

Minnesota Administrators for Special Education

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News Release

For Immediate Release: March 9, 2022

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Dena Hagen Receives MASE New Special Education Leader Award

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE) has named Dena Hagen, Director of Special Education of the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative, the recipient of the 2022 New Special Education Leader Award. Hagen received this award for her commitment to students with disabilities and their families and her active involvement in professional and community affairs. She will be honored at a statewide recognition ceremony during the MASA/MASE Spring Conference held March 10-11, 2022.

"I have had the opportunity to work with Dena through the Low Incidence Project and the MASE Board of Directors. Dena is absolutely deserving of this award as she demonstrates a high level of professionalism, willingness to help others, and leadership," wrote Erin Toninato, Special Education Director of the South Central Service Cooperative in her nomination letter. "She is an exceptional addition to every organization and is always thoughtful in her service to students."

Hagen has served as the Director of Special Education of the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative since 2016. She previously was the Assistant Director of Special Education for Duluth Public Schools. Hagen was the Region 3 Low Incidence Facilitator and an Independent Study Instructor in the Special Education Certification Program at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. She began her career in special education as a teacher with Duluth Public Schools.

The challenge of being a special education director for thirteen districts is profound. In her role, Hagen has had to balance the needs of very different and distinct districts. She has been highly successful in supporting the cooperative's districts through the vast and complex special education cooperative process. Hagen is a results-driven leader who is supportive of district teams. She is always assessing the needs of the cooperative and makes decisions that are both fiscally responsible for member districts and positive for students within their special education programs.

Hagen has been instrumental in the establishment of a K-8 setting Level IV program for districts in the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative. This was a much-needed program as students who needed more support did not have a Level IV program within the entire cooperative. Hagen also led the 12-member school districts through the process of developing a Joint Powers Agreement to create the cooperative school district.

Hagen is an active member of MASE. She currently serves as the Secretary on the MASE Board of Directors and previously was the Area B Representative. Hagen has been a member of the MASE Nominating Committee and also is a graduate of the MASE New Leaders Cohort. Her professional activities beyond MASE include serving on Capella University's Academic Advisory Committee and the Minnesota Autism Center's Quality Enhancement Committee.

Outside of her professional capacities, Hagen has been involved in the Duluth Girls Hockey Association and East Select Soccer. She serves as the Tournament Director for the Duluth Girls Hockey Association, the second-largest tournament in the country.

Hagen received a master's degree in Special Education from University of Wisconsin-Superior. She earned a bachelor's degree from the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN. Hagen received her Administrative Certification from Saint Mary's University.

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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