

Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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**P R E S S
RELEASE**

Electronic versions of this press release and Superintendent Richardson's photograph are available. Please email Aimee Ranallo at MASA (aranallo@mnasa.org) to request copies.



Superintendent Chris Richardson

Chris Richardson is 2012 MN Superintendent of the Year

(St. Paul, Minn.) — The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Superintendent Lynn Christopher (Chris) Richardson, Superintendent for the Northfield Schools, the 2012 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year.

“I am very proud and at the same time honored and humbled to be recognized by my colleagues with this honor,” said Richardson.

“During my 30 years as a superintendent, I have always been guided by one simple yet powerful question, ‘Is this in the best interest of all the students in my district?’ I hope that in some small way I can represent my fellow Minnesota superintendents who on a daily basis strive to provide the best possible educational experience for the children and school districts they serve. Our communities expect it and our students deserve it.”

As the Minnesota honoree, Superintendent Richardson is a candidate among other state winners for National Superintendent of the Year, to be announced at the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) convention on February 16, 2012 in Houston, Texas.

Superintendent of the Year nominees are evaluated on how each candidate demonstrates:

- Leadership for learning—creativity in successfully meeting the needs of students in his or her school system.
- Communication skills—strength in both personal and organizational communication.
- Professionalism—constant improvement of administrative knowledge and skills, while providing professional development opportunities and motivation to others on the education team.

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- Community involvement—active participation in local community activities and understanding of regional, national, and international issues.

Superintendent Richardson was selected for this honor by a panel of representatives from a variety of Minnesota education organizations. “I am thrilled the committee has chosen Dr. Chris Richardson for the 2012 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year,” says MASA Executive Director Dr. Gary Amoroso. “Dr. Richardson is truly a passionate educator who works on behalf of every student in his district on a daily basis.”

Superintendent Richardson has been superintendent for Northfield Schools since 2004. With an enrollment of 3,900 students, the Northfield School District is located approximately 40 miles south of the Twin Cities in what is considered a “rural” community. The district has a long history of academic and co-curricular excellence as well as strong collaboration with their community and Carleton and St. Olaf colleges. Richardson explained, “Northfield Schools outperform the state and nation in MAP, MCAs, EXPLORE, PLAN and ACT. Over 90% of our AP test takers receive scores of 3 or higher. We also have a strong record of success in supporting students of color, students in poverty as well as those students with special needs.”

The Northfield Board of Education Chair, Kari Nelson, nominated Superintendent Richardson for the Superintendent of the Year Award. “Dr. Richardson is a gifted administrator with the ability to see both the forest and the trees,” said Nelson. “He is a long range planner, yet he deals sensitively and thoroughly with day-to-day challenges. He plants, nurtures and prunes the small seedlings that are essential for cultivating district-wide success. A real leader, Dr. Richardson is proactive, anticipating and preparing for issues that might arise.”

“As a board member, I see and experience Dr. Richardson’s leadership in ways that can’t be articulated during the course of any given day,” wrote Noel Stratmoen, a member of the Northfield School board, in Dr. Richardson’s letter of recommendation. “To me, Dr. Richardson demonstrates that leadership is a concept, a science and an art. Leadership provides vision to help others establish realistic goals. Leadership exercises faith but does not ignore the facts. Leadership defines effectiveness so others can be efficient. Leadership expects the best and influences the average to become better. Leadership provides direction and establishes the parameters of control and leadership thrives on finding opportunities so others can thrive on accomplishments.”

Dr. Richardson joined Northfield Schools during a time of severe budget difficulty. Restoring Northfield’s financial balance became his first order of business by establishing and managing a budgeting process that would cut 14% from budgets. J. Diane Cirkse, a member of the Northfield

Board of Education, praised Dr. Richardson's technique and poise during this process, "Dr. Richardson immediately organized this effort, fully engaging the community and stepping through the difficult timeline of cuts. Because the process was so transparent and so carefully managed we have emerged from deficit spending, established a surplus and have eliminated SOD in record time."

When asked to describe a strategy, Northfield Schools has employed to close a system-level gap in ethnicity, Richardson explained that as a school district, Northfield has a graduation rate of over 91%, with 85% of high school graduates enrolling in postsecondary institutions. But in 2005, the district recognized that the community's Latino students were not enjoying the same success. With Latinos making up 10% of Northfield's total population, a major achievement gap was revealed. Working collaboratively, Northfield Schools and a number of community partners, reviewed existing dropout prevention and college access models and submitted a proposal. With a \$40,000 grant, the Northfield Tackling Obstacles and Raising College Hopes (TORCH) initiative set out to provide academic and social support, mentoring, career exploration and connections with post-secondary education opportunities for Latino youth in grades 9-12. Dr. Richardson is proud to report, "Over the past five and a half years, TORCH has seen remarkable results. Today, the Latino graduation rate in Northfield has climbed to over 90%. In the past 12 months, over 80% of TORCH high school students and over 90% of TORCH middle school students showed academic gains on standardized tests or overall GPA. By the spring of 2012, five TORCH graduates will have earned a bachelor's degree, seven will have earned an associate's degree and six will have received a postsecondary certificate!"

Superintendent Richardson has also made it a priority to communicate the district's purpose and future with his constituencies. "With multiple and wide-ranging constituencies, we have been very intentional in how we have reached out to ensure a common vision and understanding of who we are and what we are striving to accomplish. We have segmented our audiences to assure that our messages are tailored to the people who are receiving them." Dr. Richardson continues, "Since teachers and staff are our most important ambassadors, we have worked extremely hard to include them in our positioning and branding initiatives. We have also targeted parents through sub-segments including high-school, middle-school and elementary, as well as parents with prospective students." Over the past 12 months, Northfield Schools has also introduced an emphasis on "Reach Out, Reaching Up," and also rolled out a new look to reinforce that emphasis and to position Northfield Schools as a caring, all-inclusive district committed to educating the people within the community with professionalism and intentionality.

"I believe strongly in a 'district continuous improvement plan' because meaningful change takes time and must be seen as a process and not an event," explained Superintendent Richardson when asked how Northfield Schools has improved the quality of teaching and leadership in its system. "The district has used a community-based strategic planning process and a District Education Program Advisory Council (DEPAC) to involve a number of staff and community members in setting the district's direction and providing broad

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recommendations for student achievement, district curriculum and student services goals. We also empower staff with expertise in curriculum, staff development and assessment to support the work of building staff.”

Northfield Schools is entering its third year of full implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in every building. Each PLC is responsible for identifying the building student achievement target(s) that they can best support, reviewing existing data about their students, determining essential learnings and creating additional formative assessments to measure how students are achieving in mastering the essential learnings. Each PLC then evaluates the effectiveness of their instruction and modifies strategies to enhance student learning. “We believe PLCs provide the best form of quality staff development. It supports teachers in working collaboratively to analyze student data, identify student needs, implement best practice strategies, evaluate the impact of their teaching on student learning and make changes in their practice to better meet the needs of all students,” said Dr. Richardson.

Superintendent Richardson is very active on the state and national level with education advocacy, funding and budget issues. He emphasizes the importance for communities to have a clear picture of the financial status of their district, “A key district strategy is demonstrating good stewardship in managing our finances.” Richardson explains, “In 2004-05, the district was deficit spending and entered statutory operating debt. In 2005-06 and 2006-07, the district reduced expenditures by 14% using program-based budgeting and in 2006, the community supported a seven year operating levy. Since then, Northfield Schools has maintained programs and staff, rebuilt the fund balance, and now holds AA+ bond rating.”

Superintendent Richardson received his Ph.D. in Education Administration from the University of Iowa and his master and bachelor of science degrees from Iowa State University. Before becoming Superintendent for the Northfield Schools, he was Superintendent for the Osseo Area Schools and prior to that held administrative positions in other districts throughout Iowa and Nebraska. Dr. Richardson is Treasurer on the MASA Board of Directors as well as an active member in the Minnesota Alliance for Student Achievement, Minnesota Council on Economic Education and Schools for Equity in Education.

MASA is a professional organization whose mission is to establish the statewide agenda for children, serve as the preeminent voice for public education, and empower members through quality services and support. MASA members are school superintendents, directors of special education, other central office school administrators, regional administrators, and higher education administrators and professors from throughout Minnesota.

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