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Attracting Women Leaders to the Superintendency

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Wells Fargo Public Finance is proud to participate in the 88th annual MSBA Leadership Conference January 15-16 at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Come visit us at booth #310.

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The MSBA Journal thanks the students of Scenic Heights Elementary School in Minnetonka, Minnesota School District for sharing their art with us in this issue. The artworks are from artists in grades kindergarten through fifth. Mr. Jonathan Maki is the art specialist, who devotes his instruction to cater around the Discipline Based Art Education philosophy. With the aid of advances in technology, Maki’s students learn about art history and cultures, art production, art criticism, and aesthetics.

COVER ART: Reagan Rohling

Calendar

JANUARY 2009
1 ............New Year’s Day
5 ............Terms Begin for Newly Elected Board Members
6 ............2009 Legislative Session Begins
13 ...........MSBA New Board Member Orientation Phase I
14 ...........MSBA Phase II Orientation
14 ...........MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
14 ...........Early Bird Workshops
15-16 .......MSBA Leadership Conference
16 ...........MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
19 ...........Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Birthday Observed
26-29 ......BoardBook Free Webinars
29-30 ......MASBO Winter Conference
30 ...........Officers’ Workshop, Alexandria
31 ...........Officers’ Workshop, St. Cloud

FEBRUARY 2009
3 ............Officers’ Workshop, Bemidji
6 ............Officers’ Workshop, Mankato
10 ...........Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus Meeting
12 ...........MSBA Insurance Trust Meeting
13 ...........Negotiations Seminars, Rochester and St. Cloud
14 ...........Negotiations Seminars, Bloomington and St. Cloud
16 ...........Negotiations Seminars, Worthington and Hinckley
16 ...........Presidents’ Day
17 ...........Negotiations Seminars, Marshall and Grand Rapids
18 ...........Negotiations Seminars, Morris and Thief River Falls
19 ...........Negotiations Seminars, Mankato and Detroit Lakes
21-22 ......MSBA Board/Staff Retreat
22 ...........MSBA Board of Directors’ Meeting
23 ...........MSBA School Board Day at the Capitol
23 ...........School Board Recognition Week begins

MARCH 2009
8 ............Daylight Saving Time begins
10 ............Township Election Day
19-20 ......MASA Spring Conference
27 ...........MSBA Phase III, Morton
28 ...........MSBA Phase III, St. Cloud
Running a referendum during hard economic times

“To me, waiting [to run a levy] would be like running across an accident victim on the road and saying, ‘If gas gets below 2 bucks a gallon, we’ll call an ambulance; if not, just hang in there, buddy!’ We just didn’t have time to wait.”

Perham-Dent Superintendent Tamara Uselman

A year-round charter school with a 45-day session and 15 days off

“History is hard to change, but what we know is that the best practice for kids is not a nine-month calendar.”

Laura Jeffrey Academy Founder Cindy Reuther

The race and poverty attainment gap

“We have a lot more people in poverty and a lot more people of color. They exist in a readiness gap. They’re not a workforce you can just turn to. They’re a workforce we have neglected to prepare. It’s absolutely crucial that we get them up to speed, get them on the launching pads for industries that need them. These are industries that are key to Minnesota’s success.”

Minneapolis School Board Member Chris Stewart

Schools looking at a four-day school week

“I just see other schools doing it because the Legislature isn’t going to come up with any money. For schools, there’s nothing else they can do. They’ve exhausted about everything they can do except shutting down buildings. So, I think other schools will be looking at it.”

MACCRAY High School Principal Gary Sims

The importance of public schools

“The incredible power of America is the opportunity it offers for everyone who lives here to achieve great results for themselves and their families. The foundation for that opportunity for success is secured by our public schools. Because we welcome every child to our schools, we create an incredible dynamic for the growth, learning and achievement of every child who attends the public schools. The outstanding results achieved for every student do not just happen. Great outcomes are the result of leadership in each public school district by superintendents and their assistants. We have developed a powerful commitment from one generation to the next. Every generation has the responsibility and obligation to insure the education of future generations. Breaking that cycle would surely destroy ‘Democracy’s Promise’ and America’s foundation!”

Minnesota Superintendent of the Year Dennis Peterson of Minnetonka

Quotes of Note captures some of the more interesting statements MSBA staff have read in local, state and national publications.
In my mind, it also requires you to take a leadership role in increasing your involvement with your local legislators and the Governor!

You’ll notice that the theme of this MSBA Journal is leadership. I pulled out my trusty Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary and looked up the definition of leadership. According to Webster, leadership means “1. the office or position of a leader; 2. the quality of a leader: capacity to lead.”

Given the drastic budget projections that we received in December for the coming biennium telling us that we as a state are starting at a $5 billion-plus deficit, you will have ample opportunities to show your leadership. The legislature will receive an updated state budget projection in late February and this is the projection they will use to set the state budget for the next two years. Indications are that this budget forecast will show an even greater deficit than projected in December. Legislative leaders are saying that it is impossible to tax our way out of this mess, so massive and far-reaching budget cuts are surely on the table for consideration.

Senate Majority Leader Larry Pogemiller, Senate Minority Leader Dave Senjem, House Speaker Margaret Anderson Kelliher, House Majority Leader Tony Stiert, and House Minority Leader Marty Seifert must get together with Governor Pawlenty to work our way out of this deep hole that is projected for the next biennium.

This column is called “Straight Talk,” so let me give it to you as I see it. We will be working very hard at the Capitol to hold on to what we have! ANY additional revenue for education is going to be almost impossible to find given the depth of the projected budget deficit. I know this is not what you want to hear, but the reality of this budget problem must be faced head-on.

I hope the February revenue forecast (the Governor uses the December forecast to set his suggested budget for the next two years—the House and Senate use the February forecast to establish their budget for the coming two years) shows a great improvement in projected revenue, but at this time nothing suggests that the forecast will be more positive. As a matter of fact, most government watchers are projecting an even larger deficit than the projected $5 billion-plus amount we saw in the December forecast.

The problems ahead during this legislative session require you to take a leadership role at the school district level. In my mind, it also requires you to take a leadership role in increasing your involvement with your local legislators and the Governor! You must convey how suggested legislation, financial and policy, will impact your district. Weekly communications with your local legislators through e-mails, telephone, U.S. Postal Service mail, and face-to-face meetings at home and at the Capitol will be necessary.

MSBA lobbyists Grace Keliher and Kirk Schneidawind are your voices at the Capitol and one of them will update the MSBA Lobby Line (1-800-864-6722) every evening during the legislative session. You can get up-to-the-minute reports on a daily basis without leaving your home and at no cost to you.

Also, we will be hosting your visit to the Capitol on MSBA’s School Board Member Day at the Capitol scheduled for Monday, February 23. We will also be joining with the League of Minnesota Cities, the Association of Minnesota Counties, and the Minnesota Township Association to sponsor a Local Government Day at the Capitol in April. The Alliance for Student Achievement will also be holding a rally in support of public education so you will have the opportunity to join with your colleagues to lobby for your district’s needs.

All of you, not just one designated person on your school board or your superintendent, must lobby this year. MSBA is your highly respected lobbying agent but we are only as strong at the Capitol as your involvement is with your local legislators and the Governor. To paraphrase a saying from my generation: tune in to what is happening at the Capitol, turn on your local citizens to what the impact of various legislative initiatives will be, and do not drop out but do the opposite: become a leader and provide leadership in lobbying your local legislators and the Governor for what is good for our number one priority—our students!
We’ve heard the word “change” bandied about during the presidential elections, and as I join your MSBA board of directors in February to advocate fixing No Child Left Behind and increasing funding for special education, we hope the “change” motto will continue.

Some positives in going to the Capitol this year will be a new president, new leadership and a new Secretary of Education. The drawbacks are that education has been buried on the Administration’s list behind the economy, the Iraq war, health care, you name it.

That’s why this year’s lobbying effort with the National School Boards Association is important. We are seeking change in the NCLB law, and we are seeking change (as in money) to pay off I.O.U.’s for public education. We need to keep education on the radar for the Obama Administration. Our message is going to be simple: With the federal government handing out $700 billion to insurance companies, banks and possibly even car dealers, we have to make the case that the best investment bank the U.S. has is its public education system.

As the government decides whether to bail out AIG or Citibank, we want to send a message that President Obama should not forget about the Bank of Public Education. You can create all the jobs you want, but if you don’t have a skilled future workforce, that plan comes to a sudden end.

For years, Congress has acted like a reluctant shareholder, promising 40 percent funding for special education and giving 17 percent. There is an eerie link that shows up in many school districts—the amount of money the districts raise through operating referenda is the exact amount of money the districts are shorted in special education funding. Now is the time for Congress to buy in as a shareholder and pay the I.O.U. to the Bank of Public Education. This move alone, in several studies across Minnesota, would decrease the number of school districts having to go out for an operating levy referendum. What a boost to the economy and a boost to education officials if they could spend their time on improving education, instead of preparing for the next round of levy referenda.

While Congress is at it, they could also fully fund the No Child Left Behind law. Better yet, they could make some common-sense changes that we will be urging, such as:

- Allow states to use growth models for Adequate Yearly Progress;
- Allow schools to base progress on a student’s Individual Education Plan if they are in the special education subgroup; and
- Allow non-English speaking students to learn the language before forcing them to take reading tests to determine AYP.

Unfortunately, advocacy has become a bigger part of being a school board member. And since 2002 when NCLB was revised, advocacy at the federal level is a must. We have worked with school boards across the nation to try to change this law so it will help kids, instead of taking resources away from them. So we are hoping the Obama Administration will keep their motto of change—change to fix the flaws in NCLB and change in the piggy bank that funds the Bank of Public Education. We, as a nation, can survive the bankruptcy of an AIG or Citibank. But we will never survive a bankruptcy of our education system. Our future as a country depends on strong funding of public education. And with the right amount of change, that’s a statement I’m willing to take to the bank.
Our significant knowledge base and experience make us well versed in all facets of education law: public employment and employee relations, student matters, school finance, elections, bond counsel services, construction, real estate, workers’ compensation, contracts, discrimination and harassment, data privacy, special education, constitutional issues and more.

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“Imagine a job that requires an Army officer’s leadership skills, a CEO’s management expertise, a lawyer’s negotiating talents and an educator’s understanding of how to teach children. That’s what it takes to be a school superintendent in the 21st century. It may be the toughest job in America.” — Sol Hurwitz, Board of Directors for the Albert Shanker Institute, a former president of the Committee for Economic Development, and a former school board member in Rye, NY.

Now imagine being that superintendent, with the added responsibility of simultaneously holding arguably another one of the “toughest jobs” in the country.

Mike Funk (BOLD), Wayne Gilman (Crookston), Jerry Reshetar (Lyle) and Charles Rick (St. Louis County) are among a handful of Minnesota school district superintendents who have served, or are currently serving, as members of the United States military.

Though the notion of alternating between an Army Combat Uniform and a suit and tie may appear uncommon, these four “superintendent-soldiers” found a lot in common between the two professions.
Gilman stresses the importance of self-care and sustainment for both soldiers and superintendents. He notes that for both you have to maintain a level of physical fitness, relieve stress, get enough sleep and keep up on reading. “You have to be the one who sets an example for everyone. You push for what you think is right to either your school board, or your platoon or company.”

Funk—whose training and deployment for his mission to Kosovo are highlighted on his www.bayonet6.com Web site—sees a connection in the importance of communication between the two careers. Among the similarities, Funk points out “the importance of relationships, talking to people, and listening to concerns over issues from students, teachers, parents and soldiers.”

“The great thing about deployments is meeting people from all over the world. You develop connections with people . . . in education and the military that helps you go a long way toward getting things accomplished,” Funk said.

Reshetar said both jobs have benefitted from one another.

“Being a soldier made me a better educator and vice versa,” said Reshetar. “The patience and common sense that you are required to have in education fit well in the military. Long-range planning is something senior leaders must do constantly. Teamwork learned in the military is extremely valuable in the education business.”

Rick adds that in both professions “you have to work with people and lead as a role model. You have to help people develop things in themselves.”

**THE DIFFICULTY OF DOUBLE DUTY**

One of the toughest things these superintendent-soldiers encountered in pulling off their double duty is dealing with the distance—from both their school district and their family. The obligation of serving in the military forced them to step away from their civilian life, in some cases for months at a time.

From 2005-2007, one Minnesota National Guard unit—the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry Division—was deployed for 22 months (16 in a combat zone). The brigade was deployed in a combat zone longer than any other military unit during the Iraq War.

Funk’s longest deployment came during his 12 months in Kosovo. Despite the distance and busy schedule, he still did his best to make time for BOLD.
“The hardest thing was having adequate communication with what is happening back in your school district,” said Funk. “You want to weigh in, but you can’t always be there to make a difference.”

Reshetar said the hard part is not only keeping up with both jobs—but the intensity of both jobs. “The schedule in the military is extremely intense,” he said. “When I was away, I took part in school board meetings over the phone in Korea. Balancing my family with two jobs was also difficult.”

Adds Gilman: “Being away from my family was difficult. It was hard having enough time and energy for both.”

**MILITARY MINDSET?**

One conception about military members who return to civilian jobs is this: they are going to run the place like an iron-fisted general. Gilman is quick to call that train of thought a misconception.

“I don’t like the perceptions like ‘He’s got that military mindset’ or that we’re autocratic,” Gilman said.

Gilman insists that soldiers-turned-superintendents are the quarterbacks—not dictators—of their districts.

“Quarterbacks run things and can only be successful if the whole team is successful. You have to act as a catalyst. You need a sense of immediacy in the military, but you need patience in the schools. Directness is not always appreciated,” Gilman said.

“Sometimes you are pigeonholed into ‘If he was in the military, he must be conservative, or, he’s an educator, he must be liberal,’” continues Gilman. “I had a foot in both worlds.”

Funk concurs: “I’ve had people assume that because you are an officer, you are going to run a ‘military organization.’”

**MILITARY MOMENTS**

One of Funk’s fondest military recollections came on Feb. 17, 2008, a day in which he had to display negotiating skills and peacekeeping prowess in a real hot zone. “One thing that stands out was the day Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. We were there to keep the peace. It was a cold day. We had a number of meetings with both sides. The world was watching them behave. There was euphoria on one side, depression from the other—but there was no violence . . . we did our job.”

Funk trained the 400 Minnesota soldiers that were part of the NATO peacekeeping mission in that hazard-combat zone. Funk brought all of his men back without anyone getting seriously wounded.

Gilman’s favorite military moment came in 1995 when he took part in a joint training exercise in Great Britain with the Highlanders and the King’s Regiment, a pair of infantry regiments with centuries-old roots. Another bright spot Gilman recalls was the opportunity to serve as the platoon leader of a mortar unit.

A deployment and a promotion comprised two of Reshetar’s most significant military moments. He recalls his deployment to Bosnia in December 1995. “That stands out because of the fellow soldiers I got to work with.”

Reshetar was also promoted to Major General in 2003, becoming one of only 50 Major Generals in the Army Reserve in the nation.

For Rick, satisfaction came from the people he encountered along the way. “I was fortunate enough to work with good leaders and people. Trainings like the United States Sergeants Major Academy really served me well.”

**SCHOOL DAYS**

All four men are equally as proud of their accomplishments at home as they are of their accomplishments abroad.

“We built a new school in 2006,” said Reshetar. “Getting the bond issue passed was a challenge, but we got a beautiful new school.”

Funk cites a number of achievements at BOLD: Passing an operating levy by a 2-to-1 margin in 2006, and providing better opportunities for his students, including upgrades in computers and the number of Advanced Placement credits (from three to 24).

Along with passing successful operating levies, Gilman cites that the leadership team at Crookston he helped assemble made him “just as happy as anything . . . I took part in the process of selecting the team.”

Two things stand out for Rick. One is something unique—overseeing the restoration of Babbitt-Embarrass’ old 1960s-era auditorium to its original luster. The other is something routine—watching his students walk across the stage during graduation, knowing he had a hand in that accomplishment.

**ORIGINS**

Funk and Gilman did some of their training together in the Minnesota National Guard from 1988 to 1992 in Mankato.

Funk made his choice to join the Guard during college. “I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do,” said
Funk. “I respected the people in the military and made the decision to join the ROTC and serve my country.”

Gilman enlisted in the Guard in his early 20s. “I was hoping to find a way to get through college,” said Gilman. “The Guard paid for one-third of my education.”

Reshetar took a great interest in the Army Reserves from the very beginning of basic training. “I just knew it was for me,” said Reshetar. “I enjoyed the organization, the discipline, the teamwork and the opportunity to learn different things. I enjoyed all aspects of it and the skill sets I learned.”

Rick was destined to join the service from a sense of duty born from heritage. “I grew up in a family with a strong military presence from both parents,” he said. “I felt an obligation to serve. I went into the military after I taught a year.”

These four superintendent-soldiers acknowledge that what they learned from serving in the military served them well in their education careers.

“The Guard helped with my professional development,” said Gilman, 45. “I believe I would not be a superintendent if not for my military background. The military taught leadership skills, grew my confidence, and taught organizational skills, strong leadership skills and communication skills, . . . It teaches how to lead and inspire.”

Funk was deployed to Bosnia from 2003-2004 and to Kosovo from 2007-2008. He quickly learned he could lead larger groups of people. “I progressed up the ranks in the military and eventually was responsible for 40 soldiers,” said Funk. “That number moved to 150 (and then) to 300. I was able to command a large organization in the military. I felt I could have a similar impact on the school world. Based on my military experience, it was an easy transition.”

Reshetar did tours in Korea on and off from 2000 to 2008. “The leadership training (from the military) paid dividends as a superintendent.”

Rick—who did his active duty in Fort Carson, Colo.—said “the skills I learned in the military serve me well as a superintendent. (The skills) help you work well with people and respect people.”

SUPPORT FROM HOME

One thing that each superintendent-soldier was adamant about was the support received.

Rick lauded his school board for allowing him to do both jobs. “I was fortunate to be able to do both. I couldn’t have done it without their support.”

“My family support has been strong. I can’t say enough about my wife,” Rick said.

Rick knows firsthand what it is like to support family in the military. Along with growing up in a strong military family, all four of his children have served, or are currently serving, in the Army—and all four have done tours in Iraq.

Funk praised his supportive school board and community. “I can’t say good enough things about them. (BOLD Board chair) Paul Leindecker has been supportive. I have a nice, strong support network (at BOLD).”

Gilman, now retired, reflects on his service with pride.

“I’m very proud (of my service) and don’t regret anything. I miss my friends—but don’t miss the training,” said Gilman. “I feel pretty lucky to have been part of the Guard.”

Reshetar adds: “It’s a lot of work to balance both jobs. I am extremely fortunate to have a supportive school board and family. Without them, I’m not sure I could accomplish what I did.”

Bruce Lombard is the Associate Director of Communications for the Minnesota School Boards Association.
Effectively filling the superintendent position in a school district is one of the most significant responsibilities school board members are empowered to complete. In a climate of increased accountability with the never-ending struggle to acquire adequate financial resources, hiring a superintendent who is visionary and who encompasses the vast skill set needed to lead in the 21st century is more critical than ever. Yet many Minnesota school boards are facing this daunting task with a declining pool of highly qualified candidates. As school boards across Minnesota look for ways to increase their candidate pool, finding ways to attract female applicants becomes vital. This article provides an overview of national and Minnesota statistics on women in superintendent positions, what women bring to the superintendency, and actions that can be taken by school boards to attract and retain women in the position of superintendent.
Percentage of Women Superintendents

The job of the superintendency remains male-dominated. While 72 percent of all K-12 educators in this country are women, in 2000 only 13% of superintendent positions were held by women (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). By 2003 this number had increased to 18%, signifying that women have made modest gains in securing superintendent positions nationally (Brunner & Grogan, 2005).

In Minnesota, the picture is less encouraging with the number of women securing superintendent positions showing a slight decline in recent years. In 2002, 13% of the superintendents in Minnesota were women. In 2005, that number decreased to 11% with that percentage remaining the same through 2008. (Minnesota Association of School Administrators, personal communication, November 10, 2008). School boards striving to expand their candidate pool need to identify what women bring to the superintendency and strategies on how to tap this underutilized population.

What Women Bring to the Superintendency

Women superintendents “work from the center of a web-like organizational structure [rather than a top-down structure]; employ a collegial, supportive, empowering style; establish a district culture of increasing achievement through their instructional leadership; create a positive environment for change; justify tough personnel issues on the basis of ‘children-first’; develop supportive networks to address political and budgetary issues; and stay true to their core values of integrity and caring about people.” (Washington, Miller, & Rene, 2007, p. 281) Women bring distinct qualities to the superintendency—qualities that complement the leadership needs of current school districts.

Expertise in curriculum and instruction. Women superintendents spend more years in the classroom before moving into administration than men. Women superintendents demonstrate a stronger belief in the knowledge of teaching and learning and in the emphasis on improving instruction. Brunner and Grogan (2007) discovered “thirty-five percent of the women superintendents were hired as instructional leaders compared to 24 percent of men.” (p. 93)

Embrace challenges of reform and change. Women superintendents stay abreast of current instructional developments in the field. They tend to embrace the challenges of reform and change as providing opportunities for action and for growth. These women view the new knowledge and understanding gained through their professional development and academic pursuits as increasing their capacities to act and to achieve district goals. They “manage the current pressure of high-stakes testing and the elimination of the achievement gap by getting professional development in curriculum and instruction.” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 136)

Interpersonal skills. Research has noted that women superintendents display a strong and consistent set of interpersonal and relational skills. (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Robicheau, Haar, & Raskin, 2008; Washington et al., 2007) “Women have greater patience and nurturing when dealing with students, parents, school employees. A woman takes care of a classroom, a school and a district as she would take care of her family.” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007,
Women superintendents use relational skills and empower others in the organization and the community to make the best decisions for children. In general, women superintendents emerge as community builders with effective interpersonal skills who were grounded in knowledge of curriculum and instruction and prepared to stay the course of leading school districts. (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Robicheau et al., 2008; Washington et al., 2007)

### What School Boards Can Do to Attract and Retain Women Superintendents

School boards can expand the quality of the pool of candidates seeking a position as a superintendent by developing a set of specific actions. These actions should heighten the possibility of attracting qualified women candidates.

#### Establish a set of gender neutral standards.

School boards can establish a set of gender neutral standards to use as criteria for identifying quality candidates for the superintendency. These standards would allow school boards to look beyond career experience and gender to a specific set of skills. School boards could use the American Association of School Administrators standards:

**Standard 1:** Leadership and District Culture
- works with the school board to develop a district vision, and promotes academic rigor and excellence for staff and students.

**Standard 2:** Policy and Governance
- recommends local policy to meet state and federal requirements, and develops procedures for facilitating teamwork between the school board and the superintendent.

**Standard 3:** Communications and Community Relations
- establishes meaningful relations with all forms of media, and formulates plans for internal and external communication strategies.

**Standard 4:** Organizational Management
- understands the district functions as a system, and uses data to make sound educational decisions.

**Standard 5:** Curriculum Planning and Development
- facilitates the development of a curriculum design, and demonstrates an understanding of curriculum delivery systems.

**Standard 6:** Instructional Management
- develops a process for improving student achievement, and describes instructional strategies that are aligned to student achievement.

**Standard 7:** Human Resources Management
- develops and implements a process for professional growth in staff, and allocates human and capital resources to effectively address student achievement.

**Standard 8:** Values and Ethics for Leadership
- models accepted moral and ethical integrity in all her/his actions, and exhibits multicultural and ethnic understanding and sensitivity.

#### Assess the community’s level of support.

School boards who want to attract women superintendent candidates need to take a serious look at their community. School boards should assess what support systems are in place within their community for women in top leadership roles. They should determine whether or not there are currently women in leadership positions such as mayor, city council, chamber board and business who could mentor and support a woman superintendent. A critical role of the superintendency is to establish a network within the community to advance the school district’s vision and mission. In most communities, this type of support network already exists for men. If similar support systems are not in place for women leaders in a community, the school board should work with the community to establish such a network for women leaders.

#### Assess skills needed in an era of accountability.

Given the current era of No Child Left Behind, a strong skill set in the area of teaching and learning is required of today’s superintendents. School boards should be familiar with the skills needed and expect that candidates interviewing for the superintendency demonstrate their ability to use those skills to lead in an era of accountability. When interviewing candidates, school boards may find women tend to possess an advanced skill set centered on teaching and learning.

#### Assessing skills needed to implement educational reform.

School boards who are investigating the need to reexamine how educational programs are delivered should consider the reform agenda women candidates bring to the superintendency. Women will challenge the status quo and ask the tough question of how the system can be improved. Moreover, because of their extensive curriculum and instruction background they will seek the most current best practices to address the achievement gap.

#### Recognize the competent women leaders within the district.

School boards need to look within and investigate the possibility that they already have effective, qualified candidates in their district. Often there are women...
within a district who have already proven themselves as leaders, yet have not pursued a superintendency outside of their current district because they are location-bound due to family constraints. These women can bring to the superintendency established relationships and long-term commitment as well as a history and an understanding of the dynamics of the district.

School boards are duty-bound to ensure that they bring the highest quality leader possible to the position of superintendent in their community. With a declining pool of highly qualified candidates, now more than ever school boards need to make a concerted effort to expand the candidate pool by recruiting women. This effort needs to be more than a goal; school boards have an obligation to students, staff and community to implement the strategies needed to tap the underutilized population of women as superintendent candidates.

Authors:

Jean Haar, Ph.D., currently Director of the Center for Engaged Leadership, Department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato, was a public school principal for seven years.

Candace Raskin, Ed.D., currently Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato, served as a Minnesota public school superintendent for four years.

Jerry Robicheau, Ph.D., currently chairperson and Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato, served as a Minnesota public school superintendent for eight years.

You can reach them at: jean.haar@mnsu.edu, candace.raskin@mnsu.edu, or jerry.robicheau@mnsu.edu.

Sources:


The Basics of Good Board Behavior

To paraphrase Joni Mitchell, I’ve looked at boards from both sides now. Serving as the South St. Paul superintendent of schools for 18 years and spending the last 11 years on the University of Minnesota’s Board of Regents has given me unique insight into the dynamics of board behavior. Mix in 30 years on a bank board and serving as a director on several nonprofit boards, and I’ve pretty much covered all the board bases. Here are my guidelines for achieving better board dynamics.
Respect boundaries
Board members should never go around the CEO. It’s a great temptation to fly solo and drill deeper into the organization, but undermining the CEO like that buys you a one-way ticket to Dysfunction Junction. Soon, the CEO is spending half the day putting out the fires you started.

Be invisible
A good board is like a team of good referees in a basketball game. They set the rules and expectations by which the game is going to be played, but you don’t even know they’re there. A bad referee dominates, crosses boundaries, takes over a game, and suddenly, the players are not the focus, the referees are.

Embrace diversity
The days of boardrooms stocked with nothing but white males are over. But diversity isn’t just about gender and racial balance. It also means diversity of interests, backgrounds, perspectives and skill sets. You make better decisions with people who bring different things to the table.

Manage and monitor
The board chair is responsible for managing the board. What does that entail? Overseeing committee assignments, drawing out members’ strengths and keeping tabs on boundary issues are some starters. The board chair constructively challenges members and holds them accountable.

Build a healthy environment
Watch out for the CBCers—Complainers, Blamers and Criticizers. They are cancers that rot the board from within. Good people, whether board members or staff, will not work in a corrosive environment. As the poison starts to spread, the eagles will fly away and you’ll be stuck with the turkeys.

Never stop growing
What’s a 10-letter word that begins with “S” and ends in disaster? Stagnation. A board needs to be stocked with lifelong learners committed to the relentless pursuit of personal and organizational self-improvement.

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Think big picture

The role of the board is visualizing where the organization will be at least three to five years in the future, then articulating that vision and putting policies in place that will get it there. If an issue can be resolved in the next month or the next year, it’s likely a management decision.

Build bench strength

One of the first questions a board should ask is, “What happens if the CEO gets hit by a turnip truck?” If you can’t identify at least one person within the organization whom you would consider for the job, you’ve got a serious problem.

Trust is a must

Absent trust, a board can’t effectively resolve the tough issues—information will be withheld, cliques will form and consensus will be undermined. A good board engages in open and candid dialogue, confident that every member is trying to do what’s best for the organization.

Unite as a team

People may think teams always get along. That’s not necessarily the case. A true team player will speak up whenever a peer or an idea needs to be challenged. But once the decision is made, you have a responsibility to support that decision.

In my view, the primary characteristic of a good board is that it’s always striving to get better. I hope these guidelines spark your board and CEO to take inventory and begin a candid dialogue. No topics should be off limits. You can reach new heights if you’re willing to roll up your sleeves and dissect your dynamics, reinvigorate your relationships and iron out the issues. The potential payoff is huge: greater trust, deeper understanding, improved effectiveness and, best of all, happier stakeholders.

Dr. David Metzen, CEO of Metzen Leadership, is a speaker, executive coach and board consultant. For more information, visit www.davemetzen.com.
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Bus time, lunch time, passing time—there are many times of the day when principals find themselves conducting crowd control. At other times a principal may be handling the many “crises du jour” or completing reports. Is this truly how we want our school leaders to spend the majority of their time each day? To be sure, getting to know students is important, and some administration is part of the job. But if a district’s focus is where it should be—on assuring that each student is learning and achieving in each classroom—school boards must work with district administration to help every principal become an instructional leader.

Principals play a critical role in creating great schools and helping students succeed. Principals set the vision, guide instruction, build the budget, unite the team and lead the drive for results. Their jobs are an extraordinary mix of small details and big ideas, of crisis management and long-range planning. It is easy to get lost in the myriad of responsibilities and become simply a building manager, rather than an educational leader focused on learning.

“But I thought it was the teachers who mattered most when it comes to learning,” you say. And it is true—teachers make the single most important contribution to a student’s academic success. There are thousands of great teachers out there who inspire learning in their students. But classroom by classroom improvement is incremental, and often is not aligned with other grades. Our goal should be great schools, not just individual classrooms. A growing body of research shows us that to have a high-performing school, you must have a high-performing principal. A high-performing principal is focused on the alignment and quality of instruction across the school and district. In other words, a high-performing principal is an instructional leader.
What is an ‘instructional leader’?

At its core, leadership in K-12 education “is the guidance and direction of instructional improvement.” A principal who is an effective instructional leader creates a vision of instruction and learning that inspires the faculty—in part because they collaborated in developing the vision. An instructional leader knows how to analyze student performance data and determine which areas of the curriculum need attention. Such a principal recognizes good classroom instruction in all core subjects (whether or not he or she is licensed in the content) and can assess the quality of instructional materials. The principal regularly coaches staff with a focus on student learning, rather than only occasionally “observing teaching” for purposes of an annual evaluation of the teacher. Finally, the principal regularly evaluates the entire instructional system—curriculum, instruction, standards, assessments, and safety nets—to assure that it is aligned with the school’s mission.

An instructional leader visits classrooms regularly, to the point that the students no longer stop and stare at the visitor. An instructional leader motivates faculty to learn from each other, and creates the time to make that happen. (Q-comp districts encourage the same.) Instructional leaders work with faculty to find the extra time and support a struggling student needs, whether it is just another five minutes on one topic, after-school sessions or doubling up on math classes.

Principals who are high-performing instructional leaders create schools where it doesn’t matter if your child ends up with the 3rd grade teacher who is beloved by all, or the “other” teacher. Instructional leaders guide the school so there is strong instruction in each classroom, and indeed across grades. Students understand what they are supposed to learn, and what a good work product for each assignment looks like. Parents understand they are welcome and know how to support their children, and teachers regularly communicate with them about the progress of their child.

Indeed, a principal who focuses on instruction will be most successful when the focus on instructional leadership is district-wide. Often our districts pursue improvement through a series of separate projects such as selecting a new curriculum and textbooks, or adopting a new technology or instructional practice. Adopting a district-wide instructional leadership model “reverses the usual relationship between routine functions and instructional improvement activities. The district’s overall instructional improvement strategy drives and shapes” administrative functions and projects, rather than the other way around. But it can start with the principal, whose effective leadership is essential for the school.
Based on extensive research by the National Institute for School Leadership, the organization created a comprehensive executive development program for principals, beginning with creating powerful visions, and continuing with strategic thinking, the foundations of effective learning in literacy, math and science, leading change, ethical leadership, building teams, and finally, obtaining and analyzing results. Through the leadership of Minnesota Education Commissioner Alice Seagren, the principals’ associations (MESPA and MASSP) and MASA, the University of Minnesota has partnered with them to adapt the NISL curriculum for Minnesota, and offer it through the Minnesota Principals’ Academy (www.mnprincipals.umn.edu).

The School Board’s Role

My school board, along with many others, is intentional about focusing on policy, and not getting mired in the details of operations. We are mostly successful, although community pressures and sometimes even the legislatively mandated policies we must pass can push us off track on occasion. We try hard to stick to our responsibilities, and send other issues to the appropriate administrator.

And, as we are forced to cut budgets every year, our administration is intentional about focusing on what is truly essential for our core mission. Increasingly that means redistributing responsibilities, as well as dropping some activities (even those some people once thought were essential).

We need to insist on, and help, our principals do the same. The core responsibility of our principals is to assure the highest quality of learning occurs in each classroom for each student. We have to encourage principals to assess how they spend their day, and find ways to redistribute or simply drop activities that began to seem necessary in an era of shrinking budgets, but do not enhance learning. Teachers who are interested in future administrative jobs may be willing to take on responsibilities that will build their portfolio. In a profession with few promotional opportunities other than moving into administration, creating ways for teachers who love the classroom to also try new functions may help retain and energize staff.

My district has only begun to use the terminology of instructional leadership in board discussions, but we have certainly seen the results. Schools that were most challenged in terms of MCA results began focusing on instruction, not only best classroom practices but “what works for Johnny—and Ameenah and Madison and Kierra.” The principals and faculty focused on each student, not just all students, and the test scores jumped up—as well as the morale of students, families and staff.

Such success can’t be, and wasn’t in our district, about one individual’s personal charisma. To repeat and sustain such progress, boards need to work with district administrators to focus all principals on their role as instructional leaders. While principals are key, developing and implementing a successful instructional improvement strategy across a district reaches beyond principals and is more complex than I have room to describe. I encourage you to consult the materials cited in the endnotes for more information and examples of success. Ultimately, school boards and district administrators must base their actions on the belief that principals are “accountable for the quality of instruction in all the classrooms in their schools, and teachers are accountable for learning and using good instructional practice.”

School boards can lead their districts to instructional leadership by encouraging the administration to provide principals the professional development they need, and help them make any necessary operational adjustments, so that all principals become the instructional leaders our students deserve. After all, instruction—and explicitly its connection to student learning—is the reason for our existence, and the principal’s role in leading instruction must be front and center. Indeed, the success of our schools in assuring high levels of achievement for all—no, make that each—student depends on it.

Julie Sweitzer is a member of the St. Louis Park School Board and works at the University of Minnesota’s College Readiness Consortium (www.collegeready.umn.edu).

SOURCES:


Elmore and Burney, supra, p. 3.
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Attend this workshop to learn how to lead collaborative conversations about wicked, complex problems facing public education. Beyond traditional meetings, collaborative community conversations are a powerful way to generate excitement in support of education and other social causes.

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**Bargaining Basics**

7 p.m. – 9 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14, Convention Center
Tuition: $50, walk-ins add $10

Presenters: John Sylvester, MSBA Deputy Executive Director, and Bob Lowe, MSBA Associate Deputy Executive Director, Membership Services.

Negotiating employee contracts is one of a board’s most important responsibilities—it’s also among the board’s most complex, technical and political duties. The session will provide negotiators with a review of basic negotiation strategies as well as an understanding of PELRA and other applicable laws. This is essential training for new negotiators and a great refresher for veteran negotiators.

**Ethics & Leadership**

7 p.m. – 9 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 14, Convention Center
Tuition: $50, walk-ins add $10

Presenter: Cindy M. Bigger, Educator for Leadership and Civic Engagement with the University of Minnesota Extension.

As a school board official, you’re presented with perplexing decisions every day. What’s right? What’s wrong? How do you know? This session will help you understand Ethical Decision Making frameworks that you can use to make decisions. Come to this session with examples, questions and your stories as we explore this provocative topic.
The Minnesota Department of Education and Governor Pawlenty are committed to providing parents and educators with the tools and information they need to help better prepare every Minnesota student for success after high school.

With that goal in mind, we have been working diligently to develop an easy-to-understand Growth Model, to help parents and educators to track students’ progress toward proficiency from year to year. Ultimately, the Growth Model will help them to better determine whether our students are gaining and maintaining skills necessary to be successful after high school. As we continue to develop this model, we have sought out input from parents, educators and state legislators.

I would like to clarify two overarching principles, which have helped to develop this Growth Model.

First, it needs to be something that is easily understood and useful to parents. Too often in education, we bog parents down with education speak and jargon that does little to inform them of how their child is performing in school. For example, while most educators and policymakers understand what a growth model is, very few Minnesota parents know what it is or understand how it can be useful.
That is why we are not only developing a report card that clearly defines what a growth model is and why it is important, but also providing them with easy-to-understand tools which map out how their child and school are progressing in regard to proficiency.

For example, the Growth Model tools used in the Minnesota Department of Education report card identify whether students were proficient in 2006-07 and the kind of progress they made during the 2007-08 school year:

- Proficient but made no growth
- Proficient and continued to make progress
- Proficient and made exceptional progress
- Not proficient and made no growth toward proficiency
- Not proficient but made some progress
- Not proficient but made exceptional progress

Second, the Growth Model we are developing will measure growth to academic standards. If we are going to use a truly useful Growth Model, it is essential that we provide parents with a measure of how students are progressing toward meeting proficiency. In other words, we need to use it as a measure of how students are progressing to knowing and understanding the content of the academic standards at each grade level.

Schools that are helping their non-proficient students grow to proficiency need to be identified and commended. Schools that are helping their proficient students maintain their proficiency or grow to even greater levels of proficiency need, too, to be highlighted. Equally, schools that are not keeping their proficient students on track or who are not achieving measurable growth from their non-proficient students need to be identified for assistance.

While there may often be disagreement over how we achieve the goal, I know that we are all united in the understanding that we must work together to ensure that every one of our students has the 21st-century skills needed to succeed in what has become a hyper-competitive world.
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Bruce Lombard
Associate Director of Communications

Family
My wife, Diane, is a Senior Outreach Specialist at the Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging, and a Program Assistant for the YMCA Brother/Sister Program. We have two sons: Logan, 4, and Alexander (Lex), who’ll celebrate his first birthday in February. And we have a third on the way.

Previous experience
I received Bachelor of Arts degrees in English and History from Chico State University in California. I worked as a copy editor at The (Mankato) Free Press for 10 years and taught English as a second language in Korea. Other random jobs I’ve held: grocery store clerk, hotel laundry man, truck loader at UPS and a one-time summer stint as a merchandise salesman at Canadian Football League games.

Hobbies
I enjoy spending time with my family, wrestling with my 4-year-old, watching movies, watching pro football (I’m one of those annoying Dallas Cowboys fans) and eating.
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shp@Johnson-Condon.com
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Attorneys

Adams, Rizzi & Sween, P.A.
(Steven T. Rizzi, Jr.)
300 First Street NW
Austin, MN 55912
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Fax: 507-433-8890
www.adamsrizzisween.com
srizzi@adamsrizzisween.com

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Kennedy & Graven Chartered
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arif.a.quraishi@jci.com

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St. Paul, MN 55107
651-602-6860
www.peoplesco.com
sheldon.crabtree@peoplesco.com

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Rochester, MN 55904
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North Sioux City, SD 57049
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www.lunchtimesolutions.com
chris@lunchtimesolutions.com

Taher, Inc.
(Bruce Taher)
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Minnetonka, MN 55343
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www.taher.com
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St. Peter, MN 56082-3015
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www.msbsait.org
ddrill@msbsait.org
jsylvester@msbsait.org

Modular Classrooms
Innovative Modular Solutions
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jqualley@innovativemodular.com

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shannon@nssi-usa.com
tim@nssi-usa.com

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Minneapolis, MN 55434-8476
612-605-7265, Fax 612-395-9928
www.professionallearningboard.com
dj@professionallearningboard.com

Public Finance
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Rochester, MN 55902
507-288-5522, Fax 507-287-0757
www.customalarm.com
nikki@customalarm.com

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Waite Park, MN 56387
800-234-7274
www.skyward.com

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(Holly Hess)
6301 Bandel Road NW, #101
Rochester, MN 55901
507-285-1026, Fax 507-424-3011
www.snrresearch.com
hhess@snrresearch.com

Technology
Sunergi, Inc.
(Jodie Zesbaugh)
900 Long Lake Road, Suite 220
St. Paul, MN 55112
651-239-1420, Fax 651-633-2299
www.sunergi.com
jzesbaugh@sunergi.com

Technology Education
PaySchools
(Patrick Ricci)
6000 Grand Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50312
281-545-1957, Fax: 515-243-4992
www.payschools.com
pricci@payschools.com

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277 East Fillmore Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55107
651-602-6839
www.peoplesco.com
bill.gausman@peoplesco.com

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116 East Oakwood Drive
PO Box 249
Monticello, MN 55362
763-295-5119, Fax 763-295-4992
www.hoglundbus.com
salesmanager@hoglundbus.com

Minnesota School Bus Operators Association
(Shelly Jonas)
10606 Hemlock St. NW
Annandale, MN 55302
320-274-8313, Fax 507-288-8877
www.mssboa.com
shelly@mssboa.com

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Sad but true, the 2007-2009 round of teacher bargaining just ended, and now school boards must begin preparing for the 2009-2011 round. The MSBA staff will do what they can to assist member school districts in the negotiations process in several ways: written Master Agreement analyses; a “Bargaining Basics Early Bird” session at the 2009 MSBA Leadership Conference; a series of 12 full-day, regional “MSBA Negotiations Seminars” beginning Feb. 13 and continuing through Feb. 19; the provision of settlement data through regular “green sheet” Web site updates and MSBA’s PEERNet; and daily telephone/e-mail contacts.

Hopefully, MSBA member school districts will take advantage of that assistance. In addition, below are three of the questions school board members most commonly ask about collective bargaining (and they are pertinent to all employee bargaining units).

Q. What is MSBA’s recommendation relative to who should bargain for the school district?

A. As is generally the case with collective bargaining, the decision as to who will bargain is a local one, and a school board typically deals with it in one of three ways.

1. The board appoints a negotiating committee consisting of board members, one of whom acts as the head negotiator. In this approach, the superintendent, business manager, and other administrators act in an advisory capacity only and provide the committee with the data and information it requires.

2. The board appoints a negotiating committee consisting of board members and the superintendent, with the superintendent acting as the head negotiator. MSBA staff recommend that this approach be used only if the superintendent is comfortable with and wants to fill that role because doing so may impact his/her ability to later fill the role as the educational leader of the school district.

3. The board appoints a negotiating committee and hires a professional to act as head negotiator. While some expense will be generated, in the long run, the negotiated Agreement will likely be a more cost-effective and tightly constructed one. As an organization, MSBA does not recommend any particular approach, but boards should definitely keep in mind the fact that the bargaining process becomes more complex and time-consuming each round as funding gets tighter, laws change, and employee negotiators get more skilled.

Q. Does MSBA have a recommendation as to which ground rules the school board should agree?

A. In this case, MSBA does indeed have a recommendation. Boards should avoid agreeing to any ground rules at all! The fact of the matter is that collective bargaining is a fluid process, and ground rules generally limit flexibility and, as a result, disrupt the process more than they facilitate it. Besides, historically, if the parties are unable to compromise and “push comes to shove,” the employees’ bargaining committee often ignore the ground rules and/or accuse the board committee of violating them. On the other hand, if the parties are involved in interest-based/non-adversarial/win-win bargaining, ground rules are required, and the school board’s committee should then honor them regardless of what the employees’ committee does.

Q. When should boards let the public know what’s happening in bargaining?

A. Again, MSBA has a definite recommendation. Boards should begin communicating with the public relative to negotiations immediately and continue such communication throughout the process until settlement is reached. Bargaining is an open process under the law (so, if board committees are being used, the negotiations sessions would be open meetings); and taxpayer dollars are being spent, so a board should keep the public apprised—in a straightforward, unemotional, and non-subjective way—of its proposals/counterproposals, the proposals/counterproposals of the bargaining unit, and the progress (or lack thereof) being made, and they should begin doing so even before the first negotiations session is held.

Commonly, the employee group will not be happy with open communication (oftentimes, in fact, the first ground rule a bargaining unit will propose is “only joint communications with the public”), but open communication is typically advantageous to boards because it serves to educate the public about what is really happening; it serves to temper outrageous/“throw-away” proposals; and it serves to keep all the bargaining unit members accurately informed.

Please feel free to contact any MSBA staff member on the MSBA Management Services Team to discuss these—and any other—bargaining questions.
MSBA is here to serve YOU...

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH

Does your district need assistance in hiring a new superintendent?

MSBA offers a variety of services and materials designed to help member school boards make the right hiring choice:

- Superintendent search workshop,
- Free administrative vacancy announcement postings,
- Superintendent search communications tool kit,
- Superintendent search firms/consultants list,
- Administrative compensation information (PEERNet),
- Superintendent employment model contract,
- Community engagement process.

For more information, contact Sandy Gundlach, Director of Management Services

MSBA supports, promotes and enhances the work of public school boards.