



The 1148er

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

I hope that you have had a great start back to school! This time leading up to MEA Break is one that is filled with the excitement of being back with our students, coupled with the need for a break to recharge our batteries so that we can be the high quality professionals they deserve! So whether you are headed to the MEA Conference this week or taking some time with family and friends, I wish you the very best. It is well earned! It is also an interesting time for our union, both locally and across Minnesota, as well as our country as a whole. Speaking to Education Minnesota's Legislative Action Committee Saturday in my new role as its Chairperson, I addressed the need to advance our legislative agenda at the Capitol in the upcoming session, while also stressing the importance of defending our union, our members, public education, and yes, our democracy in the weeks and months ahead. Better pay, better pensions, and affordable health care are what we deserve for the hard work we do for the students in our community and across our state. We must also be aware that what we have - what our union has fought hard for over the years - can all be taken away. Just a few years ago it took eleven days for the state of Iowa to strip educators there of their rights to collectively bargain for their salaries, benefits, and working conditions! Opponents of our union and of public education would like to do the same to us here in Minnesota, and we need to be prepared to stand with one another and, with a collective voice say NO! Some of us know this and are already standing up and speaking out, but what exactly is on the line?



- **Negotiated pay and benefits:** Our salary schedule, health insurance, and paid leave are the result of collective bargaining. Without a union, our district can unilaterally change or reduce these benefits at any time.
- **Job security:** The just-cause protection against arbitrary termination would no longer apply, and we could be fired without reason.
- **Due process:** A transparent grievance process for disputes would disappear. Without a union, our district would listen to employee concerns and then do what it wants.
- **Improved safety:** Union advocacy has led to improved safety standards in the workplace and our schools. Without a union, our power to address health and safety concerns would be severely limited.

The list is certainly longer than this, but hopefully you get the point. We live in challenging times, but when things get hard, we don't give up. Instead, we double down on the one bet we know will pay out every time: Our union. It is a bet on ourselves. We work to build a stronger together every day in ways small and large and so I know we are up to the task.

In solidarity,

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HEALTH/DENTAL INSURANCE **AND THE ROLE OF THE LABOR-MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

The Labor-Management Committee (LMC) meets throughout the school year to review health and dental insurance information about our self-insured plan we have with Health Partners and Delta Dental, respectively. The information is presented to the LMC by One Digital, the district's benefits consultant broker. The first meeting of the LMC this year is on October 23 and is composed of union leadership from each bargaining unit, a representative from the school board, and the school district administration. Due to the decline in our self-funded medical insurance plan reserve over the years, the lingering impact of COVID-19 claims, inflationary cost increases, and a need to correct a negative fund balance trajectory, the school board this past spring agreed to a net 14% increase in medical insurance premiums for fiscal year 2025-2026. There has also been a 5% increase in our dental insurance premiums for the fiscal year 2025-2026. The good news? With the plan design change our members voted for as a part of our 2025-2027 contract we will see our medical insurance premium cost increase halve in 2026-2027!

WHY THIS MATTERS:

Being **self-insured** means that all employees who are on insurance provided by the district take on risk for how the plan performs. Claims are paid out from the premiums that the district and the insured employees pay. By taking on the risk ourselves, it gives us more flexibility to manage our costs and avoid a number of taxes and fees that we would be charged if we were fully insured. In theory, the healthier we are and the fewer claims we have to pay out, the lower our insurance costs are making being self insured the preferred option. The change in plan design in year two of our current insurance agreement has put us on a trajectory to continue to make this a reality, allowing us to better manage a chaotic insurance landscape that has become a state and national crisis.

HOPE THROUGH ACTION! BE A HEALTH CARE ACTION LEADER!

Managing a crisis and solving a crisis are two different things of course, which is why we are working to pass a statewide health insurance bill at the state legislature! Education Minnesota members have been working to create a statewide health insurance plan that creates one large pool for all school employees. Continuing the work to engage, organize and educate our members into the 2026 legislative session is essential to winning real progress in the healthcare crisis. In preparation to act powerfully at the Legislature, we are again using our Health Care Action Leader program. HALs will be paid a \$1,000 stipend and are responsible for engaging and organizing our members so that those members contact legislators, share their stories, and speak with one voice on our priorities. See [this link](#) for the full details of the program. The initial deadline for submissions is Nov. 3, 2025. Reach out to [Brian](#) if you are interested or want to learn more.

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!

AT THE GOVERNING BOARD

The **Education Minnesota Governing Board** met October 3–4. The following are highlights of the board's discussions and/or actions. The board:

- Approved the minutes from the July meeting, which are available for your review via the Education Minnesota Website.
- Sat four new Board members – Aaron Donais, NEA Director; Elizabethada Wright, NEA Director – Higher Ed At-Large; Janelle Hart, At-Large Zone 2; and Nicole Lawson, EMAC Chair.
- Approved additional committee appointments and Organizing for Settlement loans and grants.
- Adopted a position on gun safety in alignment with NEA and AFT, calling for a ban on high-capacity magazines and assault-style rifles.
- Heard reports from Education Minnesota staff:
 - Strategic work plan updates
 - Legislative update around special elections and the potential for a special session.
 - Updates around membership numbers.

The Governing Board next meets December 5–6. If you would like to know more about Education Minnesota's Governing Board, and/or Brian's role on it, please reach out to him.

SOLIDARITY AT THE SAINTS

WSPFT members attended the St. Paul Saints game on September 9th! It was so awesome to have members from across our local attend! We had new, veteran, and retired members from our elementary, middle, and secondary schools! Great conversations were had about the value of being a member and the importance of a strong contract for our educators and our students! Join us at the Winter Social coming up on December 10th to continue to build A Stronger Together!



KNOW YOUR CONTRACT!

You can find our contract on both [our website](#) and on the [197 website](#). Be sure to keep it readily accessible but above all, know your rights! If you ever need any help understanding them, your building reps stand ready to help!

NOTE: our 25-27 contract has not yet been added to either site, as we are currently editing the ratified agreement for publication

NEW UNION MEMBERSHIP

WHY STAND WITH US?



In August we welcomed over thirty new teachers into Local 1148 at a great orientation luncheon hosted by our building reps, site mentors, negotiators, and officers. Thank you to [Boca Chica](#) for another great spread! We always love us some WSPFTACOS! Local 1148 is over 440 members strong, but we still have some folks who have yet to join us. Our local, state, and national affiliates are only as strong as our members. When an individual chooses to stand alone, we are a little weaker for it, despite that person being able to benefit from our strong union contract. Furthermore, non-members miss out on:

- **Attorney representation:** This includes legal assistance for investigations from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), criminal and licensure investigations, and licensed educator terminations.
- **ESI-sponsored benefits:** This includes a variety of financial and insurance programs, such as discounts on home and auto insurance, access to the United Educators Credit Union, and identity theft protection.
- **Professional liability coverage:** This provides legal protection for employment-related claims.
- **Member-only professional development:** Access to the MEA Conference, MEA Online, and other free or low-cost workshops is limited to members.
- **Voting rights:** A non-member does not have a voice or vote on all union business, including the elections of our officers, reps, and negotiators.

If you know someone who is still uncertain about the importance of union membership, be sure to share your reasons for being a member and get them in touch with a building rep or an officer for more information. Additionally, share with them [the link to join](#).

UPCOMING PAY PERIOD PIECES OF NOTE

A reminder that if you are expecting a lane change it will be processed, with retro pay, on our next pay **period per our 2023-2025 contract on p. 11.**

With the approval of our 2025-2027 contract by the School Board on October 7, curriculum rates will be paid at \$40 going forward. On timesheets, anything dated before 10/7 will be paid at the old rate even if it was work done in 2025.

Members can also expect step increases and retro pay to be forthcoming in November. I have asked Payroll to stagger these changes over multiple periods so as to minimize confusion and mistakes for all involved. Please note that since we have only been working on an expired contract since July 1, the retro pay we are owed will not be a large sum. Our goal is accuracy and not speed on these items.

MEET AND CONFER COMMITTEE WORK

An important and often unsung part of the work WSPFT does for our members is through the Meet and Confer Committee. This committee is a joint District-Federation body composed of the Superintendent and a group of administrators, our president Brian McCarthy and a team of WSPFT members. Our team is led by Vice President Lora Messer-Nilles and this year includes Kristi Cooper (H), Elizabeth Howatt (TR), Michelle Link-Valenstein (PK), and Stacy Lufkin (ATPPS). **State statute** obligates the district to “meet and confer” with us on non-contractual matters of mutual importance that can improve the learning conditions of our students, which of course are the working conditions of our members! As we look to our meeting next week, the committee will be considering the 2026-2027 and 2027-28 school calendars. The former, which was approved by the school board last year, could include edits due to the change in contract language moving away from End of Quarter/Grading Days to Semester Collaboration Days (see our Settlement Summary for details). A draft of the latter calendar will also be introduced and discussed at the meeting. In both cases, **state statute** allows for districts to begin school before Labor Day given how late it falls on the calendar. If you would like to share your thoughts on this matter, or have ideas for future topics that might fit into the parameters of the work of this committee, please contact one of your building reps or **Lora**. She will also provide a report of the committee's work to our Executive Board in November, minutes of which can always be found on [our website](#).

You're invited to

WSPFT WINTER SOCIAL

Join us for a time to celebrate together and celebrate the hard work we've all put in to make the start of the year successful! Appetizers are provided by WSPFT!

Thursday, December 10th

after school

[**BLVD Tavern**](#)

UNION NIGHT WITH THE MN WILD!

The Wild are hosting their first annual Union Member Appreciation night on Tuesday October 28th as they host the Winnipeg Jets at 7:00p. They're offering an exclusive upper-level or lower-level ticket & Wild-Branded Tool-Belt to show their appreciation for all Union Members in the State of Hockey.

[Click here to purchase tickets.](#)



PEOPLE TO KNOW:

OFFICERS:

- Brian McCarthy (TR), President
- Lora Messer-Nilles (FHMS), VP
- Laura Scott (TR), Treasurer
- Beth Rabe (MO), Secretary
- Phil Hayes (FHMS), Past President
- Kim Zellmer, ATPPS Coordinator

NEGOTIATORS:

- Anne Bolsem (PK)
- Phil Hayes (FH)
- Kristy Otte (H)
- Matt Beniak (PK)



BUILDING REPS:

- Margaret Citta (TR)
- Matt Malmberg-Merthan (TR)
- Janelle Christensen (TR)
- Jodie Darwitz (FH)
- Patrick McCormick (FH)
- Angela Penttila (H)
- Kristi Cooper (H)
- Hayley DeMers (H)
- Lea Beniek (ELC)
- Michelle Smith (ELC)
- Lisa Jasper (GEMS)
- Julia Linehan (GEMS)
- Samantha Schiltz (ME)
- Anna Flies (ME)
- Anna Banti (MO)
- Kaitlyn O'Neil (MO)
- Joann Cudo (PK)
- Julie Fitzgerald (PK)
- Mary Nelson (S)
- Lori Thomas (S)

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!



EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETINGS

Just a reminder that Executive Board meetings 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 Laura Scott, 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.