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# School Administrators of Montana

# BULLETIN

*Visionary leaders united in providing, advocating, and creating education excellence for Montana students!*

Volume XLV

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No. 334



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## **Ramblings from a "Seasoned Educator"**

*by Pam Birkeland, MACSS President*

Since it "Tis the **Season**, I thought I would share a few thoughts about my career in education that I have collected over the last 45 years of seasoning.

I have often asked myself over the years, why I chose a career in education. **Was it for the money?** Silly me! My first teaching salary was \$13,000 for the year in Highwood, Montana where over the course of the 4 years I was there, I taught Kindergarten and any other subject that needed someone to teach it as well as being the librarian, K-12. **Was it for the notoriety that I would receive?** Not really, but it was extremely humbling to be named the MT County Superintendent of the Year by my esteemed colleagues last spring. **Was it because I had a deep yearning from a very early age to teach others to learn whatever skills they needed to be successful?** I have concluded that there must have been some innate desire for this last reason as I don't recall any thoughts like that early on except that I remember wanting to be a teacher like my first grade teacher while I was in first grade. I don't remember saying throughout high school that my chosen course of study in college would be elementary education and Library K-12. I had never even been around small children. However, that is where I landed from the get-go!

Now, at this stage in my career, I have come to realize that I was born into this profession. You see, my mom's grandfather was the high school principal at Custer County High School before Montana became a state. In articles in the paper, he was referred to as Professor Logan. I have no idea what he taught or where

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## Upcoming Conferences, Meetings, & Events

### Montana Principals, January 21-23

Conference  
Copper King, Butte

\*\* [View the full SAM Calendar](#) \*\*

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this month's  
featured  
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he did so. He was selected to be the Superintendent of the Territory of Montana, a position he held until Montana became a state. My mom's mother came to Park City, Montana to teach English when she was 18. Even though Mom didn't get a degree of any sort, she had the innate ability to start a school library at my elementary school as a volunteer, and she got all of the neighbor boys through geometry with her cardboard models of planes and geometric shapes. I am one of 4 children and three of us have had careers in education. I guess this helps prove my theory that I was born this way.

Over the course of my teaching career, I taught every grade pre-K through twelve either as a classroom teacher, a specials teacher (music), or a librarian. I worked for a few years with the Golden Triangle Curriculum Cooperative as a technology integration specialist. I do not recall wanting to go into administration as a lifelong career goal, but I believe that my experiences over the years pointed me in that direction. I completed my Masters in Curriculum and Instruction and K-12 Administration. During my course of study and my experience as a district administrator in Helena Public Schools, I began to see that this career choice could enable me to affect a broader spectrum of students, families, staff, and the community. Over the course of the next 14 years in Administration, I began to experience burnout, and I decided to take early retirement. I vowed never to have anything to do with education again.

My conviction to leave education lasted for 8 days. I started working in the Assessment Division for OPI where I took the lead on the formative assessment project development with Smarter Balanced. I worked with amazing Montana Educators both K-12 and Higher Ed from MT and around the country to develop a resource for classroom teachers that would ultimately be of great benefit to the children. My faith in my career was renewed.

As I continue my chosen career, now in my 45<sup>th</sup> year (I am not sure how that many years have gone by), I am not only older, but wiser. I have been the Madison County Superintendent since 2014. I have the privilege to work with many impressive educators, school staff, and community members. As the county superintendent. I have been able to see the quote "it takes a village" in action. I find myself not only working with class C schools in my county, but I also act as the administrator for a rural K-8 independent district. I am witness to situations where educators, students, families, and communities do what is needed to foster student success. As the President of the Montana Association of County Superintendent of Schools, I witness my colleagues do everything in their power to do the best for schools and children, even if the work is trying!

As I ponder the last 45 years of seasoning, I have come to strongly believe in 3 truths! First, we must work diligently to take students where they are and do everything in our collective power to move them forward. Second, early childhood education must be thought of as starting at birth until age 8. We need to do everything we can to develop a relationship with our families as soon as a child is born. Lastly, a truth that has come to me is that we must strive to "Do the Right Thing". I know that doing so is not always easy, and that sometimes doing the right thing can cause me pain. Deep in my heart, I know that my mantra to "Do the Right Thing" rings true, because as I stated in the beginning, I was "Born to do My Life's Work".

Happy Holidays, and May you find peace and joy under your trees this year along with the directions on how to "Do the Right Thing".

*Pam Birkeland*  
*MACSS President*



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# SAM Receives a \$75,000 Grant from the Montana Health Care Foundation

*by Dr. Rob Watson, SAM Executive Director*

We have great news to report about the success of a \$75,000 grant application. SAM recently applied for this grant from the Montana Health Care Foundation (MHCF). The grant will focus on school-based mental health programs in K12 schools.

The goal of this project is to increase the capacity of school districts to provide prevention, early intervention, and support to students with behavioral health needs. SAM will accomplish this goal with the following objectives:

- Develop and administer an inventory of current behavioral health interventions, primary care services, and intervention systems used by Montana schools.
- Develop a resource guide based on findings from the inventory.
- Provide support to school districts with a best-practice resource guide and mentoring to assist in developing behavioral and/or primary health care structure specific to a district's needs.
- Utilize collected qualitative and quantitative data to provide recommendations and inform future legislation.

*Inventory:* SAM staff, in collaboration with identified partners, will develop and administer a survey to collect information on existing school-based behavioral health and primary health care services, interventions, or programs utilized by school districts across the state. The survey will include information on the implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), funding source, target population, and program outcomes. The survey will be administered to superintendents, special education directors, and school MTSS teams. The survey will be followed by interviews and focus groups to gain better understanding of the systems currently in place as well as overall effectiveness.

*Resource Guide:* Information collected from the survey will be used to create a resource guide of best practices for behavioral health interventions and primary care services within schools. The project will connect other initiatives, for example: Project AWARE, Stronger Connections, 21st Century, MTSS and Community Schools. SAM will connect superintendents, principals, and special education directors with colleagues to facilitate peer learning.

*Recommendations:* The results of the inventory and the development of a resource guide will drive recommendations to the Department of Public Health and Human Services and OPI on policy changes and funding needs to increase the capacity of school districts to implement best practice MTSS interventions. In addition, the best practice recommendations in school based behavioral health services gathered in the inventory may be used to coordinate legislation in the 2025 session.

**Rob**

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## SAM Webinar Series

### Thursday, December 14, 10:00 AM

# How to Foster Resilient Leadership and Create Healthy Schools Starting from Within

**SAM MONTHLY WEBINAR SERIES**

 **THURSDAY**  
DECEMBER 14 |  **TIME**  
10:00 - 11:00 AM

**Breathe for Change**  
with Beth Schreiber

*How to foster resilient leadership and create healthy schools starting from within*

 **USE QR CODE TO CONNECT TO SAM ZOOM**  
[HTTPS://US06WEB.ZOOM.US/J/3923446729](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/3923446729)



The **December 14 SAM webinar** is designed to provide insights into nurturing resilient leadership and cultivating thriving educational environments. Led by Stevensville teacher Beth Schreiber, this webinar will explore topics such as addressing staff stress and the pivotal role of school/district leaders in staff wellness. Additionally, the webinar will examine the transformative power of Breathe for Change on a personal, relational, and organizational level when implemented in schools. This webinar is an opportunity to transform leadership, enhance well-being, and foster positive change within our education communities. Join your colleagues on **Thursday, December 14, at 10:00 AM** and give yourself the gift of self-care.

SAM Webinars are scheduled for the 2nd Thursday of each month at 10:00 AM.

Join SAM Zoom  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/3923446729>



**2024 MONTANA PRINCIPALS CONFERENCE**

**Surfin' in Butte USA**

January 21-23, 2024  
Copper King  
Butte

**REGISTER HERE**

# 2024 Montana Principals Conference

## Registration is Open

**Registration is open for the 2024 Montana Principals Conference scheduled for January 21-23 at the Copper King Hotel & Convention Center in Butte.**

Organized by MAEMSP and MASSP leadership, the Montana Principals Conference promises to be an outstanding professional learning experience featuring several keynote speakers and a variety of breakout sessions. The event will focus on timely topics including leadership, climate and culture, behavior, mental health, and assessment.

### **Keynote Speakers:**

- [Dr. Salome Thomas-EL](#) - award winning principal and teacher, internationally recognized speaker, and best-selling author.
- [Tyler Rablin](#), an educational consultant who partners with schools and organizations to focus on assessment, grading, feedback. Tyler is the author of the upcoming book, *Hacking Student Motivation: 5 Assessment Strategies That Boost Learning Progression & Build Student Confidence*.
- Mark Wilson - Former NASSP Principal of the Year and founder of [Principal Matters!](#) - Mark is committed to learning, teaching, and encouraging others to be well and successful.
- Luc Swenson - 18 year old founder of the [I Love This Life Foundation](#), a nonprofit dedicated to improving student mental health.

The Montana Principals Conference is a perfect opportunity for principals from across the state to come together, collaborate, and reenergize as they prepare for the second half of the school year.

Watch for more information and a full agenda coming soon.

### **Room Block Information:**

- **Copper King Hotel & Convention Center ( \$149.00/night plus tax)** The link expires on December 20, 2023.
  - <https://www.choicehotels.com/reservations/groups/MU03I4>.
- **Hampton Inn, Butte (\$145.00/night plus tax):**
  - <https://www.hilton.com/en/book/reservation/deeplink/?ctyhocn=BTMMTHX&groupCode=CHHSAM&arrivaldate=2024-01-20&departuredate=2024-01-23&cid=OM,WW,HILTONLINK,EN,DirectLink&fromId=HILTONLINKDIRECT>
- **Best Western Plus Butte Plaza Inn (\$105.00/night plus tax):**
  - Please call for reservations 406-494-3500 (**Room block name: 2024 MT Principals Conference**)

Click here to register for the  
Montana Principals Conference 2024

## Dennis Parman Presented with G.V. Erickson Award



SAM is proud to announce the 2023 G.V. Erickson Award recipient, Mr. Dennis Parman. Mr. Parman was awarded this distinguished honor at the annual Montana Conference of Education Leadership (MCEL) held October 18-20, 2023. This distinguished award is given to a SAM member who has demonstrated an extraordinary

commitment to the advancement and betterment of public education in Montana. This is the most prestigious award a Montana school administrator can receive. The award is named in honor of Mr. G.V. Erickson, a school administrator who dedicated his career and life to education and the children of Montana.

Mr. Parman has been a driving force in education since 1981, leaving an indelible mark as a teacher, principal, superintendent, and advocate. With a career spanning over 40 years, he has distinguished himself as a highly respected pillar of Montana public education.

Mr. Parman's remarkable career in education, from teacher to superintendent, to his role as Deputy Superintendent at the Montana Office of Public Instruction and Executive Director of the Montana Rural Education Association, has made him one of the most influential figures in Montana's public education landscape. His ability to build relationships, inspire collaboration, and achieve tangible results underscores his immense value to the organizations he has served.

Mr. Parman is an outstanding educator with a vast understanding of school curriculum, educational

## MASSP and MAEMSP Awards are Open for Nomination

MASSP and MAEMSP are accepting nominations until **Friday, December 15**, for the awards below. Follow the links for more information about each award and to submit a nomination form.

### MASSP Awards

- [MASSP/NAESP National Principal of the Year](#)
- [NAESP Conference Incentive Award](#)
- [MASSP Community Partner in Education](#)
- [MASSP Future Administrator Scholarship](#)

### MAEMSP Awards

- [MAEMSP/NAESP National Distinguished Principal](#)
- [Adrian Langstaff Award](#)
- [NAESP Conference Incentive Award](#)
- [MAEMSP Aspiring Principal Scholarship Award](#)
- [MAEMSP Friends of Education Award](#)
- [MAEMSP Appreciation Award](#)

## MASSP Assistant Principal of the Year

opportunities, operations, policy development, child development, and the role higher education plays in preparing education leaders. While serving as the Deputy Superintendent at the OPI, Mr. Parman was instrumental in facilitating the review and modernization of accreditation standards and educator licensure.

Mr. Parman is well known in the education community for his outstanding ability to analyze data and implement research-based strategies in compelling ways that influence action in the best interest of all students. His ability to research and communicate state legislative and congressional actions connected to education has been outstanding and has enhanced Montana education. His leadership on both district and state levels has been instrumental in driving important initiatives forward. His commitment to public education has contributed to collaborative efforts that drive positive change.

Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director at School Administrators of Montana (SAM), stated “Mr. Parman has a long and successful career as a Montana educator. With his varied experience, his institutional knowledge is unmatched. Mr. Parman has approached each of his roles with professionalism and kindness. We are excited to have the opportunity to honor Dennis with this award - the highest award we give at SAM.”

The G. V. Erickson Award was presented by Sara Novak, Director of Great Divide Education Services and President of SAM. The entire SAM membership congratulates Mr. Dennis Parman for being honored with this prestigious award, celebrating his dedicated service to public education which has left an indelible mark on Montana's education landscape.

## SAM Youth Endowment Open for Nominations

**Nominations are open until Friday, March 1, 2024, for the 2023-24 SAM Youth Endowment.** The purpose of the School Administrators of Montana Youth Endowment is to make a positive

## Award Presented



Congratulations to Kathy Kidder, Assistant Principal at Capital High School in Helena! Jake Warner, a Math teacher at Capital High School stated in his nomination letter, "Kathy is a tireless advocate for school culture. She has played a key role in developing and implementing our multi-tier system of support (MTSS), which includes student mentoring, positive reinforcement, and academic supports. Kathy is also a strong supporter of our teachers, and she works tirelessly to enforce discipline and create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students...Kathy's work has had a significant impact on Capital High School. Students feel supported and valued, and teachers feel empowered to do their best work. Kathy is a true asset to our school community."

The National Assistant Principal of the Year program recognizes outstanding school leaders who have succeeded in providing high-quality learning opportunities for students. The program honors high school assistant principals who have demonstrated excellence in the areas of personal excellence; collaborative leadership; curriculum, instruction and assessment; and personalization. Kathy will be recognized



impact on the youth of Montana by providing financial assistance to benefit children's health, welfare, and/or education.

Awards to nominated recipients are given in April of each year and announced in the May SAM Bulletin. Emergency requests will be accepted and presented to the board on an as-requested basis throughout the year.

Additional information, nomination guidelines, and access to the [2023-24 SAM Youth Endowment Nomination Form](#) can be found [HERE](#).

Please note: Nominations must be made by a current SAM member.

by her peers at the Montana Principals Conference in January. She will also be recognized by NASSP at *UNITED: The National Conference on School Leadership* in Nashville in July, a conference held in conjunction with NAESP.



## 2023-24 Montana Superintendent of the Year Awarded

Mr. Rick Duncan, Superintendent at Powell County High School/Deer Lodge Elementary School Districts, was selected as the 2023-24 Montana Superintendent of the Year and honored for his outstanding dedication to education and exemplary leadership in the community at the annual Montana Conference of Education Leadership (MCEL) held on October 18-20, 2023 in Billings. The award is sponsored by the Montana Association of School Superintendents (MASS).

Mr. Duncan graduated from Great Falls Public Schools and earned a bachelor's degree in Anthropology from the University of Montana in 1979. Following graduation, he accepted an opportunity to participate in a unique ethnographic study living with the Maxuci tribe in the Amazon Rainforest. In 1981, he earned a Broadfield Social Studies endorsement from the University of Montana and taught in Plains for several years. Mr. Duncan went on to teach in California, Wyoming, and Montana. He began his administrator career as an activities director and principal in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. In 2001, he returned to Montana, where he accepted the position of principal and later superintendent at the Powell County High School District, a role he currently holds. For the last two years, Mr. Duncan has also served as the superintendent of the Deer Lodge Elementary School District.

Throughout his career, Mr. Duncan has demonstrated a deep commitment to community service and professional growth. He has actively participated on various educational and community-oriented boards,



establishing himself as an influential figure in education in Montana.

Mr. Duncan was chosen as the 4-Rivers MASS Regional Superintendent of the Year in 2013 and was the recipient of the School Administrators of Montana (SAM G.V. Erickson Award in 2015). He has served as President of both MASS and the SAM and has served as the SAM Delegate Assembly Steering Committee Chair for many years. Mr. Duncan has served as a coach/mentor in the SAM Leaders Professional Learning Program for the past five years, mentoring new and experienced school administrators throughout Montana. He has also played a vital role in advocating for public education by representing SAM's interests during the past three legislative sessions.

Mr. Duncan's philosophy centers on fostering an inspiring educational environment for all children. He is known for leading by example, forging strong community bonds, and motivating students and educators alike to achieve greater levels of success.

Dr. Rob Watson, Executive Director at School Administrators of Montana (SAM), stated, "Superintendent Duncan has spent his entire career serving the needs of kids and communities. His professionalism and experience has helped to define him as a wonderful leader, not only in his community but also the entire state. We are excited to have Rick represent Montana as our Superintendent of the Year in the national competition."

The Montana Association of School Superintendents (MASS), in collaboration with AASA - The School Superintendents Association, annually recognizes and rewards the outstanding leadership of school superintendents. This program seeks to honor those strong Montana school district leaders who work successfully with their entire learning communities to provide the highest quality education possible. Candidates for both the Montana and the National Superintendent of the Year are measured by the following criteria: Leadership for learning, Communication, Professionalism, and Community involvement.

Now in its 37th year, the AASA National Superintendent of the Year Program pays tribute to the talent and vision of the men and women who lead our nation's public schools. This program is sponsored by First Student, Corebridge Financial, and AASA. Mr. Duncan will be recognized during the AASA National Conference on Education in February 2024 and will go on to compete for the National Superintendent of the Year.

## Hello from the Montana Afterschool Alliance!

We are a statewide nonprofit that advocates for high-quality, sustainable programs for youth and we believe one of the strongest allies in improving the lives of your students is local afterschool and summer programs. To support this we are actively working to foster strong, creative, and enduring partnerships between out-of-school time programs and school districts.

Collaborative efforts allow for the sharing of expertise, resources, and innovative ideas —ultimately improving the quality and reach of what is available to students in Montana.

To highlight this we recently completed a report that shares a small sampling of the incredible work and partnerships happening across the state to meet the needs of youth during the pivotal out-of-school time hours.

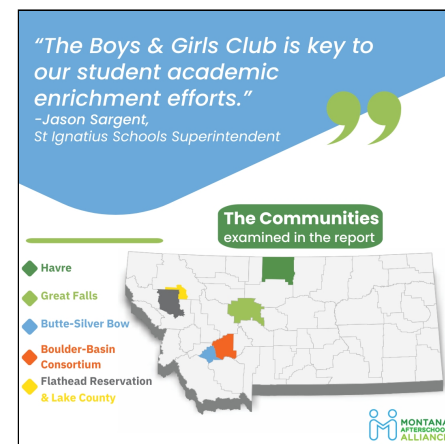
We are encouraged by the stories and examples shared in the report and thank you for your interest and all you do for Montana's families and communities.

**To spark new ideas for your community visit the summary for school administrators [here](#).**

To view the full report, download community-specific reports, and learn more about our work, visit:  
<http://www.mtafterschoolalliance.org/montana-afterschool-community-spotlight-report>.

In gratitude and partnership,

Rachel Wanderscheid  
 Director, The Montana Afterschool Alliance



**CoSN** LEADING EDUCATION INNOVATION The [Consortium for School Networking \(CoSN\)](#) and its Montana state affiliate chapter, [Montana Educational Technologists Association \(META\)](#) are pleased to continue to support the work of current and aspiring superintendents and district leadership teams in leading all aspects of digital learning transformations.

### ***EmpowerED Superintendent Initiative Resources for School Leaders***

We are pleased to share the resources created specifically for superintendents and school district leaders to support their work in leading educational technology initiatives across their school districts and build on their current knowledge, skills and confidence. The resources listed below – developed in collaboration between CoSN and AASA - are readily available on the CoSN EmpowerED Superintendents website at <https://www.cosn.org/superintendents/>.

### **The EmpowerED Superintendent edLeader Panel Broadcast Series**

CoSN, AASA, and [edWeb.net](#) co-host an online [edLeader Panel monthly broadcast series](#), sponsored by [ClassLink](#), to help superintendents connect and collaborate. Registration is free and participants can join the live event or view recordings and podcast versions starting a day or two after the live broadcast. A [“Super-Connected” community](#) is also available on edWeb.net for online discussions and resources tied to the broadcast series.

### **The EmpowerED Superintendent Toolkit**

The Toolkit opens with an Executive Summary that provides an overview of the strategies that are contained within the toolkit. What follows are two Professional Learning Modules. Module #1 presents an overview of

the five imperatives for technology leadership. Module #2 defines four specific action steps for strengthening your technology leadership team. In addition to the two Professional Learning Modules, the toolkit includes access to an expanded set of tools to strengthen technology leadership, including CoSN's research-based Framework of Essential Skills of the K-12 CTO and Certified Education Technology Leader (CETL). Key points and practical tools for hiring, developing and evaluating CTOs and educational technology professionals are integrated within this toolkit.

#### **Critical Focus Areas: Issue One-Pagers**

The Superintendent one-pagers were developed to give school leaders a quick resource to help with communication with a variety of stakeholders on important edtech topics. The "One-Pagers" are written in "non-tech talk" so that the areas being described make sense to people who do not work in the technology arena on a daily basis. Some of the twelve topics listed in the One-Pager offerings include: Artificial Intelligence & Generative AI; The Importance of Cybersecurity; Student Data Privacy; Closing the Homework Gap; Effective Technology Professional Development.

#### **Creating Effective Responsible Use Policies for Schools**

Creating the conditions for the safe and effective technology use in schools requires both technical policies and establishing appropriate behavior expectations for students. This report, produced in collaboration with the Digital Citizenship Coalition, ISTE, ATLAS and CoSN, articulates the legal requirements for schools regarding responsible use policies and includes examples of appropriate and inappropriate wording to be used developing Responsible Use Policy (also known as Acceptable Use Policies or Technology Use Agreements) documents.

#### **Self-Assessments**

Three different self-assessments are provided for school leaders: 1) Self-Assessment for Superintendents, 2) Self-Assessment for Chief Technology Officers and Technology Staff, 3) District Leadership Team Self-Assessment.

#### **Financing Technology Innovations - Strategies and Tools**

Multiple tools and workbooks for determining the "Total Cost of Ownership" and the "Value of Investment" are available for download.

#### **CoSN 2024 Annual Conference, "Leading for Innovation: At Warp Speed"**

Registration is now open for the CoSN 2024 Annual Conference, scheduled for April 8-10, 2024, in Miami, Florida. For conference and hotel information and registration links, see <https://www.cosn.org/cosn2024/>.

**CoSN Membership:** If you, your school or district would like more information about joining CoSN or getting more involved with CoSN, please contact [membership@cosn.org](mailto:membership@cosn.org).

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## 2023-24 SAM Bulletins

- [November 2023 Bulletin](#)
- [October 2023 Bulletin](#)
- [September 2023 Bulletin](#)
- [July/August 2023 Bulletin](#)

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