



The 1148er

The official newsletter of the West St. Paul Federation of Teachers

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

As I write to you our negotiations team is working on compiling the presentation materials we will share with you on our tentative agreement with the district for our 2023-2025 contract. It is a bigger job than past years, notably because we have so much new language to add/edit into our contract.

Of course what is probably obvious to most of you is that I wasn't a part of the negotiations team in past years. Although I had been in union leadership in what is now the St. Paul Federation of Educators (SPFE) this was the first time I was at the bargaining table. As you can imagine, I have learned a lot, and I am grateful to have been able to lean on our veteran negotiators, our Executive Board, Education Minnesota staff, and other local presidents for advice from day one of this process!



With that being said, I can tell you that the contract we will present to you is the best possible outcome the team could have achieved on behalf of all of us. We fought long and hard for it, and I am grateful not just for the work of our negotiators, but for all of you for the actions you took and the unity and solidarity you displayed during this process. We did it by being **stronger together**.

Granted, in a negotiation one doesn't get everything one wants, but when I consider the gains we made as they relate to our **ROAR** bargaining themes, and in considering the quality of our contract relative to others around the state, I feel very good where we landed. I know that this new contract will help us to **Attract** and **Retain** the very best educators available, and that was our priority. I recognize as many of you do that when it comes to the need to **Restore** cuts, this is not something we as Local 1148 can tackle in a vacuum, or solely in this round of bargaining. To reverse twenty years of chronic underfunding will take time and will require us to work with our union siblings, sisters, and brothers across the state. We have a great opportunity ahead of us at the Pension Rally on February 29th to do our part in that restoration process. Furthermore, we will be back at the bargaining table in seventeen months, and there we will continue the fight to do even better for our educators, and by extension our students!

I recognize that some will not agree with my positive assessment of our work. We have a union of over 430 members and to get everyone to be in complete agreement is impossible. In a democracy there should be dissent and differing opinions, and so it is a good reminder that we have elections coming up in April! Consider running for a leadership role either union-wide (officer/negotiator positions) or as a building rep. Some positions will be open, and others will have incumbents running for re-election (spoiler alert: I'm seeking a second term) but regardless, I hope you will consider it.

We all have different talents, and it takes us all to continue to build **a stronger together!**

In solidarity,

Brian McCarthy



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TENTATIVE AGREEMENT: next steps

On February 7th the district and our negotiating team came to a Tentative Agreement (TA) on a contract for 2023-2025! Due to all of the new legislation, there are myriad language pieces to codify in the contract, which will take more time than usual for the team to prepare.

- **Monday, February 26th** (if not sooner) the team plans to have the TA details for member review.
- They will then present those details in a virtual meeting for members only on **Wednesday, February 28th at 4:00** ([Google Meet Link](#)).
- Voting will then take place electronically via Election Runner on **Monday, March 4th and Tuesday, March 5th**.
- If the contract is ratified, it will then need School Board approval at the **March 18th** meeting.
- The team has been told by Tye Michaels, the HR Director, that retro pay will be on the **April 12th** paycheck (should this process proceed accordingly).

ORGANIZING FOR SETTLEMENT

The Organizing for Settlement Leadership team of Vice President Lora Messer-Nilles (FH), Matthew Beniak (PK), and Anna Thul (Me) would like to thank each and every one of you that R👮ARED for our kids during the time we have worked under an expired contract. Whether you wore blue, volunteered to lead/organize actions, wrote a letter to the School Board, or showed up at one of their meetings, your efforts made an impact! The team recognized that the new communication strategy differed from our "Know Where You Stand" communications of the past, and that there were both strengths and weaknesses to the new approach. The team has shared those concerns with Brian. The entire strategy will be reviewed in the months to come to see where improvements can be made in our next round.

LIFE INSURANCE THROUGH NEA

Being a member of our union comes with a lot of great benefits, many of which most of us don't take advantage of. One of those is access to an affordable life insurance policy through the National Education Association (NEA). You are automatically a member of the NEA so check out this benefit and more by clicking [NEA Member Benefits](#).

FUTURE 1148ER ISSUES

Have ideas for future issues or want to help in the production of the e1148er?

We'd love to [hear](#) from you!

INSURANCE UPDATE

As shared by Tye Michaels, Director of HR, on Monday, February, 12th, the district's health insurance savings fund is approaching the state-required minimum balance, and therefore health insurance costs need to increase this year. Also noted, is that there are no insurance companies who are willing to provide the smaller, less expensive, network option that has been offered until this year. The district proposes that everyone pays the same amount for the same plan in 2024-2025. Those who are currently on the Select Access plan (smaller network, less expensive) will see an increase starting July 1, 2024.

In the January 25th meeting with One Digital, they shared an update on the plan performance that, on its current trajectory, could lead the plan to run out of its reserve fund by the end of the year. They indicated that a 15% increase would add in enough money to keep this from happening but NOT to build back our reserve balance.

This was NOT a tactic by the district to influence our negotiators at the bargaining table. It was the report one year in on a two year contract.



Years ago, our union decided to stop negotiating our own separate insurance plan for our members and to join all district employees in a self-insured plan. This means that all employees from the Superintendent to child nutrition employees have access to the same coverage, and are also responsible for the plan's financial health. It also means that our insurance costs will fluctuate depending upon how we consume our benefits. Regardless, this traditionally has meant lower health care coverage costs for our employees.

However, over the past few years, a significant portion of the balance was spent on COVID tests which ended up not being free. Inflation has also hit insurance costs. Everything from centrifuges in hospitals to syringes are more expensive than they were a few years ago. We also have had traditionally great insurance with great customer service. Preferred One made it easy on us to get what we needed and being on a low deductible plan also made things very consumer-friendly.

The switch to UMR is not why we are in this position. We would be on a two year contract with any other provider and would be getting a similar report. The summary from One Digital notes that we are consuming more health care with less people enrolled in the plan. We are also now seen as risky by any provider due to our low reserve balance and would incur a large financial penalty if we broke the contract mid-year. By buying out Preferred One around the state, UMR is allegedly trying to provide similar service but also trying to make more of a profit. We have received reports in other districts saying that the experience with Health Partners, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, etc., is even worse/more prohibitive than UMR customer service. Regardless, the [HITA bid process](#) that will begin next year will allow us to consider other providers.

EDUCATION MINNESOTA AFFINITY GROUPS

You may not be aware, but EdMn has established affinity groups for BIPOC educators.

If you are interested in finding out more information on racial justice resources, or how to get involved, click [here](#), and/or reach out to [Brian](#).

Additionally, All Jewish Education Minnesota members are encouraged to [sign up for the email list](#) as this group grows into a more formal affinity group.



SAVE THE DATE:

**PENSION RALLY
FEBRUARY 29TH
AT THE CAPITOL!**

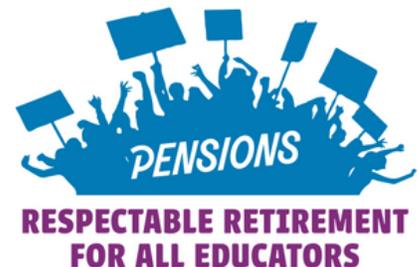
Join your EdMN siblings, sisters, and brothers from around the state to rally for a "respectable retirement for all our educators!" The rally will be from 3:45 - 4:45 in the capitol rotunda on Feb. 29th. We hope to lend a sizable WSPFT voice to help fill the halls of the capitol, with logistical information coming in the upcoming week and a half from VP Lora Messer-Nilles, and Tom Raymond (FH), our unofficial pension point person! For more information, and other ways to get involved, check out the [EdMn Pension Page](#).

Pension Rally: Educators Rally for Respectable Retirement

**Thursday, Feb. 29
3:45-4:45 p.m.
Minnesota State Capitol Rotunda**

We need state investment into our worker pension fund, so our dedicated essential workers can retire when they're ready without losing a significant amount of their pension benefit. Show up to let legislators know – we're standing together for fair pension reform.

More info here:



PENSION NEWS AND ADVOCACY

On Thursday, February 15th at 5 p.m. Education Minnesota and WSPFT will host a virtual information session on the state of our Teachers Retirement Association (TRA) pensions. The session will be led by Adam Janiak (EdMN), Jodie Darwitz (FH), and Kristy Otte (H).

Join here:

meet.google.com/YBQ-BDGS-TKU

APRIL UNION ELECTIONS

April of 2024 is election season for Local 1148! Per [Article IV of our constitution](#), our officers (president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer) and negotiators serve two year terms and new elections are held in even numbered years. Our building reps also serve two year terms, so most, but not all, will be up for re-election in April as well. An election timeline and procedures, consistent with the constitution, will be planned by the Executive Board, and shared with members this month. For democracies like ours to be vibrant, it is essential we participate! Please consider running for any of the open positions that are of interest to you!

SEIU SUPPORT: WEAR PURPLE ON WEDNESDAYS!

The Service Workers International Union Local #284 represents the District's Child Nutrition Workers, Transportation Workers, and Paraprofessionals. On Wednesday's during their negotiations SEIU members wear purple to show their solidarity with one another across Minnesota and they have invited us to do the same until they get the contracts they deserve!

SOCIAL MEDIA



@wspft1148



@wspft1148



@wspft



<http://wspft.mn.aft.org>

MEMBER RECOGNITION

Know of a member who is doing extraordinary things that deserves a shout out? [Email Brian](#) and we will look to get them into the next e1148er and on our social media feeds!

EDUCATION MN REPRESENTATIVE CONVENTION

APRIL 19TH AND 20TH

The [2024 Representative Convention](#) will be held Friday, April 19 through Saturday, April 20 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Bloomington. The RC is Education Minnesota's highest governing body, with more than 600 elected delegates meeting annually to set policy for the union. WSPFT is allocated five delegates, and it is crucial that we make our voices heard at the convention to shape policy that is reflective of the values of our local. To be a delegate, you need not be an officer or a member of the Executive Board and we would love to have new faces in the mix! If you are interested in serving our union as a delegate please [email Brian](#).

PEOPLE TO KNOW

OFFICERS:

- Brian McCarthy (TR), President
- Lora Messer-Nilles (FHMS), VP
- Hayley DeMers (FH/H/TR), Treasurer
- Michelle Smith (ELC), Secretary
- Phil Hayes (FHMS), Past President
- Kim Zellmer, ATPPS

NEGOTIATORS:

- Anne Bolsem (PK)
- Jodie Darwitz (FH)
- Kristy Otte (H)
- Ryan Pagenkopf (TR)

BUILDING REPS:

- Anna Banti (MO)
- Matthew Beniak (PK)
- Katie Carter (TR)
- Margaret Citta (TR)
- Kristina Cooper (H)
- Angela Penttila (H)
- JoAnn Cudo (PK)
- Erik Kluznik (TR)
- Julia Linehan (GEMS)
- Patrick McCormick (FH)
- Mary Nelson (S)
- Shari Niemczyk (MO)
- Samantha Schiltz (ME)
- Michelle Smith (ELC)
- Anna Thul (ME)
- Lori Thomas (S)

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

Just a reminder that Executive Board Members are open to all Local 1148 members. For a complete list of meeting times/dates, you can always refer to our [website](#)! If you would like to attend you can reach out to any EB member who can provide more information. All are welcome!

CONTACT INFO UPDATES

Do you have a NEW address? Do you have a NEW last name? Do you have a NEW building assignment/FTE? Please contact Hayley Demers, our Treasurer, at wspft1148treasurer@gmail.com with any and all changes to keep our records up to date, and our lines of communication with you uninterrupted.