

PRESS RELEASE
NEVADA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS

November 20, 2011

Nevada Association of School Boards Presents
2011 Awards and Elects New Officers

On Saturday, November 19, at its Annual Conference held in Reno at the Atlantis Hotel Casino Resort Spa, the Nevada Association of School Boards recognized the achievements and contributions of school board members, administrators, and others during 2011 and elected new officers for the Association.

School board secretaries and administrative assistants from around the State were also recognized.

2011 Awards and their recipients include:

Director of the Year—Pamela Smith, Storey County School District

This Award recognizes the consistent, effective communication skills demonstrated during meetings of the NASB Board of Directors as well as promotion of leadership skills and strategies for recognizing and rewarding student, administrator, educational staff, school, and district achievement.

Ms. Smith has served on the Storey County Board of School Trustees for ten years, half of those as either President or Clerk. During that time, she has served five years as a Director for the Association. She prepares before each meeting by reviewing agenda materials and all related documents. She has attended almost all meetings for the Board of Directors during the last five years. She has developed a statewide perspective on education issues which informs her discussions of policies to improve student achievement in Storey County. In April 2011 she represented NASB as one of three delegates to the Delegate Assembly of the National School Boards Association. Her service as a Board Member and Director has altered the educational landscape for Storey County and beyond.

New School Board Member of the Year—Erin Cranor, Clark County School District

This award recognizes the dedicated service of Nevada's newest school board members. School boards may nominate members in their first term of service.

Ms. Cranor was elected in November 2010 and took office in January 2011, just in time for one of the most brutal legislative sessions that many Nevadans can remember. The battles fought in the name of education were challenging and daunting, given the extent of budget cuts and other policy changes. Despite being on the board for less than one month, Ms. Cranor stepped forward to deliver testimony and meet personally with individual legislators. With computer in hand to show evidence in black and white, her approach was much like her style in the board room: a balance of calm, respect, and appreciation laced with meaningful data and facts. In her first year on the Clark County Board of School Trustees, Ms. Cranor has served on the Board of Control for the Nevada

Interscholastic Athletic Association, as the Board Liaison to the Audit Advisory Committee, and most recently she was selected by Governor Sandoval as a member of the P-16 Council. During her first year as a Board Member, Ms. Cranor has shown leadership, skill, and dedication to push forward educational opportunities for all Nevada children—not just those in Clark County.

Veteran School Board Member of the Year—Carolyn Edwards, Clark County School District

This award recognizes the dedicated service and leadership of local board members who have served for more than one term.

Ms. Edwards seems to have an eye for opportunities for more work. Her board colleagues suggest that she became actively involved in NASB very early in her first term. During that period, Ms. Edwards volunteered for at least 80% of the Association's committees or subcommittees and sought other opportunities to contribute. This is also the way that Ms. Edwards operates on the Clark County Board of School Trustees. She never takes a pass on an appropriate opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to student achievement, even when the work involved may seem at first to be mundane or distant from the front lines of innovative education. In addition to her work on behalf of public education, she chairs the Southern Nevada Regional Planning Commission and is very active in a number of other state and community roles. In the current year, Ms. Edwards has worked with exceptional effectiveness on the impact of Nevada's term limits. At the beginning of 2011, Ms. Edwards found herself in a position of weighty responsibility, twice as experienced as the next most senior members of the Board. Three members entered their third year of service in January 2011; the other three were brand new. As Board President, Ms. Edwards has taken seriously her opportunity to limit any possible negative impact of term limits on student achievement by building new leadership quickly yet deliberately. Her work continually demonstrates excellence in governance which makes for excellence in student achievement.

Individual School Board Member of the Year—Sharla Hales, Douglas County School District

This award recognizes the consistent use and development of effective boardsmanship skills over the course of more than one term of service. It acknowledges productive involvement in raising the level of community support for schools and the promotion of leadership and successful practices which improve student achievement while advancing the course of public education in the community, the district, or the state.

Ms. Hales is in her third term of service as a Board Member in Douglas County. The current year has been very challenging with regard to the budget and the impact of decreased dollars on students, staff, and the community. While serving as the Board's President, she consistently provides the public the opportunity to share their budget concerns with the Board. Particularly noteworthy was the guest opinion that Ms. Hales wrote for the Gardnerville **Record Courier** shortly after the hearing before the Legislature's Joint Finance Committees during which she outlined the impact that these budget cuts would have in Douglas County. Ms. Hales has high expectations for the Douglas County School District and is a

strong advocate for measures that improve student achievement. She promoted amending Board policy to require that students in Advanced Placement courses must take the exams for those courses. She also proposed mandatory counseling at the end of eighth grade, involving the counselor, student, and parent. She has been a champion for a new curriculum developed by the College Board to prepare students for university level classes. She became a NASB Director in 2004 and has served the Association as Vice President and President. She has earned the Certified Public Official diploma. Her voice has represented school board members in several regular and special sessions of the Nevada Legislature. Ms. Hales is a role model for other Board members. Her dedication, energy, and passion for public education make her a true leader for all of us.

Innovative Educator of the Year—Holly Marich, White Pine County School District

This Award recognizes the invaluable service provided to Nevada’s children by those individuals who demonstrate their leadership by promoting and implementing innovative programs designed to improve student achievement.

Ms. Marich became a teacher in White Pine County in 2001. She immediately made an impact with her enthusiasm and dedication to students. She has been a leader in promoting increased literacy and mathematics skills for all students. During her first year, she invested her teacher signing bonus money into furniture for her classroom, moving from traditional individual student desks to more collaborative tables and chairs. She served as a member of the School Improvement Team that led McGill Elementary School to be one of the first schools in Nevada to be removed from the “In Need of Improvement” list. In 2005, she was recognized by the Lincoln Highway Association as their Teacher of the Year for classroom-based projects focused on the nation’s first transcontinental highway, Highway 50, which passes through the heart of McGill. Ms. Marich is one of two teachers in the White Pine County School District who has attained National Board Certification. In 2007, Ms. Marich became a member of the Northern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program staff, and has been able to share her expertise and passion for teaching through the six counties served by that Program. Ms. Marich continues to lead by example by beginning her doctoral studies at Michigan State University, where she is specializing in literacy and technology in the classroom. She has a unique ability to share her enthusiasm and dedication to public education so that both teachers and students are eager to join her in the journey.

School Administrators of the Year—Debra Biersdorff, Washoe County School District and Todd Hess, Storey County School District

This Award category recognizes the invaluable service provided to Nevada’s children by professional school administrators. Determinations are based on multiple factors including length of service, school improvement and student achievement, unique contributions, effective professional development strategies for educational staff, innovative and successful practices which have resulted in increased student achievement in the school, district, or state.

Debra Biersdorff is a dedicated administrator who served for five years as Principal of Wooster High School in Reno. Her leadership has led to substantial student improvement and her work has led to her recent promotion to the area superintendent position. Because of her commitment to helping students succeed and graduate from high school, Ms. Biersdorff was named the 2011 MetLife/National Association of Secondary School Principals Nevada High School Principal of the Year. Her focus as Principal at Wooster High School transformed the school into a true community of learners. She consistently used proven effective research tools and best practices to evaluate her decisions and guide her staff in continuously improving the instructional program and to develop meaningful learning experiences for **ALL** students enrolled at Wooster. Additionally, she created a culture of positive regard and high expectations for all students and staff. Parents became visible and active participants in the life of the school. The high level of respect and rapport that she enjoyed with the entire school community was also visible and a worthy example for other administrators in the District. We recognize Ms. Biersdorff for her leadership and commitment to excellence.

Todd Hess exemplifies the best in meeting ever-changing challenges. Mr. Hess served as the Principal of Virginia City High School for four years and now is in his sixth year as Principal of Virginia City Middle School. During his tenure, there has been significant instructional change that has resulted in improved learning and achievement. More emphasis has been placed on instructional pedagogy and a stronger curriculum. One example of this increased rigor is that the Middle School has embarked on a process to require algebra as a required course in eighth grade. Mr. Hess has also emphasized the arts. The Middle School boasts a yearly musical, school-wide talent show, historical plays, and a choir—all with about 100 enthusiastic students. With budget cuts enacted by the Legislature, the District has been forced to reduce its administrative staff. Mr. Hess has stepped up; he now serves as Principal for two elementary schools in addition to his job as Principal at Virginia City Middle School. Mr. Hess' achievements go beyond the classroom. As a high school basketball player for Virginia City High School, he played on four consecutive state championship teams, losing only one game in those years. His talents extend to coaching. He has served as the high school Girls' Varsity Basketball coach. During his three-year tenure, his teams won three consecutive league championships, two Northern Nevada championships, and the 2010 State Championship. The "Muckers" of Virginia City have had a long history of adapting to a changing environment. Mr. Hess demonstrates the best of that historical pattern.

Superintendent of the Year—Dr. Heath Morrison, Washoe County School District

This Award recognizes the consistent use and development of skills and programs focused on board-superintendent cooperation and teamwork to improve student achievement.

Dr. Morrison joined the Washoe County School District in 2009. He was tasked by the Board with the development and implementation of an ambitious plan for reform. Upon his arrival, he visited each school, met with community groups, held town hall meetings, and deliberately sought out typically underrepresented,

diverse stakeholders. In all, he spoke with more than 3,000 community members about their priorities for the School District. Under his leadership, the District has seen improved student achievement. State proficiency test scores have increased and achievement gaps have decreased. In 2010, 80 percent of WCSD schools improved their reading scores from 2009 and 86 percent improved in math. Additional gains were seen in 2011. Dr. Morrison actively works to improve the District's graduation rate as well. Despite unprecedented budget challenges, Dr. Morrison's leadership has resulted in the implementation of new programs and initiatives that have had a direct impact on student achievement. The District recently expanded its tuition-based full-day kindergarten program, giving more students the opportunity to attend and receive additional education during their early years. The Gifted and Talented Education program was also restructured to create four middle school magnet programs and increased opportunities for gifted elementary children. In addition, Dr. Morrison has emerged as a strong advocate for public education at the State level. He served on the Nevada Education Reform Blue Ribbon Task Force. During the 2011 Session of the Nevada Legislature, he testified repeatedly about education reform and funding for K-12 education. Because of his role as an advocate for public education and his commitment to education reform, Dr. Morrison was selected by the Nevada Association of School Superintendents as Superintendent of the Year. According to Len Stevens, Executive Director of the Northern Nevada Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Morrison "has shown Northern Nevada why education is so valuable and why we must work together to improve the education we offer our youth. His leadership and courage have inspired real, positive change."

Media Award for Outstanding Education Reporting—Heather Gula, The Humboldt Sun, Humboldt County

This Award recognizes the role of media representatives in print, radio, and television when consistently outstanding reporting occurs and the media representative demonstrates excellence in these areas:

- ✓ *Working to get to know the board president, superintendent, and district communication director, as well as the district's mission, goals, and strategic plan;*
- ✓ *Reporting school news in a fair, accurate, and balanced manner;*
- ✓ *Maintaining a policy of "no surprises" by always giving school officials the opportunity to comment on information to be aired or published;*
- ✓ *Providing a high profile to positive news about school and district accomplishments; and*
- ✓ *Visiting schools.*

Although the Humboldt County Board of School Trustees has had a consistent history of a positive relationship with the local media specialists, this relationship dramatically improved when Heather Gula was assigned to cover school news. During her first assignment to the School District, Ms. Gula arrived early at the Board meeting and approached the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Board Members to introduce herself and establish connections. From her initial days on the job, she asked if the District's administrators would be willing to review critical articles to ensure accuracy, while emphasizing that her reports would be fair and represent other sides on issues. True to her word, Ms. Gula has been consistently accurate in her reporting. Throughout the year, Ms. Gula is

contacted directly by school sites inviting her to visit various school activities. She always arrives with her camera and her notepad, eager to interact with staff and students. Ms. Gula is clearly a professional. Ms. Gula was instrumental in securing a monthly "From the Desk of the Superintendent" series of articles and a monthly full-color insert on education. Both have provided good news about education. The Humboldt County Board of School Trustees is extremely grateful to Ms. Gula and ***The Humboldt Sun*** for their fair and accurate reporting of education news.

Individual Friend to K-12 Public Education—Lina Sharp, Nye County School District

This Award recognizes the invaluable service provided to Nevada's children by advocating on behalf of K-12 public education across the State or working in other direct ways to improve K-12 public education in Nevada.

Linda Sharp is a friend of education in every way possible—and not just as a life-long teacher but as a life-long learner as well, putting into practice what she has taught for seventy years.

Ms. Sharp grew up in Las Vegas and graduated from Las Vegas High School in 1937. As a little girl, she knew she wanted to be a teacher. She attended then graduated from the University of Nevada in Reno. At that time, she studied the list of schools with available teaching positions and found that all of the "town" schools were full. Only three open positions remained—Elgin and Carp schools along the railroad in Meadow Valley Wash in Lincoln County and a rural ranch school in Nye County called the Blue Eagle School. After long deliberation, she decided on the Blue Eagle School in Railroad Valley and launched a teaching career that has lasted from 1940 to the present. Ms. Sharp taught at the tiny Blue Eagle School until it closed in 1960 and then drove twenty miles to Currant for the next five years where she taught until that school closed. Then she commuted thirty-five miles to the Duckwater School. Her final assignment was in Tonopah, 120 miles away, where she taught until she retired in 1986. Ms. Sharp has remained a lifelong learner herself, studying geology, history, art, botany, and every offering she could find in Ely, Tonopah, Reno, and Elko. She has amassed hundreds of credits. In addition, she has a gift for inspiring children to learn. Many of the rural students she taught not only graduated from high school but also went on to college and earned advanced degrees. Ms. Sharp has served on the Nye County Board of School Trustees. She works with the Nevada Farm Bureau's Ag in the Classroom program and continues to assist at the Duckwater School. Ms. Sharp has inspired countless people—old and young—to continue their educations and to pursue life-long learning as she has done herself. Ms. Sharp is a truly remarkable human being and a genuine friend to public education.

Board Secretary of the Year—Kerry Paniagua, Nye County School District

This Award recognizes the vital role that board secretaries, administrative assistants, and other support staff play in working behind the scenes with local school board members and superintendents to facilitate board decision-making

and activities to improve student achievement, extend family engagement, and enhance community awareness.

Ms. Paniagua has served the Nye County School District in the Tonopah office since 1983. In 1992, she became the Board/Superintendent Executive Secretary. During that period, she and other support staff have moved from IBM Correcting Selectrics to Xerox Memorywriters to Macs and PCs. She has traveled from putting together 18 to 20 packets for each board meeting to embracing the electronic advantages of BoardBook, with some Board members now downloading their meeting packets onto their iPads. Ms. Paniagua accepts all assignments with a cheerful attitude and manages her time effectively. She steps up to challenges when they are presented, particularly those that have emerged during the current economic downturn as positions have been cut in the District. Ms. Paniagua has learned to work with “difficult” personalities and manages to do so without reacting to the surprises they sometimes present. She has provided invaluable assistance to staff, parents, and students of the Nye County School District, keeping always in mind the District’s mission: “Every child a success.”

Governance Team of the Year—Clark County Board of School Trustees and Superintendent Dwight Jones, Deputy Superintendent Pedro Martinez, and Dr. Ken Turner

This Award recognizes the vital role of local boards working hand in hand with superintendents and collaborating with district leaders to improve student across all levels.

This governance team has used ten governance principles successfully and engaged in reform in a constructive way to have a positive impact on student achievement.

The first principle is: Govern Ethically.

After the tumultuous 2011 Session of the Nevada Legislature, this governance team engaged early and effectively with students, parents, district staff, and community stakeholders in a budget process that resulted in a clearly defined student-achievement prioritized plan for cuts. Everyone could see what was at stake for students. Communication with policymakers for a better investment in education statewide has been a priority.

The second principle is: Govern Collaboratively.

As Superintendent Jones, Mr. Martinez, and Dr. Turner have developed the operational details of reform, the entire team has shared information, listening, and collaboration at all levels.

The third principle is: Focus on Student Achievement.

The entire school district has been cut, streamlined, restructured, and realigned to student achievement in only a few months, and the Nevada Growth Model was introduced.

The remaining principles include:

Govern Strategically

Be the Voice of Education
Be Responsible, Not Just Accountable
Govern Creatively and Innovatively
Be Culturally Competent
Govern Transparently
Govern as a Team

Working together as a governance team, the Clark County Board of School Trustees, Superintendent Jones, Mr. Martinez, and Dr. Turner have ensured that the vision of improved student learning and achievement is never clouded.

Executive Director’s Award—This Award was presented jointly to Marty Johnson, President of JNA Consulting Group, and Assemblywoman Debbie Smith, Washoe District 30.

The Executive Director is authorized to present special awards to school board members and others who have performed outstanding service on behalf of the Nevada Association of School Boards.

In his State of the State speech in January 2011, Governor Sandoval introduced the proposal of sweeping school district debt service reserve funds in order to fill a \$400 million hole in the State’s General Fund Budget. From that point until almost the end of the 2011 Session of the Nevada Legislature, **Marty Johnson** worked tirelessly with other advocates to educate policymakers and legislative operatives about the tremendous harm that would be done to district facilities and student achievement if this proposal were enacted. Mr. Johnson prepared a PowerPoint that simply explained this complex issue and spent countless hours meeting with the Governor’s staff, legislative staff, and others to ensure that they were accurately informed about the impact of this proposal and the Nevada Revised Statute requirements that would further complicate the situation and harm school districts. Mr. Johnson traveled repeatedly back and forth from Southern Nevada to Northern Nevada, often with little notice, to plead the case of school districts on the proposed sweeping of debt service reserves and related financial matters. Because of his tireless and continuous work during the 2011 Session, Marty Johnson is the recipient of the 2011 Executive Director’s Award.

During the 2010 Legislative Interim, **Assemblywoman Debbie Smith** convened a working group that involved all members of the public education community. In that group, various education policy changes were formulated and discussed. From those discussions emerged a number of the reform proposals that were introduced during the 2011 Session. Assemblywoman Smith has been at the forefront of education policy changes that will improve the quality and effectiveness of classroom instruction and school administration for Nevada students. She has also worked to unify constituencies around the State in support of these reforms, resulting in school board and Chamber of Commerce representatives testifying together on reform legislation. In addition, Ms. Smith chaired the Assembly Committee on Finance as well as the Joint Subcommittee on K-12 and Higher Education. Her attention to detail and her comprehensive understanding of the State’s General Fund Budget as well as its impact on students sitting in desks in Nevada classrooms cannot be matched. Having served as a board member herself, Assemblywoman Smith is always open to the perspective of school board members and understands the challenges faced when

local boards must enact legislative policy and law. In her own words in a guest commentary in the Association's August edition of **NASB News Update**, "*Failure is not an option. We all recognize the importance of a real investment in our schools and commitment to our education system. Education is truly our kids' future. It is also our State's future, as education is the key to weathering this economic storm and restructuring our economy so we attract new jobs and opportunities for Nevada workers.*"

School Board of the Year—Washoe County School District Board of School Trustees

This Award recognizes the consistent use and development of skills and programs focused on board-superintendent cooperation and teamwork to improve student achievement.

The leadership, vision, and courage of the Washoe County School District's Board of School Trustees have led to substantive, positive reforms in Nevada's second largest district. The Board was the initial catalyst for change in 2009 when it actively sought a new superintendent that shared its reform-minded vision to reverse low graduation rates, inadequate test scores, and growing achievement gaps. Dr. Morrison was hired in June 2009, charged by the board with implementing a plan that would improve the educational opportunities and achievement of each child in the District. After development of the District's strategic plan, *Envision WCSD 2015*, involving hundreds of conversations, school visits, and community meetings, the Board launched an initiative to increase graduation rates. *Door to Door for Student Achievement* has been an intensive community outreach effort that motivates at-risk students to get back in school and stay engaged in the classroom. The Board has worked with national school systems reform consultant Don McAdams to refine its boardsmanship skills. At the same time, the Board has worked collaboratively to improve community engagement through a campaign called *Listen to Learn*. Trustees meet with groups that support children in 150-200 community events each year. Trustees also write weekly articles for the *Reno Gazette Journal* to communicate with the broader community. The Washoe Board of School Trustees received Honorable Mention from the National School Boards Association for the 2011 Magna Award. As a team, the Board and Dr. Morrison have re-energized the public's support for Washoe County schools and continue to work together each day to prepare children for their future lives.

Additional Presentations and New Officers—

In addition to the above, Karen Chessell [School Board Member, Douglas], Teri Jamin [School Board Member, Douglas], and Dan Fox [Superintendent, Pershing] received certificates from the Certified Public Official Program recognizing their completion of the requirements for the Program. This expands the number to seven school board members and superintendents to meet the rigorous coursework demands of this Program. NASB co-sponsors the Program with the Nevada Association of Counties, the Nevada League of Cities and Municipalities, and Extended Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno.

The Association recognized 2011 President Christine Miller [Storey] for her dedicated service to NASB over the course of the last year and for moving the Association toward achievement of its strategic goals.

Eleven board secretaries from across Nevada and two NASB support staff members were recognized for their many contributions to the effective and efficient work of school boards in the seventeen school districts.

Churchill	Debra Shyne
Clark	Cindy Krohn
Douglas	Carolyn Moore
Esmeralda	Anita Worden
Lander	Rebecca Sabbagh
Lyon	Anthony Spotts
Mineral	Spring Blazewick
Nye	Kerry Paniagua
Storey	Toni Givant
Washoe	Lisa McNeill
White Pine	Julie Heggie

NASB Support Staff	Bonnie Kraemer
NASB Support Staff	Gloria Luongo

The Association elected new officers for 2012:

President—Carolyn Edwards, Clark County School District;

President Elect—Bob Burnham, Eureka County School District;

Vice President—Dr. Greg Koenig, Churchill County School District; and

Legislative Chair—Erin Cranor, Clark County School District.

Photos of award recipients will be available on the Association's website on or before November 30 at www.nvasb.org.

For questions, please contact Dr. Dotty Merrill, Executive Director, Nevada Association of School Boards, 775/443-5988.

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