

## Preparing School Superintendents

**Ann Zweber Werner**  
**Program Director, Licensure**  
**and Leadership Development**  
**University of Minnesota**

Preparing school superintendents is an interesting challenge. Representatives of the University of Minnesota's Licensure and Leadership Development for Educational Administrator's Program recently held listening sessions with a diverse group of 24 superintendents to determine what makes superintendent training different from other administrative licensure areas and to identify essential elements for that training. As members of the group shared their thoughts and built upon one another's comments, greater understanding of the multiple dimensions emerged.

One member stated that generally a superintendent's license is earned at the same time as another license, frequently that of the principal. Once licensed, the individual moves immediately into the principal's role — and five, six or seven years go by before someone asks him or her to be a superintendent. By that time the previous training may no longer be relevant. One superintendent said, "It would probably be better if candidates would say, 'We now are deliberately going to become a superintendent, we are going to go back and refresh all of our skills and get ready.' But, in reality, I think an awful lot of the time it's a

[clap hands together] here we go." Another shared the perspective that preparation at universities allows a person to receive the license but does not prepare the individual for the actual work of the superintendent. Currently the content base in most superintendents' licensure programs is only two or three courses added to the content base of another administrative license, most commonly a course titled School Superintendent, and, of course, a field experience. "We need to get beyond the minimums," posited another superintendent.

After defining the problem, members of the group easily moved into identifying superintendent preparation topics. Eighty-two topics were offered, many with rich discussion. One member clarified the need for "preparation in all of these topics as applied to the role of the superintendent." This simple statement and the discussion that followed underscored the importance of providing professional development programs for specific licensure areas that are based on practice and are supported by theory, reflection, research and inquiry. It validated the critical nature of pairing the voice of the practitioner in designing and implementing superintendent preparation with the voices of university experts who study best practices in support of

the implementation of sound leadership skills.

When asked what topics are most important, one superintendent replied that it is situational and depends on need (What is the latest issue?) and experience. Others identified key topics such as finance and budgeting, a clear and comprehensive understanding of teaching and learning, fairness in dealing with employees, politics including an understanding that "the great school board is the legislature," school board relationships, and creating an environment of hope. MASA Executive Director Charlie Kyte shared a similar list of topics generated by a subgroup of MASA. An associate superintendent suggested that the next step should be to reorganize the list into manageable domains and identify

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*Ann Zweber Werner*

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*MASA & MASE present . . .*



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***Conference Highlights . . .***

**Dr. David Thornburg** is an award-winning futurist, author and consultant whose clients range across the public and private sector, both in the United States and in Brazil. His monthly commentaries for PBS on the impact of emerging technologies on learning expand his reach far beyond the podium. Dr. Thornburg's educational philosophy is based on the idea that students learn best when they are constructors of their own knowledge. He also believes that students who are taught in ways that honor their learning styles and dominant intelligences retain the native engagement with learning with which they entered school. A central theme of his work is that we must prepare students for their future, not for our past.

**The Exhibit Fair** is a convenient way to visit with representatives of companies offering the latest products and services. Sign up for the prize drawings! Don't forget to shop the **Silent Auction**. Profits support the programs of the MASA Foundation.

**Small Group Breakout Sessions** will narrow the thematic focus to examine cutting edge topics.

**Dr. Michael Hartoonian** is a lecturer at the University of Minnesota, Department of Educational Policy and Administration. His research interests are in ethics, education, and economics, and their integration in a democratic republic. Before coming to the University, Michael served as Professor of Education and Liberal Studies in the Graduate School, Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota and Director of Graduate programs in Democratic Capitalism and Active Citizenship. Dr. Hartoonian has taught, lectured, and served as an education, business, and government consultant throughout the United States, Central America, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe. He will present on Thursday afternoon at the conference.

Committed to the belief that we must work to maximize the benefits and minimize the harm of media's impact on children, **Dr. David Walsh** founded the National Institute on Media and the Family in 1996. As President, Dr. Walsh spearheads the Institute's efforts to provide information about media to parents, teachers, and other concerned adults-through education, research, and advocacy. Psychologist, educator, family therapist, author, speaker, husband, and father of three, David Walsh is one of the leading authorities in North America on family life, parenting, and the impact of media on children. He is also a leading voice in addressing the issues of media's impact on brain development in children. In his latest book *Why Do They Act That Way: A Survival Guide to the Adolescent Brain for You and Your Teen*, Dr. Walsh explains exactly what happens to the human brain on the path from childhood into adolescence and adulthood.

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**Registration materials will be emailed to all members and will also be available on the MASA web site ([www.mnasa.org](http://www.mnasa.org)) and the MASE web site ([www.mnase.org](http://www.mnase.org)).**

## Preparing Young Learners in the 21st Century

by Ric Dressen,  
MASA President and  
Superintendent,  
Alexandria Schools

Growing up, I watched both *The Jetsons* and *Star Trek*. But I never thought those shows could become real. Today, I realize we are closer to those worlds than I ever imagined possible.

A major challenge for education is to prepare our young learners for a future that will include expanded space travel, robots and unknown inventions. This responsibility is truly difficult given the volume of tasks schools face each day and the speed in which our world is changing.

### The Ever-Changing World

As leaders, we need to be monitoring the future and preparing our schools to address this “ever-changing” world for our learners. The world changes include:

- Of the 391 countries in the United Nations, only 22% existed as nations fifty years ago.
- In 2000, 71% of America was white; and in 2050, 53% of America will be white.
- Only 20% of the workforce will have the skills for 60% of the jobs by the year 2010.
- Today, information doubles every 9 to 18 months.
- The Worldwide Web will change more during the next 3 years than during its first 12 years.

These are only a few of the highlights our world is experiencing. William Daggett profoundly notes in a recent leadership article, “The rate of change has been phenomenal and will come even faster. Yet, even with all these changes, if Rip Van Winkle woke up today, he’d be comfortable in most American classrooms.”

### Tomorrow’s Education

Education must begin responding to

an ever-changing world. Ian Jukes and Ted McCain, authors of *Windows on the Future*, encourage leaders to accept that change requires letting go of ideas and ways of doing things that we hold dear. They project education will not be confined to:

- A single place
- A specific time
- A single person
- Human teachers
- Paper-based information
- Memorization
- The intellectual elite
- Childhood
- Controlling learners

They suggest new curriculum for tomorrow’s schools will have to make a fundamental shift away from a focus on content-driven learning, **Preparing Young Learners...page 5**



Ric Dressen

## Power Cards—A Step Toward Greater Efficiency

by Charlie Kyte,  
Executive Director, MASA

P-cards are a way of paying school district bills electronically. Traditionally, schools relied on a paper system: receiving and processing invoices, issuing checks and mailing checks. While the system has been in use for a long time, it is relatively burdensome when compared to the efficiencies of electronic processing.

The p-card process allows a school district’s account manager to utilize an electronic card, much like a credit card, to pay for purchases. Merchants like the idea as they receive their money immediately. They do take a small

discount, which allows the bank sponsoring the cards to make a profit in the transaction.

With the p-card, schools receive a bill for their purchases at the end of the month. The school district pays a single consolidated bill with an electronic transfer from their bank or the Minnesota School District Liquid Asset Fund (MSDLAF+) to the bank sponsoring the power card. That’s it. No separate invoices, no checks issued.

Not only are p-cards more efficient, but they also are more secure. Every transaction is carefully tracked and can be tied directly back to the budget. P-cards can also be limited to only

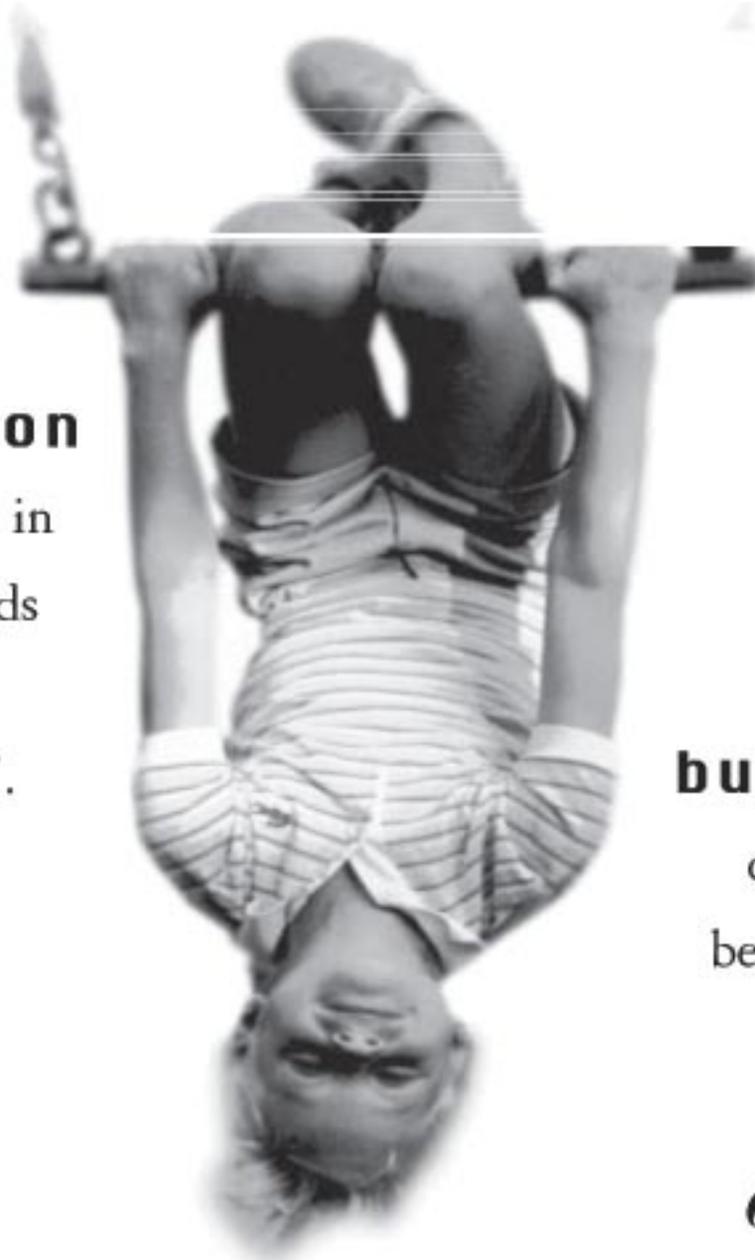
approved vendors, if so desired. MASA, in partnership with MSBA and MASBO, are sponsoring a p-card program through the Harris Bank of Chicago. We picked this particular p-card as it provided the highest level of security protection and the best commitment to training business office personnel in its use. They also provide a rebate on all school district purchases of 1/2 to nearly 1%! For large school districts, the rebate would be nearly enough to hire a full-time staff member.

To learn more about the p-card, please contact Mary Law at MASA (651-645-6272, mrlaw@mnasa.org). •



Charlie Kyte

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## Preparing School Superintendents... Continued from Page 1

indicators of quality. This content may be useful to the Minnesota Board of School Administrators as it redefines and updates superintendent competencies required of candidates seeking licensure.

The role of superintendents continues to become more complex

and challenging. Preparation programs must also change to better meet the needs of current and aspiring superintendents. The key to the design of those programs is deep and sustained collaboration between practitioners and the university. Individuals interested in participating in this discussion are welcome. If you wish to participate, please contact me at Werne023@umn.edu.

## Preparing Young Learners... Continued from Page 3

to more process-oriented form. Reading, writing and arithmetic will continue to be central to all student learning since these elements are essential "process skills" in a world that is more than ever driven by text and numerical data. Further, Jukes and McCain identify at least eight additional "process skills" to enhance the learning experiences of all students. These include:

1. Problem Solving and Critical Thinking
2. Communication Skills
3. Technical Reading and Writing
4. Applied Technical Reasoning Skills

5. Informational Affluency
6. Technology as a Tool
7. New Personal and Mindset Skills
8. New Inter-related and Holistic Curriculum

### Where Do We Begin

As educational leaders, our role is to learn more about our "ever-changing" world and future trends in education. We need to share this information with our staff and communities. More importantly, we need to shape our educational system to meet the needs of our "ever-changing" world. It probably won't be too long before we have an Elroy Jetson attending one of our schools or the Starship Enterprise establishing a time-travel charter school.

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- Bill Sturtevant

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## The Advantages of Construction Management v. General Construction as the Project Delivery Method

by Gary Benson,  
Vice President and Senior Cost Estimator  
and,  
Pat Overom, P.E.,  
Senior Project Engineer  
Kraus-Anderson Construction Company,  
Midwest Division

For years, the traditional delivery method for contracting a construction project has been the “General Construction” (GC) format, wherein an Owner identifies a project need, hires an architectural/engineering firm to design the project, puts the documents out to bid amongst general contractors (on either an invited or open list), and eventually contracts the project construction to (typically) the lowest bidder.

While this delivery method, and permutations thereof, is prevalent today, there has been a significant shift – especially in the public sector – to the “Construction Management” (CM) format for contracting and delivering a construction project. This has come about predominantly over the last two decades as owners have become more and more aware of the advantages of CM.

In considering the characteristics of the two methods, one can easily identify some of the prominent advantages of CM. First and foremost, under the CM contract for services, the construction manager is clearly an advocate for the owner’s interests and becomes part of the initial project team – owner, architect, and construction manager – typically occurring at the onset of the project design phase. This creates an advantageous teamwork situation for the owner, involving project professionals for both design and construction, unifying the design and construction of a project to meet the owner’s program needs within the time and budget constraints. Contrary to CM, the general contractor is not typically engaged until after all design work has been completed (without significant contractor input). Bids are then received, and a GC contract is executed. Moreover, this contract, by its very nature, creates an adversarial relationship between the owner and general contractor that will exist for the duration of construction.

Due to the fact that the CM method involves the construction manager at the onset of the design phase, the owner realizes many other obvious advantages of having a construction professional on board to work with the architect and engineers during the design phase. The CM is able to provide input on constructability issues, scheduling, phasing, and most importantly, detailed cost estimating and cost control. Construction cost input goes far beyond providing design-phase cost estimates. The CM will provide information to be utilized in evaluating Value Engineering efforts as the owner and project team consider various design decisions related to materials and systems, with cost information relating not only to first cost (construction), but (often) more importantly, life-cycle costs of on-going operation and maintenance, as well as replacement costs.

Clearly, this design-phase cost input and value-engineering analysis is not available to the owner under the GC format, since accurate cost information is not available until after the design is completed and bids are received. In fact, if a budget problem arises as a result of the bidding process, the owner is often faced with the lengthy (and sometimes painful) task of conducting a redesign or cost-reduction process. This process is often led by the “low bidder,” who is by nature seeking to maximize profit, thereby leaving the owner with a project that has less product for more money; i.e., much of the true savings goes to the general contractor, not the owner’s end product.

Other advantages of the CM delivery method occur during the construction phase portion of the project where, again, the owner has a construction professional advocating

for the owner’s needs in light of the construction documents, the construction schedule and, of course, construction costs. Because the construction manager is truly an owner representative, the CM is charged with supervising and coordinating the various trade contractors to ensure that the schedule is met, and that the construction meets the requirements of the architects specifications and drawings. This adherence to enforcing compliance with the construction documents serves the owner not only during construction, but also as assurance that the final building product will meet the owner’s occupancy needs long after the building is completed.

Another key advantage of CM to the building owner is that a construction manager is typically compensated for the services provided to the owner for the project during design and construction. In this way, the construction manager is not driven by a “profit” motive as the general contractor is, nor does the construction manager receive additional compensation for changes in the work. This can result in a significant cost savings to the owner, when compared to the GC delivery method by which the contractor is most often engaged by a “low-bid” situation, and must continually seek additional profit-generating opportunities throughout the duration of construction.

In closing, the CM delivery method has numerous advantages for the owner over the traditional GC method when being considered for a project, particularly in projects related to public sector entities such as public school districts, city, county and other municipal/ government work. •



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## President-Elect Candidates Speak Out

*This year, MASA is once again fortunate to have a strong slate of candidates for the various leadership positions' elections. We are using a number of different methods to deliver candidate campaign information to you. Many thanks to everyone running for a leadership position. Your commitment to your Association, your colleagues, and Minnesota's kids, is exemplary and the very thing that keeps MASA vital and progressive in our mission to be the voice for education administrators in Minnesota. We offer special thanks to Kathy Leedom, Bruce Jensen and Ray Farwell, candidates for MASA President-Elect. The position of MASA President is a challenging and time-consuming one, and we are very fortunate to have continued interest by such quality leaders. Below are Kathy's, Bruce's and Ray's comments:*



Ray Farwell

**Ray Farwell,  
Montgomery-  
Lonsdale Schools:**

I am honored to be nominated for MASA President-Elect. I have been an active MASA member on the regional level for many years. In 2004 I ran for the Board of Directors because I wanted to increase my involvement with MASA. If elected President, I will speak positively for public education for all students, public schools and school leaders. Twenty plus years of being a school leader have increased my commitment to public education and the individuals who administer school districts and school buildings. I am a strong advocate for networking with other superintendents and

mentoring and supporting those individuals entering the position. MASA has a good process for setting goals for itself and I would seek to accomplish those goals while encouraging increased member involvement with MASA.

Thank You for Your Support.



Bruce Jensen

**Bruce Jensen, Kittson Central  
Schools:**

Public education in Minnesota has long been recognized as one of the finest educational systems in the world! Whether students are from small or large districts, they continue to score among the best in the nation. Just as Minnesota schools are known for their excellence, the same can be said about its professional organizations. MASA has been and continues to be one of the premier professional organizations in the state.

I am honored to have been nominated for President-Elect of MASA. I have been an administrator for 22 years, the last eleven have been as superintendent at Kittson Central Schools. Throughout my career, I have held firm to the belief that it is important to be very active in our professional organization. I am presently serving my second term on the Board of Directors and have served on several MASA committees.

All schools, from rural to urban, face a great variety of challenges including financial shortfalls, student wellness issues and enrollment concerns. MASA must continue to actively work with our legislature and school leaders to face these challenges. I am passionate about MASA's mission and would be honored to be in a leadership role to help MASA accomplish its goals. Working together we can continue as a pre-eminent leadership organization providing the leadership skills and support needed to maintain Minnesota's fine educational systems. I would appreciate your vote.

**Kathy Leedom, Willmar Schools:**

What a dynamic and exciting profession we have chosen for our careers! Each and every day we have the privilege of being a part of a profession that has the goal of assisting all children in maximizing their potential. Spending a career improving the lives of children and young people through service and leadership has many rewards indeed. We all know about the challenges that face us on a daily basis, but we also know more and more about capitalizing on the opportunities and even turning challenges into opportunities whenever possible.

The leadership skills and abilities necessary to be successful in our important work need constant development and honing if we truly are to be effective in our endeavors. I happen to believe that our MASA organization is at the top of the list in providing ongoing experiences that allow us to be at the top of our game when it comes to our performance as well as feeling good about the job we are doing. Clearly, MASA goes a long way in providing the preparation necessary for us to meet the opportunities that allow us to be successful.

I am honored to be a candidate for President-Elect of this organization that provides so much for members who continually want to hone their skills and talents. If elected to serve you in this capacity, I pledge my energy to you in continuing the legacy of providing information and experiences that assist leaders in being at peak performance levels so that we are able to do the best job

**Kathy Leedom...page 22**

## IDEA Reauthorized - Finally!

**By Forest Hertlein, Ph. D.  
Federal Programs Specialist**

The recently reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reflects three years of testimony and lobbying, and will likely significantly impact the administration and accountability for special education at the state and local levels. By July 2005, final regulations will be drafted that include specific guidelines from the U.S. Department of Education for IDEA 2004 implementation.

Below is a summary of a few of the major changes in the new IDEA that must be implemented by July 2005. Significant changes have been made in other areas that will require administrators, teachers, and support staff to modify existing procedures and notices. TransACT Communications is currently identifying the impact of the new IDEA on parent communication to ensure that we can provide the tools necessary to help districts implement the new IDEA successfully and in a manner that keeps parents informed and involved in their children's education.

### **Funding**

Currently, federal government funds approximately 17 percent of the excess cost of special education. The new bill provides an incremental, but not mandatory, approach to reach 40 percent funding for special education within eight years. An amendment to make full funding mandatory over a six-year period failed, so funding decisions will continue through the annual appropriations process.

### **Alignment with NCLB**

Many of the reforms strive to align IDEA with NCLB. The bill requires that states establish goals for the performance of children with disabilities in order to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and notes that a state's overall performance for special education students may affect appropriation of IDEA funds. The bill also creates an allowable use of state-level IDEA funds to provide supplemental services for students with disabilities in Title I schools. Also, highly qualified staff requirements for special education teachers now closely parallel NCLB requirements for general education teachers.

### **Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and Meetings**

One of the most desired changes in IDEA by teachers and administrators relates to less paperwork and fewer team meetings within the IEP process. The new law provides some paperwork relief by requiring short-term IEP objectives for the most severely disabled students. It also provides significant relief on demands for teacher time at meetings by allowing, with parent approval, IEP modifications through conference calls or other remote methods without requiring a full IEP team meeting.

### **Discipline**

The bill allows schools to exercise reasonable discipline, while still protecting children who act out because of their disabilities. When infractions occur, children with disabilities will receive the same punishment that other children receive, unless the infraction is a direct result of a child's disability. Yet, parents will retain the right to override the district's decision that determines an infraction is not related to a child's disability. Additionally, the bill authorizes school personnel to place students in interim alternate education settings for misconduct involving weapons, drug violations, or infliction of serious injury. This provision will stand whether or not the behavior is related to the child's disability. •



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## How will the New FLSA Regulations Affect School Districts?



Kimberly Hewitt  
Boyd

**By Kimberly  
Hewitt Boyd,  
Attorney, Rider  
Bennett**

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) announced the final regulations governing overtime eligibility for “white-collar”

workers under the Fair Labor Standards Act (“FLSA”) on April 20, 2004. These regulations went into effect on August 23, 2004 and replaced regulations that had not been substantially updated in over 50 years. Announcing the regulations, U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao stated, “The final rule accomplishes exactly what we intended from the start, which is to preserve and protect overtime rights for white-collar workers. We are pleased to see people recognize the significant gains to workers under our final rule. Now there can be no doubt that workers win.”

Under the previous rules, only those workers who earned less than \$8,060 per year were automatically non-exempt, i.e., eligible for overtime pay. Recognizing that even minimum wage employees earn more than that, the new rules nearly triple the salary threshold an employee must meet before he or she will be exempt from earning overtime pay. Now, any full-time worker earning under \$23,660 per year, including “white-collar” employees in that category, will be virtually guaranteed overtime pay.

Despite the publicity these new rules have generated, their impact may be fairly minor, in particular as it relates to school district employees. In general, most

white-collar employees earn more than \$23,660 per year, and the new salary requirements do not apply to outside sales employees, teachers, and employees practicing law or medicine. In addition, school district positions that employ large numbers of people, such as teachers, instructional aides and bus drivers, are not affected. According to the DOL, the new regulations will affect only 1.3 million white-collar workers – a tiny percentage of the nation’s workforce.

In addition to a revised salary test, the new regulations modify some of the primary duties in which an individual must engage to be considered exempt. For example, under the old rules, it was sufficient for a manager to qualify under the “executive” exemption if he or she customarily and regularly directed the work of two or more employees. Under the new regulations, the manager must have the authority to hire or fire other employees, or the manager’s recommendations must be given particular weight. The duties test for the outside sales exemption has also been modified.

The regulations also contain a new rule for “highly-compensated” workers who earn total annual compensation of \$100,000 or more, at least \$455 per week of which is paid on a salary or fee basis. To qualify under the “highly-compensated” exemption, workers will also have to customarily and regularly perform at least one of the duties of an exempt executive, administrative or professional employee, as identified in the standard tests for those employees.

In addition to these overtime issues, the regulations will change certain deductions that an employer

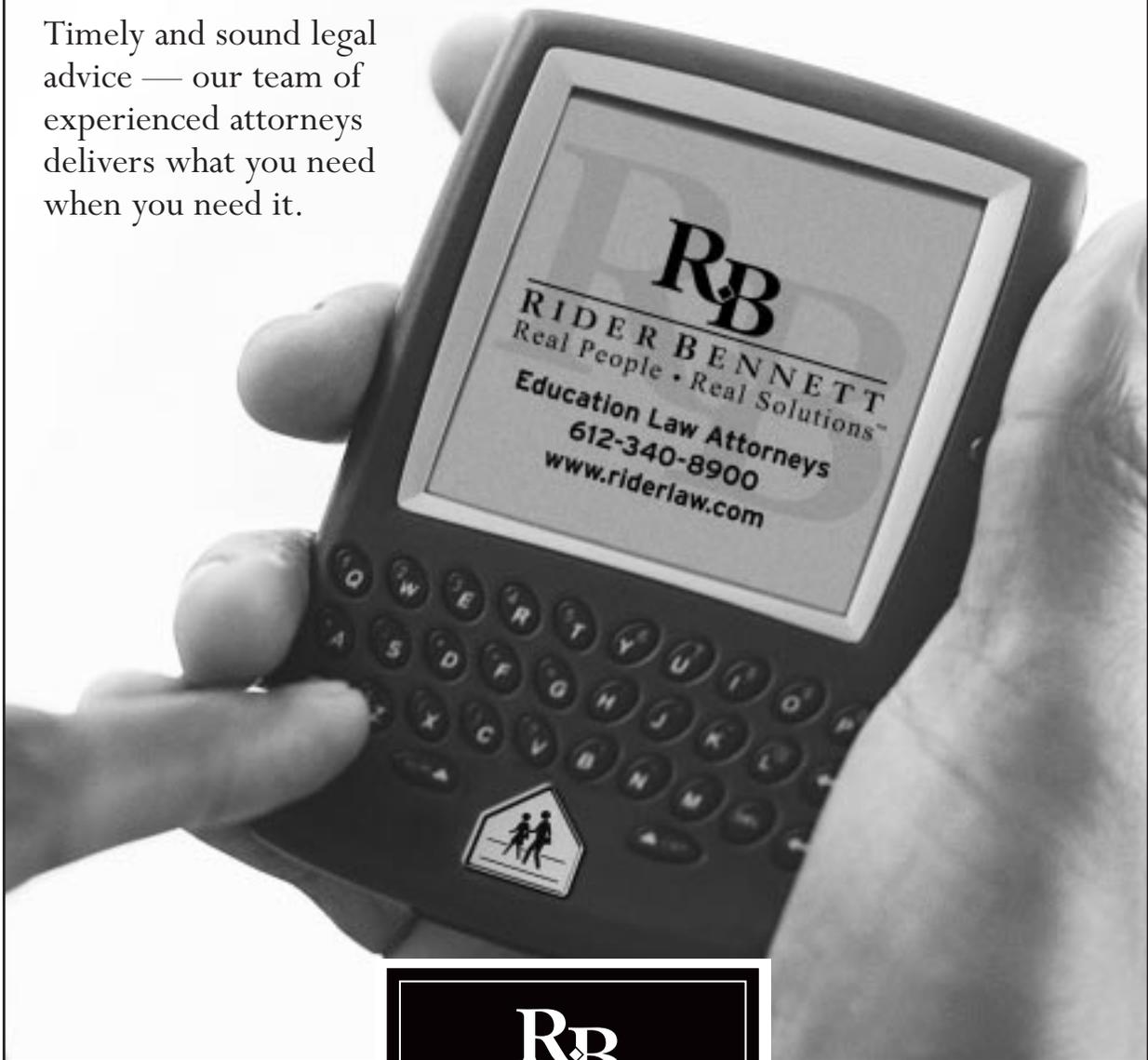
may make from a worker’s salary without threatening the individual’s exempt status. For example, the new regulations enable employers to deduct pay for disciplinary suspensions, under limited circumstances, while maintaining the worker’s exempt status. Such suspensions must be for one or more full days and be imposed pursuant to a written policy applicable to all employees. Additionally, the regulations will contain a safe harbor provision for employers that make improper deductions from a worker’s salary. Improper deductions that are either isolated or inadvertent will not result in the loss of the exemption for any of the employees subject to the improper deductions, as long as the employer reimburses the employees.

By eliminating the two-part salary test, the rules have been simplified potentially reducing the risk that employers will make errors that could result in litigation. Before the new regulations, FLSA lawsuits against school districts were on the rise. A litigation group in Mississippi had sued more than two-thirds of the school districts in that state for violations of the FLSA’s overtime provisions.<sup>1</sup> Most of the cases settled for between \$4,000 and \$5,000, for total cost to school districts of between \$15-\$20 million. That same litigation group made plans to sue school districts in other states.<sup>2</sup>

While overall the new regulations will make it easier for school districts to determine which employees are exempt and which are non-exempt, there are other FLSA concerns that may continue to cause problems for districts. For example, where there is dual **FLSA Regulations...page 20**

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## Capitol Climate—How is the Legislative Session Going?

by **Charlie Kyte,**  
**Executive Director, MASA**

One of the greater concerns we all have is finding sufficient sources of revenue to provide the time-honored programs supported by the state in Minnesota. Without sufficient revenue, increases in funding will be small and many programs will be underfunded. One of the challenges is to find a few legislators, or a party, that has the courage to tell the state to raise more revenue.

One solution is to reinstate a statewide property tax that would be fully equalized at about 20% of the public education Foundation Aid formula. This broad based and steady tax would help to stabilize the funding system for public education.

Once a revenue solution is found, we then need to be conscious of how the money is spent. Legislative leaders, while supportive of the people who work in public education, are concerned that new funding will be eaten up in salary increases. Thus, the push for an alternative compensation system, to provide a higher salary to education professionals and tie that salary level to the accomplishment of students.

At this point, it is difficult to see how an alternative performance-based compensation system will work. However, the legislature is encouraging local districts to try to find a way to tie student and teacher performance to the

compensation system. We expect that there will be significant funding behind these proposals. Expect these systems to initially be somewhat crude as both management and employees are skeptical.

Another goal of the Governor and legislature, is to move toward simplifying the funding formulas. In the past, various funding streams have tended to “get away” from state lawmakers based on the formulas in place. Thus, we are seeing significant “delinking” of funding sources from the core education formula. The simplification of the pupil weighting formula will be the subject of intense debate. From the schools’ perspective, changes toward simplification need to be crafted so that school districts don’t experience long-term revenue losses because of the simplifying changes made by the legislature.

By late March, we will have a better sense of the “civility” of the legislature. We fully expect that there will be deep partisan differences. Our hope from the beginning has been that the various players would conduct themselves with dignity and politeness. Last year that civility did not occur. This year we hope to see only minor outbursts of negative behavior and more of a commitment to work together.

We are a long way from the end of the legislative session. As I write this, I am still hopeful that this session will end with a positive outcome for Minnesota’s K-12 education system. •

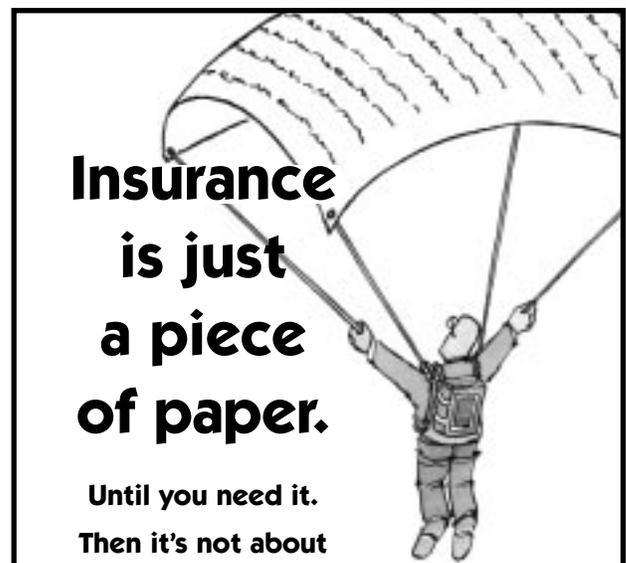


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# Minnesota: the State of Our State and Standards

**Jenni Norlin-Weaver**  
**Director of Curriculum,**  
**Edina Schools**

Standards are alive and well across the United States, including Minnesota. By the time students in the class of '08 graduate, the Minnesota Academic Standards must be firmly in place. Naturally, that means that most districts have been working to align meaningful curriculum, authentic assessment, appropriate instruction and useful professional development to them for the past two years. It is well to recall that the goal of standards-based reform has always been to improve education by raising academic expectations and specifying knowledge and skills important for all students to learn. ***How are we doing that?***

In curriculum conversations across Minnesota, many districts have found that the MN Academic Standards developed in math and language arts have required relatively little re-working of curriculum. In science, the challenge for many has been finding the courses to provide “all standards for all students,” given the mismatch between the number of credits required of high school students (3) and the strands (5). Although most curriculum teams and teachers would suggest that the MN Standards are too numerous across all content, it is the social studies standards that are most problematic in this regard. Since districts are charged with the development/ adoption of standards in other areas, these vary widely. ***What are districts doing to support implementation?***

All involved in implementing standards in the K-12 classroom find that they need strategies for identifying what skills and knowledge will help ensure high achievement levels for students in the classroom. To accomplish this, all educators in

the system must have a working knowledge of the standards. Districts have found it useful to narrow academic content standards by distinguishing the “essential” standards from those that are “nice-to-know” at each grade level and then determining the critical concepts and skills contained within them. This doesn’t “excuse” attention to all standards, but can assist in determining a focus when confronted with the sheer number of standards and benchmarks in the MN documents. So, prioritize the “essential ideas” and most important skills and make sure that teachers and students understand these priorities. ***When the standards are in place, then what?***

Simply setting standards and taking an MCA test will not coerce improvement. Using multiple assessments throughout the school year provides teachers, students, parents, and school and district leaders with valuable information about student achievement. One of these measures may be an end-of-course assessment administered system wide. Additionally, embedded “common assessments” will allow a school/district to impact the learning in process, not simply report it at the end. Provisions can better be made for diverse needs and learning styles. ***How else can we help our teachers and students use the standards?***

***Resource allocations support implementation.*** Staff development can and should include multiple opportunities to work together throughout the implementation process. The following list of considerations is intended to assist that process.

***Teachers should work together to:***

- Study the Academic Standards
- Prioritize those standards for their students

- Identify how and where the standards are addressed in district curriculum materials
- Develop strategies for standards which are important and not addressed in materials

***Professional Development:***

- Teachers need content-specific professional development in effective ways to help students master the content in state standards

***Curriculum and Instructional Support:***

- Districts must translate standards into curriculum that is specific enough to help teachers plan daily lessons
- Teachers must be provided various kinds of support to help them improve instruction

***Well-designed Assessments:***

- All assessments must be valid, fair, reliable, and well aligned with standards and curriculum
- State testing systems must include a variety of item formats that measure both basic and more advanced knowledge and skills

***Teachers and administrators should work together to:***

- Study district MCA data
- Monitor progress on standards using classroom assessments
- Use the data to determine where students need different materials or instructional strategies
- Select or develop needed materials
- Develop new strategies
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to learn

*Additional information from the author is available on MASA's web site at [www.mnasa.org](http://www.mnasa.org).* •

# Professional Partners: Examining Teacher-Superintendent Relationships

by **Charlie Kyte**  
**MASA Executive Director**  
and  
**John Borgen**  
**Field Staff, Education Minnesota**

Successful collaboration and relationships supporting a harmony of activity and purpose are important elements of the effectiveness of the school district team. The quality of those relationships can serve as a barometer of sorts, gauging the likelihood of productive synthesis among members of the team. In other words, if it takes a village to raise a child, it makes sense that keeping that village in good shape should be a high priority.

An important challenge for school district leaders is to develop a strong community of professionals who work well together. Yet sometimes administrators, especially superintendents, and teachers, particularly union leaders, find themselves in the uncomfortable position of adversaries, having to negotiate with one another and resolve employment disputes while they must also be “on the same team” for the sake of the children they serve.

We often talk about “win-win,” as though it describes the best possible outcome to any situation. Is everybody happy? Does everyone feel like they’ve won? Though we can come as close to that as fate will have it, “win-win” rarely happens—“compromise-compromise” is probably a better description of success. It seems to make sense to ask what factors increase the odds of stakeholders experiencing positive professional relationships, completing successful negotiation processes, and feeling they are valued and heard, so the district team can turn their shared focus to the business of educating kids.

Last January, MASA and Education Minnesota (the merged teachers’ unions) convened a group of teacher union leaders and superintendents to talk about the nature of existing relationships and how to build effective relationships among teachers and superintendents. The meeting was not intended to be a forum for discussion about policy or politics. It was not focused around asking specific questions or understanding particular data. It was meant to create an opportunity to talk about relationships to support ongoing conversation and to promote

greater levels of understanding.

We talked about the irritants, discussing the things that may, intentionally or not, be said and done that become sources of friction among school leaders and teachers. We wondered about how we might increase our sensitivity to one another’s perspective. We asked for honesty. Below is some of the insight gleaned from this first session.

## *Issues of Attitude*

At several points in the conversation, teachers expressed a concern about experiencing administrators being subtly condescending to teachers. A sense of being “put down,” or discounted as important contributors to the district team is the expressed result.

Of equal concern to the teachers is their impression that administrators feel that they themselves invest a deeper level of caring about students than teachers do. Teachers report a sense that administrators feel that teachers are “just there for themselves” while administrators understand the bigger picture. Yet interestingly, there is also unease among teachers with what some feel is a “business model” of leadership that is not necessarily perceived as being in keeping with the “spirit” of what a school should be.

Both teachers and superintendents expressed frustration with a lack of time for interaction and communication. Both groups articulated their understanding that a lack of time for dialogue is detrimental to getting beyond perception toward real understanding.

## *Serving the Wider Community Together*

Community expectations can create conflict among teachers and school leaders. Teachers express aggravation about experiencing that parents and community members often don’t understand their needs.

Administrators are frustrated that teachers often don’t understand the concerns of the community. Both groups expressed frustration with some parents who tend to “corner” educators.

## *Crisis in School Funding*

Scarce resources are a source of anxiety for all members of the school district team, and the allocation of dollars can have implicit, and not necessarily intended, meaning. Administrators also express concern about the ramifications of budget cutting and the potential loss of support functions.

## *The Employment Agreement*

Of course, there are a number of precarious topics around the employer-employee relationship. When we asked the discussion group what caused the most friction, both teachers and superintendents said, “bargaining.” Other areas of concern were issues around fringe benefits (interpretations of, access to, and levels of), administration control of staff development activities, the process of performance evaluation, and the processes for reductions of both non-tenured and tenured staff.

## *It’s Important to Keep Talking*

District team members who effectively communicate with one another can come to a level of intimacy that builds understanding and empathy. In the best cases, a culture of trust and acceptance fosters creativity and enhances the energy of the team. The most important conclusion we take away from our January meeting is that the dialogue needs to continue, and both administrators and teachers should actively pursue good relationships. If we were to define a recommendation based on this experience, it would be to suggest that educators look for ways to create safe conversations for discussing issues at the local level, and to celebrate that dialogue and the resulting improvement in relationships. •

# Professional Relationships in Our Schools

by **N. John Borgen**  
**Field Staff, Education Minnesota**

In ideal situations professional relationships between public school teachers and administrators are characterized by mutual respect, understanding and trust. Sometimes and in some places, this is not the norm. All too often, the ideal is only partially realized. Unfortunately, in some circumstances, the ideals are missing to a great extent. There are many reasons why there is a gap between the ideal vision and the actual quality of teacher – administrator relationships. These include competing interests and values, misunderstandings, lack of information, false assumptions, suspicions, professional jealousies, old resentments, personality issues and others.

Most education professionals expect strong, divergent opinions to exist over the issue of collective bargaining and other labor relations matters – and they do. These differences cause or exacerbate conflict and adversarial relationships. These already existing attitudes and feelings color other professional and personal interactions of administrators and teachers, especially between teacher union activists and school superintendents. Some observers would say that an “us-vs.-them” way of being exists in all labor-management relationships and that is just the way it is!

Add to this mindset the ongoing stress which public education has experienced because of constricted funding for schools, attacks on the quality of our programs and consequent erosion of public confidence in our entire public education system. All of us who toil in the vineyards of our schools have experienced the slash-and-burn mentality. Many of us feel worn down and frustrated.

It is often easier to fight those within

rather than band together to take on the common “enemy.” Some of us, and I do include myself, have not always spoken kindly about our colleagues on the “other side of the table.” Often we have enjoyed taking pot shots at each other and have allowed ourselves to sow seeds of antagonism, nurture disrespect and foster distrust. I believe many of us in the union have been part of creating an environment where mutuality has been sacrificed for self-righteousness, cooperation has been co-opted by blind advocacy for our own positions and mutual respect has been set aside for cheap shots and put downs. I also believe we have seen these behaviors from the “other side of the table,” too.

These kinds of power struggles and personality disputes have had detrimental effects on our relationships and our schools. There are better ways of doing things. One way to do this, I believe, rests with open conversation and dialogue. We should talk about how teachers and administrators have worked together exploring existing attitudes and feelings and determine what behaviors get in the way and which ones can be altered to make positive differences for our professional relationships. These could lead to not only more enjoyable and rewarding working conditions, but also to greater student learning and real school success. We are all in this public education system together. Isn't time for us to start talking to each other about ways we can make a difference?

*N. John Borgen is on the Field Staff of Education*

*Minnesota. He has worked for the former Minnesota Education Association since 1971 and since the merger with Minnesota Federation of Teachers in 1998, for Education Minnesota. Borgen began his career as a music teacher in southern Wisconsin. He has worked with teacher unions in Albert Lea, Austin, Mounds View, Roseville, White Bear Lake, and North St. Paul and in numerous smaller school districts. John Borgen can be reached at [john.borgen@educationminnestoa.org](mailto:john.borgen@educationminnestoa.org).* •



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## School Finance Litigation

By Greg Vandal,  
Superintendent  
Sauk Rapids-Rice Schools

Article XIII, Section 1 of the Minnesota Constitution clearly states: "it is the duty of the legislature to establish a general and uniform system of public schools. The legislature shall make such provisions by taxation or otherwise as will secure a thorough and efficient system of public schools throughout the state."

Educators have long questioned whether Minnesota is meeting this constitutional duty. Several years of flat funding and the advent of a standards movement here and across the nation have prompted at least one education group to study the prospect that an intervention by the courts might be required to create a system of public schools that is general and uniform and provides funding that is thorough and efficient.

For the past two years, Schools for Equity in Education (SEE), working with other education advocacy groups in the state, has been leading a study of a constitutional challenge. John Myers, a nationally-known school finance expert, was commissioned by SEE to analyze Governor Pawlenty's School Finance Reform Task Force report; the litigation study group has involved experts from the National School Boards Association and attorneys from states engaged in litigation.

Recently, meetings have been held with several education organizations who have expressed interest in supporting litigation study. SEE, under the name Association of Stable and Growing School Districts, helped advance Minnesota's most recent school funding lawsuit, Skeen v. State of Minnesota, which was decided in the early '90s. While the State ultimately prevailed in Skeen, significant advances in funding equity were secured in the legislature as a result of actions in the courts.

The current litigation study differs from the Skeen strategy in a fundamental way. While the former suit focused on the equitable distribution of state resources to Minnesota's schools, this endeavor is examining issues of adequacy. The study group, in a view shared by most education advocates, contends that the current funding system does not provide public schools the resources necessary to adequately meet state and federal standards. Additionally, current funding levels for public education are not based on a rational determination of the costs of providing a quality education to our students. Rather, state funding is determined by the amount of revenue the legislature deems

is available in a particular biennium without making any scientific assessment of whether the revenue is sufficient to meet the required outcomes.

Minnesota is not alone in considering legal recourse to funding difficulties. In the last three decades, all but a handful of states have been entangled in school finance lawsuits. The most recent of these cases have been adequacy disputes, and they have brought about significant reform.

The preferred mechanism to secure desired change remains with the state legislature. Education advocates will continue to lobby for a system which is standards-based, provides resources so all children have an opportunity to receive a free quality public education, and is funded with revenue mechanisms which offer a fair and equitable tax burden for all of the taxpayers in the state. It is hoped that, as a first step, policymakers will complete the work of the School Finance Reform Task Force and finish the education cost study begun by Governor Pawlenty. Clearly, prompt and appropriate action by the legislature would preclude the need for a constitutional challenge. •

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## FLSA Regulations... Continued from Page 10

employment calculating, overtime pay is not always straightforward. If a district employee works two positions, such as a custodian and as a bus driver, and the total hours exceed 40 in a workweek, the employee must be paid overtime. Similarly, where a district employs an individual to do one task and the same employee works with a separate company, with whom the district outsources (e.g., bus company) doing different tasks, the district might be a joint employer. As a joint employer, the district may be required to pay the employee overtime if the hours worked are in excess of 40 hours in a week for both jobs.

Districts are also faced with complicated FLSA questions where they have employees who are jointly employed as coaches or who wish to volunteer as a coach. If a teacher is also a coach the problem is less complicated, because as a teacher they are exempt. But if a non-exempt employee is also a coach or an assistant coach, a more careful analysis may be required to evaluate overtime obligations. In some cases, districts have refused to allow non-exempt employees to volunteer as coaches at all. In a recent DOL opinion letter, the issues were clarified. If a nonexempt employee wants to volunteer as a coach the FLSA requires that they only receive a nominal fee, not be coerced into volunteering and not perform services similar to regular work.<sup>3</sup> If a non-exempt employee is paid to coach, they may be entitled to overtime pay.

In order to avoid liability school districts and the administrative staff should at a minimum: (1) be familiar with the full scope of responsibilities under the FLSA; and (2) keep accurate documentation regarding the time of the day and day of the week that each of employee's workweek begins, the basis on which wages are paid, hours worked each day, total hours worked per week and total overtime earnings.

If you have other questions concerning the FLSA, your school district may contact members of the Education Law Practice at Rider Bennett, L.L.P. at 612-340-8990.

<sup>1</sup> The School Litigation Group Web site <http://www.slgcentral.com/states.html> indicates they are suing Districts in a number of states.

<sup>2</sup> Under the Act, both districts and individual supervisors may be subject to civil and criminal penalties. Civil penalties include but are not limited to, payment of unpaid overtime, reasonable attorneys' fees, litigation and pre-judgment interest. Criminal penalties are available for willful violations including, \$10,000 fine for first offense, and up to six months in jail for second offense.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Labor opinion letter to the Honorable Cass Ballinger, U.S. House of Representatives, July 14, 2004.

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# Academy for New Superintendents



**Kris Bryan Nielsen**  
Executive Director  
Minnesota Administrators  
Leadership Forum

Many of our school leaders will be retiring in the next few years. This vastly increases the need for more training for superintendents. The MASA Foundation Board has formed a sub-committee to find funding to address this need.

For the 2005-2006 school year, an anonymous donor has pledged \$20,000 to revamp and improve the existing "Great Start" series and to enhance the current training and

capacity of mentors for new superintendents. "Thank you!"

A rough outline of the training sessions for next year includes "Getting Started Right" (August), "Challenges and Current Issues" (September/October), topics relating to specific, timely tasks I (January) and topics related to specific, timely tasks II (March/April). Additionally, we will offer mentor training and work to solidify relationships between new superintendents and mentors.

MASA is also exploring other training partnerships with higher education institutions and foundations. The goal is to provide high quality training for aspiring, new and mid-career superintendents so that these leaders can keep pace with this increasingly complex and demanding position. •

## Kathy Leedom...Continued from Page 8

possible on behalf of the children of Minnesota. Whether through networking, advocacy efforts, promoting public education, thoughtful problem-solving, news alerts, cutting edge dialogue, or informational tips, MASA is one of those dynamic vehicles that we can all embrace to significantly help fill our professional needs. I request your support in permitting me to be a part of the bold leadership effort that positions us to be at the forefront in representing "Ah - Those Marvelous Minnesota Schools!"

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- Work tirelessly in carrying out the organizational goals as established by the MASA membership.
- Provide leadership in promoting public education in an effort to regain a top-priority standing in Minnesota.
- Pursue partnerships that will strengthen leadership's voice in promoting children and learning.
- Position educational leaders to effectively approach worthwhile change initiatives that are or will be on the horizon.
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# Calendar 2005

**March 16**  
**Region Meetings**  
 Thief River Falls &  
 Minneapolis

**March 17**  
**MASA Day @ the Capitol**  
 Kelly Inn, St. Paul

**March 25**  
**Spring Holiday**  
 MASA Offices Closed

**April 3**  
**Daylight Savings Time Begins**

**April 6**  
**Region Meeting**  
 Fergus Falls

**April 20**  
**Board Meetings**  
 Sheraton Bloomington  
 • Executive Committee  
 9 - 10:45 am  
 • Board of Directors  
 11 am - 4 pm

**April 20**  
**Great Start Workshop IV**  
 Sheraton Bloomington

**April 21 - 22**  
**MASA/MASE Spring Conference**  
 Sheraton Bloomington

**May 4**  
**MASA Foundation Board Meeting**  
 11 am, MASA Board Room

**May 5**  
**Region Meeting**  
 Staples

**May 11**  
**Region Meeting**  
 Mankato

**May 12**  
**Region Meeting**  
 Rochester

**May 13**  
**Region Meeting**  
 St. Cloud

**May 13**  
**Summer Newsletter Submissions Due**

**May 17**  
**Region Meeting**  
 Chisholm

**May 25**  
**Region Meeting**  
 Worthington

**May 30**  
**Memorial Day Holiday**  
 MASA Offices Closed

**June 9**  
**Region Meeting**  
 Baudette

**June 14 - 15**  
**MASA Board Retreat**  
 Science Museum of MN

*You can always find up-to-date calendar information on the MASA web site at [www.mnasa.org](http://www.mnasa.org).*

*What does a school district do to find great staff?*



Minnesota Schools Jobsite Online is an effective, inexpensive way for school districts to advertise job openings on the internet. Districts can post unlimited vacancies, for all levels of positions, for a small annual fee. People looking for positions can browse those jobs at no cost.

**School Districts:**  
**at Minnesota Schools Jobsite Online, you can**

- Post jobs
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- All Online!

The Jobsite's applicant site streamlines the hiring process for both school districts and applicants. Applicants for licensed positions complete an online screening form that member districts can use to electronically screen applicants according to their own criteria.

*Applicants may post their credentials (transcripts, license, letters of recommendation, etc.) to the site.*

For most school districts, the annual subscription cost is less than the cost of advertising just one position in the newspaper. And the jobsite postings and applications are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Rates are determined according to district size.

Jobsite Online is a service of the  
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