

Education Minnesota

Minnesota State faculty file \$1.6 million in claims for back pay

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ST. PAUL, Minnesota. Nov. 1, 2019 – Instructors at Minnesota’s two-year public colleges filed \$1.6 million worth of claims for lost wages as part of a settlement reached in May with the Minnesota State system of colleges and universities. The filing deadline was Thursday.

Since the settlement was announced, staff and officers of the Minnesota State College Faculty union met with 710 faculty members to review the instructors’ work and pay records. Of that group, 252 members filed documented claims worth \$1,563,026.



“Unions are built on the idea that workers should be treated fairly – in an equal and not arbitrary way. We ensure that happens through collective strength and enforceable contracts,” said Matt Williams, president of MSCF. “In this case, we were able to restore \$1.6 million in wages to our state’s educators: Money they earned, but did not receive, entirely because of an arbitrary accounting system. That’s not just a victory for Minnesota’s educators – it’s a victory for workers everywhere.”

There were 23 claims for \$15,000 or more. The average claim was about \$6,200.

The underlying wage dispute involved how the college system calculated the pay for faculty members with certain job assignments, such as teaching in flex labs, independent studies and internships, or instructors who performed duties as department chairs and in similar jobs.

The settlement agreement created a process for faculty to recover back pay for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years. The settlement set a maximum total payout of \$1.9 million and mandated that the system make certain changes to ensure that it correctly compensates its faculty in the future. Many faculty members benefited after the system office recalculated their pay for the 2018-19 academic year.

Under terms of the agreement, faculty members were required to file their claims by midnight Oct. 31.

The union reports the last claim was filed at 10:30 p.m. Thursday. A referee selected by both parties will review any disputed claims over the next two months.

The union began filing grievances for the pay calculations in 2010, asserting that Minnesota State was not following the contract the two sides had negotiated together. In 2016, the union took the grievances to binding arbitration. The arbitrator ruled for the union.

In December 2017, the union filed an unfair labor practices lawsuit in Ramsey County District Court alleging Minnesota State violated the law by refusing to comply with the arbitrator's decision. The settlement signed May 22 resolved that lawsuit.

“One of our most important roles as a union is to protect workers from arbitrary decisions by the employer. This nine-year effort demonstrates our resolve to enforce the agreements we have made with our employer and that the most effective way for us to do this is through harnessing our collective strength,” Williams said. “I want to personally thank the officers and staff at MSCF, the attorneys and other staff at Education Minnesota and all the hard-working member-leaders on the campuses. We could not have achieved this result without all of you.”

The Minnesota State College Faculty union is affiliated with Education Minnesota.

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