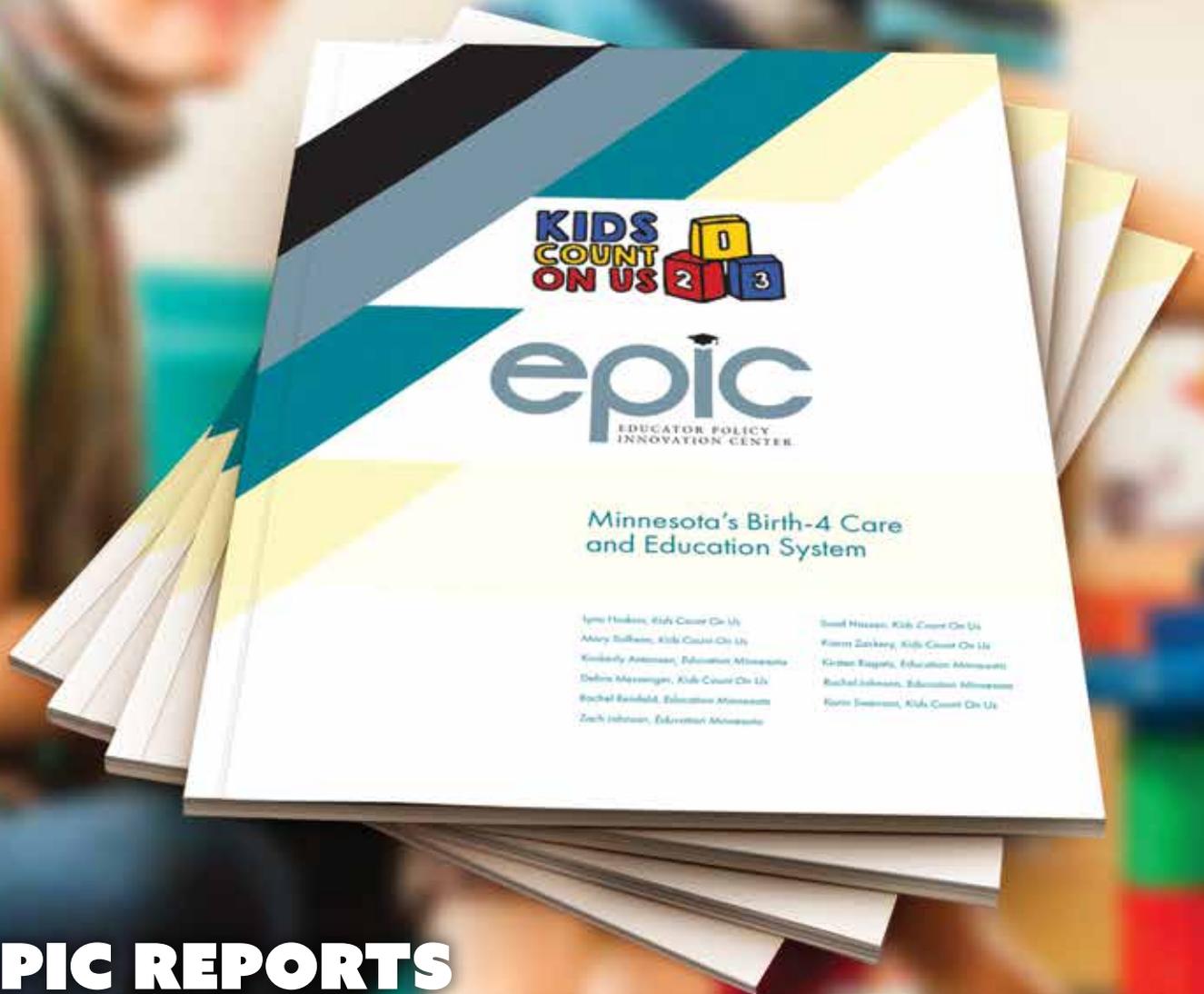


MINNESOTA

# EDUCATOR

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021



## EPIC REPORTS FOCUS ON IMPORTANT DISRUPTED LEARNING, CHILD CARE ISSUES

**COVID RESOURCES  
AVAILABLE ONLINE**



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

# LearnUpon is now MEA Online!

## New name, same quality professional development from your union.

Our online learning platform, LearnUpon, is now MEA Online. While the name might be different, MEA Online is still home to dozens of FREE webinars to help you earn CEUs for relicensure and strengthen your professional practice.

Education Minnesota members will be able to access free professional development to improve their professional practice and earn CEU credits for relicensure as well as build union understanding and power. The majority of courses will be pre-recorded. Some will be offered live via webinar and some will be a combination of both.

Education Minnesota sent email invitations to access MEA Online in July, September and November to all member email addresses we have on file.

Please check your email to find an invitation that says, "You are invited to the MEA Online learning portal." The invite will come from Education Minnesota's MEA Online Team at notifications@learnupon.com and contain a link special to each member to access the site.

If you did not receive an email invitation from notifications@learnupon.com, please email learnupon@edmn.org. (Remember to check your junk/spam folders!)



### Current course offerings include:

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- ▶ *Building Representative—Roles and Responsibilities*
- ▶ *Certified Negotiator Program for Teachers*
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- ▶ *Culturally Responsive Teaching Through a Racial Justice Lens*
- ▶ *Degrees Not Debt*
- ▶ *Engage Students With "Crossroads: An Anthology of Resilience and Hope by Young Somali Writers"*
- ▶ *English Learners (relicensure)*
- ▶ *ESP Costing Spreadsheet*
- ▶ *Finding Our Way Through: Navigating the Mental and Emotional Challenges of Our Current World*
- ▶ *Google's Applied Digital Skills Workshop (live recorded session)*
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**More information, including a video on using the platform, is available at [www.educationminnesota.org/resources/minnesota-educator-academy/LearnUpon](http://www.educationminnesota.org/resources/minnesota-educator-academy/LearnUpon).**



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

**February/March 2021 – Volume 23, No. 4**

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

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

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St. Paul, MN 55103

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

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

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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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*COVER PHOTO: Education Minnesota's Educator Policy Innovation Center will release two research papers this spring, including a first-of-its-kind partnership with ISIAH's Kids Count on Us coalition.*

# SAFETY HAS ALWAYS BEEN DEFINED BY LOCAL EDUCATORS, STUDENTS

There has never been a single definition of safety for Minnesota educators since the novel coronavirus shut down our school buildings last year. Instead, our union has acknowledged that each educator's definition of a safe worksite would depend on the latest science and local conditions.

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the global pandemic, the commitment of Education Minnesota to empower and support the efforts of local educators hasn't changed.

Some of our locals have worked with their district administrators on how to offer in-person learning safely. Others have found versions of hybrid learning work best. Still others, including some of the state's largest and most racially diverse districts, stayed with distance learning.

Educators, administrators and school board members have found solutions because we all agree that teaching students face-to-face is the best learning mode for almost everyone. However, there are other factors.

As Gov. Tim Walz has said, everyone is put at risk if the hospitals are overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients. Not only does the quality of care decline for infected patients, but packed hospitals may not have the capacity to care for patients with other illnesses. Schools have a role in limiting the spread of the virus in our communities.

We also can't ignore how the pandemic has harmed communities of color much more than white communities. Because of years of systemic racism in health care, housing, the job market and other areas, our Black and Brown neighbors are getting sick and dying in disproportionate numbers.

Is it any wonder that educators who advocate for large numbers of BIPOC students are among the most aggressive in their demands for vaccination, PPE and policies designed to slow the spread of the virus within their schools and out in their neighborhoods?

Finally, I believe any definition of safety must include educators' trust in their administrators to do the right things both today and in the future if conditions change. Trust is built through many small demonstrations of respect and transparency.

The benefits and failures of relationship-building are playing out all over the state as everyone watches and waits for the spread of the new more contagious COVID-19 variant. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned the variant could fuel huge spikes in cases in March and pressure local leaders to close schools and businesses again.

Education Minnesota believes every student and educator deserves to learn and work in an environment that's safe and welcoming—and we know those environments will all be a little

different. The job of the statewide union is to provide the resources and policy guardrails so locals can bargain for what works best for them.



Denise Specht

Our state union does that by raising up the concerns of educators and making our arguments to the governor and the Legislature for what our members need to succeed. Despite what some might say, it's not the place of Education Minnesota to "sign off" on the governor's plans – but we will provide feedback and hold leaders accountable for their decisions.

The next few months will be difficult. Many educators will transition to a new learning model. The state's vaccination program will try to overcome the Trump administrations' heartbreaking incompetence. The mental health crisis among our students will only widen and deepen.

However, if there's any group of people who can meet all these challenges and operate our schools safely and effectively, it's the educators of Minnesota.

Together,

Twitter: @DeniseSpecht

## Don't forget – there's an app for that!

Stay up to date, find events, get a digital membership card and more with Education Minnesota's mobile app.

The free app is available for all iOS and Android devices – including tablets.

### Download

1. Search for "EdMN" or "Education Minnesota" in the app store on your device.

### Get your digital membership card

1. Tap on the "Membership Card" icon.
2. Tap "List of Locals" to find the official name of your local. Some of them are long and complicated!
3. Tap "My Membership Card," then enter your first name, last name and the official name of your local.
4. Problems? Contact us at 800-652-9073 or [webmaster@edmn.org](mailto:webmaster@edmn.org).

## 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, Lenore Strouth of Gaylord, 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](mailto: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 March 5. 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!

**I want them to see that cancer isn't a death sentence. You can still be happy and playful and silly and funny and energized. I'm their best cheerleader. It's really building their self-efficacy, so that they can know that they can do anything in this world. Maybe they'll invent a cure for cancer. Wouldn't that be wonderful?**

– Roseville teacher Kelly Klein, in a KARE 11 News story, "Kindergarteners join teacher for online classes from hospital while she gets chemo" on Jan. 4. Klein has been teaching kindergarten via distance learning even while attending her chemotherapy treatments.

# TWO NEW RESEARCH PAPERS FOCUS ON IMPORTANT EDUCATION ISSUES

Education Minnesota’s Educator Policy Innovation Center will release two new research papers this spring in response to two education crises – improving equity in our state’s child care system and responding to the disrupted learning brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Minnesota’s Birth-4 Care and Education System

Minnesota has an expensive and inequitable system for providing care and education for children ages birth-4, and it is a system that is in need of a dramatic overhaul. This paper reviews academic research and explores programs and practitioners across the country to find examples of more comprehensive, equitable care and education to their youngest learners.

“This project aims to increase access and equity in early childhood education for children in Minnesota, specifically in pre-kindergarten,” said Rachel Johnson, a kindergarten teacher who sat on the EPIC team for Education Minnesota. “Adults, teachers and policymakers can better meet the current and future needs of children by addressing the research and recommendations for equitable access to high-quality early childhood.”

In early 2019, Education Minnesota and ISIAAH began to wonder about the potential to partner together to improve equitable outcomes for birth-4-year-olds and at the same time lift up the workforce that cares for and educates those children, a workforce that has been systematically denigrated, undercompensated, and lacks access to the kinds of professional development our children need them to have.

This paper is the result of 18 months of conversation, exploration, relationship-building, research and circle time together with a team composed of members of both Education Minnesota and Kids Count On Us and five staff members from the two organizations.

### **The paper’s key findings:**

- The argument children ages birth-4 need nothing more than a safe place to be while their parents

are in the workforce, commonly thought of as “care,” is false.

- The argument that holds that K-12 is strictly about “education” and not about “care” is false.
- Minnesota has ignored the critical needs of our birth-4-year-olds and suffers damage that will last for decades because of it.
- We must find a way to create access to equitable and high-quality care and education for all our state’s birth-4-year-olds who need it.
- The birth-4 care and education workforce has been historically maligned, undercompensated, and unsupported, and these conditions are currently at crisis levels.
- We must, both immediately and over time, address the needs of the workforce dedicated to caring for and educating our youngest citizens.
- Doing so will require Minnesota to raise revenue and to commit to a complete overhaul of its birth-4 system.

### **The paper’s recommendations:**

- Create a new state agency, the Minnesota Department of Early Care and Education, so that the state’s governance system can use the same vocabulary and align practices.
- Create regional Early Care and Education Hubs that are overseen by boards, representatives of public schools, special education practitioners, child care centers, home care centers and community members.
- Create a mixed-delivery pre-K system aligned with the early indicators of progress and built on equitable practices that excludes no family wanting access.
- Create a sustainable funding source so that low-income families pay nothing and all other families pay up to, but no more than, 7% of family income, regardless of number of children in birth-4 system.
- Create a community needs assessment tool to be used on an ongoing basis by the Early Care and Education Regional Hubs.

- Fund the regional hubs sufficiently so that they can respond to the community needs assessments with the appropriate services needed by the families in their communities.
- Create a funding mechanism to immediately raise the wages of the birth-4 workforce and to increase compensation, benefits and professional development via a career-wage ladder on-ramping process.

## Disrupted Learning, COVID-19 and Public Education in Minnesota

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has forced educators to move most instruction to screens and chatrooms. Now, elected officials are asking if students are experiencing learning loss.

This EPIC paper reinforces that COVID-19 is not the cause of the inequities within the public school system; it is merely the flashlight that is illuminating the problems we always knew existed. The pandemic is certainly intensifying the structural problems that disadvantage too many students, especially students of color, but neither it nor educators are to blame for students being “so far behind.”

“I feel like this alone should spur us to experiment, research, listen to the needs of those we are serving, meeting them where they are, learning from them and supporting student growth and achievement with a culturally responsive lens,” said Mary Ellen Baisley, a school counselor who sat on the EPIC team.

The EPIC paper explores public education in Minnesota during the pandemic, research from previous learning interruptions like natural disasters and what policy interventions can help repair the inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

***The paper recommends Minnesota’s leaders start accounting for the inequities within public education by providing much needed funding. In addition, the state should:***

- Provide funding for districts to offer quality, equitable extra-time programming.
- Give educators the time and resources needed to address the unprecedented levels of trauma caused by the pandemic and other moments of collective trauma experienced in 2020.

**The full reports, as well as more information on EPIC, are available on Education Minnesota’s website at:**

**[www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/  
Educator-Policy-Innovation-Center](http://www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/Educator-Policy-Innovation-Center)**

- Endorse a “do-no-harm approach” to student assessment. This will require rethinking the purpose and utility of standardized assessments.
- Encourage districts to start preparing for future disruptions now.
- Close the digital divide.

***This is also a moment to completely reimagine public education. In particular, lawmakers should:***

- Direct state agencies to study how reduced class-sizes during hybrid learning impacted student learning and classroom management.
- Convene a group of education experts to examine the traditional school calendar and the traditional school day.
- Consult educators working with students identified for special education on how some students, particularly students with autism or an emotional-behavioral disorder diagnosis, thrived in online learning.
- Ask researchers to look at any correlations between distance learning and decreases in bullying and harassment directed at LGBTQ+ students.
- Provide more funding for full-service community schools.

“We may need to reexamine how we engage with the communities we serve, what we teach, how we teach it, how we structure our services and how we assess our students,” said Natalia Benjamin, a multilingual and ethnic studies teacher who sat on the EPIC team. “The proposed recommendations are a good start to find solutions as we strive to provide equitable opportunities for the students and families who need them the most.”

# COVID, VACCINE UPDATES AVAILABLE FOR ALL MEMBERS ONLINE

As school districts continue to change learning models and a new vaccination plan for educators becomes reality, Education Minnesota continues to update its website and send email updates to its members.

## **Our COVID webpage,**

**[www.educationminnesota.org/resources/in-the-classroom/Coronavirus](http://www.educationminnesota.org/resources/in-the-classroom/Coronavirus), includes:**

- FAQs on vaccinations, saliva testing, health concerns, prep time, distance learning privacy, special education, paid leaves, unemployment and student loan debt relief.
- Contract bargaining resources including vaccinations, Q Comp guidance, reopening resources, managing workload, ESP-specific considerations and leave provisions.
- A summary of the guidance and executive orders.
- Safety checklists for educators and students and guidance around reopening of school buildings.
- Resources on educator rights and safety concerns regarding reopening of school buildings, including worker's compensation and OSHA complaints.

On Jan. 18, Gov. Tim Walz announced that the state will launch nine community vaccination sites throughout the state that will prioritize early childhood and K-12 educators.

"We know how hard this has been for students and parents. Educators want to be back with their students too. Free COVID-19 vaccinations for every school staff who wants one should be a priority and Minnesota today is taking another important step in keeping our communities safe and healthy," said Education Minnesota President Denise Specht after the announcement.

"Vaccinating educators is an important part in reopening school buildings," Specht said. "As of now, we don't know how long it will take to get everyone fully vaccinated, but we are ready to get started. Minnesotans must remain diligent and do our part to slow the spread of the virus by wearing masking, maintaining social distancing and following other safety protocols."

## **Here are the most critical pieces for you to know, as of press time:**

- Right now, there is not enough vaccine supply for all educators to be vaccinated immediately, but all school districts and charter schools will have access to vaccinations, based on their student population, at vaccination sites no more than 90 minutes from their school site. There is a very limited supply of COVID-19 vaccines from the federal government in Minnesota. Walz has repeatedly called on the federal government to purchase more.
- School superintendents will be asked to prioritize educators within each district or charter school to receive the vaccine. The state has created prioritization considerations within schools, which Education Minnesota supports, but school leaders will have some discretion. Education Minnesota will continue updating our website with guidance around the prioritization process as this continues.
- You may notice that the weekly allotments for districts and charter schools are quite small. Keep in mind that this is only each district and charter school's allotment for the week. We expect the numbers to increase significantly as the federal government ramps up vaccine production and distribution.
- Educators identified by their district for vaccination will receive a link to schedule an appointment, which will be required for a vaccination. No educator will be required to be vaccinated at this time, and school leaders will not know who has chosen to be vaccinated and who has declined. Education Minnesota has already released guidance on school vaccination policies in questions 50-55 of our Safe Learning Plan FAQ on our website.
- Education Minnesota will continue to link to more information from the state and provide legal and contractual guidance for all members around these issues as the educator vaccination program continues.



# Summer Session

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- Explore graduate education at [mnstate.edu/graduate](https://mnstate.edu/graduate)

# LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS WITH FOCUS ON COVID RELIEF

The 2021 Minnesota Legislature convened in early January, with much of the focus so far being on the COVID-19 pandemic as it still remains a concern.

As of press time, the House and Senate have held hearings on updates from the Minnesota Department of Education and hearing from parents and students on their experiences.

Education Minnesota is working with lawmakers on legislation that would address many of the COVID relief suggestions put forth by the disrupted learning research paper written by our Educator Policy Innovation Center.

### **Legislation would include:**

- Funding for quality, extended learning.
- Waiving the MCAs and other state or federally mandated test and moving toward better locally driven assessments.
- Requiring districts to develop long-term plans for future disruptions.
- Closing the digital divide by expanding broadband and allocating resources for families to pay for devices and internet.

Another key focus for Education Minnesota this session is addressing the need to completely reimagine public education and fully fund it so students have the racially just schools they deserve.

***If we want all students to thrive and succeed, Minnesota must build culturally responsive schools that reflect the diverse students they serve. Education Minnesota believes we can start doing this by passing legislation to:***

- Increase racial equity funding and American Indian aid.
- Attract and retain teachers of color.
- Expand ethnic studies curriculum.
- Expand trauma-informed practices, which are even more needed now because of COVID.
- Expand full-service community schools.

Pieces of this agenda were already receiving hearings as this edition of the Minnesota Educator went to press.

Education Minnesota is also working on the child care recommendations in the EPIC paper written with ISAIH's Kids Count on Us coalition, as well as working with other labor partners on paid family and medical leave.

Because 2021 is also a funding year, Education Minnesota will be supporting proposals that support teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the different learning models it brings with it, as well as pushing for overall increases to education funding this session and beyond.

## ***Virtual lobby days happening this session!***

Due to the pandemic, all lobby days for the 2021 Legislature will be held virtually via Zoom. These virtual lobby days will be scheduled and coordinated by local leadership and Education Minnesota staff as they have been in the past. Reach out to your local president if you are interested in organizing one for your union.

Education Minnesota is also planning issue-specific lobby days throughout the session, where members from all over the state can join and speak to legislators on the issues that matter most to them, including COVID relief legislation.

More details on the issue lobby days and how to schedule one for your local will be available at [www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature/details-on-lobby-days](http://www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature/details-on-lobby-days).

# ESP BILL OF RIGHTS A KEY PART OF LEGISLATIVE AGENDA AGAIN

**Education Minnesota will once again be introducing an ESP Bill of Rights as legislation this session. The union hopes to push key parts of this package of proposals to have hearings and receive attention.**

Everyone who works in public education deserves the same things. Respect for their contribution to the care and education of our students. Fair compensation for their work, including affordable health care. Safe working conditions. Unfortunately, most education support professionals don't get enough of any of those.

The Bill of Rights includes proposals that would help ESPs in Minnesota receive pay and benefits to sustain a family, safe work environments and voice and respect on the job.

## Pay and benefits to sustain families

***Every school employee should have the right to spend time at home with their own children, without surviving paycheck-to-paycheck and working two or three extra jobs.***

- Require school districts and charter schools to pay their ESPs at least \$20 an hour. Every school employee should have the right to spend time at home with their own children, without working two or three extra jobs to survive.
- Help educators and all Minnesotans get high quality, affordable health care. This includes allowing people to buy into MinnesotaCare and fighting for other public options.
- Provide up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for all workers through a payroll deduction and employer tax.
- Defend the law that protects workers from wage theft and crack down on employers who circumvent wage and benefit standards and laws, don't pay overtime, etc.

## Safe work environments

***Many of our ESPs are working with students with disruptive and sometimes violent behavior. Just like every student deserves a safe learning environment, every educator deserves a safe working environment.***

- Fund 16 hours of mandatory training for paraprofessionals who directly work with students before students report every fall.

## Voice and respect on the job

***ESPs work closely with our students inside and outside the classroom. They should have a seat at the table when decisions are made about their schools and profession.***

- Establish reporting and transparency requirements to identify issues of concern for ESPs on the worksite. This could include staffing levels, pay scale, safety, fair scheduling, etc.

## Help us push for ESP issues at the Capitol

All ESP members are encouraged to come to the Capitol and share their story at a lobby day. Due to the pandemic, all lobby days for the 2021 Legislature will be held virtually via Zoom.

An ESP-specific lobby day is being planned for later in the session. This will be a time for ESPs across the state to come together and share their stories around these issues and more with legislators. Watch for more details at [www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature](http://www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature).

If ESPs would like to hold their own virtual lobby days with their legislators, they can be scheduled and coordinated by local union leadership and Education Minnesota staff.

If you are an ESP member interested in testifying on these issues, email [lobbyteam@edmn.org](mailto:lobbyteam@edmn.org).

# SPECIAL ED TEACHER MOTIVATES STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

When students enter Jamie Weisz's special education classroom at Champlin Park High School, they never know who might greet them.

Of course, Mr. Weisz is there, but he has also started a project finding local and national celebrities to send him selfie videos with a motivational message for the students.

"The past few years, I have been developing a PBIS-type program for my students and a tiered reward system for them," Weisz said. "Through that, I just decided to reach out to local sports teams to see if I could coordinate a video and it kind of snowballed from there."

Weisz has worked to get videos from sports stars such as Olympic Gold Medalist Simone Biles, Zach Parise from the Minnesota Wild, Justin Jefferson from the Minnesota Vikings, musicians like Gwen Stefani, Fitz and The Tantrums and Jewel, and TV personalities like Andrew Zimmern, Carson Daly and the studio hosts from the NFL on Fox.

"I have the students tell me who their favorite

singers or athletes are," Weisz said. "Kids like food, sports, music. Then it's on me to find out who their agent is or publicist is. Then I type up a script and send it off, and hope I get something back. Sometimes they tell me they are working on it and sometimes I just get a video."

Weisz spends a lot of time building relationships with the people who can connect him to the celebrities and athletes.

"Over the time, I've been able to establish good networks through the system," Weisz said.

Those connections have also brought other opportunities for students. Weisz was connected with David Burnett, the inventor of the Pop Socket, and Burnett was a guest speaker in some of the school's math and business classes.

"It was nice to see how math applies in the real world," Weisz said. "And then of course the kids got a customized Pop Socket with our school logo on it."

Weisz said that it's a fun project to work on because of how excited the students are when he receives a new video.

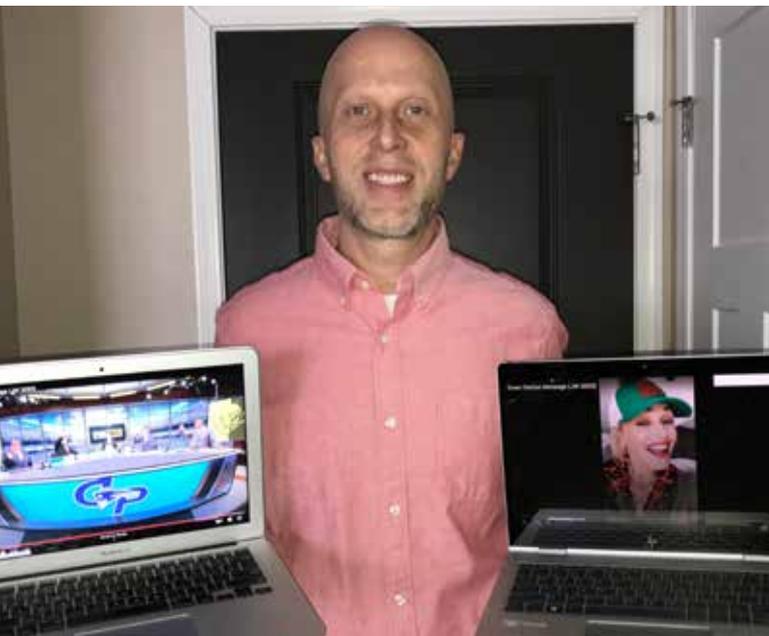
"They come in and ask if I have a new video all the time," he said. "These are people that they can relate to, and I usually put my name or our class name in the script so it's more personal to them."

Weisz tries to make sure to find people who can connect with all of his students, and sometimes has gotten videos for the entire student body.

Weisz had been working on these videos prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning, but the digital content fits in well to his new class structures.

"As I've got 8-10 kids logging into my math class, I can ask them about their interests and talking about what they did this weekend," Weisz said. "That's where I can see who to maybe reach out to."

"I try to make math as fun as I can, but this adds a little more excitement. I always try to make math as meaningful and relevant to their own lives and this adds another connection, especially during these challenging times."



Anoka-Hennepin special education teacher Jamie Weisz has worked to get personalized messages from athletes and celebrities, including Gwen Stefani and the studio hosts from NFL on Fox, to help motivate his students.

# SCIENCE TEACHERS PREPARE, DEVELOP PD FOR NEW STANDARDS

Minnesota science educators will have until 2024 to fully implement the newly approved state science standards, which include big changes for sixth-grade curriculum, but a group of educators is already working to make sure their colleagues are prepared.

"Earth science will be new for all sixth-grade teachers," said Lee Schmitt, a Minnesota Science Teachers Association past president who now works on professional development courses. "Teachers almost have to start over with new earth science content and pedagogy. But hopefully teachers will get fired up about the new standards."

Schmitt, along with Dana Smith, a sixth-grade science teacher in Bemidji, worked with the MnSTA and other educators to create the Earth Science Teacher Education Program. The program aims to bring professional development courses and cohorts to science educators across the state, as they work to implement the new earth science standards.

"It may feel really sort of discombobulated at first, but that's why we're offering the PD," said Smith, who also sat on the committee who worked on the standards. "The doing and making sense and the asking questions and the modeling that are included in the new standards—are universal in science and what we want to put in front of teachers."

MnSTA has given the planning group a grant to develop the courses and survey teachers.

Their tentative plans include a summer week-long bootcamp-style workshop for sixth-grade educators that incorporates earth and space science content, as well as how to develop three-dimensional units.

The group's goal is to have at least one in-person workshop this summer, and then offering up to 11 more over the next three summers all across the state.

Also being planned are high school-level cohorts that include a two-week course blending content and pedagogy, as well as online coursework that prepare teachers to earn 9-12 earth science licensure.

**Learn more about the Earth Science Teacher Education Program plans and take an interest survey at:**

[www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ES-TEP.html](http://www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ES-TEP.html)

The group's goal is to offer three cohorts for high school educators starting in the summer of 2022.

Smith and Schmitt are both excited about how the cohorts and workshops will not only provide educators the tools they need, but the support they need to implement the new standards.

"We're not going to hand you a book and say read this and you'll be awesome at it," said Smith. "But we're all working on this and that's what three-dimensional teaching comes down to."

"These academic communities we will create will be important," said Schmitt.

The MnSTA and ES-TEP group are working on securing legislative funding to support these trainings and make them accessible and affordable. Education Minnesota is also supporting this legislation.

MnSTA and Education Minnesota are also working to modify the language in statute on the standards to show that high school students need to take an earth science course. This change protects educators that teach earth science, and makes it clearer that the subject needs to be taught.

While a big change to her sixth-grade classroom, Smith is excited about the new standards.

"The new standards are based in NGSS (New Generation Science Standards) and are the gold standard for science education," she said. "They are backed up by two decades of research and are where teaching and learning in science is headed. This is another place for Minnesota to lead on education."

# TRA BOARD ELECTIONS APPROACHING

Teachers Retirement Association active members soon will choose representatives for the Board of Trustees in two races. Two members will be selected for four-year terms; one member will be selected for a two-year term. Terms of the elected members will begin on July 1, 2021.

Active members will receive instructions by mail in March for voting by mail or online. Votes must be returned to TRA by April 23. Results will be published on [www.minnesotatra.org](http://www.minnesotatra.org) in June.

Six candidates, all Education Minnesota members, are running for the two open spots. Education Minnesota will also have other opportunities to learn more about the candidates in early spring.

More information on the candidates and the election can be found at [www.minnesotatra.org](http://www.minnesotatra.org).

## Candidates for two four-year positions

### Yohannes Agegnehu

*Business and Accounting Faculty, Inver Hills Community College*

#### **Why do you want to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees?**

I want to serve on the Board of Trustees because I am avid supporter of TRA and would like to contribute to its success. I strongly believe that pension plans need to be protected and improved to ensure the financial future of teachers who committed their professional life to serve their communities through education. I am highly motivated and enthusiastic about the opportunities and challenges of serving on the board of trustees.



### Kevin Lindstrom

*Counselor, Anoka Technical College*

#### **Why do you want to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees?**

I want to serve on the TRA Board because I believe I can make a meaningful contribution to the Board, based on both my personal experiences and my experiences as the leader of a statewide organization. On the personal side, I have been around long enough to remember when fellow faculty members received letters notifying them of their benefits under the Improved Money Purchase program. Conversely, I haven't been around long enough to qualify for the Rule of 90. As I get closer to retirement age, all I've observed over the years becomes much more relevant, and I believe my perspective would be of value to the Board.



### Julie Reno

*Math teacher, Moorhead*

#### **Why do you want to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees?**

I would like to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees as I have a very good understanding of how retirement accounts work. I appreciate the need for representatives from Education Minnesota aiding in the overseeing of TRA and with my knowledge of both mathematics and retirement accounts, I believe I would be a great fit for this position.



## Candidates for one two-year position

### Wendy Drugge

*Math teacher, Burnsville-Eagan-Savage*

#### **Why do you want to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees?**

In my current role as the president of the Burnsville Education Association, I have been given opportunities to advocate for my members and help them better understand their contract and benefits. As a member of the TRA Board of Trustees, I would advocate for the Board to find new and additional ways to help teachers understand their benefits under TRA and further educate them about retirement.



### Mark Hagemeyer

*Staff Development/Q Comp Coordinator, Proctor*

#### **Why do you want to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees?**

I have been teaching full time since I graduated from Bemidji State in 1989. I have gained valuable experience through the work I have done with my students and their parents, but also through my day-to-day interactions with other teachers. One of the most important aspects of being a teacher is the idea of servant leadership. We are called to serve our community. We do this by creating relationships with others to best help them thrive. It is for this reason I wish to apply for the TRA board position. I think my experience could be an asset to the board, but also to give back to my fellow educators.



### Noel Ralph

*Special education teacher, Osseo*

#### **Why do you want to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees?**

I want to continue to serve on the TRA Board of Trustees to lend my voice and experiences to our pension decision making process. I continue to be a strong believer and advocate for unions and the supports needed for our teachers to be the most successful they can be. Having a strong pension for our teachers is one aspect of supporting our teachers after they have had a productive career as a teaching professional. My previous teaching experiences have supplied me with a wealth of knowledge and unique teaching environments that could shed some light on some otherwise unknown teacher/teaching perspectives.





Tom Ellison, an Alexandria industrial technology teacher, works on desktop CNC machine. Ellison has adapted his classroom to the latest technology over his 34-year career.

## ELLISON RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARD FOR HIS COMMITMENT TO HIS STUDENTS, UNION

Tom Ellison's career in education has been one of adapting and changing to meet the needs of his industrial technology learners. But at the core of his support for students has also been his commitment to his colleagues and his profession through his union work.

That focus is the reason why Ellison is Minnesota's nominee for the 2021 NEA Foundation Educator of Excellence award.

The Awards for Teaching Excellence program recognizes educators from around the country who shine in their schools, their communities and their own learning. These educators advocate for each other, the profession and students, and they embrace the diversity of their communities and the wider world.

Ellison started his career teaching in southern Minnesota for a year before moving to Brandon, where he stayed for 25 years.

"Being a small school, I was the only industrial tech teacher," he said. "I built the program up from just a couple of classes to a good number of students taking classes. I also coached in Brandon."

Ellison then started coaching in Alexandria, and when the new high school was built, the current industrial tech teacher announced his retirement, so they came knocking on his door.

"I was looking at the opportunity to be involved in their new academies and the new way of helping high school students' work on a career pathway became exciting," said Ellison. "I had chosen my college on my ability to play sports. So I was excited to help students identify some career paths in high school."

When Ellison was hired in Alexandria, he spent half of his time at the high school and half at the middle school.

"That's all they were offering to students," he said. "I wanted to see that grow. When the new high school opened in 2014, they added another half-time instructor. Now we have three-and-a-half full-time positions in the department, and I think we could have more."

The business and industry involvement in the program has been an enticing addition for students, Ellison said.

"We have some of the latest and greatest equipment that local industry has helped provide for us," he said. "We pair students with local industry and have them out in their shops to see what they do. And some companies are sending projects to us for our students to do. They are getting that real world experience while they are in school, and challenge themselves."

Ellison said these partnerships and projects have fueled himself and his students to keep pursuing more opportunities and finding new technologies to bring into the classroom.

"Some students are able to identify to opportunities to work in their communities and get well-paying trade jobs," he said. "And some students get excited about going to trade, community or four-year colleges for subjects like engineering."

In the last year, Ellison has transitioned his very hands-on class to an online and hybrid learning model.

"I do more here in their place," he said. "We've been able to do more accessing technology with the creation of the design from home. We have worked on writing more language and code or drawing. Then I can copy the code and put it into the programs here for them and see what works and doesn't."

Students can pick up the projects Ellison works on and then do some analysis at home.

Ellison has also spaced out the machines in his shop in order to bring a small amount of students in to get the hands-on, project-based learning in a safe way.

The Educators of Excellence award also honors an educator who has had an impact in their union.

As a young teacher, Ellison said he wasn't aware of the union, but quickly realized all of the ways it impacts teaching and learning.

"We have to advocate for what our teaching culture and environment is like in our own buildings," he said. "And there are contracts involved. We have to navigate through the educational process, looking out for the rights of teachers and what's best for our students."

After seeing other staff members working with the union, Ellison felt like he should step up and get involved.

"You first start by sitting on some committees," he said. "Maybe become a member rights person to learn a little bit of what else is going on in the buildings. I worked my way through some of those roles."

Ellison served as president in Brandon for many years. Then when he moved to Alexandria, he got involved with his new local.

He has served as a building representative, on the negotiations team and lead negotiator and is currently serving as president.

"I just want to be a help in the process that sets a culture and environment in our school district that we're all proud of," Ellison said.

"We're very intentional in developing a culture



*Alexandria's Tom Ellison is Minnesota's nominee for the 2021 NEA Foundation Educator of Excellence award, which recognizes leadership in education and union work.*

of respect and collaboration with our district. Then our focus can be on what's best for kids. That's the power of our union."

Ellison was hesitant to apply for the award because he is in education, coaching and the union to help others, not himself.

"Yes, being recognized for a national award is very humbling, but it is very special," he said. "It is because of the talents of those who had an influence on my life and career. I am forever grateful for the many teaching colleagues who guided me in this profession."

Ellison will be honored at a national virtual gala in February.

# NEW RACIAL EQUITY ADVOCATES BEGIN IMPORTANT WORK

Education Minnesota's Racial Equity Advocate program is now in its fourth year of training members to serve as co-conspirators and help develop an anti-racism growth mindset in local unions and school districts.

The fourth REA cohort started in November with 22 members, who will meet another three times during the school year centering around specific trainings to help build collective power to combat systemic racism in our learning communities. Meetings will cover professional development opportunities, restorative practice training and organizing members with a racial equity lens.

Many past cohort members have taken action within their locals and have either joined or started committees or workgroups focusing on racial equity and creating spaces for members of color.

Learn more about the program and when the next application window opens and other opportunities for racial equity union work at [www.educationminnesota.org/resources/minnesota-educator-academy/MEA-Fire](http://www.educationminnesota.org/resources/minnesota-educator-academy/MEA-Fire).

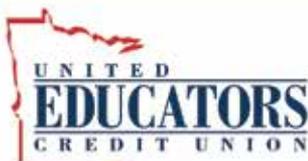


The fourth Racial Equity Advocate cohort has begun meeting via Zoom.

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# MEMBER HONOR ROLL

## Minnesota State 2020 Board of Trustees Awards For Excellence

### *Educators of the Year:*

**Jessie Breyer-Peterson**, Century College

**Ruthanne Crapo Kim**, Minneapolis Community and Technical College

**Miriam Kero**, Hibbing Community College

**Stephanie Zarse**, Normandale Community College

### *Outstanding Educators:*

**Jay Anderson**, Normandale Community College

**Jim Biederman**, Anoka-Ramsey Community College

**Gale Bigbee**, South Central College

**Tracy Boyle**, Minneapolis Community and Technical College

**Jill Cadwell**, Century College

**Angela Coffee**, Century College

**Joanna Cregan**, Saint Paul College

**Jesse Dahl**, Hibbing Community College

**Fernande Deno**, Anoka-Ramsey Community College

**Rebecca Driscoll**, Anoka Technical College

**Angela Effertz**, Normandale Community College

**Nora Gibbons**, Saint Paul College

**K.C. Hanson**, Minnesota State Community and Technical College

**Catherine Haslag**, Riverland Community College

**Matt Hoepner**, St. Cloud Technical and Community College

**Miki Huntington**, Minneapolis Community and Technical College

**Kerry Jaeger**, Northland Community and Technical College

**Joel Jensen**, North Hennepin Community College

**Katy Lundell-Stuhr**, Ridgewater College

**Rita Miller**, Minnesota West Community and Technical College

**Carolyn Neubauer**, St. Cloud Technical and Community College

**Colleen Norgren**, Ridgewater College

**David Otto**, Central Lakes College

**Kathleen Porter**, Central Lakes College

**Tinna Ross**, North Hennepin Community College

**Nancy Shih-Knodel**, North Hennepin Community College

**Brad Thorpe**, Hennepin Technical College

**Alli Vainshtein**, Saint Paul College

**Kent Voelkner**, Lake Superior College

**Melanie Waite-Altringer**, Anoka-Ramsey Community College

**Richard Watkins**, Riverland Community College

**Suzanne White**, Normandale Community College

**Rhonda Wiggins**, Hennepin Technical College

**Karin Wright**, Rochester Community and Technical College

**Nikolay Zhelev**, Lake Superior College

## Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching

**Eric Friberg**, high school science teacher, West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan

## 2020 MNSHAPE Physical Education and Health Teachers of the Year

### *Health Education Teacher of the Year:*

**Jessica Matheson**, Rockford

### *Elementary School Physical Education Teacher of the Year:*

**Randy Spring**, South Washington County

### *Adapted Physical Education Teacher of the Year:*

**Jen Heebink**, Buffalo

## National Board Certified Teachers

### *The following Education Minnesota members earned National Board Certification in 2020:*

**Kara Cisco**, St. Louis Park

**Alyssa Barnes**, Edina

**Kristy Ardinger**, Edina

**Bryana Carlson**, Edina

**Brad Dahlman**, Edina

**Rebecca Holscher**, Minnetonka

**Laura Meyer**, Big Lake

**Becky Ryan**, Roseville

**Shannon Seaver**, Edina

**Margaret Trenda**, Edina

**Erica Wattson**, Edina

**Lucas Wax**, Saint Paul

**Daniel Mollick**, Edina

**Sarah Strauss**, Minnetonka

# CONNECTING ASPIRING EDUCATORS TO THEIR UNION, PROFESSION

As Megan Bartel starts the second half of her year of student teaching, she can't help but look forward to her future career in the classroom. She also looks forward to being an active teacher member of her union.

"I'm looking forward so much to get into a job, talk to my building rep, talk with the staff in my area and look at my contract," she said. "And that is just one resource that we have available to us."

Bartel, a student at the University of Minnesota-Duluth and president of the Education Minnesota Aspiring Educators program, says that there are student teachers in classrooms across the state who feel just like her, as well as many who don't know anything about the union, too.

"We are here and we are a part of the union as students," she said. "Building reps should be on the lookout for their practicum students and student teachers. Reach out and let them know they are a member. Send them to the Aspiring Educators program for resources."

Education Minnesota staff and the members of the EMAE program have developed a resource for cooperating teachers to use as an starting point for conversations about the profession and the union.

The resource was developed with the idea that many of our student teachers are stepping into the classroom for the first time and are looking to their mentors and cooperating teachers for tips, advice and guidance. The union can, and should, play a big role in fostering that relationship from the moment student teaching begins.

"Your student teacher is already probably a member," said Bartel. "A majority of schools use Education Minnesota as their practicum insurance. So a teacher could say, 'Who's your insurance? Oh, it's Education Minnesota. Did you know...!' and then talk about the union. Or if the cooperating teacher isn't comfortable, they could ask the building rep to have a conversation with the student teacher."

Knowing that 33 percent of teachers leave within their first five years, and many citing a lack of

support as being one of the primary reasons they leave, the resource offers tips and tools to connect with and encourage your student teachers to be lifelong members of the education community.

Bartel said she has been in multiple practicum and student teaching placements and she always has talked with her cooperating teachers about their local union. She has had some tell her to not get too involved and keep her head down, and one who was so excited about her position with EMAE that she walked her around the whole building introducing her as the EMAE president.

Bartel said she hopes sharing out this resource will be a useful tool for educators – both active and student.

"Please share your knowledge with the student teacher," said Bartel. "In Minnesota, it is such an important thing. We have all of these resources available. They don't know anything about it in their first year or two. People who don't get involved in college don't really know what it is."

The Education Minnesota resource document includes 10-minute meeting topics, one-on-one conversation starters and a section on preparing for tough questions.

"We are the future of the profession and of the union, and there are a lot of us who want to be involved," said Bartel.

**To learn more about the Education Minnesota Aspiring Educator program resource document, go to:**

**[www.educationminnesota.org/members-only/member-engagement/Resources/other-member-engagement-materials](http://www.educationminnesota.org/members-only/member-engagement/Resources/other-member-engagement-materials)**

**Members will need to be logged into the member portal of the website to see this content.**

## Professional development

### ***Parent Teacher Home Visit Initiative***

The National Education Association and Parent Teacher Home Visits Institute will be a part of the NEA's partnership with Parent Teacher Home Visits, the Centers for Social Justice and Great Public Schools. The institute's coaches will support participants to successfully launch a home visit practice by providing ongoing support to local union, community and school district partners. PTHV has recently adapted its model to include virtual home visits that build strong family-school partnerships during the current climate of remote learning. The institute will incorporate this new element into the curriculum. The application deadline is Feb. 5, and the institute will begin in March. Local unions can fill out applications at <https://form.jotform.com/203558915605157>.

### ***AFT Share My Lesson Virtual Conference***

AFT's Share My Lesson has dozens of new professional development webinars—available now, for free—to help educators navigate this new learning landscape. The site is also hosting a virtual conference March 23-25. The conference will feature more than 30 webinars, and conversations on health and safety, learning recovery, social recovery, summer learning plans and school reopenings. For more information, go to [www.sharemylesson.com/vc2021/savethedate](http://www.sharemylesson.com/vc2021/savethedate). Educators can also be entered to win a virtual learning care package when they sign up to receive information about the conference registration.

### ***Google Classroom, Seesaw webinar***

The National Education Association has released a webinar for educators on facilitating quality practice with Google Classroom and Seesaw. Participants will learn best practices for online learning, including instructor presence, learning objectives, real world applications, clear expectations, engaging students, prompt feedback and netiquette. To access the webinar, go to [www.nea.org/professional-excellence/professional-learning/resources/tq-distance-learning-webinar-2-facilitating](http://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/professional-learning/resources/tq-distance-learning-webinar-2-facilitating).

### ***Free Holocaust studies seminar***

"Honoring Resilience: Learning from The Holocaust and the Dakota Exile" will be held July 11-17 at Saint Cloud State University. Sponsored by The Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights, with additional support provided by Mount Zion Temple, Jewish Community Relations Council and the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Education at SCSU, the seminar is free of charge to participants. Attendees will explore lessons and activities for teaching about the Holocaust and Minnesota's Dakota exile through personal testimonies and place-based experiences, including day trips to Mount Zion Temple and Dakota sites such as Oheyawahi. Participants will receive copies of relevant texts, other resources and 65 continuing education units. Attendees will also be eligible to apply for classroom mini-grants of up to \$1,000 following completion of the seminar.

This is a semi-residential seminar experience, from Sunday evening through Saturday morning. Most meals and transportation to sites will be provided. Low-cost dorm housing will be available for those traveling from further distances. For further information, email [merrymeltz@gmail.com](mailto:merrymeltz@gmail.com). To apply, go to [www.toli.us/satellite-program/st-paul](http://www.toli.us/satellite-program/st-paul).

### ***Science standards, earth science cohorts***

The Minnesota Science Teachers Association has information on the changing science standards, and with a group of educators, is working on professional development to help educators prepare for new content outlined in the new standards. The group is currently developing a weeklong workshop for sixth-grade teachers in the summer and continuing the next three summers. There is also a high school professional development cohort being developed that will begin in the summer of 2022. The educators working on these sessions are currently looking for input from educators on interest for these sessions. Go to [www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ES-TEP.html](http://www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ES-TEP.html) to learn more and complete the survey.

## Delegate selection underway for 2021 Virtual Rep Convention

Plans are underway for the 2021 Education Minnesota Representative Convention, which will be held virtually Saturday, April 24. While the format may be different, this is still an opportunity for members to represent their colleagues on issues that affect all educators by seeking a post as a delegate or alternate.

Major business for delegates includes acting on changes to the union's constitution and bylaws and considering any action items. The rules for the virtual convention will be posted on Education Minnesota's website once adopted by the Governing Board. A ceremony celebrating the award winners traditionally done at the RC will be held on a different date, to be determined.

The deadline for local presidents to inform Education Minnesota of those who will be delegates and alternates to the RC will be 5 p.m. Friday, April 23.

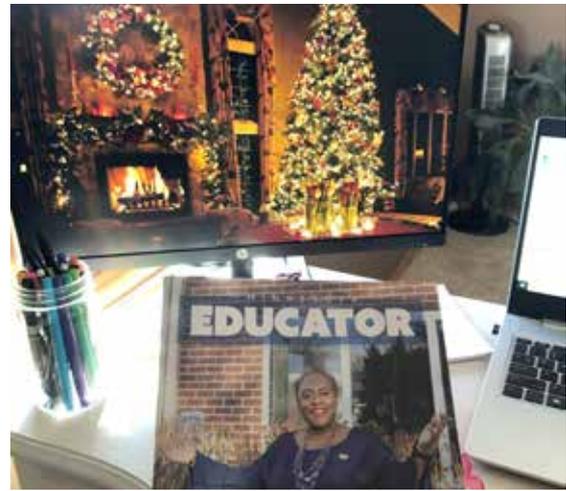
The number of delegates allocated to each local and statewide affiliate is determined by the number of members. Delegates are chosen by open nominations and secret ballot. Interested members should contact their local president for details on how to participate.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, locals may not be able to safely conduct in-person elections for delegates to the Representative Convention. Most electronic polling platforms don't comply with the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act because of the law's ballot secrecy and observation requirements.

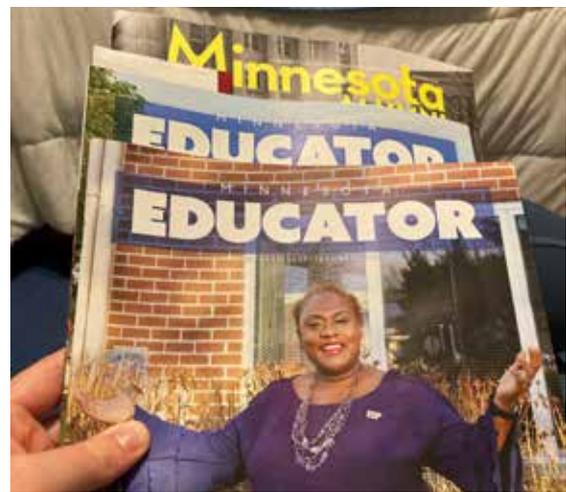
For locals who choose to conduct a mail ballot, the LMRDA requirements must be followed.

Education Minnesota understands that conducting a mail ballot election may not have been something for which your local budgeted. Therefore, Education Minnesota would like to help your local offset these unforeseen expenses. If your local needs to conduct a mail ballot election, the costs of doing so will be reimbursed by Education Minnesota. Local presidents received information on reimbursement.

## Where were people reading their Minnesota Educator? Read more about our contest on page 3!



*Karina Stripe, Owatonna*



*Amanda Mathison, U of MN, Twin Cities*



*Heather Carlson, Waconia*

# MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

## ESI Member Benefits

Education Minnesota ESI Member Benefits strives to empower members to maximize hard earned dollars, plan for the future and protect yourself and your loved ones.

### Discounts

- Zebit - shop and pay over time
- Online shopping
- Identity theft recovery plan

### Finance

- Credit Union
- Financial and Retirement Planning
- Mortgage Services

### Insurance

- Auto and Home
- Medicare and Health Insurance
- Long-Term Care and Senior Care

## No cost member benefit

Active members receive an identity theft recovery plan, paid for by ESI. Register for your coverage online.

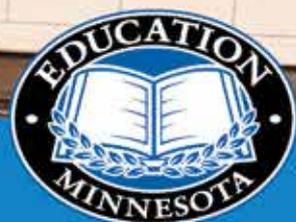
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THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL  
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## **Education Minnesota Foundation spring professional development grant deadlines approaching**

Applications for the second round of professional development grants and second-year classroom grants, from the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning are due April 2.

Professional development grants are intended to provide education support professionals, higher education faculty of colleges and universities, and teachers with opportunities to take the lead in acquiring and sharing new skills and knowledge.

These skills might include new instructional ideas, technology, working with parents, attending a conference, etc. Members may request a grant to acquire these skills and share your new learnings with your colleagues.

ESPs and teachers may request up to \$1,500, and higher education faculty may request up to \$3,000.

In addition to professional development grants for individual members, the foundation also offers applicants the opportunity to submit a professional development grant application for a group of members to either attend professional development or be trained at their worksite.

Professional development grants are awarded twice per school year – once in the fall and once in the spring.

Second-year classroom grant applications are also due April 2. This grant is intended for previous classroom-focused grant recipients who wish to expand on their original objectives, and who have the potential to realize additional goals based on the learning and outcomes of their first grant. Members may request up to \$3,000.

To learn more about the grants and how to apply, go to [www.edmnfoundation.org](http://www.edmnfoundation.org).

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