



Leading for the Future (LeaF) Series FAQ

We each have a role in shaping the future of learning. But in an increasingly complex world characterized by rapid change, considering how we might influence the future can be difficult. The Leading for the Future (LeaF) Series is designed to equip Minnesota school board members with tools and mindsets of futures thinking, which can help them consider multiple possibilities and lead amid uncertainty. A cohort of 15-20 participants from across the state will work together to think critically and creatively about the future and to apply a future-oriented lens to policy development and analysis.

What is futures thinking?

Futures thinking is a set of mindsets and collaborative tools that help us think about the many surprising ways the future could unfold. It can also clarify what we hope to see in the future and help us make decisions that are informed by our understanding of a wide range of possibilities.

Why is futures thinking important?

We all make assumptions about what the future will be like. Often without realizing it, we assume it will unfold in a predictable and linear way. By doing that, we limit our creative and innovative leadership capacity. Futures thinking enables us to examine our assumptions about the future and better understand how the changes that are happening today could affect our communities years from now. With the help of futures thinking, we can find ways to pursue our visions while grappling with the inherent uncertainty of the future. Ultimately, exploring the future is an act of stewardship to our future communities and to the young people who will live in them.

Why should I participate in the Leading for the Future Series?

The Leading for the Future Series will join together a cohort of Minnesota school board members who all want to understand and deepen their role in shaping the future. Members of the cohort will:

- Learn the tools and mindsets of futures thinking and explore opportunities to incorporate them into daily work, including relevant policy development and analysis, strategic planning, and change making in education
- Identify ways to collaborate with other local stakeholders to create change
- Broaden their networks by establishing trusted relationships with cohort members and with local thought partners

Who is eligible to participate?

Any current Minnesota public school board member whose district is a member of MSBA is eligible to apply. Applicants should be interested in making change, connecting with other board members from across the state, developing and deepening local relationships, and considering policies to support student-centered learning. Applicants who have completed MSBA Phase I, II, and III Workshops will be given priority in the selection process.

What would be required of me? What is the time commitment?

Members of the cohort will participate in 10, two-hour virtual learning sessions throughout calendar year 2021. The first session will take place on January 13, 2021, in conjunction with the MSBA Leadership Conference. Cohort members will select the remaining dates and times once they accept the invitation to participate.

In addition to participating in learning sessions, cohort members will complete reading, reflection, and brief online discussions and will commit to holding conversations with local stakeholders (their “thought partners”). Though the time commitment will vary by individual, participants can expect to spend approximately four hours per month on activities related to the Leading for the Future Series.

What will the learning sessions look like? How will this work given the pandemic?

The learning sessions will primarily or entirely take place virtually. Whether the cohort can gather in person will depend on the status of COVID-19 and participant availability. Some sessions will be scheduled to align with existing MSBA gatherings and events. The highly interactive and collaborative sessions will be facilitated by KnowledgeWorks staff.

What is the purpose of the network of thought partners and how will I select them?

Creating meaningful change in education requires participation from a broad group of stakeholders. By engaging a network of thought partners, or people with whom participants can share insights about the future in their local communities, cohort members will be creating create new avenues for community engagement and shared ownership. Series facilitators will guide cohort members on how to best curate their network in the first session. and cohort members will have time and support in selecting individuals to be part of their networks.

Who is involved in the Leading for the Future Series?

The series is a partnership between MSBA, KnowledgeWorks, and the University of St. Thomas. MSBA is hosting this series to support, promote, and strengthen the work of local school boards. Staff from KnowledgeWorks – a national nonprofit that specializes in personalized learning, futures thinking, and policy work – will be facilitating the sessions in collaboration with the University of St. Thomas.

How do I apply?

Complete the application https://stthomas.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bxVJA5w7K8RhVGt by December 1, 2020. Applicants will be notified of the decision regarding their application by December 11, 2020.

I have more questions. Who should I contact?

For questions about the content of the series, please contact Katie King, Director of Strategic Foresight Engagement at KnowledgeWorks at kingk@knowledgeworks.org. For questions about the application process or more detail on how the series can benefit school board members, please contact Lucy Payne, Associate Professor at University of St. Thomas and Mahtomedi School Board Chair at llpayne@stthomas.edu.