



MINNESOTA EDUCATOR

A publication for the members of Education Minnesota

June 2017

Excellence in education

The 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year banquet honored, celebrated and shone a light on the amazing work of the 95 candidates, 26 semifinalists and 11 finalists for this year's award. In the end, **Corey Bulman**, a Mound Westonka language arts teacher, was selected as this year's recipient and representative of all of Minnesota's outstanding teachers.

Read more about Bulman and the celebration on page 3.



Legislature goes into overtime with special session

Legislative leaders have agreed to \$467.8 million in new spending for preschools through high school—about \$167 million more than a bill vetoed by Gov. Mark Dayton earlier in the month.

But the tentative deal reached May 23 includes harmful changes to teacher licensing and layoff regulations and is void of necessary fixes to teachers' pension fund. The bill devalues the profession, allows people with little to no training to teach our children and makes it harder to recruit and retain quality educators. As of press time, the Legislature was still in

special session and the bill had not been finalized. The tentative deal includes:

- Teacher licensing standard changes that give school districts too much authority to hire people with much less teacher training. People can receive an unlimited teaching license without any teacher preparation training—essentially allowing someone to teach for their entire career without any training on how to teach.
- No changes to the Teachers Retirement Association to improve the long-term stability

of the pension. TRA's board offered a balanced solution that would maintain a reliable, sustainable pension for current and future generations of teachers.

- The removal of baseline language for unrequested leaves of absence for teachers during times of budget trouble. When union and district negotiators can't agree on a local system of layoffs, state law says the default is based on seniority and licensure area. This default was created because it protected teachers from arbitrary

or vindictive dismissals. Layoff language is now up for negotiation, without the familiar safety net.

About three-quarters of the new funding—\$367 million—will go toward a 2 percent annual increase over the biennium on the per-pupil formula. An additional \$50 million is earmarked for school readiness dollars that could be used for public preschool and another \$20 million for preschool vouchers.

The 2017 session saw unprecedented levels of educator activism, which forced Republican leaders

to up their initial education spending and abandon their proposal to offer back-door vouchers for private schools.

This shows that elections matter. Minnesota needs pro-education majorities in the House and Senate to make meaningful improvements to schools and the profession.

It also shows educators have the power to affect change when they raise their collective voice, but real progress can only come after election victories.

Watch Education Minnesota's website, social media channels and read next month's Minnesota Educator for updates and more details.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Read the articles about what has happened during the last few weeks of the legislative session and our rally to support public education. Then answer the question, "What could your school do if the Legislature funded schools properly?" and send it to us via email, Twitter or Facebook to be entered into a drawing for a \$25 Target gift card.

Email us at educator@edmn.org or post on Twitter or Facebook using #MNEducator. Find us on Facebook at Education Minnesota and on Twitter @EducationMN. Answers will appear in next month's Minnesota Educator.

Congratulations to last month's contest winner, **Melissa Williams** of Richfield.

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Recharge after a big year, prepare for an exciting fall

We made it. Most educators will be on summer break by the time this edition of the Minnesota Educator is delivered. I don't know about you, but this feels like the longest, most tiring year I've spent in education since my first year of teaching.

The elections in the fall were a test for all of us. From difficult conversations about tolerance to protecting students from outright hate speech, we faced challenges many of us never expected to see in a 21st century school.

The Trump Effect was real and I fear it's not over. But those bad behaviors led many of us to find new ways to talk about institutional racism, implicit sexism and other difficult subjects. It moved many educators to social activism for the first time.

While I would never say those conflicts were beneficial, we may someday look back on our experiences during the fall and winter of 2016-17 and conclude they made us better educators, and more vigilant in watching out for all of our students, especially those who may be scapegoats for political agendas.

Election Day was also a day to celebrate in many districts around the state. The hard work of educators to spread the word about public education turned into wins at the ballot box for several levies.

For example, in St. Michael-Albertville, educators worked with other unions to make 3,500 calls and knock on hundreds more doors on the way to passing a \$36 million building referendum.



Denise Specht, president

Minnesotans still support their public schools and their local educators, even if it doesn't always feel that way.

The Legislature came back in January and in March it received an audit of the usefulness of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. Our members lobbied hard for the audit the year before and the finished product reported what many educators already knew.

"Auditor: Testing takes up significant school time, has limited usefulness," was a story's headline on Minnesota Public Radio's website. I can imagine 85,000 educators reading that headline and nodding vigorously.

The audit reported to a wider audience some of the most frustrating facts about the MCAs, including the Legislature's requirement that the Minnesota Department of Education include adaptive questions above and below a student's grade level—questions federal rules prohibit the MDE from using. That's right, we've lengthened the MCAs for no

good reason at all. The Legislature also requires the MDE to project the career and college readiness of elementary and middle school students, even though there's no scientifically valid method of doing that. Nonetheless, the education department complies with the law and sends parents an essentially meaningless forecast.

As the report said, "One national testing expert who advises MDE commented that—given the amount of uncertainty—scores should probably show 5 percent of students as being on track for college readiness, 5 percent as being off track, and 90 percent categorized as 'don't know.'"

There are two more examples of what happens when the voices of educators are ignored.

In April, Education Minnesota hosted its annual Representative Convention. The delegates overwhelmingly voted to put three subjects at the top of our priorities for the next year—building power in our locals, focusing more attention on the needs of education support professionals and electing a pro-education candidate for governor in 2018.

The Minnesota Teacher of the Year program picked the 2017 winner in May. He's Corey Bulman, an English teacher at Mound Westonka High School. The selection committee for this award has a knack for picking great teachers who are also particularly relevant for the news of the day.

If I'm right, it's no

coincidence that Corey wrote in his application about the importance of teaching high school students to become skeptical and careful consumers of information and media. Those skills may become critical for our next generation of citizens, in the era of "fake news."

The regular session of the Legislature finished on May 22, but lawmakers were back for a special session.

But from January through May, nearly 650 educators personally lobbied their

building knew how much Minnesotans cared about the mission of public education, from pre-K through higher education.

And we finished by delivering more than 1,100 hand-written notes to Gov. Mark Dayton. We said we had his back, told him what our schools and campuses really need and thanked him for all he had already done for education.

It was a powerful day for educators and one of my proudest moments as

"Now we have time for a short break. I hope we spend it well, whether we're finding new ways to deliver the highest quality education for our students, improving our own practice through professional development or building the power within our locals, it's time to recharge, refresh and refocus—because next fall is going to be exciting."

legislators. Our members sent and made more than 5,800 emails and telephone calls—1,000 in just the final few days to protest licensure standards so loose people without any formal training in education would be permitted to teach.

It was a tremendous demonstration of our members' commitment to our students and our profession, but that was far from all we did. On the final weekend of the session, more than 500 educators and allies took over the Capitol Rotunda to rally for public education.

Our chants echoed off the Capitol dome and there's no doubt everyone in the

your president. Now we have time for a short break. I hope we spend it well, whether we're finding new ways to deliver the highest quality education for our students, improving our own practice through professional development or building the power within our locals, it's time to recharge, refresh and refocus—because next fall is going to be exciting.

Together,

Twitter: @DeniseSpecht

What will your school lose if education funding is not increased this session?

In last month's Minnesota Educator, we continued the "we want to hear from you" contest and received responses from all over the state via email and Twitter. Here is a selection of the answers. Look on page 1 for this month's question and how to submit an answer. Your answer enters you into a drawing for a \$25 Target gift card!

"If education funding is not increased (or not increased sufficiently), our school will likely have to cut staff, which means larger class sizes and fewer supports for students." Melissa Williams, Education Richfield

"If education funding is not increased this session, perhaps the most visible cutback would be a reduction in paraprofessional support staff. In my school, paraprofessionals perform a plethora of tasks and provide a great deal of academic and behavioral support, both within the classroom and beyond. It is my hope that funding is not decreased so that students and teachers can continue to benefit from their valuable service in our school district."

Debbie Cain, Fridley Education Association

"We are already stretched paper-thin, and next year we'll be paying to park in the school lot. We will be losing some allied arts, moving from the middle school concept to junior high and increasing class sizes." Jill Nysse, Winona Education Association

CORRECTION

In last month's issue, Diedra Carlson's name was misspelled in the story on page 4. The Minnesota Educator regrets this error.

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

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Bulman brings own love for literature into classroom

Corey Bulman has always loved books, which in high school wasn't always seen as a popular hobby.

"I was really into books and the arts and I luckily had teachers that fostered it," he said.

Today, Bulman brings his love of literature into his own high school English and language arts classes in Mound Westonka. And Bulman now brings a new title into his classroom too—2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

Bulman says he thought about being a teacher but it wasn't until he took English classes at the University of Minnesota that it all clicked into place.

After graduation, he got a call from Mound Westonka and has been there for the last 17 years.

"I started there when I was 24," he said. "School becomes your family. About half of our staff started within a five-year period. So this award is really the culmination of decades of work that we've been doing together."

The small west metro community feels like home

to Bulman and he takes his responsibility of educating the students of this community very seriously.

"When you work in a smaller community, you have a legacy and history with these families," he said. "I've had families where I've had four or five of their kids. You're a part of the community and a part of their dinner conversations at home. There are only two senior English teachers in the high school, so half of these kids are going to be in my class. That's a big deal."

One of the messages Bulman hopes to discuss during his service year is to make sure students are preparing for the world outside of school and being good digital citizens, knowing where their information is coming from and how to interpret it.

"If we don't teach kids to properly vet information, to properly set up their arguments and to discourse it in a healthy way, we're at a loss," he said. "If we don't teach them to become savvy with how they get their information, we're doing them a disservice."

That notion of understanding information doesn't just live online, it permeates into the literature he teaches too, says Bulman.

"Literature is a test run for real live," he said. "Character's lives will bump up against their own. While it's a fictionalized world, they aren't fictionalized feelings. I get to traffic the stuff of life."

Helping students navigate the conversations about life is also something Bulman takes very seriously.

"Everything is about your approach as an educator," he said. "I never approach a discussion saying 'This is what our outcome is going to be.' I always say, 'You don't get to say I don't know in here. You say, I don't know yet and get back to me.'"

Bulman feels that one of his biggest responsibilities as an educator is to connect with students, because that's what they are going to remember.

"You have to teach like your hair is on fire," he said. "You only get them for such a short period of time. Kids remember emotion. Content is fueled by that emotion, but you talk decades later about how that educator



Mound-Westonka English teacher Corey Bulman speaks to the crowd after being named the 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

made you feel.

"Education is a people job. You're selling ideas, selling an outlook. You work to make sure they get it, but the human interaction is important."

Bulman is grateful for going through the Teacher of the Year selection process, which includes writing essays of your philosophy of teaching and education message, as well as an interview with the selection panel if you are named a finalist. He said he is humbled by being recognized for his teaching.

"I've been in the trenches for a long time," he said. "It was important to reflect on what it is about this job that makes me come here every September."

Bulman hopes to spend his service year promoting the profession—in honor of those who inspired him.

"I am the legacy of my teachers," he said. "When people ask me about myself, I always start with 'I'm a teacher.' I live and breathe that pretty constantly. I know so many unsung heroes in the state who are just like that."

Banquet celebrates the passion, impact of teachers

The Minnesota Teacher of the Year selection process is capped off with a recognition banquet each May, where a recipient of the award is announced, but all teachers are honored.

"This program is really about all the people who use their training and enthusiasm to help their students succeed. Our union, Education Minnesota, organizes and underwrites this Teacher of the Year award on behalf of all of them," said Education Minnesota President Denise Specht in her speech at the banquet. "We are proud to do it because we believe in great teaching, which starts with the personal relationship between educator and student. That connection between individual teachers and their students is the pivot for everything else."

"Our students can only really be free if they're equipped to follow their dreams, but what they don't

know about, they can't dream about."

The banquet honored all 95 candidates, 26 semifinalists and 11 finalists for this year's award before naming Corey Bulman from Mound-Westonka the 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

Also celebrated was last year's recipient, Abdul Wright from Best Academy in Minneapolis, who ended his year of service by announcing Bulman. But Wright also spoke to the crowd about the importance of teaching and the profound responsibility of guiding students.

"We have to make sure everyone is a part of making this state better, because we have the potential," he said. "And I've seen it. I've seen the hope. I've seen the faith. I've seen the passion. I've seen the commitment to service. We will be a version of the vision of the future that our young people deserve."



The 11 finalists for the 2017 Minnesota Teacher of the Year award pose for a photo before the banquet. (Top, from left) Charity Przepiora, Michael Houston, Corey Bulman, Scott Noet, Sarah Swan McDonald and Adrian Davis. (Bottom, from left) Ali Alowonle, Mary Zilge, Teresa Stadem, Greta Callahan and Ong Xiong.

"What I do is bigger than me. I will change the world. And I'm not going to do it because of me, but because

of everyone in this room. We're going to do it together, because our young people deserve to see us do this work

together. Let's be a part of that change. Let's be a part of something great, because it's what the future deserves."

In a video honoring the 11 finalists, each one expressed his or her professional motivations and philosophies.

"It's really, really important for us to build those communities and to make sure we have that empathy and understanding (for each other)." *Ali Alowonle*

"The moments where you know that a student who didn't think that he or she could do something has done something and you can see it in their eyes—that's magic." *Corey Bulman*

"Children want to learn. They want to feel joy. They want to feel free. They want to feel happy. And if school can't be the vehicle to help them fulfil those dreams and goals, then who can?" *Greta Callahan*

"What I did or what I didn't do is what brings me back. I'm a professional, but I'm a growing professional." *Adrian Davis*

"I try to make (learning math) comfortable for them, make it somehow connect to what they know or have already learned." *Michael Houston*

"They keep me optimistic. Whether they want to help one of their students who needs new baseball cleats or if they want to show a new kid around the building because someone showed them around." *Scott Noet*

"My primary goal is for students to feel like they can safely take risks in our classroom. And that is not an easy thing to accomplish." *Charity Przepiora*

"What I get from that gift (of teaching teenagers) is an understanding of the vibrancy and the curiosity and the need to be included and the need to be respected and the need to be heard." *Sarah Swan McDonald*

"I had people who took an interest in me and cared about my growth and my success and continued to light that flame of learning. I wanted to be the teachers that I had who were igniting that flame and continued to fan it." *Teresa Stadem*

"It's especially personal to me to build on my Hmong students that they are special. They know two languages. And here's the experience that the Hmong people went through and look where they are." *Ong Xiong*

"It's more about their reaction to the day that a great lesson plan came forward and they were so engrossed in it that they didn't even know it was time to stop. That would be a perfect day." *Mary Zilge*

Jagusch brings passion for union work to new role as Education Minnesota-Retired president

Education Minnesota-Retired has a new president, but Julie Jagusch is not new to union work.

After working for 36 years as an elementary and middle school math teacher in the Anoka-Hennepin School District, Jagusch wanted to continue to be active in the union and stay connected to education.

“Being involved at the local and state levels, it was hard for me to give that up,” she said. “It was important for me to continue for my personal growth, and also because I so strongly believe in public education and what’s best for our kids and our educators.”



Julie Jagusch

Jagusch joined Education Minnesota-Retired after leaving teaching, but it took her a few years to get

involved in leadership. She has been on the board for six years, the last three serving as vice president.

She hopes to promote the union and increase involvement from all members, especially now that all active members can sign up for retired membership at no additional cost. If you have been a member of Education Minnesota for 10 years, have retired after Sept. 1, 2015, and are eligible to receive a pension, you can be a member of Education Minnesota-Retired for no additional cost.

"We want to make sure all of our members are aware of what we're doing

and encourage them to be engaged and be an active part of the organization," she said.

Jagusch said the union is hoping to expand its meeting schedule to include regional meetings around the state to make sure all members have an opportunity to attend and be a part of Education Minnesota-Retired.

“We want to keep members involved,” she said.

Jagusch said that because of her participation in Education Minnesota-Retired, she is much more aware of what is going on politically and how that affects herself and public education.

“We want to make sure

people are aware of what's going on with pensions," she said. "We have meetings that help keep us up to date on things like Medicare and health services that are available to us or our aging parents."

Jagusch began her role as president in April, along with a new executive board. Walt Munsterman is now vice president, Lynette Wayne is treasurer and Lowell Ueland is secretary.

For more information on Education Minnesota-Retired, go to www.educationminnesota.org/member-benefits/membership/retired-membership.

Sign up for shifts at State Fair booth

The 2017 Minnesota State Fair returns Aug. 24-Sept. 4.

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.

Shifts are filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Sign

up today to get the date and time you want by going to www.educationminnesota.org/events/state-fair-booth/state-fair. Only days with open slots will be listed.

The booth is open 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Shifts include taking digital photos and acting as Education Minnesota ambassadors to fairgoers. In 2016, members produced

more than 14,000 calendars
for booth visitors.

Shifts are three hours long; volunteers receive an admission ticket and T-shirt.

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



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RALLY CRIES FILL ROTUNDA!

More than 500 people filled the State Capitol Rotunda Saturday, March 20, to rally for the public schools Minnesota students deserve. More than 4,500 watched the rally streaming on Education Minnesota’s Facebook page. Speakers talked about the need for adequate funding, quality pre-K, licensed teachers, more support staff and a public education system for all students. Legislators were busy trying to find compromises on budget bills and policy legislation, but many joined the rally to show their support. After the rally, educators delivered 1,000 letters written to Gov. Mark Dayton, which thanked him for his continued support and encouraged him to stay strong in the fight for quality education.

Photos by Ashley Behrens



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Note: Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion in a voters guide and on 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 received by July 7, 2017.

Teacher, author reflects on writing about education

Writing isn't that hard. We can all do it, one word after next, little baby steps until a whole thought is complete. Writing so people will care is pretty difficult though, especially in an age where we are constantly besieged by words and ideas on email, social media and news sources.

Still, the need is there. In fact, there has never been a more important time for educators to share their stories.

I've been writing about teaching heavily for the last five years, and I've learned things. I've learned the things that have been the difference between having a few people read a piece and a few hundred thousand. I've learned about the honest desire from many to hear directly from teachers as well as the desire by some to use teacher voices for their own needs.

I've learned about haters, and I've learned how amazing it is to hear how you've impacted or supported a colleague.

Here are some quick lessons to think about when you are ready to share your stories and ideas more broadly whether you are thinking of submitting to a website, starting a blog, or sending a letter to the editor.



Tom Rademacher

THINGS TO DO:

Keep it short.

Educators have a lot to say, which is a good thing. We also tend to try to say it all at once, which is where we get ourselves into trouble. Think about your own reading habits when considering length for any piece. How long do you last before you start skimming?

In general, your goal should be to write a piece of which people will read every word. Any time I see my word count creeping over 600, I start to keep a very close eye on sections, secondary arguments and stories that can be cut.

Keep it honest.

Working in schools is really,

really ridiculously hard. It's impossible to feel like you're perfect at it. When writing about your experience, it's OK to be vulnerable. In fact, being honest about what your day feels like, what you see and feel in your work, will often make a piece more interesting, more relatable and ultimately more powerful.

Honesty isn't easy, but ignoring the good or the bad in a situation because it's politically expedient to the point you're trying to make will weaken your argument, not strengthen it. The hard truths are the most important to tell.

Tell stories.

As educators, the primary thing we can offer that no outside expert, no politician, no advocate can offer is stories about what school was like yesterday.

You are an expert in your own experience, and, as an educator, your experience is often a result of decisions being made far away from you.

Writing about those experiences is an important way to impact conversations and decisions around education, as well as to help everyone remember why we care as much as we do about the students we serve.

THINGS TO AVOID:

Don't write what people want to hear.

The organizations and people you want to impress have people that write those things for them. Repeating the same sorts of ideas and slogans that you've already heard 100 times isn't going to make your piece more impactful to anyone who is reading it.

Don't get in trouble.

Even if no one you work with or for has ever mentioned anything you've written, believe me, if you talk about any of them in a piece, however indirectly, they will see it.

If you write about your students, be extra careful. Respect their privacy to carry their own stories and their own secrets. If you are currently frustrated by the way your students are acting or learning, walk away from the keyboard. We all get frustrated, so it's understandable, but there's no excuse for teachers who would use the internet to trash the kids they're supposed to care for.

Don't give up.

I wrote regularly for a year before anyone started really reading anything. Slowly, a

few pieces caught on, and then a few more. A few years and a few hundred thousand words later, I am a better writer than when I started and have a lot more readers.

Your first piece may go viral, or may just mean the world to your two closest work friends. Either way, your first piece is just your first, or your first this year, or your first about a new topic. Give yourself time.

There will always be reasons not to write. There won't be a lot of time. There will be commenters who don't get it or who don't like you.

There are lots of reasons not to write, but we need you. We need your stories and your experience. We need your passion and your inspiration. You are an expert, and what you have to say is important. We're waiting to read it.

♦ Tom Rademacher

Tom Rademacher is an English teacher in Robbinsdale and was the 2014 Minnesota Teacher of the Year. He recently released his first book, "It Won't Be Easy. An Exceedingly Honest (and Slightly Unprofessional) Love Letter to Teaching" and blogs at <http://misterrad.tumblr.com>.

2017 Summer Financial Planning Workshops

To meet the needs of Education Minnesota members, free workshops designed just for you, are planned for Summer. REGISTER TODAY!

Financial/Retirement Planning Essentials

Mon. 6/19/2017 – TRA/PERA
Central Lakes College

Tues. 6/20/2017 – TRA/PERA
Sawmill of Grand Rapids

Mon. 6/26/2017 – TRA/PERA
Minnesota West Community and Technical College

Tues. 6/27/2017 – TRA/PERA
South Central College North

Tues. 7/11/2017 – TRA/PERA
St. Cloud Technical and Community College

Tues. 7/11/2017 – TRA/PERA
Riverland Community College

Wed. 7/12/2017 – TRA/PERA
Prestwick Golf Club

Mon. 7/17/2017 – TRA/PERA
Willmar Conference Center

Tues. 7/18/2017 – TRA/PERA
Crookston Inn & Convention Center

Thur. 7/20/2017 – TRA
Minnesota State College Southeast Technical, Tandeski Center

Thur. 7/20/2017 – PERA Only
Minnesota State College Southeast Technical, Tandeski Center

Mon. 7/24/2017 – TRA
MN Landscape Arboretum

Mon. 7/24/2017 – PERA Only
MN Landscape Arboretum

9:30-10 a.m. –
Registration/Rolls-Juice-Coffee
10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. –
Workshop/Boxed Lunch/Prizes

Topics Include:

Pension

- ▶ Learn how pension benefits are calculated and your payout options.

Planning

- ▶ Learn why you may need additional investment strategies and how to accumulate and manage your assets.

Protection

- ▶ Learn your financial vulnerability with long term illness and how to protect yourself.

Financial Planning for Beginners and NextGen

Mon. 6/19/2017 – Next Gen
Central Lakes College
Brainerd, MN

Tues. 6/27/2017 – Next Gen
South Central College
North Mankato, MN

Wed. 7/12/2017 – Next Gen
Prestwick Golf Club
Woodbury, MN

Mon. 7/24/2017 – Next Gen
MN Landscape Arboretum
Chaska, MN

9:30-10 a.m. –
Registration/Rolls-Juice-Coffee
10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. –
Workshop/Boxed Lunch/Prizes

Topics include:

- ▶ Managing your paycheck.
- ▶ Learn the importance of budgeting and smart debt management techniques.
- ▶ How much will a \$50 per month contribution amount to in 30 years?
- ▶ What is a 403(b) and why should you contribute to one? What is a Roth IRA?
- ▶ How does a Roth work, and is it the best for you?
- ▶ Learn the value of your defined benefit pension and how much of your income it can replace when you retire.

LIMITED SEATING, RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

RSVP to Deborah Skog at 651-292-4856 or deborah.skog@edmn.org. Please leave your name(s), phone number and which session you would like to attend. Spouses/Guests Welcome.



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

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Check your paystubs to make sure everything is correct

Few things sharpen the senses like the gentle winds of spring, the passing of April 15 and the impending summer break. This is the season to check your paystub and contract to ensure that your pay is correct. If there is an error, it is usually not going to be in your favor, and there may be a limited time to correct what has gone wrong. The following are a few things to be mindful of when reviewing your paycheck.

Lane changes

Many contracts contain specific, and sometimes unforgiving, deadlines for applying for lane changes. If you are currently in a master's program, or are sitting on master's credits that you have already earned, the sooner you submit them to the district, the better, because the lane movement may not be effective until the beginning of a new semester. A tougher problem, which seemed to plague a number of school districts during the 2015-16 school year, is the disputed credit. In two cases, districts refused to grant lane changes to teachers who had completed coursework, claiming that the courses did not entail master's level work. In each of these cases, the arbitrator sustained the union's grievance. In the



Meg Luger-Nikolai

more egregious case, the superintendent had granted permission to take the courses, and then told the teachers the lane changes were refused. The union quickly grieved this bait and switch. Check the contract language if you experience pushback in submitting a lane change. Chances are, the language is not as restrictive as the district thinks. Additionally, the sooner you alert your member rights advocate or local president about the problem, the sooner the union can get to work untangling the knot.

Union membership

In Minnesota, public employees do not become members of the union unless

they sign a membership form. Chances are pretty good that if you are reading this, you are a member. However, now is a good time to encourage your colleagues, particularly if they are a more recent hire, to ensure that they are paying full union dues.

The difference is significant—if an individual is currently paying the fair share fee because he or she has not signed up for membership, that individual is not entitled to the entire range of benefits available to Education Minnesota members. In many, many cases, our colleagues remain fair share fee payers after being hired simply because they haven't turned in a membership form or because no one has had a chance to discuss the value of membership with them. Summer is a great time to connect with co-workers to ensure that their paycheck reflects the appropriate deduction for union membership.

Overpayments/underpayments

Overpayments and underpayments are two sides of the same coin. Through no fault of the employee, he or she is either being asked to accept years of wage loss, or to repay thousands of dollars they never intended

to receive. In either case, it is a very unwelcome surprise.

An underpayment dispute usually begins its existence the day that an employee signs his or her contract. Employees may incorrectly be denied credit for previous experience when they are placed on a particular step in the contract. Alternatively, semester credits might be inaccurately recalculated as quarter credits when placing a teacher in a lane, or credits may altogether be missed. Although the problem arises at an employee's hire, it can be corrected when an employee notices the error. Take a look at the contract, take a look at your paycheck, and make sure that your pay aligns with your credentials and your work. The longer you wait to do this, the harder it will be for the union to recover pay lost prior to when the grievance was filed.

Overpayments are a slightly different animal. These are nearly always the result of a payroll error. In the worst cases, employees may have received thousands of dollars above their agreed upon rate of pay over one or more years. While employees are limited in their ability to recoup underpayments, employers can typically go back at least two years to recover an overpayment.

LEGAL BRIEFS

What employers absolutely cannot do upon discovering an overpayment is simply take the money from an employee's next paycheck. State law precludes an employer from garnishing employees' wages in the absence of a written agreement. If the district discovers an overpayment, and tells you they are going to take the money from your next check or checks, let the union know immediately.

The end of the school year is a good time to take stock of your paycheck. Although it is often not an employee's fault when his or her check has an error, it is usually the employee, and not the district, who can be stuck with the consequences of that error. Make sure, heading into this fall, that your check reflects your education and your experience.

♦ Meg Luger-Nikolai
Luger-Nikolai is an Education Minnesota staff attorney.

MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

Summer to-do list

All members

- ☐ **Check out our newest sponsored program for great rates on banking needs, loans and more.**
United Educators Credit Union, www.uecu.coop 651-264-0668/800-229-2848
- ☐ **Attend an ESI financial and retirement planning workshop.**
See workshop schedule for summer dates.
- ☐ **Schedule a financial review.**
Call EFS Advisors 763-689-923/877-403-2374.
- ☐ **Compare rates on auto and home insurance.**
Liberty Mutual, Darlene VonArx: 800-465-4064 ext. 55018. Travelers: 888-695-4640.
- ☐ **Create a PerksConnect account to save on shopping, travel and more!**
Go to: edmn.perksconnection.com; Click on "Register Now". Use Group Code: EDMN12 – Enter your profile information and start shopping! 877-253-7100.
- ☐ **Update your beneficiary for the NEA Complimentary Life Insurance**
Call NEA Member Benefits 800-637-4636 or visit www.neamb.com

- ☐ **Register for your COMPLIMENTARY identity theft plan.**
Paid for by ESI for all individual active teacher and ESP members. Register today!
www.educationminnesota.securusid.com. 612-238-0340/877-833-9041.

Visit esi.educationminnesota.org for more information on ESI, AFT+ and NEA Member Benefits.

Early career members

- ☐ **Understand what a 403(b) is and how to start one.**
- ☐ **Does your district have a match, and are you taking advantage of it?**
- ☐ **Consider opening an account with United Educators Credit union.**
- ☐ **Attend a financial planning for beginners/Next Gen workshop.**

Register for your COMPLIMENTARY identity theft plan. Paid for by ESI for all individual active teacher and ESP members. Register today! www.educationminnesota.securusid.com. 612-238-0340/877-833-9041.

For more information, contact ESI at 651-292-4856 or 800-642-4624.



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EDUCATION MINNESOTA OPPORTUNITIES

RACIAL EQUITY ADVOCATES WANTED FOR YEARLONG TRAINING

The Minnesota Educator Academy's Facing Inequalities and Racism in Education (F.I.R.E.) program is looking for 20-24 educators from across the state to participate in a yearlong training to become Racial Equity Advocates (REAs).

This year's participants will be the first group to pilot the training, and educators who complete the program will have the opportunity to train the next cohort of REAs.

Online applications will be accepted until June 12.

REAs will be able to:

- Serve as a supportive peer for colleagues who are working to develop an anti-racism growth mindset.

- Deliver professional development and facilitate community learning experiences related to racial equity.
- Participate in conflict resolution and restorative justice efforts within learning communities. These communities may include colleagues, administrators, local leaders, parents and students.
- Examine equity issues with others (administrators, staff, students, parents or community partners).
- Create an environment for members of learning communities that is safe enough for risk-taking, yet challenging enough for stakeholders to push themselves and each other; a "brave space" is essential for meaningful growth.

- Select and utilize resources available for training.
- Engage in reflective practice and conscious self-care.

For more information about the program or to see if you are a good fit to participate, go to www.educationminnesota.org/resources/minnesota-educator-academy/MEA-Fire/REA-Network-Program.

The website includes preferred qualifications for candidates, a training schedule, an interest and experience questionnaire and the online application.

If you are interested in the REA program, but are not able to commit to the requirements, please consider training as a community storyteller. More information on how to sign up is on the website as well.

ABOUT THIS PAGE

The Minnesota Educator provides opportunities listings on this page as a member service, highlighting the free and low-cost professional development the union provides. The page also lists conferences, training and resources of possible interest. Readers interested in pursuing an opportunity should check it out carefully. The Educator tries to include only legitimate, useful opportunities that support education practice.

To submit an opportunity:

- Send a complete description of your opportunity to educator@edmn.org.
- Send your item by the first Friday of the month to be considered for the next month's Opportunities page. Include daytime contact information.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mindfulness in Education Summer Institute

The Center for Spirituality and Healing is hosting three days of professional learning and discussion on mindfulness research and practices to address urgent needs in schools. The Mindfulness in Education Summer Institute runs June 28-30 at Webster Elementary School in Minneapolis. Topics include the current state of mindfulness research, role of mindfulness in education, research-informed evaluation of available mindfulness programs and mindfulness, equity and culturally responsive practices. Continuing education credits are available upon completion. Scholarships are also available. The \$300 cost includes lunch all three days.

For more information or to register, go to www.tickets.umn.edu/CSH/Online and click on the link for the institute.

Accounting training for high school educators

The Minnesota Society of Certified Public Accountants is hosting a course for high school educators who teach accounting content in their classrooms. The training will take place July 26-28 at the Minnesota Society of CPAs offices in Bloomington. The training is free and educators will receive a \$200 stipend and lunch for attending. The training will focus on daily lesson plans and assignments, pre-written exams, a textbook with notes and PowerPoint presentations, and access to online resources like videos and webcasts.

For more information, go to www.mncpa.org/apaccounting.

Minnesota Zoo engineering, science workshops

The Minnesota Zoo's ZOOMS Institute will engage teachers in utilizing animals and the zoo as a tool to integrate engineering concepts into their curriculum, based on the Minnesota State Science Standards. Sessions will focus on engineering by animals, engineering from animals (biomimicry) and engineering for animals. The institute will run Aug. 7-9 and is open to all K-12 educators. The fee is \$50 and 18 continuing education units are available. The zoo is also offering a ZOOMS Institute 2.0 on Aug. 10 for anyone who has attended the first institute. ZOOMS 2.0 will expand participants' zoo knowledge and engage in various STEM lessons and activities to further equip educators to challenge

students to think like zookeepers, exhibit designers and conservationists. The 2.0 institute costs \$25 and offers six continuing education units.

For more information or to register, go to <http://mnzoo.org/education/schools-teachers/teacher-programs>.

Scholarships available for science, technology workshops

Each year the Minnesota Chapter of the AVS, Science and Technology Society sends a secondary school teacher to the Science Educators Workshop at the annual AVS International Symposium. This year's workshop will take place Oct. 30-31 in Tampa, Florida. There is a possibility that the Minnesota Chapter will send two teachers in 2017. The workshop includes training in vacuum technology, a tour of local industry and the opportunity to interact with other STEM teachers from throughout the nation. The school district where the teacher selected works will receive a vacuum trainer system. The Minnesota chapter of AVS will cover the costs of transportation, hotel, meals and possibly a substitute. The registration deadline is Aug. 15.

For more information or to apply, please go to: www.avs.org/Education-Outreach/Science-Educators-Workshop.

STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

State Fair individual exhibits, technology education competition

The Minnesota State Fair hosts a K-12 competition for student work each year. Students can enter work in two categories: individual exhibits and technology education. Individual exhibits submissions can include drawings, paintings, sewing, jewelry, reports and creative writing. Technology education submissions can be architectural working drawings, photography, welding, woodworking, CO2 cars and solar boats. All entries must be submitted by Aug. 8.

For more information on the competition or how to register, go to www.mnstatefair.org/competition/edu.html.

CLASSROOM RESOURCES

Books, learning materials, other resources available through First Book

First Book is a nonprofit social enterprise that provides new books, learning materials, and other essentials to children in need. Educators and program leaders serving at least 70 percent of the children from low-income families are eligible to sign up with First Book. Also available is the First Book Marketplace, an online resource available exclusively to schools and programs registered with First Book and serving children in need. The marketplace offers thousands of brand new resources at 50-90 percent off retail price, including books, school supplies, e-devices, teacher resources, games and other educational products.

For more information on the program or how to sign up, go to www.firstbook.org or www.fbmarketplace.org.

U.S. government online resources

Kids.gov is the official kids' portal for the U.S. government. The site links kids, parents and teachers to information and services on the web from government agencies, schools and educational

organizations, all geared to the learning level and interest of kids. Kids.gov is organized into four audiences: kids (grades K-5), teens (grades 6-8), teachers and parents. Each audience tab is divided into educational subjects like arts, math and history. Included in the web offerings are games, videos, information on each state and a calendar for educators.

Storyline online children's book program

The Screen Actors Guild Foundation offers a free Storyline online program. The online streaming video program featuring famous actors reading children's books aloud. There are 38 different titles available, including "Stellaluna" and "Harry the Dirty Dog." The videos are available on both YouTube and SchoolTube. For each book, supplemental curriculum developed by a literacy specialist is provided, aiming to strengthen comprehension and verbal and written skills for English language learners worldwide.

To see all the website offerings, go to www.storylineonline.net.

Smithsonian's History Explorer website

The Smithsonian's History Explorer website is from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and features history lessons, interactive activities, featured artifacts and more for all grade levels and historical time periods beginning in 1620 through present day. The site offers 30-minute webinars that highlight key resources from the museum's online materials to help you plan specific lessons on topics like the Civil War, the Star Spangled Banner and more.

To explore the website's resources, go to <https://historyexplorer.si.edu>.

GRANTS AND AWARDS

Crayola creative leadership grants

The Crayola Creative Leadership Grant program provides funding for innovative, creative leadership teams to identify and deliver innovative programs that inspire educators to increase art-infused education. The plan should address specific needs and interests of your professional learning community. Up to 20 grants will be awarded. Each grant-winning school receives \$2,500 and Crayola products valued at \$1,000. Applications are due June 23 and must be submitted by the school's principal.

For more information about the grants and how to apply, go to www.crayola.com/for-educators/ccac-landing/grant-program.

Captain Planet Foundation environmental grants

The Captain Planet Foundation grants are intended to provide hands-on environmental stewardship opportunities for youth, serve as a catalyst to getting environment-based education in schools or inspire youth and communities to participate in community service through environmental stewardship activities. The foundation will accept small grant requests for \$500 to \$2,500. Preferential consideration is given to requests that have secured at least 50 percent matching or in-kind funding for their projects. Grant applications are due Sept. 30 and Jan. 31.

For more information about the grants or how to apply, go to <http://captainplanetfoundation.org/apply-for-grants>.