

The 1148er

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Greetings 1148ers!

The world has been noisy. Loud opinions. Sharp Divisions. A constant stream of things said too quickly and felt too deeply. The bluster of the year demanded reactions when what most people needed was space - breath, a moment, a pause long enough to gather themselves.

These words, penned by Charles J. Divencenzo Jr. in an editorial he wrote for Sunday's Minnesota Star Tribune, metaphorically stopped me in my tracks and led me to jettison the original message I had been working on for going on three weeks. That message was one of defiance, about a need to flex our union muscle to defend democracy, and to rally support for our union siblings, sisters, and brothers across the state that are facing bargaining challenges that we have not known in our local's recent history. It was "loud."



Instead, Mr. Divencenzo Jr. reminded me of something I say quite a bit in this column and to fellow union members and community members alike: that we build a stronger together in gestures small and large, at times very publicly and very loudly, but more often than not in the small, simple acts of kindness and solidarity that we show towards one another and most importantly our students.

Education Minnesota leadership has tasked myself and the approximately 440 other local presidents with making sure our members are "Action Ready." I've struggled with what that means, and whether or not WSPFT is "ready" in whatever manner they are alluding to. And yet as I pen this final version of this message to you, I find myself very confident in all of us. Local 1148 is a union of very strong, very compassionate people that lift up one another and our students every day. We raise hell at rallies, but we also make sure kids get on and off the school bus safely every day. We are the providers of smiles that reassure our students that they belong, and the collective force that stands ready to push back on any effort that would inhibit our ability to deliver for them or one another. Are we ready? We've been more than that for over seventy five years. Count on it.

So as we look to 2026, I wish you all the long pause that Mr. Divencenzo Jr. writes of. I thank you for all that you do to make our schools the special places that they are. You are the best gift our students could receive this holiday season, and every day they walk into our learning spaces.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian McCarthy".

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INTRODUCING OUR HEALTH CARE ACTION LEADERS:

KRISTI COOPER AND HAYLEY DEMERS

We are very pleased to introduce our new Health Care Action Leaders, Kristi Cooper (H) and Hayley Demers (H)! Kristi and Hayley will be responsible for engaging and organizing WSPFT members to lobby legislators, share their stories, and speak with one voice to successfully pass our statewide health care bill. Each local in the state was asked to have a member fill the role and we are very fortunate that we have two great people that have stepped up for us! Access to affordable, high quality health care is increasingly out of reach for people all over Minnesota and across the country which is why Education Minnesota members have been working to create a statewide health insurance plan that creates one large pool for all school employees. We would not only appreciate your support of Kristi and Hayley, but also your involvement with the work they are doing on our behalf! For more information on how you can help, please reach out to either of them at kristina.cooper@isd197.org or hayley.demers@isd197.org.

GET YOUR RELICENSURE CREDITS **FREE** OVER BREAK

As an Education Minnesota member, you have access to dozens of relicensure and other virtual professional development courses through the MEA Online learning platform. All MEA Online courses are done asynchronously, at every individual's own pace. The site also saves your progress, and automatically awards CEUs to your account and to your email upon each course completion. Access MEA Online by [clicking here](#). Having trouble logging in or accessing courses? Email meaonline@edmn.org.

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!

AT THE GOVERNING BOARD

The [Education Minnesota Governing Board](#) met December 5-6. The following are highlights of the board's discussions and/or actions. The board:

- Approved the minutes from the October meeting, which are available for your review via the Education Minnesota Website.
- Approved Organizing for Settlement Grants and Loans to support locals in bargaining.
- Adopted the 2026 legislative agenda which prioritizes health care, pay, pensions and professional respect.
- Engaged in a presentation on organizing and authoritarianism and how strong, action-ready locals protect public education.
- Received officer updates including IO tours, national union work, Every Member Matters, awards and upcoming elections.
- Reviewed year-end financial updates from the secretary-treasurer.
- Shared local bargaining updates and previewed upcoming statewide action opportunities.

The following committees convened and and reported on their work to the larger body:

- Human Rights
- Action Ready Locals
- Apprenticeships
- Audit
- Personnel
- Budget & Finance
- Executive Committee

The Governing Board next meets February 20-21. 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](#).

EDUCATION MINNESOTA REPRESENTATIVE CONVENTION: CALL FOR DELEGATES!

The 2026 Representative Convention will be held Friday evening April 24 through Saturday afternoon, 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 is allocated six 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](#). If we have more than six applicants, we will hold an election in accordance with [Article IV of our constitution](#), EdMn election rules, and federal law.

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!

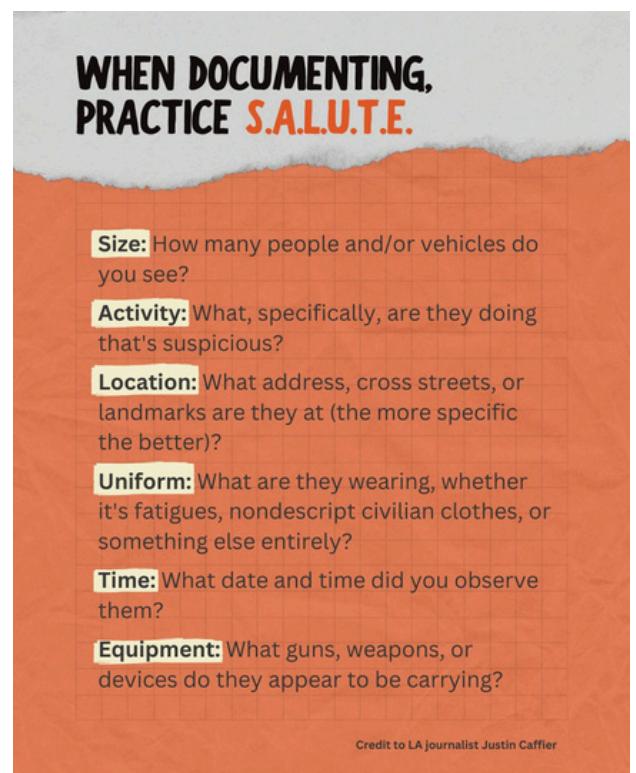
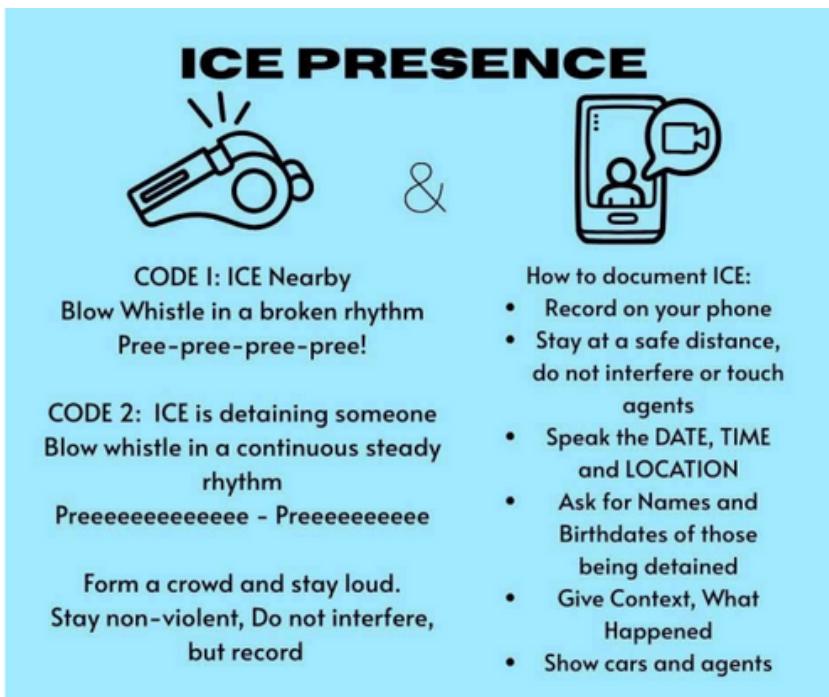
NOTE: our 25-27 contract has not yet been added to either site, as we are currently editing the ratified agreement for publication. They anticipate this will be complete in early January

KEEPING OUR COMMUNITY SAFE

The increased presence of federal agents in the Twin Cities in recent weeks has raised alarm in our community. It is important to stay calm and stay informed. As a union of educators, we can stand together to support our students, their families, and each other. We are proud of the recent efforts of our educators at Heritage, Garlough, and district-wide, who have organized larger-than-normal bus duty supervisory teams to make sure our students are safe as they come and go from school.

As individual members, it is important for us to know the rights that all of our students have, regardless of their immigration status. In 1982, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plyer v. Doe* that states cannot deny undocumented children a free public K-12 education, as it violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. More specific information was shared via building principals the week of December 8th, but should you have questions about this, please connect with a WSPFT officer or building rep..

Outside of the duty day, if you find yourself witnessing an ICE encounter in our community or throughout the Twin Cities, here are some best practices on documenting the encounter as safely as possible. Thanks to our union siblings, sisters, and brothers from Education Richfield for sharing these with us.



POLITICAL CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

Registration is now open for Education Minnesota's Political Conference. This members only event runs from Friday evening January 30th until Saturday afternoon January 31st at the DoubleTree by Hilton Bloomington. There will be a variety of sessions to access strategies and resources to get out the vote at the local, state, and federal levels. As Minnesota educators we have the freedom to vote, to teach honestly, to bargain collectively and to work in union for the resources we need to be healthy, focused, and financially secure at work and in retirement. Not all educators across the country can say the same and that is why we must protect those freedoms by electing pro-public education officials that share those values! If you need more information, please [reach out to Brian](#), otherwise you can [register here](#) to join us at the conference!

ESI MEMBER BENEFITS: WHEN CAN I AFFORD TO RETIRE?

The answer to this question depends not only on how well you have planned financially, but also on what your plans are in retirement. While you are working, your income comes from your paycheck. In retirement, your income will come from three sources: your pension, social security, any savings you have accumulated in accounts such as 403(b)/457/IRAs and savings.

In this session, topics will cover pension education (including how benefits are calculated and understanding defined benefit pension plans) and financial planning (including what to expect from social security, tax-free and tax-deferred savings, asset allocation and asset management / diversification / performance and fees, and 403(b) match as well as severance payment options).

Virtual seminars for educators are scheduled for Tuesday, January 27th and Thursday, February 5th from 6-7pm. [Click here to register.](#)

WSPFT WINTER WARM-UP RECAP

We had a great turnout at [BLVD Tavern](#) on Wednesday December 10 for our Winter Warm-up with around seventy members from across nearly every site turning out for the fun! A big thanks to Chucky Her (FH) and Nick Fixler (TR) for hosting a very fun, and very competitive trivia game! The winners were Matt Malmberg-Merthan, Dan Sebastian, Kyle Earnest, and Carrie Garcia of Two Rivers!

Thanks to BLVD management and staff that donated prizes for the trivia and made the event such a hit! Remember to support them throughout the year as they are also graduates, students, and parents in District 197! Bring your I.D. badge for a 2-4-1 drink deal when you go!

Be sure to save the date for our Spring social on 5/20/26 (hosted by [FoodSmith](#)) where we will also honor our retirees!



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.