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**MAY 2018**
7............Superintendent Evaluation Workshop, Alexandria
8............Superintendent Evaluation Workshop, St. Peter
9............BoardBook Webinar
9–11........MASBO Annual Conference
17–18........MSBA Board of Directors’ Annual Meeting
22............Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting
25............2018 Legislative Update Webinar
28............Memorial Day (no meetings)

**JUNE 2018**
6............BoardBook Webinar
13............Tiered Licensure Webinar

**JULY 2018**
4............Independence Day (no meetings)

**AUGUST 2018**
5............MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
5............MSBA Summer Seminar Early Bird Workshop, Minneapolis
6............MSBA Summer Seminar, Minneapolis
7............MSBA Learning to Lead – School Board Basics: Phase I & Leadership Foundations – School Finance and Management: Phase II Combination, Minneapolis
7............MSBA Charter School Board Training, Minneapolis
7–8............MDE/ASA Conference
9–10........National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers Conference, Twin Cities
14............Primary Election Day [no meetings or activities 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.]
16............Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting

MSBA thanks art teacher Dawn Rossbach and her students at Menahga High School for sharing their art in this issue.

**COVER ART:**
Anna B.

Contact MSBA’s Bruce Lombard at blombard@mnmsba.org if you’d like to see your students’ art displayed in a future MSBA Journal magazine.
Award Criteria are Changing to Ensure All Board Members Have a Strong Foundation

By Kirk Schneiderwind, MSBA Executive Director

MSBA first started offering an All-State School Board award in 1971. The MSBA Board of Directors and staff wanted to identify and recognize the public school board members who had a long service of improving student achievement in their school district.

Like most things, change has made today’s MSBA Board of Directors and staff rethink the criteria that is needed to award school board members with the All-State status. For one thing, school board members who serve 20 years, 30 years, or 40 years are becoming fewer each year. The latest average of service for Minnesota school board members done at the end of 2016 showed an average of 8.6 years, down drastically from the 1970s or even the 1990s.

With more board members serving shorter terms, MSBA wanted to also recognize those members. This is why we are proud to launch our Rising Star award, for those outstanding board members who are in the first four years of their service, but who have been strong contributors to the school district team. The award, created in memory of the late MSBA Deputy Executive Director Tiffany Rodning, will be looking for a first-term board member who creates that spark to help the board focus on improving student achievement. Look for the applications this summer, being launched alongside our 2018 Summer Seminar.

Second, MSBA has continued to improve and offer training we feel would help our public school boards become high functioning.

For the success of school boards, the MSBA Board and staff believe that all board members should complete the MSBA School Board Workshop Series, at a minimum. Commonly called Phase I-IV, each workshop adds dimension to complete the five Standards of School Board Leadership.

In Learning to Lead — School Board Basics: Phase I, board members learn about their role as a school board member and the role of the superintendent.

In Leadership Foundations — School Finance and Management: Phase II, board members learn about the mandated subjects the state wants everyone to know. This session covers such core topics as budget, school finance, local levies, policies, laws affecting school boards, and personnel issues.

Phase III training will now be required for anyone applying for the All-State School Board Award. Phase IV training will also be required for board members to receive a Leadership Development Certificate.
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The School Board Workshop Series is every member’s foundation to succeed. If you have not taken Phase III or Phase IV, we will offer these sessions in September, along with the regular regional workshops in April of each year.

High-functioning boards, like any profession or trade, should understand that ongoing, relevant, and meaningful training is essential to the work they do.

Kirk Schneidawind is MSBA’s Executive Director. You may contact him about this column at ksneidawind@mnmsba.org.

This is where many board members pause in our Learning to Lead series. However, Building a High Performance School Board Team: Phase III is one of the most important workshops which helps board members learn how to work as a team. This workshop teaches board members about group dynamics, different personalities, and how to make progress as a school board team despite different backgrounds, opinions, and attitudes. About 50 percent of our board members have taken this workshop. Those who have attended say that Phase III should also be required because it is so useful in getting a board to work together and avoid dysfunction.

This is why Phase III will now be required before any board member can be nominated for our All-State School Board award or our new Rising Star award.

Our newest School Board Series workshop is Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV. This workshop completes the series by focusing on the main area of school board member work — policy. This workshop also has important components on dealing with the public — either through open forums, the media, or through community engagement.

MSBA feels so strongly that all four workshops should be part of a board member’s learning that all four will now be required to receive MSBA’s Leadership Development Certificate.

MSBA offers many more workshops, events, and opportunities to engage in advocacy. In today’s world, a school board member needs a solid foundation to keep a school district running effectively.

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Who Would Have Thought That Part of a School Board Member’s Job Would Be So Focused on Preventing School Shootings?

By Kathryn Green, MSBA President

This month I am speaking from the heart. Schools in several areas of our country and state have experienced traumatic acts of violence.

Just a few years ago — when we were tasked with dress codes, bus schedules, and Friday night football — we would not have imagined the mission before us now. There has been another tragedy in another school. We can feel our heartbreak once again for “our” kids.

Our classrooms have been designed to be a place of learning. Now, conversations are taking on what if the unimaginable were to happen? How can we prevent it? “Offense” and “defense” are amid pencils and marker boards in our discussions. Students are using their imagination to design barrier protections. Our kids are afraid, and so are we. There is a critical call to action.

If I would profess to have the answer to solve this evolution of our society, it would be in vain. I think what it is going to take to find answers is to have open and honest conversations. We need to take the classroom approach that there are no dumb questions — being respectful and listening to all wanting to enter the dialogue.

Instead of focusing on student achievement and curriculum, we are also charged with student safety. Is an armed, highly trained individual in our schools what is needed? More bullying prevention programs? More mental health initiatives for students? Gun control? It may be that the solution is part of each of these issues. I don’t have the answers.

The bottom line is, we as school board members are charged with educating our students in a safe environment. That means that we oversee the physical and emotional space of our classrooms and schools. From an operations perspective, each school district will need to complete an ongoing comprehensive risk analysis. We will need professional guidance to recognize all the facets of our “new” threat. This will be a continuing necessity, and likely an expensive one, but an investment that must happen.

Being a school board member comes with manuals and statutes and the responsibility to bring solutions to challenges beyond our control and to be ready at a moment’s notice. Good leaders need to pivot and adapt to address new challenges. This may be our biggest challenge. And like the administrators at the Parkland school in Florida, it may start with simply listening to our own students’ concerns.

Kathryn Green is the MSBA President. Contact Kathryn at kathyannegreen@gmail.com.
The legislative changes enacted during the 2017 Legislative session are playing out in this year’s tax statements and upcoming school district budgets. If turnout at our presentation of this material at the 2018 MSBA Leadership Conference is any indication, school board members are seeing the need to convey the message that legislative changes are helping to reduce property taxes.

In 2017, the Legislature enacted two changes to reduce property taxes for commercial-industrial and seasonal-recreational (cabin) properties, in an effort toward eliminating the State General Levy (also commonly referred to as the Statewide Business Property Tax). Most property taxes in Minnesota are retained locally; however, the State General Levy is a tax on commercial/industrial and cabin properties that is paid to the State General Fund. This tax has increased over time, and was never very popular with business or cabin owners. The inflation factor on the amount levied was removed, and the first $100,000 of value of a commercial-industrial property is now excluded from this specific tax. There is no impact to school revenue or levies because of this change, but it is worth noting...

Hot Property Tax Topics
Everything school districts need to know about the agricultural credit, tax levies, and more

By Jodie Zesbaugh and Shelby McQuay, Ehlers

Ehlers’ Jodie Zesbaugh and Shelby McQuay presented “Hot Property Tax Topics” during a workshop at the 2018 MSBA Leadership Conference.
that businesses will see some overall property tax relief, and both business and cabin owners will not see automatic increases in this levy in future years.

Of course, in the front of the mind of every farmer is the school building bond agricultural credit. And yes, this is a permanent law change which provides owners of agricultural property with a 40 percent credit for taxes attributable to school district debt service — existing and new debt, excluding OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) bonds. The credit applies to school debt taxes on all agricultural property classified as 2a, 2b and 2c, regardless of homestead status.

This agricultural property tax credit begins with taxes payable in 2018 and was first reflected on the Truth in Taxation statements sent out in November 2017 on the line titled, “School building bond credit.” This is an amount that school districts can point to when speaking with agricultural property owners to let them know that they are directly benefitting from this law change. It is important to note that this credit is not a shift to other property owners, but rather paid by the state from an ongoing appropriation. Largely, the state’s revenues are made up of individual and corporate income taxes, which has allowed the state to follow through on their commitment to lower property taxes. Finally, what used to come to the district from property tax revenues will now be paid by the state and listed on the payment reports that districts receive from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE).

As mentioned, the agricultural credit applies to existing and new debt, plus there is one other positive interaction that is worth highlighting. The current long-term facilities maintenance (LTFM) revenue program now has a tax advantage for districts with agricultural land, if bonds are issued to finance deferred maintenance projects. The portion of the revenue levied in the debt service fund is included in the calculation of the school building bond agricultural credit. The result of issuing a bond is tax neutral, though, for other properties.

During the presentation of this material at the Leadership Conference, we offered one example of how issuing bonds to address deferred maintenance needs lowered property taxes for farmers. By allocating a portion of the revenue the district is already receiving for long-term facilities maintenance needs to pay the debt service on a bond issue, farmers saw an increase in the credit and a resulting decrease in their taxes. The issuance of facilities maintenance bonds for deferred maintenance is allowed even after a levy is certified through a transfer of LTFM revenue from the General Fund to the Debt Service Fund by board resolution. Our second example provided insight into the many financing tools that can be combined to both lower the bond amount presented to voters yet still complete the full scope of projects facing a district with aging facilities.

Along with these legislative changes that were likely the talk among your farmers and small business owners, it is helpful to have a 30,000-foot understanding of
the property tax system in Minnesota. First, understand that the timeline from start to finish (from the assessment to the district recognizing the revenue) is a two-year process. For the 2018 tax year, property is assigned a value in January 2017, the school district levy setting procedures take place over the summer and fall 2017 and a final property tax levy is adopted by the school board by December 28, 2017. In spring and fall 2018, those property taxes are due to the counties. School districts recognize those revenues for their school year 2018-2019 budgets, which ends June 30, 2019.

Differing from cities and counties, the amount of revenue a district can raise through its levy is dictated by the state Legislature. Everything from the property value, the tax base, and the maximum levy is outside of district control. Within those bounds, the district adopts their final levy, which may only exceed the amount determined in law by voter approval. Contrary to popular belief from the outside of a school board room, not all taxes paid by property owners go toward the school. On a statewide average, the breakdown is approximately equal among school districts, cities/townships and counties, with the remainder of a property owner's tax liability due to special taxing districts (i.e. watershed districts), townships, and the state.

Another contrast with city/township taxes is that increases in tax levies do not always result in increases in the district's budget. Because of the complexity of education formulas, there is often a shift between state aid and property tax revenues that does not change the total revenue due to the school district. This shift can arise from a change in the property value or student count in your own district as well as how those values have changed relative to other districts around the state. Property wealth and property wealth per pupil are the major formula factors that determine a district's ability to levy. Therefore, as those factors change, the amount of “local effort” or levy a district is required to contribute to the total revenue can change, with the remainder coming from state aid.

In addition to the mix between aid and levy to determine the total property tax liability, the variations in property taxes from year to year and among property types is attributable to property tax classifications. For example, a home valued at $100,000 will not pay the same taxes as a business property valued at $100,000 due to the property tax classification system. State statute defines the capacity of a property to pay, which is different for each type of property. A home valued at $100,000 has a capacity of 1 percent and a business valued at $100,000 has a capacity of 1.5 percent. So, a uniform tax rate applied against 1.5 percent of a business’ value generates more revenue than 1 percent of a home valued at that same amount. These are state level decisions and are entirely outside of a district’s control.

In addition to classification rates, the state also provides a preference to homeowners by reducing the value of a home through the homestead exclusion, thereby reducing the amount (or capacity) subject to taxation.

To make things even more complicated, the classification and exclusion discussion is only applicable to one of the property tax bases (called Net Tax Capacity) that schools levy against. Because two is more fun than one, education revenue specific to the operating referendum, equity...
and transition formulas are levied on another tax base (called Referendum Market Value) that only affects homes, businesses and the house, garage, and one acre (not other agricultural property or cabins).

Please be aware that there are three property tax programs at the state level that are available to help property owners reduce their burden. The most far reaching is the Minnesota Homestead Credit Refund which has existed since the 1970s and is available each year to homeowners and renters. The calculation for determining the amount of the refund due is a function of both income and property taxes paid. The average property tax refund for the 2016 tax year was $853, so this is not something to be ignored. Secondly, the Special Property Tax Refund is another refund from the state that targets a special group of taxpayers who have seen a tax increase of at least 12 percent and $100 over the prior year, which can be especially helpful in the first year after a referendum. There are no income limitations on this program; however, the gross tax increase cannot be the result of improvements to the home. Third, and a bit different, is the Senior Citizen Property Tax Deferral program which allows people age 65 and older with a certain household income to defer a portion of the property taxes on their home. The program is designed to help those living on a fixed income provide predictability by fixing the amount of property tax paid for the duration of a homeowner’s participation in the program. More on each of these programs can be found by referencing the M1-PR on the Minnesota Department of Revenue’s website.

It is no wonder that so many people attended our “Hot Property Tax Topics” workshop at the Leadership Conference! There is a lot to learn, and always a new development when it comes to property taxes and how they relate to school district budgets and to property taxpayers in your district. Hopefully, this article gives you more information to use at your school board meetings, and with your public.

Jodie Zesbaugh (jzesbaugh@ehlers-inc.com) is a Senior Municipal Advisor/ Vice President and Shelby McQuay (smcquay@ehlers-inc.com) is a Municipal Advisor for Ehlers. You can visit the Ehlers website at http://www.ehlers-inc.com.
Caitlin K.

Elk River Area School District
Wins 2018 Magna Award

District honored for its “Creating Value Through Mindfulness and Nature” program

Elk River Area’s “Creating Value Through Mindfulness and Nature” program was established initially out of crisis. Several traumatic incidents occurred, resulting in multiple deaths (i.e., student/staff suicides). The number of student/family crisis situations because of mental health issues increased dramatically within the same period. Since most of these instances involved underserved children, the district partnered with outside organizations and experts to learn as much as possible, provide extensive training, and embrace innovative and dynamic solutions that would be both sustainable and supported.

The district allocated resources in personnel and training relating to mindfulness and nature

In March 2018, Elk River Area School District was announced as a winner of the National School Boards Association’s Magna Awards. NSBA’s Magna Awards program have a long history of recognizing school district innovation and creativity in helping increase student achievement. “Equity in education” was the focus of the 2018 Magna Awards. Elk River Area was a recipient in the “5,000 to 20,000 Enrollment” category.
exploration. Hundreds of students are served weekly, as well as staff and families throughout more than 20 communities.

How does this program seek to remove the barriers to achievement?

The district’s efforts have helped make children more aware of their actions, their feelings, and their overall physical body as it pertains to learning and others.

Previously, children who were active or disruptive in class were often medicated or sent to planning rooms. Now, before classes even begin for the day, a focus is placed on movement that is constructive and affirming. Breathing tactics, exercises, and best practice strategies help all learners, and are now part of everyday instruction.

Elk River Area partnered with various organizations including, but not limited to the National Fish and Wildlife Service, Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, Arbor Day Foundation; and Dimensions Educational Research Foundation to create and provide what one child described as a “Sense of Wonder” at locations throughout the district. Nature Explore Center and Oak Savannah invite respectful collaboration, help remove barriers, and serve as a “comforting” learning space for all.

Evidence of the program’s success

The program has been running for seven years. It has evolved significantly, but results have been overwhelmingly positive and sustainable. Achievement on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment has improved at every level (elementary, middle, and high school) every year, in all three assessed content areas for the last seven years. Results from the achievement gap analysis indicate that Elk River Area is effectively closing the gap consistently in all three of these areas.

This article was reprinted with permission from the April 2018 edition of the National School Boards Association’s American School Board Journal.

Contact Elk River Area Superintendent Daniel Bittman at daniel.bittman@isd728.org for more information about his district’s award-winning program.

Visit https://www.nsba.org/newsroom/american-school-board-journal/magna-awards to learn more about the NSBA’s Magna Awards.
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As an occupational therapist, I was attuned to the needs of the students who were struggling with learning in the classroom. Many of these students receive therapy services to help them succeed. Until I began working for a workers’ compensation company, I didn’t think about the teachers, paraprofessionals, or other staff members who were often injured from students with aggressive behaviors.

The high number of injured staff members, coupled with the difficulty districts have in hiring and retaining paraprofessionals helped me realize that something is missing. De-escalation techniques and behavior management programs are being taught, but how about prevention through calming the sensory system? Of course, there is never a single answer, but awareness and training

The Impact of Challenging Behaviors in the Classroom

Calming students’ sensory systems is an effective technique to enhance safety and learning

By Theresa Parish

Risk Administration Services (RAS) is a participating insurer — for risk management products and services — in the MSBA Insurance Trust Risk Protection Program. Visit http://www.mnmsba.org/MSBAIT-RiskProtectionProgram for details.
about sensory processing can be a tool that will not only help decrease behaviors, but also improve focus and learning for the entire classroom.

Sensory processing is the way each and every one of us responds to incoming sensory information. Our brain takes that sensory information and helps our body to provide a response to it as necessary. We learn and grow through our senses, which include touch, sight, sound, smell, taste, proprioception, vestibular, and interoception. Children with developmental or intellectual issues may have problems with any of these sensations. However, the sensory system may not be fully developed until age 10; therefore, any child may struggle with sensory issues. These issues can present as behaviors such as hitting, kicking, yelling, throwing, biting, pulling hair, and even running. Any of these behaviors can lead to a staff injury.

The impacts of challenging behaviors reach further than a bite on the arm. Challenging behaviors have an impact on the teacher’s ability to teach. They may affect learning and safety for students. The student with challenging behaviors may be labeled as “naughty,” resulting in lowered self-esteem and social skills. A staff member who has been injured may have difficulty with fulfilling duties at work and/or at home. The school district itself can be affected by high injury rates and staff turnover.

Many teachers have heard of sensory processing issues and many have embraced creating a “sensory classroom,” but they continue to struggle. Therapists may be willing to help, but are often busy providing services and training on how to handle only those students who qualify for services. This leaves many teachers and paraprofessionals without strategies for the entire classroom.

Having that balance of getting enough information about sensory processing, but not too much information is important. It’s like Goldilocks, we need it to be “just right.”

Each school district is unique, but they have many of the same issues surrounding challenging behaviors. Finding the “just right” training for each district is important in order to create something that will last longer than the day of the training. Real changes need to occur. Understanding is important, but action and support from the school board, superintendents, and principals is absolutely necessary.

RAS courses provide anyone in the school district who interacts with students with a basic understanding of sensory processing, how it affects behavior, and what can be done to calm and organize the sensory system with quick and easy techniques for the entire classroom. All districts have access to the Challenging Behavior Injury Reduction Basic Courses. Please contact Theresa.Parish@Rascompanies.com for additional information.

It’s time to take a second look at the impact of challenging behaviors and what can be done to lessen the effects on staff and students now and into the future.

Theresa Parish is an occupational therapist and a Senior Ready Associate for the Ready Approach. She is an Ergonomics and Loss Control Specialist/Sensory Processing Specialist with Risk Administration Services (RAS).

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In any type of organization, individual and organizational learning occurs at various interrelated levels. In education, teachers often learn at an individual level as they engage in teaching. As they implement new or existing instructional practices, they reflect on the impact of those practices and make adjustments when necessary. A second type of learning occurs between individuals in a building. A structured example is Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), where teachers work together as a team to reflect upon and improve instructional practices. Learning can also occur between buildings and districts.

Recently, a new paradigm, Networked Improvement Communities (NICs), is emerging through the work of the Carnegie Foundation. NICs provide a structure for system leaders to engage with leaders from other districts who are trying to solve similar problems. The premise of an NIC is that when individuals from diverse contexts operate in a shared learning environment, their capacity to implement, evaluate, and refine solutions grows exponentially. We know that millions of educators are engaged in individual learning on a daily basis. Teachers are confronted with classroom problems and experiment with different ways to respond. We also know that many school districts across the country are implementing PLCs and other system initiatives to help teachers learn from each other to improve student outcomes. Many districts are obtaining positive results! In his book “Learning to Improve,” Tony Bryk says “We live in separate silos. Much of value is being learned, but it lives and dies with those who have learned it.” NICs are focused on breaking down these silos and identify where unusually positive outcomes are occurring and figuring out exactly what is being done to replicate similar outcomes in other contexts.

Now, you may be thinking that there are many organizations and networks of practice that could be considered NICs. However, consider the defining characteristics of a NIC, and determine whether the networks you belong to meet these characteristics.

- NICs are intentionally designed networks, grounded in improvement science, where participants have defined roles, responsibilities, and norms for membership.
NICs are focused on a common well-defined “aim” or problem of practice.

NICs engage in analyzing the problem to develop a hypothesis about why the problem is occurring. This information is used to generate solutions.

Each member works to develop, evaluate, and refine system improvements.

Conditions and variations in performance across the network are analyzed allowing participants to see things that even the best individual educator would miss.

Participants learn from each other about what works and doesn’t work in each context.

Comparing results and learning from each other through a NIC creates a sense of “moral urgency” and the recognition that if one district can move the needle on an important problem, other districts can and should be able to replicate solutions as well.

In contrast, we often see examples of positive outcomes in another district but often discount the data and explain away differences through factors such as better students, more resources, or better conditions.

CAREI is beginning the process of working to establish NIC’s for system leaders to tackle common problems of practice. We are moving away from the notion that researchers are “knowers” and school people are “doers” who should simply implement new findings from research to a framework where all players are improvers! Instead of implementing “initiatives” fast and wide, we want to learn fast and implement well in a variety of conditions and contexts. We want to refine quality processes, tools, and relationships to support complex work in different situations. Finally, we want to stop focusing on generating lists of what works, and instead, figure out what works, where, and why as the new gold standard.

If the idea of belonging to a NIC resonates with you, please give me a call at 651-303-4141 or email me at kgibbons@umn.edu. We are working to identify grants that would support this work and give district leaders a unique opportunity to implement solutions together and learn from each other. In addition, CAREI is leading a book study this year on “Learning to Improve,” and we plan to offer the book study again next year.

Kim Gibbons, Ph.D., is the Director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI). Learn more about CAREI at https://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei.
How Does the Minnesota School Boards Association Insurance Trust Benefit Public School Districts?

By Denise Drill, MSBA Director of MSBAIT and Financial Services

What is the Minnesota School Boards Association Insurance Trust (MSBAIT)?

MSBAIT was formed in 1972 by MSBA to provide pooled self-insurance and endorsed programs to member schools. The purpose of MSBAIT is to provide for its members and their employees and officials various forms of insurance, including any forms of permitted group insurance, for the benefit of school districts.

What is the criteria for being a member of the MSBAIT?

The first criteria for being a member of MSBAIT is you need to pay your dues or fees and join the MSBA. Then, review the products approved by the MSBAIT Trustees for your risk management solutions and make a purchase. The MSBAIT Trustees have approved contracts with risk management experts to bring stable, quality, cost-effective solutions to Minnesota public schools.

What is the mission of MSBAIT and how does it benefit public schools?

The MSBAIT Trustees are locally elected Minnesota school board members. They know the risk management issues facing Minnesota public schools and the funding constraints. The trustees try to develop solutions which provide cost-effective, quality services to assist Minnesota public school districts in either transferring the risk with insurance coverage or managing the risk with solid risk management tools. The commercial carriers and brokers with whom the trustees contract are top-rated, service-orientated entities. The trustees understand the importance of local control and the diverse differences in risk tolerance, personnel, location, and size of Minnesota public schools.

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- Accident Fund Insurance Company of America
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- EMC Insurance
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You are a member of MSBAIT if you purchase one or more of the “Advanced Protection Plans” using Marsh & McLennan Agency (MMA) for:

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What are the “Advanced Protection Plans” and why aren’t they included in my insurance coverage?

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MSBAIT works very closely with the MSBA, NIS, and MMA, to develop a wealth of risk management and loss control expertise.

Visit http://www.mnmsba.org/MSBAIT for more information about MSBAIT.

Denise Drill is MSBA’s Director of MSBAIT and Financial Services. Contact Denise at ddrill@mnmsba.org

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Zuki Ellis has been representing St. Paul her entire life.


“I have very fond memories of my experience there,” Ellis said. “I remember the name of every teacher I had from kindergarten to sixth grade.

It was where I went to have fun, it didn’t feel like school.”

Ellis then attended St. Paul’s Highland Park Junior High before graduating from Highland Park Senior High School in 1992. In 2011, she completed her bachelor’s degree at Metropolitan State University with a double major in Ethnic Studies and Social Science.

In November 2015, Ellis was elected to serve on the St. Paul School Board, where she now currently serves as board chair. During her tenure on the St. Paul Board, she has earned MSBA’s Leadership Development Certificate and Directors’ Award.

Ellis joined the MSBA Board of Directors in January 2017. As the MSBA Board Director of Director District 8, Ellis serves both Twin Cities school districts — hometown St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Zuki Ellis: Be in Your Community and Give Back in Service

MSBA Director District 8 Board Director serves St. Paul and Minneapolis

By Bruce Lombard
Within the interview below, Ellis tells why she decided to run for school board, reveals what she likes best about serving on the board, and shares her hope that MSBA can grow into a more diversified organization.

**MSBA: Why did you choose to run for the St. Paul School Board?**

**ZUKI ELLIS:** I ran for school board because I felt that my experience in the district as a parent would be valuable. I felt like parent voice wasn’t being heard, respected, or represented at the table when decisions in the district were being made. I had knowledge, background in special education as a parent, and parent leadership with PACER. I believed these would all be helpful in my role as a school board member.

I wanted to make a difference and support the students in the district. I grew up in St. Paul. This is my community, they are my children, and I wanted to show them that this is a path they could travel as well — the opportunity to be in your community and give back in service.

**MSBA: What is the most rewarding aspect about being a board member?**

**ZUKI ELLIS:** One of the most rewarding aspects about being a board member is getting to see my students in our many buildings — to see what school looks like and feels like for them. They generally have a lot to say and make several suggestions as well.

Each one of our schools are different, vibrant, and energizing. You learn something new about them with every visit. There is nothing like it.

I also love graduations and celebrations that honor the hard work, dedication, and commitment from our students. They do so much and any opportunity to acknowledge their accomplishments with their families is a privilege.

**MSBA: What advice would you give to a new school board member?**

**ZUKI ELLIS:** New board members, be patient with yourself. Ask lots of questions because you get a lot of information shared with you, at you, and it can be overwhelming. It is hard to carve out school board-specific work time to go over agendas and upcoming topics, and to jot down questions, concerns or clarifications.
It is important that you see yourself as a learner in this process and journey. Having a former school board member that served in your district as a mentor is good. They can offer perspective, and you can bounce ideas off of them. Support on multiple levels for this work is a bonus.

MSBA: As the Board Director for MSBA Director District 8, you represent the St. Paul and Minneapolis school boards. What are some of the bigger issues affecting those two districts?

ZUKI ELLIS: The St. Paul and Minneapolis school districts face some of the same issues as other districts around the state — such as needing more funding and greater support from our state Legislature, which would go a long way to adequately support our students in public education.

I am excited for the future of St. Paul Public Schools as we are currently in the middle of a community engagement process to ensure students, staff, families, partners, and our community have the opportunity to weigh in with perspective and input for the direction of the district. There is a lot of work to do and it is a good time to assess who we are, who we want to be, and work our new strategic plan that focuses on achievement for our students with educational outcomes preparing them for career and/or college.

MSBA: You joined the MSBA Board of Directors in 2017. What were your first impressions of MSBA as an organization?

ZUKI ELLIS: My first impression of MSBA as an organization was at the annual Leadership Conference that I attended in January 2016. I was disheartened by the lack of diversity in representation by elected school board members across the state of Minnesota.

I did meet a few board members of color, but we were very few in this very large group.

MSBA: What is it like to serve on the MSBA Delegate Assembly?

ZUKI ELLIS: The first time I attended the Delegate Assembly was in 2016, but attending the Delegate Assembly in 2017 was a different experience.
entirely. As an MSBA Board Director, I got to see and be a part of the process to see first drafts of resolutions, the changes, make suggestions, and select resolutions in preparation to be presented at the Delegate Assembly. There is a lot of work that goes into it.

I felt very supported by everyone in presenting the special education cross-subsidy resolution. That resolution passed at the Delegate Assembly this year, but did not the previous year. It was cool to present a resolution for the first time and have it pass.

MSBA asked every district to pass the special education and English language learner resolutions to take to Congress in Washington, D.C. St. Paul passed the resolutions two weeks later at our December board meeting. There is still work we are all trying to do together and that is challenging and an opportunity for us to support our students in Minnesota.

**MSBA: Have you enjoyed serving on the MSBA Board?**

**ZUKI ELLIS:** I have enjoyed my time on the MSBA Board. I recognize the importance that the organization has on a statewide level and the work it does nationally on behalf of our students in Minnesota and the elected school board directors they represent. I am learning a lot with each board meeting we have and look forward to connecting with colleagues as we discuss/share similarities, differences, experiences, challenges, and opportunities we have in our roles as elected board members who are heavily invested in our communities in so many ways.

I would like to see the MSBA Board have more members of color on it. I think that is a place I would definitely like to see MSBA grow a lot more.

Contact Zuki Ellis at zuki.ellis@spps.org.

View the complete MSBA Board of Directors at http://www.mnmsba.org/MSBABoard.

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**Zuki Ellis: Life Outside the Board**

**Family:** Husband, Greg; and sons, Jibri, Dominic (not pictured), and Zakias

**High school:** Highland Park High School (St. Paul)

**College:** Metropolitan State University

**Favorite movies:** “Love & Basketball,” “The Five Heartbeats,” “The Color Purple,” “Black Panther” and “The Day After Tomorrow.”

**Favorite TV shows:** My son says “Criminal Minds” is my favorite show. I also watch and love “House M.D.,” “Timeless,” the “Star Trek” TV series and movies, “The X-Files” TV series and movies, and “Luke Cage.”

**Favorite books:** “I Put A Spell On You: The Autobiography of Nina Simone,” “Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement” by Barbara Ransby, “Lose your Mother” by Saidiya Hartmann, and “I Know This Much Is True” by Wally Lamb.

**Favorite music:** Prince, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, Fleetwood Mac, Bruno Mars, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Motown music, and Marvin Gaye.

**Fun facts:** I love to crochet. I collect postcards from every state or city I visit.
MSBA’s Vendor Directory

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

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Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law allows school board members to attend a school board meeting from a remote location using interactive technology if compliance with the other provisions of the statute is accomplished. Some of the more well-known examples of interactive technology are Skype and GoToMeeting. The applicable statutory language can be found in M.S. 13D.02, Subd. 5, which provides the following:

“A school board conducting a meeting under this section may use interactive technology with an audio and visual link to conduct the meeting if the school board complies with all other requirements under this section.”

The “other requirements” referenced are found in the other subdivisions of M.S. 13.02 and include the following: From Subd. 1. Conditions:

“(1) all members of the body participating in the meeting, wherever their physical location, can hear and see one another and can hear and see all discussion and testimony presented at any location at which at least one member is present;
(2) members of the public present at the regular meeting location of the body can hear and see all discussion and testimony and all votes of members of the body;
(3) at least one member of the body is physically present at the regular meeting location; and
(4) each location at which a member of the body is present is open and accessible to the public.”

From Subd. 4. Notice of regular and all member sites:

“… the public body shall provide notice of the regular meeting location and notice of any site where a member of the public body will be participating in the meeting by interactive … [technology]. The timing and method of providing notice must be as described in section 13D.04 [Notice of Meetings].”

The interactive technology must work — both the audio and visual components. The remote locations must be open and accessible to the public. This means the public does not have to pay to enter the remote location. The law is silent, but a seemingly reasonable solution to a remote location with a locked door would be to post instructions to knock or ring a bell if the public wants to enter the remote location to see and hear the school board meeting.

Remote participation will almost always be a change to a regular meeting location for the remote participants, because few people will know at the time the regular meeting schedule is set where and when they will need to attend a regular meeting remotely. As a result, the notice requirements would fall under...
the special meeting requirements of M.S. 13D.04, which can be found in Subd. 2. The notice for a special meeting must be posted on the school district’s principal bulletin board or, if none, on the door of the school board’s usual meeting room and either (1) mailed or delivered to those who have requested notice, or (2) published in the official newspaper. Both of these notices must be accomplished three days before the meeting. The notices for remote participation at school board meetings must include the remote location(s).

Telephone or audio-only participation in school board meetings is not allowed under the Open Meeting Law unless the governor or his/her designee has declared an emergency for a major incident like a natural disaster, a hazardous materials incident, a national security threat, or a health pandemic. See Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 12 for a complete list. The provisions of M.S. 13D.015, “Meetings by Telephone or Other Electronic Means,” do not apply to school boards; these provisions apply only to certain state agencies, departments, or commissions.

With some advanced planning and the correct functioning technology, school board members can both travel and participate in school board meetings.

Cathy Miller is MSBA’s Director of Legal and Policy Services. Contact Cathy at cmiller@mnmsba.org.
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