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Our master planning process enabled the school district to determine their main priority needs which included an elementary school addition and a high school kitchen/dining addition.
## SEPTEMBER 2017

4............ Labor Day (no meetings)
5............ First Day School Can Be Held
12 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour, Thief River Falls & Worthington
13 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour, Grand Rapids & St. Peter
13 .......... Board Book Webinar 10 a.m.
14 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour, Cloquet & Rochester
19 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour, Sartell & St. Paul
20 .......... MSBA Advocacy Tour, Willmar & St. Paul
24-25..... MSBA Trust Edge Training, St. Cloud
29 .......... Last Day for Submitting Resolutions

## OCTOBER 2017

2–3......... MASA Fall Conference
5-6......... Minnesota Association of Educational Office Professionals Conference
8-9......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
9 .......... Columbus Day Observed (optional holiday)
11 .......... Board Book Webinar 10 a.m.
12 .......... MSBA Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV, Bemidji
13 .......... MSBA Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV, St. Cloud
14 .......... MSBA Building a High-Performance Team: Phase III, St. Cloud
14 .......... MSBA Charter School Board Training, St. Peter
17 .......... Superintendent Evaluation Workshop, Arden Hills
19 .......... MSBA Insurance Trust Annual Meeting
19-20..... Minnesota Educator Academy (MEA) Conference
23 .......... Superintendent Evaluation Workshop, Bemidji
24 .......... Superintendent Evaluation Workshop, Kasson-Mantorville
27 .......... MSBA Building a High-Performance Team: Phase III, St. Peter
28 .......... MSBA Representing Your Community Through Policy and Engagement: Phase IV, St. Peter

## NOVEMBER 2017

2–3......... MASBO Fall Conference
5-6......... MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
7 .......... Election Day (no meetings or activities 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.)
10 .......... Veterans Day Observed (no meetings)
11 .......... Veterans Day (no meetings)
13–17..... American Education Week
15 .......... Board Book Webinar 10 a.m.
15 .......... Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting
15 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting (tentative)
16 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting and Webinar (tentative)
18 .......... MSBA Pre-Delegate Assembly Meeting (tentative)
23 .......... Thanksgiving Day (no meetings)
24 .......... Optional Holiday

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MSBA thanks the students of Austin High School for sharing their art in this issue.

**COVER ART:**

Emily Anderson
As part of MSBA’s strategic goal of “meeting members’ needs,” we assured our boards that we would seek input on matters that are important to its leadership. MSBA was founded in 1920 by the state as an organization to provide training to school board members. The state of Minnesota required that public school board members “shall receive training in school finance and management” from MSBA. After nearly 100 years, training is still a fundamental element of the Association.

Training has changed every year as more mandates are added on public school districts – from the state Legislature to (in the 1970s) the federal government.

Every year we adapt our training to what the law requires and what our members need to become high-functioning school boards.

Later this month, school board members will have an opportunity to take MSBA’s annual short survey that will focus entirely on training. We want to know what you think of our current offerings, such as:

• The School Board Workshop Series (formerly known as Phase I, II, III and IV)
• The Officers’ Workshop: which trains board chairs, treasurers and clerks on their duties
• The Trust Edge: a new workshop focused on building trust among board members, staff and community
• The Negotiations Seminar: gives board members the tools needed to help negotiate complicated contracts

MSBA’s Board Development team is available to come right to your district’s door with inservices such as:

• Mutual Expectations – a facilitated presentation to develop or explain norms, behavior and responsibilities of board members so everyone is on the same page
• School Board Self-Evaluation – just added to our training menu – is a short online evaluation of board efficiency to give a more in-depth look at how your board operates
• Superintendent Search Workshop – helping boards take the initial steps by working with a consultant to hire a new superintendent

Our Leadership Conference — which features motivational keynote speakers and a wide variety of workshops — draws more than 2,000 public school board members and staff, while our Summer Seminar prepares board members for a new school year.

MSBA will also be asking you about what training you’d like to see that is not being offered, what days work best for training (is Monday best for Summer Seminar, or maybe a Friday instead), what times work best (if it is a 2-hour training, is it better to start at 5 p.m. or 7 p.m.). We also want to know why some members do not attend training. Is it the day of the week, time of day, distance to get to a regional site?

Lastly, we’ll be looking at ways that MSBA can use technology to provide some types of training. Maybe a webinar on a specific topic – something that members can watch 24/7 if they miss the original broadcast. Maybe a live stream of a workshop.

We know some of our training may never be adaptable to a webinar, but some areas could be offered. That’s why we encourage you to take our short survey.

Instead of conducting a large 60- to 100-question survey, it’s been pared down to 30 questions or less on the specific topic of training. This is the third of four surveys we’ve conducted. We started with communications, then government relations, and will end with policy services in 2018.

MSBA always takes your feedback seriously, and we know your comments will make our go-to training even better.

Contact Kirk Schneidawind at kschneidawind@mnmsba.org.
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A SCHOOL BOARD’S MISSION IS GUIDED BY A STRONG MISSION STATEMENT

By Kathy Green, MSBA President

School board members are elected officials charged in statute to govern school districts in providing for the education of public school children. We do that through complex development of policy and oversight of the management we have authorized to direct our vision. It all starts with a district’s mission statement. It can take hours, days, weeks and months to find the perfect combination of words to exact the purpose of our districts. Vital and dynamic debate can bring forth the essence of a district, unique in demographics and community.

The school board I serve on adopted our latest mission statement in 2015. “Engaging and Empowering ALL learners for life!” This is the declaration that is displayed in each educational area in our district from classrooms to administrative spaces. It is a constant reminder of our values and visions. It keeps our focus and priorities in balance. The word ALL is powerful and daunting – it acknowledges and values the diversity and uniqueness of each of our students, their talents to be developed, and needs that affect their ability to learn. The distribution of resources needs to address differentiation of curriculum and adaptation of delivery systems. “Learners for life” honors and respects that education is a continuum to the fullness of our existence. “Engaging and Empowering” speaks to the active role each member of our district plays in being relevant in the educational process and respecting a student’s potential to grow and contribute.

In order to support our mission statement, we needed to identify the underpinnings of our assertion. Core competencies that are present in our mission are teaching and learning to meet a diverse range of learners and creating environments to meet diverse learning needs. Our core values statement reads:

“High Expectations – of and from all people all the time.

Integrity – to have the courage to do what is right in the face of challenges.

Focus and Purpose – to operate with intention.

Innovation – to support creative processes and solutions.

In order to advance its mission and vision, the Austin Public Schools is dedicated to the following values, which represent the attitudes, behaviors and commitments to which it must adhere.

High Expectations – of and from all people all the time.

Integrity – to have the courage to do what is right in the face of challenges.

We, as a board, have committed to review our mission, values and vision each year to evaluate if our work is current and relevant. Our strategic plan is now being revised every three years. We found that it is no longer acceptable to stretch a strategic plan out further with the current rate of change we are experiencing.

I find my work on our mission statement is vital. It sets our district’s direction and focus. The clearer our goals, the easier the decision-making process is for each person in our district. Each of us can look to our mission to determine our course of action. Seven small words hold the essence of our district and the board’s commitment to our values.

Contact Kathy Green at kathyannegreen@gmail.com.
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Opening keynote speaker Willow Sweeney (Top 20 Training) presented “Living Above and Below the Line: Discovering The Power of Choice” during the MSBA Summer Seminar. More than 200 school leaders attended the seminar, held August 7 in Brooklyn Park.

Closing keynote speaker Tom Melcher — the Minnesota Department of Education’s Program Finance Division Director — provided members with a funding update.

MSBA’s Associate Director of Board Development Gail Gilman informed the membership about MSBA’s new electronic School Board Self-Evaluation program, which provides data to school boards to guide goals-setting for continual team improvement.

William Morris presented “Lock the Vote: 2017 Referendums and the Creation of Voter Stockpiles.”

Triton Public Schools Superintendent Brett Joyce delivered “Senior Seminar: A Cure for Senioritis” during an afternoon Fast Track Session.
HOW TO PASS A REFERENDUM

NORTH BRANCH AREA REGROUPS FOLLOWING NARROW FAILURE IN 2016, PASSES THREE BALLOT QUESTIONS IN 2017

By Patrick Tepoorten and Dr. Deb Henton

May 25, 2016, should have been a dark day at North Branch Area Public Schools (NBAPS), but it wasn’t. The previous day, May 24, NBAPS had put forth a single ballot question to fund facilities needs for the next several decades. It was a good proposal – $62.1 million for infrastructure improvements across the school district, and the addition of an activities center to be utilized by both the school district and the community at large. Despite all of the work contained in the proposal, falling debt allowed NBAPS to offer these improvements to the community in a tax-neutral package that would not raise school taxes from existing levels. Given high levels of taxation in Chisago County, school district staff and the school board felt the tax-neutral aspect of the referendum would appeal to voters and propel the referendum to victory. Instead, the school district lost on May 24, by 125 votes out of 2,210 votes cast.

Far from downtrodden, school district staff saw the 125-vote difference and were encouraged. Ballot questions previously brought forward to district residents resulted in significantly higher failure rates. On May 25, after canvassing a wide range of individuals involved with the May 24 initiative, Superintendent Deb Henton decided to move forward with another proposal to the school board as soon as feasible. School district staff and school board members knew that another “tax neutral” proposal would not be possible with rising costs, inflation, and falling debt. To be successful, NBAPS would have to ensure the proposal spoke to the concerns of the community – both in general and as pertaining to the May 24 proposal.

The first order of business was to get a better picture of what worked in the last election and what failed to garner necessary support. NBAPS contracted with Springsted Inc. to conduct a post-election analysis, and learned the following:

- Younger voters (18–24) accounted for 20 percent of votes cast despite representing 37 percent of registered voters.
• Election turnout by parents with students in grades K–12 was 27 percent, substantially lower than ideal.
• “Tax neutral” did not have a significant impact on how residents voted.
• Support for constructing additional facilities (activities center) was low.
• Voters expressed majority support for a tax increase of up to $50 a year.

While data about the election was being compiled, representatives from ATS&R (the school district’s design firm) and Kraus Anderson (construction manager) interviewed representatives from a wide range of interests and gathered reflections on the recent election. Groups included representatives from early childhood programming, school district union leadership, staff from the high school, middle school, and elementary school, coaches, and even veterans representatives, who were counting on a successful referendum to partner with the school district toward the construction of a veterans memorial in North Branch. As well, NBAPS used Springsted’s random sample survey questions to poll parents, staff, and community members at large.

What went wrong?

Taxes are high in Chisago County and attempts to raise property tax bills can be met with great scrutiny and even suspicion. The school district was therefore excited to put a proposal to the community that would address tens of millions of dollars in deferred maintenance needs across the district, create an activities facility for students and the community at large, and do so without generating increases to existing property tax bills. “Tax neutral” would be the message that carried the school district to victory.

Except it didn’t.

Surveys showed the school district overestimated the impact “tax neutral” would have on decision making. Roughly 40 percent said the tax neutral nature of the referendum didn’t have any impact at all. Of those who were unaware of the neutral impact, roughly 60 percent said it would not have changed how they voted. More survey results, along with the ATS&R/Kraus Anderson interviews, provided additional depth:

• It was felt too much emphasis had been placed on the activities facility and more attention to improvements that would impact academics was needed.
• With the inclusion of district-wide deferred maintenance and a detached activities center, there was concern the ballot question had been overly complicated.
• State law reads that referendum ballots must include language indicating to voters that a “yes” vote will result in a tax increase. It was felt by many this language indicated the school district had “lied” about the tax impact even though school district communications spoke directly to the dissonance between the statutory requirement and tax neutral language.
The district’s independently-provided tax calculator was considered suspect because it kept producing a result of “$0” no matter the property value – which was correct because the proposal was tax neutral, yet voters had difficulty understanding how this was possible.

- Staff revealed a number of internal issues:
  - Despite repeated attempts to have representation on the Facilities Study Group that had been in existence for three years, and multiple meetings held at sites and with union leadership, staff did not feel part of the decision-making process that led to the single question.
  - The school district did not do enough to make sure staff understood the details with confidence enough to speak to the referendum publicly.
  - Despite contentious teacher contract negotiation period over the winter leading up to May 24 hurt support for the referendum internally and in the community.
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  - The school district did not do enough to make sure staff understood the details with confidence enough to speak to the referendum publicly.
  - A contentious teacher contract negotiation period over the winter leading up to May 24 hurt support for the referendum internally and in the community.

- Voters wanted the opportunity to vote on deferred maintenance/academic improvements and activities facility expansion separately.

With dismal turnout among parents and younger voters, it became clear the school district had not done enough to encourage voting among those important demographic groups. The bottom line – the school district needed a new approach if it was to go back to the ballot box any time soon.

**A second chance**

With an “autopsy” of the last election complete, NBAPS got to work building toward a second chance on May 23, 2017, albeit with significant differences from the first attempt:

- Staff became more involved in creating the final product and much more “buy-in” was created as a result.
- The referendum was split into three questions, giving voters more choice. The questions separated activities from deferred maintenance/academics, and added dedicated funds for technology:
  - Question 1: Funds to maintain schools with safety and security improvements, deferred maintenance and updates to classrooms and other district facilities.
  - Question 2: Funds to improve athletic spaces with a gym addition to the high school and updates to both the middle school and high school gyms. (Question 2 is contingent on Question 1 – Question 2 can only pass if voters approve Question 1.)
  - Question 3: Funds to invest in classroom technology to support student learning in a rapidly changing world (not contingent on Question 1).
- Barb Nicol Consulting was hired to help the district clarify its message to voters, organize the campaign, train staff in her “site team” process to create greater awareness and support, and guide the school district in reaching parents and younger voters.
- School district leadership attended Springsted’s presentation, “Why Referenda Fail,” and a review of post-election analysis and survey methodology.
- Video was used to share the school district’s message with voters.
  - Primary video displayed on referendum website and social media.
    - Shown during school district events during election season.
  - Short videos were created for each question and provided with question details.
  - 30-second version created for the movie theater during election season, played before each movie.
- NBAPS spared no opportunity to reach out early and often to voters.
District leadership and consultants used January and February of 2017 to work on messaging and materials, rather than starting a new campaign immediately. Staff were provided some basic “quick facts” that could be used to respond to general questions about the referendum, and scripts were provided for events in specific areas, such as the gymnasiums and auditorium, explaining some of the improvements that could be expected if the referendum were successful.

Soon enough it was March and time to unveil the school district’s referendum materials to the public. NBAPS’ history with Thoughtexchange® made it the perfect vehicle for getting the word out. The school district had used Thoughtexchange three times with great success – collecting feedback about general concerns and the 2016 referendum over the previous year. Thoughtexchange was a product that families and community members had a comfort level with using, which made it more likely they would be willing to do so again.

NBAPS used Thoughtexchange to disseminate the school district’s referendum materials to all families and staff, as well as community members, in March, and over the next few weeks the school district collected feedback on the referendum. Using this approach allowed NBAPS to identify concerns with the materials and the referendum early in the process and adjust accordingly. The responses received by the school district guided the “Frequently Asked Questions” section of the website, and provided insight into questions and concerns that would be addressed in follow-up communications.

Meanwhile, there was much happening behind the scenes. Principals and select volunteer staff were being trained in the Nicol “site team” process and bringing knowledge and materials back to each site. The superintendent, the mayor of the City of North Branch, and school district teacher and support staff unions reached out to union leadership in St. Paul and not only generated monetary donations to the citizens advocacy committee, but provided telephones, software, and voter lists for volunteer calling efforts. Regional representatives of the Laborers International Union of North America offered – as it had in the previous election – to provide funds and people to the effort, and contacted its local members as well.

The citizens committee began planning its push to election day, including a variety of efforts to reach voters. The site teams were fertile ground for seeking volunteers for the many evenings of calling that took place between March and May, as well as the citizen committee’s door-knocking event the weekend prior to the election. The school district uses a tool called GuideK12™ to keep track of families in the district. The citizens committee was able to request and receive this public information, and used it to determine “zones,” or to target either individual parent households in the district with high concentrations of school district families or parents of students who were either non-registered voters, or had voted infrequently. The volunteer door-knocking lists had specific addresses to contact, rather than just entire neighborhoods. Thus, the citizens committee volunteers were able to maximize the efforts of those volunteers who braved the chilly, rainy weather that May 21.

One primary difference between how NBAPS handled the 2016 election and the 2017 election was around absentee ballots. In 2016, absentee voting was treated traditionally, and though it was offered as an option to voters, it was not stressed in any way other than to share the information through school district mailings. In 2017 NBAPS placed much more emphasis on “early voting” and encouraged parents/guardians to vote early at every opportunity. In April and May, the school district extended district office hours on numerous days to accommodate incoming voters from events around the school district. Extended hours were available for voting during the evening of the elementary school carnival and early childhood conferences, along with the evening prior to the day of the election. This strategy would provide dividends on May 23, especially for Question 2, which failed at the ballot box on May 23 but was carried to success by early votes.
The difference in early ballots is staggering. In 2016, 213 early votes were tallied in the district’s defeat at the ballot box. In 2017, 770 early votes were cast. In all three questions, early votes went more than 2-to-1 in favor of the question.

Unified and Motivated

All of the efforts listed thus far had an impact on the election. Any one effort could have been the one that put the school district “over the top” in the 2017 election. Behind each effort, however, were people willing to do the work. The story of this election for NBAPS is the story of a school district community unified in its vision for the future, and motivated to make that vision a reality. Yes, evening phone calls and other efforts were effective, but they could not have been effective without the volume of volunteers willing to take their personal time to make it effective. Here are some examples of efforts made by district staff:

- Use of social media increased tremendously. Facebook® Live was utilized in May in the week prior to the election. The superintendent “friended” as many staff members on Facebook as would accept her invitation. She sent out countless positive messages regarding the school district and then some election reminders.
- The citizens committee met with the chair and vice-chair of the school board weekly on Saturday mornings during the last two months of the campaign to plan activities in support of the election.
- Referendum materials were provided at the North Branch Area Chamber of Commerce’s “Community Expo” in March, attended by hundreds of residents.
- District staff attended public city council meetings in North Branch, Stacy, and Harris; and met publicly with civic organizations such as veterans groups, Rotary, Lions, and the Chamber of Commerce. The video was shown at all of these meetings.
- A petting zoo was held the late afternoon and early evening of the election. Adults who had an “I voted” sticker on received a free Dairy Queen treat from the citizens committee.
- Track and Field Day was held the day of the election. The citizens committee passed out bottles of water to attendees and reminded them to vote.
- The day of the election, a well-known retired staff member volunteered her time to stand in the parking lot on election day to greet voters and direct traffic.
- GuideK12 was used to map neighborhoods and target specific households with information the Saturday prior to the election.
- A lit drop and rally were held the Saturday before the election and prior to volunteers knocking on doors identified through the use of GuideK12.
- A button campaign with the campaign logo was initiated internally and externally.
- The teachers union and the support staff union held a joint general membership meeting after school on the day of the election in which they reminded staff to vote.
- Middle school students spread their “We R Red” campaign throughout the grounds of the schools the Friday prior to the election by tying red ribbons to trees.
- Community members tied red ribbons to their mailboxes and trees in support of the election.
- A message was developed by the activities director and shared with NBAPS coaches to be sent by coaches to related youth sports organizations.
- Weekly meetings occurred with a core team that reviewed activities and planned others.
- The superintendent shared all referendum materials with staff using “Supt.’s Bulletin,” an email newsletter to all staff.
- Twice monthly meetings of the full administrative team took place to discuss ways to further communication about the election.
Staff initiative – “What I Like About North Branch Area Public Schools” a social media campaign leading up to election day, was conducted on Facebook.

An opinion leader list was developed by the administrative team, and each person on the list was contacted by an administrator who discussed the election with them.

Superintendent Henton, Community Ed Director Brett Carlson, and Community Relations Coordinator Pat Tepoorten were the featured speakers at a North Branch Area Chamber of Commerce “Lunch and Learn.”

A text message to families reminding them to vote was sent late on the day of the vote.

A letter was mailed to all retired resident staff, reminding of the election and early voting.

A staff email signature was created using the referendum logo, which was “click through” to the referendum website, and distributed to all staff.

Periodic emails regarding the election were sent to families by the principals.

Election judges were hired for all days of early voting.

In light of crowding problems in the 2016 election, NBAPS insisted upon additional election judges for the spring of 2017, as well as more machines and the addition of traffic control.

In May, sites held referendum meetings with staff to field questions and ensure staff had accurate information.

Unions, both local and regional, supported the Vote Yes campaign with contributions, phone banks and door knocking. Worked with unions to focus efforts on parent households.

Signage and sandwich boards were placed at events promoting early voting.

Administrators were encouraged to contact key opinion leaders personally via phone, email or text the day before or the day of reminding them of the vote.

The high school principal met with high school seniors and shared information about the election in the weeks leading up to the vote. Students who voted the day of the election could be considered an excused tardy with an “I voted” sticker.

Postcards were created and distributed to staff to be filled out personally and mailed to families. The postcard included website, early voting, and election day details.

The above list is far from exhaustive. It is really only those things that were coordinated or documented. It does not account for all of the individuals who carried the district’s message to social media, talked with friends and neighbors, notified the school district of potential issues or rumors. It can’t account for the staff member who drove elderly neighbors to the polls, or the community member with the courage to publicly respond to misinformation on social media.

The truth may very well be that the 2017 referendum was won on May 24, 2016. That was the day each and every person who had spent years working toward a better future for the students and community realized that goal was actually within reach. Unified in that goal, and with a strong desire to see it realized, NBAPS supporters needed only the road map. Springsted, Nicol Consulting, Thoughtexchange®, GuideK12™, the school board, and education and labor unions provided that map, and the citizens committee, district staff and its supporters not only followed it, they added numerous landmarks along the way, motivated by the idea that, at last, a long-sought destination was within reach.

Patrick Tepoorten is the community relations coordinator and Dr. Deb Henton is the superintendent of North Branch Area Schools. Contact them at ptepoorten@isd138.org or dhenton@isd138.org.
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From serious allegations to parent interference, school board members and administrators receive any number of emails and calls from parents complaining about coaches during the school year. When other community members start voicing support for the coach, the school district can end up squarely in the middle of a community-wide debate. Separating parents’ valid concerns of misconduct from malcontents can be a challenge for even the most seasoned school administrators.

As a result, school districts must be prepared to properly address the issues that arise when parents, students, or community members make complaints about a coach. The school district must tread carefully, ensuring that the coach receives due process, while at the same time assuring the public that the complaints are being handled appropriately. The Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (MGDPA) and, to the extent there is information about current or former students, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), imposes restrictions on what information can be shared publicly. This can result in practical difficulties associated with communication to the public.

Parents are increasingly spending significant time and money on youth athletics. In 2016, TD Ameritrade released a survey of 1,001 parents whose children participate or have participated in a “highly competitive or elite club team.” Parents reported spending $100 to $500 per month, per child, with nearly 20 percent spending at least $1,000 or more. Due to the increased investment in sports by parents, it is not unusual for complaints about coaches to be made directly to the school board. School board members should be encouraged to direct such complaints to the athletic director or other appropriate administrators for handling. School board members should not become involved, unless or until formal board action is necessary.

Complaints made about coaches should be taken seriously. Regardless of how a complaint is presented, the worst reaction to a complaint is to do nothing – or appear to do nothing. Even if the initial allegations appear trivial, school district administrators should not make comments that
minimize the significance of the complaint. Instead, school officials should assure the complainant that the school district will look into the matter and take any appropriate actions.

After receiving a complaint, the school district should follow its internal policies and procedures for investigating complaints. The nature of the allegations will determine the scope of the investigation. While many complaints will fall into the playing time category, which generally can be resolved quickly, some complaints will require more extensive investigation. School districts should seriously consider retaining an attorney or other outside investigator for serious complaints, including allegations of hazing, unlawful harassment or discrimination.

Many students and parents are reluctant to come forward with concerns about coaches because they fear retaliation during practice, reduced playing time during games, or that the complaint will result in particular student(s) being cut from a team. To address this concern, administrators should assure the complainant that retaliation is not tolerated and ask the complainant to report any further alleged misconduct immediately. During the investigation, administration should also direct the coach not to retaliate against any person that the coach believes has complained, or provided information, about the coach’s conduct. Any allegations of retaliation should also be investigated.

At some point, the school district may wish to remove the coach from his or her duties. Head varsity coaches have an annual, one-year contract as a coach. The school board may or may not renew the contract for the following year as the board sees fit. However, prior to taking action to non-renew a head varsity coach, the school board needs to be aware of the procedural rights of the coach. These rights include timely notification to the coach of the decision to non-renew and the coach’s right to request the reasons, in writing, for the non-renewal decision.

Finally, if requested by the coach, the school board must provide the coach with a reasonable opportunity to respond to the reasons for non-renewal at a school board meeting. However, the coach’s right to a response is limited. For instance, the coach does not have the right to a hearing before a neutral hearing officer. The coach also does not have the right to subpoena or cross-examine witnesses.

In 2013, the Legislature added statutory language that the “existence of parent complaints” must not be the “sole” reason for a school board to not renew a coaching contract. This new statutory language has resulted in coaches challenging school boards’ decisions to non-renew their contracts. The Minnesota Court of Appeals has provided clarification that school boards faced with parent complaints about a head coach may still decline to renew a coaching contract for a different reason. Further, school boards can elect to non-renew head varsity coaches based on the substance of complaints, regardless of whether the complaints originated with parents.

For more serious misconduct, a school board may wish to consider termination of a coach’s duties during the existing contract. Coaches have greater procedural rights associated with a termination during the life of an existing contract. As a result, school districts are advised to discuss their options with legal counsel.

Parents’ increased focus on athletics, combined with the competing pressures between winning games and providing a positive experience for student-athletes, has resulted in more complaints against coaches. School districts must use a defined process to funnel complaints to appropriate administrators, investigate the complaints promptly and then take appropriate action – always keeping in mind the procedural rights of the coaches. Having a process in place will assist in separating out any valid complaints and help to minimize public disruption.

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153 Cancer Cases reported in 2015 related to artificial turf.
Being a school leader in today’s era of accountability may seem like a daunting task. There is increased pressure for results, and often, our stakeholders want to see immediate improvement. Many educators suffer from a common affliction called “solutionitis.” “Solutionitis” occurs when we jump quickly on a solution before completely understanding the problem. Popular ideas move quickly, and these ideas become the new hammer for fixing the achievement gap. Often, these new ideas lack a solid research base, so improvements are not seen. And so the cycle continues to find the next new idea.

To avoid “solutionitis,” effective leadership is critical. We know that leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student achievement. Research has shown that principals are responsible for 25 percent of school effects on student learning (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). In 2009, the Wallace Foundation produced study results indicating that, when, (a) principals focus their efforts on improving instruction, (b) teachers trust the principal, and (c) the principal works to develop shared leadership within the building, higher scores on standardized tests of achievement result. Key leadership responsibilities include communicating a vision of high standards, creating an engaging and safe environment, encouraging leadership by others, focusing on improving instruction using data, and improving outcomes through collaboration. Meeting these responsibilities will require that instructional leaders are results-oriented and data-informed. They must be responsive to feedback and be effective communicators. Above all, they must work to build consensus and articulate a vision for the building that aligns with district priorities.

Many school leaders have read the seminal work of John Hattie (e.g., Visible Learning, 2009). Hattie sought to identify the most powerful variables associated with student achievement. What you may not realize is that Hattie continues to update his original research. In 2016, Hattie ranked collective teacher efficacy as the No. 1 factor influencing student achievement based on a meta-analysis by Eells (2011). Collective teacher efficacy involves helping all staff to understand that the way they go about their work has a significant impact on student results – for better or worse. In fact, collective efficacy and student achievement are strongly related with an effect size of 1.57. This is more than double the effect size of feedback (0.75) and is beyond three times more powerful and predictive than socio-economic status (0.52). They are also three
times more likely to influence student achievement than student motivation and concentration, persistence, and engagement (0.48).

Effective leaders realize that putting vision into action is only possible through setting ambitious goals and mobilizing their teams to meet these goals through challenging staff not to use other factors such as home life, motivation, and/or socio-economic status as an excuse for poor progress. Although these factors may hinder learning, leaders need to convey that a great teacher will always try to make a difference despite these factors, and they will often succeed.

Effective leaders enable collective teacher efficacy through developing teacher leaders or “shared leadership” within the school. In order to advance teacher influence, administrators can identify areas that might be considered for school improvement (e.g., school environment, delivery of curriculum, professional learning, collective efficacy, parental involvement, etc.) and begin to increase opportunities for teachers to become involved in meaningful ways. Collective teacher efficacy is also enabled when there is a clear set of goals that are measurable and appropriately challenging, and consensus has been reached on these goals. Finally, effective leaders build collective efficacy by being responsive and showing concern and respect for their staff. Responsive leaders demonstrate an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and protect teachers from issues and influences that detract from their teaching time or focus. This includes providing teachers with materials and learning opportunities necessary for the successful execution of their job. When principals demonstrate the ability to respond to the needs of the staff, teachers feel supported and they have a greater belief in their collective ability to affect student outcomes.

The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) will continue to work with school leaders to improve collective teacher efficacy through identifying evidence-based practices, scaling these practices up in schools, and using data to evaluate the impact of these practices. One of the ways we partner with school leaders is through CAREI Assembly Membership. During the 2017–2018 school year, we will have three levels of membership available. A basic membership involves:

- Participation in four, half-day Assembly networking meetings wherein school districts share issues and strategies for dealing with today’s complex educational reforms. Assembly meetings are accessible online, as well as in person, so you can choose to participate in the discussions from your office.
- Access to the monthly “Research Watch” electronic newsletter. Each issue highlights a summary of research studies published that will be of interest to you as a district leader. Topical areas include leadership, social-emotional learning, teaching and learning, assessment, and unique learners.
- Access to the “Members Only” section of the new CAREI website where valuable resources will be shared.

CAREI membership is one of the best ways that a school district can stay connected to the emerging knowledge about educational policy and practice. We sincerely hope that you will join our collaboration. You can enroll your district in the District Assembly via the CAREI website at https://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/member-registration.html. In addition, please feel free to contact me at kgibbons@umn.edu.

Kim Gibbons, Ph.D., is the Associate Director of CAREI. CAREI is the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota. Learn more about CAREI at https://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei.
The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires each state to design their own accountability system to measure schools – restoring decision-making back to the states and local school boards. For the first time, states are required to include one factor that goes beyond testing and gets at school quality or student success when measuring school performance.

Minnesota has chosen to measure chronic absenteeism, or consistent attendance, as one of its five key indicators to school performance. Minnesota is not alone in its focus on absenteeism. Nearly all the states that have submitted ESSA plans have included chronic absenteeism as a part of their new accountability system. This new focus has motivated MSBA to further research the topic.

**Why Chronic Absenteeism Matters**

Chronic absenteeism, as defined by the U.S. Government, is missing 10 percent or more of the available school days. Chronic absenteeism has been found to be an early warning sign of low academic achievement and a predictor of those who may drop out of high school. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, about one in seven of the nation’s students missed 15 days or more in 2014. Nationwide, nearly 10 percent of kindergartners and first graders are chronically absent. Research shows absenteeism can lead to academic deficiencies and a higher likelihood of dropping out of high school.

Frequent absenteeism at the preschool, kindergarten and first-grade levels inhibits students’ ability to learn to read by the third grade. The National Campaign for Grade Level Reading, a collaborative effort by dozens of funders to ensure more children master reading by the end of third grade, recognizes chronic elementary absenteeism as a significant problem that must be addressed.

**The (Bus) Route to Better Attendance**

Transportation plays a bigger role in attendance than one might think. Michael Gottfried, an associate professor of education policy at the University of California Santa Barbara, and his colleagues tracked

“We know in pre-K and K who our students most at risk are, those students who are missing 15, 20, 25 days a year. We know right there if we don’t intervene these are our future dropouts.”

— then-U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, March 2011

**Minnesota will focus on boosting attendance rates under the Every Student Succeeds Act**

*By Denise Dittrich and Kimberley Dunn Lewis*
“It comes down to logistics and routines,” Michael Gottfried said. “The school bus is an easy lever. If the bus comes every day at 7 o’clock, you are more likely to get your kids ready to get on the bus” than if parents had to drive or walk the child themselves.

Attendance for more than 14,000 kindergartners in the 2010–2011 school year and compared how students got to school. The 30 percent of students who took school district transportation missed fewer days and were two percentage points less likely to be chronically absent than students who walked, biked or were driven by parents, by the spring semester.

**It All Adds Up**

In secondary school, skipping class can often “fly under the radar” of administrators. Researchers Camille Whitney of Mindful Schools and Ching Lou of Stanford University tracked class-by-class attendance for more than 50,000 middle school and high school students in an urban school district from 2007 to 2013. They found that missing individual classes adds up to missed learning days. Once the researchers totaled the absences, the chronic absenteeism rate rose from 9 percent to 24 percent, a staggering percentage; and yet it may be “low-hanging fruit” for districts to make a significant impact on attendance rates.

One new study by the Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest suggests early warning systems can help school officials catch students who start to miss early in the year, before they go fully off-track. The study found schools that implemented an early warning intervention and monitoring system — a seven-step data tool that tracks absences and other indicators — had significantly fewer students who were chronically absent than control schools — 10 percent versus 14 percent. Moreover, overall grade point averages were higher at the schools using early warning systems, and significantly fewer students in those schools failed one or more classes than the students in the control group schools.

**Minnesota Plan for Consistent Attendance**

If school boards are to improve educational achievement, close the achievement gap and increase graduation rates, chronic absenteeism must be addressed. Minnesota’s new ESSA plan will help bring issues to light with an ambitious statewide goal of having all students in attendance at least 90 percent of the time; the school’s goal will be 95 percent with no student group falling below 90 percent. Our current consistent attendance rate must improve by just over 6 percentage points, since our current rate is about 88.6 percent throughout Minnesota.

The goal is meaningful; however, we must not lose sight of the fact that percentages can draw attention away from the actual number of students impacted. Many educators mistakenly assume a 95 percent ADA rate is a proven indicator of good attendance. The Attendance Works and the Family Policy Center provide an example: in a school of 200 students with a 95 percent average daily attendance, 30 percent, or 60 of the students, could be missing nearly a month of school. Moving the example closer to home, in a large metropolitan school

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**Information courtesy of Stephanie Graff, Minnesota Department of Education:**

A student is considered chronically absent if they miss at least 10 percent of the days they are enrolled at a school.

**The chronic absenteeism rate for a student group is the result of:**

Number of chronically absent students in the group / all students in the group

For example, of the 50 Hispanic students at Wobegon Middle School, two were chronically absent. The chronic absenteeism rate for the group would therefore be 2/50, or 4 percent.

**The consistent attendance rate for a group refers to all students who are not chronically absent, which could also be described as:**

100 percent – chronic absenteeism rate = consistent attendance rate

For example, the consistent attendance rate for Hispanic students at Wobegon Middle School would be:

100 percent – 4 percent = 96 percent

Thus, the consistent attendance rate for Hispanic students at Wobegon Middle School would be 96 percent.
district of 20,000 students, 1,000 students could be missing nearly a month of school. Improved data and analysis will help districts understand how many and which students are chronically absent.

**Root Causes**

To achieve this ambitious goal, we will need to engage our communities to find the root causes, in and outside of our school districts. Experts point to several categories for chronic absenteeism:

- Students miss school for family trips or mental health days, because parents assume a few days won’t affect learning.

- Students miss school because family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work, or involvement with the juvenile justice system interferes with school.

- Students are absent because they want to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment, or embarrassment.

- Students choose not to attend school because they simply don’t see the value of being in class.

Educators in Duluth drilled down further and found poverty, mental illness and home life play a significant role in absenteeism – especially true in schools where the majority of kids participate in free and reduced-price lunch programs. Some high school students work until late at night and struggle to get up for school. In other situations, parents may not be present for a variety of reasons. Whatever the reason, the results leave children on their own in the morning, putting them at risk.

**Take the First Step**

Research has illuminated some strategies that have worked or may work:

1. Form a school attendance team engaged in analyzing data, identifying trends and the factors contributing to chronic absence, and implementing a multi-tiered approach to reducing the chronic absenteeism.

2. Implement “walking school buses,” with groups of children walking to school together, led by parents and teachers, to ensure children get to school on time and safely.

3. Examine attendance data beginning in the 2017–2018 school year. Start to identify schools with between 93 percent and 97 percent attendance rates and analyze the data further to determine the extent of the problem. Schools with average daily attendance rates below 93 percent are almost certainly dealing with high concentrations of absenteeism.

“If you are looking only at full-day absences you’re not capturing all the students who are at risk,” Camille Whitney said.
4. Seek competitive grant money for truancy intervention programs. Grant money could be used for coordination between schools, districts, and counties outlining timelines, comprehensive strategies, and effectiveness of the intervention program.

5. Develop and implement an early warning intervention plan.

6. Begin the conversations with students, parents and community members on the importance of being in school – every day.

Historically, schools focus on documenting who is absent and leave it at that. With a renewed interest, and the implementation of ESSA, we must move from just knowing the data to moving forward with solutions to the problem. This is something we can do something about. Schools and districts will be asked to implement new strategies that focus on consistent attendance. In many cases a single shot approach will not be enough, but rather a multi-faceted approach by intervention involving students, parents, schools and courts.

In regard to chronic absenteeism, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) will be providing last year’s attendance data to school districts in the fall. MDE will be providing guidance on how to look at and report attendance data to provide greater consistency around the state.

Denise Dittrich and Kimberley Dunn Lewis are part of MSBA’s Government Relations staff. Contact them at ddittrich@mnmsba.org or klewis@mnmsba.org.

Johnson Nguyen
What are some concerns school districts may have as a result of the recent legislative session?

1. Unrequested Leave of Absence Language — MSBA has received a number of inquiries concerning the repeal of “M.S. 122A.40, Subd. 11” and “M.S. 122A.41, Subd. 14” and the new requirement to negotiate unrequested leave of absence (ULA) language into teacher Master Agreements effective July 1, 2019. Our position is that school districts should attempt to negotiate this language during the current bargaining cycle so the language is in place for the 2019–2020 school year. The impetus behind the legislation appeared to be to provide school districts with an opportunity to negotiate language which would provide them something other than strict seniority to use when forced to make reductions in their teaching staff due to a lack of pupils or for financial reasons. Legislators voiced concern that a number of their constituents were frustrated with high-caliber probationary teachers being non-renewed to protect more senior teachers who are just putting in their time. School districts that have already negotiated ULA language as provided in M.S. 122A.40, Subd. 10, or M.S. 122A.41, Subd. 14, are not required to negotiate new ULA language. With that said, school districts should review their existing ULA language and any proposed ULA language to ensure that it provides some opportunities to determine which teachers will be placed on ULA other than strict seniority. If school districts only negotiate ULA language that relies strictly on seniority, the Legislature may choose to develop its own ULA plan and place it into statute. MSBA’s new Model ULA language includes opportunities other than strict seniority for school districts to consider when placing teachers on ULA, for example:

a. the inclusion of “qualified” language which requires the teacher to have “successfully taught in the subject matter or field area” in the last five years;

b. a requirement to place a teacher on a “Teacher Improvement Plan” on ULA prior to placing any other qualified Tier 3 or Tier 4 teacher on ULA;

c. a teacher holding a master’s degree in the subject matter or field in which he/she is employed would not be placed on ULA before any teacher in the subject matter or field who does not hold a master’s degree;

d. language protecting teachers involved with the school district’s affirmative action program;

e. teachers who have received specialized training at the school district’s expense to teach certain courses; and

f. language which protects teachers who if placed on ULA would result in the discontinuance of curricular programs.
2. Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board — Effective January 1, 2018, the Board of Teaching and the Educator Licensing Division of the Minnesota Department of Education are being eliminated and combined into a new Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB). The new board members are scheduled to be appointed this fall and will start the process to hire a new executive director in October. This board will take over the responsibilities surrounding the licensing of teachers in January 2018. Prior to this time, school districts should follow the same steps they have used in previous years for the granting of special permissions, approval of non-licensed community experts, and the licensing of new teachers. Questions regarding the PELSB should be directed to Alex Liuzzi, Interim Executive Director Board of Teaching, at alex.liuzzi@state.mn.us or 651-582-8885, or Debby Odell, Interim Director of Licensing, at debby.odell@state.mn.us or 651-582-8522.

3. E-learning days — M.S. 120A.414 created a provision that allows school districts to offer up to five days of full access to online instruction provided by students’ individual teachers due to inclement weather. These days would count toward the hours of instruction and the number of days required in M.S. 120A.41. In order for the school district to adopt such a plan, it must consult with the exclusive representative of the teachers and include accommodations for students without Internet access at home, for families who do not have digital device access for all children in the household, and provide accessible options for students with disabilities under chapter 125A. The school district must provide an annual notice to parents and students of the e-learning plan at the beginning of the school year. The school district must also provide notice to parents and students at least two hours prior to the normal start time that students need to follow the e-learning plan for that day. Finally, the plan must require that each student’s teacher(s) be accessible both online and by telephone during normal school hours on an e-learning day to assist students and parents.

Contact Bill Kautt at bkautt@mnmsba.org.
In 2015, Suzy Guthmueller joined the MSBA Board of Directors where she leads MSBA Director District 5, representing school board members from the north metro.

The always affable Guthmueller serves locally on the Centennial School Board, where she was first elected in November 2002.

Born in St. Paul, Guthmueller grew up in Arden Hills and graduated from Mounds View High School before attending the University of Minnesota. Guthmueller earned a Bachelor of Science in Consumer Food Science and Marketing.

She’s done it all job-wise during her work career — a waitress, processing health claims for an insurance company, jobs with Tupperware and Land O’ Lakes, and a volunteer coordinator for an elementary school.

In the ensuing interview, Guthmueller — currently serving her fourth term at Centennial — recalls why she decided to run for school board.

Also, she discusses her work in schools prior to joining the board, her frustration with the lack of state funding for her school district, what makes board work rewarding for her, and the importance of MSBA for school board members.

**MSBA:** What made you want to run for the Centennial School Board?

**GUTHMUELLER:** Prior to running for school board I was very active in our community. I was involved in our PTO, district committees including chairing the Boundary Committee — which made district boundary changes for the addition of a new elementary school — and volunteering at church. I had lots of respect for our school board and administration. I wanted to be part of the school community at the district level. At the time I had a high school freshman and middle school student, so the
timing was perfect to move from the elementary PTO involvement to more of a total community-involved position. I felt the desire to continue trying to make a positive impact in the quality education system that Centennial Schools provide our community.

**MSBA:** Are there any specific issues that are currently affecting the Centennial School District and/or MSBA Director District 5?

**GUTHMUELLER:** Adequate funding has to be the top issue affecting Centennial Schools. Our school district is property poor when it comes to tax base. Our property owners burden a much larger tax load than most districts. Because of this, it is very difficult to pass an operating referendum in our area. Unfortunately, frustration with the state’s inability to fulfill its constitutional obligation to adequately and equitably fund public education has left a hole in our budget year after year. Budget cutting has become a yearly event at Centennial. Being forced to rely on a voter-approved referendum just to maintain current operations is not a formula that Centennial can maintain.

**MSBA:** What is your best accomplishment as a school board member?

**GUTHMUELLER:** I think the best is yet to come! I have truly enjoyed the past 15 years on the Centennial School Board. We as a board have accomplished much. The recent passage of a capital levy to rehab our schools has been very gratifying. We are very grateful to our community that they put this as a priority. To see our buildings in tip-top shape and ready to teach the learners of today is very fulfilling. The recent development of a new strategic plan – with collaboration and input from community members, school board members and district employees – has been a great process with an excellent vision for the future of Centennial Schools.

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

**GUTHMUELLER:** Seeing the success of the students as well as the pride in the families, staff and community as the students walk across the stage at graduation is so rewarding. The first day of school is also a favorite of mine. To see the excitement in the students’ eyes and the enthusiasm of our staff on the very first day of school is something I get excited for each year.

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

**GUTHMUELLER:** Make sure you ask questions, lots of questions. Surround yourself with knowledgeable people. Get involved with school board committees, be active in the community, visit schools and attend events. Learn about district operations such as teaching and learning, finance, policy and personnel. Participate in the training services provided by MSBA. Take the classes,
go to the seminars, ask the MSBA staff questions, and use the MSBA website as a resource. Develop board goals and work collectively toward them. Be informed, transparent and fiscally responsible to your stakeholders. Never stop learning. Always do what is best for kids. Work collaboratively with your fellow board members.

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

**GUTHMUELLER:** It is an honor to serve on the MSBA Board and represent the school districts of Anoka County. The MSBA Board has been a wonderful opportunity to work collaboratively with school board members from across the state. Being a member of the MSBA Board has given me the broader knowledge of the needs of all corners of our state. The opportunity to work together with the MSBA staff to make a difference for all school boards has been extremely rewarding. I have enjoyed the friendships that I have made on the MSBA Board and the knowledge I have gained as a board member.

**MSBA:** Why is MBSA important for board members to utilize as their go-to organization?

**GUTHMUELLER:** MSBA is the organization where school boards learn to lead. MSBA is the go-to organization for board members as well as many district administrators. MSBA training is so important to all board members to stay up to date on changing mandates, laws and policies. The MSBA staff does a great job of educating board members, working with school districts, offering seminars, classes, legislative service and advocacy. We are lucky to have an organization that is just a phone call away to answer our questions. MSBA is a school board member’s best resource.

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Contact Suzy Guthmueller at sguthmueller@isd12.org.
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Complicated issues sometimes arise for school board members regarding their school board work and other relationships or business dealings. Model Policy 210 addresses many of these issues. This column will provide a brief overview and some additional resources.

**Conflict of Interest (M.S. 471.87 – 471.89)**
A school board member cannot have a personal financial interest in a sale, lease, or contract or personally benefit financially from anything he or she is authorized to take part in as part of his or her school board work. However, many exceptions exist to this broad rule; probably the most commonly encountered is a contract for which competitive bids are not required. If an exception is found, the school board must unanimously approve the sale, lease, or contract, the interested school board member must file an affidavit with the clerk, and the school board must adopt a resolution. The contents of the affidavit and resolution are described in M.S. 471.89 and in Model Policy 210, Part III. B.4.

**Gift Ban (M.S. 471.895) and Model Policy 421**
A school board member cannot accept a gift from a person or a representative of a person, association, or company that has a direct financial interest in a decision that a school board member is authorized to make. A few exceptions exist but are very limited. In general, if someone is doing or wants to do business with the school district, a school board member will not be able to accept anything from him or her beyond a trinket worth less than $5.

**Hiring a Teacher Who Is a Relative of a School Board Member (M.S. 122A.40, Subd. 2)**
If an applicant for a teaching position is related to a school board member, the hiring of the relative must be by a unanimous vote of the full school board.

**Compatibility of Offices**
If a school board member holds or wishes to hold another office, he or she should check to see if that other office is compatible with being a school board member. If the offices are not compatible, a choice will have to be made. House Research has a document that is an excellent resource for these questions.

**School Board Member’s Employment with the School District (M.S. 123B.195)**
School board members can work for the school district if their expected earnings will be less than $8,000 in the upcoming fiscal year and they receive majority approval for the employment at a meeting where all school board members are present. This approval is an annual requirement for the duration of the dual roles of school board member and employee. If the vote does not approve the employment, the school board member has no further right to employment in the district for the duration of his or her school board service.

**School Board Member’s Spouse’s Employment with the School District (M.S. 471.88, Subd. 21)**
If a school board member’s spouse is a school district employee in a union, the school board member must abstain from the vote on the applicable collective bargaining agreement. The remaining members at the meeting must approve the agreement by a majority vote, the essential facts of the agreement must be described, and the school board member’s spouse cannot get a special benefit from the agreement.

The school board can determine that a conflict of interest exists. School board members who have an actual or possible conflict should reveal the relevant information to their fellow board members immediately. In general, if it appears that a school board member has an interest in a vote besides his or her desire to make the best decision for the students in the school district, at least a potential for a conflict of interest exists.

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