

Hon. JoAnn Ward
State Representative
MN House of Representatives
State Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Rep. Ward:

The purpose of this email is to give you a status report on recent leadership changes at the Perpich Center For Arts Education. Please feel free to share this status report with anyone who would like a copy.

Governor Dayton has used his appointment power to reshape the Perpich Center Board of Directors. Beginning in July of 2016 he began the process of replacing Board members as their terms expired or they resigned from the Board. As of January 11, 2017, he has appointed nine (9) new members of the 15-member Board. I understand that he plans to appoint another new member soon.

The new members bring a wealth of experience in education, business, and non-profit arts management. For example, Julie Workman serves on the Rochester School Board, and was just elected its Board Chair. Leslie (Schumacher) LeCuyer is the Executive Director of the Central Minnesota Arts Board who served eight years in the Minnesota House of Representatives, where she served on the House Education Committee.

Other new members include Jody Grams, HR and Information Services Manager for Bremer Bank, N.A. in St. Paul; Thomas Surprenant, General Counsel for Stahl Construction, and co-Founder of Songs of Hope, a non-profit organization which has provided summer arts education camps for inner city and international students since 1990; Gregory Winter, Twin Cities filmmaker and art director, and a partner in Blue 60 Pictures, formerly Wilson Griak; George Sutton, Executive Director of James Sewell Ballet who also provides arts consulting services on a national basis; Linda Brobeck, a former arts educator who has taught in or administered high school and post-secondary programs; and Julia Donnelly, who is a graduate of the Perpich Arts High School and works in government relations representing the interest of clients at the Minnesota Legislature.

I have been practicing law for nearly 40 years in Southwest Minnesota, where I am serving as the City Attorney for the cities of Luverne and Edgerton. I have also served twice on the Minnesota State Arts Board, and as Board Chair the last two years of my second term. In addition, I have served as Chair of the Trustee Candidate Advisory Commission which recruits and recommends Trustees for the Minnesota State Colleges and University System. I was elected Vice Chair of the Perpich Board in September of 2016, and I became the Acting Chair of the Perpich Board as of January 11, 2017.

We join five longer serving members of the Board: Janeen Cary, Masters Information Media, Academic Librarian, Hibbing Community College (retired); Nathan Coulter, Legislative Assistant to Sen. Melissa Halvorson Wicklund; Linda Henning, State of Minnesota, Metropolitan

Council Environmental Services; Mikal Nabors, Minneapolis Foundation; and Matthew Ollig graduate of the Perpich Arts High School and MCAD, and full-time artist who was recently featured in the StarTribune on January 11, 2017.

At least eight (8) of the Board members have completed the Phase II training provided by the Minnesota School Board Association and required by Minnesota Statute. We expect that the rest of the Board will also complete the Phase II training.

The Board met on Thursday, January 12, with most of the new members in attendance. Our first item of business was to discuss the Search Process to select a new Executive Director to replace Sue Mackert, whose retirement was effective on January 2, 2017. The Board is committed to hiring a fully licensed education professional with experience in the field. We are working with Minnesota Management and Budget to put in place a Transition Plan and also an ED Search Process to identify and hire a new Executive Director who will begin work on July 1, 2017. Even though the process has not yet started, I have already received letters expressing interest in the position from two highly qualified educators, so I am optimistic that we will find the right person to lead the Perpich Center before the July 1 deadline.

The newly reconstituted Board of Directors will hold its Annual Meeting on February 9, 2017. At that time we will elect officers, consider Bylaw changes, and the new Board Chair will appoint Committee members. In addition to the existing Committees -- Appeals, Board Development, Budget & Finance, Executive Committee, Government Relations, Nominations and Personnel -- I will be proposing two new Committees. The first one will be the Information Technology Committee to support the Arts Library and address needed technology infrastructure. The second one will be the Statewide Outreach Committee to support and re-invigorate the legislative mandate to provide arts education to the entire State of Minnesota. We are also planning a Board Retreat after the new ED is hired to discuss Board policies and prepare a Strategic Plan for the Perpich Center.

In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Ben Vander Kooi, Acting Chair
Board of Directors
Perpich Center for the arts