

The 1148er

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Greetings 1148ers!

Since last I penned this column, I have had a few unexpected opportunities to speak and advocate on behalf of our members, and I have learned something about myself in the process. Whether in front of 1500 Illinois Education Association members, two dozen or so members of the Minnesota House Education Finance Committee, or one Minnesota Governor, it is important I speak from the heart!



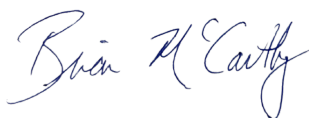
So, it is with a touch of irony that I recently made a [Youtube video](#) for potential members to explain why union membership is of value and I used – gulp – a script! As I close the video (and spoiler alert, it won't be going viral) I said “we are a big tent with a lot of loud voices and sometimes divergent opinions. We don't always agree, but that discourse is what makes us stronger in the end.”

Over these last few months, we have seen that in action as we have worked out how best to keep our students, families, and community safe during Operation Metro Surge. I can't overstate my gratitude for the work you have all done to see us through this unprecedented time.

Building *a stronger together* takes time, and energy. It comes in all shapes and sizes. Thank you for your commitment to doing your part in making WSPFT what it is today, and showing what it can be in the future.

In this issue we have plenty of examples of this work in action. I hope when you flip through the following pages you find the same pride and promise in the work we're doing, and the contributions of our members, as I do.

In solidarity,



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LOCAL 1148 ELECTION UPDATE

On April 9 and 10th, WSPFT members voted in Local 1148's negotiator election. If you did not see the results in the email that was sent out on 4/10, you can take a look at them [here](#).

Beginning on July 1, our officer team will include Brian McCarthy (TR) as president, Kristi Cooper (H) as vice-president, Laura Scott (TR) as Treasurer, and Athena Gause (TR) as Secretary. Our negotiator team will be made up of Matthew Beniak (PK), Anne Bolsem (PK), Margaret Citta (TR), and Kristy Otte (H). We are grateful for all the members who have stood as candidates for officer, negotiators, and building rep roles.

We would also like to thank the Election Committee (Matt Klebe, Chair, TR, Sue Grove, TR, and Colleen Volkmann (ELC) for their work in coordinating the election and certifying the results.

A special word of gratitude to outgoing Vice President Lora Messer-Nilles (FH), Secretary Beth Rabe (Mo), and Negotiator Phil Hayes (FH). In ways big and small, you have made an impact on our union and we are grateful for your service and leadership. Although no longer in these roles, they remain strong advocates for our members and our union and no doubt many of us will seek them out in the years to come for support and guidance. Thank you!

MINNESOTA AFL-CIO SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

DEADLINE MAY 1

The Minnesota AFL-CIO is now taking scholarship applications for high school seniors graduating this year. Applicants must be a union member or dependent of a union member, have a straight "B" average, and planning to attend a post-secondary institution within the State of Minnesota. [Apply Now](#)

UNION MEMBERSHIP AFTER RETIREMENT

Thinking of retiring in the next few years? Education Minnesota offers membership for retirees.

You may be eligible for a membership at no cost to you!

Have a [look here](#) to see if you are eligible and the benefits of staying an EdMn member.

UNION PLUS

EVEN MORE BENEFITS TO UNION MEMBERSHIP!

If you haven't already, check out [Union Plus](#) for myriad types of fringe benefits that come with our membership in the AFL-CIO. They offer [scholarships](#), mortgage assistance, credit and medical bill assistance, shopping/travel discounts and 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!

EDMN REPRESENTATIVE CONVENTION

The 2026 Representative Convention will be held Friday, April 24 through Saturday, April 25 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 will be sending six delegates (our total allotment). Our delegation will include Matt Beniak (PK), Eddie Chhoun (TR), Kristi Cooper (H), Stacy Lufkin (IPC Coach/FH), Matthew Olson (G), and Kristy Otte (H). Brian McCarthy will also be attending/participating in his role as Governing Board Representative for Election District L (much of the SE Metro). While the formal period to submit action items and amendments to our constitution have passed, if you have any questions or have issues you would like to see raised, please reach out to any of our delegation prior to April 24.

403(b) ENROLLMENT PERIOD

We are closely approaching our 403(b) enrollment period. For those that are interested, Josh Nokes from Corebridge will again be offering phone and virtual appointments regarding our district's 403(b) retirement plan. Meetings will be made available for you to ask questions about the plan, to enroll in the plan or to review your existing accounts. You can schedule a time to [talk with Josh](#) here. Do you know that Corebridge is one of six vendors providing 403b plans through the district and it is NOT required to use one over the other? A complete list can be found [here](#).

Important Info to Know:

1. To start your contributions in September, you must complete a Salary Reduction Agreement by 5/15/26 per our contract. This form is available via the [HR Staff Hub page](#) or [here](#) if you are logged in.
2. If you are eligible for the match for the 1st time, you must complete a Salary Reduction Agreement by 5/15/26 per our contract to indicate you are eligible for the match for 2026-2027.
3. If you are eligible for an increase in your match, please confirm you are contributing enough to ensure you will see your increased match for 2026-2027. This may require you to complete a new Salary Reduction Agreement.

403 ROTH: A REMINDER

In our last round of negotiations we added to our contract the option to allow members to opt into a 403b Roth plan. Access to this deduction option is via the same [form](#) used for the regular 403(b) plan discussed above. Below includes information from our contract on how the 403(b) Roth deductions work. As always, consult with a financial planner to ensure this is the right option for you.

Subd 1. Roth 403(b) Contributions Employees who elect to participate in the Roth 403(b) plan may contribute a portion of their salary on an after-tax basis to their Roth 403(b) account. Contributions to the Roth 403(b) will be deducted from the employee's paycheck in accordance with the contribution limits established by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and applicable plan rules.

Subd 2. Employee Contribution Limits Employees may contribute up to the maximum limit allowed by the IRS to the Roth 403(b) account, which includes any applicable catch-up contributions for employees age 50 or older. The contribution limits may change annually based on IRS guidelines.

Subd 3. Plan Administration:

ISD 197, in partnership with a third-party administrator, will provide necessary details regarding plan enrollment, contribution procedures, and investment options. Employees are encouraged to review all plan documents and consult with a financial advisor to determine how the Roth 403(b) plan fits within their retirement strategy.

SHANNON DODSON

1 OF 11 FINALISTS FOR MN TEACHER OF THE YEAR!



In the February 1148er, we were excited to announce that WSPFT had not one, but **TWO** semi-finalists for Minnesota Teacher of The Year! If you didn't get a chance to get to know a little more about Somerset's Shannon Dodson and Michelle Bannie then, [check out that issue here](#). While we couldn't be more proud of both of them for making it so far, we are thrilled to announce that Shannon has moved on to be one of eleven finalists from across the state! Both Shannon and Michelle will be honored at the 62nd annual Minnesota Teacher of the Year recognition banquet on Sunday, May 3, at Saint Paul RiverCentre. The culmination of the event will be the announcement of the 2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year. This event is organized and underwritten by Education Minnesota. All Teacher of the Year candidates and their supporters are invited to the banquet. Tickets can be purchased [through EventLeaf](#) where more information about the banquet is also available.

ANNE BOLSEM

EAGAN ROTARY TEACHER OF THE YEAR

When Tom Benson, principal at Pilot Knob, was asked why Anne Bolsem is deserving of recognition, he had a hard time narrowing it down. Anne's impact reaches far beyond a single moment—she consistently demonstrates dedication, care, and a commitment to supporting all students and staff. Anne's work truly makes a difference in our Pilot Knob school community. Mr. Benson shares that he could never describe Anne Bolsem in three words, and could go on all day about her positive attributes, but since Anne is a Kindergarten teacher he recognizes Anne's ABC's as "**A**uthentic, **B**rilliant and **C**ompassionate".

Authentic = Anne brings her authentic self to school each day, and her students love her fashion style.

Brilliant = Anne is so very creative, she thinks of ways to reach all of our students.

Compassionate = Cares for every student and adult in the school (world). When Anne was asked what makes her passionate about her work, she shared the following:

As I share my mission statement I hope to create for you a picture of Anne Bolsem: teacher, leader, learner, colleague, and friend. My mission is to stimulate creativity, imagination, individuality, and enthusiasm in all my students. I will challenge my students to meet my high expectations in all areas of their growth—socially, intellectually, emotionally, and physically—then work with each child to ensure their success. Each day, I will be an example of respect, compassion, honesty, and positive thinking. I will touch children in a way that changes their whole being, giving a part of myself to each individual. I will touch children in a way that changes their whole being, giving a part of myself to each individual. My students will leave my classroom confident in their abilities and excited to learn new things, remembering that they will never know what they can do until they try.



MAY DAY!

WEAR WSPFT BLUE FOR LABOR SOLIDARITY

Join WSPFT members in a show of solidarity with our siblings, sisters, and brothers in the wider Labor Movement in wearing our blue WSPFT gear May 1. May Day is an internationally recognized day that celebrates working people, acknowledges the gains we have made collectively, and steels us to continue the fight to make our world a better place for generations to come!

For more information on May Day events around the country, you can [click here](#). And for a good historical overview, check out the [Smithsonian's page](#) on May Day or [UCLA's take](#).

WSPFT SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

In March, the Executive Board was pleased to award 19 scholarships to graduating Seniors that are the children of WSPFT Members.

We offer our congratulations and best wishes to the following recipients:

- Amelia Bannie (daughter of Michelle, S)
- Corbin Challifour (son of Katie, H)
- Adelaide Christensen (daughter of Janelle, TR)
- Nora Filo (daughter of Amy, ELC)
- Aiden Finn (son of Courtney, H)
- Brody Henry (son of Ann, TR)
- Claire Korkki (son of Stacey, PK)
- Layla Lawson (daughter of Shannon, G)
- Giada Lombardi (daughter of Amy, PK)
- Calvin McCabe (son of Chelse, H)
- Addison Ney (daughter of Seth, FH)
- Lucas Robinson (son of Shawn, FH)
- Bella Rossum (son of Jen, Me)
- Haley Siebenaler (daughter of Ann, ELC)
- Riley Tillander (son of John, TR)
- Quinn Tillander (son of John, TR)

As we are with all our students, we are SO proud of them and look forward to the great things they will accomplish!

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](#), or reach out to [Brian!](#)

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!

WSPFT IS EDMN'S NO KINGS CONTEST WINNER!

WSPFT Local 1148 was Education Minnesota's winner for the highest number of members at the March 28th, No Kings Rally in St. Paul, MN! Here are some photos of members from that day! Thanks to Kristi Cooper (H) for creating an opportunity for interested WSPFT members to join together at the Rally!



SPRING CELEBRATION AND RETIREMENT PARTY

Be sure to save the date for our Spring Celebration where we will honor this year's retirees! It begins after work on Wednesday 5/20/26 and will be hosted by [FoodSmith](#). The formal program will begin around 4:00. Hors d' Oeuvres and non-alcoholic beverages will be provided by WSPFT. Alcoholic beverages are available for purchase.



PEOPLE TO KNOW:

OFFICERS:

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

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)

NEGOTIATORS:

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



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.