADUATE**

MSBA’s original logo was a simple outline of the state of Minnesota with an old-fashioned school handbell alongside. From the 1970s until 1994, it was used as the symbol of MSBA. But a new branding consultant was hired in 1994, and staff settled on a new logo – a blue and tan torch logo. The secret in the new logo? If you looked really close, you can see that
the torch was actually a book – a symbol of light and education. Yeah, most people didn’t realize the torch was a book. So in 2016, when MSBA went through rebranding, the logo was redesigned for simple primary colors, a focus on a high school graduate ready for the world with a golden swoosh for a bright future. Welcome to MSBA’s newest logo and tagline: Where School Board Members Learn to Lead.

A SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH SERVICE THAT FOCUSES ON THE SCHOOL BOARD
In May 2010, MSBA’s Board of Directors approved adding a MSBA-led Executive Search Service to support school boards as they conduct their searches and make the hiring decision.

From the outset, MSBA-led executive searches were based on one clear premise: The School Board would be in charge of all decisions. MSBA would focus on handling the details of a superintendent search and guide the School Board through the search process without making the decision(s) for them. MSBA’s approach remains the same today. (See article on Page 51.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING
In 2014, MSBA started its Strategic Planning Services for school districts. A district’s strategic plan, sometimes set on a shelf, became a more important document when requirements for The World’s Best Workforce were passed in the Legislature.

With a series of in-district meetings, boards are able to set their goals for the future. So far, more than 70 school boards have requested the service. (See article on Page 55.)

RECOGNIZED FOR INNOVATION BY NSBA
The National School Boards Association’s inaugural Innovation Award was presented to MSBA in August 2016. The honor was based, in large part, by the Board of Director’s work around the Association’s own Strategic Plan, which focused on equity and diversity issues, positioning MSBA to remain as the “Go-To” education association, and an extensive series of member surveys conducted over four years to listen to member needs in various areas of board work. The ultimate goal of the plan is to make boards better so they can work for ALL students to achieve.

NSBA Regional Director Barbara Riley said MSBA “directed the focus of its work squarely on the needs of students.”

REMEMBERING TIFF
On March 23, 2017, longtime MSBA staff member Tiffany Rodning passed away at the age of 49, following a seven-month fight with cancer. For 23 years she worked as the chief financial officer for MSBA and led the charge to rebrand MSBA with a new logo and a “Learn to Lead” tagline. As colleague Katie Klanderud wrote, Tiffany could be found in one of three places:

• Leading from the front – cheering you on and bringing you along.
• Leading from behind – encouraging you and having your back when you needed it.
• Leading alongside – so you knew you weren’t alone in whatever it is you’re going through.

It is how Tiffany taught all of us to “Learn to Lead.”

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE PUSH FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION
School boards saw the changes in the student population first – an increase in children of color. Some districts were able to hire teachers of color and start changing the face of instruction in the state. In 2016, Helen Bassett of Robbinsdale Area and Abdi Sabrie of Mankato Area helped form the School Board Members of African Heritage, which later became a more inclusive Board Members of Color group. As MSBA follows its Strategic Plan, it hopes to help school boards become more diverse to reflect Minnesota’s changing communities and schools. Efforts such as Reimagine Minnesota have also looked at how we can welcome diverse people and help them become leaders.

Then-Board President Kevin Donovan helped lead MSBA’s push for inclusion, saying “We need to celebrate our cultural and ethnic differences as an integral part of everyone’s education.”
In his 33 years at MSBA, Mike Torkelson worked to make a difference for school boards and students by providing excellent development opportunities for school board members, and creating accessible and easily understood school board elections.

Torkelson began his work at MSBA in November of 1968, and retired at the end of June 2003. He served as Executive Director of MSBA from 2002-2003, filling in when they went on a search to hire a new director. The person that they had selected as the new Executive Director had declined the position. The board began a new search. “They didn’t know what to do and I said that I could stay as they started to search again. So I was only the director until Bob took over,” Torkelson said. As Executive Director, Torkelson did not make any new hires. However, he did change around some roles of people, but in his words, “My main job for those years was keep the ship afloat,” Torkelson said.

Torkelson was drawn to MSBA because it was a job. Right after getting out of the Air Force in August 1968, Torkelson’s goal was to become the Director of Public Relations for either the Minnesota Twins or the Minnesota Vikings. However, those goals did not materialize. When he started looking for jobs, every job placement he answered gravitated towards insurance, but he was quick to decline any offer of which that was involved.

Eventually with the help from two Twin Cities women, Torkelson was introduced to MSBA. “As kind of a quirk, a woman who was on the Board of Directors from Minneapolis had a good friend. This friend of hers worked in St. Paul and ran a placement agency. They were at dinner one night, and the school board member from Minneapolis said to the woman from the placement agency, Grace Smith, that MSBA was thinking about hiring somebody to do public relations and information. The placement woman with whom I had just met with two days before said that she had met this young guy who came in, and he might have some interest in it. She called me up and asked me if I would be interested, and I said, if it was a job, I was interested,” Torkelson said.

The woman at the placement agency knew that Torkelson wanted to live in a metro area, but told him that the position would be in a small town. When she told him that it was in St. Peter, a town where he had spent his undergraduate career, he did not think twice and called the MSBA Executive Secretary on the recommendation of Ms. Smith. The Executive Director invited him to come down for an interview, along with his wife, which happened to be the same weekend as Homecoming at Gustavus. They met at his office, sat and chatted, and then Wettergren offered him a job, which he started on the first of November.

Torkelson was hired as the MSBA Director of Information. At the time, they only had three full-time administrative staff members. Once Torkelson was added, along with Jim Schmid, who was hired to do insurance around the same time, that made a staff of five.

During his first couple of days on the job, Torkelson read the MSBA manual, which was not nearly as developed as it is now. “I knew nothing about school boards. I knew we had one in St. James [his hometown], but I didn’t understand the function, so I just perused that for a while,” Torkelson said. After having worked at MSBA for a while, the Executive Director assigned Torkelson to take over school board elections, which used to take place in May, but now take place in November. Torkelson took what little there was on school board elections, about three pages in the manual, and began to work on the elections. At the beginning, he thought to himself: “How difficult can it be to have a school board election?” Taken by surprise, it was a lot more difficult than he had expected. However, Torkelson worked hard on school board elections until the day he left MSBA. Now, one of the sections in the MSBA manual includes the election manual, and was devised to help both the association and school districts with the election process.

School board elections take place every two years. In the process of setting them up, there are all kinds of publication dates and forms to fill out. Prior to the manual, half of the time those working on school board elections at the district level would miss deadlines and publications dates. When the manual was finally completed and implemented, it was a godsend for so many of the districts.

When Dick Anderson became the Executive Director, Torkelson became the Associate Executive Director and started to do work with training, the Boardcaster publication, and the Journal magazine. Eventually, his position evolved into doing a lot of work with training for school boards.

When Torkelson first started at MSBA, he recounts that probably 90 percent of school board members were men. As school districts and boards grew, they gradually got more women and professionals that joined, changing the dynamic of local boards over the years. The entirety of the education structure in Minnesota when Torkelson began was composed of approximately 440 school districts. There was not the in-depth kind of resources in schools that there needed to be.

There was a basic curriculum, but that was it. Everything began to evolve when school finances became more difficult, when trying to find ways to use money effectively. There were also limited training opportunities for board members. Eventually, these opportunities evolved nationally as professionals started to become school board members. These professionals had different ideas of what they
When Torkelson started at MSBA, there was an annual Convention, that is now known as the annual MSBA Leadership Conference. At the Convention, there was a one-day orientation program for newly elected school board members. In addition to this opportunity, MSBA had a summer workshop, now called the Summer Seminar, and the Legislative Delegate Assembly. Those three workshops and seminars were the only meetings that were in place to help with school board development. The Convention did have small-group training sessions, but they were very limited in terms of content and learning opportunities.

Torkelson wanted to provide new training opportunities for board members that would be effective in creating successful board functions. “I attended a national conference and heard about a pilot program called Board Action. It was a workbook and film. I went down there for three days to learn about the program. When I came back, we bought into it and we started having regional meetings.”

These were some of the first regional training sessions that MSBA offered. They would take place during an evening, afternoon, or were all-day sessions. One of the newer developments with this opportunity was the ability to take school board situations and have school board members discuss the role of school boards and how they could combat these problems. There were role-playing activities that were added to help get school board members involved at the meetings. For these discussions, a clip would be shown and then people would be split into different groups. From there, they would take the film clip of a particular board situation and they would discuss how they would do it as a group. It was a highly successful program, and it was really well received.

“The people learned, as did we as the association. It was interesting to me to see how people in different parts of the state answered the same situation differently,” Torkelson said. From there, MSBA gradually got into the Phase Three and Phase Four Programs it has today.

Torkelson is proud of how, over the course of all of the time he was at MSBA, the association worked to increase the training and learning opportunities for superintendents and board members. The association did some really innovative things at the Convention during that time. The structure of the Convention used to be Monday, Tuesday, and business sessions in the morning on Wednesday. There were eight workshop rooms, and about 200 people could fit in a room. Because there were so many more people attending, those attendants started asking for more. One of the first things that was added to the Convention were mini-sessions that took place first thing in the morning on the second day. There was resistance from the staff at MSBA regarding the mini-sessions, with the mindset that people would not get up in the morning to go to them. To their surprise, the sessions were packed.

From then on, the Convention expanded on the mini-sessions and cut back on free time, allowing for more training opportunities. “I marveled that the Convention from this year, and the training opportunities that were there. Anyone who went to the school board convention and told me they didn’t learn anything, I told them that they didn’t go to anything. You can’t tell me that you didn’t find something. It doesn’t matter if you get one idea or if you get 50. As long as you get one idea that you can take back to your board to help you work better and do things better for the kids, it’s been successful. That is one thing I take pride in. And I certainly did not do it alone. I think it was good for education in general, and good for us,” Torkelson said.

Although Torkelson found a lot of success in his position as Executive Director, when he stepped in, the association had gone through a little bit of a financial crunch. Torkelson worked with MSBA to find ways to cut corners and do some belt tightening with the finances. Other than trying to keep the finances on the “straight and narrow,” there were no other major problems. There were additions to programs for training purposes, but in terms of troubles or issues, there was nothing earth-shattering. Most of the focus and challenge for MSBA was in finding a new Executive Director, while Torkelson was in charge of keeping the status quo within the association.

In terms of his involvement with MSBA publications, Torkelson started off producing the newsletter and eventually went on to do the magazine. Torkelson’s undergraduate degree is in education at Gustavus Adolphus College, but he was involved with sports information and public relations as well. He knew how to do news releases and the publications effectively.

“If you look at those first issues, everything was copied from something else, that’s all we did. It eventually evolved into something that isn’t nearly as good as it is now,” Torkelson said. He also was involved with training development, which he really enjoyed, because of the interaction with people. The training programs, while being serious minded in their goals, included a lot of built in things where you could have fun while doing it. Torkelson was always a big believer in face-to-face interaction. “I still maintain that there is something to be said about the interpersonal face-to-face communication. You get the people comfortable with asking questions,” Torkelson said.

This was especially important during election season, when MSBA staff would spend all day on the phone answering questions for a two-week period.

One of the most important things that Torkelson learned throughout his time at MSBA was that, when you had an idea and you didn’t get any credit for it, that did not matter as long as it happened. He took this mindset into his work, creating publications and board member opportunities that represented the positive, impactful changes that MSBA sought to accomplish.

Torkelson remembers his time at MSBA with fulfillment and gratitude for the people who made it a great place to work. “Dick [Anderson] and I were very good friends over the years. We had a lot of fun times here. We had some tough times too, but I enjoyed it. The times I hated my job were so minuscule,” Torkelson said. In his retirement, Torkelson now works as an election judge, which he has been doing for a dozen years, and has enjoyed greatly.

Over the years, Torkelson was fortunate to do a lot of different things with MSBA. He said that he would have never taken a job where he had to stay in the office all the time and did not want a job where he traveled all the time. His work with board opportunities and school board elections while at MSBA kept him busy both at the office and out at different school districts interacting with superintendents, school board members, and secretaries. In this he worked to “keep the ship afloat,” while making impactful differences at MSBA and for school boards across Minnesota.

Kristi Manning was an intern from Gustavus Adolphus College, who worked for MSBA during the 2018 school year.
For the educators and school boards in the first decade of the new century, nothing defined schools more than the bi-partisan revamp of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act called No Child Left Behind.

On came testing in reading and math in every grade. Science testing was added. Each year students would be expected to go to a computer lab in early April and take tests for up to three different subjects. The law wanted an increasing percentage of each grade level of students to reach proficiency or else penalties could include open enrollment (which Minnesota already had) or turning a “failing” school into a charter school (which Minnesota also already had).

Each year the state would have to publish a list of schools that didn’t meet Adequate Yearly Progress, hitting a high of 472 public schools placed on the AYP list in 2004. That year, of those 472 schools, 83 percent were placed on the list because of 1 or 2 subgroups – mainly special education and Limited English proficiency students.

Some schools were on the AYP list each year through 2005 and faced the sanction of changing governance of the school to a charter school. Problem was, at that time, 12 percent of public schools were on the AYP list, compared to 29 percent of charter schools.

There was much that was wrong with the NCLB law. But one thing it did shine a light on was uniformity, “We want the goal to be quality, not uniformity,” he wrote.

AN OVEREMPHASIS ON TESTING
As former MSBA President Barbara Klaas reflected on the NCLB law, she appreciates how the law shined a light on the disparities in achievement among student groups. It was a first step to create a system for evaluating and holding schools accountable to alleviate the gaps.

“Unfortunately, the result was to place too much emphasis on two main subject areas and create tests that are not responsive to students’ and teachers’ needs while they are in the classroom learning,” she said. “We were torn, in my district, with forging ahead with the work we were doing to create diagnostic testing tools versus the time and energy needed to respond to the demands of enacting NCLB.”

In some schools, April testing tied up a school’s computer lab for weeks, making it impossible for teachers to have students use the computer lab during “testing time.” Some schools were on the list simply because their special education students – specifically defined as not being at grade level – did not perform at grade level.

By the fifth year of NCLB, the law had created a bi-partisan effort to get rid of the sanctions and change some of the rules that defied common sense. From then-Republican Congressman John Kline to Democrat Paul Wellstone, both were working to “fix” the law.

Superintendents were calling to reduce the testing. As former Hopkins Superintendent Michael Kremer wrote in a 2005 Journal: “Tests do not teach children; teachers do.” Kremer also advocated that NCLB shouldn’t treat all schools the same. “We want the goal to be quality, not uniformity,” he wrote.

Groups like Parents United started talking to parent groups about the law and tests. Mary Cecconi, who headed up the group and was a Stillwater Area school board member, said one test score should not determine the outcome of students or schools.

If there was one part of learning that NCLB didn’t consider, it was how to emphasize the social-emotional part of a child’s development. “We need to find areas where kids are struggling as early as age 3,” she said. Her goal was to really define what it meant to be ready for kindergarten and let parents know what that meant.

Cecconi said the achievement gap encompasses transportation gaps, liveable wage gaps, low-income housing gaps, health care gaps and so much more.

“I think schools have to admit we can’t do it all by ourselves,” she said. “But we do need to be courageous and push for the tools we need and do whatever it takes to help every child.”

The overemphasis on testing sparked movements in parent circles to simply opt their students out of standardized testing. Nearly two decades after the law was enacted, a recent Star Tribune article showed big spikes in students not taking the tests. At Minneapolis’ Patrick Henry High School, 91 percent of students refused the math test; another 85 percent refused the reading test.

MSBA LOOKS FOR A MORE COMPREHENSIVE WAY TO JUDGE STUDENT, SCHOOL SUCCESS

Kirk Schneidawind was MSBA’s lobbyist during the NCLB years. The message he received from members was very clear: “One test is not the way to judge students.” MSBA pushed for a state plan that would have multiple measures – one of which would be growth.

In the original NCLB law, there was a proficiency bar and the percentage of students needed to reach the bar kept rising every year.

“We wanted a student’s growth to be another factor, along with proficiency,” Schneidawind said. Many students were able to make improvements, but if the proficiency bar wasn’t reached, the effort wasn’t counted. Eventually, Minnesota moved to add a student growth measurement to the testing outcomes.

Another push was to include student scores on college entrance exams, such as the ACT test, and look at how many students went on to attend college.

Looking back on the law, Schneidawind agrees that NCLB did highlight that districts need to develop strategies to help all kids achieve.

“We’re still challenged by that today,” he said. But he is glad that the one-size-fits-all sanctions are gone, such as “firing the staff of a school on the AYP list for X number of years.”

“If I think it’s been proven that the sanctions were simply wrong,” he said. As public schools move ahead, he sees more personalized learning happening for all students. Though there might not be a comprehensive reform in the works, Congress will continue to nibble around the edges to make the law work better.
For 38 years, Bob Meeks helped to cultivate change at MSBA. As a passionate advocate for leadership and board opportunities, he worked to create a family approach to MSBA operations that supported school boards and student success in education across the state.

Bob started with MSBA as Director of Special Projects on November 1, 1975. In his time with the Association, he continued his service as chief lobbyist. During his last 10 years at MSBA, from July 1, 2003, to June 30, 2013, Meeks served as MSBA’s fifth Executive Director.

Before coming to MSBA, Meeks was working for the American Red Cross and decided that it wasn’t where he wanted to stay. He went on to work for the Minnesota State College system which is now Minnesota State. He worked for the Chancellor’s office and did enjoy education. The position at MSBA came to him when he was over at his grandparents’ house in Walker.

“We were having dinner with them and I read the Sunday paper. There was an ad for help wanted, and all it said was that it was an educational position in Southern Minnesota. It turns out, my uncle was a former legislator and was aware of MSBA and its work. A guy I worked with at Minnesota State Colleges had also worked closely with MSBA,” Meeks said. Because of these connections, Meeks was drawn to MSBA and was hired in November of 1975.

Meeks obtained his passion for education from his parents, who instilled the beliefs that an education is the way to become a better person and a productive member of society. “I grew up believing that education was a great pathway for all people. The challenges are probably greater, but I think that the rewards are the greatest. Just watching students grow, and providing the best opportunities we can, given the resources we have,” Meeks said. This was what drove him to MSBA and why he stayed for so many years, working to create educational opportunities for school boards and student success.

When Meeks became Executive Director, MSBA’s relationship with other units of government - specifically, cities, counties, and townships - was basically non-existent. He took the lead and met with city and county leaders to form the Big Three, which eventually became the Big Four when the townships joined.

During this time, Meeks additionally served as a part of the State Executive Directors Liaison Committee. For him, this was a great experience because it allowed for seven or eight state Executive Directors to work with the NSBA Executive Director in order to make sure that state, federal government, and NSBA were all on the same page.

As Executive Director, Meeks had multiple tangible goals. His first and number one goal was to enhance the public school system that is governed by locally elected school board members. By doing this he also could work toward his number two goal, which was to work to provide school boards across the state with information necessary to provide outstanding student opportunities. Those were his two main goals, but as Executive Director he also had one additional goal. “I believe in moving forward, but I also believe in looking back to learn. I think I did that for my 10 years as Executive Director. We had new proposals, and some of them were ideas or proposals that go around and come around again. We did learn from the past as we moved forward,” Meeks said.

In terms of changing staff positions and the layout of employment at MSBA, Meeks hired 10 staff members. About half of those were in response to retirements. Current Director of School Board Services, Sandy Gundlach, was hired from NSBA to start a superintendent search program for school boards. Katie Klanderud was hired to replace longtime Board Development Director Jan Rhode, and the current Deputy Executive Director, Gary Lee, was on the Board of Directors when he was hired to work with MSBA in Management Services. There was a strong program already in place, but with additions to the staff, the association was strengthened.

In the years Meeks was Executive Director, the association was not a lot different from how it is today. However, as a staff member, it was totally different. There were no computers, everything was typed and had to be proofed, and everything was manual. Everything that was sent out was in print form, and the Association had a print budget that was out of sight. “As Executive Director, I had such good people before me: Wettergren, Baker, Anderson, Torkelson,” Meeks said. As the years passed, his goal, along with the staff at MSBA, was to enhance what was built at the association. One example of this was the Student Scholarship, an idea that Meeks took to the board. “I still believe that was one of the best things we did.”

Even before serving as Executive Director, Meeks thought that MSBA’s main job was to provide excellent education. In response to these thoughts, Meeks developed the MSBA Student Scholarship to be awarded to two student school board members in Minnesota.

“We were really pushing that [student school board membership] at the time. For example, St. Peter had a student member on the board that participated in all of our meetings. I took that idea to the board as one of my goals and the board said, ‘Yeah. Let’s go. Give us something.’ So I decided to go with two $3,000 scholarships, to make it worthwhile, not $100, but $3,000, something very meaningful, and have student school board members apply. So that’s what we did. And it really worked out,” Meeks said.

Since the Student Scholarship was implemented, there have been attempts by MSBA to follow up with recipients to see if those student school board members have served on a school board, and where they are at now. There is a pretty good record of recipients from when it was implemented in 2009. When the scholarship started, there were about 10% of the districts with student school board members, and now, Meeks said, he would imagine that it has increased to 40% of districts.

In addition to the many successes that Meeks had in his years as Executive Director, there were also challenges that MSBA faced during that time. There was declining enrollment in some parts of the state, while other districts were gaining in enrollment. In response, MSBA was trying to meet the needs of both types of districts. The association also went through some really tough state budget problems. The staff tried to figure out what school boards could do to address lower funding. Another challenge was hiring new staff, bringing them up to speed, and meeting the needs of a diverse population of school board members, which has always been a challenge for MSBA. And, certainly computers were a challenge. “That
Although it brought challenges, towards the end of his time at MSBA, Meeks was beginning to do more with computers and technology. With an increase of technology, MSBA worked with other units of government to have a unified voice on many issues and to continue their role in BELL which is the Better Education Legislative Liaison, of which Meeks served as president at one time. MSBA began going out and meeting with first-time superintendents to talk about how MSBA services could help them and their boards. “This opportunity really materialized the knowledge from people coming out of state or moving up from a principal to superintendent, and made them familiar with MSBA, what we could do for them, and their role with MSBA,” he said.

Although Meeks did not serve on a school board prior to working for MSBA, he now serves as a member on the St. Peter School Board. He was appointed to a two-year position the year after he retired as Executive Director at MSBA. When that term ended, he successfully ran for election.

Following his term, he does not plan to continue serving on the school board. However, he has had a great experience serving for the past six years. “I knew I could talk the talk and I wanted to see if I could walk the walk. It’s been a great experience for me. St. Peter built a new high school and we initiated a lot of changes. I wouldn’t change a thing about serving on the school board, except I found out that even after I worked at MSBA for 38 years, it’s a heck of a lot of work to serve on a school board. Now when I get something from MSBA, I look at it differently from when I produced it,” Meeks said.

As a leader for MSBA, there is a lot to think back on and be proud of. Meeks is especially proud of the consistent and forward-looking leadership that he was surrounded by when working to build coalitions in education. There was a cohesiveness and family approach that MSBA took to the staffing that helped make MSBA a great association. “I believed that MSBA was a family, and if one of us was hurting, all of us were hurting. Working with a great staff makes it so much easier. All of the people have your back. We really were a family and I think that was really exhibited as much as anything when Tiffany passed away. The pain that not only the current staff, but also the former staff, went through when trying to make sense of all that. I was very proud when I became Executive Director. I made Tiffany Rodning and John Sylvester Deputy Executive Directors, and with Barb Lynn, who was my Administrative Assistant, we were a strong administrative team. Anything of importance was bounced off of the team. It came from the bottom up, and I really think that helped us,” Meeks said.

Meeks is grateful for all of the time he spent working at MSBA, making connections, while supporting school boards and students. “It was a long time, but now it has gone by so quickly. I’ve been out for six years which again is quick. It was the blink of an eye. I was very fortunate to work with this staff, and to serve with the thousands of school board members and superintendents I worked closely with, and the MSBA Board.” In addition to being thankful for his time at MSBA, Meeks is mainly proud of the work that the association accomplished that helped the students in Minnesota become more productive citizens.

From his work in Special Projects to creating the Student Scholarship, Meeks worked hard to make MSBA an association focused on helping school boards achieve their goals for student success, while taking a family approach at MSBA to progress in forward-looking leadership.

Kristi Manning was an intern from Gustavus Adolphus College, who worked for MSBA during the 2018 school year.

In 1993, the Minnesota Legislature enacted a law that required school districts to have a student representative serve on their school boards.

Three years later, the Legislature repealed this mandate, but many districts opted on their own to keep student representation on their school boards.

“I talked to board members and superintendents about their student representatives,” said Bob Meeks, who at that time was working as an education lobbyist on the MSBA Government Relations staff. “The more I talked to them, the more I understood how much work some of these students were doing — and in some of the cases, these students went well beyond what a student consult or rep would do.”

Flash forward to 2006. Meeks never forgot about those students’ contributions. Now serving as the MSBA Executive Director, Meeks ruminated on a goal he set for himself during his tenure — creating a scholarship program to recognize Minnesota’s student board representatives he’d heard so much praise about.

During meetings with executive directors from other state school boards associations, Meeks would ask the other executives if they offered a student scholarship program that MSBA could emulate.

“No one was doing a student school board scholarship program, so we had to put it together ourselves,” Meeks said. “To my knowledge, MSBA is still the only state school boards association that offers this type of scholarship.”

In 2009, Meeks — with “big help” from then-staff member Tiffany Rodning — gained approval from the MSBA Board of Directors to establish the MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship program.

“The scholarship was a way for us, as the leading education organization, to provide recognition for up to two students,” Meeks said.

The scholarship program would award two senior high school students each with $3,000 to use toward their postsecondary education.

“I didn’t want the scholarship to be a $50 or $100 award,” Meeks said. “I wanted it to be something that acknowledged the work the kids put in, and that the scholarship was competitive. That’s how we got to the $3,000 figure for two students.”

Applications for the first MSBA scholarship were made available in January 2009. By the March deadline, 35 students had applied.

Betsy Anderson, then in her fourth year on the Hopkins School Board, had one of her student school board representatives in the running for that first scholarship.

Hopkins Public Schools had been one of the districts that kept its student board representative program in place following the repeal of the state law. Anderson said the Hopkins school leaders in the early 1990s saw “tremendous value in having student voices at the table when district decisions were made.”

The first MSBA Student Scholarship Committee, which was comprised of five members from the MSBA Board of Directors, pored over the applications in order to complete the tough task of paring a deserving field of 35 students down to just two.
Anderson, who served on the MSBA Board of Directors from 2011 to 2017 and was at the meeting table for many Student Scholarship Committees, can attest to the difficulty of selecting just two winners.

“The talent of the student applicants was outstanding,” Anderson said. “Narrowing it down took many hours and careful study of the applications. In the end, the committee usually had a few that rose to the top. Even though the process was difficult, it was also filled with hope. If I was ever lamenting the state of our community, our state or our nation, I would only have to read the words of those young people to be reminded that the generation ahead of us was strong, capable, and compassionate — that we are all in very good hands.”

Though Anderson didn’t serve on that first Scholarship Committee in 2009, she was overjoyed by the committee’s decision. The first MSBA Student School Board Membership winners included her school board student representative, Ethan Lang, along with Cambridge-Isanti High School’s Kendra Lynn.

Meeks decided early on that an MSBA delegation — made up of MSBA staff members and/or MSBA Board Directors — would present the scholarship awards to each student locally during one of their school board meetings.

Anderson recalled good memories of MSBA rolling into town to honor her board’s student representatives.

“I will always remember how fun it was to have MSBA attend a meeting to make the formal, public presentation,” she said. “For one student in particular, we were able to keep the whole thing a surprise! We were even able to get his parents there to watch the surprised reaction. There were a few times that our students were invited to present at the MSBA Leadership Conference, too. Very proud moments and happy memories, for sure!”

From the award’s inception through Meeks’ departure from MSBA in 2013, she was able to attend a number of these scholarship presentations across the state.

In 2011, during an award presentation at White Bear Lake Area Schools, Meeks recalled how appreciative the student’s parents were.

“That student and her parents talked to me after the presentation, and it was clear how much the scholarship award meant because they didn’t have a lot of money,” he said. “And $3,000 is a good first start.”

Meeks, a native of Walker, also had then opportunity to present an award close to home when a student from the neighboring Cass Lake-Bena School District was honored in 2010.

With three MSBA scholarship winners to its name, Hopkins Public Schools can claim “dynastic” status for the time being. After Ethan Lang won one of the inaugural scholarship awards in 2009, Hopkins students also took home the prize in 2014 (Tim Bergeland) and 2017 (London Lowmanstone). Anderson said she’s proud of Hopkins’ three scholarship winners.

“It is definitely a wonderful distinction to hold the record for the most MSBA Scholarship winners, though the lasting value is in having known these young people and watched their growth over the years,” Anderson said.

Anderson, now the communications director for Perpich Center of the Arts, said the Hopkins student board members faced difficult issues like budget cuts and school closures — and handled it all with aplomb.

“Those students attended all of our meetings, engaged in the conversations just like their elected counterparts, and carried themselves with great maturity,” she said. “I would say the same for the other student board reps, even though they may not have won the scholarship those years.”

Duluth Public Schools (2010 and 2014) and White Bear Lake Area Schools (2011 and 2018) are the only other multiple scholarship-winning districts.

Currently in its 11th year, the MSBA Scholarship has been awarded to students from 18 different school boards. The award has been presented to students as far north as Cass Lake-Bena, Duluth and Proctor — and as far south as Austin and Caledonia Area. Caledonia Area also marks the smallest district awarded (by enrollment, with less than 700 students), while South Washington County Schools is the largest district (more than 18,000 students enrolled) to win.

MSBA scholarship recipients have gone on to attend a variety of postsecondary institutions. Four of the scholars choose Ivy League schools — two at the University of Harvard, one at Brown University, and one at the University of Pennsylvania (Wharton Business School). However, the most popular individual choice so far has been the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota, which has enrolled four MSBA scholarship winners.

Anderson and Meeks both view student representatives as the voice of the students and a valuable resource for school boards.

Meeks eventually joined the St. Peter School Board in 2014, which allowed him to work closely with the student representatives he set out to honor with the MSBA scholarship program.

“The amount of hours of time the students put in is somewhat amazing,” Meeks said. “I could just tell from my personal experience here in St. Peter, the student school board members we’ve had, some are more active than others, but all of them put the time and effort in.”

As the Student School Board Scholarship program moves into the future, Meeks is proud its creation is part of his personal legacy at MSBA.

“I’m probably as proud of this scholarship program as anything I did while I was the executive director of MSBA,” Meeks said. “It’s the students who are being recognized, as well as their school board and community for the role they provide for the student to fill. I am so happy that it’s continuing, and we have even more student school board members.”

Today, by MSBA’s unofficial count, the number of public school boards having at least one student representative on the school board has risen to at least 130.
Looking Forward to the Future of MSBA: 
Kirk Schneidawind, MSBA Executive Director, 2013-Present

Striving to Support Student Achievement and a Successful Future for MSBA

By Kristi Manning - MSBA Intern

Kirk Schneidawind has served students and school boards throughout his entire career. Working towards high student achievement has been his main goal, whether that is moving students into secondary education or the workforce.

Schneidawind started his career in education as a substitute teacher. He then went on to teach special education in St. Peter. He then took a position teaching middle school social studies, as well as coaching boys and girls golf and boys basketball.

Schneidawind started at MSBA in 1999 to pursue lobbying. “I took a year’s leave to see what lobbying was all about and I really liked it. I started in 1999, so it’s been almost 20 years now working for the association. I still have my foot in the education world, but also in the government and policy-making world,” Schneidawind said.

Schneidawind went on to get his administrative principal and superintendent license. While he could have gone down that route, he liked the work of MSBA, the policies and finance-related work as a way to help students. He also liked the idea of not just helping his own classroom and school, but all of Minnesota’s public schools.

After working for MSBA for 14 years, he started his position as executive director on July 1, 2013, after former executive director Bob Meeks retired.

One thing that Schneidawind has intentionally shifted is that MSBA has taken a focus on looking at the good of the student, with a student achievement-focused mission. He found that in the past, MSBA was an association that was driven on managing the district, specifically in terms of business. While that is still an important part of board work, the Association has been more purposeful in focusing on student performance. In response to these goals, the trainings, advocacy, and strategic plan that MSBA provides all look at the best practices that reach towards outstanding student achievement.

Schneidawind and the Association have been intentional about getting opportunities out to school board members. His main objective is to provide beneficial and accessible training opportunities to school board members. With these goals in mind, the association has implemented the addition of Strategic Planning Services, Superintendent Search Services, and a Trust Edge training component. One of the most successful additions was the superintendent evaluation tool that gets the MBSA staff out into the communities, helping our board members. This is all in line with trying to become a more proactive organization, rather than waiting for problems to arise and then trying to solve them, as well as aiming to better prepare our school board members for those situations.

The final goal that Schneidawind is working towards relates to the issue of equity. “What we’re trying to do is help our board members focus on student achievement, but also recognize the changing demographics in Minnesota to prepare and set the stage to help improve our students of color, special education students, and free and reduced lunch students, who have historically, when looking at the MOAs, have not performed as well,” Schneidawind said.

In doing this, MSBA focuses on overall student achievement while bringing it back to the school board role, and training and educating them in what the board responsibility is in helping both teachers and students in moving the needle on student achievement.

The reason why school boards and city councils are so important is because they are at the heart of local government, and that is where things get done. Having a good representative body in a school board can really make a difference in a school district’s performance or outcomes. One of the main messages that MSBA aims to send to school boards is that of building high-performing school boards.

One of the MSBA taglines is, “Where School Boards Learn to Lead,” and a lot of times school board members might not see the process of representing a school district that way. Because of this, local government is the heart of creating a better education system in Minnesota.

Schneidawind maintains that local decision-making is the best when made by those who are closer to the action. Many times, the legislative bodies try to “fix” all of the things that have issues at the local level, making it one-size-fits-all, instead of letting the local boards and communities fix the problems themselves. Because of the importance and his respect for local government, Schneidawind has developed a much broader view of the importance of public education across the state.

“I think there is an inherent value in the school board members having a close personal touch to the district. It provides that community input into what they want their schools to look like. It’s kind of a fundamental piece of any strong organization. You hear from the community, and you build a stronger and better school,” Schneidawind said.

During his tenure, Schneidawind has not had any monumental hurdles that he has needed to overcome. However, one of the most challenging things MSBA has gone through together as a staff was the loss of Finance Director, Tiffany Rodning. “She was so well-respected among all of the staff, our members, and associate business partners who knew her. It was funny, today I was driving in here and I was thinking about her. So that was probably the most challenging thing,” Schneidawind said.

The other challenging time for Schneidawind on a statewide level, was going through the 2008-2009 recession for Minnesota school districts. “I think the uncertainty around stable funding for our districts was really a challenge. There were some things, they shifted some money, that made it really challenging for our districts. I was lobbying, but at this point, it was a challenging time for the country, for our state, and for our school districts.” Schneidawind said. Years later, those districts are still feeling the effects.

In his time at MSBA, Schneidawind has had many accomplishments to be proud of. Recently, MSBA has been more intentional about preparing the association for the future, as well as preparing school board members for what the future will hold. The association rebranded, resurfaced, and refocused on what MSBA does for its members. Those services, which include Strategic Planning, are fundamental towards helping boards move...
forward in productive ways, setting a vision for where they want to go, and focusing on planning for advancement. “I’m proud of the energetic and knowledgeable staff that we have. They do great work for all of our districts, and many have had school board experience or a foot in the K-12 space,” Schneidawind said.

MSBA is celebrating its 100-Year Anniversary in 2020, and everyone at the Association is very proud of the fact that, over the years, MSBA has had such a strong member base who have been supportive of the Association and its efforts. MSBA is also fortunate to have a strong Board of Directors who do a great job of providing direction and oversight for the Association. Those who serve on that board are school board members, and they understand the value and importance of the services that MSBA provides. In addition, having their oversight and vision is part of why MSBA is such a strong organization. Schneidawind contends that those members who sit on the Board of Directors are really the best of the best school board members because they know their role in providing governance and oversight, but also let the executive director and staff do their work.

According to Schneidawind, citizens are overwhelmingly choosing public education for their student’s education. That speaks to the value of our schools and our teachers. From a statewide perspective, that means having good schools translates to having good graduates, and having good graduates means that there will be a solid foundation for a great workforce. Minnesota is recognized as one of the top five states in public education, and those results feed into a state that does really well economically, putting people to work, allowing students to go to college or trade school, and making for a better Minnesota.

In the spirit of MSBA executive directors, Schneidawind agrees that MSBA has been like a family for himself and his co-workers. For him, that is no question. “When you’re working with the same number of people, the stability of the workforce, and the employees it really does make it feel like a family. And any of our staff members would help their co-worker out at the drop of a hat. Whether that is moving somebody or helping someone at work, we treat it that way,” Schneidawind said. By having the smallness of the staff of MSBA, everyone gets to know their co-workers kids and their grandkids.

In terms of building for the future, MSBA, with leadership from Schneidawind, is focusing on how it can build an Association that meets the needs of the next generation of school board members. This is important in how MSBA will run in the next few years, as well as in the distant future for Minnesota public education.

With strong leadership, support, and commitment, Schneidawind, the MSBA staff, the Board of Directors, and school board members are working to create the best in Minnesota.

Kristi Manning was an intern from Gustavus Adolphus College, who worked for MSBA during the 2018 school year.

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MSBA’s Executive Search Service Helps Boards with One of its Most Important Decisions

By Sandy Gundlach, Director of School Board Services

MSBA has long valued the important decision a school board must make when hiring a new superintendent to lead and manage the school district. Knowing that about 54 superintendent positions transition from one superintendent to another each year, school board members quickly learn that, at some point in their tenures, they will be members of school boards that must search for and hire a new superintendent. In 1992, I was elected to the St. Peter School Board. At that time, the search-related options available to a school board were limited and that was especially true for smaller school districts. This article provides a history relative to MSBA’s decision to offer an executive search service.

Long before adding an executive search service, MSBA staff was a “phone call away” or, more recently, an “email or text message away” when school board members needed answers to their superintendent search-related questions. Then, MSBA’s staff developed an in-district workshop designed to help school boards conduct a successful search. The content focused on such topics as how to conduct a search, relevant laws, and interviewing. The in-district workshop was helpful for school boards whether conducting their own searches or hiring an outsider to help them. Next, in the late 1990s, three retired Minnesota superintendents developed a search service and other superintendent-led search options would soon follow prompting discussion and debate about whether MSBA should develop an executive search service. Finally, in May 2010, MSBA’s Board of Directors approved adding a MSBA-led executive search service to support school boards as they conduct their searches and make the hiring decision.

From the outset, MSBA-led executive searches were based on one clear premise: the school Board would be in charge of all decisions. MSBA would focus on handling the details of a superintendent search and guide the School Board through the search process without making the decision(s) for them. MSBA’s approach remains the same today.

In 2015, MSBA expanded its executive search team’s capacity by adding service providers, also known as consultants, to help deliver search services and other services as needed. MSBA’s team of service providers consists of former superintendents and a school board member, all of whom know and understand the role and function of the school board, how law affects the hiring process, and which search-related practices work. As a result, MSBA greatly expanded both its reach and ability to continue to provide quality search services and other services to its members.

MSBA’s reach extends nationally to other states through the National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers (NASS), an organization MSBA joined nearly two decades ago. The NASS is comprised of more than 100 superintendent search consultants representing 40 state school boards associations who assist their peers in other states by providing access to nationwide job postings and vital reference and work-history verification concerning out-of-state applicants. Ultimately, when a school board hires MSBA to conduct its superintendent search, the school district taps into NASS — one of the most experienced, qualified networks of search consultants in the United States.

Since the 2010-11 school year, MSBA’s search team has conducted a combined total of 59 searches in various locations throughout the state. It’s important to note that 21 of the searches were conducted during the 2018-19 school year.

As we all know, trying to predict the future can be a foolhardy activity because the actual outcome often falls short of what we think will happen. Similarly, despite having no crystal ball one thing remains clear for MSBA’s executive search services: like all MSBA services it will continue to grow its strategic governance focus and support the needs of the school board above all else.
MSBA Staff celebrated the launch of its new branding, complete with a new logo, a mission to be the Go-To Organization and the mantra: Where School Board Members Learn to Lead.

School board members, administrators and students from across the state took a bus to the Capitol in 2003 to tell legislators to make K-12 education a priority that needs to be funded.

What a difference a couple decades makes. As MSBA entered 2000, Jesse Ventura addressed board members. He later went on to call education funding a “black hole.” In 2019, Gov. Tim Walz addressed board members and said that as a former teacher, he will give his full support to funding education.
The opening day of MSBA’s Leadership Conference is always a busy time with registration and school board members making new connections.

School board members had fun in the Leadership Conference Exhibit Hall, playing a little hockey at the Minnesota High School League booth.

Arlene Bush (with her family) receives the first MSBA Distinguished School Board Member award for being the first person to top 1,000 MSBA points. Two years later, the award was named after her. Marilyn Forsberg of Spring Lake Park, Roy Nelson of Red Lake and Jeannette Kester of East Central have also won the award.

Kathy Green welcomes new MSBA President Deb Pauly and hands over the gavel to her at the 2019 MSBA business session.

Former President Joanne McCabe unfolds a long list of state education mandates in a plea to the legislature for local control.

Minnesota Department of Education Finance Director Tom Melcher packed the house for many years at the Leadership Conference as he explained how new laws would affect school finances.
It took years of research and prodding, but in 2013, the state Legislature recognized the importance of preschool and all-day kindergarten. On May 22, Gov. Mark Dayton signed legislation that provided funding for all-day kindergarten – something MSBA delegates had pushed for more than a decade.

MSBA Government Relations Director Denise Dittrich had just started work at the Association a year earlier and remembered the work to pass the bill was a huge team effort.

“It took years to get this passed because it was a statewide, systemic change to the K-12 system,” she said. “MSBA was an integral part of the process, but there were education experts, school leaders, advocacy groups, community organizations, parents and lawmakers who all made it happen.”

Dittrich said the accomplishment demonstrates how change happens – usually a long process with research and leaders of all types willing to step up and do the right thing.

“It really came down to an equity issue for students,” Dittrich said. “Some had all-day kindergarten available and others didn’t.”

Those districts that could afford to take money out of the general fund to pay for all-day kindergarten were able to offer it, while many other school districts couldn’t afford it.

When it passed, schools also rushed to add space to their elementary schools to accommodate full-day kindergarten classes. Usually in a calendar year, about 20 school districts asked for bond referenda. In 2014, 55 districts asked for help to build new early childhood centers, add on to elementary schools or simply built new elementary schools. In 2015, another 66 districts made requests – the largest number of bond requests since MSBA began tracking the requests in 1980.

**TARGETING 3-AND 4-YEAR-OLDS FOR QUALITY PRESCHOOL OR EARLY CHILDDOOD PROGRAMS**

Dittrich said the next step would be to look at targeted preschool for 3 and 4-year-olds in poverty as a way of closing the achievement gap. Just like full-day kindergarten, that push might also take some time.

During the past biennium, the state offered money for preschool scholarships, something former Federal Reserve vice president and now University of Minnesota Humphrey School Senior Fellow Art Rolnick is passionate about.

Years ago, Rolnick heard a pitch from Ready for K Executive Director Todd Otis about putting more money into early childhood to close achievement gaps.

“The problem was that any group could make a moral argument for their cause,” Rolnick said. “I told them that I thought it would be more effective if we could make an economic argument.”

The next thing he knew, he was appointed to the board and given the task to make an economic case for preschool funding. He joined with colleague Rob Grunewald, looking at the Perry Preschool study. The Perry preschool had high-quality teachers who worked with 3- and 4-year-olds whose families were in poverty.

Their question was to see what the return on investment was – and Rolnick was hoping for at least a 5.8 percent return. “We wanted to make sure the return was at least better than the average 5.8 percent of return on any investment,” he said. Their results showed an 18 percent rate of return.

“The number was so large, we sent it to some experts at the University of Chicago to check,” Rolnick said. “It was still 18 percent. And if anything, we were told that we might be understating the benefit.”

Rolnick’s research found quality child care saves government money when a child is ready for kindergarten and doesn’t need special education services, isn’t held back a grade, doesn’t drop out and doesn’t end up in the criminal justice system. It also helps get the parents back into the workforce.

Rolnick thinks fully funding kindergarten was a good step, but he also thinks that by age 5, it’s too late to close achievement gaps. His plan would be to offer scholarships to quality preschools and daycares for all 3- and 4-year-olds in poverty. The state has set aside $70 million annually for the scholarships. He said to fund it for all kids in poverty, it would need to be $400 million annually. If that happens, his hope is that he’ll be out of a job and all kids will be achieving at similar levels.

**MSBA’S STANCE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD FUNDING**

MSBA’s Dittrich said that adding early childhood or public preschool to the school district’s plate will require more than simple per pupil funding increases. Funding has to be stable and it also needs to cover additional special education costs and transportation costs.

The current MSBA legislative policy urges the Legislature to ensure that any expansion of the Early Education Program allow for flexibility in the implementation, structure, staffing and timing, as well as appropriating adequate and equitable resources for additional age-appropriate classrooms and fully fund transportation costs in order to meet the needs of the local community.

Right now, voluntary pre-K is funded at 0.6 pupil units.

“I think most board members also agree that the Legislature can’t rob money from the K-12 system to cover additional funding for preschool,” Dittrich said.

Right now, most Early Childhood programs are run through the Community Services fund. But there are also programs like Head Start, School Readiness, School Age Care, and many others.

“There has to be agreement on what programs work, and how the state should get there,” Dittrich said.
MSBA’s Strategic Planning Process Sends Boards on the Right Course

By Jeff Olson and Gail Gilman

In Lewis Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland,” the following exchange occurs between Alice and the Cheshire Cat.

“Would you please tell me which way to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to go,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where,” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

Effective school boards don’t follow the example set by Alice. Instead, effective school boards provide leadership in clarifying the school district’s purpose and direction. The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) started its Strategic Planning Process in 2014 to help school districts put its Strategic Plan on the “right course.” The process has been used by 65 school districts to date. Assistance occurs in four stages.

First, MSBA consultants conduct planning and preparation activities designed to provide the school district leadership team with the knowledge needed to set the strategic planning model in motion. This phase of the process involves several components including: the development of a timeframe for the process; providing resources for the selection and recruitment of the Strategic Planning Committee; reaching consensus on methods to be used to gather feedback about the school district; and, reviewing how the process is designed to incorporate all planning efforts, including the World’s Best Workforce Plan, under one “umbrella.”

Second, MSBA provides the school district with several methods of gathering “stakeholder” input on the strengths and issues of the school district. One option is for the district to use on-line surveys for the purpose of collecting the opinions of both internal and external stakeholders. Surveys can be provided by MSBA staff or the school district may choose to develop its own surveys. Also, MSBA consultants conduct forums with students, members of the administrative team, staff, and the community. Following the completion of these activities, the consultants provide the Strategic Planning Committee with a written summary and analysis of the stakeholder input activities.

Third, MSBA staff conduct four meetings with the school district’s Strategic Planning Committee. The first meeting is designed to develop or revise the district’s mission, vision, and beliefs/values statements. In the second meeting, Committee members receive information about the school district from the superintendent of schools and are provided with a summary of stakeholder-related input results from the MSBA consultants. Also, the Committee conducts an “environmental scan” on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (S.W.O.T.) of the district. During the third meeting, the Committee develops specific goals and objectives designed to reflect the mission, vision, and beliefs of the district, as well as to address concerns and issues identified during the S.W.O.T. analysis. The final meeting is conducted via Skype from the MSBA office and is focused on clarifying and finalizing goals and objectives developed by the Committee.

Finally, MSBA provides the school board and superintendent with methods for “following-up” on progress in accomplishing the goals and objectives established in the Strategic Plan. Included are templates for developing “action plans”, methods of communicating with stakeholders about the plan, and a suggested format for regular monitoring the success of meeting the key components of the plan. Following the school board’s approval of the Strategic Plan, MSBA will provide the school district with a final document summarizing the Strategic Planning Committee’s work and will conduct a follow-up meeting on progress in completing the plan approximately one year after the plan is finalized.

MSBA has recently offered additional features for board planning, which includes the Equity Dashboard and the Software Management Program.

The Equity Dashboard is a tool districts can use to monitor student achievement and evaluate strategic initiatives through an equity lens.

The Software Management Program is a new tool that will help districts track progress toward Strategic Plan goals and include various steps boards have taken toward accomplishing a goal.

MSBA also offers an inservice with the board team to discuss implementation and monitoring of the strategic plan.

In the end, clearly one of the fundamental purposes of the school board is to envision the future of the school district. This is accomplished by clarifying the school district’s purpose, direction, goals, and objectives. A well-crafted Strategic Plan guides this process and ensures that, unlike “Alice”, the district knows “which way to go” in order to provide high quality education to the students it serves.

For more information, go to www.mnmsba.org/strategicplanningservices or contact Gail Gilman at 800-324-4459, ext. 130, or ggilman@mnmsba.org.

Jeff Olson was a consultant for the Minnesota School Boards Association and is now interim superintendent for St. Peter Public Schools. Gail Gilman is the Director of Strategic Planning and Board Leadership. You can reach her at ggilman@mnmsba.org.
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HOW ENERGY EFFICIENCY HELPS SCHOOLS SAVE MONEY
by Jennifer Kimmen, Services Manager

When we talk about school budgets, conversations typically center on needs directly related to education: staffing, programs or supplies. Ways to save energy may be the last thing on our minds. But, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, K-12 schools spend about $8 billion a year on energy nationally. That’s second only to personnel costs. When budgets are tight, energy efficiency can reduce future costs while improving the learning environment for both students and teachers.

Consultations and audits

While inefficiencies such as outdated or broken equipment may seem obvious, a professional audit is the best way to determine issues that need to be addressed and provide guidance on how to fix them. Audits not only help identify equipment that needs to be replaced, but also pinpoint behaviors that could be contributing to energy inefficiencies, while offering proactive measures schools can take to avoid future inefficiencies.

Audits are relatively low in cost, and energy companies such as Minnesota Energy Resources often offer rebates to help pay for them. Besides audits, schools can consult with energy companies directly to create money-saving energy efficiencies. They can recommend opportunities for both immediate and long-term efficiencies and often design custom rebates to offset long-term project costs.
General maintenance and tune-ups

Regular maintenance and tune-ups of equipment and energy systems are critical to maximizing their efficiency and life. Failing to properly maintain HVAC systems, water heaters and food service equipment, for example, results not only in higher short-term energy costs but can also shorten their lifetime. Eventually, they can become hazardous. Consulting with an energy company can help identify equipment that could use a tune-up to prevent hazards, run more efficiently and improve indoor air quality, resulting in a cleaner, healthier environment in your school.

Energy efficiency rebates

Tuning up or replacing existing equipment can be expensive in the short-term but results in savings over the long-term, as new equipment or tune-ups generally end up paying for themselves. Schools looking to cut back on energy expenses can take advantage of rebates available for a wide variety of energy-saving measures, from tune-ups and installing insulation to replacing larger equipment such as furnaces, boilers, water heaters or food service equipment.

Minnesota Energy Resources offers a custom rebate program for energy-saving measures not covered by other available rebates. The savings through these programs can be substantial. For example, one school district received a rebate of $21,605 for completing an indoor air quality renovation project.
Other tips for saving energy in schools

Using ENERGY STAR®-certified products ensures smaller equipment such as computers, printers and copiers also use energy efficiently, and online resources such as ENERGY STAR tools or Minnesota Energy Resources’ saving energy page can provide other tips for cutting energy use (and costs).

The earlier, the better

Being proactive about saving energy has countless benefits, from immediate savings and extended equipment life to improved air quality and a healthier environment for teachers and students.

Getting an energy company involved early helps schools avoid energy inefficiencies and the costs that come with them.

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