

M I N N E S O T A EDUCATOR

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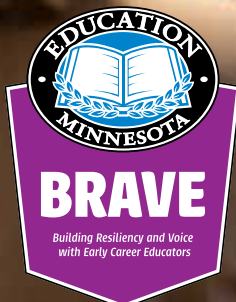
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**THE VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS**

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Mail: Minnesota Educator
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To inquire about advertising in the Educator or on the website:

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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.

President: **Monica Byron**

Vice President: **Marty Fridgen**

Secretary-Treasurer: **Ryan Fiereck**

Executive Director: **Carrie Lucking**

Director of Public Affairs: **Kathi Micheletti**

Editor: **Heaven Keane**

Art Director: **Eric Widi**



Table of contents

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: Public schools for all, or just a few? The future of education in Minnesota.

page 2

Meet Monica Byron, Education Minnesota's new president.

page 4

Meet the 2025-28 Education Minnesota officer team.

pages 5-8

Solidarity leads to success in Becker Education Association exclusive representation challenge.

pages 9-11

NEA report finds inflation outpacing educator pay increases.

page 12

Willmar teacher expands inclusivity with NEA Disability Visibility book grant.

pages 13-14

ESP of the Year nominations still open.

page 15

Unemployment insurance funded for two more years.

page 15

Education Minnesota teacher apprenticeship program creates new pathway to classroom teaching.

page 16

Legislature finishes the year with special session.

page 17

"No greater champion for Minnesota's students, educators and the public good." Education Minnesota mourns assassination of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman.

page 18

Public schools for all, or just a few?

The future of education in Minnesota

As I begin my term as president of Education Minnesota, I know I'm taking office at one of the most challenging moments for public education in decades—but I believe we're strong enough for whatever comes next.

For over 25 years, I've dedicated my career to education—first as a Home School Liaison, then as a teacher and districtwide elementary math coach for Richfield Public Schools. Throughout this journey, I've seen the profound effect educators have on students' lives and how a strong, united union empowers us to overcome obstacles and create lasting change. That experience has shaped my vision for the next three years. It's built on collaboration, inclusion and unwavering advocacy for public education and the people who deliver it.

This vision collides head-on with Washington's approach. While I speak of collaboration and building connections with educators, legislators and community allies, Education Secretary Linda McMahon has declared the U.S. Department of Education explicitly rejects "divisive DEI programs and gender ideology." As a founding member of our union's Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee and the first Black person to serve as Education Minnesota's president, I know diversity, equity and inclusion aren't divisive—they're essential to ensuring every student succeeds.

This administration has also withheld \$6.8 billion in federal education funds that were supposed to be released July 1, including about \$74 million for Minnesota's students. The cuts target professional development for educators and programs for the at-risk students I've spent my career supporting.

In Minnesota, we understand that every student deserves the freedom to learn the full story of America, both the good and the bad, in a safe and welcoming school. Yet members of this administration believe children must be taught prescribed "patriotic" values rather than critical thinking skills. Meanwhile, McMahon champions a national voucher scheme that will drain resources from the public schools that serve all children.

This administration's approach embodies everything I oppose. Where they see division, I see the strength that comes from diverse perspectives. Where they create barriers, I work to build bridges. Where they defund public schools, I fight to ensure every educator has the tools and support needed to thrive.

James Baldwin, one of my favorite authors, once wrote: "The paradox of education is precisely this—that as one begins to become conscious, one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions." This wisdom guides my approach.

Our schools are constantly evolving, and so must our union. By embracing fresh perspectives and innovative solutions, we will meet challenges head-on and build a union that continues leading public education in Minnesota and beyond.

The challenges ahead are formidable. More than 8 in 10 Minnesota schools report teacher shortages. Our union will continue working to alleviate this crisis through improvements to educators' pay, pensions and health care.

We will face more attacks from federal officials who would rather dismantle public education than strengthen it. But when educators unite around our shared values of freedom, inclusion and excellence, we can resist. Together, our union will ensure educators have the resources they need to sustain their families and serve every student with dignity and respect.

I am proud to be an educator and part of our extraordinary labor movement. We in Minnesota will move forward—hopeful, determined and undaunted.

In unity,

Monica



Monica Byron



Congratulations to Nichole Markworth of Lac qui Parle Valley 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!

Nichole reads her Educator at Arenal Volcano in Costa Rica while participating in the NEA Foundation's Global Learning Fellowship.





Educators in the news

“We were really proud in our new contract of pushing our starting salary over \$50,000 for the first time, but that’s not really keeping pace with inflation for our teachers, especially when you include...high health care costs, childcare costs and student loan payments.”

Anoka Hennepin president John Wolhaupter in a June 3 MPR article titled, “Report finds housing costs outpacing growth of teacher salaries.”

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 Minneapolis Federation of Educators on Facebook:

-  facebook.com/MFE59

Follow West Central Area Teachers on Facebook:

-  Search for MN EA 7283

Richfield educator Monica Byron is Education Minnesota's new president

Byron, a 24-year educator, is the first person of color to serve as Education Minnesota president

On July 1, Education Minnesota welcomed a new president for the first time since 2013. Vice President Monica Byron ran unopposed for president and was elected by delegates at the 2025 Representative Convention.

Byron has served in many roles over her 24 years as a Richfield educator, but she began as an education support professional. She started her classroom career as a homeschool liaison in Richfield Public Schools until she got her teaching license in 1998. She then worked as an elementary classroom teacher, an instructional coach for her school, and, most recently, an elementary math coach for the district.

Byron comes from a strong union family. "My grandpa was a postal worker and my mom was a Hennepin County social worker, and they were both very active in their unions," she said. Her mother would take Byron to meetings and explain what the union was doing and how their work benefited the broader community, including the families she worked with as a Child Protective Services social worker.

When Byron was looking for a job as a young adult, her grandfather encouraged her to look for a union job. "When I was growing up, people would always tell me I should be a teacher. My grandfather also told me I should be a teacher because the unions are strong,"

she said. He touted the benefits of a union job: a steady pension, stronger worker protections and more stable benefits than many private-sector options.

Taking her grandfather's advice to heart, Byron jumped into leadership in her local affiliate. She held numerous positions within Education Richfield, including building representative, treasurer, membership chair, government relations chair and more. "I've always believed in the power of the union to help support educators," she said.

Byron got involved in statewide union leadership after a call from Judy Schaubach, who was president of Education Minnesota at the time. "She asked me to attend a training on women and minority leadership," Byron said. "In that training, I heard about a program out in California called the Ethnic Minority

Affairs Committee, so I came back and asked to start an EMAC in Minnesota." EMAC began as a task force in 2003, and in 2010 it became a standing committee.

Throughout her tenure in statewide union work, Byron has consistently expanded representation within the union and brought voices to the table that have not traditionally been represented. Through her work with EMAC, she saw a need for historically marginalized members to have a stronger voice within their locals, so she worked to create Education Minnesota's affinity spaces and ethnic forums. "We wanted to make sure



that members had a voice throughout the state, not just through a single committee,” she said.

Byron said her decision to run for vice president in 2022 was partly due to encouragement from members and partly from watching former vice presidents Bernie Burnham and Paul Mueller. “I was always in awe of our leadership and all the work they did,” she said.

New statewide officer team looks forward to growing the union and uplifting member voices

On July 1, Education Minnesota welcomed a new team into the roles of president, vice president and secretary-treasurer. In addition to Byron, Marty Fridgen was elected vice president and Ryan Fiereck was elected secretary-treasurer. With a brand-new slate of officers for the first time in 12 years, the Minnesota Educator sat down with the new officer team to talk about the transition and their plans for the union over the next three years.

Editor’s note: Responses have been edited for clarity and concision.

Minnesota Educator: Can you share your vision for the next three years?

Monica Byron: The biggest vision is that members see themselves in the union. That they know that if they need something, want to explore something or find more information, they can go to Education Minnesota to find that. I want members to understand that we are the union—it’s not some external force out there. We control our own destinies and can make things happen when we do things together. Another priority is growing our membership, making sure that members understand membership and why it matters. We also want to make sure that we are at the forefront of what’s coming. We can’t control it, but we can make sure that as things change, we are as proactive as we can be.

Marty Fridgen: I would add to the point about understanding what the union is that it’s also important we develop an understanding of how we fit in with the broader labor community. We aren’t alone, we work with partners, and each of us has different needs and

Although she never aspired to serve as an Education Minnesota officer, EMAC members encouraged her to run for the position, which she eventually won.

Byron said she wants to be a leader who centers member voices. “I’m excited to represent members across our state,” she said, “and I will do the best I can every day to make sure our members’ voices are heard.”

experiences, so of course we’re going to fight for pay and for insurance and pensions, but we are also going to fight to ensure that everyone is included—including students and our members.

Ryan Fiereck: The biggest goals I have for the next three years are to review the policies and make sure they’re up to date with our operating procedures because it’s always good to get a fresh set of eyes on them. I would like to provide clarity around expense reports so that members can submit them correctly the first time [and get reimbursements to members more quickly]. I want to make sure we have member feedback built into the systems so that whatever we plan in the future responds to whatever members need.

Minnesota Educator: Given all the uncertainty at the federal level, what do you think is the union’s role in this moment?

Monica Byron: Our role is to make sure that we decipher the information as best we can and keep members informed. To be as transparent as possible and develop ourselves as a source of information that members come to. Especially in these times of misinformation and disinformation, it’s important for the union to be a reliable source and utilize our wonderful staff to tackle what’s coming. When they know that we are getting information from our partners, from the national organizations and their legal teams, that we [have the network to vet information], we can be that trusted resource for members as things change.

Marty Fridgen: We need to encourage engagement and action because that's how we are going to be able to fight back as democracy gets weakened. We were reminded this past week at the NEA Representative Assembly that it's the unions that fight back against those things and take action to say we're not going to stand for this. And so we need to [encourage people to get involved and understand that] we can't just sit on the sidelines.

Ryan Fiereck: A part that hasn't been mentioned is making sure that we use member perspective to build something that's going to be better, regardless of which direction we go. We should be the one-stop-shop for

Minnesota Educator: Looking at your past union work, what's something you are proud to have worked on and hope to continue?

Monica Byron: I'm proud of my work around member voices and advocacy, especially being able to start affinity spaces at the local level and at Education Minnesota with our Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee. I'm also proud of the government relations work I did for the local getting members to see themselves in those roles and taking action at the Capitol, lobbying and seeing that politics does play a role in everything we



Vice President Marty Fridgen and members meet with Senator Judy Seeberger at the 2025 Pensions Day of Action.

vetting the information but also providing the path forward. There are going to be opportunities to do something better, and sadly, it's not going to be fun to go through it but it's important that we do more than just try to defend what we have. We also need to remain hyper-focused on providing what members need to meet the moment. Whatever challenges are going to come ahead, we are trying our best to uplift the [member voices] that make our democracy a better place.

do and that we should have a voice in that.

Marty Fridgen: Thinking about my experience as local president [of United Teachers of South Washington County], I am proud of getting many more people involved and active in our union [and of what we've accomplished because of that]. After the murder of George Floyd, we worked with our school district and school board to get a racial justice statement. In the last round of bargaining, we negotiated the best contract we've had in 25 years. We couldn't have done it without everyone working together, and I'm proud of the work that we did.

Ryan Fiereck: I'm proud of some of the local leadership experience I have with teachers and ESPs [as president of Education Minnesota St. Francis], bringing their perspective forward to look at challenges a different way and then continuing to push for progress in our pensions and benefits. Each group's needs are different and having those different perspectives when you're trying to get something better for everyone will hopefully be a tool that I can bring to the table.

Minnesota Educator: Looking toward future work, what specific initiative are you most excited about working on?

Monica Byron: I am excited to see what this role will bring. We've made a lot of changes to some programs—for example, bringing in our Organizing for Settlement Committee—and when it comes to the unique programs we have that no other state affiliate does, I'm excited to see what's possible and how our members can benefit from what we have to offer. I'm also looking forward to getting around the state to connect with members. As an officer team, we are also excited to work on our legislative agenda and hopefully pass a statewide health insurance pool and improve pensions. We know this is a year for bargaining and we are ready and excited to support our local negotiators as they bargain boldly.

Marty Fridgen: We talk about how strong locals mean you have a strong state union, and strong state unions mean you have a strong national union. It is about the locals and how do we help them understand that we are here to support them, but we still need them to be the boots on the ground and take action to protect whatever [the issues are] facing their community. It goes back to the premise that strong locals where members are engaged mean that our members have trust in each other and don't just come to [the state affiliate] for things but go to each other and work together because they trust that their neighbors know what they're doing and can work together. It's important to remember that we need to be the strongest at the local level.

Ryan Fiereck: I think with the opportunities that we see in front of us for the next year, the part I'm most excited about is seeing how our members respond to a bit of the unknown. I think they're up for the challenge of doing things differently in a moment that requires us to do things differently. That could be through grant programs or political activities, or even curriculum changes. I'm excited to see how our members will rise up and protect the classroom, the union, their teaching spaces and workplaces and all the things in between. It would be great to predict what could happen, but I strongly believe our members are capable of figuring out the best path forward, knowing the challenges or restrictions we have...almost every time we've [faced new situations], our members have provided the path forward. I also think we look at how to engage newer members at the local level and how we can develop opportunities to empower members at the local level so that we can be strong on a state level.

Minnesota Educator: As you move into these roles, what should members be on the lookout for, and will we see changes in the short term?

Monica Byron: Learning more about the new team as we grow into these roles. I can't wait for members to learn about who I am as a leader and I'm excited to meet members and find out ways we can get engaged and show them as a state union that we are all in this together. We're all a part of what's to come and together we can do this.

Marty Fridgen: We are new faces in these roles and two of us are brand new to the statewide officer team, but our members can still count on us. We're still a strong union and we're going to continue providing local affiliates with what they need. We might do things a little differently and have some new ideas that we want them to try, but at the core we have a solid foundation. We are just the next group of caretakers for this organization. When I took this role, I left my position and now they have a new person to be that caretaker and carry on what we've been doing. They should look for some new faces and new ideas, but at



the core we're still going to keep growing our union and making it stronger.

Ryan Fiereck: Right now this team is set up to continue its work connecting with members, so I would tell folks to lean on their intermediate organizations and local leaders to get an opportunity to reach out and speak with us firsthand as we try to get around the state and meet folks. We will also be focused on closing those loops and doing the little things like updating phone numbers, making sure people have the information they need. Hopefully folks have that before September, but if members need something, they can always reach out to their field staff or look at the website to close that gap. Our hope is that whatever they have planned is not bogged up by anything we are doing, because we are here to help.

Minnesota Educator: Any parting thoughts that you'd like to share with members?

Monica Byron, Marty Fridgen and Ryan Fiereck:

We have been working hard over the summer to build a team here at headquarters and across the state to make sure we are ready to go. We want to extend our sincere appreciation to [Education Minnesota] staff who have been working hard to support the transition. We know that takes up a lot of extra time, but their hard work has helped us be ready to go on day one. We also hope that members have a great start to the school year. We want to be out there on the front lines with you, so please lean on your union for anything you need.

Secretary-Treasurer Ryan Fiereck addresses the crowd at Education Minnesota's Strong Schools, Strong Pensions rally in May 2025.

Solidarity, organizing lead to success in Becker exclusive representation challenge

During a break in discussion of business items, over 600 delegates to the Education Minnesota Representative Convention posed for a photo with signs that all said the same thing: "BEA, we've got your back!"

The signs were a demonstration of support for the Becker Education Association, which was going through a challenge to its exclusive representation status for the district.

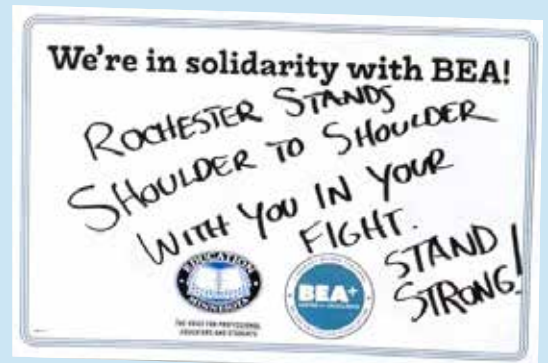
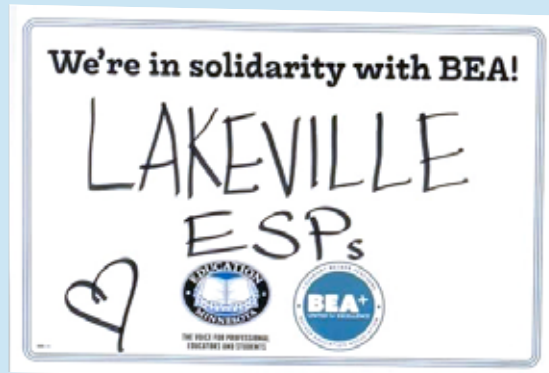
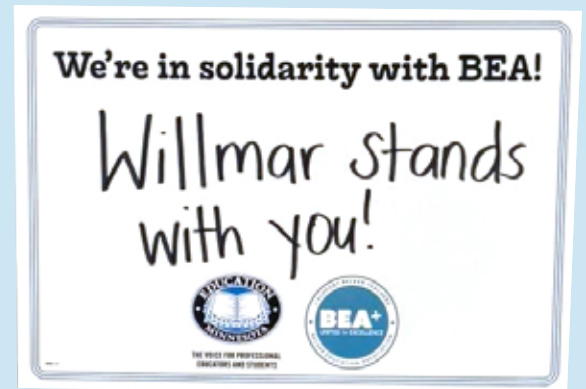
The photo, which included NEA President Becky Pringle, AFT President Randi Weingarten, Education Minnesota officers Denise Specht, Monica Byron and Rodney Rowe, and BEA co-presidents Lauren Pauley and Karen Landsverk, encapsulates the solidarity that comes from belonging to a national, state and local union.

Landsverk and Pauley say that solidarity was a big part of why BEA successfully retained its exclusive representation status.

Back home in Becker, different visions were emerging of what the union should be and where its focus should lie. A few years ago, a small group of BEA members did not agree with the direction that the state and national unions were moving. They felt it was too political and wanted the union to focus solely on local issues.

BEA leaders disagreed, arguing that state and federal policies have too much impact on classrooms for educators to avoid them. Curriculum standards and funding are set at both the state level and national level, and choosing to stop participating in those discussions would result in a loss of collective power, thus creating a less effective union.

That group of members eventually broke away and formed a new organization, the Becker Association of Professional Educators. BAPE pitched itself as a local-focused alternative to BEA, for members who wanted union representation without politics.





Rush City Education Association shows solidarity with BEA.

Not long after its formation, BAPE tried to challenge BEA's exclusive representation status. But the first time they tried, they were unable to secure enough challenge cards to trigger an election.

After the initial attempt to challenge BEA's exclusive representation status, the local began organizing so that they were ready to respond if they were challenged again. Their strategy was simple: build relationships and share information through open communication. BEA established four to five members per building to be "champions," individuals who are widely respected and trusted by members to give accurate and clear information. The champions' role was to have conversations, answer questions and receive feedback from members about the union's priorities.

Pauley said that information sharing was a way to show solidarity with members. "This is what the union is," she said. "We care about what everyone is thinking and what everyone's vision of the future is."

To set their champions up for success, another member began creating communications materials, such as Q&A documents, and establishing avenues to get information out to members first. "Inevitably, the other side will have messages too. What we found is that oftentimes, their messaging wasn't inaccurate, but it was often incomplete," Landsverk said. BEA leaders felt it was important to have people available to answer questions and clarify information for members.

BEA kept all of its communications positive. They framed the issue in a positive light, focusing on how much more effective the union is when part of the state and national affiliates, and how much more support they can provide to each other when they work as part of a larger collective.

They also emphasized how the size of the state and national affiliates allows them to provide services that most locals don't have the capacity to do on their own. For example, Education Minnesota has a dedicated

team of lawyers that can provide contract support and legal advice. "When we don't understand something, it's the bigger collective that makes the difference," Landsverk said.

She points to the recent pension improvements Education Minnesota advocated for at the Capitol as an example of how the collective power of the state affiliate was able to win big for educators: Because tens of thousands of educators were advocating on this bill, the bill eventually had 17 sponsors and received bipartisan support. The backing of tens of thousands of voices is what makes those large-scale victories possible.

Solidarity from nearby locals helped bolster the movement. St. Cloud Education Association sent Crumbl cookies to BEA members. SCEA and other locals nearby took photos holding signs of support for BEA that were compiled into a slideshow and shown to members at a general meeting. At the Representative Convention, hundreds of members from across the state stood in support of BEA.

After establishing their communications strategy and trusted messengers, BEA found ways for passionate members to get involved. In addition to the champions, they had a group of people—affectionately referred to as the Fab Five—focused on the behind-the-scenes and logistical details: grabbing doughnuts for meetings, ensuring sign-in sheets were ready to go, providing pizza for members who attended school board meetings, scheduling lunches at schools and sending postcards with testimonials to Becker educators.

Because of these organizing efforts, when BAPE collected enough challenge cards to trigger a vote this past spring, BEA was ready.

Once the election was underway, BEA was able to shift its focus from voter persuasion to voter turnout. "We wanted high turnout for the vote because we wanted to use it to get an idea of our future as a local," said Pauley.

To achieve the levels of turnout they wanted, BEA made it as easy as possible for members to vote. BEA sent out guidance about the ballots and a timeline so that members knew what to expect. They organized ballot drop-off events and hand-delivered sealed ballots for members who did not want to mail their ballots.

BEA's efforts were ultimately successful: they achieved 90% voter turnout across the district. Of those who voted, 71% elected to keep BEA as the exclusive representative for Becker, and 29% voted for BAPE.

"I think people realized that, yes, local is important, but we are not an island. The collective is important," said Landsverk. They said this process showed members that there are a lot of educators going through similar issues, such as struggling with negotiations or with their school boards, and that it was empowering to have more than just a small group.

Pauley and Landsverk emphasized that this victory was truly a team effort. "People are passionate about our local, about that unity and continuing something that historically has been a really important part of our community," Pauley said. While they knew that solidarity was a strong value in Becker, both leaders said they were blown away by the support they received from the community, from other locals, and from Education Minnesota leaders and staff. "Sometimes you feel kind of alone, and this made us realize that this isn't just our fight, this is a fight for all of us," said Landsverk.

Pauley and Landsverk say their focus is now on rebuilding and moving forward, but they are proud of the relationships the local has built. "While we need to continue to work on bringing people in, I believe we strengthened a lot of the relationships we've had," Landsverk said.



NEA report finds inflation outpacing educator pay increases

Minnesota ranks 15th in teacher pay, 16th in ESP pay, but nationally teachers make 5% less than they did ten years ago

NEA's annual Educator Pay in America report, released in April, tracks the state of teacher and education support professional pay at the state and national level. The report shows Minnesota's average teacher salaries for the 2023-24 school year were \$72,420 and K-12 ESP salaries were \$35,938.

While we rank towards the top compared to other states—15th and 16th in the nation, respectively—educator wages have not kept up with inflation. On average, teachers across the country earn 5% less than they did ten years ago.

Furthermore, both starting teacher salaries in Minnesota and average ESP salaries are not high enough to provide a living wage. According to the report, a living wage in Minnesota is \$64,701, but starting teacher salaries average around \$45,000 and K-12 ESP wages average about \$36,000.

In addition to inflation, other costs are also increasingly pricing

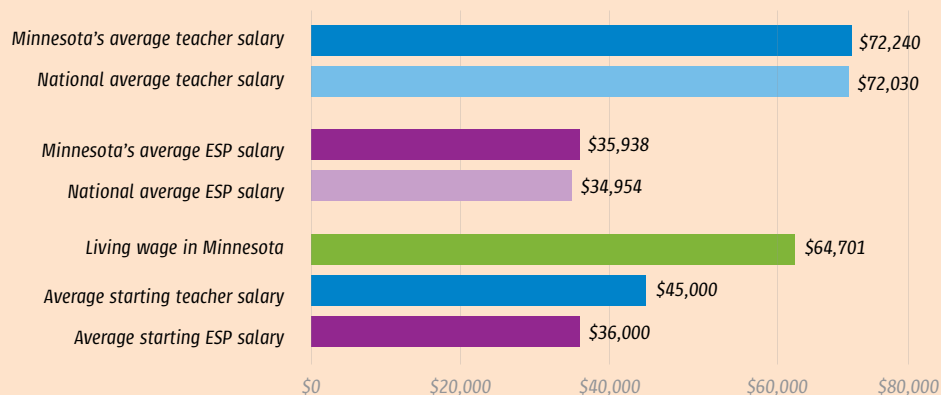
educators out of the classroom: skyrocketing health insurance and childcare costs, lack of affordable housing and uncertainty regarding student loans. John Wolhaupter, president of Anoka Hennepin Education Minnesota, spoke with Minnesota Public Radio in June about how Anoka Hennepin is struggling to keep early career educators because they can't afford to live in or near the district. "It's really a struggle to bring in new teachers on a continuing basis... especially when you're competing with other professions that people can go into right out of college and make \$10,000 or \$20,000 more," Wolhaupter told MPR.

The union difference

The report also showed how strong unions positively impact educator pay. In states with collective bargaining, teachers make 24% more and ESPs make 7% more than in states without any collective bargaining laws.

Education Minnesota's members have led the charge on increasing pay for both classroom teachers and ESPs. Our legislative agenda calls for a starting wage of \$60,000 and raises across the board commensurate with experience and pay in similar professions, along with a \$25/hour wage for hourly workers and a minimum hourly salary. This legislative session, we successfully protected unemployment insurance for ESPs over the summer and are currently working on establishing a statewide mandatory pool to help reduce health care costs for educators and ensure that more of their paycheck goes into their pockets.

Minnesota still has a long way to go to improve educator pay—especially for ESPs—but through our strong collective bargaining policies and the collective power of our members, we will be able to continue improvements on pay, pensions and health care.



Willmar teacher expands library inclusivity with NEA Disability Visibility book grant

At Kennedy Elementary School, students are guaranteed to find themselves represented in a library book.

The bookshelves have an impressive array of titles that reflect the diverse makeup of the school's students, including selections in Native languages such as Dakota and Ojibwe, books in Somali and an entire section of Spanish language books. For the 40% of the student body that are Spanish speakers, this creates a level of access that students don't often have.

Kennedy students will soon see a new selection of books on the library shelves, thanks to a grant from the National Education Association that provides educators with funds to purchase books featuring protagonists with disabilities.

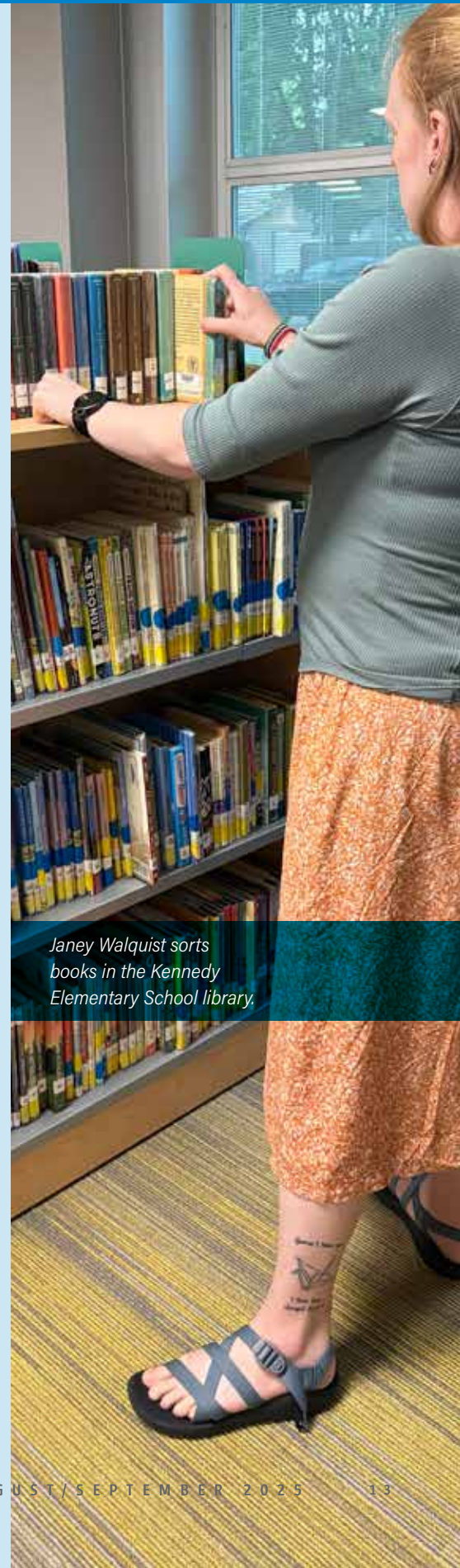
Janey Walquist, an English language teacher who applied for and won the grant for Kennedy, said the idea came to her after working in her school's library. Kennedy Elementary does not have a dedicated librarian, so teachers split their time between classroom teaching and working in the library. Walquist, then a science teacher, worked half-time in the classroom and half-time in the library, where she saw students' excitement when they found something in a book to connect with.

"Once the kids figure out where the Spanish section is, or the Somali language section, if that's something that is important to them, they will gravitate towards it every single time," she said. "The kids get excited about seeing themselves in the books and it helps them enjoy (or at least tolerate) reading." Walquist said the students also use the books to connect with classmates from similar cultural backgrounds.

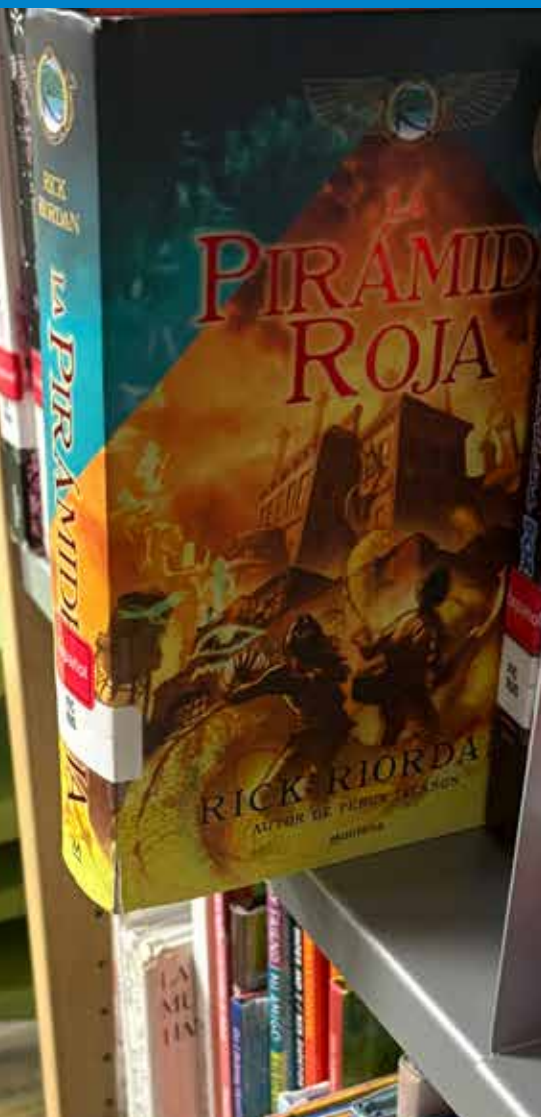
While the library does an excellent job of offering a wide range of books that reflect the school's culturally diverse student population, Walquist said staff are always looking for ways to create a more inclusive library. "We have a lot of books that show [racial and cultural] diversity, but we don't have a lot that celebrate students with disabilities," she said.

Expanding the library's collection to include disability-focused books is especially timely because Kennedy has recently introduced a program for students with developmental cognitive disabilities. For many Kennedy students, this will be their first time interacting with students who have higher support needs.

Walquist's goal is that these books will help foster empathy and understanding among students. "Kennedy students have been very open to having [DCD] students in their classes, but further understanding of those things takes



Janey Walquist sorts books in the Kennedy Elementary School library.



The Spanish-language book section of the Kennedy Elementary School library.

education,” she said. She felt that the books from this grant would not only provide the students with a good opportunity to learn, but they would provide teachers with a tool to use in their classrooms to help students understand their new classmates.

Walquist hopes this experience instills kindness in students that follows them into adulthood. “Now is the time to teach this so that, as adults, when they come across people in the community [with disabilities], they understand more about those people’s experiences. Kids at the elementary age can soak in so many things and if they see people with disabilities in a positive light, it’s more likely to carry over to the rest of their lives,” she said.

For students who want to learn more, the plan is to put QR codes on the covers of the books. Those codes will link to resources from disability-focused organizations so that parents can do activities at home, and teachers can use the resources in the classroom even after the books have been returned to the library. Walquist said she hopes these resources allow the conversation to continue and provide students with further opportunities to learn about disabilities.

Once the books are settled in, if the QR code system is successful, Walquist said the long-term plan is to expand the QR-code links to include more Spanish and Somali language resources, because there are not as many options for disability-focused books in those languages. “We have a few books from this grant that are in different languages, but a lot of them aren’t available in hardcover and the paperback books simply aren’t as durable,” she said.

Walquist encouraged members to take advantage of the opportunities and events available through the state and national affiliates. She first learned about the grant while attending the NEA Representative Assembly, where NEA representatives provided detailed information about the grant and were available to answer questions.

“You get to step outside of your bubble, meet teachers that you connect with and learn about things like the Disability Visibility grant,” she said. “This is what will keep me going as a teacher when the monotonous day-to-day becomes difficult.”

Education Minnesota offers several grants through the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. You can learn more and apply for 2025-26 grant opportunities at edmnfoundation.org/overview.

The National Education Association also offers many grants through the NEA Foundation. Information about some of the grants they offer is available on their website, neafoundation.org.

There's still time to nominate a colleague for ESP of the Year

Nominations are open until Sept. 15

If you would like to recognize your ESP colleagues' exemplary work, nominate them for Education Minnesota's Education Support Professional of the Year! Since 2007, the ESP of the Year program has recognized outstanding professional and union work by education support professionals across Minnesota. Nominees can be in any ESP job category, including paraprofessional, secretarial or clerical, custodial, food service, maintenance, trades, transportation, groundskeeping, security, technology services, health services and more.

Any current Education Minnesota ESP members whose membership started on or before August 31, 2022, are eligible!

The ESP of the Year represents Minnesota ESPs throughout the profession and connects with their communities as an ambassador of the program. The Education Minnesota ESP of the Year will receive a \$1,200 honorarium and their choice of either a Chromebook, iPad or other tablet.

The winner will also serve as Minnesota's nominee for NEA's ESP of the Year program and will receive an expense-paid trip to the NEA Education Support Professional National Conference.

For more information or to submit a nomination, visit our website: educationminnesota.org/news/awards-and-honors/esp-of-the-year

Unemployment insurance for hourly workers funded for two more years

Since 2023, hourly school workers have been able to receive unemployment insurance over the summer. This program is vital for reducing turnover in ESP roles and increasing flexibility and stability for education support professionals, who remain some of the most underpaid employees in public education.

Earlier this session, Republicans proposed legislation that would defund this program. The proposal received significant pushback, and Education Minnesota successfully defended against all attempts

to repeal this benefit. Education Minnesota members testified to the Legislature on how this bill has benefited educators and students, highlighting reduced turnover and the benefits that increased continuity has on students.

A standalone bill passed in May funds unemployment insurance for hourly school workers for the next two summers. Education Minnesota will continue to push for this funding to be made permanent.

Education Minnesota teacher apprenticeship program creates new pathway to classroom teaching

Earlier this summer, Education Minnesota officially began a new apprenticeship program for elementary educators

Currently, the landscape for teacher apprenticeships is very segmented: if a district even has an apprenticeship program, it's managed at the district level. This results in wildly different apprenticeship experiences from district to district, since larger districts with more resources have more capacity to develop a comprehensive program.

The new apprenticeship program aims to standardize training while providing a pathway to bring more teachers into the classroom. The program was created by the GroundUp Coalition, which is made up of Black Men Teach, CDF Freedom Schools, the Kitty Anderson Youth Science Center, Sankore Counseling, Bemidji State University and Education Minnesota.

Education Minnesota will be the primary sponsor of this program.

This apprenticeship program is similar to a residency program, but because it is implemented through the union, it provides more worker protections and benefits than residency. Under the program, participants work extended hours—they will work 37.5 hours as opposed to the usual 30-32 hours/week for many paraprofessionals.

Apprentices also receive pay increases on top of their contractual pay increases every year of the program. Additionally, participants can become Tier III teachers and receive a bachelor's degree within three years without going into debt.

The apprenticeship began with training in early June. Apprentices traveled to Knoxville, TN, to learn about Freedom Schools and the curriculum they would implement through the summer program. Once they returned, participants spent the next six weeks teaching classes in that program.

Angela Stewart, a paraprofessional in Robbinsdale, said that the curriculum has helped her strengthen her ability to plan lessons. "Having that has been helpful because I can branch off from it and add more," she said. Stewart, who is working with level II students during the summer program, has added classroom events and activities for the students that go along with the lesson plan.

Kiyanna Thompson, a supervisory paraprofessional in the Hopkins school district, spoke about how the program provides an entry point for someone who didn't excel in a traditional classroom

setting. "I never thought I would be a teacher. I love learning, but I did not like a lot of the aspects of college," she said.

Thompson said that the apprenticeship program allows her to obtain a degree in a way that works for her. "We get to learn on the job and while we have classes, it's more group class and less sitting in a classroom listening to a lecture," she said.

Stewart and Thompson both said that the program has been beneficial so far. Thompson said she was skeptical at first, but working with the students has helped her build confidence and work through some of her own nervousness. "I know that this is something I will be involved with for many years to come," she said.

The apprenticeship program initially launched in Robbinsdale and Hopkins and includes 10 participants who are district employees. If it is successful, Education Minnesota will expand the program statewide and eventually include secondary education.

More information about the program will be available on Education Minnesota's website soon.

Legislature returns for special session in June

Due in part to the roadblocks the Legislature faced during this session, lawmakers had to meet for a one-day special session in June to formalize a budget deal that was negotiated at the end of the regularly scheduled legislative session.

This was an incredibly tough budget year, and many public programs were cut. However, through the advocacy of our members and the efforts of our lobby team, we were able to successfully defend education funding for the next two years.

Below, we have provided a summary of education-related budget proposals that were addressed during the special session.

Education finance

- The per-pupil formula remains linked to inflation. Thank you to everyone who sent emails and made phone calls to their elected officials and urged them to keep this link!
- Additional targeted funding for English language learners of \$47 million in 2026 and \$124 million in 2027.
- Increases in funding for special education of \$375 million in 2026 and \$445 million in 2027.
- Decreases in special education transportation reimbursement.
- Establishment of a Blue Ribbon Commission to look at special education costs.
- Decreases in aid to school libraries.
- Flexibility with calculation and usage of compensatory revenue.

READ Act policy and funding changes

Most of the changes to the READ Act included in the budget are designed to clean up and clarify existing language. Those include:

- Changes to reporting requirements for dual immersion education sites and allowing those students to undergo screenings in both English and their primary language.

- All paraprofessionals and community volunteers assisting with reading instruction must complete a free READ Act training offered through regional literacy networks. The training is online and asynchronous.
- Teachers that are new to Minnesota and that have entered the classroom through nontraditional pathways will need to certify that they have completed READ Act training at their first license renewal.
- For the 2025-26 school year, districts may decrease student contact time by 5.5 hours to allow for READ Act professional development.
- If an educator misses a required training because of medical leave that the district knows about, the district can't hold the individual responsible for the cost of missed training.
- If districts don't sign an MOU by Aug. 1, they will be put into statutory default, which means that the READ Act stipend money will be divided by the total number of educators who need to take the training and then given directly to those eligible educators. This ensures that the stipend money gets into the hands of educators instead of being held hostage by the district.

Emergency short call subs

The budget bill includes a new temporary license for emergency short-call substitute teachers. This license is available for current paraprofessionals with one year of experience or applicants with an associate's degree. Short-call subs can only be in an assignment for 10 days, and the district must provide training and regular substitute pay.

For a more in-depth explanation of these proposals, please check out the legislative update webinar on our website at educationminnesota.org/members-only/2025-legislative-wrap-up. If you have further questions, please contact our lobby team at lobbyteam@edmn.org



Speaker Emerita Hortman with Governor Walz and members at the 2020-21 Unity Summit.

“No greater champion for Minnesota’s students, educators and the public good:” Education Minnesota mourns assassination of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman

In recent years, Minnesota has made historic investments in public education – none of which would have been possible without the leadership of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman, who had been the leader of the Minnesota House DFL since 2017 and a fixture of Minnesota politics for over two decades.

In the early hours of June 14, days after the Legislature adjourned their special session, Hortman and her husband Mark were assassinated in a series of politically-motivated attacks that also wounded state Sen. John Hoffman and his wife Yvette, an Osseo educator and Education Minnesota member.

After losing two elections, Hortman was elected to the Minnesota House in 2004. She held onto her swing seat for 11 election cycles following that initial win. As a legislator, Hortman was dedicated, passionate and collaborative. She could find common ground with anyone and had a knack for bringing people together. She had a grand vision for how government could help Minnesotans, and when she had the opportunity during the 2023-24 DFL trifecta, she brought many aspects of that grand vision to life through programs such as Earned Sick and Safe Time, Paid Family Medical Leave and linking education funding to inflation to ensure that public schools receive stable, consistent revenue.

In a June statement, former Education Minnesota President Denise Specht praised Hortman’s work on behalf of Minnesota families and schools. “She was a courageous, brilliant and strategic leader who was struck down by a horrific act of violence,” Specht said. “There was no greater champion for students, educators and the public good than Melissa Hortman.”

After the attack, Melissa and Mark’s children Sophie and Colin released a statement in which they provided seven ways to honor the Hortman’s:

1. Plant a tree.
2. Visit a local park and make use of their amenities, especially a bike trail.
3. Pet a dog. A golden retriever is ideal, but any will do.
4. Tell your loved ones a cheesy dad joke and laugh about it.
5. Bake something — bread for Mark or a cake for Melissa — and share it with someone.
6. Try a new hobby and enjoy learning something.
7. Stand up for what you believe in, especially if that thing is justice and peace.

Political Action Committee Refund Request

Thousands of members of Education Minnesota choose to contribute to the union's political action committee.

The PAC is one of our main tools to bring educators' voices to the policy debate by electing people who will listen. Those PAC dollars go back to local unions to help them win school board and levy elections, as well as support pro-public education candidates at the local and state levels.

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

_____ Please refund to me my \$30 PAC assessment that would otherwise be contributed to the general account of Education Minnesota Political Action Committee for the 2025-26 academic year.

Non-U.S. citizens should request this refund.

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

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Local/Affiliate: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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

DEADLINE FOR REFUNDS:

Refund requests MUST be received by Education Minnesota:

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

**Checks will not be mailed until
the end of November, after all
forms have been processed.**

ORIGINAL SIGNATURE NEEDED.

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

Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Refund Request

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

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

_____ Please refund to me my \$5 foundation assessment that would otherwise be contributed to the Education Minnesota Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning for the 2025-26 academic year.

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

Name: _____

Email address: _____

Address: _____

City, State, ZIP: _____

Local/Affiliate: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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

DEADLINE FOR REFUNDS:

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

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

**Checks will not be mailed until
the end of November, after all
forms have been processed.**

ORIGINAL SIGNATURE NEEDED.

Return this form to:
Education Minnesota Accounting Department
Attn: Refund Request
41 Sherburne Ave.
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Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.



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Don't miss the 2025 MEA Conference!

Education Minnesota members and college students studying to be educators are invited to attend the annual MEA conference at the St. Paul RiverCentre in downtown St. Paul on Oct. 16.

Attendees can earn continuing education credits for attending the workshops offered at MEA. Participants will receive a certificate of attendance at the end of each workshop they attend, but local continuing education committees determine whether to approve the credit.

In addition, some sessions may help fulfill state relicensure requirements. Check with your district's continuing education committee to see if you will receive credit.

Education Minnesota offers free childcare for conference attendees. This service is open to children from ages six months to 10 years and will be available from 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. on site at the St. Paul RiverCentre. Attendees should register for childcare when they register for the conference.

Can't make it? No problem! Courses are available to members year-round through Education Minnesota's MEA Online portal. Both the conference and MEA Online are free of charge but are only open to members of Education Minnesota.

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