

# Minnesota Administrators for Special Education

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News Release

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## Sheila Merzer Receives MASE Distinguished Service Award

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE) has named Sheila Merzer, Educational Consultant, the recipient of the 2020 Distinguished Service Award. Sheila will be honored for her positive history and association with Minnesota public education, contribution to improving Minnesota’s public education, and reputation as a person who willingly “goes the extra mile” at a statewide recognition ceremony during the MASA/MASE Spring Conference, March 12-13, 2020, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

“Not only does Sheila have a positive history with schools in Minnesota, her reputation with families and agencies is also strong. Sheila doesn't play favorites. Rather, she favors finding solutions and helping everyone support the student, however that might look,” said Jill Skarvold, Regional Specialist for Special Education of the Lakes Country Service Cooperative. “I'm grateful that I made that first call to Sheila years ago and that she has continued to be a leader who I can call at any time for assistance. She willingly goes that extra mile to ensure that special education services are focused on student needs.”

Merzer began her work in the field of autism in 1972 as a graduate student at the University of Minnesota (U of M). The program was funded by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped and started by Dr. Uwe Stuecher. The purpose of the program was to demonstrate that children with autism could be managed and could be taught.

Merzer became an instructor at the U of M in 1974. During that year U of M's Autism Program began providing consultation services for students throughout Minnesota, particularly Greater Minnesota, who were identified with autism.

Merzer worked as a psychologist at Minneapolis Children's Hospital and co-directed a training and treatment program and consultation service named the Exceptional Children for Communication and Interaction Disorders from 1978-1990.

Merzer and her partner provided training to school districts throughout Minnesota, the surrounding states, parts of Canada, and even in Venezuela. Merzer also collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Education's initial strategies for supporting district's throughout the state in their first low incidence model pertaining to autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

In 1990, The Minneapolis Children's Hospital decided to terminate their outpatient psychology programs. Merzer and her partner started their own private practice when the program that they headed at the Minneapolis Children's Hospital rebranded under the name the Fraser School and then became the Fraser Child and Family Center.

Merzer currently has eight colleagues who work with her full and part-time. Her team primarily provides assessment, consultation, and training services upon school district requests. Merzer and her team are often asked to conduct independent educational evaluations (IEE's) and attempt to resolve the issues that led to the request in ways that support both the parents and the school districts. Merzer has one mental health contract with Medica/Optum Health and, where the referral concerns related to educational programming, they have developed a collaborative consultation model.

“Sheila has provided invaluable consultation for school districts through the State of Minnesota for more than 25 years that I have been a special education administrator. Her work has improved the programs for students with disabilities on a grand scale and it has also improved the relationship between parents and

school districts in many cases,” said Duane Borgeson, Executive Director of Learner Support Services of the Moorhead Area Public Schools. “I can say unequivocally that Sheila's skills have improved education for students with disabilities in our schools. She takes the time to train teams to work with our most needy students and quickly builds a rapport with parents that helps build or rebuild trust between the parent and the district.”

Merzer is an active member of MASE. She frequently presents at the MASE conferences and at other local, regional, national, and international conferences.

Merzer received a master's degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. She earned a bachelor's degree from Middlebury College in Vermont. Merzer also holds a Special Education teaching degree in Emotional and Behavioral Disorders.

*MASE is a professional association organized to promote programs and services to improve the education of children with disabilities, to foster high quality programs of professional development, and to study problems relating to serving children with disabilities and improving the leadership of administrators for special education. MASE members are administrators for special education in public or private schools, cooperative regional, state and other education administrative units, college and university professors of special education teacher or administrator preparation programs, and administrators, coordinators or consultants for the Minnesota Department of Education.*

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