

MASE New Leaders Cohort
October 27, 2021
Presenter Biographies

Melanie Kray
Executive Director of Special Services
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Melanie Kray has been a special education director for the past 8 years, currently serving as the Executive Director of Special Services at SouthWest Metro Intermediate District. Prior to working as an administrator, Melanie worked as a school psychologist for 19 years. As a school psychologist, she worked for Southern Plains Educational Cooperative, SWWC Service Cooperative and Central Public Schools. She has been active in designing and implementing creative programs to meet the needs for students with disabilities. She is the co-chair of the MASE Professional Development Committee.

Holle Spessard
Director of Special Services
Tri-City United Schools
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Holle Spessard has been a special services administrator for the past 11 years, currently serving Tri-City United school district. Prior to working as an administrator, Holle worked as a level IV EBD teacher for Benton-Stearns Education District and prior to being a teacher, she worked as a paraprofessional. She has been active in the development of programming for students with developmental/cognitive disabilities within her district and she strives to continue to enhance opportunities for students. Holle is an active member of MASE and is the co-chair of the Professional Development Committee.

Amy Ernst
Director of Special Education
Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose Schools
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Amy Ernst is the Director of Special Education for Buffalo Hanover Montrose School District. This is her 7th year serving BHM schools and her 13th year in special education leadership. Outside of school, you can find her spending her time with her husband Mark, four daughters and two step-sons. Amy was the 2019 recipient of the MASE New Special Education Leader Award.

Nicole Woodward
Director of Special Education
St. Croix River Ed. District
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Nicole Woodward has been the Director of Special Education of the St. Croix River Education District since 2015. Her previous positions at SCRED include School Psychologist and Special Services Supervisor. Woodward is knowledgeable in all areas of special education, from due process regulations to creating unique programming for the students with intensive needs. She has a special skill of explaining difficult concepts in a way that makes them easy to understand and is patient with others while they are learning new things. Woodward is an effective communicator and connector allowing her to navigate difficult conversations with students, staff, and parents, and effectively facilitate professional learning opportunities. Nicole believes we are better together and is passionate about creating a strong network of collaboration among MASE members, because of this she is actively involved in both professional and community affairs.

Danielle Theis (*pronounced like rice*)
Director of Special Education
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Danielle Theis has been working successfully with youth who experience mental health and behavioral challenges since 1990. She prides herself in assisting schools in becoming trauma responsive. Danielle is a licensed psychotherapist, Director of Special Education, and K-12 Principal. Danielle has served as the Administrator in Setting IV programs in public schools for seven years. Danielle was Principal of New Dominion School of Gerard Academy for ten years serving students within a residential treatment facility. Danielle currently serves as the Director of Special Services for Owatonna Public Schools. Danielle is one of 30 Master Trainers for Life Space Crisis Intervention in the world. She is acknowledged by the Minnesota Department of Education as an expert in reducing restrictive procedures and working effectively with children who display significant behavioral challenges. Danielle provides trainings and

consultative services to support children experiencing mental health and behavioral challenges, and the adults who serve them, in our schools and communities.

Melissa Schaller
Executive Director of Special Education
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Melissa Schaller is the Executive Director of Special Education for Intermediate School District 917 where she has worked since 2008. Melissa is responsible for oversight of district special education programming among other duties which includes approximately 25 sites, nearly 600 staff, and a budget of more than 40 million dollars. Prior to joining ISD 917, Melissa was the Director of Special Education for the Austin Public School District. She has served many state level organizations in the field of education including serving as president of the executive board of both Minnesota Administrators for Special Education and Minnesota Council for Exceptional Children. Recently, she completed her PhD at the University of Minnesota in Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development.