

MSBA PROPOSAL

JANUARY 2, 2026



MINNESOTA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

EXECUTIVE SEARCH SERVICES

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January 2, 2026

Cindi Hills
School Board Chair
Aitkin Public Schools ISD 1
306 2nd St. NW
Aitkin, MN 56431

Dear Chair Hills and Members of the Aitkin School Board:

On behalf of the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA), thank you for the opportunity to share our qualifications to assist Aitkin Public Schools in the search for your next superintendent. This proposal details MSBA's interest in providing search services for your district, and highlights why we believe MSBA's experience, qualifications, and steady hand will provide the support your board needs to successfully complete this crucial and compelling executive search.

As Aitkin seeks its next leader, MSBA will assist the school board with crafting the district's leadership profile, designing stakeholder involvement, developing district-focused interview processes and procedures, and guiding the board through understanding the impact of Minnesota's Open Meeting Law, Government Data Practices Act, model policies, state statutes, and data requests on search activities. MSBA's deep knowledge in these areas supports and fuels our understanding of the breadth of issues your board faces, and as a result we will ensure that thorough, transparent, effective, and legal processes occur throughout the entirety of your search.

For over 100 years MSBA has been a trusted resource for Minnesota school boards, including the past 15 years spent guiding our members through more than 200 successful superintendent searches. We are now the leading provider of superintendent search services across the state, an honor we feel is directly attributable to listening to our members, learning from every search we've conducted, and continuously improving our process to bring tried-and-true as well as cutting-edge approaches to the districts we serve.

Thank you for your consideration. MSBA would be honored to assist Aitkin Public Schools with its upcoming superintendent search, so please contact me if you have any questions or need further clarification on MSBA's services, staff qualifications, fees, or search references.

Sincerely,

Barb Dorn
MSBA Director of Leadership Development and Executive Search

TABLE OF CONTENTS for AITKIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

| | |
|--|-------|
| INTRODUCTION and TESTIMONIALS | 4 |
| PLANNING THE SEARCH and HIRING CRITERIA | 5 |
| PUBLIC INPUT | 6 |
| ADVERTISING and RECRUITING | 7 |
| NATIONAL AFFILIATION OF SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHERS | 8-9 |
| INTERVIEW TRAINING and PREPARATION | 10 |
| SCREENING, MSBA VETTING, and FINALISTS SELECTION | 11-12 |
| CONTRACT and FOLLOW-UP SERVICES | 13 |
| SUMMARY OF SEARCH SERVICES | 14 |
| ESTIMATED FEE FOR SERVICE and SATISFACTION GUARANTEE | 15 |
| HIRING THE RIGHT SUPERINTENDENT WORKSHOP | 16 |
| WHY MSBA? | 17-18 |
| PROPOSED TIMELINE | 19 |
| TEAM QUALIFICATIONS and EXPERIENCE + MAP | 20-21 |
| SEARCH REFERENCES and RECENT MSBA SEARCHES | 22-27 |
| Search Team — MSBA Staff | |
| BARB DORN | 28 |
| AMY JORDAN | 29 |
| TERRY MORROW | 30 |
| GARY LEE and TIFFANY GUSTIN | 31 |
| SHELBY HERRERA and BRUCE LOMBARD | 32 |
| MARIA SHINABARGER and JOEL STENCEL | 33 |
| Search Team — MSBA Service Providers | |
| LEE WARNE and BRUCE KLAEHN | 34 |
| PAUL CARLSON and RENAE TOSTENSON | 35 |
| GARY KUPHAL and STEVE NIKLAUS | 36 |
| BILL TOMHAVE and WENDY SCHOOLMEESTER | 37 |
| KATE MAGUIRE and JOHN WARD | 38 |
| CONNIE HAYES and BERNADEIA JOHNSON | 39 |
| MARK ZUZEK and JOSH PAULY | 40 |
| ERICK ENGER and HEIDI HAHN | 41 |



Where Minnesota School Boards Learn to Lead

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most important decisions a school board will ever make is to choose a new superintendent. As the school district's chief executive officer, the superintendent is responsible for providing district-wide leadership, implementing the school board's policies, and ensuring the school board's priorities are met. Effective superintendents ensure that all students are learning at high levels. Ultimately, hiring the right superintendent — someone who possesses the skills and attributes needed to help achieve your school district's vision and strategic priorities — requires time, thoughtful planning, and sound recruitment and employment processes and procedures.

The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) is pleased to present the school board of Aitkin Public Schools with a proposal for executive search services. MSBA has been providing Minnesota school boards with search services for more than 15 years, and as a result brings a strong school board perspective to the search and its outcome. As your association, we have a vested interest in helping your school board find and hire the best person for its superintendent.

MSBA-led searches are based on one clear premise: all searches are conducted through the lens of school board leadership. This means we understand and prioritize the needs of the board, and the district itself, above all else. Also, throughout the search MSBA will professionally handle every detail and guide the school board through the process, allowing the board to concentrate on the most important aspects of the search — interviewing the most qualified candidates and selecting the next superintendent.

TESTIMONIALS FOR MSBA EXECUTIVE SEARCH SERVICES

"I was incredibly pleased with the process and thankful for the work MSBA did for us. From a board member perspective, MSBA's process is so much more fair and informative compared to other firms we've used. If I'm on the board when we have to do this next, MSBA would certainly be my first choice of firm to hire."

- Matt Moehrle, Board Vice Chair, Sartell-St. Stephen ISD 748

"MSBA provided guidance and recommendations that helped the board tremendously with our search. Throughout our work with them, they continually reinforced that this is a board decision that they are assisting with. Giving the board that level of ownership while providing expertise throughout the process was extremely appreciated."

- Cory Johnson, Board Chair, Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan ISD 196

"MSBA far surpassed our expectations. They are the perfect guide to help school boards navigate the superintendent search process, and I would absolutely recommend MSBA because of their depth of expertise and ability to empower boards to make informed decisions. Also -- and this is no small thing -- the candidates they brought forward were exceptional. I cannot imagine how we could have navigated this experience without them."

- Dr. Jean Marvin, Board Chair, Rochester Public Schools

PLANNING THE SEARCH AND HIRING CRITERIA

Initial Planning Meeting

An MSBA search begins with an initial planning meeting between the school board and the search team. At the planning meeting, a search team member will work with the school board to establish the search timeline, hiring criteria and leadership profile, as well as determine methods of public involvement, identify the district's position in the marketplace, select advertising venues, and finalize all processes, procedures, and expectations for conducting the search.

Some school boards also choose to begin their search by participating in MSBA's "Hiring the Right Superintendent" workshop at no additional charge. This workshop may be utilized as a kick-off to the search, providing board members with a solid foundation of what to expect during the entire process. The workshop booklet has also proven to be a valuable resource and useful tool over the months-long search, particularly for school board members unfamiliar with the search process. Again, this workshop is available (but optional) for all MSBA searches depending upon the needs and circumstances of each individual district.

Determining Hiring Criteria and Leadership Profile

Your district is unique, and an important initial step in the search process is to identify the personal and professional skills and attributes the school board most desires in a superintendent. This in turn will provide the basis for the position leadership profile and hiring criteria. Public input will also be considered in developing the leadership profile, as will the district's strategic plan and mission.

Early in the process MSBA's search team will lead the school board through crafting the profile, which will then be used throughout the duration of the search as a guideline for selecting finalists, creating interview questions, and assessing superintendent candidates to find the best fit for Aitkin Public Schools. In other words, the leadership profile and hiring criteria serve as a beacon to help guide the school board in its search from the beginning to end of the process.



PUBLIC INPUT

Several opportunities for public involvement are included in the search package, including:

- an online **survey**, open to all staff, parents, students, community members, and district partners
 - ◊ This survey will include gathering quantitative information on public priorities regarding candidate background, skill set, experience, and personal characteristics.
 - ◊ It will also gather qualitative information through open-ended questions on the challenges and opportunities facing Aitkin, and what type of leader could effectively serve the district.
 - ◊ This survey will be offered in multiple languages per the district's request, as well as hard copies to ensure access for those unable or uninterested in taking the survey electronically.
- **Search Preview Meetings** will be held with internal district leadership to inform them of search process details, answer their questions, and ask for their help in getting people involved in the search. This allows trusted resources *from within* the school walls to help share information and bake credibility and integrity into the search process.
- an **informational Q&A session** for all staff and community members regarding the superintendent search process. This public session is hosted virtually by MSBA, and is recorded to ensure all district participants have access to accurate information regarding search processes and expectations. The recording will then be made available on the district website throughout the duration of the search. Launched three years ago, these proprietary **Q&A with MSBA** sessions have proven to be one of the most effective tools a district can utilize to increase both the credibility and transparency of their search, and to limit toxic misinformation. Through leveraging the power of sharing information, these unique Q&A sessions have solidified MSBA's reputation as a provider of clear, accessible, and inclusive superintendent search services.
- **Input Forums or Interview Committees** will be offered in conjunction with the second round of interviews. Several options will be provided to the board for consideration, including the pitfalls and opportunities of involving others in the interview process. MSBA will also train participants to ensure adherence to all legal requirements involved in interviewing the finalists.

A la carte Options

Additional options for the school board to consider in gathering public input early in the process is through holding **Focus Groups** and/or **Listening Sessions** across multiple constituencies. These group sessions are a traditional methodology utilized by many search firms as the primary source of public input; however, these sessions must be carefully designed and implemented. MSBA will conduct them if requested, although the board should also consider the value of 24/7 stakeholder access to the survey as the initial (and sole) early feedback opportunity. The availability and anonymity of the survey contrasts significantly with the tendency of group sessions to amplify some voices over others, and the inequities which can result from access (or lack thereof) to participate. The decision of why and how to conduct group sessions must be carefully considered before initiating a search, and MSBA will guide this conversation to ensure the best possible decision is made regarding public input for your district's superintendent search process.

NOTE: If requested, MSBA's a la carte fee for these services is \$1,395 per day or \$300 per group.

ADVERTISING AND RECRUITING

To create, sustain and heighten interest in your district's position, MSBA will utilize and leverage our resources and connections on both a statewide and national scale.

Locally, MSBA's search team will directly contact Superintendents, Assistant/Associate Superintendents, Cabinet Members, Principals, and Assistant Principals across the state to inform them of the vacancy and application procedures. Emails are sent directly to these individuals at regular intervals throughout the search, as well as phone contact to ensure this opportunity remains top of mind particularly for candidates who most closely match the candidate profile. Finally, the vacancy announcement (developed in partnership with the school board) will be posted on the following statewide job opportunity sites:

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA). MSBA's superintendent job openings page receives more than 7,000 hits per month during search season, including many from out-of-state applicants as well as former Minnesota administrators looking to return to the state for their own personal or professional reasons
- Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA)
- Minnesota EdPost (hosted by St. Cloud State University)

Nationally, MSBA will reach out to contacts across the country through our search team's personal and professional relationships, and our contacts at the National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers (NASS) as detailed in the following two pages. This year MSBA has also added to our search team a National Recruiter in Josh Pauly. Josh specializes in creating strategic partnerships with school districts, and he travels the country attending national educational conferences to discuss AI as well as to recruit for MSBA-led Minnesota searches such as Aitkin's. Josh, a former school board member himself, holds a Master of Education degree from the University of Minnesota and we are excited to have him on the team.

Finally, if desired by the school board, we will post on the following nationwide job sites as well. In that case, any additional advertising costs must be approved by the school board and borne by the school district.

- Top School Jobs (EdWeek)
- American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
- National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE)
- Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)
- National Indian Education Association (NIEA)

In conclusion, facilitating the complexities of the advertising, recruitment, and application process is one of the MSBA search team's greatest strengths. Not only will we develop all application procedures, handle applicants' calls and correspondences concerning the vacancy, collect and review applicants' files, and develop a recommended pool of applicants for school board consideration, but also aggressively market the opportunity to secure a diversified pool of high-quality individuals interested in the unique opportunity to lead Aitkin Public Schools as its next superintendent.

NATIONAL AFFILIATION OF SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHERS



August 29, 2025

Dear School Board Members:

As a school board member, you are about to make one of the most significant decisions of your career: selecting a superintendent. Your decision will have a long-term impact on your school district. To ensure you make the best decision, consider using your state school board association's superintendent search service to facilitate your next search.

The National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers (NASS), the most experienced network of search professionals in the United States, stands ready to execute a national campaign to find your district's next superintendent. With over 100 consultants located in 38 states, NASS harnesses the skills and experiences of our search professionals with proven track records of accomplishment. NASS consultants are known for their integrity, passion, and focus. They understand that each search is unique and tailored to meet your district's specific needs. They also recognize the importance of maintaining a successful, long-term relationship between your board and your state school board association. Since 2022, NASS members have conducted 484 superintendent searches, resulting in over 5,420 applications.

NASS members serve school boards daily. As Chair of NASS, I can assure you that you will receive personalized attention and a commitment from your NASS professional to assist you in a dedicated and confidential manner, adhering to the specific laws of your state. The successful executive search process commences with a strong team of professional search consultants and culminates in a robust and long-term partnership between the school district and its top administrative leaders. NASS's mission is to identify top executive leadership for school districts across the United States, guided by our core values: ethics, integrity, leadership, and teamwork. If retaining a successful and long-term leader is a priority for your district, consider partnering with a NASS consultant and your school board association.

Regards,

Ben Torres

Ben Torres
NASS Chair

NATIONAL AFFILIATE OF SUPERINTENDENT SEARCHERS



National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers (NASS members)

| | | |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| Alabama | Massachusetts | Oklahoma |
| Alaska | Michigan | Oregon |
| Arizona | Minnesota | Pennsylvania |
| Connecticut | Mississippi | South Carolina |
| Florida | Missouri | Tennessee |
| Georgia | Montana | Texas |
| Idaho | Nebraska | Utah |
| Illinois | New Hampshire | Vermont |
| Indiana | New Jersey | Virginia |
| Kansas | New Mexico | West Virginia |
| Kentucky | North Carolina | Wisconsin |
| Maine | North Dakota | Wyoming |
| Maryland | Ohio | |

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Interview Training and Preparation

One of the things unique to superintendent search activities in Minnesota are the ramifications of our state's Open Meeting Law. Therefore, prior to the application deadline the search team will meet with the school board to help it prepare for and conduct the first and second rounds of interviews and reference checks. Interview training will include information to help school board members conduct interviews in open sessions, as well as abide by all requirements of the Data Practices Act.

The search team will also help the school board develop interview questions that fit the candidate profile, that do not violate the law either directly or indirectly, and that standardize the interview process to ensure a level playing field for all candidates. In addition, the search team will assist the school board with planning second interviews and additional reference checks.

Because hiring the superintendent is the school board's role, MSBA recommends that only its members participate in the finalists' interviews with the board. If the school board decides to involve non-school board members in the interview process, however, the search team will help the school board develop a process that makes clear the advisory nature of the non-school board members' roles that does not infringe upon the school board's role as the sole hiring authority for the position of superintendent. The search team will provide guidelines and training for the non-school board members, and review all questions submitted by group members. By following these recommendations, the school board is able to standardize interview questions and format, provide more control over the selection process, and reduce the school district's risk of liability.

Without question, interview training and preparation is key to a successful superintendent search. MSBA's long-standing reputation for high-quality training programs carries over to our executive search services, and in addition to providing a firm foundation for search decision-making, many boards have found MSBA's training and guidance throughout the process to have strengthened their board relationships as well. This result has become an unexpected bonus for those districts striving to become a more high-functioning school board, as the consensus-building aspects of MSBA's search process helps them become a stronger and more unified team.



SCREENING, MSBA VETTING, AND FINALISTS SELECTION

Screen Applications, Vet Candidates, and Select Finalists

After the application deadline has passed, MSBA's search team will review applicant files in relationship to the position leadership profile established by the school board in order to identify the applicants who best meet the school board's hiring criteria. The search team will then conduct preliminary verification of references and pre-interviews of the applicants who best meet the school board's identified profile. This vetting process involves MSBA staff as well as former superintendents and school board members serving as MSBA service providers during the executive search process.

IMPORTANT: ALL COMPLETED APPLICATIONS will be made available to school board members to review prior to the candidate selection meeting. A foundational belief of MSBA's executive search service is that it is crucial for board members, as the district's hiring authority, to have the opportunity to review all applications in order to make the most informed decision possible. This information is confidential and must be treated in accordance with Minnesota's Data Practices Act, and MSBA's training services during the search will outline all board responsibilities regarding data privacy issues.

Once the screening, preliminary verification of references, pre-interviews, and vetting have been completed by MSBA, the search team will meet with the school board to recommend those candidates MSBA feels best fit your district's leadership profile and assist the school board in selecting those to be interviewed. The next page in this proposal outlines MSBA's vetting process in greater detail.

Following the school board's selection of finalists, the search team will prepare a news release for the district to send to staff, the media, and community including the names of those to be interviewed, as well as the schedule of remaining search-related activities.



MSBA'S APPLICANT VETTING PROCESS

After the application deadline has passed, a team of MSBA service providers and staff review all completed applications. MSBA will look at their licensure, references and recommendations, and work and educational history. We then align each applicant's background, experience and application information with the district's hiring criteria, leadership profile, and feedback gathered from the public regarding the next superintendent's desirable skills, traits, and experience.

After reviewing all completed applications, each member of the vetting team rates all applicants on a 5-point scale and an aggregate rating is compiled.

Next the team meets to discuss the ratings and evaluate which applicants have risen to the top and why. Following a lengthy discussion, consensus is reached on which applicants to consider presenting to the board due to their alignment with the hiring criteria and the district's needs.

This results in the team conducting additional vetting on 8-12 applicants (or more, depending on size and quality of the pool). This vetting includes team members conducting a phone interview with each applicant, holding conversations with at least three of their listed references, and a closer look into each applicant's qualifications. The result is the final list of applicants MSBA recommends be presented to the board for interview consideration.

At the candidate presentation meeting with the board, MSBA will share our recommendations. After hearing short verbal presentations on each applicant, the board will then discuss the applicant pool (by alphabet identifier only to abide by data privacy laws) and request clarification from MSBA as needed (recognizing our responses will also be somewhat limited due to privacy laws). The board then has three options:

- Accept the recommendations made by MSBA for first round interviews as presented.
- Accept some applicants recommended by MSBA but replace others with candidates identified by the school board.
- Forfeit all candidates recommended by MSBA and select an entirely new slate of applicants identified by the school board.

A motion will then be made, seconded, and passed (again, using alphabet identifiers only). Once this motion has passed, the board chair or MSBA will read aloud the names of those selected for first round interviews. These names will be in no particular order and not tied to their alphabet identifiers.

MSBA will then call these applicants to congratulate them, confirm their interest in the position, and inform them they will receive an email from MSBA's application software (Revelus) to schedule their interview. Once all interviews are scheduled, MSBA will send each interviewee an email containing final information for their interview. Finally, applicants not selected for interviews will receive an email thanking them for their interest in the position, and notifying them that the board has chosen to proceed with other candidates who more closely align with the district's hiring criteria.

NOTE: Clear communication during a superintendent search process is extremely important, and over the past five years both candidates and board members alike have praised MSBA's strengths in this area.

CONTRACT AND FOLLOW-UP SERVICES

Decisions, Contract, and Announcement

The search team will guide the school board through the process of contacting the lone finalist to offer the position. MSBA recommends the school board use the MSBA/MASA Model Superintendent Contract as the basis for negotiating the superintendent's contract, and will provide comparative superintendent salary and benefit information to assist the district in negotiating an appropriate compensation package. MSBA's search team will not negotiate the contract for the school board, however, as it is the board's responsibility to set and negotiate all hiring parameters for the new superintendent. The search team will draft a news release for the district to send to staff, the media, and community announcing the new superintendent.

The search team will also personally contact the non-selected finalists.

Transition Plan and Follow-up Services

Once the search is concluded and the parties have a signed contract, the search team will continue to provide support for the school board and superintendent. Past clients have found MSBA's search services follow-through to be invaluable in setting expectations and ensuring success for the new board-superintendent team.

For example, to strengthen the school board and superintendent's working relationship, and to provide support to the new superintendent, the search team will:

- assist in developing a transition plan for the new superintendent, if requested;
- provide the board with MSBA's proprietary guide "Preparing for Your New Superintendent: A Checklist for School Boards"
- facilitate a Transition Workshop to develop goals and/or performance expectations for the school board and superintendent after the new superintendent begins work in the school district;
- visit the new superintendent during their first year of school district employment; and
- be available to answer the new superintendent's and the school board's questions during the transition and beyond via phone, email, workshop, etc.

NOTE: There are **no additional charges** for any of the above transition services.



SUMMARY OF SEARCH SERVICES

The proposed search for Aitkin Public Schools includes the services outlined below.

The MSBA Search Team will:

- Conduct an initial planning meeting with the school board to establish the search timeline, discuss hiring criteria and public involvement, identify the district's position in the marketplace, determine advertising venues, and finalize all processes and procedures for conducting the search. *
- Collect public input through an online qualifications and quantitative data survey (in multiple languages as requested by the district). Results will be summarized for the school board by MSBA.
- Hold **Search Preview meetings** with district leadership to share information and answer their questions.
- Conduct focus groups and/or listening sessions with a cross-section of district constituencies if requested by the district for an additional fee. Results will be summarized for the school board by MSBA.
- Host an online informational proprietary **Q&A with MSBA** session regarding the superintendent search process, and provide the recording for placement on the district's website. **
- Develop a two-sided color vacancy announcement and post on both statewide and national job sites.
- Directly contact Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Service Cooperative Directors, Principals, Assistant Principals, and Cabinet Members across the state to advertise the vacancy and share how to apply.
- Develop all application procedures, handle applicants' calls and correspondence, collect and review applicants' files, and receive applicants' credentials.
- Screen the applicant pool against the school board's established hiring criteria and leadership profile.
- Conduct preliminary verification of references and pre-interviews and vetting of applicants who best meet the school board's hiring criteria and leadership profile as determined by MSBA's screening team.
- Conduct a meeting with the school board for purposes of interview training, developing interview questions, and clarifying interview schedules. **
- Conduct a meeting with the school board for purposes of presenting candidate recommendations so the school board can select finalists for interviews, and clarifying remaining steps of the search process. **
- Coordinate with finalists and be present during the first and second rounds of interviews. *
- Prepare a news release for the district to send to the media, school district staff, and community that includes the names of the finalists who will be interviewed.
- Facilitate public involvement in the second round of interviews, if requested. *
- Prepare a news release for the district to send to the media, school district staff, and community introducing the new superintendent.
- Assist in developing a transition plan for the new superintendent, if requested.
- Visit the new superintendent during their first year of employment. *
- Facilitate a Transition Workshop to develop goals and/or expectations for the school board and superintendent within six months after the new superintendent begins work in the school district. **

* **Designates in-district meetings, if possible.**

** **Designates virtual meetings. However, at the board's request in-district meetings may be substituted for an additional \$300 per meeting.**

ESTIMATED FEE FOR SERVICE

The professional services fee for Aitkin's superintendent search is **\$7,900**. This includes the **MSBA search team's time and all expenses, public survey, Search Preview meetings, Q&A with MSBA session, vacancy brochure, all application procedures, applicant screening, finalist recommendations, interview training, news releases, and MSBA's Transition Workshop**.

A la carte options of **customized public involvement** beyond the above services (such as Focus Groups or Listening Sessions) will be provided for \$1,395 per day or \$300 per group if requested. These options would be added solely at the discretion of the school board.

MSBA does not charge for consultant travel, attendance at interviews, transition services, or any initial or ongoing support of the new board team. As noted earlier, if the board requests it, MSBA's "Hiring the Right Superintendent" workshop is included in our full search services at no additional charge.

Any language interpretation, refreshments, childcare costs, or school board member stipends or expenses associated with finalists' interviews (i.e. travel and lodging for candidates) are not included in this fee.

Finally, MSBA has no potential conflicts of interest in providing these search services to Aitkin Public Schools, and the level of services and fee included in this proposal are negotiable based on the school board's needs.

ADDITIONAL FEES: A LA CARTE OPTIONS

NATIONAL ADVERTISING SITES: As referenced on Page 3, additional advertising is available on the following sites at no additional mark-up:

- American Association of School Administrators (AASA) - 30 days @ \$849; diversity boost for \$149
- National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) - 30 days @ \$330; featured job boost for \$125
- Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS) - 6 weeks @ \$250
- Top School Jobs (EdWeek) - 60 days @ \$895
- National Indian Education Association (NIEA) - 8 weeks @ \$80
- National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET) - 3 weeks @ \$275; 6 weeks @ \$360

BACKGROUND CHECKS: National criminal background checks, as well as verification of employment, educational credentials, and professional licensure are also available at a cost of \$395 per candidate.

SATISFACTION GUARANTEE

If, at any time during the first year of the new superintendent's contract the board releases the superintendent, MSBA will conduct a second superintendent search for no additional fee. However, the school board would be responsible for new direct expenses, if any, incurred by MSBA for the second search.

NOTE: this guarantee is dependent upon the new board team's participation in the Transition Workshop, which must be held within six months after the new superintendent begins work in the district. Also, the candidate hired as superintendent must have been included in MSBA's recommended slate of finalists.



HIRING THE RIGHT SUPERINTENDENT - WORKSHOP

One of the most important decisions a school board will ever make is to choose a new superintendent. As part of MSBA's commitment to board leadership, we offer a **Hiring the Right Superintendent** workshop to help school boards learn about the process for conducting a successful superintendent search. Workshop topics include:

- Whether to use a consultant
- How to work with a consultant
- Setting a timeline
- Developing qualifications and selection criteria
- Involving the public as well as the media
- Dealing with internal candidates
- Legal pitfalls
- Interviewing Do's and Don'ts
- Deliberating in public
- Q & A re: superintendent search options and best practices

Each board member receives a booklet with sample vacancy announcement, application form, interview questions, reference check form, and other material board members can adapt for their district's specific needs.

The foundational knowledge this workshop provides helps school boards feel confident in the board's decision-making process regarding the superintendent search, as well as fully prepared to take their next steps. Cost is \$1,395 in-district (\$1,095 virtual) and includes all time and materials. This workshop is available only to MSBA members.

For more information please contact Barb Dorn, Director of Leadership Development and Executive Search, at 507-508-5501 (cell), or bdorn@mnmsba.org.



WHY MSBA?

MSBA believes the following distinguishing features truly differentiate our services from other firms in both the philosophy and implementation of executive search services.

1. LENS OF SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP

MSBA understands not only the best practices of conducting a superintendent search, but also the myriad of challenges and opportunities facing school boards today. In addition we know how to balance Minnesota's Open Meeting Law with our state's Data Practices Act, the increasing pressure on public education to provide an equitable education to each and every student, the impact of data requests on board work, and the vital leadership role a school board must fill in finding its next superintendent. As stated by a school board member after one of last year's MSBA-led searches: *"The best part of the search was MSBA's focus on finding the person that was best for our district, instead of the way other consultants seem more focused on finding jobs for their candidates."* MSBA's strong school board perspective is core to our search process and truly makes us unique among all firms submitting proposals to conduct superintendent searches across the state.

2. TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATION

Every facet of a superintendent search depends upon clear and open communications amongst the school board, search firm, and the public. To ensure transparency we offer our **Search Preview meetings** and **Q&A with MSBA**, and most importantly, we share ALL applications with board members to ensure you make the most informed decisions possible. We understand the additional work this creates for the district's search firm, but believe our ability to conduct the labor-intensive legwork yet guide the process clearly and appropriately, empowers school boards to confidently take ownership of finding the right leader for their district. In addition, MSBA partners with the Board of School Administrators (BOSA) to ensure any applicants we recommend as finalists either already have, or will soon have, a Minnesota superintendent license. This is particularly important for out-of-state superintendents who assume Minnesota has licensure reciprocity, which we do not.

3. NO HIDDEN FEES

Search costs quickly escalate when firms charge for consultant travel, multi-language surveys, attendance at finalist interviews, transition services, workshops, etc. MSBA stands behind all fee options as outlined in this proposal so your board can rest assured that total search costs will not exceed your expectations.

4. POST-HIRING SUPPORT

A new superintendent's first year can feel overwhelming due to volume of workload coupled with a steep and intense learning curve. MSBA firmly believes our transition and follow-up services provided to the new Board-Superintendent Team make a significant difference in ensuring a successful first year. Our Transition Workshop helps you discuss expectations, clarify goals, and lay the groundwork for that year's superintendent performance evaluation process. We also provide a transition plan outline upon request, visit the new superintendent during their first year, and remain fully available by phone, text, email, or workshop to continue building trust and collaboration among board members and their new superintendent. Together all of these MSBA commitments help a superintendent's first year start (and stay) strong.

WHY MSBA? (FROM OUR CLIENTS)

MSBA was willing to allow our board to customize the process to fit our needs. They were thorough, flexible, excellent listeners, and their patience and dedication brought us to a successful finish line.

- Board Chair, Robbinsdale Area Schools

MSBA was both easy to work with and made a daunting process manageable and enjoyable. I believe it also helped draw our board closer.

- Board member, Byron Public Schools

The process was clear from the beginning and the information supporting the process was extremely organized. There were no extraneous steps or information that complicated the process, so the Board and the community could all be on the same page at all times.

- Board member, Rochester Public Schools

MSBA does amazing work! They were very professional, calm and relaxed. They were thorough in their explanations and answers. If anything came up a call was either answered right away or called back quickly. MSBA made the overwhelming process VERY manageable!!"

- Board member, Cleveland Public Schools

MSBA was top notch every step of the way. They were responsive and supportive. I enjoyed working with them and felt comfortable asking them anything. They were a perfect guide for our board to ensure legal compliance and operate with the utmost integrity."

- Board member, Kasson-Mantorville Schools

MSBA handled finding a superintendent with professionalism, thoroughness and gave us what their expectations were from us. They also kept us encouraged that a good outcome would be the result.

- Board member, Litchfield Public Schools

We had a great experience utilizing MSBA for our district's search. They helped us focus on what we wanted in a superintendent, and their process brought clarity and harmony to the board table.

Throughout the process we relied heavily on MSBA's expertise, and as a result they helped us find the best possible fit. Our board would unanimously recommend using MSBA for your search.

- Board Chair, Alexandria Public Schools

MSBA was prompt with sharing their insight and providing requested feedback. It felt like we were in experienced hands for this important process.

- Board member, Sartell-St. Stephen ISD 748

The process was very organized and as chair of the board I always felt comfortable working with MSBA. I trusted their advice, appreciated their insights, and felt validated and respected. I can only say good things about the process.

- Board Chair, Bloomington Public Schools

MSBA was great to work with. They provided guidance throughout the process, were professional, knowledgeable, and acted with integrity.

- Board member, Brainerd Public Schools

TENTATIVE TIMELINE

Late January 2026 to Late February 2026

- School board holds initial planning meeting with MSBA search team to establish the timeline, review hiring criteria, identify district's position in the marketplace, determine advertising venues, craft venues for stakeholder involvement, and finalize all processes and procedures for conducting the search.
- MSBA holds **Search Preview** meetings with district leaders to share information regarding the search.
- MSBA hosts an informational **Q&A with MSBA** session regarding the superintendent search process.
- MSBA collects public input through survey (optional: focus groups and/or listening sessions)
- MSBA prepares a summary of public input for board to review and integrate into the search process.
- School board approves all advertising materials, including hiring criteria and vacancy brochure.
- MSBA search team finalizes application procedures and advertises the vacancy.

Late February 2026 to Mid-March 2026

- MSBA search team continues to advertise the vacancy and receive applications.
- MSBA search team conducts initial screening of applicants.
- MSBA search team conducts vetting of applicants, preliminary verification of references, and pre-interviews with candidates most aligned with the district's leadership profile and public input.

Mid-March 2026 to Late March 2026

- MSBA's search team meets with the school board to conduct interview training, develop interview questions, clarify interview procedures, and facilitate applicant screening conducted by the school board to select finalists for interviews.

Late March 2026 to Mid-April 2026

- School board conducts first round of interviews.
- School board conducts reference checks.
- School board conducts second round of interviews (optional: board invites public feedback).
- School board selects lone finalist.

Mid-April 2026 to Late April 2026

- School board negotiates terms and conditions of superintendent's contract.
- School board meets to approve the superintendent's employment contract.

July 1, 2026

- Superintendent reports to work.

Late July 2026 to Late December 2026

- New Board-Superintendent Team participates in MSBA's Transition Workshop.

NOTE: This timeline provides a starting point for considering and adopting a superintendent search timeline. Specific dates and times will be determined at the initial planning meeting.

TEAM QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

MSBA has compiled a team for the Aitkin Public Schools superintendent search possessing a wealth of experience across numerous fields in public education throughout the state of Minnesota. These individuals are identified on the following page, and include former:

- School board members
- Superintendents
- Associate Superintendents
- Cabinet-level administrators
- Human Resources professionals
- General counsel / Attorneys
- Cultural diversity trainers
- Teachers and coaches
- Communications specialists
- Project managers

The breadth and depth of qualifications on this team is enormous, and the experience these individuals have in the realm of public education numbers in the hundreds of years. Beyond the statistics, however, a passion for PreK-12 education drives the work we do. Every single person on MSBA's superintendent search team believes in, supports, and advocates for Minnesota's students who attend our state's public schools, and we will bring that same dedication and commitment to the search for Aitkin's next superintendent.

But don't just take our word for it, as school board members from recent MSBA searches had this to say:

For MSBA to come into a district where tensions were high and structure unstable, was remarkable. They took on the challenge and made everything very straightforward. I will forever be grateful for the time they took to explain things and reach out to those who had questions. Throughout the search their attitudes remained positive and comforting.

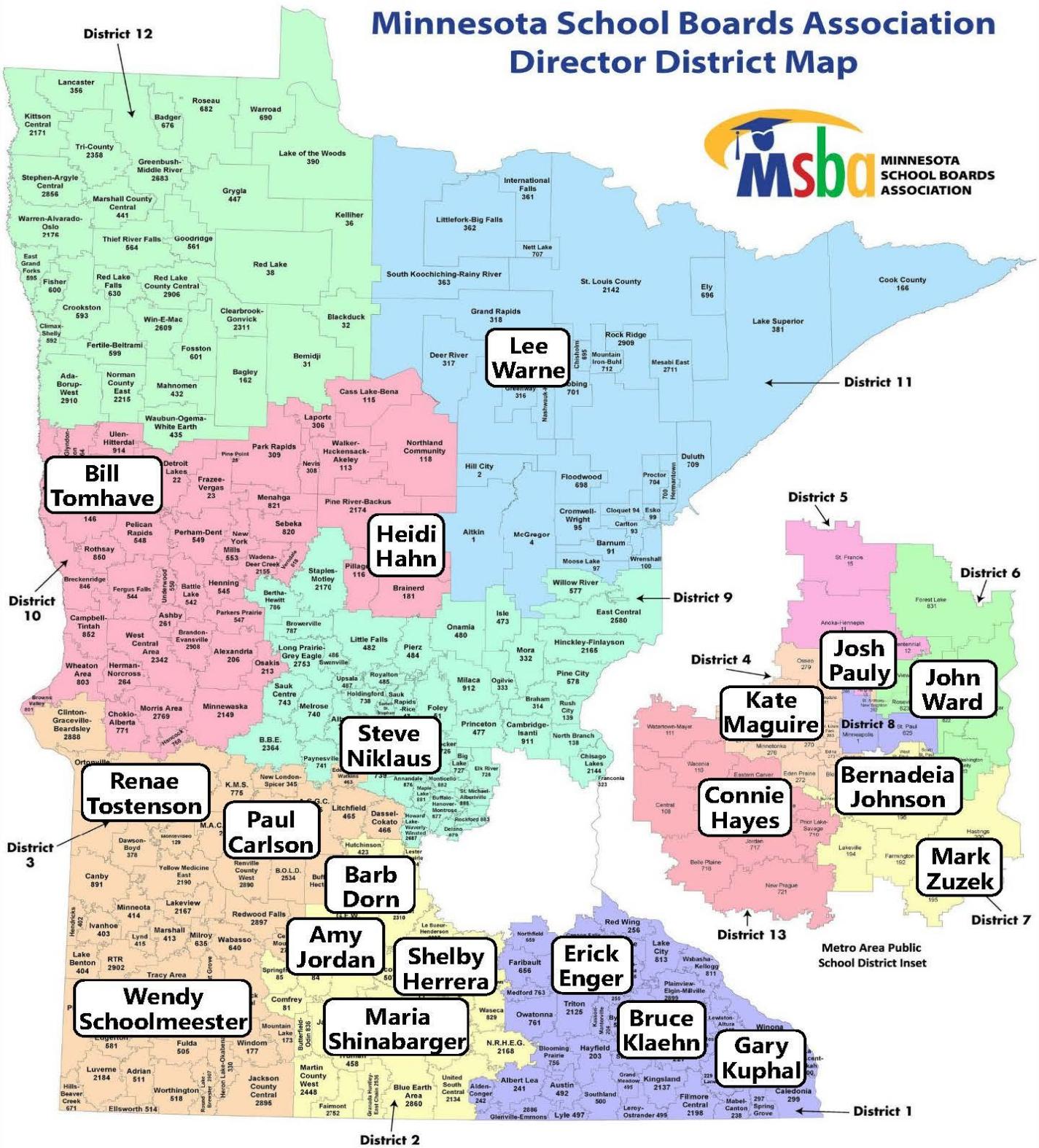
Working with MSBA on our superintendent search was an amazing experience. The entire process was completed with professionalism and dedication. Everything from preparing the hiring criteria to the interviewing of candidates was done transparently. MSBA is an industry leader and our search was successful because of them.

As you'll see in this proposal, MSBA team members' tangible qualifications and experience are viewable on our resumes. The collective background of our team members is impressive. However, the intangibles are what we feel make the biggest differences for our clients. We listen carefully, communicate clearly, and deeply understand the complexities and emotions involved in a superintendent search, not only for the school board, but for staff, students, parents, and community members as well.



TEAM QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

Minnesota School Boards Association Director District Map



2025-2026 MSBA-LED SEARCHES

* AS OF 1.2.26

- Benson Public Schools
- Brainerd Public Schools
- Crookston Public Schools
- Edina Public Schools
- Hinckley-Finlayson Schools
- Jackson County Central Schools
- Pillager Public Schools
- St. Louis County Schools
- Stewartville Public Schools
- Wayzata Public Schools

MSBA 2025-2026 SEARCH SERVICE REFERENCES *

* AS OF 11.16.25

As the 2025-26 search season continues to unfold, MSBA will be hired to assist additional school districts with their superintendent searches.

Typically, MSBA does not provide reference names or contact information until the conclusion of that district's search process. However, if it is important for you to visit with anyone from the above districts whose searches are currently underway, please let us know and we will request permission to share their contact information with you as part of MSBA's proposal to assist Aitkin with its upcoming search.

2024-2025 MSBA-LED SEARCHES

- Albert Lea Area Schools
- BOLD Public Schools
- Brainerd Public Schools
- Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191
- Byron Public Schools
- Crosby-Ironton School District
- Eden Valley-Watkins ISD 463
- Elk River ISD 728
- Hastings Public Schools
- Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Public Schools
- Kasson-Mantorville School District
- Kelliher Public School District 36
- La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools
- Lake of the Woods School
- Lynd Public School
- MACCRAY Public Schools
- Mahnomen ISD 432
- McGregor ISD 4
- Melrose Area Public Schools
- Montevideo Public Schools
- Nevis Public School
- Northland Community Schools ISD 118
- Northwest Service Cooperative
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville Community Schools
- Proctor Public Schools
- Red Lake County Central ISD 2906
- Red Lake Falls Schools
- St. Croix Preparatory Academy
- St. James Public Schools
- Saint Peter Public Schools
- Worthington ISD 518

MSBA 2024-2025 SEARCH SERVICE REFERENCES *

* MORE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

1. Dave Klatt, School Board Chair, **ALBERT LEA AREA SCHOOLS**, dave.klatt@alschools.org
2. Anna Werb, School Board Chair, **BURNSVILLE-EAGAN-SAVAGE ISD 191**, awerb@isd191.org
3. Jeremy Aagard, School Board Chair, **BYRON PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, jeremy.aagard@byron.k12.mn.us
4. Julie Alsum, School Board Chair, **MACCRAY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, alsumj@maccray.k12.mn.us
5. Andrew Lindow, School Board Chair, **NEVIS PUBLIC SCHOOL**, alindow@nevis308.org
6. Lynn Peterson, School Board Chair, **PROCTOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, lpeters2@proctor.k12.mn.us
7. Charlie Potts, School Board Chair, **ST. PETER PUBLIC SCHOOLS**, charlie.potts@stpeterschools.org

2023-2024 MSBA-LED SEARCHES

- AFSA Charter School
- Badger Independent School District
- Brainerd Public Schools
- Cleveland Public School
- DaVinci Academy of Arts + Science
- East Grand Forks Public Schools
- Greenbush-Middle River-Tri County Schools
- Hill City School
- International Falls Independent School District
- Kasson-Mantorville Public Schools
- Lac qui Parle Valley School District
- Litchfield Public Schools
- Montevideo Public Schools
- MN River Valley Education District
- New York Mills Public School
- Ogilvie Public Schools
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville Community Schools
- Red Wing Public Schools
- Robbinsdale Area Schools
- Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan District 196
- Sartell-St. Stephen ISD 748
- St. Charles Public Schools
- St. Louis Park Public Schools
- St. Paul City School
- Warren-Alvarado-Oslo School District
- Win-E-Mac Schools

MSBA 2023-2024 SEARCH SERVICE REFERENCES *

* MORE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

1. Cory Johnson, School Board Chair, **Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan District 196**, cory.johnson@district196.org
2. ReNae Bowman, School Board Chair, **Robbinsdale Area Schools**, renae_bowman@rdale.org
3. Alex Carlson, School Board Chair, **Litchfield Public Schools**, acarlson@isd465.org
4. Jim Bryant, School Board Chair, **Red Wing Public Schools**, jrbryant@rwps.org
5. Travis Gransee, School Board Chair, **St. Charles Public Schools**, tgransee@schs.k12.mn.us
6. Kevin Boyles, School Board Chair, **Brainerd Public Schools**, kevin.boyles@isd181.org
7. Kent Harfmann, School Board Chair, **Kasson-Mantorville Public Schools**, k.harfmann@komets.k12.mn.us
8. Tricia Meling, School Board Chair, **Sartell-St. Stephen ISD 748**, tricia.meling@isd748.org

2022-2023 MSBA-LED SEARCHES

- Chisago Lakes School District
- Crookston Public Schools
- Dawson-Boyd Public Schools
- East Grand Forks Public Schools
- Foley Public Schools
- Hastings Public Schools
- Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted Public Schools
- Kaleidoscope Charter School
- Lake City Public Schools
- MACCRAY Public Schools
- Northwest Suburban Integration School District
- Pipestone Area Schools
- Red Wing Public Schools
- ROCORI School District
- Thief River Falls Public Schools
- Tri-County/Greenbush-Middle River Schools
- Wabasha-Kellogg School District
- Winona Area Public Schools
- Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools

MSBA 2022-2023 SEARCH SERVICE REFERENCES *

* MORE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

1. Lori Berg, School Board Chair, **Chisago Lakes School District**, lberg@isd2144.org
2. Frank Fee, School Board Chair, **Crookston Public Schools**, ffee@rrv.net
3. Bruce Lund, School Board Chair, **Dawson-Boyd Public Schools**, blund@dwby.k12.mn.us
4. Lisa Hedin, School Board Chair, **Hastings Public Schools**, lhedin@isd200.org
5. Heath Oeltjen, School Board Chair, **Lake City Public Schools**, hoeltjen@lake-city.k12.mn.us
6. Jim Bryant, School Board Chair, **Red Wing Public Schools**, jrbryant@rwps.org
7. Phil Rosendale, School Board Chair, **Wabasha-Kellogg School District**, philrosendale@wkfalcons.org
8. Nancy Denzer, School Board Chair, **Winona Area Public Schools**, nancy.denzer@winona.k12.mn.us
9. Angie Bredehoft, School Board Chair, **Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools**, angie.bredehoft@zmsch.k12.mn.us

2021-2022 MSBA-LED SEARCHES

- ACGC Public Schools
- Albert Lea Area Schools
- Bemidji Area Schools
- Cass Lake-Bena Public Schools
- Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley Schools
- Dover-Eyota Public Schools
- Fosston Public Schools
- Greenway Public Schools
- Kingsland Public Schools
- La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools
- Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Public Schools
- Menahga School District
- Mid-State Education District
- New London-Spicer School District
- Ortonville Public Schools
- Pequot Lakes Public Schools
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville Community Schools
- Proctor Public Schools
- Red Lake Schools
- ROCORI School District
- South St. Paul Public Schools
- Stillwater Area Public Schools
- Swanville School District
- Thief River Falls Public Schools
- Tri-City United Public Schools
- Tri-County / Greenbush-Middle River Schools
- Ulen-Hitterdal Public Schools
- Underwood School District
- Verndale Public School
- Waconia Public Schools
- Waterville-Elysian-Morristown Public Schools
- West Central Area School District
- Windom Area Schools

MSBA 2021-2022 SEARCH SERVICE REFERENCES *

* MORE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

1. Neal Skaar, School Board Chair, **Albert Lea Area Schools**, neal.skaar@alschools.org
2. Carol Johnson, School Board Chair, **Bemidji Area Schools**, Carol_Johnson@isd31.net
3. Eric Morken, School Board Chair, **La Crescent-Hokah Schools**, eric.morken@isd300.k12.mn.us
4. Kim Bolz-Andolshek, School Board Chair, **Pequot Lakes Public Schools**, kbolz@isd186.org
5. Jennifer McDonald, School Board Chair, **Proctor Public Schools**, jennmcd777@gmail.com
6. Alison Sherman, School Board Chair, **Stillwater Area Schools**, shermana@stillwaterschools.org
7. Dana Geller, School Board Chair, **Waconia Public Schools**, dgeller@isd110.org
8. Gary Michael, School Board Chair, **W-E-M Public Schools**, sba.email@yahoo.com

2020-2021 MSBA-LED SEARCHES

- Austin Public Schools
- Bloomington Public Schools
- Byron Public Schools
- Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley Schools
- Cook County ISD 166
- Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Public Schools
- Greenway Public Schools
- Houston Public Schools
- Intermediate School District 917
- La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools
- Lac qui Parle Valley School District
- Lake Park Audubon School District
- Lynd Public School
- Montevideo Public Schools
- Rochester Public Schools
- Royalton Public Schools
- Tri-County Schools
- Ulen-Hitterdal Public Schools

Member districts:

Bloomington, Burnsville-Eagan Savage,
Farmington, Hastings, Inver Grove Heights,
Lakeville, Randolph, South St. Paul, and West
St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan

MSBA EXECUTIVE SEARCH SERVICE REFERENCES 2020-2021 SEARCHES

* MORE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

1. Kathy Green, School Board Chair, **Austin Public Schools**, kathy.green@austin.k12.mn.us
2. Nelly Korman, School Board Chair, **Bloomington Public Schools**, nkorman@isd271.org
3. Harvey Bergh, School Board Chair, **Byron Public Schools**, harvey.bergh@byron.k12.mn.us
4. Lindsey Leach, School Board Chair, **DGF Public Schools**, lleach@dgf.k12.mn.us
5. Dr. DeeDee Currier, School Board Chair, **Intermediate School District 917**, dcurrier@isd191.org
6. Kelly Snell, School Board Member, **Montevideo Public Schools**, ksnell@montevideoschools.org
7. Dr. Jean Marvin, School Board Chair, **Rochester Public Schools**, jemarvin@rochesterschools.org

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA STAFF

MSBA's search team is comprised of experienced MSBA staff and service providers. Search team members understand that selecting a superintendent is one of the board's most important duties and have a vested interest in the success of your search. Below are brief resumés of MSBA's search team.

■ BARB DORN

Barb has more than 35 years of experience in nonprofit leadership, marketing and communications, consulting, and process facilitation. She has worked across public, private, and nonprofit sectors to build collaborative and viable partnerships, deliver high-impact workshops, and produce outcomes based on common goals and shared decision-making processes. Barb has also served on the Boards of Directors for Greater Mankato's City Center Partnership and the area chapter of Leave a Legacy. She joined MSBA in 2019 and is a member of the National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers.

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA): Director of Leadership Development and Executive Search
- YWCA Mankato: Executive Director
- March of Dimes: Division Director
- Minnesota State University Mankato: Adjunct Professor
- Pathways Marketing: Owner / Marketing Consultant
- DLR Group: Business Development / Referendum Consultant

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Individual school board in-services: Superintendent Search, Mutual Expectations, and Superintendent Evaluation
- Presenter — MSBA workshops, seminars, and conferences:
 - ◊ Superintendent Evaluation
 - ◊ Superintendent Search
 - ◊ Various other topics
- Program and Brand Management, Marketing, and Public Relations
- Daily telephone/email responses to MSBA school board member questions
- Contributor to The MSBA *Leader* newsletter
- Presenter at other professional workshops and conferences:
 - ◊ Leadership Development Series including:
 - Collaboration and Teamwork
 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 - Conflict Management
 - Resiliency
 - Communication and Team-Building
 - ◊ Community Relations
 - ◊ Strategy and Visioning

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA STAFF

■ AMY JORDAN

With more than 27 years of leadership experience primarily in the nonprofit sector, Amy is a collaborative leader committed to serving the public, with a focus on youth. She has experience in recruitment, training, creating partnerships, policy and compliance, and program management and evaluation. As an empathetic partner, Amy is skilled at finding commonalities and consensus amongst diverse groups. The development of her action plan led her team's work to receive national recognition for exceeding key performance indicators in diversity and inclusion while working for a national nonprofit. With strengths in execution and relationship building, she is a natural cultivator of the potential in others and strives for continuous improvement. Amy is goal-oriented, ethical, deliberative, and possesses basic language skills in both Spanish and ASL (American Sign Language). She joined MSBA in 2022 and is also a member of the National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers.

WORK HISTORY

- MN School Boards Assoc. (MSBA): Associate Director of Leadership Development & Executive Search
- Miracle League of North Mankato: Executive Director
- YWCA Mankato: Director of Programs for Women and Girls
- Girls on the Run of Greater Mankato: Council Director

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Leadership of and engagement with multiple community groups
- Collaboration and cooperative working relationships with diverse groups
- Leadership of multiple community programs for women, girls, immigrant and refugee women and their children, and people with disabilities
- Policy development and compliance
- Evaluation management
- Plan development for implementation of best practices
- Brand management and communications
- Facilitation of national training for hundreds of leaders on:
 - ◊ Inclusive language and conversations
 - ◊ Facilitation
 - ◊ Context
 - ◊ Conflict resolution
 - ◊ Relationship-building/Teambuilding
 - ◊ Mastery experiences for self-efficacy
- Presenter — MSBA workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Presenter—National Affiliation of Superintendent Searchers conference
- Daily telephone/email responses to MSBA school board member questions
- Contributor to The MSBA *Leader* newsletter and the MSBA *Journal* magazine

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA STAFF

■ TERENCE MORROW, J.D., Ph.D.

Dr. Morrow holds deep experience in law and policy development; nonprofit and school board development and legal guidance; planning, directing and expanding successful nonprofit fundraising; fiscal and budget oversight; and project management. His government relations experience includes designing and executing state and federal legislative strategy; directing successful policy plans; developing state-specific legislative strategies; testifying before legislative bodies; hiring and managing contract lobbyists and consultants; representing organizations before local, state, and federal agencies and departments; maximizing traditional and new media in campaigns; project management; and building effective coalitions with trade associations, interest groups, and others. Dr. Morrow joined MSBA in 2017.

EDUCATION

- Doctor of Philosophy, Communication Studies
Northwestern University, Evanston, IL
- Juris Doctorate, Law
University of California, Davis
- Bachelor of Arts, Rhetoric
University of California, Berkeley

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Assoc. (MSBA): General Counsel / Director of Legal and Policy Services
- Nicollet County, Minnesota, Board of Commissioners: Elected Board Member
- St. Peter, Minnesota, School Board: Elected Board member
- Uniform Law Commission - Chicago, IL: Legislative Director / Legal Counsel
- Minnesota House of Representatives: Elected Representative of District 23A
- Gustavus Adolphus College: Associate Professor of Communication Studies / Department Chair
- Hoge, Fenton, Jones & Appel - San Jose, CA: Attorney

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Builds legislative and government relations
- Provides legal guidance to school districts and administrators
- Engages with stakeholder organizations throughout the state
- Drafts commentaries, newsletter updates, legislative summaries, and related documents
- Works with state agencies on licensure and policy issues
- Served rural Minnesota county for two terms as an elected county commissioner
- Served rural district in the Minnesota House of Representatives, including committee assignments on K-12 Policy and Finance (Vice Chair); Agriculture Policy and Finance; Environment; Higher Education Finance and Policy; Rules; State Government; Transportation Policy and Finance
- Led expansion of collegiate academic department; created civic engagement and public discourse initiative
- Presenter — MSBA workshops, seminars, and conferences
 - ◊ Open Meeting Law; Phase trainings; Policy issues; and more
- Daily telephone/email responses to MSBA school board member questions
- Contributor to The MSBA *Leader* newsletter and The Journal publication

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA STAFF

▪ GARY LEE

Gary has 30+ years of experience in private business — both in a large corporate setting and as an owner/president of small rural businesses. Gary is a former member of the Fertile-Beltrami School Board. Gary also served on the MSBA Board of Directors, the Northwest Service Cooperative Board of Directors, the Minnesota Service Cooperatives Board of Directors, the MSBA Insurance Trust Board of Directors, and the Big Three working group. Gary joined MSBA in 2009.

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA): Deputy Executive Director
- Lee Nursery, Inc.: Owner and President
- Lee Nursery Supplies, Inc.: Owner and President
- Sondreli Business Services: Owner
- UNISYS (formerly Sperry) Defense Systems: IT Manager

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Individual school board in-services: Superintendent Search and School Board-Superintendent Relationships
- Presenter — MSBA workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Analyze superintendent employment contracts and negotiations

▪ TIFFANY GUSTIN, MBA

Tiffany has 15+ years of experience working in and with public schools. She served as a school business official for ten years before joining MSBA in 2019. Her experience with district operations includes responsibility for all aspects of finance and human resources, as well as oversight of food service, transportation, and facilities. She is pursuing a doctorate in Leadership in K12 Administration.

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA): Director of Management and Insurance Trust Services
- ISD #1 – Aitkin Public Schools: Business Manager
- Technical Services of Duluth: Programmer/Data Analyst
- Aitkin County: Administration and Human Resources Specialist
- Computer Associates International: Software Engineer

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- School board in-services: Negotiations, Leadership Foundations - School Finance and Management, Officers' Workshop - Treasurer
- Facilitation and oversight of the MSBA Insurance Trust
- Presenter: MSBA webinars, workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Presenter: Other professional organization workshops and conferences

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA STAFF

■ SHELBY HERRERA

Shelby has more than 25 years of experience in education — as a classroom teacher, a paraprofessional, and a teaching assistant at the university level. Shelby joined MSBA in 2019.

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA): Administrative Assistant to Strategic Governance
- Mankato Public Schools: Science Teacher
- Mankato Public Schools: Paraprofessional
- Minnesota State University, Mankato: Teaching assistant

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Conduct research and compile data
- Handle information requests
- Interact with a wide range of staff, business partners, and members
- Prepare reports, memos, letters, and other documents, using word processing, spreadsheet, database, etc.
- Assist applicants and board members with Revelus, MSBA's proprietary application platform

■ BRUCE LOMBARD

Bruce has more than 15 years of experience providing a full range of administrative support services. Bruce joined MSBA in 2008.

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA): Associate Director of Communications and Marketing
- Mankato Free Press: Copy Editor
- Washington Unified School District (West Sacramento, California): Substitute Teacher
- Sogang University Language Program (Seoul, South Korea): English Language Instructor

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Provides customer support to MSBA members via email and phone
- Occasionally handles information requests from the media
- Posts job openings on MSBA Jobs webpage and in MSBA Leader newsletter
- Interacts with a wide range of staff, business partners, and members

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA STAFF

■ MARIA SHINABARGER, J.D.

Juris Doctor and educator with over 15 years' experience as a community servant. Maria joined MSBA in 2018.

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA): Associate Director of Management Services and Charter School Liaison
- Law Clerk at Hennepin County Attorney's Office
- Cambridge Academy East (Mesa, Arizona): Middle School English Teacher, Director of Professional Development
- Milan C-2 School District (Milan, Missouri): Middle School Reading Teacher

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Facilitate community, staff, and student input sessions
- Ensure compliance with data privacy statutes by redacting resumes
- Consolidate staff and community responses to surveys and interviews
- Help members interpret state and federal statutes regarding human resources, data practices and contracts

■ JOEL STENCEL, CPA

Joel has more than 20 years of accounting and auditing experience providing a full range of support services. Joel joined MSBA in 2017.

WORK HISTORY

- Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA): Director of Association Finance
- Eide Bailly LLP: Audit Manager

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- School District Auditor
- Answer and direct phone calls to appropriate parties
- Interact with a wide range of staff, business partners, and members
- Gathers salary information for Districts selected
- Assists with EMD analysis submitted by school board members

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

▪ LEE WARNE, Ed.S.

Lee has been in education since 1972, including serving as a teacher, coach, high school principal, superintendent, service cooperative executive director, Minnesota Rural Education Association executive director, and Association of Educational Service Agencies executive director. Lee has served at all levels of leadership in local, state, and national organizations. Lee has also received numerous awards at the regional, state, and national levels.

WORK HISTORY

- Greenway Public Schools: Interim Superintendent
- RTR (Russell-Tyler-Ruthton) Schools: Interim Superintendent
- Association of Educational Service Agencies: Executive Director
- MN Rural Education Association: Executive Director
- Lake Benton School: Interim Superintendent
- SW/WC Service Cooperative: Executive Director
- West Central Area Schools: Superintendent
- Norman County West: High School Principal
- Halstad Public School: High School Principal

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Facilitated over 50 superintendent searches and several district strategic planning sessions
- Provided assistance to school boards and superintendents in various aspects of leadership and training

▪ BRUCE KLAEHN

Bruce has recently retired from 41 years as a Minnesota educator, serving as a teacher, coach, principal, and superintendent, as well as an adjunct college instructor in educational administration. He has extensive experience in financial budgeting, school construction projects, administrative mentoring, and contract negotiations.

WORK HISTORY

- Southeast Service Cooperative: Educational Consultant
- Winona State University: Adjunct Instructor
- Dover-Eyota Public School District: Superintendent
- Grand Meadow Public Schools: Superintendent
- Granada-Huntley-East Chain School District: Principal
- Madelia Public Schools: Teacher and Coach

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Experience facilitating superintendent searches
- Mentor of new superintendents in southeast Minnesota

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

▪ PAUL CARLSON

Paul has 39 years of experience in education as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. He is committed to delivering effective guidance for educational excellence to ensure optimal education opportunities for all students.

WORK HISTORY

- ACGC Public Schools: Interim Superintendent (1 year)
- Hancock Public Schools: Part-time Superintendent (5 years)
- New London-Spicer Schools: Superintendent (17 years)
- New London-Spicer Schools: High School Principal
- Sleepy Eye Public Schools: High School Principal
- Sleepy Eye Public Schools: Business Education Teacher

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Implemented long-range planning and goal-setting processes gathering community input and student achievement data resulting in facilities maintenance and energy project
- Led five successful operating levy campaigns and two successful bond levy campaigns

▪ RENAE TOSTENSON, Ed.S.

Renae has nearly 40 years of experience in education. She has served as superintendent (Lac qui Parle Valley Schools, 2011-2017), principal (Appleton Elementary School, 2007-2011), teacher coach (Lac qui Parle Valley Schools, 2005-2007), and as an elementary school teacher.

WORK HISTORY

- Lac qui Parle Valley Schools: Superintendent
- Lac qui Parle Valley Schools: Principal
- Lac qui Parle Valley Schools: Teacher coach

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Presenter at MASA and MSBA conferences and workshops
- Facilitated superintendent searches

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

▪ GARY KUPHAL

Gary has 48 years of experience in education, all but four years in Minnesota. He has served as a high school principal in Henderson, assistant high school principal and middle school principal in La Crescent, and superintendent in Southland, LeRoy-Ostrander, Plainview-Elgin-Millville, and Mabel-Canton.

WORK HISTORY

- Mable-Canton Schools: Superintendent
- La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools: Interim Superintendent
- Kingsland Public Schools: Interim Superintendent
- Southland School District: Superintendent
- LeRoy-Ostrander School District: Superintendent
- Plainview-Elgin-Millville Community Schools: Superintendent
- La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools: Middle School Principal
- Henderson School District: High School Principal
- Henderson School District: Counselor
- Cleveland School District: Counselor
- Union-Whitten School District (Iowa): Teacher

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Facilitated superintendent searches, board development, and school district strategic planning sessions
- Facilitated community task force on facilities planning

▪ STEVE NIKLAUS

Steve Niklaus brings 43 years of experience in education including serving as superintendent (Annandale Public Schools, 1992-2017) and principal (Annandale High School, 1986-1992, and Atwater-Grove City High Schools, 1980-1986). Steve has served on several state and regional professional boards and committees. Steve has worked in both Minnesota and North Dakota school districts.

WORK HISTORY

- Annandale Public Schools: Superintendent
- Annandale Public Schools: Principal
- Atwater-Grove City High Schools: Principal
- Welcome High School: Principal
- Oakes High School, Oakes, North Dakota: High School Teacher

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Led six successful operating levy elections and four successful building bond elections
- Experience facilitating with superintendent searches

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

■ BILL TOMHAVE, Ph.D.

Bill has more than 45 years of extensive experience in education starting as a high school mathematics teacher and including 40 years in higher education involved with teacher preparation. Bill was elected to the Moorhead Area Schools Board of Directors in 2001, serving through 2018, and was honored by MSBA as a member of the All-State School Board in 2015.

WORK HISTORY

- Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota: Assistant/Associate/Professor, Mathematics
- University of Minnesota, Morris, Minnesota: Assistant Professor, Mathematics
- Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa: Instructor, Mathematics
- Oregon Consolidated Schools, Wisconsin: Teacher, High School Mathematics

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Director of Moorhead Area School Board 2002-2018, held positions of Chair, Vice-Chair, and Treasurer
- Board of Directors for Lakes Country Service Cooperative 2007-2018
- Experience assisting with community discussions and candidate screenings and interviews
- Ambassador, Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA), 2006—2009
- Region 1 Joint Powers Board, 2010—2018; Vice Chair 2012—2018

■ WENDY SCHOOLMEESTER, Ed.D.

Wendy has almost four decades of experience in education including elementary teacher, elementary principal, professor of education, and school board member.

WORK HISTORY

- Southwest Minnesota State University (SMSU): Professor of Education, Adjunct Professor, Student Teacher Supervisor
- University of Sioux Falls (USF): Adjunct Professor
- MN Rural Education Association (MREA): Board Member representing Higher Education (2-year appt.)
- Pipestone Area Schools (PAS): School Board Member (5.5 years)/School Board Chair (3 years)
- Russell-Tyler-Ruthton Schools (RTR): Elementary School Principal
- Pipestone/Jasper Schools: Elementary Teacher

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Served on and chaired several search committees for SMSU
- Guided PAS Superintendent search as board chair
- Presented numerous educational keynotes and sessions locally, state-wide, and internationally
- Collaborated with PAS to begin an Educators Rising Club to address teacher shortage in Minnesota

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

■ KATE MAGUIRE, Ed.D.

Dr. Maguire is a proven system leader focused on improving academic outcomes for all students by building shared vision for work; establishing trust through effective and collaborative relationships; driving for instructional excellence; creating safe, healthy, and responsive work and learning environments; and creating systems of accountability and continuous improvement. Dr. Maguire was honored as Minnesota's Superintendent of the Year by MASA in 2014, and she holds a Doctor of Education in Education Leadership from the University of St. Thomas, as well as an Education Specialist degree and Master of Arts degree.

WORK HISTORY

- Concordia University: Contracted Faculty of Practice
- St. Louis Park Public Schools: Interim Superintendent
- Anoka Hennepin Schools: Interim Superintendent
- Osseo Area Schools
 - ◊ Superintendent
 - ◊ Assistant Superintendent
 - ◊ Director, Curriculum, Instruction * Educational Standards
 - ◊ Director, Human Resources
 - ◊ Principal
 - ◊ Assistant Principal
 - ◊ Assistant Administrator
 - ◊ Teacher, Social Studies

■ JOHN WARD, J.D., Ph.D

Dr. Ward holds 30+ years of experience in Minnesota public education, with his last 25 spent working for the Mounds View Public School District. There he served in a variety of leadership roles, finishing his career as Assistant Superintendent. John also holds a bachelor's degree in political science from St. John's, his Juris Doctorate from William Mitchell College of Law, and a Ph.D from the University of Minnesota.

WORK HISTORY

- MN School Boards Assoc. (MSBA): Associate Director of Leadership Development & Executive Search
- Mounds View Public Schools
 - ◊ Assistant Superintendent
 - ◊ Director of H.R. and Operations
 - ◊ Director of Secondary Schools
 - ◊ General Counsel/Assistant to the Superintendent

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Led MSBA executive searches, assisted in evaluation and goal-setting and conflict resolution strategies
- Leadership team participant in district strategic planning, implementation and assessment initiatives
- Negotiation of over twenty labor contracts with teachers and other bargaining groups
- Leadership of district/community task force groups in facilities, community education and athletics

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

■ CONNIE HAYES

Connie has 40 years of experience in education, including 23 years as a superintendent. She retired from Northeast Metro 916 after 15 years. During her educational career, Connie also served in coordinator positions and as a school psychologist. While working in the private sector she advised districts on public financing.

WORK HISTORY

- Northeast Metro 916 Intermediate School District: Superintendent
- Springsted: Vice-President
- La Crescent-Hokah Public Schools: Superintendent
- McGregor Independent School District #4: Superintendent
- Lynd Public School District and Marshall Public Schools: Superintendent and Curriculum Coordinator
- SW/WC ECSU: Coordinator and School Psychologist

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Provided leadership in district strategic planning and goal-setting processes
- Built consensus across participating school districts in a long-range facility planning, financing, and construction of three specialized facilities for unique learners
- Facilitated construction of a major addition to a secondary building and improved district finances

■ BERNADEIA H. JOHNSON, Ed.D.

Dr. Johnson's extensive background includes leadership roles in several districts in Minnesota and Tennessee ranging from 36,000 to 125, 000 PK-12 students. Her last district position was serving as Superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools. Recent work includes coaching school principals and superintendents, teaching, advising, and researching leadership and school district policies that impact students' mental health and academic achievement across Minnesota. She has been a keynote speaker, panelist, and presenter, and has served on local and national Boards to promote education as a public good. She teaches in the graduate school, in the administrative licensure graduate program, and advises doctoral students through the Department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Twin Cities Campus. Bernadeia received her doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, and her undergraduate degree from Alabama A & M University. Today, Bernadeia turns her efforts to speaking on her experience living with Stage Five kidney disease and the importance of prevention of kidney disease. She received a kidney transplant in April 2024.

SUPERINTENDENT EXPERIENCE

- Minneapolis Public Schools
 - ◊ Superintendent of Schools
 - ◊ Deputy Superintendent of Schools/Chief Academic Officer
- Memphis City Schools
 - ◊ Deputy Superintendent of Schools

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

■ MARK ZUZEK

Mark holds a commitment to ensure quality educational leadership occurs in each school district. This means that staff will be supported to do their jobs well, and students will enjoy meaningful interactions with caring, well-prepared, creative, and enthusiastic staff. Mark has served as both a superintendent of schools as well as a school board member, giving him a unique perspective on the superintendent search process.

WORK HISTORY

- Hastings Public School Board: current member and Treasurer
- Intermediate School District 917 School Board: current Director
- Intermediate School District 917: Superintendent
- Hastings Public Schools: Middle School Principal
- Hastings Public Schools: Assistant Middle School Principal
- South Saint Paul High School: Assistant Principal

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Responsible for the leadership of over 500 employees assigned to 27 programs across 18 physical sites
- Served the needs of nine school districts across Dakota County and Bloomington
- Collaborated with St. Thomas University to develop and manage a unique licensure program that provided a pathway for paraprofessionals to attain their license while working full-time

■ JOSH PAULY

Josh has 13 years of experience in education. He completed Georgetown's McCourt School of Public Policy Education Finance program, Minnesota's Education Policy Fellowship program, and was a Fellow at the Center for Policy Design. During his educational career, Josh served as a teacher and school board member. While working in the private sector he advised companies on partnerships and solutioning for K-12 schools and nonprofits. He also mentors school board members across the country through School Board Fellows and co-founded the Get on Board Minnesota program. He received the University of MN's Rising Alumni Award in 2018.

WORK HISTORY

- Get on Board Minnesota: Co-Founder
- Future Focused Solutions: Director of Strategic Partnerships
- Books on Wings: Executive Director
- Minneapolis Public Schools: School Board member (Chair of Policy Committee & Supt Evaluation Committee)
- People Sourced Policy: Executive Director
- Minneapolis Public Schools: Teacher

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Created a leadership development program to support individuals as they consider running for school board.
- Developed school board policies, created an evaluation tool with metrics for board members to use with their superintendent, and provided leadership in district strategic planning and goal-setting processes.

SEARCH TEAM — MSBA SERVICE PROVIDERS

■ ERICK ENGER

Erick has 37 years of experience serving in public education, all in Minnesota school districts. He has held a variety of positions, including interim superintendent, superintendent, principal, coach, and teacher.

WORK HISTORY

- Plainview-Elgin-Millville Schools: Interim Superintendent
- Lake City Public Schools: Superintendent
- Zumbrota-Mazeppa Schools: Teacher, Coach / Principal
- West Concord Public Schools: Teacher and Coach
- Albert Lea Schools: Teacher and Coach

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Successfully ran and passed both operating and building referendums.
- Completed strategic planning processes in several school districts.
- Served as both a principal and superintendent mentor.
- Oversaw two superintendent searches as the district point of contact for the search firm.

■ HEIDI HAHN

Heidi holds 30+ years of dedicated experience in public education as a passionate and driven educational leader committed to empowering and positively impacting those she serves. Her career has been marked by leadership positions, including Director of Special Education and Superintendent, where she championed inclusive and innovative practices. Heidi thrives on fostering environments where every student and educator can succeed, and she is deeply invested in the continual growth and improvement of our educational systems. Heidi strongly believes in collaboration and connection as ways to make a meaningful difference in the world of education.

WORK HISTORY

- Sourcewell: Associate Director of Special Education
- Brainerd Public Schools: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent
- Paul Bunyan Education Cooperative: Director, Assistant Director
- St. Cloud State University: Adjunct Faculty - Education Administration and Leadership
- Brainerd Public Schools: Special Education EBD Teacher
- Brainerd Public Schools: Counselor

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- Education Administration and Leadership licensure
- District and public agency strategic planning sessions
- School and non-profit board development
- PELSB Board Member - tiered licensure system

THANK YOU

Thank you for considering MSBA's executive search services. On behalf of our entire team, we would be honored to assist Aitkin Public Schools with its upcoming superintendent search and wish you all the best moving forward in your process.

Please reach out if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Barb Dorn

MSBA Director of Leadership Development and Executive Search



MINNESOTA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

EXECUTIVE SEARCH SERVICES

Empower your board. Hire with confidence.