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DECEMBER 2024 / JANUARY 2025

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**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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There are challenges ahead, but Minnesota educators can meet them

Donald Trump's election and hostility to public education will pose new challenges to Minnesota educators in 2025. The most dangerous of them may be his support for school voucher programs that divert taxpayer money from public education to private and religious schools.

Compounding the threat of a significant defunding of public education in Minnesota from a national voucher program or other parts of Project 2025 is the likelihood of a state-level program emerging from the Minnesota House, which is evenly divided as I write this.

However, I believe we can overcome this challenge by coming together in union as we have many times before. Further, our collective action will keep pushing our union's priorities of improving the pay, pensions, health care and working conditions of our educators.

While the election has made our jobs more challenging, I'm optimistic about resisting vouchers at the state level.

First, voters in other states have rejected them almost every time they've had the chance. Despite the backing of a few billionaires and the MAGA majority on the U.S. Supreme Court, most Americans don't want to weaken their local schools.

On Election Day 2024, pro-education voters defeated vouchers in Kentucky, 65% to 35%, winning all 120 counties. They repealed vouchers in Nebraska, 57% to 34%, and they blocked vouchers in Colorado, 52% to 48%.

The second big reason is Gov. Tim Walz and the pro-education majority in the state Senate. It was only six years ago when Walz was presented a watered-down version of school vouchers to appease the anti-school majority in the Senate that year. As the Washington Post reported in August, our governor was a hard no and was ready to shut down the state to block vouchers.

But these programs are still a top priority for the Republican Party nationally and its allies in the state. In May, the Minnesota Parents Alliance hosted an event with the right-wing Center of the American Experiment, the national anti-union coalition State Policy Network and

OAK, a Minnesota-based voucher advocacy group.

Twenty-eight states and D.C. have at least one private school choice program, according to an analysis by Education Week, and Texas is poised to implement its own next year.

Voucher programs are marketed by many different names, including education savings accounts and tax-credit scholarships, but they have a few things in common: little oversight, frequent scandals, traditional schools get squeezed and the primary beneficiaries are wealthy parents who already have their children in private schools.

Critiques of vouchers are similar from state to state. Private and religious schools rarely outperform traditional public schools, despite cherry-picking their students. They would take everyone's tax money but reject students for their special learning needs, religious practices or because their families are LGBTQ+.

The next few years will be more difficult for educators than we had hoped, but we will keep making our case to our communities and our elected leaders. If we're serious about doing what's right for the future of all students, Minnesota needs to continue using public dollars for public schools.

That means providing comfortable buildings for students and staff, modern technology, and fully staffed schools with well-trained educators from all walks of life in Minnesota. And we need to give those educators smaller class sizes and caseloads so they can build trusting relationships with each student.

It won't be easy, but we can get there...

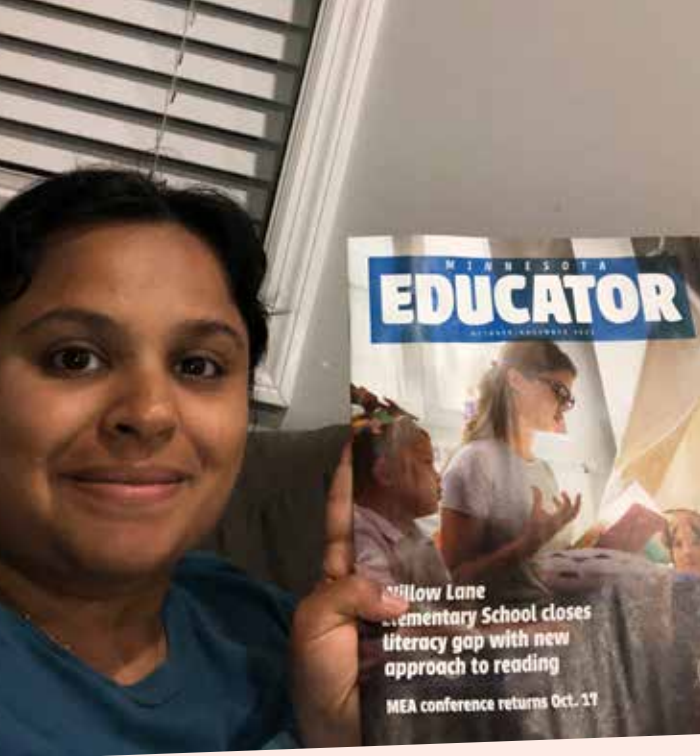
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Congratulations to Lakshmi Srinivasan from Osseo for being this month's contest winner!

We love seeing all the places you read your Minnesota Educator. Send a photo of where you're reading your Educator to educator@edmn.org to be entered into a drawing! *Please include your name, your district or local and a one-sentence description of where you are reading.*

The winner will receive a \$50 Target gift card and be featured in the next issue of the Minnesota Educator. Happy reading!





Educators in the news

“The kids are much more able to start their day right when their tummies are full.”

Echo Park Elementary School kindergarten teacher Abby Balster in an October Star Tribune article titled, “Inside the rush as Minnesota schools serve millions more free breakfasts.”

Getting social!


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Connect with your local!

Each issue, we will select a couple of local unions' social media pages to highlight. Make sure to give them a follow to stay up to date on what's happening at the local level.

Follow Columbia Heights Federation of Teachers on Instagram:

 [@columbia_heights_local_710](https://www.instagram.com/columbia_heights_local_710)

Follow Shakopee Education Association on Twitter (X):

 [@ShakoEdAssn](https://twitter.com/ShakoEdAssn)

Mark Bauch of St. Paul is Education Minnesota's 2024-25 ESP of the Year

Bauch is a special education educational assistant at Washington Technology Magnet School in St. Paul.

The first thing students at Washington Technology Magnet School notice about ESP of the Year Mark Bauch is his height. But Bauch, who is 6'11," doesn't mind—he uses it to connect with them. "It helps with building immediate relationships with the kids," Bauch said. Upon speaking with Bauch, what becomes more noticeable than his height is his passion—for his students, for his community, and for the work he does as a sports coach and educational assistant for ninth grade special education students.

In Bauch's career, sports and education have always been intertwined. In fact, coaching is what initially got him into the classroom. After graduating with a degree in child psychology, he coached basketball at a recreation center. His colleagues noticed how good he was with the kids and offered him a job coaching at recreation centers around St. Paul. He was working at Rice Recreation Center, which is attached to a school, when one of his former teachers approached him about collaborating on a "rec and reading" afterschool program for junior high students, where the kids would read for about a half hour and then play basketball for an hour. He agreed and began working with these students, reading and then playing sports with them. The students responded positively and the next year, Bauch was asked to lead the program.

He continued working at the rec center and leading the program for a couple years. After a couple of long-term subbing stints, the teachers he worked with advocated for Mark to be hired. Eventually, he was hired in his current role as an educational assistant and served as a basketball coach until this year. He currently coaches track and field.

Throughout his career, Bauch has tied coaching into his approach as an educator. He uses sports to encourage students to try their best academically. He said, "If I can coach here, I can use it as an incentive



ESP of the Year Mark Bauch poses with the corkboard of pictures he's taken with students at their graduations.

and a reason to care about their grades and give them a chance."

Bauch's passion also stems from his roots in the community. Born and raised in St. Paul, Bauch went to school not too far from where he teaches now. This community connection helps him build relationships with his students and their families. "Because I was born and raised here, I tend to know the families of the students I'm working with," he said.

Knowing their families helps him build trust with students. As we walk through the halls, Bauch points out a student heading to class. "That student over there used to be one of mine," he says. "He was skeptical of me at first, but then I read his last name, and it turns

out I grew up with his uncle. Once I told him that, he opened right up."

"Mark knows the families and the neighborhood in ways that few other educators can," said Michael Nawrocki, speech language pathologist at Washington. "He knows the challenges our students face and can empathize with them but will never make excuses for them. He leads with empathy and high expectations."

Bauch says his focus is on teaching students foundational skills and building up their sense of agency. "I tell the kids three things that can make school a lot easier: 1. be on time to class, 2. respect the teacher. You don't have to like them, but you have to respect them. 3. try your best at your work," he said. "As long as they do those three things, I can help them with the harder stuff. But I expect them to meet me in the middle."

His goal is to get these skills so ingrained that by the time his students get into higher grades, they do well in their classes—and he's been mostly successful. In his office, he has a giant corkboard full of pictures that he's taken with former students at their graduations. He says it encourages students to do well and try hard in school. "They'll come into my classroom and ask if their picture can go up on the wall," he said, "They get really excited about it."

He also stresses the importance of ensuring the kids he works with don't feel singled out. "Although I'm there for specific kids, I'll move around the room and make it look like I am there for the whole classroom, while still keeping a keen eye on the students on my caseload."

Even after they leave his charge, Bauch still makes it a point to stay in touch with his former students. "I have kids that I've connected with emotionally that need to check in with me. And I see them around, so I'll check in with them," he said. "Sometimes they'll come back and ask me for help with their work. If I can't help them, I'll find someone who can."

His colleagues say that Bauch is particularly skilled at working with some of the more challenging students. "He consistently seeks out the students who face the greatest challenges," said Tim Hayden, special education teacher at Washington. "Where others see difficulty, Mark sees opportunity."

Bauch says part of it is just a natural knack, but part of it is studying child psychology. He says it's important to read a student's emotional state and adjust the response as necessary. He ensures that he stays regulated and remains a calming presence for students when they become dysregulated. "Of course, the height helps as well," he laughs. "But I can also connect with [the kids] really well. I think it's because they know I care ... and we have great teachers in the high school, I think it creates a very [stable and steady] environment for the students," he said.

As the 2024-25 ESP of the Year, Bauch will receive a \$1,200 honorarium and his choice of an iPad or Chromebook. He will also represent Minnesota in the National Education Association's ESP of the Year program and will receive all expenses paid to attend the NEA's ESP conference next spring.

Bauch and Speech Language Pathologist Michael Nawrocki talk during a planning period.



Ten other ESPs recognized as finalists, semifinalists for ESP of the Year

Education Minnesota also recognized four other ESPs from across Minnesota as finalists for ESP of the Year. Additionally, there were six other nominees recognized as semifinalists.

There were 63 nominations this year. Of those 63, 11 chose to submit portfolios that included essay responses and recommendation letters.

To be eligible, nominees must be active members of Education Minnesota and must be a member for at least three years as of Aug. 31 of the award year. Individuals can be nominated by anyone associated with Minnesota public schools. Nominations for the 2025-26 ESP of the Year will open next summer.

Education support professional job categories can vary from district to district but typically include public-school employees that are not considered full-time active classroom teachers. This can include, but is not limited to, paraprofessionals, educational assistants, secretarial/clerical roles, custodial, food service, maintenance, trades, transportation, grounds keeping, security, technology services and other roles.

The recipient of the ESP of the Year award is recognized at a reception at Education Minnesota headquarters. Additionally, there is a celebration at their school on ESP Day during American Education Week.

This year's semifinalists were:

- Kim Ambers, a special education educational assistant in Minneapolis Public School District.
- Latricia Adams, a special education educational assistant in Saint Paul Public Schools.
- Nicole Corniea, a licensed practical nurse in Farmington Area Public Schools.
- Ethan Fabel, a child care worker in Watertown-Mayer Public School District.
- Miki Nahmensen, a special education paraprofessional in Waconia Public Schools.
- Sarah Wabbe, a preschool education support professional in Waconia Public Schools.

2024 ESP of the Year finalists

Kristy Ersfeld: building nurse in Farmington Area Public Schools

In nomination materials submitted for the award, Ersfeld describes her work with one of her favorite sayings: "students must be healthy to be educated and educated to be healthy." As a building nurse, she is responsible for the health and safety of 600 students, including many students who don't always have access to medical care outside of school. She works closely with school counselors to determine and address when visits to the health office are more social/emotional or educational in nature.

"Kristy goes above and beyond to help others and steps up when many would redirect," said third grade teacher Steven Marich in nomination materials, "To teachers, office staff, and students, she is invaluable."

Jennifer Hoover: media center paraprofessional in Watertown-Mayer Public School District

As a media center paraprofessional, Hoover's goal is to "get to know each student and learn what their interests are, [then] use those interests to help them develop a love of reading," she said in materials submitted for the award. Hoover has worked to create a media center that is interactive and showcases the books and materials that students are interested in. She invites the students to take pictures of themselves reading books, which she displays in the media center for students to see themselves and their friends. "Students love seeing these photos of fellow classmates building, drawing or baking cookies from directions found in library books," said fourth grade teacher Tami Kuntz in nomination materials.

"Mrs. Hoover has worked hard to structure library time in a student-centered fashion," Kuntz said. "She has maintained high expectations...and has an obvious desire to help students reach their full potential."



The 2024-25 ESP of the Year finalists with Education Minnesota officers. From left: 2024-25 ESP of the Year Mark Bauch, Education Minnesota Vice President Monica Byron, Kristy Ersfeld, Jennifer Hoover, Sarah Rice, Marianne Sannito, Education Minnesota President Denise Specht and Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe.

Sarah Rice: special education paraeducator in Farmington Area Public Schools

Rice said in nomination materials that she works hard to build relationships with all her learners and takes pride in finding ways to differentiate instruction so it works for the students in her care: “whether that looks like going on a walk while we read assignments out loud or curating the focus of a task to something I know they are interested in, it’s a joy to watch students make progress and be full participants in the classroom.”

In nomination materials for the award, Rice’s coworkers described her connection with and passion for students. “Sarah has an unparalleled ability to build strong, trusting relationships with our learners, ensuring that each learner feels supported and valued,” said Joe Sage, principal at Boeckman Middle School. “Her compassion, dedication and insight into the needs of our students allow her to create an environment where every student can succeed.”

Marianne Sannito: DCD education support professional in Waconia Public Schools

In nomination materials, Sannito’s colleagues praised the way she connects with students and creates an environment of trust. “When working one-on-one with students, she co-regulates...creating a learning environment that allows children to push through their limitations. She pours care, love and patience into every child every day,” said Dr. Khuzana DeVaan, principal of Southview Elementary School.

In addition to her work as a DCD education support professional, Sannito is very active in her local and in her community. When her area lost their boys’ swim co-op club, she organized the community to create a boys’ swim team and swim club in her school district. Eight years later, the swim team and swim club have over 100 participants.



The 2024-25 ESP of the Year semifinalists with Education Minnesota officers. From left: Ethan Fabel, Education Minnesota Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe, Latricia Adams, Sarah Wabbe, Education Minnesota Vice President Monica Byron, President Denise Specht. Not pictured: Kim Ambers, Nicole Corniea and Miki Nahmensen.



Education Minnesota vice president Monica Byron announces the 2024-25 semifinalists and finalists at a reception on Oct. 26.

Michelle Dennard congratulates 2024-25 ESP of the Year Mark Bauch.



Election 2024: Success in school board campaigns, DFL retains majority in Senate, Minnesota House splits

In 2024, Minnesotans voted on many elected positions, including President, Senate, U.S. Congress, Minnesota House and school boards.

We encouraged locals to get involved in school board elections through recruiting, screening and endorsing candidates. We also encouraged locals to use PAC donations to communicate with voters about their endorsed candidates through targeted mail pieces, phone banks, canvassing and other voter outreach.

Our members rose to the challenge, with 33 locals choosing to go through the process—a new record for local participation in candidate screenings. Education Minnesota locals endorsed candidates who promised to deliver public schools that are safe, welcoming and effective for all students and educators. We are proud to report that about 75% of union-endorsed candidates were elected, with 70 wins in 95 races. Education Minnesota-endorsed candidates also significantly outperformed the Minnesota Parents Alliance-endorsed candidates in head-to-head races: our candidates won 72% of races.

This success would not have been possible without the hard work of our members, who worked together with community allies to make over 100,000 phone calls in October for local races and sent thousands of postcards to voters about endorsed school board candidates. We also exceeded our organizing goals with more than 550 worksite action leaders and 59 get-out-the-vote leaders.

In a statement released after the election, Education Minnesota President Denise Specht said, “Minnesotans trust their local educators—the people who know best where their local schools struggle and succeed—and voted for educator-endorsed candidates. The task ahead is to turn that support for the mission of public schools into policies that address the educator shortage and deliver the quality of education our all our students deserve, with no exceptions.”

Education Minnesota members also worked on 26 referendums to raise local revenue to support various functions of their local schools, including capital projects, buildings, operations and technology. A preliminary analysis shows voters approved just over half of the funding requests put to them—about the same percentage as in 2023.

In addition to school board elections, Minnesotans also voted for their state House members and in one special election for state Senate.

Because DFL candidate Ann Johnson Stewart won the special election triggered by Sen. Kelly Morrison’s resignation to run for Congress, the Minnesota DFL will retain control of the Minnesota Senate.

In the Minnesota House, the DFL lost three seats, bringing their 70-seat majority down to a 67-seat tie with Republicans, which means that neither party has a majority in the state House. This has only happened one other time in Minnesota history and presents unique challenges to determining which party will control the chamber. The last time this happened, the parties split leadership: House Republicans controlled the Speakership and House Democrats chaired the major committees. At the time of publication, we are unsure how chamber control will be structured.

Regardless of the changes we are seeing in the Legislature, Education Minnesota’s legislative agenda remains unchanged. We will continue to prioritize improvements to pay, pensions and health care and advocate for the schools our educators and students deserve. Our 2025 legislative agenda will be available soon on our website at educationminnesota.org/advocacy/at-the-legislature.

Strengthen your bargaining skills at the 2025 Collective Bargaining and Organizing Conference

The Collective Bargaining and Organizing Conference will be held on Jan. 24-25, 2025, in Bloomington. Every two years, this conference brings together organizers, negotiators and advocates to learn best practices for bargaining and contract negotiations, including how to build unity across locals and incorporate more open and inclusive practices in bargaining.

At the 2023 CBOC, Education Minnesota encouraged members to “bargain boldly” through effective community organizing and transparency during the bargaining process. This approach proved effective in the 2023 negotiation cycle: locals that practiced open negotiations and demonstrated transparency about the bargaining process with members and the community often ended up with stronger contracts than we had seen previously.

The 2025 CBOC will continue to build on open bargaining tactics with workshops designed to help both brand-new negotiators and those who have been through this process before.

The conference will begin on Friday with a welcome and keynote, followed by a session for all participants that goes over tactics for dealing with some of what we saw at the bargaining table during the 2023 cycle.

After the general session, classes will follow two main tracks: negotiation mechanics, which builds skills necessary for bargaining team members to successfully prepare and work on negotiations; and power-building, which covers skills related to organizing, mobilizing the community and stakeholders, and why escalation plans are necessary.

Certain classes in each track will have both introductory and advanced levels, based on attendees’ bargaining experience. Additionally, the conference will include the Certified Negotiator Program for ESPs and teachers.

This conference is open to active members of Education Minnesota. You do not need to be a current member of your local’s bargaining team to attend. Registration

opened in mid-November and this year’s registration fee is \$100.

Equity commitment at CBOC

Bargaining is most successful when there are a range of perspectives at the negotiating table, which is why Education Minnesota is working to make CBOC as accessible as possible for members that experience significant barriers to participation in union events. The CBOC will have a dedicated pathway for members of color to become leaders in their locals and at the bargaining table. We also want to ensure that all educator voices are recognized at the table—not just classroom teachers.

To accomplish these goals, we have established the following supports for the CBOC:

- All ESP members who wish to attend will have their conference fee waived and we will cover the cost of one hotel room for that member.
- Anyone who identifies as a member of color/BIPOC will have their conference fee waived and we will cover the cost of one hotel room for that member.
- The conference will have ESP-only classes and strands as part of the conference schedule.

Members from the same local may be asked to share a room.

This year, the CBOC will include a pathway designed to allow members with similar experiences to connect. This strand, “Negotiating and Organizing for BIPOC members,” will provide a series of four sessions on Saturday during the conference and is open to BIPOC attendees. Our goal is to provide an honest discussion from BIPOC members of Education Minnesota locals about the risks and rewards of serving as a negotiator. Classes will include introductions to negotiations and organizing, a specific focus on language promoting equity at the table and a panel of BIPOC members.



AHEM members at a rally outside of a school board meeting in November 2023.

ESP members who wish to participate in a full conference strand with other ESPs will have two options:

- The Certified Negotiator Program for ESPs, which runs the entire length of the conference.
- The organizing pathway, “Organizing fundamentals for ESPs.”

Creating spaces for our non-licensed staff to connect, engage, and learn from each other reflects our union’s commitment to supporting educators in whatever role they play in our schools.

Case study: Anoka Hennepin Education Minnesota

Anoka Hennepin Education Minnesota represents one of the largest school districts in the state, extending 172 square miles and covering parts of 13 counties. “Because we are so large, we have a wide and very diverse range of concerns among our members and our district is very polarized,” said John Wolhaupter, AHEM lead negotiator. “This extends into a lot of our conversations, and since our community members fit all of the demographics, agreement can be hard to come to.”

The best way they’ve found to navigate such a large and diverse district is to build strong connections with members across the district through organizing. Attending CBOC not only showed them new ways to connect with members, it also introduced them to tools and resources to help them do so more effectively. One approach they took is to create authentic channels through which to engage with members about bargaining and negotiations.

“Each building has a building leader, a local contract action team member, a strike captain and a communications plan,” said Valerie Holthus, president of AHEM. “Because of our structure, we remain connected to each part of our district.”

Establishing this infrastructure allowed them to successfully practice open negotiations—because the infrastructure was built, they were easily able to communicate with members about the negotiation process.

CBOC also taught AHEM attendees new ways to discuss member priorities for bargaining. “We’ve really started to use more online tools,” Wolhaupter said. “Instead of sifting through a long list of comments on a survey, we can [set up a virtual meeting and] facilitate that back-and-forth conversation to get into more details on what our members are asking for.”

“CBOC is a great way to expand your toolbox as a negotiator or an organizer,” said negotiation team member Mark Corcoran. “You get different perspectives from other places and other locals, but also learn about new topics you might want to pursue or different approaches you might not have thought about otherwise.”

Using what they learned at CBOC, AHEM was able to negotiate some substantial wins in their contract, such as pay increases of 5% in the first year and 3% in the second, changing the early childhood and family education salary schedule to one that aligns with the K-12 teachers’ salary schedule and a 10% increase in the district’s insurance contribution.

AHEM negotiators said that CBOC not only helped them learn how to connect and engage with their members, it also allowed them to connect with colleagues in other districts. “It helps you learn who to talk to. You feel more involved, you feel more like part of the family. It helps remind you that we’re all part of the union and that we aren’t the only ones going through these struggles,” Corcoran said.

Register for the 2025 Collective Bargaining and Organizing Conference on our website at educationminnesota.org/members-only/bargaining/trainings.

Education Minnesota awards honor outstanding member work

Each year, Education Minnesota presents several awards to members in recognition of their outstanding achievements. Presented at the annual Representative Convention, these awards include the Human Rights Award, the Peterson-Schaubach Outstanding Leadership Award and the We Are One Solidarity Award.

Human Rights Award

This award recognizes outstanding work to protect the human and civil rights of educators and students. Members can nominate either an individual or a local, but nominees must be active members of Education Minnesota to qualify.

Nominees should meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The nominee has contributed to the field of human rights, either through a special project, direct services or their life's work and role.
- The nominee has inspired direct action in the cause of human and civil rights.
- The nominee has demonstrated a personal commitment to the promotion and protection of human and civil rights through curriculum and instruction.
- The nominee has initiated or engaged in activities that positively impact the educational, social, economic or political life of the community.
- The nominee has displayed creativity, determination and perseverance in achieving human and civil rights goals.

Peterson-Schaubach Outstanding Leadership Award

This award is presented to an Education Minnesota leader who has made outstanding contributions to Education Minnesota or its locals through demonstration of Education Minnesota's statements of principle.

Nominees for this award are submitted by members of the Education Minnesota Governing Board (excluding officers).

We Are One Solidarity Award

This award is given out annually to an Education Minnesota local union or group of active members demonstrating outstanding or significant leadership in any of the following ways:

- Developing and implementing an organizing campaign.
- Expanding relationships with other unions and the AFL-CIO.
- Developing and implementing a member engagement campaign.
- Working collectively for the common good.
- Protecting or advocating for workers' rights.
- Extending the benefits of a union by organizing the unorganized.

Any Education Minnesota member can nominate a local union or active member by submitting a nomination form to the Education Minnesota president.

The deadline for award submissions is Friday, January 31. More information and details on how to submit a nominee are available on our website under the "News & Events" section.

Education Minnesota Statements of Principle

- Commitment to members.
- Commitment to the profession.
- Commitment to the learners.
- Commitment to public education and the community.
- Commitment to the organization.
- Commitment to the labor movement.
- Commitment to racial equity and social justice.

2024 We Are One Solidarity Award winners: Education Minnesota – Hermantown

The winner of the 2024 We Are One Solidarity award is Education Minnesota – Hermantown, for their work mobilizing their members around negotiations. They learned that their district was sitting on \$7 million in unallocated funds. They began sharing negotiation updates with their members, including the fact that the district had a significant sum of unspent money.

They also hosted informational pickets and, with the help of Education Minnesota organizing grants, created an organizing committee to help mobilize their members. As they communicated with members, they began making specific asks of members that played to those members' strengths.

Because of this work, they increased their member attendance at school board meetings from 25% to over 40% and were able to get 70-80% participation in



Education Minnesota - Hermantown, 2024 We Are One Solidarity Award winner.

negotiation escalation tactics. And as a result, they negotiated a contract that significantly increased the district's contribution to their health insurance premiums and included salary increases of 6% in 2023 and 3% in 2024.

2024 Human Rights Award winner: Zak Amin, Moorhead

Education Minnesota's 2024 Human Rights Award winner is English as a second language teacher Zak Amin of Moorhead. Amin was recognized for his work creating a Kurdish heritage and culture class. In the Moorhead school district, Kurdish is the second-most common language, spoken in the homes of 239 families. Amin created the class after he noticed that there was a cultural divide between parents and children. "The parents were speaking Kurdish, but the children were speaking English. They understood each other, but there was a big gap," Amin said.

Amin, who has worked as a liaison to Kurdish families, said that one of his goals is to help the parents become more Americanized while helping the kids develop a sense of pride in their Kurdish heritage so that the parents and children can bond. In addition to teaching Kurdish in Moorhead schools during the day, he teaches English to many of his students' parents at night.

The community response to the class has been overwhelmingly positive. Students say it's helped them connect with their culture and develop their identity. "I think it's pretty cool, it gives us an opportunity



Zak Amin, Moorhead, 2024 Human and Civil Rights Award winner.

to represent ourselves and embrace who we are," said one Moorhead student. "Some of us weren't born in Kurdistan—some of us were born here. This class gives us the opportunity to learn our history, language and culture."

Zak Amin said his goal is to make Kurdish a world language one day. "Even if I cannot do it," he said, "I would do my best to help whoever takes that responsibility."

2024 Peterson-Schaubach Leadership Award winner: Tracy Detloff, New London-Spicer

Education Minnesota's 2024 Peterson-Schaubach Leadership Award winner is Tracy Detloff, a special education teacher in New London-Spicer. She was recognized for her work helping fellow educators navigate student loan debt relief. The programs available for educators to receive debt relief have historically been difficult to navigate, due to ever-changing requirements. After seeing a union brochure at her school about loan forgiveness programs, New London-Spicer special education teacher Tracy Detloff began the intense process of navigating the programs. After a few tries, she was approved, and her student debt was forgiven. She then realized that there were others in her district who may not know that they could benefit from the program, so she began leading workshops to present information about the loan forgiveness process to other members of her local and in the Central Lakes United Intermediate Organization. "An Education Minnesota staff person called me and asked me what I knew about these programs," said Detloff. "They came to my work, and I gave them all the information on the different types of loan forgiveness for teachers in Minnesota. From there, Education Minnesota went on to create Degrees, Not Debt." This nationally recognized program is one of Education Minnesota's most popular programs and has helped many members receive student debt relief—vitally important, because Minnesota currently ranks fifth in the nation for student loan debt.



Tracy Detloff, New London-Spicer, 2024 Peterson-Schaubach Outstanding Leadership Award winner.

Detloff characterizes her leadership style as focusing on support and empowerment. "I think a good leader is a supporter of everybody," Detloff said. "I used to always do things for people but now I realize somebody who is a good leader will show you how to do it for yourself."

Because of her leadership on student loan debt relief, along with her leadership in Central Lakes United and in her local, Detloff received the 2024 Education Minnesota Peterson-Schaubach Leadership Award, which recognizes leaders for outstanding contributions to our organization, its locals and the core purpose of our union.

The voucher mirage: fake popularity, fake results

Vouchers have long been a mainstay topic in educational policy discussions, and this year is no exception. Likely as not, next year will not be an exception, either. Moreover, this is not a partisan issue. St. Paul's DFL-endorsed city council members placed a ballot measure before voters this fall that provided public funding for private sector childcare and preschool. In Kentucky, the largely Republican legislature put to voters the question of whether the state constitution should be amended to provide financial support for students opting out of public schools.

In both jurisdictions, these ballot measures went down in a resounding, unambiguous defeat. On the other hand, legislators in Texas appear to be poised to adopt legislation that will permit the diversion of educational funding to private school voucher programs. This follows an ugly intra-party primary process in Texas in which a number of Republican legislators who had previously voted against voucher programs were unseated by challengers further to their right. What we are seeing is that support for vouchers is high amongst doctrinaire opponents of public education. They are not particularly popular with the public. There are many reasons for this.

For one thing, vouchers are typically expensive, and they invariably siphon funds from free public schools. In July, ProPublica found that Arizona's voucher program had "precipitated a budget meltdown." This was in part because Arizona grossly underestimated the cost of the program at its inception, and in part because there is no limit on how wealthy a family can be in order to use vouchers. Worse yet, because most families receiving vouchers were already enrolling students in private school, the voucher amounts were a new net expenditure.

In addition, vouchers pay for schools that are largely unregulated. In Minnesota, private schools don't have to offer students the protections of the Pupil Fair Dismissal Act. Private schools are also not required to follow statutory requirements common to schools regarding staff, curriculum or minimum hours of instruction. More importantly, private schools may

This Legal Briefs column, written by Education Minnesota attorneys, is one of an occasional series on legal developments that affect educators.

also seek exemptions from the Minnesota Human Rights Act, which could enable them to discriminate against students and families.

Predictably, the risk of this strategy has been borne out in other jurisdictions. In Louisiana, education researchers found in two separate studies that voucher programs reduced student achievement in the areas of both language arts and math. Researchers attributed this to poor quality private schools. In Indiana, researchers found losses in math, and no improvement in language arts.

“For one thing, vouchers are typically expensive, and they invariably siphon funds from free public schools.”

These programs are often sold by legislators to their constituents as improving parent “choice.” When voucher programs do receive more public support in polling, it is because the language of polling options framed the program as offering greater freedom to parents. However, this is misleading. In rural communities where

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Filing period open for Education Minnesota officer, governing board, NEA director positions

Candidate filings for Education Minnesota officers and National Education Association director positions are open. Candidate filings for Education Minnesota's governing board election district positions will opened Nov. 4.

The three-year terms for president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer will end on June 30, 2025. Currently, these offices are held by President Denise Specht, Vice President Monica Byron and Secretary-Treasurer Rodney Rowe.

The current terms for two NEA director positions held by Jasman Myers and Heather Bakke will expire Aug. 31, 2025.

Education Minnesota is governed by an elected board comprised of one member from each of the union's 26 election districts. The current three-year terms of these members will expire on June 30, 2025.

Eligible members who wish to run for any of these positions must submit the designated filing form to the Education Minnesota Elections Committee by Dec. 13. Forms are available to complete and submit electronically on the Education Minnesota website. They are also printed below.

To be an eligible candidate for any of these positions, an individual must be an active Education Minnesota member at the time of filing and throughout the election process.

Filing Form for Officer

This form must be filed with the Elections Committee of Education Minnesota. Please print clearly.

I, _____, wish to file for the following position:

OR

I, _____, wish to nominate _____ for the following position:

You may only select one position:

President **Vice President** **Secretary-Treasurer**

Candidate information

Mailing address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____

Local: _____ Email: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____ Work phone: _____

Do not submit before filing period begins on June 1. Deadline is 11:59 p.m. Dec. 13, 2024.

Scan and email completed form to elections.committee@edmn.org, submit by mail to: Elections Committee, Education Minnesota, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 or by fax to: 651-767-1266. If you do not receive confirmation of receipt within seven days after submitting, inquire by email to elections.committee@edmn.org.

Note: Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion on the Education Minnesota website. The photo and statement must be submitted using the online submission form at www.educationminnesota.org by Dec. 20, 2024.

(For official use only)

This filing form was received on _____ by _____. Membership was verified on _____ by _____.

Filing Form for Governing Board – Election District

This form must be filed with the Elections Committee of Education Minnesota. Please print clearly.

I, _____, wish to file for the following position:

OR

I, _____, wish to nominate _____ for the following position:

Governing Board – Election District: _____

(Three-year term: July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2028. Election district map located at www.educationminnesota.org.)

Candidate information

Mailing address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____

Local: _____ Email: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____ Work phone: _____

Do not submit before filing period begins on Nov. 4. Deadline is 11:59 p.m. Dec. 13, 2024.

Scan and email completed form to elections.committee@edmn.org, submit by mail to: Elections Committee, Education Minnesota, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 or by fax to: 651-767-1266. If you do not receive confirmation of receipt within seven days after submitting, inquire by email to elections.committee@edmn.org.

Note: Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion on the Education Minnesota website. The photo and statement must be submitted using the online submission form at www.educationminnesota.org by Dec. 20, 2024.

(For official use only)

This filing form was received on _____ by _____. Membership was verified on _____ by _____.

Filing Form for NEA Director

This form must be filed with the Elections Committee of Education Minnesota. Please print clearly.

I, _____, wish to file for the following position:

OR

I, _____, wish to nominate _____ for the following position:

You may only select one position:

NEA Director (Position 1) **NEA Director (Position 2)**

Candidate information

Mailing address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____

Local: _____ Email: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____ Work phone: _____

Do not submit before filing period begins on June 1. Deadline is 11:59 p.m. Dec. 13, 2024.

Scan and email completed form to elections.committee@edmn.org, submit by mail to: Elections Committee, Education Minnesota, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 or by fax to: 651-767-1266. If you do not receive confirmation of receipt within seven days after submitting, inquire by email to elections.committee@edmn.org.

Note: Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion on the Education Minnesota website. The photo and statement must be submitted using the online submission form at www.educationminnesota.org by Dec. 20, 2024.

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This filing form was received on _____ by _____. Membership was verified on _____ by _____.

Delegate selection for the 2025 NEA Representative Assembly

The NEA Representative Assembly, the major decision-making body for NEA, is scheduled to meet in Portland, OR, July 2-6, 2025.

All active Education Minnesota members are eligible to run to be a state-credentialed delegate to the NEA RA. The filing period closes Dec. 13. Interested members may file by submitting the designated filing form to the Elections Committee. Filing forms are also available on Education Minnesota's website.

Elections will take place in local districts on weekdays during the 15-day window from Feb. 10-Feb. 28. Ballots will be mailed in early February to all local presidents in districts where an election is necessary.

Nominations for state-credentialed aspiring educator delegates close Feb. 15. Elections will take place at the 2025 Aspiring Educator Leadership Spring Workshop, if necessary.

Funding information for state-credentialed delegates

State-credentialed delegates will receive funding to attend the NEA RA, provided they are in attendance for the entire RA, from the first caucus meeting to adjournment on July 6, attend all caucus meetings and are present on the convention floor for all proceedings.

Funding includes airfare made through the designated travel agent and direct billed to Education Minnesota (alternative transportation will be reimbursed up to a predetermined amount), the cost of a double-occupancy room at the convention hotel for an authorized number of nights and reimbursement for meals and other related expenses (with original itemized receipts).

For state delegates working in year-round school settings, substitute costs will be reimbursed as outlined in the Education Minnesota Financial Policy for Governance and Members. Funding is not available for Category 2 delegates, those who are retired or inactive members.

Filing Form for NEA RA State-Credentialed Delegate

This form must be filed with the Elections Committee of Education Minnesota. Please print clearly.

I, _____, hereby submit my name for state credentials to the NEA RA to be held July 2-6, 2025 in Portland, Oregon.

OR

I, _____, wish to nominate _____ for state credentials to the NEA RA to be held July 2-6, 2025 in Portland, Oregon. I further certify that the nominee is eligible for state credentials as a delegate from:

- Active Member – Election District:** _____ (K-12; statewide affiliates; and school-related personnel)
- Category 2** (inactive NEA life member and not an Education Minnesota Retired member)

Please complete the following information:

Name: _____ Local: _____

Home address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____

Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____ Work phone: _____

Work email: _____ Personal email: _____

Do not submit before filing period begins on Nov. 4. Deadline is 11:59 p.m. Dec. 13, 2024.

Scan and email completed form to elections.committee@edmn.org, submit by mail to: Elections Committee, Education Minnesota, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 or by fax to: 651-767-1266. If you do not receive confirmation of receipt within seven days after submitting, inquire by email to elections.committee@edmn.org.

Note: Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion on the Education Minnesota website. The photo and statement must be submitted using the online submission form at www.educationminnesota.org by Dec. 20, 2024.

(For official use only)

This filing form was received on _____ by _____, Membership was verified on _____ by _____.

Filing Form for NEA RA State-Credentialed Delegate: Aspiring Educator

This form must be filed with the Elections Committee of Education Minnesota. Please print clearly.
I hereby submit my name for state credentials to the NEA RA to be held July 2-6, 2025 in Portland, Oregon.
I further certify that the nominee is eligible for state credentials as a delegate from:

Aspiring Educator

(must be an Education Minnesota Aspiring Educator member)

Please complete the following information:

Name: _____ College: _____
 School address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____
 Home phone: _____ Cell phone: _____ Work phone: _____
 Work email: _____ Personal email: _____
 Summer address: _____ City/State/ZIP: _____

Do not submit before filing period begins on Nov. 4. Deadline is 11:59 p.m. Feb. 15, 2025.

Scan and email completed form to elections.committee@edmn.org, submit by mail to: Elections Committee, Education Minnesota, 41 Sherburne Ave., St. Paul, MN 55103 or by fax to: 651-767-1266. If you do not receive confirmation of receipt within seven days after submitting, inquire by email to elections.committee@edmn.org.

Note: Candidates may submit a photo and statement for inclusion on the Education Minnesota website. The photo and statement must be submitted using the online submission form at www.educationminnesota.org by Feb. 21, 2025.

(For official use only)

This filing form was received on _____ by _____. Membership was verified on _____ by _____.

Apply for funding for the AFT TEACH Conference

The AFT TEACH Conference, a biennial event devoted to professional development, will be held July 24-27 in Washington, D.C.

Your local president should have an information packet from the American Federation of Teachers that includes a tentative schedule, hotel and conference registration forms.

Education Minnesota will provide funding for one member from each election district, as well as one statewide/higher education member and one education support professional member, to attend the conference. Please note, pre-conference expenses are NOT covered as part of this funding. Members who would like to apply for state funding should complete the form found at <https://cvent.me/wmrnIL> by Friday, Dec. 13.

The selection of state-funded participants will be made January 2025, and those awarded funding will be notified and sent the necessary information. Priority

will be given to first-time attendees. Funding includes conference registration, airfare, hotel accommodation and meals.

All members are welcome to attend at their own expense.

If you have questions, contact Janel Engesser at 800-652-9073 ext. 4867 or by email at janel.engesser@edmn.org.

2025 AFT TEACH Conference

July 24-27, 2024; Washington, D.C.

To be considered for a state-funded position, please fill out the State-Funded Participant Interest Form at www.cvent.me/wmrnIL by Friday, Dec. 13.

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there are no private schools, vouchers do not provide additional choice for parents; and because vouchers rarely cover the full cost of private school tuition or the additional costs of attending a private school, they also offer little choice to low-income parents. This is one of the reasons that Arizona’s voucher program has been found to disproportionately benefit wealthy and upper middle-class families.

Given all of this, it is by no means surprising that, when given the opportunity to vote on a voucher proposal, even Tennessee voters rejected the policy by a nearly 2-1 margin. Most taxpayers do not want policies that weaken their public schools. In a Reuters/Ipsos poll from 2023, only 36% of respondents indicated their support for diverting public funds to religious schools. If pollsters asked families whether they want to divert public school funding to unregulated schools that will worsen students’ educational outcomes, that number would very likely be even lower.

Privatization of education is neither advisable nor necessary. The most well-meaning advocates are responding to a circumstance in which public infrastructure is either not yet universally available (pre-school options) or chronically underfunded. When our elected leaders build consensus to create universal opportunities for students to learn together in public schools, every stakeholder wins.

Less well-meaning advocates are simply looking for new and creative ways to try to wind down public schools. This is how states end up with a voucher program that craters a state budget merely to finance a choice wealthy parents were already making—as we saw happen in Arizona. However, subsidizing the fracture of one of the United States’ most democratizing institutions, the public schools, is in no one’s interest. Doing so in a way that offers no quality control for instruction or inclusive practices is particularly pernicious for students and their families. Given this, Minnesotans should continue to urge elected officials to reject vouchers, regardless of the age of the student, and instead to fully fund public schools that can be effective and welcoming to all students.

“In Louisiana, education researchers found in two separate studies that voucher programs reduced student achievement in the areas of both language arts and math.”



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When you do, you can have some peace of mind that your loved ones will receive their benefit in a time of need. This unique benefit helps ensure educators like you have additional coverage beyond what may be provided through your district. It's just one of the many ways your union membership works hard for you.

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neamb.com/mycomp for a
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Education Minnesota
41 Sherburne Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55103

THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS

Take advantage of professional development through Education Minnesota!

Education Minnesota offers almost 100 in-person trainings that locals can request. These trainings cover over ten categories, including leading and growing your union, bargaining/negotiations, organizing, relicensure and more. Connect with a local leader and field staff to request any of these trainings for your next professional development day!

Trainings are of no cost to locals and for Education Minnesota members only. The full booklet of offerings is available to view on educationminnesota.org.

Can't make it to an in-person training but still interested in professional development? No problem! Trainings are available anytime on MEA Online for Education Minnesota members to take at their own pace. Relicensure offerings, information about pensions, various legal trainings and more are available now.

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go to meaonline.learnupon.com.***

