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SEPTEMBER 2016
5.............Labor Day (no meetings)
6.............First Day School Can Be Held
8.............MSBA Advocacy Tour – Mankato & Rochester
13...........MSBA Advocacy Tour – North St. Paul & Worthington
14...........BoardBook Webinar
14...........MSBA Advocacy Tour – Bloomington & Spring Lake Park
15...........MSBA Advocacy Tour – Hopkins & Willmar
20...........MSBA Advocacy Tour – Sartell & Thief River Falls
21...........MSBA Advocacy Tour – Fergus Falls & Grand Rapids
22...........MSBA Advocacy Tour – Cloquet & Walker
30...........Last Day for Submitting Resolutions

OCTOBER 2016
3–4.........MASA Fall Conference
6–7.........Minnesota Association of Educational Office Professionals Conference
7–8.........MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
10..........Columbus Day Observed (optional holiday)
11..........Superintendent Evaluation Workshop
12..........Superintendent Evaluation Workshop
15..........MSBA Charter School Board Training
17..........Superintendent Evaluation Workshop
18..........Superintendent Evaluation Workshop
20..........MSBA Insurance Trust Annual Meeting
24..........Superintendent Evaluation Workshop
25..........Superintendent Evaluation Workshop
30..........Last Day for Submitting Resolutions

NOVEMBER 2016
3–4.........MASBO Fall Conference
6–7.........MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
7..........MSDLAF+ Annual Meeting
8..........Election Day (no meetings or activities
6 p.m. – 8 p.m.)
10..........MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meetings
            (Morton & Proctor)
11..........Veterans Day (no meetings)
12..........MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meetings
            (Rochester & St. Paul)
14–18.....American Education Week
15..........MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meetings
            (Little Falls & Thief River Falls)
24..........Thanksgiving Day (no meetings)
25..........Optional Holiday

MSBA thanks the students
of Ellen Hopkins Elementary
School in Moorhead for sharing their art in this issue.

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As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance the value of your MSBA membership, we will be sending you an MSBA Government Relations Survey via email in late September.

This Government Relations Survey follows last fall’s Communication Survey in a series of surveys that emerged from the MSBA Board of Directors’ strategic plan in February 2015.

The MSBA Government Relations staff’s advocacy work is critical. Each year, MSBA’s lobbyists develop and advocate for a legislative platform based on your input to improve public education. Your Government Relations team is comprised of three well-qualified individuals who are passionate about and committed to public education: Grace Keliher, Denise Dittrich and Kimberley Dunn Lewis.

Hopefully, you are already aware of the great work our Government Relations staff accomplishes on your behalf. We also hope you are aware of other services they provide — the MSBA Capitol Connections blog [https://msbacapitolconnections.com], video updates, the Monday Morning Coffee conference call, updates on Facebook and Twitter, and much more.

Your feedback to this Government Relations Survey is essential. This survey is a great opportunity for us to hear from you and find ways we can assist your advocacy efforts to better support our schools. Please take the time to respond to this survey. Let us know how our advocacy efforts at the state and federal level are working for you.

How do you see yourself as an advocate for public schools and our students? What advocacy tools do you find helpful? How could we improve our communications? What events do you use to get meaningful and relevant legislative news and updates? What are the barriers? What do you think MSBA does well in the advocacy field? Could we be better and more efficient? We want to hear from you.

Continuous improvement is a part of any learning organization. As a membership-driven association, it is important for MSBA not only to get your feedback but also to help prepare your association for the future.

Grace, Denise and Kimberley are tireless advocates for you at the state Capitol, but they need your feedback to do their jobs properly. Speaking of which, plan on attending one of the stops on the 2016 MSBA Statewide Advocacy Tour in September. This Tour is a conversation among board members, superintendents, your local legislators and the MSBA Government Relations team.

Each Advocacy Tour stop opens with networking and a light dinner. From there, one of your lobbyists will review pertinent outcomes from the 2016 legislative session and then look ahead to the 2017 session.

The Tour marks an additional opportunity for you to get involved with MSBA in order to make a difference in the lives of your students. Also, the Tour offers MSBA another avenue in collecting input from you on policy and funding matters that are important to you.

The Advocacy Tour made a big impact last year as we took your feedback on the teacher shortage crisis and turned it into the Teacher Shortage Act bill, which was passed by the Legislature last session.

Bring your ideas to one of these Advocacy Tour stops. We are stronger together.

Please visit http://www.mnmsba.org/AdvocacyTour for details about the Advocacy Tour.

Kirk Schneidawind is the Executive Director for the Minnesota School Boards Association. To reach him about this article, email him at kschneidawind@mnmsba.org.
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HELP YOUR STUDENTS TO LIMIT STRESS IN A STRESS-FILLED WORLD

By Kevin Donovan

In my public school experience, it seemed as if we didn’t have many worries in our “Leave It to Beaver” world. Of course, there was the normal childhood angst of what order one was picked for the softball team — last in my case. The one major concern I remember was the threat of nuclear attack. Several times a year we would practice a drill for that fear by forming lines outside the classroom and walking downstairs and into the basement where we saw the very iconic symbol that marked the nuclear fallout shelter. We would stand in this dark, dank room until the all-clear signal was given, and then it was back to our insulated innocent world.

Today, in our increasingly complex world, our students have more worries and concerns than ever before. Violence and intolerance are everywhere. We are only a smartwatch flip away from some traumatic event. How can we help shape policy to protect our students and promote healthy learning in a stress-limited way?

I have had the opportunity in the last couple of months to sit down with some thought leaders and discuss some great research that should enhance student learning and help our kids develop the critical skills and competencies for the 21st century.

Julie Dahl (a Minnesota Sleep Society member), Kyla Wahlstrom (from the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement), Chace Anderson (Wayzata Schools Superintendent) and I discussed school start times and the compelling evidence around student success based on when school begins. Early start times might work well for parent work schedules, bus schedules and after-school activities, but the research suggests that these start times are detrimental to the health and academic well-being of high school-aged students. Reach out to these individuals and others to see if later start times could be beneficial to your students.

Recently I heard a talk by Erin Walsh of Mind Positive Parenting on stress, brain development and resiliency in our students. Erin suggests that a little healthy stress is good for a child’s brain development, but many times our students are getting too much unhealthy stress or what she labels “toxic stress.” Science suggests that the developing human brain, when subjected to too much stress in a repetitive manner, can actually rewire the neural pathways. This change in child development can cause lasting harm to student behavior and success. What we can do to provide a healthy environment in our schools to ensure positive student outcomes was addressed by my third visit to a local expert in education, Kent Pekel.

Pekel is a longtime educator and CEO of the Search Institute. The vision statement of the Search Institute is “Discovering what kids need to succeed.” This local resource has been helping community coalitions and schools solve critical challenges in the lives of young people. One of the core findings is how important developmental relationships are in fostering psychological and social skills that are key and critical for success in education and life.

We as school leaders need to be aware of the current trends in education and student wellness. This is not the static world we experienced in our school years. We should strive to be at the forefront of education research and also help guide policy to help our students succeed in an exponentially changing world.

Kevin Donovan is the president of the Minnesota School Boards Association. To reach him about this column, email him at mnsbdonovan@comcast.net.
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Framing the Equity Conversation

Summer Seminar speaker Bukata Hayes framed the conversation of equity for school board members.

Keynote speaker Mary Fertakis researched some history of racism in Minnesota and how that impacts our state as our population becomes more diverse.

Moorhead Area School Board member Bill Tomhave had a laugh at the Ask MSBA booth with staff members Jeff Olson and Bill Kautt.

Board members discuss issues with each other during MSBA’s Early Bird on “A Racial Equity Approach to Critical Teacher Shortages.”

MSBA President Kevin Donovan kicked off the Summer Seminar.
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The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of upper secondary education and contemporary problems in Minnesota, Norway and Japan. The article concludes there are both differences and similarities in structure, content and issues like completion rate. Possible explanations to these differences are discussed. It is not the intent of this article to make comparisons of student achievement based on some test scores. Instead, it is to discuss organizational variables that may have an influence on student achievement.

The content of this article is a narrative based on available documents and visits to schools. When making comparisons, it is important to be aware of differences as well as similarities, and to take into consideration geographical, cultural, demographic and historical background. Such factors influence the local structure of education today. The roles of society, culture, parents and students need to be emphasized, and seem to be quite different in Minnesota, Norway and Japan.

One difference among the three systems is there is more national government control in Norway and Japan. Both have what is referred to as a “national school system” combined with freedom for the local school systems to reach national criteria.

All three systems for decades had a school system aimed to prepare students for higher education or a career. In order to accomplish this, it takes three years of studies of general subjects like national and foreign language, mathematics, social science, natural science and physical education. In Minnesota, only English as a national language is compulsory. In Norway and Japan, both the national language
and English as a foreign language are required and are introduced in the elementary grades. Norway also has a second foreign language requirement.

Vocational programs and subjects are elective tracks in all three systems, but the programs are structured in different ways. Minnesota has what can be referred to as “integrated structure.” This refers to the fact that some subjects are required and some are elective. However, they all count toward graduation. Classes counted toward graduation are offered beginning in the ninth grade. The type of vocational/technical subjects available for the students may vary from one school to another, and may depend on the local industry and local norms.

Norway and Japan have a dual system, although somewhat different from each other. In both countries, students after junior high school can choose between a general program and vocational programs. In Norway, about 48 percent of students choose a vocational program, and about 52 percent choose the general program. In Japan, there are far fewer students who choose a vocational program (about 24 percent), and far more students who choose to take the general program (about 74 percent). There might be historical and structural reasons for that. One factor might be that vocational training in Japan traditionally was provided by the companies, and is still very much so. The purpose was to ensure lifelong employment in the same company. Another factor might be that parents in Japan expect their children to have an academic career, enter a high-rank university, and in that way secure their future.

In Norway, vocational education is quite different from both Minnesota and Japan. First, the students after junior high school have to choose one of nine vocational programs. After two years in school, they have to get an apprentice contract with a company. The two apprentice years are paid, but the company is obliged to provide training according to a national standard, and provide a special examination that is both theoretical and practical. Those who pass the exam are certified as skilled workers and earn a special diploma. Such certification sets the standard for the level of pay.

When making comparisons, the roles of culture and family are factors to take into consideration, though not easy to identify. From literature and observations, education in Japan seems more influenced by a collective culture than in Norway and Minnesota. The Japanese culture tends to embrace and direct the younger generations until they are 18 years old. The family and society seems to have a strong influence on the children’s choices and their daily life. In Japan, there is a form of “soft” control, helping young people to avoid illegal activity. In some cases, hairstyle and other forms of appearance, such as school uniforms, also need to be within a certain standard. Some students say they feel this conformity is a pressure. On the other side, it makes life easier because differences related to fashion, conflicts on dress codes and other decisions are made easier. In Norway and Minnesota, students seem more left to their own choices, even about going to school. In order to prevent staying away from school, Norway recently passed a law that requires 90 percent attendance. If students do not attend, they may not earn a valid diploma. In Minnesota, attendance is one of the standards used to measure accountability; however, it is difficult to monitor.

continued on page 16 >
The issues facing education in all three systems are: (a) graduation rate, (b) dropouts, (c) achievement gap between students of differing social groups, (d) teacher preparation, (e) diversity, (f) principal leadership, and (g) preparing students for the future. In Minnesota, race as related to the predictable racial achievement gap is a major issue. In Japan, similar issues are discussed but Japan can still be regarded as a monoculture society. Since the 1970s, immigration has changed the social and cultural structure in Norway, especially in the cities; and today like Minnesota, it is a multicultural educational system. Some schools have multiple languages spoken within the class, and teachers are faced with addressing multicultural challenges. Further, poverty and its impact on education and student learning is an issue that is more significant in Minnesota than in Norway and Japan. Minnesota has the highest poverty rate of the three systems at about 22 percent. The majority are students of color, who may be the most likely to drop out of school. The poverty rate in Japan is about 16 percent, and has been increasing over the last years. However, poverty is not easily observed in Japan, maybe because it causes shame. Therefore most Japanese tend to be surprised when confronted with these figures. The poverty level in Norway is the lowest at about 5 percent.

In Minnesota, completion rate and “dropout” rate have been addressed as problems. The concept refers to the percentage of students entering secondary education in a certain year who pass the graduation criteria and graduate. However, there is no clear definition of the concept of completion among the three systems, and the criteria may vary from one country to another. These variations need to be considered when reading statistics from different countries like Norway and Japan and the state of Minnesota.

The completion rate in Norway is about 82 percent, but lower in some vocational programs. In Minnesota, a recent statistic from the Minnesota Department of Education states a goal for 90 percent completion rate by 2020. In Japan, the completion rate is about 96 percent – quite above the two others, and an interesting phenomenon. So far, we could not find any other country with similar or higher completion rate.

The available statistics in Norway indicate that completion rate and dropout rate correlates with individual, structural, cultural and socio-economic factors. In Norway, the students have to make a correct choice at the age of 15 or 16, and there are few chances to adjust after they have started in a certain program. Students who had problems or low marks or failed in primary school also tend to face problems later, and the risk for dropping out is high. Because of low scores, they tend to end up with second or third choice when entering secondary education, and to have problems when they apply for an apprentice contract. Consequently, these students have to take general courses as the final alternative. Family background and especially lack of support from family seems to have a negative effect on completion rate.

Minnesota differentiates clearly between completion rate and dropout in its statistics. It would be a great improvement if every state and every nation did the same. The Minnesota statistics also indicate similarities with Norway. In addition, there are factors like ethnicity and poverty that may affect the dropout and completion rate. White students have a high completion rate and low dropout rate — while
black, Hispanic and Native American students have a lower completion rate. The national statistics in Japan do not provide any further information to explain problems like dropout. However, there are research and reports indicating variations among schools, districts and socio-economic groups. When we count the number of students from the national statistics, actual completion rate seems to be lower – it may be lower than the official 96 percent – though some students may have transferred to correspondence or other programs.

Norway has a national examination system starting from lower secondary education (K8-K10). The purpose is to assure the same level of competence in all schools. This is also evident in the vocational programs. For instance, the criteria for an electrician are the same nationwide. Entrance to higher education is decided on the basis of the national examination and the sum of marks from upper secondary education.

The system in Japan is quite different. There is no national standard of student achievement. It is up to the local school to decide the criteria. Each college or university has its own entrance examination. This is similar to Minnesota. The competition to enter a high-rank university might be very difficult. Therefore, students study hard to pass such tests, and even take private classes like Juku to improve their scores. On the other hand, low-rank universities may be quite easy to enter, as long as you can pay the tuition fee.

Recent projections indicate that Minnesota and Norway will experience teacher shortage in the near future, especially in disciplines like special education, science, math and vocational education. In Japan, the situation seems different. Because of low birth rate and fewer students enrolled in school, it is difficult to get permanent employment as a teacher in Japan. Consequently, they do not predict a teacher shortage.

Regarding teacher and school leadership competency, laws have passed in Minnesota that hold teachers and school administrators accountable for student achievement. As much as 25 percent of a teacher’s performance evaluation can be directed to student achievement. As schools become more diverse in any system, there is a growing need for teachers to understand the impact of culture on learning.

As one can read, it is not a simple task to make educational comparisons between countries and states. Each brings unique variables in addressing its own educational system. We hope that will be taken into consideration when we say, “Why can’t our school system be like that other country?”

Jerry Robicheau, Ph.D., is vice chair of the Faribault School Board and Director of Administrative Licensure at Concordia University (St. Paul). Bjørn Magne Aakre, Ph.D., is a professor at NORD University in Nesna, Norway. Takayuki Kato is a PH.D. student at Nagoya University in Japan.
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Final rule changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) were recently announced. Initiated by a 2014 Executive Order directing the U.S. Secretary of Labor to “update and modernize” the overtime exemption rules, the final rule significantly increases the salary amount an employee must earn to meet the administrative, executive and professional exemptions from overtime pay. This article will briefly summarize the changes to the FLSA regulations made by the final rule as they relate to school district positions, as well as the relevant regulations that did not change.

The FLSA is a federal law that guarantees a minimum wage for all hours worked in a workweek and overtime pay at the rate of one and one-half times the employee’s regular rate of pay for hours worked over 40 in a workweek. The FLSA classifies employees as either nonexempt or exempt. Nonexempt employees are subject to all FLSA regulations. Exempt employees perform certain job duties and generally are not subject to the minimum wage and overtime pay provisions, but remain subject to other FLSA requirements. To be classified as exempt, the employee must meet a three-part

continued on page 20 >
test: (1) be paid on a salary basis, (2) at a minimum salary level, and (3) have the primary duty of performing exempt work.

What changed?
The new regulations affect the salary level test for exempt employees.

- The current regulations set the minimum salary level of $455 per workweek or $23,660 per year. The final rule increases the salary level to $913 per workweek or $47,476 per year. For a 10-month employee who works 40 workweeks in a year, the annual salary level is prorated to $36,520 ($913 x 40).

- With respect to the highly compensated employee exemption, the salary level increased from $100,000 annually including at least $455 per workweek to $134,004 annually including at least $913 per workweek.

- Additionally, the final rule provides for an automatic adjustment every three years beginning January 1, 2020.

While not regularly observed with school employees, the new regulations also allow nondiscretionary bonuses, incentives and commissions to be included in the calculation of weekly salary up to 10 percent of the salary level. Other requirements relating to using these amounts are also found in the new regulations.

What Didn’t Change?
Salary Basis Test
No changes were made to the salary basis test. To be exempt, an employee must still be paid on a salary basis, that is, each pay period the employee must regularly receive a predetermined amount constituting his or her compensation without regard to the quality or quantity of the work performed.

Job Duties Test
The job duties test also did not change. To qualify, the employee’s primary duty must meet certain factors set forth in the exemption.

Executive employees manage the school district or a recognized department thereof, including directing the work of two or more employees and having the authority to make decisions or recommendations regarding the status of those employees. A supervisor of buildings and grounds or transportation director may fall within this exemption.

Administrative employees have the primary duty of performing office or non-manual work directly related to the school district and exercise discretion and independent judgment with respect to significant matters. Positions in areas of finance, accounting or human resources may fall within this exemption. Also, academic administrative employees perform administrative functions directly related to academic instruction or training in the school district. Employees such as a superintendent, principal, curriculum director and academic counselor may fall within this exemption.

Professional employees perform work requiring knowledge of an advanced type in a field of science or learning customarily acquired by a prolonged course of specialized intellectual
instruction. Employees such as a school nurse or physical therapist may fall within this exemption. Also, employees whose primary duty is teaching, tutoring, instructing or lecturing in the activity of imparting knowledge and who are employed and engaged in this activity as a teacher in an educational establishment fall within the teacher exemption.

Employees who meet the computer employee or highly compensated employee exemptions are less often found in school districts. This, however, does not mean that they should not be considered when conducting an employee audit.

**Salary Level for Teachers and Academic Administrative Employees**

The salary level for teachers and academic administrative employees did not change. Teachers are not subject to the salary level or salary basis tests. Academic administrative employees can meet the salary level test if their salary is at least equal to the entrance salary for teachers in the school where they are employed.

**Record-keeping Requirements**

The FLSA recordkeeping requirements did not change. Hours worked must be tracked by nonexempt employees. The regulations provide that employers may use any timekeeping method they choose so long as it is complete and accurate.

**What’s Next?**

In light of this significant increase in the salary level test, some school employees who are currently treated as exempt will no longer meet all three parts of the test for exemption. Consequently, it will be important for school districts to conduct an audit of employees who are currently classified as “exempt” to determine whether their classification is affected by the final rule changes.

School districts will also need to determine how they will classify those employees who no longer meet the tests for exemption. The primary options include: reclassifying the employee as nonexempt and paying overtime for all hours worked over 40 in a workweek; adjusting the employee’s salary level to meet the new threshold; limiting the hours worked to 40 in a workweek; or some combination of the above. Options may be limited by a collective bargaining agreement.

School districts should give notice to affected employees as to how they will be affected with respect to payroll schedules and deductions. Provide training to newly classified nonexempt employees on timekeeping and overtime policies and procedures.

Like them or not, the new regulations are effective on December 1, 2016. Beginning your preparation now, however, will allow for more restful nights come mid-November.

This article is intended to provide timely information and does not constitute legal advice.

Michelle D. Kenney is an attorney with Knutson, Flynn & Deans, P.A.
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In the 1970s and 1980s, St. Louis Park — located on the western edge of Minneapolis — was a thriving, fast-growing community. The St. Louis Park School District was one of the largest school districts in Minnesota, graduating more than 800 students per year. Nearly all of the students were white and the economics of the area were strong.

Then, the community and school district began to age, and St. Louis Park began to transition into an inner-ring suburb. Enrollment began to drop and many schools were closed. By the late 1990s, it was not unusual for 40 percent of the ninth-grade students to fail at least one class, and the graduation rate was dropping. By the early 2000s, the senior class was approximately 280 students and the student demographics had shifted to approximately 60 percent white, 30 percent black and 10 percent Hispanic.

Angela Jerabek, the ninth-grade counselor at the time, applied for a small state grant to implement a homegrown ninth-grade program. Jerabek believed that decreasing the ninth-grade failure rate would lead to an increase in the graduation rate, an improved school climate, and a reduction in student at-risk behaviors.

St. Louis Park’s ninth-grade program did not require a change in administration or to the teachers in the school. The program did not

RAISING THE BARR

St. Louis Park program boosts achievement, graduation rates — and relationships

By Robert Metz

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change the students, the curriculum, or the facility. The program did not create a magnet program or a charter school. What the program did do was develop the ability of teachers to create intentional relationships with students and then to use those relationships to remove nonacademic barriers to learning. Most people are surprised to learn that students typically do not fail a high school class because they are not smart enough. At St. Louis Park High School, we have many different levels of courses and can almost always place a student in a course that matches his or her academic level. Most students fail a class because of nonacademic barriers.

After many years of development, the model is now known as Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR). There are eight main components to BARR. Each, on its own, is not radical, but together they produce outstanding results. For example, in a BARR school, teams of teachers meet regularly to get to know their students extremely well. They track student progress, and design and deliver interventions for the students they share. In addition, students participate in a social-emotional learning activity, called I-Time, on a weekly basis. These activities build trust and collegiality among the students and between the students and the teachers.

Today approximately 85 percent of St. Louis Park ninth-graders pass all of their classes, which in turn led to a four-year graduation rate of 93 percent in 2015. In addition, by building relationships with our black and Hispanic students and leveraging those relationships to reduce their ninth-grade failure rate, graduation rates for black and Hispanic students have increased dramatically. In 2015, 91.4 percent of black students and 95 percent of Hispanic students graduated in four years, compared to 62 percent of black students and 65.6 percent of Hispanic students statewide. Besides the improved student results, there are many other benefits to BARR.

We have experienced a tremendous shift in our ninth-grade class culture. Relationships are especially important for students who otherwise might not bond to school, or for students who may be facing personal struggles. Once students form a personal bond with someone at school, they begin to care about what happens in school. Once they begin to care about what happens in school, their success almost always improves.

BARR has also served as a very effective teacher development model. As teachers work in teams to problem-solve around individual students, the competitive and creative part of teaching is reignited. Experienced teachers mentor younger teachers, and younger teachers share new ideas with experienced teachers. When teacher teams see that they are really making a difference, that in and of itself becomes highly motivating. Today, many of our most experienced and well-respected teachers request to teach ninth grade.

It should be noted that we have been able to make and sustain these dramatic improvements with very little annual expense. In fact, we have actually saved money. Before implementing BARR, many students failed classes, requiring us to reteach sections of courses for students who needed to retake a course to earn credit. In addition, many of our students who were behind in their credits left our school to make up classes in nearby alternative schools, taking their state aid with them. With BARR, far fewer students fail a course, so the need to fund additional credit-recovery courses has lessened greatly, and the number of students who leave to attend alternative schools has slowed to a trickle.

BARR was awarded a federal Investment in Innovation (i3) Development Grant in 2010 and an i3 Validation Grant in 2013. BARR is now being used by dozens of schools across the country. I am convinced that BARR will work anywhere. BARR will work in big schools and small schools, rural schools and urban schools, private schools and public schools. I strongly encourage you to consider using this model in your school district.

Robert Metz is the superintendent of St. Louis Park Public Schools. You may contact him about this article at metz.robert@slpschools.org.
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Unraveling the Cost in Dollars and “Sense”

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

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Sleep is as important as food when it comes to a student’s ability to succeed. Educators recognize that hungry children are prone to a host of problems including an inability to concentrate, lack of energy or motivation, poor academic performance, tiredness, behavioral problems, and feeling sick [1]. Because of an awareness of this relationship between hunger and multiple health issues, teachers have been leading proponents for supportive meals. Schools are playing a more significant role in the well-being of the children in our communities, and the Minnesota Sleep Society hopes to engage more educators, parents and health care providers in taking sleep into account. While there are ongoing efforts to address hunger in the classroom with the 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act [2], there is not an equivalent act that ensures our state’s students are obtaining the required amount of sleep they need to be successful students. Therefore, students continue to starve despite being fed well. They are starving for sleep. A sleepy student cannot learn.

In order to assess how the students are faring in your school, review how your district policies may be having a negative impact on students’ sleep and discuss this topic with your superintendent. Compared to adults, children and teens need significantly more sleep to support their rapid mental and physical development. Yet the CDC reported in 2015 that only 27.3 percent of high school students nationwide get eight or more hours of sleep on an average school night [3]. Similar data can be found related to grade-school children. This sleep deprivation among our children and youth has risen to such a level that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has declared it a public health problem [4].

Raising awareness of this issue is critical. Health and school leaders can help parents become better educated about positive sleep practices, and children can get the sleep they need to be able to function at their best during the day. Unfortunately, most parents do not recognize how much sleep their child needs and falsely assume the amount of sleep their child is getting is adequate. The Minnesota Sleep Society has grave concerns that there has been a normalization of this.
Yet how would adults necessarily know what is the correct amount of sleep their child should obtain? The CDC reports that 30 percent of adults in Minnesota do not get the recommended seven-plus hours of sleep to promote optimal health and well-being [5]. If children’s behaviors are influenced by their parents, then the perpetuation of this problem will continue. Sleep is a necessity that should never be shortchanged. No parents would see it as appropriate that their child only received two meals a day. The same concern should be shown for the lack of sleep children get.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) has recently released updated recommendations which have been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) on the optimal amount of sleep for children of different ages: Teens should sleep eight to 10 hours per night, while younger children six to 12 years old need nine to 12 hours [6]. These recommendations are significant because they represent the first time that any professional organization has developed age-specific recommendations based on a rigorous, systematic review of the world’s scientific literature relating sleep duration to health, performance and safety.

There are both physiologic and social/environmental factors that place children at risk for sleep deprivation. From a physiologic standpoint, we all have an internal clock known as a “circadian clock” that tells us when we are sleepy at night. In teenagers, this clock tells them to be sleepy at a much later hour than adults. A common misbelief is that adolescents are tired, irritable or uncooperative because they choose to stay up too late, or are difficult to wake in the morning because they are lazy [7]. You cannot will a teenager to sleep at an earlier time, no more so than you could will a diabetic to control their sugars without insulin. It is not entirely under their control. From a social/environmental standpoint, the ability of a healthy child or teenager to obtain the proper amount of sleep is undermined by multiple factors including access to technology after dusk, homework and school start times, to name a few.

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Technology
As classrooms are becoming more technology-dependent, students are being asked to spend more time staring into a computer screen at home. This is having a negative impact on sleep. The intensity of the light emitted from these screens suppresses melatonin, the nocturnal hormone that promotes sleepiness. As a result of less melatonin production, students are kept awake well past the desired bedtime. The sensitivity of the light is even worse for pre-pubescent children. Children, like adults, should be winding down in preparation for sleep. Dimming the brightness and limiting access to the devices (e.g., phones, video games, laptops, TV) for 1 hour before bedtime are ways to help confront this problem. Technology is dessert to a child; they need to have “portion control” so they do not overindulge.

Homework
Expectations placed upon teenagers in regard to their homework may be overbearing. We need to re-evaluate the workload placed upon students after leaving school, as it directly impacts their bedtime. Stanford University researchers found in a survey of 10 high-performing high schools that the average student has 3.1 hours of homework a night. This was associated with greater stress and reduction in health — including sleep deprivation.

School Start Times
High school students start school too early. Teenagers go to bed later due to a normal physiologic shift in their circadian clocks, and they also naturally wake up later — often, later than the time they are expected to be awake and ready to learn on school days. In August 2014, the AAP released a policy statement recommending middle and high schools delay the start of class to 8:30 a.m. or later [8]. Fortunately, there is a movement across the country to embrace this expert advice. Schools are starting later. Pediatrician Judith Owens, MD, lead author of the policy statement, stated: “The research is clear that adolescents who get enough sleep have a reduced risk of being overweight or suffering depression, are less likely to be involved in automobile accidents, and have better grades, higher standardized test scores and an overall better quality of life. Studies have shown that delaying early school start times is one key factor that can help adolescents get the sleep they need to grow and learn.” [5]

If students are impaired upon entering the classroom due to lack of sleep, then they will not be energized and ready to learn. We will set them up to fail as lifelong learners, which can impact their abilities to be engaged and productive citizens as adults. Sleeping the number of recommended hours on a consistent basis is associated with better health.
outcomes including: improved attention, behavior, learning, memory, emotional regulation, quality of life, and mental and physical health. Improving the sleep habits for our state’s students will directly impact their success and overwhelmingly improve school culture. Chronic sleep loss in children and adolescents is one of the most common public health issues in the U.S. today [5].

We have seen a wave of districts in Minnesota who have advocated for changing school start times and identified ways to overcome obstacles. Many more districts are contemplating making this commitment to their students as well. By recognizing that adequate sleep is as important as hunger relief for the health and success of our children, the Minnesota Sleep Society is encouraging all districts to take the necessary steps to ensure their students have all the support they need to be successful.

Keith L. Cavanaugh, MD, FAAP, FCCP, authored this article on behalf of the Minnesota Sleep Society. Cavanaugh is the Medical Director at The Sleep Center at Children’s Hospital of Minnesota in St. Paul.

Contact the Minnesota Sleep Society at secretary@mnsleep.net for more information.

References:

1. HungerInOurSchools.org
3. CDC – Youth Risk Surveillance Survey 2015

Suggested sites for more information:

2. www.mnsleep.net
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KEY QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE WORLD’S BEST WORKFORCE

By Jeff Olson, MSBA Management Services Consultant

QUESTION: What is the World’s Best Workforce?

JEFF OLSON: The World’s Best Workforce (WBWF) legislation (M.S. 120B.11) was passed in 2013 with a focus on increasing student performance across all grade levels. The WBWF requires school districts to have: all children ready for school; all third-graders reading at grade level; all racial and achievement gaps closed; all students ready for career and college; and all students graduating from high school.

Each school district is required to create a plan to align programs, curriculum, and instruction to meet WBWF requirements. The success of the school district plan is measured by: the number of students who are ready for kindergarten; closing the achievement gap by student group; MCA scores; high school graduation rates; and measures of career and college readiness.

By law, school districts are required to develop a World’s Best Workforce Annual Report and a report summary on a yearly basis. The report summary needs to be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education by December 1 of each school year.

QUESTION: What are some additional requirements of the World’s Best Workforce?

JO: The WBWF requires local school boards to adopt a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan that supports teaching and learning and is aligned with the WBWF. The plan should include: clearly defined district and site goals focused on student achievement; a process for assessing each student’s progress in meeting academic standards; a system to periodically review and evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction; strategies for improving curriculum, instruction, and student achievement; educational effectiveness practices that develop and support teacher quality, performance, and effectiveness; and an annual budget to implement the strategic plan of the district.

In addition, school districts need to have a “District Advisory Committee” that is actively involved in an annual review and monitoring of the World’s Best Workforce Plan. To the extent possible, parents and other community members should comprise at least two-thirds of the advisory committee.

Also, districts are required to: hold an annual meeting to review and revise the goals of the WBWF Plan; publish a report on progress in meeting WBWF goals; periodically survey and report on affected constituents’ perceptions of their level of satisfaction with the school district.

QUESTION: What are the new World’s Best Workforce Requirements enacted by law in 2016?

JO: School districts are now required to do the following: administer a civics exam to ninth-grade students starting in the 2017–2018 school year; identify kindergarten through grade 2 students not reading at grade level prior to the end of the school year and provide alternate instruction to those students; establish a school site team to develop and implement strategies to improve instruction, curriculum, cultural competencies, and student achievement at the school site; and collect and report disaggregated student data for student outcome performance to the Minnesota Department of Education.

Contact Jeff Olson at jolson@mnmsba.org. Submit your Ask MSBA questions to Bruce Lombard at blombard@mnmsba.org.
IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Bemidji Area School Board member Ann Long Voelkner: “Advocacy is a critical component of being a successful board member”

By Bruce Lombard

Ann Long Voelkner joined the MSBA Board of Directors in 2011, where she represents Director District 12 (which covers northwest Minnesota). Ann has served on the Bemidji Area School Board since 2001.

Born in Fargo, Ann and her family moved often. Ann attended school in Iowa and Redwood Falls before landing in Duluth as a seventh-grader. Ann graduated from Duluth Central High School, left home to attend Bemidji State University and graduated from Michigan Technological University with a BS in Forestry.

She married her high school sweetheart, Kurt, around the time she launched her career with the USDA Forest Service. Ann and Kurt eventually moved to Bemidji, where he teaches eighth-graders science, outdoor skills and volunteerism.

Ann has worked for National Forests in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and now Minnesota. Now working in the Chippewa National Forest, Ann said she thoroughly enjoys her position as the Public Service Team Leader.

They have four children — all graduates of Bemidji High School — Meg, Travis, Andi and Kaila.

Recently, Ann spoke about why she decided to run for school board, what issues are affecting her MSBA Director District, and what it was like advocating for public education at the federal level.

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

ANN LONG VOELKNER: I ran and continue to run for a seat on my local school board because I believe in volunteerism and giving my skills back to the community. It is in honor of people that have given their services in the past, and I continually work to build a positive future. My husband and I have four children and, as a result, I had been an active member of my children’s schools PTO boards, a volunteer in their classrooms — and also engaged with 4-H, community
sports and music lessons. Serving on the school board was and continues to be for me an opportunity to be intensively engaged in public education and to positively work with board members, students, parents, staff, administration and legislators to create the best educational opportunities for our community’s public school students.

**MSBA:** How can school board members make the biggest impact?

**ALV:** I believe the biggest impact can be achieved by continually learning about public education; listening to students, parents, community and staff; making informed decisions; and bringing people together to build the future of our schools. Decisions are made by the whole board, and so the opportunity to bring forward what I know and be augmented by working with fellow board members to influence and create policy; build consensus amongst the board; and to hire excellent people to work with students and to guide the district creates the biggest positive impact on students’ success.

**MSBA:** You attended the NSBA Advocacy Institute in Washington, D.C., in June with some of your MSBA Board colleagues. What was that experience like?

**ALV:** Attending the National School Boards Association Advocacy Institute was an awesome experience. As we all know, local, state and national advocacy is a critical component of being a successful board member. The opportunity to advocate for the students of Minnesota in the Washington offices of our elected senators and representatives was very valuable. Each of our representatives knew us and they listened. We talked about the importance of school districts figuring out how best to adapt federal legislation to local conditions within the Every Student Succeeds Act and Child Nutrition programs; to reauthorize the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Act where students can learn technical and work skills in concert with local businesses; and the importance of increasing investments in Title I and IDEA. Now we need to continue that conversation to keep quality education at the forefront of legislation.

**MSBA:** Are there any specific issues that are currently affecting your Director District?

**ALV:** Most likely many of the issues we work with in northwest Minnesota mirror the rest of the state. The issues are inclusive of adequate funding for special education, addressing achievement gaps, right-sizing district facilities, and providing a quality education for all students. One specific example is that we have been planning for and implementing comprehensive career and technical education programs into the curriculum. We do a very good job at providing educational resources for college prep, and now we need to do the same for a meaningful, relevant career and technical education curriculum. Successful industry partnerships, certifications, and a pathway into postsecondary technical education and/or employment creates a successful program. That is our goal, and we are soon to begin implementation.
**MSBA:** What is the most rewarding thing about being a board member?

**ALV:** There are so many rewarding aspects. One of my favorites is high school graduation! Being able to congratulate and recognize students on their achievements is amazing. To see the pride and happiness of their families; to see teachers applauding the graduates; and to know all the people that have contributed to the success of our students is a joyful experience.

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

**ALV:** First, congratulations on becoming a school board member! It is a rewarding job and it’s a job with our community’s future — the kids — at the center of all we do. So my advice is to continually learn all you can about public education; be open-minded; listen to people; visit schools, students and staff; hire excellent people; develop goals and work toward them; and make informed decisions. Be passionate about providing a quality education for our students!

**MSBA:** What do you like most about being on the MSBA Board of Directors?

**ALV:** I am honored to represent northwestern Minnesota school boards on the MSBA Board of Directors. Service on the MSBA Board represents to me an opportunity to provide leadership as a director, while focusing on continual improvement of MSBA as it serves school boards across the state. I bring the perspective of northwestern Minnesota to conversations and decisions of the MSBA Board, and thoroughly enjoy working with and learning from fellow board members.

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

**ALV:** MSBA is a valuable resource for all public school board members from anywhere in Minnesota. If you have a question about governance, legislative activity, finance, personnel, policies, board development and training – the highly skilled MSBA staff is there to help. During my board service I have called MSBA a number of times to ask a variety of questions ranging from board development opportunities and financial questions to personnel/administrative guidance; and to talk about legislative strategies. Each conversation was extremely helpful — I received the help I needed and I was able to translate that into more effective local board governance. MSBA is the place where board members learn to lead!

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Bruce Lombard is MSBA’s Associate Director of Communications. Contact him at blombard@mnmsba.org.
Family: Husband Kurt teaches eighth-graders science, outdoor skills and volunteerism in the Bemidji Area School District. Daughter Meg and her husband Erik live in Bellingham, Washington. Meg has a Landscape Architect degree, but is finding her calling to be in K–8 education. Son Travis and his wife Laura are brand-new parents of Jaxon and live in Berthold, North Dakota, where Travis puts his Environmental Science degree to work monitoring air quality on oil fields. Daughter Andi, a very recent Civil Engineering graduate from the University of Minnesota Duluth, now works for Minnesota Department of Transportation in Bemidji. Daughter Kaila is a senior at Concordia College in Moorhead and is working really hard to achieve her goal of becoming a physician.

High school: Duluth Central High School

Favorite movie or TV show: “Waking Ned Devine”

Favorite book: “East of Eden” by John Steinbeck

Favorite music: Any music that my kids and husband play — guitar, violin, bassoon, piano and voice. I loved Adele’s July concert in St. Paul and The High Kings (an Irish folk group) at the Big Top Chautauqua in Wisconsin.

Favorite Minnesota food: Wild rice and fresh-caught campfire-fried walleye.

Fun fact: We built our own house with the help of family and friends. Every corner has a memory of the experience!
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Since presidential elections happen once every four years and many of us may have forgotten (or tried to forget) what presidential election season is like, this article will provide some reminders and suggestions to help school districts keep the focus on education — at least during the school day. Avoiding political advertising on television, on the radio, and in the newspaper outside the school day between now and November 8 may not be possible.

The policies your school district has in place may already provide the language needed or, at least, may be a good start. For example, Model Policy 505 deals with distribution of materials by students and employees on the school premises and Model Policy 904 is the corresponding policy for distribution of materials by people not affiliated with the school. A review of these policies would be a good idea and, if your school district has not adopted something like these policies, consider doing so before the first political fliers arrive in your hallways.

When dealing with political activities, the word for school districts to remember is “neutrality.” If school districts allow one candidate for office to come into school to speak, they must allow all candidates.

When school employees are on work time, they cannot wear buttons or apparel favoring a candidate, party, or one side of a ballot issue. The same rule of neutrality applies to classrooms and school-controlled communication platforms. Otherwise, the appearance is that the school employee or the school district itself is favoring a candidate or side.

The policy for student dress and appearance, 504, contains a reminder that students retain their right of free speech at school. This right is subject to certain limitations, including the school district’s ability to stop or prevent a disruption of or interference with education. Otherwise, students may “express … political … opinions by wearing apparel on which such messages are stated … as long as they are not lewd, vulgar, obscene, defamatory, profane, or do not advocate violence or harassment against others” or activities illegal for minors. See Model Policy 504, II.C.3. and II.E.

If your school district is looking for a specific policy covering political campaigns and activities, we have posted a sample policy (“Political Campaigns and Activities”) on our website at http://www.mnmsba.org/Resources/Policies (login required).

Contact Cathy Miller at cmiller@mnmsba.org.
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