

# Cooperative Connection

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Southeast Service Cooperative

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## SSC and MASA Region 1 host successful 2016 Legislator/Educator Forum

*By Kari Kubicek*

The Southeast Service Cooperative, in collaboration with Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) Region 1, held its annual legislative breakfast on Saturday, February 20, at SSC's Wood Lake Meeting Center. Kasson-Mantorville Schools Superintendent Mark Matuska moderated the event providing opportunity for both legislators and educators to share constructive dialogue on a variety of topics.

Twelve legislators attended the 2016 forum, including Representatives Peggy Bennett, David Bly, Jeanne Poppe, Duane Quam, Steve Dratzkowski, John Petersburg, and Kim Norton and Senators Kevin Dahle, Matt Schmit, Vicki Jensen, Dave Senjem, and Carla Nelson.

Also in attendance were 21 superintendents and 21 school board members representing 27 area school districts, as well as Brad Lundell, Executive Director of

*Forum continued on page 16*

## Exciting finish to SSC's Member vs. Member Walking Challenge

*By Nicole LaChapelle*

Just a few hundred steps separated the winning teams in Southeast Service Cooperative's Walking Challenge, in which over 700 individuals from 24 SSC member organizations competed. Fifteen Southeastern Minnesota School Districts and eight Local Government Members participated in two separate steps-based challenges. Winners



*Members of the winning local government team - City of Kasson*



*Members of the winning school district team - PEM*

*Walking continued on page 15*



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# SSC staff and board member updates

## Meeting Center Coordinator Christina Bokusky



Christina began her position as Meeting Center Coordinator in March. Prior to working at SSC, Christina worked at Fastenal and Black River Memorial Hospital. She also was a marketing intern at the Mayo Clinic. Christina graduated from WSU in December with a BA in Communications. She, alongside Donna Dickison, is responsible for all day to day operations and business

development of the Wood Lake Meeting Center.

Christina is originally from Buffalo, Minnesota, which is in-between St. Paul and St. Cloud. Her family includes her parents, two younger brothers and a very mischievous Maltese named Taz.

Christina enjoys running and spending time at the gym, singing in her church's choir, and traveling. Some of her favorite destinations include South America, Mexico, and Italy.

Christina is enjoying her new position and shared, "Everyone here is so happy, upbeat, and supportive! People get so much work done, but have fun doing it."

## New Board Member Karla Bauer



Karla represents Kenyon-Wanamingo school board, where she is in her 8th year of service. Karla works at Mutual Fire Insurance Company. She and her husband, Troter, have a son in college and daughter in high school. They live on a farm in rural Kenyon where they raise crops, goats, cattle, and miniature donkeys. Karla loves spending time with her kids, traveling, reading, cheering on the Vikings, and most of all, teams from Kenyon-Wanamingo!

## Program Manager Sarah Ness



Sarah began her work as SSC's newest Program Coordinator in December. Originally from Rochester, Sarah coordinates the Cooperative Purchasing Connection (CPC). She meets directly with members to share information on CPC and provides assistance in the procurement process. Sarah brings a wealth of experience from

her work with the Reading Center in Rochester, Mayo Clinic and Shorewood Senior Campus. Sarah received her undergraduate degree in Marketing from UW-Eau Claire and is currently pursuing her MBA.

Sarah and her husband Dan have a two-year old daughter, Taryn. In her free time she enjoys coaching and watching dance, playing softball, camping and traveling, with her favorite destination being the Caribbean.

Sarah stated, "The members and staff of SSC are wonderful! I look forward to building lasting relationships with our members to better serve your needs and ensure continued excellence in our communities!"

## Donna Dickison promoted



Donna Dickison was recently promoted to the position of Meeting Center Coordinator. Donna started at SSC in November 2015. Donna, along with Christina Bokusky, handle all of the Wood Lake Meeting Center's day to day operations and business development.

# Bullying investigation practices: Key findings from Hanover Research

By Kari Kubicek

Outlined below are key findings from a Bullying Investigation Practices report developed by Hanover Research. In the report, Hanover Research presents best practices in the investigation of bullying behavior, including special considerations for the investigation of cyberbullying. This research relies on guidance published by state departments of education, school districts, and legal experts.

Schools are responsible for investigating allegations of bullying behavior among students. School officials face several challenges while investigating bullying, such as discerning between bullying and other forms of behavior, and collecting evidence of alleged bullying behavior. Recently, states and districts have updated their anti-bullying policies to address cyberbullying, an increasingly common form of bullying that occurs using technology such as texting and social media.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Bullying often involves repetitive behavior and a power imbalance between the students involved. Bullying is often defined as unwanted, intentional, and aggressive behavior between students that occurs on a recurring basis and is directed at a student or group of students who are not in a position to respond. The Georgia Department of Education further defines



bullying as behavior that interferes in a student's education and threatens the normal operations of the school.

- Experts recommend that schools document all reported cases of bullying. While school officials may first learn of bullying behavior from a teacher who observed the behavior or from a verbal report by a student, they should request written descriptions of what occurred before beginning an investigation. Many districts developed standardized bullying incident reporting forms, some of which are available online and allow students, staff, or parents to submit reports anonymously.
- School officials should interview the victim and perpetrator separately, and interview any other individuals who observed or may have knowledge of the bullying behavior. Interviewees should not be promised confidentiality. Many districts require school officials to complete the investigation and submit a written report within a specified period of time, such as 10 school days.
- School officials should determine appropriate responses to bullying behavior based on the severity and frequency of the behavior. Possible consequences may range from a written apology and conferences with the student in less serious cases, to suspension and legal action in the most serious cases. School officials may also consider referring students to counseling and other types of pro-social remediation.
- In cyberbullying investigations, school officials should consider where the incident took place and the nature of the offending content when determining how to respond to a complaint. In some cases, districts may investigate incidents that occurred off-campus, particularly if these incidents have caused a significant disruption to school operations.
- Complaints that involve potentially criminal activity or the transmission of sexually-explicit material should be reported to law enforcement immediately. Teachers who discover explicit content on an electronic device should not digitally transfer the image to other teachers or administrators at the school, as such action could be considered distribution of pornography.

*Bullying continued on page 4*



*Bullying continued from page 3*

- To collect evidence of cyberbullying, districts may confiscate electronic devices and/or take screen shots of offending material. If content has already been deleted, the investigator may be able to access the material through a third party, such as another student who received a forwarded message. In addition, districts and law

enforcement may be able to obtain additional records from electronic service providers, such as cell-phone carriers.

The information presented in this report offers a framework for developing an effective investigation protocol for bullying. Please note, however, that Hanover Research does not provide legal interpretation

or advice; all questions regarding general or specific legal requirements related to investigation protocols, evidence collection, and reporting requirements should be referred to legal counsel.

Hanover Research. (January 2016). Bullying Investigation Practices.

## Applications being accepted for McGrath Bullying and Harassment Certification Program

*By Kari Kubicek*

The Minnesota Department of Education School Safety Technical Assistance Center (SSTAC) is currently accepting applications for the development of a training cadre of 12 individuals in Minnesota for the *McGrath Bullying and Harassment: Minimize the Risk Curriculum* and certification. The courses and certification are designed to provide clear methods and procedures to meet state and federal legal requirements and offer practical tools that charter schools and districts can implement to prevent and neutralize the effects of bullying. The SSTAC invites interested individuals to apply to be a member of this cadre.

The Center will be offering the McGrath Bullying and Harassment training to charter schools and districts as an option to meet the staff training requirements of the Safe and Supportive Schools Act. Further information about the training can be found at the [SSTAC](#)



[website](#). This training, and the cadre, will build the capacity of the education community to intervene, respond and investigate to reports of bullying and harassment.

Applicants must be available for training at the Minnesota Department of Education in Roseville, from May 4-6, 2016. The trainings will be held from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM each day. Applicants must attend all three days, in full, to receive the certification. Applicants must have experience and success in conducting training and/or professional development. Preference will be given to applicants who work outside of the metro area, or who have significant school or district training experience. Applicants may be independent contractors or affiliated with non-profit or

for-profit organizations, training institutions or professional organizations. Applicants may be faculty members of colleges, community colleges and universities. Additional information for applicants can be found on the [SSTAC website](#), along with the application and reference forms.

Only completed applications will be accepted. The application deadline is Friday, March 25 at 5:00 PM CT. Applications will be reviewed and applicants will be notified of their status in the program by April 15, 2016.

Please submit applications by email to [MDE.SSTAC@state.mn.us](mailto:MDE.SSTAC@state.mn.us) with the subject line: Application for McGrath TOT.

If you have any questions, please contact [MDE.SSTAC@state.mn.us](mailto:MDE.SSTAC@state.mn.us).

# Mindfulness for stress reduction

By: Katie Schmitt

In December, I attended a breakout session at the Association for Educational Service Agencies (AESAs) National Conference called “Mindful Education”. It provided an overview of mindfulness and examples of practical application from the perspectives of a school principal, a school nurse working with students receiving special education services and an educational service agency leader. Before the session started the room was abuzz with nervous energy and small talk. The room was packed with every seat filled and a “standing room only” overflow section at the perimeter. Within a few minutes of speaking, the presenters created a calm in the room. They led attendees through a short, guided meditation facilitated by the ringing sound of a metal bowl. As they continued with their presentation, they shared the benefits, research, and resources for incorporating mindfulness practices in schools. Below is an introduction to mindfulness and a briefing on benefits for schools and other workplace settings.

## What is Mindfulness?

John Kabat-Zinn, founder at U Mass Center for Mindfulness, defines it as, “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (2003). Mindfulness helps to remove us from the natural fight or flight stress-response pattern of the “reptilian brain” and into a focused state. The practice, in basic form, consists of directing attention to a specific focus – a breath, sensation or feeling - to anchor the experience. As spontaneous thoughts, feelings, or images appear, practitioners refocus attention to the anchor. The practice

## Upcoming Mindfulness Training Sessions

### Mindfulness and Stress Reduction for Educators:

April 13 at 9:00 - 11 AM or  
5:00 - 7:00 PM

### Mindfulness and Stress Reduction in the Workplace:

April 13 at 1:30 - 3:30 PM

can be formal or informal. More formal practice is developed through intentional meditation (sitting, standing or lying). Informal practice employs focused attention into everyday tasks and interactions using the senses. Mindfulness programs in schools and other workplace settings are typically secular in nature.

## What are the benefits for schools?

Teachers serve as the nervous system of the classroom. Through the practice of mindfulness, educators prepare their brain for teaching and students’ minds for learning. Some mindfulness programs focus only on teacher practice as a way to reduce stress, increase attention, and develop resiliency. Other programs include teaching students mindfulness techniques. A growing body of research outlines the following benefits of mindfulness:

- Evokes focused-attention
- Promotes emotional and behavioral regulation
- Increases a sense of well-being and empathy
- Fosters resiliency
- Generates positive school climate
- Decreases anxiety, stress and fatigue

- Improves working memory and executive functioning
- Supports academic achievement and social skills development

## What are the benefits for other workplace settings?

Mindfulness programs and training are applicable to other workplace settings at the individual or organizational level. For example, at SSC, we’ve incorporated mindfulness into our wellness programming with guest presenters, resources (Dr. Amit Sood’s Book, *The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living*) and individual wellness challenges. There are personal and professional benefits of practicing mindfulness, including: social skills development, emotional control, increased clarity and attention, improved productivity, reduced stress and anxiety, and better relationships.

Mindfulness can be a life-changer leading to self-improvement and stress relief. The AESA “Mindful Education” presenters discussed the importance of allowing mindfulness integration to be organic and administered through invitation. In that manner, we invite you to attend one of the upcoming mindfulness trainings for beginners held at the Cooperative on April 13. To encourage further exploration, a [list of mindfulness programs and resources is available on our website](#). Please note that these have not been formally reviewed by SSC and are intended to serve as a starting point for our members.



## Top placing teams at Regional Knowledge Bowl



1st Place (Tier AA) - **Northfield Chrome**  
Advisor: Troy Cohrs



1st Place (Tier A) - **St. Charles 1**  
Advisor: Theo Derby



2nd Place (Tier AA) - **Rochester Mayo Gold**  
Advisor: Jake Giesen



2nd Place (Tier A) - **Dover-Eyota 1**  
Advisor: Alberto Vera



3rd Place (Tier AA) - **Red Wing 2**  
Advisor: Greg Grinager



3rd Place (Tier A) - **Spring Grove 1**  
Advisor: Al Lochner

# Five Knowledge Bowl Teams advance to State

Dover-Eyota, Northfield, Red Wing, Rochester Mayo, and St. Charles will move on!

By Kirsten Kuehl



The 2016 Senior High Knowledge Bowl Regionals, sponsored by the Southeast Service Cooperative, were held on March 14, 2016 at the Wood Lake Meeting Center in Rochester. The following area teams competed after advancing from Sub-Regionals. A total of 110 teams (51 in Tier AA and 59 in Tier A) participated in Sub-Regionals on February 29, March 3, 7 and 10, 2016.

**Tier AA Regional** consisted of teams from: **Albert Lea, LaCrescent, Northfield (2 teams), Plainview-Elgin-Millville, Red Wing (2 teams), Rochester Mayo (3 teams), Stewartville and Winona.**

**Tier A Regional** consisted of teams from: **Chatfield, Dover-Eyota, Houston, Kenyon-Wanamingo (2 teams), Kingsland, Lanesboro, Medford, Pine Island, Rushford-Peterson, Spring Grove, and St. Charles.**

Awards went to the following teams. The top three placing

teams received a trophy for their school and medallions for individual team members.

## Tier AA

**Northfield Chrome**.....1st Place  
**Rochester Mayo Gold**...2nd Place  
**Red Wing 2**..... 3rd Place

## Tier A

**St. Charles 1**.....1st Place  
**Dover-Eyota 1**.....2nd Place  
**Spring Grove 1**.....3rd Place

**The top three teams from tier AA and top two teams from tier A advance to the State event at Cragun's in Brainerd on April 13-14, 2016.**

Teams from these schools also participated in the Senior High Knowledge Bowl season: Austin, Caledonia, Fillmore Central, Goodhue, Lewiston-Altura, Kasson-Mantorville, Mabel-Canton, Pacelli, Southland, Triton.

The Minnesota Service Cooperative Knowledge Bowl competitions are interdisciplinary academic contests for students. The Senior High Knowledge Bowl is for students in grades 9-12. During the contest, teams of students compete in written and oral rounds by answering questions related to all areas of learning, typical of secondary educational programs. Questions test students' recall,

problem solving, and critical thinking skills. This competition provides a format for student growth centered around academics. Teams consist of five students (five competing in the written round and four competing in each oral round).

The Regional Knowledge Bowl event is sponsored by the Southeast Service Cooperative.

# Junior High Knowledge Bowl news

By Kirsten Kuehl

Fifty-three teams from 18 area districts participated in 2015-16 Junior High Knowledge Bowl. Teams competed in Round Robin competitions in October, November and December. Each team then competed in the Sub-Regional competitions in January. The top twelve teams from each tier advanced to Regional. The competitions consist of 1 written round (60 questions) and 4 oral rounds (45 questions/round).

The Junior High Knowledge Bowl Sub-Regional Competitions were held on January 5 and 7 at the Southeast Service Cooperative. The Tier AA teams were from: Chatfield, Dover-Eyota, Kasson-Mantorville, Northfield, Pine Island, Plainview-Elgin-Millville, Red Wing and Winona. The Tier

A teams were from: Caledonia, Fillmore Central, Grand Meadow, Houston, Kenyon-Wanamingo, Kingsland, Mabel-Canton, Rushford-Peterson, Southland, and Spring Grove.

The Junior High Knowledge Bowl Regional competitions were held on January 20 at the Southeast Service Cooperative.

## Teams placing at Regional

### Tier A

1<sup>st</sup> place Kenyon-Wanamingo  
Red  
2<sup>nd</sup> place Rushford-Peterson 1  
3<sup>rd</sup> place Houston 1  
4<sup>th</sup> place Fillmore Central 2  
5<sup>th</sup> place Spring Grove 2

### Tier AA

1<sup>st</sup> place Chatfield 1  
2<sup>nd</sup> place Chatfield 3

3<sup>rd</sup> place Pine Island 1  
4<sup>th</sup> place Kasson-Mantorville 1  
5<sup>th</sup> place Northfield Gold

The Minnesota Service Cooperative Knowledge Bowl competitions are interdisciplinary academic contests for students. Junior High Knowledge Bowl is for students in grades 6-9. During the contest, teams of students compete in written and oral rounds by answering questions related to all areas of learning, typical of secondary educational programs. Questions test students' recall, problem solving, and critical thinking skills. This competition provides a format for student growth centered around academics. Teams consist of six students (six competing in the written round and five competing in each oral round).



## Public Service Loan Forgiveness – Results as of December 2015

959 individuals at member sites contacted Innovative Student Loan Solutions and/or scheduled a meeting with an ISLS advisor. This represents 10% of employees region-wide. 414 did not qualify for the PSLF program. (414 of 959 = 43%, which is in the normal range of 35-45%; disqualification is typically due to the debt to income ratios). Visit the [SSC Student Loan Forgiveness Program webpage](#) for more information on this program.



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# Junior High Knowledge Bowl Regional Winners



1st Place (Tier A) - Kenyon-Wanamingo Red  
Coach: Darin Walling



1st Place (Tier AA) - Chatfield 1  
Coach: Trish Doyle



2nd Place (Tier A) - Rushford-Peterson 1  
Coach: Mary Wolter



2nd Place (Tier AA) - 2nd Place (Tier AA) - Chatfield 3  
Coach: Trish Doyle



3rd Place (Tier A) - Houston 1  
Coach: Levi Olstad



3rd Place (Tier AA) - Pine Island 1  
Coach: Rosario Mollo

# Byron Public Schools 8th grader is the Southeast Minnesota Spelling Bee Champion

By Katie Hartman



Twelve spellers (six from each Regional Spelling Bee) competed in the Final Spelling Bee on Tuesday, February 23, at 9:00 AM at the Southeast Service Cooperative in Rochester. These twelve students were narrowed down from 76 students from 37 districts in Southeast Minnesota who participated in the two Regional Spelling Bees on February 9, 2016, coordinated by the Southeast Service Cooperative. After 17 rounds and 1 hour and 45 minutes the winner was declared.

Benjamin Lee, an 8th grade student from Byron Public Schools was declared the champion after correctly spelling the word suffocate. Benjamin also participated in the Final Bees in 2014 and 2015.

Benjamin advances to the 89th annual Scripps National Spelling Bee from May 22 – May 27, 2016. He won a trip (for himself and one adult) to Washington, D.C. (donated by Southeast Service Cooperative). He also received a first place trophy, Webster's Third



*Spelling Bee Champion Benjamin Lee.*



*Shenali DeSilva (1st Runner-Up), Benjamin Lee (Champion), and Thomas York (2nd Runner-Up).*

New International Dictionary (provided by Scripps National Spelling Bee), 2016 United States Mint Proof Set (The Samuel Louis Sugarman Award from Scripps), a one-year subscription to Britannica Online Premium and Valerie's Spelling Bee Supplement Booklet.

Shenali DeSilva, an 8th grade student from Pacelli Catholic Schools, was the 1st Runner-Up. Shenali received a trophy, and Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary (donated by Merriam-Webster) and Valerie's Spelling Bee Supplement Booklet.

Thomas York, a 7th grade student from Rochester Catholic Schools, was the 2nd Runner-Up. Thomas

received a trophy, and Valerie's Spelling Bee Supplement Booklet.

Other students participating in the Southeast Minnesota Final Spelling Bee were:

- Anders Herfindahl-Quint, Kasson-Mantorville Public Schools, 6th grade
- Piper Mohring, Northfield Public Schools, 7th grade
- Jayden Ihrke, Plainview-Elgin-Millville Public Schools, 6th grade
- Kinsey Brandt, Red Wing Public Schools, 7th grade
- Kenny Burke, Red Wing Public Schools, 7th grade
- Zhenya Ratushko, Rochester Public Schools, 6th grade
- Madeline Boie, Rochester Schaeffer Academy, 5th grade
- Jake James, Rushford-Peterson Public Schools, 8th grade
- Emma Bucknam, Winona Public Schools, 8th grade



# "Skinny" health plans

By Bill Colopoulos



## Author's note:

*Skinny Minimum Essential Coverage "MEC" plans have been available for two to three years; ever since the inception of the ACA's employer shared responsibility rules (employer mandates) began an ensuing debate over what is and what is not covered under an MEC health plan, whether or not individual policies may be paid by employer plans of any kind or type, etc. Skinny MEC health plans are a response to the demand for finding ways around the onerous new employer shared responsibility rules while at the same time reducing health plan cost liabilities.*

The ACA is bringing a new wave of benefit strategies to the market; especially for self-insured health plan sponsors. That's because ALEs (aka "Applicable Large Employers") with self-insured health plans may use the ACA's rules to eliminate a significant portion of the value – and cost – of their current health benefits program and still satisfy most of the impact of the ACA's

new employer mandates; avoiding the "sledgehammer" or "no coverage" penalty.

By using the ACA's minimum coverage rules as a guideline, self-insured ALEs may convert their current full-coverage health plan to a "Minimum Essential Coverage-only (MEC)" or "skinny" health plan. This method proposes the group discontinue their traditional benefit health plan and replace it with a "skinny", "MEC" plan that provides coverage only for ACA-qualified preventive care services.

The skinny MEC plan provides no coverage for anything else; no hospital, no surgical, no outpatient, no therapy and no prescription services are covered. Minimum, bare-bones coverage is provided for preventive services only. The preventive only MEC plan is then coupled with a section 125 health care savings account; funded to some level by the employer and whose cash value the employees would presumably use to purchase more substantial health plan coverage for non-preventive services on their own; either through the individual market or through a spouse's group health plan (for those fortunate enough to have that option).

By itself, the new "skinny" plan represents a vast reduction in cost to the employer (often as little as \$50 - \$75 per employee per month) plus whatever "other expenses" the employer is willing to fund in a separate account; typically used to fund 213 (d) expenses.

Thus, by adapting "skinny" health plans, employers are using the ACA rules as a pretense for dramatically reducing the benefit value they are offering now and transferring the majority of the risk of their current health plan to their employees.

Where do the interpretations of MEC being satisfied by preventive only care for self-insured plans come from? For more details about the ACA's definition of MEC, visit:

[www.http://nexgenhce.com/billsblog.php](http://www.nexgenhce.com/billsblog.php)

What employer and group of employees would consider replacing their current health plan with a benefit plan that covered only preventive services? How would the majority of employee's healthcare expenses – for hospital, surgery, out-patient care, pharmacy, etc. – be covered? Whose liability would those expenses become? The employee? The individual insurance market? Apparently, skinny plans suggest transferring the lion's share of current benefit liability to the insured market.

Proponents of skinny plans ultimately suggest transferring current group health plan liabilities to individual health policies; with the skinny plan only serving the purpose of the ALE employer meeting the requirements of the ACA's basic coverage requirement. That is an interesting idea, but one with many implications and potential complications; among



them the question of how the individual health insurance market would react to such a transfer of liability and whether or not they would permit it.

Of course, the more meaningful question is what the net cost effect to the employer and employee will be under such a program? Exceptionally high cost groups hope they will be able to abdicate their high claims costs to and disperse them among individual health plan policies. But for most groups, individual policies are likely to add up to considerably more costs, when accurately priced in comparison among all current group plan participants.

The successful transfer of group plan liabilities to individual health plans under the skinny MEC health plan strategy is based on the following assumptions:

1. Individual policies may be purchased with funds provided by the employer; with a practical way for the employer to contribute towards the cost of the individual plans that compares to current payroll deduction methods.
2. Individual health policies will allow employers to transfer the cost responsibility of their employees' own healthcare costs; specifically the effect high claimants have on traditional group insurance premiums.
3. The individual health plan market will cooperate in helping employers transfer their current cost liabilities to individual health insurance policy pools. Presumably, the

employees will be able to use an employer-provided tool to select and enroll in their individual policies and pay for them via payroll deduction.

In regards to point 1, IRS Notice 2015-87 issued in late 2015 (which is still being interpreted in the early months of 2016) suggest several compliance issues with skinny MEC plans sold in conjunction with individual policies; intending to replace traditional group plans. The new interpretations purported by IRS Notice 2015-87 suggest that an employer may not, through any means, allow for or provide the transfer of funds pre or post-tax to employees in any manner that would allow them to use such funds to purchase individual policies intended to replace a group health plan \*.

*\* Minn. Stat. § 62L.12 imposes restrictions on the sale of individual policies to employees who may otherwise be eligible for coverage under a group health plan of a small employer (<50). Minn. Stat. § 62L.12 also imposes a licensure risk on insurer brokers who "knowingly and willfully" break apart certain small groups. The statute's purpose was to prevent insurance companies and agents from predatory practices such as selling policies to individuals who are otherwise entitled to coverage currently maintained by their employer.*

The second point suggests replacing group plans with a group of individual policies so that the employer is effectively held harmless of any financial accountability for the future claim costs of their employees. This assumption commits a group to

the notion that individual policies will consistently be less expensive and inflate at a slower rate than group policies; an assumption that is dramatically incorrect in the vast majority of cases; especially for groups with younger, healthier employees.

The third point is that individual health plan carriers will not encourage the wholesale transfer of group health plan liabilities to individual policies and will not cooperate by providing integrated billing or enrollment administration. Those plan administrative services – characteristic of an employer sponsored group health plan – will have to be administered separately by the employer or through some other entity; requiring new, additional administrative infrastructure and its associated costs.

### **Are skinny health plans viable alternatives to traditional group health plans?**

In cases where a group represents an adverse risk pool of very old and/or very sick employees who year in and year out show little or no improvement, the community-rated individual plan alternatives purchased together with a skinny MEC plan could possibly represent a comparative cost advantage over the current group plan. But is this a common or even likely scenario?

In the vast majority of group health plans, if a group conducts proper due diligence and carefully compares the benefit values of its current plan – and then matches those benefits up carefully with the

# New contract awarded for hardwood flooring

By Katie Schmitt

Are you planning to refinish, restore, or replace your hardwood flooring? We are pleased to announce a new purchasing contract option for hardwood floors. In collaboration with the Cooperative Purchasing Connection, Southeast Service Cooperative has awarded FLR Sanders a contract for hardwood flooring. This contract is the result of a formal Request for Proposal, meeting the requirements of the municipal contracting Law and allowing SSC members to purchase from this contract without bidding.

As a provider of Maple Flooring Manufacturer Association (MFMA)



*Halenbeck Hall at St. Cloud State.*

gym floor installations, sanding and finishing, artwork design and professional game line painting, annual recoats and repairs, FLR

sanders can provide SSC members with full-service solutions for hardwood flooring. Members receive no-cost consulting for any wood floor project from their MFMA certified installers, including evaluation of your existing gymnasium floors. Our contract provides access to their in-house art and design department with unlimited interactive artwork designs. Expect best quality products, a 5% discount on services and extended warranty options to prolong the life of your floor.

For more information, contact Lon Hollister at FLR Sanders at: 763-633-1170 or [lhollister@flrsanders.com](mailto:lhollister@flrsanders.com).

# Innovative Office Solutions: Service beyond expectation

By Katie Schmitt

In the early days of our new contract with Innovative Office Solutions, one thing became clear - service comes first for their entire team. I have been so impressed with their quick response to get up and running in Express and to connect with our membership. As we've needed to purchase office supplies at the Cooperative, their team has provided no-pressure consulting and expertise. This refreshing commitment to service beyond what is expected has elevated the Cooperative's relationship with Innovative Office Solutions to a true partnership.

Two key players in developing a spirit of collaboration and service for this new contract are Mike Callahan and Gary Feichtinger. Mike and Gary serve as the primary Account Executives for the majority of SSC members. They have significant experience in the office supply industry. Mike brings enthusiasm

to every conversation and a deep understanding of our membership. Gary, who is based in Owatonna, is resourceful, friendly, and focused on bringing the best value to every purchase no matter the size of the order. Mike and Gary also have cross-trained customer service support staff that provide superb assistance for our membership, ensuring you can always get a live person on the phone and someone who is empowered with the tools and resources to help you as quickly as possible.

We can connect you with the Account Executive assigned to your organization. Contact Sarah Ness at: [sness@ssc.coop](mailto:sness@ssc.coop) or 507-281-6678.

If you have not yet registered to use this contract, please click on the link below to register your organization.

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## Contract Benefits for SSC Members:

- Free delivery with no minimum order
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Mike Callahan



Gary Feichtinger

# The trickle-down theory

By Sarah Ness

The recession wreaked havoc on local governments and non-profits, while the demand for services has increased employee workloads. Purchasing departments are now finding ways to stretch budgeted dollars further than ever before by better leveraging their buying power and using best practices like strategic sourcing and cooperative purchasing. The results of these best practices directly impact community members of the region.

Procurement savings do not jeopardize the livelihood of the government workforce, nor do they negatively affect residents. Strategic sourcing and procurement maximize the volume in a specific purchasing category to get lower prices and superior levels of quality and service. While procurement savings alone are not a cure-all to budget shortfalls, they can lessen painful service cuts or tax increases. A dollar saved in procurement can be used somewhere else to meet an objective or goal that provides value to citizens of that area.

Procurement has been doing more with fewer resources. Because of the tumultuous events of the last decade, procurements are aimed at stimulating the economy, homeland



security, emergency response and sustainability.

## How Does It Work?

Participating in cooperative purchasing involves one governmental entity using a contract competitively procured by another agency, such as the Cooperative Purchasing Connection. With a few exceptions, nearly every state and local government has statutory authority to participate in cooperative purchasing agreements. It is a process that has been classified as a best practice in the American Bar Association's Model Procurement Code and has been endorsed by every major public procurement association.

## Benefits for Cities, Counties, or Non-Profits:

1. **Saves administrative time and soft cost of conducting and administering individual procurements.** Employees no longer spend their limited time doing RFP's. Also, because there is no need to conduct individual procurement, communities using cooperative purchasing

can dramatically reduce the time required to establish a new contract saving months to weeks.

2. **Combines the volume of multiple governments and agencies creating value driving down prices.**
3. **There is flexibility.** This allows the Cooperative Purchasing Connection to require Minnesota-specific terms and conditions, while taking advantage of local and national contracts.
4. **Preserves the Integrity of the Procurement.** Contracts competitively procured by the Cooperative Purchasing Connection are consistent with the state's procurement processes and requirements.

## Benefits for Community Members:

1. **Saves taxpayer money.** Savings can lessen painful service cuts or tax increases and can be passed on to other city services like parks, libraries, and police.
2. **Ensures the agency's dedication of employees to find cost-effective solutions.** This helps to ensure they operate within their means.

To find more information on the Cooperative Purchasing Connection and available contracts visit [www.purchasingconnection.org](http://www.purchasingconnection.org).

  
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*Walking continued from page 1*

in the School District Challenge included: Plainview-Elgin-Millville – 1st Place, Kingsland – 2nd Place, Grand Meadow – 3rd Place. The remaining teams, which each received an honorable mention, are listed in the order of their ranking: Lake City, Wabasha-Kellogg, Zumbrota-Mazeppa, Mabel-Canton, Stewartville, Goodhue, St. Charles, Lewiston-Altura, Fillmore Central, Cannon Falls, LeRoy-Ostrander, and Rochester.

Plainview-Elgin-Millville School District Wellness Coordinator Marcia Schultz shared, “I heard countless times how staff members would stay up later to get on the treadmill or they’d walk to someone’s desk to talk instead of emailing them. It was great to see people in the hall after school walking together to get those steps in.” She added, “I’ve heard great things about the challenge. It was so close and everyone was very motivated to continue and pull out a win this time!”

The City of Kasson was the winner in the Local Government Division. The rest of the rankings were as follows: The City of Albert Lea – 2nd Place, The City of Bryon – 3rd Place. The honorable mention placements included – The City of Spring Grove, Freeborn County, Austin HRA, Fillmore County, Workforce Development, and the Rice/Steele 911 Center.

Linda Rappe, Wellness Coordinator at The City of Kasson, noted that her colleagues were very excited to have won for the second year in a row, “They were working really hard to win and every week when I told them we were behind the last week they “stepped” it up even farther. I would send out encouraging emails and kept in close contact via email about our progress and their individual progress.” She also shared, “We had one department that set a timer and everyone at once would get up and walk around the office

for 15 minutes and they did this every couple of hours.”

The contest, which ran the month of January, was based on the number of steps walked by participating members. Trophies will be awarded to Plainview-Elgin-Millville School District and The City of Kasson. Certificates were presented to all teams who participated.

*Health Plans continued from page 12*

cost and benefit values of individual policies similar to the current group plan that are priced separately for each and every employee – savings will typically accrue in favor of the group health plan; not the skinny MEC plan with individual policies.

Lastly, will employees accept skinny MEC replacement plans? Currently, employees enjoy the protection of Minnesota Statutes prohibiting a reduction in benefit value unless the reduction is approved by the employees, as well as the

employer. In public sector groups with collectively bargained units, how likely would employees be to agree to such a transfer of benefit value and cost liabilities? Skinny MEC plan solutions underscore the general ineffectiveness of attempts to reform health care by instead reforming health insurance. Effective health care reform requires that health care service costs must be addressed. They are the true drivers of the cost of health insurance. Meaningful health care

reform will not be accomplished by nit-picking around the legal edges of the ACA rules.

Bill Colopoulos is a healthcare economist and benefit advisor to the Southeast and South Central Service Cooperatives based in Rochester and Mankato, Minnesota. For more information about this and other health care-related topics, visit Bill’s website: [www.nexgenhce.com](http://www.nexgenhce.com)

*Forum continued from page 1*

Schools for Equity in Education, Kirk Schneidawind, Executive Director of the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA), and Grace Keliher, Director of Governmental Relations for MSBA.

Once Superintendent Matuska welcomed everyone and each legislator introduced him or herself, brief presentations were provided by the following individuals related to four areas: Goodhue Superintendent Mike Redmond presented on Long Term Facility Maintenance, Stewartville Superintendent David Thompson presented on All Day Every Day Kindergarten, Medford Superintendent Rich Dahman presented on Local Option Revenue, and Byron Superintendent Jeff Elstad presented on Bullying Definition.

Following these brief presentations, longer presentations were provided, each followed by time for questions and answers related to the specific topic. Topics included the following:

#### **1. Early Childhood**

Rochester Superintendent Michael Munoz, provided information on Facilities and Capital Needs related to Early Childhood, Austin Superintendent David Krenz and Community Education Director Amy Baskin spent time reviewing early childhood financial needs, and Faribault Superintendent Todd Sesker provided a presentation on



*The Legislators responding to questions at the Forum.*

Early Learning Personnel Needs.

#### **2. Tax Impacts on Rural Communities**

Pine Island Superintendent Tammy Berg-Beniak and Kasson-Mantorville Superintendent Mark Matuska presented on Agricultural Impacts and Debt Services related to this topic.

#### **3. Alternative Licensure**

Cannon Falls Superintendent Beth Giese presented on Alternative Licensure.

#### **4. Internet Access in Rural Communities**

Kingsland Superintendent John McDonald provided a presentation related to broadband access in rural communities.

We thank these superintendents for preparing and presenting information about the local impact of these education funding and mandate issues. We also thank the senators and representatives that attended this year making this such a valuable event for both Southeast Minnesota educational leaders and legislators.

The final portion of the day allowed for the legislators to direct questions to the forum participants which encouraged more discussion and information being shared.

## Recent Board meeting actions and information

**Note: Complete SSC Board of Directors meeting minutes are available on the SSC website at [www.ssc.coop](http://www.ssc.coop).**

In addition to routine fiscal and routine business actions, the Board took the following actions in recent meetings

### October 2015 Meeting

- Accepted and approved the Cooperative Purchasing Connection contracts as proposed.
- Affirmed the October 31, 2015 cancellation of the contract with ClearCost.
- Approved the promotion of Katie Schmitt as Development & Innovation Specialist effective October 1, 2015.
- Opened the position of Program Manager and authorized the Executive Director to immediately conduct a search and selection process for hiring as soon as possible.

### November 2015 meeting

- Accepted and approved the application of MN Prairie County Alliance for SSC membership and the joint powers application for participation in the Local Government Health Insurance Pool, effective January 1, 2016.
- Authorized the Executive Director to open a part-time WLMC set-up assistant position and search and hire a person as soon as possible.
- Awarded a contract to Elcor for asphalt work, the costs to be

shared between SSC and Families First of MN.

- Authorized staff to contract with Armon Architecture, Inc. to assist with a bid process for remodeling of the SSC office as proposed by staff.

### December 2015 Meeting

- Renewed SSC's records management service arrangement with Information Systems Sciences (ISS) with the same terms of the current contract, for the period January 1 – December 31, 2016.
- Scheduled the April 2016 Board meeting on Wednesday, April 20 to include approval of the School Health Pool financial/group recommendations.
- Approved the extension of the current contract with Genie Neville to include the year July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017 under the same terms and conditions outlined in the current contract; compensation adjustment to be negotiated jointly by the Executive Director and other MN Healthcare Coalition executive directors.

- Declared the open Local Government position vacant and appointed Sue Phillips to a one year term beginning January 1, 2016.
- Hired Sarah Ness as Program Manager effective December 29, 2015 at 100% FTE.
- Accepted the resignation of Andy Schalm effective January 7, 2016 and authorized the Executive Director to conduct a search and hire a new math specialist/school advocate as quickly as possible.

- Awarded the following bids for the proposed office remodel: Schwab LLC to serve as contractor and Ryan Electric to carry out the electrical work; and authorized staff to proceed with finalizing plans and scheduling construction.
- Abolished SSC's non-member up-front participation fees effective January 1, 2016 and revised our language regarding this fee to read:
- Non-members may access the Cooperative Purchasing Connection for no fee.
- Non-members may access other SSC services; however, SSC will charge a differentiated service fee that represents an added value to member organizations.
- Access to participation and value of the Health Insurance Pools and the Environmental Health & Safety Management requires membership in SSC.

### January 2016 Meeting

- Carol Cravath was declared Chairperson.
- Brian Grudem was declared Clerk.
- Tess Arrick-Kruger was declared Vice-Chairperson.
- Mary Blair-Hoeft was declared Treasurer.
- Approved the proposed new CPC vendor contracts, including Nelson Auto Center, Leasing Specialists LLC, FLR Sanders, Haldeman-Homme/Anderson Ladd, and Innovative Office Solutions.
- Accepted the resignation of Peggy Merkel effective January



## Recent Board meeting actions and information continued...

5, 2016, approved the proposed WLMC Coordinator position description, promoted Donna Dickison effective February 1, 2016, opened the second WLMC Coordinator position, and authorized the Executive Director to fill the position as soon as possible.

- Approved a pay equity wage adjustment for Scott Fitzsimonds.

### February 2016 Meeting

- Accepted and approved the settlement report for the 2014-2015 School Health Insurance Pool and, pursuant to SSC policy on management of the Health Insurance Pools, credited calculated excess claims fund for eligible groups.
- Released \$690,000 (held in addition) from the School Health

Pool IBNR Fund Balance.

- Accepted a grant from the AgStar Fund for Rural America in the amount of \$10,000 to purchase supplies and updates to the Mobile Science Labs.

## Delivering Support and Services Straight to Schools

Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence deliver a wealth of support and services straight to schools. And it's working. Centers are staffed by specialists with a full range of expertise, from math and reading to special education, English language development and data analysis.



Every three years, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) releases a list of Priority and Focus schools. **Priority schools are the five percent most persistently low-performing Title I schools. Focus schools are the ten percent of schools with the largest achievement gaps.**

The designations, part of Minnesota's school accountability system, look at students' scores on state tests, student academic growth from year to year, reduction in achievement gaps, and graduation rates.

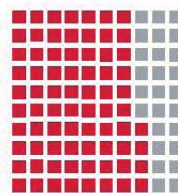
Once designated, **Priority and Focus schools must create a plan to increase student achievement, but they don't have to go it alone.** They can get help from Minnesota's Regional Centers of Excellence.



A collaboration between MDE and Minnesota's Service Cooperatives, there are six Regional Centers, located in **Thief River Falls, Mountain Iron, Fergus Falls, St. Cloud, Marshall, and Rochester.**

In addition to content expertise, **center specialists offer an outside perspective on schools' efforts to increase student achievement.** They guide and support staff at Priority, Focus and Continuous Improvement schools through the process of needs assessment, building and strengthening leadership teams, and developing continuous improvement plans.

Minnesota Department of  
**Education**



74%

of the first cohort of Priority schools show **improved student growth** from 2011 to 2015.

56% of the first cohort of Focus schools show improved student growth from 2011 to 2015.

From 2014 to 2015, center specialists spent **nearly 13,000 hours in direct service to 78 schools.** As a result, **65 percent of Priority and 63 percent of Focus schools showed improved growth.**



Named one of Harvard Ash Center's 2015 **Top 25 Innovations in Government.**

### Nearly 20%

of schools designated Priority or Focus in 2012 that **worked with a Regional Center improved so much that they were recognized as Reward or Celebration-Eligible three years later.**



# Calendar

## April

*April 5*

**Title I, II, and III Overview from MDE**  
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

*April 6*

**Generations in the The Workplace**  
8:30 AM - 11:30 AM

*April 9*

**Save Your License Saturday**  
9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

*April 12*

**SAC Meeting**  
12:00 - 3:00 PM

*April 13*

**Mindfulness & Stress  
Reduction for Educators**  
9:00 - 11:00 AM *or* 5:00 - 7:00 PM

**Mindfulness & Stress  
Reduction in the Workplace**  
1:30 - 3:30 PM

*April 20*

**SSC Board Meeting**  
5:00 - 8:00 PM

*April 21*

**Introduction to Google Drive**  
8:30 - 11:30 AM

## May

*May 19*

**SAC Meeting**  
12:00 - 3:00 PM

*May 25*

**SSC Board Meeting**  
5:00 - 8:00 PM

## June

*June 14*

**Decoding and the  
Struggling Reader**  
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

*June 16*

**9 Essential Skills for the  
Love and Logic Classroom**  
8:30 AM - 3:30 PM

*June 16*

**SAC Meeting**  
12:00 - 3:00 PM

*June 22*

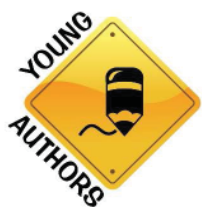
**Understanding the Condition of  
Poverty**  
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

*June 22*

**SSC Board Meeting**  
5:00 - 8:00 PM

*June 23*

**Instructional Strategies for the  
Under Resourced Learner**  
9:00 AM - 3:00 PM



## SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 29<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL YOUNG AUTHORS, YOUNG ARTISTS CONFERENCE!

On May 17, 18, and 19, over 900 students in grades 3-5 from public, private, and home schools across southeast Minnesota will converge in Rochester for a conference that promotes student enthusiasm and competence in written and visual communication. Students will learn from and work with authors, poets, illustrators, artists, journalists, book crafters, sculptors and others in sessions that expose them to the art and joy of writing and creating.

Feel free to check our website for more information:  
[www.ssc.coop/Page/122](http://www.ssc.coop/Page/122)



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We want to be there when you call, so try dialing us directly at the numbers below. Our voice mail system allows you to leave a detailed message if the person you're calling isn't able to answer right away. If you don't know who you need to talk with, dial (507) 288-1282 or 1-800-657-6996 and one of our staff or our auto-attendant will direct you from there. To send a fax dial (507) 288-7663.

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