

Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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News Release

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Dr. Matthew Hillmann is the 2023 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year

The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Dr. Matthew Hillmann, Superintendent of Northfield Public Schools, the 2023 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year. As the Minnesota honoree, Dr. Hillmann is a candidate among other state recipients for National Superintendent of the Year, to be announced during the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) National Conference on Education on February 16-18, 2023, in San Antonio, TX. Dr. Hillmann was selected for this honor by a panel of representatives from a variety of Minnesota education organizations. Nominees are evaluated on how each candidate demonstrates leadership for learning, communication skills, professionalism, and community involvement.

Dr. Hillmann has been the Superintendent of Northfield Public Schools since 2016. Before the superintendency, he served as the Director of Administrative Services and Director of Human Resources and Technology. Dr. Hillmann started his career as a computer education teacher and technology coordinator with Madelia Public Schools and served as a technology coordinator, dean, and principal with Belle Plaine Public Schools.

Under Dr. Hillmann's leadership, Northfield Public Schools has worked to close achievement gaps, specifically between students of color, white students, and students of different socioeconomic levels. A priority is to eliminate these gaps before students enter the K-12 system. Northfield Public Schools has addressed these gaps in three areas: strengthening and expanding district childcare and preschool programs, intentional collaboration with community preschools and childcare programs, and supporting parents seeking services for their preschool-age children.

From 2018 through 2020, all students, students qualifying for free/reduced-price lunches, and Hispanic students in the district experienced an increase in the percentage deemed "ready for Kindergarten" based on the STAR reading and initial MAP assessments. In 2021, 100% of incoming Kindergarten students who attended the district's Early Ventures licensed childcare center, and 95% of Hand in Hand Preschool children were "ready for Kindergarten," as identified by the Minnesota Department of Education's approved assessment. Additionally, five years ago, Dr. Hillmann began the "Happy Birth Day" program, where he sends a handwritten card to every infant born within the district. This card begins the relationship with the district and families, and invites them to attend a free Early Childhood Family Education class.

With a focus on reading, the district's Grade 3 students have been continuously improving proficiency in reading on the MCA-III during 2017-2019 from 56.9% to 68.3%. Despite a regression during the pandemic, Northfield Public Schools was identified by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading as a 2021 Bright Spot Community for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Only 54 communities were recognized across the United States and Northfield was the only one in Minnesota to be identified.

During his tenure, Dr. Hillmann has developed a “cascading communication” strategy to promote aligning the district’s vision and operations across the community. This cascading communication involves regularly distributing key messages across multiple modalities. The positive impacts of this communication strategy are illustrated in a recent district survey where 88% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “The superintendent uses a variety of methods to promote effective communication throughout the district” and 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that “I have a clear understanding of the mission and goals of my school district.”

Dr. Hillmann and his leadership team work to amplify the voices of traditionally marginalized segments of their community through representation from diverse communities on advisory committees such as the American Indian Parent Advisory Committee and the Hispanic Parent Advisory Committee. Dr. Hillmann’s commitment to marginalized segments of his community is evidenced by his selection as the City of Northfield’s 2022 Human Rights Award recipient. Members of the district’s Hispanic Parent Advisory Committee nominated Dr. Hillmann for the award.

"Dr. Hillmann has quickly emerged as a fierce leader and advocate for equity and student achievement not only within his district but also across the entire state," said MASA Executive Director Dr. Deb Henton. "If you ever have the opportunity to work with Dr. Hillmann you will quickly learn that his top priority is the well-being and success of all students and families. We are proud to have Dr. Hillmann represent our administrators as Minnesota’s 2023 Superintendent of the Year.”

Dr. Hillmann is an active member of MASA and the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). He has served on the MASA Board of Directors, Excellence and Equity in Education Steering Committee, and currently is the MASA President. Dr. Hillmann is also a member of Schools for Equity in Education. Dr. Hillmann has participated in AASA’s Aspiring Superintendent’s Academy and the National Superintendent Certification Program. He is a graduate of the 2016-17 MASA Great Start Cohort for New Administrators.

Dr. Hillmann is active within his community. His involvement includes the Northfield Rotary Club, Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Directors, Northfield Growing Local Leaders Program, and the Northfield Racial and Ethnic Equity Collaborative.

Dr. Hillmann has received a number of awards throughout his career including MASA’s 2022 Region 1 Administrator of Excellence Award, City of Northfield’s 2022 Human Rights Award, 2020 Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce "Chamber Champion" Award, 2015 MASA Outstanding Central Office Leader of the Year Award, the 2006 Minnesota State University, Mankato Outstanding Young Alumni Award, and the 2001 TIES Outstanding Technology Leader Award.

Dr. Hillmann earned a doctorate in Educational Leadership, master’s degree in Education Technology, and a specialist degree in Education Administration from Minnesota State University, Mankato. He received a bachelor’s degree in History from St. John’s University (NY).

The Minnesota Superintendent of the Year Award is sponsored by ATS&R, Planners/Architects/Engineers. Visit their website at www.atsr.com.

For more information on the AASA Superintendent of the Year Program, please visit www.aasa.org.

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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