

MEA • Voice

Mr. Smith's Dream Center



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Letter to members: Here for you in uncertain times

Uncertain times can be trying for all of us. But by working together, we can and will overcome what uncertain times bring us — both through strength in numbers as a union and as a network of dedicated educators that can rely on each other in tough times.

It's times like these that are why we have a union: to provide a focal point for the work that must be done. And MEA is here for that work.

To advocate for our students and our members. To negotiate contracts that provide educators and students the tools to teach and learn. To advance our profession through training and best practices. To protect our members' rights and livelihoods.

MEA's dedicated leaders and staff are on the job doing that work and more. Your membership helps drive that work — and a sense of belonging that can also bring comfort in a storm. Being part of our state's premier organization believing in and advocating for public education brings both results and a community you can lean on during tough times.

Despite uncertainty, by working together as educators and union members with those who share our beliefs, we will continue to make a difference for each other and the students we serve.

In our local communities, we'll keep striving for the schools all our students deserve.

In Lansing, we'll fight for what educators need to do their jobs with respect while providing for their families (like our continued advocacy around House Bill 6058 and getting changes signed into law to reduce out-of-pocket health costs — read more on p. 7).

And as developments come from Washington, D.C. — spurring the range of emotions they generate — we must continue working together with what is best for every Michigan student as our North Star.

In Solidarity Always,

Chandra Madafferi

Brett Smith

Aaron Eling



QUOTABLES

"It's basic social studies — bills that pass both chambers of the legislature go to the governor."

Senate Majority Leader Winnie Brinks (D-Grand Rapids) regarding the refusal of new House Speaker Matt Hall (R-Richland Twp.) to transmit House Bill 6058 to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer for consideration. The Senate has filed a lawsuit to compel Hall to fulfill the constitutional requirement to transmit this bill, which would address skyrocketing out-of-pocket health costs for school and other public employees. *Read more on p. 7.*



*Chandra Madafferi,
MEA President & CEO*



*Brett Smith,
Vice President*



*Aaron Eling,
Secretary-Treasurer*



Art teacher Christine Lakatos helped launch a student-led Green Team promoting sustainability and leadership in Livonia schools which has gained national recognition for its broad scope, page 20.



For more indepth story coverage with links and additional photos, visit mea.org/voice



On the cover: Grand Rapids teacher and artist Stephen Smith helps students find their passion and purpose, pictured in his gallery with works by Detroit artist Sheefy McFly. Photo by Miriam Garcia, story page 9.

Behavior coach, page 14.

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MEA VOICE

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Protect Public Education

President Donald Trump has revealed his top education priorities through words and actions since his January inauguration. The list is a call to commitment for all who recognize public education as a pillar of American society.

The Trump administration agenda would harm public education from preschool to high school, colleges and universities, affecting students from rural regions to small towns to suburban and urban areas. Here is what he wants to achieve:

- **Cuts to federal funding for PreK-12 students living in poverty and those with disabilities**
- **Diverting public tax dollars to private and religious schools with a national voucher mandate**
- **Gutting protections for vulnerable kids — children from immigrant families and LGBTQ+ youth**
- **Eliminating federal funding for programs to help disadvantaged students attend college**
- **Restricting students' freedom to learn accurate history and read books from diverse viewpoints**

Now is the time to organize locally — get involved to strengthen your union's membership and build community and solidarity.

Stay tuned to NEA for the latest information on what's happening and resources to respond at nea.org/protect.

QUOTABLES

“Creating chaos is not leadership. Educators won't be silent as anti-public education politicians hurt our students, our families, and our communities across America.”

NEA President Becky Pringle speaking out on Jan. 28 after President Donald Trump issued an executive order freezing numerous federal grants and loans, a move viewed as unconstitutional by historians and legal experts. The order was rescinded the next day, but disruption and uncertainty continued across PreK-12 and higher education.

Below: Becky Pringle speaking at Grand Rapids Community College in September 2024.



Call for submissions! 2025 MEA/MAEA Art Exhibition



Artists can submit digital entries for the 2025 juried MEA/MAEA Art Acquisitions Purchase Exhibition from March 1-April 1. This year's 61st annual event also features an updated drop-off and pick-up process for selected works. No entry fee is required; any member in good standing of MEA or MEA-Retired is eligible to submit up to three original artworks in a wide range of mediums for the exhibition which will run from May 17-June 9.

Pictured from last year's show is "The Embrace," by MEA-Retired member Arlinda Crossland of Bloomfield. Visit nea.org/art to find information and the online entry form.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Early career help: tough topics

The young leaders of MEA's Michigan New Educators — MiNE — are presenting a virtual series called “Tackling Tough Topics,” professional development they designed to help newer educators survive the cold, dark days of winter.

While early-career educators may have attended other professional learning opportunities centered around these topics, this one is tailored to their needs, facilitated by peers from across the state, and open only to educators in the first seven years of their careers.

“We wanted to give educators a safe environment to come together to tackle the tough things we deal with in our day to day and support each other to know we're not alone,” said Erinn Parker, a MiNE representative and president of the Stephenson Education Association in Menominee County.

The four-part virtual series began in January with a session on classroom management and continues through April. Each Zoom session begins at 5 p.m. EST/4 CST. These sessions are all SCECH eligible. Other sessions include:

Mental well being Feb. 20

This session is designed to help educators prioritize their mental well-being. It will explore the unique challenges of starting a teaching career and provide practical strategies for managing stress, setting boundaries, and cultivating self-care habits. It will help participants maintain balance and build resilience.

Work-life balance March 27

As educators, there is always more work that could be done. This session will help educators learn to manage time, set boundaries, and prioritize personal well-being despite the demands of teaching. Participants will leave with actionable tools to maintain balance and thrive both personally and professionally.

Evaluations April 17

This session helps educators know the legal and contractual issues of the evaluation system and leverage this knowledge to have great results in their own performance evaluation. Focus will be on showcasing strengths and growth areas in the various evaluation tools utilized across the state, interpreting feedback, and knowing your rights and the district requirements related to your evaluation.



Erinn Parker

Find a registration link at mea.org/tackling-tough-topics.

“MiNE selected the topics by reflecting on our first years of teaching and talking about our greatest needs during this time of the school year,” Parker said. “It’s important to revisit expectations, take care of ourselves, and better understand evaluations as they come at the end of the year.”

COMING SOON: Look for a reboot of our MiNE podcast and a series of Pop-Up PD videos of short and easily consumable learning segments. This summer a book study on *Beyond Your Bubble* will discuss ways to talk about important issues among people with differing views.

MiNE is dedicated to creating professional learning and networking opportunities for early career educators. Join us! ▼



Follow @mineweducators
on Instagram, X and Facebook

Register:
mea.org/tackling-tough-topics

Here to help

MESSA's Member Service Center, field reps provide peace of mind

MESSA understands why it's important for you to connect with students and the communities you serve. You welcome students everyday with enthusiasm, patience and warm smiles. You also work to make sure our communities are safe and operating properly.

We know it's stressful at times. We know it's challenging. That's why we want to make sure you have peace of mind when you contact MESSA.

MESSA's Member Service Center is staffed with friendly, knowledgeable specialists who can answer any questions you may have — big or small.

- ▶ Need more information about your benefits? No problem.
- ▶ Have a concern about a medical bill? Check.
- ▶ Do you need to connect with your provider to learn more about a procedure? We can help with that, too.

Call our East Lansing-based Member Service Center at 800-336-0013 to get the help you need. And get this — when you call, you'll speak with an actual human being.

"My family has experienced the overwhelming nature of health care firsthand," said Erin Marshall, a MESSA member service specialist. "It can be exhausting and confusing. Knowing that my conversations with members can offer clarity and reassurance when they need it most, is incredibly meaningful to me. I know that MESSA medical coverage has immense value, and I want our members to experience the sense of relief that comes with understanding the details of their benefits."

You can also connect with us via live chat or send a secure message from your MyMESSA account or the MESSA app. And guess what? There's an actual human being on the other end of the digital connection, too. Not some chat bot.

MESSA field representatives

MESSA's field representatives are our experts in health benefits and are passionate about supporting our members.

Our 16 field representatives are licensed insurance agents who are stationed throughout the state to provide personal service to you. No matter where you are, you have a local field representative assigned to you and your coworkers to help explain your coverage and plan options, assist with individual claims, and attend association or staff meetings to provide information.

You can find your local field representative at messa.org/field or call at 800-292-4910, ext. 7817. You can also call MESSA's award-winning Member Service Center at 800-336-0013. We're here to help. ♥



MEA members tell House Speaker: *Stop playing politics with our lives*



L-R: Kim Sandefur (Comstock),
Caryn Leonard (Troy), Todd Simon (Waverly)

JOIN THE FIGHT

MEA members, leaders and staff have pushed for months to get a solution to the health care cost crisis. Our hard work resulted in legislation passed by the state House and Senate — it's unconstitutional for the new Republican House leadership to withhold it from the governor!

MEA member Kim Sandefur teaches math to fourth and fifth graders in Comstock, but recently she delivered a lesson to lawmakers in Lansing on how newly installed House Speaker Matt Hall (R-Richland Twp) must follow the state constitution.

In a hearing before the Senate Labor Committee, Sandefur detailed crushing health care cost increases that are financially burying public-sector employees and driving great educators out of careers serving Michigan's students.

In December the Legislature passed House Bill 6058 to address the problem, but as of press time for this magazine Hall was refusing to send the bill to Gov. Gretchen Whitmer for a signature. The State Constitution states: "Every bill passed by the Legislature shall be presented to the governor."

A resident of Hall's district, Sandefur testified: "Playing party politics with people's health care and income is deplorable. We are struggling to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers as it is. They should not have to choose between health care and the job that they so love doing."

To compel Speaker Hall to fulfill his constitutional obligation, the Democratic-led Senate filed a lawsuit this month to force House Bill 6058 — and eight other bills held in limbo — to be sent to the governor.

HB 6058 would fix Public Act 152, the state law passed in 2011 by a Republican-controlled Legislature and Gov. Rick Snyder, which limited the amount employers could pay toward health care costs for teachers, school support staff, and other public employees.

Because the capped amount has never kept up with annual health care inflation, educators and others have been forced to pay an increasing share of employers' total health insurance premiums. This year alone, the hard cap increased by 0.2% while health care inflation was 15%.

Sandefur gave the Labor Committee an elementary lesson on subtraction, laying out details of her income as an 18-year teacher to show life has become unaffordable for those who've dedicated careers to public service.

Higher out-of-pocket insurance premiums. Higher deductibles.

Shrinking paychecks. On New Year's Day, Sandefur's eight-year-old daughter needed to visit an emergency room.

After exam, x-rays, lab tests, medicine, her daughter was diagnosed with pneumonia and released with orders for more prescriptions. The financial hit? Sandefur's out-of-pocket medical costs in January exceeded her monthly income, and the prescription medicine was ineligible for a payment plan.

"As a parent, I was sickened by the fact that insurance costs are now factoring into whether or not I can afford to seek medical treatment for my child," she said.

The situation threatens to push out longtime and early-career educators, testified MEA member Caryn Leonard, a veteran teacher in Troy.

"One younger member even stated the financial reality is unsustainable, and now new teachers must make a hard choice between their financial stability, their health, or continuing to do what they love — which is teaching. I am here today for those younger teachers." ▼

Learn more and get involved at mea.org/fixhealthcare.

Creativity points to passion, 'Art is how I dealt with grief'

By *Brenda Ortega*
MEA Voice Editor

Big themes recur throughout the story of Grand Rapids art teacher Stephen Smith.

Trauma. Grief. Hopelessness. Then creation, connection, community. Images and ideas return like motifs in Smith's remarkable personal narrative.

A 37-year-old San Francisco native, Smith is a multi-faceted and award-winning artist, innovative entrepreneur, emerging community leader — and a second-year high school teacher who took what he calls “a backwards mode” into the classroom.

Painful tragedies dramatically altered his life course in college — away from computer science into psychology — and pointed him toward a future in art and education. In grief, he discovered art could be a healer, teacher, guide, path.

Now he shows young people the way. “The biggest problem I see in our inner-city youth — what I attack — is hopelessness,” he says.

“When people think there’s nothing they can do, there’s no option, that prompts the mind to have nihilistic tendencies, and nihilism causes people to live on the edge, take a lot of risk, do things they wouldn’t have done had they had something to lose.”

His mission is to show young people their value by tapping into what matters to them. “The first activity I do with all the students I have is we find where their purpose meets their passion. Then we try to live there.”

That’s where Smith lives with his wife Taylor and their three sons, ages two, four and six. The couple partners on numerous artistic endeavors, collaborations, and mentorships — always with more in the works, always aimed

at expanding artistic expression and opportunities in Grand Rapids.

At the center of it all is Muse GR, an art gallery the pair created from a run-down building in the city’s West Side, previously an adult bookstore. The Smiths gutted and rebuilt the structure to house an art studio and exhibition space — now an integral part of the region’s arts scene.

Since its opening in 2018, Muse has officially hosted two juried winners at ArtPrize — the celebrated international art competition exhibited each fall in dozens of venues across downtown Grand Rapids — including Smith’s brainchild, “Art Pod,” which won one of six \$10,000 awards in 2021.

In addition, he was one of 20 artists who collaborated on the Trauma Project, led by well-known local artist Scoob, which was selected last September as the 2024 ArtPrize winner of the \$50,000 Juried Grand Prize.

The project — 16 paintings by Scoob and an 18-track album by various contributors including Smith — first debuted at Muse in the spring before entering the competition at a different location last fall.

Smith also mentors aspiring young artists at his gallery’s studio. Some have contributed to winning ArtPrize entries, and a student of his from Ottawa Hills High School who creates in the Muse studio won the 2024 ArtPrize-related



“Art Pod,” a mobile gallery created by Stephen Smith, changed art work each day and won a 2021 juried award at ArtPrize, the international competition held each fall in Grand Rapids.

purpose

Consumers Energy SmartArt award and a \$2,000 prize.

He can be outgoing and enjoys connecting with others, says wife Taylor. But he also feels deeply and can be a quiet and reflective thinker and problem solver. His next big dream is to fund a residency for a professional artist to live rent-free in the apartment above the gallery and get paid to create.

“Stephen is a creative in every aspect of the word,” Taylor said. “He’s influential, and he takes that really seriously. He knows that what he says and what he does is seen by other people, and he wants the impact to be positive, so socially responsible is what I use to describe him.”

A musician, photographer, composer, painter and mixed-media artist who loves to tell stories with his art, Smith is relentlessly creative — continually developing, planning, and executing new ideas.

He says, “When I leave the world, I want to be empty.”

‘Pretty little mistakes’

Just six miles from Muse, Smith is an MEA member teaching art foundations, digital media, and yearbook at Ottawa Hills in Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) — and grateful to have landed in an ideal spot for his first full-time teaching job.

His classroom is joined with another art teacher’s space plus a versatile third room, and the two educators co-teach to give students greater choice in what projects to pursue and which medium to try.



Stephen and Taylor Smith renovated a run-down building on the city’s West Side to create Muse GR, an art gallery that is the center of their wide-ranging creative partnership. Background works by Flint artist Pauly M. Everett.

“We partner the whole year,” he said. “We give students the options of two 2-D projects and two 3-D projects so they can go to either teacher. I’m focusing on 2-D; she focuses on 3-D. It’s been highly supportive for me to have half of my lesson plans created and we combine our efforts.”

His co-teacher is a career changer with an accomplished resume of her own. MEA member Jennifer Sharp previously worked as an award-winning digital creative director at National Public Radio, Public Broadcasting System, and Michigan State University.

Sharp has only one year more experience at the school than Smith, but in a short time she has repurposed corners and closets — and secured one-time federal COVID-19 funds from the district — to add a glass studio, three state-of-the-art Macs stocked with Adobe suite, and a 3-D printer.

Those capabilities brought depth and variety to existing resources for drawing, painting, sculpting, photography and fashion design.

“To have this ability to offer choice and have student voice come through is really important,” Sharp said. “They feel ownership of the time they spend in the classroom, and it’s very exciting.”

Sharp feels “blessed” to work alongside Smith, she added. “What’s great about his perspective is that he can talk about real-life art careers and say from experience, ‘Your creative ideas are worth something; they’re valuable.’ And the kids believe and respond.”

A chart on a white board indicates how many students can sign up for each option.

“I like the experimental aspect of art class,” Smith said. “I feel like everybody has something that they will enjoy, so I

expose them to different activities and processes. I prompt them to try things that will make them more comfortable.”

He likes to free inexperienced artists from anxiety by pointing out “pretty little mistakes” that can be the rewards of creative risk-taking. “You can run with a mistake or you can layer it,” Smith said.

On the flip side, Smith said obliteration as a strategy can also stretch comfortable artists out of their comfort zone — as in a fascinating communal art project that he and Sharp tried last year. The week-long prompting exercise utilizes pencil, charcoal, pastels and paints.

Students are given direction at each step. For example, they might be told to pick a word that describes a feeling and write it backwards. Add your interpretation of a flower. Place an image of an eye somewhere. One day they use pencil; then charcoal; then paint or pastel.

“We have them add things until they feel comfortable with it; then we say ‘Switch’ and tell them something to add to somebody else’s work,” he said. “The most anxious part is the obliteration where we tell them, ‘Now take white paint and go over it.’”

After the paint dries, the artists continue adding layers as directed until

eventually out of messy chaos — despite their uncertainty — beauty emerges. “They loved them. It was really cool.”

He knows not everyone will become an artist, but exploring creativity opens up anyone’s potential. “One of my goals is 100% participation, so having students find their purpose and passion is a key in how I equip them to learn.”

He likes to frame students’ work, and he rotates gallery-style wall displays of student creations mixed with pieces by professional artists, which he also uses to teach art analysis: describe, interpret, judge.

One time he intervened with a student who wanted to throw away his artwork because it looked different from others. “I said, ‘This looks like fine art. Let me frame it and show you.’ When I framed it he was like, ‘Oh my gosh, it looks so good.’”

The dream center

Smith’s transition to leading a classroom has been eased by the fact he isn’t new to GRPS. He began his career in the district 14 years ago as a behavioral specialist, working with struggling students one-on-one or in small groups to help them better engage in school.

Back then too, he landed in a perfect spot at Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy, a K-8 school where he had his own room dubbed “Mr. Smith’s Dream Center” where he managed a challenging caseload of students showing disruptive behaviors.

Smith extended access to creative activities they enjoyed doing in the dream center as they achieved steps toward a behavioral or academic goal. Drawing and painting. Writing songs or stories. Making a music video.

One girl’s behavioral turnaround was connected to her producing a podcast



(Above) Smith collaborated on the Trauma Project, last year’s Grand Prize winner at ArtPrize, seen here with project leader Scoob (right) and Steve Fenton from AllArtWorks. (Below) At school Smith collaborates with art teacher Jennifer Sharp.

from a talk show she hosted before an audience. The girl studied and practiced topics related to social-emotional wellness and shared her learning in interviews using restorative questioning.

The show gave her positive attention. Other kids wanted to be interviewed or in the audience, Smith said, “and she would say, ‘If you want to be on my show, you have to exhibit these behaviors.’”

Smith started as a behavioral specialist in 2011, soon after earning a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Fisk University, a historically Black college in Nashville, and moving to Grand Rapids.

Thomas Standifer was a teacher at MLK — now an elementary school principal in the district — and saw Smith’s potential early on. Standifer encouraged him to become a teacher.

“Mr. Smith built relationships that made kids want to come to school so they could be in that room and hang out with him,” Standifer said. “He helped them find what they were looking for within themselves.”

Although he’d always enjoyed art, Smith didn’t find the purpose inside himself until he was away at college, studying computers, and dual tragedies plunged him into devastating grief. Both of his brothers back home were murdered in separate violent incidents just one year apart.

Smith coped by immersing himself in art, especially creating music and performing. His music built a following; he was taking every photography class at Fisk; and he changed his major to psychology.

“I wanted to figure out what’s in the minds of inner-city youth, and that’s how I got the idea to create a space for people to use art as counseling.”

Smith enjoyed being a school behavioral specialist, but it was a lot of work for low hourly pay, he said. He picked up side gigs doing corporate photography for several big clients — work he still does today — and teaching introductory art as an adjunct instructor at Grand Valley State University.

He met Taylor at church, where both volunteered on creative projects. She has a broadcasting degree and videography experience from work in non-profit communications. They married in 2015,



Always working on new projects, Smith aims to expand artistic expression and opportunities in the city. “When I leave the world, I want to be empty,” he says.

and the next year Taylor agreed to buy the dilapidated storefront instead of a traditional first home.

It took nearly two years to complete renovations to open the gallery and move into the upstairs apartment — at the same time their first child was born. “Originally we thought of something more on the photography-videography side of things,” Taylor said. “But in the process of re-imagining the space and what this area of town needed, we decided on an art gallery. That shift felt more inclusive.

“We are not very one-dimensional, so this allows for all the pieces of who we are and what the community is.”

They lived in the apartment for two years as the gallery got up and running before moving into a home next door to Taylor’s mother in 2020, anticipating their second son’s arrival.

Smith took the Michigan teacher certification test and passed. The district hired him to teach in the 2023-24

school year while completing a certification program. Taylor left a full-time job to manage the gallery and teach art part-time.

Life was hectic but good. However, tragedy struck again.

Smith’s mother was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and he juggled frequent trips to San Francisco for months amid first-year classroom demands. “I’m feeling more settled now, but it’s been challenging for me, a tough transition.”

He spent most of last summer in California, helping his two sisters care for their mom until she passed away in August at age 64. Her funeral was on the Friday before the first day of school this year.

Smith returned to his family, faith, and foundation. “Art is how I originally dealt with grief,” he said. “Now being an art teacher is cool because I have a student whose mother is sick as well, and I’m able to show him how art can provide comfort and relief.



(Above) Now a second-year teacher, Smith suffered a painful loss during his first year and found comfort, as always, in art. (Below) The Smiths' art gallery, Muse GR, has become an integral part of the region's arts scene.



shows. I'm not the only one he helps. He's simply a great person, so I can only thank him."

Last spring, after Nusra created mixed-media sculptures as part of an in-class assignment, Smith suggested she find a way to adapt the works and enter the SmartArt (Students Making Art with a Renewable Theme) competition led by Consumers Energy, ArtPrize and GRPS.

Nusra won the district-wide competition for her entry "Earth Balance," featuring a paper mache globe sprouting a vibrant tree. She was awarded a laptop, the \$2,000 prize and public display of her work.

Nusra plans to pursue an art career and knows she can always lean on her mentor. "Mr. Smith is humble. He's kind. He's very talented and generous. There isn't a bad word to describe him."

Musician Tyrell J sings the same tune. At age 18, after graduating from GRPS, Tyrell got connected to Smith in 2020 via The Collective, a grant-funded program at Muse that offered skills-building and mentorship for a small group of aspiring musicians in Grand Rapids.

The Collective provided sanctuary during the pandemic, Tyrell said. "We were a family, always together. Even when we got days off, we used to ask Steve like, 'Hey, can we come to the studio?'"

The group learned through workshops organized by Smith, wrote and recorded music, produced an album and video, and performed in local venues. Smith pulled back the veil from the business side of music and built their confidence, Tyrell said.

"Steve made big things seem small and doable if you're willing to put in the work. He was always doing things behind the scenes. I didn't know how much until later, but he was opening doors."

Now 23, Tyrell J is an R&B and hip-hop artist who performs locally, including recently as an opener for a nationally known artist.

"One thing about Stephen — he does what he promises. He's come to my events, sponsored some of my (album) release parties. He gave us photo shoots so we could have professional pictures.

"Even if you're not a quote-unquote 'artist,' you still can do creative things that allow you to escape your grief or deal with your trauma in a healthy way. For me, I'm trying to find balance. Balance with work, balance with family, and taking time when I need it."

'Multi-hyphenate talent'

The young people he mentors and teaches say Smith pushes them to think and see possibilities. Ottawa Hills junior Nusra Juma says plainly, "He came into my life and changed everything."

Nusra immigrated to the U.S. with family as a refugee from the Democratic

Republic of Congo five years ago, settling in Nevada as a sixth grader who spoke no English. "I didn't even know how to greet people," she said. "I learned to express myself through art."

Nusra bonded with a middle school art teacher, Ms. Wellman, who nurtured her talent over four years in Reno. When she and her family moved to Michigan last year, Nusra felt lost without her joy in painting. Then she was placed in art class with Smith, who recognized her gifts.

"He told me that he had a gallery that I could also use as a studio space," Nusra said. "And now he teaches me new ways of art, how to sell my art. He provides most of the materials and sponsors my

He is a multi-hyphenate talent, and I don't feel like I can ever pay him back for what he's instilled in me."

The Collective was formed from a \$10,000 grant awarded to the non-profit arm of Muse by the city's SAFE Task Force, an anti-violence initiative. The planned one-year program stretched into three years, and "it's a mentorship that's lifelong," Smith said.

Smith has broad connections in the arts community, which he calls on to support others. When he holds exhibitions of student work, the art creators, curators, and collectors he knows show up to buy it.

The same goes for professionals he showcases. Last year, Muse hosted two indoor solo exhibitions by well-known Michigan artists for ArtPrize. Both muralists and mixed-media artists, Sheefy McFly from Detroit and Pauly M. Everett from Flint, sold at least \$20,000 of work at Muse.

A third exhibit outside of Muse won a \$15,000 visibility award for Flint artist Keyon Lovett. Housed in a storage container that Smith converted to a mobile art gallery, "456: A Reflection on Fatherhood" recreated Lovett's childhood living room with 456 letters to his father taped to walls.

The mobile gallery known as "Art Pod" first won a juried award for Smith in 2021 when he exhibited different artwork for each day of ArtPrize, including student pieces. Recently the Art Pod traveled to show Lovett's work at University of Michigan-Flint.

Smith also contributed a song — "Cursed Generations" — to the 2024 Juried Grand Prize winner, the Trauma Project, a "three-part story" that moves from darkness to light. Muse debuted that work in four live activations last spring; now Smith is selling the paintings and developing a traveling exhibit.

The local artist behind the Trauma Project, Scoob, worked tirelessly forming community and energy around the work, Smith said: "People were flocking to the 106 Gallery to see it."

'The spark is hope'

One year ago, in the midst of Smith's mother's illness, the community also

(Above) Junior Nusra Juma, Smith's Ottawa Hills student, won an ArtPrize-related contest last year. (Below) Tyrell J is a local R&B and hip hop artist who credits his success to mentoring from Smith.



turned out to the Grand Rapids Public Museum to support a project close to his heart: release of an album by Smith and others, "God's Gumbo" by Friends of Sinners, presented with an interactive "artscape."

The sold-out event at the Chaffee Planetarium featured artifacts from the Grand Rapids African American Museum & Archives, southern cuisine by master chef Patria from Patria's Kitchen, and the album's music alongside images projected on the planetarium sky highlighting Black experience through a social justice lens.

The evening concluded with a tender tribute to Smith's mother. Accompanying family images on screen, Smith's emotional variation on the gospel song "Goin' up Yonder" was rewritten to include personal messages with church choir-style backing vocals.

The album project was four years in the making, starting in the pandemic, so "The music expressed grief in a sense, but I was intentional about using it to uplift people."

Because the Smiths are involved in many civic arts initiatives, including the Grand River Public Art Plan and the city's Arts Advisory Council, they

take care not to over-extend. Both must agree before starting a project, and sometimes the timing isn't right... yet.

But as Smith sees it, a dream that takes shape makes the next one possible. Creativity is both its own reward and the seed of another. "Once you're working in your purpose, hopelessness can't exist," he says.

"In the midst of feeling you don't have a voice or you're not being heard, you can create something that impacts people. There's a spark that happens when other people light up at something you've done. The spark can give you energy to keep going. That spark is hope." ▼

Behavior? *There's a coach for that*

MEA member Lindsey Wilson holds a position in Lowell Area Schools that rarely existed in Michigan school districts just five years ago. Wilson is a behavior coach, assigned to address needs of students exhibiting the most challenging classroom behaviors.

She doesn't work directly with children most of the time. Like an instructional coach, she brings an expert perspective to help K-12 educators shift their practice as one part of a team effort to find individualized

approaches for each young person in need.

Wilson recognizes how difficult it can be to manage just one student whose outbursts may regularly disrupt a classroom of 30 kids. She helps educators understand the reason or "function" behind the most challenging behavior and how to turn a struggling student in a healthier direction.

"That's where the need was — to help identify what students are trying to communicate by engaging in these

behaviors so that we can better meet those needs before behaviors get dangerous or severe in the school setting," Wilson said.

Over the past several years, educators across the country have reported sharp increases in problematic student behaviors in school, including physical and verbal aggression.

In an MEA survey of Michigan educators conducted last November by Emma White Research, 88% of respondents said they were "extremely" or "very" concerned by student behavior and mental health issues — topping all other concerns, including pay, health care costs, staffing shortages and burnout.

In January, the non-profit magazine *Education Week* reported national survey findings in which 72% of teachers and school leaders said student behaviors have worsened either "a little" (24%) or "a lot" (48%) since 2019. The EdWeek Research Center survey was conducted in December.

This is the fourth year that Wilson has served as a coach in Lowell helping to design and initiate a Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP) for every student on her caseload. She formally supports 12-15 student teams and monitors close to 25 active behavior plans.

All of the students Wilson serves have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) related to a disability or impairment. But she said, "Challenging behaviors are happening across the board, and these principles can be

Lindsey Wilson (left) works in a team approach with others, including teachers, social workers, and psychologists.



Changing behaviors: the BASICS

B = Breaks [allow for a dignified way out]

A = Always reinforce [give positive attention]

S = Safety [meet the need at first sign of distress]

I = I Wonder if [validate student feelings]

C = Calm [keep your tone neutral]

S = Silliness [humor can disrupt tension]



Wilson helps classroom educators respond to the needs of children exhibiting challenging behaviors.

applied in settings with general education and special education students.”

She says most students exhibiting negative behaviors don’t want to do harm; they simply don’t yet have the skills, knowledge or experience to better meet their needs — even in the face of consequences.

Her goal is to develop a plan for classroom teachers and paraeducators to work together with the child in replacing harmful behaviors — often part of a longstanding pattern — with productive ones. Frequently there is a need the student doesn’t understand or know how to communicate or access.

“Self-advocacy and communication is mainly what we’re targeting when trying to shape behaviors, because behavior is a form of communication.”

Wilson begins the process by conducting a functional behavior assessment, involving interviews and questionnaires with family and school staff, followed by classroom observations.

She seeks to find contexts and triggers for challenging behaviors, what “precursor” behaviors tend to occur in a buildup toward bigger ones, and

Case Study: Behavior Analysis

An elementary student was exhibiting disruptive behaviors, including verbal and physical outbursts, which interfered with individual and whole-class learning. A functional behavior assessment determined the child was engaging in the behaviors to avoid non-preferred tasks.

The student team developed a Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP) to teach replacement skills for the undesirable behaviors. The child was able to request a break at any time, using words or a card, and have the request honored. The break was allowed to be in a location preferred by the student.

In addition, the environment was adjusted to better support the student and encourage more productive engagement.

Tasks were broken into smaller pieces. Scheduled breaks were built into the day. Timers gave visual cues for task duration, upcoming breaks, and break endings. The child’s interests, such as favorite characters and colors, were incorporated into challenging tasks.

The child’s disruptive behaviors decreased as the new skills were used consistently. The student was eventually removed from the PBSP and continued engaging successfully in school.

what the student brings in terms of interests and strengths.

Often difficult behaviors in school serve a function for the student to avoid undesirable tasks. Wilson conducts several observations to find reasons, brings findings to the team, and a plan is developed collaboratively.

“I don’t have a teaching background, so I don’t want to throw strategies at a teacher and say, ‘Here’s what you should do.’”

In general, the plan involves teaching the student a more productive way to communicate a need and having the teacher honor those requests. “But it’s a process, too, because you don’t want to live with a student needing to escape all the time. You want to build voluntary engagement as well.”

Slowly and systematically, the student is encouraged to engage more and for longer periods. “That’s where individualized techniques come into

play. We use a lot of embedding of their unique interests into different tasks.”

Wilson is a board-certified behavior analyst with a master’s degree in professional behavior analysis and experience in clinical settings. In addition to working with student teams, she has collaborated with Lowell’s Special Education director and coaches at the Kent Intermediate School District to deliver all-staff professional development.

“Whether it’s embedding interests or making sure we’re always valuing the students’ communication and self-advocacy — it’s all about bringing back joy in learning for students.”

For districts without their own behavior coaches, similar services can be accessed through most regional ISDs. “It used to be pretty unique to see this role in a school, but it’s becoming more and more common across Michigan now,” Wilson said. ▼

Norway provides lessons for reconfig

*By Chandra Madafferi
MEA President & CEO*

Collaborate, explore and participate are three words that were everywhere in a middle school that I visited in Norway last October, where I joined a group of professors from Michigan State University’s College of Education to observe Norwegian schools in action and bring home lessons for our state.

Simply put, we have a long way to go.

For years, I’ve heard the Scandinavian education model produces students who outperform their peers in the U.S. on global assessments. After this trip, facilitated by MSU’s Global Education Policy Leadership Program, I have a clearer picture of why nations like Norway are doing such a great job with education.

The key similarities between Norway and Michigan were clearly the students in the classrooms, eager to showcase their work, and the educators,

enthusiastic and passionate about being there for their students.

Beyond that, the differences were striking, from preschool through post-secondary.

Exceptional spaces and more exceptional training

The middle school we visited left a lasting impression. When we walked in, it felt like stepping into one of our newly constructed schools, complete with open learning spaces, stadium-style seating, bright colors, and the clean, minimalist Scandinavian design you’d expect. What was truly remarkable, though, was that the building was 25 years old — yet it was impeccably maintained, primarily by the students themselves.

What made this school even more special was its status as one of the nation’s partner schools. Here, education professors from the university

— who train the next generation of teachers — engage in action research directly with classroom teachers. Their collaborative work focuses on areas like teaching practices and assessments, ensuring a fully integrated approach with student success at its core.

Notably, every professor teaching these future educators had extensive experience as highly qualified teachers themselves. It’s a prerequisite for becoming a professor of education, a standard we might associate with other professions like medicine, where practicing doctors train the next generation of physicians. This was truly a teaching and learning school, akin to a teaching hospital.

Feedforward for success

I observed multiple classroom teachers utilizing a “feedforward” (instead of a “feedback”) system. This method provides students guidance to help them achieve a desired goal rather than telling them what they should have done after the fact. Norwegian education experts have identified the feedforward model as having “greater potential than feedback in enhancing learning.”

I watched students work in small groups while teachers provided feedforward guidance to enhance their projects — a practice that all good educators employ. This allowed



Practical experience was a hallmark of Norwegian schools, helping students get real-world qualifications through academic programs. For example, this classroom provided 11th and 12th grade students with hands-on dental technician training, and similar programs offered pharmacy technician and medical assistant training.

Ensuring education in Michigan

students to discover and create while understanding the objectives they needed to meet. Although I'd implemented similar feedforward practices in my classroom, I hadn't had a term for it until now.

Age-appropriate testing, grading and schedules

Another striking feature of Norway's education system is the infrequency of standardized testing. Students only take standardized tests to measure their progress in grades 5, 8 and 9. What's more, Norwegian law prohibits the issuance of official grades for students until they enter secondary school in grade 8.

Instead, teachers use formative assessments that measure developmental benchmarks more meaningfully, moving beyond traditional bubble tests. I was impressed by the hands-on, project-based learning I observed across all grades, where students were grouped by ability in a fluid manner, allowing for differentiated instruction.

In addition, Norwegian students typically attend school only until about 2 p.m., with minimal homework until 10th grade. Children are encouraged to go outside after school to play, engage in extracurricular activities and spend quality time with their families. Universal free after-school programs emphasize recreation and extra academic support when needed.

Compare this with Michigan, where students often feel like they're working a full-time job and have little time to be kids.

Collaboration and collective strength

Norwegian teachers also experience a different model of school. The



MEA President & CEO Chandra Madafferi poses with a sign celebrating a university-school partnership centered on the concepts of “collaborate, explore and participate” — common themes she saw throughout Norway’s education system.

educators I met teach an average of 17.5 to 20 hours a week within the approximately 30 hours that school is in session each week. The rest of their time is spent planning cross-curricular activities, such as integrating reading and writing into science and social studies. This allows teachers to work collaboratively with their colleagues as a true team.

Moreover, every teacher is part of a union, ensuring they have a strong collective voice, feel respected as professionals, and are treated as trusted experts by school administrators, parents and the community.

Parts of Norway are more diverse than I expected, as the country has welcomed many immigrants and refugees over the years. Despite their differences, Norwegian students are treated with dignity and inclusivity, promoting a culture of mutual respect.

I recognize that Norway and Michigan are distinct places, and we can't simply snap our fingers and adopt the Norwegian model. However, there are aspects we can and should embrace — because our current education system is outdated and bogged down by too many standardized tests that sap the joy from learning.

We need to rekindle a love of education and prepare our students to be problem solvers and creative thinkers who can grow into responsible, hard-working adults capable of engaging with one another. We've discarded our VCRs; it's time to consider upgrading our educational model for the future. ♥

Learn more about MSU's Global Education Policy Leadership Program at education.msu.edu/epfp/globaleplp.



Middle schoolers see future options at summer manufacturing camp

*By William Renner
Hastings Area Schools*

One of the great joys of teaching is when a light bulb goes on for a student who grasps a new concept. That's what I loved about hosting a summer camp for my middle school manufacturing students in Hastings last year.

Not only did incoming sixth, seventh and eighth graders learn new skills. They also saw those skills in action during field trips to manufacturing companies in our community — and began to imagine future possibilities for their lives.

My campers enjoyed all of those benefits from participating in a five-day, 25-hour summer camp. Much can be accomplished in a short time through intensive experiential summer learning opportunities, and grants are available.

The Hastings Middle School Manufacturing Camp was funded with a grant from the Fabricators and Manufacturers Association, which also provided curriculum. Additional support came from my school district and the local companies that agreed to donate time and labor.

My teaching approach would not exist without the consideration of others. I've always used grants and donations to buy classroom equipment and materials I need to teach technology and design in my small town.

That's especially true for summer camp. Three local companies and a community college gave generously to make my students' learning possible. In the end, the kids' excitement was equally matched by the adults who took time to share knowledge.

My goal in providing summer enrichment is to introduce campers to career paths that offer financial stability and what type of education and certifications they require. I didn't realize how much we would also bust old stereotypes in our minds about the nature of manufacturing jobs.

We got to see skilled workers doing highly technical tasks to exact specifications in clean, modern facilities. Even I was surprised at times by the innovation and creativity involved in designing and building high-quality products efficiently.

Today's manufacturing doesn't fit the image of early 1900s factories.

The work is dynamic, and employee learning and job growth is encouraged and rewarded. The kids enjoyed demonstrations and got to try out some equipment.

We visited **FlexFab**, an engineering company that designs products for extreme environments from materials such as silicone rubber. We learned about company-funded education that positions employees for success and the employer for innovation.

How exciting it was for my students to see computer coding that made things work on a grand scale. In my classroom, students were used to watching a table-sized X-Carve machine make cuts from their computer inputs. At FlexFab, the CNC machine was the size of a car.

Another field visit took us to **Co-Dee Stamping**, where 100-year-old presses that stand a story-and-a-half tall have been modified to build modern pieces and parts of products that we use everyday. Campers learned how dies and presses form metal components.

We heard from workers making parts for Bradford White Water Heaters in Middleville, Michigan. At



William Renner teaches a one-week summer manufacturing camp that delivers big payoffs for students at Hastings Middle School.



Co-Dee they make the tray that sits underneath the water tank and the top cover that must meet specifications perfectly to properly vent gases out of the exhaust pipe.

At **Hastings Fiber Glass Products**, they make dependable Hot Line Tools & Equipment used worldwide to help ensure the safety of electrical line workers who handle dangerous power lines in their jobs.

The work space was orderly and air conditioned, more like an office setting than a factory. It takes precision technology and exacting standards to produce durable products that customers rely on, which requires employee training and ongoing product testing.

Our visit to the **Kellogg Community College (KCC) Mobile Manufacturing Trailer** was another highlight for campers who got to explore virtual welding and Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems.

KCC's Industrial Trades Trailer allowed students to get hands-on with equipment used in HVAC systems and to learn about KCC programs that offer a path into future jobs and careers.

Back at school our curriculum explored entrepreneurship through the story of the Slinky — a wildly successful toy invented by accident in the 1940s when a naval engineer, working on springs to stabilize ships, knocked one from a shelf and saw it “walk” down in a series of arcs.

We played with Slinkies and then produced our own toys — a peg board game with golf tees. Campers used software to design pegs, printed them on 3D printers, and built boards using various tools.

Interestingly two companies we visited shared similar stories as Slinky. Hastings Fiber Glass came to be when a worker making fiberglass fishing poles had an idea to make tools for power line workers because the material does not conduct electricity — but his boss didn't listen.

Likewise FlexFab started in the founder's garage to become an international company. Both manufacturers employ hundreds in our town.

However, our field trips reinforced more than the entrepreneur curriculum. Students witnessed firsthand how much math and reading



is required to succeed in a skilled trade, and that understanding translates into greater motivation in school.

There are so many diverse paths to success. I always ask my students: What do you want to do? What jobs match your interests and abilities? As a teacher, I always ask myself: What can I do to make my teaching relevant and spark students' interest in school?

Summer manufacturing camp is one of the answers. You can learn about the grant I used to fund the program by searching for **SparkForce, the FMA Foundation**.

At camp, students see how hard work in school can lead to rewarding careers, and I watch them grow toward a productive future. Nothing is better than seeing that light come on in a young person. ♥

Green Team promoting sustainable science, leadership earns national recognition

In three decades as an educator, Hayes Elementary art teacher Christine Lakatos never considered herself an environmentalist. Yet Lakatos and her students at the Westland school for years created art

using egg cartons, paper towel tubes and other household waste.

Under Lakatos' leadership, Hayes Elementary, part of Livonia Public Schools, achieved Michigan Green School status in 2016. She helped

launch the Hayes Green Team to complete tasks such as waste reduction and recycling to maintain the state-level certification.

Over the years, projects became more time-intensive and complex, Lakatos said: "Once you start, it's kind of hard to stop. I became more and more passionate along the way, and thought it was really important to promote this environmental awareness at a young age."

Eight years later, Lakatos and the Green Team garnered national attention for Hayes Elementary as the school was named a 2024 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School — one of only 41 schools nationwide chosen for the recognition last year.

Lakatos and her team completed a 20-page application outlining efforts to reduce environmental impact, improve health and wellness, and provide effective sustainability education to students.

A lengthy review process involved the Michigan Department of Education, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education.

Unlike Michigan Green Schools, the one-time Green Ribbon designation is not recertified.



(Above) Renee Kish, union and Green Team member, and student lunch safeties with the Share Cart. (Below) Green Team leader Christine Lakatos and students won a Detroit Zoo Merit Award for Waste Free Wednesday and earned a field trip to the zoo.

nability, onal status

Team formation

The Hayes Green Team started with five students but now involves every student and staff member. Early projects included a successful letter-writing campaign urging district officials to replace Styrofoam lunch trays with compostable alternatives district-wide.

More recently the Green Team conducted a waste audit showing a large portion of cafeteria trash was uneaten food. They launched “Waste Free Wednesdays” to raise awareness and added a cafeteria Share Table where students place unwanted items to be redistributed under staff supervision.

“It really does teach them responsibility and helps them develop their leadership skills,” Lakatos said. “They are just super excited to do all these things.”

In November, Leanne Weber, a science education consultant for the Michigan Department of Education, saw the cafeteria program in action and marveled at its efficiency.

“They even had a special signal to talk to (team) leaders. They knew right away if someone put up a hand with a fist that they needed a Green Team leader to come assist them.”

Weber added the Hayes application stood out because “even though there is a teacher champion leading the work, the students on the Green Team have really taken ownership of the work.”

A key consideration of Green Ribbon applicants is applying the work to student success in the classroom. While student achievement can be tied to numerous factors, Hayes Elementary — at 46% free and reduced lunch

MEA committed to green schools

MEA is working collaboratively with Climate Jobs International and other labor unions to develop a road map for achieving zero emissions in Michigan schools. This initiative aims to identify effective solutions while ensuring that all work is performed by union labor.

“We are committed to having our schools be part of a healthy environment for the students we serve and the broader community,” said MEA Vice President Brett Smith, who is MEA’s liaison to the group. “As educators and union members, we know the value of working together to solve issues and we’re committed to doing that with our zero emissions goal, which is vital to our world’s future.”

Is your school engaging in any green school activities, like solar power installations, carbon reduction strategies, electric vehicle adoption, or energy-efficient building technologies? Let us know so we can use your stories to inform this crucial work and provide case studies to inspire further action across the state.

Email us at publicaffairs@mea.org or call 517-337-5508.

— significantly outpaced statewide averages in 2024 M-STEP third and fourth grade English and math.

“Something different is happening at Hayes, and one of those things is green and sustainability work,” Weber said.

‘Art-ivist voices’

Lakatos encourages her students to be “art-ivists” by using art to make their voices heard. In one case, students used artwork to voice concerns about sea turtles consuming discarded plastic and our country’s large carbon footprint.

The students created a sea turtle sculpture made of discarded plastic, and a large cardboard sculpture of a tennis shoe to signify our country’s large carbon footprint.

The Green Team goes the extra mile to ensure used classroom materials don’t go to waste. Used crayons are

melted down and repurposed into new, ergonomic-shaped crayons for district students with special needs.

The district’s students with special needs helped empty recycling bins each week as part of an inclusive, district-wide effort.

The Westland community also plays an active role in the work, including partnerships with local civic organizations and businesses. Westland voters passed a bond that replaced traditional lighting with LED lighting, enhanced air quality with upgraded HVAC systems and replaced the school’s roof.

“This was truly a district and community effort,” Lakatos said.

‘We rock at this’

The Green Team’s work at Hayes often takes students outside the classroom, such as when they collaborated with the 3 B’s Native Plant Garden,

located at a park near the school, to create educational signs identifying various birds and butterflies alongside their host plants.

Students researched a company that turns plastic bottle caps into benches and then collected, sorted and weighed 300 pounds of caps to create a bench now available to visitors.

The students have acted to conserve food pollinators by symbolically adopting the honeybee and Monarch butterfly via the World Wildlife Fund and installing a native pollinator garden.

The pollinator garden will be supported by mentors from a local Wild Ones chapter, General Motors, and a Master Gardener for funding, planning, and maintenance.

Matthew Rodgers, a Hayes Elementary fourth grader and student leader for the pollinator garden project, said he's excited to be doing important work.

"There's a lot of trash on the ground and the air can get polluted, but with all the flowers and plants I think it will

make the air better for the world," Matthew said.

Next the Hayes Green Team is researching the feasibility of launching a composting program to reduce waste and sell the resulting compost for investment back into the program.

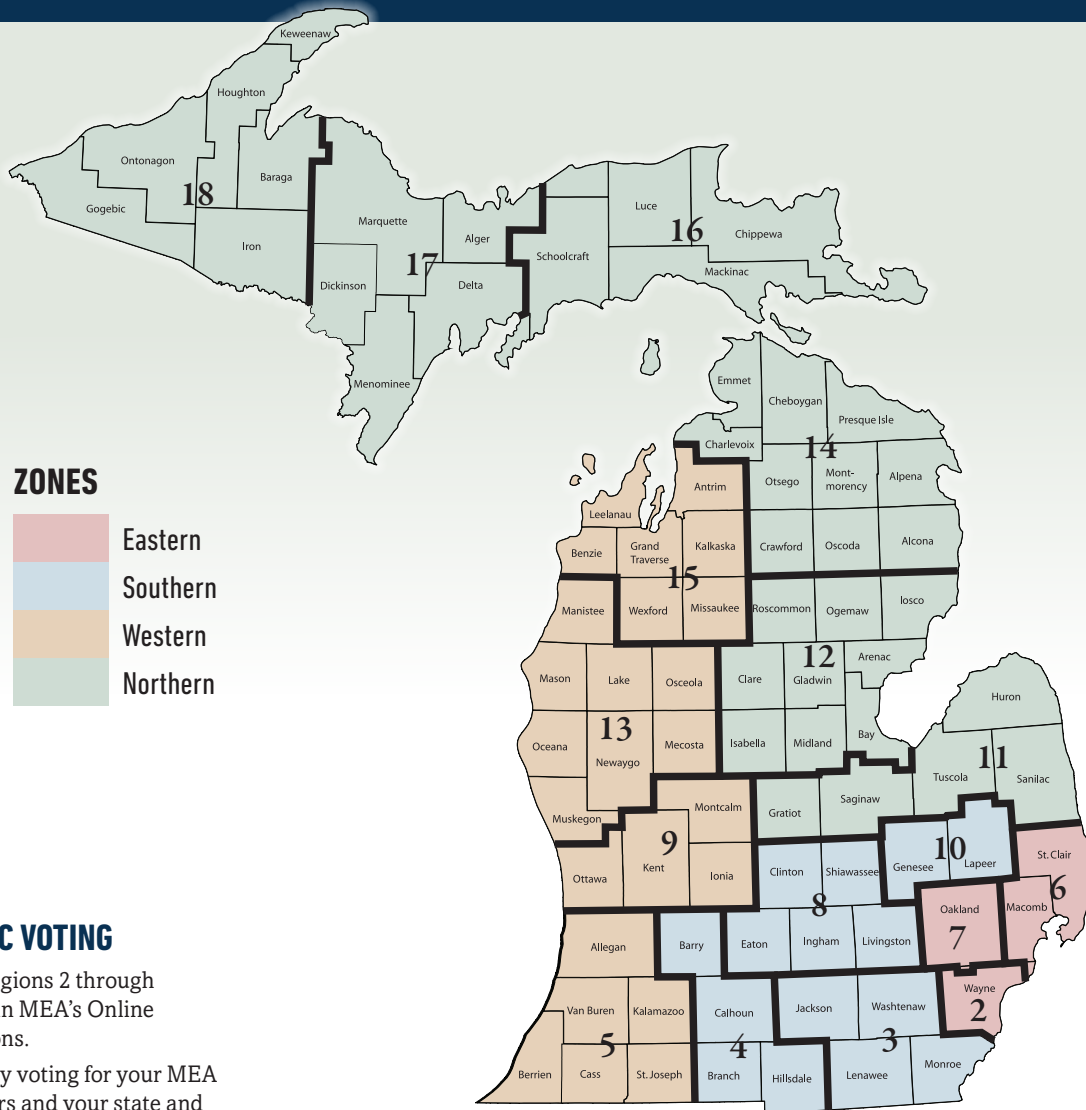
"We kind of rock at this," Lakatos said. "Our students are proving that small actions add up to big changes. There's always more to do, but we're excited to keep making a difference together." ▼



(Clockwise from left)
A sculpture made from garbage that sea turtles mistake for food. A fourth-grade lunch safety does his part. Student-made signs adorn the pollinator garden. The adult Green Team is part of an all-school initiative.



MEA REGION ELECTION INFORMATION



ELECTRONIC VOTING

Members of regions 2 through 18 participate in MEA's Online Region Elections.

Get involved by voting for your MEA Board members and your state and national delegates anytime between 8 a.m. Saturday, March 1, 2025 and 11:59 p.m. Saturday, March 15, 2025. Sign in at mymea.org/voting and follow the prompts. Members access the website using the same username and password for the Members Only website. If you have any problems, please contact the MEA Help Center at 866-632-4357.

There will be a continuous ballot for ESP members who will begin with the statewide Region 50 ballot and continue with their region's ballot.

Positions elected by acclamation at the December region meetings will be noted on the ballot.

Online election rules and an explanation of the process were forwarded to local presidents and region election chairs the last week of January 2025.

Election procedures required to be followed in the regions comply with relevant federal laws.

ELIGIBLE VOTERS

Voter eligibility listings will be created from information received by the MEA Membership Department from the local associations by Feb. 7, 2025.

PAPER BALLOTS

All elections conducted by MEA will utilize the MEA IT electronic voting system to allow the opportunity for greater participation in our membership and election integrity. This means paper ballots should not be used at the local level for any March 2025 region elections. If an individual is unable to access the online voting system during the voting period, a paper ballot may be requested by contacting MEA IT at 517-337-5440 or by sending an email to ernst@mea.org. All members must be in good standing to be eligible to vote.

ABSENTEE BALLOTING

The region at-large election is an online election, however, eligible voters who are not able to vote online during the election period may notify Rebecca Ernst of their need to vote by absentee ballot. Notification can be sent by email to ernst@mea.org or by mail to MEA Executive Office, 1350 Kendale Blvd., East Lansing, MI 48823. The request must be in writing, include the specific reason necessitating an absentee ballot, and be received no later than Feb. 21. Eligible voters requesting an absentee ballot, and complying with the above requirements, shall be mailed an absentee ballot by the MEA Executive Office. An absentee ballot must be returned by U.S. mail and received no later than the last day of the election. Late absentee ballots shall be unopened and set aside as void ballots.

CANDIDATES IN THE MARCH REGION ELECTIONS

REGION 2

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 7/14/27:
Steve Conn, Wayne-Westland E

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:
Heidi Posh, Livonia E

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:
#Ed McGovern, Wayne-Westland E

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

3 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/27: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Steve Conn,
swconn80@hotmail.com

REGION 3

Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Josh Hendrickson, Whitmore Lake E

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

KEY:

= Elected by acclamation

* = Minority 3-1(g) position

\$ = Funded NEA RA position

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community
CFMOPT

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

4 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

5 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

3 positions*, immed. through
8/31/26: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community
CFMOPT;
#Rebecca Staple, Saline CFMOPT

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Jim Brousseau,
jbrousseau@mea.org

REGION 4

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 7/14/27:
#Anthony Pennock, Battle Creek E

Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

2 positions*, immed. through
3/31/26: NNR

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

3 positions*, immed. through
3/31/26: NNR

Position 7 – EA/ESP NEA RA At-Large
Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Lance Hawblitz,
lancehawblitz@yahoo.com

REGION 5

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:
Roy Freeman, Dowagiac Union CMT;
Tharan Suvarna, Dowagiac Union E

Position 3 – MEA RA At-Large Delegate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26:
Betina DuBois, Kalamazoo E;
Tharan Suvarna, Dowagiac Union E

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:
Kathleen Frink, Portage E;
Tharan Suvarna, Dowagiac Union E

Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:
#Mary Cooper, New Buffalo E

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27:
#Suzanne Cramer, New Buffalo E

Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#Mary Cooper, New Buffalo E,
#Suzanne Cramer, New Buffalo E

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

2 positions*, immed. through
8/31/27: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

4 positions, immed. through 3/31/25: NNR

4 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#Roy Freeman, Dowagiac Union CMT

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/25: NNR

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

Elections Chair: Mary Cooper,
coopermary29@gmail.com

REGION 6

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:

#Cathy Murray, Port Huron E

Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

3 positions*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Kathryn Cafagna, Fitzgerald E;
#Deborah Robertson, Harper Woods E;
#Michelle Woodman, Chippewa Valley E

Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:
#Alan Demski, St Clair Co RESA E

Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#Leslie Bailey-Leonard;
Marysville O;
#Shauna Williams, Marysville P

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Alan Demski, St Clair Co RESA E

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/25: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Cara Konicek,
carakonicek@gmail.com

REGION 7

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:

Jason Cichowicz, Troy E;
Angela Chen, Pontiac E

1 position, immed. through 7/14/27:

Chris DeYonke, Farmington E;
Angela Chen, Pontiac E

Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Angela Chen, Pontiac E

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#LaBrea Fort, Pontiac P

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Giselle Buchanan, Troy E

2 positions*, immed. through
3/31/26: NNR

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Melissa Dodge, Troy E

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:
Amanda Ziegler, Pontiac E;
Angela Chen, Pontiac E

Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25:

#Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

3 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate

4 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

2 positions*, immed. through
3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Kecia Jones,
jaxjokeci@gmail.com

REGION 8

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:
Kristi Craig, Howell E

Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/27: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$

CANDIDATES IN THE MARCH REGION ELECTIONS

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Chelsea Ott, Waverly FOP

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

4 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Delegate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27:

Allyson McCann, Grand Ledge P

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Alternate

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Chelsea Ott, Waverly FOP;

#Rhonda Snook, Waverly FOP;

#Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Jeffry Wilson,

parliamentdestruction@gmail.com

REGION 9

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:

Rick Jackson, Kelloggsville E;

Matt Marlow, Grand Rapids E

Position 2 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate-Representative of

Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:

Erin Monk, Byron Center E;

Dan Slagter, Grand Rapids E

Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –

Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Juan Gonzalez, Jenison E

Position 8 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 9 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

4 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

3 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Delegate

4 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Alternate

5 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Elections Chair: Wendy Winston,

wendy.winston@att.net

REGION 10

Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Tammy Armbruster, Mt Morris E

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large

Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Felicia Naimark, Flint E

Position 8 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#Marsha Turner, Beecher E

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 9 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Delegate

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Stacey Hittle,

kamandkara@me.com

REGION 11

Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large

Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

4 positions*, immed. through

3/31/26: NNR

Position 7 – EA/ESP NEA RA At-Large

Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Jennifer Shelito, Tuscola ISD COPT

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25:

#Toni Scribner, Vassar E

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27:

#Roger Rothe, Birch Run E

Position 8 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#Tracy Brightman, Vassar E

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Marci LaValley, Unionville-Sebewaing E

Position 9 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

5 positions, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Cassie Hill, Harbor Beach E

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#Jennifer Shelito, Tuscola ISD COPT

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same

seat as above: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27:

#Marci LaValley, Unionville-Sebewaing E

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

KEY:

= Elected by acclamation

* = Minority 3-1(g) position

\$ = Funded NEA RA position

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
Elections Chair: Jennifer Shelito,
jshelito@mea.org

REGION 12

Position 7 – EA/ESP NEA RA At-Large
Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Jerry Lombardo, Midland City E
Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/25:
#Daryl Phillips, Beaverton E
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR
Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$
1 position, immed. through 3/31/26:
#Kelly Fischer, Beaverton E
1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR
Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$
3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Daryl Phillips, Beaverton E
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR
Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
1 position, immed. through 3/31/26:
#Kelly Fischer, Beaverton E
1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate
2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Elections Chair: Jenny VanDuinen,
jjvandu@svsu.edu

REGION 13

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:
#Deeann Skov, Fruitport E
Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 5 – EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate
– Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Deeann Skov, Fruitport E
Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/25: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR
Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$
3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$
3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
3 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR
Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:
Sue Federico, Reeths Puffer OP
Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate
3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Elections Chair: Sue Federico,
suefederico@yahoo.com

REGION 14

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/
NEA RA Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:
#Greta Brock, Boyne City E
Position 3 – MEA RA At-Large Delegate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
2 positions*, immed. through
3/31/26: NNR

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
2 positions*, immed. through
3/31/26: NNR
Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
1 position, immed. through 8/31/27:
#Jessica Tippett, East Jordan E
Position 9 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$
3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 10 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Kara Wasylewski, Boyne City CFMOPT
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
Position 11 – ESP MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$
2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
1 position, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same
seat as above: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 14 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
Position 15 – ESP NEA RA
Cluster Alternate
2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Region 14 MAHE – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:
#Chet Jessick, North Central MI Coll E
Region 14 MAHE – EA MEA RA
Cluster Alternate \$
1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Elections Chair: Greta Brock,
gbrock@mea.org

REGION 15

Position 4 – MEA RA At-Large Alternate –
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large
Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR
Position 7 – EA/ESP NEA RA At-Large
Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
Position 8 – EA MEA RA
Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/27:
#Kaitlyn Ware, Pine River E
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

CANDIDATES IN THE MARCH REGION ELECTIONS

Position 9 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Delegate

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Not Available

REGION 16

Position 3 – MEA RA At-Large Delegate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Arielle Haske, Pickford E

Position 6 – EA NEA RA At-Large

Alternate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Stacy Geyer, DeTour E

Position 9 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Jane Bolm, Manistique E

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Angela Bjunes, Lake Superior St Univ CFGMO

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Al Beamish,

a-beamish@mymea.org

REGION 17

Position 1 – MEA Board of Directors/ NEA RA Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/25:

#Paulette Pepin, Gladstone E

Position 9 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 10 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:

#Kathleen Enright, Negaunee OPT

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 11 – ESP MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#Victoria Snyder, North Central E

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Position 14 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Delegate

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

Position 15 – ESP NEA RA

Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Paulette Pepin,

paulettelarson@chartermi.net

REGION 18

Position 8 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25: NNR

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Lisa Olson, Forest Park E

Position 9 – EA MEA RA

Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26:

#Morgan Raether, Adams Twp E

Position 12 – EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25:

#David Torola, Calumet E

Position 13 – EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Steve Elenich,

selenich@copperisd.org

REGION 50

Multiple candidates for Region 50 – listed in alphabetical order

Region 50 – ESP NEA RA At-Large Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/25:

Jaime Frank, Saginaw Valley St U CM;

Robert Gaines, III, Farmington OP

Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community

CFMOPT;

Chelsea Ott, Waverly FOP;

Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT;

Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above:

Jaime Frank, Saginaw Valley St U CM;

Robert Gaines, III, Farmington OP;

Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community

CFMOPT;

Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT;

Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26:

Jaime Frank, Saginaw Valley St U CM;

Robert Gaines, III, Farmington OP;

Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community

CFMOPT;

Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT;

Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

Region 50 – ESP NEA RA At-Large Delegate – Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

2 positions*, immed. through 8/31/26:

Robert Gaines, III, Farmington OP;

Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community

CFMOPT;

Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT;

Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/25:

Robert Gaines, III, Farmington OP;

Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community

CFMOPT;

Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/25, same seat as above:

Robert Gaines, III, Farmington OP;

Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community

CFMOPT;

Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT;

Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

KEY:

= Elected by acclamation

* = Minority 3-1(g) position

\$ = Funded NEA RA position

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February is a reminder of what matters most: your health. With American Heart Month and National Cancer Prevention Month upon us, it's a good reminder to prioritize your health and schedule a checkup.

MESSA makes it easy to care for yourself and loved ones with free annual physicals and preventive screenings — no cost to you, just peace of mind. That includes cancer screenings, such as colonoscopies and mammograms. If you see an in-network provider, these preventive checkups and exams are free under every MESSA plan.

You can also sign up for the free Teladoc Health Hypertension Management program. Qualifying members receive a blood pressure monitor, tips

on nutrition and one-on-one support from expert coaches.

Heart disease has been the No. 1 killer in the United States since 1950 and the top contributor is high blood pressure. Cancer follows as a close second leading cause of death for the past 75 years.

Your well-being is our top priority. We are all busy — we get it. And sometimes, because of all the running around we must do, our health takes a back seat. Don't wait — schedule your free annual exam or cancer screening today.

If you need help finding an in-network doctor, call us at 800-336-0013 or use our Find Care tool at messa.org/FindCare. To learn more about Teladoc Health, visit messa.org/Teladoc. ✓



*By Ross Wilson,
MESSA Executive Director*



Nominations sought for ESP Caucus Board

Nominations are being accepted for several positions on the MEA ESP Caucus Executive Board. Open positions are as follows:

AT-LARGE:

2 Positions – Sept. 1, 2025 to Aug. 31, 2028

DIRECTOR OF MINORITY CONCERNS

1 Position – Sept. 1, 2025 to Aug. 31, 2028

DIRECTOR BY CLASSIFICATION CUSTODIAN:

1 Position – Sept. 1, 2025 to Aug. 31, 2028

FOOD SERVICE:

1 Position – Sept. 1, 2025 to Aug. 31, 2028

MAINTENANCE:

1 Position – Sept. 1, 2025 to Aug. 31, 2028

PARAPROFESSIONAL:

1 Position – Sept. 1, 2025 to Aug. 31, 2028

TRANSPORTATION:

1 Position – Immediate to Aug. 31, 2026

Elections to the ESP Caucus Executive Board will take place during the MEA Spring Representative Assembly on May 9-10, 2025.

Information needed for each candidate includes: name, present occupation, home address, home and work telephone numbers, home email address, school district, name of nominee's local ESP association and written consent of the candidate running for office.

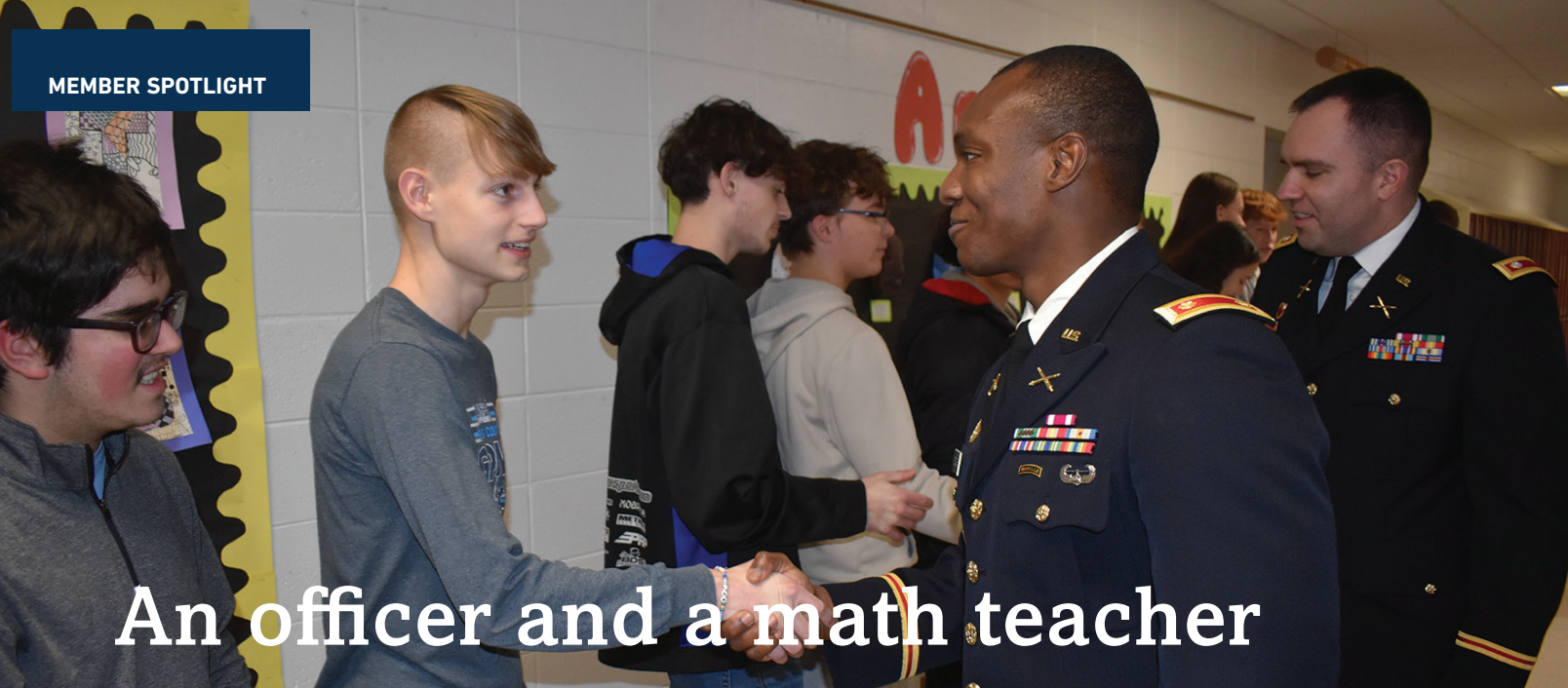
Candidates and nominators must be members in good standing of MEA/NEA. To receive delegate mailing

labels, information must be received no later than March 10, 2025. Mail to: Gezelle Oliver, MEA/ESP Department, PO Box 2573, 1216 Kendale Blvd., East Lansing, MI 48826-2573, or email to goliver@mea.org.

Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor at the MEA/ESP Caucus meeting on Friday, May 9, 2025. Candidates will be given up to three minutes to address delegates.

Biographical sketches can be sent to Heather Traxler, MEA staff assistant to the ESP Caucus, via htraxler@mea.org. She will send them collectively to all ESP RA Delegates in good standing.

Direct election questions to Jim Sparapani, ESP Caucus Elections Chairperson, at 906-779-1984 or via email to jsparapani@att.net. ✓



An officer and a math teacher

MEA member Kossi Komlassan has led soldiers in combat and teenagers in math class.

Both of those identities recently came together in one room at Beaverton Junior/Senior High School (BJSHS) when the third-year educator received a promotion in the Michigan Army National Guard in a ceremony before his family, school community, and the sophomores he teaches.

Komlassan advanced from Captain to Major, a rise from company-grade to field-grade officer, which he compared to going from senior teacher to principal. “It means the world to me that my leadership saw the potential in me to take on that much more responsibility,” Komlassan said.

Born in Togo in West Africa, Komlassan immigrated to the U.S. in second grade and grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. After nearly 10 years of U.S. Army active duty, living out a dream to serve his country, he enlisted in the National Guard and settled near Midland with his wife and two children.

His unique life experiences have equipped him to teach math in a way that even reluctant learners can embrace, he says. As a youngster who did not speak English, Komlassan spent his early years in school struggling to understand academic content — except when math time rolled around.

“It was the only class that made sense, because mathematics is a universal language,” he said.

He teaches geometry in addition to his Guard duties, sometimes using scenarios from his time as an artillery officer to demonstrate concepts such as angles and distance. “That application of geometry helps them understand terminology and how important it is to make correct calculations.”

His greatest reward is seeing students grow from fearful to confident. “I know that everyone can learn math, so it makes me super excited when I see a kid get it. I think, *Yeah — you’ve always known this.*”

Komlassan began as an officer after completing Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC) while earning a bachelor’s degree in mathematics on a track and football scholarship at Olivet Nazarene University in Illinois. There he met wife Rebecca, a Michigan native who became a pastor.

He deployed overseas in Korea and in Iraq, where he led a combat unit of 12 soldiers during the battle for the city of Mosul — the largest urban battle since World War II. Komlassan was in charge of artillery, mortars, attack aviation and fixed-wing aviation.

He has learned about leadership from both his military and education roles, he says. Teenagers are not much different than young soldiers, but he reminds himself that students need

guidance to learn from mistakes while wrong choices can mean life-or-death consequences for soldiers.

“Under any circumstances, a good leader has to know that — however you feel — your attitude and the non-verbal, physical cues you’re giving will permeate throughout the organization.”

Komlassan also learned the importance of empathy in leadership from an ROTC instructor in college who once paid for his airfare to Georgia when he couldn’t afford to go home for Christmas. “That act had such a significant impact on my life,” he said.

He loves the military’s camaraderie and brings that ethos to his classroom. “I always remind myself of that impact I can have with a kid like me, who maybe doesn’t have as much money. Every student has potential to be a great citizen and have a life that’s beneficial to the community.”

BJSHS Principal Renee Inscho said after the ceremony — which was attended by sophomores and live-streamed to other classes — Komlassan teaches students about more than math.

“He knows all about leadership, commitment, and getting the job done well,” Inscho said. “He’s an excellent role model for our kids, and it’s a proud day for Beaverton Schools.” ▼

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