

The Power of We

Local leaders from around the state share the challenges they've tackled and the successes they've achieved in partnership with Education Minnesota.

Education Minnesota works at the Legislature to push for student loan relief:

“Education loan debt is out of control and crippling our students and working families across this country. However, my union, Education Minnesota, is working to make college more accessible and affordable for everyone. My fellow teachers and I are able to come together and fight for a system that is fair for everyone, not just the wealthy and powerful.”

Verlena Bradley, elementary teacher, St. Paul Federation of Teachers

New locals are joining Education Minnesota to be part of something bigger:

“We are excited to join forces with 85,000 union members and work with a union that will allow us the opportunity to manage our own unit, that listens to the members, supports us when needed and is powerful enough to help us reach our goals.”

Janel Monson, paraprofessional at Sunset Terrace Elementary School in Rochester and president of the newly organized Rochester Paraprofessional Association

Education Minnesota supports locals in grievances and arbitrations:

“In the fall of 2013, our middle school teachers agreed to work an overload schedule in exchange for smaller class sizes on a trial basis. We agreed to this trial with an MOU. When this temporary agreement expired at the end of that school year, the district sought to make it permanent without negotiating or providing additional compensation for teachers in accordance with the overload language in our Master Agreement. Naturally, our leadership team filed a grievance. At that point we called in Education Minnesota field staff to guide us through the grievance process, which ultimately led to an arbitration hearing.

Having not been through this process before, our leadership team relied heavily on our field staff and an attorney provided by Education Minnesota. Our field staff and attorney were there to walk us through every step of the process, from gathering documentation and witnesses to choosing an arbitrator. They were by our side throughout the process and represented us at the arbitration hearing. Ultimately, the arbitrator ruled in our favor, putting \$150,000 back into the pockets of our members.”

Cheri Stageberg, President, Stewartville United Educators



“Education Minnesota has helped our local with top-notch legal assistance. Even though we are small (around 60 members), Education Minnesota provided us with an attorney to assist us through an arbitration process. That attorney defended us and established a legal strategy that ensured a teacher was not denied the compensation that their education and experience warranted. They were responsive, available, efficient and professional all the way through the nearly year-long ordeal.”

Casey Bernston, President, Waubun Education Association

“Our membership benefitted immensely from the assistance of legal counsel from Education Minnesota attorneys during a recent dispute that culminated in arbitration. Our district didn’t want to recognize certain graduate credits for initial placement on the salary schedule, which we thought was wrong. Without the knowledge and expertise of Education Minnesota attorneys, which our dues help to pay for, current and future teachers coming into the profession would be making thousands of dollars less a year than they otherwise might have. Protecting salaries and the dignity of education is what the power of belonging is all about.”

Chris Swanson, Education Minnesota Cloquet

Education Minnesota helps local communities elect pro-public education school boards:

“Having a school board that can cooperate and work together is vital to move forward and work through the hard issues we face. People saw the community working with the DFT, labor organizations and Education Minnesota. This is a partnership, and the work that you put into it pays off.”

Bernie Burnham, president, Duluth Federation of Teachers. DFT endorsed four candidates in 2017; all of them won.

Educators value the professional development opportunities Education Minnesota provides:

“I want to learn something new, from different people from all over the state.”

Elaine Matama, education support professional, St. Paul Federation of Teachers

“The number one thing ESPs always say is they train the teachers, they don’t train us. And without the union’s support, we wouldn’t get any training.”

Lisa McQuerter, education support professional, Education Minnesota Osseo ESPs

Education Minnesota supports locals in levy campaigns to provide necessary funding for school improvements:

North Branch learned that harnessing the collective power of area labor unions, community members, parents and educators can bring even the most difficult “vote yes” campaigns over the top.

The district’s facilities and equipment sorely needed updating, but voters repeatedly rejected ballot measures for the necessary school improvements. Seven attempts had failed over the past 15 years. For the eighth attempt, North Branch brought in support from Education Minnesota and other labor organizations—three ballot questions totaling more \$75 million in upgrades passed.

“We wouldn’t have been able to come up with the money and the resources on our own to get the word out and get accurate information out to voters in a format they could understand. It takes everybody—parents, businesspeople, superintendents, teachers, janitors, local labor unions. It was a lot of people working together for the first time in a long, long time.”

Stacy Johnstone, president, North Branch Education Association

Education Minnesota attorneys help clarify legal issues and advocate for members in need:

“As a teacher representative for my members, I found that Education Minnesota’s legal staff have been able to assist me in a variety of ways. The lawyer I work with was able to make laws understandable, listened to my members, and offered guidance to help us get the outcome and support we wanted, and also willing to meet with us in my own district. I would not have been able to achieve our positive results for my members without the legal services from our union.”

Denise Casey, Member Rights Advocate, Education Minnesota Buffalo

Education Minnesota helps members face down attacks on educators and public education:

“As educators, we know there are some challenges we simply cannot take on alone. Such was the case for our Edina teachers last year when our schools and teachers were attacked by the Center of the American Experiment over declining MCA scores that made it (falsely) appear that our equity efforts were leading to a decline in academic achievement by students in our school district.

These attacks, in some instances directed at individual teachers, led to a significant number of threatening messages to our teachers and even death threats. Through it all, we relied heavily on the expertise and poise of our colleagues at Education Minnesota to guide us through this dreadful series of circumstances and we were able to experience, first-hand, the strength and the power that comes from a togetherness between our local and state organization. Ours was a real-life experience in the importance of how we are always stronger together.”

Tom Connell, president, Education Minnesota Edina