A New Era of Learning
Student innovation challenge blends active learning and fun
Everything You’ve Always Wanted to Know About Long-term Facilities Maintenance Revenue
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Calendar

M A Y  2 0 1 6
4–6 .......... MASBO Annual Conference
10 .......... BoardBook Webinar
19–20 ...... MSBA Board of Directors’ Annual Meeting
25 .......... Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting
30 .......... Memorial Day (no meetings)

J U N E  2 0 1 6
1 .......... BoardBook Webinar

J U L Y  2 0 1 6
4 .......... Independence Day (no meetings)

A U G U S T  2 0 1 6
7 .......... Early Bird Workshop
7 .......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
8 .......... MSBA Summer Seminar
9 .......... MSBA Phase I & II Combination
9 .......... Charter School Board Training
9 .......... Primary Election Day (no meetings or activities 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.)
9–10 ...... MDE/MSA Conference

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The MSBA Journal thanks the students of Barnesville Public High School for sharing their art in this issue.

COVER ART:
Taylor Peterson
Minnesota’s teacher shortage

“Traveling around the state, this is one of the most pressing issues we hear from school districts. We are doing whatever we can to make sure teachers not only enter the profession, but stay in the profession.”

MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind

“We are not generating and retaining enough teachers, especially teachers from diverse backgrounds. The number of new teacher licenses awarded has declined by 7 percent in the last five years. What we have been doing in the past has not worked.”

MSBA Associate Director of Government Relations Denise Dittrich

“This session we are prioritizing getting more high-quality teachers into the classroom. However, not only do we want to get them to go into the teaching profession, we want to offer our ongoing support by investing in teacher training and development.”

Minnesota Senator Chuck Wiger

“Last year, 56 percent of school districts said they would find hiring special education teachers ‘very difficult.’ Schools across the state are struggling to find qualified applicants for a variety of positions – from math, science and special education to agriculture and career and tech ed. I am proud of the bill we’ve put together which addresses this statewide problem by attacking it on several fronts. By combining new grant money and loan forgiveness with greater investment in programs we know work already – I am confident we can ease the burdens on school districts.”

Minnesota Senator Kevin Dahl

National school facilities funding gap

“U.S. public school infrastructure is funded through a system that is inequitably affecting our nation’s students and this has to change.”

U.S. Green Buildings Council CEO Rick Fedrizzi, on a report released in March concluding the nation is spending about $46 billion less than what it needs to keep up its school buildings.

“Knowing that every penny we spent meant less funding for our students, we tried every way we could to control costs, but we still had to rely heavily on the assistance of the county and they had to recoup their expenses. At the conclusion of the election we ended up with a total of 34 votes. The cost for printing, county services, election judges, and district employee time totaled $12,166.73. That equates to $357.85 per vote.”

Gibbon-Fairfax-Winthrop Superintendent Tami Martin, testifying before the House Government Operations and Elections Policy Committee meeting earlier this year regarding her school district’s costly special school board election held in January because of a state election law passed in 2015.

Broadband

“The GigaZone will provide the school districts (with) Gigabit Internet speeds throughout the school day so educators and students alike can use the Internet faster and more efficiently. This upgrade is being provided at no extra charge so districts can stay within their budget and prepare their students for the future and the new technologies it will bring.”

Steve Howard, Paul Bunyan Communications IT and Development Manager, on his company upgrading technologies it will bring.

Lack of school counselors

“Knowing that costs for personnel, transportation, and health insurance don’t always go down, districts want to have as much flexibility as they possibly can to meet the needs for their students.”

MSBA Executive Director Kirk Schneidawind, adding that MSBA members understand the value of student support positions – but school boards are still coping with a level of state education funding that hasn’t kept pace with inflation for more than a decade.
In December, in an historic milestone for local governance and Minnesota’s local school board members, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law. ESSA is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. With the signing of this bill, we have rewritten the history of the No Child Left Behind Act and returned responsibility for school accountability back to the states and local school districts.

I applaud lawmakers for listening and responding to our school board members to end the unrealistic requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act. A special thank-you to Minnesota’s Representative John Kline and Senator Al Franken for leading the effort to reauthorize the ESEA, which was long overdue. Rep. Kline is the chairman of the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee. Sen. Franken serves on the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Their bipartisan leadership and willingness to act in the best interests of students, parents and local communities is what we expect from our elected officials – and they delivered.

A section on local governance in ESSA contains language – which NSBA helped craft – that pushes back against federal intrusion into school administration, including the development and expenditure of school budgets. The new law specifically addresses potential federal reach through non-regulatory means and requires local stakeholder (e.g., school board) input at the federal level prior to issuing such guidance. Because ESSA returns to states and local districts more flexibility in key areas such as testing and accountability, local stakeholder input into the regulatory process over the coming months will be exceedingly important.

The big question now: What’s next? The transition for the new law will occur over the next several years and cover fiscal years 2017–2020, essentially a four-year authorization. Some key implementation dates include:

**For the 2016 calendar year**
- Existing State plans will be in effect through the close of August 1, 2016.
- New state plans pursuant to ESSA will take effect beginning with the school year 2017–2018.
- Existing waivers terminate on/after August 1, 2016.

**Beginning school year 2016**
- School districts must notify parents:
  - Of their right to request and receive information about the professional qualifications of their student’s classroom teacher(s).
  - Regarding students participating in mandated assessments, and the right to opt out of those assessments.

**Beginning school year 2017–2018**
- State plans must include what is required in the plan’s sections on “statewide accountability system” and “school support and improvement activities.”
- State plans must establish a state-determined methodology to identify one statewide category of schools for comprehensive support and improvement (continued at least once every three school years).

We must, however, stay in front of the changes. There are a lot of moving parts with this reauthorization. MSBA will continue to work with and through NSBA to keep in front of all the new developments.
As the sounds of Sir Edward William Elgar’s “Pomp and Circumstance” resonate in school gymnasiums and arenas across Minnesota — signaling another successful graduation ceremony and the end of the academic year — I would ask you: “Is this symbolic anthem being heard by all our students?” Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding “no” for 18 percent of our state’s students. Minnesota ranks close to the bottom of states when it comes to on-time graduation rates for students of color.

I would urge you to make graduation a regular topic of conversation with your superintendent. Graduation is a key metric on just how well your district is performing. I looked on the World’s Best Workforce (WBWF) section of our district’s website to examine Mahtomedi’s graduation data. In 2015, 98.5 percent of students graduated on time in Mahtomedi. The report on the WBWF indicated four students had not graduated on time. Digging a little deeper, I learned that these four students are on track to graduate by working on their GED certificate or finishing off a requirement course for graduation. I must point out that Mahtomedi is above the state average in socioeconomic means. The state average for graduation is 81.9 percent in aggregate. For our students of color, the graduation rate is an unacceptable 60 percent.

Most readers know the statistics of lifetime earnings for a high school graduate versus someone who drops out. The median annual income of a high school dropout in 2015 was less than half that of someone with a four-year degree, according to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. The earning differential becomes even greater with additional education. The semaphore at the crossroads of education is successfully graduating from high school. Only by graduating can one continue down the road of lifelong learning. To be clear, there are many wonderful and rewarding directions one can take after one has a diploma – community college, trade school, a four-year college and military service options.

Identifying the warning signs of students struggling should be on everyone’s radar. “Young people likely to drop out often show signs of trouble before reaching high school,” said researcher Robert Balfanz, a leading scholar on graduation rates at Johns Hopkins University. Balfanz said “school staff should measure what he calls the ABCs: attendance, behavior and course failure. Schools can improve graduation rates by focusing on freshmen whose middle school records raise red flags in these areas.” [“High school dropouts try to get back in the game” by Brandt Williams, March 7, 2016, mprnews.org]

Minnesota, as a state, spends a smaller amount on student support services than any other state in the nation. At a time when we need to get more students to graduate on time, the support to help struggling students is at an all-time low. Students who drop out risk prison incarceration rates much higher than high school graduates. In fact, the yearly cost for prison rivals the cost for a year of college tuition at our most expensive private colleges.

State Demographer Susan Brower shared at a recent White Bear Area Chamber of Commerce meeting: “Declining growth in the labor force means we cannot afford to waste the potential of our current and up-and-coming workers.” With our workforce projected to grow at a very tepid rate of 8,000 per annum
from 2016 to 2020, and 4,000 per year from 2020 to 2030, we need every student to reach his or her full potential in education for personal aspirations and for the workforce of tomorrow.

Getting all of our students to graduate is essential to Minnesota’s long-term economic success. Elected officials, along with education and business leaders, need to focus on increasing educational achievement for all Minnesota students.

I encourage you to know and track your district’s graduation rate, including students of color! Minnesota is a state that works – we have a strong knowledge-based economy and a great quality of life. In order to preserve and further this trend, we as school leaders need to have a relentless pursuit and focus in having all our students graduate. Let’s share “Pomp and Circumstance” with all our students.
In January 2016, DLR Group sponsored the Student Innovation Challenge, held at the MSBA Conference in Minneapolis. The firm initially introduced this competition at the National School Boards Association (NSBA) Annual Conference in 2015 in Nashville. We use the event to observe how students learn and interact with professionals in a real-life setting, insights which ultimately influence our future designs.

Three teams involved at the MSBA Conference represented Jordan Middle School, Robbinsdale Middle School and Detroit Lakes Middle School. Each team developed a unique problem in advance to be placed into a “hat” for random drawing. Teams had an incentive to design a problem that would challenge the team that drew it, while of particular interest should they draw their own. Responding to a problem statement encourages each team to apply systemic solutions in a project-based, active learning environment. The challenge requires students to research the problem, learn all that they can, and develop new and innovative solutions. The problems included:

1. Design and implement an education system that decreases the illiteracy rate of people living in poverty in each of two different communities: Minneapolis and a city of their choosing in a developing nation. The solution should decrease adult illiteracy by 35 percent and child illiteracy by 80 percent by the year 2041 in each of the two communities.
2. Develop a plan for U.S. colleges and universities, both locally and nationwide, to lower the average cost of tuition by 25 percent by 2026, and maintain those costs (relative to inflation) through 2036, without sacrificing the quality of professors or programs offered at those schools.

3. Define the key components of a holistic system that could replicate the high standard of living in North America (Chicago) for South America (Lima, Peru). With these components in mind, develop a multifaceted approach that will raise the standard of living for the 13-year-old boy in Lima to match that of a boy living in Chicago by 2041.

The problems that the students developed were both interesting and difficult. With a random distribution, none of the three participating teams received their own problem. The assignments were set and the teams began to work. Students delved into their assigned problems for a week leading up to the conference. During that week, the teams were given free rein to research their problem in any way and could confer with any resource they chose.

When the teams arrived at the MSBA Conference, we introduced a “twist” to the teams’ problems to elicit additional skill development. “There is a highly contagious disease popping up and spreading across the world. Not much is known about it – like its origin, impact, or a cure. The solution for now is to sequester 10 adults and 100 children from each country for 10 years. What does that look like? Define the context. Then develop nine initiatives for this group to help them start a new society.” Adding a twist in real time, at a live event, generated a real-life exercise requiring collaboration within teams, between teams, and with conference attendees.

Our goal for the Innovation Challenge is to ignite change – change in facilities, change in the learning environment, change in the overall learning experience, and change in the learners’ attitudes toward learning. Project-based and active learning are not new educational models, but districts are sometimes slow to embrace new ways of learning. DLR Group seeks to facilitate future changes more quickly through these types of activity, which allow students to experience the relevance of their work and be the voice of change.

During the Challenge itself, students used the furniture to collaborate; white boards to share information and diagram ideas; and their own technology to co-create and organize. The teams came together as a larger group to discuss and vet schemes and then broke off into their smaller groups to continue research and development. Each team exhibited agility as they navigated the Exhibit Hall, seeking out external resources and conference attendees to help solve their problem. Curiosity and self-motivation drove them to advance and continuously improve their solutions.

For DLR Group, observing the Innovation Challenge gives us additional incentive to continue refining our approach to
K–12 work: designing spaces that work to support agile student bodies and changing team sizes; integrating the best furniture to help students productively engage; and making sure there is enough space to make a mess, co-create and display group ideas collaboratively.

A recently completed middle school project in Jordan is a living and breathing example of how this can be implemented. Jordan Middle School was constructed in 1964 and stood as a proud fixture of education for its community. The building provided the canvas for learning for a variety of students by serving as the district’s high school for many years, and then for the last 15 years as the district’s middle school. The school’s interior components, including classrooms and instructional areas, remained in their original condition. Year after year students filled the halls and classrooms of a facility that was rapidly aging before the community’s eyes. Yes, generations of families attended the beloved school, but it was time for a new and updated interpretation of learning space in order to support the demands of 21st-century learners.

Together, the Jordan School District and DLR Group created a plan encompassing strategic additions and renovations to maximize the usability of the existing building, while creating a wide array of flexible NextGen learning spaces. The Jordan Middle School design provides a balance of space types between open and closed, large and small, with permanent and flexible wall configurations. The building allows for a variety of student-teacher ratios, supporting inquiry-based lessons, making and creating, and collaborative activities.

“I’ve done a lot of research into middle school programs and I believe the key is to provide students with the freedom to be more creative thinkers,” said Jordan Superintendent Matt Helgerson. “Our teachers are encouraged to experiment, to try new things, to explore opportunities for collaboration and interdisciplinary discovery. The emphasis is on collaboration.”

Renovations totaling 75,000 square feet create flexible and reconfigurable spaces for Jordan students and staff. Two academic clusters house students in grades 5–6 and grades 7–8 and provide space for experiential learning. Each cluster includes seminar rooms, labs, maker spaces, small group spaces, and teacher support areas. Staff and students determine how spaces are used throughout the day, and throughout the week, to accommodate particular lesson plans.

Teachers are not assigned to a specific room. Rather, they work with their colleagues to determine an allotment of rooms that best supports the instruction model and tasks at hand. The overall space allocation and room configuration can be changed over time in response to increased enrollment or redesigned curriculum. This fluid and dynamic model allows for learner-driven scenarios and promotes cross-collaboration between staff and students alike.

A strategically placed 13,500-square-foot addition blends with renovated existing space to provide classrooms, labs, flexible learning areas, and support spaces to the academic clusters. The new configuration also creates a new public entry with improved security and direct sight lines from the administrative suite.

“This design will allow a true middle school concept to grow and will give us flexibility to try new things,” said Helgerson. “Students will have an opportunity to work with others to solve problems. Staff will have the ability to be more creative with lesson design, creating an interdisciplinary approach with two or three classes working together.”

Within each academic cluster is an “Einstein Lab,” a designated space for hands-on learning. Each one of these areas contains a small lecture space, small-group room, collaborative computer lab, science lab,
and hands-on project room – all divided by glass partitions with layered transparency. These spaces are reserved by staff and are accessible to all disciplines. The high degree of internal flexibility can be easily manipulated by staff in a few minutes by moving walls or furniture. This flexibility to change configurations allows for more self-directed learning by each student.

The centrally located commons is where social learning happens. This “new” space was created by raising the roof in the center of the building to introduce natural light into a previously dark and confined space. The commons serves as the primary community gathering area where students eat lunch, and can be used throughout the school day including an ad hoc “mountain top” teaching environment, collaboration stations or a formal performance area. Additionally, high-table nooks built into the perimeter are available to both students in small-group work or teachers in individual or team prep.

The commons is an extension of both the media center and the art studio, providing gallery space as a physical manifestation of arts integration into everything the school does, as well as seating and study areas.

Flexible spaces with a variety of formal and casual furniture allow for more self-directed learning by students throughout the entire facility. These spaces can be used individually for small-group work or be combined for larger scale projects. The furniture choices throughout the building were focused on functionality, sharing, and collaboration.

The “new” Jordan Middle School, born out of an idea to support 21st-century learning in a renovated traditional school facility, supports many of the goals of the Student Innovation Challenge by providing a variety of learner-centered spaces focused on creativity and collaboration.

Chris Gibbs is a principal and Amy Ennen is a project designer for DLR Group. Learn more about the DLR Group at http://www.dlrgroup.com.
For years, school districts have been advocating for an expansion of the alternative facilities program to all districts. Currently, 25 large districts can use this program to fund deferred maintenance and other facility projects; however, the education funding bill approved by the Legislature during the 2015 session included a variation on that program for all districts, calling it the Long-Term Facilities Maintenance Revenue (LTFMR). The approved program represents a partial adoption of the 2014 Working Group on School Facilities recommendation that all districts have full access to an alternative facilities-style funding program for deferred maintenance.

LTFMR can be used to fund health and safety, accessibility, and deferred maintenance projects. It can be used on things that are attached to, or a part of, a building, and replaced on a like-for-like basis. Examples of eligible projects include tuck-pointing, roof repair and replacement, athletic field resurfacing (if replacing grass with grass, for example) and flooring replacement. New construction and remodeling projects are specifically excluded from the program.
The revenue will be phased in over three years, beginning with taxes payable in 2016, for fiscal year 2016–17, as follows:

- up to $193 per pupil unit for fiscal year 2016–17,
- up to $292 per pupil unit for fiscal year 2017–18, and
- up to $380 per pupil unit for fiscal year 2018–19 and subsequent years.

The per-pupil amount is reduced if a district’s average building age is 35 years or less. In addition, LTFMR is not all “new” (i.e., additional) revenue. It replaces the former Health and Safety, Deferred Maintenance, and Alternative Facilities revenue programs and associated funding, which were eliminated beginning with taxes payable in 2016, for fiscal year 2016–17.

Districts may receive additional revenue, above the amounts described above, for specific purposes, including:

- indoor air quality, fire alarm and suppression, and asbestos abatement projects over $100,000 per site;
- payments on existing alternative facilities bonds; or
- a “grandfather provision” (if they would have qualified for greater revenue under the three programs that LTFMR replaces).

Districts may fund projects directly on a pay-as-you-go basis with their revenue, or may issue bonds and use the annual revenue to finance the debt service on the bonds. They may also save the annual revenue, accumulating a restricted fund balance that can be used for larger projects, or use any combination of these three options. In any case, to qualify for the revenue, districts are required to file a 10-year facilities plan that shows how they intend to use the revenue. This plan may be amended after its initial adoption.

LTFMR is provided through a mix of property taxes and state aid. The revenue is equalized, with an equalizing factor equal to 123 percent of the state average adjusted net tax capacity (ANTC) per pupil unit, which for taxes payable in 2016 is approximately $9,000. The state created a new form of ANTC for purposes of calculating aid for this program, in which half of the value of agricultural land and buildings is not included. So districts with large concentrations of agricultural property may qualify for more aid than they would have if the existing measure of ANTC were used. This equalizing factor is high enough that a large number of districts qualify for aid. And because the factor is set as a percent of state average ANTC per pupil unit, if property values increase statewide over time, the equalizing factor will also increase. This may reduce the erosion of state aid that has been seen in so many programs that have fixed equalizing factors.

There are many factors to consider when determining a long-term plan for the use of LTFMR. In many cases, the goal may be to fund all needed projects while keeping overall property tax rates level and as low as possible. A district may also want to maximize available state aid to fund projects. In addition, if bonds will be issued to finance projects, a district will want to ensure that enough LTFMR revenue is preserved to fund smaller ongoing projects.
There are also additional legal requirements if bonds are issued to finance projects. For example, a notice of intent must be published in the district’s official newspaper which describes the projects funded by the bond issue, the amount of the bond issue and the total district debt. The publication must occur at least 20 days prior to the earliest of: solicitation of bids, issuance of bonds or final levy certification.

The LTFMR program will provide significant additional revenue to many of the districts which did not qualify for the full Alternative Facilities Program. It also creates an array of new financing options for many districts. In some cases, the program may be one of a several tools used to meet the needs for financing capital projects.

For the Monticello School District, the LTFMR program had a significant impact on their planning for a bond referendum this past November. Because the district had paid off the debt on their 1999 high school, they were going to see a significant reduction in their levy. District administration had known about this reduction for some time and planned to go to the community in November 2015 to ask for approval to purchase bonds for building improvements. Many of these improvements were long-term maintenance projects which were long overdue. With limited capital funds available, these projects had been put off for many years. Projects also included an office addition to the middle school, adding a gymnastics gym and stadium at the high school, a complete remodel of a former K–5 building to a pre-kindergarten/kindergarten center in anticipation of greater preschool programming and to provide additional space at the elementary buildings, as well as secure building entrances and site upgrades.

In May 2015, the plans had been finalized and would call for over $62 million in funding to complete what needed to be done. The dollar amount seemed staggering and there was concern about how the community would react. Comments such as, “We built the high school in the late ’90s for less than $30 million, so how come you need this much now and you’re not even building a new school?” brought concern to board members as the district took initial feedback from the public on their plan.

In June 2015, with the approval of LTFMR for districts such as Monticello, the board and administration revised the plan. Projects that would qualify for the LTFMR program were removed from the proposed bond referendum and included in the required 10-year LTFMR plan. This reduced the amount the district would be asking the community to support in the bond referendum to just under $40 million, a much easier amount for the community to accept.

On November 3, 2015, the election took place and more than 70 percent of voters supported the proposal. In a separate question regarding an increase of $200 per pupil on an operating levy, the district also received more than 70 percent support of the voters. The flexibility for funding provided by the LTFMR program was critical in gaining this measure of support.

We welcome the opportunity to work with public school districts and bring them our rich history of responsive, creative, practical, and high quality legal services.

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"Why is MSBA located in St. Peter?" is a question MSBA staff members often hear. The Twin Cities area would seem like a more likely location for MSBA – considering the other prominent statewide education organizations such as the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA), Education Minnesota, and both state principals associations (MESPA and MASSP) are housed in St. Paul.

Finding the answer to the “why St. Peter?” question requires taking a look back at William “Bill” Wettergren, MSBA’s first full-time executive director.

Mike Torkelson – a former MSBA staff member whose tenure ran from 1969 to 2004 – worked alongside Wettergren for nearly 20 years. As Torkelson recalled from stories he had heard, the genesis of “MSBA in St. Peter” occurred back in the late 1940s. Back then, the MSBA Board of Directors was represented by one school board member from each congressional district in the state (a precursor to MSBA’s current Director District setup).

Despite being in existence since 1920, MSBA still didn’t have a physical office to call home. The Board of Directors used to alternate serving as the association’s part-time executive director (then called the “executive secretary”). Torkelson said the part-time executive directors pretty much ran the entire association out of their homes. A milk crate contained all of MSBA’s vital documents – and this crate would get passed from director to director.

This arrangement continued until Wettergren’s turn as the part-time executive director came up in the rotation.
“The MSBA Board realized it was starting to grow as an organization,” Torkelson said. “They eventually asked Bill if he would become the full-time executive.”

Wettergren, who represented the St. Peter School Board, accepted the full-time job during an MSBA Board meeting, but on one condition: the organization would have to be headquartered in St. Peter.

“That’s really the reason they ended up being in St. Peter … when they asked Bill to become the full-time director, he said: ‘Well, that’s fine, I will take the job full-time, but my office is going to be here – because I’m not moving.’ Basically that’s how it all came down,” Torkelson said.

Another story has Wettergren, who worked in the dairy business, telling the MSBA Board that he would accept the job “but my cows and I aren’t moving” from St. Peter.

“After that meeting, Bill just loaded up three boxes and put them in his trunk – and that was the association,” Torkelson added.

Wettergren officially became the full-time executive director on August 1, 1950 – a position he would hold until his retirement in 1983.

Torkelson noted that there wasn’t any dissention at the time from the other MSBA Board Directors about making St. Peter the home of MSBA.

“The organization was just starting to grow and it was after that that things really took off,” he said.

In 1952, Wettergren hired his first employee, Mildred Stotz, for the position of secretary. “Mildred was with Bill and MSBA for forever and two days,” Torkelson joked about Stotz, who worked for MSBA from 1952 to 1974.

Willard Baker was hired nine years later. “Baker used to tell stories about the mice and rats they had to deal with in the basement of the feed store,” Torkelson said.

MSBA’s next move took headquarters to Third Street across from Patrick’s restaurant in an old Bolton & Menk building.

In the late 1980s, the MSBA Board approved the construction of MSBA’s current location at 1900 West Jefferson Avenue. The new office was completed in 1992 – before the building was leveled by a tornado that hit the town on March 29, 1998.

While the Jefferson Avenue facility was rebuilt, MSBA headquarters was temporarily based in offices in the (now former) Northwest Bank building in downtown Mankato.

The MSBA office was rebuilt quickly, with additional space. Staff members returned to St. Peter in November 1998.
RELOCATION?

During his lengthy MSBA career, Torkelson said he heard the “Why are you in St. Peter?” question many times.

“From time to time, there was a lot of pressure from the metro area to move the office up there,” Torkelson said. “It became an issue a couple of times at the Delegate Assembly and at the Leadership Conference. People would raise the question: ‘Why aren’t you up there?’”

During the Wettergren administration, Torkelson said Wettergren would always end this debate by saying: “I’m going to be the director and I am staying here and that’s it.”

As the use of fax machines and the toll-free 800 phone numbers became more widespread, Wettergren and Baker (who eventually succeeded Wettergren as executive director) would point out: “Hey, if you have a question, you don’t drive over to the MSBA office – you call them. So, what difference does it make where we are located?”

“Then people just sort of said, ‘Yeah, I guess that’s true.’” Torkelson said. “Then the issue just kind of died.”

However, prior to the construction of MSBA’s current building, Torkelson said some of that chatter regarding a potential move to the metro area resurfaced.

Torkelson said the speculation over a move to the Twin Cities raised many questions: What are you going to do about the staff? Are you going to pay for the current staff to be relocated – or are you going to hire all new staff?

“I don’t know that we were ever very close to moving the office, but some people from the metro would argue about all the other state education organizations being up there,” Torkelson said, himself a former MSBA executive director. “I think when they realized that they don’t drive over to the MSBA office anyway, it didn’t matter that much. I think a lot of superintendents and board members from outstate prefer that we stay here.”

Bruce Lombard is MSBA’s associate director of communications. You may reach him at blombard@mnmsba.org. A special thank-you to Mike Torkelson for his contribution to this story.

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Anoka-Hennepin, Kelliher, Sauk Rapids-Rice earn national honors for advancing student learning

Sources: American School Board Journal and Sauk Rapids-Rice School District

The Anoka-Hennepin, Kelliher and Sauk Rapids-Rice school districts are recent recipients of 2016 Magna Awards.

The Magna Awards is a national recognition program from the National School Boards Association that honors school board best practices and innovative programs that advance student learning. For more than 20 years, the Magna Awards panel of independent judges has reviewed programs that showcase school district leadership, creativity and commitment to student achievement.

Magna nominations are judged in three enrollment categories (under 5,000 enrollment; 5,000–20,000 enrollment; and over 20,000 enrollment) with one grand prize winner in each category. Each grand prize winner receives $5,000 from our sponsor, Sodexo. There are five additional winners and five honorable mention winners within each enrollment category.

Anoka-Hennepin earned first place winner status in the over 20,000 enrollment division for the Anoka-Hennepin Technical High School.

Kelliher also received first place winner status (in the under 5,000 enrollment division) for its Students First program.

Sauk Rapids-Rice took honorable mention in the under 5,000 enrollment division for “Creating Connections and Doing it Right: Sauk Rapids-Rice to Changchun, China.”

All Magna winners and honorable mention recipients were recognized in a special section in the American School Board Journal and at the School Leaders Luncheon during NSBA’s Annual Conference held in April in Boston.

Please see a profile of each winning school district on the following pages.
Anoka-Hennepin Technical High School moved to the Anoka-Hennepin Technical College campus in fall 2015, giving students full access to college classes and resources. This allows students to create a five-year education plan running through high school and postsecondary training at the same campus. They can earn college credit for free while completing high school requirements. The high school creates an environment that honors and invites students of diverse backgrounds to be part of an inclusive learning community. It offers individualized schedules and online options with a daily advisory to promote academic progress and support social and emotional growth. After-school credit makeup each week helps students stay on top of their school work. Small class sizes allow students to form important relationships that not only help academic success, but promote students’ gifts and talents as they plan for their future career and college pursuits. Transportation within the school district is provided along with free breakfast and lunch. Child care is free as well, making attending school much easier for students with children.

The high school has seen an enrollment increase. Students have increased participation in postsecondary education options (concurrent enrollment), improved their graduation rate, and increased participation in business mentorships. All students have a postsecondary education plan. Students are eager to complete their high school diploma as a means to completing their postsecondary education. One recent student experience exemplifies what program officials are seeing. A young man who was close to graduation participated in a tour of the college, unsure of a profession. He wasn’t initially interested in taking the tour but did so as part of his graduation plan. After learning about the golf course management program, and his ability to take the initial courses for free, he is now enrolled in the program and will start his internship this spring. This is taking place while he is still supported by his high school counselor, advisor and principal.

The school board set goals for student achievement that drove the decision-making process in creating the program. The board was seeking better college and career results for students who remain in the system beyond their graduation year. This program is intended to increase the overall graduation rate and to successfully place students in area colleges and technical programs. These goals aligned with the school board’s vision. Board members have supported the development of this program. Officials at the Minnesota Department of Education have toured the program, enthusiastically supporting the district’s work and praising the school board for its approval.

For more information about Anoka-Hennepin Technical High School, contact Anoka-Hennepin Associate Superintendent Jeff McGonigal at jeffrey.mcgonigal@anoka.k12.mn.us.
Kelliher School is located in a very rural setting in a high-poverty part of Beltrami County. More than half of the students reside on the Red Lake Indian Reservation and 84 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals. A large number of students live in generational poverty. Many students, especially those living on the reservation, do not trust adults who are not part of their immediate family. Many struggle even to put faith in members of their own family. Students living in trauma often perpetuate the patterns of living a day-to-day existence with goals that are short-sighted and related to immediate gratification instead of long-term learning goals. This program pairs middle school students with adult Success Coaches who meet with their mentees each month, developing a strong relationship or bond. Success Coaches inquire how their students are doing in school. They provide solutions to problems and can share how they have dealt with similar struggles. These connections help students believe in themselves and develop a sense of personal autonomy and hope for their futures.

The district has documented improvements in a number of areas, including behaviors, discipline referrals, and attendance. Student surveys indicate improved attitudes and perceptions regarding the culture and climate. Since the inception of the program, the number of incidents has been reduced. Attendance has improved while incidents of truancy have dropped. Students are self-reporting that they are more engaged in school and in learning. An annual Hope Survey has served as a reliable tool for measuring the growth of student hope indexes between fall and spring. According to this survey, student hope has increased since the program started.

Initially, the school board’s leadership role included authorizing the program, both in principle and in terms of the costs associated with launch and maintenance. In addition, all five board members serve as Success Coaches. Such participation provides a strong and positive leadership example for the school staff and the surrounding community. The board has consistently supported efforts by administration and faculty to remove social-emotional-behavioral barriers to learning and improving the culture of learning within the school.

For more information about Students First, contact Kelliher Superintendent Tim Lutz at tlutz@kelliher.k12.mn.us.
The Sauk Rapids-Rice School District earned its second straight Magna Award. In 2015, Sauk Rapids-Rice received a first place winner for its “Equal Access and Opportunity for All” program, a plan to increase equity through technology.

In 2016, the district was selected for an honorable mention award for “Creating Connections and Doing it Right: Sauk Rapids-Rice to Changchun, China.” The district currently provides Chinese language and culture instruction for elementary- and middle school-aged children, and has established meaningful relationships between Sauk Rapids-Rice students and students of the same age in Asia through its sister school in Changchun.

“The district’s focus on increasing global competencies has provided amazing opportunities for students, preparing them for post-secondary experiences and careers,” said Sauk Rapids-Rice Superintendent Dr. Daniel Bittman.

In addition, Sauk Rapids-Rice High School students have the opportunity to travel to China for two weeks at little or no cost to their families while they learn Chinese language and culture, experience a “home stay,” create and perform a production in Chinese, and work collaboratively on projects that are relevant to both countries.

“The St. Cloud State University Confucius Institute and staff have been instrumental in providing these experiences for our children and staff, and we are eternally grateful,” Bittman said.

Superintendent Bittman expressed thanks and congratulations to Sauk Rapids-Rice School Board members Lisa Braun, Tracey Fiereck, Mark Hauck, Robyn Holthaus, Tracy Morse, Phil Rogholt, and Jan Solarz, and the entire Sauk Rapids-Rice School District staff and community.

“We are honored to serve with this fabulous Board of Education and are proud of their continued commitment and success,” Bittman said. “They make great things happen for our children, school district, and community each and every day.”
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Linden Olson was elected to the MSBA Board of Directors in 2011, where he represents Director District 3, which covers southwest Minnesota.

Farming and education are both synonymous with Olson, who is a Worthington man through and through. “I was born, raised and still live on our farm just south of Worthington where we grew corn and soybeans and had a fairly large hog operation at the time,” he said.

Olson received his diploma from Worthington High School in 1955. In 1958, he graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Science degree in Animal Science with minors in Agriculture Economics and Plant Industry.

Along with farming, Olson also did some accounting and swine management consulting. Nowadays, along with being on the school board, the “partially retired” Olson manages two vacation rental houses in Strawberry, Arizona.

Olson’s run on the Worthington School Board began with his 2004 election.

In this interview, Olson discusses two issues affecting his rural community – the school bond referendum burden placed on farm land and the challenges of a racially diverse school district – along with his dislike for the numerous mandates imposed on school boards.

MSBA: What made you run for your local school board originally?

LINDEN: After renting out our farm ground and ending some service terms on state and national boards, committees and task forces, I wanted to become involved in something local. Because of my interest in education, I felt the local school board would be a good fit.

MSBA: How can school board members make the biggest impact on their districts and their students?

LINDEN: With about $100,000 invested in every graduating student, I feel the biggest impact is to offer as many opportunities and experiences both in and out of the classroom as the budget will allow so students can develop the knowledge and lifelong skills to become productive contributing adults in our global society.
MSBA: The tax burden falls hard on farm land when a bond referendum is approved. This is a key issue for your school district and other area districts. Can you explain why this issue is so important to resolve?

LINDEN: When the present tax system was started, the average farm was about 160 acres in size and each farm had lots of children. Today the average farm is much larger and the average family size is much smaller – but the tax system has not changed. When a bond referendum is passed, the largest share of the financial burden in highly rural areas is borne by a relatively few farmers, whether they own or rent the land they farm. Secondly, farm land values have increased much faster than other property, so the tax liability in districts that have a high percent of their tax base in ag land has shifted to ag land.

MSBA: Worthington is a very racially diverse school district. How does your district handle an influx of different languages and different cultures?

LINDEN: With about 85 languages and dialects in our community, the Worthington School District strives to meet the needs of all students. We have Spanish interpreters for each school and interpreters for other languages as needed. We have EL classes for all levels of learners. We participate with other schools in the county in the Nobles County Integration Collaborative (NCIC). The city in collaboration with the NCIC holds an International Festival in July that showcases the various cultures in the area. The district’s Community Education offers programs for parents to help them understand the school system so they can help their children succeed in school, adult basic education, and a number of other programs to help people new to Worthington become familiar with the community and help them overcome the language and cultural barriers they face.

MSBA: What is the most rewarding aspect of being a school board member?

LINDEN: The biggest reward is seeing all the students, both youth and adults, using the myriad opportunities and experiences available throughout the district to develop into confident adults wherever they choose to live after graduation.

MSBA: Is there one thing you don’t like about being on a school board?

LINDEN: The restrictions and mandates placed on schools by state and federal laws, rules, regulations and court decisions have limited local school boards’ ability to make important decisions that affect local districts. Local districts now have more responsibility and less authority than parents. There is a large disconnect between the mandated tests that are used to rate schools and the knowledge and skills employers desire in employees for today’s workforce.

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

LINDEN: First, keep in mind the two main jobs of a school board. One is to hire the superintendent. The second is to set policy and to have oversight that those policies are carried out the way the board intended. Dysfunctional boards most often happen when they try to get involved in management functions. Also, keep disagreements on the issue level and never let them get personal. Keep in mind that schools are a complex collection of responsibilities and programs and you will never know everything about your district. As a board member in my 12th year, I still find out new things about what our district is doing. And finally, try to keep abreast of what is happening in the area and on the state and national levels that will affect schools in the years ahead.
Linden Olson

Family: My wife Carol is a registered nurse at Sanford Worthington. My daughter Nora and her husband Sam are both teachers at the American Collegiate Institute in Izmir, Turkey. My daughter Ahnna is a senior credit analyst at AgStar in Mankato. Her husband Kyle works with Compart Farms near Nicollet. Our granddaughter Korie is their 15-month-old toddler. My son Joel and his new bride, Tara, both work in sales with Prairie Livestock Supply in Worthington and have a small cow-calf operation on our farm.

High school: Worthington High School

Favorite movie or TV show: “Gandhi”

Favorite book: “The World is Flat 3.0” by Thomas L. Friedman

Favorite music: Classical music

Favorite Minnesota food: Fresh sweet corn, a grilled pork chop and some home-baked rye bread

Fun facts:
- I rode horseback to a one-room country school through seventh grade.
- I enjoy baking bread.
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MSBA is pleased to introduce Peter Campion as the latest addition to its staff. Peter joins MSBA as the Associate Director of Board Development.

Prior to being hired by the MSBA, Peter worked at the University of Minnesota as a leadership and civic engagement educator, and as a graduate teaching and research assistant while pursuing a doctorate from the department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development.

Preceding his time at the University of Minnesota, Peter was a professional football player in the National Football League (NFL). The Carolina Panthers selected Peter in the 2002 NFL draft. During his two-plus-year stint in the NFL, Peter played for the Panthers, the St. Louis Rams, the Green Bay Packers, the Seattle Seahawks and the Oakland Raiders.

After the NFL, Peter transitioned to academia as an adjunct faculty member at multiple higher education institutions.

Peter has a strong interest and experience with adult learning styles, meeting management, and interpersonal and team development. Peter’s work as a leadership and civic engagement educator has developed his knowledge base and experience working with public sector boards.

“I relish the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of students by strengthening the work of Minnesota public school boards,” Peter said.

Peter grew up in the Fergus Falls area and is a North Dakota State University alumnus. He enjoys athletics, travel and spending time outdoors with his two daughters, Cadence (12) and Addison (4).
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