

MINNESOTA EDUCATOR

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2021

**EDUCATION
FUNDING INCREASES
AFTER RECORD-LEVEL
MEMBER ACTIVISM**

**EDUCATORS, LOCAL
UNIONS FACE HONESTY
IN EDUCATION ATTACKS**



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS



Take all of your relicensure courses on MEA Online!

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

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

This year's virtual Summer Seminar at the beginning of August means many new asynchronous options will be shared on the platform and ready for you!

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 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, please email 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 for more details.



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

August/September 2021 – Volume 24, No. 1

The Minnesota Educator publishes every other month. It is one of the union's print and digital publications to educate, inform and organize the community of members. The Educator is reported, edited and designed by union staff members. The paper is printed in LSC Communications' union shop in Menasha, Wisconsin. Find copies of the Educator online at www.educationminnesota.org. Go to the News menu, then Minnesota Educator.

To reach the publication for queries, story or commentary ideas:

Email: educator@edmn.org

Mail: Minnesota Educator
41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103

To report a change of address or end duplicate mailings, contact the Education Minnesota membership department:

Email: membership@edmn.org

By web: www.educationminnesota.org and choose the Contact Us link to send a change of address.

To inquire about advertising in the Educator or on the website:

Email: kaitlyn.peterson@edmn.org
Phone: 651-292-4829

For general inquiries and business at the state headquarters:

Phone: 800-652-9073 or 651-227-9541

For information about union activities, work and resources, go to www.educationminnesota.org.

Follow Education Minnesota

Facebook: www.facebook.com/EducationMinnesota

Twitter: www.twitter.com/EducationMN

Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/EducationMN

Instagram: www.instagram.com/educationminnesota

Minnesota Educator (ISSN 1521-9062) is a bimonthly publication.

Periodicals are postage-paid at St. Paul, Minnesota, and additional offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Minnesota Educator, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103-2196.

Minnesota Educator. All rights reserved, but readers are welcome to reproduce any article in whole or in part on the condition that they give credit to Education Minnesota.

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.

President: **Denise Specht**

Vice President: **Bernie Burnham**

Secretary-Treasurer: **Rodney Rowe**

Executive Director: **Sara Gjerdrum**

Director of Policy and Public Affairs: **Carrie Lucking**
GR/Communications Director: **Kathi Micheletti**

Editor: **Kieren Steinhoff**

Art Director: **Eric Widi**

Contributing Editor: **Megan Boldt**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE.

Bargaining contracts that reflect funding increases, COVID relief and equity are important.

page 2

A national attack on equity and honesty in education finds its way to Minnesota districts.

pages 4-5

Legislative session ends with largest increase in education funding in more than a decade.

pages 6-7

Student borrower bill of rights will help protect educators struggling with education debt.

pages 8-9

Bloomington paras bring contract fight public after two years of negotiating.

page 10

Facebook Live event featured educators sharing racial equity work.

page 11

Two new charter schools join Education Minnesota.

pages 12-13

Walt Munsterman wins NEA Lifetime Achievement award.

page 14

MEA Conference will be hybrid, featuring both online and in-person workshops.

page 20

COVER PHOTO: Education Minnesota members joined other allies at a rally in May, calling for legislators to fund programs that support working Minnesotans.

LET'S JOIN TOGETHER FOR THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

How would you know if you're in an important historical moment?

It's the sort of contemplative question you find around campfires and porches on summer nights.

After a few of those conversations with colleagues and friends, I believe we're in one of those moments. And only a few people have noticed.

What we do together as a union in the next few months will affect our schools for years to come. Lasting success is possible, but so are haunting failures.

The anti-equity movement sweeping across the country threatens years of work in making our schools more safe, welcoming and effective for all students.

While a few billionaires and the promoters who work for them may talk about critical race theory, this movement is more than a pedagogical debate about history lessons.

Listen to the angry and misinformed speakers at school board meetings. It's clear they oppose a more honest history of race in America, but that's not all.

They also protest any program or policy that might inspire more understanding and respect for people of color and LGBTQ+ youth.

Educators cannot allow the prejudices of a few to deny our students the education they need to live and lead in the multiracial, multicultural world.

Instead, it's time to speak up for today's students while also bargaining for policies to benefit future learners.

There is money on the table after the state Legislature passed the largest increase to the per-pupil formula in 15 years. The federal government is pouring millions more into schools as part of the COVID-19 relief packages.

This is the moment to work in union to ensure the new money flowing into schools is spent equitably and effectively—while acknowledging every worksite has unique needs and priorities.

The situation is ideal for the flexibility of bargaining for the common good. I invite you to get involved with your community and your local to set the right priorities.

If the national backlash against equity policies and the unprecedented amount of money on the table for bargaining this cycle wasn't enough, we're entering the second fall of the COVID-19 pandemic—and new cases are rising again.

As I write this, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics have issued contradictory guidance for wearing masks in schools this fall.

When such prestigious scientific institutions can't agree, it seems to me that educators will need to stick together to make sure

whichever guidelines are adopted are done safely, sensibly and fairly.

After all, within the past 18 months, many educators were asked to return to their classrooms before their districts could supply safety gear or were ready to socially distance their students.

Let's also not forget that some district administrators refused to pay hourly educators for the time they missed work because they were in quarantine or waiting for a test result to come back—even after the federal American Rescue Plan offered a dollar-for-dollar repayment of the district's costs.

Overcoming the national coordinated attack on education equity, spending millions of dollars in new resources and managing the tail end of the worst public health crisis of the century is not something any of us can do alone.

We need to remember the value of belonging and the power of working in union toward our shared goals. If we do, we can rise to this moment for the good of our profession, our students and our communities.

Together,

Denise

Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

COVID-19 guidance, FAQs continue online as school year prep begins

With the new academic year beginning, Education Minnesota will continue to monitor, provide guidance and support to members for any COVID-19 questions that may occur before and throughout the year.

Education Minnesota will continue to provide FAQs around vaccines or mask requirements for educators and students, sharing safe reopening of school buildings guidance and bargaining resources for local unions as they work with administration.

Resources are also available for distance learning support, as many districts plan to continue to offer some form of online education.

Watch Education Minnesota's social media channels and www.educationminnesota.org/resources/in-the-classroom/Coronavirus for up-to-date resources and information.

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, Amy Engler, Fridley, 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 Sept. 10. 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!

This is more tradition that came from survival, resistance and resilience, which then we have adopted as a community at large, not just South High, but across our country, Turtle Island.

– Minneapolis Federation of Teachers member Vince Patton, who is Oglala Lakota, about hosting a Native Prom at South High School this spring, in a Minneapolis Star Tribune article about the event on June 22. Patton teaches in South High's All Nations program, a culturally responsive Indigenous education open to any Native student in the district.

EDUCATORS, LOCAL UNIONS PUSH BACK AGAINST ATTACKS ON HONESTY IN EDUCATION

Karen Rubado, a teacher and local union president in Pequot Lakes, knows exactly when a shift happened in her district.

The then-superintendent filmed a video for an event highlighting rural equity efforts and discussed how educators had gone through training from The SEED Project (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) and his reasons for wanting to bring educational equity to their district.

"Then it got shared online," Rubado said.

Since then, school board meetings have become loud and angry, she said.

Rubado and Education Minnesota-Pequot Lakes, as well as other educators and local unions across Minnesota are experiencing what is becoming a national movement, attacking honesty in education and racial equity efforts.

Using words like "critical race theory," this coordinated effort is a key focus of places like Fox News.

Minnesota educators who are working to review the social studies standards on state law-driven 10-year cycle are also seeing this divisive language playing out in their work.

In Minnesota, this includes a public relations campaign by an affiliate of the Koch propaganda network called

the Center of the American Experiment, which hosted a tour on the topic this summer.

For Rubado and other educators, tensions are running high within their districts.

"We've had an uptick in angry emails from parents, when maybe there wouldn't have been a concern or a concern would have been addressed more collaboratively," she said. "There have been accusations on a Facebook page of things that aren't happening in our schools."

For Pequot educators, they are working with a new superintendent to stay on the same team.

"We have teachers that attend the school board meetings, since that group also attends them all," Rubado said. "We feel the vast majority of our community is not against equity. It's a small group. They are just very loud. A lot of our community members just don't know what to do."

As a local union, Education Minnesota-Pequot Lakes has been hosting social justice happy hours, a space where members can attend and just talk about what's happening in their schools, classrooms and community.

"It's been great for people to have the time to process and gather in a very casual, collegial way," said Rubado. "It went from once a month to every

other week to people asking to have one every week."

Rubado also says the local is gearing up to endorse candidates in their 2022 school board races.

South St. Paul social studies teacher Mark Westpfahl was also surprised by how loud a group could get, when he started hearing people question the proposed social studies standards.

"I'm still blown away that I'll encounter someone in the past few months that will ask me if teaching World War I is being taken away," he said.

Westpfahl knows that the campaign of misinformation being spread about what is being taught in schools is part of the same campaign of misinformation about what is and what is not in the first draft of the social studies standards, which are not finalized as the process continues on its long-planned timeline.

"We're still having the conversation of why can't we hear some of the other viewpoints, which has been happening throughout the history of this country," he said. "It doesn't erase anything. It adds another layer of history. Most people aren't willing to have the discussion to learn. It's driven by fear and not by evidence of anything."

Westpfahl knows social studies

teachers across Minnesota want to be an inclusive community, talking about missing narratives.

"We can combat the argument that it's not an erasure of history, but it's about including voices that haven't always been heard," he said.

Dr. Lee-Ann Stephens, a teacher in St. Louis Park, sees these conversations extending beyond the school day in her work as an advisor to the high school's Students Organizing Against Racism group.

Stephens says the group is full of discussions on why there is minimal representation in advanced placement classes, equity vs. equality, student-led movements and counter narratives.

"Students have a desire to have classes taught with multiple perspectives," she said. "Their first question is always, 'Why aren't we learning this in school?'"

Stephens hopes other educators across Minnesota have conversations with students and their colleagues about how to create anti-racist curriculum and schools, because she knows students are having conversations about it in their own circles.

"The beauty of living in the U.S. is you can love this country and critique it," Stephens said. "Racism continues to permeate our society and our students know it exists, especially our students of color. There's freedom in addressing our history, the good, the bad and the ugly."

Teaching the truth: "Critical race theory"

A growing number of people understand and publicly acknowledge the ways our laws, practices and institutions in the United States harm Black, Indigenous and other people of color.

Unfortunately, the right has resorted to its usual dog whistle strategy of distraction and division. This coordinated effort uses the phrase "critical race theory" as a catch-all for their anxieties about losing power and dominance.

The goal is to use schools and college campuses to stoke fears about what educators teach our students so they can undermine trust in our public schools and its teachers and ultimately cut education funding.

What is critical race theory?

It's an academic framework that is more than 40 years old and is centered on the idea that racism is systemic, not just a product of individual bias or prejudice, and embedded in our policies and legal structures.

Critical race theorists shift the focus away from individual people's actions and toward how systems uphold racial disparities.

Who's behind the attacks

Billionaire-funded promoters, think tanks, activists, and politicians have redefined critical race theory as a sweeping term to describe anything that has to do with equity, cultural competency or education about race. This tactic is not a good-faith debate about pedagogy. It is intended to exploit racial divisions.

In Minnesota, the Center of the American Experiment toured the state in June to push its false narrative about what's being taught in our schools to eventually prevent kids from learning our shared stories of confronting injustice.

CAE tries to disguise itself as a non-partisan think tank but pushes the agenda of its corporate donors—promoting school privatization and vouchers and vehemently opposing programs that advocate for people of color. The organization also runs active campaigns to persuade Education Minnesota members to leave their union.

Rochester high school teacher Natalia Benjamin also saw how students were craving more conversations about multiple perspectives when she taught an Ethnic Studies class for the first time this year.

"It was a small class, but I had

a very positive response from both the students and the parents," she said. "Something that was instrumental in it being a positive experience was to touch on topics,

**HONESTY IN EDUCATION,
CONTINUED ON PAGE 19**

EDUCATION BUDGET, FEDERAL DOLLARS, CREATE EQUITABLE INVESTMENTS IN MINNESOTA SCHOOLS

Gov. Tim Walz and the Minnesota Legislature approved an education budget that includes the largest single increase in the per-pupil formula in 15 years, a meaningful step toward fully funding our public schools.

The Minnesota Senate passed the budget bill June 30 and the governor signed it hours later. The Minnesota House voted on it June 26. It will increase state funding for preschools through high schools by \$554.9 million over the next two years.

The bump in state funding, along with one-time federal money for pandemic recovery, should protect most schools from devastating budget cuts and layoffs.

Public schools will see \$462.9 million in new per-pupil aid over the biennium—a 2.45 percent increase the first year and 2 percent in the second.

Educators and parents successfully blocked attempts to include private school vouchers in the deal. But Senate Republicans refused to raise taxes on the wealthiest few and corporations to give students smaller class sizes, more support services and greater access to mental health resources.

Here's what's included in the education bill:

- \$46.6 million to maintain 4,000 voluntary pre-K spots.
- \$16.7 million to help attract and retain more teachers of color.
- \$10 million for special education students.
- \$4 million for English language learners.
- \$1.8 million for non-exclusionary discipline and trauma-informed training to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

Here's what didn't make it into the bill:

- Funding for full-service community schools.
- Paid training for education support professionals.
- More money for student support staff.
- Policies to increase worker voice. This means

Tier 1 teachers are still prohibited from joining their bargaining unit and mandatory subjects of bargaining were not expanded to include issues like class sizes or staffing.

- Changes to state law allowing hourly school workers to access unemployment if needed during the summer months.

"This budget contains the single largest increase in the per-pupil funding in more than a decade, preserves thousands of pre-K seats and makes a wise, strategic investment in increasing the number of Minnesota's teachers of color," Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said in a press release after the bill was passed. "We are disappointed by the lack of certain equity provisions supported by educators, but this budget is a meaningful step toward fully funding public education."

"This would not have happened without hundreds of educators sharing their stories with legislators about what their students need to succeed," Specht said, adding that more than 700 educators met with over 100 lawmakers in the 2021 session as part of Education Minnesota's lobby day program. "Educators live the reality of underfunded schools that have few resources to support student learning. Many shared their fears about what would happen to public schools if hundreds of millions of dollars were siphoned off into vouchers for private schools."

Even though the education bill did not contain several of Education Minnesota's funding priorities, thankfully Gov. Walz included many of them in his plans for spending \$132 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds. Gov. Tim Walz's includes many of Education Minnesota's priorities, including: increased spending on full-service community schools, layers of student support services, mentoring for new teachers, expanding non-exclusionary systems of discipline, and providing training in trauma-informed teaching for teachers and paraprofessionals.



Hundreds of Education Minnesota members participated in a May rally before the end of the regular legislative session, calling for leaders to fund education and other priorities that make Minnesota a welcoming and thriving place to live and learn, no matter what you look like or where you come from.

Specifically, the plan includes:

- \$66 million for learning recovery, including a particular emphasis on students receiving special education services.
- \$26 million in school support, including \$23 million in other state activities funds and \$3 million in grant administration funds to expand systemic supports for students.
- \$13.6 million in state support to build and reinforce systems and structures within MDE to better support students, families and educators.
- \$13.2 million for summer enrichment grants, with half of the funds directed to community organizations and half directed to culturally specific community organizations.
- \$13.2 for after-school programs, directing funds to Ignite Afterschool and other community organizations.

The Legislature did also create to a \$250 million essential workers fund, which is aimed at providing COVID back pay to workers who were on the front lines of the pandemic. As of press time, a legislative work group was appointed and has a charge to bring forward recommendations by Sept. 6 for how the funds should be disbursed. Education Minnesota plans to push for education support professionals who were on the front lines providing in-person child care to be included.

The higher education bill includes:

- \$100 million in new money for higher education.
- No tuition freeze and a tuition increase cap of 3.5 percent.

- \$1 million for student teacher grants.
- \$2 million for underrepresented teachers of color grants.
- \$400,000 for the teacher shortage loan repayment program.
- \$3 million for aspiring teachers of color scholarships.

There's also good news for student loan borrowers, essential workers and early learning advocates. State lawmakers passed the following legislation:

- The Student Loan Borrowers Bill of Rights to help regulate loan servicers and protect borrowers from unscrupulous practices that forces many to pay millions of dollars in unnecessary interest.
- The Great Start for All Minnesota Children Task Force, which will look at child care and early learning affordability for families and the workforce challenges that exist. The governor's Children's Cabinet is also directed to develop a report on how all early care and learning programs could be consolidated into a single agency.

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

The Legislature finished its regular session May 17 but came back in a special session June 14 to finish the state's two-year budget.

STUDENT BORROWER BILL OF RIGHTS BECOMES LAW

Education Minnesota and its allies have been working on legislation that would protect and support those who take on education debt for years, and this year that effort turned into a new law—the Student Borrower Bill of Rights.

“Student loan borrowers like me need someone on our side to protect us from abuses by loan servicers and lenders,” said Sarah Rother, a Chaska educator during a 2019 legislative hearing on the bill. “We need to have a student loan watchdog making sure those who take out student loans have standard consumer protections from misinformation, customer service failures and discriminatory practices.”

The SBBOR will require student loan servicers such as Navient and FedLoan Servicing, the multi-million dollar corporations who serve as intermediaries between borrowers and lenders, to operate in Minnesota under common-sense rules that are being adopted by other states and that we hope will be adopted nationally.

Student borrowers will now have basic protections in place, such as:

- Loan servicers will be required to communicate information about loans and repayment in a timely and accurate fashion. Borrowers will now be notified if and when a loan is transferred and to whom.
- Borrowers must now be evaluated for repayment options that take income into account, making it easier for people to afford payments while staying on track and protecting their credit. Loan servicers will be required to determine if a borrower could benefit from forgiveness options.
- Borrowers will be subject to an additional variety of consumer protections that level the playing field and make it possible for people with student debt to not just repay their loans but do so in a way that does not hurt their chances at home ownership, planning a wedding or starting a family—all decisions that borrowers are putting off because of the crushing weight of education debt.

Student loan servicers have been sued by the American Federation of Teachers, Consumer Finance Protection Bureau and states all over the country for taking advantage of borrowers and making it for systematic and widespread misinformation and deceptive practices that will now be unlawful in Minnesota.

The SBBOR was part of the commerce bill passed this legislative session. The SBBOR had bipartisan support and was authored by Rep. Zack Stephenson and Sen. Zach Duckworth. Stephenson has led on this effort the last three sessions, making sure there was awareness of the challenges Minnesotans face in paying back loans and receiving loan forgiveness.

Minnesota becomes the fifteenth state in the nation to pass a borrower’s bill of rights.

Minnesota is also ranked fifth in the nation for the amount of student debt we carry per-person at \$37,492 for state college students, according to the Student Borrower Protection Center. Minnesota’s outstanding debt burden is \$29.1 billion.

As this legislation was passed, more information has been reported as to why it is so important.

A report issued in June by the national Consumer Finance Protection Bureau outlined ongoing unfair, deceptive and abusive acts that loan servicers commit that prevent borrowers from accessing information that allow them to access loan forgiveness for 10 years of public service from a long-standing federal program, Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

For example, many essential workers that have been critical to our well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic are public employees. Under federal law, many should have been presented with information on how to access Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

The report found that servicers engaged in a deceptive act or practice by advising some borrowers they could not become eligible for this program, denying relief to too many. The SBBOR will now help provide relief should such deceptive practices take place in Minnesota.

This legislation was born from Education Minnesota's Degrees, Not Debt program and the stories of educators like Rother and Verlena Bradley, an elementary teacher in Saint Paul.

"I have had to deal with unaccountable and abusive loan servicers," Bradley said in a 2019 legislative hearing about the bill. "When I try to call loan servicers to get my questions answered, sometimes I'm on hold for more than 30 minutes only to be talked down to by a so-called customer service representative and not get my issue resolved. I've been misled into taking out student loans with high interest rates with little to no

information on the terms of the loan. Then I found out companies were selling my loans to each other, making it difficult to find out who I owe."

Education Minnesota's Degrees, Not Debt program now includes trainings on MEA Online that members can take at their own pace. Education Minnesota staff can assist members in navigating their loans, what forgiveness options may be available and how to work through the forgiveness process.

Learn more about the program at www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/Degrees-Not-Debt.

A loan forgiveness success story

Michelle Lieder, an elementary school physical education teacher in South Washington County, recently got a surprise in her bank account as student loan payments she had made for the last two years were returned to her as she completed the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

"I felt like I won the lottery," Lieder said. "The money that was forgiven will allow me financial freedom to take care of house projects and travel."

Lieder first heard about loan forgiveness options when she attended an Education Minnesota Degrees, Not Debt workshop through her local union.

"I went to the course about five years ago to learn about the program in hopes I would one day qualify," she said. "I was determined to take advantage of it."

But as many educators find out, the process for Lieder was not as easy as it should be.

"As I began applying to learn if I was on track to qualify, I found out that I had not been on the correct repayment plan," she said. "My biggest frustration is that the borrowers, the FedLoan for example, have had zero responsibility in guiding public service employees who may qualify to the correct repayment plans so that they could be on the right track."

Last summer, Lieder knew she met the requirements for the Temporary Public Service Loan

Forgiveness and spent three months going back and forth with submitting information to the program.

"There was always some confusing reason as to why I did not qualify," she said. "I was spinning in circles with them no matter who I talked to or how many times I resubmitted the paperwork. I took a break, did more research on how to get qualified, contacted Education Minnesota for advice, and then in April of 2021 received a random letter in the mail stating that my account was being considered for TPSLF."

As the school year ended, Lieder logged into her account and said she noticed things looked a little different.

"It was now saying I had met the requirements," she said. "Within a couple weeks my balance was forgiven and the payments I had made for two-plus years were deposited into my bank account."

Lieder said that she encourages other educators to check into the process and give it a try, as well as a reminder that Education Minnesota and the Degrees, Not Debt program can help.

"This was something that I put a lot of time into and had hit so many setbacks that I was sure it wasn't actually happening," she said. "But once the money was in my bank account and the account balance was zero at FedLoan, I was so relieved."

BLOOMINGTON PARAS TAKE CONTRACT FIGHT PUBLIC

The Bloomington Federation of Paraprofessionals' contract has been unsettled for more than two years. And after working during a pandemic, many of whom were on site providing essential child care from the start, the local union decided to take its negotiations fight public.

"Our members have gone through a lot," said Bill Schwandt, the local union president. "We're fighting for some equity and we're fighting for respect."

This spring, the union decided to do informational picketing and inform the community about their unsettled contract.



Members of the Bloomington Federation of Paraprofessionals, along with other colleagues and Education Minnesota officers, did informational picketing in May, after their contract negotiations hit the two-year mark. Their contract remains unsettled as of press time.

"We had days of 20-plus people there, on their own time, at different schools throughout the district," Schwandt said.

Members were at 14 different schools in five days, standing on the streets outside buildings, holding signs and passing out information about how negotiations have been going. They asked community members to reach out to school board members to ask them to settle their contract.

The biggest sticking point is wages. The union has asked for a 40-cent an hour raise, adding steps and reducing the number of years on their longevity steps. The BFP is also asking for a one-time bonus for working in the pandemic.

The district negotiates where they say, "We're going to do a 2 percent increase for everybody," said Schwandt.

"What does an admin get on a 2 percent raise at their six-figure salary? And a para getting a 2 percent raise comes out to \$400 a year," said Schwandt. "It barely amounts to an extra bag of groceries a month."

Especially as the pandemic continued and the paraprofessionals continued working in person, assisting with online learning, providing child care and delivering meals, the members knew they wanted to fight for what they know they deserve.

"When we did a survey when we started bargaining two years ago, 42-44 percent percent of the paraprofessionals in Bloomington are the primary wage earners," said Schwandt. "And 60 percent of paras are working at least one extra job, if not two. They tell us we are important and vital parts of our programs, but pats on the back don't pay the bills."

"How much energy does someone have for their students when they are working nights and weekends to make ends meet? The district has an opportunity to right the ship. As everybody's salaries increase, ours stay stagnant."

The stagnant and inadequate wages are also showing up in the district's ability to hire paraprofessionals, said Schwandt.

"I don't think there's ever been a time where there is no open positions for paraprofessionals," he said. "There's usually five to seven open positions, and the other paraprofessionals pick up the slack. We fix problems and we figure out how to make things work best."

As of press time, the BFP and district's last proposals were only about \$83,000 apart, but the district wasn't moving.

"That's about four open para positions that they have budgeted," said Schwandt. "That money is there. Not to mention the ESSER funds where Bloomington is slated to get more than a million."

Schwandt is now looking at an option to settle two two-year contracts as they are approaching the time they would normally start to talk about bargaining their next one.

EDUCATORS SHARE EQUITY WORK IN LOCALS, DISTRICTS

Education Minnesota members who are focusing on racial equity and social justice work in their locals and districts shared their stories at a virtual live event on June 9, streamed and saved on Education Minnesota's Facebook video page.

Sabrina Tapia of Prior Lake-Savage, Jenifer Stehr of Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan and Caroline Long of Minneapolis all shared their stories about their work, how it sparked their local unions into action and the triumphs and challenges they faced.

Tapia shared that her local union, the Prior Lake-Savage Education Association, has created a Coalition for Teachers of Color, is creating a cohort to support Tier One teachers who often are teachers of color move to full licensure, and engaging parents and students.

"One of the ways that our local has supported us is just working with the community. Partnering with parents is one of the most important things that we've done because a lot of times, just like BIPOC educators have been marginalized, our BIPOC parents have been marginalized," said Tapia. "We are having parent affinity groups, monthly meetings where parents can come and speak to how would you like your child represented in school or just the creation of joy."

The Prior Lake-Savage Coalition for Teachers of Color just received an Education Minnesota Foundation grant, as well as a National Education Association Safe and Just Schools grant, to continue and expand its work into the next school year.

In Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan, Stehr said a union social justice committee actually started with a majority of white members wanting to do something after the murder of George Floyd.

"We had so many members reaching out to our local president saying, 'How can we help? How can we get involved?,'" she said. "We started the social justice committee and we found something that members really had a passion for and that more members than we even thought of joined. And so we kind of collectively came together with so many people that had so many experiences and wanted to help support our students of color and our teachers of color. And it just took off."

Stehr said the committee plans on doing more member engagement this year, as well as professional development.

For Long, racial equity work has always been a core of her personal and professional life.

"I have always kind of had that fire, being an educator of color," she said. "I have felt undermined and demeaned, not respected in my own profession. It seemed like George Floyd seemed to be the catalyst where people are like, 'Oh, now we're going to believe what you're saying.' And so then a lot of things just kind of have taken off from there."

In Minneapolis, the union's bargaining team, which Long is a part of, is now reviewing language and policies in their contract that could better support equity and recruitment and retention of educators of color.



Caroline Long, Minneapolis



Jenifer Stehr, DCUE



Sabrina Tapia, Prior Lake-Savage

TWO NEW CHARTER SCHOOLS UNIONIZE WITH EDUCATION MINNESOTA

The teachers and staff at Hiawatha Academies, a Minneapolis charter school network, and Great River School, a St. Paul charter school, both voted to unionize with Education Minnesota this June.

Both schools' bargaining units will include teachers and most non-management school staff.

Great River and Hiawatha become the fourth and fifth charter schools to unionize with Education Minnesota. The 106 educators at Great River and 205 educators at Hiawatha are now spending the summer creating and adopting governing documents and beginning the process of negotiating their first contracts.

For both groups, the idea to unionize came after years of conversations about organizing. But both groups also said the pandemic and distance learning gave them more reasons to highlight the need for educator voice in decision-making at their worksites.

"Like most of the country, the pandemic shined a very bright light on how decision are made and who was at the table," said Abby Mesnik, an educator at Great River who was one of the leaders of the organizing efforts. "We're relationship based, which is a good thing. But that means that certain people have more power than others. These people are getting listened to and these are not. How can we all as one group work together?"

"I always tie it back to Hiawatha's mission statement which is that all scholars will be empowered with the knowledge, character and leadership skills to graduate from college and serve the common good," Janiru Herath, a Hiawatha Academies educator during a Facebook Live announcement of the unionizing effort. "Through unionizing, we can have a seat at the table in which the decision-making process can include all voices. That would include teachers, paraprofessionals and operations staff."

At Great River, Mesnik said that there is a teacher-majority school board, but the mission statement of that board states that they

don't manage the day-to-day policies and board members are told to take their "teacher hat" off while acting as a board member.

"So things like our grievance policy has been on their docket for five years," she said. "The things that we need support with, they are not supposed to handle."

Spencer Virden, an educator at Hiawatha, said the real conversations about unionizing started when educators would go to networking or professional development days put on by the administration and nothing seemed to be relevant to what was happening in classrooms.

"Every single time we had a network day, it was starting to boil over," said Virden. "Staff started to push back and challenge power, even without a union."

But Virden said the networking days also allowed educators from across the five Hiawatha sites to come together and start having conversations and exchange ideas.

"When rank and file members get together, there is real talk," he said.

Educators at both schools said that feeling like they are in a silo and not always supported was another major reason for unionizing.

"Our school has always seen the value of unionizing but it didn't seem practical at the beginning because we were so small and still establishing our school culture," said Jessy Fabel, a Great River educator. "But we outgrew our current structure. We grew from 300 to 700 students and we didn't put in any new systems so a lot of things fell through the cracks."

"As our school grew, we're lacking some of the systems in place to get answers," said Mesnik. "We're also so isolated and we couldn't communicate about our struggles and problems. In doing the union work, it was the first time we as elementary teachers worked with middle and

high school. It brought us back as one school to talk about what we need as a whole school. We realized that these weren't just group or individual problems, but a whole school problem."

At Hiawatha, there are five schools, so educators are naturally separated, but Virden said that educators were craving the opportunities to connect.

"There was a visible frustration from people at our all staff meetings," said Virden. "So we had about six or seven people from the high school start talking. Then it became about 12 or 13."

Educators reached out to representatives at Education Minnesota to learn more about the process of organizing.

"We had a moment of where we thought we could just announce that we want a union. Then we realized, oh maybe we should find out our rights and the legal aspects of the process," said Mesnik.

While the pandemic brought more reasons to organize to light, it also made the process of organizing a little more difficult.

"When you're trying to unionize in the pandemic, and you can't have a one-on-one conversation in their classroom, it was difficult to contact people and then start the conversation of the union," said Fabel. "To go through all the steps and have to vote, it was a more cumbersome process. But we had small events where we had the initial conversation and then had people sign the cards, right then and there. It gave people the time to connect and people were hungry for it."

"Once we got all of the schools represented on the organizing committee, we started really working on our campaign," said Virden. "We started at about 12-15 percent, but we had meetings on Zoom and just started chipping away at conversations. More and more people joined, then they had relationships with other people and invited them in. You have to build the majority. Solidarity doesn't come instantly."

Now that both groups have voted and are officially a union, the process of setting up their bargaining units begins.

The educators of Great River and Hiawatha Academies are both focused on keeping these efforts tied to what is best for students and staff.

"We hope that students and staff will benefit

from having a consistent voice that already know their families and community and know how to advocate for what they need," said Herath.

"We have amazing staff, and in order for us to keep a sustainable model, it's important for us to keep those people in place. Having this union in place will allow us to advocate for our families like never before. It's incredibly valuable."

"Students are at the center of everything that we do, and by prioritizing the voices of the people who work closest to them, we can increase student outcomes and we can also increase the satisfaction of the workers," Tory Waggoner, a Hiawatha Academies educator, during the Facebook Live announcement of the unionizing effort.

"We could not continue with the status quo," said Mesnik. "Now it's on to talking about what's important for people to negotiate for before we act on it."



Liked by [chriswilliamsmn](#) and 27 others

hiawathaunion Hiawatha workers received our ballots in the mail yesterday! We will have until June 8th to fill out and mail back our ballots, and on June 10th we will know our results! Thank you to all those who are supporting us along the way.

Educators at Hiawatha Academies used social media as another way to communicate about why they were unionizing.



Walt Munsterman started his career in Anoka-Hennepin, but served as the MEA Vice President in the 1980s and has led and remains active in Education Minnesota Retired. Because of his 40-plus year career of union advocacy, Munsterman was given the NEA's 2021 Distinguished Service Award.

MUNSTERMAN WINS NEA DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Retired teacher and union leader Walt Munsterman was honored with the National Education Association's 2021 Distinguished Service Award, the union's highest honor.

"As I go back throughout the years, the NEA helped me become the individual I am today," Munsterman said in his thank you remarks. "All the time and the trainings they spent made me a better leader."

Munsterman received the award for his 40-plus years of activism this spring and was recognized at the NEA-Retired Annual Meeting in June.

"Walt has devoted his career to education and to education employees," said Julie Jagusch, the current Education Minnesota Retired president, in her nomination letter for the award. "I know I owe a lot to Walt for his dedication. He has served as a role model for me."

Munsterman's career began as a teacher in Anoka-Hennepin, where he served as local union president and on the negotiations team. His union advocacy began when he worked on getting the right for collective bargaining for Minnesota public employees in the early 1970s.

He went on to serve as Negotiations Council Chairperson the Minnesota Education Association before serving as vice president of MEA for eight years.

"While serving in these positions, Walt actively supported many Minnesota locals in their

negotiating efforts and walked the picket line with many striking locals," said Jagusch.

Munsterman has attended more than 40 NEA Representative Assemblies and continues to attend events as an Education Minnesota Retired member.

"When the MEA and the Minnesota Federation of Teachers merged to form Education Minnesota in 1998, Walt helped to merge the two retired organizations into Education Minnesota Retired," said Jagusch. "He served as the first president of Education Minnesota Retired, and then served again at a later time."

Munsterman also serves on the American Federation of Teacher's Retired Program and Policy Council, as well as the Minnesota AFL-CIO Retiree Council.

"As a member of both of these, he works toward improving the life of retired union members," said Jagusch.

Munsterman, along with his wife Adele, also a retired educator, continue to be active in the Minnesota DFL party, especially in their local senate district.

"Walt's focus in political work has always been centered around what is best for students, teachers, and public education," said Jagusch.

As part of the award recognition, Munsterman read the NEA Mission Statement at the full NEA Representative Assembly at the event in July.

SUPREME COURT UPHOLDS STUDENT'S OFF-CAMPUS SPEECH RIGHTS

When 14-year-old Brandi Levy was not selected for the 2017 Mahanoy Area High School varsity cheerleading team, she vented her frustration on every modern teen's venue of choice: social media. From a convenience store, Levy expressed her dismay with a Snapchat photo of her flipping off the camera. Along with the photo was the caption, "f--- the school. . . f--- cheer, f--- everything." The school cheerleading captains soon learned about the post. The school district suspended Levy from the junior varsity team for one year. The resulting legal dispute in *Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.* went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled 8-1 last month that the school district had violated Levy's First Amendment rights.

The lawsuit

Levy, represented by the American Civil Liberties Union, argued that the school had no right to punish her for something she said off-campus. Her case quickly garnered support from free speech advocacy and religious groups such as the Alliance Defending Freedom. The school's choice to discipline Levy sparked an influx of amicus curiae briefs from such groups who expressed concern that a ruling in favor of the school could lead to prosecution of student religious beliefs.

The school district argued that districts have a history of regulating student speech off campus. Additionally, they contended, COVID-19 era online learning muddled the lines between on- and off-campus speech. Along with anti-bullying advocacy groups like the Cyberbullying Research Center, the school district argued that a decision in favor of Levy would weaken schools' ability to discipline students for off-campus discrimination, harassment and bullying. In an amicus brief, the Biden administration's Department of Justice emphasized that schools to comply with federal civil-rights statutes. Such statutes require schools to address harmful speech on the basis of sex, race or disability that may obstruct equal access to education.

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

The ruling

Writing for the majority, Justice Stephen Breyer cited *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, a famous 1969 SCOTUS decision that protected the free speech of students who wore black armbands to school to protest the Vietnam War. The court affirmed that schools have a valid interest in regulating disruptive off-campus student speech. However, Levy's post was made on a weekend, off-campus, on a personal cellphone and to her friends. It did not target any individual or name her school. Justice Breyer noted in his majority opinion that "[Levy] uttered the kind of pure speech to which, were she an adult, the First Amendment would provide strong protection." Because Levy's speech was not "substantially disruptive," the majority agreed that the school violated her First Amendment rights.

Breyer established a few guiding principles for schools to consider as they evaluate student-speech discipline. First, parents generally have the responsibility to discipline children off-campus. Furthermore, if schools could discipline all off-campus speech, they would have 24-hour jurisdiction over everything a child says. Breyer emphasized that schools have "an interest in protecting a student's unpopular expression, especially when the expression takes place off campus." After all, he concluded, "America's public schools are the nurseries of democracy."

LEGAL BRIEFS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

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 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 _____.

Earn While You Shop

Three EASY Ways to Get Rewarded!

- 1 Use your UECU Debit Card 12 times per month
- 2 Be enrolled & log in to Online Banking once per month
- 3 And receive eStatements

12 Debit Card purchases must post to your account during the monthly statement cycle. Account approval, qualifications, limits, and other requirements apply. Ask a UECU representative for details. Federally insured by NCUA



Cash Back **or** High Yield
Compare our reward
checking accounts at

www.uecu.coop

651-264-0669 | 800-229-2848

Political Action Committee Refund Request

Thousands of members of Education Minnesota decide to contribute to the union's political action committee. The PAC is one of our main tools to bring the educator voice to the policy debate by electing people who will listen.

Those PAC dollars go back to local unions to help them win school board and levy elections, as well as support pro-public education candidates at the state and national level.

In accordance with Education Minnesota Bylaw Article 2, Section 3, Subd. b, I hereby request the following:

____ Please refund to me \$25 of my contribution to Education Minnesota's dues that will be contributed to the general account of Education Minnesota Political Action Committee for the 2021-22 academic year.

**ALL OF THE FOLLOWING FIELDS ARE
REQUIRED. PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY.**

Name: _____

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Local/Affiliate: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

A request for refund of the Education Minnesota Political Action Committee contribution will not affect membership rights or benefits. Retired members are not assessed, thus do not qualify for the refund.

DEADLINE FOR REFUNDS:

Refund requests MUST be received by the Education Minnesota Political Action fund:

- 1) By Oct. 31 for continuing members; or
- 2) Within 30 days of signing a membership application for new members.

**CHECKS WILL NOT BE MAILED UNTIL
THE END OF NOVEMBER, AFTER ALL
FORMS HAVE BEEN PROCESSED.**

ORIGINAL SIGNATURE NEEDED.

Return this form to:
Education Minnesota Accounting Department
Attn: Refund Request
41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103-2196

Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Refund Request

Contributions to this foundation will provide financial support for innovative programs initiated by Education Minnesota members, locals and affiliates that promote educational access for learners and excellence in teaching. Grants also support professional development for education support professionals and higher education faculty.

In accordance with Education Minnesota Bylaw Article 2, Section 3, Subd. c, I hereby request the following:

____ Please refund to me \$ ____ (maximum \$5) of my Education Minnesota foundation assessment that will be contributed to the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for the 2021-22 academic year.

**ALL OF THE FOLLOWING FIELDS ARE
REQUIRED. PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY.**

Name: _____

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Local/Affiliate: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

A request for refund of the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning assessment will not affect Education Minnesota membership rights or benefits but will make you ineligible to receive a grant from this foundation. Retired members are not assessed, thus do not qualify for the refund.

DEADLINE FOR REFUNDS:

Refund requests must be received by the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning:

- 1) By Oct. 31 for continuing members; or
- 2) Within 30 days of signing a membership application for new members.

**CHECKS WILL NOT BE MAILED UNTIL
THE END OF NOVEMBER, AFTER ALL
FORMS HAVE BEEN PROCESSED.**

ORIGINAL SIGNATURE NEEDED.

Return this form to:
Education Minnesota Accounting Department
Attn: Refund Request
41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103-2196

Professional development

National social studies conference In Minneapolis

The National Council for the Social Studies will hold its 101st annual conference in Minneapolis, Nov. 19-21. The conference will include 400-plus workshops, featuring the latest in social studies and geography education. There will also be more than 75 exhibits highlighting the latest social studies products and services. NCSS says they continue to work closely with our partners in Minneapolis to monitor current health and safety conditions, restrictions and requirements for large events. Registration fees range from \$109 for a single day for a student member to \$450 for a full conference for non-members. For more information including on how to register, go to www.socialstudies.org/conference.

Classroom resources

Academic enrichment programs, activities

Reach for the Stars is a guide listing more than 120 academic enrichment programs and activities to supplement classroom learning and help students discover and develop their interests, passions and talents. Reach for the Stars is updated yearly as public service from Synergy and Leadership Exchange and the Minnesota Academic League. Download a free PDF at www.synergyexchange.org/reach-for-the-stars or request a print copy of promotional postcards by emailing reach@synergyexchange.org.

HONESTY IN EDUCATION, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

have hard conversations and look at different perspectives. It's not about teaching one certain way, but having students have those discussions to come up with their own conclusions."

Teaching students to build their activism and find solutions to issues in their community is a component of Ethnic Studies, said Benjamin.

"At the root of it is understanding people and understanding our differences and lifting each other up, so everyone has the chance to be successful," she said. "At the end of the day, it's about our students being able to learn from different perspectives and come up with their own answers."

Kate Schmidt, president of the Dakota County United Educators, wants to make her schools places where all students can thrive by exposing members and students to different perspectives.

The public forum section at the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan school board meetings began filling up with people wanting to speak against equity efforts, so now the local union has begun organizing members to speak and share what is really happening in their classrooms.

"We are planning on having speakers at every meeting," said Jenifer Stehr, a teacher and local

union leader. "We're trying to get new teachers and teachers from different backgrounds. We have a local union social justice committee and that group is making the plans."

Schmidt said they feel supported by their school board and district in this situation, but knows the union can be doing more to support its own members.

"We are doing member education as to what is going on through our newsletters," she said.

"We've talked about different trainings we can do through our local on making sure our classrooms are anti-racist. Educators are already doing so much in their classrooms, teaching books, doing restorative practices. Let's all build on that work."

Schmidt also said the union will be doing screenings and endorsements in their school board races that will focus on candidates who are equity-focused.

DCUE is also using their negotiating efforts to make sure members are supported in their classrooms.

"For the first time in our history, we are proposing some academic freedom language," said Schmidt. "We have to be professionals but we're going to teach hard things. And if someone doesn't like it, we need to have some protections around this."

MEA CONFERENCE WILL BE HYBRID THIS YEAR

Members can attend this year's MEA conference either in-person on Thursday, Oct. 21, at the Saint Paul RiverCentre or log on to watch select sessions virtually.

The 2021 MEA conference lineup includes about 70 in-person workshops, focusing on racial equity in education, student and educator mental health, classroom strategies and much more. About a dozen of those workshops will be offered in real time online, while another 50 courses are available on Education Minnesota's MEA Online for members to complete at their own pace.

The conference is free and open to Education Minnesota members and aspiring educators only, but you must register in advance. Go to www.educationminnesota.org/events/mea starting Aug. 1 to sign up for sessions. Register early to get into the workshops you want.

Free onsite child care will also be available during the MEA conference for in-person attendees. You must register in advance; registration

will open in August.

And if you attend in person, don't forget to plan on visiting dozens of exhibitors offering education-related products, services and programs.

You may be able to earn general continuing education credit and fulfill state relicensure requirements for attending the MEA conference in person or virtually. An attendance certificate will be emailed to

you after you complete the online session or handed to you when you leave the in-person workshop.

Free professional development is always just a click away for active members of Education Minnesota. Members can access our full catalog of professional development on MEA Online to improve their professional practice, earn CEU credits for relicensure and build union understanding and power.

MEA DETAILS

When: 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 21, 2021

Where: Saint Paul RiverCentre; some live sessions will be available via webinar.

Admission: Free and open to Education Minnesota members and aspiring educators only.

Registration: Opens Aug. 1!

OCT. 21 SCHEDULE

General session: 9-10:30 a.m.

Workshops: 10:45 a.m.-4:45 p.m.

Exhibits: 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

LEGAL BRIEFS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

For educators

We generally do not recommend that most educators monitor student social media activity unless it is connected to a class or authorized extracurricular activity. Student reports of inappropriate social media activity targeting students or staff should be directed to deans

or administrators. Education Minnesota's legal department also has a training on this topic titled, "Cell Phones, Social Media, and Student Safety," which members may request through their local or intermediate organization.

— Lindsay Lundeen

Lundeen is a law clerk at Education Minnesota

MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

Benefits and services for members

Maximize hard-earned dollars

We believe educators deserve more and continually look for ways to help you maximize your hard-earned dollars. With the newly enhanced PerksConnect program there are more ways to save, regardless of your ZIP code.

Zebit

- Shop millions of products including electronics, furniture, appliances and more.
- Pay over time, interest free.

<https://zebit.com/edmn>

PerksConnect Online Shopping

- Explore the enhanced PerksConnect discount program.

edmn.perksconnection.com

Click on: "Activate Your Account Now." Use group code EDMN12

No cost member benefits

Identity Theft Recovery Plan

No cost recovery plan for active and retired members, paid for by ESI. Register today. Upgrade to family coverage for as little as \$3/month.

www.educationminnesota.securusid.com

NEA Life Insurance

- \$15,000 one year no cost life insurance for new members.
- \$1,000 NEA Complimentary Life Insurance for all active members.

Designate your beneficiary at www.neamb.com.

AFT Life Insurance

- \$5,000 life insurance for new members, no premium payment required.

Print the beneficiary form at

www.aftbenefits.org/no-cost-term-life-insurance

Plan for today and the future

For many, budgeting is a monthly struggle and planning for retirement seems unrealistic. A variety of programs will work with you and your unique situation so you can not only plan for today but also for the future.

Credit Union

- Savings, checking and modern banking services including mobile check deposit and mobile wallet.
- Professional development, student loans, scholarships, grants and free classroom resources.

www.uecu.coop 651-264-0669

Toll-free: 800-229-2848

Financial/Retirement Planning

- Personal financial review, pension planning, and asset management with a local advisor.
- Free financial and retirement seminars for members.

www.efsadvisors.com 763-689-9023

Toll-free: 877-403-2374

Mortgage/Loan Services

- Purchase, refinance, new construction and home equity.

www.mneducatorshomes.com 952-252-4490

Credit Card

- Earn rewards with every purchase.
- Choose a card that earns cash back with the NEA® Customized Cash Rewards Visa Signature® Credit Card.
- No annual fee.

www.neamb.com/personal-finance

For information about rates, fees, other costs and benefits associated with the use of this credit card, call the number listed above. This credit card program is issued and administered by Bank of America, N.A.

Protect yourself and love ones

From aspiring educators to retirees, protecting yourself and loved ones can provide peace of mind. Our benefit partners will work with you to make sure your protection level is appropriate and affordable.

Auto and Home/Renters Insurance

- Special savings on auto, home, condo and renters insurance.
- Customized coverage for educators.

Liberty Mutual: 952-229-5692

Darlene.VonArx@libertymutual.com

Travelers: 888-695-4640

travelers.com/educationminnesota

Medicare and Health Insurance

- Provides members with health insurance advice, education and expertise including Medicare options.

www.edmn.schatzbenefits.com 612-428-0132

Long-Term Care Insurance

- Protect your savings and assets; special discounts for members and families.

www.educatorsltc.com 763-689-9023

Toll-free: 877-403-2374

Senior Care Navigation

- Free Senior Care Navigation including finding best-fit, reliable resources.
- Assistance with short- or long-term care and wellness support.

www.lifesprk.com/edmnnav 952-345-3317

Email: ShineOn@lifesprk.com

41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 651-292-4856 800-642-4624

esi.educationminnesota.org esi@edmn.org

Paid for by ESI, not by dues. ESI is self-supporting; revenues provide benefits, service and consumer education for members. What do YOU want to know? Send questions to esi@edmn.org.





THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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

Nominations open for the 2021-22 ESP of the Year

Nominations are open until Sept. 26 for the next Education Minnesota Education Support Professional of the Year.

The program honors exemplary professional and union work by an Education Minnesota member in any ESP job category, including paraprofessional/education assistant, secretarial/clerical, custodial, food service, maintenance and trades, transportation, groundskeeping, security, technology services, health services and others.

All Education Minnesota ESP members who have been members for at least three years as of Aug. 31, 2021, are eligible. Individuals can be nominated by anyone associated with Minnesota schools.

The ESP of the Year represents peers throughout the profession and connects to communities as an ambassador, and is Minnesota's nominee for the National Education Association's ESP of the Year award.

The ESP of the Year receives a \$1,200 honorarium, their choice of an iPad, Chromebook or tablet, plus an expense-paid trip to the NEA's Education Support Professional National Conference

To nominate a candidate for 2021-22 Education Minnesota ESP of the Year, go to www.educationminnesota.org/resources/esps/esp-of-the-year-nomination-form.

MINNESOTA
ESP
OF THE YEAR