Aim Higher Act pushes for what students, educators really need

The Minnesota Legislature continues its work this session, with bills passing that would take money away from schools and create a rating system for schools based on test scores. But Education Minnesota has introduced legislation that talks about what schools really need to help students lead healthy, successful lives and keep educators in the profession.

Our Aim Higher Minnesota Act, SF3926/HF4382, looks beyond the easy fixes and establishes class size limits, funds the state portion of special education costs and allows schools to hire enough counselors, nurses, social workers and other student support services to meet students’ needs. The Aim Higher Minnesota Act also:

- Reestablishes the online special education system to reduce the paperwork burden.
- Provides money for home visits to strengthen parent involvement.
- Creates educator data teams so educators can better use assessment data in their teaching.
- Funds the educator loan forgiveness program so educators can afford to stay in the profession.
- Creates trauma-informed and restorative practices training programs for teachers to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Increases state funding for the safe schools levy to give districts the flexibility to make much-needed safety improvements to buildings and/or hire additional support staff.
- Establishes a 1:290 student-to-support staff ratio.
- Ensures that education support professionals are paid for e-learning days.
- Funds professional development for all education support professionals.

Members can urge lawmakers to support the Aim Higher Minnesota Act by signing our petition at https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/tell-legislators-to-aim-higher-on-public-education.

While the Aim Higher Minnesota Act looks to raise educator voices and support students, other bills moving through the Legislature aim to do the opposite.

A ballot measure that would amend the state constitution to dedicate certain sales tax revenue to transportation projects is being heard in the House and Senate.

If approved, voters would decide in November whether sales tax revenue from motor vehicle repair and replacement parts should be used exclusively for roads and bridges. It would not increase the current tax rate. This means there would be less state funding available for public schools, nursing homes and public safety. The amendment would lock in spending for just one area, handcuffing legislators and cutting off important discussions on how we spend taxpayer money.

Republicans House and Senate leaders have unveiled education spending plans for

Legislature, page 6

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Read the article about Deer River’s full-service community school project. Then answer the question, “What would you like to see your school do (or what is it already doing) that fits into the full-service community school model?” and send it to us via email, Twitter or Facebook using #MNEducator. Find us on Facebook at Education Minnesota and on Twitter @EducationMN. Answers will be run in next month’s Minnesota Educator.

Congratulations to last month’s contest winner, Jill Nysse of Winona. See a selection of answers to last month’s question on page 2.

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Educators in Minnesota can affect policy. Let’s keep it that way.

Twenty years ago, the leaders of two competing unions of educators in Minnesota set aside their differences for the common good. Those leaders of the Minnesota Education Association and the Minnesota Federation of Teachers choose a new path because they dreamed of a better future for their members and their students.

They didn’t know what would happen, but they went forward. They were bold in uncertainty, strong under pressure and endured the criticism of even their friends.

At our 2018 Education Minnesota Representative Convention at the end of April, we celebrated the educators who merged their unions in 1998 to create our union.

Their decisiveness has benefited us all. Minnesota educators enjoy higher compensation than educators in states with weaker unions do. We can negotiate for more affordable health insurance. We still have defined-benefit pensions. Minnesota educators work in newer schools, with more resources, than educators in the South and West who are walking out. Our civics

...materials are new enough to mention the word “Obama.” That’s no accident.

The lobbying and political programs of Education Minnesota have kept the funding of public education near the top of the legislative agenda for a generation. Which is not to say public education is without problems. Too many students, particularly students of color, are falling behind. Too many teachers are leaving the profession too soon. But those problems, and many others, are still within our power to fix. Many of our colleagues in states with laws more hostile to unions cannot say the same.

We can affect workplaces...
The annual Education Minnesota Representative Convention is the union’s business meeting, and while there were business items discussed, the overall feel of the event was one of unity.

Whether it was kicking off the celebration of Education Minnesota’s 20th anniversary as the nation’s first merged education union or taking action on items to bring more health care options to members, all was done to improve the lives of educators in Minnesota.

In the face of attacks like the court case Janus v. AFSCME or bills at the state legislature to minimize educators’ voices in the classroom, members put forward action items aimed at recruiting and retaining educators in the profession, as well as in the union.

Action items that passed on the convention floor to help keep our unions strong and the best educators working in schools and on campuses include:

• Education Minnesota will support locals and intermediate organizations in developing and implementing local membership plans by providing relevant training, tools, resources, and support systems to ensure locals and IOs successfully recruit and retain members.

• Education Minnesota will continue to provide grants to locals, through an application process, to support the development and implementation of local membership plans with a focus on recruiting and retaining members.

• Education Minnesota will continue to use existing programs and resources to advocate for high-quality, accessible, affordable and sustainable health care for all. This shall include, but not limited to, concepts such as universal health care, Medicare for all, and single-payer health care systems.

Also passed was an action item that supported the union’s work prior to the November election. Delegates approved Education Minnesota establishing the following days of action to unite members in voting, worksite and political action:

• United early voting day: Friday, Oct. 19

• United grassroots engagement days – days to organize together at work and on campus, and to call and canvass educators and community members: Sept. 20 and 22, Oct. 4, 11, 13, 16, 25 and 27

• United get-out-the-vote days: Nov. 3 and 5

More information on those days and the activities planned around them will be in future issues of the Minnesota Educator.

Education Minnesota President Denise Specht ended her report to the convention with a call for all delegates to reaffirm their choice to be a union member. Delegates held signs saying the word “union” similar to the image from the movie, “Norma Rae,” and took photos to share on social media.
Robin Courrier

Robin Courrier, the president of the Mankato Teachers’ Association, was named this year’s Peterson-Schaubach Leadership Award winner. Courrier also works as the lead teacher at Bridges Community School in Mankato, where there is no principal and she is both a teacher and does administrative work. “Robin’s work has been a shining example of a life of service. Her firm commitment to the principle of team and unity, has led her to serve as a voice for educators and work collaboratively with a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the service of students, families and the community,” said Don Sinner, Education Minnesota-Lakeville president who nominated Courrier.

She has been the president of the Mankato Teachers’ Association for almost two decades, serves on the Education Minnesota Governing Board and is a National Education Association Director.

Courrier has a long history of leading in education and the union at the local, state and national level. She has been the president of the Mankato Teachers’ Association for almost two decades, serves on the Education Minnesota Governing Board and is a National Education Association Director. Courrier also works as the lead teacher at Bridges Community School in Mankato, where there is no principal and she is both a teacher and does administrative work. “Robin’s work has been a shining example of a life of service. Her firm commitment to the principle of team and unity, has led her to serve as a voice for educators and work collaboratively with a broad spectrum of stakeholders in the service of students, families and the community,” said Don Sinner, Education Minnesota-Lakeville president who nominated Courrier.

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Diane Noll

Diane Noll, a member of the Albany Education Assistants & School-Related Personnel and Education Minnesota’s 2017 Education Support Professional of the Year, was honored at this year’s Representative Convention.

Noll is an administrative assistant at Albany Elementary School. She formerly was the president of the Albany Education Assistants & School-Related Personnel. “She watches out for the custodians, the food service, for us paras. It’s not all about her, it’s about everybody else, and making everything tick around here,” said Jean Kollodge, a paraprofessional at Albany Elementary School. “She knows in the end, if everybody’s happy, it reflects onto the students here at Albany Elementary. She sees that big picture and that’s why I think she’s so special.” Her colleagues describe her as “the glue that holds it all together” and the “face and the voice of Albany Elementary.” They also said that Noll takes those roles very seriously.

“She’s not just here to pick up a paycheck. She’s here because she loves the kids, she loves the community and she loves the school. And that shows every day. I’ve never seen Diane with a frown on her face,” said Karl Kise, Albany’s community education coordinator. “She’s always got a smile.”

Three ESI workshops this spring or summer

Got training with a TIA? Get training with us! Participate in this year’s training opportunities and learn about the latest developments in education and employee benefits.

May workshops

May 1 Woodbury Education MN Office
2462 Woodbury Dr., Suite 100

May 10 Duluth Education MN Office
609 E. Central Entrance

May 15 Owatonna’s Golden Valley
660 Wintzella Avenue N.

All morning workshops

9:30 a.m. Registration
10-12:30 p.m. Workshop

June and July workshops

June 14 Winona Education MN Office
500 Second Ave.

June 18 St. Cloud Education MN Office
3001 2nd St. S., Suite 200

June 19 Prairie Woods - Spicer
12718 36th St. N.

June 10 MN Landscape Arboratum
3678 Arboratum Dr.

June 10 MN Landscape Arboratum
4642 Arboratum Dr.

June 11 Apple Valley Education MN Office
9550 146th St. W., Suite 114

June 12 Brooklyn Park Education MN Office
9210 Wyoming Ave. N., Suite 200

Topics to be discussed include:

• Legal contract information including what to look for in your contract before you retire

• Pension education including learning how benefits are calculated

• Financial planning including how to bridge the gap between what you will receive from a pension and what you need to retire

• Asset protection including how you can protect your assets and savings

Watch your email for the link to register or you can contact Deb Siko at DebSiko@fsi-edmn.org or 651-292-4656 (please leave your name(s) and which session you would like to attend)

Seating is limited

Register early to secure your spot.

Spouses/guests are welcome

Planning for retirement? Attend an upcoming ESI workshop this spring or summer.
Celebrating 20 years of unity

Sept. 1, 2018, will mark 20 years since Education Minnesota was formed. The Representative Convention April 27-28 served as the kickoff to the celebration of our union’s two decades of unity.

The merger brought together the Minnesota Education Association (MEA) and Minnesota Federation of Teachers (MFT) in what was the first merged union in the country to be recognized by both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. There had been previous mergers before, but this was a recognized, accepted merger by both national unions.

“When the merger happened, there were two organizations—the MEA and the MFT—which were both doing the same things, but just a little differently,” said Education Minnesota Vice President Paul Mueller, who discussed the history of the merger and its importance at the convention. “But because there were two groups, that inherently created a world of competition, fighting among colleagues, smear campaigns in publications and a division that really served no purpose.”

Mueller was the president of the Brooklyn Center local union at the time of merger and remembers feeling like the unions had a lack of power at the local, state and national level, because they were too busy fighting with each other.

“I began my teaching career in the early ’80s and I can remember the amount of time and money that was spent just to decide which union the MEA or MFT would have bargaining rights was huge,” he said. “That meant those resources were being put into professional development, lobbying at the Capitol or racial equity work—any of the things we value in our union today.”

The merger celebration included video interviews with the leaders of the MEA and MFT about the catalyst for the merger, how it came together and the successes we have had because we are one, united voice for educators and students. The videos are available on Education Minnesota’s YouTube page.

Why it happened

The Public Employees Labor Relations Act (PELRA) started what would be the catalyst for the merger, the fight between the MEA and MFT to be the exclusive representative for an individual school district’s employees.

“In districts where there were two representatives of the EA and the FT, elections took place to determine who had the majority of supporters,” said Larry Wicks, the former executive director of the MEA and Education Minnesota. “Whoever won the election, they became certified as the exclusive representation. That began the codified fighting of the EA and the FT.”

The fighting also moved to the state level. Politicians and decision makers in education were able to use the two organizations as bargaining chips and try to make them take different positions.

“We were doing things or making decisions based on what we thought the other organization would or wouldn’t do,” said Judy Schaubach, former MEA and Education Minnesota president. “Whether it was in the political arena or at the local level, in the back of our minds, we were always thinking, if we take this position are we going to lose members to the other organization because they will take a different position?”

The push for merger really started at the local level. Rank-and-file members were tired of the fighting and didn’t see a real reason for there to be two separate unions.

The first merger came in the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan district. It was not an easy process, said Greg Burns, former MFT assistant to the president and Education Minnesota director of field services.

“There were meetings, after meetings, at every retreat center throughout Minnesota. There were hard conversations about overcoming and dispelling the myths that were being created as we tried to one up each other in the pursuit of the exclusive representative right,” said Mueller.

Eds across the state saw that as well and stepped up to take charge. A merger transition team and advisory board were both formed. A set of guiding principles was created and approved by the leadership of each organization.

“We were constantly going back to members,” said Schaubach. “We would put together our principles of merger. We’d bring them to the governing board for approval, to the convention for approval. Every step of the way, we continued to get support from the membership. We never got ahead of them.”

It also wasn’t easy to get this idea of a merged state union past the two national groups. Even though the nations were considering merger at the same time, they were never able to come together.

Our successes because it happened

Education Minnesota, the labor movement and public education in Minnesota has faced unprecedented challenges in the last 20 years. And the leaders of the merger agree, that if there were still two unions, those challenges would have been harder to face.

“When we were looking at creating a framework for alternative compensation, people got into those committees and struggled with those tough issues. They maybe disagreed on philosophy issues, but it was never about what organization they came from,” said Schaubach.

“Right away there were those days where you could do as a single organization that we wouldn’t have been able to do separately,” said Burns. “Or they wouldn’t have been as good.”

While it was a long, difficult process, all of the leaders of the merger movement agree it was worth it.

“As Education Minnesota moves into a new era, we know that because of our merger, we can remain a strong, united voice,” Mueller said.

“Our history proves that Minnesota educators can take on the impossible,” said Mueller. “We did it 20 years ago and we will do it again as we remain a strong, powerful voice for another 20 years.”

“With all of the challenges that we are facing now, it’s not going to be easy,” Schaubach said. “But you can always count on us. We’re all together, speaking with a single voice. You just can’t give up. We learned that through this endeavor.”
Momentum begins for worksite political leaders

Education Minnesota members across the state are beginning work on the 2018 campaign.

Would you like to get involved in the 2018 campaign in your worksite and local union? Learn more about how to become a worksite action leader, digital engagement leader and more at www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/2018-election/get-involved.

Online “Believe in ‘We’” ads to run year-round

Across the state—in online banner ads, on Facebook and Instagram feeds, YouTube videos and even audio services such as Spotify—the latest phase in Education Minnesota’s “Believe in ‘We’” ad campaign will help tell the simple stories of the incredibly powerful relationships students and educators build every day in our schools and colleges.

The new phase of the campaign is called “Believe in Me/Believe in ‘We’,” and it’s our first foray into a completely online, year-round advertising campaign.

Digital users will see educators interviewing students to not only hear about their dreams, but also the reasons behind those dreams and their hope for how they can make a difference. Along the way, our educator interviewees are talking about the “teaching,” encouraging and expanding on the students’ thought processes. The goal is to show, even more than tell, the special and critical bond and role professional educators have in making a better tomorrow possible.

The videos and audio clips for the campaign were recorded in metro area and Greater Minnesota schools and higher education campuses in February and March.

Looking for the ads appearing on your social media channels, and be sure to like and share using the hashtags #BelieveInMeWN, #BelieveInWeMN. Learn more and see all of the videos at www.BelieveInMeWN.com.

Legislature from page 1

The House and Senate bills expand the grounds for the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to revoke or suspend a teacher’s license and create new ways to prevent the layoffs of hundreds of Minnesota teachers due to budget cuts.

“Every infusion of one-time money will keep Minnesota teachers in the classroom for another year, prevent the teacher shortage from getting worse, and keep class sizes from increasing in dozens of districts,” said Denise Specht, president of Education Minnesota. “This won’t fix the chronic underfunding of special education, the driver of the current crisis, but it will buy time for the state and federal governments to find a long-term solution.”

The rest of the biennium with little to no new funding, House Republicans outlined $35 million in new spending, while Senate Republicans proposed no funding increase for the state’s preschools through colleges. Gov. Mark Dayton wants to spend an additional $83.7 million on public education.

Gov. Mark Dayton also has proposed investing $137.9 million on the current budget surplus to prevent the layoffs of hundreds of Minnesota teachers due to budget cuts.

The Senate education bill includes language that would create a five-star rating system to judge schools based mostly on their test scores. The bill the Senate passed on May 1 eliminated that proposal.

The House and Senate bills expand the grounds for the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to revoke or suspend a teacher’s license and create new ways to prevent the layoffs of hundreds of Minnesota teachers due to budget cuts.

The Senate education omnibus bill still includes the provision to establish locally determined academic balance policies.

Stay updated on what is happening with these bills and more at www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy.aspx#at-the-legislature or on Education Minnesota’s Twitter and Facebook pages.

A new piece of the union’s campaign plan includes training and activating worksite members as worksite action leaders.

Worksite action leaders are at the forefront of Education Minnesota’s campaign plan because we know member voices are essential to our success in electing pro-public education candidates in November.

No one can do it for us, or will do it for us. There are two kinds of power: organized money and organized people.

We are the organized people. “This is personal, but the solution is political,” said Tim O’Neill, a philosophy professor at Rochester Technical and Community College. “This is about protecting my family and preserving everything I hold dear.”

“May we not be able to sway the Supreme Court, but we can influence Minnesota politics. We can elect an education-friendly, pro-union governor and Legislature. We can send our own people to St. Paul to represent us. That is why, when my friend and union sister, Jamie Mahlberg, decided to run for the Minnesota House, I stepped up to manage her campaign. Everything I love is under attack, and the only solution is political action. I cannot not act.”

There are some numbers that illuminate strategic opportunities and challenges in the 2018 elections:

• 8,770 – Margin of victory for Gov. Dayton in 2010.
• 33,000 – Education Minnesota members who skipped voting in midterm elections.
• 145,000 – The margin of votes in a generic pro-union vs. anti-union statewide election. To safely elect a pro-union governor, 145,000 Minnesota voters did not vote in 2014 to need to vote in 2018.
• 1,206 – Worksites and campuses in Minnesota with at least 10 members who did not vote in 2014.

Education Minnesota is focusing its campaign plan on member engagement and outreach at the building level. That is where the worksite political action leaders come in.

Research shows that members who didn’t vote or weren’t active have not been motivated by our traditional campaign tactics like mailing and phone calls.

Worksite action leaders will relate to their colleagues and cut through the stereotypical campaign “noise,” as well as help to make the campaign about real issues that will improve educators’ work and home lives.

Another piece of the worksite action leader’s work will center on getting people out to vote.

Whether it’s holding early voting parties at their building or hosting happy hours after you get a group of colleagues to go vote on Election Day, these educators will be working to encourage others to get out and vote.

Education Minnesota is also hoping to do more outreach with members through digital platforms.

Educators interested in becoming a local digital engagement leader can help the union share information about the election through social media, video and texting platforms.

Gubernatorial endorsement

The Education Minnesota Political Action Committee is planning to screen gubernatorial candidates at their meeting in May. That does not mean they will endorse at that time, but it does mean all candidates will have completed all of the components of our endorsement process.

The five-step process to earn 2018 Education Minnesota gubernatorial endorsement includes:

2) Spend a full- or half-day shadowing educators at work.
3) Engage in a pocketbook and community issues roundtable conversation with educators.
4) Complete a candidate questionnaire that will be shared publicly.
5) Participate in a screening interview with the Education Minnesota PAC board.

Vignettes of the candidate forum and the roundtables are available on Education Minnesota’s Facebook page.

Stillwater teacher Bevin O’Brien testified against the constitutional amendment that would dedicate state funds to transportation. She said, “How can you say you want our schools to be safer, but at the same time, remove the resources that can make that happen? Our students and schools are counting on you—please don’t divert funding away from us.”
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Deer River teacher wins national community school award

DeAnna Hron, a kindergarten teacher at King Elementary in Deer River, was recently named the 2018 Educator Leadership Award winner by the Coalition for Community Schools.

Hron has been a champion for her district’s implementation of the full-service community school model. “One reason to make sure my community has what it needs,” said Hron. “And our students won’t be successful if they don’t have what they need.”

Deer River applied for grant funding to start work on building the services for their community school after the Minnesota Legislature allocated $500,000 in the 2013-17 biennium.

“The unmet needs of students in the community and then I am looking at my classroom and am trying to meet their needs there,” Hron said in an interview with the Minnesota Educator last year. “My kids need these things, but I can’t do it all. That’s where the community school model comes in.”

The district was able to use the grant funds to hire a site coordinator, Chad Evans, who nominated Hron for the award.

The Coalition for Community Schools, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education K-16, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government and philanthropy as well as national, state and local community school networks.

Deer River started the process of building their community school last year by holding a needs assessment. They offered a meal and talked with students, parents and community members about what they felt their biggest needs were as a community.

Since then, the district has added a lot of services and this past September became a complete full-service community school.

The school has a senior center and early childhood center on site.

“The seniors use the center two days a week, said Hron. “They have their own separate entrance. They have done some serving in our cafeteria and worked registration for us at events. We hope to expand what they do in our schools, but it’s just nice to have them see our kids.”

The district also now has a community café two nights a week, where people can come in and eat or get to-go meals for their families.

“Kids can go to after-school programming, grab a to-go meal for their entire family and take the last bus home at 6 p.m.,” Hron said.

The district’s community school leadership team is still working on getting a wellness center for the community, as well as more opportunities for mental health services.

“One of the things we’re working on is tele-health—over the internet,” said Hron. “We struggle to get enough providers up here. It’s exciting to think that people will have the opportunity to get the help they need, even if it’s a phone call or chat.”

Evans is working on outfitting a resource room, so parents can come into school and use a computer and printer. Hron said they are considering opening it up to anyone in the community.

They have also developed a partnership with Itasca Community College to offer a class at the high school in Deer River.

“We have 16 people taking an introduction to business class,” Hron said. “The professor comes here. We give them access to technology. We’re providing days away for the students. We’re already talking about what class to offer next.”

One piece they are struggling with is providing dental care.

“We’ve discovered a lot of our kids aren’t covered and dentists won’t touch them,” said Hron. “Even kids with medical assistance is tough. We need to figure out how we can get kids to the dentist.”

Hron says another struggle is their location and trying to find partnership opportunities.

“I go to meetings with people from the other full-service community schools and Deer River is the only one that’s rural,” she said. “Everyone was talking partnerships with corporations. We’re struggling with finding partners because we don’t have this broad base. We are struggling with how we get more partners, even if they’re further away.”

Another worry for Hron is funding. The grant funding from the state will be gone soon, and there is currently no sign of additional funding being approved.

“Having Chad as a site coordinator is huge. With talk of no funding, I don’t want our coordinator to have to find grant funding to pay for his own salary,” she said. “It’s a really great thing, but you don’t want to take it from somewhere else in the school.”

While it seems like a large undertaking, Hron said it is all worth it. The results may take some time, but she knows there are already benefits to the students.

“It’s been a little slow to get people into the idea that it’s not just a school from 8-3,” she said. “If parents can get the resources they need, it will show up in the students being happier, healthier and being successful.”

Thank you, educators!

Every year, thousands of kids and adults thank educators who were influential in their lives at Education Minnesota’s State Fair booth. We will feature a selection in each issue of the Minnesota Educator this year. Keep an eye out for your name!
Volunteers needed for 2018 NEA RA

With the 2018 National Education Association’s Representative Assembly being held in Minneapolis, June 30-July 5, volunteers are needed to help the event run smoothly.

Members can learn more and register for volunteer shifts at https://goo.gl/6Cnpab. Members can also contact the host committee at neara2018@gmail.com. Volunteers will receive a $40 per day stipend, plus breakfast, lunch and parking. Volunteers can be Education Minnesota members, their friends, family or anyone over the age of 15.

Volunteer Opportunities Include:

Delegate Services
The delegate services committee provides services for delegates with physical challenges.

Information and Registration
The information and registration committee provides volunteers for information booth and registration areas.

NEA Fund for Children
The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education is charged with soliciting voluntary contributions from NEA members, their family members, and NEA and affiliate staff for use in the campaigns of candidates for federal office.

RA Telephone Network
The RA telephone network committee is responsible for staffing and operating the microphone and telephone system used by delegates to communicate with the presiding officer and the assembly in order to participate in the association’s business.

Event Services
The event services committee includes volunteer opportunities such as ushers, floaters, host committee room monitor for meals, HCR dinner, joint conference, and other special event help as assigned.
Virtual reality brings whole new world into classrooms

When third grade students in Edina Public Schools learn about the pyramids or the Great Wall of China, they take a “field trip” there. Thanks to virtual reality viewers, smartphones and the Google Expedition app, students are able to “enter” a photograph and feel as if they are really there.

“I want to bring elementary students around the world,” said Meghan Eberhart, an elementary digital learning specialist in Edina. “The first time people do virtual reality, everyone has a first gasp or moment of whoa. That’s a lot of fun.”

Eberhart, as well as technology teachers at the middle and high school, are bringing virtual reality to their students thanks to grants from their district’s education foundation.

With her grant, Eberhart bought 25 phones and viewers that she brings around to the district’s six elementary schools.

At the high school, Jodi Ramirez, a computer science teacher, was able to buy one HTC Vive headgear, two paddles and two sensors.

With this equipment, students are able to get into entirely virtual worlds, move around, create art and more.

“Right now it’s about giving kids exposure to this world and just letting them play,” said Tim Berndt, a technology education teacher who, along with Ramirez, runs the equipment at the high school. “Right now, we’re not really tying it to any curriculum. We just want to let them experience what it looks like.”

Berndt also brings the equipment over to the adjacent middle school. Since the high school only has one headgear, students take turns moving through an app called STEAM that allows the students to walk on Mars, underwater, explore a Titanic exhibit and play games.

Berndt says he hopes to expand the collaboration with other departments.

Students are also able to play in the Tilt Brush app from Google, which allows them to use the paddles to create artwork using mediums like snow, fire and smoke. Berndt has shown the app to art teachers and wants to try virtual field trips in social studies classes.

Ramirez uses the program in her architecture class. Students design a house in their drafting software, bring it into the virtual reality world and are able to walk through the house to see if it is properly laid out.

“This challenges us, too,” said Berndt. “We want to learn more activities and put it into other areas of the school.”

Since she works at all of the district’s elementary schools, Eberhart has created a schedule for teachers to check out her kit of phones and viewers.

“I was able to jump from school to school to school to work with the media specialists and teachers, supporting them,” she said. “It’s been a really collaborative project within the Edina district.”

Some of the ways the elementary teachers have been integrating virtual reality in their lessons include showing fourth grade students photos from the states they are studying, exploring different careers like going to a workshop of an engineer or the International Space Station, and studying different habitats like the grasslands of Africa and then exploring them.

Google Expeditions, which is a free app, provides the 360-degree photo, so the students feel like they are in the place they are studying.

“Some of the photos are from high above, taken with drones, like the Grand Canyon,” said Eberhart. In a lesson about how migrating families came to the U.S., students were able to look at a photo of people in New York when they were coming over from Europe.

“The students had to look at the clothing the people were wearing and share with their partners,” she said. “It’s great for the turn-and-talk culturally and linguistically responsive strategies.”

Getting students used to the virtual world is a hurdle for Eberhart.

“We give kids a heads up that they are in charge of their viewing,” she said. “They can take it down if they are feeling sick. It’s just a lift viewer, so they can bring it up and down as needed.”

Berndt said with older students, there is already usually a familiarity with the technology.

“It takes them about two seconds and they usually have a handle on it,” he said. “They adapt and learn pretty quickly.”

Eberhart and Berndt are both grateful for their district’s foundation and technology department for getting them set up with the equipment.

Both say that if educators are interested in exploring how the virtual world can fit into their classrooms, they suggest checking out the free apps available on their own smartphones first.

“Trying it with your own phone to see what they look like, and trying things out is an easy way to see if it would be a good fit,” said Eberhart. There are also somewhat inexpensive options like Google Cardboard viewers that can be used with smartphones.

“You need to check the viability with your technology department first,” said Berndt. “We needed ours to get the STEAM app installed on a special computer.”

Both are now interested in exploring augmented reality and how that can be used in the classroom.

“The sky is the limit with this stuff,” said Eberhart. “There are so many great things to do with this.”

Edina elementary students use the Google Expedition app to experience a 360-degree photo of what they are studying, such as the Egyptian pyramids or African grasslands.

Edina middle and high school students are being introduced to virtual reality, through the HTC Vive headgear, paddles, sensors and STEAM software. Tim Berndt, a middle and high school technology education teacher, is able to bring the equipment and computer to his classes on a movable cart.
Lessons learned as union service concludes

Dear Education Minnesota members,

After more than 30 years working in public sector labor and employment law, I’m ready to start a new life chapter—retirement! Before I go, I wanted to share a few lessons learned along the way.

No. 5: The only absolute is that there are no absolutes. Never say never. Never say always. Individuality is the essence of humanity. My truth will never be completely the same as your truth. When we honor and acknowledge our respective truths, we will find shared truths. Our shared values will carry us to greater power. That person who looks or seems completely different from you? Don’t believe it. Don’t reject them. You share some interests, goals and hopes. Reach out. You will find common ground. I guarantee it.

No. 4: Our public schools are the backbone and rock of society. Period.

No. 3: There is no better life than representing and advocating for teachers and other school district and education system staff. School district staff live and breathe the vision that the purpose and advancement of our society and education depends on an educated society, including the poorest and least advantaged among us. Without that, we will not advance. With it, we have no limits.

No. 2: We all carry a certain amount of implicit bias against people who are not like us. Whether the bias is based on race, religion, gender, economic status, geography, age or any other difference, we all experience it, live it, know it, react to it. We all need to acknowledge how our implicit bias affects our assessment of individuals and organizations. We all need to recognize our implicit bias and fight against it. Please bare your soul and join me in challenging our individual and institutional prejudice.

No. 1: The power of the union. In the 1970s, my mother enlisted me to support the United Farm Workers in their fight for a living wage and tolerable working conditions. Ever since, I recognized unions as the primary source of power, awareness, enlightenment, education and beauty for workers and society. Forty years later, as I graduate into retirement and prepare for the November elections, I continue to embrace and evangelize these values. I invite each and every one of you to join me in the crusade for equity and influence. Join me in trumpeting Paul Wellstone’s challenge: We all do better when we all do better.

In solidarity,

Christina Ogata
Education Minnesota
General Counsel

About Christina Ogata
Christina Ogata is retiring after more than four years as general counsel for Education Minnesota, after serving as an Education Minnesota staff attorney for 19 years.

Her career included the 1990 case Aderman v. Washington County, which required the county to honor its individual promises to provide health insurance to retirees; authorship of our brief in Skeen v. State of Minnesota, the 1993 case in which the Minnesota Supreme Court declared that in Minnesota, education is a fundamental constitutional right; the 2004 case of Education Minnesota Greenway v. ISD 316, in which the appellate court confirmed that an employer’s unilateral freezing of wages and benefits during bargaining is an unfair labor practice; developing the “Chisholm promise” doctrine, which determines when school districts must honor their collectively bargained guarantees of health insurance for retirees; and a body of work involving racial integration, equity and inclusion from the 2000 lawsuit challenging segregation in Minnesota’s schools to the current organizational work addressing privilege and implicit bias.

In addition to her legal work, Ogata is an amateur classical musician and Latin music dancer, human relations activist, community participant and supporter of several nonprofit arts organizations.

In her first months of retirement, Ogata plans to devote her time to working toward electing pro-public education candidates in the November elections and catching up on 20 years of reading.
The school year is beginning to wind down and educators are thinking ahead to summer. But summer also means a wonderful opportunity for professional development at Education Minnesota’s Summer Seminar.

Summer Seminar is part of the Minnesota Educator Academy and offers high-quality professional development, leadership training and networking opportunities. It will be held July 30-Aug. 1 at the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota. All Education Minnesota members are invited for three days of personal and professional development, an opportunity to connect with other educators from across the state and to have fun.

This year will feature expanded course offerings, which means more professional development classes and more ideas on how to build a strong local union. Based on member feedback, this year’s Summer Seminar will also feature more member-led courses.

A few of the new courses that will be offered this year are:
- Systematizing Multi-Sensory Instruction for Students With Dyslexia
- National Board Certification: Are You Ready for the Challenge?
- Take a Drink from the Formative Assessment Firehouse
- Supporting Future Educators
- Are You Prepared? The Hormel Smile as a Case Study in Organizing
- Financial Education for Members Who Don’t Know Where to Start
- Bullying Prevention Best Practices


More information on attending the event can be found at www.educationminnesota.org/events/summer-seminar.

A poster with course offerings will be mailed to school sites in May.

The deadline to register is July 17.

After Summer Seminar concludes, Education Minnesota will reimburse each local for the registration cost of:
- One member in their first five years
- One member working in education
- One member of color
- And one member who does not fall into either of those categories

The registration cost of $70 includes participation registration in courses, meals for all three days of the event and lodging in a shared, double-occupancy dorm room with two single beds.

Local presidents will also receive more information about Summer Seminar. Please contact your field director at sam.janusczyk@edmn.org for more information.