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EDUCATOR

JUNE / JULY 2022

**Convention delegates
chart course for
union's work**

**Onamia's Lancaster
named Teacher of the Year**



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THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

June/July 2022 – Volume 24, No. 6

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

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FRONT COVER: Education Minnesota Representative Convention delegates debate a number of action items.

Ready or not, the fall's political campaigns have begun

There was no good reason for the Republican members of the Minnesota Senate to pack up and stop negotiating before the deadline to pass bills during the 2022 session of the Minnesota Legislature, but there was a bad one: Election-year politics.

Minnesota educators began the third week of May expecting the leaders of the Legislature and Gov. Tim Walz to honor their commitments to each other and the people of Minnesota to finish their work on time and within an agreed-upon framework for spending a \$9.25 billion surplus.

As of press time, it didn't happen. Instead, the final two of weeks of the session became another set of lessons in why educators need to stay engaged in the political process if we ever want our schools to be fully funded.

A bipartisan deal announced May 16 would have spent \$4 billion on tax cuts and \$1 billion on education, in addition to other spending. It would have left \$4 billion in reserve.

Dozens of educators visited the Capitol in the final week of the session. They talked about school buildings in need of repairs. They described working conditions that were burning out their colleagues. Most of all, they pleaded with representatives and senators to use the surplus to ease the mental health crisis among students and staff.

It wasn't enough.

The political pressure to run out the clock was apparently too strong for the GOP senators to resist. The theory was that it was better to spend nothing now because if the party wins big in November it could control the House, Senate and governor's office. Then it would be easy to spend the entire surplus on tax cuts, which inevitably favor the wealthiest households and corporations.

One of the final versions of the education bill would have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to pay down the special education cross-subsidy, which is the difference between the cost of providing special education services and the revenue to pay for those services. While not ideal, the plan would help nearly every district in the state.

But instead of hammering out the details with his colleagues in the House, the chair of the Senate education committee, Sen. Roger Chamberlain, R-Lino Lakes, didn't call his committee together to negotiate in the final 24 hours. Like ignoring

the alarm of a smoke detector, I worry the delay for sending resources to our schools will turn the current state of emergency into a conflagration of crises this fall.

Lesson 1: There is no bipartisan consensus at the Capitol around supporting the needs of every student.

If there was a time when educators could depend on support from across the political divide, that time has passed. Get to know your candidates. Some will listen to a story about a suicidal child and the need for hiring more mental health professionals and look an educator straight in the eye and say, no, it's not a budget year. It happened this year. Get informed. Vote your values.

Lesson 2: When the Legislature sends a blank check to your district, be ready to influence how it's spent.

If the money for the cross-subsidy had passed, it would have freed up money for other things. Those other things could be mean bonuses for the top administrators or new office furniture, so stay organized and engaged with your school boards. The best people to decide how to allocate district resources are the people who know the students best.

We all wish this exhausting school year would have ended with better news from the Legislature, but it didn't. Now it's up to us to rest, recharge and resume our work toward fully funding our schools by electing leaders in November who value students and can deliver on their promises.

Together,



Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

Election 2022 worksite trainings

In 2022, we have the power through our democracy and union to vote for public education and protect our collective bargaining rights. But we need educators at the forefront of that movement.

Get involved and help elect pro-public education candidates this fall by being an Education Minnesota Worksite Action Leader in your building. Worksite Action Leaders help get information out to their colleagues at a building level, sharing non-partisan voter education materials about the candidates and having conversations with your colleagues about the importance of getting out the vote.

Trainings will be held all summer for these positions and is available on MEA Online. Go to edmnvotes.org to find all of the details about the positions, the trainings and our campaign work.

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, Erik and Hanna Brandt of Saint Paul, for being this issue's winning submission!

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

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



Submissions are due July 8. 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!

“

When schools don't have the resources they need, all kids pay the price, but our students with disabilities pay a uniquely higher price because they don't have the tools they need to access their education like their peers.

”

– Claire Luger, a White Bear Lake special education teacher, in a commentary “Teacher: Spend the surplus right and we can bring joy and stability back to students” posted on the Minnesota Reformer online publication, May 9.

Convention delegates chart course for union's work

Delegates to the 2022 Education Minnesota Representative Convention discussed and passed items aimed at making our union more inclusive and supportive of members.

At the April convention, the 491 delegates passed all three of the proposed bylaw amendments, and all nine action items are moving forward.

The constitution and bylaw amendments passed mean Education Minnesota will:

- Decrease the dues formula to better reflect the cost of running our continuous retired membership program.
- Reduce the dues cap to \$9 per year.
- Add a dues level for active ESP members whose total annual salary is less than 10 percent of the prior year two-year average starting teacher salary and give the governing board the authority to set the dues amount for this level.

Many of the nine action items centered on the equity work of the union, as well as making sure educators have the support they need to retire when they want.

Delegates passed action items to have Education Minnesota:

- Gather curricular resources from existing Indian education partners on the historical and intergenerational traumatic impact of Indian Boarding Schools, particularly those in Minnesota, and use its communication tools to highlight and disseminate the resources to our members, and Education Minnesota will advocate for the passage of federal legislation to establish the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools and similar initiatives through the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and the United States Congress.
- Advocate at the Legislature and the TRA board for increases in employer and state contributions to the Teachers Retirement Association sufficient to cover the cost of making the Rule of 90 available to all plan participants.
- Work with education stakeholder groups to advocate for stability of the pension funds and increased

investments from the state of Minnesota and school districts for the benefit of all Minnesota educator pension plans, and work on issues relating to access to health care upon retirement.

- Deploy best practices for relational organizing, placing a priority on conducting one-to-one conversations with members to better understand their needs, interests and concerns. Education Minnesota will provide financial support and training to local affiliates to facilitate relational organizing work.
- Boldly move forward on its work for racial justice with governance leaders and our Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee (EMAC), reaffirming and amending our vision for racial justice, creating a concrete action plan that includes both staff and member work, and by holding one another accountable to acting on our plans.
- Establish an EMAC Retired Committee. This committee will work with and mentor Education Minnesota members of color as experienced, cultural support for the purposes of retention and leadership development.
- Expand the member-to-member mediation program to include diverse mediators trained specifically in racial conflict resolution.
- Study the possibility of providing a statewide equity audit with member locals to report on progress around NEA 3-1G, AFT and state union anti-racism goals.
- Direct the Education Minnesota Dues Review Committee, at its next convening within the next year, to comprehensively study the current dues structure. This study must include, but is not limited to, making sure the dues being assessed to members is reasonable and fair based on length of membership and the size of the local. Specifically, the committee will research the reduction of dues for all locals, especially smaller locals, not to increase dues of some locals to balance a reduction of dues in

other locals. Additionally, the committee will research a graduated/tiered dues structure for new members. The governing board and/or the committee will propose changes to the dues structure at the 2023 Representative Convention in an action item or bylaws amendment based on conclusions drawn by this committee through this study.

Delegates also elected Education Minnesota's statewide officers and NEA Directors. These positions will begin their terms July 1 and run for three years.

President Denise Specht and Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe were reelected to their positions. Monica Byron, an elementary teacher from Richfield, was elected vice president in the open race.

Byron is vice president of Education Richfield and in her 24th year of teaching as an elementary math coach. She has long been involved in the union at the local, state and national levels. Byron is a founding member of Education Minnesota's Ethnic Minority

Affairs Committee, a member of the Governing Board and has participated in numerous national conferences and conventions. Byron is the first Black person to serve on Education Minnesota's officer team.

"The pandemic has illuminated many unsustainable situations such as unfilled staffing positions, unsafe schools, educator of color shortages and the racial and social justice inequities that lie within our public education system," Byron said. "As Education Minnesota's vice president, I will continue working to strengthen our labor union, help transform the public mindset of education and work to retain and engage all members, especially the voices of our BIPOC members."

Brainerd special education teacher Heather Bakke was reelected as NEA Director, and North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale special education teacher Jasmin Myers was elected to the other NEA Director position. A full introduction to the new officer team will be in the August/September Minnesota Educator.

Delegates to the Representative Convention elected a statewide officer team for the union whose term will begin July 1. President Denise Specht (center) and Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe (right) were reelected and Monica Byron of Richfield (left) was elected vice president.



Teaching is an exchange of hearts for Onamia's Lancaster

Sarah Lancaster knew she wanted to be a teacher when she was asked to read to her classmates in kindergarten.

"I had a fabulous kindergarten teacher who found creative ways to provide extensions for kids who were ready for challenges, so she had me read aloud to my class," she said. "I sat in the chair in front of my classmates and knew this was it. It was what I was going to do."

Lancaster is now finishing her ninth year of teaching in the same school district where she was that kindergartner. And, in early May, she was named the 2022 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

Lancaster is the 58th recipient of the prestigious award, the first from the Onamia district and the first

teacher of Asian Pacific Islander descent to be named Minnesota Teacher of the Year. It's the first time in 40 years of the program where a teacher from a district as small as Onamia has been recognized.

"Onamia is a small community with a big voice," Lancaster said. "Our school is doing amazing things in this town of 800 people. Small districts don't always get the spotlight, but small districts all across Minnesota are doing amazing things too."

Lancaster's first and only teaching job has been in her hometown, teaching third grade for two years and the rest in first grade. She says it is important to live in the town where she teaches so her students can see and identify her, the only licensed BIPOC educator in her district, as a community leader. "I want to give back to the community that once helped to set me up for success," she said.

The consistency of staying in Onamia and in first grade is also something important to Lancaster.

"I've taught every kid who is in our school who is in first through seventh grade," she said. "For kids who have dealt with trauma and inconsistency outside of school, me being here and being in first grade is a sense of safety for them. New kids coming into first grade see me in the halls and maybe had siblings who had me. That takes away some of their anxiety, too."

Her teaching team, especially her fellow first-grade teacher Cyndi Martin, is another reason Lancaster has stayed in Onamia.

"We have found in each other a partnership and friendship that pushes for the success of students and each other," Lancaster said.

Martin wrote a recommendation letter for Lancaster to be considered for the Teacher of the Year award.

"No matter the age of the students she is working with, Sarah displays an unrivaled amount of passion for student education and improvement," said Martin in her letter. "Sarah is forever willing and open to acquiring new knowledge to help students in need of intervention or enrichment. Her breadth of knowledge in teaching methods is vast, and she is able to connect with students in so many effective ways."



Sarah Lancaster was named the 2022 Minnesota Teacher of the Year at a banquet in St. Paul in early May.

No matter what, it all comes back to the relationships with the students for Lancaster.

"The question I most often ask myself when teaching in the classroom is how will these interactions, lessons of instruction or the activities we do guide these students to be better than before," Lancaster said in one of her award submission essays. "Student behaviors are the language of their needs and emotions, and many times resolving a miscommunication can create a more positive and successful atmosphere. I feel a strong need to be a safe space for these children, a friendly ear to lend, and show them that I am more human than what they see in the classroom."

Lancaster also said that she gets just as much from her students and they get from her. She calls it an "exchange of heart."

"We build this relationship where we give a little bit of ourselves to each other," she said in a video submission for the award. "And I get to see these pieces of me go forth into the world through each and every one of the students that I've taught."

Throughout her recognition year, Lancaster hopes to bring her voice to the conversations around support for small and rural schools, increasing the number of teachers of color in Minnesota and more focus on student and educator mental health.

"Mental health is a huge, huge issue that we need to address," she said. "I have experience with suffering from abuse and trauma as a child. A lot of kids are experiencing mental health issues due to the pandemic."

Lancaster knows that making sure students are safe and loved is so important but also knows that the secondary trauma to educators is something that needs to be addressed in schools, too.

"Within my classroom there is a community, and it is vital that each student knows their voice is heard and their well-being is cared for," she said in one of her award submission essays. "We have open communication, practice patience and empathy, and model conflict-resolution. I also ensure that each student feels validated and supported through these practices. This foundation of trust and understanding is what allows me to support my students as needed including their social, emotional and mental well-being."

Lancaster hopes to work with others to create relationships with students of color to connect them with the teaching profession.

"It's a long-term relationship commitment to solve the problem of our stagnant number of teachers of color in our state," she said. "How can we connect with our students of color and help them into the profession to better reflect our students' diversity?"

In addition to teaching, Lancaster has coached more than 20 seasons of both athletics and arts programs in Onamia, directing three of the annual high school musicals and volunteering with local youth groups as well as through her church. She currently serves as president of the Onamia Area Civic Association.



Lancaster celebrates with her husband Grant, also an educator, and her son Emmett after being named Teacher of the Year.

Lancaster holds a bachelor's degree from St. Cloud State University and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction and design from St. Mary's University of Minnesota.

An independent selection committee representing Minnesota leaders in education, business and government chooses the Teacher of the Year from individuals who are nominated and who then choose to become a candidate. Education Minnesota organizes and underwrites the program. The Minnesota Teacher of the Year Program also receives support from the following organizations: Expedition Credit Union, the Harvard Club of Minnesota Foundation, EFS Advisors, Aviben and Education Minnesota ESI.

Ten others honored as Teacher of the Year finalists

Besides Lancaster, 10 other teachers were also finalists for 2022 Minnesota Teacher of the Year award. Here are their reflections on why they teach.



"We are tasked with a most important and awesome endeavor that will impact the lives of our students forever."

Edward T. Barlow, Minneapolis, music, grades 6-8



"I teach because I want to inspire kids. I want to tell them they can do anything they want and that they can follow their dreams."

Bradley Hubred, Moose Lake, science, grades 5 and 6



"Having someone that students can relate to and see themselves in and connect with on the level of feeling like they're represented is really important."

Yonnie Eiden-Giel, South Washington County, social studies, grades 11 and 12



"I want to empower my students to embrace their unique selves and help them to imagine a bright future of their own design."

Erin Karlgaard, Brainerd Public Schools, grade 3



"I teach to create a safe and supportive environment for those who have not always had one."

Jon Fila, Intermediate District 287, English, grades 9-12



"I teach to allow students a safe space to discover who they are and know that they are loved for whoever they are."

Rachel Volkmann, Hopkins, grade 5



"I teach because I believe our youngest learners need to begin their educational path, knowing that there is a place for them at school."

Kendall Gonzalez, White Bear Lake, kindergarten



"I teach because I have a passion to unlock the superpowers of my students in the autism community. So they can discover their unique gifts and succeed in a world that doesn't quite understand them."

Andrea Welvaert, South Washington County, ASD/SPED, grades 6-8



"I teach because I want to nourish love and positivity in my students so they can bring that into their own societies and make the world a better place after they graduate."

Paul Houck, Southwest Metro Intermediate District 288, English and math, grades 9-12



"I teach because the classroom is a place where we can foster understanding between people of different perspectives in hopes of eliminating the divides that exist in our world."

Eric Zuccola, Robbinsdale, English, grades 9-12

Willmar educator receives national grant to support ELL students

Jenna Hafner knew she had to look for some new books and curriculum to reach her English language learner students after distance learning. Thanks to her local union, she applied for and received a \$25,000 American Federation of Teachers grant to get her students what they need.

"This will have a huge impact for our students," Hafner said.

Hafner works with close to 300 multilingual students in grades 9-12 at Willmar High School. She said her students range from newcomers to long-term English learners, so they have always had a need for culturally relevant, engaging and age-appropriate books, but especially as they help students recover from the pandemic learning loss.

"The biggest need for our multilingual learners is in literacy," Hafner said. "Now it's filling the gaps that they missed out during COVID. They weren't exposed to English at home or complex ideas at their level or texts at their level. A lot of our students didn't have equal access to internet or were helping family members at home, and we as teachers were trying to do so much."

Hafner's local union president, Tammy Knapper, knew Hafner wanted to pursue something more for her students and came to her with the AFT Innovation Fund's Return, Recover and Reimagine (RRR) grants, which are focused on supporting educators, students and communities as they continue to grapple with the effects of the pandemic.

To apply for the grant, Hafner gathered district data on demographics and what curriculum they had in place. Then she completed essay questions and supporting documents to show what needs this money would help meet.



"I did quite a bit of research into programs," she said. "I wanted to find a program that was appropriate for adults and English learners. I met with five intervention programs and found the one we settled on. It also took quite a bit of research to find high-interest and research-based materials."

Hafner has been doing a pilot of the intervention program with a few students and has already been seeing exciting results.

"In a matter of three weeks, 100 percent of the students that I'm piloting this with have increased their reading scores," she said. "It's very targeted toward phonics, decoding and the rules of English. It's filling in all these gaps that they missed out during COVID."

Hafner is excited with the results and hopes to expand on the success.

"Having this targeted intervention has made a huge difference and now we'll be able to expand it and reach more students," she said.

Hafner will use two-thirds of the grant money to buy physical books over the summer to build out her classroom library and curriculum. The other third will go to the reading intervention program which is a combination of a digital platform and physical reading materials.

"We want to get everything, and teachers trained, so we can implement it this fall," Hafner said.

Even if Hafner didn't get the grant, she knew she wanted to bring in whatever new materials she could to help her students.

"Since I was doing the research, I had a back-up plan of, 'If I don't get the money, how can I implement what I learned?'" she said. "Having this plan, I learned so much."

Pandemic reflections

At the 2022 Education Minnesota Representative Convention, delegates spent time honoring, sharing and connecting about the ways they have gotten through the last two years. Local unions and members have bargained and advocated through so much more than they ever could have imagined. There was also time spent to reflecting on how Education Minnesota has supported its members throughout the pandemic. Educators across Minnesota continue to “choose union” and Education Minnesota continues to stand up for its members in so many ways.

Building power and advocacy in locals

Local unions, their members and Education Minnesota staff consistently bargained and worked through all the different learning models and mitigation efforts throughout the pandemic.

Whether it's been negotiating leaves for the colleague with an underlying condition who cannot be in a school during a pandemic, planning a car parade at the height of the pandemic, or providing virtual PD so that you can keep working and keep your license in a pandemic—your union has been here to support you.



Anoka-Hennepin Education Minnesota members rallied for more safety and mitigation efforts as their district was making return to school buildings plans in the fall of 2020.

Brooklyn Center educators immediately pivoted to community support after Daunte Wright was killed in 2021.



There for you on your worst days

These last two years have been the most difficult years of our profession. There have been immense challenges but your union—our union—has been the place to make sure our schools and our members have been supported, safe and in a place where we can move forward to a better future for us all.

COVID-19 wasn't the only pandemic our union and our country reckoned with the last two years.

The murder of George Floyd, the police killing of Daunte Wright, and too many other tragedies pushed the racial equity work of our union to the forefront. We saw our unions in Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center provide immediate mutual aid to their communities—and many of you donated food, supplies and money to support those efforts. Multiple Education Minnesota staff were either released to coordinate relief efforts after the devastation of communities in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder.

We all need fewer worst days, but we also need to know that someone will be there for us when we have them.

We are here to be partners as we fight for what we need – AND WIN

From the Minnesota Teacher of the Year program and ESP of the Year award to providing free professional development to sharing all your stories on social media—Education Minnesota is so proud to support its members through it all.

Our Degrees, Not Debt program has helped members receive hundreds of thousands of dollars in student loan forgiveness, especially in the last few years with the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program waiver from the Biden Administration.

Every legislative session, Education Minnesota members step up and lobby their local legislators, flood their phone lines, send emails and in 2021, gather 20,000 petition signatures to advocate for the funding our schools and students deserve. Through that advocacy, we forced the Senate to agree to historic school funding increases.

Is it enough? Not even close. But the work we did last session and this session served as the building blocks for fully funding public schools. It was the beginning and our union's work in the elections this November will continue to push for the schools all Minnesotans deserve.



Education Minnesota also provides free professional development in person, like at the MEA conference each fall, and now online.



There is power in a union's members, staff

This pandemic has been bookended by two historic educator strikes—in St. Paul in 2020 and this year in Minneapolis.

The power of our union was seen and felt in those actions. Education Minnesota's collective strength and support for our locals was on full display.

Take the photo on the left. An Education Minnesota staff member climbed up a hill and stood on a fence to be able to document the solidarity of those marching in Minneapolis. Education Minnesota's art director designed the signs and our union print shop printed all of the materials they needed. Education Minnesota staff supported the members and community members who created the banners at art build events. Education Minnesota staff and other union staff marshalled the march to make sure everyone was safe.

Not only during this march and other events during the strike did staff support this effort, but more than 50 staff helped provide the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals with negotiations data, legal review of bargaining proposals, press releases and media outreach and showed up to walk the picket lines.

Education Minnesota was there for the MFT and we will be there for the next local in the same way.

Free online class provides support for cooperating teachers

Education Minnesota members will soon have access to a free online training which they will need in order to have teacher candidates in their classroom.

The Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board adopted a new rule for teacher preparation programs that requires each cooperating teacher paired with a candidate during student teaching and practicum "has completed professional development in coaching strategies for adult learners."

Cooperating teachers will have to have completed this professional development course by this fall, if they are hosting a teacher candidate in the fall.

Education Minnesota partnered with the Minnesota Association of College of Teacher Education to create a training that would be available to our members at no cost.

The training was developed by Education Minnesota members and staff and representatives

from MACTE. It is available on MEA Online, and can be accessed and completed whenever is most convenient for participants. The training provides an overview of adult coaching strategies and offers best practices via theory as well as in the form of interviews with current cooperating teachers and teacher candidates. The class will be about an hour long and only available on MEA Online. Members can access it and take it at their own pace.

The content is based on very basic principles of adult learning through videos and questions. Members will also receive a CEU after completing the course.

Watch for more information on Education Minnesota's website and social media channels about the class and find more information on MEA Online, go to www.educationminnesota.org/resources/professional-development/mea-online.

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Legislature leaves with unfinished business for schools, more

The Minnesota Legislature adjourned May 23 with no deal to spend the state's \$9.25 billion surplus. As of press time, there was no plan for a special session to pass any of the proposals, including \$1 billion for education.

In the end, Senate Republicans walked away from fulfilling their end of a bipartisan agreement that would have spent \$4 billion on tax cuts, \$1 billion on education, \$1 billion on health care and human services, \$450 million for public safety and the judiciary, and \$1.5 billion on other spending.

Senate Education Chair Roger Chamberlain, R-Lino Lakes, was charged with negotiating the details of the bipartisan agreement, announced May 16, with DFLers in the House. Instead, he failed to the gavel the committee together in the last 24 hours of the session.

Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said the failure of Senate Republicans was unacceptable. She called on Senate Majority Leader Jeremy Miller, R-Winona, to honor his commitment, negotiate a K-12 education bill that meets the real needs of students, and agree to pass it into law during a short special session, which as of press time, did not happen.

"Senate Republicans made a billion-dollar promise to Minnesota students," said Specht. "Students and educators are reeling from mental health crises. There's a lack of substitute teachers and bus drivers. Students need extra attention to recover from the pandemic while our schools are losing too many experienced teachers to burnout. Senate Republicans have let every single student, family and educator down. There is no longer a bipartisan commitment to providing public schools that allow all students to pursue their dreams, with no exceptions."

Education Minnesota members spent the session asking for the surplus to be spent on what schools and students need, especially as schools continue to face challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Educators told lawmakers that:

- Shortages of substitutes, ESPs and bus drivers will get worse without higher pay.

- Working conditions, including class sizes, are driving out experienced teachers.
- College students aren't going into teaching.
- The mental health crisis among students and staff won't fix itself.

Education Minnesota will continue to update members via email and on social media if any other news happens at the Capitol this year.

Now, the union turns its focus to November and electing pro-public education candidates who will fund our schools and give our students what they deserve.

How did Education Minnesota members get involved this session?

- **Sent thousands of emails to stop bad bills, such as private school vouchers and the so-called "parents bill of rights," which would have put more burden on educators.**
- **Hundreds connected with their local legislators during our virtual Lobby Days.**
- **Dozens came in person to the state Capitol in the final week of the session to talk to lawmakers about the importance of an investment in public education.**
- **Thousands advocated for improved retirement benefits and created Education Minnesota's Pension Task force. The bills and advocacy on that topic will continue in future legislative sessions.**
- **Thousands sent emails asking for dedicated funding for student mental and physical health staff, such as counselors, licensed school nurses, psychologists and social workers.**



Mora ESP local president Bill Arimborgo testified in support of the frontline worker pay bill and advocating for educators who worked in person like the ESPs in Mora to be included. ESPs from across the state testified on this bill throughout the last two years, including Judie Bomchill of Robbinsdale (below left) and Maria Cruz of Rochester (below right).

Educators eligible for frontline worker pay after months of advocacy

Education support professionals and teachers who worked in person for at least 120 hours between March 15, 2020 and June 30, 2021 will be eligible for a frontline worker bonus payment after legislation was signed into law this April. Applications are set to open around June 8.

Gov. Tim Walz and legislative leaders agreed in June 2021 to use federal relief funds to reward workers who were on the frontlines of the pandemic with one-time bonus payments. After months of negotiations and stalling from Republicans who wanted to limit payments to workers in health care and long-term care settings, the Legislature finally reached an agreement that gave more money to a wide range of frontline workers.

Who is eligible?

Education Minnesota, along with other unions and organizations, fought alongside the DFL to ensure

a diverse range of frontline workers who risked their health during the height of the pandemic were recognized.

Those eligible include ESPs, teachers, bus drivers, grocery store workers, factory workers, health care workers and many more. Employees in those categories are eligible for payment if:

- They worked in person for at least 120 hours between March 15, 2020, and June 30, 2021.
- They did not receive unemployment for more than 20 weeks during that period.



- For educators, their wages were no more than \$185,000 for a married taxpayer filing a joint return or \$85,000 for all other filers.

How much money will workers receive?

There is \$500 million available for compensation. Employee payments are dependent on the number of eligible workers who apply. Payments cannot exceed \$1,500, but they will be lower if there are a significant number of applicants. We estimate checks will be about \$750 per worker.

Why is there an income limit to receive the one-time payments?

Since Minnesota initially planned to use a portion of its American Rescue Plan funds to pay for the frontline worker bonuses, eligibility guidelines were aligned to federal treasury rules.

Under the U.S. Department of Treasury's Final Rules on State and Local Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds, premium pay must be targeted to low-wage workers who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The treasury department set worker earning eligibility at or below 150 percent of the state's average annual wage for all occupations defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This set Minnesota's maximum income limit at \$85,000 for individuals and \$185,000 for married couples.

We know these payments don't go far enough and won't reach all Minnesota workers who put themselves at risk during the declared peacetime emergency. However, this funding will make a meaningful impact on our lowest-wage workers who were on the frontlines of the pandemic.

How can I apply?

Individuals will have to apply to the Department of Labor and Industry for these payments. DOLI will be creating an application process for employees. Once that process opens, employees will have 45 days to apply. We expect the application process to open around June 8. Education Minnesota will be communicating with members when the application opens.

ESPs from all over Minnesota testified multiple times in support of this bill, as they were the workers most often in person throughout the beginning of the pandemic.

"The No. 1 priority was the safety of our students and employees, however our nutrition department, and paraprofessionals remained in the schools. They are true frontline workers, showing up to work every day because children still need to be fed, providing daycare to Tier 1 workers, and delivering homework to the students at home."

– Bill Arimborgo, Mora ESP

"So many other ESPs were doing the same things as me. Working in person, doing new work and learning new things so we could support our students and families. All without training and any additional pay. Even before the virus, ESPs like me weren't getting the pay or respect we deserve for the work we do."

– Maria Cruz, Rochester paraprofessional

"It was fantastic to have kids in the building and I loved being able to see them. But I knew it came at a cost. My son has severe asthma and I had to take that into consideration every day. But I knew my students needed me. There was so much happening in their lives. They were dealing with things changing every day. I wanted to be at least one constant for them."

– Judie Bomchill, Robbinsdale education assistant

Special education task force gets attention of Legislature

Educators advocated for what they need in a meeting with a legislator, who then wrote a bill. While it didn't pass, they are not giving up.

The time special education teachers need to process paperwork got overdue attention at the Legislature, thanks to the advocacy of the members of Education Minnesota's Special Education Task force.

While legislation addressing paid time for due process did not pass this session, the task force is hopeful to continue the conversation in future years.

Education Minnesota convened the task force this year after members identified the need to connect and work on solutions to issues related to special education with their union, especially issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Special education always goes by the wayside," said Linda Howe-Wensel, a behavior resources teacher in Mankato. "We're not ever working toward solutions when we know there are problems. We wanted to talk as colleagues and with our union about paperwork and caseload numbers."

Rep. Heather Edelson (DFL-Edina) met with the task force earlier this year after authoring the special education pandemic recovery bill last session.

"She wanted to talk about that and wanted to hear our stories of how districts maybe weren't following her intent," said Howe-Wensel. "We shared some of that with her. Then she said, 'What else could we do at the legislative level to help SpEd teachers?'"

The task force answered with one word—time.

"Teachers need more time to do the paperwork," said Mona Springis-Doss, a high school special education resource teacher in Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan. "There ultimately needs to be less paperwork to do, but that's a huge compromise and conversation. It's unfortunate that we need 300 pieces of paperwork to protect our kids."

"We told her about how we tried to do the caseload limits, but there's always going to be more and more paperwork and that it was time to do this," said Howe-Wensel. "She loved the idea. You're talking about federal

and state mandates to do this paperwork, so let's give us the time."

Edelson immediately went back and authored a bill in the House stating that school districts and their local unions need to bargain provisions for due-process forms and procedures time for educators assigned to teach or provide services to students with individualized family service plans or individualized education programs. The bill said that if the parties can't agree on the time, the state would require that special educators receive an average of 60 minutes per day as paid time for paperwork.

"Giving SpEd teachers the hour a day to do the paperwork, it's not enough, but it's a recognition that we need more time in our day to do the paperwork in addition to the duties we have just like any other teacher," said Springis-Doss.

Edelson's bill moved through the House and after Sen. Zach Duckworth (R-Lakeville) heard about it during an Education Minnesota Lobby Day, he authored a companion bill in the Senate.

"It was very exciting to see this become a bill," said Springis-Doss. "Members of the task force testified. When you're advocating for your students, it's easy to speak to what we need."

The proposal made it into the House's final education bill, but unfortunately, it wasn't passed into law this session. Task force members know this doesn't mean their advocacy is done.

"This is as far as a special ed bill has gotten in the Legislature before, that I can remember," said Howe-Wensel. "This is something that has been needed for so long and it's so exciting that people are listening."

"There was a lot of awareness raised, at a minimum," said Springis-Doss. "This group isn't backing down. We're going to continue to push for this."

Howe-Wensel, Springis-Doss and the rest of the task force know that working toward getting special

educators support and time is crucial to the profession and student success.

"If I had the time to do my paperwork during the day, it will give me family and sleep time back. I will be a better teacher," said Springis-Doss. "My learning activities will be more individualized and focused because I can plan. I'll have more time to communicate with parents and families. The changes that need to be made can't be done on the local level. It has to be at the state level."

"We can't find teachers that are licensed. You're taking your kids that need the most highly-qualified people to be teaching them, and this is the area where we have the most unlicensed staff," said Howe-Wensel. "We can't get teachers if we aren't going to go to college for it and when I ask people why not special education, they said they know the paperwork is too much. If we can make this state law, it would be groundbreaking to keep and retain teachers."



The task force lobbied Sen. John Marty (left center) and Rep. Emma Greenman (right center) in the last week of session. The bill was not passed but the task force looks forward to continuing to push for it next session.



Members of Education Minnesota's special education task force have met all year to discuss how the union can best support special educators across the state. The task force includes (from left): Linda Howe-Wensel, Mankato Teachers' Association; Jasman Myers, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale Education Association; Beth Isaacson, Albert Lea Education Association; Christy McCoy, St. Paul Federation of Educators; Ramona (Mona) Springis-Doss, Dakota County United Educators; Jennifer Reillo, North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale Education Association; Cassie Letourneau, Duluth Federation of Teachers; Nissa Ulven, St. Paul Federation of Educators; Tiffany Dreher, Dakota County United Educators and Gift Saloka, St. Cloud Education Association.

Task force members not pictured include Kathleen Kallis, Northwest Regional Interdistrict Council; Rebecca Wade, Education Minnesota Roseville; Elizabeth Townsend, Ely Education Association; Madelyn Sjoberg, Intermediate District 916; Ellie Segler-Conrad, Farmington Education Association; Linda Scholla, Waconia Education Association; Nicole Paquette, Intermediate District 916; Tammy Knapper, Education Minnesota-Willmar; Sarah Klocker, Elk River Education Association; Valarie McWilliams Jones, Wayzata Education Association; and Becki Church, Education Minnesota Freshwater Education District.

Rochester celebrates union history

The Rochester Education Association celebrated 100 years as a local this year and honored its place in history as the birthplace of what would become the statewide union.

"One hundred years later, we are still meeting as a union to elevate the work that is being done on behalf of our students," said Dan Kuhlman, the current REA president. "We also want to emphasize that we have strong roots in unionization since Education Minnesota was founded right here in Rochester."

On Aug. 27, 1861, educators gathered at the Baptist Church in Rochester to form the Minnesota State Teachers Association, which then became the Minnesota Education Association which then became Education Minnesota.

Before the union—between 1841 and 1860—men teaching in rural schools could expect to earn \$4.15 to \$6.30 a week. Men teaching in urban areas were paid \$11.93 to \$18.07 a week. Women earned less.

"Imagine what it was like for the teachers, back in the day, to make the decision that teachers in our area needed to band together to achieve a greater purpose," said Kuhlman. "For us to be here today, with approximately 1,300 members working with 18,000 students, is an incredible feat. I wonder if the educators that formed and chartered the Rochester Education Association ever imagined what we would grow into over the next 100 years."

Nearly 100 educators, including teachers, college professors and administrators, came to Rochester for that first union gathering in 1861.

"The desirableness of such a meeting must be apparent to all. Every profession and every interest should be represented and guarded by its own members or adherents," said John Ogden, principal of the First State Normal School in Winona, in an advertisement for the convention.

The MSTA constitution stated it was organized "to elevate the character and advance the interest of the profession of teaching and to promote the cause of popular education in the United States."



In 1861, the Baptist Church in Rochester, situated across the street from what is now Mayo Park, was the site of the birthplace of the Minnesota State Teachers Association.

The early fights for the MSTA included improved compensation and stringent teacher certification standards.

Looking back is a way to celebrate and honor the work of the union, especially given all that has happened during the pandemic, said Kuhlman.

"When you look back at all the work that our educators have done over the course of our time in COVID, it is truly amazing," he said. "We have retooled education faster than any other time that I can think of in the history of education. Not only did educators do this, but they balanced it with their own personal needs for how to keep their children learning while they were gone. We continue today addressing the students that are learning in the classroom and those that are quarantined and are still needing to learn. This is only being accomplished because we are working together to meet those needs."



Dan Kuhlman, Rochester Education Association president, spoke at a banquet honoring the 100-year anniversary of the local being formed.

Are you retiring this year? Continue as a member of Education Minnesota

If you are retiring or retired, and have been an Education Minnesota member for at least 10 years (does not have to be consecutive), you may qualify for retired membership at NO additional cost.

Benefits of retired membership:

- Continue access to Economic Services Inc. (ESI), NEA and AFT member benefit programs.
- Stay connected with other retired colleagues through newsletters, regional events and annual meetings.
- Participate in Education Minnesota political action and legislative efforts on issues as pension benefits.
- Ensure quality education for future generations of Minnesota students.
- Support Education Minnesota's ongoing efforts to ensure quality working conditions as well as competitive salaries and benefits for school employees.
- Maintain Educators Employment Liability Insurance (EEL) coverage when teaching as a day-to-day substitute in all public school districts in Minnesota.

How do retired members benefit Education Minnesota?

Using their experience in education and their flexible schedules, retired members can help build power in the union by:

- Volunteering and recruiting other members to engage in Education Minnesota campaign activities.
- Serving as ambassadors for educators and the union with community service groups.
- Covering hearings and lobbying for Education Minnesota's legislative agenda.

Register online when you give your retirement notice. More information and the registration link can be found at www.educationminnesota.org/membership-benefits/join-now/retired-member.

Professional development

Summer Institute for Climate Change Education

The Summer Institute for Climate Change Education is structured to allow time for learning and networking, July 18-22. During the first two virtual days hosted by Climate Generation, educators can select from concurrent workshops. During the third day, educators will attend a cohort workshop facilitated and hosted by a regional cohort leader to focus on place-based climate change education and the need for ongoing support throughout the year. Scholarships are available. For more information or to register, go to www.climategen.org/our-core-programs/climate-change-education/summer-institute-climate-change-education.

Teaching the history of the Arab- Israeli conflict using primary sources

The Arab-Israeli conflict is frequently in the news and understanding it is critical to being an informed citizen in today's globalized world. This session from the Institute of Curriculum Service traces the history of the conflict using a diverse set of primary sources, from the Library of Congress's Teaching with Primary Sources Program, and a range of source analysis and media literacy strategies. This summer opportunity is virtual from July 27-29, 9 a.m.-noon. A stipend of \$150 is available upon completion of the course and evaluation. To apply, go to <https://icsresources.org/summer-institutes>.

Technology Integration Workshop

BestPrep's three-day Technology Integration Workshop will be held Aug. 1-3 in Hopkins. Educators of all grade levels and subject areas will learn how existing and emerging technologies can enhance lesson effectiveness and increase student engagement. TIW also provides a job shadow experience from a leading Twin Cities business volunteer. Attendees will be given dedicated reflection, coaching and work time to update a unit plan of their choice. For more information or to register, go to www.bestprep.org/technology-integration-workshop.

Summer Seminar registration now open

Education Minnesota's Summer Seminar professional development conference is back this Aug. 1-3 at the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota.

Registration for the conference is open until July 15. Go to www.educationminnesota.org/events/annual-events/summers-seminar for full conference details and to register.

All active members are invited to choose from dozens of different course options that will improve professional skills while connecting you with other educators from around Minnesota.

This year, we're offering numerous new courses, including:

- Hot Topics in Licensure

- Researching Educator Well-Being
- "Excuse Me, I'm Speaking"
- Organizing Your Building to Get Out the Vote
- English Language Learners: What You Need to Know
- Anti-Racism and Equity at the Bargaining Table
- We Are All Educators: How ESPs and Teachers Can Build an Effective Educational Climate Together
- Building Union Power Through External Relationships

A number of courses are led by Education Minnesota members.

Registration costs range from \$90 for all sessions and meals to \$155, which includes lodging, meals and housing for both nights.

State Fair booth is back in 2022

Education Minnesota's booth at the Great Minnesota Get Together is scheduled to be back Aug. 25-Sept. 5 after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic.

Volunteer signs up are open now! Members can volunteer for three-hour shifts helping produce personalized calendars for visitors and acting as Education Minnesota ambassadors to fairgoers.

In 2019, Education Minnesota produced more than 15,000 calendars for booth visitors.

Volunteers receive an admission ticket, T-shirt, mileage reimbursement and parking reimbursement for up to \$10.

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

For more information or to sign up to volunteer, go to www.educationminnesota.org/events/annual-events/state-fair-booth.



Education Minnesota's State Fair booth is back in 2022. Register today for shifts to help fairgoers get a free photo calendar and learn about Education Minnesota and the union's work.

MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

When Can I Afford to Retire Seminars

During your working career, your income comes from your salary. In retirement, your income comes from three sources; a pension, Social Security and other savings you have such as a 403(b). Whether you are an early career educator or nearing retirement, attending a When Can I Afford to Retire seminar can give you the tools you need to plan for the future.

Education Minnesota members with a TRA pension

Date	Time	Location
June 20	9:30-10 a.m. Registration and exhibits 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	MN Landscape Arboretum Chaska, MN
June 21	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	International Events Center Rochester, MN
June 28	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	Best Western Kelly Inn St. Cloud, MN
June 29	9:30-10 a.m. Registration and exhibits 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	Jimmy's Event Center Vadnais Heights, MN
July 12	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	Hampton Inn and Suites Bemidji, MN
July 13	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	Pier B Resort Duluth, MN
July 25	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	Holiday Inn Detroit Lakes, MN
July 26	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	Ever Spring Inn and Suites Marshall, MN

Register today!

Members with a TRA pension
<https://www.cvent.com/d/lkgzz6>

Members with a PERA pension
<https://www.cvent.com/d/wkg2xh>

You can also email Deb Skog at
deborah.skog@edmn.org

Education Minnesota members with a PERA pension

Date	Time	Location
June 20	9:30-10 a.m. Registration and exhibits 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	MN Landscape Arboretum Chaska, MN
June 29	9:30-10 a.m. Registration and exhibits 10-11:30 Seminar and lunch	Jimmy's Event Center Vadnais Heights, MN
July 13	10-11 a.m. Seminar	Virtual
July 26	6-7 p.m. Seminar	Virtual

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

esi.educationminnesota.org esi@edmn.org

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THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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

Educators qualify for frontline worker pay!

Gov. Walz and legislative leaders agreed in June 2021 to use federal relief funds to reward workers who were on the frontlines of the pandemic with one-time bonus payments.

Education Minnesota, along with other unions and organizations, fought alongside the DFL to ensure diverse range of frontline workers who risked their health during the height of the pandemic were recognized.

Those eligible include ESPs, teachers, bus drivers, grocery store workers, factory workers, health care workers and many more.

Employees in those categories are eligible for payment if:

- *They worked in person for at least 120 hours between March 15, 2020, and June 30, 2021.*
- *They did not receive unemployment for more than 20 weeks during that period.*
- *For educators, their wages were no more than \$185,000 for a married taxpayer filing a joint return or \$85,000 for all other filers.*

Individuals will have to apply to the state Department of Labor and Industry for these payments. DOLI will be creating an application process for employees. Once that process opens, employees will have 45 days to apply. We expect the application process to open around June 8.

Read more about the payments, how to apply and how educators advocated to be included on pages 14-15!