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During one of our many Zoom calls with the membership this spring, I recall a comment that matriculated from the chat box: “We will come back better,” a counter-and-envelope-pushing comment that offered an aspirational slice that was far better than “returning to normal.”

Inferred within that comment is that our K-12 delivery model will return better in 2020-2021. Our new normal for Minnesota’s public school districts will now include a public health component in its decision-making matrix. While student and employee safety have always been a priority, the complexity and unrelenting scourge of COVID-19 has made health and safety an even larger priority.

Minnesota Education Commissioner Mary Cathryn Ricker and Governor Tim Walz have made their guidance public knowledge through a Safe Learning Plan – a balance of local decision-making based on local and regional health data and our ability to implement some of the best practices ensuring student safety. As we expected, the guidance recognized the message that MSBA shared throughout this developmental stage: Each of our public school districts is unique. A one-size-fits-all approach would not work for our public school districts. Nor can we expect the guidance to answer every question.

Our message to the governor and the commissioner has been one of trust. Our state has a long and strong history of following a blended model of governance which includes a strong partnership with our state’s leaders. Trust must be extended to our school boards and superintendents to make some of the key decisions that will strike a meaningful balance between safety and the learning opportunities for our students.

Your communities are looking for leadership from their school boards and administration. When you are serving in an elected position, you can never know for certain what issues will show up on your front porch on any given day. The circumstances around this public health pandemic is one of those issues – albeit, a big one.

As I shared in my column in March, you will not have an immediate solution to every issue. For most of us, succeeding in the game of golf is a real challenge. In my role as a golf coach, one of my greatest joys was watching the development of my players when things were not going their way. “It’s how you handle your misses that will help define you.” No one likes to miss a putt or hit a tree. In golf, life, and positions of leadership, you will have some misses, but the strength of your leadership is in how you respond that will matter to your students, staff, and community. Equally important are the grace and humility that are demonstrated.

The challenges that the health pandemic has brought have led to many unanswered questions and yet we know that we have a very important job to do in providing a state-of-the-art public education experience for all of our students. Your leadership and decision-making during this time will be questioned and tested. Regardless of where you land with your learning model for your students, lean on those foundational core values, vision, and the leaders in your district to not only come back, but come back better.

Kirk Schneidawind is the MSBA Executive Director. Contact him at kschneidawind@mnmsba.org.
SEPTEMBER 2020
3 .......... MSBA Insurance Trust Meeting
7 .......... Labor Day (No Meetings Allowed)
9 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour (Virtual – Central Minnesota)
10 ........ MSBA Advocacy Tour (Virtual – Northern Minnesota)
15 ........ MSBA Advocacy Tour (Virtual – Metro Minnesota)
16 ........ MSBA Advocacy Tour (Virtual – Southern Minnesota and
Catch-All)
25 ........ Last Day for Submitting Legislative Resolutions to MSBA
28–29 .... MASA Fall Conference (Virtual)
30 ........ MSBA Phase III Workshop, Part 1 (Virtual)

OCTOBER 2020
3 .......... MSBA Phase III Workshop, Part 1 (Virtual)
4 .......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
7 .......... MSBA Phase III Workshop, Part 2 (Virtual)
10 .......... MSBA Phase III Workshop, Part 2 (Virtual)
12 .......... Columbus Day Observed (Optional Holiday)
13 .......... MSBA Charter Workshop, Part 1 (Virtual)
14 .......... MSBA Phase IV Workshop, Part 1 (Virtual)
15 .......... Minnesota Educator Academy (MEA) Conference (Virtual)
17 .......... MSBA Phase IV Workshop, Part 1 (Virtual)
20 .......... MSBA Charter Workshop, Part 2 (Virtual)
21 .......... MSBA Phase IV Workshop, Part 2 (Virtual)
22 .......... MSBA Insurance Trust Meeting
24 .......... MSBA Phase IV Workshop, Part 2 (Virtual)
27 .......... MSBA Charter Workshop, Part 3 (Virtual)
29–30 ...... MASBO Fall Conference (Virtual)

NOVEMBER 2020
3 .......... Election Day (No Meetings or Activities from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.)
4–5 ......... MASBO Fall Conference (Virtual)
8–9 ........ MSBA Board of Directors Meeting
10 ........ Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting
11 .......... Veterans Day (No Meetings Allowed)
16–20 ...... American Education Week
17 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting
(Virtual – Northern Minnesota)
18 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting
(Virtual – Southern Minnesota)
19 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting
(Virtual – Central Minnesota)
21 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting
(Virtual – Metro Minnesota)
26 .......... Thanksgiving (No Meetings Allowed)

NOTE: This calendar of events is subject to change. Visit www.mnmsba.org for the most up-to-date information.
Female Superintendent Perceptions of Challenges in Seeking and Serving in the Position of Superintendent of Schools

Number of practicing female superintendents in Minnesota remains low due to internal and external barriers

By Dr. Michelle Mortensen, Superintendent of Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart Schools

Throughout the United States, female educators outnumber males in K-12 public school teaching positions and in university educational leadership programs; however, males fill the majority of public school superintendent positions in the United States.

As early as the 1800s, educated and trained females were allowed into teaching positions, but not leadership positions. By custom, women could not supervise men. Therefore, as long as one male teacher would be made to be subordinate by a female’s administrative advancement, she was denied promotion to a leadership position. Even though that sounds preposterous today, the presence of female superintendents has remained sparse in the United States since the Chicago Public School system named Ella Flagg Young as the first female superintendent in 1909.

By the end of the 20th century, fewer than 1,000 female superintendents were leading the 15,000 school districts throughout the United States. Employment of teachers in public school systems throughout the United States remains predominantly female, but the American public school
superintendency has been unchanged for the past 100 years.

During the 2018-2019 school year, the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) had on record 1,564 active superintendent licensures. Of those 1,564 licenses, 912 licenses were issued to males and 652 to females. That number doesn’t seem too daunting to comprehend until you compare the difference between active license holders and those actually practicing within the state of Minnesota. Based off of active membership in, and data supported by, the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA), the number of practicing female superintendents compared to the number of school districts with active memberships throughout Minnesota looks something like this:

- 2014-2015 = 53 / 324 16%
- 2015-2016 = 55 / 319 17%
- 2016-2017 = 54 / 325 17%
- 2017-2018 = 53 / 322 16%
- 2018-2019 = 52 / 321 16%
- 2019-2020 = 55 / 327 17%

When you look at the trend of licensed female superintendents practicing in Minnesota, you will notice that there hasn’t been much change in the last seven years. Only 8% of licensed females are practicing in Minnesota.

Even with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office for Federal Contract Compliance Programs enforcing federal laws – such as the Equal Opportunity Employment Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act – making it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person’s race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information, the gap of female to male superintendent employment ratio in Minnesota is still 1 to 5.48.

In order to increase the number of females entering into the field of superintendency, we need to know, understand, and act on the barriers that are limiting this from happening. There are two types of barriers for female superintendents.

The first is interior, or self-imposed, barriers. These include: lack of self-esteem; lack of assertiveness and demands for greater work ethic; job locations; unwillingness to relocate; lack of career planning and career path; responsibilities of families and home; lack of mentors and networks; delayed entry into administrative positions; and internalization of sex roles. Women may not have confidence in their skill set and therefore won’t apply for the positions posted. In comparison, even though men may think they are lacking in the skill set, they will apply and learn as they go. Women feel they must have the knowledge before they can apply.

The second is exterior barriers. Individuals have no control over exterior barriers. Exterior barriers have been...
documented as lack of mentorship, the “good ole boy” network, sex-role stereotyping, school board behavior, and the selection process. These often include cultural attitudes, organizational structures, and government barriers. Historically, the top spots in administration were viewed as a private club controlled by the “ole boy network.” K.A. Farr describes the “ole boy network” as a “white, upper (or upper middle) class men in their productive adult years with established informal networks through which instrumental favors are exchanged and barriers to inclusion are erected. They are unified through chauvinistic, class, and local traditions that afford them ‘insider’ privileges.”

The good ole boys clubs on some school boards, and who exist to a degree within the superintendent ranks, make it appear that there is no place for women in important things like: finance, building a school, maintenance and ground work, and law. The struggles for females to break into this group are frustrating and prompt females to frequently feel as though their opinions and work ethics are not valued and perceive a definite difference between the way new men are gathered into the group versus the way they are.

While working to complete my doctoral dissertation, the first question that I asked Minnesota practicing female superintendents was to tell me what challenges they experienced in seeking and retaining their position as superintendent of schools. The category reported most often was gender discrimination and the double standards that they have experienced. Researchers and feminist theorists have provided evidence to back these experiences. Females face challenges that men do not endure. They are encouraged to smile more, have their appearances assessed and critiqued more often, and are often scolded when they assert their authority. Females have to earn their credibility with the board and the community in different ways than males. It appears that males are granted credibility until they lose it. Females don’t have it, until they’ve earned it. Men can be seen as confident and assertive, while women are viewed as pushy and emotional even though the two groups might be saying and acting in the same manner. The perception that when a female in a leadership position is forceful in stating positions, expectations, etc., she is perceived as being “bossy” or “bitchy,” while a male leader doing exactly the same thing would be regarded as “taking charge.”

Joyce Dana and Diana Bourisaw added: “Women are considered to be primarily emotional; men are considered to be rational. Women are considered to be ‘soft’ leaders; men are considered to be ‘strong’ leaders. Women gossip; men talk. Women suggest; men direct. Women nurture; men conquer. Women who exercise their authority are seen as micromanagers; men are seen as strong leaders.”

Many employment opportunities in districts in financial distress are restricted to male superintendents as school boards feel that females are incapable of fiscal management of the district. School boards and/or community members may hesitate to hire a female superintendent as many are
more comfortable with men, as hiring male superintendents was common practice throughout history. Some boards simply feel it would be problematic that the highest-paid public worker in the county or city is a female.

Females feel there is a need to convince the school board during interviews that they are not only qualified to perform the duties, but they have to prove that they are capable of taking charge and that a female can run a school district equal to a male candidate. There is an important need to change the mindset of the community in order to believe in her leadership. Once serving, female superintendents are also more likely than men to be punished for mistakes and are 1.4 times more likely to receive critical subjective feedback, as opposed to positive or critical objective feedback, either formally or informally.

MASA has come forward with a goal to help increase the number of active female superintendents from 17% to 30% by 2024. In order to obtain this goal, additional supports have to be put into place. Policymakers should explore developing means to promote school board stability and purposeful training on superintendent and school board roles in order to reduce school board and superintendent turnover. Voluntary or involuntary, the loss of a superintendent may adversely affect staff morale and employee job satisfaction. The effect may cause an increase in principal and teacher turnover and a decline of job performance, with the real tragedy being how it negatively impacts the school system and the children.

We must establish local coalitions and partnerships to promote the importance of school board service and mentor quality candidates in the position prior to an election. School boards and superintendents need continued discussion regarding the importance of developing equitable relationships within school districts and maintaining fair and equitable hiring standards, assisted by professional organizations such as the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) and MASA. These organizations should be encouraged to provide more mentorship and networking opportunities to effectively eliminate “good ole boy” mentalities.

Universities should be encouraged to make sure that students are exposed to diverse groups of superintendents with various levels of experience and should ensure that females are identified, recruited, mentored, and supported from graduate work through job inception. Career planning could begin in undergraduate programs and continue through graduate programs. What is studied in graduate school (textbooks) is leadership knowledge, disposition, and performance in school districts from a male perspective, since most superintendencies are filled predominantly by men. This message to women who are studying school and school district leadership in graduate school is: “This is what men do to succeed. If you will learn and practice this, behave the way that men who want to be successful behave, you might succeed in the leadership position – if you can acquire it.” (Dana, J. A., & Bourisaw, D., 2006).
In general, there is a perception that insufficient qualified female superintendent candidates exist. Even with increasing numbers of females obtaining the licensure for superintendency, both exterior and interior barriers have limited female access to the top leadership position in public schools. These females come well prepared with knowledge, skills, and credentials for the superintendency. In the last decade, more researchers are seeking to shed light on the issues of career choices, perceptions, and aspirations with hopes of finding a solution to the low and stagnant number of females entering into the superintendency.

Minnesota female superintendents do not seem to be motivated by the title of superintendency. The main goal is student achievement and creating opportunities for students no matter the barriers in their way. These females are resilient in their pursuits for equality while working diligently to be positive role models for other aspiring superintendents. Overall, the female superintendents within the study show tenacity and are awe-inspiring. However, respect and credibility come at a higher cost to females. They must work harder and longer to obtain the same credibility as their male peers. These incredible women have worked hard to overcome these barriers but continue to stress the need for continued work in higher education, legislative policies, and societal changes to make needed changes within the field.

Despite all legislative and statutory developments, the representation of women at the CEO level in school districts continues to be slight. While it may be hard or uncomfortable for some, we need to engage more people into the conversation in order to change the paradigm that women cannot handle the position of superintendency as well as men can, if at all. Based on current rates of change in the United States, it will take three or more decades for female superintendents to attain equity with male superintendents.

Dr. Michelle Mortensen is the Superintendent of Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart Schools and can be contacted at mmortensen@blh.k12.mn.us.

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Elections in the Time of COVID-19 Will Be Different
Absentee voting, candidate shortages among key issues for school board elections

By Greg Abbott, MSBA Director of Communications and Marketing

Like everything, school board elections this year will be very different. This fall, 302 of 332 public school boards will be holding elections in November. Now that candidates have filed (or not enough have filed), here are some things for candidates, school election officials, and superintendents to watch as election results start coming in.

**Absentee voting will be huge**

For school board candidates, you may want to make sure you get your message out before September 18. On that date, absentee voting and early voting will be available. If absentee voting in the primary race is any indication, people will be voting by mail, absentee, and voting early in droves.

For this year’s primary, absentee ballots were 10 times higher than any other year. School districts should expect a high turnout because of the election year, and also a very high turnout from absentee/mail-in voting.

If your district is one of the few conducting an operating levy or bond referendum in November, this also means you need to get your message out on why you need public support BEFORE September 18.

**Not enough people filed for a seat**

Every year, there will be school districts who call and worry about what happens on Election Day because only two people filed for a board seat and they have three positions open. This year, in some rural districts, this is a much more
common occurrence during a pandemic.

However, the answer to “What happens after Election Day?” is still the same: The three people with the most votes qualify to serve on the school board.

So, in the case of two people filing for three seats, it will usually be the two people who filed and then the person with the most write-in votes. Maybe they get 90 votes. Maybe three. But whoever garners the most votes qualifies for the position.

The only red flag is if the write-in winner declines to serve on the board. In that case, the board will need to appoint a person to serve until the district pays for a special election in 2021 to fill the remaining three years of the term. Many times, MSBA is asked if the board can simply appoint whoever was next in line during the election. Though a school board could do that, MSBA’s best practice is to simply open up the position for applications and appoint from the applicants. Maybe the person picked would have been the one next in line. Most importantly, it keeps the district from setting a precedent of putting whoever is “next in line” on the board. Maybe this year, the person is solid. But next time, your runner-up may have only received two votes and is the town quack. It is better to have an open application process.

**Best steps for a candidate**

If you’re a school board candidate, hopefully you’ve been attending meetings or viewing them virtually. Another helpful thing to do is to watch MSBA’s “Running for School Board” video. This video gives you a real feel for what the job encompasses and the real reason you should be running – to help ALL kids succeed. Visit www.mnmsba.org/BecomingASchoolBoardMember to view this video.

It would also be a good time for you to review the school district’s strategic plan and see what the goals are and how the board is working toward those goals. Sitting down with the superintendent or business manager to review the budget and how the state funds schools is usually a very eye-opening experience, as well.

With the pandemic making it harder for candidates to go door-to-door, advertising and lawn signs might be a bigger alternative for campaigning. That costs money, and also brings up how every candidate needs to watch their income and expenses for their campaigns. If you spend or receive more than $750 during your campaign, you will be required to fill out a campaign finance report. This form is in the Campaign Finance Manual every candidate should have received when they filed for election or re-election. If you don’t have a copy, your school district election officer or county auditor should have one; or you can download it from the Secretary of State’s office. Those reports are due to the school district election officer 10 days before the election (October 24, 2020). School election officers, it is your responsibility to post any campaign finance report on continued on page 16
the district website and send a copy of the report to the Campaign Finance Board.

**If elected, when do you start on the board?**

Candidates who are elected to a four-year term at the general election start their position the first Monday in January (January 4, 2021). If a candidate is elected in a special election, that person starts as soon as they “qualify.” What does that mean? It means that:

- The winning candidate has filed a Campaign Finance Certification of Filing form, saying whether they spent or received $750 or didn’t reach that limit.
- The winning candidate has signed the Election Certificate.
- The winning candidate has signed the legal Oath and Acceptance of Office form in front of a notary.

Usually seven days after the school board canvasses the results (to give time for anyone to contest the election), the school election officer can then give election certificates to the winners. So, in a special election, the winner could take the board seat as early as mid-November and not wait until the first Monday in January.

**Set the example of a lifelong learner by attending training**

One of the goals for students is to foster a desire to keep learning throughout life. As a school board member, you need to set the example. Board members are the only elected public servants who are required to attend training. MSBA provides that training in their School Board Workshop Series, offered in December and January and throughout the year. With the pandemic, those sessions will likely be virtual so members can attend from the comfort of their own home. A complete workshop schedule can be found in the Learning Center on the MSBA website at http://www.mnmsba.org/SchoolBoardWorkshopSeries.

Board members will be coming into the job with the stresses of COVID-19, the stresses of pivoting from in-person to hybrid or distance learning, and the financial stress of trying to help all students while federal money may be lagging and the state grapples with a deficit. It will require bold visions, it will require you to support your superintendent, board team, staff, and students. It will require your best effort to ensure everyone is safe and all students achieve. And if you ever need help, MSBA is always a phone call away at 800-324-4459 to answer any questions, discuss any concerns, or simply lend an ear.

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**Greg Abbott** is the MSBA Director of Communications and Marketing. Greg handles elections and referendums for the association. You can respond to this article by contacting him at gabbott@mnmsba.org or 507-420-1881.
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Anna Maria Chávez Takes the Helm of the National School Boards Association

Chávez’s life has been defined by public service, advocating for schoolchildren

By Kathleen Vail, Editor-in-Chief of the American School Board Journal

The girl was sitting on the floor of a Phoenix homeless overflow shelter in the late evening when Anna Maria Chávez met her. Her name was Andrea. When their paths crossed, Chávez was deputy chief of staff for urban relations and community development for Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano. Funding for homeless services and shelters were under her purview, and Chávez wanted to find out about the people who used these services. She accompanied Phoenix police officers on the city’s annual homeless count, a one-night accounting of the people in a community experiencing homelessness. “We went to shelters, under bridges, vacant lots,” she says. “We interviewed homeless people on the streets.”

On this night, Chávez encountered Andrea, a girl staying in the overflow shelter with her mother and little brother. Andrea told Chávez she was scared, but not about her safety. She
was scared that she wouldn’t be able to go to school the next day and do her schoolwork. Her mother, Chávez found out, faced addiction issues. The family had been in and out of shelters, and Andrea had attended many different schools and districts.

Chávez left the shelter that night angry and upset, worried about the future of Andrea and children like her.

The memory of the young girl in a homeless shelter who wanted to go to school stuck with Chávez. During her tenure as Gov. Napolitano’s deputy chief of staff, “I accumulated all the state agencies that dealt with the safety net.”

Advocating to bring equal opportunities to children and others propelled Chávez throughout her career and brought her to the National School Boards Association (NSBA).

Chávez became NSBA’s executive director and CEO in May. She follows Thomas J. Gentzel, who retired after more than 40 years of service on behalf of school boards. Gentzel led NSBA for the past seven and a half years. Chávez is NSBA’s sixth leader in its 80-year history.

“Anna’s distinguished public service and nonprofit leadership career bring a wealth of experience in organizational transformation and working with state organizations, making her the perfect choice to lead NSBA at this stage in our history,” said Charlie Wilson, NSBA President. “We’re very excited to welcome Anna aboard.”

Chávez grew up in a rural community in southern Arizona. Her father was a migrant farmworker, and her mother ran a large farm in the area. Public service was a guiding force in her family. It wasn’t uncommon, Chávez says, to be woken up by neighbors knocking on the door, asking for advice and assistance from her parents.

Her parents were leaders in the community. Volunteering and service were not choices—they were required, Chávez says. Her mother ran for school board in a time when it was unusual for women, especially Latina women, to seek elected office. Chávez was her mother’s campaign manager and frequently attended board and community meetings with her. Later, she encouraged her mother to run for a seat on a community college board. She won, becoming the first woman to serve on that board.

Education also was a priority in her family. “My best memories were of librarians and teachers,” Chávez says. “That’s where I decided to become a lawyer and advocate on behalf of other people.”

Her family eventually moved to Phoenix, where she and her siblings attended high school. She was offered a full scholarship to Yale University. She was the first woman in her family to attend college and the first person from her high school to attend Yale.
When the time came to leave for Yale, she made the 3,000-mile trip to Connecticut by herself. During her college years, she worked two jobs to pay for personal expenses. After she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in U.S. history, she went to law school at the University of Arizona, where, as a speaker of three languages, she focused on international law.

When she graduated, she’d planned to work for a private law firm in Phoenix, but she was pulled instead into public service. She entered the Federal Government Attorney Honors Program and worked for the U.S. Department of Transportation. After the program, she stayed in Washington, serving in several positions in the Clinton administration, including as a senior policy adviser to U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater.

After her work in Washington, she returned to Arizona, where she served in the administrations of two Arizona governors, Jane Hull and Janet Napolitano.

When Napolitano left Arizona to serve as President Obama’s secretary of homeland security, Chávez decided not to go with her. She wanted to work with children and nonprofits. She was hired as the CEO of the Girl Scouts of Southwest Texas, which took her to San Antonio. “It was an amazing opportunity to work with schools and school superintendents and programing at the schools,” she says.

In San Antonio, Chávez grew membership and raised money for the organization. Her successes caught the attention of the national Girl Scouts of the USA. In 2011, she became the first woman of color to lead the Girl Scouts.

During her tenure, the national organization shifted focus to integrating STEM and financial literacy into the curriculum. Girl Scout cookie sales went digital. With Sheryl Sandberg, Chávez founded the “Ban Bossy” campaign to discourage the use of the word as a pejorative way to describe girls and women who are leaders.

Most recently, Chávez was the chief growth officer and executive vice president at the National Council on Aging. “I spend a lot of time listening,” she says of her leadership style. “I don’t assume I know everything. I like feedback.”

She takes the reins of NSBA at a tumultuous time in society and in public education. School leaders across the country face the daunting task of reopening schools safely this fall after closing at the start of the pandemic. The nationwide Black Lives Matter protests sparked by George Floyd’s death in Minneapolis brought long-simmering racial tensions to the foreground again. Assisting NSBA’s state association members with these crises is at the top of her agenda.

Chávez was named one of the world’s 50 greatest leaders for 2016 by Fortune magazine. She received the 2013 Law College Association Award from the University of Arizona. She is the recipient of the 2013 Excellence in Community Service award from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the 2013 Graciela Olivarez La Raza Award from the National Council of La Raza. In 2014, she was number 22 on Fast Company’s annual list of the most creative people in business. She has been recognized as one of the 100 Women Leaders in STEM by STEMconnector.

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“It’s easy to ignore privilege when it works in your favor.”
– Activist and writer Rachel Cargle, tweeted in December 2018 (A bold statement that, in my opinion, expresses a dangerous and real truth in public education today.)

Behind the volumes of federal data on diversity demographics and its effects on student achievement, measured through standardized tests that expose gaps exacerbated by complicated recipes to allocate resources and funds, is a system heavily nuanced by layers of historical and cultural influence with few tools to understand the significance between the interactions of the above and our unique experiences that make each person an individual.

Jessica Davis – the 2019 Minnesota Teacher of the Year – says closing achievement gaps and “providing a more equitable educational experience for students in Minnesota must be our goal.”

A Better Future for Education Will Be a Hard Journey That Requires Extreme Investment

2019 Teacher of the Year Jessica Davis: “Changing the infrastructure of our schools and our education departments at large is the difference between a superficial Band-Aid and a sincere attempt at longitudinal improvements”

By Jessica Davis, 2019 Minnesota Teacher of the Year

Editor’s Note: As the Minnesota School Boards Association celebrates its centennial this year, we’ve asked people to write about their vision of education in 2040. This month, we hear from 2019 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, Jessica Davis. In past issues, we’ve heard from school board members, students and MSBA staff. In our next issue, you’ll hear from a superintendent. If YOU have something to say about education in 2040, feel free to email YOUR essay to Greg Abbott at gabbott@mnmsba.org by October 1.
I propose that public education work toward more culturally responsive practices by inviting more deliberate and intentional strategies to confront and correct truths evidenced in data. These strategies can take myriad forms, from student groups celebrating diverse populations to professional learning for staff on the issues that underlie our disparities. The specifics are subject to time. The real question is how we guide ourselves toward those conversations to begin with.

What do we WANT education to look like?

What will public education look like 20 to 40 years from now, you ask? To answer that question, we must first ask ourselves what do we want public education to look like? When I speak to strong, passionate educators, we all agree that we want education to serve its stated purpose: to provide all students with the skills necessary to access opportunities. After all, the idea of education was built with the understanding that we care that every child within each of our communities, whether known to us or not, receives proper instruction.

Yet, we continue to live in a time that not only maintains but increases the divisions throughout the country, and simultaneously moves us away from what binds us – such as our commitment to public education.

Just glancing at educational headlines reveals that our intention of reaching all students is not being met. The huge disparities across student populations poignantly articulate that a family’s financial means and skin color too often predict the degree to which their children experience success in school. Disappointingly, Minnesota produces the largest achievement gaps in the country. Closing these gaps and providing a more equitable educational experience for students in Minnesota must be our goal.

The investment this mission requires is extreme. And while that may seem daunting, it needs to be said that the failure to put forth such an investment is vastly more concerning. The gaps we currently experience in education are due, in large part, to the failure of our predecessors to tackle these issues in meaningful ways, leaving them to become exacerbated over time. Some might look upon the change needed and dismiss it as radical. Yes, true equality is a world that is radically different than the one we currently know, and the pursuit of these ideas have always been belittled and mocked by the ignorant and injust. Let this be your notice – it will not be easy. Nothing worth doing ever is.

In December 1965, the Family and Child Welfare Committee published a report with the antiquated title of Mental Retardation in Greater Minneapolis. Within that report, they stated that “the attention we are beginning to pay to ‘high risk’ groups and poverty neighborhoods holds promise of reducing the incidence of culturally caused cases of retardation.” Beyond the absurd and damaging suggestion that disabilities have ever been the product of specific cultures, this statement highlights that it was only at the end of 1965 when our state’s leadership was merely beginning to attend to the unique needs of these “‘high risk’ groups and poverty neighborhoods.” The problem? The stage had already been set. Our schools were designed by and for the privileged populations of

“We need to ensure that our board members reflect the populations of the districts we serve in their entirety. Plainly put, representation matters.”

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Minnesota, and while it is undeniable that attention was being directed to the outcomes for less-fortunate students, there has since been a failure to acknowledge the true degree to which change is necessary for us to sincerely address the needs of all of our residents.

**We must change the infrastructure of schools**

I believe that true and meaningful change is possible, and I believe that 20 years down the road we can be in a much better place. There is one major factor that we must consider if we are to truly take this work seriously: infrastructure. It isn’t a glamorous topic, and it doesn’t often lend itself to headlines like other buzzwords such as bullying or social-emotional learning (both of which are of great importance). That said, changing the infrastructure of our schools and our education departments at large is the difference between a superficial Band-Aid and a sincere attempt at longitudinal improvements.

In education, much like other sectors, we have incentivized immediate results which has seen our districts jump from trend to trend looking for a quick fix. The very suggestion that some quick fix exists is an insult to the complexity of the issues we face in education and the unique characteristics of each of our individual students. We are dealing with centuries of institutional poverty and oppression. The maze of obstacles our marginalized populations face is overwhelming, and the undoing of such obstacles will require an unflinching focus as we rewrite how to reach our students. If we are serious about answering this call, then the implications are enormous.

The need to focus on equity long-term has notable implications for our school boards as well. The research and statistics need to be in the front of the minds of those who lead our communities’ educational decisions. We can respect the unique culture and traditions of each community while still requiring that our decision-makers, including our school board members, be well-informed and acknowledge the effects of our decisions on our most vulnerable populations. Furthermore, we need to ensure that our board members reflect the populations of the districts we serve in their entirety. Plainly put, representation matters. How is your school board considering the needs of all students? How have methods of communication been diversified to ensure that the content is reaching all corners of the community? These are questions that our school boards and district leaders alike need to ask themselves and address through policy and procedure.

The fact of the matter is that there are plenty of people who are eager to further compromise public education. I say this without cynicism, but simply as a realistic reflection on the place we find ourselves and how we got here. The need to fight to not only preserve public education but to strengthen it is no small task. It will require a collective voice. We will need to give strength to our unions and be deliberate in who we select as our leaders. To those who are in unions presently being led by individuals who have not identified equity as an explicit priority, my ask is that you speak up and, better yet, consider stepping into a leadership role. There must be a sincere understanding of and commitment to the battle being waged, because frankly, we are presently in retreat.

**You have to be actively involved in meaningful outcomes**

While it is often disheartening and too often bogs us down in a fatigue of compassion, a focus on this specific nationwide crisis does come with some inherent optimism. Deliberate and intentional commitment to the effort of closing our achievement gaps, with realistic and empathetic understanding of our history and its contributions to our current ailments, is a strong declaration that we believe better results are possible.

My hope for the future of education is one where we constantly reflect and move forward to consider where our disparities exist and meaningfully take steps toward removing the obstacles responsible for these unacceptable outcomes. Yes, this hope is optimistic; and yes, I do believe it is a real possibility. However, it only happens if you are involved in realizing it. Yes, you specifically. No one can be exempt from the responsibility of creating equity in our communities and schools.

I have always been grateful for colleagues and administration who remain unapologetically student first; these champions recognize that we are not afforded the space or time to be polite or patient when student futures are at risk. Every student deserves to be affirmed and empowered by their own talents, culture and community to ascend to their highest potential. Most importantly, they deserve educators who want the same. Indeed, our future depends on it.

Jessica Davis is a math teacher at South St. Paul Secondary School. She was named the 2019 Minnesota Teacher of the year. To respond to her essay, you can reach her at jdavis@sspps.org.
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Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts across Minnesota are starting an unprecedented school year. The School Nurse Organization of Minnesota (SNOM) is keenly aware of concerns that will impact the health and safety of students, school staff and families. According to Minnesota Statute 121A.21: “Every school board must provide services to promote the health of its pupils.”

COVID-19 highlights the importance of school districts to meet the health and safety needs of the district. Licensed School Nurses (LSN), as Public Health Nurses, are key components of meeting those needs and should be involved in district and community planning.

Unfortunately, in Minnesota, one-third of school districts do not have an LSN. In many of the remaining school districts, LSNs may be assigned to a number of schools and programs which may be spread out a great distance apart. Some school districts do not have licensed nurses to provide health service tasks.

An LSN can reduce school district liabilities by having a qualified person in your district who can administer proper treatment and address medical issues. In some school districts, LSNs have been very involved with school district planning for the 2020-2021 school year related to the impact of COVID-19. As the knowledge of COVID-19 and cases continue to evolve, LSNs can partner with school districts to develop policies and procedures for the health and safety of students and staff.

School Nurses Bridge Student Health with Education

School Nurse Organization of Minnesota: We can help districts navigate pandemics

By Jolie Holland and Mary Heiman
To help school districts navigate the issues related to the pandemic, MSBA, administration, and LSNs should be in communication with MDE and MDH to address the following considerations.

1. Training, problem solving, and support for:
   - Student and staff screening procedures
   - Infection control – including designating isolation rooms with appropriate staffing
   - Physical distancing and hygiene measures
   - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) proper use
   - Contact tracing
   - Quarantine, exposure, and isolation guidelines – including a procedure for family notification of an ill student
   - Establishment of a comprehensive plan for outbreak management
   - Communication to students, families, and community on district’s plan
   - County and state public health communication/liaisons

2. Procurement and dissemination and use of PPE and strict guidelines to protect our community
   - Face covering expectation and availability for students and staff
   - Additional protective equipment for staff when supporting:
     - People with symptoms of COVID-19
     - Staff transporting symptomatic people with district vehicle when family cannot pick them up
     - Students requiring 1-to-1 support – including activities of daily living and complex medical cares
     - Students unable to honor social distancing and hygiene guidelines

LSNs provide the critical bridge between health and education. This bridge supports the health and wellness of all members of our communities far into the future. SNOM encourages district officials to hire qualified, trained LSNs as it would benefit all students and staff, especially in the midst of a pandemic. The partnership of school community leaders and school nurses is essential in determining a safe return to school for students and staff.

During this time of COVID-19, Licensed School Nurses stand ready to partner with school leaders to plan for safe learning and continued support throughout the school year for students and school community.

Jolie Holland is a Registered Nurse and Licensed School Nurse, serving as the School Nurses of Minnesota Legislative Chair; and Mary Heiman is a Registered Nurse and Licensed School Nurse who serves on the SNOM Executive Board. To comment on their article, you can contact them at mary.heiman@edinaschools.org.

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Minnesota Statute for School Health Services 121A.21
https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/121A.21
NASN Coronavirus Disease 2019 Resources
SNOM Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Toolkit for MN School Nurses
MSBA is pleased to announce the latest addition to our staff — Jennifer Ebert. Jennifer joined MSBA on March 2, 2020, as MSBA’s Administrative Assistant to Government Relations and Finance. Jennifer grew up in the small town of Clontarf, Minnesota, and attended Benson Public Schools from kindergarten through graduation. After high school, she graduated from the legal secretary program at the Willmar Area Vocational Technical Institute (which later merged with another school to form Ridgewater College).

Her previous work experience includes various financial and legal/administrative assistant roles. Jennifer and her husband, David, moved to the area in 2019 to be closer to their three children and three grandchildren.
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QUESTION: What are important factors to consider when developing a good board-superintendent relationship?

ANSWER: Wise school board members and superintendents understand the value of having a strong working relationship and know that consistent and open lines of communication are key to success. They also know how important it is to talk about and reach consensus on topics such as preparing the board meeting agenda, handling public comment at board meetings, addressing concerns from stakeholders, and crafting processes and procedures for things such as budget development, superintendent performance evaluation, and board self-evaluation.

In response to these opportunities to strengthen board-superintendent teams, MSBA offers several workshops to help build these relationships. MSBA’s workshops can assist boards and superintendents on specific topics such as developing mutual expectations, clarifying roles and responsibilities, creating a superintendent evaluation process, or defining board and superintendent goals. These workshops may be customized to meet a specific district’s needs, so if interested please contact MSBA for more information.

QUESTION: Given the upheaval caused by COVID-19, we haven’t addressed the superintendent’s evaluation. Should we skip it this year?

ANSWER: Without question COVID-19 has thrown a wrench into even the best-laid plans for superintendent evaluation. Although board members and superintendents may currently feel overwhelmed, now is an opportune time to clarify expectations surrounding your superintendent’s performance. Try this: imagine your district one year from now, and as a board discuss what two or three goals you would want the superintendent to have accomplished during that time. Keep these goals simple, realistic, and flexible. While recognizing the challenges facing your superintendent this year, providing direction for performance expectations and priorities will prove to be a solid investment of your board’s time and energy.

QUESTION: We have goals in place for our superintendent and for the board, but the pandemic casts a cloud on the applicability of these goals. What should we do?

ANSWER: Uncertain times call for even greater clarity surrounding board and superintendent goals. In the midst of the pandemic you should define your district’s priorities for both governance and management and expect to revisit those goals as needed due to the shifting landscape of COVID-19. So, in response to this question, do not discard your in-place goals for either the superintendent or board. These were crafted to provide a beacon for your district in more certain times. Keeping the core intent of the goals in place while modifying expectations to fit reality is key to successfully moving your district forward.

Barb Dorn is the MSBA Director of Leadership Development and Executive Search. Contact her at bdorn@mnmsba.org.
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School districts across the nation have risen to the challenges that 2020 has imposed upon students, families, staff, and communities. The COVID-19 pandemic brought with it seemingly unending questions focused upon health and safety, teaching and learning, funding uncertainties, and more.

Minnesota’s school board members turned to customary resources to help answer these questions, including federal and state law and school district policies. In 2020, emergency executive orders, requirements and guidance from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and federal education and health measures expanded the range of sources upon which school boards could seek assistance. At the same time, school districts encountered new and sometimes confusing or contradictory instructions. In this environment, Minnesota’s school districts performed remarkably well under the circumstances.

A mainstay principle for school districts across Minnesota — local control — often appeared to be at odds with the evolving body of laws, requirements, recommendations, and guidance that arose during the pandemic. At times, legislatures and departments determined how schools would operate. Examples included the statewide move to distance learning in the spring, the requirement that school districts provide care for children of essential workers, and limitations upon school district’s ability to exercise managerial control. In other instances, school districts were permitted to exercise local authority, including decisions concerning summer school and nutrition programs.

Graduation in spring 2020 and adoption of base learning plans for the fall 2020-2021 school year proved to be touchpoints illuminating the tension between federal and state direction and local decision-making by school boards. Executive orders forbade indoor or stadium graduation ceremonies. School districts could choose to hold a parking lot or similar commencement exercise. In August 2020, school districts could determine the fall base learning model, but only within parameters and metrics established by MDE and MDH.

Understandably in both situations, some school boards and superintendents desired clear directives on how they should proceed. Others preferred broad local authority with few limitations imposed from Washington, D.C., or St. Paul.

The very nature of the law likely exacerbated the tension. First, during a pandemic, little time is available for detailed, expansive, or unchanging laws and agency guidance. The transitory nature of such laws and guidance leaves gaps that local school boards had to resolve. Second, laws are written with broad strokes because it is impossible to address each conceivable situation with explicit direction. Thus, terms like “reasonable,” “to the extent possible,” and “must” versus “should” that occurred throughout the executive orders and MDE and MDH documents simultaneously lacked clarity and allowed local decision-making.

This year, Minnesota’s school districts sharpened their capacity to balance local decision-making and educational, health, and legal rules and guidance. School board members, administrators, and staff came together and worked with federal, state, county, and local experts to serve our students and families. In the end, the value of local community control of K-12 education in Minnesota has been illuminated and confirmed.

Terence Morrow is the MSBA Director of Legal and Policy Services. Contact with questions at tmorrow@mnmsba.org.
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You made a mobile WiFi hotspot so kids can connect and keep learning.

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You made a lunch and homework delivery vehicle so kids’ minds and bellies stay full.

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To all the teachers, administrators, school board members and transportation directors who are relentlessly and creatively finding ways to keep our kids learning during this difficult time: Thank you.

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Construction continues at each of ISD 181’s school buildings (Brainerd High School, left). The $205 million project includes renovation, remodeling, and right-sizing throughout the district as well as a new elementary school.
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Fred Nolan from ICS will be moderating free, informal discussions with superintendents from East Central Public Schools, Mora Public Schools, Bemidji Area Schools, and Nashwauk-Keewatin Public Schools about their COVID-19 plans for their districts. Join us on Fridays over your lunch break - these will be conversations you won’t want to miss!

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12:00 pm to 1:00 pm