

Minnesota Administrators for Special Education

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News Release

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Heidi Nistler Receives MASE New Special Education Leader Award

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE) has named Heidi Nistler, Director of Special Education of Eden Prairie Schools, recipient of the 2023 New Special Education Leader Award. Nistler 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 9-10, 2023.

“Heidi and I worked together for three years as supervisors of special services in Shakopee. During my time working with her - I witnessed first-hand her commitment, extreme competence, creativity, collegiality, grit, and her ability to approach situations very systematically and efficiently through strategic thinking,” wrote Michelle Cuka, Director of Student Support Services of Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools in her letter of support. “I am a better leader and person for having worked with Heidi. It is an honor to call her friend and to support her nomination for the New Special Education Leader Award.”

Nistler has served as the Director of Special Education of Eden Prairie Schools since July 2022. She previously was the Director of Special Education for Sherburne and Northern Wright Special Education Cooperative and Assistant Director of Special Services for Shakopee Public Schools. She began her educational career as a Special Education Teacher with Shakopee Public Schools.

In her first year with Eden Prairie Schools, Nistler has devoted her time to creating and establishing special education systems, including developing additional programming to expand the continuum of services for students with disabilities. She created special education due process resources, which increased staff capacity to navigate challenging due process situations, and she also advocated for the needs of students, families, and staff through meetings with local legislators. Additionally, she supervised four intern educators seeking Director of Special Education administrative licensure.

During her tenure at Sherburne and Northern Wright Special Education Cooperative, Nistler contributed to the quality of special education service for students across the four districts of Becker, Big Lake, Monticello, and St. Michael-Albertville. She developed and presented

cooperative budgets exceeding \$12M including strategic management of general education and special education funding, and increasing Third Party Billing and general education and special education competitive grant opportunities. In addition, Nistler provided leadership to district leaders, teachers, and other educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, including adherence to federal and state requirements and implementing changes to technology, health services, and instructional models; developed tools and resources for special education pandemic recovery services used by districts across the state.

Nistler is an active member of MASE. She currently serves as the Legislative Committee co-chair to the MASE Board of Directors, a member of the Professional Development Committee, and chair of the Aspiring Directors Sub-Committee. Nistler supports the professional learning of her MASE colleagues as a frequent presenter at the MASE SLICE of Collaboration meetings on topics including Ensuring Accurate Child Count; Pandemic Recovery Services; and Building Relationships with Your Elected Officials.

Beyond MASE, Nistler is a member of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA). She currently is a member of the Equity and Excellence in Education Steering Committee, Legislative Committee, and MASA's 2023 Leading with Equity and Excellence training series. Nistler previously served as the Special Education Component Group Representative to the MASA Board of Directors. She is also a member of the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC).

Nistler received an Education Specialist and a master's degree in Educational Leadership, and a bachelor's degree in Special Education Developmental Disabilities from the Minnesota State University-Mankato.

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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Photo: Heidi Nistler

