

MEA voice

**UP students boost
sustainability**

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**Secretary averts
tragedy**

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Leading on Literacy

**'Everyone needs
to get involved'**

LETTER TO MEMBERS:

Literacy demands consistency

Student literacy promises to be a major topic throughout 2026, with Gov. Gretchen Whitmer committing to it as a top issue for her final year in office.

Regardless of test scores and political spin, we can all agree that improving student literacy is an educational imperative. We can and must help every student improve reading skills needed for personal, social, economic and civic engagement.

Michigan has already taken important steps with a new reading law that emphasizes research-based instructional practices — instead of test-and-punish models like third-grade retention.

Success in helping every student develop literacy skills and a love for reading will come down to consistency, resources and dedication.

Changing approaches year after year undermines both educators' and students' ability to make long-term gains. Experts agree that we need to stick to a plan for years to see the student outcomes we desire — not impatiently bounce from one idea to another.

From there, educators need high-quality training in evidence-based instructional practices and the tools necessary to do the job with each individual student.

Michigan must commit to getting great professional development, curriculum and tools into the hands of every educator — and ensure that you are compensated for the time needed to master new approaches rooted in the science of reading.

Nothing is more key to the success of students than the teaching and support provided by qualified, caring educators working with them every day. Great educators who are well-trained and fully resourced can help every student maximize their potential.

Your expertise is invaluable in this work, and MEA is committed to being a champion for our profession in conversations about student literacy. This magazine highlights just some of the great work our members are doing — and we're proud to work every day to support you.



*Chandra Madafferi,
MEA President & CEO*



*Brett Smith,
Vice President*



*Aaron Eling,
Secretary-Treasurer*

Quotables

“If this bill package passes today, we will have passed two very solid school policy bills in the past month, indicating that yes, we can come together across the aisle and across chambers to do the right things for kids, parents and schools.”

Sen. Dayna Polehanki, chair of the Senate Education Committee, on passage of bipartisan bills banning student cell phone use during class — with emergency and medical use exceptions — and requiring school districts to adopt cell phone policies. Previously the Legislature passed a measure eliminating ACT Work Keys from the Michigan Merit Exam. Work Keys has been replaced by a new workplace readiness assessment, which juniors are now allowed to opt-out from taking.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

62nd MEA/MAEA Art Exhibition

Artists can submit digital entries for the 2026 juried MEA/MAEA Art Acquisitions Purchase Exhibition from March 1-22. This year's 62nd annual event includes a new Award category in addition to Best of Show, Juror's Choice, and MEA Purchase awards: Promoting Peace through Art. 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 open in April. Visit mea.org/art to find information and the online entry form.



Marquette Alternative High School teacher Brian Prill has helped make the school a leader in environmental sustainability, CTE, and redefining the role of alternative ed. Read more, page 15.



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



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On the cover: Educators such as David Pelc of Romulus are shifting how they teach young readers and ensuring classroom voices are valued as new literacy laws take effect. Photo by Miriam Garcia, stories on pages 7-14.

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MEA VOICE

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Supporting students amid immigration fear and uncertainty

As educators, MEA members are committed to the safety and well-being of students, families and the communities we all call home. We believe schools and communities should be places of learning and belonging, and they should be safe for all.

Whether it's in Minnesota or here in Michigan, the fear and trauma immigration enforcement is creating for children and families is real and harmful. Aside from the obvious and life-altering impacts on those experiencing these events firsthand, students here and across the country are watching these events unfold, often live and unfiltered via social media.

MEA is committed to staying focused on student needs while ensuring our members are protected. Members can access regularly updated information in two key areas at mea.org/immigration or use the QR code above.

Legal and Employment Guidance on Immigration Issues

See the resources NEA has compiled to assist with situations when immigration enforcement impacts your school or worksite. **The most essential element to remember: DO NOT attempt to handle situations on your own.** Follow established district or employer procedures and notify administration and your local MEA office immediately. Reach out to MEA local leadership and staff for assistance, support or answers to questions.

Calls to Action and Other Ways to Help

Ways for MEA members to take action on immigration issues can change on a daily basis, including calls to contact Congress or the Michigan Legislature to influence legislation, webinars with more information, or events happening in local communities.

NEA is partnering with ACLU nationally on this issue. In addition to watching here for actions to take, ACLU of Michigan is a great resource for MEA members who want to engage further — learn more at [ACLU Mich.org](https://ACLUMich.org).

Quotables

“There are no words to fully capture the pain, fear and disruption this causes for our scholars and their loved ones. To see our families targeted in this way is a violation of the sense of safety that every member of our community deserves.”

Alena Zachery-Ross, superintendent of Ypsilanti Community Schools, in a Jan. 27 letter to the community on arrests of several parents during student drop-off, at a bus stop away from district property, by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.



Education Minnesota IN ACTION

The sight of another vacant desk or empty square on the kindergarten reading rug broke the hearts of Minnesota educators who faced intensified immigration enforcement in December and January.

They used their fear and sadness as NEA members do: to galvanize action. They organized, stood in solidarity with parents, and made sure their children have what they need — including students hiding with their families from warrantless arrests.

Already the hubs of communities, schools became the grocery stores, laundromats, and even the banks, in some cases. Minneapolis-area educators, such as teachers Lorna Plana and Naomi Stenson (pictured), delivered supplies when needed.

“Teachers and school staff are the ones who have trust with families. So many people want to help, but right now, we are the people who can do this,” Plana said.

“We’re not superheroes,” Stenson added. “We’re all just regular people...doing small things. But those small things can add up.”

Adapted from NEA Today, “As Fear Grips Schools, Minnesota Educators Mobilize to Protect Students and Families.” Read the full story at mea.org/immigration.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

Advance your degree without debt

MEA is creating pathways for members to secure less expensive graduate credits, a move made more vital since the U.S. Department of Education announced plans to cap federal student loans available to pursue certain graduate degrees, including education and social work.

A new MEA offering allows members to earn up to nine post-graduate college credits per year through an annual subscription for just \$275 – and choose from a variety of online courses to address their professional development interests.

The PD Course Subscription gives MEA members access to online non-matriculated graduate courses for one low annual fee through a partnership with Lake Superior State University (LSSU) and Virtual Education Software, Inc. (VESI).

Members who purchase the \$275 annual subscription can enroll in one course per term (or two courses during summer if fall or spring term is skipped) for a total of three courses and nine credit hours per year – less than the typical cost of one graduate credit hour.

Credits earned can be used to renew a credential or move lanes on a salary schedule, in addition to building professional knowledge and skills.

Course topics cover a wide range from classroom management to differentiated instruction; community building; reading, writing and math instruction; teaching students who are at-risk, have special needs, are gifted and talented or English language learners; early childhood development; and more.

Many MEA members have already taken advantage of this program.

Melissa Nita, a Troy Schools teacher, has taken multiple courses with plans to advance a lane this summer.

The option was “very affordable and not too stressful to do while teaching and mommying two littles,” Nita said.

Another teacher from Troy, Corinn Puzzuoli, had a whirlwind year where she completed her Master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and earned enough credits through this program to jump two lanes on the salary scale.

“I was eager to shift my focus and explore the behavioral, social, and emotional aspects of student development,” Puzzuoli said. “I selected Behavior Is Language, Understanding Aggression, and Social and Emotional Learning (courses).

“Through these courses, I gained a deeper understanding of the ‘why’ behind common student behaviors, along with practical strategies to better support students’ needs. I also strengthened my approach to social and emotional learning, helping me create a more inclusive, supportive, and well-rounded classroom community.”

Leanne Cockrell, who teaches at Delta-Schoolcraft Intermediate School District, has taken courses entitled “Behavior is Language” and “Typical and Atypical Child Development.”

Cockrell liked that the courses were flexible, requirements were clear, communication with the professors and submitting work is easy, and the courses are directly related to her current teaching position, which is first- and second-grade mildly cognitively impaired students.

Cockrell said, “In taking these courses, I have moved over lanes, going from a Masters to a Masters +15. My salary has increased and I’ve gained valuable knowledge. It’s been a win-win for myself and my family.” **V**



Puzzuoli



Cockrell



Nita

For additional information or to register, go to mea.org/graduate-credit-partnership.



Take care of your mental health – *MESSA can help*

While supporting your students, schools and community can be rewarding, it can also wear you down mentally. That's why every MESSA health plan includes comprehensive mental health for every stage of your life.

Support, your way

Whether you prefer traditional in-person support or a virtual option, MESSA offers you the care you need at every stage of life.

In-person visits

MESSA provides excellent coverage for mental health services. For more information or to find an in-network provider, call (800) 336-0013 or visit messa.org/FindCare.

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Connect with a licensed therapist or U.S. board-certified psychiatrist to get treatment for grief, anxiety, depression and more. These visits require an appointment. Evening and weekend appointments are available.

Appointments are subject to deductible, copayment and/or coinsurance, depending on your plan. Download the Teladoc app or call (800) 835-2362 for more information.

MyStressTools

This is a free suite of stress management and wellness resources. Just take a confidential "Stress Profiler" quiz to identify your stress and anxiety. Based on your answers, MyStressTools provides you with information, strategies and resources tailored to your needs. Learn more at messa.org/MyStressTools.

Calm Health app

MESSA members 13 and older now have free 24/7 access to digital mental health support through the convenient Calm Health app. The Calm Health app offers personalized, self-guided mental health programs created by psychologists.

To get started:

- Download the Calm Health app
- Create an account
- If prompted, use access code **bcbsmi**
- Answer a few quick questions about how you're feeling
- Get program recommendations just for you

Through Calm Health, you'll receive:

- Custom treatment plans tailored to your needs
- Sleep support
- Meditations and soundscapes
- Guided programs for anxiety, depression, chronic illness and more

Produced by the same company, Calm Health app is different from the popular Calm app, which is a subscription-based program. For more information, visit calmhealth.onelink.me/cfkt/bcbsmi.

We're here to help

You can find more information on mental health services offered at MESSA at messa.org/MentalHealth. If you have questions about your benefits, call our Member Service Center at (800) 336-0013. You can also connect with us via live chat through your MyMESSA account or the MESSA app. ✓



Educators prepare for literacy changes

Burry photo by Kim Kozlowski

*Stories by Brenda Ortega,
MEA Voice Editor*

As in most stories of change, the timeline of MEA member David Pelc's teaching transformation marks a few key events building up to the pivotal moment.

Early on, a volunteer experience spent reading books with youngsters in disadvantaged communities hooked him on the joys of teaching and spurred him to become an educator.

Later, burnout settled in after 16 years of teaching at an elementary school in Romulus and feeling exhausted by facing greater needs than he could meet.

After switching roles to become a reading interventionist, expecting to be renewed by working one-on-one or in small groups, he grew frustrated by ineffective curriculum he was supplied — much like other districts used.

Finally, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Pelc's sense of inadequacy became too much to bear as he tried to teach the youngest students, who were struggling to learn foundational reading skills, from the other side of a computer screen.

It was hard to schedule meeting times with kids on his caseload. Some showed up only sporadically. He kept teaching the same sight words to the same kids who weren't getting it.

"That was probably the heart of defeat for me," he said. "That's where I started going to the internet and just trying to find different things that would work, and I started talking to people online and looking up things."

Pelc read work by researcher David Kilpatrick, emeritus professor at New York State University College at Cortland. "I always knew about phonemic awareness, but I didn't understand how strong of a predictor it is for reading success. And I didn't know how to

practice it."

One exploration led to another. Then, "I came across the famous Facebook page," he said.

The private Facebook group he joined, Science of Reading-What I Should Have Learned in College, today boasts 243,000 members. In 2020, it was a year old and growing.

"It was the best professional development. They hosted free webinars. They would support you when you asked questions about different programs. People were generously sharing resources, sharing slides. Somebody bought me a set of decodables."

So began a multi-year effort to change how he taught kids to read. In 2022 Pelc took what many consider to be the Cadillac of trainings — LETRS — previously out of his financial reach, made available through a grant from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE).

The next year, he took a no-cost,

grant-funded training through his intermediate school district — Wayne RESA — on a high-quality scope and sequence program, UFLI Foundations, from the University of Florida Literacy Institute. Pelc then crowd-sourced funding to get certified in EBLI (Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction).

Seeing results with students kept up his motivation to continue learning and shifting his practice, Pelc said. “Unfortunately, it’s complicated and messy. I wish it wasn’t, but it is.”

To help others, Pelc started one of many state-level offshoots of the original Facebook group. Michigan Science of Reading-What I Should Have Learned in College now has 4,300 members.

His experiences have taught him how policymakers and school leaders should approach implementation of new laws aimed at improving reading instruction and literacy outcomes.

That expertise got Pelc invited to join a

panel discussion at an all-day Literacy Summit at the Michigan Science Center in Detroit, part of Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s push to make literacy a top priority of her last year in office. *(See related story, page 14.)*

“We need systems that develop, coach and support teachers and don’t overwhelm them,” Pelc told nearly 300 education, business and non-profit leaders at the summit in December. “We must create a safe learning environment... and we have to pay educators for their extra time.”

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

MEA member Ashleigh Burry agrees it’s more important to invest in educators and their knowledge than expensive curricula stamped with the latest terminology.

The 20-year classroom veteran and Novi elementary teacher stressed the science of reading is an important body of research — not a commercial program: “That’s my number-one message. Curriculum doesn’t teach kids; teachers do.”

Her nuanced view as a literacy teacher reflects the wariness of educators pushed and pulled in the so-called “Reading Wars,” a decades-long debate over methods: phonics vs. whole language, decoding vs. immersion in high-interest content and authentic tasks.

The answer is not either-or; it’s both-and, Burry said.

She acknowledges that many pre-service teachers in college — herself included — were not adequately taught how to do explicit phonics instruction in favor of teaching kids to use cueing to decipher an unfamiliar word through context clues.

What’s new in literacy, dyslexia laws

MEA member **Andrea Ward** knows the devastating effects that reading struggles can have on a child’s self-esteem. Ward was diagnosed with dyslexia in fifth grade and has dedicated her life to helping others who struggle in school.

“Reading struggles shape who (kids) think they are and what they believe about their ability levels,” she said. “I remember believing that I was less capable, less able than my peers.”

A special education teacher in Grosse Pointe, Ward appreciates Michigan’s new literacy and dyslexia laws — passed by the Legislature with bipartisan support and signed by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2024. Both measures go into effect in the 2027-28 school year.

The laws require school districts to train teachers in the body of research known as the science of reading and use evidence-based curriculum for whole-class instruction and targeted interventions. Each year K-3 students must be screened for dyslexia.

K-3 assessments and reading plans required under the Read by Grade Three law remain.

The state has issued a preliminary list of approved assessments and curricula for use in instruction, monitoring and targeted support. The vetting process continues through Sept. 30.

For decades, so-called “Reading Wars” have debated the primacy of phonics or whole language instruction. Explicit teaching of phonics was overlooked despite research showing its efficacy.

“It can’t be one or the other,” said Ward, who holds a master’s degree in special education and a doctorate in leadership. “There needs to be a balance between good text and good instruction.”

Ward hopes the laws will prevent children from slipping through cracks in the system, which will require adequate training and supports for teachers as part of a long-term commitment.

“This can’t be this year’s or this decade’s fad,” Ward said, also warning against over-reliance on technology. “There’s no replacement for a skilled, well-trained teacher working with a student.”



Literacy leader cultivates joy

Dionna Roberts wears multiple hats, but she likes to say, “Literacy is my ‘jam,’ meaning my job and motivation for the work I do.”

A longtime educator, now a principal and current president of the Michigan Reading Association (MRA), Roberts describes her core philosophy as a balance between the technical “science of reading” and the motivational “art of teaching.”

She agrees that explicit instruction in phonics is crucial to building kids’ foundational reading skills, but she wants to make sure reading love remains part of the equation too.

“If we are not cultivating a culture of literacy where books are celebrated and stories are sources of joy, then why would kids want to learn how to read? Reading is a hard task to do. Are we modeling reading? Are we making reading a part of what we do and how we operate?”

The MEA-Retired member is in her third year as principal of Lincoln International Studies School in Kalamazoo Public Schools after spending 17 years as an elementary teacher and three years as a literacy coach in the district.

As MRA president, she champions “literacy for all” as an equity issue that requires breaking down systemic barriers, including access to culturally relevant books, certified teachers, and the best teaching practices, saying, “Every child has a right to read.”

Roberts’ district is ahead of upcoming requirements in Michigan’s new literacy and dyslexia laws, having already adopted a highly regarded phonics program for K-5 use called “UFLI Foundations” from the University of Florida Literacy Institute.

The next step is ensuring teachers receive good training, so they can determine how to use the program to best effect, Roberts said. “I would never take away the professional judgment of educators. I respect them too much for that.”

Mark your calendars for upcoming inspiration, she noted. The MRA conference in Lansing, March 6-8, will feature Anita Archer, a renowned expert in structured literacy. Learn more at michiganreading.org.



She soon learned readers need it all: phonics plus meaning and motivation.

“I don’t know that there’s disagreement about whether we need both explicit instruction and the kinds of experiences with literature that make us think and feel and love to read. Reading is knowledge. My goal has always been to help my students become readers and enjoy reading.”

In recent years, more than 40 states, including Michigan, have passed laws requiring research-based reading instruction, following years of flat reading test scores nationwide and a growing equity gap between students from high and low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Like Pelc, Burry is completing free LETRS training through the MDE, an expensive and time-consuming course — requiring 160 hours over two years to finish — which is not a curriculum but instead delves into the latest research on how the brain learns to read.

LETRS, or Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling, covers the “why” and the “how” of

best practices, empowering educators to better understand how to evaluate, diagnose and address students’ reading difficulties.

When she finishes, Burry will move up one lane on the salary schedule with the credits earned.

Meanwhile, she’s piloting structured literacy programs, which feature a systematic, sequential method for teaching reading skills: sounds, sound-symbol awareness, syllables, word parts, syntax, and meaning.

Ultimately the goal remains to have highly skilled, well-trained educators, equipped with good-quality tools, who can help kids develop all of the essential literacy skills, from decoding to fluency, vocabulary and comprehension — with reading enjoyment.

“As a profession, we need to be able to adapt on the spot,” she said. “As a teacher, I need to do what works with the kids that are in front of me. To do that, we need training and support to keep up with the most current information.”

Literacy Coach Patricia Clancy echoed Burry’s thoughts. Job-embedded

professional training for educators is the key to strengthening reading instruction, she said. Teachers’ knowledge, expertise and decision-making are the most critical factors for fostering student success.

“If you look at the research on LETRS and where it’s been effective, in all of that research it’s always been paired with coaching,” Clancy said. “Teachers need support to apply their learning. It’s



Farlee



Burry photo by Kim Kozlowski



Becker



Raether

the teacher that matters.”

A longtime educator and MEA member who has been a classroom teacher, an interventionist, and now works as a state-funded ISD early literacy coach in Midland, Clancy has been around long enough — 36 years — to recall Reading First, a six-year \$1 billion federal push to shift K-3 reading instruction toward research-based practices.

Part of President George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Reading First became mired in allegations that states and districts were pushed to adopt poor-quality teaching programs by consultants who benefited financially. Major studies showed few reading comprehension gains.

Clancy wants to make sure the focus stays on empowering educators and maintaining local control over curricular choices. Top-down mandates and vendor-driven, one-size-fits-all, scripted curricula do not work, she said.

In December, the MDE issued initial lists of two assessments for screening and monitoring for dyslexia and 14 tier-1, class-wide reading curricula approved for use by districts beginning in the 2027-28 school year. The lists were required under the reading law passed in 2024.

Additional periods to submit assessments and curricula for review and potential inclusion on the lists run through September. Find information about how to submit an assessment or

curriculum by searching “K-12 literacy and dyslexia law” at [Michigan.gov](https://www.michigan.gov).

The state’s funding of LETRS training and emphasis on literacy coaching are positive trends in the right direction, Clancy said, adding another bright spot has been the development of more decodable texts that are engaging and fun to read.

“Coupled with the Literacy Essentials, teachers now have the tools they need to focus their instruction on the practices that reading science has shown to work.”

Michigan Literacy Essentials are a state-adopted set of research-supported instructional practices to improve literacy outcomes for young learners. Developed and updated by the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) in collaboration with educators and literacy experts, these practices define a minimum standard of effective literacy instruction that should occur in every classroom, every day. These practices are not a curriculum but a framework grounded in decades of research that guides professional learning, classroom instruction, and coaching.

“Don’t get me wrong; having good-quality curriculum is important,” Clancy said. “But what matters most is teachers’ understanding of how children become literate and the decisions they make in those discretionary spaces.”

MEA member [Rebecca Farlee](#) is a new

literacy coach this year in Montcalm County's Carson City-Crystal schools, a mid-Michigan district of 1,000 students. A 25-year veteran teacher, Farlee is helping prepare for changes under the new literacy laws.

So far she has focused on building trust among the elementary teachers she serves by listening to what they need and delivering resources that include ready-to-use lessons and materials. She also does regular classroom read-alouds and related activities.

"Read-alouds have been a super fun part of the role that is the perfect opportunity to model," she said. "They can be a valuable way to build (kids') foundational skills but also language comprehension pieces — building background knowledge, building vocabulary."

Like all teachers, Farlee has continued learning throughout her career and now is finishing up a master's degree in reading. She has long

understood the importance of phonics; early on she was trained in the Orton-Gillingham approach for students with learning difficulties.

"The science of reading is real, and it's here to stay," she said. "I don't think it's a pendulum swing. The research has been there for a long, long time, and it has been ignored for a long, long time."

The LETRS training she recently completed has been more valuable than any course she's taken through her degree programs, Farlee said. Nothing she learned, however, changes her reason for being with students.

"My number-one goal is to get kids to love reading, to love books — and giving them choice in what they want to read and giving them time to do it."

To that end, she also hopes eventually to take on the task of trying to revitalize the school's library as part of her coaching role. Since the district no longer has



a certified librarian, use of the library has dwindled and the book collection has stagnated.

"There's data out there showing that schools with a librarian have higher test scores," she said. "It's sort of been my mantra: if literacy is valued, then the first thing you see when you walk in the door should be text — words, books, stories."

Leaders from the Michigan Association of School Librarians (MASL) validate Farlee's assertion, yet only 9% of school buildings in Michigan have

A case study in Waterford

Waterford Education Association President **Mary Craite** has been teaching for 40 years. After completing the literacy training known as LETRS — which stands for Language Essentials for Teaching Reading and Spelling — she's ready to teach another 40.

"LETRS is among the best professional development that I've had in my career," Craite said.

The training provided her "missing pieces," she said. Skilled reading is word recognition (decoding) multiplied by language comprehension (making meaning): Without both, "One times zero is still zero."

A misconception about the "science of reading" is that it only refers to phonics instruction, but it covers the five pillars of literacy: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

LETRS is "curriculum agnostic," meaning it teaches knowledge that can be used with any curriculum. Michigan is among 32 states contracting with Lexia, the company that houses LETRS, to provide teacher training.

The Waterford School District and the local union agreed to leverage federal COVID-relief funds and state literacy grants to pay a stipend for every K-5 teacher to complete LETRS. The district also adopted a new evidence-based curriculum, HMH.

The partnership between the district and union was critical to achieving nearly 100% staff completion, which has been "transformational," Waterford Superintendent Adam Martin told attendees at the Michigan Literacy Summit in December. (See related story, page 14.)

"The staff in every one of my elementary buildings talks about how impactful the LETRS training has been on their ability to meet the needs of every student in their classes," Martin said.

The result has been steady growth in NWEA assessments and state M-STEP scores in every building and grade level. There is no magic — only shared commitment, hard work and belief, agreed Waterford Assistant Superintendent Darin Holley.

"We really embraced our inner Dan Campbell," Holley said, referring to the Detroit Lions coach known for gutsy play-calling. "It was fourth down and a mile to go, and we went for it."



Libraries and literacy go hand-in-hand



The decline in literacy test scores in Michigan over the past few decades parallels the dramatic loss of certified school librarians across the state, say two MEA members who also lead the Michigan Association of School Librarians (MASL).

Librarians are literacy leaders with expertise in book collection development, information literacy instruction, and defending intellectual freedom, said MEA member **Christine Beachler**, a Lowell schools librarian and MASL immediate past president, who attended the Michigan Literacy Summit in December. (See related story, page 14.)

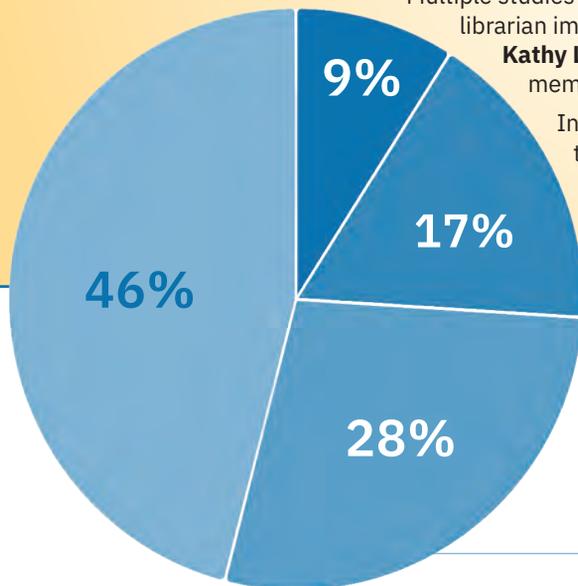
School librarians make a wide range of books and resources affordable and accessible to every child. They teach reading skills and digital literacy. Yet only 9% of Michigan school buildings have a full-time certified librarian, Beachler notes.

“Teaching kids to read is wonderful, but school librarians pick up from that point and build cultures of reading,” Beachler said. “Librarians help students discover books they love and continue to foster love of reading and critical thinking skills.”

Multiple studies have shown access to school libraries staffed with a full-time certified librarian improves student achievement, and at-risk students benefit most, says **Kathy Lester**, a former school librarian in Plymouth-Canton, MEA-Retired member and MASL advocacy chair.

In Mississippi, which policymakers like to cite as making literacy gains over time, school districts must employ a number of certified school librarians based on student enrollment.

“If you want to improve literacy in Michigan, you need to staff modern libraries with certified teaching librarians,” Lester said.



Michigan School Library Staffing (as of Dec. 2024)

- 9%** Buildings with certified Media Specialist at least 1 FTE
- 17%** Additional buildings with certified Media Specialist at any FTE
- 28%** Additional buildings with uncertified Library Staff at any FTE
- 46%** Buildings with NO Library Staff

* FTE = Full Time Equivalent

a full-time certified school librarian, ranking the state 46th in the nation in librarian-to-student ratio. (See related story above.)

First-grade teacher Alicia Becker can relate to knowing what’s missing but not having power to fix it. A longtime



MEA member in Oakland County’s Hazel Park, who has taught everything up to eighth grade and reading intervention, Becker lamented that educators’ “hands were tied” for years.

“Depending on what district you taught in, for a long time we were mandated to teach programs that didn’t have much if any phonics in them,” she said. “It’s very frustrating; teachers should have some autonomy over how they teach in their classrooms.”

In years past, teachers would return from professional development sessions that covered evidence-based practices and be told to keep with the approved curriculum even though it didn’t fully align with the research, Becker said.

Since then, Becker and other Hazel Park educators have completed LETRS training, for which the district used state grant money to pay each a \$1,000 stipend upon completion. In addition, Becker used the credits to advance a lane on the salary schedule to master’s plus 15.

LETRS was fascinating, and Becker experienced “lots of lightbulb moments,” she said. It was exciting to learn about explicit teaching practices that could fill some gaps in her knowledge — and to have the ability to put new ideas into practice.

That is not to say phonics is a be-all, end-all solution to improving literacy, or that deeper, more advanced skills

aren't as important, she added.

"Out of my whole morning, I spend about 40 minutes doing phonics. It's just one piece of the foundational blocks that kids need, but for a long time we were not teaching it in a systematic way every day."

MEA member Julie VanLier faced similar frustrations as a kindergarten teacher in Kentwood schools when she moved from a building that served an affluent part of the 9,500-student district to a school in a high-poverty area.

The literacy approaches she'd always used no longer worked. Students needed more support, but she didn't know how to provide it. Seeking answers, she discovered EBLI (Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction) and paid out-of-pocket to take a course and become certified.

Several years later, VanLier said 95-100% of her kindergartners learn to read. Not only that, student behavior problems decreased. Now she's a passionate advocate who helps others when they ask for guidance and helps to tutor struggling older students in her prep time.

"Changing what I did wasn't easy; I had to push aside a lot of ingrained beliefs," VanLier said. "But when I changed, I saw huge differences."

Founded 25 years ago in Genesee County, EBLI uses a speech-to-text model that proponents say works with struggling readers of any age. Rather than beginning with letters-to-sounds, this approach starts with sounds and shows letter combinations to make them.

VanLier contends that educators shifting their methods to evidence-based practices should expect to feel uncomfortable at first, because changes to core teaching practices need to be more than surface level — instead transformative. "For me, it's been life-changing."

She believes the biggest obstacle to the state's initiative to improve literacy is school districts purchasing teaching materials that only superficially embrace labels and buzzwords without truly giving classroom teachers the knowledge and tools for mastery.

Armed with in-depth understanding of how children learn to read, VanLier said she only needs whiteboards, dry-erase markers and magnetic letters for every child to grasp phonics.

"It's such a paradigm shift. My kids now can do harder things than what kids at my old school could have done from a higher socio-economic status. And the difference is how I go about teaching them."

MEA member Morgan Raether knows how critical it is for readers to have foundational skills. It's the focus of her job to help boost literacy skills at the secondary level in Adams Township schools in Painesdale, outside of Houghton in the Upper Peninsula.

Raether is in her second year as a reading specialist for the combined middle-high school where she has taught English and German for 12 years. Because not as many resources exist for secondary-level reading specialists, she's been designing the role as she goes.

She was part-time and reactive in the first year, providing one-on-one support to students who were struggling to read and write. This year, she's also added a more proactive approach — leading professional development promoting cross-curricular strategies.

"A lot of non-English teachers think they don't need to teach kids how to read by the time they're in middle school or high school, but it takes a different process to read, comprehend and analyze a math book versus a social studies text versus a historical document."

Raether presents strategies that cut across subjects and

offers materials others can use or adapt to their needs. "Reading and writing is for everybody to teach about because there are so many different types of text — and so much information — that our students need to be able to comprehend and use."

TO SUM IT ALL UP

It takes vulnerability for educators to change teaching practices, says David Pelc, the educator from Romulus who shared his science of reading journey at the governor's Literacy Summit.

"We teachers lose sleep over kids not making progress. The most frustrating feeling is not knowing how to help struggling readers."

For him, learning and making shifts in practice meant confronting sadness for kids he could have helped if he'd known what to do sooner. He turned it into motivation.

"Then I lost more sleep — because I was waking up really early to keep learning. My wife was like, 'What are you doing up at four o'clock in the morning?'"

Educators need consistency, resources, support and respect, Pelc told summit participants.

"Educators need time to practice and get good at this work. We need to have knowledgeable educators turning into leaders and mentors, and this is probably the most important — we need administrators that understand what good instruction looks like.

"Everyone needs to get involved; it's going to take a collective effort, but it gives me great hope for Michigan because this is what we're doing today." ✓



A SMITHSONIAN AFFILIATE

Students First
Michigan Department of Education

Summit highlights literacy

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer gathered hundreds of leaders from education, philanthropy, government and business in December to underline the need for shared responsibility to improve literacy – which she said in her final year in office, “will remain my number-one priority.”

“Helping every child read is tough; it’s a worthwhile goal. It’s a long-term project that will pay off in decades, not days,” she told 300 attendees at the Michigan Literacy Summit, co-hosted by new **Michigan State Superintendent of Public Instruction Glenn Maleyko**.

The all-day event at the Michigan Science Center in Detroit took stock of changes happening in Michigan one year into implementation of new literacy laws passed in 2024, which fully take effect in the 2027-28 school year.

The new laws require schools to screen for dyslexia and adopt

curriculum, instructional methods, and multi-tiered support for struggling readers that are grounded in the science of reading, which includes explicit teaching of phonics in the early grades.

Sens. Dayna Polehanki (D-Livonia) and Jeff Irwin (D-Ann Arbor) co-sponsored the legislation, which also requires teacher preparation programs to train aspiring educators in evidence-based practices.

So far adding funding to hire more literacy coaches, help districts buy state-approved curricula, and provide grants for teacher training has been the main focus for Whitmer and state legislators.

The summit also served as an introduction for Maleyko, the former superintendent of Dearborn Public Schools, new to the state’s top post leading the Michigan Department of Education.

Maleyko said a sustained and collaborative effort to improve literacy is a critical priority. He planned to embark on



a statewide listening tour to hear from students, educators and families.

“Improving literacy is not a partisan issue,” he said. “It’s a shared commitment to Michigan’s children... Do not body check your own teammates; we’re all on the same team.”

Several panel discussions explored complexity of reading skills beyond decoding and the roles of education partners such as out-of-school-time providers and the business community.

Panelist David Pelc, an MEA member reading interventionist in Romulus, started a private Facebook group, Michigan Science of Reading-What I Should Have Learned in College.

Educators need safe, collaborative spaces where they can talk about evidence, support each other, and improve instruction, Pelc said. “It’s important to see other people wrestling with all the different curricula and programs, and they can talk it out.”

Three panelists from Mississippi, who discussed their state’s success in lifting fourth-grade reading scores, said the key was a comprehensive strategy sustained over 20 years.

Michigan State Board of Education President Pamela Pugh said she appreciated the summit’s call for unity and urged continued focus on Michigan’s needs, which include higher pay to attract and retain educators and resources to support instruction.

“We need to continue to show that we prioritize education through getting the dollars to the classrooms and to our children,” Pugh said. ✓



Students in alternative school learn skills, build community

Marquette Alternative High School (MAHS) teacher Brian Prill has helped make the school a state-wide leader in environmental sustainability, Career and Technical Education, and in redefining the role of the alternative high school.

Prill, who teaches social studies, Spanish and a construction and work readiness course, provides a world view for his students, having completed Fulbright scholarships in Nepal and Germany and his student teaching in Ecuador.

Prill's international experiences helped him see the value of democracy in the U.S. His teaching philosophy is rooted in John Dewey's "Democracy and Education," published in 1916, which argues that a strong democracy must equally value vocational training and academics.

"They have to work together for our system to function," Prill said, explaining why he's spent the past several years involving all of his students in projects to make the district, Marquette community and world a better place.

Shining a light on education

Four years ago, Prill's students studied the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which include affordable and clean energy. The class concluded that powering MAHS with solar panels would improve environmental sustainability at Marquette Area Public Schools, a district of roughly 3,300 students along Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula.

The project would require ingenuity, study, willingness to learn from mistakes — and money. After exhausting traditional grant funding routes, Prill and his students found partners in the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians.

The tribes provided \$35,000 in seed money to tap a \$34,000 U.S. Department of Energy matching grant. The tribes had supported previous Prill-led projects, including building two local disc golf courses — Eagle Rock in Marquette and Superior Pines in Grand Marais.

The solar panel project also entailed community partnerships, including with Peninsula Solar, a Marquette-based solar panel installer.

This year, students will assess data from the system along with weather patterns and their impact on energy production. They are evaluating the feasibility of generating year-round electricity for the school. The 18.1-kilowatt system now produces a third of the school's power.

Since going online at the end of September, the solar panel system has generated almost 4,000 kilowatts of energy — a significant start for the project, Prill said.

With energy savings from the system, the school's new goal is to reinvest the savings along with additional money from fundraising events to expand the system until 100% of the school's energy is produced by solar, with potential to extend the program to other buildings.

"This is where the project gets really exciting," Prill said. "Not only do we get to celebrate a small step towards sustainability while studying real-time data from our system, but we also get to create a multiplier effect where our initial investment of time, energy and money grow and compound."

Bradley Miller, a 2022 Marquette Alternative High School graduate, was



involved in the early planning stages of the solar panel project. He learned about the leg work that goes into large-scale projects, such as attending meetings with Prill to obtain approval from the Township Board.

“Once they approved it, he didn’t just take it and do it all himself,” Miller recalled. “He taught the students actually how to write a grant. We did it as a class.”

Marquette Area Education Association (MAEA) President Chris Thoms advocated for the solar panel project for its benefits to students, whose involvement translated into work experiences.

“It was just making sure our central district administrators knew the value of his project. They saw it right away,” Thoms said.

Solving problems

Prill and his students continue to identify sustainability problems and local solutions, creating more hands-on learning opportunities.

Prill’s economics students took action when they learned of Colony Collapse Disorder, which occurs when the majority of worker bees in a hive die off or disappear. Related to climate change, the problem threatens essential pollination of crops and ecosystems.

The students installed an eight-panel plexiglass observation hive at the school, which is repopulated every February or March. They wrote letters to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency making the case to remove pesticides from food systems to protect the honeybee.

In spring, all of Prill’s students work together to tap local maple trees for syrup, process it, then sell the finished product. Proceeds fund microloans through Kiva, a nonprofit that aids aspiring business owners in the developing world — inspired by his Fulbright experience in Nepal.

Over 10 years, the maple syrup sales have raised \$3,000 for microloans to developing countries. The businesses repay the loans, which are used again to support new small businesses.

“It kind of builds this global aspect of the classroom of seeing these things have a real impact on the world,” Prill said. “It helps students understand their power to make the world a better place and their roles and responsibilities in doing so.”

NEW COALITION FOCUSES ON CLEAN ENERGY IN SCHOOLS

Educators are integral in establishing clean energy initiatives that prepare public school students for in-demand careers and promote environmental sustainability — all while saving money on energy costs that can be reinvested in our classrooms.

MEA member Brian Prill’s solar panel project in Marquette — which is already reducing his school’s carbon footprint — demonstrates how such programs provide climate job pathways for students, said MEA Vice President Brett Smith.

“While our students are still in our public-school hallways, these projects provide on-the-job training for good-paying, clean energy jobs that reduce energy costs,” Smith said. “They also support clean energy systems and upgrades to our schools, creating

healthier and safer learning spaces to help students succeed.

“In partnership with union tradespeople, educators can lead the way by providing strong career and technical education programs with hands-on learning opportunities that make a difference for students, communities and the environment.”

MEA is committed to supporting these efforts in schools statewide. That’s why we’re helping lead Michigan Climate Jobs — a new coalition dedicated to modernizing our schools’ energy infrastructure, showcasing renewable energy career opportunities for students, and ensuring clean energy work is done by skilled, union labor.

Stay tuned for more on this important new partnership.



The students also develop entrepreneurial skills, learning price points, costs of running a business, evaluating supply and demand, and investing profit.

Bringing CTE to Marquette

This school year, Prill helped launch a certified Career and Technical Education program in a partnership between his district and the Marquette-Alger Regional Education Service Agency. The CTE program is housed in existing shop space at the alternative high school.

Prill's Construction and Work Readiness class teaches students wood-working basics, including safely using power and hand tools to build small projects. Those students helped apply siding for a Habitat for Humanity project in Ishpeming in the fall.

The class partners with local unions and building organizations for "talent tours," in which students visit job sites to discover career opportunities and learn to cooperate, be on time, and develop a work ethic.

"A lot of it is that soft skill building, that grit to be a successful worker and employee in the trades," Prill said.

He was inspired to organize a CTE program in part during a 2022 Fulbright Teaching Global Classrooms scholarship in Germany, a world leader in vocational training and apprenticeships, which solidified Prill's belief in providing robust quality education for all students, not just the academically gifted.

Redefining the alternative

Prill initially thought his job at the alternative high school would be temporary, but 11 years later he remains part of a team that rarely experiences turnover.

Students enroll at Marquette Alternative High School by choice. School leaders identify potential candidates who are behind on credit hours, but the school's goal goes beyond restoring credits to actively engaging kids and getting them excited for the future.

However, the school's overarching goal isn't for kids to just earn credits but to get actively engaged about education and excited for their future, Prill explained.

"We're really successful at that," he said. "I think we've kind of turned the curve in our community, where the community sees the value of our work."

Miller, the 2022 graduate, found his learning home at the school after struggling to fit in at the traditional high school. It was much like an actual home, he said, including a "family room" where students discussed problems or challenges with teachers and staff.

It was the first time Miller felt teachers, including Prill, took time to understand him and how he learned. Today, Miller owns his own automotive glass and calibration business in Marquette.

"I used to be failing in school until I went there," he said. "I have no idea where I would be right now or the mental state I'd be in. That school changed my life. You'd really have to be there to see the magic of what they do in that school."

Violet Mattson, a senior in Prill's government class, transferred to the alternative school after receiving failing grades at Marquette Senior High School. With more individualized attention, she's gained self-confidence and now is dual-enrolled at Bay Mills Community College.

"I found my people," Mattson said. "I found teachers who care about me and want to see me succeed."

Mattson is headed to Northern Michigan University next year to pursue an early education degree. Through dual enrollment at Bay Mills, she is interning at a preschool down the street from the alternative high school.

"I enjoy it so much and it was just an amazing opportunity. I want to be that teacher who helps kids grow, basically," Mattson said.

Over the past decade, not only graduation rates have improved at the alternative high school, said Thoms, the MAEA president. The school's nurturing approach and community connections have boosted students' health and happiness, he asserted.

"The family meetings they do are some of the best programming our district offers," Thoms said. "This gives them a place to feel like they're at home." **V**

Facts v Fallacy

PART II: School Funding

By Brenda Ortega
MEA Voice Editor

Michigan voters are likely to see the phrase “record school funding” in campaign mailers from both political parties this election year. The difference will be in perspective.

One side will use the term to tout recent gains in school funding as a point of pride in better supporting educators and students. The other side will use it as a weapon to attack schools for not achieving better test scores.

The truth is school funding saw much-needed increases over Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s tenure. It’s accurate to say, in nominal dollars, the state achieved historic school funding.

But the claim of “record school funding” is misleading — not only because it fails to account for inflation, says MEA Labor Economist Tanner Delpier, a leading expert on school finance.

Typically used to compare Whitmer’s education record to her predecessor, Gov. Rick Snyder, the term “completely ignores the historical context before 2012, which is right around the time that school funding in the state hit rock bottom,” Delpier said.

“Why start the line graph in 2012?” he asked. The answer is simple.

When compared to bottomed-out K-12 spending achieved by Snyder and a Republican-controlled state Legislature in 2014, significant increases led by Whitmer — especially in the past three years — appear as unprecedented.

[Fig. 1]

Further pulling back the curtain from 2012 to 2002 reveals the true trendline, Delpier points out.

“There was a massive decline from 2002 to 2014, and earlier funding levels have not yet been restored. While the state is no longer at the

lowest funding level in history, (school) funding remains 32% below that early 2000s peak — a gap amounting to about \$10.4 billion.

“The truth is that funding has dropped sharply since Proposal A in 1994.”
[Fig. 2]

LESS FUNDING ÷ MORE SCHOOLS

After Michigan voters approved Proposal A, amending the state constitution to shift school financing from local property taxes to state taxes, lawmakers increased spending on education for a few years. Then began the devastating decades-long decline.

Promoted by Gov. John Engler, a conservative proponent of market-based school reform centered on competition, Proposal A also ushered in charter schools and schools of choice which placed additional financial pressures on public school districts.

In effect, “The policy of Michigan has been to spread a declining share of state resources over an ever-increasing number of institutions while we have a declining student population,” Delpier said. “That is the definition of inefficiency.”

Michigan has the most for-profit charter schools in the nation. The state spends more than \$1 billion on over 300 charter schools — 30% of which regularly fail and close due to low enrollment or financial mismanagement, according to a review by the Network for Public Education.

The rules in place allow charter school operators to generate profit from per-pupil revenue while holding land tax-free as it builds up value, Delpier said.

“The business model of charter

schools is land speculation. When you have a school that is for-profit, in a literal sense what they have to do is what’s best for the shareholders rather than the students.”

In addition to unaccountable charter schools, a growing number of hidden costs drain dollars from K-12 districts.

One type is pension debt payments drawn from state education funds, which reduce what’s available to serve students. Other examples include underfunded state mandates and pre-school expansion.

State policymakers also have accelerated a trend — as recently as the 2026 fiscal year budget — toward using the K-12 budget to pay for higher education, which historically came from the state’s general fund.

“Compared to the years after Proposal A, Michigan is now effectively transferring out \$1.6 billion from K-12 schools to support community colleges and universities each year,” Delpier said. “In real terms, nearly \$18 billion has been diverted away from K-12 schools since 2010.”

Recent per-pupil spending increases in 2023 and 2024 moved Michigan to the middle of the pack in national comparisons, he added. “While this recent *increase* in per-pupil funding may be ‘historic,’ the current funding *level* — in both per-pupil and total terms — is not.”

MONEY MATTERS

Numerous studies show that investing in schools and learning resources pays off in student outcomes, according to a research review by the Learning Policy Institute titled “How Money Matters in Schools.”

“The research documents that resource investments matter for

FIG. 1 Effective PK-12 Education Revenue, FY 2012-2024

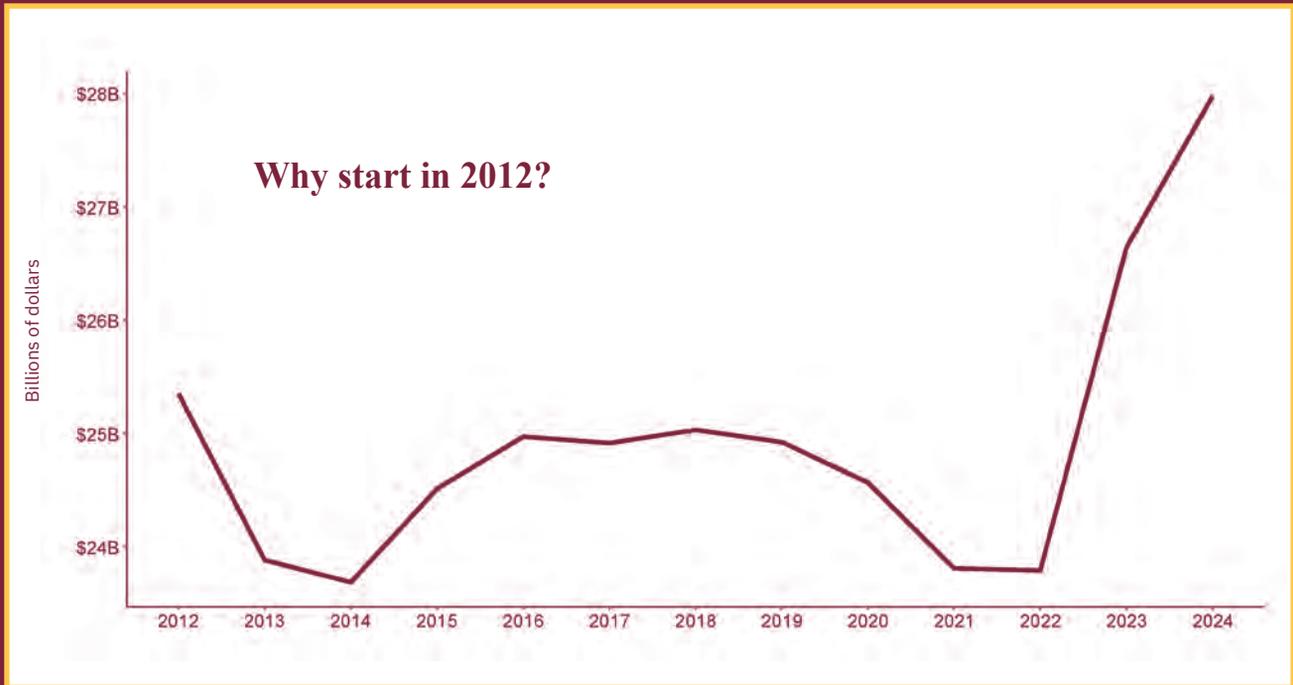
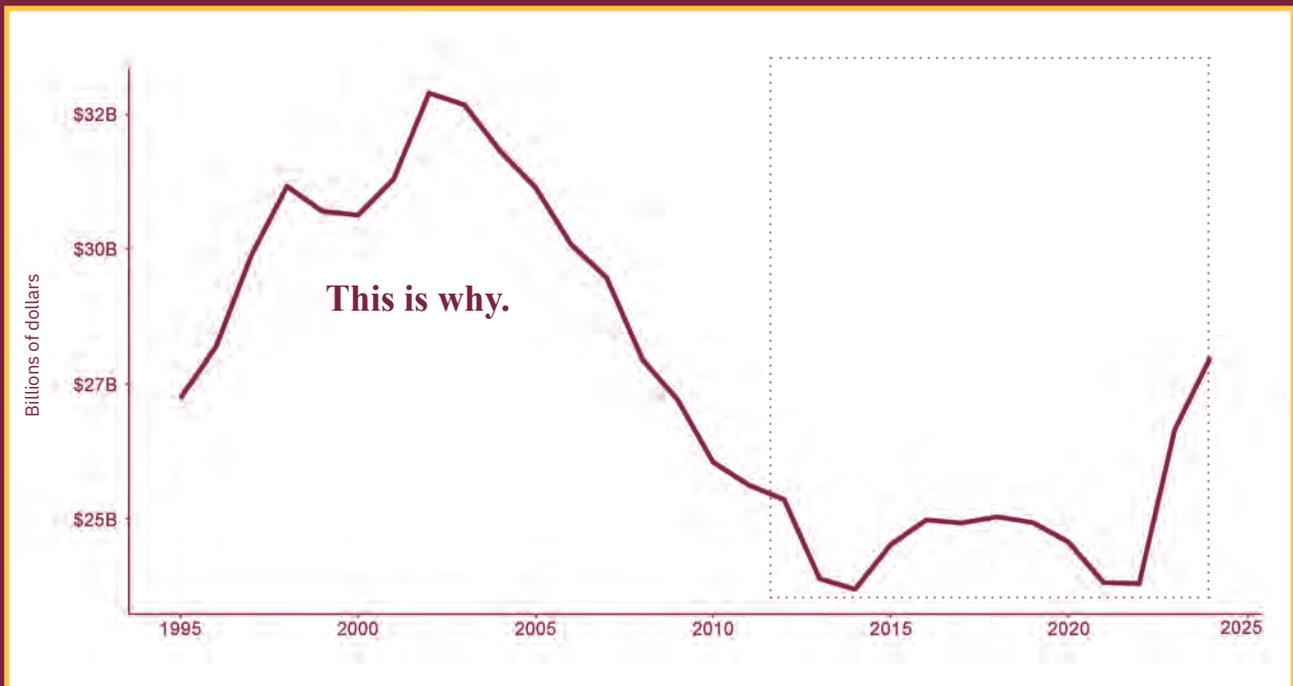


FIG. 2 Effective PK-12 Education Revenue, FY 2012-2024



Effective Education Funding excludes one-time federal stimulus revenue and state debt passthrough revenue and adjusts for inflation.

student outcomes, especially when they are directed to under-resourced districts and students from low-income families,” the policy brief concludes.

The institute’s review found the biggest payoffs from investments toward smaller class sizes and additional supports for younger children and those with greater academic needs, plus ensuring educator quality through higher pay.

“Sustained improvements in the level and distribution of funding across local public school districts lead to improvements in the level and distribution of student outcomes, ranging from graduation rates to educational attainment and wages,” the report said.

“There is scarce evidence that one can gain stronger outcomes without these resources.”

The key word is “sustained,” Delpier said. “What the research literature tells us is that funding has to be sustained for a period of years before you expect to see impacts on achievement.”

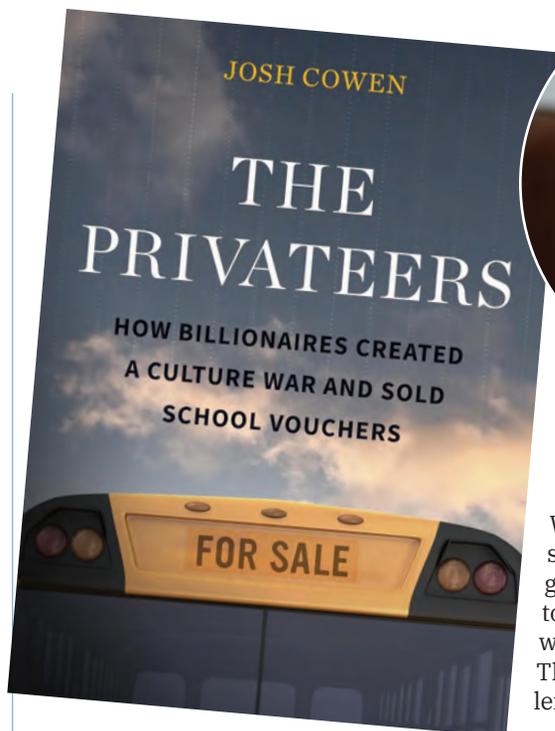
A recent study by Michigan State University’s Education Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) concurred with Delpier’s assessment that the state’s K-12 school funding has not rebounded from the peak of 2002 even as pressures have intensified on school districts.

Key findings from the EPIC study, titled “Funding Michigan’s Future: Three Decades of School Finance and the Policy Questions Ahead”:

The demographics of Michigan’s student body have changed in ways that make it more expensive to provide education now than in the past. Today Michigan has fewer students and a student body with greater needs.

Districts face greater restrictions on how they use their revenues now than in the past.

Districts are now expected to provide more services beyond instruction (e.g. universal meals, student mental health), but funding for them has been unstable.



Nevertheless, as this year’s election season intensifies, partisan pundits and politicians will turn up the volume on school funding and performance.

Critics of public education, including billionaire dark money donors like the DeVos family and the politicians and think tanks they finance, will talk about record funding and label schools as “failing” to make the case for further test-and-punish policies and privatization.

They will continue to say Michigan ranks 44th in the country in fourth-grade reading scores on the Nation’s Report Card, even though the test makers warn against using the data to rank states because score differences are often tiny enough to fall within the standard measuring error.

The election messaging was already clearly on display last June at a House Education Committee hearing on education budget goals and needs, as Rep. Brad Paquette (R-Niles) engaged in a lengthy argument with state education officials.

“We’ve increased funding, yet results are still tracking downward,” Paquette said. “When does accountability come into play?”

Committee member Rep. Dylan Wegela (D-Garden City) set the record straight: “Record funding is only as good as saying we have record wages today. When you adjust for inflation, we are barely ahead of the year 2000. This has created a classroom size problem and a teacher shortage.”

The forces tearing down public education over the past 20 years pretend it’s possible to do more with less funding, but their real goal is privatization and profit-making, says Josh Cowen, an MSU professor of education policy and a member of UTSF MSU (Union of Tenure Stream Faculty).

An expert on school vouchers and their effects on student performance, Cowen is the author of *The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers*.

What stands at 44th in the nation and falling is average starting teacher pay in Michigan, Cowen notes. Overall Michigan educators now earn nearly 23% less than other workers with similar levels of education and experience.

Cowen shared a new research paper in the February 2026 issue of *Economics of Education Review*, showing that increasing teacher pay in New Jersey led to large gains in student math and reading performance over time.

“No serious plan for improving Michigan schools exists without higher educator pay,” Cowen said. **V**

Read more from Josh Cowen on the next page, and find related stories and source information from our Facts v Fallacy series at mea.org/facts.



Data says vouchers harm kids

Two decades ago, MEA member Josh Cowen began his career as an education researcher without strong opinions on school vouchers and full of idealism about the potential for scientific data to help make public schools the best they can be.

Over time, working alongside voucher advocates to evaluate programs, he watched as evidence mounted showing vouchers harm students and communities — especially the most vulnerable. Yet proponents continued pressing for expansion.

Today he's a modern-day Paul Revere, traveling the country to speak and testify, writing articles and books, warning of the danger he sees in a school reform movement built on right-wing ideology instead of evidence — and funded by a shadowy network of billionaires.

“Just on the merits, vouchers should have died a decade ago,” Cowen said in an interview.

A professor of education policy at Michigan State University and member of UTSF MSU (Union of Tenure System Faculty), he added, “Why are we still having this conversation?”

Cowen is talking about vouchers a lot these days out of necessity. The policy of granting publicly funded “scholarships” or “tuition tax credits” for children attending private schools has spread to more states than ever, despite a record of academic loss for students.

Last July, Republicans in Congress and President Donald Trump passed the first nationwide federal voucher scheme, which will require states to opt-in. “There could be some benefit to public schools under the federal tax credit, but the devil will be in the details,” he said.

Cowen wrote a book, *The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers*, published by Harvard Education Press, to tell the story he's witnessed over 20 years and make the case against vouchers plainly and urgently.

From the introduction: “Expert analysis, independent and investigative journalism, and a handful of transparent state and federal accountability audits show that policies diverting public funds for private school tuition have some of the worst outcomes in the education research record to date.”

For his work, Cowen was honored with NEA's 2025 Friend of Education Award at last summer's NEA Representative Assembly (RA). In his acceptance speech, he explained that vouchers were rooted in backlash against the Civil Rights movement dating back to the 1950s.

“When I first started the work that brought me up here, I thought I was talking about history,” he told thousands of member-delegates gathered in Portland, Ore. for the NEA RA in July.

“But as we've seen, threats to public education and to public investments

in all of our futures — from health care to jobs to retirement security and even basic, affordable costs of living — this is all very much breaking news.”

In the first Trump administration, Michigan Republican Party donor Betsy DeVos became U.S. Education Secretary favoring charter schools and vouchers. But it's bigger than DeVos.

“It's an entire political agenda,” Cowen said. “We know not just the DeVoses but other Republicans are gearing up to make 2026 in Michigan the ‘education election’ for their priorities like more standardized testing. Cuts to public school funding. And yes, school vouchers.”

In his book, Cowen details how randomized control trials — conducted by multiple research teams studying voucher programs in Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio and elsewhere — measured academic losses on par with or surpassing those from Hurricane Katrina and later COVID-19.

Meanwhile, a growing body of research reveals strong positive effects from increased funding to public schools when sustained over time and paired with evidence-based practices.

“If you grew up professionally, as I did, in the world where data and evidence and results are supposed to inform public policy, then you should be saying at the top of your lungs that vouchers hurt kids and families,” he said. **V**

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:

DIRECTOR BY CLASSIFICATION

CUSTODIAL:

1 Position – Immediate to Aug. 31, 2028

FOOD SERVICE:

1 Position – Immediate to Aug. 31, 2028

MAINTENANCE:

1 Position – Immediate to Aug. 31, 2028

OFFICE PERSONNEL:

1 Position – Sep. 1, 2026 to Aug. 31, 2029

TRANSPORTATION:

1 Position – Sep. 1, 2026 to Aug. 31, 2029

Elections to the ESP Caucus Executive Board will take place during the MEA Representative Assembly on April 17-18, 2026.

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. In order to receive delegate mailing labels, information must be received no later than Feb. 17, 2026 and should be mailed to: Gezelle Oliver, MEA/ESP Department, PO Box 2573, 1216 Kendale Blvd., East Lansing, MI 48826-2573, or it can be sent via email to goliver@mea.org.

Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor at the MEA/ESP Caucus meeting on Friday, April 17, 2026 and those names will be added to the ballot. 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 email to htraxler@mea.org. She will send them collectively to all ESP RA delegates in good standing.

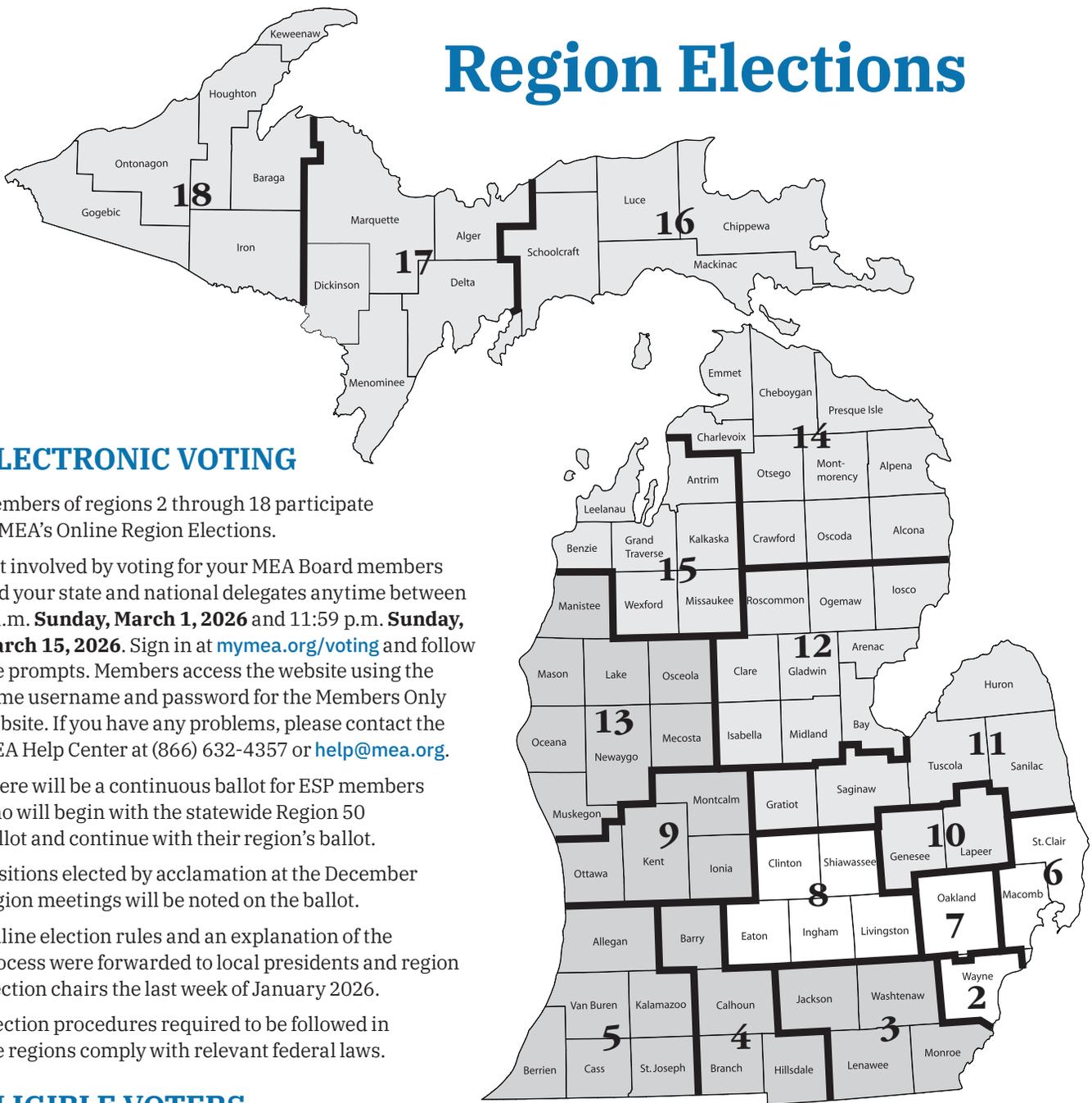
Questions about the elections should be directed to Jim Sparapani, ESP Caucus Elections Chairperson, at (906) 779-1984 or via email to jsparapani@att.net. **V**

FREE
Identity Theft Recovery
and **50% OFF**
Identity Protection Plans

Exclusively for MEA members
at mea.securusid.com



Region Elections



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. **Sunday, March 1, 2026** and 11:59 p.m. **Sunday, March 15, 2026**. 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 or help@mea.org.

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 2026.

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, 2026.

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 2026 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 rwalworth@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 Rhianna Walworth of their need to vote by absentee ballot. Notification can be sent by email to rwalworth@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. **V**

CANDIDATES IN THE MARCH REGION ELECTIONS

KEY:

- * Minority 3-1(g) position
- # elected by acclamation
- \$ MEA funded positions
- NNR no nominations received

Multiple candidates listed in alphabetical order.

REGION 2

- Position 1**—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: Kelly Eddy, Livonia E; Jason Krajewski, Wyandotte E
- Position 2**—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, immed. through 7/14/27: #James J. Lockwood, Plymouth-Canton E
- Position 3**—MEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Cristen Belloni, Van Buren E; #Benjamin Edwards, Livonia E; #Megan Thrasher, Garden City E
- Position 4**—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
4 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Erin Jackson, Allen Park E; #Christine Lakatos, Livonia E; #Angela Lentz, Wayne-Westland E; #Amanda Moran, Dearborn Heights E
- Position 5**—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: Cristen Belloni, Van Buren E; Christine Lakatos, Livonia E
- Position 6**—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Christine Lakatos, Livonia E; #Carl Lowe, Wayne-Westland E; #Edward McGovern, Wayne-Westland E
- 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 8**—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- Position 9**—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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
- 2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- Position 15**—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Elections Chair:** Steve Conn, swconn80@hotmail.com

REGION 3

- Position 1**—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: James Brousseau, Milan E; Nency Fields, Ann Arbor E
- Position 3**—MEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Percy Brown, Ann Arbor P
- Position 4**—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: Rhoshawda Miller, Ypsilanti Community E; Charlotte Tillerson, Ypsilanti Community E; Crystal Willit, Monroe ISD CMOPT
- Position 5**—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Nency Fields, Ann Arbor E
- Position 6**—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
5 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: Matt Deloria, Dexter E; Rhoshawda Miller, Ypsilanti Community E; Sheri Powers, Adrian E; Leslie Rollins, Saline E; Charlotte Tillerson, Ypsilanti Community E
- 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 8**—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Beth Manuel, Ann Arbor Library E
- 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR
- 3 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- 1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR
- 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
- Position 9**—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 11**—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
4 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 12**—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR
- 6 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

- 6 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- 3 positions*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- Position 13**—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 14**—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Charlotte Nixon, Ypsilanti Community CMOPT
- 1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: #Crystal Willit, Monroe ISD CMOPT
- 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: #Crystal Willit, Monroe ISD CMOPT
- 2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- Position 15**—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Elections Chair:** Jim Brousseau, jbrousseau@mea.org
- ## REGION 4
- Position 3**—MEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR
- Position 4**—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 6**—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
4 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 8**—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR
- 1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- Position 9**—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 11**—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 12**—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR
- 1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
- 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
- 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
- Position 13**—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
- Position 15**—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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 7/15/26:
#Kimberly Largen, Mattawan E

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

3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
#Andrea Eash, Mattawan E; #Shona Espinoza, Kalamazoo GOPT; #Betina DuBois, Kalamazoo E

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Tricia Dinda, Kalamazoo GOPT; #Logan Fisher, Galesburg-Augusta E

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: Mary Cooper, New Buffalo E; Kathleen Frink, Portage E

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

6 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: Andrea Eash, Mattawan E; Kathleen Frink, Portage E; Elizabeth McDermott, Kalamazoo E; Christine Payne, Kalamazoo E; Heather Reid, Kalamazoo E; Stacy Reinhart, Portage E; Amy Scrima, Lake Michigan CC E

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

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

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Chad Carlisle, Dowagiac Union CMT

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

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

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Amy Scrima, Lake Michigan CC E

3 positions, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

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

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

4 positions, immed. through 3/31/28: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/28: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, immed. through 3/31/28: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/28: NNR

Elections Chair: Mary Cooper,
coopermary29@gmail.com

REGION 6

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

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26:
#Eric Kehres, Utica E; #Heather Schulz, Lakeview-St Clair Sh E

Position 2—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate—Representative of Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: #Robert Callender, Warren E

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

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Cathy Murray, Port Huron E

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

4 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Kimberly Cook, New Haven E; #Patrick Connell, Port Huron E; #Amy Langmesser, East China E; #Andrea Pilatowski, Utica E

Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
#Jacqueline Shelson, Grosse Pointe E

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: #Kathryn Cafagna, Fitzgerald E

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: #Kathryn Cafagna, Fitzgerald E

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

5 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Kimberly Cook, New Haven E; #Stephanie Givinsky, Lakeview-St Clair Sh E; #Amy Langmesser, East China E; #Catherine Leon, Port Huron E; #Deborah Robertson, Harper Woods E; #Catherine Leon, Port Huron E

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Jason Belfinger, St Clair Co RESA E; #Katelyn Vogel, St Clair Co RESA E

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Kendra Rodriguez, Capac CFMOP

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Alan Demski, St Clair RESA Co E; #Katelyn Vogel, St Clair Co RESA E

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: #Jason Belfinger, St Clair Co RESA E

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: #Jason Belfinger, St Clair Co RESA E

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Leslie Bailey-Leonard, Marysville O

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Shauna Williams, Marysville P

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Kendra Rodriguez, Capac CFMOP

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/28: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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 7/15/26: Andrea Catalina, Walled Lake E; Angela Chen, Pontiac E; Brittany Perreault, Farmington E

Position 2—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate—Representative of Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26:
Angela Chen, Pontiac E; Matthew Gonzales, Royal Oak E

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

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: #Kia Glass, Farmington E

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Angela Chen, Pontiac E; #Angela Lowry, Bloomfield Hills E

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Giselle Buchanan, Troy E; #Angela Chen, Pontiac E

4 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Amanda Ziegler, Pontiac E

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: Angela Chen, Pontiac E; Amy Jones, Avondale E

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Angela Chen, Pontiac E; #Emily Mannor, Farmington E

4 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

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

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: #Candice Ridley, Pontiac E

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

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

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Amanda Maki, Clarkston T

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: #Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: #Stephen Sanchez, Clarkston T

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

3 positions, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

4 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, immed. through 3/31/28: NNR
Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR
 3 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
 3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Kecia Jones, Pontiac P
 3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Elections Chair: Richard Tabor, NorthvilleEA@gmail.com

REGION 8

Position 1—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate \$
 1 position, immed. through 7/14/26: Martine Rife, Lansing CC E; Zondra Sickles-Blake, Lansing E
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: same seat as above: Martine Rife, Lansing CC E; Zondra Sickles-Blake, Lansing E
Position 3—MEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Allyson McCann, Grand Ledge P; #Jeffrey Wilson, MSU APA E/ESP
Position 4—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Patricia Purol, Lansing CC E; #Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT
 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: Curlada Eure-Harris, Lansing CC E; Mary Levey, Ovid-Elsie E
Position 6—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Curlada Eure-Harris, Lansing CC E; #Ravon Keith, Lansing CC E; #Patricia Purol, Lansing CC E
 3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Mary Levey, Ovid-Elsie E
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: #Peter Faziani, Ovid-Elsie E
 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: #Ellyn Faziani, Ovid-Elsie E
Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
 2 positions, immed. through 3/31/27: NNR
Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
 2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Chelsea Ott, Waverly FOP; #Andrea Wells, Eaton Rapids CFMOP
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT
Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
 4 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
 2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
 2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
 4 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Elections Chair: Jeffrey Wilson, parliamentdestruction@gmail.com

REGION 9

Position 1—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate \$
 1 position, immed. through 7/14/28: #Melissa VanGessel, Caledonia E
Position 3—MEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR
Position 4—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Pamela Seales, Grand Rapids E
 4 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Dan Slagter, Grand Rapids E
Position 6—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Pamela Seales, Grand Rapids E; #Cara Williams-Gardner, Grand Rapids E
 5 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 7—EA/ESP NEA RA At-Large Delegate \$
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Wendy Winston, Grand Rapids E
Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: 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, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
 5 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
 2 positions*, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR
Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
 5 positions, immed. through 3/31/27: NNR
 2 positions*, immed. through 3/31/27: NNR
Elections Chair: Marcella Weldon, weldonghea@gmail.com

REGION 10

Position 1—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate \$
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: #Karen Christian, Flint E
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: Frank Burger, Carman-Ainsworth E; Sarah Foster, Fenton E
Position 3—MEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Felicia Naimark, Flint E; #Kevyn Welter, Flushing E
Position 4—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Tamara Armbruster, Mt Morris E; #Vishaun Ezell, Westwood Heights E; #Brett Smith, Linden E
 1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: #Felicia Naimark, Flint E
Position 6—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
 4 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #David Griffel, Clio E; #Vishaun Ezell, Westwood Heights E; #Gwendalyn Gulley, Westwood Heights E; #Stacey Hittle, Swartz Creek E
Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: #Vishaun Ezell, Westwood Heights E
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Gwendalyn Gulley, Westwood Heights E
Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
 2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
 1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR
 1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR
Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
 2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
 2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Stacey Hittle,
kamandkara@me.com

REGION 11

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

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/27: #James Rhoden, Saginaw E

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Belinda Kennard, Vassar CFMP; #Dawn Perez, Midland City E

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
#Christina Mulford, Saginaw Twp E

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

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Dawn Perez, Midland City E

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

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

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: #Toni Scribner, Vassar E

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Marci LaValley, Unionville-Sebewaing E; #Toni Scribner, Vassar E

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

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

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

4 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/28: #Melissa Aldrich-Elgie, Birch Run CMOPT; #Belinda Kennard, Vassar CFMP

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

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

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

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Jill Eremia, Tuscola ISD E

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate

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

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Jennifer Shelito,
jshelito@mea.org

REGION 12

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

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: Edward Clements, Bay City E; Marcia Mackey, Central Mich Univ E

1 position, immed. through 7/14/27: Jenny VanDuinen, Houghton Lake E; Amanda Walker, Bay City E

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Maureen Eke, Central Mich Univ E;
#Deborah Rickert, Saginaw Valley St U CM

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
Maureen Eke, Central Mich Univ E; Ana Geib,
Midland City E

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Maureen Eke, Central Mich Univ E; #Jenny VanDuinen, Houghton Lake E

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Jenny VanDuinen, Houghton Lake E

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/28: #Daryl Phillips, Beaverton E; #Jennifer Tallman, Coleman E

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Olivia Barnes, Beaverton E; #Denis Mayowski, Houghton Lake E

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

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

2 positions, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Jenny VanDuinen, Houghton Lake E

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

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

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: 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, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Deb Rickert,
debrmarie@gmail.com

REGION 13

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

3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 5—EA NEA RA At-Large Delegate—
Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: Tyler Frank, Montague E

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

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

3 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 3/31/28: 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, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: Karla Wheeler, Oakridge CFMT

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate

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

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate

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

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Sue Federico,
suefed14855@icloud.com

REGION 14

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

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: Erin Mastin, Boyne City E

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

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

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

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

Kimberlee Johnson, Charlevoix E
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: Kimberlee Johnson, Charlevoix E

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: Kevin Varnhagan, Alanson E

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: Kara Wasylewski, Boyne City CFMOPT

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: Kimberlee Johnson, Charlevoix E

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

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

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

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Region 14 MAHE—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

Region 14 MAHE—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Greta Brock, gbrock@mea.org

REGION 15

Position 1—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: #Genevieve Minor, Traverse City E

Position 4—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Bryan Hawkins, Kalkaska E

Position 6—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 7—EA/ESP NEA RA At-Large Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: Allyson McBride-Culver, Traverse City E

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: #Mary Graverson, Buckley E

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

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

1 position*, immed. through 8/31/28: NNR

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Genevieve Minor, genminor622@gmail.com

REGION 16

Position 3—MEA RA At-Large Delegate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26: Stacey Geyer, DeTour E; Christina Messer, Lake Superior St Univ CFGMO

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: Stacey Geyer, DeTour E; Christina Messer, Lake Superior St Univ CFGMO

Position 4—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Onnalee Gibson, St Ignace E

Position 6—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Stacey Geyer, DeTour E

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Wendy Halsey, Pickford E

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Elizabeth Birr, Manistique E; #Stephanie LeBlanc, Brimley E

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Christina Messer, Lake Superior St Univ CFGMO

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Elections Chair: Al Beamish, albeamish8912@gmail.com

REGION 17

Position 4—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Michael Lyons, Carney-Nadeau E

Position 6—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Michael Lyons, Carney-Nadeau E; #Erinn Parker, Stephenson E

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 10—ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

1 position, immed. through 8/31/26: #Aiden Petz, Marquette Area OP

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: #Aiden Petz, Marquette Area OP

Position 11—ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 12—EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: NNR

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

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 13—EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Position 14—ESP NEA RA Cluster Delegate
2 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: NNR

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same seat as above: NNR

Position 15—ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR

Region 17 MAHE—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, immed. through 8/31/27: NNR

Elections Chair: Paulette Pepin, paulettelarson@chartermi.net

REGION 18

Position 1—MEA Board of Directors/NEA RA Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 7/15/26: #Eric Ghiggia, West Iron County E

Position 4—MEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Amanda Rinkinen, Baraga Twp E

Position 6—EA NEA RA At-Large Alternate—Representing Minority 3-1(g) \$
2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: #Morgan Raether, Adams Township E; #Michelle Seppanen, L'Anse E

Position 8—EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: #Lisa Olson, Forest Park E

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28: #Morgan Raether, Adams Township E

Position 9—EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

Make the most of your MESSA benefits this year

February is both American Heart Month and National Cancer Prevention Month – perfect reminders to schedule that important annual checkup.

We often hear from members who were grateful that a screening or routine appointment caught an issue early. That's why we put such an emphasis on preventive care.

MESSA plans cover one physical every calendar year for members and their dependents, as well as two gynecological exams. We also cover cancer screenings, such as mammograms, prostate exams and colonoscopies. These preventive checkups and exams are free under every MESSA plan when you go to an in-network provider.

If you need additional heart health support, you can sign up for the free Teladoc

Health hypertension management program. Qualifying members receive a blood pressure monitor, tips on nutrition and one-on-one heart health support from expert coaches.

For more than 75 years, heart disease and cancer have been the two leading causes of death in the United States. Regular preventive checkups and exams can catch warning signs early, when conditions are most treatable.

We're all busy and sometimes amid the everyday hustle and bustle our health takes a back seat. Please know that an appointment for your annual physical or a preventive cancer screening can save your life.

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*



2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Amanda Rinkinen, Baraga Twp E;
#Heather Skulan, Wakefield-Marenisco E
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 10–ESP MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
#Stephen Elenich, Copper County ISD
CFMOPT
Position 11–ESP MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#John Lorenson, Ironwood CFMOPT
Position 12–EA NEA RA Cluster Delegate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
#Morgan Raether, Adams Township E
1 position*, immed. through 8/31/26:
Elizabeth Bertucci, Houghton-Portage Twp E
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same
seat as above: NNR
Position 13–EA NEA RA Cluster Alternate
2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Amanda Rinkinen, Baraga Twp E
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
1 position*, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26: NNR
Position 15–ESP NEA RA Cluster Alternate
1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Chantel Spear, Ironwood CFMOPT

Region 18 MAHE–EA MEA RA Cluster Delegate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
#Trevor Ploe, Gogebic CC E

Region 18 MAHE–EA MEA RA Cluster Alternate \$

1 position, 3-yr. term begins 4/1/26:
#Matthew Gage, Gogebic CC E

Elections Chair: Steve Elenich,
selenich@copperisd.org

REGION 50

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

1 position, immed. through 8/31/28:
Dylan Baade, Oakland University CM;
Shona Espinoza, Kalamazoo GOPT; Allyson
McCann, Grand Ledge P; Charlotte Nixon,
Ypsilanti Community CFMOPT; Bonnie Rattai,
Stockbridge FOPT

3 positions, immed. through 8/31/26: Dylan
Baade, Oakland University CM; Leslie
Bailey-Leonard, Marysville O; Alexander
Dawson, MSU APA E/ESP; Shona Espinoza,
Kalamazoo GOPT; Tracie Guilmet, Rochester
P; Kendra Rodriguez, Capac CMFOP; Shauna
Williams, Marysville P; Crystal Willit, Monroe
ISD CMOPT

3 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26, same
seat as above: Dylan Baade, Oakland
University CM; Leslie Bailey-Leonard,
Marysville O; Alexander Dawson, MSU
APA E/ESP; Susan Federico, Reeths-Puffer
OP; Robert Gaines III, Farmington OP;
Tracie Guilmet, Rochester P; Bonnie Rattai,
Stockbridge FOPT; Kendra Rodriguez, Capac
CMFOP; Shauna Williams, Marysville P;
Crystal Willit, Monroe ISD CMOPT

2 positions, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26: Dylan
Baade, Oakland University CM; Alexander
Dawson, MSU APA E/ESP; Susan Federico,
Reeths-Puffer OP; Crystal Kinard, Ann Arbor
P; Bonnie Rattai, Stockbridge FOPT

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

2 positions*, immed. through 8/31/28: Shona
Espinoza, Kalamazoo GOPT; Bonnie Rattai,
Stockbridge FOPT

2 positions*, 3-yr. term begins 9/1/26:
Shona Espinoza, Kalamazoo GOPT; Robert
Gaines III, Farmington OP; Crystal Kinard,
Ann Arbor P

Secretary recalls run-in with gunman

For MEA member Maria Scott, the Romulus Middle School secretary who averted tragedy when an armed man rang the school's front buzzer, first her instincts kicked in — then her training took hold.

"I knew something wasn't right and instantly called 911," Scott said in an interview.

It happened during a quiet morning lull in the front office. Scott was completing a monthly report, with jazz music playing softly in the background, when the buzzer rang around 9 a.m.

New to the middle school this year, Scott viewed the man in the intercom system's video camera and recognized him as a parent. But in the space of "milliseconds," she noticed his bulky coat. His face was partly obscured.

"I knew something was off because he never comes up with a big coat on — even in the prime of winter," Scott said. "And I saw how he was kind of like in a pace at the door. I said, 'Hi, sir; can I help you?' That's when he said, 'I'm here to get my (cuss word) son.'"

Scott picked up the office phone and dialed for help. On the call with the police dispatcher, still watching the man on camera, Scott thought she saw a gun in his coat.

"That's when I went to the school intercom. I said, 'This is an immediate lockdown. This is not a drill. Immediate lockdown. This is not a drill.' I said that at least four times."

She grabbed her cell phone and called the superintendent. Within seconds, she heard the first shot. Then a second. A third. "I'm still on the speakerphone with the dispatcher. I said, 'Shots have been fired.' I prayed that nothing was breached, but I didn't know.

"I'm trying to kneel down after the second gunshot but still keep eyes on him for the dispatcher. The police department pulled up so fast, and I'm telling play by play to the dispatcher:



'OK, Romulus police has pulled up. He's walking towards them now, with his hands up.'"

Once he was in custody, Scott let go. "I finally released it. When I saw them put him in handcuffs, that's when it all came over me, and I fell to the floor and began to cry. Right under my desk. I just cried. I couldn't believe it. It felt so unreal."

Later she learned more than three shots were fired. Students and staff told her they recognized the gravity of the moment from the tone of her voice on the intercom. Scott was flooded with appreciation. Flowers and cards and hugs and thank yous.

A week after the Jan. 6 incident, the reality was sinking in. "I have a six-year-old and a 17-year-old, and right now my six-year-old just sees Mommy as his hero. But my oldest, he fully understands. He's like, 'Wow, Mom.' The what-ifs are playing in our heads, and we're so grateful."

Scott appreciates the quick police response; emotional support from staff, administrators, students and families; excellent training she received from

the district. Thoughts of her training helped her stay calm: "I literally kept telling myself, *OK — what did I learn to do next?*"

Brandyn Martin, a night custodian who serves as president of the Romulus support staff union, said the incident is a reminder of "the incredible value of our well-trained school support staff.

"They don't get the recognition they deserve, but the important work they do every single day provides a safe and healthy environment for our students to learn."

Scott started at the middle school in August after nine years at a district elementary. She loves the diverse role of school secretary — managing paperwork, caring for sick or injured kids, administering prescribed medicines, and giving advice, encouragement and hugs.

"I can't stress enough for secretaries all over the world: Remember your why. That day, knowing why I became a secretary helped me so much. I just remembered my why — because I love those children. I knew how much I loved everyone in that building." **V**



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