



The 1148er

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

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Greetings 1148ers!

When I write these messages, I first like to look back at what I wrote this time last year, as well as what went out in the last edition. It helps to get some perspective on where we've been and where we are going. As you can imagine there wasn't much from those that could really have prepared me for the crisis we now find ourselves in and from which I write to you now. I first want to express to you my profound gratitude. Showing up every day for our students is already a noble and challenging endeavor, but to do so in these times is nothing short of heroic.



These past nine weeks I have talked with so many of you as well as union leaders from around the state, school board members, legislators, community members, cultural liaisons, business owners, and administrators. Despite the extraordinary circumstances we find ourselves in, I have been steeled by the strength and resolve on display in all we are doing collectively to protect ourselves, our students, and our community.

Unfortunately there is no rest for the weary, but we must and we will persevere for we have justice on our side. We have worked hard to build a *stronger together* for nearly 75 years and it is in times like this when we use that collective muscle to soldier on for those that need us most.

And know that I see you. I know you have protected bus stops from ICE agents, you have bought and delivered food to families afraid to walk outside their homes, you have protested for the first time in your lives against an unfathomable threat to our Constitution and our American way of life. And I see you showing up every day bringing a sense of continuity and comfort to your classrooms that provide a safe haven for ALL of our students, full stop.

Yes, the journey on this river of justice will be long but I'm grateful our boat is out on this river and that we are committed to seeing this journey through. And if you haven't yet gotten on board we welcome you. It is never wrong to lift someone else up.

In solidarity,

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EDMN SUES FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

On Wednesday, February 4th, union leaders from around the state stood with Education Minnesota as it was announced that they would be suing federal offices and official to block the Department of Homeland Security and Immigrations and Customs Enforcement from conducting raids on or near public schools or school bus stops (within 1,000 feet) without a judicial warrant or genuinely exigent circumstances.

We are proud to be among those who are taking a public stand against the cruelties that are being committed against our student and communities. School should be a safe place for learning and growing and we hope that this is one step to restore that for our students!

We see the work you are doing and how you are banding together to do this work. We appreciate your flexibility, resilience, and the strength that it takes to show up everyday.

If you'd like, you can read the official [lawsuit](#) or [Education Minnesota Press Release](#).



**ICE won't leave
our schools
alone. So we're
suing to keep
them away.**

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!

LOOKING FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS?

If you are looking for some affordable continuing education credits, you can check out the offerings by St. Cloud State University [here!](#) They offer teaching certification for those on a Tier 1 or Tier 2 license, a variety of Masters programs, including Curriculum & Instruction and Administration & Leadership, Career and Technical Education (CTE) certificates, and more.

MINNESOTA AFL-CIO SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

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](#)

Also, a reminder that the deadline to apply for the [WSPFT scholarship](#) is 5 p.m. Friday, February 13. This information was originally shared via email last month.

WSPFT ELECTIONS IN APRIL!

April of 2026 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. You can also find out more about the duties of all of these positions in the [by-laws of our constitution](#). An election timeline and procedures, in alignment with the constitution, will be planned by our Election Committee, and shared with members in a few weeks. For democracies like ours to be vibrant, it is essential we participate! Please consider running for any of the positions that are of interest to you!

LOOKING TO BUY A HOME IN 2026?

[Tradition Mortgage](#) is the preferred mortgage lender for EdMn, and if you are purchasing a home in 2025, they are offering up to \$22,000 in down payment assistance at a low interest rate of 1.99%. You can find more details, as well as more great member benefits at [Benefit options - Education Minnesota](#).

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!

TEACHER OF THE YEAR NOMINEES!

Two of our very own, Shannon Dodson and Michelle Bannie, were nominated for Teacher of the Year! They are among 128 finalists! The banquet is set for May 3rd and we wish them all the best! You can read the press release [here!](#)



SHANNON DODSON

Shannon has been part of the Somerset community for 7 years and has worked in District 197 for a total of 8 years. She brings 30 years of experience in education to her role. Although she is not originally from Minnesota, Shannon has deep roots in the district. She has three daughters who attended Friendly Hills Middle School and Two Rivers High School, and she currently has one daughter who is a senior at Two Rivers, making her connection to the district both professional and personal.



Shannon's favorite thing about being a teacher is, without hesitation, the kids. Shannon says that she loves most about working at Somerset and in ISD 197 is the opportunity to build real relationships with students and watch them grow not just academically, but as people. Every day, she is part of a community where students feel safe to be themselves, take risks, ask questions, and figure out who they are becoming.

Our students are thoughtful, funny, resilient, and incredibly perceptive. They challenge Shannon to be better, to listen more carefully, and to teach in ways that honor who they are. The joy, curiosity, and humanity they bring into the classroom is what makes this work meaningful. No two days are ever the same because no two students are ever the same—and that is what makes teaching here so special.

Shannon is most proud of the classroom environment she has created where students feel a strong sense of belonging.

Academic growth is important, but Shannon believes students learn best when they feel seen, valued, and safe. She has worked intentionally to build a classroom culture where every student knows they matter, where their voices are heard, and where they can show up as their full selves. When students feel that sense of belonging, they take greater risks, engage more deeply in their learning, and develop confidence that extends far beyond the classroom.

Seeing students support one another, celebrate each other's successes, and carry that sense of empathy and inclusion into the wider school community is something I'm incredibly proud of. It's a reminder that teaching is about much more than content—it's about helping young people understand their value in the world.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR CONTINUED



**MICHELLE
BANNIE**

Teaching is a second career for Michelle, whose journey began the day she walked her oldest daughter into Somerset, falling in love with the school and community. By the time her second daughter began kindergarten, Michelle had earned her Master's in Education and completed her student teaching (also at Somerset). Michelle has been a full-time part of Somerset and ISD 197 for 13 years, which also marks 13 years in her own classroom.



Her favorite part of working at Somerset is that it still feels like the same welcoming home she first walked into so many years ago. Living and working in the community has been especially meaningful because Michelle's two daughters attended Somerset, Heritage Middle School, and Two Rivers High School. She treasures the moments when graduating seniors return to the building before commencement to remember their own journeys and to inspire younger students. Michelle is most proud of the relationships she has built with students and families over the years and strives to create a classroom where every student feels valued and supported.

KS95 TEACHER OF THE WEEK: **RODRIGO SÁNCHEZ**

We are thrilled to be able to highlight another teacher in our district, Rodrigo Sánchez, who recently won the KS95 Teacher of the week! You can listen to his brief interview [here](#). He's in the running for \$1500 for him and \$1500 for Garlough!

Rodrigo embodies Garlough. He's a former Garlough student who now teaches at Garlough, all while working toward his administrator's license and coaching soccer at Two Rivers High School. He is an incredible relationship-builder who holds students to high expectations, believes deeply in their potential, and makes sure every student knows they are loved.



EDMN POLITICAL CONFERENCE RECAP

WSPFT members attended the Education Minnesota Political Conference during the last weekend of January 2026. They listened to a wonderful line up of speakers, including Tim Walz, Peggy Flanagan, Keith Ellison, Angie Craig, and Amy Klobuchar. Members were able to share about the importance of improving health care, educator pay, pensions, and more! Our own Margaret Citta (TR) was among members who spoke on the MN Paid Family Medical Leave Act!



WSPFT members left feeling proud of the commitment to our communities and our fellow members. We continue to encourage everyone to remain steadfast. It's hard for everyone right now, so find how you can help within your capacity and remember to take care of yourself!

EDMN REPRESENTATIVE CONVENTION

FINAL DELEGATE CALL

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 is allocated six delegates, and it is important 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. The deadline to apply is March 1.

RETIRING THIS YEAR? TAKING A LEAVE NEXT YEAR?

Be mindful that you need to inform HR by March 1. It would also be great if you could [let Brian know](#) as we begin to plan our spring retirement celebration. The March 1 deadline also applies for various types of Career/General Leaves. For more specific information, please review [our contract](#).

WSPFT SPRING SOCIAL SAVE THE DATE!

Mark your calendars for our Spring Membership Meeting on 05/20/2026! [Foodsmith](#) is hosting us and we plan to celebrate our 2026 retirees as well!

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.