

CONNECT NS

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Osseo Area Schools Reimagines Leadership and Culture Through the Practice of Holding Space

August 22, 2025
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

September 5, 2025
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

September 26, 2025
Executive/Legislative Committee Meeting
7:30 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Anderson Center
Bethel University
Arden Hills

October 3, 2025
Board of Directors Meeting
7 a.m. - 9 a.m.
Quora Education Center
NE Metro 916
Little Canada

Osseo Area Schools is striving to transform education by utilizing the simple yet powerful belief that every member of the community deserves to be seen, heard and valued. Under the leadership of Supt. Dr. Kim Hiel, the district has embraced holding space — a concept grounded in the work of Heather Plett — as both a leadership stance and a practical framework to cultivate a human-centered culture across its PreK-12 system.



Supt. Dr. Kim Hiel

While holding space may sound abstract at first, Osseo Area Schools has undertaken the work of making it real — anchoring the concept in shared language, leadership practices and organizational structures. Guided by the mantra *One Community for All*, the district has translated the philosophy into daily action for scholars, staff, families and community partners.

A leadership shift: From theory to districtwide application

Dr. Hiel's embrace of holding space has become a catalyst for district transformation, with three foundational pillars anchoring the efforts to cultivate a human-centered approach:

- **Self** - How we slow down, locate our feelings and stay grounded
- **Others** - How we show up for community members, colleagues and relationships
- **System** - How we cultivate a culture where all voices are respected, and leadership is practiced with humanity and trust

To guide application across contexts, Osseo Area Schools created the following guiding principles:

- Slow down and ground yourself
- Locate your feelings and triggers
- Clarify your offer to hold space

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It is an honor to have the opportunity to serve as the chair of AMSD for the 2025-26 school year. I want to thank St. Anthony-New Brighton Board Member Laura Oksnevad for her service as chair over the past year. Laura provided tremendous leadership in raising awareness and building support for student-centered learning initiatives and advancing AMSD's priorities. We are in the process of gathering feedback from AMSD members and will soon begin the work of drafting the legislative platform for the 2026 session. Enjoy the rest of summer and I wish you a great start to the school year!

From the AMSD Chair, Jim DeMay, Mounds View Board Member

Districtwide Effort Centers Human Dignity and Belonging in Education

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- Be fully present
- Listen without judgment or fixing
- Respect autonomy and offer closure

These principles have become central to professional learning and leadership development, empowering school board members, and district and school leaders to navigate everything from daily decisions to districtwide initiatives with greater empathy and clarity.

Navigating complexity with humanity

The impact of this framework was perhaps most visible during Osseo Area Schools' attendance boundary review process — historically one of the most polarizing issues a district can face. Anticipating community concern, the district intentionally prepared leaders to lead with compassion, not control.

At community forums, participants were introduced to the concept and practice of holding space before engaging in small group conversations. Feedback from participants overwhelmingly reflected appreciation for being part of something authentic and human-centered. "We saw people engage with respect," said Dr. Hiel. "They felt heard. And even when there wasn't agreement, there was trust in the process."

Leading through tension, building through trust

At the school level, the concept and practice of holding space is becoming a strategy for courageous, values-based leadership. When staffing changes at Oak View Elementary caused concern, Principal Ryan Gibbs gathered his leadership team and framed upcoming conversations with staff through the holding space lens. "These sessions were really impactful," Gibbs shared. "People were able to feel like they were heard, seen and supported. We were able to build trust, share our 'why,' and affirm that we're in this together." The process didn't just resolve tension — it strengthened the school's culture.

Extending the circle of care

What started as an internal leadership commitment has since extended far beyond the district. Osseo Area Schools has introduced holding space to local partners, including the Maple Grove Police Department, and collaborated with the Minnesota State High School League to support student-athletes across the state. "Dr. Hiel's leadership philosophy, grounded in holding space, complements our values at the Maple Grove Police Department," said Police Chief Eric Werner. "This work strengthens our commitment to respecting the dignity of all people we serve."

A culture where every voice matters

As the political landscape surrounding public education grows increasingly divided, Osseo Area Schools aims to offer a hopeful counter-narrative — one rooted in dignity, curiosity and connection. By investing in the slow, relational work of holding space, district leaders are creating the conditions for transformational change.

"We're not here to fix people," says Dr. Hiel. "We're here to walk alongside them, to build trust, and to shape spaces where every person — child, adult or community partner — can show up fully. This is our work. It's messy. It's human. And it's necessary."

Through holding space, Osseo Area Schools is not just improving practice — it's leading with heart. And in doing so, it is living into the promise of public education as a place where all can thrive.

This month's member feature was submitted by Kay Villella, Executive Director of School/Community Relations, Osseo Area Schools.

Minnetonka Supt. David Law Begins Term as National AASA President



Supt. Law at the AASA Installation Ceremony

Minnetonka Supt. David Law was sworn in this July as the 2025-26 president of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, a national organization representing more than 13,000 school system leaders.

Since 2022, Law has been superintendent in Minnetonka Public Schools, after serving as superintendent with the Anoka-Hennepin Public School District for eight years. He also served as 2019-20 president of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators. He also serves on the AMSD Board of Directors and previously served a three-year term on the AMSD Executive Committee. In 2020, he was named Superintendent of the Year by the Minnesota Association of School Administrators.

Law, who holds a law degree from the Mitchell Hamline School of Law in Saint Paul, received his BA in mathematics from Hamline University and his K-12 principal and superintendent licenses from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He has worked as an administrator or teacher in districts including Mounds View, Anoka-Hennepin and the White Bear Lake school districts, and is a graduate of Coon Rapids High School.

Q: Are you the first Minnesota superintendent to serve as the president of AASA? If so, that must feel special?

David Law: *As I understand it, I am the first AASA president from Minnesota. It does feel rewarding to represent our state in this role and to be selected for this opportunity.*

Q: What inspired you to run for this role — and what does a Minnesota perspective bring to this role?

David Law: *When I had the opportunity to serve as MASA president in 2019-2020, I learned how valuable an organization that supports school leaders can be. It was at our spring conference that a representative from MDE shared we would all need to make significant changes due to the pandemic. The need for statewide communication and support for leaders was critical. Since that time, I have become more involved at the national level and see that the need to learn together and support each other is equally as important. State associations in combination with AASA play a large role in ensuring superintendents have the tools they need to lead.*

Q: What's the biggest current challenge facing public schools in Minnesota and across the country?

David Law: *There are many different pressures impacting public education currently. At the forefront are budget shortfalls at the state and federal level that are forcing school districts to reprioritize and reduce programs and support. This is at a time when accountability is putting pressure on schools to perform, creating a situation that can feel unsurmountable. There is a nationwide shortage of licensed staff — specifically teachers — that continues to cause issues for providing the best possible education for our students. Schools are also working hard to meet the changing needs of our students, which will require some shifts to how we educate, measure, and communicate.*

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School Districts Need Flexibility and Support to Provide Real-Life Experiences for Students

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Q: As you look out over the landscape of schools across the country what stands out to you about Minnesota schools?

David Law: Minnesota has a long history of strong public schools. This comes from a public commitment to support our schools financially, as well as strong community support for local school districts. We have also been on the leading edge of educational innovation, being one of the first states to legislate public charter schools and school choice to allow parents the opportunity to seek the best opportunity for their children. The current push nationally for vouchers to create school choice seems like old news in a state with open enrollment and many publicly funded options.

Q: What will you focus on most as president of AASA? Do you have a theme and goals for your presidency?

David Law: AASA recently published The Public Education Promise, a document that outlines key priorities for school districts to consider when meeting the future needs of our students. Sharing this work across the country will be some of my most important work as the AASA president. I am also committed to sharing the amazing stories of success in public education across the country to increase public confidence in our schools and to reinforce the good work happening.

Q: Where do you see public education in 10 years? 20 years?

David Law: One of the lessons learned from the pandemic was the strong role schools play in our community. Parents and community members rely on our school systems for stability, support and student growth. In 10 years, I am confident that some of the changes we are making now with literacy instruction will have made a significant impact on student achievement and will have created more opportunities for students to explore a wide range of programming aligned to future careers. I am hopeful that our school districts are increasingly given the flexibility and support to provide more real-life experiences for students that are aligned to students' strengths and interests.

Q: What can educators and education professionals do right now to make a positive impact on the future of education?

David Law: This is a critical time to share the positive stories about public education. We have so many amazing students and staff, yet the narrative is always around struggling students or staff who have made poor decisions. Invite the community into school to see what is really happening. Every school has a great story to tell, and success breeds success.

Save the Date: Fall AMSD/BrightWorks Conference

Please mark your calendar for the annual AMSD/BrightWorks Policy Conference on Tuesday, Nov. 11 at the Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park.

The keynote speaker will be Dr. Dylan Wiliam, an international education expert who will examine how artificial intelligence will not only change how we educate young people but also change what education is for. Dr. Wiliam stresses the importance of investing in the existing teacher force to develop their practice of classroom formative assessment to improve student achievement. Dr. Wiliam has authored or co-authored numerous notable books including [*"Creating the Schools Our Children Need,"*](#) and [*"Making Room For Impact: A De-implementation Guide For Educators."*](#)