Cruz-Guzman Case Update
Jessica Davis – 2019
Minnesota Teacher of the Year
Governing Bodies and the Outlier Syndrome
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Summer 2019 was a season of change for MSBA.

We experienced the departures of two valued longtime staff members — Bill Kautt and Jeff Olson. Bill is currently enjoying a well-earned retirement. Jeff has returned to St. Peter Public Schools to serve as interim superintendent. Both men served the MSBA membership with deep wells of knowledge.

While losing Bill and Jeff was tough, your Association had anticipated these personnel changes. Good organizations rebuild/retool, and we did just that with four great new hires this summer, since we are also anticipating some additional retirements in 2020. While the names and the faces may be changing at the Association, our commitment to meeting the needs of our school boards will not. Our service-focused mindset will continue and only get better.

In July, we brought three new staff members into the mix — Barb Dom (former executive director of the YWCA Mankato), Jackie Fahey (former administrative assistant at Le Sueur-Henderson Public Schools) and Paula O’Loughlin (a former Stillwater Area School Board member and a program manager for Equity Alliance MN).

In August, we rounded out our new additions with Tiffany Gustin — a former business manager for Aitkin Public Schools.

We have the utmost confidence in our new personnel. They all look forward to working with and serving the MSBA membership. Learn more about these new staff members on Pages 28-29 of this issue.

When MSBA brings in new staff members, we believe it is important to properly onboard them by integrating them into our Association and our culture.

Likewise, school board members should be aware of how their new staff members and teachers are being onboarded at their district office and schools, respectively.

It’s critical for MSBA and school districts alike to create a welcoming and supportive work environment — especially in today’s tight labor market. School districts continue to face teacher shortages, due to having fewer teaching candidates, and new teachers are not sticking with the profession as long they once did.

Hiring is a time-intensive process. Districts should capitalize on the opportunity to make new staff feel a part of the mission. The important work for staff and administration begins after the job has been accepted. First impressions matter. Districts should take a good look at their practice of onboarding all of their new employees. Generally, employees know within six months if the new job is the right fit.

Just like MSBA encourages veteran board members serve as mentors to newly elected board members. I would recommend school districts do likewise with new staff. A supportive mentor can have a positive and long-lasting impact on a new staff member.

The Summer 2019 edition of HR Magazine offers some helpful tips on making onboarding more effective:

- Define your objectives. Determine the structure and content of your onboarding program. Give careful thought to what new hires need to know about the organization and their roles.

- Identify key players. Onboarding is more than an HR initiative. People throughout the organization need to take ownership of their part in the process by contributing content, serving as mentors, and building connections with new hires.

- Stay engaged. Onboarding can last from a few weeks to more than a year. Develop timetables to ensure that new hires stay on track, and suggest resources to help them develop throughout their employment journey.

- Keep tweaking. Gather feedback from new hires about how the onboarding process worked for them and how it can be improved.

Contact Kirk Schneidawind at kschneidawind@mnmsba.org.
### September 2019
- 2: Labor Day (no meetings)
- 3: First Day School Can Be Held
- 5: MSBA Insurance Trust Meeting
- 10: MSBA Advocacy Tour (Marshall and St. Peter)
- 11: MSBA Advocacy Tour (Fergus Falls and Staples)
- 12: MSBA Advocacy Tour (Thief River Falls)
- 17: MSBA Advocacy Tour (Cloquet and Sartell)
- 18: MSBA Advocacy Tour (Grand Rapids and Willmar)
- 19: MSBA Advocacy Tour (Rochester)
- 20: Building a High-Performance School Board Team: Phase III (St. Cloud)
- 21: Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV (St. Cloud)
- 21: MSBA Advocacy Tour (St. Paul)
- 27: Last Day for Submitting Legislative Resolutions

### October 2019
- 7: MSBA Board of Directors Meeting
- 7–8: MASA Fall Conference (Duluth)
- 10–11: Minnesota Association of Educational Office Professionals Conference (Alexandria)
- 14: Columbus Day Observed (optional holiday)
- 17: Minnesota Educator Academy (MEA) Conference (St. Paul)
- 24: MSBA Insurance Trust Annual Meeting

### November 2019
- 3–4: MSBA Board of Directors Meeting
- 5: Election Day (no meetings or activities 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 Meetings (Little Falls)
- 14–15: Minnesota Association of School Business Officials Fall Conference (Bloomington)
- 16: MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meetings (St. Paul)
- 17–18: MSBA Trust Edge Workshop (Bemidji)
- 18–22: American Education Week
- 19: MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting Webinar
- 28: Thanksgiving Day (no meetings)

### December 2019
- 6: MSBA Board of Directors Meeting
- 6–7: MSBA Delegate Assembly
- 13: Learning to Lead — School Board Basics: Phase I (St. Peter)
- 14: Leadership Foundations — School Finance and Management: Phase II (St. Peter)
- 25: Christmas Day (no meetings)
The Cruz-Guzman desegregation lawsuit is working through a mediation process in which the Minnesota School Boards Association offered valuable perspective and assistance. In the Cruz-Guzman lawsuit filed in 2015, seven families and an organization argue that the state has enabled segregated schools in Minneapolis and St. Paul through several factors, including laws concerning charter schools and open enrollment rules. The segregated schools, according to the lawsuit, have led to a failure to provide an adequate education as required under the state’s constitution.

The Cruz-Guzman case (Cruz-Guzman vs. State of Minnesota) is moving through the court system. A court of appeals decision in 2017 had determined that the state Legislature, not the courts, should resolve the issues raised in the lawsuit. In July 2018, the Minnesota Supreme Court overruled the court of appeals, which returned the lawsuit to the trial court. With a potential trial start date in summer 2020, the parties have been engaged in a mediation process throughout summer 2019.

During the Cruz-Guzman mediation process, organizations — including the Minnesota School Boards Association, Education Minnesota, the NAACP, and others — have offered presentations to the parties and the mediators. On July 10, MSBA President Deborah Pauly, Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind, and Director of Policy and Legal Services Terry Morrow presented information and possible solutions drawn from Minnesota school districts’ initiatives.

This last point is tremendously important. The MSBA presentation offered numerous examples of the work that school districts and their partners have undertaken across...
Minnesota to focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and the achievement gap. A central theme emerged: school districts and school boards are leading at the local level — and it is crucially important to build ways in which the lessons learned can be shared effectively throughout Minnesota.

The MSBA presentation focused upon three main points. First, it considered the ways in which the achievement gap and student demographic trends (both of which are raised in the lawsuit) exist across the state. Second, the MSBA presentation divided the achievement gap into key categories and offered significant factors and possible solutions. Third, the presentation turned to the opportunity gap and called for greater collaboration to address these non-academic concerns that can critically impact a child’s education.

President Pauly and Executive Director Schneidawind opened the presentation by carefully describing the work that the Jordan School District and others have undertaken regarding equity, the achievement gap, integration, and diversity. An important part of this discussion emphasized the ways in which Minnesota school boards have reconceptualized their responsibilities, leading to greater emphasis upon vision, long-term strategy, student achievement, use of data to inform decisions, and policy development.

MSBA affirmed that student achievement is a statewide issue and that achievement gaps exist within and outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. This discussion touched upon the demographic changes that districts throughout Minnesota are experiencing. The mediation participants were especially interested in the fact that 134 school districts participate in the state’s Achievement and Integration Program.

Turning to the achievement gap, MSBA opened by recognizing that educating every student is every school district’s mission and that school boards are responsible for educating the students who attend the district’s schools. Achievement gap solutions must be crafted in light of local conditions, challenges, and opportunities. This foundation allowed the presentation to identify specific gaps that affect academic achievement.

The planning gap discussion observed that some school districts are engaged in initiatives regarding implicit bias, systemic racism, and strategic planning that focuses upon student achievement. Here, MSBA Leadership Conference presentations by the Roseville Area School District and the Sauk Rapids-Rice School District were cited as examples that merit wider dissemination.

Turning to the teacher gap, participants considered efforts to expand the number of teachers of color throughout the state, ways to improve teacher retention, shortage areas and the ways in which they impact student achievement, and more. Next, the curriculum and instruction gap centered upon creating an inclusive curriculum, culturally responsive teaching, personalized learning, student diversity and success in college credit courses, and related matters. The Leadership Conference presentations by the school districts in Onamia, Columbia Heights, Eastern Carver County, Roseville Area, Mounds View, Austin, Elk River Area, St. Cloud Area, and Centennial were highlighted as offering possible solutions to this gap.

Consideration of the school climate and culture gap emphasized the work that school districts are undertaking related to positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) and culturally responsive leadership. The collaborative initiative between Stillwater Area and Equity Alliance Minnesota — along with work being done in Centennial and Lac qui Parle Valley — generated steps that school districts can implement.

Schools must be safe places for students and staff. Minnesota’s school districts understand that academic guidance, mental health support, and trauma and emotional support enhance safety and contribute to academic achievement. Executive Director Schneidawind emphasized the ways in which positive relationships support the whole child. The work of school districts in Ulen-Hitterdal, Roseville Area, Deer River, Crookston, Stillwater Area, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Mankato Area, and Intermediate District 287 to institute Response to Intervention (RtI), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and related programs highlighted examination of the student support gap.

Educators know that breaks in education can exacerbate student achievement challenges. To address the calendar gap, the MSBA presentation discussed flexible learning years, summer programming with local partners, and other opportunities that districts in St. Peter, Eastern Carver County, and St. Anthony-New Brighton have developed. Observing that an academic gap can exist when students enter kindergarten, Executive Director Schneidawind offered significant insights regarding state funding for preschool education and shared concerns regarding limited availability of this resource.

The state of Minnesota selected chronic absenteeism as an Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) indicator. Attendance gaps, which can arise from student absence and from suspension or expulsion, were discussed next. Creating a positive school culture and climate, catching attendance problems early, and community-based strategies that involve local partnerships were identified as possible solutions. Discussion of the discipline gap, which focused upon disparities in discipline procedures, suspensions, and expulsions, recognized the work that districts across Minnesota are undertaking to study data and reconsider existing practices.

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A technology gap impacts student achievement. Districts, schools, and students continue to experience a digital divide driven by barriers related to accessibility and affordability. The mediation presentation examined efforts to improve technology within Minnesota’s schools and connectivity access in communities. In addition, the participants considered issues surrounding affordability of hardware, software, and internet access for Minnesota’s students and their families.

Turning to districts’ efforts to use data to inform decision-making related to student achievement, diversity, equity, and inclusion, MSBA walked the mediation through the MSBA Equity Dashboard. The MSBA Equity Dashboard gathers data from the school district’s Student Information System, ad hoc data from the school district, and data from other public sources and aggregates the data by student demographics. The resulting dashboard will highlight student populations that are in need of specific intervention.

Regarding the funding gap, MSBA observed that districts must have sufficient resources to address the achievement-related gaps.

Turning from the achievement gap to the opportunity gap, the MSBA presentation drew attention to factors affecting academic performance — including poverty, housing, health, and hunger — that extend beyond the school. Citing Minnesota Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan’s observation that “kids don’t come in pieces,” the presentation invited the mediators to examine ways in which governmental units, communities, stakeholders, and others can work together to address the opportunity gap. School districts throughout Minnesota are creating collaborations and community interventions to find ways to bring communities into our schools and schools into our communities. School districts such as Mankato Area, Hopkins, Columbia Heights, and Brooklyn Center offered helpful Leadership Conference presentations that were noted in this conversation.

The Cruz-Guzman mediation process offered an opportunity for Minnesota’s school boards to present meaningful measures and solutions related to the lawsuit’s focus and which can be pursued throughout Minnesota. Executive Director Schneidawind closed the discussion by stating that MSBA is committed to working with school boards to build upon these local initiatives on student achievement and the achievement and opportunity gaps.

Terry Morrow is MSBA’s Director of Legal and Policy Services. Contact him at tmorrow@mnmsba.org.
MSBA’s Summer Seminar Keynote Speaker Jolly Corley emphasized the importance of BOLD Leadership to help board members set goals that will help all students be successful.

Minnesota State Demographer Susan Brower showed attendees how our state is changing and why it is important for schools to help with the census count coming up in 2020.

Lucy Laney Principal Lisa Pawelak and “Love Them First” film director Lindsey Seavert discuss the efforts of the school’s staff and teachers to connect with all of their students and raise them up to succeed, pulling out the strengths and resiliency of each student. MSBA had a special screening of the KARE 11 film, which is due to be released on Sept. 12.

Roseville Area Principal Chris Hester, Assistant Superintendent Jenny Loeck and Board Chair Kitty Gogins told their district’s equity journey that increased participation for ALL students in college and career courses.

Mankato Diversity Council’s Bukata Hayes led the MSBA Early Bird Session on inclusion and diversity.

Summer Seminar attendees stopped by the InGensa booth, one of four sponsors that included MSBAIT, Piper Jaffray, and Nexus.
South St. Paul Public Schools’ Jessica Davis was crowned the 2019 Minnesota Teacher of the Year on May 5. Davis — a math teacher at South St. Paul Secondary School — is the first South St. Paul teacher to win this prestigious award. She started her career at St. Paul Harding Senior High School in 2006, before joining South St. Paul in 2009.

Davis took time from her busy summer schedule to answer questions from MSBA. In the interview below, Davis discusses the importance of the award, why representation matters for students of color, and reveals what school board members can do to make a positive impact on equity in schools.

**MSBA:** Did you ever envision that you would be named the Minnesota Teacher of the Year? What was your initial reaction to hearing the news?

**JESSICA DAVIS:** In a word, never. The Minnesota Teacher of the Year award wasn’t even on my radar — and I was honored as our district’s Teacher of the Year in the previous school year (2018), which was an absolute shock to me as well.

South St. Paul is blessed with incredible teachers. We had four teachers in our small district (there are only two elementary schools, a K-5 school, one secondary building for all 6-12 grade students, and one alternative program) accept nominations for this year’s teacher of the year.

Davis learned of his nomination about a week before I learned of mine, and asked me to write a letter of recommendation on his behalf. I was incredibly excited for him as he is wildly deserving...
of the honor. He served as our Union President during two of some of the most difficult years of our district. It just so happened that when I pulled my own nomination letter from the box in the staff mailroom one morning the next week, Luke was checking his mail at the same time. He noticed the puzzled look on my face, inquired, and then excitedly encouraged me to open the envelope. He also wrote a letter of recommendation on my behalf. I guess that means he’s the better writer! I am blessed, for sure.

I am certain no one chooses this career in hopes of fame or fortune. We do it because we know it is important. My focus is giving students authentic experiences that challenge them to think about how they might respond to life outside of the safety net of their high school walls or community. When I discovered that I had the ability to (and enjoyed) helping others navigate through the educational system, I knew I had found my purpose in life.

Teaching and mentoring completes me as a person and is how I’ve decided that I can best contribute to a better society. I am honored to be recognized for doing work that I feel is part of my responsibility, and represent a profession filled with thousands of selfless and compassionate people of all worthy of the title, certainly for at least one student at some time or another, of “Teacher of the Year.”

**MSBA: Why is representation so vital for students of color?**

**JESSICA DAVIS:** We know that the unique obstacles that our students of color and other marginalized youth groups face have a strong impact on how they experience education.

It’s not hard to believe that when students don’t see people who look like them, they aren’t really given a fair opportunity to consider what sort of success they might enjoy for their own futures or even how they may get there (utilizing access and opportunity).

Furthermore, representation matters in the word itself — who is representing students with these marginalized experiences? Do those representatives empathize? Do those representatives share some of the experiences, and if so, how did they navigate through them? Do those representatives understand the challenges and obstacles of education specifically related to students of color? In many cases, yes! I have many wonderful colleagues (the majority of whom have been white, however) that deftly build relationships with our students to foster environments in which our students feel safe and in a place to process and learn. But, when a student doesn’t feel safe, and when a student doesn’t feel like their perspective, ideas, or experiences are being validated — who represents that student now? Where should those students go?

The good news is, there are many kinds of students. Therefore, shouldn’t it follow that there are just as many kinds of teachers diverse in race, gender, orientation, religion, and otherwise, as well?

Yet, even in my lovely district, the teacher demographic is sorely unrepresentative of our student population.

**MSBA: In a May 2019 MPR story, you were quoted as saying: “I want to open up the conversations around equity and why we’re in the positions that we are in our educational**

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system and move forward from there.” What can school board members and other education stakeholders do to make a positive impact on equity in schools?

JESSICA DAVIS: Get out of the way.

It’s crass, I know — but nothing my students have accomplished has been because I told them to do so. EVERYTHING, and I mean, EVERYTHING is because they wanted to. My role was to find a way to make it happen, encourage them to take on challenges or calculated risks, and show them how to find their potential.

The past few years have looked like this:

- Students wanted to form a Black and Brown Student Union (which we call Black Pride Organization, BPO) — we used my prep time once a week to have leadership meetings.
- Students wanted to have a career panel with Professionals of Color (and had role models they wished to bring in and celebrate) — we planned and organized an event that has now become an annual tradition attended by hundreds.
- Students wanted to celebrate Black History Month in a more deliberate way — we invited parents in for breakfast for National African American Parent Involvement Day (NAAPID), accepted invitations to speak and share our mission of inclusion and opportunity at places like the Department of Human Resources, and offered opportunities to learn and discuss the importance around Black History.
- Students wanted to be viewed as leaders — we sought out volunteering opportunities and connected with the younger grades for mentoring. Soon, opportunities were coming to them, and students were asked to participate in all sorts of events.
- Students saw people of color at other schools graduating while wearing identity/cultural sashes during the ceremony and wanted to celebrate in similar fashion — we researched how to create a proposal, requested meetings, and practiced speeches for school board meetings.

All of this is because the students asked. My job was only to figure out how to say “yes” while making as many of the moments as possible teachable ones.

I think the more professional answer to your question, however, is to challenge the school board, administration, and community to be DELIBERATE about equity. It’s hard work to consider whom is being given access to resources and opportunity, and then INTENTIONALLY make decisions that even out the playing field.

An example of this in my own district would be the demographics of our Community Learning Center compared to our Secondary building. Students who are given the opportunity to make up credits or receive more individualized attention in the specialized programing offered at our CLC are, unfortunately, not representative of our general student population. (If a student is black and/or has an identified learning disability, they are almost exclusively precluded from access.)

If we aren’t deliberate in looking at those types of statistics, how do we ever make any changes? Then, the next questions become: Why is this our current reality? and What are we going to do about it?

The answers to those follow-up questions are hard. Especially when one realizes they may be complicit in the marginalization of certain populations.

MSBA: You also once said, “I knew I could make teaching math fun.” What approaches do you take in the classroom to make math fun and more digestible for your students?

JESSICA DAVIS: Two things:

1. Humor. I’m lucky in that I have 11th- and 12th-graders, which generally means they have a firmer understanding of sarcasm and are capable of deeper conversation and thinking. So, we laugh. We have fun and act our age — OK, their age — because they are still kids. Then we have tough conversations around life and math, which are often synonymous in the world of a 12th-grader. And then we laugh again.

2. Struggle. I let students see me struggle. Sometimes it’s with a math problem. Sometimes it’s with life. Being a teacher means I am a role model. I teach people and use math as the vehicle to do so. The skills one uses to work through a math problem are all the same skills one uses to work through the mundane obligations of adulthood. We must teach all our students to be critical thinkers and persevere. This includes the “average” student, the “honors” student, the “troubled” student, and every other adjective attached to students who are all simply kids that need and deserve the challenge to become better versions of themselves. All students. All.

MSBA: What’s the one thing school board members can do to make things better for teachers in the classroom?

JESSICA DAVIS: Listen. #EveryVoiceMatters. I challenge everyone to consider how they are going to use theirs.

Bruce Lombard is MSBA’s Director of Communications and Marketing. Contact him at blombard@mnmsba.org.
2019 — Jessica Davis, South St. Paul
2018 — Kelly D. Holstine, Shakopee
2017 — Corey Bulman, Mound Westonka
2016 — Abdul Wright, Best Academy
2015 — Amy Hewett-Olatunde, St. Paul
2014 — Thomas Rademacher, West Metro Education Program
2013 — Megan Olivia Hall, St. Paul
2012 — Jackie Roehl, Edina
2011 — Katy Smith, Winona
2010 — Ryan Vernosh, St. Paul
2009 — Amber Damm, Minneapolis
2008 — Derek Olson, Stillwater
2007 — Michael Smart, Intermediate District 287
2006 — Lee-Ann Stephens, St. Louis Park
2005 — Glen Sorenson, Proctor
2004 — Tom Keating, Monticello
2003 — Gino Marchetti, Minneapolis
2001–2002 — Barb Stoffet, Hopkins
2000 — Katie Koch-Laveen, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan

1999 — P. Brett Smith, Mahtomedi
1998 — Ellen Delaney, North St. Paul
1997 — Neil Witikko, Hermantown
1996 — Beth Christensen, Mankato
1995 — Mary Beth Blegen, Worthington*
1994 — Donald Johnson, Owatonna
1993 — Bonnie Lutz, Evansville
1992 — Rita Wigfield, Hopkins
1991 — Rhoda Stroud, St. Paul
1990 — Dr. Cathy Nelson, Fridley
1989 — James Ellingson, Moorhead
1988 — Maureen Sanger, Roseville
1987 — Paul Goodnature, Albert Lea
1986 — Judy McCreery, Roseville
1985 — Guy Rice Doud, Brainerd*
1984 — Margaret Engebretson, Cass Lake-Bena
1983 — Donald Miller, Roseau

* Named National Teacher of the Year the following year
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Those who have been working with municipalities for an extended period have observed a phenomenon that occurs at the governing body level. Let’s call this phenomenon the Outlier Syndrome.

The Outlier is the “lone wolf” who sits on a school board or a city council and steadfastly refuses to act like a member of the team. Even while isolating himself or herself as the only person on the losing side of just about every vote, the Outlier manages to create havoc with the rest of the body. The Outlier may be obstreperous and obstructionist. The Outlier may refuse to recognize and respect the norms that guide the rest of the body’s conduct. The Outlier may position himself or herself as the only “ethical” or “transparent” member of the body. The Outlier’s every statement and action may be aimed at preserving that self-assumed distinction rather than making any concrete achievements. Sometimes, a board is unfortunate enough to have more than one Outlier.

Have you ever experienced the Outlier Syndrome in action? It can be called a syndrome because of the recognizable features or symptoms that seem to fester whenever an Outlier sits on a governing body. Do you have an Outlier on your governing body?

Could you possibly be an Outlier? Should the Outlier Syndrome be viewed as an affliction or malady? And if so, what can be done? We’ll explore these questions in more detail below.

**Power, Goals and the Outlier**

To understand the Outlier’s impact on a governing body, let’s start with the idea that elected officials can only act as part of a body — a collaborative decision-making body. You can search throughout the laws governing statutory municipalities, or just about any home rule charter, and you’ll likely find no powers or duties that are to be exercised by a singular elected official — other than the mayor, who may have certain defined responsibilities. This means that, as elected officials, the only way you can get anything accomplished is to have a majority of the governing body on your side.

It’s likely that each elected official has an individual list of goals; goals that those who voted for you want you to accomplish. But your goals can be accomplished only if they’re part of the goals of the body as a whole. That means your success depends on creating a consensus of the majority! And where does the Outlier fit in on a collaborative decision-making body? Nowhere. Perpetually being on the losing side of a vote means that the Outlier gets...
nowhere on his or her goals … unless, of course, he or she feels that being an Outlier is its own reward.

**Are you an Outlier?**

Perhaps you have met your share of Outliers, who tend to share one or more of these characteristics:

- There is an element of the lone crusader in them. They feel they were elected to shake up the status quo in some way. Maybe they think their predecessors were too cozy with developers, not friendly enough with the business community, too close to the municipality’s staff or not close enough to the municipality’s staff.
- They view themselves as independent thinkers. They are often highly intelligent, but not “people persons.” In kindergarten, their report cards might have reflected a poor score on “plays well with others.”
- They take a perverse glee in being the “outsider,” relish arguments for argument’s sake and place little value on matters like courtesy and regard for the feelings of others.
- They hate having to endure “soft” discussions, such as a council or board retreat, the establishment of a mission or vision statement, the development of consensus around rules of procedure or rules of conduct, a session to discuss goals and priorities, or an insurance liability training session.
- They feel they are always right, and everyone else is always wrong. They feel they are always ethical, and everyone else is not. They feel they are looking out for the citizens, and everyone else is not.
- Initially, they may just have been unfamiliar with the ways of local government and needed to build the skills to work effectively in a new environment. One or more gaffes may have caused them to be pegged as Outliers and treated accordingly, initiating an unhealthy Outlier dynamic.
- There may have been some explosive moments in private or public with the Outlier’s colleagues, or the colleagues may have made some attempt at an “intervention.”

These observations may not be totally on the mark, but one characteristic of the Outlier cannot be denied: he or she is seldom on the prevailing side of a vote, and is often at loggerheads with the rest of the body.

Do you think you may be an Outlier? If so, you might examine what your goals as an elected official really are. Do you want to have a list of concrete accomplishments at the end of your term? Or will it be accomplishment enough to have been the “loyal opposition”? If it’s the former, then your behavior may be working at cross-purposes with your goals. If it’s the latter … really? Will the people who voted for you be satisfied with that accomplishment? Will you?

**Is the Outlier a Problem for the Rest of the Body?**

Most people who’ve had to deal with an Outlier would say that yes, the Outlier is a problem. How? Here are some ways:

- Anger and frustration build when a board has to deal with an Outlier, siphoning away energy that could be spent on more positive endeavors. This is a particular problem if tensions have built to the point that confrontations have begun to occur. No reasonable person wants to attend or view a board meeting and have a hockey game break out. It may be entertaining, but it’s embarrassing to the governing body and to the community.
- Healthy teams seek to build a sense of camaraderie and cohesiveness. That’s not entirely possible when there’s an Outlier. It’s not healthy to build a team around a shared hatred of one of its own members, and most reasonable people would prefer not to have that happen.
- The Outlier’s perspective tends to be oppositional. From a liability standpoint, such a perspective is risky. If you’re taking positions on an oppositional basis, are you really meeting your fiduciary duty to look out for the best interests of the entity?
- A disharmonious governing body is a dysfunctional governing body. It’s been the Colorado Intergovernmental Risk Sharing Agency’s experience that liability claims thrive in an environment of disharmony and dysfunction.
- Your staff members are affected by the Outlier Syndrome, too. From the staff’s perspective, seeing dysfunction on the governing body is a little like watching discord between one’s own parents. It’s unsettling, distressing and morale-crushing.
- Most importantly, it’s a shame for the governing body to lose a potentially valuable contributing member. In a worst-case scenario, the Outlier becomes completely disempowered as he or she is ignored and marginalized. But this means that the body isn’t running on all cylinders and is deprived of the valuable perspectives that the Outlier might otherwise bring. Ultimately, the voters and the community are the losers.

**Dealing with the Outlier Syndrome**

You can’t cure an affliction until you recognize it. And you can’t recognize what you haven’t named and defined. If your municipality is afflicted with Outlier Syndrome, you’ve taken the first steps toward a cure by naming, defining and recognizing it. Here are some other steps you might consider:

- Confront the issue forthrightly and compassionately in a neutral environment. A council or board meeting is likely not a neutral environment. Perhaps the matter could be discussed as one item on a retreat agenda. Be prepared
with specific examples of how the Outlier has negatively impacted the body.

• Consider addressing the issue in the context of a larger discussion about governing body rules of procedure or rules of conduct. The “norms” that guide members’ interactions with one another may be obvious to some, but not to all, especially newer members. Those norms can be part of the discussion and the process of articulating them can facilitate a consensus to honor them.

• Consider bringing in an outside facilitator to assist you, as a governing body is a bit like a marriage that’s been arranged for you by the citizens. There’s nothing wrong with getting some outside help for perspective and to find solutions.

If you think you might have the Outlier label pinned on you, consider these suggestions:

• First, get a reality check. Find out how you’re being perceived by your peers. It may be very different from your own perception of yourself. Ask each of your colleagues to give you a frank assessment.

• Check your motivations. If you have concrete goals you want to accomplish as an elected official, you must accept that success in your position can’t happen without collaboration and consensus building. There is nothing that you can accomplish alone. So, set a goal to be on the “prevailing” side or to bring others over to establish a “prevailing” side.

• If you’ve already burned some bridges, understand that consensus building can’t happen without mutual trust, respect and a sense of cohesion. These will take time to build. Look for a retreat or other opportunities to clear the air and start fresh.

• Use staff as a resource! Your manager or administrator wants nothing more than to assist newly elected officials in learning the ropes and understanding the best time, place and approach to raising issues. Don’t get off on the wrong foot with blunders that might peg you as an Outlier.

[Editor’s note: Be mindful that board meetings to discuss the conduct of board members are subject to the Open Meeting Law. MSBA can assist school board members in this area.]

What if all efforts to deal with the Outlier Syndrome fail? Well, it might be time for the rest of the governing body to cut its losses and move on. Don’t continue to agonize over the Outlier and his or her impact on the body’s functioning. Continue to accord the Outlier the same opportunities to participate in discussion and decision-making as any other member, but don’t allow the Outlier to keep pushing your buttons. Remember, arguments and confrontations require more than one participant. You may need to simply say “thank you” or move on to the next point of discussion. Ultimately, the responsibility for putting an Outlier into office rests with the citizens, so there’s only so much you can do. Try to go about your business without having the Outlier become the dysfunctional center around which the rest of you swirl.

Conclusion

Governing body members don’t all have to be in lockstep, thinking and behaving in the same way. On the contrary, diversity of thinking, styles, opinions, experiences and approaches are healthy and necessary for a collaborative decision-making body. There is truly a collective wisdom that comes forth when many diverse minds work together on common goals. But the Outlier Syndrome is detrimental to a high-functioning governing body and, therefore, to the community. If your governing body is afflicted with the Outlier Syndrome, it’s time to do something about it.

Tami A. Tanoue is the executive director for the Colorado Intergovernmental Risk Sharing Agency, a public entity self-insurance pool providing property, liability and workers’ compensation coverages to local governments in Colorado. Previously she was city/town attorney or special counsel for numerous Colorado municipalities. Prior to that, she was staff attorney for the Colorado Municipal League. Contact Tami at Tami@cirsa.org.

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WE BUILD. trust. communities. people.
There is still time to add a few must-reads to your reading list. So go ahead and find your favorite reading spot — an outdoor coffee shop table, a dock on a lake, a recycled plastic Adirondack chair, or a sofa inside an air-conditioned spot — and cozy up to these must-reads so you are ready to start the school year with inclusive education in mind.

Here at the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI), we publish a short electronic newsletter each month during the school year called the CAREI Research Watch. In it, we summarize current research in education that we believe can inform the practice of district, school, and teacher leaders. Last year, 54 school districts were members of the CAREI Assembly and received these newsletters monthly. Please let me know if you would like more information on becoming a CAREI Assembly Member by contacting me at kgibbons@umn.edu. Our April 2019 special issue focused on Culturally Responsive Leadership in Education. Keep reading for summaries of Five “Must-Reads” from this issue.

**Must-Read One: Implementing an Equity Literacy Framework in Schools**

Gorski & Swalwell (2015)

This article helps leaders look inward at their own biases. This article highlights the importance of implementing a framework
centered on equity, in order to create environments which purposefully address issues such as racism, homophobia, sexism, and economic inequality in schools. The authors identify four specific abilities which educators and students alike develop through an Equity Literacy framework:

1. Recognize forms of bias, discrimination, and inequity, even when subtle.
2. Respond to bias, discrimination, and inequity in a thoughtful and equitable manner.
3. Redress bias, discrimination, and inequity by responding to both interpersonal bias and also systemic and social change.
4. Cultivate and sustain bias-free and discrimination-free communities, including through an understanding that everyone in civil society has a basic responsibility to recognize, respond to, and redress inequity.

This general framework is applied to the school settings through five guiding principles for an equity literacy curriculum.

1. Equity literacy is important in every subject area.
2. The most effective equity literacy approach is integrative and interdisciplinary.
3. Students of all ages are primed for equity literacy.
4. Students from all backgrounds need equity literacy.
5. Teaching for equity literacy is a political act - but not more so than not teaching for equity literacy.

Read more about each of these principles and the authors’ experiences in school-based focus groups which highlight the need for an equity literacy framework in the full article at www.edchange.org/publications/Equity-Literacy-for-All.pdf.

**Must-Read Two: Culturally Responsive Leadership — An Introduction**

**Khalifa (2018)**

Enjoy a good biography? Learn about Joe, a legendary culturally responsive school leader. This freely available introduction to Dr. Muhammad Khalifa’s book, “Culturally Responsive School Leadership,” summarizes his ethnographic research in Davistown, a community near Detroit, Michigan. Conclusions of his research are explored in more detail in his book, and are highlighted here.

- Culturally self-reflective leaders can engage in reflection on their personal and organizational roles in a way that provides space for students and families to view their leaders as fair and reduce suspicion between some minoritized students and the school.
- School climate can be changed in ways that foster a sense of belonging for minoritized students.
- In conjunction with this change in climate and feelings of belonging, student identities associated with minoritized communities can be explicitly accepted and honored.
- School leaders can promote culturally responsive curriculum and instruction in ways that promote connections between curriculum and students’ lives and facilitate engagement with curricular content.

This introduction also summarizes key contextual and historical factors of oppression and their impact on school and community underdevelopment. The role of school leaders in calling attention to the enactment of oppression in an ever-changing way and on a variety of characteristics including racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and national lines is explored. Dr. Khalifa challenges our views on how families can engage with the school and to resist the harmful school-centric leadership role adopted by most principals. He proposes a model of school leadership which centers on community leadership and the culturally responsive behaviors that school leaders can use to resist oppression in school environments, engage the communities they serve, and improve the lives and educational experiences of minoritized children. Access the introduction chapter at https://bit.ly/2LMWOIx or purchase the book from Harvard Education Press (www.hepg.org/hep-home) and other book sellers.

**Must-Read Three: Implementation of Best Practices for Transition Planning with Students Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Youth with Disabilities and their Families**

**Gothberg, Greene, & Kohler (2018)**

In general, post-school outcomes are poor for students with disabilities. However, for students with disabilities who come from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds, the outcomes are even more discouraging. This study reviewed research identifying 11 research-based practices for promoting the active involvement of youth and continued on page 24
their families from CLD backgrounds during the transition planning process. These practices are broadly categorized as:

1. Use culturally responsive communication with families.
2. Demonstrate cultural reciprocity with families when planning transition services.
3. Utilize person-family centered approaches.
4. Provide cultural competence training to school personnel.
5. Provide transition training to parents on topics including special education law, parent rights and responsibilities, and available special education services.

In a survey administered to school staff from interdisciplinary transition teams from 90 school districts over five years, the results indicated that none of these five best practices were consistently implemented. In most school districts, staff focused on Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) compliance with little to no consideration of the specific needs of students and families who were CLD. Additionally, no training was provided to staff or families regarding the specific needs of this student population. The authors identified this as an area for state Departments of Education and local school districts to improve the training and support provided to teams focused on transition planning to address this research-to-practice gap.

**Must-Read Four: Low-Cost Strategy for Addressing Discipline Disparities for Black Male Students**

Cook, Duong, McIntosh, Fiat, Larson, Pullmann, & McGinnis, (2018)

The school to prison pipeline is criminal — but these researchers are on the case! Exclusionary discipline continues to be a common practice in schools and disparities exist with students of color, especially Black males, receiving exclusionary discipline at the highest rates. This study examined the efficacy of a low-cost strategy for addressing malleable root causes of discipline disparities for Black male students. The GREET-STOP-PROMPT (GSP) approach used (a) proactive classroom management strategies, (b) a self-regulation technique for teachers to mitigate the impact of biases when responding to problem behavior, and (c) reactive strategies to increase empathic, consistent, and appropriate responses.

1. **GREET:** Teachers were provided specific evidence-based classroom management techniques to increase their knowledge, skills, and confidence. These included Greeting students positively at the door; Receiving positive behavior with frequent, specific, contingent feedback; Establishing and cueing behavioral expectations; Engaging students by increasing opportunities to respond; and Taking time to provide wise feedback by voicing high expectations and belief in students.

2. **STOP:** Teachers were trained to self-regulate their behavior through a process of Stopping any immediate reaction, Taking a breath to regulate, Observing the knee-jerk reaction, and Proceeding positively by identifying a course of action and doing what is most effective.

3. **PROMPT:** Teachers practiced progressive methods for responding to perceived or actual problem behavior by providing Proximity to correct behavior: Redirecting students to get back on track; Ongoing Monitoring and reinforcement of peers for social learning; Private prompting; and Teaching through a structured empathy statement, labeling inappropriate and appropriate behavior, outlining choices, warning of consequences, giving think time, and checking back in with the student.

This study tested this strategy with three schools that were under Federal and State oversight due to racial disproportionality with exclusionary discipline. In all three schools, Black male students were more than 2.5 times more likely than other students to be referred to the office for behavior problems. Teachers were trained on the intervention during two 3-hour sessions. Teachers also received ongoing coaching and attended problem-solving meetings.

Decreasing trend and level changes were observed in the three schools with the implementation of the GSP intervention, indicating that the intervention was effective in decreasing the discrepancy in office discipline referrals (ODRs) per week between Black male students and all other students. In all three schools, Black male students continued to be more likely to receive ODRs than other groups. However, the overall number of ODRs at all schools decreased with the implementation of GSP and the likelihood of Black male students receiving ODRs was reduced by two-thirds. Additionally, teachers reported that GSP was feasible and acceptable, indicating that this could be a sustainable practice for schools to implement.

**Must-Read Five: The Principal’s Guide to Building Culturally Responsive Schools**

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)

This guide for school leaders is organized by action, with
each including a rationale, specific recommendations, and an extensive list of resources and tools. The following actions are identified:

1. Engage in Culturally Responsive Leadership: Building leaders must be willing to engage in critical self-reflection and understand their own multiple identities.

2. Diversify Student and Adult Capacity: Building leaders facilitate student and adult leadership and ownership of school change. Leaders are committed to identifying and interrupting policies and practices which perpetuate unequal outcomes.

3. Utilizing Assets To Ensure Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning: Teachers and staff may need coaching on implementing effective culturally responsive teaching. Leading that effort is the role of the principal. Culturally responsive instruction does not mean that students of different races should be taught in different ways. Rather, it is a focus on incorporating aspects of students’ lives into the curriculum to make it more relatable across cultures.

4. Providing Diverse Opportunities for All Students: Building leaders can facilitate an inclusive environment which creates a safe space and appreciation for diversity.


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

Additional Resources

Disparities in Rates of Chronic Absenteeism
The Hamilton Project created an interactive data map (https://bit.ly/2YuDwJA) showing rates of chronic absenteeism by state and school district. You can also select “Student Characteristics” to see how students are disproportionately affected by chronic absenteeism based on characteristics of ethnicity and special education status.

Disparities in OSS Rates
This interactive data map (https://bit.ly/2OmeLiX) from the Department of Education demonstrates out of school suspension (OSS) rates by state and district. The interactive map allows filtering for Black male and Black female students. Additional maps for Hispanic, Native American, and students with disabilities are available at https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/data.html.

Income Mobility and Geographic Disparities
The US Census Bureau and researchers from Harvard University and Brown University have released data looking at adult outcomes of earnings distributions and incarceration rates based on the neighborhood in which children are born. Read the executive summary (www.census.gov/ces/pdf/opportunity_atlas_summary.pdf) of their research and explore the data map at www.opportunityatlas.org.

School Climate for LGBTQ Students

References


QUESTION: What is a consent agenda and when can it be used?

ANSWER: A consent agenda packages a group of noncontroversial items that do not require an explanation or discussion into one agenda item. This allows the board to approve all of these individual items together, at one time, in one motion. Parliamentary procedure allows boards to use a consent agenda, typically by developing a specific rule or policy (see MSBA/MASA Model Policy – 203.6). Again, a consent agenda allows many items to be passed with one motion, second, and vote, thus freeing up meeting time for the board to discuss other items on the agenda.

The consent agenda is frequently one of the first few things listed on the agenda, and common items listed under it include approval of minutes, bills/cash disbursements, financial reports, and personnel changes. If supporting documentation is needed for an item on the consent agenda, an addendum is generally attached. MSBA recommends the consent agenda not include items that have special conditions (e.g., require a resolution or specific voting requirements).

Any individual board member may remove an item from the consent agenda without explanation, motion, or second from another board member. Typically, the removal of an item from the consent agenda is because a board member feels the item needs special consideration. A motion to approve the consent agenda and the individual items listed should not be discussed — this is essential in order for the consent agenda to be effective. That being so, the board chair should ask if any board member wants to remove an item from the consent agenda prior to asking for a motion to approve it. If an item is removed from the consent agenda, it will be placed on the agenda for separate consideration, which is frequently immediately following the consent agenda vote.

In order to ensure the board team understands the purpose of a consent agenda and how items may be removed, the board chair and superintendent prepare the agenda, it is important that all board members take time to read their board packets and properly prepare for the board meetings.

Your MSBA staff are here to support you and help answer your questions.

Contact Amy Fullenkamp-Taylor and Katie Klanderud at ataylor@mnmsba.org and kklanderud@mnmsba.org, respectively.
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Barb Dorn
MSBA Director of Leadership Development and Executive Search
Barb Dorn grew up on a farm north of Lake Crystal and attended Lake Crystal Public Schools from kindergarten through graduation.

Barb’s first job was bean walking, followed by teaching swimming lessons from seventh-grade through 12th-grade (“which sure beat bean walking”). She also lived in Amman, Jordan, as an AFS exchange student during the summer before her senior year.

At Gustavus Adolphus College, Barb majored in Political Science and Communications, and minored in Music. She worked as a C.F. (Collegiate Fellow, aka R.A.) and over the course of her four years at Gustavus, she mostly remembers spending a lot of time studying in the library.

Barb’s career has followed “a long and winding road” across multiple sectors, and she has “never held a job she didn’t like.” Over the years, Barb has worked in business, government, nonprofits, higher education, and spent a long stint as a self-employed marketing consultant. Most recently, Barb served as the Executive Director of YWCA Mankato, leading a team to eliminate racism and empower women, and “experienced first-hand the deep and lasting rewards of cause-driven work.” This discovery then led Barb to MSBA and its mission to support, promote, and strengthen the work of public school boards.

Barb lives just outside Nicollet with her family and a “menagerie of animals.” Her husband, Kevin, owns a lawncare and landscaping business (Yard Works Plus), and raises white and piebald deer along with exotic birds and “other strange creatures.” Barb’s son, Evan (24), is an insurance agent with Bankers Life in Edina, and is an alum of the University of Minnesota-Morris — where he played football and participated in an all-star game in Mexico his senior year. Barb’s daughter, Tessa (17), is a senior at Nicollet Public Schools, and very involved in volleyball, dance, school governance, and band — and is currently considering all her options after graduation.

Barb’s hobbies include reading, corralling the activities of her family, and anything “Breaking Bad”-related.

Meet MSBA’s New Staff Members

MSBA is pleased to introduce four new staff members — Barb Dorn, Jackie Fahey, Tiffany Gustin and Paula O’Loughlin — who will help enhance the programs and services enjoyed by members. Each new staff member brings a unique blend of skills and experience that will help MSBA support, promote, and strengthen the work of public school boards in Minnesota.
Paula O’Loughlin  
MSBA Associate Director of Board Development

Prior to being hired by the MSBA, Paula worked at Equity Alliance MN as a Program Manager supporting professional development and student programming. In her role, Paula had the good fortune to learn and grow alongside students of all ages, educators, administration, and school board members to advance educational equity. Paula also worked with nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies across the state to support their equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts.

Paula was privileged to serve on the Stillwater Area School Board from 2015-2018. Her daughter, Kyra (17), and son, Daniel (15), are Stillwater Ponies and attend Stillwater Area High School.

Paula believes in the power of relationships to transform our schools so that every student has the opportunity to achieve. “I truly believe that the need for each of us to be seen, heard, and belong is universal and when that need is met, we are able to show up as our very best selves in every space. I am so grateful to be at MSBA to work in partnership with school board members who are doing such critical work for our students across this great state. Board work is not easy and it requires a heightened consciousness of self, vulnerability, and willingness to work across differences. When relationships amongst the board are rooted in mutual trust and respect, as well as a belief in each and every child, all students will benefit.”

Paula was born in Seoul, South Korea, and adopted as an infant. She grew up in Woodbury, Minnesota, and graduated from St. Catherine’s University. She and her husband, Sean, met when Paula was living and working in New York City. They now reside in Lake Elmo with their children and their new Golden Retriever, Lucy.

Paula is passionate about racial, social, and economic justice, and has a strong interest in mindfulness, travel and all food.

Tiffany is active in the Aitkin community, and is also currently serving as the Executive Secretary of the Minnesota Federation of County Fairs.

Tiffany Gustin  
MSBA Associate Director of Management Services

Tiffany Gustin has served as the Business Manager of the Aitkin Public Schools for 10 years. Prior to serving in that role, she worked as a data analyst and software developer in the private sector, in addition to working for more than four years in county government.

Tiffany attended the University of Minnesota – Duluth and earned a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration with concentrations in Finance and Management Information Systems. She later earned a Master’s in Business Administration from Bethel University and she is currently enrolled at Bethel pursuing a doctorate in K-12 Educational Leadership.

She resides in Aitkin with her husband, TJ, and her two children, Thomas (16) and Raija (14). “I love spending time with my family, especially near a campfire.”
MSBA’s Vendor Directory

MSBA’s Vendor Directory helps connect school districts with the products and services they need. The directory is always at your fingertips. You’ll find it printed in the back of every Journal magazine as well as on the MSBA website at www.mnmsba.org. Most listings in the web version of this directory include a link so you can head instantly to a website or email address. The directory includes everything you need to know to contact a company quickly—phone numbers, fax numbers and addresses—in an easy-to-read format. If you have a service or product you would like included in this directory, please contact Erica Nelson at 763-497-1778 or erica@pierreproductions.com.

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Unesco, Inc. (Kevin McGauley) 2125 2nd Street White Bear Lake, MN 55110 888-514-1971, Fax 952-487-9389 www.UnescoCorp.com kevin.mcgaulley@unescocorp.com

Wendel (Jim Wilson) 401 2nd Avenue North, Suite 206 Minneapolis, MN 55401 612-332-1401 www.wendelcompanies.com jwilson@wendelcompanies.com

Wold Architects and Engineers (Vaughn Dierks) 332 Minnesota Street, Suite W2000 St. Paul, MN 55101 651-227-7773, Fax 651-223-5646 www.woldae.com mail@woldae.com

ATHLETIC SPORTS FLOORS/ SURFACING

Fisher Tracks, Inc. (Jordan Fisher) 1192 235th Street Boone, IA 50036 515-432-3191, Fax 515-432-3193 www.fishertracks.com jfisher@fishertracks.com

ATTORNEYS

Kennedy & Graven, Chartered (Maggie R. Wallner) 200 South Sixth Street, Suite 470 Minneapolis, MN 55402 612-337-9300, Fax 612-337-9310 www.kennedy-graven.com contactus@kennedy-graven.com

Knutson, Flynn & Deans (Thomas S. Deans) 1155 Centre Pointe Drive, Suite 10 Mendota Heights, MN 55120 651-222-2811, Fax 651-225-0600 www.kfdmn.com tdeans@kfdmn.com

Pemberton Law Firm (Michael T. Rengel) 110 N Mill Street Fergus Falls, MN 56537 218-736-5493, Fax 218-736-3950 www.pemlaw.com m.rengel@pemlaw.com

Ratwik, Roszak & Maloney, P.A. (Ann R. Goering) 730 2nd Ave S., Ste. 300 Minneapolis, MN 55402 612-339-0060, Fax 612-339-0038 www.ratwiklaw.com info@ratwiklaw.com

Rupp, Anderson, Squires & Waldspurger, P.A. (Ann Thorne) 333 South 7th Street, Suite 2800 Minneapolis, MN 55402 612-436-4300, Fax 612-436-4340 www.raslaw.com info@raslaw.com

BUILDING ENVELOPE CHOICES

Kline-Johnson & Associates (Larry Brown) 2950 Metro Dr. Minneapolis, MN 55425 715-651-2500 larry@kline-johnson.com
# MSBA’s Vendor Directory

## Financial Management

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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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| Ehlers                        | Greg Crowe  
3060 Centre Pointe Drive  
Roseville, MN 55113  
651-697-8522, Fax 651-697-8555  
www.ehlers-inc.com  
gcrowe@ehlers-inc.com |

## Fire & Security

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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
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</table>
| Arvig                         | 150 Second Street SW  
Perham, MN 56573  
888-992-7844  
arvigbusiness.com  
answers@arvig.com |

## Indoor Air Quality

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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| ISG                            | Rod Schumacher  
115 E. Hickory Street, Suite 300  
Mankato, MN 56001  
507-387-6651  
www.is-grp.com  
rod.schumacher@is-grp.com |

## Fitness Equipment

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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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| Johnson Commercial Fitness    | Drew Wurst  
7855 Equitable Drive  
Eden Prairie, MN 55344  
952-500-0508, Fax 952-906-6909  
www.2ndwindexercise.com  
drew.wurst@johnsonfit.com |

## Food Service Products & Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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| Taher, Inc.                    | Erin Marissa  
5570 Smetana Drive  
Minnetonka, MN 55343  
952-945-0505, Fax 952-945-0444  
www.taher.com  
emarissa@taher.com |

## Health Insurance

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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| PreferredOne                  | 6105 Golden Hills Drive  
Golden Valley, MN 55416  
763-847-3331, Fax 763-847-4010  
dan.stewart@PreferredOne.com  
www.PreferredOne.com |

## Public Finance

<table>
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<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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| Kennedy & Graven, Chartered    | Maggie R. Wallner  
200 South Sixth Street, Suite 470  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
612-337-9300, Fax 612-337-9310  
www.kennedy-graven.com  
contactus@kennedy-graven.com |

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Perham, MN 56573  
888-992-7844  
arvigbusiness.com  
answers@arvig.com |

## Transportation

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<th>Company</th>
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| PFM Asset Management, LLC -  | MSDLAf+  
(Donn Hanson)  
50 S. 6th Street, Suite 2250  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
612-371-3720, Fax 612-338-7264  
www.msdlafl.org  
hansond@pfm.com |

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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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| Springsted Group              | Rick Yount  
380 Jackson Street, Suite 300  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
651-223-3060, Fax 651-233-3046  
www.springsted.com  
ryount@springsted.com |

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<th>Company</th>
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| Ratwik, Roszak & Maloney, P.A.| Ann R. Goering  
730 2nd Ave S., Ste. 300  
Minneapolis, MN 55402  
612-339-0060, Fax 612-339-0038  
www.ratwiklaw.com  
info@ratwiklaw.com |

## Other Services

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St. Paul, MN 55101  
651-223-3060, Fax 651-233-3046  
www.springsted.com  
ryount@springsted.com |

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612-339-0060, Fax 612-339-0038  
www.ratwiklaw.com  
info@ratwiklaw.com |

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Minneapolis, MN 55402  
612-339-0060, Fax 612-339-0038  
www.ratwiklaw.com  
info@ratwiklaw.com |

## School Safety

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<th>Company</th>
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| 3D Response Systems           | 6224 Lakeland Avenue North  
Brooklyn Park, MN 55428  
Fax 888-445-2842  
www.3dresponse.com |

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School board members often use social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to communicate with constituents and the community. Some board members use a social media platform to share district-generated information. As recent court decisions and other governmental opinions demonstrate, however, use of personal accounts gives rise to significant legal considerations.

In January 2019, the Minnesota Department of Administration issued Advisory Opinion 19-001, which considered whether a Minnesota mayor’s personal Facebook account constituted “government data.” Minnesota law defines “government data” as “all data collected, created, received, maintained or disseminated by any government entity regardless of its physical form, storage media or conditions of use” (Minnesota Statutes 13.02, Subd. 7). In this case, the city did not create the Facebook page, did not authorize or approve it, and did not collect, create, maintain, receive or disseminate the information. The information was not created as part of the mayor’s “city-sanctioned responsibilities” and did not represent the city’s position. For these reasons, the mayor’s Facebook page and its content did not constitute government data.

This mayor’s personal Facebook page was not government data, but additional questions can arise with public officials’ use of social media. In July 2019, a federal appeals court ruled that an elected official may not block individuals from the official’s social media accounts that are used for official purposes. The court stated, “The First Amendment does not permit a public official who utilizes a social media account for all manner of official purposes to exclude persons from an otherwise-open online dialogue because they expressed views with which the official disagrees.” In a similar case, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the chair of a Virginia board of supervisors could not block a resident from her Facebook page. The page was a “public forum” for First Amendment purposes, the court determined.

Public officials’ use of social media represents an evolving area of law. Several general guidelines have emerged for school board members to consider when using social media as part of their school board service.

Some commentators discourage public officials from encouraging online discussion of current issues on a social media platform that the public official created and uses. Under Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law, board members should take care to not use social media as a means of communicating with one another. Due process considerations suggest that a board member not offer an online opinion on a matter that is yet to be decided; otherwise, the social media post could be seen as a predetermination or bias by the board member.

Social media content should not include confidential, private, or other information that cannot be legally shared with the public. Regardless of the type of content that the board member posts on a social media platform, it may be helpful for school board members to state clearly on the site that they are offering their own views rather than speaking for the board or the district.

If a member of the public posts a comment on a board member’s social media site that may be defamatory, harassing, illegal, or otherwise problematic, the board member should take care to document the matter and work with the school district to determine appropriate next steps, which may include contact with the social media provider or law enforcement. Similarly, security breaches on a social media platform should be immediately reviewed and resolved.

Terry Morrow is MSBA’s Director of Legal and Policy Services. Contact him at tmorrow@mnmsba.org.
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Editor's Note:
This is the fourth in a series about the history of the Minnesota School Boards Association. In this issue, we look at MSBA from 1980-2000.

The tornado of 1998 dominates the history of the Association as it neared the year 2000. The office building was completely destroyed, the staff scattered—with management services and lobbying staff up in St. Paul, board development staff back out on the road doing workshops, and most remaining staff in a temporary office in the Norwest Building in downtown Mankato.

Luckily, nobody was hurt or died. What was to then-Executive Director Dick Anderson “a disheartening sight” soon turned to plans of putting things back together, keeping services going to board members, and making the Association stronger.

During the last 20 years before the turn of the century, public education also weathered many storms. The population boom in the 1960s had long gone. In the late 1970s and on until the 1990s, enrollment in public schools fell, creating funding hardships for schools.

And in the 1990s, the era of choice left public schools wondering how to adapt—with Gov. Rudy Perpich starting open enrollment in 1988 and later pushing for charter schools in 1991. Public schools now had to compete with their neighbors, had to offer as many classes and electives and sports, and had to find ways to deal with funding losses if students went elsewhere.

Perhaps the first blow was the publication of “A Nation at Risk” in 1983, which was a scathing attack on public education that asserted public schools were failing. Instead of simply defending the status quo, educators took some commission recommendations to heart, increasing the rigor of curriculum, adding items like computer science, raising standards for teachers, and creating “gifted and talented” programs.

Public schools became stronger, more nimble, and more efficient, surviving those storms. And at MSBA, the Association also became used to change. Longtime Executive Director Bill Wettergren retired in 1983, and Willard Baker took over for six years before passing the baton to Dick Anderson. New staff hires brought new ideas, new programs and new ways to promote, support and strengthen school boards.

As 2000 dawned, MSBA was offering new, improved services from a new office with a staff made stronger from pulling through a tragedy together. With its first Web page on the horizon, MSBA was ready to take on the challenges of helping board members into the future.

Executive Director Dick Anderson stood in the rubble of what was once his office at MSBA. It had been totally destroyed by a tornado on March 29, 1998. With a hat and gloves on, he smiled at the camera. He knew nobody had been killed or hurt on staff. He knew there would be a long road of rebuilding ahead. But he also knew it could be the start of a new beginning, a stronger Association. And that was a reason to smile.

MSBA had weathered many storms in education over the decades. Anderson knew MSBA would weather this storm as well. “We intend to go forward with as many of our planned meetings and workshops as possible. Even while rebuilding, we will continue to provide service to our members,” he wrote in a message to the membership. Just a couple days after the storm, Development Director Jan Rhode was off to do a Phase 3 Workshop in Grand Rapids, and Lobbyist Bob Meeks was off to the Capitol. The rest of the staff set up temporary headquarters in the Norwest Building 10 miles away in Mankato.

In 1998, MSBA Executive Dick Anderson walked through the rubble of what remained from the Association’s St. Peter office after a tornado destroyed the six-year-old building.

Greg Abbott

Marjorie Johnson, Lake Park

L. Robert Lee, Montevideo

Willard Baker

Minneapolis

1920 - 2020

MSBA 1980-2000: Surviving the Tornado and Coming Back Stronger

Information compiled by Greg Abbott
A tornado destroyed the MSBA office building, reducing it to pieces of strewn roofing, siding and wood splinters. The building was only six years old when it was hit by the tornado.

Three months later, Anderson’s Journal column listed updates from different staff members:

• Marian Nygard: “We are able to live in our home, despite boarded up windows and torn up carpet. We are on the list for a contractor to begin work, so patience is the word!”

• John Sylvester: “Our home literally looks like a tar paper shack. We’re waiting for our siding and windows to arrive.”

• Bob Lowe: “The damage we experienced was limited to primarily outbuildings. Our dogs, who lost their kennel and were let in during the storm, caused more damage to our dwelling than the storm did.”

Lakeville resident Carol Metz stopped by the new office in December to return a weekly schedule the tornado had blown from St. Peter to Lakeville. The muddy, wrinkled calendar was framed and returned “so you can see what you were supposed to be doing that next week.” She wrote of how MSBA was in her thoughts and hoped everyone’s lives were returning to normal.

Anderson received hundreds of letters of support and offers to help. Looking at the property, which had lost more than 400 trees, he set up an arbor fund to create some sense of normalcy for the land. Donations from all across the state and from school boards associations all around the nation came in.

Eventually, all the debris was hauled away. The only thing left standing was the concrete elevator shaft. A new building was built at the same location, completed in November with new offices, computers, and a conference/workshop room. As a permanent sign of all the support and donations to the Association, staff can look out their office windows 22 years later and see a beautiful grove of trees around the building.

REALLY, WHY WAS THIS WOMAN SMILING?
As a promotion for the 1981 MSBA Leadership Conference, a picture of a smiling woman was placed in the March Journal, asking readers to guess why this woman (Jeanne Robertson) was smiling. The reason MSBA was looking for was that she was smiling because she was going to be the keynote speaker for the Leadership Conference. Nobody guessed the answer, but at least a few people wrote in to guess she was smiling because “she had just decided not to file for re-election to her local school board.”

A CONTEST
Why is this woman smiling?

If you know the answer (or think you do) drop us a line before May 1. The correct answer with the earliest postmark will receive a prize.

This promotion for the Leadership Conference didn’t have a winner. It asked why the woman was smiling, but nobody guessed correctly.

NEGOTIATIONS BECOME TOUGHER
Up until 1981, Minnesota law limited teachers’ right to strike. During the seven years up to 1981, there were a total of 14 teacher strikes. But when a new 1980 law allowed unlimited right to strike, Minnesota saw 35 strikes from 1981-82 and another eight strikes from 1983-84. Contract settlements were delayed. “In my judgment, this is not working and needs to be changed,” said Executive Director Willard Baker. “Slow settlements, strikes, and unrest are weakening public support for this great education system.”

MSBA’S JOAN PARENT BECOMES SECOND MINNESOTAN TO LEAD THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

In April of 1983, Joan Parent of the Foley School District was elected President of the National School Boards Association. Only one other MSBA board member, Edna Paul, had ever led the national group. Wettergren said that Parent “believed sincerely that one must have all the information possible to serve effectively as a school board member in her local district.” That, he said, was why she was so involved in learning at the many workshops and events offered by MSBA. (See the article on Joan in this issue.)

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The 1980 Gallup Poll showed the top problems confronting education were: lack of discipline, use of drugs, and poor curriculum standards; In 1989, the top problems listed were: use of drugs, lack of discipline, and lack of financial support.
MSBA: Years 1980–2000

A 1986 survey found the percentage of female board members had increased from 12 percent in 1970 to 25 percent. With three-year terms, the percentage of board members with six or fewer years of service was 49 percent in 1970. It rose to 71 percent in 1986.

THE FIRST-EVER SCHOOL BOARD DAY AT THE CAPITOL

MSBA sponsored the first School Board member Day at the Capitol on April 7, 1983. It was a huge hit with more than 600 school board members and superintendents attending. Gov. Perpich met with the MSBA Board of Directors, and Senate Majority Leader Roger Moe spoke to the group, saying, “This is the largest group I have seen since we tried to repeal the helmet law.” The event in 1986 drew more than 800 people and remains the largest Day at the Capitol MSBA has held.

A NATION AT RISK

Reports in the news media blared that a new government report said public schools were failing students. It recommended a school year of 200-220 days, increased graduation requirements of four years of English, three years of math, science and social studies, and a half-year of computer science. It also had multiple recommendations for increasing teacher education standards and salaries. (See article in this issue.) The positives of the report were overlooked, but the negatives were highly publicized, with MSBA agreeing that schools should review graduation requirements and their curriculum to make sure students would get the training they’d need for the future.

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS NOW AN OPTION FOR THE FALL, EVENTUALLY MOVING TO NOVEMBER

In 1984, school boards could decide whether to stay with May elections or move them to the November General Election. The move, done without consultation of board members, had MSBA worrying that putting a nonpartisan race into a partisan November General Election would result in politics getting in the way of school board elections. The main concern was that in some school districts, maybe political parties would start endorsing nonpartisan candidates and affect the outcome of the elections. “School boards are not Republican or Democrat,” said executive director Willard Baker. “Education crosses all party lines. That’s why it is listed as nonpartisan. That’s why November school board elections are a bad idea.”

The choice in a Spring or Fall election came to an end in 1994. School elections were then mandated to go to the November General Election in either an odd or even year. Districts had until Jan. 1, 1998, to make a final transition.

THE MINNESOTA SCHOOL DISTRICT LIQUID ASSET FUND BEGINS

As a way to help public schools get the highest investment yields, MSBA helped establish the Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund in October of 1984. By pooling funds, the money can draw a higher yield and is more likely to be stable and preserve capital. The primary feature is a money market fund, but there is also a fixed-rate investment program for government securities and bank certificates of deposit. It remains a partnership with the Minnesota Association of School Administrators and the Minnesota Association of School Business Officials, with a board consisting of business officials, school board members, and superintendents.

OPEN ENROLLMENT

When Gov. Rudy Perpich brought up the idea of having open enrollment in 1985, the blowback from the education community was fierce. Then Executive Director Willard Baker said the “proposed school voucher proposal” would eliminate control over resident pupils by the school district. “It is time to speak out on this mandate with a strong voice because state policy-makers appear to have rekindled the torch of state direction in local policy-making.”

The 1985 Leadership Conference had a record attendance of 3,557 members. It remains the highest-attended conference in MSBA history.
MSBA stood for only pushing legislation that would give ALL school districts a win – whether metro or rural. And for the next few decades, rural school districts also continued to have full membership with MSBA.

SURVEYING THE NEEDS OF THE MEMBERSHIP

The first comprehensive survey of MSBA was completed in 1985, with responses from 32 percent of school boards and 40 percent of superintendents. Some of the findings:

- 90 percent liked the Leadership Conference, and thought Monday-Wednesday were good days for it, but nearly 25 percent thought it could be shortened to a two-day event. It was eventually changed to a two-day event for the 1987 conference.
- The most-read publication was the Boardcaster newsletter (90 percent), closely followed by the Journal (89 percent). The lowest-used publication was the MSBA pocket calendar.
- As for special services, the ability to call in toll-free to ask questions was by far the most-used service and had a 97 percent rating for excellent or good responses.
- A new wrinkle was that 65 percent of the membership thought the Board of Directors should have a President-elect to learn the position before taking over as President. That finding changed MSBA by-laws and was implemented within the next year.

Large overall surveys by MSBA continued on in 1995, 2006, and are still running today in small versions for specific service areas each year over the past four years.

POST-SECONDARY ENROLLMENT OPTION PASSES LEGISLATURE IN 1986

In a last-minute conference committee discussion, the 1986 Legislature approved a bill to allow post-secondary enrollment options for juniors and seniors in high school.

MSBA President Jean Olson was against the move, questioning whether 16- and 17-year-olds would be ready socially for college attendance, and how inequities would abound for many school districts not close enough geographically for students to attend a post-secondary institution. “The public policy question of K-12 dollars being diverted to post-secondary schools needs review,” she said. “If college costs are a concern to parents, that is a separate issue.”

NEW RECOGNITION PROGRAM FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Starting in July of 1986, MSBA’s board approved a new recognition program that went beyond selecting six Outstanding School Board members. In an hours-to-points system, board members could be recognized for earning 100 points of MSBA training or participation in advocacy events and conferences (now known as the Director Award). It also established the Board of Distinction Award for school boards with a majority of members earning 100 points or more during a three-year period. The Outstanding Board Member Award was changed to the All-State School Board award, offering recognition for up to seven board members. The President’s Award and Leadership Development Certificate came in 1991, and the Arlene Bush Distinguished Board Member award would come later. The awards ceremony was originally part of an evening banquet, but later switched to a luncheon when the banquet was dropped.

CHANGES TO THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

In 1988, MSBA added the Show and Tell exhibit to the conference. It was a hit. But staff hit a snag because of construction in Minneapolis

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and date conflicts in St. Paul. So the 1989 Leadership Conference was moved to a Thursday-Saturday event and moved back to the St. Paul Auditorium. As of 1987 a luncheon also honored both the All-State School Board and the members who received a certificate for 100 points of training. In 1990, with the Minneapolis Convention Center complete, the conference moved back to Minneapolis but kept its Thursday-Saturday days. Three years later, the Leadership Conference was downsized to a two-day event, Thursday and Friday.

**AIDS BECOMES A CONCERN FOR SCHOOLS**

As AIDS education began to hit the Midwest, MSBA responded with a special session at its 1988 Leadership Conference with Dr. Michael Osterholm talking about the AIDS epidemic and procedures schools should have in place if a student or staff member had AIDS. Later that year, the Minnesota Department of Education offered three regional statewide workshops to help administrators implement AIDS education for prevention and risk reduction.

**PHASE III BEGINS – ALL ON BOARD**

Jan Rhode came aboard MSBA in 1988. A year later, she featured an Early Bird program called “All On Board,” complete with video scenarios on board ethics, citizen complaints, and more. The huge success prompted it to be offered before the summer Management Services Workshop. It was a big hit again and became a permanent add-on to the board training Phase I and II series. The All On Board segment was combined with an “ABCs of Policy” workshop segment to make up the new Phase III training. Eventually, MSBA filmed specific videos with Minnesota actors that became part of the training in 1994.

**KINDERGARTEN GETS SERIOUS**

No more just a playtime garden for children, kindergarten in 1987 became more serious. A study of full-day kindergarten showed positive learning results in students who reached third grade, especially for students of color. Soon, schools were tightening up entrance ages to kindergartens. Eventually, the issue continued to come back every few years under different disguises, such as education tax credits.

**MSBA GETS ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB**

In 1997, MSBA launched its first web site. By the end of the year, it was being used so much that a special T1 line had to be installed. The most-read items were the 1997 Legislative Resolutions that were put on the website for the first time.

Executive Director Anderson said: “No longer is the information flow from MSBA dependent upon the discretion of the postal system, board chair, or superintendent. Every board member can be connected to the worldwide web.”

The web site saw an average of 10,000 hits per month that year. The site now averages about 55,000 hits per month.

**COLUMBINE creates a NEW CHALLENGE FOR SCHOOLS ACROSS THE NATION**

The 1999 school shootings in Columbine, Colorado, touched off concerns of school safety across the nation. As some people struggled for answers, American Association of School Administrators Executive Director Paul Houston said, “We can’t find rational answers for irrational acts.” But that shooting made school boards realize that the once unthinkable was now thinkable. National School Public Relations Executive Director Rich Bagin, in a 1999 Journal issue devoted to the topic of school safety, said that school boards now had to decide how much they wanted to do to improve school safety – relocating offices, police on site, anonymous tiplines, metal detectors? The follow-up question was tougher: How much is your community willing to pay for the safety improvements?

The most common solutions at the time were to adopt zero-tolerance weapons policies for schools and try to increase counseling for students. Some districts thought that Columbine was just a rare exception that could never happen again, but the nation was soon to find out that it could happen anywhere…even in Minnesota. Then Rep. David Minge wrote that voucher schools should have in favor of other choices. In 1995, the response to vouchers was: “Vouchers are not about choice. Minnesota already has choice through open enrollment and charter schools.”

Studies were shown that vouchers didn’t work in other public school systems. And when student proficiency didn’t increase, suddenly voucher schools didn’t have to show academic progress or accountability.

And as Rep. Lyndon Carlson wrote in the February 1996 Journal: “Our constitution specifically prohibits the use of public funds to promote religious schools. I will not use our public funds to do this.”

The 1997 session saw Gov. Carlson veto the K-12 Omnibus bill and say he wouldn’t approve it unless vouchers (tax credits) were approved. MSBA and Executive Director Dick Anderson called on Carlson to “do the right thing.”

MSBA also started a campaign to flood Carlson with letters against the idea. Eventually, the idea was turned back, but the issue continues to come back every few years under different disguises, such as education tax credits.

**MSBA STARTS ITS OWN POLICY SERVICES**

For a couple decades, MSBA referred school districts to certain global policies that were developed and offered through the National School Boards Association. But as school board members’ main job became focused on policy, the MSBA Board wondered about creating a policy service that had federal law, but was also specific to Minnesota law. In November of 1993, a Policy Service Task Force was formed, with volunteer advisors from school districts. The basic slate of mandated and recommended policies formed what is now MSBA’s Policy Services. The service officially began July 1, 1995.

**VOUCHERS REAR THEIR UGLY HEADS ONCE AGAIN**

Gov. Perpich had pushed through the era of open enrollment in 1988. Then charter schools in 1991. In 1995, it was Gov. Arne Carlson’s turn, and he pushed vouchers for another school choice option. Vouchers had been defeated in the Perpich years, in favor of other choices. In 1995, the response to vouchers was: “Vouchers are not about choice. Minnesota already has choice through open enrollment and charter schools.”

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Futurist Bill Banach in 1990 predicted: students will come to class expecting to be entertained, schools will be held to world standards – not just national, and communities will want more from schools but won’t want to pay for it.

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**For more information, contact Greg Abbott, MSBA Director of Communications:**

Information for this article was compiled by Greg Abbott, MSBA Director of Communications. To respond to the article, you can reach him at gabbott@mnmsba.org.
“Why is MSBA located in St. Peter?” is a question MSBA staff members hear often, especially when the League of Minnesota Cities, Association of Minnesota Counties and many other associations are all in St. Paul.

Finding the answer dates back to the early days of MSBA, when the Board of Directors’ President used to serve as the director (then called the “executive secretary”).

A milk crate contained all of MSBA’s vital documents – and this crate would get passed from director to director. This arrangement continued until the Board wanted a part-time staff member to run the association.

As the newest executive secretary, Wettergren accepted the job on one condition: The organization would have to be headquartered in St. Peter. “My cows and I are not moving,” he told the Board.

The first office was a room in the St. Peter High School. As a couple staff were added, the office moved to the basement of a feed store in downtown St. Peter.

In 1961, MSBA’s office was moved to the back of a building on Third Street in downtown St. Peter, complete with cubicles and desks for a four-person staff – no more dealing with mice or rats in the bottom of the feed store.

When the owner of the building left for Mankato, MSBA expanded into the space. It would expand that office two more times.

The original “new” building on the hill was approved by the Board in 1992 after a facilities committee reviewed the Association’s facility needs. The downtown office had three additions built onto it – the newest addition in 1973. In 1988, a reserve fund was set aside to pay for new building expenses. The land was purchased for $4,500 and assessments of $42,000 were paid. The old office downtown was sold for $125,000 to help cover the costs of the new building, estimated at $540,000.

Consideration of moving the office to St. Paul was short-lived when MSBA found out that the Association of Minnesota Counties paid $1.5 million to build an office near the Capitol.

When the tornado destroyed that first hilltop office in 1998, discussion again surfaced about moving to St. Paul. At the time, staff worked out of the former Northwest Bank building in downtown Mankato until the building was rebuilt.

Former Executive Director Mike Torkelson said it became an issue at some of the early Delegate Assemblies, with Wettergren ending the debate by saying: “I’m going to be the director and I am staying here and that’s it.”

And as fax machines and toll-free 800 phone numbers became more widespread, the feeling was: “Hey, if you have a question, you don’t drive over to the MSBA office – you call them. So, what difference does it make where we are located?”

And the issue faded away, said Torkelson. Even after the tornado, he said moving the office was not a big consideration.

“I think when they realized that they don’t drive over to the MSBA office anyway, it didn’t matter that much. I think a lot of superintendents and board members from Greater Minnesota prefer that we stay here,” Torkelson said.

Bruce Lombard is MSBA’s associate director of communications. You may reach him at blombard@mnmmsba.org. This article was originally published in the May-June 2016 issue of the Journal and has been updated slightly.

MSBA moved from its downtown St. Peter building to a new building on the hill by Gustavus Adolphus College in December of 1992…and rebuilt six years later after a tornado leveled the first building.

In March of 1991, MSBA started Lobby Line – a toll-free number that board members and school staff could call to get an update of the day’s legislative activity. The service lasted for 25 years.
A Passionate Coach and Educator, Working for Better Opportunities in Minnesota Public Schools

By Kristi Manning - MSBA Intern

Willard Baker was a passionate educator, coach, and lobbyist who worked to create the best for school boards and students across Minnesota. His work helped establish MSBA, as well as promote and advocate for teachers, students, and those involved in the Minnesota public education system.

Baker was a native of Iron Mountain, Mich. He had a passion for education growing up and, during his college years, went on to earn his Bachelor’s Degree from the University of Michigan, and Master’s Degree from Mankato State University in Mankato, Minnesota.

“Bake,” as he was known by his friends, family, and co-workers, worked as a teacher and athletic coach in St. Peter and Rochester public schools until 1961, when his fondness for education led him to accept a position in St. Peter at the Minnesota School Boards Association.

Baker assisted former executive director Bill Wettergren in building the association before becoming Executive Director in 1983. After working for the association for 27 years, Baker retired in 1989. In addition to serving as the second Executive Director at MSBA, Baker served on the State Continuing Education Committee, the School Finance Task Force, the Council on Quality Education, the State Continuing Education Committee, as well as multiple other committees that worked to support and benefit educational opportunities in Minnesota.

The MSBA office in St. Peter moved around the town quite a few times before Baker came to work for MSBA. However, when he started, the office was in the basement of a feed store in town. According to former MSBA Executive Director Mike Torkelson, Baker used to tell stories about the rats and mice that they had to deal with at the feed store. Baker worked during the stage where MSBA was a three-person operation and saw the growth of the organization over the years.

The work he did through MSBA was influential in the ways that public education evolved over the years. Baker was willing to look into new ideas, but was always careful when considering new plans. “He was a high school teacher and a coach and I think he cared about kids, and this [MSBA] gave him a platform for him to do that,” said his son, Jeff Baker.

When modifications to school aid in Minnesota came around, Baker was interested in looking into the modifications. Through the aid that would be provided, Baker saw that it would increase the support for schools, but was also cautious of the fact that becoming too dependent on aid could be damaging to MSBA and Minnesota schools.

In his position at MSBA, Baker did a lot of lobbying and work at the Capitol. With a difficult political agenda to navigate, Baker was able to follow that when he was trying to get something done for education in Minnesota. The Democrats or Republicans would sponsor a bill, and Baker had the ability to navigate who had the stronghold to get done what he needed to get done.

Baker was also passionate about the work that he did on the forefront of performance-oriented compensation. During his time working with MSBA, teachers were paid on a grid system. It had nothing to do with whether you were a good teacher or not, it was your degree of education and how many years you had been teaching. They would plug that number in and that is the amount you got paid. “I think he saw the bigger picture in that education is so important and to get good education you need good teachers and how to figure that out. I think he was pretty proud of that,” said his son, Brad Baker.

Additionally, he was at the forefront of assisting with leveraging benefit plans for all of the districts. He helped come up with plans, rather than every district coming up with their own healthcare and benefit plans, and eventually he put it all together. “I think they were one of the first bigger organizations to do that. I know he was big on that,” Jeff Baker said.

Baker also had a strong love for baseball that he passed on to his kids. His son, Brad Baker, is the current head coach of the Gustavus Adolphus College baseball team. Baker was a member of “M” club at the University of Michigan and played on two Michigan Big Ten championship baseball teams. He went on to continue as a coach in both the St. Peter and the Rochester school districts.

Baker came to St. Peter to play baseball and also worked as a teacher. He was hired to work for MSBA by Bill Wettergren, who was impressed by his capability and passion for the work. Baker was still involved with coaching baseball while also working to build up MSBA.

“It’s kind of like coaching to build something like that, and I think he was pretty good at it,” Brad Baker said. With his time outside of MSBA, Baker started coaching his kids in baseball when they were around 13 years old. “That’s something that he really liked about MSBA, too. Even though he was busy with a lot of stuff, they gave him balance and there was flexibility where he could do those things,” Jeff Baker said.

Growing up with a father who worked for MSBA, Brad and Jeff did not know the details of his work but knew the general idea of the work he was doing with MSBA. “He was all about doing what is right. Whether it was at MSBA or outside of it. He was very principled and he was a good leader. I think he had the respect of the people who he worked with at MSBA and the school districts so it was fun to watch that part and see how he operated. And I hope we got some of that from him,” Brad Baker said.

Towards the end of his time at MSBA, Willard Baker had concerns about the increasingly popular movement to allow parents to have choices in where their children attended public school. While the idea in theory seemed beneficial for some students, Baker was concerned that if parents had the choice to move their children to another school in a certain district, or another school district completely, that they would be doing it for reasons other than education. His main worry was that athletic opportunities at other schools would push parents to move their children.
“Change is inevitable, and we have to adapt to change.” That is former MSBA Executive Director Richard Anderson’s motto. As a former teacher, Anderson believed in local governance of public schools and supported the strong education that public schools provide. Because of his love for school board governance, the position at MSBA was a natural fit in pursuing his passion.

Before working at MSBA, Anderson was a teacher and coach in Hibbing for seven years. He grew up in Two Harbors and went to school at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, receiving a minor in political science, which he then incorporated into completing his Master’s Degree. As a public school teacher, Anderson was active in the Federation of Teachers. He was passionate about collective bargaining, the negotiation of wages and other conditions of employment by an organized body of employees, and in 1973, when MSBA was looking for someone who knew something of the topic, Anderson was hired to work in government relations.

Anderson served multiple positions with the association before becoming Executive Director in December 1989. He left MSBA in February 2002 to work for the National School Boards Association until he retired in 2008.

The building MSBA worked out of was across from a popular restaurant and bar, Patrick’s on Third, in St. Peter. When Anderson started, there were a handful of staff members, including long-time MSBA Executive Director William Wettergren, Willard Baker, Mike Torkelson, and Bob Meeks – all went on to be Executive Director at one time or another.

As he continued his time as Executive Director, Anderson added the positions of Communications Director, Clerical Administrator and two CPA’s in accounting. Because of increasing technology, the staff in the mail room was reduced. Anderson also added a Policy Services program, in addition to a Technology Director.

In terms of programing and learning opportunities for board members, Anderson implemented a statewide orientation for board members, including three regional Phase workshops. School Board training was scarce when he started as Executive Director of MSBA. There were a few program meetings, but they often happened on a one-time basis. For school board members, it was a hit or a miss. Either you were able to go and get the training, or you did not. There were no fax machines or Internet during this time, so landlines, gestetners, and electric typewriters were the technologies available for communicating. These programs allowed board meetings to become accessible to a greater number of school board members. At this time, there were about 437 school districts in the state of Minnesota, according to Anderson.

While working at MSBA, Anderson also initiated other board development programs that moved the development opportunities outwards in the state. When more opportunities for board development appeared, Anderson was an advocate for adding and evaluating the opportunities to better serve school boards. In addition to his advocacy for school board opportunities, when Anderson moved to work for the National School Boards Association, he became the Senior Leader of Annual Conference Programs. In this role, he helped to organize the annual convention and other conferences put on by NSBA that worked to benefit school boards.

One of Anderson’s main goals as Executive Director was to move the leadership within the association from staff positions to the Board of Directors. “I always had a great Board of Directors, and over time moved them straight to owning the association. Their leadership directed the staff to what they wanted to provide for school boards,” Anderson said.

By making MSBA administrator focused rather than staff focused, it created a healthy environment where the Board of Directors took ownership of MSBA. Anderson described the Board of Directors he was fortunate to work with, “good, solid thinking people to work for, with service leadership.”

While he experienced many accomplishments as Executive Director, there were also...
challenges that Anderson faced. Collective bargaining at the capital was tough during his time as Executive. Anderson also had to deal with strikes, and in response developed the first strike plan for school districts. In addition, vouchers were another challenge that faced MSBA. MSBA worked against Governor Carlson and, in turn, had a knock down, drag out fight that won against vouchers.

It was difficult to develop collaborative and working relationships with the teachers’ union at this time as well. Anderson’s goal was to even out the divide between the teachers’ union and school boards by creating communication opportunities at the leadership level, where members of both parties could discuss and communicate about issues. School funding was also low at this time. Anderson and his Board of Directors knew the schools were being underfunded, as there was a three-to four-year period where funding was not increased. To combat this, Anderson and other directors created a funding strategy that included a study that proved school districts were not receiving enough funding. This study contributed to an increase in funding for schools.

The final issue that was extremely difficult during Anderson’s time at MSBA was the 1998 tornado and its effects in detail. “I was watching during Anderson’s time at MSBA was the 1998 tornado and its effects in detail. “I was watching TV and a red blob was coming over St. Peter. I looked out into my backyard and my tin shed had blown over and was in the neighbor’s yard. It was hailing softball-sized hail. Then it all stopped and the sun broke out.” Anderson was contacted at his home following the tornado letting him know that the alarms were going off at the MSBA building, which happened quite often because of the wind. When he arrived, he was in shock at what he saw. “The building was destroyed. The gas regulator was torn off and you could hear the plumbing running, flooding the floors. There were trees down everywhere.”

Anderson and Former Executive Director Bob Meeks both lived in St. Peter as did many other MSBA staff members. Meeks’ and Anderson drove around late into the evening to staff members’ homes to make sure they were okay following the devastating event.

The current MSBA building had been built 6 years before the tornado struck. It was built for the second time and finished in November 1998. The entire event was stressful on everyone, especially Anderson. “I didn’t sleep for three days. My mind was racing. I kept thinking, what is the next step?” The computer system’s server was recovered and the MSBA staff was moved to a temporary location in Mankato, while Board Development and Government Relations were moved to the attorney’s office in St. Paul. The entire move was assembled in four days. Through all of the destruction that the tornado caused, the Minnesota School Boards Association did not lose service to its membership.

In all of his accomplishments and work at both MSBA and NSBA, Anderson is most proud of the people he was fortunate to work with. “I am proud of having strong leadership. They were a quality staff that, along with the Board of Directors, made a great team. The product of good government made Minnesota a leader in the quality of education, and produces results that do not go unnoticed,” Anderson said. “Being an Executive Director isn’t a job, it’s a life.”

At the end of the interview, Anderson signed off with his signature line. As a former member of the United States Marine Corps, Anderson, who worked endlessly to create leadership positions, provided opportunities for board development, and held strong relationships with his staff and board of directors, remained always faithful to the betterment of education in Minnesota and around the country. In other words, Anderson was, “Semper Fidelis.”

Kristi Manning worked for MSBA as an intern from Gustavus Adolphus College in 2018.

Parent Left Her Legacy on Education, Athletics, and Advocacy for Students Across the Nation

By Kristi Manning, MSBA Intern

An accomplished woman, Joan Parent of Foley was not only a believer in education, but worked to make the lives of students, especially women, better for the long run. Parent supported the approval and acknowledgement of women in the areas of science, mathematics, engineering, and athletics.

In addition to participating as a member on the Foley School Board for 30 years starting in 1957, Parent went on to serve as the 42nd President of the Minnesota School Boards Association. While acting as MSBA President, Parent also represented the Central Region on the National School Boards Association Board of Directors beginning in 1977. In April of 1980, as former President of MSBA, Parent was elected to the post of NSBA Secretary-Treasurer. From there, Parent went on to become the Second Vice President in 1981, First Vice President in 1982, and in 1983 was elected as the President of the National School Boards Association.

Joan Parent was born in Toronto, Canada, and grew up in Ontario. She married Murray Xavier Parent, a classmate from Ontario Veterinary College. Following their graduation, they moved to his hometown of Foley to practice veterinary medicine. In 1946, Parent became the first female licensed to practice veterinary medicine in the state of Minnesota. Although she had a passion for her work as a veterinarian, Parent was just as passionate about helping advocate for women’s opportunities in education and athletics.

“She started her role on the school board in the 1950s,” said her daughter Joellen Johnson. “At
that time there were no women on the board. Although she would not have considered herself a feminist, when as issue arose and they needed a different voice, she was there to speak up.”

In the interest of her passion for athletics, Parent began serving on the Minnesota State High School League Board of Directors in 1972. She later became the MSHSL Board of Directors President in 1975 – the first woman to lead the League and the first woman to head a high school sports association in the nation. As an active athlete herself, having competed in swimming, ice hockey, and field hockey during her high school years, Joan saw the need for women to participate in sports. During her time as the president, Parent supported and helped fight for Title IX to move forward, allowing equal recognition between men’s and women’s sports across the state.

“She was appointed to MSHSL as a school board member, at the time that was pivotal for Title IX. She was shocked at how far behind the state was in terms of opportunities for women in sports. She got a lot of pushback, but she spoke up for what she thought was right. She had a strong voice,” Johnson said.

Because of her work to create changes that positively impacted women and sports in Minnesota, Joan Parent was honored with the Minnesota Legacy Award in 2015, two years after her death, at the 29th Annual Minnesota Girls and Women in Sports Day at the Minnesota History Center.

Leading as an advocate for women in sports was not the only way Joan Parent spoke out and up for women. Parent supported and stood firm for education, especially mathematics and the sciences.

Parent’s time with the National School Board Association began while she was on the board of directors at the Minnesota School Boards Association. She first held the position representing the Central Region on the 20-member NSBA Board. As the years passed, Parent was elected into higher positions with NSBA. Working on the board of directors with NSBA, Parent was named by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) as one of their most accomplished former presidents. Her willingness to advocate for change and promote equal opportunities for all students is what made Parent a successful, dedicated, and admired leader in Minnesota and across the nation.

Kristi Manning was an intern from Gustavus Adolphus College, who worked for MSBA during the 2018 school year.
A report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education dominated the news in April of 1983 and for the next few years.

As MSBA’s Mike Torkelson wrote in MSBA’s Journal: “When a federal commission on education asked ‘mirror, mirror on the wall,’ America’s schools did not reflect back as the fairest of them all.”

The federal report, entitled “A Nation at Risk,” focused on five areas:

- Content: Schools should strengthen their graduation requirements and – at a minimum – require four years of English, three years of math, science and social studies and a half year of computer science. Also recommended was two years of a foreign language.
- Standards: School curriculum needs to be more rigorous, the report said. Textbooks need to be up-to-date and standardized tests should be used.
- Time: Schools don’t need an agrarian school calendar anymore. Students need to be in school 200-220 days a year for a seven-hour time period, the report said.
- Teaching: The report made seven recommendations for teachers, such as salaries needing to be more market-competitive, teaching candidates need to meet higher standards, school boards should adopt 11-month teacher contracts, and incentives should be used to attract students to teaching.
- Leadership: Citizens need to provide the financial support and stability for schools to bring about these reforms and then hold elected officials accountable for implementing the reforms.

MSBA’s Executive Director Bill Wettergren said schools would gladly accept the challenge and review graduation standards and increase the rigor of curriculum. But when then U.S. Secretary of Education Terrell Bell was asked where additional money would come from for the funding of additional teacher programs and more school days, Bell’s answer was: “the state and local communities.”

At the time, Minnesota was running a deficit. Federal support in education funding had dropped from 7 percent to under 5 percent.

Wettergren also took issue that the report gave a broad brush to ALL schools, when Minnesota was actually doing well in some of the areas. And in areas that needed help, “boards must work with the public to put pressure on state legislators to repeal statutes that protect teachers who cannot do the job and offer better pay to teachers who do excellent work.”

At the National School Boards Association, newly elected President Joan Parent of Foley, Minn., said the report helps schools to focus on areas it needs to zero in on. Resolutions from the NSBA Delegate Assembly agreed that schools should review curriculum, add more instruction time, and look at teacher standards.

“We welcome the opportunity to play a major role in making a comprehensive reassessment of public education,” Parent said. Then NSBA Executive Director Thomas Shannon said schools need to “step up” or the public and legislators may look at other ways to reform education, whether through open enrollment, charter schools, or vouchers. He stated that schools across the nation all want to raise the bar, but it also means that Congress needs to provide adequate federal funding to get the job done...funding that was cut the next three years under the Reagan administration.

In an example of odd timing, then Gov.-elect Rudy Perpich sent a letter to schools, telling them to keep the school year between Labor Day and Memorial Day so it wouldn’t interfere with the state’s tourism industry. Superintendents said with those restrictions, it was hard enough to make a 175-day calendar work, let alone a 200 or 220-day calendar.

MSBA’s Willard Baker, who took over as executive director later in 1983, said the reaction to the report from schools should focus on the positive. “It is not time to be defensive. It is not the time to say that money is the only answer to better education, but rather it is the time for school board members to provide positive leadership.”

Parent put it bluntly: “Public schools currently occupy the witness stand in the court of public opinion, and they’re subject to cross-examining unlike any we have seen before. We should use the opportunity to address constructively any problems that exist and to reaffirm our many accomplishments.”

In October of 1983, MSBA sent a packet of materials to all school districts in response to the Commission’s report. It included the board’s position statement, a summary of characteristics for effective schools, suggestions to improve academics (28 of them), suggestions for implementing recommendations, enacted legislation that addresses academic excellence and facts about “What’s Right” with Minnesota public education.

Former Minnesota Education Commissioner Alice Seagren was then a young parent with children. She went on to serve on the school board, serve in the state Legislature, and later serve as education commissioner.

Looking back on “A Nation at Risk,” she said it ended up raising the discussion of what education should look like. “Early on, our founding fathers decided children should be educated. It made our country one of the strongest,” she said. “As we became a more sophisticated system, there became more state and federal control. It made everyone stop and think of how we could improve education and ensure we give our kids the right kind of education.”

Seagren was on a curriculum committee that worked with teachers on textbook selection to make sure the texts reflected state standards and were up-to-date. She also saw the proficiency pendulum swing from the early days of Outcome Based Education (OBE) to Profiles of Learning to No Child Left Behind testing.

“Minnesota had a system for standards way before No Child Left Behind required states to have a set of standards,” Seagren said. Minnesota actually moved forward on many of the recommendations from “A Nation at Risk.”

The only recommendation the state went backward on: Lengthening the school year. Her ideal would be to have intensive summer programs for students who aren’t meeting standards so they could catch up. “But that costs money. Some districts have tried that, but it is expensive.”

She said the school system also needs to build the right interventions into schools to catch students before they get behind.
Economic Policy Institute Research Associate Richard Rothstein, in a report on "A Nation at Risk 25 years later," wrote that the core assumptions of the commission were flawed. Much of the analysis was based on slightly declining student scores on the SAT test from 1960 to 1980. What the commission failed to realize, said Rothstein, is that in the 1960s, only white, college-bound students took the SAT. By 1980, the demographics of SAT test takers had widened to more than just the top students and more than just white students. Despite more students taking the test, the scores remained relatively stable, which should have shown an IMPROVEMENT in student learning.

The other failure, according to Rothstein, was asking schools to improve dramatically without any support from other social, governmental, and economic institutions. "It distracted education policymakers from insisting that our political, economic and social institutions also have a responsibility to prepare children to be ready to learn when they attend school," Rothstein wrote.

That failure of the government and other social support systems was exactly what MSBA’s Wettergren predicted after then-U.S. Education Secretary Bell threw the question of funding school improvements to “anyone but us.”

Greg Abbott is the Director of Communications for MSBA. To respond to this article, you can reach him at gabbett@mnmsba.org.

## Open Enrollment Experiment Continues to Grow

**By Kaci Schneidawind**

**Special to the Journal**

Whether you love it or hate it, you can’t deny that open enrollment is one of the most consequential — and controversial — experiments in public education. For better or for worse, it gives public school students in Minnesota and across the country the option to enroll in schools not within their residential district. Minnesota’s open enrollment system was the first of its kind in a statewide capacity, and was implemented by Gov. Rudy Perpich in 1988 as an incentive for competition among schools with a goal of improving the state education system. The 1990-91 school year was the first in which open enrollment became mandatory for all Minnesota school districts.

The Minnesota Department of Education reports that during the 2017-18 school year, more than 80,000 students — 9 percent of the state’s total public school students — are open-enrolled. Another 57,000 students enrolled into charter schools. Today, the policy has had the greatest impact on small, rural districts. According to the Center for Rural Policy and Development, open enrollment in rural schools in Minnesota has seen an uptick through the past decade, from 9 percent in 2006-07 to 15 percent in 2016-17. Additionally, the Center concluded that there were 25,000 open enrollments in rural districts during the 2017-18 school year, signifying a 50 percent increase from 2016-17.

**MSBA’s take on open enrollment**

When Gov. Rudy Perpich brought up the idea of having open enrollment in 1985, the blowback from the education community was fierce. Then Executive Director Willard Baker said the “proposed school voucher proposal” would eliminate control over resident pupils by the school district. “It is time to speak out on this mandate with a strong voice because state policy-makers appear to have rekindled the torch of state direction in local policy-making.”

Then MSBA President Jean Olson of Duluth said open enrollment would increase transportation costs and create a whole new expense for marketing, recruitment and retention from one school to the next. “What about community pride and cohesiveness?” she asked. “We’re exchanging cooperative efforts for distrust and divisiveness.”

Many concerns can be summarized by the thought that students would open enroll into another district for non-academic reasons. “Maybe Joe’s girlfriend lives in a neighboring district or Jane wasn’t’ to play on a different basketball team,” Olson wrote.

MSBA also brought in superintendents and school board members to testify against the proposed legislation. However, since the legislation passed in 1988, the organization has not had a position one way or the other.

A district that has drawn many students through open enrollment

Though the state’s rural districts have been most affected by open enrollment, larger districts have also been impacted — for better or for worse. Minnetonka Public Schools is a suburban district that has gained a large number of students from open enrollment — 3,700 this fall, to be exact. Superintendent Dr. Dennis Peterson shared that this has increased the funding for his district by over $27,000,000. He said that if it were not for these students enrolling from other districts, Minnetonka would lose not only this entire revenue, but about $12,000,000 of expenses as well.

A considerable amount of Minnetonka’s success with open enrollment is credited to marketing to local families to “encourage them to choose Minnetonka over other districts and private schools,” said Peterson. He also noted that the district markets “broadly” across the area to attract new families to live in Minnetonka.

As for those other districts and private schools that lose students to Minnetonka, Peterson said that he is unaware of any hard feelings that these neighboring districts might have. “Some of them probably resent the fact that their families are choosing another district.” However, he pointed out, “we are not the ones making the choice [to enroll in another district] — it is [the students’] parents. [The other districts] could do everything Minnetonka is doing in order to keep their students.”

A district that loses students through open enrollment

While open enrollment has been a benefit to Minnetonka Public Schools, not all metro districts have shared in their success. Forest Lake Area Schools is a net loser on open enrollment, in a large part due to location, location, location.

The district has seven elementary schools, which presents some challenges regarding enrollment. Some students and families choose to attend outlying districts may be closer to the schools in a neighboring school district than their own secondary schools. For instance, Lino Lakes Elementary is over 15 miles from Forest Lake’s middle school and high school. As a result, families living in this community often choose to attend Centennial schools because their schools are closer to where they live.

“Generally speaking, we have an open enrollment gain from districts to our north and an open enrollment loss to the districts to our south,” said Forest Lake superintendent Dr. Steve Massey. “Additionally, we have two fairly large charter schools and a private Catholic school (grades K-8) in the heart of our district. Each of these schools have a combined enrollment close to 2,500 students, many of whom are within our attendance area.”

Despite this, Massey said he is not sure that the district would do anything differently because of open enrollment, other than “remain fiercely committed to providing relevant, dynamic, and high-powered learning options for our students.” However, he added, the district is

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After three years of pushing open enrollment, then-Minnesota Gov. Rudy Perpich received some help to usher another choice option for students: charter schools.

Minnesota became the first state to create a legislated charter school in 1991. The law formed eight results-oriented schools, with the first, City Academy in St. Paul, opening its doors in 1992.

As of 2018, there are 164 charter schools in Minnesota, serving 56,000 students.

Leading the charge to get charter schools through the Legislature was then-state Sen. Ember Reichgott Junge. Her efforts to move the legislation were detailed in her 2012 book, “Zero Chance of Passage: The Pioneering Charter School Story.”

The birth of charter schools had much to do with timing, Junge said. Gov. Rudy Perpich had opened the door to charter schools by pushing through open enrollment. Later, Junge heard about the idea of charters from American Federation of Teachers leader Al Shanker. He spoke to the idea as a way to give professional opportunities to teachers and try new learning ideas without all the restrictions put on independent school districts.

There was also a Citizens League of education leaders, business leaders, and citizens who took the idea and fleshed it out into legislation.

“I think people don’t realize that chartering was an idea that came from outside of the system,” Junge said. “Many people also don’t realize that it was very bi-partisan.”

At the time, there was big pushback from union leaders, despite Shanker proposing the idea. He had viewed charter schools as something that could be done within the district and with collective bargaining. But the legislation broke from that idea so schools would have more autonomy.

Junge said the first bill was very compromised and heavily amended to get past the Legislature. It was limited to eight charter schools and required double approval from both the state and the local school district.

“I thought at the time that a charter school would never be approved,” said Junge. But local school districts allowed the concept through. “I think with George H.W. Bush pushing private school vouchers, this was seen as something as a middle road between traditional schools and private schools.”

MSBA stance: Don’t oppose, but work to improve the law

MSBA’s Government Relations Director at the time, Bob Meeks, said the Association did not adopt a position regarding charter schools. That left staff open to looking at the law, and working to edit out concerns to improve it.

“We thought that, if done properly, charter schools could become lab schools,” said Meeks. “The idea was that charter schools would be provided mandate relief and have the ability to experiment.”

Whatever worked for charters, he said, could be used for independent school districts.

As time went on, the MSBA Board of Directors realized that charter schools were going to become part of the public school system.

“The MSBA Board spent a significant amount of meeting time dedicated to discussing the relationship MSBA should have with charter schools,” Meeks said. The Board knew the public had an interest in making sure all students received excellent education opportunities. MSBA opened up its training for charter school board members, and also became certified to teach and create mandated charter board member training.

Charter schools can also sign on as MSBA Charter Associates and receive access to services, such as policies and financial services.

student transitions from pre-k to kindergarten, kindergarten to first grade, etcetera,” said Massey.

The Forest Lake district also uses Facebook advertisements and other social media sites — such as Instagram and Twitter — along with videos, print material, dynamic websites, and realtor partnerships as marketing tactics.

Ultimately, Massey views options and choice for families by way of open enrollment as a “good thing.” This seems to be the general consensus among educators in the state; that though open enrollment may hurt some school districts, it helps those in need of it. If nothing else, it’s proved to ignite competition and debate among districts. This experiment in education has undoubtedly changed the landscape of Minnesota public schools — for better or for worse.

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Orfield said the studies, if the type of students are held constant, show that charter schools have done slightly worse than traditional public schools.

Orfield said there are a few Beat-the-Odds charter schools that have done better. “But the makeup of the charters can be very different when compared to public schools,” he said. When factors such as mobility, poverty, and homelessness are held constant, he said traditional public schools do slightly better.

Junge said that slight improvement may be because of charter schools pushing traditional schools to improve.

Segregation in schools

The report also showed how charter schools have led to more segregation of students.

“Charters speed up the trends – some suburban mainly white charter may start up and mess up the integration in other schools,” Orfield said. “At the other end, charters may create an Afro-centric or all Latino or all Hmong school. For kids in the same neighborhood, the white kids may go to a white school, black kids go to a black school. All social science says integration is good. Kids do better and feel more comfortable in a racially integrated society.”

Junge takes issue with the report saying that charter schools have increased segregation in education. “Charter schools, by their nature, provide freedom of choice for students,” she said. In the case of a Hmong Immersion School or Friendship Academy’s enrollment of 98 percent African Americans, the big difference is that parents choose those schools. “And the real question is whether the school is helping students achieve. Immersion may help children learn about their culture, and if that spurs achievement, that is the most important thing.”

Junge sees charter schools continuing to see steady growth over the next decade.

“I see opportunities for chartering and school district sectors to come together and learn from each other about personalized learning, sharing facilities, more teacher-powered schools where they take leadership.”

Orfield said as more people realize that charter schools are not performing better, he sees a decline in the movement.

“I voted for charter schools, and they promised to do better,” he said. “They didn’t.”

Greg Abbott is the MSBA Communications Director. To reach him with comments about this article, send an email to gabbott@mnmsba.org.
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