

Great Start Cohort – Presenter Biographies

August 18, 2022
Minneapolis Marriott NW
Arbor Lakes Room

Deb Henton, Ed.D.

Executive Director
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Dr. Deb Henton was appointed Executive Director of MASA on July 1, 2020. She had been an active member of MASA participating on various committees and served as President of the association in 2018-19. During her presidency, Dr. Henton worked with the Board of Directors and the Executive Director to advance the initiatives in the MASA strategic plan and worked to outline an initiative to increase the number of female superintendents. As Executive Director, she has continued these efforts while also focusing on inclusion and equity.

Dr. Henton's prior experience includes a wide range of experiences at both the school district and state level. She has been a teacher, assistant principal, principal, executive director, chief of staff, and for thirteen years a school superintendent. Dr. Henton was appointed to two terms on the state Board of School Administrators by Governor Dayton and recently chaired the board before becoming Executive Director of MASA.

Dr. Henton is the recipient of a number of professional recognitions. In 2018, she was named the Minnesota Superintendent of the Year. In 2015, MASA's Region 6 awarded her as their Administrator of Excellence, and in 2014, she received MASA's Kay E. Jacobs Memorial Award. She was named the 2011 eSchool News Tech-Savvy Superintendent and the 2013 Outstanding Service Award recipient from the Minnesota Service Cooperatives.

Dr. Henton received her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota in 1999. She holds a master's degree in Educational Administration and a master's degree in Education, both from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. Dr. Henton's bachelor's degree in Broad Field Social Studies and History is from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

Kirk Schneidawind

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Gary Lee has 29 years of experience in private business — both in a large corporate setting and as an owner/president of small rural businesses. Gary is a former member of the Fertile-Beltrami School Board. Gary also served on the MSBA Board of Directors, the Northwest Service Cooperative Board of Directors, the Minnesota Service Cooperatives Board of Directors, the MSBA Insurance Trust Board of Directors, and the Big Three working group. Gary received a bachelor's degree in Accounting / Computer Science from Minnesota State University – Moorhead. Gary joined MSBA in 2009.

Amy Fullenkamp-Taylor serves as the Director of Management Services for the MN School Boards Association. Before joining MSBA, she spent over 15 years working as a human resources professional for a diverse portfolio of industries including Gaming, Retail, Telecommunications, and Manufacturing. She received her bachelor's degree from MN State University - Mankato and her MBA from Capella University. Amy also holds the following certifications - Senior Professional in Human Resources from the Human Resource Certification Institute and SHRM Senior Certified Professional from the Society for Human Resource Management.

Nancy Rajanen

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Dr. Rajanen completed a 38-year career in Minnesota K-12 public education, with 20 years in Pk-12 leadership roles. Her leadership roles in Minnesota included Director of Special Education, Director of Human Resources, Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent of Schools. For the past seven years, Dr. Rajanen has been

Coordinator of Administrative Licensure at the University of Minnesota, providing instruction and advising to graduate students pursuing MN administrative license as Principal, Superintendent, or Director. Dr. Rajanen has assumed leadership roles within professional organizations, including the State Negotiators, MN Association of School Administrators and MN Association of Personnel Administrators.

Dr. Daniel Bittman

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Dr. Bittman has served as Superintendent of ISD 728 since July 1, 2017 and grew up in the area. He served as Superintendent of the Sauk Rapids-Rice School District since 2010 and until joining ISD 728. Prior to that time, he served as Assistant Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Education, Director of Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Centennial School District, and as Director (Elementary) in the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nevada. Throughout his career, he was named as Coach of the Year, Teacher of the Year, and the 2016 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year. He completed his term as MASA President on June 30 and is completing his sixth year on the AASA Governing Board as a Minnesota Superintendent representative.

Dr. Bittman earned his B.A. Degree from the University of Minnesota-Duluth in Secondary Education, specializing in Spanish, Psychology, and Coaching, and his M. Ed and Ed.D in Educational Leadership and Higher Education from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

He was appointed by Governor Pawlenty and served a four year term on the Minnesota Board of Teaching as Minnesota's Administrative Representative, and has served in an official capacity on numerous Boards and/or Committees such as, but not limited to, the St. Cloud Area Chamber, Great River Rotary, Better Living: Exercise and Nutrition Daily (BLEND), Minnesota Association for School Administrators, Partners for Student Success, and the St. Cloud State University Teacher Preparation Institute. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his wife and three children, which often

Dr. Matt Hillmann

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Dr. Matt Hillmann is the Superintendent of Schools in Northfield, Minnesota. Matt grew up in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. He earned a Bachelor's degree in history at St. John's University in New York City and earned Master's, Specialist, and Doctoral degrees from Minnesota State University, Mankato. Matt has over 25 years of public education experience as a teacher, coach, principal, and district-level leader in nearly every aspect of school administration.

He has taught as an adjunct faculty member for educational leadership at Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota State University, Mankato, and the University of Minnesota. Matt met his wife Mary when they were first-year teachers in Madelia, Minnesota. They have three children and live in Northfield. Matt is a passionate Minnesota Twins, Minnesota Golden Gopher, and St. John's Red Storm fan.