

2025 MCEA Awards & Recognition



*Honoring Excellence in Leadership,
Connection, Innovation, and Lifelong Learning*



Message from the MCEA President



Rachel Amdahl
2025 MCEA President
Bemidji Public Schools

To our incredible 2025 MCEA Award recipients, congratulations.

Each of you represents the heart of what community education is all about. You give your time, energy, and creativity to help others learn, connect, and grow, and in doing so, you make your communities stronger.

I am continually inspired by the people behind these programs—the late nights, the problem-solving, the courage to try something new, and the quiet moments of encouragement that lift others up. Your impact reaches far beyond your schools and districts; it shapes lives across Minnesota.

Thank you for believing in this work, for leading with heart, and for reminding all of us what's possible when passion meets purpose.



Message from the MCEA Executive Director

To all of this year's honorees, I want to say thank you.

Your dedication, creativity, and compassion are what make community education such a powerful force in our state. Whether you are teaching, leading, mentoring, or collaborating, your work brings learning to life and connection to the forefront.

The stories in these pages are more than accomplishments—they are reflections of your care for people and your belief in what community education can do. You inspire us, you lift others, and you remind us that community education is built by people who show up with heart.

I appreciate each of you and the impact you have in your communities and throughout the state. We are so proud to celebrate you and deeply grateful for the difference you make every day.



Matt Dickhausen
MCEA Executive Director

BELIEVE in the Power of Community Education

**MCEA Fall Conference
October 29-31, 2025
Minneapolis Marriott Northwest**



CONTENTS

Message from MCEA President & Executive Director	03
Contents Page	04
Awards Introduction	05
Outstanding Community Education Project Awards	06-17
Community Education Partner of the Year	18-19
Supportive Administrator of the Year	20-21
Regional Community Educators of Excellence	22-26
Statewide Community Educator of Excellence	24



Celebrating Excellence in Community Education

Each year, MCEA honors the individuals and programs that make Community Education in Minnesota truly exceptional. Through statewide and regional nominations, these awards celebrate those who lead with heart, innovate with purpose, and bring people together through learning and connection.

The honorees featured in these pages represent the best of what Community Education stands for: inclusion, collaboration, and a shared belief in lifelong learning. Their work strengthens communities across Minnesota and inspires others to continue making a difference.





Outstanding Community Education Project Awards

The MCEA Outstanding Community Education Project Awards honor districts across Minnesota for creative, impactful initiatives that exemplify the very best of community education. Each recipient showcases how local vision and teamwork strengthen connection, expand access, and enrich learning for Minnesotans of all ages — creating a lasting impact in their communities.



SCHOOL SUPPLIES FOR ALL

Faribault Public Schools

School supplies are expensive. In fact, in recent years, school supplies locally have run an average of nearly \$90 per student. Buying supplies can also be stressful for families, trying to find everything on a child's school list. Furthermore, we know that many of our Faribault families are struggling financially; in fact, 2 out of every 3 Faribault Public Schools students (69%) qualify as low-income.

To help ease this burden for Faribault families, the Community Action Center, Supply Our Children, and the Faribault Area Chamber of Commerce have once again partnered with Faribault Public Schools for the "School Supplies for All" initiative.

For the second year in a row, families with students in preschool through 8th grade will not be required to purchase school supplies or follow supply lists. Instead, each child's school supplies were in their classroom when school started this fall!



THE HASTINGS TRISHAW SHED PROJECT

Hastings Public Schools

The Hastings Trishaw Shed Project is a collaborative effort among Hastings Area Rotary Club, Hastings Public Schools' High School Construction Class, Hastings Community Education, Cycling Without Age, and Doug Speedling Builders. Together, these partners designed and built a dedicated shed to house trishaws—three-wheeled cycles used to give free rides to seniors and adults with disabilities as part of the Cycling Without Age initiative.

Cycling Without Age promotes intergenerational connection by offering elderly or disabled residents the chance to experience our community and trails from the seat of a trishaw—sharing their stories and feeling the wind in their hair. The program is entirely free and aims to strengthen social bonds, trust, and respect across generations.

The shed, located at the Hastings Community Education building, was constructed entirely by the Hastings High School Construction Class. Students completed the project from the ground up, applying exterior sheathing, roofing membranes, and shingles, creating a meaningful, hands-on learning experience.

Rotary served as the lead fundraiser and project organizer, coordinating contributions and support from Doug Speedling Builders to make the shed a reality. This project exemplifies the power of partnership in Community Education—combining youth skill-building, senior engagement, and volunteerism in service of a more connected and inclusive community.



CHILDCARE CHAMPIONS TRAINING DAY

North Branch Area Public Schools

North Branch Area Community Education, in partnership with the Chisago County Child Care Coalition, hosted a professional development event to support child care providers through high-quality training, peer networking, and access to resources. The Coalition—made up of school, county, nonprofit, and business leaders—works to address the county’s critical child care shortage by building supportive services for providers.

The event offered six hours of Develop-approved training on trauma-informed care, school readiness, communication, and child development, along with vendor booths, networking, and professional perks such as free t-shirts, headshots, and door prizes. Key partners included Chisago County HRA-EDA, First Children’s Finance, Child Care Aware of MN, Pine Technical & Community College, and local providers, reflecting strong cross-sector collaboration.



OSSEO ECFE FAMILY SHELTER CONNECTION

Osseo Area Schools

Osseo Area Schools' ECFE team launched the Family Shelter Connection in fall 2023 to support families living at the newly opened Hennepin County Family Shelter. Recognizing an immediate need, ECFE home visitors began offering one-on-one visits to connect families with community resources, early childhood programming, and school district support.

As the program grew, ECFE formed a powerful partnership network that included Hennepin County staff, the Hennepin County Library, and the Early Childhood Home Visiting program. Together, they created weekly family playtimes at the shelter—offering parents and children opportunities to learn, play, and build relationships in a welcoming space. The library's Aprendamos Juntos program provided toys, art materials, and educational resources, while ECFE and partner staff worked side-by-side to ensure families had access to vital programs and connections.

In spring 2025, the team opened a dedicated family play space at the shelter—further strengthening collaboration between ECFE and county programs. Since its launch, more than 40 families have received support through this initiative, which continues to foster connection, stability, and learning for families in transition.



CURRENTS OF CONNECTION: CLASSES ON THE MISSISSIPPI

Minneapolis Public Schools

Minneapolis Community Education transformed the Mississippi River into a classroom, offering a series of cultural and environmental classes that connect participants to their community's history and natural resources. Through partnerships with Native American storytellers, local historians, musicians, and city departments, the programming creates meaningful experiences that honor the river's cultural significance while celebrating its vital role in sustaining local communities.

Since launching in Fall 2023, the project has delivered impressive results: 37 classes and 1,102 participants, with 38% of classes reaching capacity. The programming generated over \$50,000 in revenue, and 83% of participants rated their experience 5/5.

The initiative provides inclusive, intergenerational experiences that promote cultural understanding and environmental awareness. Program revenue is reinvested to sustain and grow future offerings while supporting local partners. Through storytelling, shared history, and hands-on experiences, the program creates lasting community connections that strengthen a sense of place and pride along the Mississippi River.



DORA-DRIVING OPPORTUNITIES WITH RECREATIONAL ADVENTURES

Proctor & Hermantown Schools

This summer, Proctor and Hermantown Community Education took a bold vision and put it on wheels—literally. With the launch of DORA (Driving Opportunities with Recreational Adventures), children ages 4–12 experienced free, high-quality recreational programming brought directly into their neighborhoods.

June through August, DORA made scheduled stops across Proctor and Hermantown, transforming parking lots, fields, and parks into hubs of play and learning. Each week featured a new theme designed and led by Community Ed interns, offering hands-on activities from art and sports to water games and creative building. The van was always “stuffed” with fresh opportunities for fun and friendship.

The program expanded access to families new to Community Ed and strengthened connections with returning learners. For many children, DORA was their first introduction to the power of community-based learning. Behind the scenes, interns gained real-world experience in program planning, youth engagement, and community outreach. Their creativity, adaptability, and leadership ensured that every child who attended had a positive and memorable experience.

DORA’s inaugural season proved what can happen when innovation, community investment, and career development come together. By bringing play to our youth, DORA strengthened community ties, empowered youth leaders, and gave children across Proctor and Hermantown the chance to explore, discover, and grow.



POLAR EXPLORERS

N. St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale - ISD 622

Polar Explorers invited community members of all ages to experience the parks of North St. Paul through a series of free, engaging summer events designed to encourage outdoor exploration, creativity, and community connection. Participants collected stamps in a Polar Explorer Passport and earned a commemorative hat for completing their journey—encouraging repeat participation and ongoing involvement throughout the season.

Each session featured a creative theme that brought neighbors together for play, learning, and celebration—from tie-dye art and Guinness World Record attempts to a high-energy foam party, sandcastle building with live music, and a festive bike parade along the Gateway Trail.

By blending creativity, outdoor exploration, and community pride, Polar Explorers demonstrated the power of place-based community education. The series lowered barriers to participation through free, drop-in access and offered joyful, intergenerational experiences that promoted wellness, connection, and a deepened sense of belonging across North St. Paul.



LGBTQ+ SWIM MEET UPS

N. St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale - ISD 622

The LGBTQ+ Swim Meet Ups are a free, family-friendly series of open swim events designed to create a safe, welcoming, and affirming space for LGBTQ+ individuals and families to gather, connect, and enjoy recreation together. Hosted at John Glenn Middle School's pool, the events provide inclusive facilities—including gender-affirming restrooms and a family locker room with private stalls, ensuring accessibility and comfort for all participants.

Staffed by LGBTQ+ professionals and allies, the program reinforces representation and belonging while fostering a sense of safety and community pride. The meet-ups have quickly become a vital connection point for LGBTQ+ youth, families, and adults, offering positive, identity-affirming experiences that promote wellness, visibility, and inclusion in public spaces.

In a time when representation matters deeply, the meet-up is more than a swim - it's a celebration of community, safety, and equity in public spaces.



MAHTOMEDI CAREER, INTERNSHIP & VOLUNTEER FAIR

Mahtomedi Public Schools

In April 2025, Mahtomedi Community Education hosted its first Career, Internship, and Volunteer Fair at Mahtomedi High School in response to community feedback requesting more career exploration opportunities for high school students. The event was shaped by Mahtomedi's guiding principle, "You Shared, We Listened," highlighting the importance of community feedback.

Over 30 businesses and organizations showcased opportunities, and more than 25 volunteers offered resume reviews and networking practice for the 400-plus students in attendance. The fair reflected the true mission of community partnership, bringing together schools, families, and local businesses in support of student success.

The event was a strong success thanks to collaboration with Mahtomedi High School administrators and teachers, and it advanced the district's strategic plan by helping students strengthen communication skills, explore career pathways, and build career readiness. The fair had a lasting impact not only on students but also on the businesses and individuals involved, who remarked on how meaningful and impactful the day was for them.



RIVER VALLEY THEATER COMPANY AND SHAKOPEE COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Shakopee Public Schools

River Valley Theatre Company (RVTC) and Shakopee Community Education have partnered since 2012 to present high-quality youth theatre experiences through RVTC's Youth Studio. Over the past decade, this collaboration has produced more than 30 plays, engaging over 1,000 young performers in creative, confidence-building stage experiences.

RVTC secures the musical rights and hires the production team, while Community Education provides theatre space, logistical support and coordination with school district departments. Community Education also assists with program design, ticket sales, and front-of-house support, ensuring a seamless experience for families and audiences.

Community Education has proudly served on RVTC's Board of Directors for approximately ten years, further strengthening this longstanding partnership. Additionally, RVTC and the Shakopee High School Drama Club have established a shared resources agreement, benefiting both youth and high school productions.

Together, RVTC and Shakopee Community Education foster a vibrant, supportive environment where students develop important skills like self-expression, creativity and teamwork through their involvement in theatre.



SCHOOL-AGE CARE HYBRID SOCIAL WORKER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Anoka-Hennepin Schools

The School-Age Care Hybrid Social Worker Internship Program is a partnership between Anoka-Hennepin Community Education's school-age care program (Adventures Plus), Anoka-Hennepin Schools, and district social workers. The program was developed to address staffing shortages while creating valuable, real-world training opportunities for college students majoring in social work.

Interns in the program gain a partially paid experience that blends school social work knowledge with hands-on learning in Adventures Plus. They split their time between Adventures Plus sites and school social workers, building rapport with students, learning about child development and behavior interventions, and supporting social-emotional learning through group activities. The interns receive supervision from both programs and benefit from free professional trainings offered throughout the school year.

This collaboration has proved to be a tremendously beneficial partnership for interns, Adventures Plus staff, and students alike. Interns earn required hours toward their degrees while gaining meaningful, practical experience that prepares them for future social work careers. At the same time, Adventures Plus students benefit from additional support, individualized attention, and enhanced social-emotional learning opportunities led by skilled, compassionate future professionals.





Community Education Partner of the Year Award

The MCEA Partner of the Year Award recognizes an individual or organization whose leadership, generosity, and partnership have strengthened Community Education across Minnesota. This award honors those who give of their time, talents, and resources to enrich lives, expand access, and build stronger communities.

Recipients embody the spirit of lifelong learning and collaboration. Their efforts create opportunities for others, foster inclusion, and demonstrate the power of partnership in action.



BRYAN SCHIFFLER

CIVIC MEMBER, ALBANY AREA
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Bryan Schiffler, owner of Albany Chrysler Center and the TANI Division, is a true example of community-first leadership. His actions reflect a deep-rooted commitment to the greater Albany area, consistently prioritizing initiatives that enhance quality of life, support local programs, and strengthen community connections. Bryan leads with sincerity and generosity, investing in the people and projects that make his community thrive.

From supporting performing arts and early learning to improving parks and public spaces, Bryan's leadership is defined by collaboration, care, and a steadfast belief in giving back. Across all these efforts, Bryan demonstrates a consistent and selfless investment in building a stronger, more connected community.



Supportive Administrator of the Year

The MCEA Supportive Administrator of the Year Award recognizes an educational leader who champions the mission of Community Education through advocacy, collaboration, and vision. This award honors a leader whose commitment ensures that lifelong learning thrives within their district and community, strengthening connections between schools, families, and the broader community.



DANA KAUZLARICH MILLER

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF TEACHING AND LEARNING, WAYZATA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dana Kauzlarich Miller, Executive Director of Teaching and Learning for Wayzata Public Schools, is a passionate advocate for early learning and family engagement. Her leadership ensures that every child begins their educational journey with strong foundations and that Community Education remains central to the district's priorities. Dana leads with clarity, compassion, and an unwavering belief that learning begins long before kindergarten and continues far beyond the classroom.

Her commitment to partnership and innovation has strengthened collaboration across departments, elevated early learning staff, and expanded opportunities for families throughout the district. From championing preschool access to fostering professional learning communities, Dana exemplifies the advocacy, collaboration, and lifelong learning that define Community Education in Minnesota.





Regional Community Educators of Excellence

The MCEA Regional Community Educators of Excellence Awards celebrate professionals across Minnesota who exemplify leadership, inclusion, and innovation in lifelong learning. These honorees represent the best of community education – creating opportunities, building partnerships, and inspiring growth in the communities they serve.





Region 1

LINDA JACOBS

Winona Area Public Schools

For over 22 years, Linda Jacobs has been a pillar of Community Education in southeastern Minnesota. A dedicated advocate for adults with disabilities and lifelong learning, she builds partnerships that create lasting impact. Whether mentoring social work students, collaborating with local organizations, or leading wellness initiatives, Linda's compassion and energy inspire connection, inclusion, and community pride.

Region 2

ADRY STAFFORD

Worthington Public Schools

As Family and Community Liaison Coordinator, Adry Stafford has transformed how families connect with education in Worthington. Her leadership ensures that every family, regardless of language or background, feels welcomed and supported. Adry's cultural insight, positivity, and dedication have strengthened relationships across the district, setting a powerful example of inclusion and equity in Community Education.



Region 3

MISCHELLE SQUIRE

Osseo Area Schools

For more than 30 years, Michelle Squire has led with innovation, creativity, and heart. As Marketing and Outreach Specialist for Osseo Area Schools, she has transformed how Community Education engages learners of all ages through data-driven outreach and digital storytelling. Her leadership, mentorship, and advocacy for lifelong learning have made a lasting impact across Minnesota.



Region 4

JULIE KINSELLA

Bloomington Public Schools

With 26 years of dedication to early learning and childcare, Julie Kinsella is a trusted advocate for families and children in Bloomington. Her leadership, compassion, and creativity have shaped beloved initiatives like the Bloomington Bookfest, fostering community connection through literacy and play. Julie's work continues to enrich families and strengthen community ties.

2025 MCEA

Statewide Community Educator of Excellence

Region 5

KHIA BRUSE

*District 196 -
Rosemount-Apple Valley- Eagan*

For more than 26 years, Khia Bruse has exemplified leadership in Community Education, visionary, collaborative, and grounded in service. Her work at Roseville Area Schools and ISD 196 reflects a career dedicated to empowering families, supporting staff, and expanding access to lifelong learning.

Khia's impact extends well beyond her own district. She mentors emerging leaders, fosters innovation, and reminds others that community education is, above all, about people. Her integrity, humor, and heart embody the collaboration and care that define excellence in our field.

A longtime MCEA leader, Khia has served as a Board Member, Regional Representative, and Secretary, and has twice co-chaired the MCEA Fall Conference. Her steady leadership, organization, and creativity have strengthened events and initiatives that unite Minnesota's community educators.





Region 6

LILA MAPP

Fridley Public Schools

Lila Mapp has redefined parent education through empathy, honesty, and cultural awareness. As an ECCE Parent Educator, she creates safe, meaningful spaces for families to connect and grow. Her willingness to lead courageous conversations—like her book club on *How to Raise Antiracist Children*—has opened doors to inclusion and authentic community dialogue.

Region 7

JOELLE HOFER

Moorhead Area Public Schools

A leader in early learning for more than 25 years, Joelle Hofer has expanded access, improved kindergarten readiness, and built strong community partnerships in Moorhead. Her equity-focused leadership and genuine care for children and families have made her programs a model of excellence and collaboration across Minnesota.



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Region 8

ALEXANDRA HANSON

Hibbing Public Schools

In just three years, Alexandra Hanson has built a thriving aquatics program from the ground up, now serving nearly 3,000 participants. Her creativity, drive, and community spirit have revitalized Hibbing's programs and inspired others to get involved. Alex's energy and passion embody the heart of Community Education.



Region 9

TONY REIMERS

Morris Area Schools

Tony Reimers exemplifies the power of collaboration in Community Education. As Director of Morris Area Schools, he has built lasting partnerships that enhance recreation, learning, and connection. His visionary leadership and commitment to teamwork have strengthened Morris and inspired communities across the state.



**That's
Community Ed!**

Thank You for Celebrating Excellence in Community Education

Each year, the Minnesota Community Education Association proudly recognizes the people and programs that bring lifelong learning to life across our state. Their leadership, creativity, and compassion strengthen Minnesota communities and remind us of the power of connection through education.

Together, we continue to build spaces where everyone can learn, grow, and belong. Thank you to every educator, partner, and advocate who helps make Community Education a cornerstone of vibrant, inclusive communities.



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