

## Where Are We Headed?

### MASE Strategic Plan 2021-24

As the 2021-22 school year begins, so does our exciting journey of implementing a new strategic plan that will guide the direction of our professional organization for the next three years. The MASE Strategic Action Plan 2021-24 (see page 10) was developed by our Board of Directors, which includes our executive council, committee chairs, and area representatives based on input gathered from our broader membership. The purpose of this article is to introduce you to the plan and to let you know how you can live it out as a MASE member!



### Inside this issue

2021-22 Business Partners .....	2
Executive Notes .....	4
New Leaders Cohort .....	6
Legacy Award .....	7
Fall Conference Fundraising .....	8
MASE Strategic Plan .....	10
Legislative Update .....	11
Welcome New Members .....	12
Research to Practice .....	14
Legal Notes .....	17
MASE Calendar .....	20

### MISSION

Our mission captures why we exist as an organization. The MASE mission will remain the same - to build strong leaders who work on behalf of students with disabilities.



**Jamie Nord**

Executive Director  
St. Croix River Education  
District  
2021-22 MASE President

### VISION

Our vision is what will drive our work toward this mission during the next three years. As we were developing the strategic plan, the Board decided to organize our vision around our committee and MASE area structures. Therefore, we have seven vision statements, one for each of our committees along with one broad statement for our MASE areas.

### GOALS

The MASE Board of Directors began brainstorming potential annual goal areas at the retreat in June of 2021. This fall, we will be enlisting the assistance of our committees and MASE areas to further develop our annual goals. Our committee chairs will guide each committee through a process to establish annual goals centered around their respective vision statements. In addition, our area representatives will gather input to determine area-specific goals aligned to our vision.

### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

As an organization, we are committed to ongoing growth and development. Therefore, a continuous improvement cycle will be implemented to keep

*Where Are We Headed? continued on page 5.*

Special thanks to our 2021-22 MASE Business Partners!

The MASE Business Partnership program strengthens the ties between MASE members and their collaborative partners in the public, private and non-profit sectors. Our goal is to advance the field of special education and improve student outcomes with an emphasis on proven, evidence-based practices.

## **Platinum Business Partner Membership**

eLuma Online Therapy

Family Achievement Center, Inc. (Related Service Provider)

Goalbook

Grand Canyon Education

Kennedy & Graven, Chartered

Move This World

SpEd Forms

Strategic Staffing Solutions

TeleTeachers, Inc

Transition Assessments and Curriculum

## **Gold Business Partner Membership**

Ratwik, Roszak & Maloney, P.A.

Rupp, Anderson, Squires & Wald

## **Silver Business Partner Membership**

Baker Tilly US, LLP

CAREI

Infinitec UCP-Seguin

Integrative Therapy

STAR Autism Support, INC

University of St. Thomas Department of Special Education

## 2021-22 Membership Renewal!

Have you renewed your membership yet? Do you have a colleague would benefit from a MASE membership? Encourage them to join MASE today!

**New this year!** MASE has had inquiries from colleagues in other states who would like access to MASE benefits such as communication and professional development.

### **MASE Associate Out of State Membership**

Associate Out of State Membership is open to any person working in a state other than Minnesota who is actively engaged in or associated with any phase of special education leadership. This non-voting membership permits members in good standing to attend all MASE meetings, workshops and seminars; receive MASE publications; and serve on MASE committees. This membership category will be offered at a cost equal to the cost of an in-state Associate membership."

As always, if you have questions or need assistance, contact the association offices at [members@mnasa.org](mailto:members@mnasa.org), 651-645-6272, or 1-866-444-5251 (toll-free).

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### **To renew your membership(s)**

- Go to: [https://events.resultsathand.com/masa\\_masemembership/1346](https://events.resultsathand.com/masa_masemembership/1346)
- Select your membership from the top of the page.
- Are you new to MASA / MASE?: Select "No, I am a returning member."
- Enter your 2020-21 email address
- Enter your 2020-21 member password

Note: Renewing members received an email on June 3 with membership log-in information from [deb.larson@mnasa.org](mailto:deb.larson@mnasa.org).

You will then see your membership form with all the fields already populated. From here you can see your membership data for the 2021-22 school year, make any needed changes, and enter your payment for your dues.

You may use a credit card, PayPal, or choose "invoice me," in which case an invoice will be automatically emailed to you.

We look forward to serving you in the coming year!

I've always wanted to start a newsletter article with: "Damned if you do...damned if you don't!" Especially apropos in this time of mask/no mask controversy. I immediately thought of the special education director's life, pre-COVID. Our most "damned" issue was whether to agree to a parent request and you could still be challenged for not denying the request and going to due process. Now, for many of us, we can add masking...Yikes!

Welcome back to the new school year. I hope that you were able to actually get away and possibly find a place where masks were not needed. Possibly, you found a place where you could hang out, see new sites and just enjoy being away. Since my last newsletter article, the MASE Board has met and installed new leaders or current leaders in new positions. Jamie Nord is our new president. Marcy Doud is our new president-elect. Sarah Mittelstadt is our new past president and Legislative Committee tri-chair. Scott Masten continues as the treasurer. Dena Hagen also returns as the secretary. As in the past, this group meets as the MASE Executive Committee monthly to address the needs of our members, consider any new challenges, and to provide direction to me. We are fortunate to have such a strong group of MASE leaders.

Once again, in July, Cheryl Johnson, our CASE Liaison, arranged for all of our members to participate in the Virtual CASE-CEC Special Education Legislative Summit (SELS) typically held in Alexandria, VA. Striking was the fact that it was not COVID-19 that prevented an in-person summit, but the concerns over the safety of Congressional staff. Washington D.C. offices continue to be very lightly staffed due to an unfortunate increase in the number of threats directed towards our Congressional members and their staff. We had the opportunity for virtual visits, during which we updated the staffers (with the exception of Congresswoman Angie Craig with whom we were fortunate to meet face-to-face online) on the ongoing challenges to delivering special education services and supports to our

students with disabilities. We continued to advocate strongly for bipartisan support of S-866 and HR- 1878 that would put into place a structure for a ten-year ramping up to the 40% federal coverage of special education expenses promised with the IDEA authorization in 1975. We also advocated for support for students with disabilities, the public schools that serve them, and the teacher preparatory programs in the various "recovery bills."



**John Klaber**  
MASE Executive Director

In June, I was invited to meet in-person with the special education administrators from Region 4/ Area C at their retreat in fabulous Fergus Falls. You have no idea how much I relished the opportunity for a real face-to-face meeting. So much so that I didn't even mind the 510-mile roundtrip drive. In July, I had another opportunity to visit with Area MASE members. This time, at the Region 9/Area FI member's retreat. We had great conversations over the challenges of moving out of the pandemic. Obviously, we were hoping that there would not be a new round of infection.

Our MASE 50th Anniversary Committee continues its preparations for our MASE Fall Conference. It will be an exciting opportunity to celebrate MASE and its amazing legacy. Dates: October 27-29 at Madden's on Gull Lake.

A special thank you goes out to those of you who have successfully lobbied the many vendors interested in your business, convincing them to become MASE Business Partners. Our number of MASE Business Partners, especially at the Platinum level has increased dramatically over the past 6 months. As in the past, we are asking you to consider responding to calls from vendors with a statement that you prefer to work with those that have taken the positive step to become a MASE Business Partner.

***Executive View continued on page 5.***

## MASE IMPACT

Fall 2021

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### 2021-22 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President

**Jamie Nord**

Executive Director, St. Croix River Education District

President-Elect

**Marcy Doud**

Assistant Superintendent of Specialized Services, Saint Paul Public Schools

Past President

**Sarah Mittelstadt**

Director of Special Services, Southern Plains Education Coop.

Secretary (20-22)

**Dena Hagen**

Director of Special Education, Northern Lights Special Education

Treasurer (19-22)

**Scott Masten**

Director of Special Education, Lake Agassiz Education Cooperative

Area A (21-22)

**Eva Pohl**

Director of Special Education, PAWN Special Education

Area B (21-23)

**Brian Yurelich**

Executive Director, Northland Learning Center

Area C (20-22)

**Michelle Bethke-Kaliher**

Director of Student Support Services, Alexandria Public Schools

Area D (20-23)

**Amy Ernst**

Director of Special Education, Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools

Area E (21-22)

**Erin Hoffman**

Assistant Director of Special Education, SVWC Service Cooperative

Area F-1 (20-23)

**Erin Toninato**

Director-Region 9, SC Service Cooperative

Area F-2 (16-22)

**Robert Dehnert**

Director of Special Services, Faribault Public Schools

Area G (21-23)

**Sara Lein**

Director of Special Services, W. St. Paul-Mendota Hgts.-Eagan Area Schools

Area H (18-22)

**Deb Anderson**

Director of Special Education, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools

MASA Component Group Representatives:

**Heidi Nistler (21-22)**

Director of Special Education, Sherburne-Northern Wright Special Ed. Coop.

**Renaë Ouillette (17-23)**

Executive Director of Student Services, Lakeville Area Public Schools

Retiree Representative (21-23)

**Jill Skarvold**

National CASE Liaison (18-22)

**Cheryl Johnson**

Executive Director, Goodhue County Education District

MNCEC Liaison (21-23)

**Christian Wernau**

RLIF, Zumbro Education District

Executive Director

**John Klaber**

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#### *We continue growing from on page 1.*

us focused on our strategic plan. It will include establishing annual goals, tracking our progress, reporting out to the Board of Directors, and reflecting annually to determine new or revised goals.

As your incoming president, I look forward to living out the MASE Strategic Plan 2021-24 with you this year and in the years to come. I would like to thank you in advance for your engagement in the committee and MASE area goal setting conversations this fall. Your voice matters as we work to prioritize our goals for the 2021-22 school year! ●

#### *Executive View from page 4.*

Finally, I'm glad you're back and I look forward to visiting with you at your area meeting and at the MASE Fall Conference. Please keep in mind that if you are dealing with an issue or concern, I am waiting to hear from you. This might be a contract issue, potential court case, or something as simple as connecting you up with a resource.

You are not alone! You are a member of MASE, an amazing organization with over 50 years of experience supporting those who support students with disabilities.

Stay Well! ●

## 2021-22 MASE New Leaders Cohort

If you are aware of any new special education directors or leaders, please encourage them to register for the training!

MASE New Leaders' Training is a series of professional development sessions that provide opportunities for:

- newly employed Minnesota special education directors to explore the knowledge and skills needed for a successful first year
- mid-level leaders to enhance leadership skills either in preparation for advancement in leadership or for general skill development
- "newer" leaders who wish to refresh their training.

### Cohort Fee

MASE Members \$500 | Non-MASE Members \$700

### Registration Info

Full details and registration information online at: <https://events.resultsathand.com/newleaders/1387>.

### 2021-22 Program Dates

#### **October 27, 2021**

Madden's on Gull Lake, Brainerd  
Entire Group: 9 am – 2:30 pm  
Directors of Record: 2:30 pm – 4 pm

#### **Directors' Session - Virtual**

#### **November 17, 2021**

Directors of Record Only  
Online, 2-4 pm

#### **January 19, 2022**

MASE Offices | 1884 Como Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108  
Entire Group: 9 am – 2:30 pm  
Directors of Record: 2:30 pm – 4 pm

#### **Directors' Session - Virtual**

#### **February 16, 2022**

Directors of Record Only  
Online, 2-4 pm

#### **March 9, 2022**

Minneapolis Marriott Northwest | 7025 Northland Dr N, Brooklyn Park, MN 55428  
Entire Group: 9 am – 2:30 pm  
Directors of Record: 2:30 pm – 4 pm

#### **Directors' Session - Virtual**

#### **April 20, 2022**

Directors of Record Only  
Online, 2-4 pm

#### **May 11, 2022**

Madden's on Gull Lake | 11266 Pine Beach Peninsula, Brainerd, MN 56401  
Entire Group: 9 am – 2:30 pm  
Directors of Record: 2:30 pm – 4 pm



## John Klaber Receives MASE Legacy Award

MASE has named John Klaber, MASE Executive Director, as the recipient of the 2021 Legacy Award. Klaber will be honored for his commitment to encouraging, developing, and mentoring leaders who reflect the MASE mission at a statewide recognition ceremony to be held at the 2021 MASE Fall Leadership Conference, October 27-29, 2021, at Madden's on Gull Lake.

Klaber began his career in public education as a history and German high school teacher and varsity basketball coach for Independent School District #319 in Nashwauk, MN. He went on to be a School Psychologist for Yellowstone West/Carbon County Special Services Cooperative in Laurel, MT, and then for the Mankato Area Public Schools. During his time at the Mankato Area Public Schools, Klaber was the Area Learning Center Director, Interim Director of Human Resources, and finally the Director of Special Education and Student Services. In 2013, Klaber began his role as the MASE Executive Director.

"John has demonstrated a lifelong dedication to the field of special education and in his daily work he embodies the MASE spirit and mission," said Jamie Nord, MASE President and Executive Director, St. Croix River Ed. District. "John goes the extra mile for our members and he is committed to creating a legacy of compassionate leaders in the field of special education."

Klaber's drive and passion to build positive relationships has been an asset to MASE. He has used his skills and expertise to increase the advocacy reach of MASE by developing strong, positive connections with the Minnesota Department of Education, advocacy organizations, and state and federal legislators. He has organized the efforts of the MASE Board of Directors and committees, and supported the Executive Board to ensure that the organization is able to follow through and provide timely, consistent responses to various groups.

Klaber is consistently focused on serving the best interest of the learners in Minnesota and the administrators working to support them. He knows that in order to impact the future of education positively, we must all work to support others. Throughout his career, Klaber has mentored many MASE members in the field of special education. His

passion for supporting new administrators in the field of special education is evident in all the work that he does.

Klaber has remained active in many professional associations and organizations through his career. His involvement and leadership include the Council for Administrators of Special Education (CASE), MASE and the MASE Board of Directors, Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA), National Association of School Psychologists, Minnesota School Psychologists Association, Minnesota Association of Alternative Programs, Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning Alternative Programs Advisory Committee, and the Montana Association of School Psychologists.

Klaber was the recipient of the 2018 MASE Distinguished Service Award and the 2016-2017 Ysseldyke Distinguished Best Practices Award from the Minnesota School Psychologists Association.

Klaber received a master's degree in Education and a School Psychology Certification from the University of Wisconsin-Superior. He earned a bachelor's degree in Education from the University of Minnesota Duluth and completed the Hickory Tech Educational Leadership Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. ●

*Save the Date!*



**MASE**  
**Best Practices**  
**May 11-13, 2022**  
**Madden's Resort, Brainerd**

# FALL CONFERENCE

# fundraising

**Help Support the MASE Stenswick-Benson Scholarship Fund at the 2021 MASE Fall Leadership Conference!**

This fall, we invite everyone to participate in some fun events that will raise funds to support [Stenswick-Benson Scholarship Program](#).

## **Important to Note: No Silent Auction this year**

Over the last several years, we have seen a reduction in both numbers of donated auction items and purchases, so we will be forgoing the silent auction this year.

## **The MASE Fall Raffle**

Raffle tickets were mailed to all MASE members (active and retired) shortly after Labor Day. Once again, we will be asking members to either sell or buy their tickets. Tickets will again be \$10 each; a book of six is \$50. Prizes include cash, a Treager smoker, yeti coolers, and Coach purses. The drawing will be on Thursday evening at the Fall Leadership Conference. Members will be directed to return their funds and ticket stubs to the MASE office, to their Area Representative, or to bring them to the conference.



**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**2021 MASE Fall Leadership Conference**

**October 27-29, 2021**  
Madden's on Gull Lake, Brainerd, MN

**If you get funds and ticket stubs from your Area's members, please don't forget to bring them to the conference.**

We are making a special request of you as Area Representatives: please use the resources you have (meetings, email, etc.) to remind members to watch their mail for their tickets, check in to ask whether they have received their tickets, and do whatever you can to encourage sales.

As an added incentive, if you sell all six of your tickets, you will be entered into a drawing for a special valuable prize!

## **2021 MASE Wine Tasting Fundraiser**

Wednesday, October 27 • 8 – 10 pm • Town Hall at Madden's

Our theme for the Wine Tasting this year is "Back to the Seventies." MASE is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, so it is a great opportunity to focus on the decade of the birth of MASE ... think bellbottoms, platforms, earth shoes, tie-dye, and Farrah Fawcett's hair! So get your table theme going — we missed the chance to show off our Area creativity last year, so it's time to spin that disco ball and make it extra special. Once again, everyone will vote for their favorite table, and the beautiful (oo-ahhhh) MASE traveling trophy is at stake! In 2019, Area C won the coveted MASE traveling trophy for the best Area wine table.

### **Area assignments for table libations:**

Area A ... Liqueur & Coffee Drinks	Area E ... Other Wine
Area B ... Cocktails	Area F-1 ... White Wine
Area C ... Non-alcoholic Fancy Drinks	Area F-2 ... Beer
Area D ... Minnesota Grown	



# FALL CONFERENCE

# fundraising cont.

***There are more fundraising opportunities at the MASE Fall Leadership Conference!***

## **Guess Your Best!**

Thursday, October 28 - guessing is open all day, 8 am - 5 pm - Town Hall Lobby

This year we will have a fun game of chance. For a \$10 donation, members can choose their lucky number on a chart of 100 numbers. On Thursday evening, we will draw the winning number and the person holding that number will win a great prize. You can increase your chances and buy more than one number, just sayin'.

## **Grab Bag Wine Sales**

Thursday, October 28 - at the reception before dinner, 5 – 6 pm

Every bottle of wine is the same price ... but bottles will be hidden in wine bags tied with red, white, or pink ribbons. The ribbons are your only hints! You might get "Three Buck Chuck," or you might get Chateau Lafitte Rothschild Bordeaux (well, probably not, but something really great anyway!).

Donate wine for the grab bags!

Please bring your donation to the registration desk in Town Hall. We are hoping to receive 100 bottles of wine.

## **MASEwear Boutique**

Thursday, October 28 - all day, 8 am - 5 pm - Town Hall Lobby

Back by popular demand! The cute t-shirts and wonderful wind shirts will be back for sale this year. Do your holiday shopping early -- or buy something for yourself!

## **MASE Business Partnership Renewal**

Once again, renewing your business partnership membership will be even easier because we are continuing to use the online platform for your renewals! You can renew your membership online at this link: <https://events.resultsathand.com/maseapp/1359>. Simply click on the "membership form" tab on this page and you can arrange and pay for your membership. MASE offers three tiers of membership, and each level of partnership and the related benefits are described on the form.

MASE also has a strong presence on a national level, through our participation in the National Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) and through MASE's Federal Advocacy Committee.

We sincerely hope that you will renew your business partner membership! If you would like a reminder of your current membership level, you can check on our web site at <https://www.mnase.org/20-21-business-partnerships>, or call our office (651-645-6272). For those of you who are interested in arranging your newsletter advertising, note the advertising link on the online page as well. Business Partners receive discounted advertising.



# STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2021-2024

**OUR MISSION** What impact are we trying to achieve?

To build strong leaders who work on behalf of students with disabilities

**OUR VISION** Where are we going moving forward?



In every classic example of students finding 'unexpected' success, we find a teacher who believes that all students can learn.

- Paula Kluth



Strengthen our membership base through targeted campaigns and member engagement strategies



Provide high-quality professional learning driven by the needs of our members



Develop the capacity of our members to advance our legislative priorities through support of intentional advocacy efforts at the state and federal levels



Promote continued excellence in our field through recognition and opportunities for leadership roles within our organization



Engage in continuous improvement cycles to ensure we are making progress toward our mission as an organization



Enhance our recruitment and retention of business partners who financially support our mission



Establish and implement area-specific goals aligned to one or more of the Vision Statements



### CONTACT US

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St. Paul, MN 55108  
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www.mnase.org

With the school year just starting, the 2022 Legislative Session seems like something in the far-off distant future. While we have a few months to go before the last week of January 2022, planning is already underway for the coming session. It's an election year for the Governor and the entire Legislature with the added dimension that legislative district boundaries will all be redrawn before the 2022 election. Recent legislative sessions have been more politically charged than in earlier eras, but the coming session may be even more supercharged given these factors.

What will this mean for education, both in terms of funding and policy? Perhaps the largest—and most encouraging—change to the condition of the state budget over the last year is the reversal from projected deficit to projected surplus. Going into the 2021 legislative session, it was estimated that the state was looking at a \$1.3 billion projected shortfall. As devastating as the COVID-19 pandemic was to sectors of the Minnesota economy, Minnesota's economic performance actually improved and by the end of session, the state was looking at a projected budget surplus of \$2.6 billion. These figures do not include the Federal revenue that was passed in several COVID-relief efforts. The emerging variants may put a dent in Minnesota's economic recovery, but there is little doubt that the Legislature will be looking at a healthy state bank balance come next January.

The discussion of what to do in 2022 can go in any number of directions. The 2021 omnibus education funding and policy bill largely concentrated on putting more revenue on the general education basic formula, with increases of 2.45% for the 2021-22 school year and 2.00% for the 2022-23 school year. With all the attention paid to the basic formula, there was little money leftover to curb growth in the special education cross-subsidy or address other elements of Minnesota's education funding system that need repair. I can envision efforts to put more money on the basic formula or channel more resources into the special education funding system to keep the cross-subsidy under control (perhaps both!)

Several policy items related to special education were not adopted during the 2021 session. The Senate bill contained language relating to the ability of parents to have private duty nurses accompany their medically fragile students during the school day. That issue will

likely be discussed again in 2022.

Of paramount importance to MASE members looking ahead to 2022 are the recommendations that will be developed by the Commissioners of Education and Human Services to allow school social workers to bill through Medical Assistance for services they provide as part of a student's IEP or IFSP. Language requiring the development of these

recommendations was included in both the omnibus education funding and policy bill and the omnibus health and human services funding and policy bill. Both agencies are aware of the language and will be working to assemble recommendations that will achieve what the special education community has sought for more than a decade. Being able to access the approximately \$10 million in Federal revenue that is being left on the table due to Minnesota's interpretation that school social workers cannot be reimbursed for these services unless they report them through CTSS won't solve the special education cross-subsidy, but it will certainly help by funding needed services without having to dip into school districts' general funds. I will keep you posted on the progress of this important discussion.

As always, thanks for your leadership during these difficult times. I can be reached at either 612-220-7459 or [lundelllegislative31@gmail.com](mailto:lundelllegislative31@gmail.com). ●



**Brad Lundell**  
MASE Lobbyist

# WELCOME

# *new members*

Taylor Anderson, Assistant Director, Roseville Area Schools  
Cynthia Atsatt, Director of Special Education, Minneapolis Public Schools  
Adrianne Blazevec, Special Service Supervisor, St. Croix River Ed. District  
Shannon Brennan, Principal/Assistant Director, Intermediate School District 917  
Becky Brodeur, Interim Associate Superintendent, Anoka Hennepin School District  
Cassie Castro, Manager of Special Education, Wabasha-Kellogg School District  
Kelsey Clobes, Special Education Teacher, New Ulm Public Schools  
Emily Cory, Early Childhood Special Education Lead, Eden Prairie School District  
Patricia Cummings, Director of Special Education, Fergus Falls Area Special Ed. Cooperative  
Krystal DeGraw, Special Services Coordinator, Brooklyn Center Community Schools  
Molly Dexter, ECSE Manager, Lakeville Area Public Schools  
Jennie Ellingson, Special Education Teacher, Mora Public Schools  
John Engstrom, Superintendent, Carlton School District  
David Engstrom, Superintendent, Robbinsdale Area Schools  
Eric Fergen, Director of Special Education, Rivers Edge Academy  
Natalie Ferguson, Special Education Coordinator, Nova Classical Academy  
Michelle Foshay, Special Education Coordinator, Northern Lights Special Ed. Cooperative  
Julee Gackle, ECSE Teacher, Lakeville Area Public Schools  
Jennifer Gates, Early Childhood Mentor Coach, Mankato Area Public Schools  
Courtney Gehling, Assistant Special Education Coordinator, Stewartville Public Schools  
Maggie Goldade, Special Services Supervisor, Owatonna Public Schools  
Katie Groth, Project Manager, South Washington County Schools  
Heidi Halker, Special Education Coordinator, Northern Lights Special Ed. Cooperative  
Carrie Hansen, Special Education Teacher, Red Wing Public Schools  
Lindsey Hartjes, Assistant Special Education Director, St. Paul City Schools  
Bradley Homstad, Superintendent, Lancaster Schools  
Darin Johnson, Executive Director of School Management, Mounds View Public Schools  
Nicolle Johnston, Director of Special Education, Yellow Medicine East  
Adrienne Jonas, District Wide Behavior Specialist, Eden Prairie School District  
Rachel Kjonaas, Director of Special Education, Lakes Country Service Cooperative  
Julie Koehler, Supervisor, N. St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale School District  
Ryan Korolewski, Special Education Coordinator, Cannon Valley Special Education Cooperative  
Kate Krzenski, Special Services Supervisor, St. Croix River Ed. District  
Brittini Kuehl, District Special Education Coordinator, Goodhue County Ed. District  
Nicole Kujath, Special Education Coordinator, Kasson-Mantorville Schools  
Jennifer Kuykendall, Special Education Coordinator, St. Anthony-New Brighton School District

# WELCOME

# *new members*

Laura Kvamme, Dean of Special Education, Intermediate School District 917

Sarah Lancette, Student Services Coordinator, Osseo Area Schools

Lori Lavin, Special Education Teacher, North Branch Area Public Schools

Kaitlin Lieser, Administrator, SWWC Service Cooperative

Regina Magedanz, Special Education Supervisor, St. Cloud Area School District

Michelle Marchant-Wood, Educational Consultant, South Washington County Schools

Tammy McGlennen-Willis, Coordinator of Special Services, Albert Lea Area Schools

Michael Meihak, Superintendent, NRHEG Public Schools

Mary Moore, Assistant Principal /Manager, NE Metro Intermediate School District 916

Janell Ost, Special Education Teacher, Pierz School District

Deb Parson, Director of Student Services, St. Francis Area Schools

Nicole Patock, Special Education Coordinator, Hutchinson Public Schools

Montana Peters, Special Education Teacher, Sartell-St. Stephen Schools

Amy Raffelson, Elementary Special Education Supervisor, Lakeville Area Public Schools

Sheila Riebe, Executive Director of Special Services, Albert Lea Area Schools

Jill Rohan, Special Education Teacher, Red Wing Public Schools

Emily Rudolph, ECSE Coordinator, Hibbing Public Schools

Lynn Sakry, Special Education Supervisor, St. Cloud Area School District

Sarah Schavee, School Psychologist, Mounds View Public Schools

Clover Schmitt, Director of Special Education, Hiawatha Valley Ed. District

Zachary Selnes, Director of Special Education, Hiawatha Valley Ed. District

Irina Soboleva, TASSEL Transition Program Coordinator, Eden Prairie School District

Jennie Sorenson, School Psychologist & Secondary Special Education Lead, Mounds View Public Schools

Ashley Speltz, Special Education Teacher Leader, Mounds View Public Schools

Sarah Stay, Coordinator of Special Services, Albert Lea Area Schools

Larry Syverson, Special Education Supervisor, St. Cloud Area School District

Sarah Thiry, Director of Special Services, SW Metro Intermediate District 288-06

Niceta Thomas, Director of Student Services, Roseville Area Schools

Laurel Tomandl, Student/Teacher, Stillwater Area Public Schools

David VanHorn, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, SW Metro Intermediate District 288-06

Nikki VanOeveren, Assistant Manager, Itinerant & Related Services, NE Metro Intermediate School District 916

Eric Weedman, Dean of Students, Southern Plains Ed. Cooperative

Katie Zehowski, Special Education Advisor/Coordinator, Jane Goodall Environmental Sciences Academy



# RESEARCH TO *practice*

## A Return to School: What Should Be Our Focus? Relationships

As schools across the state return to what they hope will be a more “normal” year, there are many things that understandably will vie for attention: COVID 19 safety protocols, perceived learning loss, mental health, social and emotional learning, and racial equity to name just a few. While we know each school and district has its own context, we draw upon the results of the two statewide [MN Safe Learning Surveys](#)<sup>1</sup> to advocate that a focus on relationships, specifically educator and student relationships is the route to productively addressing many competing priorities. We realize this is easier said than done.

### Defining Relationships

While we believe educators value relationships, and strive to develop them with their students, we recognize that relationship building itself is rarely the focus of professional development in back-to-school sessions or PLC meetings. While educators understandably spend time on things like data analysis, grading practices, literacy instruction, and a whole host of other really important topics, we would invite you to ask yourself, ‘when was the last time our district explicitly focused on relationships either in professional development or in data gathering and analysis’? In a discussion about “relationships”, we feel a conceptual framework is helpful. We offer the [Developmental Relationships Framework](#)<sup>2</sup> from [Search Institute](#), a nationally recognized non-profit research to practice organization located in Minneapolis. Drawing on both the vast literature surrounding relationships and their own research, Search Institute defines a *Developmental Relationship* in five elements: (1) expressing care, (2) challenging growth, (3) providing support, (4) sharing power, and (5) expanding possibilities (see Fig. 1 on page 15). Supporting these five elements are 20 actions educators can draw upon as they work to build these developmental relationships with young people.

### Why Relationships

Our findings from the two statewide MN Safe Learning Surveys (SLS) aimed to capture the experiences of educators, families and students during the 2020-2021 academic year. Over 39,000 respondents across two distributions

overwhelmingly told us they are concerned about mental health, engagement, and being behind academically. Addressing these will be important, but an overarching vision or vehicle for doing so may be found in a genuine focus on relationships. Let’s look at each of these areas more closely.

### Mental Health

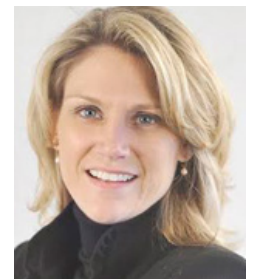
In both the winter and spring SLS, when asked about needed supports, teachers, support professionals, administrators, families and students all cited mental health within their top three challenges. When asked in the spring survey what they wanted to see moving forward, educator comments focused on infrastructure and workload, families cited desires to return to full-time, in person learning, and students were concerned about grades, assignments, and workload. All of this quantitative and qualitative data supports the need to be focused on mental health. Yet, we know classroom teachers cannot do this alone. Experts are needed. Financial investments in support systems that link school based mental health experts with those in our communities to support students and families could provide needed space for classroom teachers to focus on the other remaining concerns.

### Engagement

Perhaps the most difficult finding from the SLS to wrap our heads around is that surrounding student engagement, as respondent groups were fairly divided in their reported experiences. Educators reported ‘engaging students in learning’ as their #1 success and their #3 challenge. Similarly, families reported



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**Research to Practice continued on page 15.**



**Fig. 1. Developmental Relationships Frameworks**



### Research to Practice from page 14.

'receiving support from teachers' as their #1 success and their #2 challenge. Students reported 'keeping up with schoolwork' and 'understanding schoolwork' as their #1 and #2 challenges respectively. This likely contributed to the perceived difficulty of engaging students that educators reported. As most return to school this fall, there may be a desire to fix 'learning loss', however, as the often cited saying goes, 'Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care'. And, as we will see in the next section, being behind academically is a real concern, yet engaging students in learning cannot be demanded, and it will not come without an intentional focus on building authentic relationships with young people.

#### Being Behind Academically

When asked about learning this past school year, all respondent groups agreed they felt some learning was taking place; however, they also overwhelmingly reported they felt more learning was taking place pre-COVID. That information combined with the fact that students reported their #1 concern moving forward was 'being behind academically' and families reported it as their #2 after social interactions and relationships, brings us back to how we approach the potential need to 'catch kids up'. If we do so absent relational engagement and instead communicate to students and families that they are behind, there

is a likelihood that we could only be exacerbating the already established concerns for mental health. Instead, we encourage educators to draw upon the potential actions in Search Institute's Developmental Relationships framework. When communicating with students sending messages like, "I believe in you", "I expect you will live up to your potential" and "I will help guide you through the hard situations and systems as we navigate getting there" along with, "I will respect you by taking you seriously and treating you fairly as we work to solve problems and reach goals" may go a long way in securing engagement and addressing academic concerns.

#### The Equity Connection

We know a simple focus on relationships without a genuine acknowledgement of the fact that our schools are fundamentally producing inequitable outcomes along lines of race would be irresponsible as two white women authoring this article. As our team at the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement have begun initial analyses of the SLS results by race, we found some important differences in the areas of learning, connectedness and perceptions of racism and racial microaggressions. Families of students of color, American Indian students, and multiracial students felt less connected to teachers and support staff while their students felt less connected to their classmates than their white

### Research to Practice continued on page 16.

peers. These students, along with their families, also reported they in fact felt they were learning more this school year than pre-COVID, a stark difference to their white counterparts. We hypothesize this ties to the finding, that students of color, American Indian students and multiracial students and their families were more concerned about racism and racial microaggressions when asked about their top concerns around schooling moving forward. A focus on relationship building without an understanding of the inherent historical nature that race and racism has played in schooling would be naïve. As we approach relationship building with students from minoritized groups and their families, we need to do so while also being critically self-reflective. Given that in Minnesota only approximately 5% of teachers are teachers of color of American Indian teachers, much of that critical self-reflection around potential biases and hidden biases must be taken up by white educators<sup>3</sup>. This does not mean white educators do not or cannot build relationships with BIPOC students, in fact we know the opposite can be true. However, in order to build authentic developmental relationships, educators must seek to know and understand the students and communities they serve by examining their own epistemologies and share power. ●

1. [MN Statewide Learning Surveys](#)
2. [Search Institute Developmental Relationships Framework](#)
3. [2021 Biennial Report Supply and Demand of Teachers in Minnesota](#)

#### Resources:

##### Relationships

- [Redesigning Schools for Stronger Relationships](#)
- [The Power of Relationships in Schools](#) (Video)

##### Mental Health

- [A Quick-Start Guide to Reframing Children's Mental Health](#)
- [Restart & Recovery: Leveraging Federal COVID Relief Funding & Medicaid to Support Student & Staff Wellbeing & Connection](#)

##### Engagement

- [Reunite, Renew, and Thrive: Social and Emotional Learning \(SEL\) Roadmap for Reopening School](#)
- [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\) Resources](#)

##### Being Behind Academically

- [Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development Into Action Leveraging Recovery Funds to Prioritize Wellness and Accelerate Learning](#)

- [Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond](#)
- [SEL & MTSS Toolkit for State and District Leaders](#)
- Equity
- [The Importance of Addressing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Schools](#)
- [Five Equity Practices for Principals](#)
- [Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework](#)
- [Great Lakes Equity Center Resources](#)



### CASE Annual Fall Conference

November 11-13, 2021  
Little Rock, Arkansas  
[www.casecec.org](http://www.casecec.org)

## Save the Date! 2022 MASA/MASE Spring Conference

March 10-11, 2022  
Minneapolis Marriott Northwest  
Brooklyn Park, MN



[www.exceptionalchildren.org/events](http://www.exceptionalchildren.org/events)

## Dyslexia and Struggling Readers

**M**innesota seeks to have every child reading at or above grade level by third grade.<sup>1</sup> The law requires that school districts and charter schools<sup>2</sup> identify students in kindergarten through second grade reading below grade-level and students in third grade and beyond who “demonstrate a reading difficulty to a classroom teacher” unless a reason other than the characteristics of dyslexia has been identified.<sup>3</sup>

**Screening for dyslexia.** In July 2020, Minnesota added the obligation for school districts to screen the identified struggling readers for the characteristics of dyslexia.<sup>4</sup> To meet this obligation, the Minnesota Department of Education (“MDE”) advises schools to use the data collected in the universal screening process to identify difficulty with one or more of letter naming fluency, phonemic awareness, word reading fluency, and oral reading fluency. Once a student is identified, the MDE advises that the school team should verify whether or not the difficulties are due to the characteristics of dyslexia by collecting additional diagnostic information such as teacher assembled assessment data, data on the student’s response to interventions, and the student’s history and family history. The additional information should fill the gaps remaining after the universal testing.<sup>5</sup>

Identification allows the school team to determine the students’ instructional needs.<sup>6</sup> The school district must provide reading intervention to the struggling readers.<sup>7</sup> Reading interventions provided pursuant to Section 120B.12 must continue until the student reads at grade level.”<sup>8</sup> Under Minnesota law, a student who is kindergarten to grade two and not reading at grade level must be provided with alternative instruction that is “multisensory, systematic, sequential, cumulative, and explicit.”<sup>9</sup> Students beyond grade three will require the same to ensure the provision of an appropriate education.

**Child-Find.** School districts have a “child find” obligation under both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504.<sup>10</sup> “Screening and intervention do not replace formal evaluation when there is a suspicion of disability and when specially designed instruction and accommodations are necessary to continue developing reading skills.”<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, Minnesota law requires school

districts to provide “at least two instructional strategies, alternatives, or interventions using a system of scientific, research-based instruction and intervention . . . while the pupil is in the regular classroom” prior to referring a student for a special education evaluation unless the special education team determines the student’s “needs for evaluation [are] urgent” or an evaluation request is made.<sup>12</sup> An IEP team can waive the pre-referral interventions when the need to evaluate is urgent.<sup>13</sup> The United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (“OSERS”) advises that if the struggling readers “do not, or minimally, respond” to the interventions, the students must be referred for a special education evaluation.<sup>14</sup>

When a student is identified as having the characteristics of dyslexia—or has a diagnosis of dyslexia—and responds poorly to interventions, the school district must conduct an evaluation before the student qualifies for special education under the IDEA or services under Section 504.<sup>15</sup>

To qualify, the evaluation must establish that the student has a qualifying disability and needs special education as the result of the disability.<sup>16</sup> A comprehensive evaluation should not only determine eligibility but should identify each of the student’s needs – even if they are not needs commonly associated with the qualifying disability.<sup>17</sup>

**Discussing Dyslexia.** Minnesota Rule defines a specific learning disability to mean a disorder in understanding language that may manifest as difficulty with reading



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**Legal Notes continued on page 18.**

including dyslexia.<sup>18</sup> While MDE does not recommend that educators diagnose dyslexia, educators may initiate or respond to dyslexia discussions with parents.<sup>19</sup> MDE advises that school staff should feel comfortable using the terms utilized in Minnesota Statutes: “struggling reader” and “characteristics of dyslexia.”<sup>20</sup> School officials, however, “should not tell a family that a student ‘has dyslexia’ as this implies a diagnosis” and should “not argue or debate the label of dyslexia with families” as “[s]chools do not make a diagnosis of dyslexia” and “[e]ducators are not qualified to diagnose dyslexia.”<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, OSERS advises that the term dyslexia can be used in special education documents and that “there could be situations” where educators implementing the IEP would need to know the information.<sup>22</sup> If the student has a diagnosis of dyslexia, the IEP team should consider that information as it does all outside data and the due process paperwork should reflect that the team considered the diagnosis as the cases below illustrate.

**Disability Diagnosis.** In *Fort Osage v. Sims*, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals addressed the issue of whether a particular disability diagnosis was required to be included in an IEP.<sup>23</sup> The student in that case qualified for special education under the category of Other Health Impaired based on her diagnosis of Down Syndrome. Her parents argued that she also had autism and the school district denied her a free appropriate public education (“FAPE”) because it failed to label her disability as autism and thus did not tailor her IEP to her unique needs. The Court noted that the IDEA “intends that IEPs contain accurate disability diagnoses” but it held that courts should not automatically set aside an IEP for failing to include a specific disability diagnosis or even one that contains an incorrect diagnosis.<sup>24</sup> The Court held that the failure to include the term “autism” in the student’s IEP did not deny her a FAPE because the IEP identified her educational needs, set meaningful goals, provided “tremendous resources” to assist the student and she made progress.<sup>25</sup> Finding that the IEP was “highly customized to meet [the student’s] needs” and that it would not have changed if the diagnosis of autism was included, the Court found the IEP provided the student with a FAPE.

In *M.L.K. v. Minnetonka*, the school district identified the student’s special education reading needs—among many other needs—and continuously

provided ever increasing specialized reading instruction utilizing the Sonday, Foundations, and Wilson Reading Systems Intensive Instruction reading methodologies. The school district initially qualified the student for special education under the Autism category with his goals being focused on reading, math and attentional needs. His IEP’s did not include the term “dyslexia”, however, until it was diagnosed by a medical provider.<sup>26</sup>

The parents filed a complaint with MDE and it found that the school district had provided a FAPE by identifying the characteristics of dyslexia and providing research based methods of reading instruction.<sup>27</sup> A due process hearing was held and the judge found that the district had not identified the student’s disabilities because it failed to label the student’s reading needs as “dyslexia.”<sup>28</sup> The School District appealed to the Minnesota Federal Court and that Court also held that the failure to specifically name the reading disability as “dyslexia” lead to inadequate services and a denial of FAPE.<sup>29</sup> The matter is currently pending before the Eighth Circuit. The Minnesota Administrators for Special Education and its partners, the Minnesota School Board Association and the Minnesota Association of School Administrators filed an amicus brief in support of the school district. A decision is expected in the near future.

**Practice Pointers.** With the recent requirement to screen students for dyslexia, educators should review the MDE’s guidance cited in this Article. A comprehensive evaluation and re-evaluation should identify all of the student’s needs whether the need is commonly associated with the eligibility category or not. Reading needs should be addressed with as much specificity in that evaluation as possible to promote appropriate instruction. Struggling readers or those with dyslexia or its characteristics should be taught using an alternative, research-based curriculum.

Dyslexia has long been recognized in Minnesota as a type of specific learning disability, understanding it and discussing its characteristics with parents is important. We commonly hear that educators may not use the term “dyslexia” because it’s a “medical term.” While educators cannot diagnose dyslexia, it is important to acknowledge the characteristics, use research-based instruction that is appropriate for students with dyslexia and not to shy away from discussing the impact of the diagnosis on the student’s



learning. ●

1. RRM: #405479 Minn. Stat. § 120B.12, Subd. 1.
2. As the relevant law applies equally to charter schools and school districts, we refer to school districts and charter schools as “schools” or “school districts” in this article for the sake of simplicity.
3. *Id.* at Subd. 2.
4. *Id.*; see also 2019 Minn. Laws, 1st Spec. Sess. ch. 11, art. 2, § 2.
5. MDE, Screening and Identifying Characteristics of Dyslexia 1-3 (Aug. 19, 2019); MDE, Victoria Weinberg & Amy Schulting, *Dyslexia and Specific Learning Disabilities* (Mar. 5 2019), <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/prof/MDE086178> (hereinafter, “Weinberg & Schulting, Dyslexia & SLD”); MDE, Amy Schulting & Vicki Weinberg, *Dyslexia Screening & Identification* (Dec. 7, 2018), <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/prof/MDE086178> (hereinafter “Schulting & Weinberg, Dyslexia Screening”).
6. Schulting & Weinberg, *Dyslexia Screening*.
7. Minn. Stat. § 120B.12, Subd. 3.
8. *Id.*; Schulting & Weinberg, *Dyslexia Screening*.
9. Minn. Stat. § 125A.56, Subd. 1(c).
10. See 34 C.F.R. § 104.32(a); 34 C.F.R. § 300.111.
11. MDE, *Revising Local Literacy Plans to Include “Efforts to Identify Students with Dyslexia”* 1 (Aug. 16, 2017).
12. Minn. Stat. § 125A.56, Subd. 1.
13. *Id.*
14. U.S. Dep’t of Educ., OSERS, *Dear Colleague: Dyslexia Guidance* 2 (Oct. 23, 2015) (internal citations omitted).
15. *Id.* at 1; 34 C.F.R. § 104.35(a).
16. 34 C.F.R. § 300.8(a)(1); Minn. Stat. § 125A.02, Subd. 1.
17. Minn. R. 3525.2710 subp.4A(2); 34 C.F.R. § 300.304 ©(6).
18. Minn. R. 3525.1341 subp. 1.
19. MDE, *Dyslexia Discussions: Information for Schools and Families* 1 (last visited Aug. 21, 2021).
20. Schulting & Weinberg, *Dyslexia Screening*.
21. MDE, *Dyslexia Discussions: Information for Schools and Families* 2-3 (last visited Aug. 21, 2021).
22. U.S. Dep’t of Educ., OSERS, *Dear Colleague: Dyslexia Guidance* 1, 3 (Oct. 23, 2015).
23. *Fort Osage v. Sims*, 641 F.3d 996 (8th Cir. 2011).
24. *Id.* at 1004
25. *Id.*
26. See *Minnetonka Pub. Schs. v. M.L.K.*, No. CV 20-1036 (DWF/KMM), 2021 WL 780723 (D. Minn. Mar. 1, 2021).
27. MDE Complaint Decision No. 19-086C.
28. *M.L.K. v. Minnetonka Pub. Schs.*, OAH Docket No. 82-1300-36317, at 40-42 (Case, ALJ, Jan. 30, 2021). The judge also found that the district misdiagnosed the student by not labeling his severe attentional needs as “ADHD.” *Id.* at 41-42.

## Have You Moved in 2020-21?

Help us keep track of you - and keep your MASE benefits and services coming to you. Please fill out this online form to let us know if you will have moved positions or districts for the 2021-22 school year!

MASE Transitions Online Form: <https://forms.gle/Se48RhNPPPhLpGDPB6>

If you have new colleagues in your area who are not MASE members, please let deb.larson@mnasa.org know and we will send membership information to them.

## 2021-22 MASE Committees

The 2021-22 MASE Committees have been published online.

You can find the full list online at:

[www.mnase.org/committees](http://www.mnase.org/committees)

If you missed the sign-up deadline and still would like to serve on a committee please contact Dave Christians (dave.christians@mnasa.org) at the MASE Offices.

# MASE CALENDAR

## 2021

### **September 24**

Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

Virtual

### **October 15**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

9:30-11:30 am | Virtual

### **October 27**

MASE Board of Directors Meeting

MASE New Leaders Cohort

Madden's on Gull Lake, Brainerd

### **October 27-29**

MASE Fall Leadership Conference

### **November 11-13**

[CASE Fall Conference](#)

Little Rock, AR

### **November 12**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

### **November 17**

MASE New Leaders Cohort

MASE Offices, St Paul

### **November 19**

Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

Virtual

### **November 19**

MASE Annual Meeting

1-3 pm | Virtual

### **December 10**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

9:30-11:30 am | Virtual

## 2022

### **January 19**

MASE New Leaders Cohort

MASE Offices, St Paul

### **January 21**

Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

Virtual

### **February 11**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

9:30-11:30 am | Virtual

### **January 19**

MASE New Leaders Cohort

MASE Offices, St Paul

### **March 9**

MASE Board of Directors Meeting

MASE New Leaders Cohort

Minneapolis Marriott NW, Brooklyn Park

### **March 10-11**

MASA/MASE Spring Conference

Minneapolis Marriott NW, Brooklyn Park

### **March 18**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

9:30-11:30 am | Virtual

### **April 8**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

9:30-11:30 am | Virtual

### **April 15**

Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

Virtual

### **April 20**

MASE New Leaders Cohort

MASE Offices, St Paul

### **May 11**

MASE New Leaders Cohort

Madden's on Gull Lake, Brainerd

### **May 11-13**

MASE Best Practices Conference

Madden's on Gull Lake, Brainerd

### **May 20**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

9:30-11:30 am | Virtual

### **June 10**

MDE Special Education Directors' Forum

9:30-11:30 am | Virtual

### **June 17**

Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

Virtual