

Lead From Where You Are

Tagged: [Newsletter](#) • [Sep](#) • 2010

By: Darcie Birkett, Assistant Supt, Business Services, Ottawa Area ISD and President of MSBO

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Where Do You Find Your Sanity?

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By: Angie McArthur, MSBO Board Member, Superintendent, Engadine Consolidated Schools

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Register now for the 12th Annual Facilities and Operations Directors Conference.

We continue to experience tremendous change in education. Staying abreast of the best practices associated with safe, healthy, and effective school facilities can certainly be a challenge.

Spotlight on Meridian Award Winners

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By: Nicholas Thornton, Supervisor of Energy Management & Facility Services Wayne-Westland Community Schools

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*“Sometimes you can make the greatest impact from somewhere other than first place. Ninety-nine percent of all leadership occurs from the middle of an organization” - **The 360 Degree Leader***

According to John C. Maxwell, the author of *The 360 Degree Leader*, leaders in the middle must perform multiple tasks and are often forced to deal with multiple shifting priorities, often with limited time and resources. This is a perfect description of a day in the life of a school business official. Yet, there are many people employed in school districts that feel that leadership or a vision for their school district must come from the top down. However, I disagree. I believe it's critical that today's school business officials not only possess financial and administrative skills, but that they must also possess the ability to lead.

A 2009 article published in *School Business Affairs* cited a recent survey conducted by ASBO International that determined that most school business officials view technical skills as more essential to their positions than leadership skills. Yet, the school business official, often recognized as the second most important position in a school district, typically participates in making strategic decisions that directly impact education. Analysis of the survey conducted by E. Glenn McClain, Jr., Ed.D, superintendent of the Platte Valley School District in Kersey, Colorado and Richard A. King, Ph.D, professor and associate dean at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee concluded that, “along with fiscal and educational accountability, this elevated stature underscores the need for business officials to have leadership skills to complement their critical technical skills.”

If we believe Maxwell's premise that 99 percent of all leadership occurs from the middle of an organization – then it's imperative that we improve our leadership skills. The bottom line is that anyone can choose to become a leader whatever his or her role in a school district.

The board and the superintendent may be the primary inventors of a district's vision, but as school business officials you may often need to be the interpreter for all those employees that look to you for leadership. Interpreting the vision includes providing clarity to those affected. People want to know where we're headed this year; where we're headed over the next 3 to 5 years; what's going to change; will I still have a place in the organization; what should I learn to be more valuable in the future. You may not know all the answers, but continually communicating can help ease rumors and fear of the unknown.

Douglas Reeves, in *The Learning Leader*, says that by definition, vision contemplates the future, and the future inevitably involves uncertainty, change, and fear. Hence, visions need to be explained in clear language with distinct steps to success.

Never underestimate the importance of your role in the lives of your employees, supervisors and most of all students, regardless of the areas you work in within your school district. **Like it or not, you are seen as a leader in your area.** As leaders we must not only remain focused and informed regarding the direction of our districts, but we must continue to be informed on the ever changing issues we face in our state and country, as well as globally.

The ultimate result of our development as leaders is that we increase our value. We become the “go to” person, perhaps even outside our normal duties. This makes us harder to replace. Management excellence guru Tom Peters calls it, “Distinct vs. Extinct.”

Another way of looking at it is this: In the future, those who don't add value won't matter; and those who don't matter won't survive. My challenge to you is to lead your district and help prepare our students for the 21st

Century.

Where Do You Find Your Sanity?

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By: Angie McArthur, MSBO Board Member, Superintendent, Engadine Consolidated Schools

I don't know about all of you, but I felt this last year was a little crazy in Michigan school business. With funding continually changing, special pots of money being created (with only forty-thousand strings or so attached), and budgets being held until just past the final hour, I found myself going a bit insane. Okay, maybe just a little *more* insane than I was before all of the surprises of 2009-2010.

I've been living in a nice little world of delusion called summer. It's nice there. I actually felt like we had rounded the corner, and maybe our district was going to be okay sooner than later. Then, BAM! (thanks, Emerill!), maintenance of effort slithers into the discussion. There goes \$17,000 of my hard-fought fund balance. Oh, and thanks to the legislative bodies for raiding the School Aid Fund recently. Oh, I beg your pardon...."borrowing" from the SAF. I wonder if I can borrow that same way for the cash flow shortage I'll be facing in the next month. Things that make you go hmmm....

Throughout all of this chaos, I have found great solace in my connection to [MSBO](#). There have been countless times that I receive hot-off-the-press, accurate information from the [MSBO](#) staff that has been instrumental in making me feel comfortable in my recommendations to the board. I know that our staff at [MSBO](#) has the ear-to-the-ground and the seat-at-the-table that provides its members with the best factual knowledge available.

Sometimes I need a "local" connection to soothe the nerves. Although our region in the UP is pretty large, we are still a pretty tight-knit regional group. If one of us needs assistance, help is only a phone call away. For those of you in close proximity to your regional group, make sure you are involved! There has been a great turnover in school business personnel, and there are many out there who could use a seasoned (is two years considered seasoned now?) [MSBO](#) member to provide answers.

One of my favorite places to look for my sanity is the [MSBO](#) listserv. I know that by putting out a quick email, I'll get a response back from someone who has the answer. There really aren't many organizations that have that connection. Some days, I'll just take a peek at the listserv to see if there is inspiration from Rob Burgess, or a zinger from "The Mayor" or a well-written piece from Kent Cartwright. Thanks, guys! You always make my day!

I had the luck of attending an ASBO event this summer, the Eagle Institute in Gettysburg, PA. There were representatives from many state SBO organizations, and I enjoyed hearing what happens in other states. I truly believe that our [MSBO](#) is one of Michigan's greatest associations. I encourage each of you to stretch a little bit more, and get more involved with [MSBO](#), whether it is by inviting a colleague to your regional group, serving as a mentor, joining an [MSBO](#) committee or running for the [MSBO](#) Board.

Oops, I've got to run! I'm off to the [MSBO](#) Northern School Finance Workshop in Traverse City. Then I need to buy a couple of busses using the [MSBO](#) Bus Purchasing Program. I hope you have a great year! Collectively, and individually, what we do extends the possibility for Michigan's students. If you can't find your sanity, enjoy the insanity! We're all in it together!

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Bus Purchasing Made Easy – Online Program Streamlines Process

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This enhancement allows for more functionality than ever before. Because the program is web based, all information you enter into the system will be saved. You don't need to worry about exiting and losing the data entered. Just return and resume where you left off.

Getting Started

Go to <http://michigan.cooppurchase.com>. Prices remain firm until April 15, 2011. This program makes bidding and ordering buses extremely simple and smooth. The bidding has been accomplished for you; all that is left is to "build" the bus desired and compare pricing from the four bidding dealers. The program provides extensive flexibility and customization – there are over 275 options available, allowing you to customize your bus to fit your district's needs.

We've changed the platform for the program, but the rigorous process to develop the bid remains the same. Each year, several months in advance of the bid, a committee of experienced transportation directors reviews the program. The base specifications and the options are analyzed and modified, as needed. Bus dealers are involved in the process to ensure the committee is aware of the newest developments in the school bus industry.

The goal of the committee is to provide a base specification that ensures an extremely high quality, safe bus. There are many districts that don't have the experience necessary in this area and they can be assured that if they order a bus from this program, it will be top quality.

It is not a sole source bid process. Districts can compare and choose among the four dealers, who represent International, Blue Bird, and Thomas/Freightliner.

The program offers an extensive help menu listing instructions, dealer contact information, base specifications and options. Conventional, Special Needs, Transit Rear Engine, Transit Front Engine, A-II, and BE style buses are all offered in the program. Further help is just a phone call away.

[MSBO](#) has continued to keep the administrative fee low at \$100 per bus, with a maximum of \$1,000 per district per year.

For questions or more information regarding the bus purchasing program, call Scott Little at 517.327.2582, or Pat Korloch at 517.327.5920.

MSBO Member Wins ASBO Pinnacle Award

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School business officials are some of the most creative individuals in education, so it's quite an accomplishment to be lauded as one of the most innovative. From building community outreach to boosting nutrition for students, the 2010 recipients of the ASBO International Pinnacle Award have implemented unique projects to improve their districts and enhance the profession.

One of this year's winners is [MSBO](#) member Sharon Raschke, Ed.D. Executive Director of Finance and Business for Dexter Community Schools. Sharon was named a recipient of one of ASBO International's highest honors – the Pinnacle Award of Achievement for the project, “The 4-Bucket Plan: A Better 403(b) Retirement Plan.”

Sharon will be presented her award at the ASBO Annual Conference this month. We will highlight Sharon's award winning program in an upcoming [MSBO](#) newsletter. Join us in congratulating Sharon Raschke and Dexter Community Schools for this great accomplishment!

MDE/MSBO Workshop

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October 26, 2010 • Kellogg Center • East Lansing, MI

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Topics include:

ORS Update

Education Jobs Bill and ARRA Funding Update

State Economic Update

MDE Federal Audit Update

CEPI Update

FID Update/School Lunch Report/GASB 54

Changes in State Aid

Deficit & Budget Plans/Transparency Reporting

Legislative Update

With this opportunity to meet and speak with MDE staff, you can develop a relationship that will help facilitate communication in the future!

Overnight accommodations are NOT included in the registration fee. A block of rooms has been set aside for workshop attendees. Hotel registration is made directly with the Kellogg Center at 800.875.5090. To receive the \$89 special rate, make your reservation by Saturday, Sept. 25.

[Register online.](#)

Be the Architect of Your Future!

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There is absolutely no better place to access high-level information on school facilities than [MSBO](#)'s Annual Facilities and Operations Directors Conference.

School facilities represent a tremendous resource and responsibility for districts. Included in those responsibilities is always the need to be as efficient as possible in operations - whether that means better energy management or the implementation of lean practices for maintenance. Doing things "the way we've always done it" is no longer acceptable.

We must keep moving forward with new ideas and innovative programs and practices. Sharing and learning together is essential to success. This conference provides a unique opportunity to refresh and Be the Architect of your future.

Register now for the 12th Annual Facilities and Operations Directors Conference is October 3-5 at Crystal Mountain.

Information for the conference and registration is available on the [MSBO website](#).

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Spotlight on Meridian Award Winners

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District Saves with In-House Energy Management Program

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With school budgets on the mind of all superintendents and business managers, keeping the utility bill under control is a concern for schools in good times and bad. While energy performance bonds, sinking funds, and bond issues serve to improve the energy efficiency of our facilities, getting all staff to assist in the energy conservation effort is part of the energy story that districts simply cannot afford to neglect.

In 2008, Wayne-Westland Community Schools set out to do just that—educate the staff about conservation and enlist them in the conservation efforts. While hiring an outside consultant to do the job was an option, the district instead chose to tackle the task with in-house forces and created a program titled I-Save: Individuals Save and Vie for Efficiency.

At its heart, the program asked each building to select a point person to head up the energy conservation efforts at their building. The operations department provided each building with a presentation on the program and a startup kit that included a variety of items to help buildings in their journey. The kit included items such as CFL light bulbs, light switch stickers, posters, energy meters, and a handbook. The district's energy manager did a monthly walk through at each building with the principals and/or point person to identify areas for possible habit changes as well as physical deficiencies. The walk through, titled Energy Use Reviews, were focused on identifying anything that could be done to reduce energy consumption and educating the point person in the process. Additionally, monthly fliers containing information on energy conservation were e-mailed out to the point persons to share with their buildings. To encourage student participation, poster, essay, and video contests were also held in all buildings.

While the program offered plenty of supplies, support, and information, achieving staff participation was viewed as key. Therefore, the program offered financial rewards to buildings for simply enlisting in the program and offered more rewards for achieving the energy savings goals. The results of the program were \$430,000 (or 11.5%) in cost avoidance for electric and natural gas utility costs in F08/09 and \$520,000 (or 16.3%) during F09/10. From those cost avoidance savings, over \$100,000 annually was returned to the school buildings in the form of additional discretionary instructional supply budgets.

At the end of the day, Wayne-Westland Community Schools has created an energy conservation program that is truly something that all staff and students benefit from: educationally, financially, and environmentally.

Celebrating Award Winning Budgets

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A well thought-out, well-communicated budget is vital to developing the support of the school district's stakeholders and promoting transparency and accountability. The Meritorious Budget Awards Program, sponsored by ASBO International, promotes and recognizes excellence in school budget presentation and enhances school business officials' skills in developing, analyzing, and presenting a school system budget.

This year, ASBO acknowledged 118 award recipients, a record number. Among those recognized are five Michigan school districts.

Congratulations to the 2009/2010 Meritorious Budget Award (MBA) recipients from Michigan.

Bloomfield Hills Schools

Farmington Public School District

Grand Blanc Community Schools

South Lyon Community Schools

Walled Lake Consolidated School District