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INKSTER

## He's the school leader of the year

**Superintendent came to a failing district**

December 23, 2007

**BY NAOMI R. PATTON**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

All 95 members of the Inkster High School Class of 2007 graduated this summer. That may not be an unusual milestone in most high schools, but the last time it happened in Inkster Public Schools was 1992.

Long considered a failing district, Inkster once claimed some of the lowest MEAP test scores in the state. This year, for the first time in 10 years, the district's third- and fifth-graders earned adequate yearly progress status with MEAP scores, marking the second consecutive year.

Many attribute the improvements to Inkster's superintendent, Thomas Maridada. He attributes the turnaround to hard work, elevating the standards of instruction and the professional development of the staff.

Either way, the Michigan Association of School Administrators has taken notice and named Maridada its 2008 Michigan Superintendent of the Year.

"This was a consensus choice . . . unanimous," said William Mayes, the association's executive director.

"He has galvanized a community," Mayes said of Maridada. "He lives to make a difference."

In her nomination, City Councilwoman

DeArtriss Richardson said Maridada, 41, has taken a deficit, poorly maintained buildings, low test scores, a largely non-certified teaching staff, high dropout rates and low parent involvement and made them remnants of Inkster Public Schools' ugly past.

"Superintendent Maridada's philosophy is if it's broke, fix it," Richardson wrote.

In 2002 the debt-ridden district was taken over by the state. Then-Gov. John Engler appointed an emergency financial manager to run the district.

Maridada arrived as a consultant in 2004, when the district had about 1,200 students. He was named superintendent in 2005, beating out about 25 candidates.

Today, there are more than 2,300 students, and the district's \$22-million budget is no longer oozing red.

"In education, our bottom line has to be student achievement," said Maridada, a 1984 Cass Tech High School graduate. "We have to teach them all as if they were destined to be the president of the United States."

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Maridada, who graduated from University of Detroit Mercy and Wayne State University and is working on his doctoral degree from the University of Pennsylvania, said the goal is to show that "kids that come from Inkster can compete."

School board President Jean Fuller said she knew Maridada was a positive influence when her school-age granddaughter gushed about him during his consulting days.

"He's committed. He's taking us to higher levels than we were," Fuller said. "What he's demanding of the children and what he's demanding of the staff ... nothing holds him back."

Contact **NAOMI R. PATTON** at 313-223-4485 or [npatton@freepress.com](mailto:npatton@freepress.com).

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