

M I N N E S O T A

EDUCATOR

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2023

**Q&A with new Senate
Education Committee
Chairs — both educators**

**Legislative agenda includes big
asks for students, educators**



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

Free MEA Online class fulfills new requirement for cooperating teachers!

**Find the class and more information on MEA Online
at [www.educationminnesota.org/resources/
professional-development/mea-online](http://www.educationminnesota.org/resources/professional-development/mea-online).**

The Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board adopted a new rule for teacher preparation programs that requires each cooperating teacher paired with a candidate during student teaching and practicum "has completed professional development in coaching strategies for adult learners."

Cooperating teachers now have to have completed this professional development course by this fall, if they are hosting a teacher candidate.

Education Minnesota partnered with the Minnesota Association of College of Teacher Education to create a training that would be available to our members at no cost.

The training was developed by Education Minnesota members and staff and representatives from MACTE. It is available on MEA Online, and can be accessed and completed whenever is most convenient for participants. The training provides an overview of adult coaching strategies and offers best practices via theory as well as in the form of interviews with current cooperating teachers and teacher candidates.

The class is about an hour long and is only available on MEA Online. Members can access it and take it at their own pace.

The content is based on very basic principles of adult learning through videos and questions. Members will also receive a CEU after completing the course.





THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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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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Positive election results not enough (but a very good start)

Educators should be proud of all we accomplished in the 2022 elections because without the work of our union family there wouldn't be pro-education majorities in the House and Senate and Minnesotans would not have re-elected Gov. Tim Walz, Attorney General Keith Ellison, Secretary of State Steve Simon and State Auditor Julie Blaha, who all support working people.

But that was 2022 and now it's 2023. It's time for us to make sure our candidates deliver on their promises. It's also for us to get serious at our local bargaining tables. Status quo contracts aren't acceptable when the state is poised to invest billions more in its schools. In the governor's inaugural speech, he promised that during this legislative session: "... we will make the largest investment in public education the state has ever seen." He continued, "We will fund special education and make sure every young person in Minnesota has the resources they need to succeed."

In the first week of the legislative session, House Majority Leader Melissa Hortman and Senate Majority Leader Kari Dziedzic listed increasing funding for public education among their top priorities.

As educators, we know the needs. Schools are understaffed almost everywhere. Classrooms are overcrowded; I recently heard about 40 5th graders in the classroom of one suburban district. Students are denied the opportunity to take band, art or technical education because the classes were cut. Students with IEPs needing one-to-one attention aren't getting it because ESP jobs can't be filled for what the district is paying. Unacceptable waiting lists for mental health support. The list goes on.

The data backs up our experiences. A recent report from the think tank NorthStar Policy Action said per pupil state received by Minnesota schools has declined by 20 percent in 20 years after adjusting for inflation. Local taxpayers have picked up the slack, but school revenue is still down 6 percent statewide—and much higher in districts that can't pass referendums.

The Economic Policy Institute reports Minnesota teachers, on average, are paid 26 percent less than people in other professions with similar qualifications. Inflation

is part of it. Our union records show the average salary increase for Minnesota teacher locals in 2021-22 and 2022-23 was 2.2 percent and 2.2 percent while inflation in our region increased 4.8 percent in 2021 and 7.2 percent nationally in 2022.

Clearly, this bargaining season is a time to be bold. Contracts this year must acknowledge the effects of inflation on educators' ability to provide for our families. They must create working conditions that encourage experienced educators to stay. And those contracts must persuade college students that education careers can pay their education debts.

There's a list of worthy investments to be made in 2023, but one of them must be raising compensation for all educators, from their first day through a dignified retirement. Minnesota simply cannot provide its students with the education they deserve without addressing the staffing crisis, particularly among BIPOC educators and educators who work with students with special needs.

We must all resist the temptation to settle quickly for an offer that's too low. When any local settles for less than its members are worth, it affects negotiations in surrounding areas. Better to stay strong, see the size of the state's new investment and keeping negotiating for a contract that raises the bar for everyone.

There have been very few times in my career when I felt more optimistic about the chance to see the sort of changes that improve the lives of educators and students.

Together,



Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

NEA classes now available on MEA Online

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

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

Existing users will need to go to <https://meaonline.learnupon.com/users/password/new> and follow the prompts to reset your password.

To access the NEA portal for new classes, log in with your new password, go to portal switch button at the top of the page and click "PEP – Professional Excellence Portal." Members will have to take the very short mandatory welcome to NEA training before seeing the full free catalog of courses.

All of the information to access the platform and courses will be available on the Education Minnesota and MEA Online websites.

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, Ellen Surbrook, Retired, 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 March 3. Happy reading!

Educators in the news!

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

“

I love it. It's opening doors for me. As a paraprofessional, there are limits set on me. So I want to be in more spaces where I can make change.

”

– Leticia Alvarez, a Bloomington paras member, in a news story on FOX 9 TV Dec. 6. Alvarez is a student in a new program at Normandale Community College, which recruits and supports BIPOC students as they pursue the first two years of a special education degree, by covering the cost of tuition, books and more.

Senate education committees led by educator legislators

The 2022 election flipped the Minnesota Senate to a pro-public education majority. With that, Senate leadership went back to a two committee structure for K-12 education—one focusing on education finance and one on education policy. Leading those two committees as chairs are two retired educators and Education Minnesota members. Sen. Mary Kunesh, a 25-year library media specialist in her second term in the Senate after also serving in the House, is chair of the Senate Education Finance Committee, and Sen. Steve Cwodziński, a 33-year social studies teacher starting his third Senate term, is chair of the Senate Education Policy Committee.

Why is having educators as education committee chairs important? The committee's chair has the primary agenda-setting authority for the committee. The chair identifies the bills or issues on which the committee will try to formally act through hearings and vote to continue on to become law. Having people who know what it is like to be an educator making those decisions means they know what to prioritize to get students, educators and schools what they need.

The Minnesota Educator sent Sen. Kunesh and Sen. Cwodziński a few questions so Education Minnesota members can get to know them and what to expect from their leadership this session.

Minnesota Educator: Why did you run for office?

Sen. Kunesh: Over my 25 years as a teacher—a Library Media Specialist for 20 of them—I experienced many changes; some good, some not so much. Sometimes

This will be an ongoing feature in the Minnesota Educator with other education and union leaders at the Legislature profiled.

change was good but come every fall, we'd gather as a staff and hear the outcome of legislative mandates. Quite often mandates were decided by persons with little understanding of the reality of the world of learning by students and instruction by teachers. Too often mandates came unfunded, compromising the entire structure of school districts. As an LMS I worked with all teachers and I heard their frustration and discouragement, motivating me to make a difference. Then came my first volunteer opportunity to work on a big campaign and having met movers and shakers I learned how the political world worked. I knew that I could do it, so I waited, learned more, met more folks, and when the opportunity arrived, I jumped at the chance to move Minnesota in the right direction!

Sen. Cwodziński: Throughout my tenure as a civics teacher, I used three overarching values to teach the crucial role American citizens play in our government, civic duty, civic virtue, and political efficacy. During these years, I had many students ask why, if I preached these principles, I didn't run for office myself. And, for just as many years, I wouldn't have a response. When I was set to retire after 33 years of teaching, I decided I wanted to put into practice what I tried to teach my students. And by running for the Minnesota State Senate, that's what I tried, and am trying, to do.

Minnesota Educator: Who was your favorite teacher?

Sen. Kunesh: My favorite teacher was a nun named Sister Del Rey. I went to a small village parochial school that was right behind my house. Sister Del Rey was very creative and artistic, and I loved her creativity. She planned fun art projects, encouraged me to use my creativity, and let me spend time together after school to help her. She was kind to a kid who often got lost in a big family, making me feel unique and talented. She was chatty, but not too much, let me help run the



Sen. Mary Kunesh (left) sits with educators during a hearing on one of the many education bills she has authored in her time in the House and now in the Senate, including recruitment and retention of teachers of color.



Sen. Steve Cwodziński (center) speaks to a rotunda full of Education Minnesota members during a 2019 rally at the State Capitol. Cwodziński brings 33 years of social studies teacher experience with him to the Legislature.

mimeograph (those papers smelled so good!), and was probably my first adult friend. When she left to go to another school, I remember feeling like I lost my best friend.

Sen. Cwodziński: When remembering my own time in education, two teachers stick out to me. First, Mr. Baker instilled in me a sense of knowledge for current events and following what is happening around the world. Secondly, Mrs. Salverson introduced me to the world of fiction and instilled a love of literature.

Minnesota Educator: What does it mean to you to be chairing a committee on education?

Sen. Kunesch: I am still a bit disbelieving! To think that six years ago I was a middle school teacher who was responsible for establishing a well-rounded library collection, teaching technology, researching and resources, administering standardized testing, grumbling about the Legislature, and now—I'm in the role of making financial decisions that will affect 2,014 Minnesota schools and 821,260 students! It is a daunting responsibility but one I am excited and ready to take

on. Minnesota is in a unique position of where three of the four education chairs are former educators—and the fourth a huge student advocate. With those life experiences, we are ready to both identify and understand the individual needs of the students in Minnesota and then utilize keen insight into how we will advocate for students, staff, communities, and the specific needs that will allow our communities to thrive.

Sen. Cwodziński: As an American government teacher, it's a dream come true. In a culmination of 33 years in the classroom and six years on the education committee, I am honored to be the Chair of the Minnesota Senate Education Policy Committee. Now, I come to work every morning, sit at my desk, face the Minnesota State Capitol Building, and do my best to better the education system.

Minnesota Educator: What are some of your top priorities for education in Minnesota?

Sen. Kunesch: I am determined to ensure that educators have the resources that they need to create a positive, productive classroom to meet the needs of all students. That means that not only do classrooms have the

technology and tools to assist instruction but also the support staff to address barriers to learning. I'm confident that when we put classrooms, mental health, special education, and English learning supports in the forefront; when we make sure every kid has access to free meals, incorporate creative instruction across the spectrum, and pay our staff a true living wage, our students and staff will succeed.

Sen. Cwodzinski: My top priorities for education in Minnesota include menstrual equity, civics and financial literacy education requirements, supplemental nutrition aid, improving the mental health of students, and teacher respect, recruitment and retention. During the height of COVID, I called my friends who are still teachers and asked how the school year was going. Let's just say, I stopped asking how the year was and started asking what their silver lining after COVID would be. The resounding answer was to go back to educating the holistic child. One of the biggest aspects of our education system is that there is more to education than the academics. Physical, social and emotional growth are all crucial to preparing a student for life, not just college or a career. I like to say, "don't let academics get in the way of your education."

Minnesota Educator: How will you use your experience in education from your own life in your legislative work?

Sen. Kunesh: My 25 years in education and my own life experiences have greatly influenced my decision to run for public office. I have had many positive influences in my life; individuals who have mentored me, collaborated with me, provided constructive professional development, and encouraged me when exhaustion and struggles were affecting our ability to bring valuable instruction to diverse classrooms. Having witnessed firsthand the challenge of providing full funding to meet the needs of special education students and English Learners fueled my run for the Legislature. Personally feeding students who could not pay for lunches and seeing valuable resources—like Library Media Specialists—be eliminated, all brought me to this unique responsibility in bringing systemic changes to our students and teachers. These experiences have fueled my desire to help shape young

minds, and it hasn't changed—I'm just working from a new, unique angle.

Sen. Cwodzinski: I have spent more time in the classroom and have taught more students than any other senator in Minnesota history. This experience granted me a unique perspective on education issues and prepared me to take on the role of Education Policy Chair. Being an educator also taught me the importance of maintaining nonpartisan relationships. I started every semester by having the conservative students in my class sit on one side of the classroom, and the liberal students on the other. Then, they would spend the next nine weeks bridging the gap between them.

Minnesota Educator: Why should educators stay engaged with the Capitol?

Sen. Kunesh: Our legislators need to hear from educators who work with our youngest to oldest learners. The most important thing to know is how valuable it is to develop and deliver a message to elected officials to create realistic policy and allocate constructive funding. Being a constituent as well as an educator, you represent the concerns of constituents—in fact, educators are some of the most important people with whom legislators or staff will meet because of the many diverse relationships you have in your schools and communities. As decision makers we often have access to many facts and figures surrounding issues. When educators engage with legislators, your job is to make the issue relevant by telling personal stories that illustrate the issues you most care about or choose to advocate for. What you bring to the table are compelling stories about the impact of policy issues on people that legislators represent.

Sen. Cwodzinski: The voter turnout in Minnesota is already among the highest in the nation. For our educators, voter turnout should be at 100 percent. It is important to take an active and engaged role in school referendums, state Legislature elections, and school board elections because educators teach our students that their voices matter too.

Legislative agenda focuses on major increases in supports for students, educators

Minnesota's five-month legislative session started Jan. 3, and with the newly-elected pro-public education and pro-union majorities in the House, Senate and the governor's office, Education Minnesota is ready to fight for big wins for educators, students and schools.

Education Minnesota is calling for more for Minnesota's students and educators at the Legislature in 2023—more quality time together, healthier learning spaces and more great educators who are compensated like the experts they are and reflect the diversity our state.

"The mandate is clear for the governor and the leadership of the House and Senate to come together and pass the multi-billion-dollar investment in public schools needed to provide every student with the personal attention from their educators, a healthy learning environment and access to world-class educators in every classroom. The voters – and educators – of Minnesota expect nothing less," said President Denise Specht in a press release after the election.

Since November, Education Minnesota members from around the state who serve on the Legislative Action Committee have been working with staff to develop the union's legislative agenda. This is a starting document and given the historic nature of our state's budget surplus and the pro-education majorities, this agenda is the union's baseline of priorities and goals for this session.

The agenda is also approved by the educators on the Education Minnesota Governing Board.

Our legislative agenda includes bills designed to recruit, develop and retain the best group of teaching professionals in America. Without great educators, our students cannot receive the world class education they deserve.

Education Minnesota is aiming high because the needs are urgent. Chronic underfunding by the state and two years of historic inflation are putting extraordinary pressure on educators and students. Fulfilling the promises of full funding will cost billions of dollars, but if Minnesota is serious about making sure every student can pursue their dreams, no matter where they live or what they look like, our elected leaders must get serious about funding what works.

Learn more about our legislative work and how you can get involved in pushing for the passage of these issues and more at www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature.

From pension reform to dedicated funding for mental and physical health teams to living wages for education support professionals, Education Minnesota's Legislative Agenda was crafted by educators from across the state and informs the union's work at the Capitol. The agenda includes:

Students and educators benefit from more high-quality time together

- Reduce class sizes and/or improve educator-to-student ratios in public schools.
- Immediately increase the per-pupil funding formula to compensate for two years of historic inflation and pin future formula increases to the inflation rate.
- Increase access to time in college by renewing Minnesota's commitment to public higher education by returning to statutory levels of funding for state colleges and universities.
- Fully fund services for all members of the school community, including E-12 students in special education and English language learners.

- Provide dedicated due process time to special education teachers to meet students' needs and to hold meetings with families.
- Increase "prep time" for effective lessons for all teachers.
- Eliminate unnecessary policies and mandates that cost valuable time during the school day.
- Create a universal child care and early learning program, using mixed delivery, where low-income families pay nothing, and no family pays more than 7 percent of family income.

Healthy spaces for educators and students are a requirement for academic and professional success

- Fully staff mental and physical health teams by hiring more licensed school counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other support professionals.
- Provide all students with free meals.
- Offer a curriculum that reflects the diversity of Minnesota and makes all students feel welcome and engaged, no matter what they look like, where they come from or how they identify.
- Eliminate racial and cultural biases in standardized testing that create barriers and anxiety for students.
- Ensure students in Minnesota's colleges and universities study in safe, healthy buildings by funding the backlog of Higher Education Asset Preservation and Renewal Account, or HEAPR, requests.
- Give more students and their families easy access to full-service community schools, which offer a range of services and supports for their health and well-being.

Provide every student with access to great educators, including educators who reflect the diversity of race, place, gender and age of Minnesota

- Recruit and retain high-quality educators through competitive salaries and benefits, commensurate with other professions with similar educational requirements, as well as education debt forgiveness.

- Reform the teacher pension system to make the profession more attractive to new educators and, for current teachers, provide a fair, high-quality benefit that permits a dignified retirement even before age 66.
- Address the critical staff shortages facing our schools in licensed and non-licensed positions, including by ensuring all education support professionals earn at least a living wage of \$25 an hour.
- Fund 16 hours of paid training for all paraprofessionals who work directly with students.
- Enact specific policies to attract and retain teachers of color, including paid student teaching, mentoring and other programs and protections.
- Ensure all teachers are trained on cultural relevancy, special education needs and literacy before entering the classroom.
- Advance and expand collective bargaining proposals, including expressly permitting educators to bargain for class sizes and mental health support for students and staff.
- Allow Tier 1 teachers to join the bargaining unit of teachers with Tier 2, 3 and 4 licenses.
- Provide 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for educators and all other families.
- Reduce the cost of health care for educators and all public employees.
- Provide contract parity, including salary and benefits, between K-12 teachers and licensed early childhood, early childhood family education (ECFE) and adult basic education (ABE) teachers.
- Provide Minnesota's youngest learners with access to well-prepared teachers by requiring pre-K teachers in public schools to hold the appropriate state license. For current teachers without state certification, fully fund their time and tuition to earn a license.
- Provide all students with access to professional media specialists who can teach the differences between reliable information and misinformation and disinformation flooding social media.



How to stay informed, get involved this legislative session

This legislative session with pro-public education majorities in both the Senate and House means educators need to be involved with the legislative process now more than ever before. We can win what we, our students and our schools need if we hold elected officials accountable. Educators are the most effective advocates for public schools!

Share your story at a lobby day

Local union and intermediate organization lobby days can be in person or virtual and scheduled through your union and IO leadership and Education Minnesota staff. We will be hosting several issue-based virtual lobby days, in addition to local lobby days, which are open to all active members. Topics to be determined. For more information, go to www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature/lobby-days.

Meet with legislators when they are back in their district

If your legislators are back in their district and if they are having any public meetings, attend one! Invite your local legislator to your school, campuses and classroom, in a safe way. The more they can see and hear about what is going on in their local schools, the more likely they might be to fight for what you need. If locals or members want to schedule a formal meeting with the legislator, contact your Education Minnesota field staff. Education Minnesota also plans to host regional meetings with legislators. Watch for more information about those meetings to be shared in emails and on our website and social media channels.

Raise your voice by testifying at a hearing

Committee hearings are a focal point of the legislative process at the Capitol and give educators the chance to share their stories and make their voices heard. Contact Education Minnesota's lobby team at lobbyteam@edmn.org if you're interested in testifying. The team can help you prepare your remarks and make sure you are where you need to be.

Read the Capitol Connection e-newsletter

Every week during the legislative session, Education Minnesota sends an e-newsletter called Capitol Connection to all members. Capitol Connection summarizes the most recent actions affecting public education at the Legislature, and looks ahead to upcoming issues, hearings and activities. If you're a member and haven't begun receiving the Capitol Connection, contact webmaster@edmn.org and put Capitol Connection in the subject line.

“It was because of all of us that we showed the district how strong we are when we work together in union.”

– Beth Ketzner, Mahtomedi Paraprofessionals – Education Minnesota local union president

Mahtomedi ESPs bargain equitable health insurance contributions, wage increases

Members of the Mahtomedi Paraprofessionals-Education Minnesota local union worked hard to win major wage and benefit increases in their latest contract. Their contract wins included a \$1.25 increase in each year, for a total of \$2.50 increase in salary per hour, as well as a 100 percent contribution for single health insurance and 85 percent for family insurance.

“Honestly, I never thought I would see the day that they would get equitable contributions to health insurance that match all other district employee groups,” said Beth Ketzner, local union president. “This just goes to show how important a union is, and in unity there is strength, and how much stronger we are when we work together and have a collective voice.”

Ketzner said that the idea of a collective voice was a major focus of the union’s member organizing during this bargaining round.

“Before we began, we selected a small committee of workers to represent the majority, who conducted a survey to understand the interests and concerns of all the MESP members,” she said. “Based on the survey results, the negotiations team identified top issues which were used to form goals and put together a contract proposal, as well as an organizing plan.”

The open communication started at the beginning of bargaining was carried throughout the negotiations process.

“We kept an open dialogue and kept the members informed with email updates with what was happening throughout the year it took to come to an agreement,”

said Ketzner. “We were more open with what our goals were by letting the members know exactly what we were asking for. In the past what was being bargained for was held to more secrecy.”

The Mahtomedi ESPs also went to school board meetings and spoke to the board directly.

“We expressed our concerns and issues and asked the board school to expand the parameters of bargaining, giving district negotiators the green light to negotiate a contract that respects, honors and values our work,” said Ketzner. “We had a good showing of MESP support at the meeting.”

The ESPs worked with their union field staff and organizer on a member engagement and organizing plan. A big piece was having members sign an online petition of support, which Ketzner and the negotiations team emailed to all the school board members and district negotiators.

“We had 58 members of our union sign the petition,” said Ketzner. “I feel the petition was a huge success as it showed the district that we had all of our people behind us.”

Ketzner is hopeful that the tactics and unity shown by the Mahtomedi ESPs in this last round of bargaining will be carried forward into future work and contracts.

“The support of Education Minnesota staff helped make what seemed impossible happen,” she said. “But it was because of all of us that we showed the district how strong we are when we work together in union.”

Member Honor Roll

Congratulations to the Education Minnesota members who have been honored for their work in the last year.

2022 Cultural Jambalaya Diversity Award Winner

- Dr. Lee-Ann Stephens, an equity leader and teacher at St. Louis Park Schools, won the 2022 Cultural Jambalaya Diversity Award. Cultural Jambalaya — a non-profit organization — grants a diversity award to resource educators who promote multiculturalism and diversity. *Photo courtesy of Cultural Jambalaya*



Dr. Lee-Ann Stephens

U.S. Department of Education RISE Award nominee

- Tequila Laramée, an education support professional in Minneapolis and the 2021-22 Education Minnesota ESP of the Year, was named Minnesota's nominee for the 2023 U.S. Department of Education RISE Award by Gov. Tim Walz. Created by Congress in 2019, the Recognizing Inspiring School Employees recognition award is intended to honor one extraordinary education support professional annually and to generate appreciation for all classified school employees.

SHAPE America Teachers of the Year

- Randy Spring, South Washington County, has been named 2022 Central District Elementary Physical Education Teacher of the Year by the Society of Health and Physical Educators.

2022 Minnesota Rural Education Association Educators of Excellence

North Central

- Dave Perry, Cloquet

South

- Jacob Johnson, Windom

North

- Courtney Skjerven, Thief River Falls

South Central

- Jenny Maras, Morris

2022 Minnesota Council on Economic Education Educator of the Year Teaching Awards

Grades K-5 award:

- Jackelyn H. Doyle-Eustice, Saint Paul

Grades 6-8 award:

- Krysten Lynne Dane, Glencoe-Silver Lake

Grades 9-12 award:

- Craig N. Geyen, Monticello

Art Educators of Minnesota 2022 awards

Elementary Art Educator of the Year:

- Andrea Wigern, Glencoe-Silver Lake

Rookie Art Educator of the Year:

- Amy Moreland, Rochester

Emeritus Art Educator of the Year:

- Cheryl Burghardt, Retired

Minnesota Association of Agriculture Educators 2022 Teachers of the Year

Outstanding Agriculture Education Teacher of the Year:

- Pamela Koenen, Alden-Conger

Outstanding Teacher Mentor:

- Roger Dvergsten, Grand Meadow

Outstanding Early Career Teacher:

- Becky Cronk, St. James

Outstanding Middle/Secondary Agriculture Education Program:

- Kaylee Pratt, Staples-Motley

Outstanding Post-Secondary/Adult Program:

- Deron Erickson, Minnesota West-Westland

State College Faculty start campus liaison program during latest negotiations

The Minnesota State College Faculty, the statewide union of the two-year Minnesota State colleges, knew they wanted to get more members involved in the negotiations process for their last contract. Enter the Bargaining Action Teams.

"The BAT is a place for members to come and get their voices and concerns heard, but it's an organizing opportunity too," said Nicole Bietz, who recently took office as the MSCF secretary but had been a BAT leader on the Inver Hills Community College Campus. "The number one concern of our members is the stuff in the contract. This has been an avenue for the rank-and-file to have a more direct voice in the negotiations process. We had a more traditional approach in years past. We would survey members before and there were updates, but there hadn't been a lot of two-way communication until the final settlement. This gave us the ways to engage around priorities as it was going along."

There were 53 members across the state who became BAT leaders and actively participated in the process. BAT leaders identified teams on their campus of around 10 members per team to connect with on a regular basis about what was happening in negotiations. The

BAT leaders who have regular debrief sessions with the negotiations team both to share information and solicit feedback. The BAT leaders also coordinated actions on campuses as negotiations progressed, such as petitions and letter-writing campaigns.

"After each meeting (with the negotiations team), we reached out to our small local faculty group to give them updates, ask for their feedback—which included a prioritization of values when it came to the contract—and, sometimes, had specific asks," said Faith Ericson, who served as a BAT leader at St. Cloud Community and Technical College. "I know that faculty on my campus have good ideas and their own passions, so the opportunity to be a conduit between these faculty and the MSCF contract bargaining team was too good of an opportunity to pass up."

MSCF leaders wanted to be intentional about spreading out the work and the access to union knowledge.

"Feedback from the leaders is that they felt more engaged with the process. It gives another avenue to give voice to people who hadn't had a formal role in the union," said Bietz.

Being more involved in the negotiations process is what drew Jesse Dahl to the program. Dahl, an electrical maintenance and construction instructor at Hibbing Community College, said he hopes more members become more knowledgeable about the negotiations process.

"This was easy to participate in, just getting a better understanding of the terminology from the negotiations team," he said. "And then I was bringing that back to the people I see and work with on my campus."

Getting that chance to talk to people on his campus about their issues was a huge takeaway of the program for Dahl.

"I could have bigger conversations with them about the real issues," he said. "We have the tech faculty and the liberal arts faculty, who are often split, even in the contract. So programs like this give us all a better understanding of every side and how we can be better together."



Expanding their bargaining actions during the last round of negotiations also included MSCF members and staff bringing petitions, letters and demonstrating at the Minnesota State system office in St. Paul.

Ericson said that sense of unity was also true on her campus because of the BAT program.

"It worked. It encouraged fight. It encouraged unity," she said. "I think important employment concerns were revealed and supported in ways that may not have happened in the same way without this process. It was a transparent way to make sure the bargaining process was representative of the membership."

With their current contract settled, MSCF leadership is looking to continue this program and grow it in the next round.

"We are doing some information sessions, like bargaining 101," said Bietz.

Other information sessions include topics such as open bargaining and student-centered bargaining.

"We want to focus on what can we do as members and as a union to support what happens in that negotiations room," said Bietz.

Bietz and the other MSCF leaders know there's still a lot of work to be done.

"From a member engagement standpoint, the BAT leaders this negotiations round was huge. There was still a lot of disappointment in what our contract settlement was. But what that's doing is creating the infrastructure and pressure points for the work moving forward," she said.

That work on what's next for contract negotiations will be a major focus of work for the MSCF statewide leaders, as well as the BAT leaders.

"As we prepare for the negotiations, we can use our BAT now to engage with members, think about our proposals and how we engage and organize members ahead of time," Bietz said. "We can pause and reflect and do some education on how we want it next to go. MSCF has traditional structural processes. The BAT program opened up these spaces for more accountability around bargaining."

MSCF bargaining action team leaders received regular updates from the negotiations team, took that information back to a small group on their campus and had regular conversations about contract proposals and how negotiations were going. The BAT leaders also organized a petition and letter-writing campaign, which were delivered to the Minnesota State negotiations team and the board of trustees, like this one on the Central Lakes College campus.





As a member and leader within the Saint Paul Federation of Educators, Ellen Olsen (right) was on the front lines of the union's historic strike in March 2020.

Olsen recognized with union's highest honor as leadership, career continues

Ellen Olsen, a sign language interpreter in Saint Paul, was named the 2022 Education Minnesota Peterson-Schaubach Outstanding Leadership Award winner. Olsen is the first education support professional to win the union's highest honor.

Named after the two women who led the merger of the Minnesota Education Association and Minnesota Federation of Teachers, the Peterson-Schaubach Outstanding Leadership Award is given annually to an Education Minnesota leader (local or state) who has made outstanding contributions to Education Minnesota or its locals through demonstration of Education Minnesota's Statements of Principle. Nominations are made by Education Minnesota Governing Board members.

"There are so many places in our union that have Ellen's fingerprints on them," said Education Minnesota President Denise Specht. "She's the compass

that we need, and the person who is always reminding us to be better."

Olsen has held numerous leadership positions in her local union, the Saint Paul Federation of Educators, including the director of non-licensed personnel. She has also been a member of the Education Minnesota Governing Board and served multiple terms on the National Education Association Board as an ESP Director.

"I often think of this award as going to someone at the end of their career, but I wanted to make sure Ellen is recognized now for the dedication and work she has put into this union and will continue to put into this union for a long time," said Heather Bakke, a special education teacher in St. Peter who has sat on the governing board and NEA Board with Olsen and nominated her for the award.

"When I say I'm from Minnesota, people on the NEA Board say, 'Oh you must know Ellen Olsen, she is just the best.' And that's without fail," said Judy Rohde, a retired teacher who is active in the Retired union and NEA Board. "This is just the presence that Ellen has made."

Olsen finds every opportunity for leadership she can, especially when she knows it is a place to advocate for ESPs who often aren't in leadership positions. She has spent countless hours researching places and ways to learn and grow herself as an educator, union advocate and leader.

"It's been a blessing to me to be able to do this work at the national and state and local level to help elevate education support professionals," Olsen said.

In her work, Olsen has been an example of what being a strong ESP advocate looks like.

"Ellen has showed up and showed us what it's like to be a leader," said Michelle Dennard, an ESP in Osseo who has served with Olsen on the governing board and is now on the NEA Board.

Olsen has not only prioritized advocacy for ESPs, but also is a champion for racial and social justice.

"She is the epitome of that change that we want to see," said Brenda Johnson, an ESP in Minneapolis who has served on the NEA Board with Olsen. "That new strength and leadership where we can talk about the hard questions and ask the hard questions, but then

strategically plan to say, how are we going to be a better together?"

"I am always thinking about where I can have influence," said Olsen. "What are my spheres of influence and what can we do together?"

The NEA Board has passed the safety, racial and social justice equity policy recently to make sure that racial and social justice remains a high priority of the union. Olsen was a major leader in the work and discussion at the board level and worked to make sure that resolution passed at the Representative Assembly.

"I was so impressed with how she was constantly thinking about the people who weren't in the room," said Bakke.

"This has been something that's been in the making for four or five years," said Rohde. "And Ellen was on the ground floor of getting this going. This was one of those places that one person can make a big difference and Ellen has made that big difference with this policy."

Olsen is excited to continue her advocacy in her work in her school, working on equity issues with students. She remains committed to finding leadership roles where her influence and voice can be powerful and uplift those who aren't in the rooms.

"Her voice is loud," said Dennard. "And it's the type of voice you want in the space to make sure that every person recognizes people of color."



Ellen Olsen's leadership has led her to positions within her local, state and national unions. Speaking at the 2019 NEA Representative Assembly, Ellen was elected to the NEA Board, guiding policy for the nation's largest union and bringing that work back to Minnesota and St. Paul.

Anderson's longtime leadership brings stability, solidarity to Shakopee Education Association

Education Minnesota's "We Are One" award honors members or unions who embody the word solidarity, and the 2022 awardee Dale Anderson of Shakopee fits the award criteria in every way.

"It's that whole idea of collective unity, collective thought and collective power that he really does a good job of harnessing," said Katy Tabke, Shakopee Education Association's local vice president and the one who nominated Anderson. "That idea of being better together. He really lives that every day and he embodies it. He shows all of our members what we can be when we work together."

Anderson has been president of the Shakopee Education Association for more than 20 years. He started in leadership after being an active teacher member and seeing that there was opportunities to help not only his colleagues, but the schools and students, in union leadership.

"The job of being a teacher is very difficult and it just continues to get more difficult," Anderson said. "It feels like there's more barriers and more things we have to overcome. More frustrations, more of all of those sorts of things, and fighting through that to help people understand that it's a worthwhile thing that we're doing and it's meaningful. There's arguably nothing more important for our democracy than public education."

As a local president who is able to be out of the classroom with release time, Anderson spends a lot of time building and nurturing strong relationships with administration. Those relationships have been key in the last few years as Shakopee has not only dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic and teaching and learning changes because of it, but also significant budget cuts.

"Despite some rather difficult years and hard conversations in our district, Dale has encouraged thoughtful and proactive participation," said Tabke in her nomination letter for the award. "In recent years, due to our budget shortfall, Shakopee lost 70 teachers; Dale passionately advocated for our staff needs, fought for those who were placed on leave, and sought creative solutions to a nearly impossible situation."



Dale Anderson worked tirelessly for the passage of a levy referendum in Shakopee in 2021 after a previous attempt had failed and left the district in a dire budget situation. Anderson organized phone banks and other numerous ways for teachers to support the levy passing, which it did.

The budget shortfalls were due to levy elections not passing, but when the time came for another vote in 2021, Anderson knew the work was the unions.

"Dale was at every phone bank, every meeting, and encouraged the most engagement from our membership in recent history," said Tabke. "He is a true leader who seeks to encourage others, put in all his best work, and seeks no recognition. Our levy passed in major part to his actions to encourage members to activate." Anderson also has been a leader in the district negotiations for decades.

While the district is working its way out of those budget cuts, Tabke said Anderson remains steadfast in his demands that teachers still receive improved pay and benefits.

Because of his relationships and vast negotiations experience, Anderson was also able to move through the ever-changing working conditions of the last few years in a way that made sure Shakopee teachers' voices were heard.

"He is very good about saying, 'OK, this is what I know. This is what I'm going to find out. Thank you for letting me know.' And he comes back, usually with an answer or another way to discuss where the district is coming from," said Amy Rutter, a Shakopee Education Association executive board member. "And he has been supportive of the emotional side of teaching as well."

Anderson has prioritized member engagement and personal support in their local the last few years. He has planned social events and networking time for teachers across the district to connect and share with each other.

"When we socialize and get to know each other more, we become a stronger union," said Rutter. "Not only for the stuff that unions represent, but also as members and him letting us know that he's supporting us in every way."

"The camaraderie that is created at those events really lends to people in our union working together and seeing how Dale can help them with issues that come up or how he can be supportive in anything that they need help with," said Jamie Paulson, Shakopee Education Association treasurer.

Whether in his local, at the state level or especially in his intermediate organization, Anderson's creative and steady approach to leadership shines.

"He makes you want to lead by example, just like Dale does," said Wendy Drugge Wuensch, president



As the Shakopee Education Association local president, Dale Anderson (front row, center) has found numerous ways to get his members engaged in their local and statewide politics, as he knows how important it is to the future of public education.

of Burnsville Education Association. "I think Dale embodies a servant leadership-type president."

Anderson says he isn't done with union leadership yet and hopes to continue in his role, dedicating his time, energy and talents to the members of the Shakopee Education Association.

"It's not just about the salaries and how the contract is constructed, but also being able to come alongside people who are in need or in crisis and to be able to provide support and be an encouragement. Those things are really important to me."

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Human Rights Award honors Ellis's lifelong commitment to students, education

Victoria Ellis was posthumously honored with the 2022 Education Minnesota Human Rights Award for her lifetime of service to education, the union and students. The award will also now be named the Education Minnesota Victoria Lynn Ellis Human Rights Award.

Ellis, a Minneapolis education support professional and union leader, who passed away in 2021 was a human rights champion, said Monica Byron, Education Minnesota Vice President who started the Education Minnesota Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee with Ellis and others.

Ellis spent her entire career helping people and working with students who have disabilities.

"She believed that those were some of the more underserved students in schools," said Viki's son, Justin Ellis. "For her, the focus really wasn't just on those students, but also their families. Because the family and the community to her was all part of the same thing in helping students succeed."

Ellis brought those needs of her students to her work in her union. She was an advocate for her students in every room and in every space she entered.

"Viki reminded all of us why we were here, and that's our students' education, and to make sure that they have as good an opportunity as possible," said Shaun Laden, former ESP chapter president of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers and Education Support Professionals.

Nominations for the 2023 Human Rights Award are open now. Go to www.educationminnesota.org for more information.

Those who worked with Ellis in schools or in the union called her a "truth teller" and said she was never afraid to speak up, especially when an injustice was happening.

"I can remember lots of times when everyone else was silent and Viki was speaking out," said Geneva Dorsey, an ESP in Minneapolis who now chairs Education Minnesota's EMAC. "Everyone sat back and listened and took into action what she was saying, because when Viki spoke, she was very powerful and she knew the work from her heart."

Ellis was not only extremely active in her own local, the MFT, but also Education Minnesota and both the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers. She took every opportunity to attend a conference or training, because she knew it was another way for her not only to grow and learn as an educator, but as an advocate.

"She knew that the power of working collectively was very, very important to bring in the other people around you in whatever ways that you can, so that they can find their own power and find their own ways to success," said Justin.

Justin and his family knew this was so important to her that after she passed, they set up a memorial fund for people who wanted to honor her life and donated that money to Minneapolis ESPs who wanted to take part in union leadership trainings and conferences.

Ellis not only was an advocate for her students, but for other educators, especially educators of color.

"There's always an ongoing need for more educators and for my mom, one of the biggest things that she saw was the need to bring in more educators of color



Victoria Ellis was honored often throughout her career and life, including here at the Teachers of Color Coalition for Outstanding Leadership. Education Minnesota's Human Rights Award comes to her after passing in 2021, but her family said they know it would have meant so much to her and it means a lot to them.

to help reflect the communities that we have in Minneapolis and in Minnesota," said Justin. "And help all those people maybe don't always see themselves in the classroom."

Ellis' involvement in beginning EMAC was crucial to the success of that committee, said Byron.

"She had so much historical knowledge about unions and about the community," she said. "And she really brought us together as a group."

Throughout her entire life, Ellis never stopped working so that everyone was seen and heard.

"She just wanted to be that person that wanted to be boots on the ground and get involved in everything that she could to make a difference," said Dorsey. "She paved the way for myself and others who came behind her."

Ellis was a fighter, said Justin.

"The fight she brought to taking on her cancer, that's the fight she had in real life when it came to dealing with some of the issues that educators today have been seeing for such a long time," he said. "Whether we're



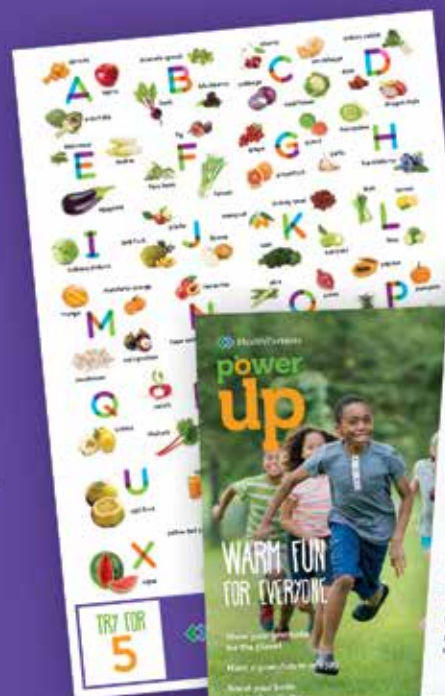
Victoria Ellis was often found at local, state and national union conferences and trainings. She wanted to be in every space she could to help advocate for what students, educators, schools and communities need.

talking about inequity in the classroom or the gaps when it comes to the wages that educators are paid. The fact that our schools are often under threat of not getting the funding they desperately need. Just being able to acknowledge that the achievement gap is real. These are the things she fought for and wanted to see a difference be made in this world."

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Delegate selection underway for Representative Convention

Plans are underway for the 2023 Education Minnesota Representative Convention, taking place April 28-29 at the DoubleTree by Hilton – Minneapolis South. Represent your colleagues on issues that affect all educators by seeking a post as a delegate or alternate. The Representative Convention is our highest governing body, with more than 600 elected delegates meeting annually to set policy for the union.

Major business for delegates includes acting on changes to the union's constitution and bylaws and considering any action items or proposed amendments to the legislative positions and the statements of principle. This year, delegates to the convention will also elect governing board members in eight at-large zones, two education support professional governing board members, a higher education/state affiliate member and an NEA Director.

March 24 is the deadline for local presidents to inform Education Minnesota of those who will be delegates and

alternates to the RC. The number of delegates allocated to each local and statewide affiliate is determined by the number of members and can be found in the Representative Convention section of our website in the Delegate Allocation Report. Delegates are chosen by open nominations and secret ballot. Interested members should contact their local president for details on how to participate.

For this event, Education Minnesota provides one standard hotel room for one night for each local sending at least one delegate and one round-trip mileage reimbursement per delegate. Local presidents have details on the financial arrangements and hotel reservations.

Learn more about the RC and elections in the member portal of www.educationminnesota.org. You will need to be logged in to see this content.

Professional development

Earth Science Teacher Education Project

Professional development for high school earth science teachers and sixth-grade teachers is available through Minnesota's Earth Science Teacher Education Project. ESTEP is available at little to no cost to educators thanks to grant funding. For more information on the offerings, locations and registration, go to www.mnsta.org/cgi/page.cgi/ESTEP.html.

Grants

2022-23 Education Minnesota Foundation grants

The Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning has multiple grants available this year. For details about the grants and how to apply, go to www.edmnfoundation.org. There's a grant waiting for you!

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 to take the lead in acquiring and sharing new skills and knowledge. A Professional Development Grant can also be used for groups to either attend professional development or be trained at their worksite. Deadline: April 7

Second-Year Classroom Grants

Previous classroom-focused grant recipients may request up to \$3,000 to expand on their original objectives, and who have the potential to realize additional goals based on the learning and outcomes of their first grant. Deadline: April 7

MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

Do You Have a Plan for Your Financial Future?

Whether you are just starting your career or nearing retirement, a plan for when and how you can retire is essential in reaching your goals.

- Will I have enough income to retire when I want and live the lifestyle I desire?
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- At what age should I draw Social Security?
- Does my employer offer a severance?
- What level of risk is appropriate for my investment goals?
- How will I pay for healthcare in retirement? Do I have long-term care protection?
- Do I have a plan for my remaining assets to pass to the people and organizations I care about most?
- Do I need to reduce or eliminate my debt?



Like much of life, financial and retirement planning is a disciplined process. How do you know if you're on track without proper guidance?

These are some of the questions addressed by EFS Advisors at seminars provided by ESI throughout the year for members throughout the state. These 'When Can I Afford To Retire' seminars help members get a better understanding of important retirement concepts and planning tools.

Members can also contact EFS Advisors directly to find an advisor near you to help you prioritize your options and create an actionable plan. Then, they help you stay on track, adjust when necessary as your needs change. Contact EFS Advisors today at 763-689-9023, efsadvisors@efsadvisors.com, or online at www.efsadvisors.com.

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TRA Board candidate information coming soon

The Minnesota Teachers Retirement Association active members soon will choose two representatives for the Board of Trustees. Two members will be elected for four-year terms which begin July 1. Six candidates are running for the open spots, and Education Minnesota has decided to provide members with multiple opportunities to learn more about the candidates before making their voting decision.

Education Minnesota will be sending all candidates a questionnaire and, from those answers, creating a digital voters' guide sent out via email. Also planned is a virtual "meet the candidates" event before voting opens, which members will receive information about via email. The event will be recorded and shared out for those who cannot attend live.

Information on the candidates and election will also be shared on Education Minnesota's website and social media channels. Voting will be open mid-March through April 21. Voting information will go to active members from the Minnesota TRA. More information is available at www.minnesotatra.org.