

Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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News Release

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Barb Nicol Receives MASA Distinguished Service Award

(St. Paul, Minn.) – The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Barb Nicol, recently retired President of Barbara Nicol Public Relations, recipient of the 2023 MASA Distinguished Service Award. Nicol has received this award for her support of the children of Minnesota and for her contributions to activities that have improved Minnesota's public education system. She will be honored at a statewide recognition ceremony during the MASA Spring Conference, March 9-10, 2023, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

Nicol has four decades of experience in the communications field. For the past 32 years, she has provided strategic communications consulting services to school districts and education-related organizations as president of Barbara Nicol Public Relations. Prior to starting her consulting practice, in the 1980s she spent six years with Sheggeby Advertising, a business-to-business advertising agency, and two years as Communications Director for the Minnesota Private College Council, a consortium of private colleges. Nicol recently retired from Barbara Nicol Public Relations in December 2022.

Throughout her career, Nicol provided her clients with various services including strategic communications and marketing planning, communications audits, publication development, referendum campaign communications, and training in school district marketing and customer service. She has worked with dozens of school districts and educational associations, and has presented at local, regional and national conferences on school marketing and communications strategies. In addition to providing project-based communications consulting, Nicol served as part-time/interim communications director for six districts while they conducted a job search or to cover a maternity leave. While the vast majority of her clients were Minnesota school districts, she also supported districts in Wisconsin and Colorado. In addition, she worked with a number of education-related organizations, including the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA); Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA); Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP); Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA); Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board; University of Minnesota-Center for Early Education and Development; and Hennepin and Dakota counties.

Nicol is a Past-President of the Minnesota School Public Relations Association (MinnSPRA). In 2014, she received the Dawn Kay McDowell Award, the highest honor given by MinnSPRA to a school public relations professional. She served on the Universal Accreditation Board, which oversees the Accreditation in Public Relations (APR) credentialing process. In 2018 she was named an NSPRA Front-Runner, which honors leaders who are doing outstanding work for their schools, their chapters and for NSPRA. In 2019, she co-authored the book, "School Tax

Elections: Planning for Success in the New Normal,” with Don Lifo, which is considered a go-to resource for referendum elections.

Nicol was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota and is a proud graduate of the Minneapolis Public Schools. She holds an Accreditation in Public Relations, an internationally recognized credential given to public relations professionals who demonstrate expert knowledge, experience and judgment in public relations. Nicol received a Master of Public Affairs in Education Policy and Non-Profit Management at the University of Minnesota’s Hubert H. Humphrey Institute. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Behavioral Science and the Law from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Each year, MASA recognizes members for their contribution to public education. MASA is a professional organization of Minnesota’s school leaders, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of special education, and other central office administrators, as well as state department administrators, college and university professors, and other educators throughout Minnesota dedicated to educational leadership for students.

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Photo: Barb Nicol

