2017 Summer Seminar
Monday, August 7

Leading Above the Line

Top Takeaways from the 2017 Legislative Session
Advocacy Matters
Students on Board
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## July 2017

4 .......... Independence Day (no meetings)
12 ........ BoardBook Webinar

## August 2017

6 .......... MSBA Summer Seminar Early Bird Workshop
6 .......... MSBA Insurance Trust Meeting
6 .......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
7 .......... MSBA Summer Seminar
8 .......... MSBA Charter School Board Training
8 .......... Primary Election Day (if applicable – no meetings or activities 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)
8-9 ........ MDE/MASA Conference
9 .......... BoardBook Webinar
15 ........ Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting

## September 2017

4 .......... Labor Day (no meetings)
5 .......... First Day School Can Be Held
12 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour
13 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour
14 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour
19 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour
20 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour
29 .......... Last Day for Submitting Resolutions

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**MSBA thanks the students of Fergus Falls High School for sharing their art in this issue.**

**COVER ART:** Anna Norgard
PUBLIC DOLLARS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Kirk Schneidawind

With the 2017 state legislative session in our rearview mirror, we have already started looking forward to the 2018 session.

First, we should take a moment to celebrate some victories: a 2 percent increase in the basic funding formula over the next two years, the agricultural land tax credit, greater flexibility with the unrequested leave of absence process, and the reform of our teacher licensure system.

However, one of our biggest victories of the 2017 session was the defeat of the scholarship tax credit. This tax credit would allow individuals and corporations to allocate a portion of their owed state taxes to private, nonprofit organizations that grant scholarships to students.

A collaborative advocacy effort persuaded Governor Mark Dayton to not accept scholarship tax credit provisions in the Omnibus Tax Bill. Public school advocates — from school boards to administrators to teachers — stood up for our public schools and opposed public dollars being used for private schools.

Although we kept the scholarship tax credit at bay this session, this issue will persist. As of January 2017, 17 states have scholarship tax credit programs.

The promotion of tax credits or vouchers — under the guise of “school choice” — appears to be one of the top education priorities of President Donald Trump and U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos.

Under President Trump’s federal education budget proposal released in May, a program originally used for researching innovative school practices would be retooled to research and promote vouchers. This new voucher program is slated to receive a total of $370 million — this funding is coming at the expense of public schools.

In June, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed a K-12 education bill that, according to the Miami Herald, includes $30 million in extra funding to expand a voucher program.

Florida could have learned something from Indiana. The so-called “Indiana Choice Legislation” — passed in 2011 and expanded in 2013 — used tax dollars to subsidize school choice in the form of vouchers, state income tax deductions, or tax credits.

The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability (CTBA) studied the consequences of the Indiana Choice Legislation in its 2015 study, “Analysis of Indiana School Choice Scholarship Program.” Among the findings, the CTBA reported a “diversion of public, taxpayer dollars away from the state’s higher-performing public education system to lower-performing private religious schools.” And because of this, the voucher legislation “may actually diminish student achievement in the state over time.”

The CTBA also concluded that “there is little to no evidence that voucher programs enhance student achievement.” Not only did that apply to Indiana, but also to Cleveland and Milwaukee — which have two of the oldest school choice programs in the United States.

We have seen that once a voucher or scholarship tax credit gets established in a state, the contribution from the state, in fact, has grown over time, which makes it vital that these programs never get a foothold into Minnesota public schools. Minnesota has done a wonderful job of offering public-school choice without having to resort to vouchers and tax-credit tricks. Our system of public education is what has made our state great.

Again, let’s celebrate our legislative victories, but we must have an eye on the future. Take the time to share the value of our strong public schools with your local legislators and members of Congress when they are back during their August recess. Investments in our public schools make a difference.

Kirk Schneidawind is MSBA’s Executive Director. Contact him at kschneidawind@mnmsba.org. For more of his views on this issue, see his guest column in the Pioneer Press from February 16, http://www.twincities.com/2017/02/16/kirk-schneidawind-the-false-promises-of-school-vouchers-and-tax-credits.
Our significant knowledge base and experience makes us well versed in all facets of education law: public employment and employee relations, student matters, school finance, elections, bond counsel services, construction, real estate, school board matters, contracts, discrimination and harassment, data privacy, special education, constitutional issues and more.

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Summer is the time when school board members catch their breath. It is a good time to take a pause and think of the successes of your district in the past year and the areas you would like to see addressed in the upcoming year. It is a great time of year to take the opportunity to come together as a board to be inspired to lead your district. It is a time when the board can strengthen its relationship with their superintendent. What would that look like and how would it move your visions forward? Visions become reality when board processes are inclusive and discussion is active with a united mission. MSBA provides a remarkable opportunity for school boards with our Summer Seminar in August. This year’s theme is “Leading Above the Line.”

A board’s ability to function effectively is dependent on the trust and respect it has for its members collectively. Each person, you included, brings a unique experience and viewpoint to the table. Those perspectives, representing the values and norms of your community, are vital for your board work to be relevant. How does a board get to this place, then grow and maintain its purpose? It does not happen passively. It takes active and decisive action to implement a desired plan of development.

Board development cannot be a one-and-done approach. Every time a new board member is added or a superintendent is changed, the dynamic of the board is altered and the process should be revisited. With the addition of a new board member, education is needed to acclimate them to the schedule, workings, and responsibilities they have accepted. That has little to do with the personal interactions of the coming together of thought. The relationship and trust between a superintendent and board members is vital to the operations of a district. Decisive board development in the area of trust can create an atmosphere where the mutual support between board and superintendent can present a cohesive presentation of actions of the school district.

Throughout the year there are a number of board development opportunities a district can take advantage of. Locally, a district can invite an MSBA specialist in to address specific areas of district growth. Networking can happen at MSBA state and regional meetings as well as National School Boards Association presentations.

Attending board development opportunities is best done with the superintendent and as many board members as are available, preferably all. For some districts this may seem like a stretch, but in reality, respect for your district means respect for your board and their ability to lead. Be active and decisive in your approach to development. Look into MSBA’s Summer Seminar, “Leading Above the Line,” on August 7 at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

Enjoy your time of invigoration, innovation, and inspiration. Looking forward to seeing you!

Kathy Green is the president of the Minnesota School Boards Association. Contact Kathy at kathyannegreen@gmail.com.
The MSBA Summer Seminar returns Monday, August 7, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park. This year’s seminar is themed “Leading Above the Line” and will showcase keynote speakers Willow Sweeney and Tom Melcher.

Sweeney is an author and co-founder of Top 20 Training, a St. Paul-based organization that provides training and materials to empower leaders, teachers, parents, and students to develop their potential. She and her Top 20 team have trained more than 600,000 leaders throughout the United States. Her career has included high school teaching and coaching, and she has been a national speaker and trainer since 2002.

Sweeney will open the seminar with her presentation of “Living Above the Line: Discovering the Power of Choice.” According to Sweeney, “Living Above and Below the Line” focuses on becoming aware of our thinking so we know when it is working and when it is not working.

Her presentation will explore: (1) the conditions that come up in our life that invite us to go below the line, (2) indicators telling us when we are below, (3) how to handle below-the-line experiences with more grace and dignity, and (4) how to trampoline back above the line.

See Page 12 for additional information about Willow Sweeney.
Fan favorite Tom Melcher – the Director of the Program Finance Division at the Minnesota Department of Education – will cap the seminar with “Keep Your Finances Above the Red Line.” Melcher will provide school board members with an update on funding from the 2017 legislative session and what lies ahead for school districts. Melcher has 27 years of experience in the Program Finance Division at the Department and holds a Ph.D. in Educational Administration from the University of Florida.

Also, Grace Keliher – MSBA’s Director of Government Relations – will offer a political update via “Insights into the 2017 Legislative Session.” Find out what new legislation will mean for your school district and get some thoughts on what the next session might bring for schools.

Get on the Fast Track

During the afternoon, seminar participants will get to choose three different Fast Track sessions to attend. Each Fast Track Session delivers concise information during a 30-minute window. These sessions include:

ESSA Plan Update and Q&A (presented by the Minnesota Department of Education’s Assistant Commissioner Hue Nguyen and Chief Accountability Officer Stephanie Graff): Minnesota Department of Education officials will update board members on the latest guidelines for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and offer time for questions on a variety of issues surrounding the topic.

Lock the Vote: 2017 Referendums and the Creation of Voter Stockpiles (Morris Leatherman Company President William Morris): In much of Minnesota, anti-referendum voters are more motivated than pro-referendum voters to participate in the November 2017 elections. Many school districts register majority support if everyone turns out; alas, in the off-year, that will not be the case. This seminar will address tactics to persuade soft supporters to become enthusiastic supporters and increase turnout among all supporters. Campaign strategies deploying early voting, absentee ballots, and innovative messaging will be discussed.

Public Schools Equity Dashboard (MSBA’s Associate Director of Management Services Bill Kautt and Consultant Jeff Olson): Learn about an instrument that can be used to assist the school board in assessing the school district’s equity needs in the areas of demographics, assessment, behavior, and participation. Utilizing this tool will allow you to identify areas where an equity deficit may exist and will assist you in planning for the future.

Case Law Update (MSBA’s Director of Legal and Policy Services Cathy Miller): Find out what the courts have decided this year that will impact your school district. Plain language summaries of the most important recent cases without legalese, irrelevant details, or endless analysis.

School Board Self-Evaluation (MSBA’s Associate Director of Board Development Gail Gilman): Research shows that high-functioning school

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Summer Seminar opening keynote speaker Willow Sweeney – co-founder of the St. Paul-based Top 20 Training – will present “Living Above and Below the Line: Discovering The Power of Choice.”

Top 20 Training provides training and materials to empower leaders, teachers, parents, and students to develop their potential. Sweeney and her Top 20 team have trained more than 600,000 leaders in the United States.

Sweeney has been a national speaker and trainer since 2002. Prior to co-founding Top 20 Training, she had a nine-year career as a social studies teacher for Cretin-Derham Hall High School in St. Paul.

It was during her time at Cretin-Derham Hall that the foundation was laid for Top 20 Training. There she helped develop the first Top 20 course, created by Tom Cody, on social-emotional intelligence called “Thinking, Learning and Communicating.” According to Sweeney, everything that led to Top 20 “came out of the creation of that class.”

Sweeney said her presentation is “something that’s a lot of fun and very spirited using self-deprecating humor.”

“We’ll talk about how we all sometimes succeed and sometimes don’t in the world of social and emotional intelligence,” Sweeney said. “Every time that we do this presentation, people say they have life-changing experiences and learn to work with their social and emotional intelligence better. I am excited to work with school board members.”

**Five Questions with Willow Sweeney**

**MSBA:** In some of your presentations, you mention “trampolining above the line.” What’s does that mean?

**WILLOW SWEENEY:** Trampolining is a “metaphor” we use to describe our own power that we have to control our inside life.

Living above and below the line is really about thinking. We often talk about our feelings, but we don’t talk about whether our thinking is working or not working for us. Living or being above the line are those moments in life when our thinking is working in a positive and healthy way. The times we are below the line are when we’re either negative or where we are having unhealthy thought patterns.

Most people think that the outside world determines whether they’re in a good mood or if their thinking is working or not. In reality, we’re all in control of our own thinking.

People have the ability to come back above the line – but you have to take that control. Sometimes, we do the things that we love in life – we go away for the weekend with our family or we meditate or we take a nap or we go fishing – but we can’t do those things when we are in the middle of a board meeting.

Sometimes, it just takes the human mind to say, “OK. Either I am going to think about something that brings me great joy and clears up my thinking – or I am going to think about something that puts me back into better perspective.”

Sometimes the idea that I can control my thinking allows me to decide that I am not going to go below the line for something. It doesn’t mean we have to like whatever it is we are doing. I don’t think school board members enjoy cutting budgets, but it doesn’t mean it has to make us lose our minds – which is what going below the line is.

**MSBA:** How can board members “stay above the line” in the face of being underfunded by the state and other negative factors?

**SWEENEY:** Board members – or any of us – who do a job understand that there’s going to be part of that job that we don’t want, or wish we didn’t have to do. If we have some perspective on the idea that we signed up to do this and we know the responsibility that comes with it, it gives us permission to do the things we sometimes don’t want to do – but not let our thinking go to a place that doesn’t work for us and doesn’t work for the people that we serve.
MSBA: How can school boards avoid negativity?

SWEENEY: For starters, acknowledging that what has been status quo in work cultures where there is a lot of negativity, doesn’t mean that has to continue. The level of negative or positive energy in any given group is based on what the group members bring to the table.

It’s very simplistic, but once understood, it makes a whole lot of sense. If you want your organization or group to be more positive, then the group members have to limit the amount of negative energy they bring – and increase the effective and healthy energy they bring. It’s like swimming in a pool: whatever gets dumped in is what we all have to swim in every day.

I love it when leaders ask me, “How do we get people to stop talking about each other behind each other’s backs?” It’s not all that difficult, you don’t need a study or a grant, you just have to stop talking about each other behind each other’s backs.

I think one of the big things that a school board could do is say: “Our expectation is that we have to deal with difficult things that sometimes include something that is negative. The kids, the teachers, and the parents need us to bring healthy and effective energy – even when things get hard.”

MSBA: What advice would you give school board members to improve schools?

SWEENEY: I’ve never been a school board member, so in my imagination, the skills that I use the most to be most effective is listening. That’s a little bit cliché. Everybody says, “No, I listen to everybody.” But if you don’t listen to the people who are going through the experiences – and trust that their experiences are real – we sometimes get caught up in just assuming that our own perspective is the true one.

I think getting to the meat of issues and listening from the perspective of everybody, and then deciding to make a decision that is in the best interest of most.

I imagine that if they have been on school boards that’s exactly why they are there, because they are good at that.”

MSBA: What can students do to prepare for their own success?

SWEENEY: Their success will come from hard work and a focus on social and emotional education. I think kids are stuck right now with the idea that what they get on test scores and the grades that they get will determine their success – which we know as adults in the real world is not true. There’s plenty of people who did really great in school and are not succeeding in adult life. And there’s plenty of people who got C-minuses in high school that are doing just fine right now. We understand that there’s this other skill set. I think once all of us in education listen and hear that test scores and grades aren’t the end-all and be-all of who ends up succeeding, we’ll remind ourselves to remind students that what’s really important is what they’re becoming.”

boards have a positive impact on student learning and development. MSBA strives to provide exceptional services to boards, with the goal of strengthening school board governance practices. Learn about a new electronic School Board Self-Evaluation, which will provide data to boards that guides goal-setting for continual board team improvement.

Senior Seminar: A Cure for Senioritis
(Triton Public Schools Superintendent Brett Joyce): The Senior Seminar asks each student to research an area in which he or she is interested. Following the research and the ensuing paper, the student embarks on a project under the guidance of a community mentor. The individual seniors present their findings to a review board made up of school board members, teachers, and community members.

A Culturally Responsive Early Bird

Members are encouraged to attend an Early Bird Session on the eve of Summer Seminar. “Culturally Responsive Leadership for Boards” is scheduled from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday, August 6, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest.

Culturally responsive leadership involves knowing one’s cultural self, expanding historical perspectives, building relationships across cultures, and engaging diverse voices in policy- and decision-making. This workshop will deepen your culturally responsive leadership skills through discussion, self-reflection, and interactive learning for personal and professional growth.

This Early Bird Session will be presented by Equity Alliance of Minnesota Executive Director Jean Lubke and two of her program managers, Mary Bussman and Paula O’Loughlin.

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Additional learning opportunities

The learning doesn’t stop after the Summer Seminar ends.

If you missed the first part of MSBA’s School Board Workshop Series, here’s your chance to catch up with the Phase I-Phase II Combo from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, August 8, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest.

Through a condensed version of both the “Learning to Lead – School Board Basics: Phase I” and “Leadership Foundations – School Finance and Management: Phase II” workshops, attendees will learn about the role of the board, the school district budget, Minnesota’s system of school finance, local levies and policies, laws affecting boards, and more.

The MSBA School Board Workshop series is the foundation of a school board member’s training in good governance.

And finally, charter school board members can receive the state-required training in finance, governance, and employment all in one day. MSBA’s Charter School Board Training — slated from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, August 8, — will teach charter board members the basics of working successfully as a board and with their director.

Bruce Lombard is MSBA’s Associate Director of Communications. Contact him at blombard@mnmsba.org.

If You Go

WHAT: MSBA Summer Seminar
WHEN: Monday, August 7, 2017
WHERE: Minneapolis Marriott Northwest, 7025 Northland Drive North, Brooklyn Park
EARLY BIRD SESSION (“Culturally Responsive Leadership for Boards”):
  7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Sunday, August 6
PHASE I-PHASE II COMBO WORKSHOP:
  8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Tuesday, August 8
REGISTRATION: Advance registration for the Summer Seminar, the Early Bird Session and the Phase I-Phase II Combo ends Monday, July 31.

HOTEL: If you need lodging, please reserve your hotel room at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest by Thursday, July 20, to obtain the special group rate. Call 877-303-1681 and ask for the “Minnesota School Boards Association Group Rate.”

Visit http://www.mnmsba.org/SummerSeminar to access hotel and event registration information.

Christa M.
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The 2017 legislative session had a different look and feel from previous sessions – literally and figuratively. The physical change was the Capitol renovation – a now-completed $310 million project. House Speaker Kurt Daudt returned along with Gov. Mark Dayton, but the new Senate Majority Leader, Sen. Paul Gazelka, provided a different political balance, leaving the Senate with a single vote margin.

The session started with welcome news from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) of a $1.65 billion surplus. It was expected the funding of education, taxes, and transportation would dominate and create tensions between budget priorities. The next five months were spent hearing, advocating, and debating major omnibus bills. Here is a list of the top takeaways from the 2017 legislative session.
Investing in All Our Students

Securing Adequate and Equitable General Education Funding

MSBA’s top priority was to annually fund the general education formula for public schools by at least the rate of inflation. The final E–12 Education Bill provides for 2 percent on the per pupil formula each year. There was a bit of a rollercoaster ride getting to that final number. Early in the session, MSBA met with education chairs and gained a commitment for 2 percent. Both the House and Senate initiated general education funding bills. The House bill had 35 authors – a significant show of support for our students. The amount went from 2 percent to 1.25 percent, to 1.5 percent and finally landed back at 2 percent.

World’s Best Workforce

A goal in the already established World’s Best Workforce (WBWF) is to have all students achieve reading proficiency by the end of the third grade. The E–12 bill strongly encourages a school district or a charter school to provide a personal learning plan for a student who does not meet grade-level proficiency as measured by the statewide reading assessment in grade three. School districts must identify students in grade three or higher who demonstrate reading difficulty to a classroom teacher. As well as, districts must annually report to the Commissioner of Education efforts to screen and identify students with dyslexia using the screening tools such as those recommended by the Education Department’s newly created dyslexia and literacy specialist.

Early Education

MSBA sought to fully fund the voluntary prekindergarten program. The E–12 bill did provide substantial increases in early learning. Governor Dayton and both education chairs prioritized early education; however, their strongly held beliefs about which programs should be funded and continued differed greatly and this became the lynchpin of a budget resolution. Early in the session, there was a proposal for consolidation of all early learning programs. Instead, it evolved into a new program called School Readiness Plus (SR+); a hybrid of the governor’s Voluntary Pre-K and the School Readiness Program. Additional money was appropriated for Early Childhood Family Education and early learning scholarships.

Ensure Every Student Has a Qualified and Committed Teacher

Attracting and Retaining Quality Teachers

MSBA authored two teacher shortage bills in the previous two legislative sessions. MSBA continued to work to implement policies that will help attract and retain teachers in shortage areas. Several components are now enacted into law. Several additional provisions benefiting teacher shortage relief were in both the E-12 and Higher Education Bills.

- Grants to student teachers who will serve in a shortage area.
- Teacher loan forgiveness increased.
- Collaborative Urban Educator grants convert to a competitive grant program.
- Grow Your Own (Paraprofessional Pathways) grants expanded.
- Alternative teacher preparation grants program expanded for shortage areas.

Early in the session, findings from the Legislative Study Group on Educator Licensure were heard by the committee and a bill was introduced. Based on recommendations by the study group, the bill establishes a new governance board and implements a tiered licensure system.

The first major component of the bill establishes the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to replace the current Board of Teaching (BOT). The second component creates a four-tier licensure structure to simplify and streamline the Minnesota teacher licensure process. The structure allows for a natural progression and the elimination of complicated processes by replacing them with more open and flexible systems to accommodate the full spectrum of

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licensing needs. The streamlining and simplification of the teacher licensure process will go a long way to help attract and retain teachers, especially those out-of-state licensed teachers. This process will also provide alternative licensure pathways – especially for Career and Technical experts to teach in classrooms – a critical piece to providing World’s Best Workforce career readiness to our students. Mentorship and training opportunities will expand to benefit and work to retain all existing teachers throughout Minnesota.

Provide Teachers with Funding for Concurrent Enrollment Credentialing

The Northwest Partnership Program is expanded to offer courses for concurrent enrollment instruction, like the “Online 18” program, for the 18 credits needed for teachers to teach Postsecondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) in high school. Funding for course development, scholarships for teachers to enroll in courses, and incentives for educators to participate in the program will now be available.

Supporting the Work of Locally Elected School Boards

Reducing Unfunded Mandates

To better understand the impact of disaggregated data, up to six rollout sites will be identified for disaggregated data reporting. The Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Education is directed to consult with stakeholders to develop recommendations for best practices for disaggregated data – specifically, how to measure and report on a student’s background as an immigrant or a refugee. The initial number of categories involved was more than 120. In the end, 22 categories were settled on for the trial period. The Commissioner is required to report findings to the Legislature. The new law also modifies student categories for growth, college and career-readiness, and student engagement reporting. The law requires data on four-year and six-year graduation rates to be disaggregated by modified student categories and requires notice to parents regarding data reporting. It takes effect in the 2018-2019 school year for rollout sites and 2019–2020 school year and later for all other schools.

Equity and Student Achievement

Research and Development

A new law establishes an Innovation Research Zone pilot program to improve student and school outcomes consistent with the World’s Best Workforce requirements. It allows one or more school districts, or charter schools, to form an Innovation Zone partnership.

Innovation Zone partners will research and implement innovation education programs and models that include things like personalized learning, competency outcomes, new methods of collaborative leadership, and new ways to enhance parental and community involvement in learning.

The Innovation Zone Plan must include the impact of student and school outcomes, roles of partners, methodologies, how staff will be included and implementation timelines.

There is a requirement for the partnership to submit the plan to the Commissioner. In addition, an Innovation Research Zone Advisory Panel will be established by the Commissioner consisting of nine members, one of which will be from MSBA. The Commissioner may approve up to three plans in the metropolitan area and up to three in Greater Minnesota.

21st-Century Facilities

Fair Tax Policies

The Omnibus Tax Bill provided relief to the agriculture community with property tax credit for agricultural land equal to 40 percent of the property attributable to school district-bonded debt levies. The credit for school building bond agricultural credit will be shown on individual truth in taxation statements. This will be effective beginning with taxes payable in 2018.

Grace Keliher, Denise Dittrich and Kimberley Dunn Lewis comprise MSBA’s Government Relations staff. You may contact them at gkeliher@mnmsba.org, ddittrich@mnmsba.org and klewis@mnmsba.org, respectively.
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Athletic Turf Choices
Unraveling the Cost in Dollars and “Sense”

New information on the long-term costs and health risks of synthetic fields is moving dollars back to natural turf because of the answers revealed in these 3 questions:

- What is the “real” cost: installation, maintenance & replacement?
- What are the field performance criteria?
- What are the health & environmental safety factors?

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MSBA has been the leading legislative advocate at the Capitol for school board members and students for decades. Advocacy begins with the local school boards participating in the fall MSBA Advocacy Tour, election of delegates or writing a resolution. It ends with board members approving a slate of resolutions at MSBA’s Delegate Assembly. These resolutions aid in developing MSBA’s policies and help the Government Relations staff shape MSBA’s annual legislative agenda and advocacy efforts at the state Capitol.

This process has been used for decades, but it was one process MSBA wanted to revisit and gather input from members in order to improve our advocacy efforts. So, in September and October of 2016, we surveyed MSBA board members and superintendents about everything related to advocacy and lobbying.

We received responses from nearly 300 board members and 157 superintendents. The survey focused on four categories:
(1) legislative communications;
(2) school board advocacy;
(3) member communications; and
(4) our Delegate Assembly process.

“We are excited to share the results of the survey and what we are doing in response,” said MSBA Associate Director of Government Relations Denise Dittrich. “It is important that you know your voice was heard and we are continuously improving our communication with you.”

Legislative Communications

More than one-half of board members and superintendents (51.7 percent) surveyed communicate with their state legislators, either by email (76.6 percent) or by personally speaking to them (60.1 percent). Members felt strongly that their voice impacts legislation (61.7 percent). One comment characterized the frustration
of many by saying, “My voice has little impact because most sessions end with behind-closed-door meetings with only party chiefs and the governor, who do whatever they want and expect the bills to be passed last-minute without being read.”

MSBA’s Director of Government Relations, Grace Keliher, says, “We believe this is a frustration of several members and we want to help change that perception. Oftentimes, one member’s vote can change the course of an issue.” The Government Relations team is committed to sharing effective and efficient legislative tools to help members impact school-related legislation.

Several respondents asked MSBA to bring back the Day at the Capitol event, stating that it helped link board members to legislators. This year, MSBA reestablished its own Day at the Capitol, with nearly 100 members meeting with legislators, learning about the big issues at the Capitol and standing up for students. One member wrote, “The lineup of legislators at lunch was incredible. It was my board chair’s first visit to the Capitol. She was thoroughly impressed.” MSBA has also been intentional at linking legislators to board members during the fall Advocacy Tours.

Several school boards develop their own legislative agenda; however, many stated they rely on MSBA’s legislative platform to set their legislative agenda.

School Board Advocacy

MSBA staff monitor when important issues are coming to committee or a floor vote and send out an alert to help engage board members on the issues. The survey found two-thirds of our respondents acted upon an Action Alert. We think that is a success, as member voices are well-respected at the Legislature.

One common issue our survey found is many members don’t like politics and defer advocacy to the superintendent or another board member who may be more interested in the Legislature. About three-fourths of board members say they get legislative news from their superintendent.

MSBA is working to increase board members’ involvement in advocacy through the fall Advocacy Tours, Pre-Delegate Assembly meetings and Delegate Assembly 101 course. About one-half of board members (50.3 percent) say they have never attended a fall Advocacy Tour meeting. And only 25 percent of board members surveyed indicate they attended the Day at the Capitol.

Communications

Survey respondents made it clear the logistics of the Monday Morning Coffee call-in sessions weren’t working for them. Several commented webinars that could be viewed anytime would be preferable. More wanted a format providing more analysis of legislative issues. MSBA responded by creating The Weekly Advocate e-newsletter. It provides members with updates on issues, upcoming hearings and events, and a short video analysis of a legislative issue. Members are able to watch – at their convenience or share during public meetings – in order to help the public understand complex issues such as funding, special education cross-subsidies or teacher licensing. The series of video analysis pieces are all five minutes or less.

Capitol Connections

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MSBA Governmental Relations Survey Action plan:

1. Transform Monday Morning Coffee into an analysis-based e-newsletter with video segments explaining complex education issues. (DONE)
2. Provide a two-page executive summary earlier and include in the Legislative Summary booklet.
3. Minimize the time commitment for delegates by offering a webinar-based Pre-Delegate Assembly meeting, along with in-person meetings.
4. Reinstate a specific school board member Day at the Capitol. (DONE)
5. Increase communications and information on how a school board member can become a delegate.

and part of MSBA’s YouTube video channel, available 24/7 to all members and boards.

By far the most popular communications item is MSBA’s Legislative Summary – a comprehensive look at all the bills passed and the impacts on schools. More than three-fourths of the board members who responded indicated the summary was valuable (76 percent). For superintendents, 94.2 percent said they felt the summary was valuable. Several members requested that a shorter, two-page executive summary made available earlier would be helpful. That way, they’d know the most important items quickly and could dig in to the details in the full summary later. Part of MSBA’s action plan is to include a two-page executive summary earlier online as well as in the booklet.

“As the newest member of the Government Relations Team, I see firsthand the influence of the school board member voice,” said Government Relations Communications Assistant Kim Lewis. “Imagine if every school board member – more than 2,000 – advocated in unity. We could make a big impact on legislation.”

The Delegate Assembly process

School boards are experiencing faster turnover. In the previous two elections, we have more than 400 new school board members, which has resulted in the loss of institutional knowledge of the entire Delegate Assembly. The survey supported this with respondents saying the Delegate Assembly process needs to be more clearly understood and promoted more. One-third of our membership is not familiar with the Delegate Assembly process and nearly 40 percent do not know how to become a delegate. MSBA’s Governmental Relations team will be sending out more information on the process and how to become a delegate. Our electronic nomination and balloting system will allow ANY board member to become part of our grassroots advocacy system.

Our Pre-Delegate Assembly meetings and Delegate Assembly are excellent primers on education issues and provide a rewarding and professional experience. The Delegate Assembly is held the first week of December in the Twin Cities. This grass-roots assembly is where school district legislative issues can become part of MSBA’s legislative platform for the upcoming session.

“We urge you to watch for details and consider becoming a delegate. I assure you this grass-roots process is a really rewarding experience, professionally and personally,” Dittrich said.
Those who indicated on the survey they were not interested in becoming a delegate, 57.9 percent said the time commitment was too big. Comments included “shorten the process,” “make Delegate Assembly a one-day event,” and/or “offer more webinars for Pre-Delegate Assembly.” In response to the comments, this year MSBA will offer a webinar-based Pre-Delegate Assembly for those who can’t make it to the meetings. Government Relations staff will continue to provide the Delegate Assembly 101 course (with the basics of Pre-Delegate Assembly) prior to MSBA’s Delegate Assembly meeting in December.

“Overall, advocacy remains one of the five pillars of school board member work. It’s something that can’t be relegated to one person on the board or something that is piled onto the superintendent’s work,” said MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind. “Every board member must stand up for their students and be the advocate to improve their future.”

Greg Abbott is MSBA’s Director of Communications. Contact Greg at gabbott@mnmsba.org.

### Advocacy Tour

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### Delegate Assembly

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“I love the Action Alerts! They are very helpful and I share them often.”
London Lowmanstone of Hopkins and Nathan Hagerott of Caledonia Area were named the 2017 MSBA Student School Board Member Scholarship winners during the spring.

The two $3,000 scholarships are given as a way to reward and encourage students to become involved in governance of their school and learn about the importance of having a locally elected school board.

Nearly 100 of the 332 public school districts in Minnesota have a student school board member at the table. A committee of five MSBA Board of Directors looked at the near-record number of applications and narrowed the field to the two recipients.

London will attend Harvard University this fall. Nathan has selected the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. MSBA interviewed both scholarship winners below.

**London Lowmanstone**

**College:** Harvard University

**MSBA:** We see you are involved in many STEM-type activities like robotics and math programs, but also in music.

How do you see the role of the arts in high school curriculum? And how about extracurriculars overall? What would your high school experience be like without band, theater, robotics – all these extracurriculars that are usually the first to be cut in a district budget?

**LONDON:** Arts classes play a role similar to any other course in high school. Courses teach students useful information about the topic that they may potentially use in their career, should they choose a related career path. But, more importantly, they teach students how to learn for themselves. In any high school course, we don’t just learn the material presented in the classroom, we have to figure out how to “study” and how to learn on our own, understanding the material in such a way that we can present our knowledge to others.

Arts courses do the same thing, but I think they could be even more important than STEM courses because they teach students completely different methods of learning and completely new ways of perceiving knowledge. For me, music is about learning how to play songs so that people feel a certain emotion. When I go home and practice my music, I’m not memorizing an empty, emotionless formula; I’m trying to figure out how to make people happier. The students in art class probably aren’t taking the class because they really want to know a particular stroke; they’re taking the class because they want their artwork to be awe-inspiring.
I also think that arts classes, much like sports and other courses, foster a mindset of self-improvement. Sports, though, often foster a mindset of competition, where you work against other teams to prove your worth. Even in other non-arts classes, students will compare grades and test scores. Arts programs, especially music, often are the opposite; we all work together in order to impress others with our talent and skill. We’re working for an overall good, not to beat someone else. I believe that’s something fairly unique to arts courses in schools.

With regard to extracurriculars in general, they add a community to the school. Academics can help to form relationships among students, but oftentimes the relationships seem to be more oriented around the class and the work associated with the class. Extracurriculars, on the other hand, encourage students to work with and talk with peers and get to know them as people, not just scholars.

Theater for me was one of those amazing communities. I don’t particularly love acting, but the way people in the theater community care about each other and support one another has made theater very important to me. I didn’t just learn how to act in theater; I learned more about humanity. I found out what life experiences my classmates were struggling through, what people were passionate about, and how to be a better friend. Those experiences don’t usually take place in the classroom.

While it may be possible for students to try to put together groups outside of school, having the support of the school, both monetarily and as a community, is key for these communities to thrive. Our theater can’t put on a play if we don’t have a director or a place to perform, and we don’t have an audience without building a school community around the play so students and parents and friends and families and other people come to the play and become a closer part of the Hopkins community.

Overall, extracurriculars are a key part to any school community. They allow the students, the staff, alumni, residents, friends, families, and anyone else to become engaged with the school. Without extracurriculars, all that’s left is a learning facility, not a learning community.

MSBA: Talk about teamwork on the board. You stressed that excellence is not just in leaders, but the entire leadership team. How have you seen the Hopkins School Board demonstrate that teamwork?

LONDON: There have been so many examples that it’s really hard to pick out one that stands out. Overall, the board has an extreme amount of trust and respect for the people giving reports. At the school board table, the presenters don’t seem to work for the board; they work with the board, informing them and helping them to make the best decision they can.

One example of this occurred when our school board was looking at finding more efficient school schedules and potentially moving out of the block schedule our high school and junior highs had implemented. When the school board received the report, it contained several different options, detailed with efficiencies in terms of full-time equivalents (FTEs), and potential pros and cons of each. Behind the scenes though, my principal worked to create a group of teachers, administrators, and students who all worked together to propose and discuss each potential model and its impact on the school. They met over many weeks, computing the FTEs and debating over how the students and staff and families might be affected by the change. The result? A medium-sized packet and a presentation to the board given by one person. But, that one presentation managed to encompass the ideas of that group that represented the entire school and its community.

Without the work put into researching and discussing and debating the different models, the board would have been forced to make a tough decision with potentially unreliable information. Instead, the board had faith that the report was accurate and that it reflected the opinions of the school, and was able to make their decision based on the data given to them in a very succinct report.

So, while it is important that the board is comprised of capable leaders, the
leaders are only able to make good decisions if they are presented with accurate and meaningful information. It is the hard work of the people behind the reports, gathering data, discussing options, and figuring out how to best represent the information, that allows the board to do its job well.

**MSBA:** How do you plan to use what you’ve learned from being on the Hopkins School Board in your own life?

**LONDON:** Since elementary school, I have wanted to create robots that aid people in natural disasters. To accomplish that goal, I plan to create and run my own company, which I imagine will have many similarities to running a school district.

One of the things I’ve picked up on the most is the amount of respect and trust the board members have for each other and those who work for them. The school board is in charge of so much that often very broad reports of entire programs are presented. Without the trust of the people who create the reports and the respect between the board and the presenters, it would be very hard for the board to know they were making the right decision. So, hiring carefully in order to have respectful and trustworthy people working for my business will be very important. Having everyone respect each other’s jobs also leads to a more uplifting work environment, like the one the Hopkins School Board has.

To the board members, the school that I spend so much of my time in is often presented as a spreadsheet of numbers. As I mentioned in my scholarship essay, it can be difficult to look at the spreadsheet and understand that the decisions made at the board table actually affect real people inside the school. I imagine business reports will be very similar, with data attempting to represent not just an entire organization, but also all of the individual people who are a part of it. I’ve noticed, though, that the board members spend considerable time inside the schools, volunteering, getting to know students, and of course, talking to us student board representatives. The numbers can help to give a quick glimpse into what’s going on, but until you start to know the people, it’s impossible to tell what impact your decisions will have and if you’ll be helping people or not. If I create a business, I plan to stay in touch with the people working inside the company, not just the numbers in the reports.

Beyond the goal of creating and running a business, being able to see the school board in action, speaking at the board table, and helping two younger students learn how to be representatives has been an amazing experience. I have much more confidence when speaking with or giving presentations to people in leadership positions. In my day-to-day life, it also helps me understand a lot more about politics and what I see going on in the news.

I have also learned how rewarding it can be to encourage people’s individual voices and opinions instead of training them to be like me. The two younger representatives on the board each have their own style of presenting and interacting with the board. Originally, I thought I would teach them how to do what I did, but I quickly found that it was much better for them to learn what worked best for them.

Being on the school board has been a wonderful experience. I’m sure I will discover many more ways it has helped me as I begin college and continue to pursue my dreams.

**Nathan Hagerott**

(Caledonia High School)

**MSBA:** What got you interested in being on the school board?

**NATHAN:** I was on a principal selection committee during my sophomore year. Our district was looking for a new principal at the time and they wanted students to help interview with the school board.

So we were tasked with showing the principal candidates around and asking them questions that applied to us—the students. When it came time for the decision, our input as students was weighted pretty heavily and seemed to be really valued. So that whole experience got me really excited about being involved with school governance.

**MSBA:** What was your experience on the school board different from what you expected it was going to be?

**NATHAN:** It was a little bit different. I was pleasantly surprised at how well my ideas and input were received. It was a position that not a lot of students had shown interest in, because they assumed that they wouldn’t have any valuable input to provide. But once I got here, I realized I could be really helpful.

**MSBA:** What issue has been the toughest to deal with during your time on the school board?

**NATHAN:** During the first half of my junior year, a neighboring community’s baseball program decided to disassociate itself from our joint baseball team. That decision kind of ruffled some feathers in Caledonia. There was talk about how we either had to disassociate or stick with the school program and like maintain it. Being involved with school governance. It was an issue I was heavily involved

“...”
in and it was really controversial at the time. So, that was probably the most important and most difficult issue I faced.

MSBA: What’s been your best moment on the school board?

NATHAN: My best moment was bringing back the Caledonia High School Jazz Band. That was something that was cut due to budget limitations after the Great Recession. One day, I was talking to some friends and we were saying, “I wish we had jazz band back.” I was on the school board by then and knew a lot about the process. So I started talking to the principal and got support from students wanting to join the jazz band. Then it kind of snowballed from there. The board was open to my proposal and today we have a functioning jazz band.

MSBA: Later in life, would you consider running for school board yourself?

NATHAN: I definitely would. It’s been a positive experience. Being on the board, I see the value of it and hope I can someday contribute as an adult.

MSBA: What do you want to be when you “grow up”?

NATHAN: My dream job would be to design cars as an automotive engineer. I love the science and the physics involved with cars and how they handle and how they function. I think that would be a really fun job to have.

MSBA: Any final thoughts?

NATHAN: I hope that other students who are interested in the school board and like local government seriously consider being a student school board member. I’ve really enjoyed it. You learn a lot about how a governing organization functions and how you can contribute in your community.

Greg Abbott is MSBA’s Director of Communications and Bruce Lombard is MSBA’s Associate Director of Communications. Contact them at gabbott@mnmsba.org and blombard@mnmsba.org.

**MSBA STUDENT SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS**

2017: Nathan Hagerott (Caledonia High School) and London Lowmanstone (Hopkins High School)

2016: McKinley Lain (Sauk Rapids-Rice High School) and Taylor Nelson (Woodbury High School)

2015: Amber Bennett (Proctor High School) and Giancarlo Marconi (Austin High School)

2014: Tim Bergeland (Hopkins High School) and Erik Thibault (Duluth East High School)

2013: Stephanie Chavez-Estrada (Richfield High School) and Molly Sandstrom (Chisago Lakes High School)

2012: Michael Gaytko (Waseca High School) and Heather Rolfing (Lewiston-Altura High School)

2011: Marguerite Haggerty (Cannon Falls High School) and Maraki Ketema (White Bear Lake High School)

2010: Kai Fei (Duluth East High School) and Tanwapor Ohl (Cass Lake-Bena High School)

2009: Ethan Lang (Hopkins High School) and Kendra Lynn (Cambridge-Isanti High School)
School districts have found many positive opportunities for partnering with or working with outside organizations. The school board is responsible for assuring that the partnerships developed protect both the policies and best interest of its students.

Outside organizations such as booster clubs, parent-teacher organizations and community foundations abound in many of our communities. These outside organizations serve a valuable purpose and complement the school district in preparing youth for lifelong activities, providing a conduit for parents and other family members to school district staff, and serving as a link to support resources.

**QUESTION:** Is it prudent for school districts to work with outside organizations?

**ANSWER:** It is common for outside organizations to develop a partnership with or work with their local school district to start up a program or activity, hand off a program or activity, or simply to enhance a current program or activity. As these partnerships are being developed, the school board should enter into agreements with both care and caution and always reserve the right to refuse partnerships, requests, or funds.

**Q:** Are the funds and activities of booster clubs and parent-teacher organizations controlled by the school district?

**A:** The school board is required by law to control the business of the school district (M.S. 123B.02, Subd.1). This includes the approval of the overall budget, all expenditures for the programs of the school district, and the acceptance of all gifts from outside entities. The school district should not attempt to control the funds and activities of outside organizations. Instead, the outside organization should maintain and control its own financial accounts and activities.

A nonprofit organization is independent of the school district and the school district lacks the authority to give gifts to or fund nonprofit organizations. A school district, however, may contract with a nonprofit organization to provide services, if appropriate, as it would with any other
vendor. Any district funds paid to a nonprofit organization must be related to the value of the services provided to the school district (Minnesota Office of the State Auditor Statement of Position – Outside Organization Supporting School Districts, February 2015).

Q: Can booster clubs hire coaches for school districts?

A: Outside organizations cannot hire coaches (or any other positions) for the school district. However, they can provide funding to fill positions. The funds must be accepted as gifts by the school board. Organizations should consult with school district staff before gifting the funds.

Q: Should school districts work with outside organizations to raise additional funds and how do these funds get to the school district?

A: Outside nonprofit organizations may conduct fundraising activities and solicit donations in order to provide gifts to schools. If a school district has policies restricting when fundraising activities may be conducted in the name of a school or a school district, the limitations would apply to fundraising by all outside organizations. Fundraisers should be conducted by the outside organization independently of the school district. The school board must approve the acceptance of the funds. The outside organization and the school district staff should communicate prior to any fundraising activity.

Q: Does MSBA have guidelines for supporting outside organizations?

A: MSBA is developing “Guidelines for Outside Organizations Supporting the School District” in collaboration with the Minnesota State High School League and the Minnesota Association of School Business Officials. The guidelines can be obtained by contacting MSBA at 800-324-4459, and will also be available on the MSBA website located at www.mnmsba.org.

Contact Gary Lee at glee@mnmsba.org and Gail Gilman at ggilman@mnmsba.org.
Mike Domin may look young, but he’s no rookie. Domin was originally seated on the Crosby-Ironton School Board in 1999 – which equates to 18 years of service.

Domin joined the MSBA Board of Directors in 2013, representing the west-central Minnesota school districts in MSBA Director District 10.

After an extensive career as a videographer, the Crosby-Ironton native now works for the Staples-based National Joint Powers Alliance as a contract administrator.

In the following interview, Domin discusses his passion for learning, his advice for new school board members, and the value of MSBA to its members.

**MSBA:** Why did you run for your local school board?

**DOMIN:** I have a passion for learning. I wanted to get involved in my school district. I was always interested in serving on some type of board. I thought the local school board would be a great start.

**MSBA:** Are there any current issues affecting Director District 10?

**DOMIN:** Like the other MSBA Director Districts, finding qualified teachers is among the biggest issues for us.
**MSBA:** What is the most rewarding aspect of being a school board member?

**DOMIN:** Seeing the students succeed – and then seeing them come back later on – is very rewarding. We’re a small community. You know quite a few of the kids and their parents and families. It’s nice to see them come back and see how successful they are.

Of course, handing out the diplomas is cool. Graduation is always a great time. Also, I like getting out and visiting the schools and classrooms. We are looking to start doing patron tours (modeled after North Branch Area), which we hope will bring parents and the public into our schools.

**MSBA:** What advice do you have for new school board members?

**DOMIN:** Listen, listen and listen. And don’t be afraid to ask questions. Coming on to a school board is always going to be a learning experience. Even after 18 years, it’s a learning experience. There’s always something you can learn.

New members should remember that boards always work as a whole – not as individual board members.

*continued on page 32*
**MSBA: What do you like best about being on the MSBA Board of Directors?**

**DOMIN:** We can take board members from all around the state and accomplish MSBA goals. The MSBA Board is definitely “family.” We work well together.

**MSBA: Why is MSBA valuable to board members?**

**DOMIN:** MSBA provides its members with valuable training tools. Our staff is so hard-working and provides board members with the services that they need. MSBA is the board members’ association. It is important that MSBA is there to help them to succeed. Attending MSBA events are also a great way to network with other school board members.

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**Mike Domin advocated for public schools at the federal level earlier this year in Washington, D.C. Domin was joined by fellow MSBA Board Directors Ann Long Voelker (Bemidji Area) and Deb Pauly (Jordan), and MSBA President Kathy Green (Austin).**

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**M I K E  D O M I N:**

**L I F E  O U T S I D E  T H E  B O A R D**

**Family:** All of my family – parents, brother and sister – live in the Crosby-Ironton area.

**High school:** Crosby-Ironton High School

**College:** Brainerd Community College (now Central Lakes College); graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science from St. Cloud State University

**Favorite TV show:** “Game of Thrones”

**Favorite movie:** “Star Wars” film series

**Favorite author:** Vince Flynn

**Favorite music:** All music – “but I’m kind of a country guy”

**Favorite Minnesota food:** Wild rice hot dish

**Fun fact:** “I’ve traveled to 16 countries. I’ve been to Japan more than 20 times for my former job as a videographer. I videotaped depositions at the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Consulate – both in Tokyo and Osaka.”

**MSBA Director District 10 board members may contact Mike Domin at mdomin@charter.net.**
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POLICY MANUAL REVISIONS ARE IMPORTANT

By Cathy Miller, MSBA Director of Legal & Policy Services

If your school district has a policy manual, great! If your school board and administration use your policy manual, even better. Policy is important, and some policies are legally required. Your district and your school board can function more efficiently by following good policy. For a policy manual to be at its best and most useful, it must be considered a work in progress. A policy manual should be a living document that is used, followed, updated, and even changed from time to time.

Policy revision can be made manageable, or at least more manageable, with MSBA’s help. One way to help is to start with a policy that guides the policy making process. Specifically, MSBA’s Model Policy 208, “Development, Adoption, and Implementation of Policies,” is a good example of such a policy. While this model policy provides guidelines, school boards can make modifications to reflect their practices.

The school board determines the number of readings for a proposed new policy or revised policy before adoption. No statutory requirements exist, but keep in mind that school board policies impact many people. The people who are or may be affected should have an opportunity to share their opinions and concerns before policy decisions are made by the board. Model Policy 208 establishes two readings with adoption taking place at a third meeting. Your board can change this. In this context, “reading” doesn’t mean that the policy or revision is read at the meeting. It means that the policy or revision is available for the public to read before or during the meeting. The board members may discuss the policy or revision and any input they have received and may make some changes prior to adoption. School boards must follow their own policies, so check yours. If your school board’s policy provides for something different from what your board wants to do, the board can revise the policy and then change its practice.

For most of your policies, MSBA recommends review once every three years. A few policies are required to be reviewed annually, and the list of these policies can be found in Model Policy 208, Part V, Paragraph D. One way to make sure your policies are reviewed on this schedule is to divide the policies that don’t have to be reviewed annually into thirds, and determine which policies you need to review each year of the three-year cycle. Then you can decide how many policies to review each month, each meeting, or each quarter, for example, to stay on track. Breaking the policy review project into smaller parts makes it more manageable.

If you find a policy that is no longer needed, no longer reflects the law, or has changed so much that it needs to be eliminated rather than revised, the board should formally vote to repeal the policy. The dates of adoption, revision, and repeal of each policy should be tracked in the district office, and including these dates on each policy is also a good idea.

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