

MINNESOTA EDUCATOR

JUNE/JULY 2021

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THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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COVER PHOTO: Brooklyn Center educators and community partners turned the Middle and High School's gym spaces into donation centers after the killing of Daunte Wright and civil unrest that followed.

PHOTO BY DUANE ANDERSON.

TERRIBLE SCHOOL YEAR BROUGHT OUT BEST IN EDUCATORS

Minnesota educators don't get enough credit. We've met more challenges and maneuvered around more obstacles this school year than anyone could describe.

Almost every educator I know is too humble to accept the label, but I'm not ashamed to call the collective effort to keep our schools operating "heroic" during this unprecedented time.

The conversations about how to work safely started in August and the decisions were different in nearly every district, but the spirit of collaboration and desire to create safe learning environments was shared across the state.

We found ways to teach from a distance and in person—and sometimes both at the same time. Our students kept learning, often in new ways. Sometimes we had to fight to keep our most at-risk colleagues safe.

We endured a scary spike in infections in November and worked through shifting and confusing guidance about the new coronavirus from the federal and state governments.

It was frustrating and exhausting, but educators kept going to work as the professionals they are. If the next edition of the dictionary needs to illustrate the word "fortitude," I think a photo of any Minnesota educator will do.

Many educators showed tremendous courage in the face of exasperated and angry parents who had been

persuaded that the virus that has killed more than 7,300 Minnesotans, including seven school staff members and one student, was a hoax.

Many of our colleagues received abuse and violent threats for teaching honestly about the racial reckoning our nation has gone through since the police killing of George Floyd, or for simply creating safe spaces in their schools for LGBTQ students.

I worry one legacy of this pandemic year will be a wider audience for the small group of politicians who stoke fear about our schools and try to dictate what educators say in an effort to prevent students from learning a more honest account of our state and national history—an account that includes some hard truths about race, gender and class.

Nonetheless, we expect all schools will be operating close to normal in the fall—in person and with fewer safety protocols. But as I look back, I see the solidarity, empathy, selflessness, professionalism and bravery among our members that makes me proud to be president of our union.

The school year is almost over, as I write this, but there's still some work to do. The crucible of this pandemic year reminds us that the status quo not only doesn't work, but it also makes our schools and students vulnerable to the next emergency.

Our profession loses too many educators early in their careers and doesn't attract enough talented young people, especially people of color. Staffing is too thin all around and there is a crisis-level shortage of social workers, counselors and school nurses to support the social and emotional health of students.

Too many of us work in substandard buildings. Too many work for wages that don't sustain their families or pay for health insurance. Too many educators work so hard they damage their own health. I could go on and on.

Legislators need to hear from us for a few more weeks about the needs of our students before the Legislature finishes its budget in June. After that, it is my deepest hope that every educator can take some time to recharge and see to their own mental health and the health of their families.

It's been quite a school year. Be proud of what you've accomplished. Take care of yourself this summer. Then come back strong in the fall and be ready to give every student, no matter where they live or what they look like, an education that will let them pursue their dreams.

Together,



Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

Continued COVID response information available online

As Minnesota makes changes to its COVID-19 response plans, including ending numerous restrictions, Education Minnesota will continue to update its website with information on the Safe Learning Plan and vaccinations.

As of press time, the state has made no changes to the Safe Learning Plan for the 2020-21 school year, as the youngest Minnesotans are still not eligible for the vaccine.

Additional health and safety recommendations for summer programming will be provided to schools in the coming weeks. Middle and high schools will continue to be able to offer COVID-19 testing for students through the state program throughout the summer.

Watch www.educationminnesota.org/resources/in-the-classroom/Coronavirus for legal guidance, FAQs and bargaining resources as our response to the pandemic continues.

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!



Thanks to an Education Minnesota Foundation grant every BH student in grades K-6 received a Personally signed book by MN Author, Mary Casanova. Thanks Mary! Thanks EDMn! @BHSisd786 @EducationMN @MaryCasanova



Where are you reading your Minnesota Educator?

Congratulations, Jill Nysse, Winona, 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 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 July 9. 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 are all incredibly proud and honored to be working with the amazing staff, families and students who really make our school run. Through unionizing, we can have a seat at the table in which the decision-making process includes all voices.

— Janiru Herath, a teacher at Hiawatha College Prep-Kingfield, in an article "Staff announce union drives at two Twin Cities charter schools" in the St. Paul Union Advocate May 4. Teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff from Great River School in St. Paul and Hiawatha Academies in Minneapolis went public with their campaigns after filing signed authorization cards with the National Labor Relations Board, triggering the union-election process.

BROOKLYN CENTER EDUCATORS GO ABOVE, BEYOND FOR COMMUNITY

The fatal police shooting of Daunte Wright in April not only shook the community of Brooklyn Center, but affected the high school building itself. Sitting across from the police department, the school became the hub for community support, while in the center of calls for racial equity.

"Given where our families live and where the incident happened, the first thought is what does this mean for our students and their safety?" said Ramon Martinez, an English language teacher at Brooklyn Center Middle and High School and Education Minnesota-Brooklyn Center vice president. "From a school perspective too, given that we work with so many community partners, it was a natural fit to call on those organizations to say, our families are going to be in need. There are things that they aren't going to get because things are shut down and services were limited."

Brooklyn Center Schools are full-service community schools, so the switch from education space to donation center was quick and comprehensive.

A full-service community school focuses on partnerships between a school and its community.

In Brooklyn Center, the district has partnerships between the schools and community organizations to provide educational, enrichment and support services to students and families. This includes medical facilities on site, so kids don't have to miss school for a whole day for an appointment, and services that allow parents to find resources their families need.

"We already had community school leaders who were already working with those community partners and who were working with people who already had access to food and supplies," said Sizi Goyah, math teacher at Brooklyn Center Middle and High School. "And we allowed those partners to lead us into more partners."

The shooting happened on a Sunday, and by Monday, the partners were already working with the school, talking about how to use the site. The pieces were in place for the schools to become community donation intake and distribution sites.

"We recognized that there was going to be a huge need for food and supplies in our community. There has always been a food desert, but when Walmart and some of the stores closed, we knew there would be more of a need," said Goyah.

"The school was able to work with community activists and community partners to transition our Blue Barn, which is traditionally used for adaptive physical education, as a collection space."

"We saw how quickly the organization could be put together," said Martinez. "Not only putting the word out that this is what the needs are, but putting the structure in place behind it, so that there wasn't a delay in services to our families and those resources became available as quickly as possible."

The district moved to distance learning for a few days, which allowed the physical spaces to be utilized. But as students and staff returned, the opportunity for hands-on learning and support took shape.

Numerous staff volunteered in the donation and distribution spaces on their prep and lunch time.

"Our top priority is always being with students. For some people, when something like this happens, you feel so powerless and when you can take action and do something, it helps with those feelings," said Rhonda Johnson Marn, an English teacher and president of Education Minnesota-Brooklyn Center.

Students also wanted the opportunity to volunteer and help.

"We saw civics and math in action," said Goyah. "Students helped sort and pack and load vehicles. They had an action learning in what it means to be a human, learning social justice which is social studies, being a part of history. We also were doing math, by fulfilling orders and calculating what was going to run out."

Educators were sorting, making runs on their lunch breaks to go buy what was out to replenish the supplies and putting in their own money to buy supplies.

"Had we not had educators who were in the

community school model and mindset for what it means to be a part of the community, that might have been difficult," said Goyah.

Not only did Brooklyn Center educators step up, but so did others. The Osseo and Anoka districts reached out and provided donations and support. The district's GoFundMe started with a goal of \$1,000 but raised more than \$140,000. Educators from all over Minnesota contributed, as well as other union members. Free food distributions were organized by other labor unions, like SEIU and the UFCW, as well as the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation.

"Thank you to all of the educators in Minnesota," Sizi. "We saw you sharing our flyer and sending money and volunteering. This is how a union is supposed to work and what union members do. This is the power of our union."

Now the focus turns back to the students and getting them to the end of the school year.

"We hope they will have as much of a normal ending as possible," said Johnson Marn. "Having some kind of stability at the end of the year will be important."

"We want to end as a school community, coming back into the building," said Martinez. "I know I needed that and the students and families needed that too."

While Brooklyn Center educators hope that no other community will face a tragedy like theirs did, they do hope that people will realize how important full-service community schools are no matter what is happening in your area.

"There's so much a student needs to be successful as a scholar," said Johnson Marn. "What the community school does is it pushes down the barriers that you might face when trying to engage a student. We talk about how it takes a village to care for a child. And a community school helps you address the needs of the whole child, and everything fits into the school day."

"This symbolizes what education is supposed to be. School is not just an 8 to 4 in a brick and mortar building," said Goyah. "School is about community. Whatever happens in the community enters the school."



Labor unions and educators from across the state helped distribute free food and supplies to community members affected by the tragedy in Brooklyn Center.



Brooklyn Center educators helped distribute food and supplies in the wake of the fatal police shooting of Daunte Wright.

OSSEO ESPS EMBRACE AMBITIOUS BARGAINING CAMPAIGN

After working on the front lines and going above and beyond during this pandemic, the Osseo Education Support Professionals are engaged in a bargaining campaign, fighting for respect, training, and livable wages and benefits.

"We've come off and are still in a very, very stressful year," said Becky Hespen, Osseo ESP paraprofessionals local president. "ESPs have stepped up to the plate, done things they never thought they could do, figured things out. They are feeling like they haven't been respected in a number of ways for what they are doing. It's made them more aware."

The ESps have been without a contract since June 30, 2020.

As of press time, the local was still negotiating but has made progress on many issues.

"We're working this year without a contract, but people aren't that upset we haven't settled yet, because they know what we're fighting for," said Sharon Salz, an ESP who serves on the negotiations team.

The major issues the local is fighting for are increases to wages and their existing benefits, access to other benefits such as dental and life insurance, professional development and having

dedicated seats on district-level committees.

"All of it revolves around the respect for what we do," said Hespen. "We deserve the things we haven't been getting."

The representation on district committees has been a motivating proposal for a lot of ESps.

"We want ESps to be put on committees so we can consistently have a voice in the decisions being made at the district," said Sieara Washington, a local negotiator. "We just want a seat at the table."

During this round of negotiations, the local has done new things to raise their voices within the district and increase member engagement.

"We had movies made to share with everyone in the buildings to keep them updated on what we're doing and our goals," said Salz.

"We have events planned every month."

The local has been a part of rallies and town hall meetings with school board members, did a postcard writing campaign to the board and made new T-shirts, buttons and yard signs for all local union members.

"With each event, we're seeing more and more people sign up and get involved," said Hespen. "People I've never seen get involved before are finding their voice."

For all of these events, the local is working in tandem with the other three bargaining units, including the administrative ESps, in Osseo to show a unified front to the district.

"Everybody was struggling," said Hespen. "We know there is power in numbers. We're separate locals, but we are all Education Minnesota."

"They are getting more active and showing up," said Kelly Wilson, the president of the Osseo teachers local, who also represents the Kidstop instructors and nurses who are partnering with the ESps. "Together that voice is amplified."

Wilson said the teachers haven't started bargaining yet, because they want the ESps to settle first.



Education Minnesota Osseo ESps and other educators in the district wrote postcards to school board members, sharing their stories of working during a pandemic and asking for a fair and competitive contract.

Increased communications has also been a key part of the Osseo ESPs bargaining campaign.

"We're sharing with them that we haven't shared with them in the past," said Michelle Dennard, the local's vice president and negotiations team member. "We're showing them what we're showing to the district."

The increase in communications and profile of the bargaining campaign has caught the eye of all ESPs in the district.

"I actually have people coming to me, asking to join the union because they see what we are fighting for," said Washington.

"If we have everyone involved, fighting for the same thing, that's the union," said Salz. "Everyone is engaged and fighting for the same thing. They are informed. That's something that was missing before."

"We want the best for our students and if you don't have the best for our ESPs, how can you have the best for our students?" said Dennard.



Osseo ESP member and negotiator Sieara Washington rallied with fellow ESPs and educators from across the district in April before a school board meeting. The ESP local has been engaging more with board members during the contract campaign.

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VIRTUAL CONVENTION FOCUSES ON EQUITY WORK OF UNION

Education Minnesota held its second virtual Representative Convention April 24, which included passage of changes to the constitution and bylaws and action items which will drive the union's work in the next year.

More than 350 delegates from across the state attended the union's annual business meeting.

"The state of our union is strong," Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said. "The polling says our public is with us. Despite the turmoil of 2020 and the challenges of 2021, I believe in us, the members and staff of Education Minnesota. I believe in 'we' and I hope you do too."

Delegates voted to amend the constitution and bylaws to:

- Allow the governing board, the executive committee of the governing board and standing committees to meet by electronic means if necessary. The governing board can also authorize an electronic meeting of the Representative Convention.
- Streamline the process for members to submit filing forms for elections.

Action items debated and approved by the delegates included:

- Calling for charges to be dropped against protesters, which included many Education Minnesota members, participating in the Nov. 4 action fighting for freedom, justice and equality.
- Working with allies to advocate for universal health care options for all Minnesota educators and all Minnesotans.
- Demanding that the Legislature raise taxes on the 1 percent in order to put a down payment on fully funded, fully resourced schools that work for every student and staff member.

Another action item passed stated that Education Minnesota's local and statewide leaders will examine state and local union practices, policies, constitution and bylaws, and committee structures through a racial equity lens, dismantling systems and structures within

Education Minnesota wins NEA Human and Civil Rights Award

Education Minnesota has been named the 2021 recipient of the National Education Association's Rosena J. Willis Memorial Award for state affiliates.

The award is given to states who support locals in racial equity work, involve more minority members in the work and leadership of the union, lead in advocacy for minority students and families, and forge relationships with other groups fighting for equity.

"As an organization, Education Minnesota is committed to meaningful, intentional and ongoing work to advance racial and social justice for its members and Minnesota students and communities," said Education Minnesota President Denise Specht. "We know we still have a lot of work to do. We will lean into this work, and do whatever is necessary to have a racially just union and education system in Minnesota."

our union that perpetuate racial inequity.

"Having more courageous conversations about racism will only make our union stronger," said Michelle Dennard, an Education Minnesota-Osseo ESP member who spoke in support of the action item. "When the union is on the front lines of tackling systemic racism, it will not only make working conditions better for educators of color, it will create more welcoming school environments for every student, no exceptions."

"As a leader in greater Minnesota, we sometimes hear, this isn't our fight," said Heather Bakke, a member of Education Minnesota GFW. "I'm here to tell you that our union is one. This is a way to look at our systems to make sure we offer welcoming places where everyone feels like they have a seat at the table."

LEGISLATURE NOT QUITE DONE AS REGULAR SESSION ENDS

The Legislature had one job it needed to do this session — pass a state budget. Unfortunately, they didn't finish their assignment on time when session ended May 17 and will have to come back this summer to finish their work.

Gov. Tim Walz and House and Senate leaders did reach an overarching budget deal that could protect most schools from devastating budget cuts and layoffs for the next two years. But the agreement doesn't provide a long-term solution to the chronic underfunding of our public schools.

"This budget should stem the tide of harmful local budget cuts, but educators throughout the state want to be able to promise their students and parents that their local school will have the resources to meet the needs of all students for years to come. We can't do that today," said Education Minnesota President Denise Specht. "The way to break this two-year cycle of budget drama is to finally change the tax code so the richest Minnesotans and the biggest corporations pay their fair share for the schools and other services working families need."

The budget does not raise additional revenue from the very wealthy, as initial proposals from the Minnesota House and governor did. Many details of the deal have not been decided. However, it is clear the agreement relies heavily on one-time money for pandemic recovery from President Joe Biden and Congress.

Legislative leaders did agree to increase state funding for preschools through high schools by \$525 million over the next two years and \$100 million for our colleges and universities.

Senate Republicans proposed \$152 million in new funding for E-12 education, while House Democrats and the governor wanted \$722 million and \$750 million in new dollars respectively.

Legislative committees will decide the details of how that money will be spent by May 28 and reconvene a special session in June to finish the state's two-year budget.

Education Minnesota encourages the Legislature to fund pre-kindergarten and other ongoing programs and increase the investment in policies that help the families hit hardest by the pandemic, including full-service community schools, ensuring hourly school workers are eligible for unemployment insurance, recruiting and retaining teachers of color, and hiring more counselors and other professionals to support the mental health of students.

There is also much work to be done in higher education to decide how specific systems will be funded and protect the quality of instruction in our state colleges and universities.

Education Minnesota leaders presented Sen. Mary Kunesch (second from left) and Sen. Lindsey Port (second from right) with the 20,000-plus petition signatures the union collected in support of fully funding public education. Leaders shown (from left) are Education Minnesota Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe, Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Chair Geneva Dorsey, Vice President Bernie Burnham and President Denise Specht.



20,000 petition signatures and counting!

Education Minnesota's advocacy continues into the special session, which includes continuing to collect signatures on our petition calling for fully funding public education.

At a We Make Minnesota rally on May 15, which Education Minnesota sponsored along with coalition partners, educators delivered the petitions signatures as of that date to Sen. Paul Gazelka, the Senate majority leader.

This fight is not over, so continue to sign and share the petition, found at www.edmnvotes.org.



Education Minnesota members and staff have been picketing at a Speedway gas station in St. Paul in support of the Marathon refinery workers, members of Teamsters Local 120. The Teamsters have been locked out of their workplace after demands for safe staffing levels.

EDUCATORS SUPPORT LOCKED OUT TEAMSTERS UNION WORKERS

Teamsters union members at the Marathon Petroleum Corp. in St. Paul Park have been locked out of their jobs since a 24-hour strike in January.

"We're fighting for operator and maintenance jobs," said Luke Fenton, a rotations equipment mechanic. "We have a guaranteed number and they are trying to take that away. We want to keep working with what we had."

Marathon wants to replace a large number of union jobs with lowest-bidder subcontractors, which would endanger the safety of the surrounding community and anyone working at the oil refinery, according to the Teamsters.

"On Jan. 21, we went on strike for 24 hours. When they tried to go back to work, Marathon had disconnected their badges and told them they were trespassing. At that point it became a lockout," said Scott Kroona, business agent at Teamsters Local 120, in a story on the national Teamsters website.

"It's not about money," said Fenton.

And Marathon is not struggling for cash, he said.

"They look millions in federal money available because of COVID," Fenton said. "Then they tried to cut our jobs, which is what that money was supposed to protect."

The Teamsters continue to try and work with management on an agreement.

As of press time, talks had stalled.

"We're being told be prepared to go through at least September," said Fenton. "They know we're not going to give. This is not our first time out."

A way for other union members to stand in solidarity with them is to stop purchasing gas or other items at Speedway stores, which are owned by Marathon.

"Stay away from Speedways and spread the word," Fenton said.

How can you stand in solidarity with the Teamsters 120 members?

Stop purchasing gas or other items at Speedway stores, which are owned by Marathon. Marathon wants to replace a large number of union jobs with lowest-bidder subcontractors, which would endanger the safety of the surrounding community and anyone working at the oil refinery, according to the Teamsters.

JUDGE ENFORCES PREP TIME FOR THOSE IN MULTIPLE LEARNING MODELS

Jennifer Spitzner is a seventh grade science teacher in Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Public Schools. During this school year, Spitzner and her colleagues experienced the rapid changes of shifting between pandemic learning models.

The additional work from distance learning instruction added even more time to Spitzner's day. She and her colleagues had to create and tailor lesson plans for learners in a remote setting. As a science teacher, Spitzner had to figure out how distance learners could dissect a frog — a standard part of her anatomy curriculum. Beyond lesson planning, in many instances educators had to teach in two modes at once — virtual and in person at the same time. Teachers had to cater to the learning needs of a constantly changing group of distance learners.

To many, it was clear that distance learning instruction, along with everything else that comes with being a teacher, involved too much that often went beyond the time in teachers' days. Due in part to Education Minnesota's member advocacy, Gov. Tim Walz issued an executive order requiring school districts to provide extra time to educators to prepare for and provide high-quality distance learning instruction. Beth Tollefson, the local union president in Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton, commented, "Walz's order was a terrific thing to offer, because it has been difficult. We all have different ways of delivering our lessons and having that extra 30 minutes was always great."

Educators in Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton received the extra prep time until Superintendent Bryan Thygeson announced he would revoke it once resuming in-person instruction five days a week districtwide, despite the ongoing pandemic and need for distance learning. Educators were quick to organize with and through their local union. Members engaged the administration in the meet-and-confer process. Some attended school board meetings to raise the prep time issue publicly. As the revocation date approached, the union

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

and its members made it clear to management that they would take legal action if necessary.

On March 15, when educators began in-person instruction five days a week, the work to support distance learning continued on as well. Students required to quarantine and those who opted for distance required teachers to perform additional instructional duties while still teaching their in-person students. Teachers were burned out toward the end of an already very long year. With the assistance of the Education Minnesota legal department, the union filed what's called a "petition for a writ of mandamus" in state district court in Clay County, a unique legal remedy to order public officials to basically follow the law.

Union members led in the lawsuit by providing key evidence and testimony leading up to and during the trial. The school district hired private attorneys. One of the district's arguments was that they did not order the teachers to do any extra work to get the job done for distance learning instruction. As professional employees, most educators should recognize that vaguely familiar line from management, where something is strongly encouraged but not necessarily clearly directed, and yet demonstrably, it is work that administrators expect and reward, or admonish employees for its absence. The superintendent even acknowledged in court that this hard work leads to good teaching. The caveat according to the district, however, was that everything the teachers did to get the job done was their own choice, and so it did not require any

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ZIMMERMAN PUTS STUDENT NEEDS AT THE CORE OF ALL HER WORK

On a typical day, you will find Richfield High School's social worker Marisa Zimmerman working with a student on what homework they need to turn in or what they need to be a successful distance learner or seeking out donations for her school's food shelf or leading a LGBTQ+ student group.

"Every day, students need more," Zimmerman said. "All of those things take time and creativity, someone to listen and advocate for what students need."

Her advocacy for students' needs is why Zimmerman was named the 2021 recipient of Education Minnesota's Human Rights Award.

"She is a person who always sees them," said Carrie Vala, an assistant principal at Richfield High School. "Whatever identity, whatever problem, whatever they bring to her. She sees them first and they co-create the plan to what they do next."

No matter what she is doing, the sole focus of Zimmerman's work is on her students.

"The first thing anyone notices about Marisa is how much students come first and foremost in anything she does," said Jill Carlton, her social worker colleague at Richfield High School.

"She's such a problem-solver, so anything that happens in the school or bigger policies, she's really able to say what do the students need and how do we get there. And she never gives up until she figures that out."

"Every conversation, every interaction with her, students are at the center," said Stacy Theien-Collins, Richfield High School's principal.

"There's a fierceness and deep skill set and passion for equitable outcomes for every student she meets," said Christina Gonzalez, the director of student support services in Richfield.

While advocating for her students, Zimmerman also pushes others to look at what systems are in place that are impacting the school setting that are creating or not creating welcoming, safe spaces for everyone.

"It's really important to look at our school policies and practices with a critical eye for what might be needed, what might be rooted in whiteness or white supremacy and really challenge those systems that are in place," Zimmerman said.

"The gift she has as a direct practitioner is to also see situations from a systems perspective, and then see and create systems that then support students," said Gonzalez.

Zimmerman facilitates the high school's LGBTQ+ student support group GLOW, which stands for gay, lesbian or whatever. The group was meeting, and during an open discussion, the topic of gendered bathrooms came up.

"Students started talking about their discomfort in using the bathroom at school. Most of the students reported not going to the bathroom at all at school," she said.

But Zimmerman said the students instantly identified bathrooms in the school which might be better identified as available for all genders.

Richfield High School Social Worker Marisa Zimmerman poses with \$2,500 worth of food for the Spartan Food Shelf, donated by the radio station KDWB's Christmas Wish program. Zimmerman has gotten the school's food shelf up and running, and expanding it to items like winter clothing and school supplies.





Marisa Zimmerman, the 2021 Education Minnesota Human Rights Award winner, with students from her LGBTQ+ student group during a solidarity week at Richfield High School.

"I said, 'What do we want to do with this? Do you want to bring this to the principal?' And they said, 'yes, yes,'" she said.

The principal loved the idea and within a month, single-stall bathrooms were turned into all-gender spaces, and when the school went through some new construction recently, several all-gender bathrooms and lockers rooms were added.

"It was a really exciting time for the students to feel like their voices were heard and that their feelings mattered and that their safety at school mattered as well," Zimmerman said.

Zimmerman has also made gender inclusion a conversation at the district level and in all classrooms when it comes to policies and structures and the language used.

"She makes sure teachers are including things in their classrooms so students are being seen," Vala said.

Zimmerman has gotten the school's food shelf up and running, and making sure there are other items besides food, including hygiene products, school supplies and winter clothing. She has made sure that the health center on

campus has been integrated well into the school community by making sure the external providers don't feel like external providers, said Vala.

"It takes a really special person to listen to a student and understand their perspective, and then come to a meeting with administrators and communicate those needs," said Vanessa Anderson, a school social work intern who has been working with Zimmerman this year.

Zimmerman has an open door for the school's staff, too.

"Everybody looks to Marisa," Carlton said. "She will offer safe spaces for teachers to talk about what they need and what they are talking about with their students."

While Zimmerman is quick to say that her students are the ones leading this important work, her colleagues know they wouldn't be able to advocate for themselves as well as they do without her.

"The strength that Marisa brings to our team is to assess student needs, to understand where our school community is and where our struggles are, and still to be focused on what we need to offer our students," said Theien-Collins.

DAVIDSON LEADS WITH DEEP CARE FOR STUDENTS, COLLEAGUES

Kim Davidson says that to her, union work has become like breathing.

"I don't even think about it anymore," she said. "I just do it. It's such an important part of who I am and what I believe in."

Davidson's commitment in her more than 30 years in education and union advocacy is what made her Education Minnesota's 2021 Peterson-Schaubach Outstanding Leadership Award winner.

"I got involved with the union because I thought it was time for me to give back," she said. "You do things without thinking they are anything special. I care about my colleagues. I care about the students I work with. If I'm able to be their advocate, their voice, why wouldn't I do that?"

Davidson has worked in Crookston for 27 years, and has held numerous leadership positions within her local, as well as her intermediate organization and Education Minnesota.

"Whether it's coming to bat for a specific teacher or helping with negotiations, she solidifies the membership and gets us through all of those things, making sure we're all OK," said Sara Geist, a teacher colleague in Crookston. "She is a champion for her colleagues. She has represented us at all levels."

Davidson started her career in the district she grew up in, Anoka-Hennepin. That is also where her union activism began, thanks to an invitation from a colleague.

"I was asked to give the strike authorization vote for Anoka. It really hit home, what they had done during those years when I was still in college, enabled me to start at a much better wage and benefits," she said.

Davidson has never shied away from an opportunity to be involved, and get others involved.

"She is always bringing new people into the union, sharing her story of how she got involved,"



Davidson's union advocacy has always centered on what students need, which in turn is also what educators need. Her work, and this photo, was featured in Education Minnesota's Educator Policy Innovation Center paper on trauma-informed schools and restorative practices in 2016.

said Mark Swenson, a teacher in Grand Forks who serves on the Western North IO Board with Davidson and nominated her for this award. "She has advocated, recruited, supported and served in so many capacities that I can't name them all. In addition, she helped to encourage the organizing of the ESP local in her district and get them to be active in our activities region-wide."

Davidson has also led at the state level in the union's political activity, serving on the Political Action Committee and chairing it at one time.

"I've always been involved with politics, whether it be lit drops, door knocking or phone banking. With the PAC, I got to be a part of it, have a say and a voice at the table," she said.

Connecting the political work of the union to her members was a big reason why Davidson has committed to being on the PAC Board.

"Sometimes when you're 300 miles away from your State Capitol, you can feel removed," she said. "So I wanted to be involved right down there, where I could come back to the people that I represent and be that connection."

Davidson also knew that it was important for her to hear what was going on in other districts and locals.

"At the PAC, I also like that we have a diverse group from across the state," she said. "We have so many similar issues, like the lack of funding, but we also have different needs, which is important for us all to know about."

Including the PAC, the core of Davidson's work has always been an advocacy for students.

"As a leader, she knows where to push and how to question for our students," said Doug Werner, a Minneapolis teacher who served on the PAC with Davidson. "You saw that in her leadership on the PAC. She was always advocating for all of our students."

Davidson knows that student success can be directly tied to educators feeling supported and respected.

"I truly believe that if the people who are working most directly with kids, if they aren't being treated fairly, if their working conditions aren't right, if they aren't feeling like a professional, all of that falls back onto the kids," she said.



Kim Davidson (second from right) spoke with then-gubernatorial candidate Tim Walz during a PAC Board meeting in 2018.

Her support for students has also brought Davidson into other union work, like working on a research paper showing the importance of trauma-informed schools and restorative practices through Education Minnesota's Educator Policy Innovation Center.

"She was advocating for trauma-informed schools before that was the lingo," said Tara Miller, a licensed school social worker in Crookston. "She knows what our students and our schools need."

"She always reminds us all that kids are more than a screening score on a test," said Geist.

Whether it be in the union or in school, Davidson is the go-to person in her district for all of her colleagues.

"She is the go-to person for parents, teachers, even administration," Miller said. "If she doesn't have the answer, she will listen and help you figure that out. People go to her knowing, if you want action, Kim's going to help."

"She always goes above and beyond for her kids. She comes up with ideas and projects that I know the kids will always remember," said Sarah Pester, a teacher in Crookston. "She knows her stuff when it comes to the union. She has an answer or can get you an answer on anything."

"Kim is nearing the end of a long career of teaching excellence, union service and most important of all, servant leadership," Swenson said. "She has led by example, and that example is spectacular."



Saint Paul Federation of Educators members and allies marched through downtown Saint Paul after their second day on the strike lines, March 11, 2020.

SPFE HONORED FOR SOLIDARITY AFTER STRIKE

“Who are we? SPFE” was heard across the entire city of Saint Paul during a three-day span in March 2020.

The members of the Saint Paul Federation of Educators, which include licensed and non-licensed staff, went on strike March 10-12, 2020 after nine months of contract negotiations. Education Minnesota is honoring their work and dedication with the union’s 2021 We Are One Solidarity Award.

“Our bargaining survey went out to folks and we really saw, this last year especially, some key issues and folks really felt strongly about them. We expected that we were going to have to work harder to get them, right from the start,” said SPFE President Nick Faber. “We didn’t necessarily think that we were going to go out on strike, but we knew it was going to be an uphill battle and that are members were ready to take that on. And that’s pretty exciting as a bargaining team to know that you’ve got that effort and commitment behind you.”

During negotiations, the union’s top priorities were:

- More mental health supports in schools, including more social workers, counselors, psychologists,

school nurses and behavior intervention specialists.

- More multilingual staff to help our students and families who need interpreters.
- Additional educators working with students with special needs and appropriate assignments for educators so they can give students more one-on-one attention.
- Expanding restorative practices to build community and a positive climate in schools.

In the end, the union’s agreement included more staffing in the areas they had wanted, expanded restorative practices and prep time for interpreters.

“We stopped talking about what we deserve and we started talking about the schools our students deserve,” said Erica Schatzlein, a member of the bargaining team. “There is almost no issue we care about more than our students’ well-being. When we were talking about the mental

health of our students, who weren't being able to show us all they could do in our classroom, our membership couldn't stand by anymore and watch those needs being unmet. They were willing to take it to whatever it takes, which this time it meant shutting down downtown St. Paul and our school system for three days."

SPFE leaders know there was potential for more, but the then-new COVID-19 pandemic meant that their members needed to be back in buildings before they were closed by the district and they lost any leverage.

But in the year since, the unity built during the strike has meant SPFE members were ready to fight for what their students and themselves needed during the pandemic.

"We left that bargaining table and immediately told the district and said we demand to bargain over the changes to work conditions due to COVID," said Faber. "We took the trust and the energy from our members and said, we're not going to take a break. We're going to continue to fight."

"One thing that has come from our strike is our members know we don't just have to take things," said Schatzlein. "When members started having safety concerns over schools reopening and what was going to happen and how they and our kids were going to be protected, they were asking, 'what are we going to do about it?'"

The solidarity shown during the 2020 strike didn't happen overnight.

"It wasn't even something that happened in the last bargaining round. It started years ago when we started letting our district know we were serious about things," said Leah VanDassor, SPFE vice president. "We did an informational picket, and that was enough. Then we scheduled a strike vote and that was enough. The next time we came within a day of striking. We ramped up our membership. They were ready for it, more and more ready for it each time."

Members were ready for the strike, saying enough is enough, said Sylvia Perez, who was director of non-licensed personnel during the strike.

"Our members just got tired of playing ping pong. All this time and effort and we just got

tired," she said. "(The district leaders) are not the ones in the schools, in the classrooms, we are. Finally we said, enough is enough."

This round of bargaining marked the first where all three SPFE units were on the same team, fighting together.

"It was powerful to see teachers and ESPs together, in unity. We all were fighting for each other," said Yasmin Muridi, an ESP member of the bargaining team.

"So often when our smaller bargaining units go to the table themselves, they say this is what we need, and they're right, but when 3,000 other educators say no, our schools do not function without these essential personnel, that amplifies the message that they've been saying for years," said Schatzlein. "We all stood together and saw that it's the same fight and our students need all of us."

Besides the contractual wins, SPFE leaders say the biggest win is the collective power their union feels.

"We have had more connections between colleagues and even across the district," said VanDassor. "There has been a major shift in how we work together."

"We realize the things that we had together on the line and the solidarity we felt and the strength and hopefulness," said Schatzlein. "Those are things that are life changing."

SPFE President Nick Faber led the crowd during a rally after their first day on the strike lines.



FILING OPEN FOR EDUCATION MINNESOTA OFFICER, NEA DIRECTOR POSITIONS JUNE 1

Candidate filings for Education Minnesota officer and National Education Association director positions are open from June 1 until Dec. 10.

The current three-year terms for president, vice president and secretary-treasurer will expire June 30, 2022. Candidates for these offices

will file by submitting a filing form below to the Education Minnesota Office of the Elections Committee by Dec. 10.

These offices are now held by President Denise Specht, Vice President Bernie Burnham and Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe.

The current terms for two NEA director positions now filled by Marty Fridgen and Heather Bakke will expire Aug. 31, 2022.

Candidates for these positions will file a form by Dec. 10. That form can be found on the opposite page.

FILING FORM FOR OFFICER

This form must be filed with the Office of the Elections Committee of Education Minnesota. Please print clearly.

I, _____, wish to file for the following position:

OR

I, _____, wish to nominate _____ for the following position:

You may only select one position:

____ PRESIDENT ____ VICE PRESIDENT ____ SECRETARY-TREASURER

Candidate information

Mailing address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____

Local: _____ Email: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____ Work phone: _____

Do not submit before filing period begins on June 1. Deadline is 11:59 p.m. Dec. 10, 2021.

Scan and email completed form to elections.committee@edmn.org, submit by mail to: Office of the Elections Committee, Education Minnesota, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 or by fax to: 651-767-1266. Note: Education Minnesota includes an insert of all candidates in the Minnesota Educator published prior to the election in April and in a Voter Guide distributed at the Representative Convention. Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion in these publications and the Education Minnesota website. The photo and statement must be submitted using the online submission form at www.educationminnesota.org. Statement and photo must be submitted by **Dec. 20, 2021**.

(For official use only)

This filing form was received on _____ by _____. Membership was verified on _____ by _____.

FILING FORM FOR NEA DIRECTOR

This form must be filed with the Office of the Elections Committee of Education Minnesota. Please print clearly.

I, _____, wish to file for the following position:

OR

I, _____, wish to nominate _____ for the following position:

(choose one position)

_____ NEA DIRECTOR (Position 1) _____ NEA DIRECTOR (Position 2)

Candidate information

Mailing address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____

Local: _____ Email: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____ Work phone: _____

Do not submit before filing period begins on June 1. Deadline is 11:59 p.m. Dec. 10, 2021.

Scan and email completed form to elections.committee@edmn.org, submit by mail to: Office of the Elections Committee, Education Minnesota, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 or by fax to: 651-767-1266. Note: Education Minnesota includes an insert of all candidates in the Minnesota Educator published prior to the election in April and in a Voter Guide distributed at the Representative Convention. Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion in these publications and the Education Minnesota website. The photo and statement must be submitted using the online submission form at www.educationminnesota.org. Statement and photo must be submitted by **Dec. 20, 2021**.

(For official use only)

This filing form was received on _____ by _____. Membership was verified on _____ by _____.



MINNESOTA HUMANITIES CENTER 2021 EDUCATOR INSTITUTES

STORY CIRCLES: ACTIVATING CULTURAL CHANGE IN SYSTEMS

Interact with Story Circle practitioners from the classroom and community and how the process can change school culture and spark systems change. Leave with a plan of how to embed Story Circles in your practice.

JUNE 21, 23, 25

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Learn from youth, elders, and scholars about narratives and approaches that have been marginalized or excluded from education. Leave with a vision of how to design equitable programming that sparks the full potential of all students.

AUGUST 24, 25, 26

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LEGAL BRIEFS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

additional compensation, time or even recognition.

The district also argued that the 2020-21 school year was just like any other year, in that the work teachers had to do to support distance learning was just like kids going on vacation or being out sick for a couple days for the flu. Judge Jade Rosenfeldt of the Clay County District Court reasoned that the district's "argument that quarantined students are no different from students in years past being gone for an illness and/or vacation is simply thoughtless."

Ultimately, the law from the executive order was clear — if teachers had distance learning students, they were due the extra prep time. The judge recognized that clarity. In her final decision, she found that the Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton teachers had been working without an

additional 30 minutes of prep time to which they were entitled under the law, and that teachers were indeed teaching students in both distance learning and hybrid learning models.

The judge ordered the school district to immediately follow the law. With the great hope of the conclusion of the pandemic, educators around the state look to the future for what their profession will look like and how it is perceived and addressed by stakeholders. Educators, when acting together, are powerful and can have a say in what their work looks like. And the educators in Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton showed that strength to their community and the rest of the state.

— Jonathan Reiner
Education Minnesota staff attorney

STATE FAIR BOOTH VOLUNTEER SHIFTS OPEN

The Minnesota State Fair is scheduled to go on as usual in August, although that may change as the global pandemic of COVID-19 unfolds. Education Minnesota plans to continue hosting its traditional booth until either the State Fair or state health authorities advise otherwise.

Every year, Education Minnesota member volunteers and staff produce personalized photo calendars for visitors at our booth in the Education Building on Cosgrove Street near the Snelling Avenue entrance.

The booth is open from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Aug. 26 through Sept. 6.

<https://www.cvent.com/d/ljqcb8>

Shifts include taking digital photos and acting as Education Minnesota ambassadors to fairgoers. In 2019, members produced more than 15,000 calendars for booth visitors.

Shifts are three hours long. Volunteers receive an admission ticket, T-shirt, mileage reimbursement and parking reimbursement up to \$10.

In addition to the photo calendar, the booth also features a different education group almost every day of the fair showcasing their curriculum area or program.

Education Minnesota cares about the health and safety of its volunteers and the tens of thousands of guests who visit our booth every year. We expect to take extra safety precautions this year, although the exact measures haven't been decided upon yet. They will be communicated to volunteers well in advance of the fair, however. In addition to the photo calendar, the booth also features a different education group almost every day of the fair showcasing their curriculum area or program.

Please email or call Ashley Behrens at ashley.behrens@edmn.org or 651-292-4862 with any questions.



MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

Summer To Do List

**Summer is a great time to review your Education Minnesota
ESI Member Benefits and other financial information**

- Active and retired members, register for the complimentary identity theft recovery plan
www.educationminnesota.securusid.com
- Meet with a financial advisor to set-up or review your 403(b)
www.efsadvisors.com | 763-689-9023
- Create an account and explore the NEW PerksConnect discount program use code EDMN12
www.edmn.perksconnection.com
- For members over 40 years old, watch the 20 minute long-term insurance webinar
www.educatorsltc.com
- Compare auto and home insurance policies if it has been over a year or your personal situation has changed
Liberty Mutual, Darlene VonArx 952-229-5692
Travelers 888-695-4640

**Take advantage of other benefit opportunities from ESI,
NEA and AFT Member Benefits including travel and
office supply discounts, special rates on loans or
mortgages, and much more**
www.esi.educationminnesota.org

41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 651-292-4856 800-642-4624
esi.educationminnesota.org esi@edmn.org

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Education Minnesota
41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103

Summer Seminar to be virtual, but includes local opportunities

Education Minnesota's Summer Seminar, one of our premier professional development opportunities, will take place virtually this August, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Virtual, synchronous sessions will take place the mornings of Aug. 3 and 4. The conference will be free for all members. Sessions strands for the conference include:

- ▶ *Know Your Rights! Bargaining and Negotiations*
- ▶ *Leading and Growing Member Engagement*
- ▶ *Union Role Training*
- ▶ *Personal Finances*
- ▶ *Racial and Social Justice*

Sessions in these strands include Winning Local Referendums, Bargaining With an Equity Lens, Member Rights Advocacy Refresher, Successful Issue Organizing, Mobilizing Members, Member Benefits, LGBTQ+ Parts One and Two, and Why is it so Hard to Talk About Race.

Classroom PD sessions, including courses needed for relicensure, will continue to be offered asynchronously throughout the summer via MEA Online.

Local unions and intermediate organizations are being encouraged to take the afternoons of Aug. 3 and 4 to plan, network, reflect on the morning's sessions, and socialize safely, if in person.

Find more information about registration, the sessions and local event opportunities at www.educationminnesota.org/events/summer-seminar.