Minnesota Association of School Administrators

1884 Como Avenue • Saint Paul, Minnesota 55108 • (651) 645-6272

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Contact: Mia Urick, urickm@mnasa.org
Director of Professional Learning
(651) 645-6272

Superintendent Sandra Lewandowski Receives Kay E. Jacobs Memorial Award

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Sandra Lewandowski, Superintendent of Intermediate School District 287, recipient of the 2020 Kay E. Jacobs Memorial Award. The award recognizes excellent leadership and involvement in MASA and other educational organizations by an administrator who is a woman. Lewandowski will be honored for her leadership, concern for students and active involvement in professional and community affairs at a statewide recognition ceremony during the MASA/MASE Spring Conference, March 12-13, 2020, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

"Sandy is a strong, racially conscious leader. She is a dedicated learner with the desire to take her learning about equity to higher levels," said Melissa Krull, Professor of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University-Mankato. "Sandy is unapologetic as a leader when it comes to student learning. She makes it known and clear that creating the best and right conditions for learning are at the center of her work. As a leader, Sandy is of the highest caliber and the consummate professional. She is most deserving of the Kay E. Jacobs award."

Lewandowski was the first superintendent in Minnesota to institute a formal district-wide Social Emotional Learning (SEL) program and the first to start a Gateway to College program. She also led the construction and financing of two schools designed for the unique learning needs of special education students. These sites have garnered state and national attention for their customized design and energy-saving features.

In 2019, Lewandowski reached out to some of the nation's leading experts on childhood trauma to better understand the impact of complex trauma and race-related trauma. Under her leadership, a partnership with Dr. Bruce Perry, whom Oprah interviewed in a 2018 segment of "60 Minutes," would support District 287 to become Minnesota's first trauma-sensitive and healing-centered school district. In 2017, she made the controversial decision to remove school resource officers from all schools and replace them with safety coaches who are trained in relationship-building, de-escalation, and mental health and trauma. Arrests, citations, and incidents with police involvement have significantly decreased.

Lewandowski is widely lauded for her legislative advocacy around mental health and racial equity, the implementation of trauma-sensitive and healing-centered school practices, employee well-being initiatives, and innovative instruction for special education students. She courageously gives voice to issues that many corporate, community, and educational leaders choose not to talk about. Lewandowski speaks about gun violence; political issues that affect families, such as immigration and raids; and race relations in our communities and schools, for example the fears of our black and brown children being shot while playing in our neighborhoods. As a white woman who holds power in our society, she uses her voice to advance racial equity and bring light to issues that impact students and families. She doesn't care to be popular or well-liked; she chooses to stand on the right side of history.

Under Lewandowski's tenure, the district has received numerous awards including: Amazon's "City on a Cloud" Innovation Challenge, Cultural Jambalaya Partner of the Year, Star Tribune Top 100 Workplace Award for Large Businesses, and the Minnesota Construction Choice Award for the North Education Center. She was the recipient of the 2015 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year Award.

Lewandowski earned her bachelor's degree with Honors, Licensure as a School Superintendent, and Education Specialist degree in Educational Administration from the University of Minnesota.

The Memorial Award was established in 1983 in honor of Kay E. Jacobs, an outstanding young administrator of many achievements who died in a car accident in 1979. At the time of her death, Ms. Jacobs was the assistant superintendent for the Mahtomedi Schools and had just been nominated, through a national screening process, for membership in the 38th Annual Superintendents' Work Conference at Teachers' College, Columbia University. This was a distinct honor, because only forty-five outstanding chief school officers from school systems throughout the United States had been invited to participate. The Memorial Award recognizes women administrators who have demonstrated the attributes of leadership and involvement early in their careers as Kay Jacobs did.

Each year, MASA recognizes members for their contribution to public education. MASA is a professional organization of Minnesota's school leaders, including superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of special education, and other central office administrators, as well as state department administrators, college and university professors, and other educators throughout Minnesota dedicated to educational leadership for students.

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