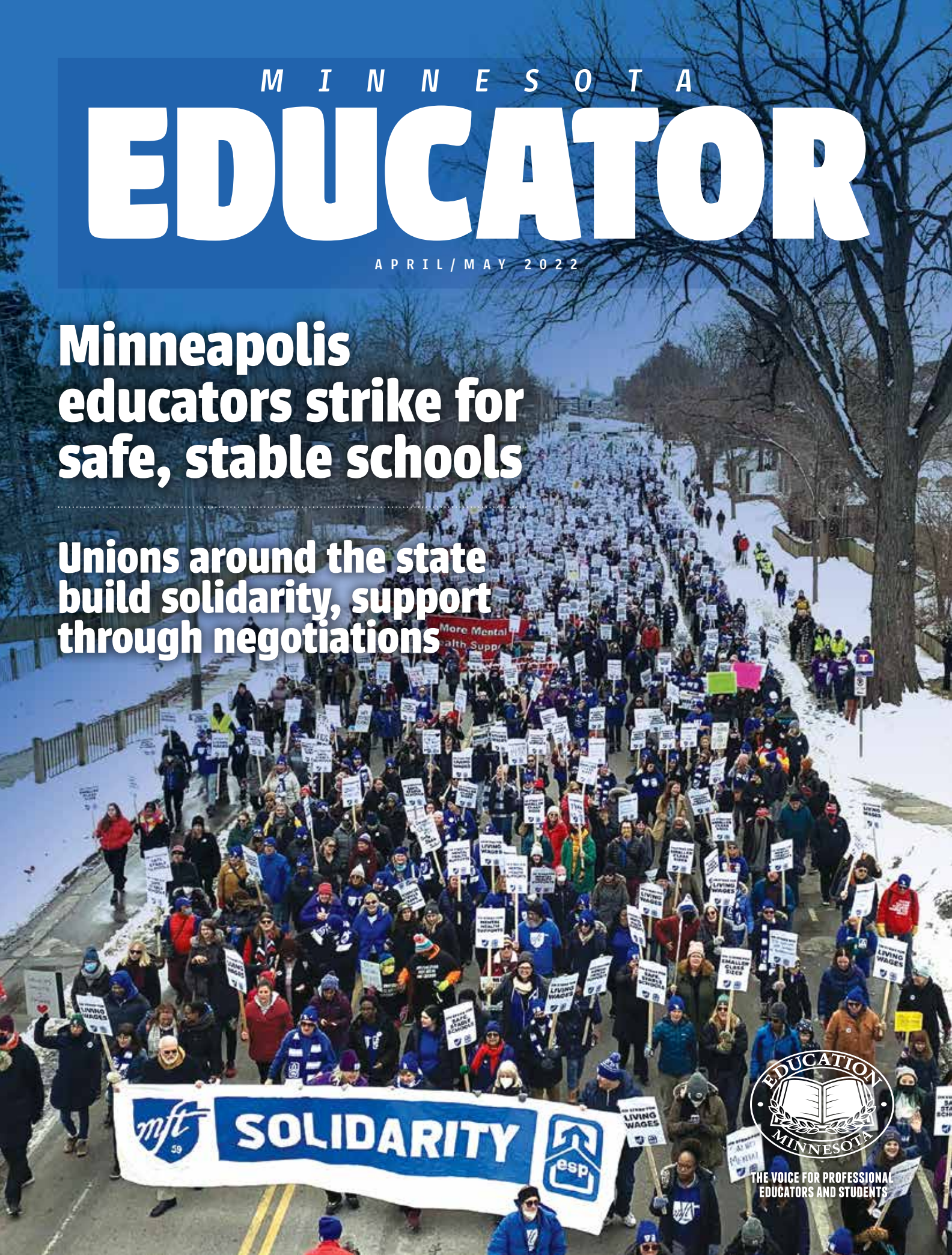


MINNESOTA EDUCATOR

APRIL/MAY 2022

**Minneapolis
educators strike for
safe, stable schools**

**Unions around the state
build solidarity, support
through negotiations**



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

February/March 2022 – Volume 24, No. 5

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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 CREDIT: DOUG DOOHER

Thanks to all the educators still fighting the status quo

With all that has been written about the Great Resignation, it's time to say thank you to the tens of thousands of educators working in union to improve the unacceptable status quo and join this moment of Great Resilience in Minnesota's public schools.

We withstood two years of COVID-19 restrictions, illness, chaos and stress. We're springing back from the attacks by big money groups on our efforts to keep students safe, to reduce the racial opportunity gaps and to teach an honest history of race and racism.

As I write this, 36 percent of our 355 locals in regular school districts have unsettled contracts. That's more than 28,100 members, including the striking educators in the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals, still pushing for better learning and working conditions.

I've visited more than 190 districts this school year and I've heard the same stories and challenges wherever I go. This year, we're all fighting for the same things.

There's not enough time to teach. We're living in a mental health crisis that's getting worse. Redundant paperwork is burning out special education teachers. Our schools are failing to recruit and retain enough educators of color. ESPs need big raises just to survive. Administrators ignore our input on important decisions.

In early March, these issues brought our union family to the edge of a strike in St. Paul and pushed the members of the MFT to the picket lines for the first time since 1970. For educators outside the Twin Cities, their issues are our issues. Their fight is our fight.

They're the same issues Education Minnesota is pushing for at the Legislature. With a \$9.25 billion budget surplus, the state can afford to pay for progress in every district. It's only a matter of priorities, values and political will.

Some groups at the Legislature have other plans for the money, including more tax breaks for the wealthiest corporations and richest households. We cannot allow certain politicians, and the multi-millionaires who fund their campaigns, to continue rigging the tax code against working families.

Instead, I believe educators all over Minnesota can take inspiration from the striking Minneapolis educators who

have marched, chanted and even danced through the cold and snow for the safe and stable schools their students deserve. If they can find that energy, so can all of us.

Please support our Minneapolis educators by going to www.safeandstableschools.org

and follow the links to donate to the strike fund, sign a petition, write a letter to the board of education or any of the other engagement opportunities.

At the Legislature, tell your local lawmakers that students and educators do their best when they are in environments where they feel welcome and supported. Minnesota must spend a meaningful portion of the surplus on the mental health of students and educators, which means funding schools so they can hire more counselors and other mental health professionals.

And when we turn even more of our attention to the 2022 campaigns for governor, constitutional officers and the state House and Senate, we will need to say loud and clear that everyone who works in public education deserves respect. We need to elect leaders who will work together with educators and recognize our work, expertise and effort with fair compensation and safe working conditions.

Without respect for educators and easy access to mental health care for everyone who needs it, offering every Minnesota student a great public education will only get more difficult. Today, I'm thankful for all the educators bringing their passion, commitment and resilience to make the changes we all want for our students.

Together,



Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

Summer Seminar is back!

Enhance your personal and professional skills at Education Minnesota's annual Summer Seminar.

In 2022, Summer Seminar is planned on being held in person at the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph from Monday, Aug. 1 to Wednesday, Aug. 3.

All active Education Minnesota members are invited to choose from dozens of different course options that will improve professional skills while connecting you with other educators from around Minnesota.

We will offer a multitude of courses that fall into strands such as negotiations, racial and social justice, member engagement and organizing, personal finance and union role training.

We offer a number of member-led courses. This is an excellent opportunity to gain professional development created by educators for educators. Watch www.educationminnesota.org/events/annual-events/summer-seminar/ for registration information soon!

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!



Richard Rosivach
@rosivachr

I'd like to thank the Freedom Foundation for paying for my postage as I reaffirm that I am and will continue to be a proud member of @EducationMN



4:42 PM - 3/4/22 - Twitter for Android

Where are you reading your Minnesota Educator?

Congratulations, Maggie Killeen of Saint Paul, 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 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 May 13. 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!

“

Northern Minnesota desperately needs more people like (these), educated professionals committed to settling in and helping address the region-wide shortage of mental health providers.

”

– Lake Dziengel, associate professor at UMD and University Education Association member in a Feb. 14 MinnPost article. The UMD program Dziengel works with offers \$10,000 stipends to offset the cost of the unpaid internship requirement for a social work masters' degree.



Educators spent mornings on the picket lines at their worksites, followed by afternoon mass actions like this one in downtown Minneapolis March 10.

Minneapolis educators strike for safe, stable schools

The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals teacher and education support professional chapters went on strike March 8, the first educator strike in the city in 52 years.

As of press time, the union's two bargaining units of more than 4,000 members were still out on strike.

"We've got teachers and ESPs and RSPs in Minneapolis working together like never before," said Shaun Laden, MFT ESP chapter president. "This time, it's different."

The ESP and teacher units are each bargaining their own contract, but they are doing it together to support each other and fight for a more systemic change in the district.

"After 50 years of knowing this isn't right or isn't feeling good, we're in this place where we can take some real action," said Greta Callahan, MFT teacher chapter president.

"What's been really powerful is our local decided we wanted to do things differently after the last few bargaining cycles and how things have gone," said Laden. "We really shifted our local mindset that bargaining is more about how prepared we are in our buildings."

The strike comes after 13 months of negotiations and mediation with Minneapolis Public Schools.

The strike authorization votes were held in school buildings in mid-February for four days.

The teacher chapter had a 96 percent turnout and 97 percent said yes.

The ESP chapter had a 93 percent turnout of their members and 98 percent voted yes.

Both units saw membership rise in anticipation of the strike. The ESP chapter saw more than 200 new members sign up so they could participate in the vote and strike.

"This is a statement from thousands and thousands of educators supporting over 30,000 students that it doesn't have to be this way, and we're going to do something about it," said Callahan, the night of the vote announcement.

MFT is calling their strike action a call for "Safe and Stable Schools."

Their major asks are:

- A living wage for ESPs.
- Contract language that calls for recruitment and retention of educators of color.
- More mental health staff to improve student-to-staff ratios.
- Contract language for class size caps.
- Competitive compensation to retain licensed staff.

"Our students and educators continue to do so much more with so much less and those at the top continue to less with so much more," said Callahan. "Our students can't afford to lose another great educator. Our students can't afford to sit in classrooms with 45 other students trying to learn."

ESP pay is the top priority for both units.

"Education support professionals are not being paid living wages. More than 70 percent of our members are working second and third jobs," said Mikel Herb, a Minneapolis ESP. "We're just asking to earn a living wage and work one job."

"ESP's keep the school running," said Patience Dolo, a counselor at North High School. "If they get a raise, that's what is most important."

Recruitment and retention of educators of color is also a top priority, so that the staff of Minneapolis schools looks more like its students.

"Our hourly workers are our most diverse workforce," said Laden. "We talk a lot about equity in our district, and one of the biggest things we can do to improve

equity and provide equity in our district is to pay our hourly workers a living wage."

The union's proposals for supporting educators of color include a mentoring program where educators of color would have mentors of color, professional development to disrupt and dismantle racist behaviors, exit interviews for any educator of color with a process for repairing harm, and culturally responsive support for educators of color to increase retention and success.

What you need to know:

- **Strike vote totals:**
 - *Teacher chapter: 96 percent member turnout, 97 percent voted yes.*
 - *ESP chapter: 93 percent member turnout, 98 percent voted yes.*
- **More than 200 ESP members have joined MFT since the strike talks happened. Teacher member applications have also increased.**
- **The teacher and ESP bargaining units are bargaining separate contracts but are united in their messages and priorities.**
- **A living wage for ESPs is the top priority of both the ESP and teacher chapters.**
- **Other top priorities are:**
 - *Contract language that calls for recruitment and retention of educators of color.*
 - *More mental health staff to improve student-to-staff ratios.*
 - *Contract language for class size caps.*
 - *Competitive compensation to retain licensed staff.*
- **The ESP chapter started the year with more than 200 open positions.**
- **Minneapolis Public Schools has lost 640+ educators in the last 18 months.**



Strike lines moved to overpasses and high-traffic areas to make sure their messages were heard by the community.

"We are hopeful district leaders will be ready to enact systemic changes to recruit and retain educators of color within our contract versus band aids," said Edward Barlow, a teacher and negotiations team member.

The strike comes after particularly tough bargaining taking place in the context of a once-in-a-generation pandemic.

In January 2021, after attempts to bargain over teacher and ESP working conditions during the pandemic, MFT filed an unfair labor practice charge with the Public Employment Relations Board against Minneapolis Public Schools.

Also in January 2021, the union filed a motion for a civil injunction over issues around returning to in-person learning. The Hennepin County Fourth Judicial District Court ruled that the Minneapolis Public School District could not require staff to return to work in person if they had previously received or are in the process of obtaining an accommodation to work from home.

"We don't have a budget crisis in Minneapolis Public Schools," said Laden. "We have a values and a priorities crisis."

During the strike, educators picket at school sites across the city each morning and often come together for a mass action midday – rallying at the State Capitol, in downtown Minneapolis and at the district headquarters.

"The solidarity and the unity that we feel and the support from the community has been amazing," said Stephanie Schreiner, an academic coach at Jenny Lind Elementary.

At the rallies, members of the bargaining team spoke about what was happening during mediation.

"At the bargaining table, the district wants to share space, but not power," said Daniel Perez, a teacher and negotiator. "We are the people in the classrooms closest to the students. We should have a seat at the table."

Educators also did multiple shifts of door knocking in the neighborhoods of their community, talking with parents and others about why they were out on strike and how the public could support them.

Educators and community members also gathered to write letters to the school board and superintendent.

Out on the strike lines, the message was clear: This is a joyful and powerful fight. A message that educators hope will carry on throughout the future of MFT and MPS.

"This is just as much for us as it is for future teachers," said North High School math teacher Tyler Salone. "This isn't just a change for us but for the future."

Strong solidarity was a hallmark of the strike lines at worksites. Many parents, students and community members joined educators on the line.



Support for ESPs crosses all bargaining units in negotiations

Minneapolis and Saint Paul are the latest examples of locals who have two or more bargaining units in negotiations and whose licensed staff are putting education support professional issues at the forefront.

"We've never worked closer," said Shaun Laden, the ESP chapter president of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals. "A lot of credit goes to (the licensed staff) really being clear that ESP pay is our top issue for our local as a whole. In our ESP chapter, it's lifted a lot of spirits to hear our licensed colleagues say this is their biggest priority."

The top priority for both MFT units while in negotiations has been for ESPs to make a living wage. Their proposal to the district, as of press time, was a starting salary of \$35,000. The local is on strike because the district is not agreeing to this proposal and more, as of press time.

"I've been doing this job for over 10 years for Minneapolis Public Schools, but still my pay stub from last year, I barely made over \$20,000 dollars," said Elizabeth Thompson, an ESP member.

The Saint Paul Federation of Educators settled their contract the night before they were set to go on strike. SPFE went on strike in 2020 over issues like increased wages and support for ESPs, as well as more mental health supports for students and class size caps. During negotiations, the local wanted to build on the improvements for students and educators from two years ago, as well as keep some of the wins the district was proposing to remove.

"This round was quite different in that the district truly believed we were ready to go on strike again," said SPFE President Leah VanDassor. "We made it clear to them that our membership was ready to walk over educational assistant pay levels, even though they are a fairly small portion of our overall membership. We all know how valuable EAs are for our students and our district."

SPFE proposed and won significant wage increases for EAs and technology that would allow them to better perform their jobs and communicate with families. The tentative agreement was ratified by SPFE members on March 16.



A living wage for ESPs is the top priority for both Minneapolis bargaining units — teachers and ESPs.

In Saint Paul, educational assistants will receive an average 13.5 percent wage increase. By the end of the contract, the starting hourly rate for EAs will be at \$18.82, up from \$15.94. The median compensation for EAs will be at \$49,664 by the end of the contract. All staff will receive a \$3,000 one-time recognition payment for pandemic work (\$1,500 for those who worked during the 2020-21 school year and \$1,500 for work in the 2021-22 school year). ESPs will also receive an increased employer contribution to health insurance.

Osseo ESPs also saw support from their licensed staff union and other bargaining units throughout negotiations.

"Everybody was struggling," said Becky Hespen, the Osseo ESP president, last spring. "We know there is power in numbers. We're separate locals, but we are all Education Minnesota."

"Together that voice is amplified," said Kelly Wilson, the president of the Osseo teachers local, who also represents the Kidstop instructors and nurses, about supporting the ESPs during their bargaining. Wilson and his unit didn't start formally bargaining until the ESP contract was settled.

Local unions continue to build power through negotiations

Most local unions across Minnesota either recently settled or are still trying to settle their 2021-23 contract. Many are using their contract to make important changes in order to support their members and their schools. Four locals shared their stories with the Minnesota Educator.

Lake Park-Audubon

Changes in district leadership last summer made Education Minnesota Lake Park-Audubon's negotiations complicated, but they persevered to get a fair contract.

"This is the second time our superintendent has changed during negotiations, which makes us start over," said Raina Askin, teacher and negotiator. "But this year for the first time, the district brought in a lawyer."

The district team also came to the table with 38 pages of edits, thanks to a review of their contract by the Minnesota School Boards Association.

"Thankfully they realized they couldn't make all those changes," said Amanda Snyder, local co-president and negotiator.

"It did make our membership very nervous initially," Askin said. "Our contract is long because of our district consolidation, but there is history in that contract."

Salary is always a top priority, specifically catching up to surrounding districts, said Askin.

"About 10 years ago, the teachers were asked for a pay freeze and didn't get a step," she said. "Then we had a few years of 'less than 1 percent.' People can hop to the next district and make \$10,000 more."

After a long negotiations process, the union got an agreement they could feel good bringing to members.

The union got a \$1,500 increase on each cell, an overall 2 percent increase this year and 2 percent next year.

"For the first year, depending on what cell placement you are, that could be about a 4.3 percent increase," said Askin.

The local also got some good language changes on leave, including adding a reference to pandemic leave in their sick leave bank and sick leave at retirement going into a 403(b) account.

Wrenshall

In Wrenshall, a huge focus of the local union has turned to lifting up the voices and stories of their members.

The local has started highlighting members and who they are, as well as things happening within their schools, on their Facebook page.

"It was time to get out there and let the community know what we're doing and the value that we add," said Denise North, Education Minnesota-Wrenshall president.

As of press time, the local is heading into mediation for contract negotiations, but North hopes that the communication strategy will continue after bargaining.

"We're not always getting a huge amount of interaction, but we know people are reading them," North said. "People say they like seeing the posts, so we know we're educating the public."

North said one member sent out a Google form for people to fill out with what information they would like shared.

The local also meets on a regular basis, not just on bargaining but education issues and what's going on in the district.

"The work and effort that we've put into our kids having a safe space either virtually or in person was a big catalyst for us coming together more," said North.

Wrenshall also started communicating with neighboring district, Barnum, about their negotiations.

"We are both still without a contract," North said. "One of our members is a parent in Barnum so they spoke at a board meeting and a couple of our members went to the meeting too. We want to be that visual that we are working together."

Barnum

Education Minnesota-Barnum is trying a new strategy around negotiations—member organizing.

Kristen Helland and other members formed an organizing committee this year around contract negotiations. As of press time, the local was headed to mediation.



"Historically, we've never been able to settle a contract on time," said Helland. "And when we do settle, it's not great."

In her 14 years in Barnum, Helland said her pay has been frozen two or three times and other contract increase never caught them up.

That frustration is what got Helland involved.

"I decided to get involved because if we just do what we've always done, we're going to get what we always get," she said.

The organizing committee worked with their Education Minnesota field staff and organizer to come up with a plan. The group meets regularly with them for support and ideas.

"We started pretty small and we're still doing things fairly small," Helland said.

The local started with getting everyone a union shirt and also having people wear black on Tuesdays, the day of school board meetings. The union has been going to school board meetings and speaking about how they feel as district employees.

"We try to highlight who we are and what our reality is," said Helland. "We're going to lose our teachers. We're not feeling valued or supported."

The local also is getting out into the community. They made buttons and stickers and hung posters on their classroom doors. They handed out snacks at conferences and basketball games with their union logo on it. They are trying to get more members highlighted on their Facebook page.

The local is also partnering with neighboring Wrenshall to support each other.

Helland hopes that this organizing and member engagement will soon become the norm in Barnum.

"Once we get through negotiations, we'll talk about how we plan long term," she said. "We've been emergency organizing. We need to build a strong infrastructure."

Northfield

Northfield teachers wanted to focus their negotiations efforts on issues highlighted by the pandemic.

"While enduring the stress of a pandemic, our members really valued their time," said Northfield Education Association local president Kevin Dahle. "We used the idea of 'teachers needing more time' in laying out our language requests."

The union looked to increase paid time off and secured an additional three personal days and an additional workday between quarters.

"We can use those workdays for planning and grading and those days can be done remotely at home," said Dahle.

With the staffing issues in the last two years, the union also wanted to focus on recruitment and retention with salary increases and other benefits.

"The district agreed to shrink our steps from 15 to 10, essentially removing the bottom five steps of our schedule," said Dahle. "This means our starting salary in Northfield this year is at \$49,783 and next year's starting salary will be set at \$50,779. This is a win for our new teachers but also allows staff to get to the top sooner."

The new contract also adds a 5 percent increase toward health insurance, increase in the district's 403(b) match and an overall 2 percent salary increase each year.

The Northfield Education Association has a history of finding creative ways to reach their negotiations objectives, said Dahle. And they make sure those objectives are rooted in their members' stories.

"Real life situations in our professional work settings have been the backdrop for our collective bargaining sessions," he said. "We will continue to appeal to the better nature of those at the table, to ensure our teachers are fairly compensated financially, with a contract that provides for us professionally."

Education Minnesota candidates' election statements

At the 2021 Representative Convention, delegates will elect the leaders for Education Minnesota. Positions to be filled are: president, vice president, secretary-treasurer and NEA director (two positions).

All candidates had the opportunity to submit a statement and/or photograph. These statements and photos appear here in the Minnesota Educator and on the Education Minnesota website. Members may view the statements online by going to www.educationminnesota.org, signing in and then clicking on the Elections tab.

Candidates for President



Denise Specht

Denise Specht

Centennial Education Association

We can have better lives at work and at home. Students can thrive in our schools and on our campuses, no matter the color of their skin, where they live, who they love, or where they pray. We achieve our dreams for educators and students by collectively working in union, rejecting efforts to divide us by race and place, and taking our equity journeys. My experience and relationships make a difference. I ask for your vote to lead with you again because members and students are counting on us.



Dan Talberg

Dan Talberg

Education Holdingford

Dan Talberg

For President of Education Minnesota

As your President, I will work tirelessly for all members, regardless of size of district or location. Help me bring Ed Mn's focus back on our members and away from political agendas on both ends of the spectrum. Together we can get back the respect we are losing in our profession, while combating mental health, low salaries, and acknowledging rural issues. Our true purpose as educators will surface again. As your President, change will happen.

Candidates for Vice President



Monica Byron

Monica Byron

Education Richfield

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we must be unapologetic for the work we do and boldly fight for members and public education. As an EDMN Governing Board member and Vice President of my Local, I work to remove social and racial justice barriers, resolve member issues, and lobby for legislation.

Working together, we can use our expertise and resources to build a strong union so our students and communities succeed. I respectfully ask for your support and vote.



Marty Fridgen

Marty Fridgen

United Teachers of South Washington County

I ask for your vote for vice president. Through serving as a local president, intermediate organization leader and governing board member, I know what it means to be accountable to members. My 24 years as an educator in both greater Minnesota and the metro area also gives me a balanced perspective. I am committed to our union's priorities of social and racial justice, fully funding our schools/campuses, and raising our unified voice to ensure all students have access to an equitable education.

Candidates for Secretary-Treasurer



Shaun Laden

Shaun Laden

Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and ESP

If elected, I'll align our resources to work that builds power to improve the lives of our members and students. The work we have to do requires us to use our resources differently and ensure that locals are centered in our work.

I'll ensure our union is facilitating leadership development for new and diverse members, locals are supported in their work, and we lead in the struggle to provide an equal and excellent education to every student, no exceptions.

There is Power in a Union!



Rodney Rowe

Rodney Rowe

Education Minnesota Worthington

The prudent use of dues dollars is the top priority in our financially strong union. As Secretary-Treasurer, I oversee budget development to provide resources for the programs and services our members want. Members have high expectations for their dues – we stretch every penny, and we will not collect more than necessary. Under my leadership, we brought parity to the dues structure and slowed down dues increases. I ask for your vote of confidence to maintain our strong union.

Candidates for NEA Director, Position 1



Jessie Holm

Jessie Holm

Education Minnesota-Hastings

I am proud to be a Minnesota Educator! Now, more than ever, public education must exceed the basic needs of all students. I represent Minnesota educators as they work to create opportunities for success for all learners.



Jasman Myers

Jasman Myers

North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale Education Association

I am in my 9th year as a special education Emotional Behavior Disorder teacher in the North St. Paul - Maplewood - Oakdale - Education Association, previously an Executive Board member of Saint Paul Federation of Educators. All voting delegates should vote Jasman Myers for the NEA Director position.

Candidates for NEA Director, Position 2



Heather Bakke

Heather Bakke

Education Minnesota Brainerd

Representing Education Minnesota as one of your NEA Directors has given me the opportunity to amplify the voices of educators from all over Minnesota. I am proud to have the opportunity to continue this important work.

Educators get active during legislative session

The 2022 Minnesota legislative session continues, as lawmakers work on bills and policies, including spending the state's \$9.3 billion surplus.

Education Minnesota members have been testifying on bills throughout the start of session, such as our ESP Bill of Rights which would give support professionals a \$25 minimum wage, dedicated training and more. There has also been a big focus on mental health in schools at the Capitol, including dedicated funding for licensed school nurses, counselors, psychologist and social workers.

The Minnesota House passed the Frontline Worker Pay Bill, which would give all essential workers access to \$1,500 as a way to thank them for helping keep our

state running during the pandemic. To qualify for the payment, someone must have worked at least 120 hours between March, 15, 2020, and June 30, 2021, and fall under income limits of \$85,000 for individuals or \$185,000 for married taxpayers.

As of press time, that bill has not had a hearing in the Senate.

Stay up to date on what's happening at the Capitol on Education Minnesota's social media channels and with the weekly Capitol Connection e-newsletter which is sent to all members.

Stronger pension system advocacy happening at Legislature

Minnesota's school staffing shortage was already a problem before COVID-19, but now it's at crisis levels. Education Minnesota knows we need competitive compensation packages that attract the best educators to the profession and keep them in our schools.

Education Minnesota created a Pension Task Force this year, which has been hard at work discussing and planning for how to advocate for a stronger pension system for all our members. The task force is chaired by Vice President Ryan Fiereck and began its work Feb. 15. As the group's work has progressed, a number of pension bills have been proposed in the Minnesota Legislature this session.

As of press time, none of the bills referenced below have made it to committee so far and more pension

bills may be proposed. Education Minnesota is actively organizing members to contact lawmakers to spread the message that the state needs to invest more in educator pensions.

The state Legislature can enhance retirement benefits to recognize and reward teachers hard work on behalf of students. There are three bills the Minnesota Legislature could consider to do just that.

- HF3771: Ensures a secure retirement by increasing the cost-of-living adjustment for retirees in all pension plans to 2.5 percent a year starting on Jan. 1, 2023.
- HF3773/SF3558: Provides 24 months of service credit for every 12 months of service for public school employees for 2020, 2021 and 2022. This makes it more affordable for school employees to retire earlier if they choose.
- HF3942/SF3649: Brings back Rule of 90. This allows an educator to retire when the employee's age plus number of years of eligible service amount to 90, without a reduction in retirement benefits.

Go to www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature to write your legislators and Gov. Tim Walz and tell them to improve retirement benefits to recruit and retain the best educators for our students.



Educators endorse Walz for reelection

Education Minnesota announced in early March that the union has endorsed Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan for reelection in 2022.

The union's endorsements are made by the Political Action Committee and approved by the Governing Board's Executive Committee.

Education Minnesota's Political Action Committee, made up of pre-K-12 teachers, education support professionals and higher education faculty members from across the state, voted on the endorsement in late February after Walz participated in the robust endorsement process created by the PAC.

"The endorsement process is driven by educators who work every day in schools across the state," said Ternesha Burroughs, chair of the PAC and a math teacher in Osseo Area Schools. "Educators are on the PAC board. Educators wrote the questions in the candidate questionnaire. Educators met face-to-face with the candidates in their schools. After that long process, it was clear Tim Walz was the best choice for governor."

The PAC also said the endorsement was because of how Walz and Flanagan have prioritized education in their first four years in office. Walz and Flanagan have:

- Increased education spending by \$1.2 billion over four years, including the largest per-pupil increase in 15 years.

- Directed \$29 million in one-time funding to support the general operations of schools and cushion temporary enrollment losses during the pandemic.
- Preserved thousands of seats in the state's pre-kindergarten program.
- Targeted spending to reduce the racial opportunity gap, including programs to recruit and retain more teachers of color.
- Invested in full-service community schools, layers of student support services, mentoring for new teachers, expanding non-exclusionary systems of discipline, and providing training in trauma-informed teaching for teachers and paraprofessionals.

The PAC once again created a member-led, transparent endorsement process for all candidates.

"Educators make our endorsements based on our values and who stands with us and will fight for us," said Burroughs. "We want pro-public education and pro-union candidates, no matter what their party affiliation."

All registered candidates as of Feb. 1 were invited to participate. Only one other candidate, Republican Scott Magie, accepted the invitation and was considered.

What was the endorsement process?

- Walz participated in a virtual forum with hundreds of educators from across the state and answered questions submitted by educators.
- Walz visited Concord Education Center, a federal level 4 special education facility, which is part of Intermediate District 917. Walz visited classrooms to see educators interact with students and had conversations with social workers, teachers and ESPs. Three educators from the site in Inver Grove Heights nominated it for a candidate visit.
- Walz also completed a questionnaire created by educators, which can be read on www.edmnvotes.org.
- Walz attended a roundtable discussion with ESP members.
- Walz did an interview with the PAC.

Interested in the endorsement process?

Find out more about the PAC and who your representative is at www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/edmnvotes/political-action-committee.

Local legislative endorsements will be taking place this spring and summer. Those endorsements are made by educators in those legislative districts and approved by the PAC. Contact your local union president, your PAC representative or Education Minnesota field staff if you are interested in serving on a local screening committee.

"I see this endorsement as a really historic opportunity to fully fund public schools."

– Karin Hogen, White Bear Lake teacher and PAC member



Karin Hogen

"He actually listens to us. He understands that funding is a systemic issue and to improve the quality of our schools, which would benefit our students and our profession, but also our communities."

– Marty Scofield, State Residential Schools teacher and PAC member



Marty Scofield

"Gov. Walz was very clear on his points to support teachers and ESPs. He made many comments (during the PAC interview) and had his own ideas on how to support our profession, without our even prompting him. He knows how necessary ESPs are especially and he wants to support our profession."

– Ona Wilcox, South Washington County teacher and PAC member



Ona Wilcox

The Campaign 2022 coverage in this issue is an independent expenditure prepared and paid for by Education Minnesota PAC, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103, in support of the named candidates. The independent expenditure material is not approved by the candidate nor are the candidates responsible for it.

2022 Minnesota Teacher of the Year named May 1

The recipient of the 2022 Minnesota Teacher of the Year award will be announced May 1. Watch for the announcement on social media and Education Minnesota's website.

A selection panel representing Minnesota leaders in education, business and government review candidate portfolios, review video submissions of semifinalists and interview finalists in person as part of the process to name a person to represent all of the amazing teachers in Minnesota.

Education Minnesota organizes and underwrites the program, which means the union handles only the business of running the program, not the selection process. Minnesota is the only state in which the union runs the program. Most are run through the state's department of education.

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Educators receive life-changing loan forgiveness

Educators throughout Minnesota are starting to see their loans forgiven through the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, thanks to recent waivers and changes from the Biden administration and the work of both our national unions.

From now until October 2022, the U.S. Department of Education will be waiving two of the four PSLF requirements. The first is that qualifying payments had to be made under an income-driven repayment plan. The second is that only payments made on Direct Loans could count towards PSLF qualification.

Education Minnesota's Degrees, Not Debt program has been supporting members through the loan forgiveness process for years and continues to support those who are navigating the recent changes.

Britt Pennington – More than \$51,000 forgiven

Britt Pennington, a licensed school counselor currently working as a mental health professional in Intermediate School District 917, had been pursuing PSLF since 2010 to pay off her grad school debt. She recently had her loans forgiven, a total which was more than her original loan.

"My loans were all from grad school, where I ended with about \$50,000 in debt," she said. "I got started on the forgiveness process right away, paid every year since 2010 and I had more forgiven than I had originally owed — more than \$51,000."

Pennington knows she is not the only educator with a story of owing more than her original loan amount, or a story about her loan servicers not being helpful.

"I used to take notes when I called my servicer. They were not helpful," she said. "I was told one thing by one person and one thing by another person. I was given so much false information. At one point, I switched to a different income-based payment plan. I verified that I submitted everything, and then out of the blue, I got a call saying I missed some paperwork and was being put on deferment. Because of that, those months that I had to spend fixing it wouldn't count toward my PSLF. But I had confirmed and specifically asked that I had everything done correctly."

Pennington didn't have to do anything differently because of the new waivers, as her 120 payments naturally coincided with the changes this fall. But she was still denied at first when she submitted her application.

"I was denied because it said I didn't work for a qualified employer, even though I had submitted all of the employment paperwork that says I do," she said. "I submitted the paperwork again and regularly logged in to check the status."

One day, Pennington logged in and the website showed a zero.

"It was surreal," she said. "I hadn't gotten the physical letter yet, but the electronic version was on the website. I started telling everyone."

Having her loans forgiven is an incredible weight off her shoulders, said Pennington.

"The process probably took years off my life," she said. "It became such a stressor. I didn't want to talk about it, but it has been helpful to talk about it more with people to feel less alone in the process. You feel really powerless when you're just one person calling the servicer, but we see what can happen when people come together and fight."

Sarah and Travis Rother – \$130,000 forgiven

Both educators in Eastern Carver County, the Rother — Sarah, a media specialist, and Travis, an English teacher — had significant debt from their education journeys.

"We are both lifelong learners who are dedicated to growing as educators," said Sarah. "We both had undergrad loans, Master's degree loans and specialist degree loans."

Sarah attended one of Education Minnesota's Degrees, Not Debt sessions and learned about PSLF and applied.

"However, I did not have the right type of loan or the right type of payment plan," she said. "PSLF was so limited and confusing before the Biden administration waiver. Because of that previous attempt, I was in the system when the waivers were announced."

Sarah still tried to do what she could to qualify before the waivers. She attempted to get on an income-driven payment plan, but got confusing and inaccurate communications from Navient, her loan servicer.

"The first estimate that my loan servicer gave me showed an 'initial payment' of \$2,875," she said. "I was shocked. It was what they expected me to pay every month. But on the same page, they also showed a maximum payment of \$500 a month. I felt like I was being misled."

Once the waivers were announced, the Rothers still started at the beginning of the process and Sarah dug into what was needed at every step. She attended virtual meetings, surrounded herself with information and resources and used the "PSLF help tool" on the Federal Student Aid website to get started.

"I was so distrustful of the entire process that I didn't want to be denied because of a technicality," Sarah said. "I was meticulous about every step. They denied me once, they were not going to turn me down again."

Travis then went through the same process.

One day, Travis received a letter in the mail with the news that his loans were forgiven. The feeling of mistrust came back for Sarah, who hadn't received anything yet.

"I took a deep breath and logged in online and had the same letter in a PDF," she said. "I experienced such a tidal wave of relief and joy."

Between the two of them, the Rothers had \$130,000 forgiven.

"We truly started this whole journey to model a healthy relationship with money for our daughters," said Sarah. "It feels like we are able to do that now. We hope they can see education as a gateway to their future, not as shackles of insurmountable debt."



Education Minnesota's Degrees, Not Debt program now has an online training available on the expansion of loan forgiveness options and the steps educators have to do in order to take advantage of this program.

Educators can access the training on the free professional development platform, MEA Online. Search the catalog for "Degrees Not Debt."

By taking the training, those wanting support for loan forgiveness questions will have a solid foundation to understand options and from which to ask questions.

In general, an educator's ability to access and/or apply for forgiveness is going to be dependent on a number of factors. There are a few options for loan forgiveness out there, but each come with a different set of eligibility standards, which is why Education Minnesota suggests taking the online training to start the process.

Once the training is complete and you have found your federal loan information on studentaid.gov, Education Minnesota staff can help guide you throughout the whole process.

Find out more about the union's Degrees, Not Debt program at www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/degrees-not-debt.

Town hall discusses changes to social studies standards

Education Minnesota hosted a town hall for its members on the new social studies standards and Ethnic Studies strand in February.

The process for updating content area standards in Minnesota schools takes place every 10 years. The social studies standards review began in the fall of 2020 and are set to be implemented in the 2026-27 school year, and while standards updates are normally routine, this update has gained a lot of attention.

"There has been a tremendous amount of disinformation about these standards," said Education Minnesota President Denise Specht at the town hall. "Most of them from big money groups who object to the broader, more honest history contained in them."

Featured speakers at the forum were members of the Minnesota Ethnic Studies Coalition, members of the standards writing committee and an educator with experience teaching Ethnic Studies.

The standards writing committee was composed of educators, parents, community members, professors from across the state.

"As a union, we believe one of the most important reasons for public education to exist is because it prepares its students to be citizens in a society they will someday lead," said Specht. "I don't believe we can do that job without giving students the facts and the tools they need to think critically about the role of race and racism in our nation. Without that kind of education and those habits in mind, we are dooming our state and country to make the mistakes of our past again and again. We need to do better."

Dr. Jessica Winkelaar, a social studies teacher in Mounds View, is on the standards review committee and says the work done in updating the standards is necessary.

"I support the new standards, including the Ethnic Studies strand," Winkelaar said. "They are inclusive, honest and necessary for all of our students in Minnesota. We

focused on what were the most important skills and content. We didn't think about cutting anything. We focused on what all our students in Minnesota need to think about at this time in our state and how we could scaffold those K-12."

Brian Lozenski, an associate professor of urban and multicultural education at Macalester College, spoke at the town hall about what Ethnic Studies are and the history of the content area.

"Ethnic Studies emerged as a set of disciplines that traditionally in the United States has been represented by Black studies or Africana studies, Latinx studies and Chicana studies, Asian and Asian-American studies, Native American and Indigenous studies and more recently and increasingly Middle Eastern and Islamic studies," he said. "Typically what had been based in community studies began to be formalized the post-Civil Rights era of the 1960s. They have been in existence informally for well over 60 years."

Lozenski said that moves to bring Ethnic Studies into the curriculum is happening nationwide and its being met with controversy elsewhere, as it has been here.

"Ethnic Studies doesn't ask us to ban anything," he said. "Ethnic Studies asks us to expand our knowledge systems and have our students understand how knowledge is constructed."

Jonathan Hamilton, a visiting professor at Macalester is a member of the standards review and one of the leads of the Ethnic Studies writing group, spoke to the process.

"The members of the committee called for the strand to added to the existing four strands of history, geography, economics and citizenship/government,"

he said. "We are calling for the additional strand, and for Ethnic Studies to be embedded in the existing strands. We wanted to approach the standards process in an equitable way where all Minnesotans were represented. There



Mounds View teacher Dr. Jessica Winkelaar spoke at a virtual town hall on updates to the social studies standards. Winkelaar serves on the standards review committee.

were a lot of conversations around alignment within the five strands to make sure they all work with each other."

The Ethnic Studies strand is comprised of three standards which invites students to explore how identity shapes individual and collective experiences.

Hamilton explained there are three major themes in the Ethnic Studies strand – identity, which is how individual experiences are shaped; ways of knowing, how different cultures understand knowledge; and resistance, to learn about the historical struggles for justice, freedom and liberation and how they continue to shape the history of our state and nation.

Jeremy Beulah, a middle school teacher in Minneapolis, also spoke at the forum about how students are



Jeremy Beulah, a Minneapolis middle school teacher, shared his experiences in teaching Ethnic Studies at the town hall. He said students are ready to have these conversations.

responding to learning about Ethnic Studies as he is currently teaching it.

"As educators, we want our students to grow through education, conversation and socialization," he said. "These are the things that go into Ethnic Studies. Students see themselves

differently and see the things around them critically."

Beulah said his middle school students are ready to have conversations about different perspectives and identities within themselves and others.

"These are things that students already see in the world around them and on social media," he said. "Why not provide them that knowledge so they are able to navigate it for their identities to be seen and for change to be made for everyone?"

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English teachers spring conference

The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English will hold its spring conference in person April 28-29 in Duluth.

The conference will be a time to reflect, learn and be in community with other English, literacy and language arts teachers and will feature keynotes from University of Minnesota professor Timothy Lensmire; poet, organizer and educator Tish Jones; Carleton College professor Deborah Appleman; and award-winning author Kao Kalia Yang.

Find more information on the conference and how to register at www.mcte.org/events/spring-conference.

New science standards workshops

Educators who will now be teaching earth science under the new state standards are invited to participate in professional development on the new benchmarks and teaching strategies.

ESTEP is a fast paced, one week, bootcamp style, regional workshop that focuses on geology and hydrology and what educators will need to start making the shift to science sense-making with their students. Summer workshops will take place June 28-July 1 at Minnesota State University, Mankato and July 25-29 at Minnesota State University, Moorhead.

Find out more about the programs and how to register at www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ESTEP_for_Secondary_Teachers.html.

Free Holocaust studies seminar

"Honoring Resilience: Learning From the Holocaust and the Dakota Exile" will be held July 10-16 at Saint Cloud State University.

Sponsored by The Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights, with additional support provided by Mt. Zion Temple, the Jewish Community Relations Council, and the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Education at SCSU, the seminar itself 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 (near Pilot Knob).

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.

Most meals and transportation to day trip sites will be provided. Low-cost dorm housing will be available for those traveling from further distances who need overnight accommodations.

For further information, email merrymeltz@gmail.com. To apply, go to www.toli.us/satellite-program/st-paul.

Summer science institutes

Hamline University is offering two free summer institutes for teachers of science.

The three-day WaterWorks Institute allows teachers to enrich their water-related curricula by learning from experts on how safe drinking water is produced while experiencing a host of water resources and activities for the classroom.

For detailed information and online application, please visit www.hamline.edu/education/environmental/cgee/waterworks.

The three-day River Institute is aimed at third- through eighth-grade teachers looking to engage students in STEM disciplines through experiential, inquiry-based investigations at local watersheds.

For more information on the River Institute, go to www.hamline.edu/education/cgee/rivers-institute.html

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MEA Online is becoming a part of NEA's online learning portal!

Our MEA Online is teaming up with the National Education Association to provide a multitude of online courses for Education Minnesota members.

MEA Online will now include online classes provided by Education Minnesota's Minnesota Educator Academy, along with all NEA online classes.

The site will remain the same, except for the addition of NEA classes for members to access.

There are two important changes for members to be aware of as these changes launch in late March/early April:

- *The URL is different! Instead of finding MEA Online at meaonline.educationminnesota.org, you will log in at meaonline.learnupon.com.*
- *Password changes! Members who already had MEA Online accounts will be prompted to change their password upon the first log in to the site.*

Members who did not previously have an MEA Online account will need to email meaonline@edmn.org with their name, local and member number (if possible) to request access to the new online learning site.

All of the instructions will be included on www.educationminnesota.org when the transition is complete.

