

Preparing Yourself to Lead



Todd Travis
MASE President and Director of
Special Education
Midwest Special Education
Cooperative

I feel strongly that educational leaders need to be responsible for their continued professional development. This is one of the reasons that I believe so strongly in MASE. MASE has such a strong history of quality professional development for educational leaders.

In addition to attending MASE professional development activities, each year I read at least two books in an effort to improve my effectiveness as an educational leader. I try to find one book that is motivational in nature and one book that will help me improve

my technical skills as a leader. For many of you who enjoy reading, two books may not seem like a very lofty goal. However reading is not the way I prefer to spend my time.

This year the motivational book I chose to read was *"Silent Impact"* by Joe Schmit. While this book is not necessarily a book for educators, I would encourage you to read it. The book emphasizes the impacts (hopefully positive) that we can have on the students that we serve and one another. It is a short book, well-written and has a powerful message. These are three factors which I truly appreciate in books.

The second book I read was *"Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement without Giving In"* by Roger Fisher and William

Ury. This book is a technical guide to the art of interest based negotiations. I was fortunate enough to be trained on interest-based negotiation early in my career and this style negotiation has served me well in dealing with all the disagreements which can arrive in the life of a director of special education.

If the principles in the books that I have read have merit I first incorporate those principles into my practice as an educational leader. I next try to share what I've learned with the staff at the Midwest Special Education Cooperative in the form of a book study or possibly training sessions. On many occasions after having shared these books with staff, or conducted training related to the principles presented, I have seen staff members apply those skills effectively. I find this rewarding and having staff members with stronger skill sets makes my job easier.

I find continuing to improve my practice as an educational leader extremely motivational. What I find even more motivational is when I am able to help the staff within the cooperative grow their skills and be more successful in their work with children and their parents.

MASE continues to provide all members access to opportunities to improve their practice as educational leaders. I have found that the more I have become involved with MASE the more opportunities I have had to grow my leadership skills. When those leadership skills are shared back with the school district you serve, the district and ultimately the students will benefit.

If you have not had an opportunity to serve on a MASE committee I would encourage you to do so. The committee structure gives members a great opportunity to begin to be more involved. Serving on a MASE committee will not only give you a chance to give back to a great organization but to grow your skills as a leader.

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Association Update



John Klaber
MASE Executive Director

I'll start with a bit of a rant... I've always been struck by the amazing number of folks who really believe that the summer months for a special education director are filled with late arrivals to the office, casual conversations over coffee, long lunches, early departures home in the afternoon and extended days at the lake. What is particularly disturbing is that those folks occasionally include school board members and other district

administrators. Earlier this summer I heard from a special education director whose school district had decided that they really only needed to work a bit more than nine months out of the school year. The district believed that summer really was a "down time" where they could do without their special education director's services, although the director really needed to "remain available" in case something came up.

I will admit that life was typically not as frantic during the summer months as throughout the school year and I was blessed to have great administrative assistant support and an equally exceptional assistant director and coordinator. However during the summer my staff and I still needed to meet with families of students with disabilities new to the community, make sure that extended school year programs were functioning, assure that birth to three programming continued without a hitch, plan staff assignments in response to changing student and school demographics, screen, interview and hire new staff, create alternative staffing plans for both our professional staff and our paraprofessionals when confronted with newly arrived students, newly opened positions or unfilled ones, order supplies and materials, and plan for staff training programs.

Unlike many special education directors, I did not have to also run an alternative high school, ELL services, Title One, etc., although the school nurses did report to me. As an aside, I counseled the aforementioned special education director to look for new employment. It appeared to me that the proposed change in the number of paid workdays was an attempt to create an untenable working condition in order to force them out and that the work of the special education director was not valued by their district. I am happy to share that this special education director is now happily working for another school district.

What is the lesson that I want you to learn? Don't assume that folks understand what you do day in and day out. That is especially the case when it comes to the summer months. No, don't whine about how hard your job is, but do look for

opportunities to educate folks on what you do on behalf of the students and the taxpayers each and every day. I should also apologize for the nearly record-setting run-on sentences in this paragraph. My English teacher sister would be appalled and my high school English teacher, Mr. Burroughs, is probably spinning in his grave.

Our legislative activities on your behalf continue. Since my last update, I have had the opportunity to participate in Congressman John Kline's education round table discussion. We have met with the school social worker organization regarding possible legislation. Our legislative committee has met to begin putting together our 2016 platform. I also attended the joint MASA/MASE Federal Advocacy trip to Washington DC during mid-September. MASE President Todd Travis and I were able to meet with representatives from AASA and enhanced our relationship with legislative staff, representatives and senators. We advocated for legislative changes that will result in positive outcomes for our students and communities.

Equally important is that we reinforced our belief that regular and special education must stand together. To that end, we have endorsed altering the MOE rules to promote and support efforts that result in improved efficiency without negatively impacting services to students with disabilities. I have also been working on continuing our "Silos to Systems" conversations with MASA, elementary principals, secondary principals and curriculum directors. More to come later this year regarding this initiative.

Finally, I am on Facebook (John Klaber) and Twitter (@jpklaberMASE). There will not be any pictures of our intellectually challenged dog, no dancing cats and only a small possibility of images of granddaughters. I hope to see you at our fall conference, at regional meetings or at MDE Directors Forums. Have a great year!



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IMPACT is your newsletter and we encourage your input! If you have ideas or an article to share, please contact us at the MASE offices at 651-789-4061 or email us at dchristians@mnasa.org.

2016 Legislative Preview



Brad Lundell
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It seems like it's a long ways off, but the 2016 Legislative Session is creeping up slowly. The Legislature will be convening on March 8, 2016, in what should be an interesting year. The Capitol is largely closed down for renovations with only the House chamber being open. The Senate will be meeting in the newly-constructed office building and holding its floor sessions in a large committee room while the official Senate chamber is restored. As a result of the construction work on the Capitol, some are predicting a

short session, but recent history has shown that regardless of obstacles—physical or fiscal—sessions usually last into May in the non-budget year.

What makes a longer session likely this year is that two major bills—the tax bill and the transportation bill—were not passed in 2015, leaving a lot of money on the bottom line going into the 2016 session. Add to that the fact that the state's financial picture continues to improve as economic performance remains steady and there may be as much as \$1.5 billion available for the Legislature to dedicate toward tax relief and increased spending without endangering the overall budget.

Beyond the tax and budget issues, there will be a number of policy issues that will command the attention of the Legislature. One issue that is plaguing school districts and is especially difficult to the area of special education is that of the teacher shortage. Even in subject areas where there was once a surplus of teaching candidates, school districts are now finding it increasingly challenging to find and hire quality teachers across the instructional spectrum. It is even more difficult in the area of special education, where the shortage has become extreme with districts applying for an increasing number of variances to make certain students in special education classes receive the service they are entitled to.

There is no silver bullet to solve this problem. Instead, a multitude of approaches will have to be employed to swell the ranks of prospective teachers. First on the agenda will likely come in the form of several measures that were discussed but not enacted in 2015. Teachers and administrators from other states have often had difficulty getting a Minnesota license. This approach received a fair amount of attention during the 2015 session, but in the end, teachers and administrators with licenses issued in other states did not see the barriers to receiving a Minnesota license reduced appreciably. Much has been made of the failure to address this angle of the teacher shortage and I fully expect it will be front and center in the

2016 discussion.

Incentives to help increase the pool of candidates should also be investigated. Loan forgiveness for teaching candidates in curricular areas could certainly steer college students into licenses that would give them a strong opportunity for immediate employment after graduation and at the same time reduce their financial burden.

Lastly, and this is another angle in an on-going chorus for change, would be a reduction in the paperwork required of special education teachers. Several stabs have been taken at this issue over the past decade, but to this point, none seem to be producing a meaningful reduction in the number of forms and reports special education staff must complete and file. I have spoken with several administrators who have paraprofessionals that they believe would make excellent teachers, but when approached with that suggestion, the paraprofessional often says something to the effect that if they became a teacher, they'd spend less time with students. Our reporting system has saddled teachers with a paperwork burden that is more than enough to discourage candidates from seeking work in the special education field and progress needs to be made towards dramatic reduction of this paperwork.

Given the health of the state's fiscal bottom line, I wouldn't be surprised if some attention is directed toward special education funding in 2016. The statewide cost to school districts in terms of the shortfall of funding in the special education formula is estimated to be \$600 million in the coming school year. The Governor's 2015 supplemental budget contained \$40 million in additional special education funding, but unfortunately that was not included in the final budget agreement.

I hope to get out to regional meetings before the 2016 Legislative Session, so don't hesitate to contact me if you are interested.

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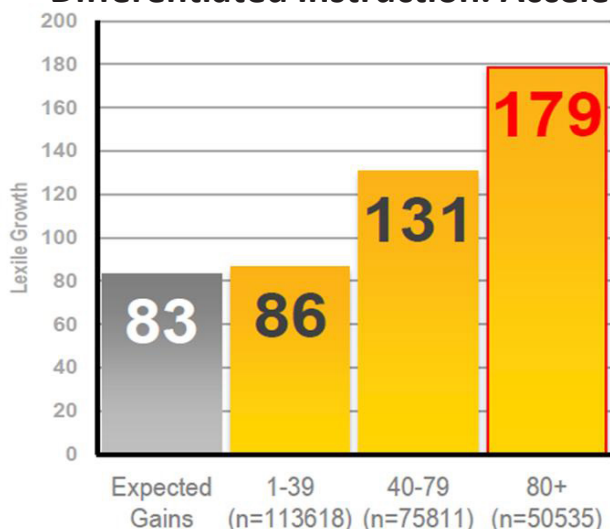
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Re-invest Maintenance of Effort (MoE) Resources to Improving Learning for ALL

This was written with the leadership of 2015-16 MASA Federal Advocacy Committee Chair Connie Hayes, Superintendent of the NE Metro 916 Intermediate District. We would like to thank our colleagues who contributed their wisdom and perspective to this document: Dan Naidicz, Special Education Director and Alyssa Diamond, Communications Coordinator from NE Metro 916 Intermediate District.

What is Maintenance of Effort (MoE)? Maintenance of effort is a concept that requires states and school districts to maintain funding efforts from year to year in order to receive any federal education dollars. MoE provisions are intended to ensure education funding is not reduced for students with disabilities in tough economic times and that federal funding does not supplant other sources of money.

It's time to change the way that districts look at MoE and allow resources to be re-invested into initiatives and programs consistent with Multi Tired Systems of Supports (MTSS) so that all students have better outcomes...

Why is this a problem in school districts you serve? Current exceptions to the MoE are too narrow to account for temporary fluctuations to special education budgets, such as longterm substitute costs or students whose successful development reduces the need for expensive temporary treatment services from one year to the next. MoE requirements act as disincentives for school districts to plan and work productively together to decrease redundancies and operational costs related to special education and to improve programming for all students.

Some school districts can identify efficiencies in spending in special education that should be re-invested to improve student learning, for example:

More efficient bus schedules – Districts can share busing services for some special education students rather than transporting one student per bus to other districts. Even though students could receive the same level of service (transportation on appropriately outfitted buses), and districts can save hundreds of thousands of dollars by collaborating, MoE restrictions require districts to miss the opportunity for the savings to be re-invested on improving student learning for all.

Create in-district programs and reduce placement with other districts – When districts have the capacity to serve students in their own neighborhood schools rather than transporting them to other districts, they might save dollars. Under MoE, the same level of spending is required. Savings cannot be re-invested to improve programs for all students.

MoE Does Not Guarantee Best Services for Students with Disabilities Anyway!

Staffing and scheduling models – In a simplified hypothetical scenario, a district's entire special education spending is \$1,000,000 comprised of 20 teachers, each earning \$50,000

a year. If the district was to cut a teacher, and spend \$950,000 instead, this would violate MoE. If however, all teachers received a 5% raise, the district could cut a teacher, potentially decreasing services to students, and not violate MoE. Thoughtful planning for the needs of students should not be compromised by MoE.

Provide Some Flexibility in Spending to Plan for Better Student Success

The constraints of MoE hold state education agencies and local school districts to unrealistically narrow restrictions that fiscally punish the SEA or LEA for proposing rational exceptions to the requirements that can result in better outcomes for students. MoE made sense when services for students with disabilities were developing in schools. Now, however, either intentional or not, MoE equates spending with effort. They are in fact different.

It's time to change the way that districts look at MoE and allow resources to be re-invested into initiatives and programs consistent with Multi Tired Systems of Supports (MTSS) so that all students have better outcomes, resulting in fewer children being referred to special education, such as:

1. Re-invest dollars to hire general education, highly skilled, reading specialists that serve all children with needs in reading.
2. Re-invest dollars to pay for additional general education math teachers for high school students who struggle with math (with and without an IEP), and similarly for English. Extra general education staff would support extra extraction from content expert teachers.
3. Re-invest dollars to less costly, but better for students, pushing services and inclusion (setting II) rather than substantially separate (setting III) when appropriate.
4. Re-invest dollars to hire behaviorists to better support students with emotional/behavioral needs, serving students before a referral to special education.
5. Re-invest in social workers and substance abuse counseling to address needs of students who have complicated lives, but not a disability.
6. Re-invest in instructional coaches to improve core instruction, where students with special needs receive the vast majority of their learning.

How? Support HR 2965: The BOLD (Building on Local District) Flexibility in the IDEA Act. BOLD amends provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) related to MoE. Your local school districts need your support for BOLD. By doing so, your school leaders would have the opportunity to make wiser investment decisions for limited education dollars on proven initiatives with greater results.

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**2014 MASE
Fall Leadership Conference
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As leaders we strive to build learning environments that meet the individual needs of all learners and therefor improve academic outcomes. Evidence-based practice supported by strong leadership and coaching help our teams better align resources with intended results and support the use of effective innovations. Join us this fall and explore effective practice in special education leadership, informing instruction for all learners!

Conference Highlights

Join us on Wednesday afternoon for the Legislative Training session followed by dinner. The speaker on Wednesday evening is award winning author, performer and motivational speaker, **Geri Jewell**. Thursday morning's keynote speaker, **Conn Thomas**, will examine the essential components for improving outcomes for all students, focusing on instructional leadership and structures to support instruction, as well as the elements of systems change that are required to create impact schools.

On Friday morning, **Michelle A. Duda** will teach us about the science that supports bringing locally developed instructional innovations to scale - and will explore the question of how many times do we initiate a promising practice, only to have staff say, "we can't do it" or "it doesn't work"?

On Thursday afternoon and Friday morning, individualize your professional learning by attending a variety of breakout sessions.

During the MASE Annual Meeting, in addition to a brief association update, participants will hear from Minnesota State Policy Director Barbara Troolin. Claudine Knoblauch will also lead a conversation with Dr. Norena A. Hale about her insights into Minnesota's special education administration evolution.

Thursday's Exhibit Fair features a number of MASE's colleagues in business, offering the latest in products and services of interest to special education leaders.

There's an app for this! Our conference app provides many great features for participants to personalize their conference experience including: program information, personal profiles, announcements, exhibitor details, and audience feedback. Our app will work with smartphones, tablets and laptops so BYOD (Bring Your Own Device)!

Each year at our fall conference, we hold several fundraising events to benefit leadership development in special education. This year, we again dedicate our efforts to support the Stenswick-Benson Scholarship Fund.



Our theme for the Wine Tasting this year is **"Saturday MORNING Live: Vintage Cartoons"** so think about your best Saturday morning or after school memories and get ready to sample your favorite beverages, all to support the Stenswick-Benson

Scholarship Fund. Our MASE Areas will once again sponsor tables and our theme this year invites the regions to show off their best Roadrunner, Bullwinkle, or Popeye through their table theme. All of our Mouseketeers vote for their favorite table, and the beautiful (oo-ahhhh) MASE traveling trophy is at stake!

Shop 'til you drop during Thursday's Silent Auction. Bidding will be open all day, closing at 5 pm.

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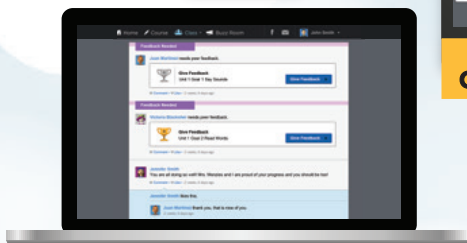
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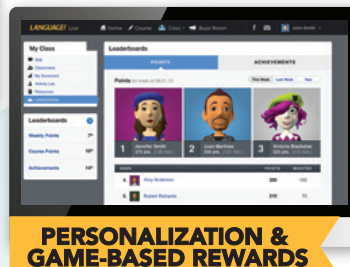
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Nan Records Receives Legacy Award

Nan Records, Director of Special Education for the Sherburne-Northern Wright Special Education Cooperative, has been awarded the Legacy Award by the Minnesota Administrators for Special Education (MASE). Ms. Records will be honored for her commitment to encouraging,



Nan Records
Director of Special Education
Sherburne-Northern Wright
Special Education Cooperative

developing and mentoring leaders who reflect the MASE mission at a statewide recognition ceremony to be held at the MASE Fall Conference, October 21-23, 2015, at Cragun's in Brainerd.

"Nan Records is an outstanding special education director. She embodies what the Legacy award signifies," wrote nominator Carla Nohr Schulz, Director of Special Services for Farmington Area Public Schools. "Her dedication to MASE

and to special education has developed the MASE New Leaders training into one of the best! Nan's commitment to presenting information of the highest standard and her willingness to share her expertise with others is essential to the program."

Throughout her career Ms. Records has mentored, trained and supported aspiring administrators through MASE New Leaders. She also helped to create the MASE Nova fellowship program, is a founding member of the Midwest Instructional Leadership Council (miLc), and often presents on a variety of complex topics to various administrator groups, parents and school boards. In addition to leading the MASE New Leaders training, Ms. Records is currently seated on both the MASE and Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) board of directors, and was previously the professional development chair for The Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE). Ms. Records earned her bachelor's degree from St. Cloud State University, her master's degree from the University of St. Thomas and her specialist in special education administration from St. Cloud State University. In 2005, Ms. Records received the MASE Distinguished Service Award, in 2006 she was named the CASE Outstanding Administrator of Special Education, and in 2012 she received the MASE Special Education Administrator of the Year Award.

The MASE Nominating Committee selects the Legacy Award recipient based on a review of biographical information

provided in the nomination materials. The recipient must be a current active MASE member who has contributed to the professional growth and development of others through a service history as a long-standing, contributing MASE member. The recipient must demonstrate a commitment to the field of special education through training, mentoring, personal support, modeling, and demonstrating an impact that is considerable and measurable over time; and contribution at the local, regional, and state levels.

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 educational 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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Translating Research to Practice: It takes a Village!

Kim Gibbons, Ph.D.
Associate Director of CAREI

Most of us have heard the phrase “It takes a village to raise a child.” As a parent, I completely agree! As an educational professional, I think this phrase applies equally to translating research to educational practice – it takes a village, and it is not as easy as it sounds! I have spent the last twenty years of my career working in the schools to try to improve educational outcomes for students. While I continue to have the same mission, I recently began working at the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota as an Associate Director. Now, my task is how to assist districts and other educational organizations to use the results of research to help guide their work towards closing the achievement gap and increasing educational outcomes for all students.

My experience over the past 20 years has largely been focused on how to maintain effective programs for students during tough economic times. We have all faced budget cuts, quickly rising benefit costs, salary increases for staff, and a growing number of high needs students. Fortunately, I learned there are strategies available that can raise achievement to all students without breaking the bank! However, the challenge for leaders is to distinguish what expenditures really make a difference for students from a hundred that do not. Knowing what works requires district leaders to ask different questions.

Typically, conversations start out by asking “What works in education?” While this may seem like a great question, a more powerful question is “What works best?” If you review the educational research literature, there are thousands of strategies that “work.” However, we need to identify those strategies that have the greatest impact on student achievement and make sure those strategies are well embedded in the instructional environment. When we talk about closing the achievement gap, we need to identify strategies and frameworks that will accelerate student achievement allowing them to make more than one year’s growth in one year.

Imagine if you had answers to some of the following questions during your annual budget preparation:

- Students of teachers receiving support from instructional coaches gained 4 months more learning than students of teachers who did not receive coaching.
- Students of teachers who received professional

development in (pick your area) fared no better than students of teachers who did not receive the professional development.

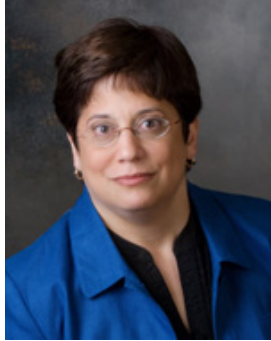
- Students who used on-line “flex books” performed similarly on standardized tests of achievement than students who used traditional textbooks.

If you were trying to make budget decisions about those three areas, you may decide to invest in instructional coaches, change the way professional development is delivered, and move away from purchasing textbooks in selected areas. But having data like this requires work. It requires that districts evaluate all programs, frameworks, and strategies using multiple measures. Many districts don’t have the internal capacity to do this type of work.

CAREI wants to help! We are working to identify statewide needs in the area of assessment, research, and evaluation and provide low-cost (or no-cost) services to districts. We have set an ambitious goal that we want our services to impact 80% of school districts within three years! In the ongoing quest to translate research to practice, I will be writing a regular column in the MASA newsletter called “Research to Practice.” I hope to identify relevant research and help build the bridge to practice. Please contact me at kgibbons@umn.edu if you want more information about CAREI or if you have certain topics you would like covered in future newsletters!

Kim Gibbons, Ph.D., currently is the Associate Director of the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at the University of Minnesota. Prior to that, she was the Executive Director of the St. Croix River Education District (SCRED) located in Rush City, MN. SCRED has received national recognition for its use of the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework. In 2007, SCRED received a legislative appropriation to fund a statewide Minnesota RtI Center for two years. Dr. Gibbons obtained her doctoral degree in school psychology from the University of Oregon where she received extensive training in the problem solving model, curriculum based measurement, and research-based instructional practices. Prior to her role as the Executive Director, Dr. Gibbons has worked as a director of special education, staff development coordinator, and school psychologist. She is active in state leadership and is the past-president of the Minnesota Administrators for Special Educators. Finally, she is the co-author of three books and has numerous other peer-reviewed publications. She is a sought-after consultant who has given numerous workshops throughout the nation.

Top Five New School Year Resolutions for Special Education Administrators



Nancy E. Blumstein
Attorney
Ratwik, Roszak & Maloney, P.A.

*"For last year's words belong to
last year's language.*

*And next year's words await
another voice.*

*And to make an end is to make a
beginning."*

- TS Eliot

It's that time of year again, when special education administrators have the opportunity to take a thoughtful look at the past, resolve to make a fresh start and

take positive steps for themselves, their staff members and school district. As you approach this often daunting task, we suggest you consider adopting some or all of the following five resolutions for the upcoming school year:

1. Resolve to Be a Creative Problem Solver, But Remember that FAPE is the Bottom Line.

When disagreements arise concerning student's educational programs, it is admirable when special education administrators work to find creative ways to resolve direct conflicts with a parent's position or request. There are a great many benefits associated with a special education administrator stretching his or her creative muscles to find a middle ground that is acceptable to both a parent and the school district. In addition to saving you and your staff a great amount of time and energy, such actions support the development of a positive relationship with the student's parents. By acknowledging the parents' concerns and ideas, the school district is building goodwill that will help them later on down the road if and/or when mistakes are made. This is the case even when the resulting educational program upon which the parents and district reach agreement is not, in the administrator's view, as good a program as the educational program that the district originally proposed. However, regardless of the obvious benefits that compromise may bring, it is important that the school district never compromise to the extent that it is no longer providing the student the free appropriate public education (FAPE) it is legally obligated to provide. This is the bottom line beyond which school districts simply cannot go.

If you compromise FAPE when acceding to a parent's request, you will place the school district in an almost impossible defense posture. The argument that the school

district was just complying with a parental request will never be an adequate defense to an allegation that the school district failed to provide a student FAPE because the obligation to provide a student FAPE is the school district's alone. Moreover, it is an obligation that is owed to the student, not the student's parent. Therefore, the student's right to FAPE cannot be waived. Nor, can the school district's obligation to provide it to a student be delegated to a parent, even with the parents' consent and approval. Consequently, FAPE always needs to be the bottom line. There is no question that a school district can reach that goal differently than originally proposed, but it must still meet that standard.

2. Provide Yourself the Time You Need To Educate Yourself, Your Staff and Your School District.

One certainty on which you can depend is that the law is constantly evolving and changing. Though it is difficult to step away from your daily chores when the pile of things in your "to do" bin starts to grow and you find that you're spending more time putting out fires than getting anything else done, you still need to provide yourself the time you need to enrich yourself professionally, through training and opportunities for professional growth. In particular, you especially need to take the time to stay abreast of the current law. This will pay you back exponentially. The day you spend at a seminar or the hour you spend listening to a recording of case law summaries may result in significant savings to your school district in the future. In addition, avoiding potential missteps in the future will greatly reduce

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Have you renewed your membership?

Membership materials have been mailed.
For more information or additional membership materials, contact the MASE office at (651-645-6272 or members@mnasa.org) or visit our website at (www.mnase.org).

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your stress and the stress placed on your staff and educators.

After you attend a training, be sure to share what you learned with your staff. Some Directors have set aside time during staff meetings for this purpose. Some, schedule regular trainings throughout the year. Whatever you decide to do, remember that it is important to provide staff the opportunity to develop their skills and improve their understanding of the law. Employees who believe they are valued as professionals and are constantly developing new skills and areas of knowledge will be more committed to you and the School District. Moreover, staff members who understand why you have made particular changes and/or have taken a different position than you may have taken in the past, are more likely to “buy-in” and be accepting and supportive of it.

3. Remember to Respond to the Present and Look to the Future.

It is also vitally important for special education administrators to take a step back from their daily responsibilities in order to analyze the division’s effectiveness and make plans to address potential areas of weakness. This is where your ongoing communication with and training of your staff will pay off. After each training, survey your staff as to whether what they are doing in the classroom is consistent with the law you have just discussed with them. Have them brainstorm ideas about how the School District can improve its practices including, but not limited to: drafting comprehensive evaluation plans; developing evaluation reports that more completely reflect the evaluators’ conclusions and analysis; improving the quality of due process documents, including prior written notices; progress reports; and IEPs; developing and following behavior intervention plans (“BIPs”); and filling out restrictive procedure reports in a manner that will inform those who did not witness or participate in the procedure why it was used and how it was consistent with the student’s BIP (i.e. thoroughly explaining how interventions contained in the student’s behavior plan were employed prior to resorting to the procedure). Lastly, remember to discuss

ways that your staff might be able to communicate more effectively with angry and/or dissatisfied parents. This might include appointing one person within the school to be the person within the school district that communicates with the parent (in order to ensure consistency of the message provided and limit the amount of staff time devoted to this task) or communicating with the parent in a more effective manner that may be more responsive to the parent’s individual needs. For example, some parents, may need to see information in writing in order to process the messages you need to provide.

Once you’ve gathered all the ideas that were generated through these meetings, spend some time analyzing their consistency with the law, drawing on assistance from your legal counsel, to the extent you believe necessary. Then, develop your overall improvement plan. Remember, the plan you develop can be divided into phases whereby you address different areas or functions of the district’s special education program at different times.

Most importantly, in both your discussions with your staff and in the written improvement plan you develop, it is imperative that you never suggest that the school district’s current special education program is or was in any way deficient. Instead, you’ll want to commend your staff for the work they are doing and present your ideas and plans as a continuous improvement initiative. That said, your staff will need to understand that compliance with this initiative is not voluntary and that everyone will be expected to implement the changes you have identified.

4. Don’t Get Caught By Surprise: Develop a System for Identifying Potential Due Process Landmines.

As any seasoned special education administrator knows, regardless of the quality of the improvement plans you develop and implement, there will always be due process errors present in the school district – some will be minimal while some could involve multiple students over a long span of time. For example, in a recent case our office handled, a school district discovered that a special education case manager failed to hold annual IEP meetings and update his student’s IEPs over multiple school years. In another, a case manager held the meetings and drafted updated IEPs for her students, but failed to provide them to parents and obtain their approval. Finally, in yet another situation, it was discovered that a teacher failed to send parents progress reports consistent with their IEPs. In all of these situations, the mistakes discovered had the potential of undermining the school districts’ provision of special education and related services to multiple students over a significant period of time. Even though the school districts involved were

Are You Moving?

Now is the time of year when many of our members are on the move! Help us keep track of you (and therefore keep your MASE benefits and services coming to you!). Just give Deb a call (651-645-6272 or 866-444-5251), fax her a note (651-645-7518), or email her at members@mnsa.org and she will update your records. Also, if you have new colleagues in your area who are not MASE members, let us know and we will send membership information to them.

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fairly certain that the affected students received appropriate services, the due process errors in the student's files made it difficult, if not impossible for the school districts to defend themselves in the event a parent challenged their child's provision of FAPE. Moreover, had these errors been discovered during a compliance review, it is possible that they may have supported a conclusion that there were systemic deficiencies within the school districts.

One thing on which special education administrators can depend is that due process mistakes will occur, even in the best run special education program. The key is to limit these type of surprises from occurring in your school district by identifying the "landmines" within your district before they are identified by someone else and/or become as wide ranging and potentially threatening as those discussed above. Set up a system of random file checking that will occur as an ongoing process throughout the school year. While this task can be delegated to supervisors or building level coordinators, it is imperative that the same process be used throughout the school district and that data is collected as a result. All special educators should be informed about the random checks before the process is implemented. It is important that they understand that they are not being singled out, but are being treated the same as every other special educator in the school district. That said, just knowing that their files are subject to random scrutiny will likely heighten your special educators' attention to due process requirements, resulting in an overall improvement in the quality of due process documents.

When due process problems are identified through your random file review system, you need to respond on two fronts to the problems identified. First, you need to review additional student files for which the same case manager was responsible to determine both the scope and nature of the problem. Once you have that information, you should review the results with the employee and develop a performance improvement plan. Consistent with the development of this plan, you need to determine whether the employee needs additional training and/or support. Set reasonable deadlines and expectations and be certain to follow through on the deadlines that you set.

Next, you need to review the overall data collected from your random file reviews to determine if there are school or district-wide deficiencies that need to be addressed through school or district wide training.

5. Remember: You are Not Invincible.

It is fair to assume that, as someone who has risen to the level of a school administrator, you have high standards and expectation for your own performance. However, while these characteristics may have taken you far in your

career, they can also spell your downfall because you are not invincible, you are simply a human being with a finite amount of energy, even if it is greater than most. Maintaining a superhuman pace and meeting unrealistic expectations over a long period of time will exhaust you, both mentally and physically. Therefore, if you want to avoid the pitfalls of exhaustion and career burnout, it is imperative that you set boundaries for what you can reasonably accomplish. Don't hold yourself to unrealistic expectations. Set reasonable deadlines and goals for yourself, just as you would for your staff. There are tricks to presenting your accomplishments in a positive manner without depleting your energy reserves. Some directors adopt a practice of under promising and over performing. That way, when they are able to provide an answer or meet a deadline sooner than promised, the recipient is pleasantly surprised and views the director more positively than if the director failed to meet a deadline that was unreasonable at its start. Further, you need to recognize that there are limits to what you alone can do. To the extent you can, lessen your burden by delegating the tasks that you don't need to do yourself to another person within the school district.

Finally, it is important for you to accept the reality that even smart, knowledgeable people make mistakes, fail to meet a deadline and/or don't know the answer to a question. The key is to view that misstep in perspective and not to permit it to take you off course or undermine your confidence. You need to move forward, regardless of what has occurred in the past. In moving ahead and resolving an issue or concern, keep in mind that good ideas are rarely generated in a vacuum. Allow yourself the freedom to rely upon your colleagues or contacts for assistance or ideas. Remember that, in the end, it is not about you. It is about the result you are seeking for the school district. How you began the race or whether you stumbled along the way is unimportant; it's all about reaching the finish line.

Have a wonderful school year!



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Special thanks to our 2015-16 MASE Business Partners!

The MASE Business Partnerships program strengthens the ties between MASE members and their collaborative partners in the public, private and non-profit sectors. Our goal is to advance the field of special education and improve student outcomes with an emphasis on proven, evidence-based practices.

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2015-16 MASE New Leaders Cohort

The MASE New Leaders Cohort is a series of professional development workshops that provide opportunities for:

- Newly employed Minnesota special education directors to explore the basic information needed for a successful first year
- Mid-level leaders to enhance leadership skills either in preparation for advancement in leadership or for general skill development
- Newer leaders who wish to refresh their training

Participants will have the opportunity to meet other new leaders, experienced colleagues, state department staff and other resourceful people from the special education community. Topics include federal and state special education law, finance and budgeting, state reporting, program topics and leadership. Select sessions will have role-specific content to build individual skills. Continuing education units (CEUs) will be granted for each session in the series.

Registration is available at www.regonline.com/1516maseNLC

Wednesday, October 21 • 9 am - 4 pm

Cragun's Conference Center, Brainerd
Preceding the MASE Fall Leadership Conference
Topic: You're the Leader - NOW WHAT?

Wednesday, November 18 • 9 am - 4 pm

Cragun's Conference Center, Brainerd
Preceding the CLM Leadership Conference
Topic: Instructional Leadership

Wednesday & Thursday, December 2 & 3 • 9 am - 4 pm

MASE Office, St. Paul
Topic: Resource Stewardship and Budgeting

Wednesday, March 9 • 9 am - 4 pm

Minneapolis Marriott Northwest, Brooklyn Park
Preceding the MASE/MASA Spring Conference
Topic: Policy, Law and Political Influence

Wednesday, May 4 • 9 am - 3 pm

Madden's Lodge, Brainerd
Preceding the MASE Best Practices Conference
Topic: Communication Skills for Leadership

Wednesday, June 22 • 9 am - 3 pm

MASE Office, St. Paul
A special session for Directors only.

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2015-16 MASE Professional Development Survey

Keep your eyes open for the 2015-16 MASE Professional Development Survey! You will be receiving the survey in your inboxes in the coming weeks. MASE Fall Conference attendees will also have an opportunity to take the survey in Brainerd.

Thank you in advance for your responses and thank you for helping shape MASE professional development for 2015-16!

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MASE Calendar

2015

Thursday - Friday, October 15-16
Education MN Conference, St. Paul

Wednesday - Friday, October 21-23
MASE Fall Leadership Conference, Cragun's

Wednesday - Friday, November 18-20
CLM Fall Conference, Cragun's

Thursday - Saturday, October 29-31
CASE Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA

Thursday - Friday, November 26-27
Thanksgiving Holiday - MASE Offices Closed

Friday, December 4
MDE Directors' Forum, St. Paul

Thursday - Friday, December 24-25
Winter Holiday - MASE Offices Closed

2016

Friday, January 1
Winter Holiday - MASE Offices Closed

Friday, January 15
MASE Leadership Issues, Sauk Rapids Gov't. Center

Thursday-Friday, March 10-11
MASA/MASE Spring Conference, Brooklyn Park

Friday, March 25
Spring Holiday - MASE Offices Closed

Wednesday - Saturday, April 13-16
CASE CEC, St. Louis, MO

Friday, April 22
MASE Leadership Issues, Sauk Rapids Gov't. Center

Wednesday - Friday, May 4-6
MASE Best Practices Conference, Madden's

Monday, May 30
Memorial Day Holiday - MASE Offices Closed

Thursday-Friday, June 16-17
MASE Board of Director's Meeting