

Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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News Release

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Dr. Robert McDowell Receives Outstanding Central Office Leader Award

(St. Paul, MN) – The Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) has named Dr. Robert McDowell, Assistant Superintendent of the Stillwater Area Public Schools, the recipient of the 2019 Outstanding Central Office Leader Award. Dr. McDowell received this award for exhibiting a willingness to risk, possessing strong communications skills, being a progressive change agent, and having high expectations for himself and others. He will be honored at a statewide recognition ceremony during the MASA/MASE Spring Conference, March 7-8, 2019, at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

Dr. McDowell began serving as Executive Director of Learning and Innovation for Stillwater Area Schools in July of 2015, and was named Assistant Superintendent in 2018. Before coming to Stillwater, he served as Principal for Sunrise Park Middle School in White Bear Lake. Dr. McDowell's educational career began as a high school Technology Education teacher in Eau Claire, WI. He moved from the classroom into a variety of leadership positions, including Technology Education and Coordinator positions in Eagan and Edina public schools as well as an assistant principal position at Valley Middle School in Apple Valley.

Shortly after Dr. McDowell joined the Stillwater Area Public Schools, the school board made the decision to close three schools within the district as a result of learning inequities and budget constraints. Dr. McDowell stayed steady and calm as he coordinated an in-depth transition plan and led principals, teachers, and staff through a smooth transition during this extremely trying time in Stillwater. In just 22 months, he was instrumental in closing three schools and re-distributing thousands of students and hundreds of staff members to new buildings, constructing a new elementary school, and designing and implementing a 9-12 high school configuration. In addition, he was a leader in the process of converting the district's junior high schools to true middle school models, for improved wrap around services for students, planning and implementing a Spanish Immersion program, moving an alternative learning center to the high school and providing support for all elementary schools to have preschool programs within the school.

Dr. McDowell led several innovation initiatives in the past two years in Stillwater, such as the creation of the "Student Innovation Teams," where elementary and secondary students are trained in the human-centered design process and given the opportunity to define a problem they've encountered within the system and ultimately submit their innovation solutions to district leaders for implementation. Dr. McDowell also created the "Shadow a Student" program, where district leaders select a student and follow them around for a day as a way to learn what it is like to be a learner in their schools. They observe the school experience through the eyes of their student and reflect on what they see that is working or not working.

Dr. McDowell is an active MASA member. He is also a member of the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and Association for Middle Level Education.

Dr. McDowell holds a doctorate of education in Leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota; a specialist degree in Administration from Minnesota State University-Mankato; a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of St. Thomas; and a bachelor's degree in Technology Education from the University of Wisconsin-Stout.

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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