

# MINNESOTA EDUCATOR

APRIL/MAY 2021

**EDUCATORS USE  
UNION POWER TO  
ADVOCATE FOR  
SAFETY, SUPPORT**

**NEW TOOL SHOWS  
HOW UNDERFUNDING  
AFFECTS DISTRICTS**



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS



# ***Loan forgiveness program tools online***

**Education Minnesota's partnership with the loan forgiveness program Summer continues. As a member, you have free access to the service.**

Through Summer, members are able to use a loan consolidation tool, get assistance in developing an income-driven repayment plan and submit for the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Summer also can help members find out what savings programs they are eligible for, compare options side-by-side and help members enroll in programs – all online.

Minnesota was the first state to roll out the program, in conjunction with the American Federation of Teachers. Members will need to sign in with their Education Minnesota member ID number.

**To get started, visit Education Minnesota's signup page at [www.meetsummer.org/education-minnesota](http://www.meetsummer.org/education-minnesota).**

Also, Education Minnesota's popular Degrees, Not Debt training is now available on our online professional development platform, MEA Online, as a self-guided training.

Once you log into your MEA Online account, search the catalog for Degrees, Not Debt: Self-guided training.

The training discusses the types of loans, loan forgiveness plans and what you need to know as you apply.

**Full details about our Degrees, Not Debt program, and information about the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Student Loan Provisions, is available at [www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy#Degrees-Not-Debt](http://www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy#Degrees-Not-Debt).**





THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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The Minnesota Educator is published for members to share news about education issues and training opportunities for educators as well as union and political news that affects public education in Minnesota.

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# PREPARING STUDENTS FOR CIVIC LIFE SHOULDN'T BE CONTROVERSIAL

There are many answers to the question, "Why offer a free public education to every Minnesota student?" For me, the most important response is to prepare our students to be informed citizens of the democracy they will inherit.

People have told me that answer is corny, but I never thought it would be controversial.

The fact that the proposed changes to the state's K-12 social studies standards have touched off so much outrage and disinformation shows our schools are at a crossroads.

The proposed standards offer students a more diverse view of history, economics, geography and the other social studies disciplines. I believe they are part of how schools should change to prepare students to understand and live in our diverse state and country.

The Minnesota Department of Education has a thorough description of the process for updating the standards. But for a quick summary, state law says Minnesota's academic standards will be reviewed and revised on a 10-year cycle.

This year the social studies standards are up. A 38-member committee of educators, parents, school board members and businesspeople met last year and released their draft recommendations in December.

The complete document is available on MDE's website, but it's fair to say the proposed

changes are more thought-provoking and recognize more of the state's racial and cultural past. There is far more Native American history, for example.

The draft presented the new objectives and was never intended to be a comprehensive list of what would be taught in public schools. Nonetheless, several commentators seized on the document and starting spouting nonsense.

Maybe they were just confused when they reported that Minnesota schools would stop teaching about the World Wars and the Holocaust — a lie that has been repeated by the Center of the American Experiment, Fox News, Alpha News, Brietbart and others.

I doubt it was such an innocent mistake.

When the Minnesota Senate Republican Caucus sent out a press release Feb. 11 about a bill to delay the standards for two years, the caucus made clear their opposition was to standards "tailored to social justice and equity."

The caucus objected to a list of specific proposed standards, including that students would:

- Learn to recognize unfairness, stereotypes and bias on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination).
- Define freedom and democracy, and examine how

different groups have been included or excluded from the ideals over American history.

- Explain how systemic inequity has been a barrier to accessing credit.

This debate is really about whether certain politicians will let educators and parents transform Minnesota's schools to better educate and prepare all students — white, Black and brown — for successful lives in the 21st Century.

Hypothetically, high school graduates with some lessons in red-lining and predatory lending aimed at Black families might be less willing to believe the racist trope that people living in poverty are solely to blame for their situation.

Minnesota students deserve the freedom to see a fuller picture of our state and nation — the good, the bad, the generous and the cruel — because we're educating the leaders of tomorrow.

We can't let the prejudices of the leaders of today deny their successors the education they will need to bring Minnesotans together to make a state where everyone can thrive, no exceptions.

Together,



Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

## Virtual lobby days continue

The most effective advocates for public schools in Minnesota are the front-line educators who guide our students toward successful lives every day, which is why Education Minnesota has made it easier than ever for members to participate in lobby days, even during a pandemic.

Virtual lobby days are available to be scheduled throughout the rest of the session.

These virtual lobby days can be scheduled and coordinated by local union or intermediate organization leadership and Education Minnesota staff as they have been in the past.

This year, we're offering several issue-based lobby days, which are open to all active members.

Two are scheduled to be held in April.

Watch [www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature/details-on-lobby-days](http://www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature/details-on-lobby-days) for more details, including how to register.

## Getting social!

Educators use social media as a way to connect with their communities, colleagues and the world. We will feature posts from Education Minnesota members and locals each issue! Make sure to follow Education Minnesota on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and Pinterest!



## Where are you reading your Minnesota Educator?

**Congratulations, Kyra Christopherson of Minneapolis, for being this issue's winning submission!**

We love seeing all of the places where you are reading your Minnesota Educator!

Email a photo to [educator@edmn.org](mailto:educator@edmn.org) or share it on social media using #mneducator of where you are reading your Minnesota Educator to be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Target gift card!

Submissions are due May 7. Happy reading!



## Educators in the news!

Education Minnesota members are often interviewed in their local newspapers or TV station. We will feature a quote each issue!

**We have learned to rehearse using Google Meet, where we cannot all unmute and sing together, due to the lag between each computer creating a cacophony of sound. We rehearse by keeping everyone on mute and listening to the teachers. We record individually, then edit the recordings together to create what are called 'virtual choirs.' Many music educators have spent countless hours learning audio and video engineering skills to edit their groups together to be able to hear the true sound of the ensemble.**

– Susan Zemlin, Blaine High School's director of vocal music, in an article celebrating her receiving the Minnesota Music Educators Association's Music Educator of the Year Award. The article ran Feb. 26 in the ABC Newspapers.

# EDUCATORS USE UNION POWER TO ENSURE SAFETY FOR STUDENTS, STAFF

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed a lot of the ways in which teaching and learning happens in and out of school buildings. For the 2020-21 year, local school districts were allowed to make decisions for their schools and communities on which learning models would be used and how. This left many local educator unions stepping in. Using the power of negotiations, many unions came to agreements with districts, making sure that the safety and health — both physical and mental — of staff and students were at the forefront of those decisions.

## Minneapolis teachers take health accommodations fight to court

After spending the fall in full distance learning, the Minneapolis Public Schools announced a return to in-person learning for elementary schools to starting in February.

As plans took shape, the district told employees that it would no longer accept accommodations, including those allowing people with health concerns or who live with people with health concerns to work from home.

The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals tried to negotiate with the district over the terms and conditions of returning to school buildings with no success.

"Educators are the ones on the ground who will be implementing these plans and having us at the table in the decision-making process is crucial to the success of returning to in-person learning," MFT Teacher Chapter President Greta Callahan said in a press release in January.

After their attempts to bargain continued to be met with resistance or silence, MFT leaders took their concerns to the Public Employment Relations Board and the courts.

In late January, the MFT filed an unfair labor practice charge with the PERB.

The claim stated: "The Union has been attempting to engage in collaboration and problem solving throughout the pandemic, but the District has yet to negotiate over the critical terms and conditions of employment involved in a safe return to in-person teaching and learning. Although

the Union will continue to attempt to reach resolution on these issues with the District, it is very concerned about the District's refusal to engage in what it calls 'formal bargaining' over these mandatory subjects of bargaining."

A few days before educators were supposed to report to buildings to prepare classrooms for students' return, the union also filed a motion for a civil injunction in Hennepin County's Fourth Judicial District Court.

The filing asked the court to stop the district from refusing to accept accommodation requests under Gov. Tim Walz's Executive Order 20-82.

The court moved quickly and ordered that the Minneapolis Public School District could not require staff to return to work in person Monday, Feb. 1, if they had previously received or are in the process of obtaining an accommodation to work from home.

The order stated that because it understands at least 40 percent of Minneapolis students have chosen to remain distance learners, the district should be able to have educators provide remote instruction to remote learners instead of reporting to a school building to do so.

"We are happy to have our concerns heard and recognized by the court, but we are frustrated that it took legal action to get the district to abide by the rules the governor has put in place to keep workers safe during this devastating pandemic," Callahan said after the court ruling. "This process has only caused unnecessary, additional stress on our educators, and we hope this brings them some relief."

MFT ESP Chapter President Shaun Laden agreed

that this court order is an important step, and that the unions will continue to push the district to follow their contracts and keep the health and safety of all members of the school community at the heart of their decisions.

"Educators want to be back in classrooms, in front of students, but we need to feel safe, supported and heard by our employer as we work to return to in-person learning," said Laden said in a press release after the court ruling. "We hope this court order will bring more conversations on how we can work together so all of our students, staff, families and communities are comfortable with the plans."

Since the end of January, the district has been following the court order as it relates to providing worker accommodations and the union is waiting on the PERB to do its investigation on the ULP claim.

### Cass Lake-Bena bargain over dedicated pandemic leave

Leaders of the Cass Lake Education Association spent the last year working closely with their superintendent on COVID plans and learning models.

Co-presidents Lisa Maki-Kuhn and Molly Turner sat on the district's COVID response team, and communicated out any updates and information to their members on a regular basis.

The district spent March to January in distance learning, due to the district serving a high population of Native American students and the health risks to their communities being higher.

Throughout the year, Maki-Kuhn and Turner engaged with their membership around what they needed in order to feel safe and supported.

One of the issues they worked to resolve was a locally negotiated, dedicated COVID leave memorandum of understanding that would replace the federal leave which expired Dec. 31, 2020.

"We started the process back in July," said Maki-Kuhn. "We first started looking at a MOU. We sat down with our superintendent in August and went through it. I don't think initially she thought we needed it because I think what many people didn't understand was that the COVID leave ended on Dec. 31. I think a lot of people



Members of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals held a socially-distanced rally ahead of elementary students returning to in-person learning in February. The union filed a court order with the district after it was not going to provide any accommodations for staff as students returned to buildings, even with 40 percent of students still choosing distance learning. The union prevailed and continues to push the district to bargain over issues of student and staff safety.

thought it would last the entire school year."

Maki-Kuhn and Turner took surveys of members and presented findings to the school board, sharing out the information on why the MOU was important.

Their superintendent then saw a MOU from a neighboring district that included leave language and she showed her support for it as well.

The MOU states that teachers who are unable to work because they are diagnosed with COVID-19, are identified for self-quarantine or are providing care to a family members who is quarantining or diagnosed with COVID-19 will receive 30 district-provided "pandemic leave" days, as well as other safety and workload considerations.

"(The superintendent) thought that 30 days would really help show staff that the district cared about them and wanted them to be safe," said Turner.





Education Minnesota's website contains an entire section for members to access related to bargaining around the COVID-19 pandemic, including many of the locally negotiated MOUs discussed in this article. You must be logged into the member portal to see these resources.

"She wanted to make sure that our staff, if anything happened and they were sick, that they wouldn't lose their home or not be covered," Maki-Kuhn said. "She wanted staff to know that the district appreciates everything we've done and they are going to support them if they get sick."

## Winona teachers address workload concerns

The Winona Education Association members have seen multiple changes in learning models over the course of the 2020-21 school year, and with that has come multiple opportunities to bargain with the district over student and staff safety and workload concerns.

In the elementary school levels, the concerns were around prep time.

"With some of our members who are at multiple buildings, especially our specialists, it really put a tight crunch on prep time," said Linda Pfeilsticker, local union president, during a presentation at Education Minnesota's Collective Bargaining and Organizing Conference. "And it also made it really difficult when the extra 30 minutes came in. That was great, but we didn't know where to put them. There are 15 minutes here, 10 minutes there, whatever it was."

The union took up the issue with the district and they agreed to a MOU that stated that "the modified safe learning elementary schedule for students K-4 does not allow for teachers to have the same number of a preparation minutes per school day but does allow for the appropriate preparation minutes per week."

The union and district agreed that teachers will

be provided with the contractual preparation time over the course of the week for the 2020-21 school year while in a hybrid or in-person learning model. That has looked like shaping Wednesday schedules in a little different fashion to address the needs of elementary school teachers, said Pfeilsticker.

At the high school, the transitions between distance, hybrid and in-person were more complicated, said Pfeilsticker.

The district and union decided to look at outside assistance to make sure teachers had what they needed to be successful.

"It came down to member mental health and physical health and we agreed to basically a distance learning teacher and we agreed to partner with Edgenuity (an online curriculum and learning platform) just for this year, understanding what we were doing was for the betterment of the entire staff," said Pfeilsticker. "And working through that so we could address concern now, knowing it wasn't something we were going to permanently be in."

The MOU states that "the district would purchase additional support services through Edgenuity to assist students in need of specialized support so as not to increase the workload of the teacher providing instruction in an in-person or hybrid learning model."

Pfeilsticker said that now, if the district wants to continue offering any kind of distance learning option to high school students in the future, they have the building blocks of what the discussion would need to look like, but for now, she is happy that her members are happy.

"That MOU made the lives of our secondary teachers much better," she said.



# POLL SHOWS EDUCATION DEBT STRESS WIDESPREAD ACROSS MINNESOTA

**Three-quarters of Minnesota student loan borrowers say their student loans cause them stress and most report they would have trouble paying for an unexpected expense or are already falling behind in their finances, according to a poll released in March.**

Education Minnesota partnered with the Center for Responsible Lending to poll Minnesotans about education debt, as part of our Degrees, Not Debt program. The CRL is a national group working to ensure a fair, inclusive financial marketplace that creates opportunities for all credit-worthy borrowers.

The poll comes as Minnesota lawmakers consider the Student Borrower Bill of Rights, which as of press time has been moving through the House and the Senate. The bill would provide oversight over student loan servicers and hold them accountable for serving borrowers fairly and responsibly. Problems with servicers include misleading information, misapplied payments and failure to place borrowers into the income-driven repayment plans for which they are eligible, which adds to their debt load and makes covering living expenses more challenging.

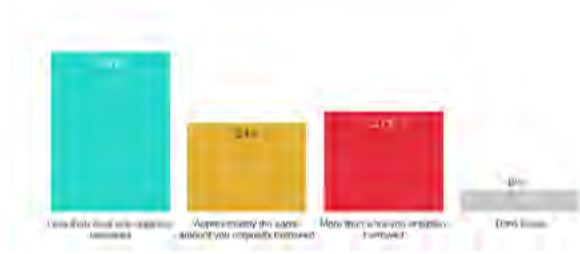
"College affordability and education debt are no longer just a burden — they have become a barrier to the American Dream. And loan servicers are part of the problem," said Education Minnesota Vice President Bernie Burnham.

"Borrowers in low-wealth, rural and communities of color are harmed the most. This poll shows strong support for bold solutions, and one clear need is holding servicers accountable through the Student Borrower Bill of Rights."

The vast majority of poll respondents support major reform across party lines, with 79 percent supporting an office to take student loan complaints and advocate for borrowers.

The poll also found that Black and Latino students struggle to fund their college experiences due

A fourth of Minnesota borrowers (27%) report being more than twice their supposedly borrowed



*A recent poll by Education Minnesota and the Center for Responsible Lending shows that education debt has a big impact on Minnesotans' stress and spending.*

to broad societal discrimination, and they are targeted by poor quality, for-profit institutions that fail to provide reliable educational benefits. As a result, students of color accumulate high levels of unmanageable debt. Almost half of Black graduates owe more on their undergraduate student loans four years after graduation than they did when they received their degree, compared to 17 percent of white graduates.

The poll also found more than half (51 percent) of Minnesota's student loan borrowers struggle to afford their payments. Borrowers also report that they have delayed saving for retirement (50 percent), put off buying a home (29 percent), been unable to buy basic necessities like food or clothing (26 percent), put off starting a family (20 percent), or have gone without medical care (17 percent) in order to pay their student loans.

For more information or to see the full poll results, go to [www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/Degrees-Not-Debt/Poll-Education-debt-in-Minnesota](http://www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/Degrees-Not-Debt/Poll-Education-debt-in-Minnesota).

## ONLINE DASHBOARD SHOWS WHY DISTRICTS NEED FULLY FUNDED SCHOOLS

Education Minnesota has launched a new online platform to show a snapshot of what fully funding schools might mean in our school districts.

The web-based platform allows educators, staff, families, community members and legislators to see how a school district fares in the funding of certain categories.

The goal is to show the clear need for fully funding education using key data points that affect teaching and learning conditions in a school district.

The areas highlighted on the dashboard are only a few issues we must address to start the long process of building schools worthy of all students, regardless of race or address. This does not show everything a district needs to be fully funded.

The dashboard also serves as a way for the public to interact with our full funding campaign. Users will be asked to share the dashboard on their social media channels, as well as sign Education Minnesota's petition asking lawmakers to fully fund schools and contact their legislators about these issues.

The dashboard will be a part of an advertising campaign Education Minnesota launched this spring to educate and inform the public around the need for fully funding education.

### How do we use the dashboard?

Go to [www.believeinwemn.com/dashboard/](http://www.believeinwemn.com/dashboard/). You will enter in the school district number or city that you want to view. Then you will go through three values-based questions to hopefully root the user in why these data points are important to student success.

The questions are:

- Should the state of Minnesota provide financial resources to close the racial-equity opportunity gap and to fully fund special education services and instruction for English language learners?
- Should schools provide the nurses, counselors, psychologists and social workers that our students need to get timely help?

**Should the state of Minnesota provide financial resources to close the racial-equity opportunity gap and to fully fund special education services and instruction for English language learners?**

Do you agree?



[SKIP QUESTION](#)



We're so glad you agree!

**DISTRICT 15** needs \$1,631,641/year in **ADDITIONAL** state funding to give its equity efforts a chance to succeed.

*Question one on the dashboard asks about racial equity, special education and English learners funding. The platform shows a total needed for each district, as shown for ISD 15, as well as a breakdown of each of the three areas where funding is needed.*

- Should school funding in Minnesota be equitable and sufficient across the whole state, so that all students — no matter what they look like or where they come from — have what they need to succeed?

Users will see how much funding their district needs in that category to meet the suggested threshold, such as fully funding special education services, meeting the national ratios for support services staff or showing how much local levies have had to cover costs.

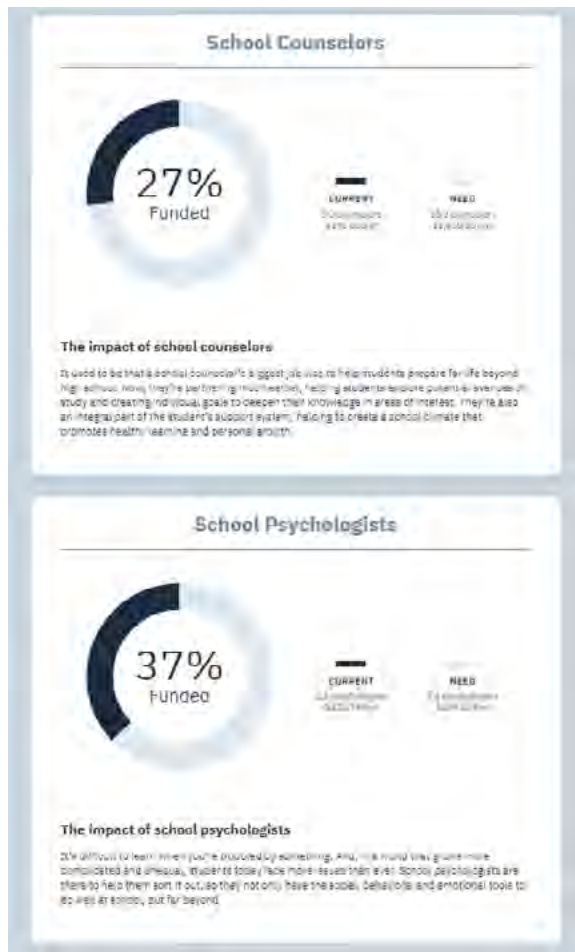
Each category also includes a description of why these areas of funding are important to creating an equitable and successful school community.

At the end, the user will get a final “report” card summary of the total dollar amounts needed to fully fund each issue.

### Why are there only a few areas?

These are the data points that Education Minnesota and the state can track for the 300+ regular school districts and charter schools. These are issues that are accessible statewide.

Unfortunately, we are not able to provide the data from intermediate districts, co-ops and ed districts because of their limitations around levying for funding and some of their specific funding categories.



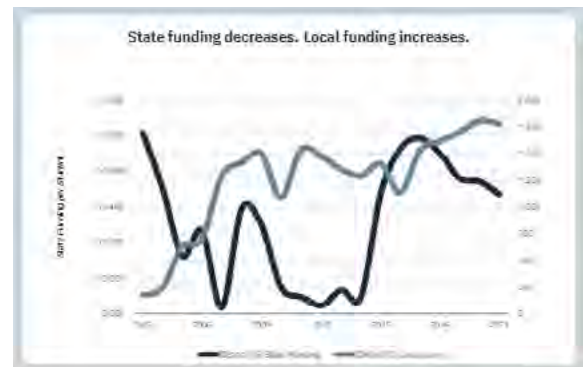
The second question on the dashboard focuses on student support staff — licensed school nurses, counselors, psychologists and social workers. Districts are able to see how many staff they need to meet the recommended staffing levels by the national associations of those educators, and how much funding that would take.

These are also the data points where we can show a direct dollar amount to resolve the underfunding.

## How did we get/calculate this data?

We have gathered this data from both internal and external sources:

For question one on the racial-equity opportunity gap and fully funding special education services and instruction for English language learners: This data comes from the Minnesota Department of Education. It was generated in response to proposals from the State Funding Task Force around racial equity and special education. The



Each district's final question will include a graph showing how state funding has changed over time, using inflation-adjusted dollars, with districts getting 11 percent less in state aid than in 2003. The graph will also show how much local taxpayers have had to fund schools during that same period of time.

EL data is MDE data on the EL "cross-subsidy" comparing spending vs. revenue on students who are English learners. These are amounts directly provided and calculated by MDE.

For question two on the staffing of licensed nurses, counselors, psychologists and social workers: Education Minnesota used MDE data on the numbers of staff in each district in each position and figure out the ratio of students to nurses, for example. We figured out what FTE would be needed if districts had sufficient staff to meet the ratios recommended by the professional associations, such as the National Association of School Nurses, for example, and then we figure out what the gap is. A total cost is determined to make up the gap by multiplying the number of staff needed by a per-FTE cost number that is generated by looking at the average salary reported for licensed teachers with an additional 30 percent benefit premium.

For question three on the funding levels and inflation adjustments: This is based on MDE data and the calculations are done by an economist with expertise in school finance, Jeff VanWychen. He has worked for the state and now is a consultant. The data takes MDE's per-pupil aid and levy amounts from the most recent forecast and does an inflation-adjustment to determine their value in 2003 dollars. The trend is then shown in per-pupil amounts, which is often talked about as the per-pupil spending power.



# HOPKINS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION, SCHOOL BOARD PASS JOINT CALL FOR FULL FUNDING

The Hopkins Education Association and their school board became the first district in the state to pass a partnership plan, calling for the state to fully fund education.

The resolution that passed unanimously by the local union's governing board and the school board states:

"Be it resolved that the Hopkins School Board, in partnership with Hopkins Education Association, calls on the governor and Minnesota's Legislature to either remove or fund any and all unfunded mandates and find the courage and the political will to raise taxes on the wealthiest 1 percent and largest corporations and fully fund all aspects of Minnesota's public schools so all students can receive the opportunities and supports they deserve."

Hopkins Education Association President Paula Klinger said she knew she wanted to do something this legislative session to urge lawmakers to invest more in education.

"They don't realize how hurtful this lack of funding has been to public education," Klinger said. "The opportunities my children had when they were in school and the costs to us as a family were so very different. The costs to families now means they are budgeting to participate in activities like sports, music, theater and even some classes."

Klinger said she knew the school board was also concerned with the costs of unfunded mandates on schools from the state, as well as funding not keeping up with inflation. She approached one of the members to present an idea she and Adam Janiak, the Education Minnesota field staff who supports Hopkins, had created.

"We wanted a sign of unity to push this idea of full funding," Klinger said.

Before submitting the resolution for the school board's agenda, Klinger was invited by the board's member to attend the meeting of the Legislative

Action Coalition. The board and LAC already had passed their own legislative platform, so they suggested some edits to the resolution, but worked collaboratively with Klinger.

They included items highlighting how the state's funding shortfalls have affected Hopkins students and staff, including, "Whereas, in 2003, the state made significant changes in how Minnesota funds schools so that total real per-pupil state aid is \$503 less per student now than it was in 2003, costing the Hopkins School District nearly \$3.4 million in the 2020-21 school year."

Klinger presented a letter to the board stating the intent of the partnership plan and why the teachers wanted to bring it to the board.

It was put on the board's agenda for March 2 and passed unanimously.

"We were joined this year by the HEA, which has come to us with a proposed resolution," said Steve Adams, the board director who worked with Klinger, during the board meeting March 2. "I urge us to pass it."

Board Chair Jennifer Bourchard also shared her excitement in the partnership between the union and the board on the resolution.

"I was personally really excited to receive this email from our HEA president with this resolution, because it speaks to first, the commitment of our Hopkins educators to really get behind this advocacy effort, and if we can team up as people who care about public education in this state," Bourchard said during the meeting. "Because obviously, we care deeply about what happens in Hopkins but it's a moral and ethical and economic imperative to fully fund public education across our state. Anyone who has done advocacy work in any realm knows there is power in numbers."

With the resolution passed, Klinger is now working with her members to contact their legislators with the information or attend the local's April lobby day.

To continue and expand on this project, Klinger is hopeful that Adams will bring the resolution to other members of the Minnesota School Boards Association and, with further help and support from Janiak and Education Minnesota Organizer Sarah Derdoski, created a petition for all members to sign, asking them to pledge to work together to fully fund schools.

"When we contact our legislators and attend the lobby day, we will have the resolution and petition as clear demonstration that we are united, labor and management, in our message that our students, our families, our schools and our society absolutely require the attention of our legislators to act to fully fund our schools," she said.

***Learn more about how your local can take action by signing our statewide petition or working with your school board members to pass a resolution at [www.edmnvotes.org](http://www.edmnvotes.org).***

Education Minnesota has developed sample school board language, but locals can work with their field staff and organizers to create one that fits their local.

The statewide petition asks Minnesota legislators and Gov. Tim Walz to stave off any cuts to school funding, address the disruptions to education caused by COVID-19 and start making strategic investments to fully funding welcoming schools that work for everyone. Share the public petition with your colleagues, friends, family and on your social networks.

Also watch Education Minnesota's website and social media channels for information about an outside, socially-distanced rally May 15 to call for fully funding education ahead of the last week of the legislative session,



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# LAKE CITY PARAPROFESSIONALS BECOME NEWEST ESP UNION

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the power of having a union when it comes to worker and student safety. The paraprofessionals in Lake City saw that firsthand.

"With COVID, we felt like we were on the short end of the stick," said Michelle Seydel, a paraprofessional who started the organizing effort. "And we found ourselves without jobs. We showed up every day, but we weren't given a choice in our jobs."

"During that uncertain time, we saw teachers had someone to go to," said Vernoica Mickelson, another para involved in the organizing. "We just kept getting told we'll figure something out."

Seydel reached out to the teachers in the district who are leaders in their local union and got connected with staff at Education Minnesota.

"After a few meetings, it was clear this is where we wanted to go," she said. "Then it was educating the paras in our district about why."

There are 24 paraprofessionals throughout the district.

"We started gathering information from the other paras about how they felt and what they wanted," said Mickelson. "The unity of us coming together was huge for us. We had thought we could come together, but had never talked about it. We found out we were all pretty much on the same page."

When it came time to sign authorization cards, indicating their intent to bargain collectively with the district, the group got 90 percent of their staff to sign. And their superintendent took those counted cards as their vote, and recognized their group as a union.

"We know that doesn't happen often," said Seydel. "That gives us hope that we will have a good negotiations."

The group is getting set up with Education Minnesota, getting their local union number and access to membership forms to get members signed up.

The have elected their officers — Seydel serving as president and lead negotiator, Mickelson as treasurer — and negotiators are starting to get to work preparing for their first contract.

"Negotiators are meeting regularly to learn and talk through what we want," Seydel said. "We are learning a lot about what contracts are. We want to talk to everyone and see what people like and don't like."

Right now, the group has a non-certified work agreement, so the idea of a negotiated contract is exciting for Seydel.

"Right now, we get a couple personal days, sick days, we have an options to buy into the health insurance," she said. "Right now, every couple years they'll let us come and try and negotiate and we might get a .26 increase and no other benefits. This will give us a voice and a contract to point to and say, 'this is what our contract says.'"

The process of becoming a union has united the paras throughout the district and Seydel and Mickelson are excited about what they can achieve next.

"We have title paras who work on certain things, and then we have a lot of special education paras," said Seydel. "That builds a chasm between job groups. This process has really unified us."

The process has also connected the paraprofessionals with the teachers in the district, too.

"The teachers are so thrilled for what this can do for our district," Seydel said. "This unified all of our staff, having more equity and voices for everybody. When done right, that can be beneficial for all staff in the district."

***The Ada-Borup paraprofessionals have also recently voted to become a certified local with Education Minnesota! Welcome to both these ESP groups!***



# COURT RULES FOR UNIONS IN DUES REFUND CASE

Education Minnesota, Shakopee Education Association, Anoka Hennepin-Education Minnesota and the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association recently scored an important victory in a case that is part of a national wave of anti-union litigation following the U.S. Supreme Court's 2018 decision in *Janus v. AFSCME*. In the *Janus* decision, the court ruled that requiring non-members to pay an agency or "fair share fee" as authorized by state law, violated the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

In *Hoekman v. Education Minnesota*, three Minnesota teachers sued for refunds of fair share fees and union dues that Education Minnesota and other unions collected prior to the decision. They claim that *Janus* not only prohibits the collection of fair share fees from non-members — which stopped immediately after the decision was issued — but that non-members must also be refunded fees collected prior to the decision. In addition, they claim that people who chose to be union members are also entitled to refunds because they did not have the choice to be a non-member and pay nothing.

The unions received a highly favorable ruling from the District Court in May, effectively telling plaintiffs that they could speak only for themselves and were not representative of other members. That decision is on appeal, but in November, the court also held oral arguments on the unions' motion to dismiss the case entirely. In the Feb. 12 ruling, U.S. District Court Judge Susan Nelson granted the unions' motion to dismiss the lawsuit based on what is recognized as the "good faith defense," that unions cannot be held financially liable for collecting fair share fees authorized by state law and U.S. Supreme Court case law that was valid prior to the *Janus* decision.

Nelson noted that every court to hear a post-*Janus* case has recognized the good faith defense, and she quoted the Third Circuit Court of Appeals' decision in *Diamond v. PSEA*: "It is fair — and crucial to the principle of rule of law more generally — that private parties like the Unions should be able to rely on statutory and judicial authorization of their actions without hesitation or fear of future monetary

*This Legal Briefs column, written by Education Minnesota attorneys, is one of an occasional series on legal developments that affect educators.*

liability." The court added that Education Minnesota had no reason to doubt that collecting fair share fees was lawful, observing, "PELRA permitted the Education Minnesota Defendants to collect fair-share fees... and PELRA's constitutionality was supported by the Supreme Court's decision in *Abood* and forty years of precedent thereafter."

The court also rejected the argument by one of the teacher-plaintiffs that Education Minnesota's dues revocation window violates her First Amendment rights under *Janus*. The court held that because the teacher was a member at the time she signed her application agreeing to the window and received the benefits of union membership in exchange for her dues, the agreement was valid and enforceable.

This decision was the result of diligent work by countless members and staff of Education Minnesota. Prior to the *Janus* decision, locals worked hard to prepare themselves and their members for the changes that the decision would require if fair share fees were prohibited. Following the decision, locals and staff did considerable work updating membership practices and contract language. In addition, our affiliation with NEA and AFT helped us coordinate our legal strategy and resources on a national scale, which is exactly what the anti-union forces bringing these lawsuits are doing on the other side.

Although the plaintiffs have already filed an appeal to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, all other appellate courts that have heard similar cases have found in favor of the unions and dismissed these cases. In January, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear appeals in three similar cases against unions.

David Aron  
Education Minnesota General Counsel

# AG EDUCATOR CONNECTS STUDENTS, CONTENT USING TIKTOK

Nathan Anderson is a second generation agricultural teacher, but a first generation TikTok star.

The Watertown-Mayer High School teacher was a bit of a naysayer to the popular social media platform at first, but then seeing how much his students used it and trying new, digital ways to connect once the COVID-19 pandemic hit, he saw an opportunity.

"I started making a couple videos in the winter of 2019-20 but it really took off during the COVID shutdowns in the spring of 2020," Anderson said. "I kept trying to make funny videos as a way for myself to stay sane and lighthearted during that stressful time. As school started up again, I started making videos

that related to the classes I was teaching as well. My followers skyrocketed in the fall and now I have over 73,000 followers."

Anderson said his students really love following his TikTok account and word has spread throughout the school, which in turn has increased interest in his classes.

"I was thinking about offering a new class next year called 'Cowboy Cooking,'" he said. "I made a video about it asking my TikTok followers if it sounded like a class they would take and then decided that we would offer it. We had around 100 students pre-register to take it next year, so we are going to have to offer it three times to fulfil the demand."

Not only does he use the videos in fun ways, he has also found them to be practical classroom tools.

"In a class this fall, we were building fishing rods," Anderson said. "In order for me to still follow COVID guidelines and maintain social distancing, I made a series of videos showing step by step how to do it so I would not have to get right next to my students and show them. They could just pull up the videos and see what to do."

Anderson's new take on student engagement has also piqued the interest of other educators, including an opportunity to present at a national conference last January.

"I have had a couple virtual meetings with ag teachers

from my region and they have commented that the videos are providing them and their students with much needed laughter," he said. "I am also able to connect with teachers from all over the country, which I find amazing. I have received countless messages from beginning ag teachers and soon-to-be ag teachers asking for my advice on certain topics or for curriculum."

Being asked for advice by younger teachers feels a little strange, as Anderson considers himself new to the field yet. He is in his sixth year of teaching. He spent four years at Breckenridge High School before coming to Watertown-Mayer.

"I look to my dad and the other teachers for advice and the fact that people look to me for guidance still baffles me," Anderson said.

Anderson's dad is an ag teacher, so while he considered a few other subject areas to teach, he knew he couldn't give up Future Farmers of America and ag education just felt right.

While TikTok may be the popular new social media platform of the moment, Anderson hopes that the student connection to the content won't be a fad.

"I get students who normally would avoid the ag classroom coming in and saying 'Hey, aren't you TikTok famous?' and then we get chatting about that and it can lead to bigger class sizes for me," he said.



**mnaagteacher** Nathan Anderson · 5h ago

🎵 original sound · Nathan Anderson



Check out Nathan Anderson at [www.tiktok.com/@mnaagteacher](https://www.tiktok.com/@mnaagteacher).



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## PRIOR LAKE-SAVAGE COALITION FOR TEACHERS OF COLOR BRINGS EQUITY WORK TO FOREFRONT OF LOCAL UNION

The Prior Lake-Savage Education Association's Coalition for Teachers of Color have begun creating real action steps for the local's members of color, and creating opportunities for white colleagues to become equity co-conspirators.

The CTOC is a subset of the PLSEA, helping move equity work within the union and district.

"The foundations for the CTOC were always in the district. The CTOC didn't form by bringing in different personnel, or placing people through a rigorous program. It was membership engagement stripped down to its basic principles. Members being seen, valued, empowered and advocated for," said Sabrina Tapia Contreras, who serves as the group's coordinator and sits on the PLSEA Executive Board.

After the murder of George Floyd, PLSEA leadership began having conversations about supporting students, families and members, as well as working on the local's own equity plan.

"I remember Shawn (Beaudette, the PLSEA local president) calling me," said Tapia Contreras. "I remember him pausing the conversation and apologizing to me. Apologizing because I had been fighting for the rights of teachers of color for years on the exec board and really hadn't gotten anywhere to make real change. It was that apology, I think, that really fueled this moving forward. We began with two listening sessions and began sketching out the initial plans for the CTOC."

While the listening sessions were the start, leaders knew more meaningful connections were needed between the union and members of color.

"Before the listening session, I went back and forth on whether or not I would go. There hadn't been a ton of effort in the past on behalf to unite and support TOCs, so I was hesitant," said Adrienne Young Koplitiz, the CTOC board's first officer who leads the internal education work. "I attended, and I'm so glad I did. It was really the meeting that gave the momentum for the CTOC to form."

Supporting the group, but also providing a space for members of color to lead, has been the job of PLSEA President Shawn Beaudette.

"Our members just need a space where their voices are amplified," he said. "As leaders, we are also in a position to call out racism in our schools without fear of retaliation. We have also worked to create an atmosphere where, as a group, we communicate to advance equity work as an entire membership."

The CTOC formed a board with five members of color, all of whom are leading in specific areas of work.

"Each of the board areas is specifically designed to address direct blockades that contribute to the low percentage of involvement for teachers of color both in our district and across the state: membership engagement, educational and financial transparency, internal education, external partnerships and leadership development," Tapia Contreras said.

Since August, the CTOC has established a parent affinity group, launched a fundraiser and assisted the district's school board in drafting an equity resolution, said Young Koplitiz.

"We held our first Parent Affinity Group in October, where we invited parents of color or white parents with students of color to come together for discussion and connection, and we continue to hold them on a monthly basis," she said. "We sold PLSEA CTOC Co-Conspirator T-shirts, and they were a huge hit. With the purchase of a shirt, folks got an invitation to join our Co-Conspirator Cohort, a group of allies committed to meaningful change and building community. We raised \$2,100, which we are investing in teachers who need financial assistance on their equity journey through grant opportunities."

The CTOC has also been coordinating anti-racism professional development for staff.

In January and February, they partnered with Humanize My Hoodie and Education Minnesota to offer free workshops to PLSEA and Education Minnesota members, with about 120 educators attending.

"We have had great attendance at professional learning sessions, and that will continue to grow internally now that other members see the work

that is being done,” said Beaudette. “Our members leading the CTOC have done an amazing job engaging with members and finding opportunities that really fit with what people need.”

Tapia Contreras is now working on a three-year and five-year plan for the group, and is applying for grant funding from the Education Minnesota Foundation and National Education Association.

“I tell people the biggest overlying goal is to create a shoulder-to-shoulder experience where community members, teachers, school board members and administration are recognizing where their own personal privileges lie, where accountability needs to be held and calling people in, rather than calling people out, to create healing,” she said.

Creating the trust in the union and district systems with members of color takes time and was even more difficult in a pandemic, said Tapia Contreras.

“We can sell all the T-shirts in the world, but if we’re not making real changes that affect teacher’s lives to improve their quality of life, they are not going to buy into another equity group promise,” she said.

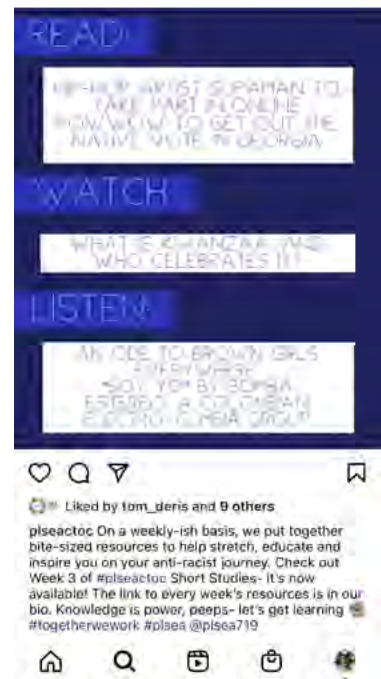
“Especially in a year like this, folks are drowning in work and transitions and lack of support, so finding the energy to press on with equity work can be daunting,” said Young Koplitz. “Overall, the response has been positive and encouraging, from both TOC and white teachers alike. We have about a dozen

active members in our CTOC, and about 25 total TOCs in our district. We’re working on getting more folks involved.”

Tapia Contreras, Young Koplitz and Beaudette all encourage other locals to look at engaging, empowering and advocating for members of color and equity work.

“I think there’s a large misconception that you can’t start a TOC group in a district without a lot of TOCs,” said Young Koplitz. “We are proof here in PLSAS that you can establish, maintain and grow a powerful, change-making group where TOCs make up only about 4 percent of the teaching staff. All you need to begin is a handful of individuals committed to the cause, and local leadership who is willing and able to walk with you every step of the way.”

“It’s also okay to start small and know that there are people that want to make some changes — they just need a space to get started,” said Beaudette. “Local leaders have to be ready for the tough conversations. Know people will push back and it’s a part of the necessary process.”



*The Prior Lake-Savage Education Association's CTOC has created social media accounts to support their work.*

“Every single district has a CTOC waiting to explode,” said Tapia Contreras. “Our Ethnic Minority Affairs Council forums at Education Minnesota, and their community partnership programs, have been working diligently and deserve a lot of recognition for laying down the groundwork for any of this to take flight.”

# EDEN PRAIRIE PRESCHOOL TEACHERS SETTLE FIRST CONTRACT

**Nearly three years after forming a union, the Eden Prairie Preschool Education Association has its first contract and its members are ready to start working on the next one.**

"This was going on a three-year process," said Aubrey Boubelik, a preschool teacher who served as a negotiator. "It has strengthened all of us together. It's worth it."

The 2018-20 contract includes 3 percent increases in wages for both years, an increase in personal days and the ability to bank up to five, increased sick leave and grievance, layoff/reduction and representation language.

"We have representation now. We have people we can go to with some things," said Boubelik. "There was about a \$10,000 gap between the average K-12 teacher and preschool teacher, and we aren't getting paid over the summer. We didn't get all of that fixed this contract, but we are closer."

While the contract passed unanimously, the road to the EPPEA's agreement was far from smooth.

In April 2020, the district discontinued the preschool program, which meant the teachers were laid off.

"We had a union with no members," said Dominic Kirkpatrick, Eden Prairie high school teacher and president of the Eden Prairie Education Association, of which the EPPEA is a unit.

"We stopped negotiating as our program diminished," said Angela Ericsson, another teacher and negotiator. "We stopped from last March to October. Then we had to start over as finances changed."

In September, the program was back up and running, though not as many teachers were hired back.

The group of licensed preschool teachers became interested in unionizing after conversations with Early Childhood Family Education colleagues who were a part of the union.

"We realized we didn't have a union rep, and we just had a handbook," said Ericsson. "We wanted to be more inclusive with the district and the ECFE and K-12 teachers. We wanted to be able to discuss our wants and needs as teachers and to have a say in what we wanted and not just be told."

After reaching out through the Eden Prairie Education Association, a group of the preschool teachers began meeting with Education Minnesota field staff and organizers and having meetings as a large group.

"There was a little bit of hesitancy since we have part-time positions and full-time positions, so



*Mariah Thompson votes on the Eden Prairie Preschool Education Association's first contract, which passed unanimously.*



they were wondering how this would affect us," said Boubelik. "But it was a unanimous decision to unionize, for the most part."

"Once everyone was educated on what it would mean, everyone was on board," said Ericsson.

The preschool teachers are their own union with their own contract, but are a part of the EPEA union, which includes the district's ECFE-12 teachers.

As a show of solidarity, the EPEA voted to pay for the EPPEA's local dues for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, knowing they were still working on their first contract.

"These teachers were working side-by-side with the teachers of our membership as well," said Kirkpatrick. "They are doing that exact same work or very, very similar to the kindergarten teacher that will be right next door to them as our district is moving the pre-K programs to the elementary schools. They will be using the same lunchrooms, accessing the same special ed teachers."

"It was a show of solidarity to support these teachers and the importance of the work that they do to feed in to the K-12 community and the community as a whole," she said.

Being treated like the professional, licensed teachers they are was a big reason why the group joined Education Minnesota.

"I feel like it's strengthened our program as a whole," said Ericsson. "New hires used to be given an eight-page document. Now we have a real contract."

While the process to get their first contract was long, Ericsson and Boubelik are ready to get back to the table to negotiate their 2021-23 contract.

"The next one will be a lot smoother. We have a framework," said Ericsson. "We want to do it right away. We have set language. We can ask our members about their wants and needs and jump into it right away. I'm most excited to have a starting point and have that support."

In the next contract, the EPPEA hopes they will get to a salary schedule and the option to be paid on a 12-month schedule.

"We didn't get on the teacher contract with an addendum like the ECFE teachers are this round, but we are working our way closer," said Ericsson.



Angela Ericsson (left) and Aubrey Boubelik (right), who served as the preschool teacher negotiators, get ready to vote on their first contract in early March.

With the support of EPEA and Education Minnesota, Ericsson and Boubelik say their membership feels like it is in a better place with the district, and for that they are happy.

"Just being able to negotiate back and forth is huge," said Boubelik. "The district knows who we are now."

*Photos courtesy of Dominic Kirkpatrick, Eden Prairie Education Association*



## Grants

### ***NEA Safe and Just Schools Partnership Funding***

The National Education Association has Safe and Just Schools Partnership Funding for local unions who demonstrate commitment and capacity to implement and explore initiatives and partnerships to dismantle systemic inequities and unjust education practices that hinder healthy, safe and just learning and working environments for each and every student, educator or public employee in their worksites and communities. Applications will be accepted between now and July 31, with awards contingent upon available funding. Awards are one year in term and typically range from \$3,000 to \$75,000, depending on the number of members, students or community members associated with the grant. Go to [www.nea.org/resource-library/safe-and-just-schools-partnership-funding](http://www.nea.org/resource-library/safe-and-just-schools-partnership-funding) for more information on the program and how to apply.

## Professional development

### ***History Happened Here virtual workshop***

The Minnesota Historical Society is offering Zoom workshops during the COVID-19 pandemic. The workshop "History Happened Here" will be held April 15 from 4-6 p.m. The public conversation about how we remember history, memorialize events, and recognize public figures can engage students, too. In this two-part program, educators will first hear from community members leading the conversation about how we memorialize our past. Teacher educators from MNHS will share primary sources and activity ideas about how to have classroom conversations about the history and memory of a school, neighborhood, city or region. This workshop is geared toward classroom teachers in grades 6-12. Go to [www.mnhs.org/tedworkshops](http://www.mnhs.org/tedworkshops) for more information and how to register.

### ***Learning for Justice, formerly Teaching Tolerance, online opportunities***

Teaching Tolerance is now Learning for Justice, a name change to better reflect the work of the organization. The website still includes the classroom resources, professional development, a magazine, other publications and grant opportunities. Free, on-demand webinars are

still available on topics such as class, gender and sexual identity, immigration and race and ethnicity. Classroom resources include lesson plans, student texts, film kits and printable posters. Go to [www.learningforjustice.org](http://www.learningforjustice.org) to see all of the offerings on the rebranded website.

### ***Free Holocaust studies seminar***

"Honoring Resilience: Learning from The Holocaust and the Dakota Exile" will be held July 11-17 at Saint Cloud State University. Sponsored by The Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights, with additional support provided by Mount Zion Temple, Jewish Community Relations Council and the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Education at SCSU, the seminar is free of charge to participants. Attendees will explore lessons and activities for teaching about the Holocaust and Minnesota's Dakota exile through personal testimonies and place-based experiences, including day trips to Mount Zion Temple and Dakota sites such as Oheya-wahi. Participants will receive copies of relevant texts, other resources and 65 continuing education units. Attendees will also be eligible to apply for classroom mini-grants of up to \$1,000 following completion of the seminar.

This is a semi-residential seminar experience, from Sunday evening through Saturday morning. Most meals and transportation to sites will be provided. Low-cost dorm housing will be available for those traveling from further distances. For further information, email [merrymeltz@gmail.com](mailto:merrymeltz@gmail.com). To apply, go to [www.toli.us/satellite-program/st-paul](http://www.toli.us/satellite-program/st-paul).

### ***Earth science professional development***

The Minnesota Science Teachers Association is working on professional development to help sixth-grade educators prepare for new content outlined in the new standards. Two week-long boot camp style workshops are planned for July 26-30 in Bemidji and Aug. 2-6 in the Twin Cities metro, exact location TBD. The workshop will help sixth-grade teachers incorporate earth and space science content into their classrooms, as well as three-dimensional units. The workshop cost is \$390, but the MnSTA is currently working on legislation to make the programs accessible and affordable. Go to [www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ES-TEP.html](http://www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ES-TEP.html) to learn more and apply.

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## ***All relicensure courses, plus more, now available on MEA Online!***

Education Minnesota's new online professional development platform, MEA Online, continues to grow its list of offerings.

Now, all seven areas needed for educator relicensure are available, including all four parts of the new Cultural Competency requirement.

Many sessions that were presented live at our Collective Bargaining and Organizing Conference in January are now available in an asynchronous format, including Negotiations Resources: Online Data & Information to Support Bargaining and Virtual Negotiating: Moving Bargaining Online.

These courses are free to active Education Minnesota members. Members can take them at their own pace.

Education Minnesota sent email invitations to access MEA Online in July, September and November to all member email addresses we have on file.

1. Please check your email to find an invitation that says, "You are invited to the MEA Online learning portal." The invite will come from Education Minnesota's MEA Online Team at [notifications@learnupon.com](mailto:notifications@learnupon.com) and contain a link special to each member to access the site.

2. If you did not receive an email invitation from [notifications@learnupon.com](mailto:notifications@learnupon.com), please email [meaonline@edmn.org](mailto:meaonline@edmn.org). (Remember to check your junk/spam folders!) The MEA Online team will respond to your email promptly and send you an automated email invitation as described in step one.

New courses are added each week and month, so continue to check back and see what new opportunity awaits!

Go to [www.educationminnesota.org/resources/minnesota-educator-academy/MEA-Online](http://www.educationminnesota.org/resources/minnesota-educator-academy/MEA-Online) for more details.

