

MINNESOTA EDUCATOR

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2019

**OFFICER TEAM
READY TO LEAD
WITH NEW
PERSPECTIVES**

**BACK PAY CLAIMS
FOR FACULTY CROSS
\$100,000 MARK**



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THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

August/September 2019 – Volume 22, No. 1

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. Go to the News menu, then Minnesota Educator.

To reach the publication for queries, story or commentary ideas

Email: educator@edmn.org
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41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103

To report a change of address or end duplicate mailings, contact the Education Minnesota membership department.

Email: membership@edmn.org
By web: www.educationminnesota.org and choose
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To inquire about advertising in the Educator or on the website

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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 new
officer team began their three-year terms on
July 1. (From left) President Denise Specht,
Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe and Vice
President Bernie Burnham pose outside the
union's headquarters office in St. Paul.

UNIONS ARE HERE TO IMPROVE EDUCATION, OUR MEMBERS' LIVES

Maire Sustacek walked out of her union's office the morning of July 11 with 20,000 new reasons to look forward to the winter holidays.

The biology instructor had just filed a claim for \$20,655 in back pay as part of a settlement negotiated by the Minnesota State College Faculty union, a part of Education Minnesota, and the state college system.

Sustacek and hundreds of other faculty can expect payments by the end of the year because their union fought for them for years through grievances, arbitration and a lawsuit.

When educators want to improve their lives and the lives of their students, they go to their unions. Unions exist because members like you have seen the value of belonging. Here are just a few examples.

MSCF and Education Minnesota attorneys worked since 2010 to reach a settlement in May worth up to \$1.9 million in back pay for hundreds of faculty at the state's two-year colleges.

Nationally, the American Federation of Teachers is suing U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos because of her gross mismanagement of a loan forgiveness program for public-service workers. One of the plaintiffs is Janel Menzel, a math teacher in Brainerd with crushing education debt.

Many members of Education Minnesota shared similar debt stories as part of our work

advocating at the Legislature this year. Altogether, 493 members from 89 locals attended a lobby day.

Our work saved voluntary pre-kindergarten and persuaded lawmakers and Gov. Tim Walz to stop the growth of the special education cross subsidy. We overcame opposition in the Senate and finished with a funding formula that kept pace with inflation.

It's true we wanted more. Our union has said loud and clear that fully funding Minnesota schools—with smaller classes, more counselors, fair compensation, etc.—will cost between \$3.7 billion and \$4.3 billion in new state spending.

We're also on the record supporting tax increases on the wealthiest corporations and individuals to pay for it. In contrast, the professional associations of the school boards and top administrators were silent when the time came to say what schools really needed.

Educating students—no matter their race, gender or religion—should be the first priority of state government. Our union believes the educators who do the job deserve compensation equal to the importance and difficulty of our work. Further, we believe the chronic underfunding of student needs is unfair and shortsighted.

Those goals put us at odds with the wealthy few who rig the rules against working people

and try to divide and distract us along lines of race, gender and immigration status.

Many members have already received mailings from one of their organizations, the Center of the American Experiment, the local unit of the Kochs' national State Policy Network.

Most members trash the center's mailings, but some have been writing pro-union messages and returning them to the sender. One favorite was, "If teachers unions aren't needed, then why are the Koch brothers spending millions to destroy them?"

That's an idea worth stealing. We're mailing stickers to members, which can be used to respond to the union-busters or to show your union pride in other ways. When you do, please post on social media with the hashtag #chooseunion.

Our union and our vision for high-quality public education for every Minnesota student are under attack. Winning will require the voices, talents and, yes, dues, of educators throughout our state. We ask that you join with us, or stay with us, because we can build on what's working and fix what isn't. But only if we stick...

Together,



Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

Volunteer at, visit our State Fair booth!

Every year, Education Minnesota member volunteers and staff produce personalized photo calendars at our booth in the Education Building on Cosgrove Street near the Snelling Avenue entrance. Come visit our booth, or sign up for a shift.

The booth is open from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 22 through Monday, Sept. 2. Volunteer shifts include taking digital photos and acting as Education Minnesota ambassadors to fairgoers. In 2018, members produced more than 15,000 calendars for booth visitors.

Shifts are three hours long. Volunteers receive an admission ticket, T-shirt, mileage reimbursement and parking reimbursement up to \$10. Go to www.educationminnesota.org/events/state-fair-booth for more information or to sign up to volunteer.

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!

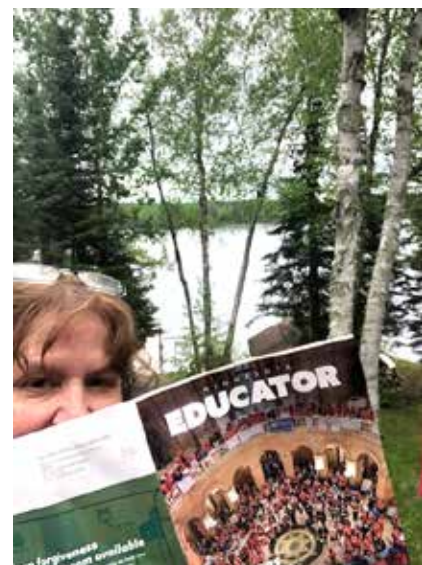


Where are you reading your Minnesota Educator?

Congratulations, Megan Lescarbeau from Hibbing, for being this issue's winning submission!

Summer has allowed the Minnesota Educator to travel the country, spend a lot of time outside with you all!

The contest continues! Email a photo to educator@edmn.org or share it on social media using #mneducator of where you are reading your Minnesota Educator to be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 gift card! Submissions are due Sept. 6. Happy reading!



Members in the news!

Education Minnesota members are often interviewed in their local newspapers or TV station. We will feature a quote each issue!

I remember sitting at the table watching my kids running around and playing and just thinking, man, I am stuck with this now. The freedom that would come with being released of the student loan debt kind of came crashing in in that moment.

— Janelle Menzel, a high school math teacher in Brainerd, said in a July 10 National Public Radio story about education debt and issues with repayment and loan forgiveness. Menzel is one of the educators suing the U.S. Department of Education, along with the American Federation of Teachers, to hopefully fix the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

OFFICER TEAM WANTS TO ENGAGE WITH MORE MEMBERS, KEEP UP MOMENTUM IN NEW UNION WORLD

President Denise Specht and Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe took office for a third three-year term July 1. They are joined on the leadership team by new Vice President Bernie Burnham. The Minnesota Educator sat down with the union's leaders to discuss their vision for the next three years.

Minnesota Educator: What can members look for as the new team takes office?

Denise Specht: A new team offers an opportunity for new perspectives, new visioning and a reintroduction of our union and our leadership team to our state. Members and locals can continue to count on the support and resources that Education Minnesota has always been providing. I think what they can also expect are more visits and getting the new officer team out to locals to introduce Bernie and get a really good understanding of how we can best serve our members in the next three years.

Bernie Burnham: I do hope to bring a new perspective. When talking to locals, I will be able to say, "I just did that." I hope to have that connection with people. It's very exciting. I can't wait to get out to all the corners of the state.

Rodney Rowe: I think since last year with the *Janus* decision, there is a lot to be learned. Things are different. We want to continue to hear from

members about how we can help them build a strong local. That is really what the union is—building your local to be the strongest it can be. There have been lots of new changes and I know the members will have lots to share with us, as well.

ME: What are your biggest hopes for the next three years?

DS: I was really proud of the work we did leading up to the *Janus* decision, and I was even more proud of the outcome. We are going to see drop campaigns continue. We are going to see the wealthy billionaires behind the *Janus* case continuing to drive an agenda that is meant to silence workers, weaken our voice in the workplace and at the Capitol.

Our members are choosing union. Unions are cool again. We have to continue to engage our new hires. We need to make sure our locals have a plan around having a conversation around standing in solidarity together.

BB: We need to continue to share our story about why we are in the union and why we are in this work. It's about telling your story about why you are doing this work and why it's so important. Beyond students and staff, what we do for our communities as a whole when we are strong. I am excited to share how we did this in Duluth and how others can be successful in sharing why unions are important.

RR: Our members in Minnesota embrace challenges and take them head on. The solutions are out there and our members will rise to the challenge to how we can remain a strong union. I look forward to hearing from them and looking at all of the good things we learned from last year and how we can build on them to create a strong union.



Newly-elected Vice President Bernie Burnham (left) was an active member and local president in Duluth before running for statewide office.



President Denise Specht (second from right) poses with educators from Intermediate District 287 during a get-out-the-vote event in 2018.

ME: What have you been most proud of, and hope to continue working on?

DS: One of the priorities that I had when I was first elected president was that the educator voice was strong and that we had as many educators out there at decision-making tables and talking about what is going on at their worksites, on their campuses and what students need. Having an army of spokespeople has been really important. We have Education Minnesota members sitting at the highest levels of decision-making power in the state, to members sitting on district taskforces, on county commissions, professional standards boards and everything in between.

We also started a conversation this session about what fully funding schools really means. My hope is that we continue to call that out, what we can do with that and how we can get there.

BB: The political action piece has been the most exciting thing in the last few years. Our job is political, period. Everything that happens at the state and federal level affects what we do here. We know what we do every day, and we need to remind people that we are educators, and we need to vote with that hat on. If we don't do what's best for children, get them educated and have our schools fully funded, then none of us are going to bode well. We had more people step up and be engaged in the last year and I hope that only continues.

RR: In the last few years, we started saying we need to "raise our voice." And our members are really stepping to the plate to raise their voices. I think of all the various events that we have and seeing that our newer, younger members are coming and are engaged and asking how I can use my voice?

Since we have started our student program, we have reached out to them, getting them excited about the profession and about the union. How can we continue to use our voice and be at the table all the time to make sure we are getting our students what they deserve?

ME: What are you looking forward to working on most?

DS: We are a union that makes ourselves better. We offer a lot of professional development and training that I hope we can make more people aware of, because if we aren't taking command of our own profession and improving the work that we do together, I don't know who will.

Our racial and social justice and equity work is absolutely important. Unions have always been part of the civil rights movement. I believe the racial and social justice issues of today will be the union's bread and butter issues of tomorrow. Because the bread and butter issues that we're talking about right now at the bargaining table were civil rights or equity issues back in the '70s when my parents were teaching.

BB: How can we continue to help our members be aware of how we can be better prepared in the classroom? I'm a big proponent of full-service community schools, coming from Duluth where we have three of them. How can we continue to strengthen that program? It's hard work, but it is exciting work.

RR: There is so much that we do professional development-wise that is so critical. We have learned so much about the importance of the one-on-one conversation. We have learned that the start of everything is that face-to-face interaction. I'm so proud of all of the members who are out there all the time telling their story.



Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe speaks to a motion on the floor at a previous Representative Convention.

MINNEAPOLIS ESPS REFOCUS ON ACTIVISM IN CONTRACT CAMPAIGN

After the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers Local 59's education support professional chapter settled its last contract, leaders knew that something had to change.

"A lot of people felt like they lost something with that contract, even though we did get some wins," said Ma-Riah Roberson-Moody, a special education assistant at Roosevelt High School. "That feedback from membership showed that we have to do something different as a union and as a chapter."

For Roberson-Moody, that meant stepping up to serve on the chapter's executive board and taking a very active role in organizing around its contract.

"We're focusing on trying to get people to stay involved and do more than what they've done in the past," she said. "In order for the union to change and for us to get what we want, everybody has to change."

MFT ESP executive board members started by going to their membership with a survey. They knew more communication was going to need to be a keystone of their contract campaign.

"About 70 percent of our membership responded," said Roberson-Moody. "We asked people what they felt about the last contract, what their biggest issues are in the worksites. We also asked personal questions to see where they are at, like is the district's health care affordable for you and are they working more than one job."

The results showed that a majority of the MFT ESP members are working two jobs, and a large number work three jobs. A large number of members also reported not being able to afford the district's health insurance plan, especially family coverage.

The negotiations team used the survey responses as a catalyst for what to focus on in this round of bargaining.

"In this round of bargaining, we are stating who we are, what we actually need and what we deserve," said Roberson-Moody. "Our proposals are bold, because people have had enough."

After the survey, union leaders went back to the worksites with a petition asking for fair wages and fully funding for Minneapolis schools.

Seventy-five percent of members at 62 out of 70 worksites signed the petition. The petition was then delivered to building principals, the school board and state lawmakers.

"Our membership was really able to come together," said Roberson-Moody. "The escalation is important. Testing the power and structure of your membership is important, and knowing that power you do have when you come together."

The next step was a rally at MFT headquarters on June 12. Nearly 250 ESPs, teachers and members of the public attended.

MFT ESP leaders are working to keep up the momentum during the summer months. They are starting to plan events where members can receive updates and be able to network and have fun, too.

The bargaining team is meeting with the district over the summer, but as of press time, had not received the district's final proposals.

"It's going to be a fight," said Roberson-Moody. "Everybody is really passionate about what they do and know they deserve more. People are starting to share that."



The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers Local 59's ESP chapter held a rally June 12 asking for a living wage for all employees in their contract negotiations.

MEA REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

Education Minnesota members can now register for the state's largest professional development conference.

The 2019 Minnesota Educator Academy (MEA) conference will be Thursday, Oct. 17, at the Saint Paul RiverCentre and once again, open to just Education Minnesota members and college students working to become educators.

The day will feature more than 80 workshops, with a focus on sessions that meet the state's relicensure categories. Keynote speaker Dr. Eddie Moore Jr., will kick off the conference by talking about why racial justice work is the work of all of us, no matter where we live or who we know.

Moore is the co-founder and director of The Privilege Institute and The National White Privilege Conference, which provide opportunities and possibilities for research, publications, speaking and collaborations by those committed to true social and institutional change.

He received his doctorate in educational policy and leadership studies at the University of Iowa. Under his direction and inclusive relationship model, the White Privilege Conference has become one of the top national and international conferences for participants who want to move beyond dialogue and into action around issues of diversity, power, privilege and leadership.

Education Minnesota members will need to register for the conference. Register early to get in to the classes you want. Same-day registration is possible, if space is available. To see the workshop listings and register today, go to www.educationminnesota.org/events/mea.

Attendees will receive a certificate of attendance at the end of each workshop session, but local continuing education committees will determine whether to approve the credit.

Education Minnesota will be offering free onsite child care during the MEA conference. Registration will open by early August, so watch our website for more information.

The service is open to kids ages 6 months to 10 years. ACCENT on Children's Arrangements

is open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. ACCENT has prepared a children's program called Camp MEA, which includes age appropriate, curriculum-enriched activities.

A preview containing the conference schedule and highlights will be in the October/November issue of the Minnesota Educator magazine.

A printable schedule and detailed workshop descriptions are available at www.educationminnesota.org/events/mea and on the Education Minnesota Crowd Compass event app.



Dr. Eddie Moore Jr.

The Minnesota Educator Academy (MEA) conference is held at Saint Paul RiverCentre in downtown St. Paul on the third Thursday of October each year. It includes a full day of activities on Thursday. There are no longer Friday sessions.

- ▶ **When:** Thursday, Oct. 17. No Friday sessions.
- ▶ **Where:** Saint Paul RiverCentre, 175 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55102.
- ▶ **Admission:** Free and open to Education Minnesota members only.
- ▶ **Registration:** Education Minnesota members must register for workshops.
- ▶ **Exhibits:** 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m.
- ▶ **Workshops:** 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
- ▶ **Child care:** Free onsite child care will be available for Education Minnesota members during the MEA conference. The service is open to kids ages 6 months to 10 years, and will be open from 7:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Registration will open by early August.

CAN TEACHERS EARN CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDIT AT THE CONFERENCE?

You might be able to earn clock hours and fulfill some relicensure requirements. You'll receive a certificate of attendance at the end of each workshop session you attend. Your local continuing education committee determines whether to approve the credit.

CLAIMS FOR BACK PAY IN COLLEGE FACULTY SALARY SETTLEMENT CROSS \$100,000 MARK

When Maire Sustacek began serving as faculty coordinator for the science and math departments at Minneapolis Community and Technical College, she noticed something seemed off on her paycheck.

"I saw how my pay calculation changed over time," she said. "First it was calculated as contract hours, then went to credits. I noticed the change and got in contact with my local chapter and grievance rep."

Sustacek was not alone in seeing how her pay rate changed for different portions of her work, and because of that, the Minnesota State College Faculty union started filing grievances with the Minnesota State system office.

According to MSCF, a number of colleges were not accurately calculating workload and the associated pay for certain faculty with certain assignments including flex labs, reasonable credit equivalence, independent studies, internships, combined classes, science labs and mentoring. The colleges were calculating workload by credits only or contact hours only, in violation

of the collective bargaining agreement.

"Workers expect to be treated fairly," said Matt Williams, MSCF's new president. "Our job here was to hold our employer accountable for treating workers fairly. The way the employer elected to interpret the contract meant them not paying for a certain type of work."

The union started filing grievances in 2010. MSCF proceeded to binding arbitration in 2016. The arbitrator ruled that Minnesota State violated the collective bargaining agreement and required back pay to the affected faculty.

"Once we heard about the arbitration, we went back to my admins and they said, no we're not going to do that," said Sustacek. "Throughout this whole time, it was really discouraging and disheartening to me to see my pay get cut."

Throughout the next year, MSCF unsuccessfully attempted to get Minnesota State to fully comply with the arbitration award. The union then filed an unfair labor practice lawsuit alleging, among



Then-MSCF President Kevin Lindstrom signed the salary settlement agreement in May, after nine years of grievances, arbitration and a lawsuit.

other things, that Minnesota State committed an unfair labor practice by refusing to comply with the valid decision of an arbitrator.

"The arbitrator said, you can't pay one person and not pay another person," said Williams. "The system office, a government entity, refused to abide by the arbitrator."

The lawsuit was finally resolved in May, and the settlement agreement finalizes the arbitration award and provides a mechanism for providing back pay to affected individuals for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 academic years. The settlement also mandated that the system make certain changes to ensure that it correctly compensates its faculty in the future.

Minnesota State faculty who qualify for the settlement will be able to submit claims to the system office. The office will review the claims and pay out any approved claims, up to a maximum of \$1.9 million.

The union estimates the settlement will directly affect between 180 and 700 instructors. Under terms of the agreement, faculty members must file a claim for back pay by Oct. 31, 2019.

"This is really complicated," said Williams.

"The union is here to understand it all and help you through it. We do such a wide array of stuff—distance learning, internships—there's no easy way to calculate it."

MSCF staff and leadership have been hosting one-on-one meetings with members throughout the summer and plan to continue these meetings around the state this fall.

As of press time, the union has held 70 meetings, which resulted in 20 claims totaling \$105,923.36. The average value of the claims is \$5,885.

"This is the value of belonging," said Williams.

"We're in this and are having face-to-face conversations with everyone to make sure they were paid honestly for what they worked."

Sustacek scheduled a meeting and was prepared for a long, tedious process, but after logging into the system to see what she was paid and what she worked, Williams and MSCF field staff Matt Ryg had her claim figured out in less than a half-hour.

Sustacek will be asking the Minnesota State system office for more than \$20,000 in back pay for the

four semesters in which she held science labs and worked as both a faculty coordinator and chair of the Academic Affairs and Standards Council.

"It means a lot to me to get recognition for the roles that I have taken on that are non-academic. These are often roles that admins are struggling to fill. To take a pay cut to do this roles felt really bad. This is a recognition that these roles are significant and helpful and take a significant amount of work," she said.

But the dollar amount is significant as well, Sustacek said.

"I have two young kids. When my compensation isn't what it should be, we have to make financial choices that can impact them," she said.

For Sustacek, this experience has solidified her as a proud union member.

"When I first became a faculty, I joined the union because why not," she said. "I thought though, I'm not a troublemaker, I probably won't need this. But I did need it, and not in the way I would have guessed."

"I was encouraged to see the work that my union was doing on my behalf. Many of us as faculty have had individual conversations with admins about issues that go nowhere because it's just one particular issue, and we don't have the time to follow up on those conversations. Without all those people backing me up, I don't think I would have ever gotten a resolution."

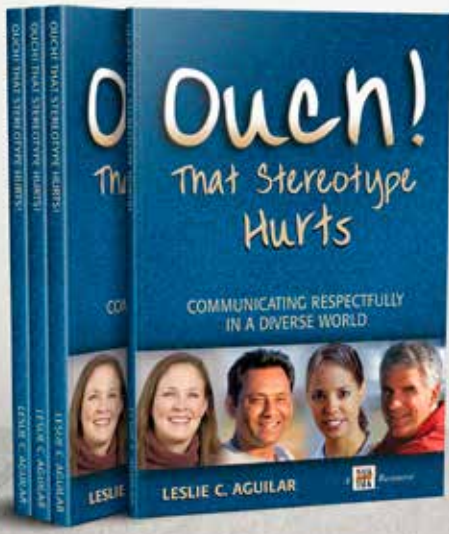
For Williams, this has solidified his belief in the power of the union and why he wants to be a leader.

"This is what we do. This is what we exist for," he said. "No one is asking for a cent more than what they honestly worked. We had an agreement that we respect and honor with our employer, and we hope they feel the same."

For more information about the workload settlement, including a workload calculator and information on upcoming meetings, go to www.mscfmn.org/workload-settlement.

MEMBERS PUT FOUNDATION GRANTS TO USE IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

The Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning offers a wide variety of grants to union members for professional development and classroom-focused projects. Three members shared their stories of how they are using the funds to help meet students' needs.



Osseo ESP Ingrid Miera used a professional development grant to hold a book study and reflections on bias and stereotypes with members of her local.

Ingrid Miera, ESL paraprofessional, Osseo

Ingrid Miera had begun a personal journey to work on her own anti-racist mindset, and wondered if other education support professionals in her district might also want to learn more about the topics she was studying.

Miera took a leap and applied for a professional development grant to create her own book study class in her local union.

The grant allowed her to purchase books and a light dinner at three meetings, held at the Osseo union office. Around 30 ESPs attended the class, facilitated by Education Minnesota staff member Allison LaBree.

"It's a training that you don't give to someone, you give it with someone," said Miera, an English as a second language paraprofessional at Fair Oaks Elementary in Osseo.

The first sessions focused on two books, but it was clear to Miera from feedback that the attendees wanted more.

Miera applied for another grant to continue to class. The second section focused just on the book, "Ouch! That Stereotype Hurts."

"ESPs sometime get PD and it's a quick thing, but this was giving them a deeper dive," said Miera.

The book includes scenarios, role plays and questions to reflect on. Miera used the grant funds to purchase journals for the attendees to use in their reflections.

"When you start, it can be scary and intimidating," Miera said. "I wanted the ESPs to have time to connect with each other and connect the learning to their work."

Miera had such a great response, she approached her principal to see if they could use a portion of their monthly ESP meeting to discuss this topic. The principal agreed.

She hopes to continue this in the next year, and is also reaching out to ESPs to see if other sites might also be interested.

Jennifer Pelletier, music therapist, Minnesota State Academy for the Blind

Jennifer Pelletier saw how much her students loved music, with one even planning on pursuing a music major in college. But they were leaving her school without any exposure to Braille music.

"Because most blind students learn music by rote, they don't have a clear concept of notation or the fundamentals of music other than from an aural perspective," she said. "At our school, we have shelves full of Braille music from past decades, but no students who can read any of it."



Jennifer Pelletier's students read Braille music using manipulatives, which she purchased using a grant from the foundation.

Pelletier first applied for a classroom-focused grant to help her students explore accessibility to music fundamentals—and expand on literacy—through a Braille music curriculum.

"This allowed us to introduce students to Braille music during our summer school session," she said.

Receiving the grant funds allowed Pelletier to purchase Braille music curriculum.

"We also purchased Tact-Tiles, which are Lego-like manipulatives with raised dots in the form of the Braille music code, and a Lime Lighter, which has an enlarged screen display and foot pedals to scroll through the music," Pelletier said.

"For our students who want to go beyond learning by rote, these tools can open the door to creativity, independence, and shared music making."

Pelletier applied for a second-year classroom-focused grant, which allowed her to focus on her low-vision learners.

"For them, the grant allowed us to invest in technology that enlarges music," she said.

Last summer, the students wrote short compositions for each other.

"A pre- and post-test showed a 60 percent increase in their skills, and they seemed to have fun in the process," Pelletier said. "It's extremely challenging to describe Western musical concepts without something tactile and fully accessible—especially when sighted peers have access to reading, writing and interpreting music very quickly."

"I don't expect our students to be reading Bach scores any time soon, but I think it's important for them to know what tools are available so they can make more informed decisions later in life."

FOUNDATION, CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

2019-20 Foundation Grants

For details about the grants and how to apply, go to www.edmnfoundation.org.

Bruce Vento Science Educator Grant

For educators who teach science as part of their day and want to acquire and share new skills and knowledge; this grant may also fund equipment or materials needed in science classrooms. Awarded twice a year.

Deadlines: Nov. 1 and April 3

Professional Development Grants for teachers, ESPs and higher education faculty

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

Educators may also submit a Professional Development Grant application for a group of members to either attend professional development or be trained at their worksite.

Deadlines: Nov. 1 and April 3

National Board Certified Teachers Scholarship

Members can receive \$500 per component, up to \$1,000 total.

Deadline: Nov. 1

Classroom-Focused Grants

Applicants may request up to \$3,000.

Deadline: Dec. 6

Second-Year Classroom Grants

Applicants may request up to \$3,000.

Deadline: April 3

IMPACT Grant

IMPACT Grant projects must be coordinated by an active member of Education Minnesota who has teamed up with a nonprofit organization or their local union/school district. Approximately \$15,000 is available for one year. The budget should reflect a one-year project.

Deadline: Jan. 10



Students in Mindy Christianson's high school English classes sit in one of seven different learning zones, which she has furnished on her own. Christianson has seen an increase in collaborative learning since switching to flexible learning spaces.

FLEXIBLE SPACES AIM TO GET STUDENTS COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO LEARN

Julie Beaver knows that her math classes at Zimmerman Middle/High School might not be a student's favorite place to be, but in the last few years, she has tried to make it a comfortable space to learn.

Beaver is one of the many Minnesota educators who have started exploring flexible learning spaces, by trying non-traditional classroom seating and room configurations.

Research on the growing trend is still limited, but a 2012 study from the University of Minnesota found a 48 percent increase in student's participation in classroom discussions

when they are in a more collaborative seating arrangement versus a traditional lecture-style setting. That study also found improvements on student performance on standardized tests.

But educators warn that it is not just about how you furnish your classroom, but also how you change the way you interact with your students in the space.

"The furniture helps a ton, but if I were to teach exactly the same way with cool furniture that does me no good," said Beaver. "I don't have to be the person lecturing in the front all the time. It didn't work really well in desks all the time either."

"Overall, it's less about the furniture and more about offering students voice and choice and including them in the design process," said Tom Deris, an elementary teacher in Prior Lake-Savage who loops second and third grades. "The success of this model does rely heavily on student ideas and interest and understanding that each group of kids is different."

"Even when I had desks, I tried to make my classroom very collaborative," said Mindy Christianson, a high school English teacher in Fergus Falls. "But the desks were getting in the way of conversations or getting into small groups."

Beaver, Deris and Christianson shared some of their philosophies around flexible learning spaces and how they set up their rooms.

Equipment/furnishings

Christianson's administration told her they would not purchase any non-traditional seating or equipment, but she was welcome to purchase or receive donations to furnish her classroom on her own.

Beaver and Deris also have outfitted their spaces on their own, with approval from their administrators.

"My philosophy is don't buy 24 of everything. Buy eight of this. Buy 10 of this," said Deris. "I had kids tell me don't do that or I don't want that. When I got my tables, my kids helped me research."

Christianson set up seven different learning zones.

"I spent the summer scouring Facebook marketplace, using wish list money from my district foundation and spending my own money," she said. "I have a traditional area and library. There's a bean bag area and a couple lounge-like areas."

Christianson said she also had some trial and error when it came to the types of seats that would hold up to high school students use all day.

Beaver has received all of her furnishings from donations.

"I put out a couple pictures of what my classroom was starting to look like and more people started donating," she said. "I got bar stools, a kitchen table, a craft table, two kitchen tables and a ton of comfortable chairs. I have 40 yoga mats, as well. Kids can sit on those, and we do some stretches when we all need a break."

For Deris, it's about making the spaces personal for the students so they can find what suits their learning style.

"I wanted to create personal space for students who need the space to concentrate and do their best work," he said.

Deris also reminds educators that modifying your classroom also requires a lot of storage and organization. He keeps some desks available in the hallway, but uses supply bins and lap desks for some of the seating options.

"It has to be functional and create an ease of space," Deris said. "The room has to be structured, but within the structure is flexibility."

Beaver and Christianson both kept some desks for students who want them.



Julie Beaver has outfitted her high school math classroom with non-traditional furniture, completely from community donations.

Usage/expectations

Deris believes that students need to have ownership in the classroom's set up.

"I set up the room based on what last year's group looked like. I pull in all the regular chairs. I put up my flexible furniture," he said. "I do two weeks of community building, getting the kids to know each other. I make seven rotations. You have to try every section of flexible seating at least for one day. I have then write down their top three choices. After they have all experienced the room, we talk about what works and what doesn't."

Beaver says she does surveys to check in with students on their seating choices.

"There were always kids who wanted to sit at desks. There were always kids who wanted to sit at the dining room table," she said. "I haven't really had any issues with classroom management, because they know if they can't handle it, they don't get to use it."

Christianson lets her students choose their own seats, and saw it contributing to a positive classroom climate. But she does monitor how students are using the spaces.

"It doesn't work perfectly for everyone," she said. "Ninth graders ended up getting assigned seats, but are earning back the freedom to choose. Really, the rules are the same than with desks."

Christianson also changes the seating depending on the curriculum.

"I put the bean bags away when we're doing speeches," she said.

Student reaction

Beaver's students have had nothing but positive reactions.

"The kids love it," Beaver said. "When they come in at open house, their eyes get really big. I have complete buy-in and parent support. Once they saw it, I got four or five more donations from parents after they saw what I was going for."

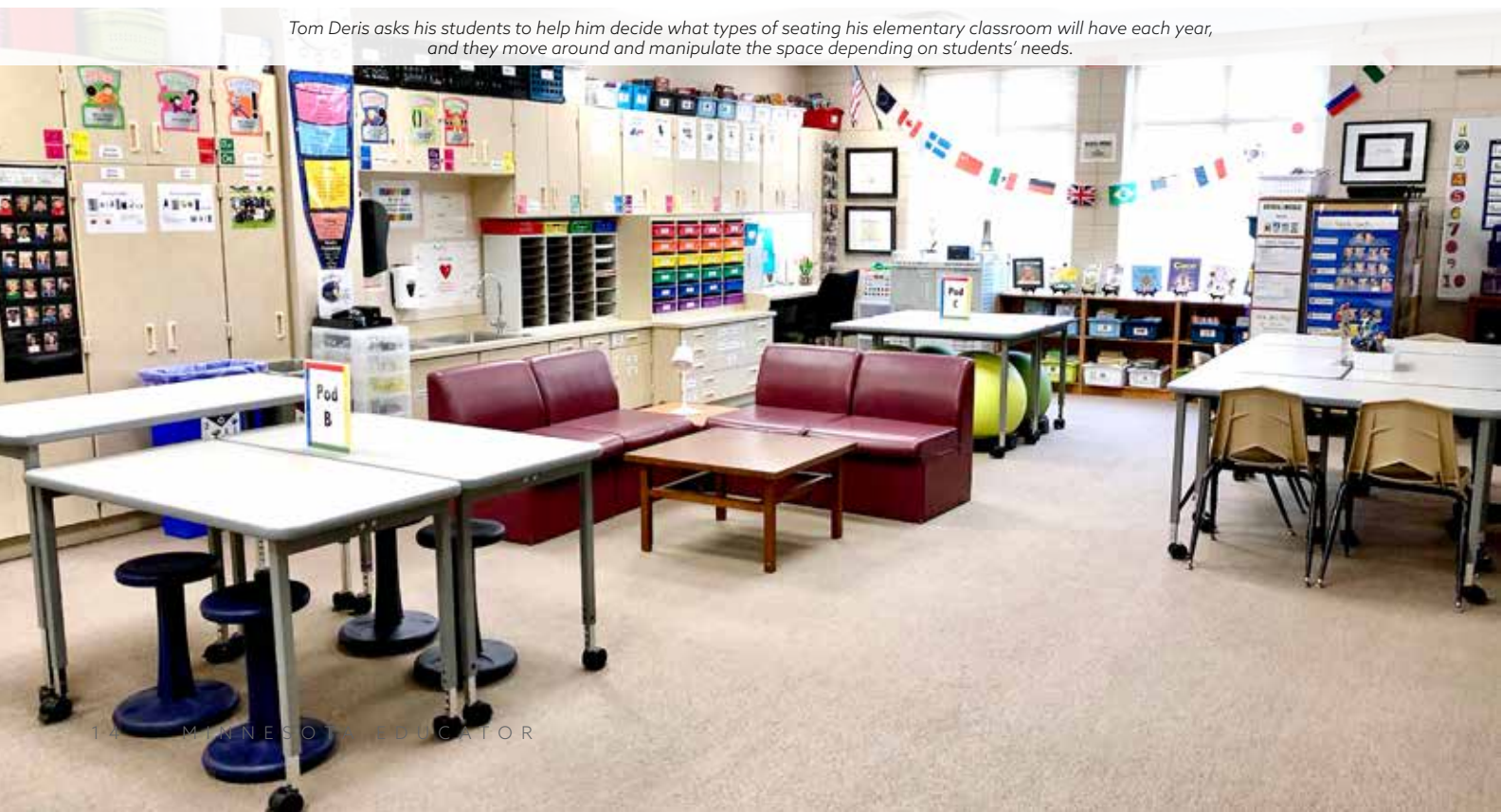
Christianson said that she has only had positive feedback.

"The students were super excited about it right from the get-go," she said. "Kids that I don't have will come in and say they want to be in my class."

Deris says he has seen behaviors improve.

"It's more about kids understanding who they are as learners. They know I need to go sit at this desk, or on this project, I need to work with somebody," he said. "I have seen a lot of friendships blossom. Kids are building more community this way. Kids are reflecting more on their own styles and traits."

Tom Deris asks his students to help him decide what types of seating his elementary classroom will have each year, and they move around and manipulate the space depending on students' needs.





Some of Pang Yang's students held a book reading at the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul. Yang and her Hmong for Native Speakers classes have published three books, using grants from the Education Minnesota foundation.

FOUNDATION, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Pang Yang, ESL teacher, Osseo

"Everything that we do, we need funding for," said Pang Yang, an English as a second language teacher at Park Center High School in Osseo.

That is why Yang applied for a classroom-focused grant to help her students explore their culture and share their stories.

"We started a Hmong native speakers program" said Yang. "I found a publisher that was trying to get more Hmong authors to write and publish stories about Hmong people and their experiences. He inspired me to work with my students to think about publishing a book ourselves."

Writing and publishing books are now embedded into the Hmong for Native Speakers class.

With the grant funds, Yang was able to bring in a Hmong hip-hop artist to talk with her students about writing poetry. He spent a week with Yang's 200 students, helped them write and then selected 40 poems, which were then published in "Hmong Youth Poetry Collections: From Mountains to 10,000 Lakes."

The grant also allowed Yang to purchase a copy of the book for each student author.

In total, Yang and her students have published three books. The other two titles are "Dear My Teacher: Letters of Joy, Pain and Triumph From Today's Teenage Hmong Students" and "The Cultural Dish: Behind Every Dish is a Story."

"The students love it," Yang said. "There are some students who are great writers and have their pieces in all three books. Some have it in just one."

Yang also brings student artists into the process, with artwork for each poem and the cover.

"With each book we try to make sure students are a part of the whole book—the title, the design, everything from the beginning to the end of the creation of the book," she said.

Students also have hosted book readings at local libraries.

"It's their time to tell their story," Yang said. "They have so much to share and so much to tell."

To learn more about the books published by Yang and her students, go to herpublisher.com.

Enter to Win an Academic Award



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We greatly appreciate your dedication to helping future generations.
That's why we are bringing back our **Academic Award**.
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LOCAL RACES CAN HAVE MAJOR IMPACTS ON SCHOOLS THIS FALL

Local elections have a major impact on our communities—especially our public schools and the education profession.

Education Minnesota can help your local create a campaign plan to win your levy or school board election this fall and in the future.

In 2018, 23 of the 32 local levies which Education Minnesota helped with passed.

Education Minnesota-Red Wing was one of those levies.

"We needed more money," said local president Kirby Hanson, of the two-question levy that both renewed an existing levy and added additional funding for programs that will benefit students.

Hanson started working with the "yes-yes" committee and several other teachers joined him. The local helped with literature drops, door knocking, phone calling, social media outreach and talking with the community at school events.

Through Education Minnesota's local election program, the local was able to receive phones and laptops to use, targeted phone number and address lists, printing and design services and strategic guidance.

"(The win) shows how a small group of influential people (our yes-yes committee) can work their butts off and steer a community toward positive decision-making," said Hanson. "It also illustrates how important teacher involvement is in our communities. Without our teachers, neither question passes."

The Centennial School District passed two questions last fall that will positively impact their teaching and learning environments.

The local union pushed the district to let Education Minnesota help.

"We would not have passed it without Education Minnesota's help," Centennial Education Association President Bruce Woznak said.

"Once Education Minnesota got involved, our local stepped up. We had 30 percent of our staff help out with the vote yes campaign."

How Education Minnesota can help your local

Working with other organizations

It's important to work with parent groups and levy campaign committees, school district leaders and AFL-CIO Area Labor Councils. Education Minnesota can help make connections through our affiliation with the AFL-CIO.

Data

Education Minnesota can create lists that target likely supporters and eliminate voters who may oppose your issue. Targeted lists reduce unnecessary work and help harvest supporters for your campaign.

Equipment

Locals can get cellphones and minutes at no cost for use in campaigns. Depending on availability, locals can also use Education Minnesota laptops and online phone lists.

Design and printing

Education Minnesota's in-house graphic designer and print shop can create and print postcards, signs and other documents for your campaign.

Financial resources

Education Minnesota's Political Action Committee makes funds available to locals for use in campaigns. To be eligible, a percentage of a local's members must be contributing to the PAC. The contribution level for 2019-20 will be available in early fall. Additional funding may also be available for locals.

To find out if your local is eligible or for how much, please contact Brit Hiedeman in the Education Minnesota public affairs department at brit.hiedeman@edmn.org.

Need help? Contact Jim Meyer, jim.meyer@edmn.org or 800-652-9073 x4813, for levies and referendums or Anna Brelje, anna.brelje@edmn.org or 800-652-9073 x4841, for school board races.

Political Action Committee Refund Request

Thousands of members of Education Minnesota decide to contribute to the union's political action committee. The PAC is one of our main tools to bring the educator voice to the policy debate by electing people who will listen. Those PAC dollars are used to win local levies and to back candidates and organizations that support lower class sizes, high standards and professional educators.

In accordance with Education Minnesota Bylaw Article 2, Section 3, Subd. b, I hereby request the following:

____ Please refund to me \$25 of my contribution to Education Minnesota's dues that will be contributed to the general account of Education Minnesota Political Action Committee for the 2019-20 academic year.

ALL OF THE FOLLOWING FIELDS ARE REQUIRED. PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY.

Name: _____

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Local/Affiliate: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

A request for refund of the Education Minnesota Political Action Committee contribution will not affect membership rights or benefits. Retired members are not assessed, thus do not qualify for the refund.

DEADLINE FOR REFUNDS:

Refund requests MUST be received by the Education Minnesota Political Action fund:

- 1) By Oct. 31 for continuing members; or
- 2) Within 30 days of signing a membership application for new members.

CHECKS WILL NOT BE MAILED UNTIL THE END OF NOVEMBER, AFTER ALL FORMS HAVE BEEN PROCESSED.

NO PHOTOCOPIES ACCEPTED.

Return this form to:
Education Minnesota Accounting Department
Attn: Refund Request
41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103-2196

Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Refund Request

Contributions to this foundation will provide financial support for innovative programs initiated by Education Minnesota members, locals and affiliates that promote educational access for learners and excellence in teaching. Grants also support professional development for education support professionals and higher education faculty.

In accordance with Education Minnesota Bylaw Article 2, Section 3, Subd. c, I hereby request the following:

____ Please refund to me \$ ____ (maximum \$5) of my Education Minnesota foundation assessment that will be contributed to the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for the 2019-20 academic year.

ALL OF THE FOLLOWING FIELDS ARE REQUIRED. PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY.

Name: _____

Last 4 digits of SS#: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Local/Affiliate: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

A request for refund of the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning assessment will not affect Education Minnesota membership rights or benefits but will make you ineligible to receive a grant from this foundation. Retired members are not assessed, thus do not qualify for the refund.

DEADLINE FOR REFUNDS:

Refund requests must be received by the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning:

- 1) By Oct. 31 for continuing members; or
- 2) Within 30 days of signing a membership application for new members.

CHECKS WILL NOT BE MAILED UNTIL THE END OF NOVEMBER, AFTER ALL FORMS HAVE BEEN PROCESSED.

NO PHOTOCOPIES ACCEPTED.

Return this form to:
Education Minnesota Accounting Department
Attn: Refund Request
41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103-2196

Professional development

FREE WEBINAR ON TEACHING AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

The Minnesota Historical Society is hosting a free webinar called "Teaching African American History: The Long Road to Civil Rights" on Aug. 29 from 3-4 p.m. The webinar will be hosted by Dr. Daniella Ann Cook from the University of South Carolina, and feature resources to help participants engage with students in ways that support culturally relevant pedagogical practice. For more information or to register, go to <http://education.mnhs.org/node/12671>.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION WEBINARS

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Project Learning Tree program has multiple online courses for integrating environmental education into your schools. The Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood course is designed for educators who work with children ages 3 to 6, and includes activities to help teach reading, writing and motor skills with a nature-based lens. Also available is a K-8 online course and e-book, and a course on starting a GreenSchools service-learning program. For more information about the courses, fees and how to register, go to www.dnr.state.mn.us/pltw/workshops.html and click on the course links.

ECOLOGY PROJECT FELLOWSHIPS

The Ecology Project International's teacher fellowships provide professional development opportunities for educators to collaborate with one another on real-world conservation projects and learn about EPI's methods for teaching field science. In 2020, fellowships will take place in Costa Rica, Baja, Belize and Yellowstone. Each professional development program is eight days. Program fees range from \$300 to \$600. This program fee covers all meals, lodging and activities. Applications close Sept. 1. For more information about the program, go to www.ecologyproject.org/programs/educator-professional-development/epi-teacher-fellowships.

INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY EDUCATORS CONFERENCE

The Information and Technology Educators of Minnesota conference will take place Oct. 10-12 at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest in Brooklyn Park. Keynote speakers include

Kristina Holzweiss, the 2015 School Librarian of the Year; Kelly Holstine, the 2018 Minnesota Teacher of the Year; and Dr. Sarah Park Dahlen, an associate professor in the Master of Library and Information Science Program at St. Catherine University. For more information about the conference, go to <https://mnitem.org/2019-Fall>.

Grants

TARGET FIELD TRIP GRANTS

Applications for Target's field trip grants program will be open Aug. 1-Oct. 1. Educators, teachers, principals, paraprofessionals or classified staff must be willing to plan and execute a field trip that will provide a demonstrable learning experience for students. Each grant is valued at \$700. Grants are to be used to cover field trip costs and fees. In the event the costs and fees are less than the grant amount, the balance of the grant may be utilized for other education costs such as materials, books and resources related to the curriculum. For more information or to apply, go to <https://corporate.target.com/corporate-responsibility/community/philanthropy/field-trip-grants>.

TOSHIBA AMERICA FOUNDATION K-5 GRANTS

The Toshiba America Foundation offers a grant to support math and science instruction at the K-5 level. Educators with innovative teaching ideas, specifically project-based learning proposals, can be awarded up to \$1,000 through this grant. Grant applications are due Oct. 1. For more information about the grant or how to apply, go to <http://www.toshiba.com/taf/k5.jsp>.

NEA FOUNDATION GRANTS

The NEA offers grants in two categories, Student Achievement and Learning & Leadership. Student Achievement grants are designed to help teachers engage students in critical thinking and problem solving in standards-based subject matter. Winning programs should also improve students' inquiry, self-paced learning and critical reflection skills. The Learning & Leadership grants fund professional development experiences and collegiate study for educators. Grants range from \$2,000 to \$5,000. The next application deadline is Oct. 15. For more information, go to www.neafoundation.org/pages/grants-to-educators.

FALL DRIVE-INS OFFER LOCALIZED TRAININGS

Many of Education Minnesota's intermediate organizations are scheduled to host professional development sessions in the upcoming months called fall drive-ins.

An intermediate organization (IO) is a regional grouping of locals—both ESP and teacher—working together on issues of common interest.

The function of fall drive-ins is to bring training, relicensure and continuing education unit opportunities to the IO's members.

Different drive-ins around the state feature different session topics ranging from union leadership, classroom management, professional practice, policy and politics and personal finance and wellness.

Session topics at some of this year's fall drive-ins include developing nurturing and professional relationships, financial planning for beginners, social media and student safety, bargaining communications, legal updates, treasurer trainings and how to deal with workplace bullying.

One of the main benefits of having these drive-ins is that the sessions are held locally. They also provide members an opportunity to network with other educators in your area.

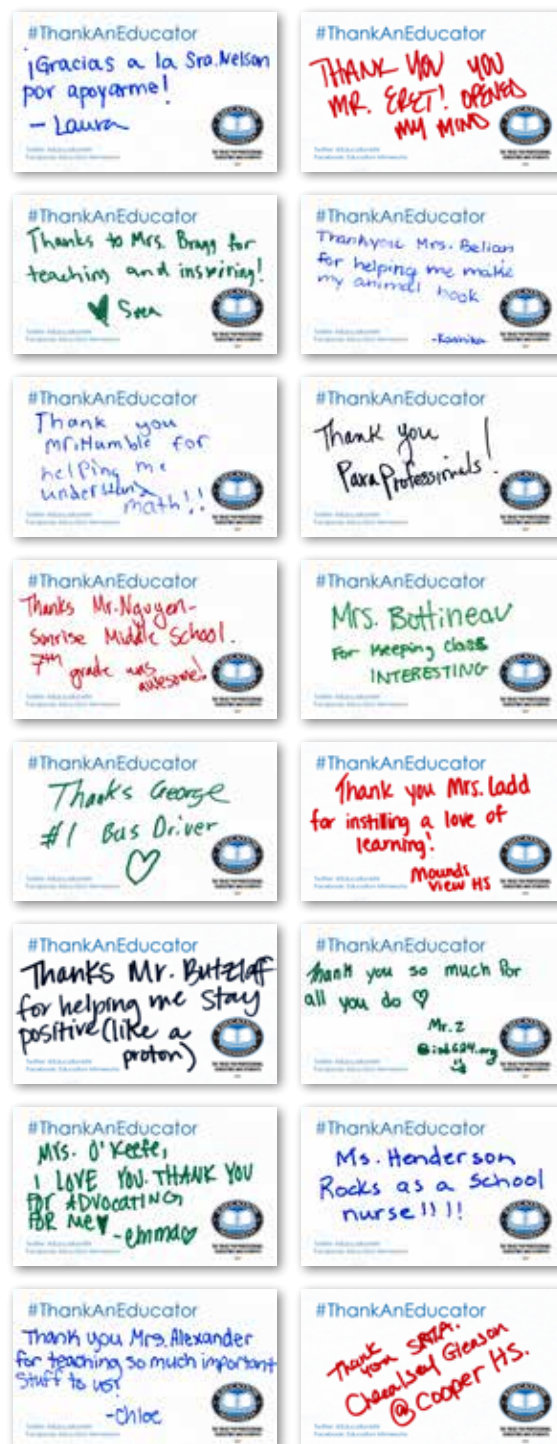
For more information about fall drive-ins in your area, talk to your local president or Education Minnesota field staff.

Most IOs post their events and professional development offerings on Education Minnesota's website calendar. Go to www.educationminnesota.org/events.aspx to see a listing of trainings offered in your area.

IOs promote strong, effective locals, and they provide support systems for members at the local, regional and state levels. The IO philosophy is driven by the belief that locals will achieve their objectives most effectively by acting in unison with other locals. Each IO has its own leadership structure, bylaws and dues system.

Thank an educator!

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. Keep an eye out for your name!



MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

WHAT IS ESI MEMBER BENEFITS?

Before a new school year begins, find out how Education Minnesota ESI Member Benefits can empower you to maximize your hard earned dollars, plan for the future, and protect yourself and your loved ones.

Discounts

- Zebit - shop and pay over time
- Online shopping
- Theater and activities

Finance

- Credit Union
- Financial and Retirement Planning
- Mortgage Services

Insurance

- Auto and Home
- Medicare and Health
- 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.

www.educationminnesota.securusid.com

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

esi.educationminnesota.org esi@edmn.org

Paid for by ESI, not by dues. ESI is self-supporting; revenues provide benefits, service and consumer education for members. What do YOU want to know? Send questions to esi@edmn.org.





THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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

Nominations open for the 2019-20 ESP of the Year

Nominations are open until Oct. 1 for the next Education Minnesota Education Support Professional of the Year.

The program honors exemplary professional and union work by an Education Minnesota member in any ESP job category, including paraprofessional/education assistant, secretarial/clerical, custodial, food service, maintenance and trades, transportation, grounds keeping, security, technology services, health services and others.

All Education Minnesota ESP members who have been members for at least three years as of Jan. 1, 2019 are eligible. Individuals can be nominated by anyone associated with Minnesota schools.

The ESP of the Year represents peers throughout the profession and connects to communities as an ambassador, and is Minnesota's nominee for the National Education Association's ESP of the Year award.

The ESP of the Year receives a \$1,000 honorarium, an iPad and a trip to the NEA's Education Support Professional National Conference.

To nominate a candidate for 2019-20 Education Minnesota ESP of the Year, go to www.educationminnesota.org/resources/esps/esp-of-the-year-nomination-form.