November 2025

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

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SOUTH AFRICA LEARNING EXPERIENCE



A coach's aspiration, belief, and assurance that if you truly desire something and pursue it with determination, it will ultimately materialize.



The Ashby Lions Club contributed $4,000 toward the South Africa Learning Experience fundraising goal. **Front row:** Leah Fick; **back row from left:** Ella Mickelson, Courtney Paulson, Hadley Hokanson, Lions members Jacque Heinen and Marsha Bowman, Konnie Peters, and Ashby Lady Arrow Lifting Coach Kevin Fick.

Kevin Fick is a lifelong resident of Ashby, Minnesota, where he owns a local HVAC business. Over the years, he has dedicated himself to coaching boys' football and helping with the wrestling program. Currently, Kevin is the certified athletic trainer for the Lady Arrows Lifting Program, which supports female athletes at Ashby Public Schools.

He shares an inspiring story about a unique opportunity for Lady Arrow Lifting members and their group of chaperones: the chance to travel to South Africa and learn about life there.

Continued on next page

Source/Author: Kevin Fick, Ashby Lady Arrow Lifting Coach
Editor: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator



> "This is going to be an unforgettable experience for everyone involved. Shannon and I can't wait to share our passion for Africa, its wildlife, and its way of life with the girls, showing them that sustainability and adventure can go hand in hand."
>
> **Antony Scheepers - Olive Ridge Safaris**

Last winter, I traveled to Uganda and South Africa, spending time fishing the River Nile and hunting in the Eastern Cape. I had high expectations for Africa, but I was not prepared for the breathtaking scope of what I experienced. For an outdoorsperson, Africa is truly my mecca. It was beyond my imagination to see and experience the variety, numbers, and sheer quality of creatures I did.

The accommodations were like stepping into an Ernest Hemingway novel—exactly what one imagines Africa to be. The people were simply wonderful, and the landscapes were stunning, stretching from the Karoo of the Eastern Cape to the coastal forests and the Indian Ocean itself.

I spent a great amount of time with Antony Scheepers, a co-owner of the South African hunting camp. Antony and I talked at length about how the land is managed, how conservation is established, and the differences between our worlds.

We discussed the perceptions of many Americans who haven't been there (including my own) and what we do in our spare time. The topic of community came up, and I spoke about my belief in the Ashby community, which, for him, was as new as Africa was to me. We live in very different worlds. I lamented that someday, I hoped a little piece of my home could make it to South Africa to see what I had.

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The Birth of an Expedition

After returning home, Antony called. We talked about a lot, and he point-blank asked, "Could you get your classroom to South Africa?" My answer was, "Probably not!" When he challenged, "Why not?" our dialogue quickly moved into ideas for what a student trip would look like.

The whole time, I was thinking about logistics: How do you pitch this to parents?

How does it become affordable for high school families? Yet, simultaneously, my thoughts raced: I preach opportunity to these kids, and this is the biggest one in most of their lives, staring me right in the face. Antony and I refined the idea, focusing on his main premise: teaching young people wildlife management and conservation at a fundamental level.

The Commitment and the Team

The idea was pitched to the parents, and as expected, met with mixed results. Families were in, and then out.

There were a few meetings and many questions. This is not your typical Boundary Waters, Mexico, or Europe trip.

When it came time to book airfare, nine brave souls signed up: five students and four adults. They named the group the South Africa Learning Experience. We had barely started fundraising, and at that moment, it was all based on a coach's hope, prayer, and the promise that if you want it and get after it, it will come.

Ashby Lady Arrow Lifter
Courtney Paulson



"If there is one single thing that I wish could come out of this, it's when these young women come home and tell their tales of adventure and what a giant world we have, that more young people take advantage of situations when they arise. In reality, don't be satisfied with blending in or listening to someone else's story. Go find yourself! Dare to be different"

Kevin Fick
Ashby Lady Arrow Lifter Coach

The trip is expertly tailored for the students, with chaperones present to ensure safety, provide guidance, and offer support throughout the entire experience.

Registered South Africa Learning Experience Student, Courtney Paulson

"I have always loved to travel to different places. Going to Africa is something I never thought I would be able to do; it has been my number one dream trip. I am so excited about this opportunity to explore. I'm not just excited about going hunting and fishing. I am an animal lover, and now I get to learn about all the different wildlife in Africa that I would never get to see in Minnesota. I can learn how they eat, travel, and live their daily lives.

Another thing I am very passionate about is plants. I am in FFA and go to state every year in a contest called nursery landscape, where we study different types of plants and trees. It would be so fascinating to learn and discover all the different plant and tree species in Africa. I'm not just excited about the animals and plants. I want to learn how African culture differs from ours. How do they live their lives compared to us? What are the jobs they have, or what do they do in their free time for fun?

In America, I think we're always on our phones or not really engaged with the world. I wonder how different it is in Africa, how involved they are in their world? I think that by going there, we will all learn lifelong skills.

Sometimes, I think I can be ungrateful for the great life I have and all my privileges. Going to Africa, I think, is going to change my perspective on the world majorly and how everyone's lives are so different from one another.

We must get our own water and purify it while we are there camping, which is something I would never have to do or even think about here. While that might be how people must get their water every day. I'm hoping to learn so much more about their culture and how our cultures compare and contrast.

I believe going on this trip and experiencing these things that no other girls our age we know have experienced, or maybe will ever experience, makes this trip even more special. I have never been more excited to go on a trip, and I won't ever forget the life skills I learn, all the animals I will see, and of course, whatever animals we get hunting and fishing."

Continued on next page





"This winter, the girls will be traveling to South Africa to join us at Olive Ridge Safaris, where they'll experience what real Africa is all about: adventure, conservation, culture, and connection."

Antony Scheepers - Olive Ridge Safaris

The students will also learn that big game hunting is a significant economic driver for many African countries. They will participate in a limited trophy harvest to see what professional hunters and trackers do for a living. The capes, hides, and horns will be harvested for taxidermy, and all the meat from the harvest will be sold to a locker for delivery to schools, grocery stores, or wherever the market takes it. They will learn that without hunting, there would be very little wildlife left outside the reserves, as humans and livestock would quickly drive wild animals to extinction.

The itinerary balances hands-on work with sightseeing. The students will travel to a large game reserve where elephants and lions roam freely to see the Big Five (the rhinoceros, Cape buffalo, leopard, elephant, and lion). They will switch from wildlife to dairy farm work for a day, learning jersey herding, actively participating in milking, and moving a herd of cattle. They will also go on a bird-watching tour in the Cape, which is home to an incredible variety of species.

To end their time, they will hike through the dunes and set up camp on the Indian Ocean to get a close-up view of marine life. They will spend 24 hours on the beach, fishing for enormous sharks and catching smaller fish to eat.

The Real Work Begins

Upon their return, the students will become the teachers. They will fulfill their commitments by giving three presentations to elementary students in Ashby, Brandon-Evansville, and West Central Area, as well as a public presentation in Ashby. The local sportsmen club, Coots Unlimited, provided a grant, and in return, the girls will set up a booth at the spring fundraiser to share their experience. Ashby Lions International, instrumental in securing a large grant, will host the girls at the 2027 Lions state convention in Wilmar for a full program presentation.



A collection of quilts is being sent to a family in need in South Africa. Grandmothers have supported the students in creating these blankets.

The adventure ends on March 11th, but the real work of teaching, sharing, and embodying the principles of conservation and global citizenship will have just begun, making the connection between the Karoo of the Eastern Cape and the town of Ashby permanent.

Do you want to learn more about the South Africa Learning Experience? You can email Kevin Fick at kevinfick2023@gmail.com.

FROM THE

Executive Director

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



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, our mission guides every step we take:

"We advocate for strong communities through service and leadership."

Every day, I am reminded of how fortunate we are to serve schools, educators, students, and communities across our region—people who embody that mission with dedication, integrity, and heart.

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend the annual MREA Summit, and I left feeling something I know many of us could use more of right now: **hope.**

Yes, the event itself was outstanding. But what stayed with me most were the conversations—both the inspiring and the challenging ones. Across our region, we continue to face difficult realities in our schools, particularly around student mental health. These issues are real, and they weigh heavily on our educators, families, and communities.

Yet amid those challenges, I experienced something powerful.

I spent time working with participants in the FEW (Future Educators Workshop). Being with these emerging educators—listening to their voices, their questions, their commitment—reminded me why we do this work. Their leadership, spirit, energy, and passion are exactly what our next generation of learners will need.

I also spent meaningful time with one of our strongest university partners, Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM). Their faculty and leaders continue to bring care, thoughtfulness, and deep passion for preparing tomorrow's educators. Every conversation left me more uplifted and more confident in the path ahead.

And I want to give a special thank-you to my friend Jennifer Maras, former National Rural Teacher of the Year, and to the incredible college mentors who helped guide and facilitate the FEW experiences. They embody the very best of what it means to serve education with heart.

So yes—I left the Summit feeling hopeful.

Why? Because the future is bright.
Because the next generation of educators is strong.
Because our partners are committed.
Because together, we are learning, leading, and innovating to build vibrant, inclusive communities.

We will be fine.
In fact, we will be better than fine.
We will be great—because our people are great.

Thank you for all you do for our students, our schools, and our communities. We at LCSC are honored to walk alongside you.



Classroom TO COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

JANE EASTES
Deputy
Executive Director

Youth in Civic Life:

Building a Pipeline of Community Leaders



2025 is the International Year of the Cooperative. A Cooperative is a collaborative model owned and run jointly by and for its members and participants. As an educational Service Cooperative, Lakes Country embraces the collaborative, cooperative model. With school, government, and nonprofit partnerships, we see our role as a connector, catalyst and a participant in providing for community well-being and resilience for the future of our youth and communities.

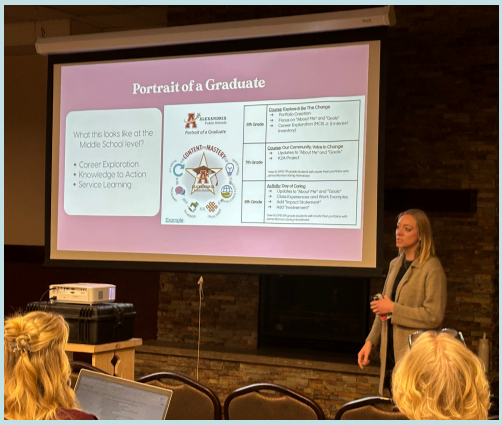
One of our newest initiatives is our Youth in Action programs, led by Staci Allmaras and her incredible Ed Services teammates. We are building these initiatives with as much input as possible from both our partners and participants (including, of course, youth voices!). We are excited to announce a pilot program with schools and communities in Otter Tail County. The core method of this project is Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). This approach empowers young people (ages 14-18) to act as researchers, exploring local data to identify school and community priorities, develop solutions, and lead implementation efforts over the following months (January–April 2026).

We'll kick off the program in December with a Youth Data Summit, where small, diverse teams from schools will learn to use data as their guide to explore and experiment with community-based solutions. We'll be collaborating with our partners, including MDE, Mentor Minnesota, Civic Bridgers, and World Savvy, to bring enriching opportunities for student projects.

Lakes Country is working with a team of local advisors to ensure this program meaningfully affects youth belonging, meaning, well-being & purpose (BMWP) for all. BMWP is a framework developed by the Aspen Institute for Community Solutions during their work to end youth disconnection from employment and education. The emerging BMWP framework is the foundation for programs focused on building communities where ALL youth thrive.



Lakes Country is excited to take part in a statewide cohort of youth-focused organizations and funders to share and build opportunities for our schools and communities using this framework as a foundation. Thank you to our community partner, West Central Initiative, for including us in this powerful work!



This week at the MREA conference, I watched an inspiring session presented by Jenna Norman, Student and Community Engagement Coordinator (how epic is that title!) for Alexandria High School, and Ryane Hardy, Professional Learning Facilitator (equally cool title) from World Savvy. They presented on their amazing collaboration to build durable leadership skills for students. Thanks to those two for leading the way with experience-based teaching, community partnerships, and youth-centered learning. I know there are many more examples in our region. We'd love to hear from you!

Happy Thanksgiving to all!



New "State of CTE" Report

Puts Two Years of Minnesota Data at Your Fingertips

Written By: Text generated by ChatGPT, OpenAI, November 2025, used and extensively edited by Dr. Lavyne Rada Associate Director of Teacher Recruitment and Retention, LCSC, and Dr. Zane Sheehan Associate Director of Teacher Licensure, LCSC

Minnesota students are stepping into a labor market that is changing fast. Career and Technical Education (CTE) is one of the most practical ways our region prepares them for what comes next, and we now have a much clearer picture of how that work is playing out across the state.

Minnesota CTE (MN CTE), a service of Lakes Country Service Cooperative, has released the updated State of CTE report for FY25, building on the first release from FY24. The result is a growing, public data resource that shows how CTE is serving learners across Minnesota. The report is available at: mncte.org/stateofcte

What is the State of CTE report?

The State of CTE report is a statewide snapshot of Minnesota's CTE system. It brings together key indicators in one place so that educators, administrators, and community partners can see how CTE participation and outcomes are shifting over time.

While the specific charts and indicators will continue to evolve, the report is designed to help answer questions such as:

- Who is participating in CTE, and in which programs?

- How does CTE participation compare across regions and consortia?
- Where do we see changes from one year to the next?
- Which groups of learners may not yet have equitable access or outcomes?

The intent is not to "rank" regions or consortia. The goal is to provide a shared, statewide fact base that anyone can use to inform planning and conversations.

Why two years of data matters

With both **FY24 and FY25** now published, local leaders can start to see trends instead of one year snapshots. That opens the door to more grounded questions, such as:

- Are participation and concentrator counts moving in the direction we expected after recent program or staffing changes?
- Are certain learner groups enrolling or completing at different rates, and has that gap widened or narrowed over time?
- Are particular program areas growing, shrinking, or holding steady in our part of the state?

Two years of data will not answer every question. It does, however, give consortia and districts a starting point to notice patterns, pressure test assumptions, and decide where to look more closely with local data.

How districts and consortia can use the report

For local leaders, the State of CTE report can support several key tasks:

- **CLNA and Perkins planning**

Use statewide trends to frame your Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment and to compare your local story with the broader Minnesota picture.

- **Board and community conversations**

Pull a few data points or visuals when talking with school boards, advisory committees, or community partners about why CTE investments matter.

- **Equity and access discussions**

Look at participation and outcomes through an equity lens to see where certain learner groups may need different outreach, supports, or program designs.

- **Program review and improvement**

Use trends over time to help prioritize where to go deeper with program review, employer input, scheduling changes, or staffing decisions.

The report is meant to be a tool that supports local judgment, not a substitute for it.

A resource for the entire region

Because MN CTE is housed at Lakes Country Service Cooperative, this work directly supports districts, administrators, and CTE teachers in the Lakes Country region and statewide.

You are encouraged to:

- Visit mncte.org/stateofcte
- Share the link with your leadership teams, CTE staff, and community partners
- Use the data in presentations, strategic planning sessions, or advisory meetings

The State of the CTE Report was written and produced by Dr. Lavyne Rada and Dr. Zane Sheehan.



Dr. Lavyne Rada
Associate Director
of Teacher Recruitment and Retention, LCSC



Dr. Zane Sheehan
Associate Director
of Teacher Licensure, LCSC

If you have questions about the report or would like support in using the data with your local teams, reach out to the **MN CTE staff at LCSC.** The team can help you interpret what you are seeing and connect it to your local context and goals.

CTE is one of the most concrete ways we connect young people in west central Minnesota and beyond to high-skilled, high-wage, high-demand careers. The State of CTE report is one more tool to make sure those opportunities are visible, understood, and improving year after year.



Beyond the Suit

Superintendent Johnson Leads with Khakis and Compassion

Source: Adam Johnson, New York Mills Public School Superintendent; Bella Huwe, New York Mills Public School Student; www.nymills.k12.mn.us; rachelschallenge.org
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator



Johnson leads by example.

"I'm not really a conventional superintendent; I'm not really a suit guy. I like khakis and 'Hey Dude' shoes."

Adam Johnson, New York Mills Public School Superintendent

Adam Johnson, a 2006 graduate of Menahga High School, is now in his second year as the Superintendent of New York Mills Public School. Johnson's path to administration was inspired early on. He knew he wanted to be a teacher and a coach, fueled by the influence of a great high school math teacher, Tim Werdock, who made learning fun.

Johnson began his higher education at the University of Minnesota Duluth before transferring to Bemidji State University, where he graduated in January 2011 with a degree in Math Education for grades five through twelve. He immediately began teaching in Hill City, Minnesota. What he initially thought would be a short-term job became a nine-year commitment, during which he coached Junior Varsity and Junior High Boys' Football and Girls' Basketball, and oversaw the Student Council.

After nearly a decade in the classroom, Johnson pursued a career in administration. He received his principal's license and served as the principal of Hill City Public School for three years. The next opportunity was the Superintendent position, which he filled, also serving as the Business Manager.

In 2024, following the retirement of Blaine Novak, the Superintendent position in New York Mills opened. Johnson submitted his application, hoping to return closer to his hometown.

He was chosen for the role, and he, his wife Jessica, and their one-year-old son Teddy moved to the area to begin his new position as Superintendent of New York Mills Public School. Johnson credits former New York Mills Superintendents Jerry Nesland and Blaine Novak as great local resources, along with his strong team in the administration office.

Culture is Key

Johnson emphasizes that culture is his core focus, both as an administrator and a former coach. "We have great staff and amazing kids in our school," he said. He compares education to sports: "You can have the best players and the best equipment, but if your culture is not strong, you will not be a successful team. It's the same for education. We can have the best lesson plans, the best curriculum, but if we have a teacher who truly doesn't care, you will not have good results with students."

Unlike his childhood memory of superintendents "hiding out in their office," Johnson likes to be visible. "If we are shorthanded in the kitchen, I will go help serve food." He chuckled, noting that students enjoy teasing him about wearing a hairnet over his beard. "I'm cool with jumping in and getting my hands dirty." Johnson also noted the student body's willingness to help, sharing that he can easily find ten students to volunteer for a project.

Students Lead Compassionate Initiatives

This strong culture is evident in the school's student-led initiatives. After the organization “Rachel’s Challenge” visited the school to speak about kindness and compassion, students were inspired to take action. This organization, established in honor of Rachel Scott, a victim of the Columbine shooting, focuses on transforming relationships through simple acts of kindness.

Bella Huwe, Student Council Vice President, National Honor Society member, and a strong student leader, worked with fellow students to create “Rachel’s Closet” for students in need. Huwe shared that the goal is to provide a discrete source of free clothing, toiletries, food, school supplies, and winter wear, acquired through donations. "It will be a room that is away from other students, so it’s not embarrassing for them to use," said Huwe, who is motivated by how much the closet will help students feel good about being in school. She hopes to have it operational in the next few months.

Huwe is also coordinating a series of blood drives as part of her National Honor Society pledge, having already organized successful drives in August and October, with the next one scheduled for March 2026.

Community and Future Focus

Community support is also rallying around the school.





The newly formed Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), called “Parents’ Nest,” will host a carnival on Friday, November 21, in the gymnasium to raise funds for school needs.In the past, this event helped purchase a makerspace and furniture for the school.

Looking forward, the school recently held a Community Listening Session with community members, the school board, students, and staff. They are in the preliminary phase of finalizing a list of school needs. The last major project completed by the school was in 2000, funded by a voter-approved referendum to add an auditorium and several classrooms.

As Superintendent Johnson looks ahead to the results of the community listening sessions, his focus remains clear: building a strong, supportive culture where students and staff thrive. With the "Parents' Nest" carnival on the horizon and compassionate student projects like "Rachel's Closet" taking root, New York Mills is demonstrating that success isn't just about the curriculum—it's about the entire community working together to lift one another up.

Do you want to learn more about the culture of New York Mills Public School, the caring student-led initiatives, and their supportive community? Visit their website at www.nymills.k12.mn.us.

A Foundation for Success

ALEXANDRIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEW CERTIFIED STAFF INDUCTION PROGRAM

Submitted by: Marceia Andreasen
New Certified Staff Induction Program Coordinator
CAPS Teacher Education Instructor at AAHS

It is a privilege to highlight the New Certified Staff Induction Program at Alexandria Public School (APS), a long-standing program that offers a comprehensive support system for new educators and certified student support staff. The program began in 2001, allowing the district to be proactive in investing in our newest team members to foster professional growth and positively impact student learning, achievement, and the students' experience in our schools.

The APS induction model is designed with a focus on structured professional development, dedicated mentoring and coaching, and administrative support. The three-year comprehensive program guides teachers through their entire probationary period. This long-term commitment reflects APS's core belief that a strong induction program is a critical piece in supporting and retaining teachers. The program's mission is to enhance the quality of instruction and student learning through supportive relationships and meaningful experiences that encourage both professional growth and personal development.

Support begins with a four-day orientation facilitated by the New Teacher Induction Coordinator prior to the school year starting. The support and development continue throughout the year through monthly professional development classes, mentor check-in meetings, and coaching support sessions. The program is strategically phased over three years to address specific needs of new certified staff. Year one focuses on professional development that supports new teachers and student support staff in understanding district expectations and programing. Year two shifts the focus to instructional strategies, helping new staff refine their instructional practices in the classroom. Year three finishes the program with a focus on curriculum design and development as well as teacher leadership.

All new certified staff receive one-to-one mentors in their first year. These mentors are trained using researched based strategies to provide high quality guidance and support. In addition to the mentor, they are supported by a content or grade level instructional coach. This system ensures new staff receive practical guidance from a peer and instructional support and feedback to accelerate their effectiveness in the classroom. By fostering a structured, sustained, and multifaceted support system, districts can ensure their newest members will receive the support they need to meet the demands of the profession in supporting the academic achievement and the school and classroom experience of the students in their care.



Members of the Regional ECFE Consortium gather at Lakes Country Service Cooperative for Conscious Discipline training.

Regional ECFE Coordinator

Sarah Velde

Champions Conscious Discipline to Nurture Grounded Children and Create a Safe Educational Culture

Source: Sarah Velde, ECFE/School Readiness Educator, Regional Early Learning Coordinator; consciousdiscipline.com
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

Sarah Velde has been in her current position as the Regional Early Learning Coordinator for two months, yet she brings a wealth of experience from her 29 years at Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC). Her diverse background includes roles as a Family Home Visitor, an Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) Teacher, a Preschool Teacher, and an Interim ECFE Coordinator.



Sara Velde
ECFE/School Readiness Educator, Regional Early Learning Coordinator

Before her time at LCSC, Velde resided in Alexandria, Minnesota, where she served as a Head Start teacher. Velde shared that she loves a new challenge and really felt excited about the opportunity when she stepped into the role of Interim Coordinator for Fergus Falls Otter Preschool and the ECFE program.

Velde expressed her passion for working with children and families, which fuels her commitment to the program. She believes that fostering relationships with children, family members, and caregivers is vital for ECFE's success. “In all education programs, it is important to listen and to learn what the children need and to support them in whatever that looks like,” she noted.



"I was lucky enough to meet Dr. Becky Bailey at a conference in Fargo, ND, in 2001. It was an incredible experience, and I've been using Conscious Discipline ever since. I have led several trainings on Conscious Discipline and have used it as a child care director and preschool teacher. When I was asked to write this, I couldn't wrap my head around what I should write. There is so much I want to share, but I decided to focus on relationship building. Conscious Discipline uses rituals and routines such as specially greeting each child, using music and fingerplays to connect, using breathing exercises to calm, wishing well when a student is absent, and welcoming them back when they return; all of these work in developing relationships in the classroom. I don't feel like you can ever be done learning about Conscious Discipline. After almost 25 years, I'm still learning new ways to develop relationships with my students and their families. - **Laura Lempe, Early Learning Coordinator, Screening Coordinator, and Preschool Teacher, Barnesville Public Schools**

A New Home at Lincoln School

During her tenure with the ECFE program, Velde mentioned they have relocated nine times.

She is thrilled to have found a permanent home at Lincoln School, where all staff are focused on early childhood. Velde emphasized the advantages of having Early Childhood Special Education, mental health support, childcare providers, preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms all in one location. This integration significantly benefits the children, as past interventions were challenging when services were in separate buildings.

"Now I might pass a special education teacher in the hallway and ask if they have a minute to talk," she said. She finds this very helpful in supporting a child who may need intervention.

Excitement for the Future

In her role as the Regional Early Learning Coordinator, Velde is eager to foster relationships, provide support within the Regional ECFE Consortium, and engage in meaningful work.

"We all have those trainings we need to complete for our licensure because they are important. But I am hoping we can do something more profound. Conscious Discipline is a perfect example of support for the region's early childhood educators," she added.

Understanding Conscious Discipline

Conscious Discipline is an evidence-based, trauma-informed approach to social-emotional learning that teaches self-regulation and discipline to both adults and children. Developed by Dr. Becky Bailey, it promotes a positive school and home culture through adult self-regulation, skill development, and enhanced safety and connection.

Velde shared that they are working on a four-part series this year. "It just makes for deeper implementation of the work we are doing. How often have you gone to a conference, thought, 'I am going to do that, that's a great idea,' and then lost momentum when you returned to work?" Velde noted that fully implementing the training in a classroom takes about three years, emphasizing the importance of supporting teachers and schools.



"Teachers and early childhood practitioners often start Conscious Discipline looking for behavior management tools—but what they discover is a mindset shift that transforms relationships, connection, and emotional safety. Conscious Discipline doesn't just change how teachers manage behavior; it changes how they teach, lead, and connect with every child." **- Katie Ganoe, Otter Tail County Early Childhood Initiative Coordinator**

Collaborative Efforts

In collaboration with West Central Initiative, Katie Ganoe, the Early Childhood Initiative Coordinator, is providing the Conscious Discipline training for the Regional Early Childhood Consortium. On November 7, Ganoe facilitated the first session of a four-part training series for over 30 Regional Early Childhood Consortium members at Lakes Country Service Cooperative.

Velde believes that the outcomes of providing Conscious Discipline training and establishing a solid educational foundation include nurturing children who are grounded in their social-emotional learning, regulated in their bodies, and part of a safe culture.
She pointed out that without these essential elements, learning is hindered due to constant trauma levels.

Velde shared that she is also excited about developing an online community for the early childhood teachers and coordinators. Traditionally, the Early Childhood Consortium would hold its meeting and then reach out to one another afterward if there were questions about best practices or if they wanted more information.
The online community is already being put into practice. They have also created an online community room for the Conscious Discipline practice to keep it separate when teachers are specifically looking for information on this program. Training schedules and highlights from the Conscious Disciple instructor will also be available in this space.
Velde often reflects on her decades of experience, noting that every classroom and every child has reinforced her core commitment: to listen, to learn, and to support. Now, as the Regional Early Learning Coordinator, she has the platform to realize her most profound goal—to move beyond mandated training and implement programs, like the multi-part Conscious Discipline series, that create deep, meaningful change.

With dedication, Velde will continue to nurture relationships and advocate for innovative strategies. This commitment ensures that the Regional ECFE Consortium remains a source of practical support, poised to address the evolving social-emotional needs of children and families for many years to come.

Learn more about the Regional ECFE Consortium by visiting our website at www.LCSC.org and clicking on Programs and Education Services.

AESA



Congratulations!

Congratulations to Darcy Josephson for being selected as one of six AESA Global Coordinators! She is set to embark on an eight-month journey focused on enhancing global leadership and engagement skills within their agencies. Participants will learn to:

- Promote educational diplomacy
- Conduct cross-cultural negotiations
- Build international collaborations

They are expected to initiate global projects in their regions and create opportunities in partnership with AESA Global. These outcomes not only support local programming but also expand horizons for their respective regions.

> "I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to join Lakes Country Service Cooperative and Southwest West Central Service Cooperative as the Global Exchange Program Director. This role offers an exciting chance to develop and support international exchange opportunities for educators and students, fostering continued learning, collaboration, and growth across our communities."
>
> **Darcy Josephson**
> Global Exchange Program Director

Throughout her career, Darcy has served in key leadership positions, including Assistant Superintendent, Director of Teaching & Learning, and Coordinator of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. She also brings classroom credibility from her years as an elementary teacher and gifted and enrichment coordinator. Known for her collaborative approach, Darcy has led initiatives across 22 school districts, coordinated regional professional learning, and successfully organized large-scale conferences attended by over 1,400 educators.

Global Coordinator Program Director
The Global Coordinator Program Director plays a crucial role in establishing and executing a worldwide exchange program for Minnesota, representing Lakes Country Service Cooperative and Southwest West Central Service Cooperative. This position requires collaboration with the Association of Educational Service Agencies to create sustainable, globally-oriented programs for both students and educators in Minnesota.

MREA
Voice For Greater Minnesota Education



Amy Dougherty

Business & Technology Teacher
Hancock Public Schools

2025

MREA Educators of Excellence & Innovation Program Award Winner

For Mrs. Dougherty, rural Minnesota students aren't apathetic—they're talented, capable, hardworking, and full of potential. And every day, she proves that with the right teacher and the right opportunities, they rise to extraordinary heights. Congratulations Mrs. Dougherty on being named a 2025 MREA Educator of Excellence in the South Central Zone. Mrs. Dougherty was honored and celebrated in November at the MREA Greater Education Summit at Cragun's Resort in Brainerd.

Source: www.mreavoice.org



OSHA 10 Hour Course

Ensure a safer, more knowledgeable workplace by enrolling in an in-person 10 Hour OSHA course offered through Lakes Country Service Cooperative. This training will teach how to recognize, abate, and prevent job-related hazards. It will also cover employee rights and employer responsibilities.



CIVIC BRIDGERS

On March 9-10, 2026, Civic Bridgers will present America's Future Summit, a two-day civic leadership accelerator designed to unite 250 Minnesota teens in celebration of the nation's 250th birthday.

A TEEN LEADERSHIP SUMMIT CELEBRATING AMERICA'S 250TH BIRTHDAY

AMERICA'S FUTURE SUMMIT



MARCH 9-10, 2026

WILLMAR CONFERENCE CENTER — WILLMAR, MN

A two-day summit for Minnesota's top 250 teens to innovate in the fields of climate, education, and media.

APPLY NOW

NOMINATE A STUDENT

Karissa Martin and Kilo

A Therapy Dog's Journey

Source: Karissa Martin, Special Education Teacher, Lakes Country Academy - Alexandria
Author: Mary Phillipe, Communications Coordinator; LCSC

Karissa Martin is a Special Education Teacher at Lakes Country Academy (LCA) in Alexandria, Minnesota. She is the proud owner of Kilo, a therapy dog at the school.

Canine Good Citizen

Martin bought Kilo as a puppy in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Kilo is a double doodle breed, a mix of labradoodle and goldendoodle. Right away, she noticed his gentle temperament and set a goal to train and certify him as a therapy dog. Two years ago, Kilo earned his Canine Good Citizen certification, the first step in the process.

While working for the Hiawatha Valley Education District in the Winona area, Martin was already bringing Kilo to a setting four school, so he was used to being in the classroom. This past summer, Kilo completed the necessary testing and paperwork and, in the fall, became an official therapy dog. The Lakes Country Service Cooperative Board subsequently approved his use at Lakes Country Academy.





Kilo's Impact at Lakes Country Academy

Now four years old, Kilo loves being around people and children. Martin reports that having Kilo on-site has resulted in increased student engagement. Students affectionately refer to him as "Mr. Kilo" and are motivated by his presence.

Students interact with Kilo with statements such as, "Are you proud of me, Mr. Kilo?" and "I will work really hard so Mr. Kilo is proud of me." Martin shared, "They are excited to make Mr. Kilo proud. They work harder when Kilo is present."

Martin shared a specific example of Kilo's calming effect: on his first day at the school, a student's behavior was dramatically regulated by his presence, resulting in a calm remainder of the day. Overall, Kilo helps to calm students and regulate their behavior.

Maintaining Certification and Well-being

While Kilo is still young, the time spent working with students can be exhausting. To keep him energized, Martin provides Kilo with breaks throughout the day and schedules rest days each week.

To remain certified as a Therapy Dog and stay in the classroom, Kilo will need to complete supervision hours. Supervision hours for a therapy dog vary by organization but generally involve supervised visits to meet certification requirements.



Woof!

Hi friends! I'm Kilo – the newest and fluffiest member of the Alexandria Lakes Country Academy team. As the school therapy dog, I take my job very seriously: spreading calm, comfort, and a whole lot of love. Oh, and getting lots of treats! Every day, I get to spend time with students who have big hearts, big feelings, and sometimes big challenges. Some of my best buddies are the staff and students in LCA's Setting 4 Behavioral and SUN (Students with Unique Needs) programs, who shine in their own ways. School can feel tricky or overwhelming sometimes… but that's when I step in with my superpowers: soft fur, gentle cuddles, and a calm presence.



In **Kilo's Corner**, I'll share the special moments from my week – the little victories that make big differences.

You might hear about:

- A student who makes good choices throughout their day to earn extra time with me.

-My reading buddies who curl up beside me with their favorite book and practice their words while I listen extra carefully.

- The way brushing my coat helps a student slow down, reset, and feel proud of themselves

-Small wins – like a smile, a quiet "hi," or a gentle pet from a student who usually needs extra time to feel safe.

I want to show everyone just how powerful a connection can be – especially the kind that comes from a wagging tail and unconditional love. My goal is simple: help every student know they are safe, understood, and never alone.

Until next time… keep your tails wagging and your hearts open!

Visit our website soon for photos and the work that is going on at Lakes Country Academy, and Kilo's Corner!

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Clean Lighting legislation aims to eliminate the sale of fluorescent bulbs, reducing risks for maintenance staff, waste workers, and others. Starting January 1, 2026, the sale, offer for sale, or distribution of pin-based linear or compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) will be banned.

Have your lighting audited and updated now, CPC can help!

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Growing Minds and Building Confidence

Knowledge Bowl Continues to Thrive

MINNESOTA SERVICE COOPERATIVE
KNOWLEDGE BOWL

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







In just its second year, the 5th–6th grade Knowledge Bowl program is already becoming a favorite tradition for students and schools across the region. What started small has quickly grown to 37 teams from 14 schools, all eager to dive into a season filled with learning, teamwork, and quick thinking.

For many of these younger students, Knowledge Bowl is their first experience with academic competition. But beyond the questions and buzzers, the real magic happens in the collaboration—kids encouraging one another, problem-solving together, and discovering just how fun learning can be. Each team attends three meets, beginning with a written round and followed by four oral rounds that challenge students across all subject areas, including current events.

The junior high season has seen impressive growth as well, with 102 teams from 35 schools competing this fall. From October through early December, students have filled each meet with energy, friendly competition, and plenty of "I can't believe we got that right!" moments.

Two months of meets, hundreds of students, and countless moments of laughter and learning—this year's seasons have shown just how powerful academic competition can be. Knowledge Bowl continues to bring students together, spark curiosity, and build skills that will last long beyond the final buzzer.

LCSC

COMMUNICATOR

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