

November 15, 2006

## Spring Lake Park superintendent Don Helmstetter is 2007 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year

**On Tuesday, November 14, the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) announced that Spring Lake Park School District 16 superintendent Don Helmstetter has been selected 2007 Minnesota Superintendent of the Year.**

He was selected by a panel of representatives from a number of Minnesota education organizations. Candidates were evaluated on leadership for learning, communication skills, professionalism, and community involvement.

At a school board meeting held hours after the announcement, Helmstetter thanked school board members “for their continual and ongoing support” and praised the “administration, faculty, and staff for their hard work and commitment and for making District 16 an exceptional school district.” He also had high praise for an engaged and supportive school community “that cares deeply about education.”

The school community encompasses all of Spring Lake Park, half of Blaine, and a portion of Fridley. With an enrollment of



*High expectations, high achievement for all. No excuses. Dr. Don Helmstetter, (above) with the district's mission statement, and (left) with two future graduates.*

4,500 students, the district considers itself and its school community to be “personal in size, extra-large in opportunity.” The district’s mission is “High expectations, high achievement for all. No excuses.”

Dr. Helmstetter has been superintendent of Spring Lake Park Schools since 1997. He has also served as superintendent in the Blue Earth, Trimont, and Martin County West school districts.

Dr. Helmstetter has served as president of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators and as a Delegate Assembly member for the Association of American School Administrators.

He has also served on Department of Education and Governor’s Office committees and task forces including Graduation Standards Implementation Advisory Committee, Governor’s Task Force on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Task Force on Graduation Standards and Transitions to College, and the State Coalition for Education Reform and Accountability.

In a nominating letter, Spring Lake Park school board chairperson Jim Amundson wrote: “The noted scholar and futurist Joel Barker has said, ‘A leader is someone you choose to follow to a place you wouldn’t go by yourself—the future.’ Don Helmstetter is such a leader and we have all followed as he has led us into a much brighter future.”

“I have been a part of this remarkable journey from up-close as a Board member and from afar as a parent and district resident.”

“This is truly the best of times in School District 16,” Amundson added. “At the same time we are celebrating the 50th graduating class of this district, we are also celebrating a true turnaround and a promising, exciting future.”

What others have said:

■ A former state senator wrote: “I have known Don for many years and you will not find a more caring or qualified candidate for this award.”

■ “Dr. Helmstetter possesses an energizing vision for the district’s future,” one parent wrote. “What makes him unique is his ability to articulate this vision in ways that widen the circle of people working to help our kids.

“He connects with people, whether it’s one-on-one, in public meetings, or through his regular newspaper columns or other communication tools.”

■ A community member said that Dr. Helmstetter’s work “originates with engaging multiple constituencies: governmental units, community agencies, parents, teachers, district staff, vendors, and others interested in strengthening our communities.

“His efforts focus on improving the way we work together in order to improve outcomes for children and families.”

■ A former superintendent said that “experience teaches us that outstanding individuals rise to the top in multiple venues within their profession and community.

“This is certainly true of Dr. Helmstetter based on his contributions as a master teacher, gifted school administrator, adjunct professor, polished writer and presenter, Rotarian, and leader in his parish.”

■ A district parent said that Dr. Helmstetter “accomplishes his tasks through hard work, open communication, sensitivity to the concerns of would-be opponents,

and a clear vision of the district’s future.

“His commitment, dedication, and talents provide me, as a parent and taxpayer, with a quiet sense of assurance that our school district will continue to successfully and effectively navigate its way through the changing vagaries of what we have come to know as our system of public education.”

■ And, a former student summed it up for many in the Spring Lake Park school community by writing: “Superintendent Helmstetter is one of the greatest role models in the world.”

Honored as Minnesota’s top superintendent, Dr. Helmstetter is now a candidate for 2007 National Superintendent of the Year as well. Four finalists for will be selected and notified in December, and the finalist will be announced in March.