

## JUNE/JULY 2023

# St. Francis office professionals and bus drivers build solidarity during contract campaigns

## Legislature adjourns with major education funding, policy changes



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## Legislative session is over, now we must bargain boldly

Educators did our part in November. Then Gov. Tim Walz and the Legislature appropriated billions for schools—but fell short on some important policies.

Now it's up to us again.

We are now in a round of collective bargaining with the power and resources to complete the Legislature's unfinished business and make the most consequential improvements to working conditions and learning environments in a generation.

The Legislature is providing schools and campuses with billions of dollars in new money.

At the E-12 level, the state will increase its spending by \$5.5 billion over the next four years.

Those are resources we can use in bargaining to make our worksites safer and more professionally rewarding places to be during the school year. We can come together to negotiate for pay raises and more affordable health insurance. When we bargain boldly, we'll win more time and money to spend with our families.

That doesn't include quality of life changes coming from the Legislature outside of bargaining.

There's dedicated money for mental health professionals who can relieve the pressure many educators are feeling to help students with issues they are not trained for.

Our schools will have an easier time hiring education support professionals now that, for the first time, unemployment insurance is available to hourly school workers. More ESPs create a learning environment that's more effective for students and more manageable for every other educator in the building.

Our locals have new power at the negotiating table. Staffing ratios are a mandatory topic of negotiations and new groups of educators can join licensed staff bargaining units.

In higher education, our members in the Minnesota State College Faculty union will see a 12 percent increase in funding for Minnesota's two- and four-year campuses. As in E-12, how well that money is spent will depend on how well we negotiate with the Minnesota State system.

Our workforce will become more racially diverse thanks to historic investments in recruiting and retaining teachers of color.

There may be educators who don't see themselves in every item in our legislative agenda, but one of the oldest tenets of unionism is to work for others' issues so they will work for yours.

### *Pensions: Incremental progress is still progress*

The most disappointing result of the session was on pension reform. We sought sweeping improvements but achieved incremental progress: A reduction of the normal retirement age by one year to 65.

But just because the improvements were small does not mean they were unimportant. Many legislators are on the record acknowledging the problem; some have already pledged to do more. All of them have heard from teachers and their union.

Our union will keep pushing for the thorough pension reforms our members deserve—and now we have momentum.

By the time this edition of the Educator is published, the next phase of our pension campaign will have begun. We're seeking fresh perspectives from members and applying the lessons learned in 2023 to make more progress in 2024.

There may never be a fix that meets the needs of every educator, but I believe we can find a solution that benefits the most Education Minnesota members possible. Stay connected with our union in the next few months to receive the latest information.

The 2023 session of the Legislature has delivered funding that will change the lives of educators and students, but only if we work in union through collective bargaining to make it happen.

Together,



Twitter: @DeniseSpecht



Denise Specht

## One Educator issue coming to households with more than one member

Education Minnesota is always looking for ways to be good stewards of our members' dues dollars. Our data systems have allowed us to now combine the mailing list for the Minnesota Educator magazine, so addresses with more than one member will now be receiving just one copy.

Both members names can be found on the mailing label. This has saved us printing and postage for more than 4,000 issues and we hope those who have more than one member in their household will make sure to share the copy!

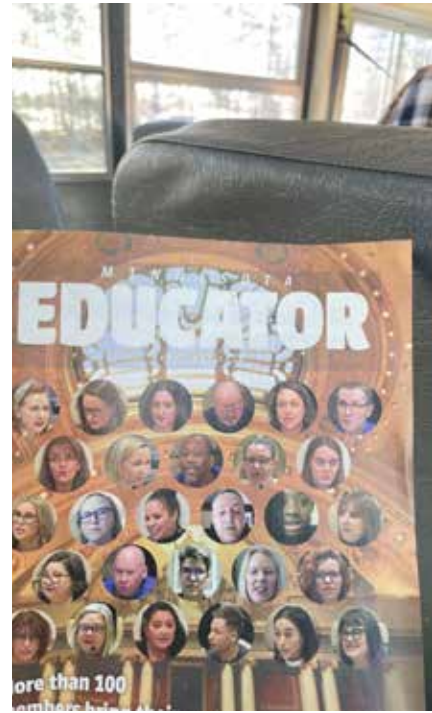
If your issue has been affected and you would like to continue receiving multiple issues or if your household was missed, please reach out to [educator@edmn.org](mailto:educator@edmn.org).

## Where are you reading your Minnesota Educator?

**Congratulations, Ashley Nelson of East Central, for being this issue's winning submission!**

We love seeing all of the places where you are reading your Minnesota Educator!

Email a photo to [educator@edmn.org](mailto:educator@edmn.org) or share it on social media using #mneducator of where you are reading your Minnesota Educator to be entered into a drawing to win a \$50 Target gift card! Submissions are due July 10. Happy reading!



## 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!



## Educators in the news!

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

“

**Faculty are deeply invested both in the institution and in our students' success. We will continue to work with the president, as we have throughout her nearly two-year tenure now. But we don't believe that those are all likely to change in the near or the medium-term future.**

”

– Brent Braga, Minnesota State College Faculty chapter president of the East Grand Forks campus of Northland Community & Technical College, in a May 12 Minnesota Public Radio story, “Minnesota college faculty vote no confidence in president, seek change in leadership.” Through their union, the MSCF members took a no confidence vote in their campus leader after enrollment and viability of program concerns under her leadership.

## St. Francis office professionals, bus drivers build solidarity during prolonged contract campaigns

"We're worth more!" became the rallying cry in St. Francis when the office professionals and bus drivers bargaining units were building toward a strike if the district didn't settle contracts that respected and valued their work.

In April, the bus drivers passed a tentative agreement reached in their final mediation session before a planned strike vote and the OPs voted to go on strike, but ended up with an agreement in a mediation session the week before they were set to go on the line.

"We had been quiet and taken less for far too long, but we knew we couldn't continue to sustain ourselves and our families on low wages and high insurance costs," said Andrea Powers, a registrar at St. Francis Middle School and negotiator for the OPs. "It took some time and they had to hear us roar first, but we are pleased to have gotten this contract done."

The OPs and drivers are separate bargaining units within the districtwide union of Education Minnesota St. Francis, which also contains separate units of teachers, preschool teachers, education assistants and nutrition services staff.

While in the same union and with the same contract timeline, the two units had never worked together on their bargaining campaigns. But as they both became frustrated with the lack of movement by the district, the two groups started working on organizing plans together—both internally and out in the community.

Together, they held rallies before the school board meetings, spoke at board meetings and did informational picketing in high traffic areas in the community. They started getting the word out about their asks in the

community, something neither group had never done before.

"When you have been undervalued and unappreciated for so long, settling is very comfortable. It's easy. Coming together as a group, speaking out, demanding your worth, it's something that you can do," said Darci Brunette, a bus driver and negotiator for their unit. "We have grown as a group. We feel empowered, strong and that the sky is the limit if we stand together."

The issues for both groups were also the same—better wages and benefits.

"The bus drivers have been asked to work longer hours and have full buses due to the bus driver shortage," said Brunette. "Better wages was the No. 1 ask. More money per hour to help retain drivers and to show our drivers they are valued. Our district has not been competitive with surrounding districts with our hourly wages for a very long time, if ever."

The OPs were looking for wages that were comparable to surrounding districts but also increases to health insurance contributions. As the lowest paid workers in the district, they were paying the most for insurance.

"We have been falling behind our surrounding districts in pay and are still currently the lowest," said Powers. "We have been given 2-3% raises while our health insurance premiums have risen an average of more than 4% every year. We have many OPs that work for health care, and some pay the district even after their paychecks don't cover the cost."

Even after the drivers settled their contract, they still showed up for the OPs' actions. The OPs voted down



The office professionals and bus drivers in St. Francis held rallies before school board meetings. They walked in together and then had people speak to the board about settling contracts that respect and value their work.

the tentative agreement reached with the district in April and immediately took a strike authorization vote. Eighty-six percent of the members voted to strike, after more than half of the membership voted down a tentative agreement.

"The district is sitting on millions of dollars in their fund reserve and are poised to get a historic amount of funding from the state—and they have employees making less than our high school students make at their after-school jobs," said Nancy Brunn, a registrar at St. Francis high school and office professional unit negotiator after the strike vote.

Just a week before they would have gone on the line, the OPs approved a new tentative agreement with the district, which included raises, a one-time stipend and a health insurance contribution increase—the first insurance increase any bargaining unit in the district has received in a decade.

"This contract is a step toward correcting the years of our work being underpaid and undervalued," said

Brunn. "We will be back at the table again in a year when this contract expires, and we hope to keep building upon this."

Both groups know they have built increased solidarity within their units and with each other which they can carry through when these contracts expire in 2024.

"Our staff have felt alone in their frustrations with being underpaid and undervalued and they realized they were no longer alone. We are stronger than ever and excited to work together on our next negotiations," said Powers.

As licensed staff in the district and across the state head to bargaining, their union local president Ryan Fiereck said everyone should look to the units for inspiration.

"Not only have they shown education support professional unions across the state that they can ask for what they are worth, they have shown all educators that they do not need to settle for doing more with less anymore," said Fiereck, who serves as local president of all six bargaining units within Education Minnesota St. Francis.

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## 2023 Teacher of the Year Houston centers community, connection, fun in his classroom

Michael Houston's teaching philosophy has always been centered upon creating classroom community, and in light of the recent pandemic and the ongoing trauma his students have endured, Houston's daily goal is to also have fun with and love on his kids.

Houston was named the 2023 Minnesota Teacher of the Year in early May—his second time as a finalist for the award. He now becomes our National Teacher of the Year nominee in 2024.

"In my classroom, my teaching style includes incorporating humor and making relevant connections to life experiences and lessons that I have learned over the years," said Houston in his nomination materials for the award. "These experiences include my own personal



experiences through my upbringing, academic and athletic pursuits and adulthood. Whether it's applying mathematical concepts outside of the classroom, or just having the confidence to navigate the world, being open with my students allows me to develop that necessary trust in order to have the greatest impact."

Houston is a mathematics teacher at Harding High School in the St. Paul Public School District, where he teaches Algebra II and Intermediate Algebra.

Raised in a single-parent household by his mother with help from his grandparents, Houston was the first in his family to graduate from college, earning a bachelor's degree from Concordia University, St. Paul and a master's degree from Hamline University. Houston also works as adjunct professor at Concordia, teaching math classes to prospective elementary teachers. He will become an adjunct professor at Augsburg University this fall.

Houston's 19-year career at Harding includes 18 years as a football coach—10 of which he was head coach. At Harding, Houston is the mathematics department chair, a learning team facilitator and union steward.

"Michael is passionate about his students and works tirelessly to engage them in the study of mathematics," wrote Kimberley Nichols, a Gordon Parks High School math teacher who previously worked with Houston at Harding and served with him on the SPPS district mathematics team. "His ability to engage all students, particularly students of color, is exceptional; partly due to his lived experiences as a teacher of color and to his determination to help all students achieve success. He meets students where they are, and inspires them to learn deeply. His passion and dedication to equity and culturally responsive instruction has made a tremendous difference in the lives of the students he works with every single day."

Houston said during his recognition year he hopes to center attention and advocacy on two issues—mental health and increasing access to relevant and culturally significant curriculum.

"The impact of the pandemic shed light on the importance of mental health support in our society," he said in his award portfolio essay. "I consider myself lucky to have had the resources to be able to address my own mental health issues; resources that the majority of our students in public education do not."

Houston also knows that it is important to recognize that our students need the requisite skill set and confidence to be able to meet the challenges and demands of the world.

"We as educators need to create curriculum that will serve them throughout their adult lives," he said. "Over the past two years, I have noticed an increase in engagement with students. Can you believe many of them didn't know what a down payment was? Addressing topics such as learning to buy a house, filing taxes and investing has opened a new world of opportunities and professions that they would have never learned about otherwise."

## Ten others honored as Teacher of the Year finalists

Besides Houston, 10 other teachers were also finalists for 2023 Minnesota Teacher of the Year award. Here are their reflections on why they teach.



"I firmly believe that if we equip young people with the tools to think critically, practice radical compassion and empathy, and envelop them with love and support along the way, the better world we all envision can become a reality."

*Fatuma Ali, Hopkins High School, Hopkins, English, grades 10-12*



"I come from four generations of educators, so I teach in part because it's in my blood. For me, teaching is one of the most honorable and fulfilling professions. I teach because it brings me joy."

*Sorcha Nix, Open World Learning Community, Saint Paul, science, grades 8-9*



"I teach to help steer the world in a better direction. I teach so that school isn't boring and oppressive. I teach to raise young people's expectations of what is possible and doable."

*Molly Megan Keenan, Harding High School, Saint Paul, social studies/history, grades 9-12*



"I teach because I want to build a better community. And every single day I want to create an environment for my students where they are given dignity and they feel loved."

*John Peter, Pelican Rapids High School, Pelican Rapids, English as a second language, grades 7-12*



"I teach because I love sharing my passion for culture, self-expression, and humanity. I teach to provide a diverse representation for my students."

*Bee Lee, Emmet D. Williams Elementary, Roseville, visual arts, grades K-6*



"I want to be part of a system where classrooms do not just look like four walls...where I, along with my students, get to figure out who we are and how we constantly grow and learn from each other."

*Fathimath Eliza Rasheed, Global Arts Plus-Upper Campus, Saint Paul, theatre, grades 5-8*



"Teaching is coming alongside someone wherever they are and encouraging them to find their passion. To find their voice. To find their perspective. To find their ideas."

*Josh Mann, St. Michael-Albertville High School, St. Michael-Albertville, social studies, grades 9-12*



"I teach because it's an opportunity to make connections to the real world, and I really enjoy being a conduit for that."

*Joe Schulte, Sartell High School, Sartell-St. Stephen, technology education, grades 9-12*



"Teaching is complicated and messy, but hidden within the mess are the most beautiful moments of connection. And being a part of those moments is why I teach."

*Giovanna Valeria Margalli, Cornelia Elementary School, Edina, elementary education, grade 4*



"I teach because every day I get to joyfully experience and re-experience our world through the eyes of children."

*Allyson Wolff, Eisenhower Elementary School, Hopkins, Spanish Immersion, grade 1*

## Convention delegates chart course for union's work

Delegates to the 2023 Education Minnesota Representative Convention discussed and passed items which will guide the union's work in the next year.

At the April convention, the 495 delegates passed action items, had robust debate, voted for governing board representatives and heard from state and national speakers.

Delegates passed action items to have Education Minnesota:

- Advocate for a legislatively referred constitutional amendment that would enshrine the collective bargaining rights in our state constitution.
- Support ongoing work to enhance local efforts in recruiting and mobilizing members.
- Advocate with the governor, the Legislature and the TRA Board for increases in the employer and state contributions to cover the cost of reducing the normal retirement age and making an early retirement rule available to all plan participants until TRA has an equitable pension for all its members.
- Support locals in standing in solidarity with one another to bargain strong contracts with significant improvements in compensation, benefits and working conditions.
- Focus its work on the educator health care crisis by investigating options for affordable, high quality educator health care including statewide or large pool plans.
- Support locals in running strong, year-round local membership recruitment campaigns and provide an umbrella statewide membership campaign.
- Engage our members and the community about labor's role in advocating for tangible solutions to the climate crisis that simultaneously strengthen the working class.

Delegates also voted for two Education Minnesota Governing Board At-Large Zone seats. Matthew Wilmes from Education Minnesota-Lewiston-Altura was elected to Zone 5 and Glazell Toledo from Education Minnesota-Intermediate School District 287 Local 2209 was elected to Zone 7.

The convention kicked off a celebration of Education Minnesota's 25th anniversary—the merger of the Minnesota Federation of Teachers and Minnesota Education Association which became official on Sept. 1, 1998.

At the convention, member and staff leaders from both unions were honored for the risks they took and the time and investment they made in making the merger a success. Our union is strong today because of their work.

Education Minnesota will continue celebrating this historic anniversary throughout the rest of the year. Watch for future issues of the Educator and our social media channels for more information.



*Union and staff leaders from the first-in-the-nation merger that created Education Minnesota 25 years ago were recognized and honored at the Representative Convention in April. Thanks to their time, energy and efforts, our union is a strong, united, statewide voice for educators and students.*

## Legislative session ends with major wins for educators, schools

The 2023 Minnesota Legislature adjourned May 22 after passing a budget that makes historic investments in public education, educators and our communities. Also passed were numerous policy changes that will impact teaching and learning across the state.

There is more work to be done on issues like pensions, but after educators put their time and energy into electing pro-public education majorities into the Legislature last November, they will begin to see real impacts to their working conditions.

On May 24, Gov. Tim Walz signed into law the historic budgets for education, labor and taxes that could provide sweeping improvements to the teaching and learning environments in Minnesota's schools and campuses, and which pay for an important step toward true pension reform for Minnesota's teachers.

The total E-12 education omnibus bill includes \$5.5 billion in new funding over the next four fiscal years, including an approximately 11 percent increase to the state's financial support for E-12 public education in the first two-year budget and a 15 percent increase in the following two years.

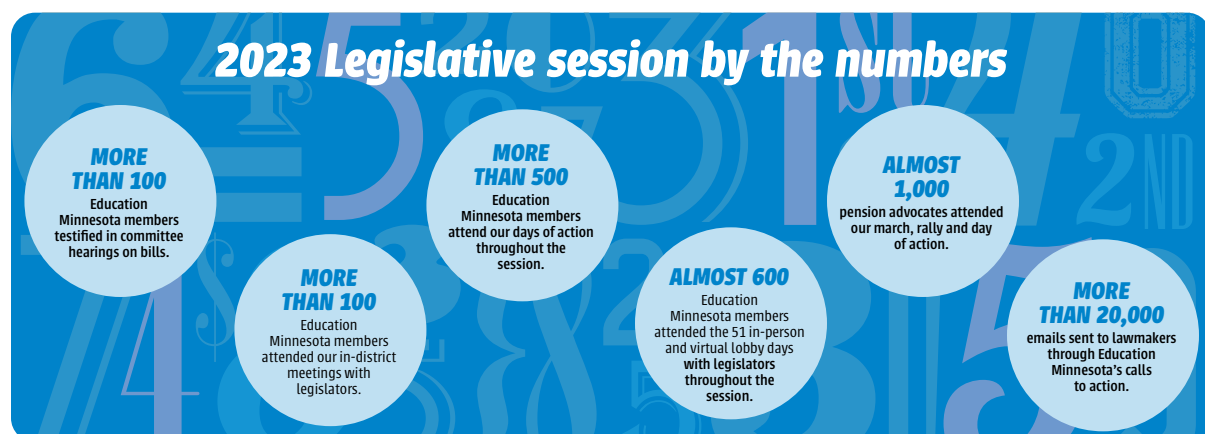
"This is a life-changing package of funding and policy for the working conditions of educators and the learning environments of students—if the new money is spent correctly," Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said. "The pension improvements are a small step toward fixing the inequities in our pension system, but our union will be back for better in 2024."

A provision in the tax bill would spend \$97 million to enable most Minnesota teachers to retire with a full pension a year earlier by reducing the normal retirement age from 66 to 65 while increasing contributions from employers and employees. Read more about the plans to continue to push for pension reform on pages 16-17.

Gov. Tim Walz, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, Senate Majority Leader Kari Dziedzic and House Speaker Melissa Hortman spoke at a bill-signing event on the Capitol steps May 24. Specht said educators can take some credit for putting the governing coalition in place.

"Educators and parents are celebrating because of the efforts of thousands of educators, before and after Election Day, who advocated for public education and the people who deliver it," Specht said. "Without the work of those educators, the elections could have turned out differently and our schools would have been facing defunding through vouchers, pay cuts for teachers, the destruction of unions, attacks on LGBTQ+ students, and restrictions on our students' freedom to learn honest lessons of history."

Read more about what passed and how it impacts you and your school on the next few pages. These are short summaries and does not encompass the vast amount of legislation impacting schools and educators. Go to [www.educationminnesota.org](http://www.educationminnesota.org) and watch our social media channels for more information.



## What are the direct funding impacts educators will see?

There were significant changes to how public schools will be funded in Minnesota this legislative session. The next few pages are a breakdown of only a handful and how they will impact educators' working conditions.

### English language learner revenue

The ELL revenue was significantly expanded in FY2024 and 2025 from \$704 to \$1,228 per eligible English learners enrolled in the district and to \$1,775 thereafter. The bill also creates EL cross-subsidy aid starting in FY2027 to provide additional funding for EL costs.

#### How will this impact me?

Currently, districts must cover the ELL cross-subsidy with money from their general fund. With this dedicated funding to provide these crucial services, more general fund dollars will be available to go to educators' salaries, benefits and directly to classroom support.

### Basic formula revenue increase

The formula was increased by 4% and 2% in the biennium, from \$6,863 to \$7,138 for fiscal year 2024 and \$7,281 for fiscal year 2025. Basic formula allowance will be tied to inflation for future years, with a minimum of 2% and a cap of 3% in statute. The language is also explicit that the Legislature may provide funding beyond the 3% percent cap to fund schools consistent with its constitutional obligation.

#### How will this impact me?

The per-pupil funding is a direct tie to supporting educators and classrooms. Educators can use the funding infusion to bargain for increases in wages, benefits and to improve their working conditions. Being tied to inflation also means that districts have a consistent number to use for budgeting and those increases should go directly to educators and students.

### Referendum revenue

The full amount of a voter-approved levy will now be renewable by a school board vote rather than a vote of the district electorate. A board-approved renewal is only possible if the amount of the levy remains unchanged, including levies with an automatic inflation-adjustment that has been approved. The term

of the referendum levy renewal by the board is limited to 10 years. This renewal can happen one time before returning to voters.

#### How will this impact me?

This change will provide a way to hold their operating budgets harmless for districts that do not wish to increase the value of their referendum revenue or believe they will face significant opposition.

### Full-service community schools

An expansion of statutory guidance and funding for full-service community schools is included in the education bill, including grants from MDE to districts and charter schools of \$100,000 per site for the first year for planning activities, and \$200,000 per year for each site for up to three years of implementation.

#### How will this impact me?

FSCS are a proven model to reduce opportunity gaps by welcoming community members as partners in school improvement, bringing community services into the school, and empowering the people closest to students to examine disparities.

### Special education cross-subsidy aid, homeless pupil aid

The special education cross-subsidy aid increases in fiscal years 2024 through 2026 from 6.43% to 44% of each school district's special education cross-subsidy, then increases the cross-subsidy aid percentage again in fiscal year 2027 to 50%. This lowers the cross-subsidy to approximately 14% of special education costs. The bill also creates a component of special education funding for districts not eligible for full reimbursement of their transportation costs for homeless and highly mobile students.

#### How will this impact me?

Currently, districts must cover the special education cross-subsidy and transportation costs with money

from their general fund. With this dedicated funding to provide these crucial services, more general fund dollars will be available to go to educators' salaries, benefits and directly to classroom support.

### **Student Support Personnel Aid**

Student support services personnel are defined as school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, school nurses, and chemical dependency counselors. Districts will receive funding on a formula basis with charter schools guaranteed at least \$20,000 in annual aid and small districts at least \$40,000. Intermediate districts and other cooperative entities will also be entitled to this aid stream.

#### **How will this impact me?**

Districts can use this funding to hire new positions or maintain or expand existing ones. Educators know the student mental health crisis is one that needs immediate attention, and this funding means teachers and ESPs can direct their focus on their classrooms and have the trained staff in their buildings to best support students' physical and mental health.

### **Funding in support of teachers of color, expanding the teaching workforce**

The education bill includes grants to support Indigenous people working to become licensed teachers, hiring bonuses to educators at Tier 2-4 licenses, grants for higher education institutions with plans to support completion and licensure attainment for educators of color, and grants to induct, mentor, and retain Tier 2 or 3 teachers who are of color or American Indian, and Tier 2 or 3 teachers in licensure shortage areas.

#### **How will this impact me?**

Minnesota needs more educators, and we specifically need a workforce that better reflects the diversity of our student population. Studies show that one of the most efficient ways to address racial disparities is to support a diverse educational workforce. These grants will also increase the educator workforce as a whole, meaning potentially smaller class sizes and more support for current staff.

### **Operating capital revenue**

Additional state aid is provided via operating capital revenue to allow for districts to purchase both menstrual products for students and opiate antagonists such as nasal naloxone.

#### **How will this impact me?**

By having products available that make students more comfortable and safer in schools, educators are better able to focus on teaching and learning.

### **Expanded voluntary pre-kindergarten seats**

Beginning in 2024, 4,000 existing voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) and School Readiness Plus (SRP) seats will become permanently funded. The bill also adds another 5,200 VPK/SRP seats for fiscal years 2026 and later resulting in a total of 12,360 VPK/SRP seats funded.

#### **How will this impact me?**

Giving more children access to pre-kindergarten and school readiness programs means students will come into our K-12 school system more prepared and ready to learn on Day One. Educators will be able to hit the ground running with curriculum.

### **READ Act**

Statutory changes significantly alter the professional development requirements for teachers of reading. The new law also financially encourages districts to use evidence-based reading curriculum. Districts must also do more comprehensive screenings for dyslexia. Districts may receive reimbursement for adopting reading curriculum from MDE's approved list of evidence-based reading curriculum that meet the requirements of the READ Act.

#### **How will this impact me?**

Local unions should prepare to bargain time and supports for the staff required to complete the trainings. Locals should also track the reimbursement districts receive for curriculum, as this will increase the amount of revenue available in a district's general education fund which can be spent in other ways to directly impact educators. Finally, locals should bargain over who will

be responsible for screening students for dyslexia as well as the supports those members will need.

### **Earned Sick and Safe Time**

This language requires that employers permit employees to accrue no less than 48 hours per year to be used for sick leave, leave for care of relatives, leave relating to weather or public health emergencies, and leave necessary to ensure one's personal safety in the event of domestic abuse, sexual assault, or intimate-partner stalking.

#### **How will this impact me?**

While this may not result in more leave for educators as it is less than what is available in most contracts, it will be necessary for virtually every bargaining unit to ensure that the categories of emergency for which their leave allotments are available includes safety-related reasons.

### **Paid Family Medical Leave**

Paid Family Medical Leave is a policy that will enable Minnesota to allow nearly all employees to access paid leave in the event of a serious health condition, a pregnancy, or the need to care for a relative. The legislation breaks benefits into two categories: 1) medical leave, including for pregnancy or recovery from childbirth, and 2) all other kinds of leave, that is parental leave, safety leave, caregiving leave, and deployment-related leave. Workers can receive up to 12 weeks of leave in each of the two categories per benefit year. Workers who need leave from both categories can take up to 20 weeks total in a benefit year.

#### **How will this impact me?**

Starting Jan. 1, 2026, educators will have access to comprehensive leave in order to support themselves and their families, which most contracts currently do not have.

### **Universal meals**

A dedicated funding source for providing breakfast and lunch for all students.

#### **How will this impact me?**

This will cure headaches for school districts that have to chase down families to pay balances, cut down on paperwork, and most importantly promote student well-being. We all know hungry students can't learn.

### **Higher Education**

The bill appropriates \$122 million for Minnesota State stabilization, which will help address college and university campus budgetary needs; \$75 million for a tuition freeze; \$50 million of one-time funding in FY2024 for campus support; and the North Star Promise, which awards scholarships to eligible students in an amount not to exceed 100% of tuition and fees. Eligibility for the scholarship includes completing the FAFSA, has a family adjusted gross income below \$80,000, has not earned a baccalaureate degree and is enrolled in at least one credit per semester.

#### **How will this impact me?**

The bill affects not only our Minnesota State College Faculty members and their daily lives in their classrooms, but any educator who is attending or has family attending a Minnesota State college or could qualify for the North Star Promise scholarships.

### **ESP support**

ESPs will now have access to paid training, paid e-learning days and unemployment insurance. Read more about the ESP specific legislation on page 13.

#### **How will this impact me?**

More professional and financial support for ESPs means better recruitment and retention of the important unlicensed staff our schools need.

## Unemployment insurance, paid training for ESPs now law

The Legislature enacted meaningful changes for ESPs this session.

### Paid training

The paraprofessional training aid passed requires eight hours of training, six of which have to be completed prior to the start of the school year. The Department of Education will be reimbursing employers for the costs related to this training. Importantly, law now also requires specific training for paraprofessionals working with students receiving special education services so that all staff working with a student can be familiar with the student's IEP.

### Access to IEP data

Districts have five days from when a student starts working with a child to offer an educator time to read the IEP of a student. This may be built within the workday, but it must be paid time.

### Paid e-learning days

If it declares an e-learning day, a district must pay all employees their wages and benefits on that day, regardless of what their position is. The new language also requires that districts permit employees to work remotely to the extent practicable or make other accommodations, including alternate work sites or permitting workers to be on-call.

### Unemployment insurance

Paraprofessionals, clerical, nutrition services, transportation, custodial and other non-instructional employees are now eligible to apply for unemployment benefits if they do not have an offer of employment for work during the summer. This change took effect May 28.

Education Minnesota has robust information online at [www.educationminnesota.org/ui-for-esps](http://www.educationminnesota.org/ui-for-esps), including a direct link to the application site. Included here are some answers to frequently asked questions, but more are answered on the website.

**Q:** Should I apply for unemployment benefits this summer?

**A:** Yes, if you are not working this summer or are working a significantly reduced schedule, you should apply. To be eligible for unemployment benefits, you must be actively looking for work and you must accept suitable offers of employment. Education Minnesota encourages you to accept jobs that are offered to you—especially summer school and extended school year positions with your district—AND apply for unemployment, as you may be eligible for a partial benefit.

**Q:** I am still working 10 hours a week and provide one of the following services; summer meals, meal delivery, child care or education support with my school district. Will I be eligible for unemployment?

**A:** The only way to know whether you're eligible for UI benefits is to apply and answer the questions honestly. Unemployment offers a partial benefit for individuals who work at jobs where they make less. It's probably in your self-interest to work summer school and collect the partial unemployment payment.

**Q:** My salary is paid year-round (annualized pay) with the school district. Am I still eligible for unemployment?

**A:** Salary paid for work prior to the unemployment benefit reporting period you are applying for is not counted as income against your unemployment benefit for purposes of unemployment. (Annualized wages do not reduce your unemployment benefit if found eligible).

### Things to consider

Should there be a break between the end of the school year and before summer school starts, you should apply for unemployment, as there are five weekdays without work that must be served before unemployment eligibility may begin. When working at summer school, should your hours drop in a week and you were not eligible before, you may be now and should apply. If there are weekdays after summer school ends and school begins, you should apply as you may be eligible.

## Important policy provisions impacting educators, unions

Being a funding year, the main focus of legislation was on the budget, but there were also significant policy provisions that were passed impacting our unions, schools, educators and students. Below is a breakdown of some of the biggest ones.

### Union freedoms

This year, the Legislature made a number of changes to PELRA that will, ideally, modernize a statute that has not seen a great deal of changes since it was adopted in 1971. These changes include:

#### Subjects of bargaining

Terms and conditions of employment now specifically includes “adult-to-student ratios in classrooms, student testing, and student-to-personnel ratios.” The language enables the parties to bargain about staffing levels in classrooms, buildings and the district as a whole. While this provision alone will not reduce the existing educator shortage, it will permit unions to negotiate with districts about staffing solutions that can aid students and help to retain staff. The language also specifically requires districts to negotiate with their bargaining units regarding the implementation of e-learning days.

#### Bargaining unit changes/pre-K licensure

Tier 1 teachers are now eligible to be in their district’s bargaining unit. Pre-kindergarten teachers are also now eligible to be in their bargaining unit. In addition, all early learning school-based programs will require licensure by 2028, however anyone who has been teaching in a program for five or more years is exempted from this requirement.

#### Access to employees

Employers must provide information about new hires to exclusive representatives within 20 days of their hire or exit from the bargaining unit. Also, employers must, every 120 days, provide information about bargaining unit members to an exclusive representative. Perhaps most importantly, exclusive representatives must be given an opportunity to meet with new employees for at least 30 minutes upon their hire.

### Access to data

Employers are now obligated to provide unions with information about new employees as well as issues relating to the enforcement of a collective bargaining agreement. Employers are no longer permitted to withhold information about grievances and investigations.

### Dues

Unions are permitted to have payroll deduction as a method of collecting dues, and employers may not unilaterally stop dues collection unless they are authorized to do so by an exclusive representative.

### Card check

Unions may use card check verification, administered by the Bureau of Mediation Services, as a method of ensuring majority support for a bargaining representative.

### ECFE/ABE rights

Early Childhood Family Education and Adult Basic Education teachers now have the same due process protections and teacher tenure protections as other licensed teachers.

### Probationary periods

The probationary period for all teachers has been lowered from 120 days a year to 90 days a year. Probationary periods have been aligned across all districts and charter schools, meaning that, once a teacher has completed their probation, they will only have a one-year probation if/when they move to another district.

### Captive audience meeting

This language prevents employers from retaliating against an employee who chooses not to attend an employer’s mandatory meetings about religious or

political matters. This would limit the ability of employers to require employees to listen to electioneering or lobbying pitches, as well as anti-union content.

### **PERB funding**

The Legislature created the Public Employment Relations Board in 2014 so that parties could file unfair labor practice (ULP) charges with an administrative body instead of in court. It previously only received a small sum of money to start its operations. The PERB is finally funded at \$750,000 annually and will now be able to hire full-time staff.

## **Student discipline**

### **K-3 Suspensions**

Districts may not suspend or dismiss a student in grades pre-K through 3, but this does not prevent districts or administrators from sending students home for less than a day if the need arises. As is the case with many provisions relating to discipline, districts must review IDEA and relevant state law when determining whether to send students receiving special education services even for a partial day.

### **Non-exclusionary Policies and Practices**

Starting this fall, schools must use non-exclusionary discipline practices before suspending a student or encouraging them to withdraw. This provision received a significant amount of attention during the legislative session, and the language that the Legislature adopted was at least partly as a result of engagement by teachers, administrators, community organizations and the Department of Education. This language did not affect the ability of administrators to remove students immediately if “it appears that the pupil will create an immediate and substantial danger to self or to surrounding persons or property.” It also reflects current best practices for classroom educators who routinely redirect and intervene when students are off-task prior to even considering whether to remove a student from the classroom.

## **Tiered licensure changes**

### **Basic skills test requirement removed**

The basic skills tests have been proven to be full of racial bias and has not correlated to teacher effectiveness.

Removing this unnecessary barrier to licensure now means that in order to move from a Tier 3 to a Tier 4 license, teachers will have to have three years teaching experience. For most, the three years will coincide with a probationary period and the move to continuing contract will happen at the same time members become eligible for their initial T4 license.

### **Teachers from other states**

The requirement for teachers coming to Minnesota from other states to stay at Tier 3 until they have accumulated three years of teaching in MN has been removed. Now, when teachers come from other states, they can go right to Tier 4 IF they have three years of experience as the teacher of record in the same licensure field. Those years don't need to have been in Minnesota.

### **Tier 2 license holders**

Tier 2 is now limited to people who have 1) completed teacher prep but not yet passed tests, 2) people enrolled in preparation; and 3) people who hold an M.A. degree in the licensure field. PELSB will work on adopting rules that require enrolled candidates to show that they are making reasonable progress at the moment of renewal.

Because no changes were made to the eligibility requirements for a Tier 3 license, Tier 2 license holders can continue to move to a Tier 3 without completing teacher preparation or submitting a portfolio. We hope that PELSB will adopt rules requiring Tier 2 license holders to show that they are making reasonable progress toward completion of programs at the moment of Tier 2 license renewal.

### **American Indian history relicensure requirement**

The new requirement, on American Indian history, has yet to be defined in PELSB rule. This law goes into effect Aug. 1, which means the state will need to build a course immediately for people renewing in 2024, and then be set to revise it whenever PELSB completes rulemaking and defines the requirement.



## Legislature passes some pension reform, Education Minnesota plans to continue advocacy

The 2023 Minnesota Legislative session ended with some reforms to educator pensions, but significant work remains. Education Minnesota is already planning for its continued advocacy for the rest of the year and into the next legislative session.

"Teaching has gotten so much harder since 1989, it just makes sense to make a full pension easier to access for the teachers who have given so much to our state," Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said. "Pensions are also an important recruiting tool for talented people considering teaching as a career because the state of Minnesota is offering something corporate America never will—a defined-benefit pension with a reasonable retirement age. The new changes aren't enough, but they are a step in the right direction, and they open the door to more improvements in the future. Our union will keep pushing."

### What did pass

#### HF3100 (as amended)

Passed out of the LCPR and impacted all four systems—Teachers Retirement Association, St. Paul

Teacher's Retirement Fund Association, Public Employee's Retirement Association (general plan contains non-licensed school employees) and Minnesota State Retirement Association (CERP plan contains some teachers)—which all contain our Education Minnesota members.

Here is the one-time funding allocated to plans with our members and effects:

- One-time 2.5% COLA, non-compounded, for current retirees of all plans and 1.45% COLA for Basic Plan members (funds listed by plan below).
- \$145 million to TRA for general liabilities and \$31 million for the retiree COLAs.
- \$148 million to PERA-General for general liabilities and reducing vesting period from five years to three

years and \$21.7 million for the retiree COLAs (also additional funding for other PERA plans).

- *The lower vesting period goes into effect immediately.*
- \$12.8 million to SPTRFA for benefit improvement of 62/30 for an unreduced benefit (combined with 1% employee contribution increase) and \$2.8 million for the retiree COLAs.
- *The SPTRFA provision for an unreduced 62/30 benefit goes into effect July 1.*
- *The SPTRFA 1% employee increase goes into effect July 1, 2025.*
- \$9.5 million to MSRS-CERP (we have a small number of members in this plan) for general liabilities with \$910,000 for retiree the COLAs (also additional funding for other MSRS plans).

### HF1938

Pension improvements in the tax bill that included funding and lowering the NRA for Tier 2 teachers in TRA and SPTRFA. The funding and benefits are both delayed and will go into effect July 1, 2025.

#### **Benefit improvement:**

- The Normal Retirement Age (NRA) is lowered from 66 to 65 in both TRA and SPTRFA for the Tier 2 plans (Tier 1 was already 65) as of July 1, 2025.
- The impact on accumulated base penalties is lowering them by 7% at each age under 66.
- The impact to those with 30-plus years of service is a lowering of the penalties that result from the current 62/30 provision in TRA.

#### **Funding:**

- The employee contribution for TRA and SPTRFA would increase by .25% on July 1, 2025. SPTRFA's increase is in addition to the 1% employee increase passed in HF3100.
- The employer contribution for TRA and SPTRFA would increase by .75% on July 1, 2025. The bill provides funding for the employer-side of the contribution, reimbursing districts and other employers.
- The bill provides the only ongoing funding allocated this session for any of the four pension systems.

## **A message from one of our biggest allies in the Legislature**

**“I’m proud to stand with Minnesota’s teachers on pension reform. As the father of two school-aged daughters, I’ve seen the remarkable effort our teachers put into their jobs, and how difficult these last few years have been. I heard it from constituents in St. Cloud, and from teachers all over the state—we can and must do better for Minnesota’s teachers. The progress we made this year is just the first step toward achieving the long-term, meaningful pension reforms our educators deserve.”**



*Rep. Dan Wolgamott (right) posed with St. Cloud Education Association local president Chris Erickson at a pension bill hearing this session.*

**– Rep. Dan Wolgamott, St. Cloud**

## **What’s next for pension reform?**

Education Minnesota will continue to share information on next steps and ways to stay involved in our Pension Updates e-newsletters and on our website and social media channels. Make sure you are signed up for emails at [www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature/pensions](http://www.educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature/pensions).

**We are not stopping our advocacy and look forward to partnering with members to make sure educators in Minnesota are supported and valued with a fair pension benefit!**

## We need library media specialists back in our schools now

*Editors note: This article is submitted content from leaders of the Information & Technology Educators of Minnesota. All of the authors are Education Minnesota members.*

In the 2021-22 school year, students at South Saint Paul Secondary School checked out 2,661 books between September and the last day of school in June. In the 2022-23 school year, students have checked out 5,583 books—more than double the previous year. A 109% increase in the number of books in students' hands. What was the difference? Simple, for the first time in more than 10 years, a licensed library media specialist was in the media center matching kids with books, ordering new books catered to the students' wants and needs, and working with teachers to teach lessons on digital citizenship, information literacy, research and more.

Now, picture the library media center at your current school building or district. What does it look like? Do you see students browsing stacks of books choosing their next read? Who is the person behind the checkout desk? Who is working with students? Chances are, it's a media aide, paraprofessional or clerk. Because at most of the schools in Minnesota, there is no licensed library media specialist.

Without a licensed library media specialist in a school, no one is trained to curate a collection of books that are representative and engaging to the staff and students at the school. No one is able to "weed" or cull items from the collection that are out of date, or that shouldn't be in a particular collection. Without a school librarian, no one is qualified to create makerspaces, places that encourage exploration, innovation and creativity in students.

According to the 2021-22 STAR Staff Assignments report, only 23% of Minnesota schools have a licensed library media specialist working in their school library. The Common Core data for the same year shows that the majority of school districts in our state don't have any licensed library staff at all. Many districts' school libraries are staffed by a media paraprofessional or clerk only, or run completely by volunteers if at all.

For both staff and students, these cold facts are disheartening. But there is hope, and even better, there is funding for that hope.

The recently approved 2023-25 Education Funding Omnibus bill includes two significant pieces on school library media centers. The first, (Sec. 6. [124D.901] PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND MEDIA CENTERS), states that "A school district or charter school library or school library media center provides equitable and free access to students, teachers, and administrators." It also states that "A school library or school library media center must have the following characteristics: (5) is served by a licensed school library media specialist or licensed school librarian."

Very simply put, this means that if a school claims to have a school library or media center, they must provide a qualified, licensed school library media specialist to manage the various aspects.

The second piece of the bill, [134.356] SCHOOL LIBRARY AID, states that "For fiscal year 2024 and later, school library aid for a district equals the greater of \$16.11 times the district's adjusted pupil units for the school year or \$40,000. For fiscal year 2024 and later, school library aid for a charter school equals the greater of \$16.11 times the charter school's adjusted pupil units for the school year or \$20,000." It goes on to say, "School library aid must be reserved and used for directly funding the costs of the following purposes within a library:

(1) the salaries and benefits of a school library media specialist." If your district, or better, your school already has a full-time licensed school library media specialist, there are other items for the library the money can be spent on.

### So why is having a licensed library media specialist in your school library important?

Licensed school library media specialists are not only trained in areas of education that no other licensure areas cover, they are overwhelmingly trained at the master's degree level and most have traditional classroom experience. Around the state, media paraprofessionals/

clerks are being asked to do duties they are not trained nor paid adequately to do.

It is up to us, the teachers, to fight once again to provide our students with what they need, and that includes library media specialists. If you are in a school or district that does not currently have a licensed library media specialist serving your school's library, make sure your administration is aware of the desire, the need and the funding to put one in place.

*Written by: Laura Gingras, Library Media Specialist, Laketown Elementary, Waconia, ITEM President-Elect; Marie Hydukovich, District Media Specialist, South Saint Paul Public Schools; Janeen Perrizo, K-12 Media Specialist, St. Charles Public School, ITEM Co-President*

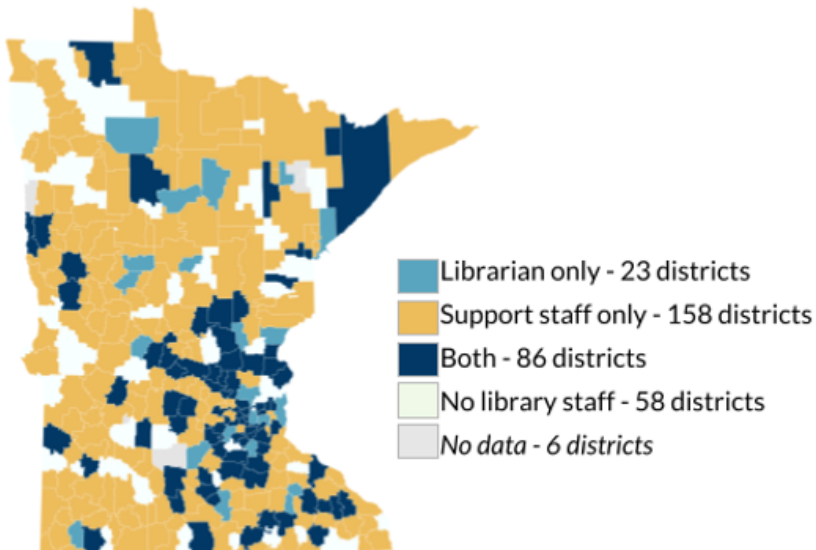
The Information & Technology Educators of Minnesota (ITEM) is Minnesota's professional organization for all school library media specialists, technology coordinators and specialists, technology integrationists, and anyone else interested in application of information and technology to learning.

Anyone interested in the objectives of ITEM is encouraged to become a member by joining MLA and choosing ITEM as your division. Visit [www.mnlibraryassociation.org/page/JoinorRenew](http://www.mnlibraryassociation.org/page/JoinorRenew) for more information.

## State of School Library Staffing: Minnesota

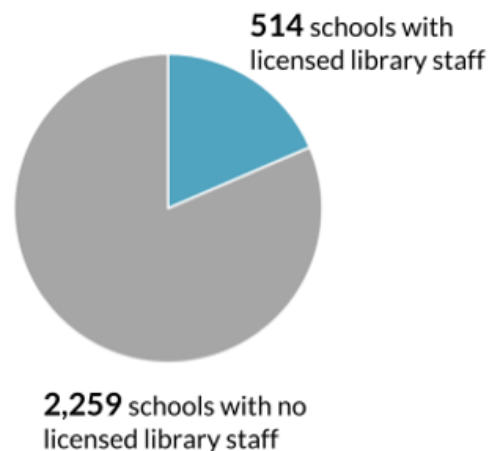
### Most school districts in Minnesota have no licensed educators working in school libraries.

Count of districts with FTE of librarians/media specialist or media support staff, Minnesota, Common Core Data 21-22



### Only 23% of schools in Minnesota have licensed educators assigned to library roles.

Count of schools with assigned FTEs of librarian, media generalist, or instructional media specialist, STAR Staff Assignments, 21-22



## All educators, including retirees, need to take caution with identity theft

The recent data breach in Minneapolis and ransomware attack in Rochester serve as reminders to educators that data protection is of the utmost importance.

Staff data of Minneapolis educators, including retirees, has been affected and some may not have heard or seen any information regarding the impacts to their own personal data.

These breaches are serious and educators, especially in Minneapolis and Rochester, need to always be cautious about receiving, interacting with, or responding to any suspicious emails or phone calls. Be aware of possible phishing events and other potential scams. Do not seek out, read, download or share any data released by the threat actor, as this plays into the cybercriminals' hands by drawing attention to the information and increasing fear and panic.

We believe the breach in Minneapolis Public Schools goes back to 1995 data, so if you worked at MPS in the last two or three decades, you are at risk of personal data being released and need to take some protections.

All Education Minnesota members have access to free identity theft protection through Education Minnesota ESI Member Benefits.

Through a partnership with Securus ID, all active Education Minnesota members have access to a no cost recovery plan, in addition to discounted rates for increased coverage. If you know of a retired educator who is not a member of Education Minnesota Retired, they can join as a member and get the free coverage. Information to join is available at [www.educationminnesota.org/membership-benefits/join-now/retired-member](http://www.educationminnesota.org/membership-benefits/join-now/retired-member).

The complimentary essential individual plan includes:

- Protection from ALL forms of ID theft—including financial, medical, benefits, insurance, phone, utilities, government documents.
- Family fraud and acts of terrorism.
- Unknown identity theft events that occurred prior to the start of new membership plan.
- Identity Specialists (CITRMS Certified) that work on your behalf until your identity is at a pre-event status.

- 24/7 victim access to an online case management system provides you with an up to the minute status of your recovery.
- Identity theft prevention and education.
- Family plan available: Family Essential includes fully-managed recovery for you, your spouse / significant other and up to eight children at same address.
- Includes limited power of attorney so that the specialist assigned to a member's case can truly complete all restoration activities on that member's behalf.

Go to [www.educationminnesota.securusid.com/complimentary-registration/](http://www.educationminnesota.securusid.com/complimentary-registration/) for more information or to sign up today.



### MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS!

Lead a **Conservation Crew** at your school! This after-school program is fully funded and comes with a **\$3000 teacher stipend**. Apply soon!

[conservationminnesota.org/crew](http://conservationminnesota.org/crew)




# MEMBERS WANT TO KNOW

## *June/July Seminars*

With all of the daily financial needs and upcoming expenses, planning for life after an education career can seem impossible. This summer we are offering When Can I Afford to Retire? seminars to help provide some of the tools you need to plan for the future.

### Education Minnesota members with a TRA pension(teachers)

Date	Time	Location
June 12	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	Pier B Resort Hotel Duluth, MN
June 13	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	International Events Center Rochester, MN
June 15	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	MN Landscape Arboretum Chaska, MN
June 20	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	Best Western Kelly Inn St. Cloud, MN
June 27	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	EdMN Field Office Mankato, MN
June 28	9-10 a.m. Seminar Zoom link will be emailed	Virtual
July 11	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	Hampton Inn and Suites Bemidji, MN
July 13	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	Holiday Inn Lakefront Detroit Lakes, MN
July 18	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	EdMN Field Office Brooklyn Park, MN
July 20	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	EdMN Field Office Woodbury, MN
July 25	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	Minnesota North College Eveleth, MN
July 26	9-10 a.m. Seminar Zoom link will be emailed	Virtual

### Education Minnesota members with a PERA pension(ESPs)

Date	Time	Location
June 13	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	International Events Center Rochester, MN
June 15	9:30-10 a.m. Registration 10-11:30 Seminar/lunch	MN Landscape Arboretum Chaska, MN
June 28	9-10 a.m. Seminar Zoom link will be emailed	Virtual
July 26	9-10 a.m. Seminar Zoom link will be emailed	Virtual

### Register Today!

Members should register early as space is limited. Register online <https://www.cvent.com/d/jlqhc9>. You can also email Deb Skog at [deborah.skog@edmn.org](mailto:deborah.skog@edmn.org).

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

[esi.educationminnesota.org](http://esi.educationminnesota.org) [esi@edmn.org](mailto:esi@edmn.org)

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**ESI**



THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL  
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

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

## ***Join your union colleagues at two exciting events this summer!***

**Education Minnesota has two opportunities for members this August – one is brand new, and one is a new take on a classic event.**

### ***Summer Leadership Seminar***

Education Minnesota's annual summer professional development event is now "Summer Leadership Seminar." This year's new event will run July 31-Aug. 2 at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota.

Summer Leadership Seminar is different from the Summer Seminar of years past, with an emphasis on relationship building and shared experiences in a cohort structure.

Leadership pathways include Certified Negotiator Program (CNP) for Teachers and ESPs, ESP A to Z, MEA Professional Development Train the Trainer, Member Rights Advocacy (MRA), Increasing Your Sphere of Influence and the Union Leadership Development Program.

### ***Uplifting Voices – A Racial and Social Justice Event***

An exciting new event focusing on racial and social justice will take place Friday, Aug. 4. Uplifting Voices – A Racial and Social Justice Event will be held at the Wellstone Center in St. Paul.

A team of members from our Racial Equity Advocacy program, in addition to Education Minnesota staff, having been planning this event with a main goal of creating a member event that centers interrupting systems of whiteness and white supremacy.

The event will feature many avenues of engagement, including an opening ceremony featuring Education Minnesota officer and member speakers, as well as a variety of sessions that include opportunities to learn, engage and connect. The event is free to Education Minnesota members, including a lunch voucher to be used at a variety of food trucks.

***Registration is now open for both events!  
Go to [www.educationminnesota.org](http://www.educationminnesota.org) for more details  
on these new opportunities and how to register.***