

Building Minnesota Communities

Together, it's what we do.

2026 MINNESOTA SCHOOL FINANCE SEMINAR



April 10, 2026
Delta Hotel Minneapolis Northeast
Minneapolis, MN





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Welcome to Ehlers' 2026 Minnesota School Finance Seminar

We're so glad you could join us!

Ehlers is privileged to share in your mission of building vibrant and sustainable learning communities across our great state. Yet fulfilling that mission isn't just about public finance solutions – these are only the fundamentals of our work. It's about people pulling together to create smart plans, build community consensus and share in the hard work that helps bring generational projects to life. That's why we're so glad you could join us for our annual Minnesota School Finance Seminar.

In this full-day event, we'll hear from MSBA's Tiffany Gustin on the most pressing questions the association is fielding from districts and we'll also take a deep dive into the expanded authority school boards now have relative to Long-Term Facilities Maintenance projects. Additionally, we'll explore how school districts around the state have implemented innovative strategies to strengthen childcare.

If there is anything we can do for you during our time together, please seek out anyone wearing an Ehlers name badge. We're happy to help.

About Ehlers

A pioneer in municipal advisory services since 1955, Ehlers helps clients build strong, vibrant and sustainable communities by delivering independent, integrated advice across all areas of public finance. We work with more than 1,500 local governments, schools districts, and public agencies across five states, placing our clients' needs and best interests at the center of everything we do.

Our services include:


- » Debt Planning, Issuance & Management
- » Investments & Treasury Management
- » Fiscal Sustainability Planning & Support

3001 Broadway Street NE, Ste. 320
Minneapolis, MN 55413
Phone: (651) 697-8500
Toll Free: (800) 552-1171
ehlers-inc.com

Resources

The Booklet

The colored tabs throughout the booklet correspond to the three different breakouts throughout the seminar.

-  Breakout One
-  Breakout Two
-  Breakout Three
-  General Session

Internet Access

Wireless internet connection is available for the entirety of the seminar.

- » Network Name: **MarriottBonvoy_Conference**
- » Password: **No Password Required**

Presentation Download

Please scan the QR code to access and download the PowerPoint presentations for this seminar.

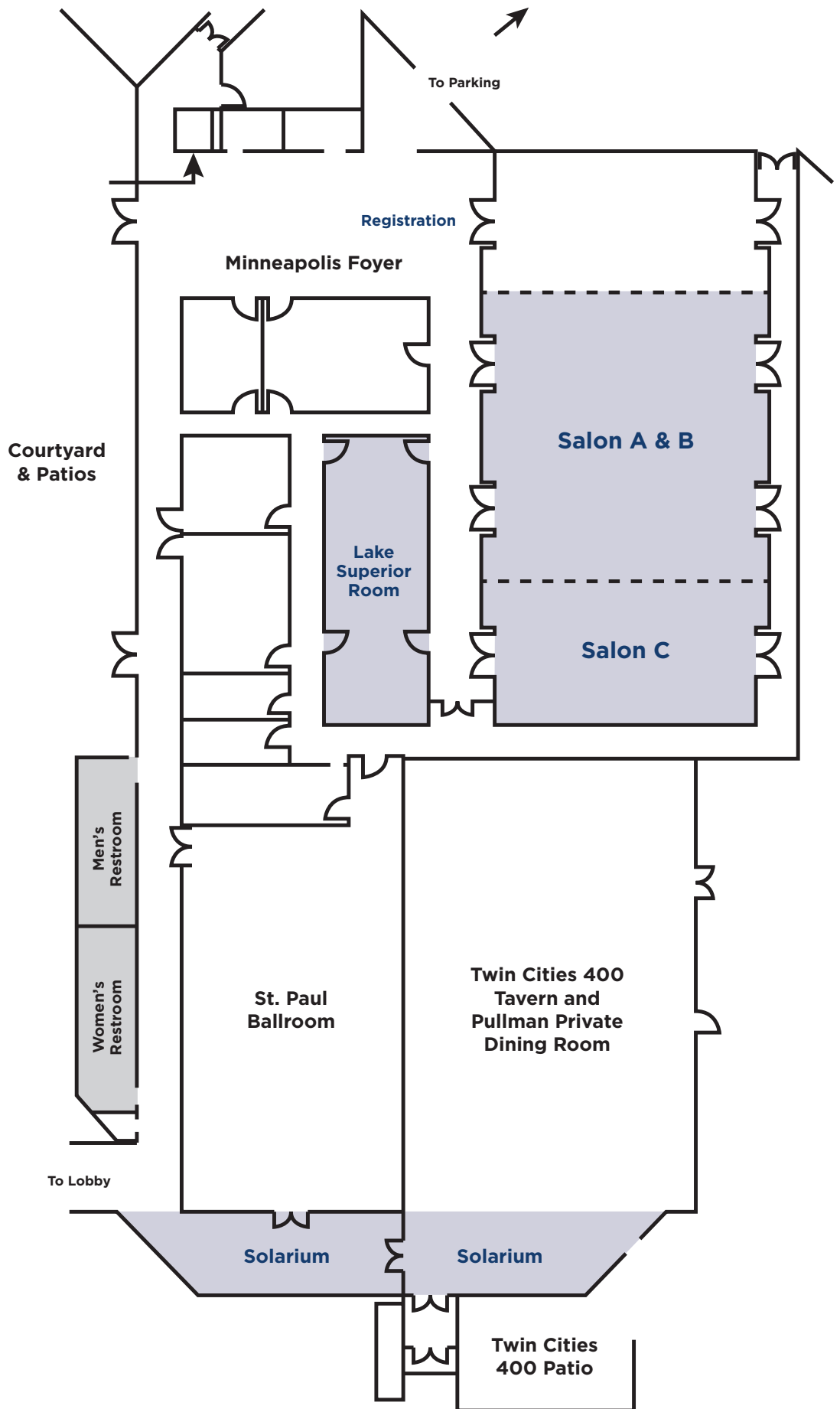
ehlers-inc.com/events/2026-school-finance-seminar/



Continuing Education Credits

The Board of School Administrators has approved this seminar for 5 hours of continuing education. Certificates of completion will be available at the registration table at the end of today's closing session.

Delta Hotel Minneapolis Northeast



2026 Seminar Agenda

FRIDAY - APRIL 10, 2026		
8:00 am	Registration/Breakfast (Salon A & B)	
8:45 am	Welcome & Logistics Shelby McQuay, Managing Director (Salon A & B)	
9:00 am	General Session: Hot Topics with MSBA (Salon A&B)	
10:00 am	Break	
10:15 am	School District Accounting & Auditing: Fiscal 2026 Update (Lake Superior Room)	The Board-Approved Financing Toolbox: Roofing Projects & Beyond (Salon C)
11:10 am	Break	
11:25 am	Get Out the Vote! Communication Strategies for Successful Referendums (Lake Superior Room)	Look Ahead! The Importance of Budgeting & Forecasting Models (Salon C)
12:20 pm	Lunch (Salon A & B)	
1:30 pm	The Kids are Alright: Creative Solutions for District Childcare Services (Salon C)	Building Stronger Facilities Plans: Insights & Strategies for "1a" Districts (Lake Superior Room)
2:25 pm	Break	
2:30 pm	Closing Address: Legislative Update (Salon A & B)	

FRIDAY, APRIL 10



9:00 - 10:00 am

General Session: Hot Topics with MSBA

Tiffany Gustin - MN School Boards Association

Every day, MSBA fields questions from school board members, district leaders, and business officials across Minnesota, and the answers to those questions offer unique insights as to what's happening in our schools. Which themes are rising to the top? What challenges are districts wrestling with right now? And where are we seeing sparks of opportunity that might shape what comes next? In this session, guest speaker Tiffany Gustin will give us the “inside scoop” on the hottest questions coming into MSBA...from governance concerns to legislative pressures to the trends districts are watching most closely. We'll highlight what we're hearing statewide, what it might mean for our collective work, and how we can better support the field moving forward.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10



10:15 - 11:10 am

School District Accounting & Auditing: Fiscal 2026 Update

Jim Eichten - LBCarlson

Join Certified Public Accountant, Jim Eichten, as he covers updates in Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) statements and auditing standards published by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, Minnesota Department of Education, Office of the State Auditor and Federal Office of Management and Budget. Specific to Minnesota school districts, Jim will relay essential information about how GASB and other oversight agency changes will impact school district financial reporting, as well as guidance on the accounting and auditing of Federal Awards.

BREAKOUT ONE

FRIDAY, APRIL 10



10:15 - 11:10 am

BREAKOUT ONE

The Board-Approved Financing Toolbox: Roofing Projects & Beyond

Shelby McQuay & Jeff Seeley - Ehlers

Recent legislative action has introduced a significant change to Minnesota's Long-Term Facilities Maintenance (LTFM) program, offering districts new opportunities to address major roofing needs. Historically, roofing projects were allowed under the standard \$380 per-pupil LTFM revenue, but the high cost of roof replacements often forced districts to rely on general fund dollars or voter-approved funding. New legislation now enables districts to qualify for additional LTFM revenue specifically for roof repair and replacement projects—providing much-needed financial flexibility. This session will walk through what's changed, why it matters, and how districts can take advantage of this expanded authority. Participants will learn how the update supports long-range facility planning, how the School Building Bond Agricultural Credit continues to benefit qualifying communities, and what considerations districts should keep in mind as they prepare and submit their LTFM plans. Join us to understand the implications of this legislative update and explore strategies for incorporating roofing needs into your broader facilities planning efforts.



11:25 am - 12:20 pm

Get Out the Vote!
Communication Strategies for
Successful Referendums

Sue Peterson - ISG

A successful facility project requires a clear roadmap with specific steps along the way. Gathering data, analyzing options, engaging stakeholders and arming school leaders with strategy are all critically important. How consulting partners work together to support a school district is also important. Join Sue as she shares stories of projects from the past decade and discusses the key elements to referendum and project success.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10



11:25 am - 12:20 pm

Look Ahead! The Importance of Budgeting & Forecasting Models

Matthew Hammer & Ryan Miles - Ehlers

Accurate budget forecasting is essential for long-term financial stability and informed decision-making in school districts. In this session, participants will explore practical tools and strategies used to analyze past, present, and projected financial conditions. We will examine statewide and district-level trends in revenue, expenditures, fund balance management, enrollment, and voter-approved funding mechanisms. Through real examples and clear forecasting models, attendees will learn how to identify emerging challenges, evaluate budget sustainability, and communicate financial outlooks with clarity and transparency. This session is designed to support both new and experienced leaders seeking to strengthen their district's financial planning and build confidence in their budgeting processes.

BREAKOUT TWO

FRIDAY, APRIL 10



1:30 - 2:25 pm

The Kids are Alright: Creative Solutions for District Childcare Services

Lynn Jenc - Alexandria Public Schools
Stephanie Hillman - Big Lake Schools
Holly Ward - Dawson-Boyd Public Schools
Representatives from Floodwood Polar Care

Childcare access has become a growing challenge for many school districts. This session highlights three school district leaders and representatives from Floodwood Polar Care who have implemented creative, sustainable approaches—from transitioning after school programs in house to partnering with external providers and expanding wraparound Pre-K services.

Hear real world strategies, partnership models, and lessons learned that can help districts strengthen childcare options for families and staff.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10



1:30 - 2:25 pm

Building Stronger Facilities Plans: Insights & Strategies for “1a” Districts

Matthew Hammer, Brian Johnson, Jodie Zesbaugh -
Ehlers

Districts with “1a” status under Minnesota’s Long-Term Facilities Maintenance (LTFM) program hold unique authority to generate additional resources for preserving and improving their facilities. With this enhanced authority comes the need for forward-looking planning to ensure that funding decisions, project prioritization, and long-term investments align with each district’s comprehensive 10-year LTFM plan. Ehlers partners with the majority of “1a” districts across Minnesota, and this session is designed to bring these districts together to deepen understanding of how to strategically leverage their LTFM authority. Through shared experiences and expert guidance, districts will gain insight into optimizing the opportunities that come with “1a” status and implementing effective practices for developing, managing, and communicating their LTFM strategies.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10



2:30 - 3:30 pm

General Session: Legislative Update

Cathy Erickson - Minnesota Department of Education

Perennial favorite and trusted statewide resource Cathy Erickson returns to walk us through the latest legislative hurdles, the bright spots on the horizon, and share the essential insights your district needs to navigate the months ahead.

Special Thanks to Our Guest Speakers



Jim Eichten

Principal - LBCarlson

Mr. Eichten is a principal with the Governmental team at LBCarlson. LBCarlson completed a strategic merger with Malloy, Montague, Karnowski, Radosevich, & Co., P.A. on January 1, 2025.

He has worked with school districts and other local governments for over 35 years. His areas of expertise include governmental auditing, accounting, federal financial assistance programs, Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting programs, management consulting services, internal control studies, operational reviews and cash flow projections. Mr. Eichten is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, Minnesota Society of Certified Public Accountants, Minnesota Government Finance Officers' Association, and Minnesota Association of School Business Officials. He is also a past Chairman of the board of the Minnesota Society of Certified Public Accountants and past member of Council of the AICPA.

SESSION: School District Accounting & Auditing: Fiscal 2026 Update



Cathy Erickson

Director of School Finance - Minnesota Department of Education

As the Director of School Finance for Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Cathy oversees teams that support general education and categorical funding, levy process and certification, financial management audits and Uniform Financial Accounting and Reporting Standards (UFARS), aid payments, budget and forecasting, fiscal notes, data management including students, transportation, and MDE-ORG sites, special education funding and compliance and monitoring, and facilities and Long-Term Facilities Maintenance (LTFM) funding.

Before joining MDE in July 2022, Cathy gained 23 years of school finance experience serving as Executive Director of Business Services/CFO at Duluth Public Schools, Finance Funding and Management Specialist at Arrowhead Regional Computing Consortium (ARCC), and Business Manager at Lake Superior School District. In addition, Cathy was an adjunct instructor for St. Mary's University teaching school finance to educators seeking administrative or superintendent licenses.

SESSION: General Session: Legislative Update



Tiffany Gustin

Director of Management & Insurance Trust Services - MN School Boards Association

Tiffany Gustin serves as the Director of Management and Insurance Trust Services for the MN School Boards Association. Before working for MSBA, she served as a school district Business Manager for ten years. Prior to working in school finance, she was a software engineer and database analyst in the private sector and worked in county government. In her spare time, she is a volunteer first responder and church pianist. She and her husband, TJ, have two adult children, and TOO MANY ANIMALS.

SESSION: General Session: Hot Topics with MSBA



Stephanie Hillman

Director of Community Education & Communication - Big Lake Schools

Currently serving as the Director of Community Education & Communication Services for Big Lake Schools, Stephanie Hillman specializes in building sustainable, high-growth district programming. She has a proven track record in childcare innovation, including developing a wrap-around preschool program that doubled enrollment in its first year and successfully transitioning school-age childcare back in-house. During her tenure at ROCORI Public Schools, she oversaw enrollment surges in early childhood and childcare programming and nearly doubled the Community Education budget. She holds an MS in Educational Administration and Leadership and a Director of Community Education license from St. Cloud State University.

SESSION: The Kids are Alright: Creative Solutions for District Childcare Services



Lynn Jenc

Director of Community Education - Alexandria Public Schools

Lynn Jenc is the Community Education Director at Alexandria Public Schools. Prior to Alexandria Public Schools, she was at Willmar Public Schools and Albany Area Schools. She is the past president of MN Community Education Association (MCEA), served on the National Network for Community Education, and past president of the Alexandria Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce. She is currently on the Alexandria Community Foundation Board, Chamber Ambassador, Forada Lions Club, and St Mary's Church volunteer. Throughout the years, Lynn has been involved in other local chambers, BPW, LAPW, Jaycees, 4H and various other volunteer and community opportunities and initiatives.

SESSION: The Kids are Alright: Creative Solutions for District Childcare Services



Sue Peterson

Education Planning Specialist - ISG

As a PreK-12 education planning specialist, Sue offers over 25 years of experience in referendum and strategic planning, community organizing, educational programming and charter school development, fundraising, marketing, school communications, and pre-referendum support. She has extensive experience collaborating with planners, architects, and engineers to guide school systems through the visioning, long-range facility planning, and bond referendum planning processes. A champion of education and innovative learning environments, Sue is passionate about helping school districts plan for the future and guides them in making decisions that are in the best interest of their students and community. During her 14 years in PreK-12 education, Sue developed community and business partnerships to further enhance the learning experience and better leverage resources.

SESSION: Get Out the Vote! Communication Strategies for Successful Referendums



Holly Ward

Superintendent - Dawson-Boyd Public Schools

Holly Ward serves as the Superintendent of Dawson-Boyd Public Schools, where she leads with a strong focus on students, families, and community. Since 2023, she has guided the district through meaningful change, strengthening systems, improving financial stability, and building a positive culture grounded in trust and collaboration. Holly brings experience as an in-home child care provider, a corporate childcare director, a paraprofessional, teacher, and special education director, which shapes her practical, student-centered approach. She is deeply committed to ensuring every child feels seen, supported, and capable.

SESSION: The Kids are Alright: Creative Solutions for District Childcare Services



3001 Broadway Street NE, Ste. 320
Minneapolis, MN 55413
(651) 697-8500
Toll Free: (800) 552-1171

ehlers-inc.com

