September 2025

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

THE READ ACT
HOW A STATEWIDE LITERACY INITIATIVE IS CHANGING THE WAY KIDS LEARN TO READ FROM KINDERGARTEN TO GRADUATION

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JEREMY KOVASH

JANE EASTES CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

REIMAGINING READINESS IN MINNESOTA

EARLY LITERACY TRANSFORMATION IN THE FERGUS FALLS KINDERGARTEN

LAKES COUNTRY SERVICE COOPERATIVE ANNOUNCES THE SELECTION OF THE 2026 RURAL MINNESOTA EDUCATION POLICY FELLOWSHIP COHORT

EMPOWERING MINNESOTA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE THROUGH CONSCIOUS DISCIPLINE

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS OFFERED THROUGH LAKES COUNTRY SERVICE COOPERATIVE

MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION IN SCHOOLS TRAINING AND POLICY REQUIREMENTS

UKERU CRISIS INTERVENTION PROGRAM

PLEASE VISIT OUR CALENDAR FOR IMPORTANT DATES.

CLICK HERE FOR A LISTING OF OUR CURRENT JOB POSTINGS

An equal opportunity employer

PDF

www.lcsc.org



The READ Act

COMPASS

How a statewide literacy initiative is changing the way kids learn to read, from kindergarten to graduation.

The READ Act, literacy legislation passed in Minnesota in 2023, is being implemented to improve reading skills for students in grades K-12. The goal is for every student to read at grade level, regardless of their zip code, a shift from the previous "Read Well by Third Grade" program.

The Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) COMPASS Regional Literacy Team plays a key role in this initiative, collaborating with schools to implement the new law.

Continued on next page

Source: Anna Gross, COMPASS Regional Literacy Lead; MDE COMPASS Literacy; https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/READ/; Captivoice.com;
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Generalist

The COMPASS Team



Anna Gross

Regional Literacy Lead

Anna supports local literacy plans with technical assistance, support Universal and Dyslexia screening administration and data interpretation and provide site-based literacy coaching support



Raina Askin

Regional Literacy Network Coach

Raina works to strengthen educator capacity to deliver literacy practices in core instruction through the Regional Literacy Network (RLN) Coaching Model to move all students toward literacy grade level proficiency.



Holly Inniger

Regional Literacy Network Coach

Holly works to strengthen educator capacity to deliver literacy practices in core instruction through the Regional Literacy Network (RLN) Coaching Model to move all students toward literacy grade level proficiency.

The COMPASS Team and the READ Act

The LCSC COMPASS Regional Literacy Team, led by Regional Literacy Lead Anna Gross, is one of nine such teams in Minnesota. The team serves as a liaison between the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and school districts, assisting schools in interpreting and complying with the READ Act. Other team members include Holly Inniger and Raina Askin, who serve as network coaches, and Michelle Steele, the Lead for Early Childhood/Early Childhood Special Education.

The team's primary work involves providing professional development to teachers. Past literacy practices were not working, as fewer than 48% of students were reading at grade level. "I don't think anyone can argue that the literacy instruction needs to change," said Gross. "We need to do what is best for kids."

Implementation of the READ Act - Phase One: Training and Screenings

The READ Act's implementation is being rolled out in phases. Phase one, which began in 2024, mandates professional development for teachers and screenings for students in grades K-3. Many schools are voluntarily extending this screening to grades K-6. A key part of the professional development is the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) program, developed by Dr. Louisa Moats. This training focuses on the science of reading, covering foundational skills like phonological awareness, phonics, and comprehension.

Gross noted that a challenge in providing this training is that districts feel "bogged down" with the time commitment. Teachers are also working to align their curriculum with new English Language Arts (ELA) standards. "Districts are feeling very bogged down. LETRS training is a lot of hours, and trying to give teachers time to align their standards to their curriculum has been a pretty heavy lift," said Gross.





Phase Two: High School Focus

Phase two, beginning in the 2025-26 school year, will expand mandated screenings to grades 4-12 using a universal tool called Capti ReadBasix. The goal is to identify students with foundational reading deficits. MDE chose this assessment because it is a diagnostic tool that helps inform intervention strategies.

Gross shared that high school is a particular area of concern because students' reading deficits often become more apparent at this stage. Additionally, high school teachers may not have received adequate training to teach foundational reading skills. "I used to teach High School English. Never, in my undergraduate, master's, or doctoral studies, did I learn to teach children to read. When your license is in High School English, no college class covers foundational reading skills, because by ninth grade, students should be able to read. But I know looking back now that I had kids who struggled to read because they were missing those foundational pieces," said Gross. "Kids can really hide it for many years. It is typically in high school when the deficits become apparent. If we can address those foundational deficits, they can catch up remarkably quickly."

> "We have really rallied around that goal in what we can do to equip our schools and their leaders with the tools they need to change literacy practices," said Anna Gross.

Challenges and Future Outlook

Schools are facing several hurdles, including limited literacy aid from the state, which often forces them to prioritize screening tools over a new curriculum. However, Gross pointed out that schools can find free curriculum resources, like UFLI Phonics and Bridge to Read. "There are ways to provide kids with what they are missing, and in a lot of curriculums it is that foundational piece," said Gross.

Despite the challenges, Gross is optimistic about the future. She believes the data from high school screenings will serve as a "wake-up call" and lead to necessary changes. She is excited to see the long-term impact on students' reading scores.

"I'm really excited to see the data from the middle and high school levels. Not because I think the data will be good but because I think it will be a wake-up call," said Gross. She added that she's looking forward to the training being done and "moving from learning what to do to look at how we implement structured training in the classroom."

"We have to remember that is what our goal is, but it takes a lot of work to get there," said Gross. "I'm excited to see the move from theory to practice in the classrooms and hear from the district literacy leads some of the success stories," she concluded.

Would you like to learn more about the Minnesota Read Act and the COMPASS Literacy Team? **Email Anna Gross** at Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

FROM THE

Executive Director

"Learning, Leading, and Innovating to Achieve Vibrant, Inclusive Communities."



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

Higher Education

A Conversation with Dr. Preston Cooper



This month, I had the wonderful opportunity to join a group of leaders in visiting Dr. Preston Cooper at his office in Washington, D.C. Dr. Cooper is a senior fellow at the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity (FREOPP), where he specializes in higher education policy and economics. His work has been nationally recognized for its clear, data-driven analysis on the value of higher education, student debt, and the return on investment for students and families.

At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, our school leaders often discuss the challenges of higher education—particularly the cost for students and families. Dr. Cooper's research challenges some of these commonly held theories and offers insights that should help shape our conversations with young people as they consider their futures.

One of the most striking points Dr. Cooper shared was the sharp decline in overall higher education enrollment over the past 15 years. Yet, within this trend, he highlighted several encouraging developments. As Dr. Cooper explained:

- *"High-quality schools—especially large public universities—grew their student bodies over the last decade, bucking the trend of lower college enrollments."*
- *"College enrollment may be sliding. Nonetheless, colleges are graduating more students and awarding more degrees in higher-earning fields. Fewer students are enrolled at institutions where the student loan crisis was most acute. The higher education sector may be slightly smaller—but it's generating better results."*

Continued on next page

This perspective offers hope and direction as we help our students navigate life after high school. While the overall number of students pursuing higher education has decreased, more of those who do are earning valuable degrees in fields that offer stronger career outcomes.

Our region's schools are also adapting and changing. Our partners at Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM), Minnesota State Community and Technical College (M State), and Concordia College continue to use this type of data and other sources to expand opportunities for students. Business, engineering, and nursing remain high-demand, high-wage fields, while Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are producing the skilled laborers that fuel our region's economy. Together, these pathways ensure that students have multiple routes to success—whether through a four-year degree, a two-year credential, or a technical program.

For those interested, Dr. Cooper's work can be explored in greater depth at his **FREOPP webpage,** where he shares outstanding charts and data that bring these trends to life:

As a region, we must continue to support our students and families in making informed decisions. By understanding the evolving higher education landscape, we can ensure our guidance is rooted in research, balanced by the realities our communities face, and focused on the opportunities that lie ahead.



Thursday, November 20, 2025, 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. at Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

Discounted registration for LCSC members.

This comprehensive training, led by Josh Heggem, an MSBA Board Certified Labor and Employment Law Specialist from Pemberton Law, is designed to help you prepare for significant changes to Minnesota's employment landscape in 2026.

The session will provide an essential update on new laws, including the new Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) and Minnesota Paid Leave laws. It will also offer a foundational review of employment law basics, focusing on key areas such as the hiring process, discrimination, effective performance management, and best practices for disciplinary actions and terminations.

The training begins with a light breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and concludes at 12:00 p.m.

REGISTER HERE



Classroom TO COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

JANE EASTES
Deputy
Executive Director

Youth in Civic Life:

Building a Pipeline of Community Leaders

I recently had an opportunity to go to Washington DC with LCSC's Education Policy Fellows. One of my top takeaways from our trips to Capitol Hill is that the government runs on young staffers who perform an incredible amount of work to support our elected officials. Another takeaway is how important it is that each of us adds our personal voice, opinion and experience directly to your elected members of congress. Calling or writing about an issue, a vote, or an upcoming vote can make more of a difference than you might expect. They want to know real-life experiences and how issues affect constituents "back home." Better yet, talk to the staffers responsible for the issue you are calling about. We talked to one new staffer responsible for education issues whose experience in Minnesota was limited and his talking points simple. When he invited us to talk to him, he heard real life specific experiences. That simple exchange and our continued relationship has the potential to shift the frame on issues he presents to his boss, our representative.



Education Policy Fellowship Cohort at the Office of Minnesota Senator Tina Smith

You don't need a title to be taken seriously. You do need authenticity and your story is helped when backed with good information. All the information we can get to have a fuller picture of our youth in schools is crucial to helping create better education and public health policies at the school, state and federal levels. Last week Lakes Country hosted two researchers from the MN Department of Education who presented on the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS). The MSS is the only wide scale consistent data collection in the state focused on the perceptions and experiences of youth. There are three age-appropriate surveys given at grades 5, grade 8, and grades 9 and 11. The survey is given every three years and is voluntary.

Is it perfect? No. Is it valuable? Yes! We heard local stories of how the data is used in some districts to make programs work better for more students. We know the data is being used by communities to get funding, in some cases millions of dollars for our rural counties, for youth-centered programs. We also heard why it was difficult to administer in some communities, and not being used. Drs. Birinci and Do were there not only to talk about the MSS, but to listen and take back what they heard to improve the survey. We thank them for reaching out, listening, and working to improve a valuable source of information. The MSS is another way that youth can tell their story as a group, and we need as many sources of credible information as possible to do better for youth in our communities and schools. After all, they will be the next staffers on the hill listening to our stories and helping craft policy for the next generation!







Reimagining Readiness in Minnesota

Written by Anne Soto
World Savvy with Lakes Country Service Cooperative & Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies

What is school really for?

I grew up a farm kid in a community of 500, where the school wasn't just a building– it was the heartbeat of the town. Friday night lights, 4-H competitions, school musicals, the science fair weren't "extracurriculars," they were community life. Everyone showed up, and in turn, community shaped my future.

That's the unique gift of rural education: the porousness between K–12 education, community assets, and local leaders. Students don't just learn in classrooms; they're shaped by business owners, coaches, elders, and neighbors.

When schools lean into this porousness, they create the conditions for young people to stay, lead, and reimagine the future of their hometowns.

Yet too often, learning stops at the textbook or the worksheet and the connection to the community ends there. But what happens when knowledge leads to action in the community? Imagine moving beyond an occasional farm field trip or Indigenous history guest speaker to units designed with local leaders. What if students worked with an ag-business to solve a real-world challenge applying math to farm yield data or partnered with the local conservation board to improve water quality in nearby lakes?

That kind of learning not only prepares students for meaningful careers, it strengthens the region itself.

Why Rural Matters

Greater Minnesota reflects the dynamics of rural America rooted in agriculture, manufacturing, and natural resources, while navigating shifts in workforce, demographics, and technology. Schools are at the center of this transition: when they thrive, the region thrives.

Continued on next page



Early Literacy

Transformation in Fergus Falls Kindergarten

Source: Shelley Schoeneck, Fergus Falls Public Schools Kindergarten Teacher; LEXIA LETRS, kindergarten.fergusotters.org
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Generalist

Shelley Schoeneck, a veteran kindergarten teacher at Fergus Falls Elementary, is a passionate champion for kids and reading. We recently sat down with Schoeneck to learn about the literacy work taking place with kindergarten-aged children at Lincoln School in Fergus Falls.

The Shift to the Science of Reading

A decade ago, the program used for early literacy was called Balanced Literacy. "We did not know how much time needed to be devoted to phonics in kindergarten, first, and second grade," Schoeneck shared, noting that phonics was always a part of the program, but wasn't placed as a high enough priority.

Schoeneck shared that she recently reviewed the third-grade testing scores on the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) website and found that, over the last decade the scores had dropped in both math and reading by close to 10% with the decline starting just before the COVID 19 pandemic hit.

At Lincoln School and many other schools in Minnesota, the Science of Reading approach is being adopted. This transition requires substantial professional development for teachers.

The Lexia LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) Suite is a thorough professional development program designed to equip early childhood and elementary educators and administrators with the essential knowledge to become literacy and language experts. Created by Dr. Louisa Moats and other literacy leaders, Lexia LETRS teaches the skills necessary to master the fundamental components of reading and writing instruction—phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and written language.

Schoeneck is excited about the opportunity for reading skills to improve now that most teachers have received LETRS Training, and they are speaking the same language. "Really, the key is that the graduating students coming out of the universities are now receiving that training as well," said Schoeneck.

Schoeneck shared that most of the schools she trained with are adopting the Heggerty Phonemic Awareness curriculum for reading, which is based on the latest research in the Science of Reading. "I think what we are doing right now is really good work," said Schoeneck. "I'm hoping that we are going to see that reflected very soon in our test scores. With the Lexia LETRS Training and the core training that teachers are undertaking, we will all be on the same page regarding the importance of phonics."

Starting Strong: Building a Culture of Learning

Schoeneck shared that 80 percent of her students either attended a preschool or daycare before kindergarten, where they received some basic reading experience. There are very few children who come to Lincoln School with no reading experience.

When asked about the information she has regarding her students' reading skill levels at the start of the year, Schoeneck explained that if her students attended Otter Preschool, she might have some limited information. However, she mainly begins assessing their reading skills on the first day they arrive to start kindergarten.

Continued on next page







> This program is evidence-based, and we are seeing great growth.

-Shelley Schoeneck
Kindergarten Teacher, Fergus Falls Lincoln School

Education Software for Guiding Instruction (ESGI) is the program Schoeneck uses to assess students. Every teacher uses the same assessment. From day one, she can evaluate the child throughout the year, review trends in what students know and don't know, and track their learning progress.

On the very first day, they hold a mini-conference where parents and caregivers meet, discuss expectations, and learn more about the child. One of the Title 1 teachers assesses the students on their knowledge of numbers, letters, sounds, and their ability to read. Schoeneck will know where to begin with each student.

With the benchmark numbers in mind, Schoeneck knows that for many of the students learning to read can be challenging. They need to start by building confidence and adopting a mindset of "We can do this!" Schoeneck shared that her method for starting her students off on a strong year is by building a culture of learning.

"We start the year by building up who we are," said Schoeneck. "Who we are to each other, who we are in this community of Lincoln School, and I just keep reminding them they are the respectful citizens. We care about each other. We love a challenge. When something is hard, we say yes, and our brain gets a chance to grow!"

This is what Schoeneck spends a lot of time on during the first few weeks of the new school year. After those weeks, she shared that if you ask her students who they are, they will say, "We are the respectful citizens. We love a challenge. We never give up!" Schoeneck explained that it doesn't matter how smart you are in kindergarten if you don't feel like you are a good friend and an important part of the community.

The Push for Phonics Mastery

Once the foundation of classroom culture is set, the intense work of early literacy begins. "We begin by building our culture of who we are and what we are capable of," Schoeneck stated.

"Then, we move on to phonemic awareness, where we learn to hear, segment, and represent those sounds through symbols, ultimately forming words. Truly, we are having phenomenal results with this method," said Schoeneck.

Schoeneck then begins to work with the students to help them learn their ABCs, learning words and sounds. They have a big celebration when this is completed, called the Chicka Chicka Boom Boom celebration, where everyone is in a parade celebrating all the letters. Then they go back to work, and Schoeneck begins teaching the letters in the order that they are found in the frequency of emerging literature. "Our Little Readers."

Continued on next page

The goal is aggressive: “That is how hard we push in kindergarten now,” said Schoeneck. “We need to have those letters and sounds down. If not, they will need some interventions.” Before the end of November, she hopes that each child in her class will have a good grasp of every letter and every sound. Interventions may include assistance from Title 1 teachers and small-group help in the classroom.

With a strong classroom culture and a focused, evidence-based curriculum, Schoeneck and her colleagues are working to ensure that every kindergarten student masters the critical foundational skills needed to become a confident, successful reader.

Learn more about Lincoln School and its culture of “Who we Are” by visiting their website at kindergarten.fergusotters.org/.

COOPERATIVE Purchasing CONNECTION

United Bus Sales is now a Cooperative Purchasing Connection (CPC) vendor



CPC conducted a competitive solicitation for Certified Pre-owned School Buses and awarded it to United Bus Sales.

United Bus Sales is a third-generation, family-owned dealership that sells used and new vans and buses, parts for all van and bus brands, and a full line of repair services out of their three service locations. United sells vehicles for schools and for municipal use.

Member Benefits

- $1,500.00 off all units priced over $50,000.00 and $700.00 off all units priced under $50,000.00
- Free fleet assessments - providing you with a plan for your transportation needs
- Free on-site demos - we will bring a bus to your location
- Free transportation for warranty claims - should your bus need warranty repair we will come get it - fix it and return it

Lakes Country Academy Ribbon Cutting

Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) was thrilled to host local community members at the Lakes Country Academy ribbon-cutting ceremony in Alexandria.



The Alexandria Chamber of Commerce welcomed community members for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at our new location on September 3, which recently completed renovations in time for the 2025-2026 school year. To make this project successful, LCSC partnered with Alexandria Public Schools and all our districts, the City of Alexandria, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Alexandria Economic Development Authority. This project was a great example of what LCSC can accomplish when working with others.

"Since 1976, we have proudly served our most vulnerable and exceptional students with special needs. Lakes Country Academy is a hallmark of that service. This program not only supports students and families but also generates new jobs and fosters growth in our region. We anticipate continued growth of this program and other synergistic opportunities for students and families," Jeremy Kovash, Executive Director, LCSC.

Do you want to learn more about programming at LCSC? Visit our website at LCSC.org and click on programs.

CONGRATS!

Celebrating Our Own Staci Allmaras

Congratulations to Staci Allmaras for her recent recognition at the Pelican Rapids Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting, where she received the prestigious P.R.I.D.E. award!

(Pelican Rapids Individual Demonstrating Excellence)



Staci Allmaras, pictured at the center with chamber board members Lana Grefsrud and Sandie Strandlien, received the prestigious award at the Pelican Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce annual meeting and awards banquet. She was recognized for her dedication to the youth of Pelican Rapids and her leadership in bringing the future Bridge Center youth and community center to life.

"Feeling super honored by our amazing community. While the acronym is pretty cool, this award isn't about an individual. "There is no I in TEAM", and that's what it takes to make change happen."

Staci Allmaras, LCSC Director of School and Youth Engagement

Lakes Country Service Cooperative Announces the Selection of the 2026 Rural Minnesota Education Policy Fellowship Cohort

MNEPF
MINNESOTA EDUCATION POLICY FELLOWSHIP



Maureen Eigen – Board Member LCSC / Alexandria Public Schools



Christy Frigaard – Early Childhood/EI Ed Instructor; ECE Program Director



Katie Ganoe – Early Childhood Initiative Coordinator, West Central Initiative



Adam Johnson – Superintendent, New York Mills Public School



Celeste Koppe – Principal Consultant, Roots & Reach LLC



Mary Ann Martin – Associate Director of Special Education Staff Growth and Development, Lakes Country Service Cooperative



Kurt Mortenson – Board Member / Commissioner, Lakes Country Service Cooperative, Otter Tail County



Mary Phillipe – Communications Coordinator, Lakes Country Service Cooperative



Shawn Reilly – School Board Member, Alexandria Public Schools

LCSC LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative



Maria Steen – Child Care Connections Director, CAPLP



Josh Wahlin – Site Administrator, Lakes Country Academy - Alexandria
Lakes Country Service Cooperative



September 2026
Current and past cohort members of the Education Policy Fellowship visit the office of Minnesota Senator Amy Klobuchar as part of the 2026 Fellowship training program.

Minnesota Education Policy Fellowship (MNEPF) is a joint venture of the Center for Policy Design, a 501(c)(3), and the Lakes Country Service Cooperative—a public non-profit membership organization. The first year of the Fellowship was 1975-76. Since then nearly **550** Fellows have completed this unique policy experience. Together this forms an important network for Minnesota and the nation.

EMPOWERING MINNESOTA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Through Conscious Discipline



Written By: Greta Hentges
Marketing and Communications Specialist
West Central Initiative

Across Minnesota, early childhood educators are finding new ways to help children build emotional resilience, develop empathy, and thrive. Thanks to a gift from the Sauer Family Foundation to West Central Initiative, more educators and families now have access to transformational Conscious Discipline training—an evidence-based, trauma-informed approach that equips adults to manage their own emotions while helping children do the same.

Developed by renowned child-development expert Dr. Becky Bailey, the program strengthens relationships between caregivers and children by fostering healthier, more connected interactions.

"We're proud to partner with West Central Initiative and support a Minnesota cohort of Conscious Discipline trainers," said Pat Sauer, President and Co-Founder of the Sauer Family Foundation.

With this funding, 50 educators and leaders from across Minnesota are completing a yearlong training to become endorsed Conscious Discipline facilitators. The program began with a two-day, in-person session in July 2025 and continues with ongoing coaching, reflective practice, and advanced training throughout the year. These facilitators will then share their expertise with Head Start programs, school districts, and child care providers—expanding access to Conscious Discipline, especially in rural communities.



Anne Hoff, the endorsed facilitator trainer, included many Conscious Discipline activities within the trainer course.

Why Conscious Discipline Matters

Conscious Discipline focuses on creating safe, connected, and supportive environments for both children and adults. At its core, the program helps caregivers and educators recognize their own emotional states, manage stress, and guide children through calming techniques and problem-solving strategies.



"Conscious Discipline gives adults the tools to understand themselves first—what triggers them, what challenges them—so they can better support children," said Marsha Erickson, our Early Childhood Specialist. "When educators and caregivers can manage their own emotions, they help children learn to self-regulate, develop empathy, and thrive."

By teaching adults how to "download their calm" and co-regulate with children, the program builds skills that support brain development, emotional awareness, and stronger relationships.

Sauer Foundation's Transformational Support

The Sauer Family Foundation has long been committed to improving the lives of children and families. When community members and early childhood leaders began calling for expanded access to Conscious Discipline, the foundation stepped in to make it possible.

"Children and caregivers around the state have benefited from this evidence-based, trauma-informed approach," said Colleen O'Keefe, Executive Director of the Sauer Family Foundation. "Supporting professional development across Minnesota is a great way to embed Conscious Discipline at the system level."

Creating Statewide Impact

The impact of Conscious Discipline is already being felt across Minnesota. Educators report better relationships with children and higher job satisfaction, which supports staff retention during a time of significant workforce challenges.

Families share stories of children using calming techniques at home, helping parents and siblings manage stress together.

"Conscious Discipline has truly been life-changing for us," said Lacey Hoppe, Director of the Minnesota State University Moorhead Early Education Center and endorsed facilitator. "We were doing all the techniques before, but now we do them with confidence, supporting each other and growing together. Becoming an endorsed facilitator has helped me live and breathe Conscious Discipline every day, showing our staff, families, and kids the benefits as I continue to strengthen myself as a leader."

The program is also reaching culturally diverse communities in meaningful ways. In some cultures, conversations around mental health can be difficult. Conscious Discipline provides tools that focus on breathing, emotional awareness, and empathy without using stigmatizing language, making it accessible and inclusive for families from many backgrounds.

Thanks to the Sauer Family Foundation's support, West Central Initiative and statewide partners are helping build a stronger early childhood workforce and providing children with the tools they need to succeed in school and in life.

Visit our website to learn more about our initiatives supporting families and educators.

Academic Programs

Offered Through
Lakes Country Service Cooperative

Author: Monica Thompson, LCSC Coordinator of Technology Integration and Academic Challenges

Through Knowledge Bowl, Math Masters, and the Spelling Bee, Lakes Country Service Cooperative is proud to provide students with academic opportunities. These programs challenge students to think critically, work collaboratively, and celebrate academic achievement. As the year unfolds, LCSC looks forward to another season of inspiring student growth and success.

As a new school year begins, Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) is excited to support students across the region with enrichment opportunities that spark curiosity, teamwork, and academic growth. From buzzer-beating academic competitions to math problem-solving and spelling challenges, LCSC programs provide meaningful experiences for students outside of their everyday classroom learning.

Knowledge Bowl

Knowledge Bowl is an interdisciplinary academic competition where teams of students work together to answer questions on a wide range of subjects. Topics include science, history, literature, math, geography, current events, and more. Students compete in written and oral rounds, with oral rounds conducted using buzzers where the fastest team to respond gets the chance to answer first.

- 5th/6th Grade Knowledge Bowl – Entering its second year, this division allows younger students to experience the excitement of competition in a supportive environment. Meets begin in October, giving these students the chance to develop teamwork skills and early academic confidence.
- Junior High Knowledge Bowl – Middle school teams also start in October, tackling more advanced content and sharpening quick recall under pressure.



- Senior High Knowledge Bowl – High school teams will kick off in December, with two full days of competition in Moorhead. At this level, students face challenging material that pushes their critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving skills to new heights.

Knowledge Bowl builds academic teamwork, resilience, and a love of learning—qualities that serve students far beyond the competition. Contact Monica Thompson, mthompson@lcsc.org, with any questions or to register.

Spelling Bee

The Spelling Bee is a time-honored academic tradition that highlights students' command of language, spelling accuracy, and ability to remain poised in front of an audience. Students advance through classroom and school-level competitions to earn a place in the regional bee.

- The Regional Spelling Bee will be held on February 17, 2026, bringing together top spellers from across the region.



The winner will have the opportunity to advance to the National Spelling Bee, gaining recognition for their hard work and dedication to mastering language. Contact **Jolene King** with any questions or to register.

Math Masters

Math Masters is a problem-solving competition designed to challenge students' logic, reasoning, and computational skills. Students work both individually and in teams to solve rigorous math problems, encouraging accuracy, perseverance, and cooperation. This spring, LCSC will host three grade-level events:

- 6th Grade – March 5, 2026
- 4th Grade – April 22, 2026
- 5th Grade – April 24, 2026

Each event consists of timed rounds that test both speed and depth of understanding. Math Masters helps students build confidence in mathematics while learning how to work collaboratively in high-pressure situations. **Registration for Math Masters** will open in October.



ELA (English Language Arts) Standards Workshop

COMPASS

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

October 14, 2025
10 am - 3 pm

This ELA (English Language Arts) Standards Workshop is an opportunity to dig deeper into the 2020 MN ELA Standards and their implementation. Regional teams will collaborate and learn together through various implementation processes, including unpacking benchmarks, bundling benchmarks, aligning standards and curriculum, and developing horizontal and vertical alignment.

Kristin Bauck, MDE English Language Arts Specialist, will facilitate the workshop alongside the Lakes Country COMPASS Literacy Team. The target audience is district standards implementation teams, including District Literacy Leads and any other key personnel involved in standards and curriculum development.

*Since this is targeted for teams, please register each person so we have an accurate number to prepare for the session.



Cost: Participation is free; however, an optional catered lunch is available for $25. Attendees will have 45 minutes to enjoy their meal if they choose to step out and grab lunch.



YOUR PATH TO WELLNESS

WEBINAR SERIES

EMBRACE THE SEASON OF CHANGE – HARVEST NEW TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR YOUR HEALTH JOURNEY.

OCT 08

MY HEALTH REWARDS PART 2

Learn how to create your account, complete a live health assessment, join challenges, set and track well-being goals, redeem rewards, and customize your interests for a personalized experience. ~personify HEALTH

NOV 12

EATING BETTER FOR A HEALTHY HEART

Nourish your body with heart-healthy habits — fuel your wellness just in time for the season of gratitude with omada

DEC 03

EXPLORING VIRTUAL CARE FOR BEHAVIORIAL HEALTH

Find new ways to care for your mental and emotional well-being as the year winds down.

Registration coming soon!

RESERVE YOUR SEAT TODAY!

Minnesota Healthcare Consortium

Lakes Country Service Cooperative





MEDICATION Administration in Schools

Training & Policy Requirements

Rick Brynildson
Program Director
of Health and Safety, Lakes Country Service Cooperative

We recently have had inquiries regarding the training requirements of staff who administer medications in schools. There are specific requirements for this type of training and who can provide this training. There are also guidelines on medication administration policy, what is required to be covered, and who should be involved in its development.

Safe and effective medication administration in schools is essential to protecting student health and ensuring compliance with Minnesota law and best practice. School administrators should be aware that staff assigned to administer medications must have appropriate training and documented competence before performing this responsibility.

Training Requirements

Training must be completed before any staff member administers medication, with refresher training provided annually or when new procedures are implemented. In Minnesota, training may be:

- Provided by a Minnesota-licensed Registered Nurse (RN) or Licensed School Nurse (LSN) through a formalized program developed by the nurse.
- Completed through an accredited Minnesota postsecondary educational institution, such as a state-approved Medication Aide course that includes classroom instruction, hands-on skill practice, and competency evaluation.
- Conducted by a supervising RN/LSN through direct competency assessment, when appropriate for the staff member's role.
- Content should cover district medication policies, safe administration procedures, proper documentation, privacy, and the Six Rights of Medication Administration.
- Staff must demonstrate their skills through a competency check, with results documented in writing.
- Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP) may administer medications only under nursing delegation and within defined limits.

Policy Development

Every district must have a medication administration policy. This policy should be:

- Developed in collaboration with the district's LSN/RN
- Aligned with federal, state, and local regulations
- Inclusive of procedures for emergencies, field trips, documentation, privacy, and error reporting
- Reviewed regularly to address changing student health needs and community demographics





Resources for Administrators

- https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/childrenyouth/schoolhealth/med/education.html
- National Association of School Nurses – Medication Administration in Schools: Evidence-based Clinical Practice Guideline and Toolkit
- Wisconsin DPI – Free videos, procedures, and competency checklists for medication administration
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College – Online course and in-person skills demonstration for school personnel

By ensuring that training is consistent, documented, and policy-driven, schools can better safeguard students' health and support staff confidence in medication administration.

For more information email **Rick Brynildson** at Lakes Country Service Cooperative.



Ukeru

By: **Mandy Almquist**
Special Education Office Assistant,
Lakes Country Service Cooperative

In our commitment to supporting members, Lakes Country Service Cooperative offers a variety of specialized trainings each August to help our region's school districts provide staff with the tools and resources they need to better serve students.
In August, we hosted Ukeru training with twenty-nine attendees. These participants will now be able to share their knowledge within their resident districts, providing further training and education to staff.
Ukeru is a crisis intervention program that provides an alternative to the use of restraint and seclusion.

The program has helped schools significantly reduce the use of restraint, seclusion, and related injuries. Built on principles of trauma-informed care and conflict resolution, Ukeru equips staff with behavioral and educational strategies, as well as physical techniques, that minimize the need for restraint.

By shifting how we think about behavioral intervention, Ukeru empowers staff to recognize the reasons behind challenging behaviors and to provide meaningful, safe alternatives that prioritize student well-being.

Learn more about the professional development we offer by visiting our calendar of events.

LCSC

COMMUNICATOR

COMMUNICATOR STAFF

Editors: Jane Eastes: jeastes@lcsc.org
Mary Phillipe: mphillipe@lcsc.org
Address:
Lakes Country Service Cooperative
1001 E. Mount Faith
Fergus Falls, MN 56537
An equal opportunity employer

CONTACT US

Executive Director: Jeremy Kovash
Phone: (218) 739-3273
Email: communicator@lcsc.org

Follow Us For More

The LCSC Communicator is a publication of Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

Views and ideas expressed in the LCSC Communicator by its contributors or advertisers do not necessarily reflect views or policies of Lakes Country Service Cooperative and should not be considered an endorsement thereof.

Lakes Country Service Cooperative retains the right to accept, reject or edit any submitted material and requires all submissions to be signed and dated.



2025 LCSC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair	Jon Karger	Board Member - Pelican Rapids Public Schools
Vice Chair	Suzanne Wing	Board Member - Ashby Public Schools
Clerk	Paul Ness	Board Member - Battle Lake Public Schools
Treasurer	Jim Fish	Board Member - City of Fergus Falls
Director	David Meyer	Board Member - Becker County
Director	Maureen Eigen	Board Member - Alexandria Public Schools
Director	Kevin Campbell	Board Member - Clay County
Director	Kurt Mortenson	Board Member - Otter Tail County
Director	Judith Moeller	Board Member - Parkers Prairie Public Schools
Director	Marc Hasbargen	Board Member - Breckenridge Public Schools
Director	Scott Steffes	Board Member - Moorhead Public Schools
Ex-Officio	Supt. Phil Jensen	Hawley Public Schools
Ex-Officio	Todd Travis	Midwest Special Education Cooperative

CONNECT WITH PROGRAMS & SERVICES AT LCSC!

- Communications & Professional Development
- Cooperative Purchasing
- Education
- Finance
- Health & Safety
- Insurance & Wellness
- Lakes Country Academy
- Special Education
- Information Technology