April 2026

LCSC Communicator

Regional News, Views, and Information

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
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MIDWEST GLOBAL BRIDGE
Supporting Student Success in the Global Classroom

MIDWEST GLOBAL BRIDGE
Connecting Schools to the World
A program of Lakes Country and SWWC Service Cooperatives
In partnership with AESA Global

by: **Jane Eastes**
Deputy Executive Director, LCSC

When the Association of Education Service Agencies (AESA), our national association, launched its AESA Global program for educational service agencies, we joined immediately. AESA Global grew out of a highly successful international program for schools operated by a Connecticut service agency. AESA Global created a path for service agencies all over the country to tap into the years of experience, relationships and connections of the original program.

To bring this opportunity to our region, Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) and Southwest West Central Service Cooperative (SWWC) joined forces to create the Midwest Global Bridge. Seasoned administrator Darcy Josephson, who recently retired from Alexandria Public Schools, is leading this program as the Global Education Program Director. Darcy has years of working in both LCSC and SWWC regions. She is well positioned to translate the international opportunities afforded by our partnership with AESA Global into effective and accessible regional educational programs.









In today's interconnected world, the idea of what it means for a student to be "prepared" is changing. Students in our communities are already connected to global systems through technology and local industry, including agriculture, healthcare, and manufacturing. As a result, schools are exploring ways to help students build the knowledge and skills needed to navigate these connections, skills like communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability. Our goals for the Midwest Global program are focused on local outcomes for our schools and students using the lens of global competence.

Within this program, global education looks like:

- Conversations with students in other similar communities
- Building skills employers are requesting
- Comparing educational pathways into careers and trades
- Exchanging ideas on how rural areas can sustain their workforce and economy

Why Global Learning Matters

Workforce trends continue to shift rapidly. Research frequently cited by organizations such as the World Economic Forum suggests that 65% of today's primary students will enter careers that do not yet exist. Economic data also points to the importance of global connections.

A significant portion of U.S. jobs is tied to international trade, and many industries in rural regions such as agriculture, manufacturing, and energy operate within global markets. Exposure to different perspectives and ways of working can help students better understand these systems.

Global learning, in this context, is less about travel and more about building practical skills: working with others, understanding different viewpoints, and applying learning to real-world challenges. Global education does not replace core academics - it strengthens them.

GLOBAL COMPETENCE

The ability to understand, communicate, and collaborate with people from different backgrounds to solve real-world problems.

The Value of Midwest Global Bridge

What's different about this program? First, we want to reframe global education not as an exotic travel program but as an essential part of modern learning, crucial for college, career, and civic readiness in an interconnected world.



For schools this means:

- Strengthen instructional practices through firsthand exposure to global education models
- Equip teachers to prepare globally competent, future-ready students
- Build cross-cultural awareness and community connections
- Return with ideas that elevate district teaching and learning
- Create long-term partnerships that expand opportunities for students

For students and educators, this means:

- Expand global awareness and cultural understanding
- Build critical thinking, digital communication, and collaboration
- Enrich curriculum with authentic, cross-cultural dialogue
- Accelerate teacher innovation through international collaboration
- Strengthening district culture around global citizenship

Through our strong, national partner who has built sustainable relationships focused on global learning, the service cooperatives are able to offer a variety of opportunities for participation, from overseas travel to remote classroom research exchanges. All program opportunities are built with a focus on providing affordable and meaningful experiences.

For many districts, the challenge is not interest but capacity. Programs like Midwest Global Bridge are designed to help address these challenges by offering structured, scalable opportunities that fit within existing systems.

Rather than requiring each district to develop its own international programming, the cooperative approach allows schools to participate at a level that fits their goals and capacity.

Program Opportunities

Midwest Global Bridge will work collaboratively with AESA Global on building a range of options.

- Virtual Collaboration

Classrooms can connect with students in other countries through structured projects. These collaborations often focus on areas like science or problem-solving and are designed to fit into the regular school year. Because they are virtual, they require minimal added cost or travel.

- Professional Learning and Exchange

Students and teachers may have opportunities to take part in short-term exchanges or professional learning experiences. For teachers, this may include summer teaching opportunities or partnerships with higher education institutions focused on instructional practices and global perspectives.

- Workforce and Systems Learning

District and community leaders may be able to take part in field studies that explore how other regions connect education and workforce development. These experiences are intended to inform local decision-making and strengthen specific pathways, such as Career and Technical Education, Early Childhood Education, and STEM.



Getting Started

District participation is designed to be flexible and responsive. Typical steps include:

- **Identifying priorities** (e.g., student engagement, workforce alignment, instructional strategies)
- **Consulting with service cooperative leadership** to explore available options
- **Starting with a manageable entry point,** such as a single classroom or pilot group
- **Expanding over time** as interest and capacity allows

This approach allows districts to integrate global learning into existing goals rather than adding entirely new initiatives.

Looking Ahead

As technology, economies, and communities continue to evolve, schools are considering how to prepare students for a wider range of experiences and opportunities. Programs like Midwest Global Bridge offer one approach—providing tools and partnerships that help districts connect local learning to broader contexts in ways that are practical and sustainable.



LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative

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NEED HEALTHY LEADERS

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PRESENTED BY:

Ric Dressen, Ed. D.

Quantum Bridge Solutions CEO and Co-Founder

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FROM THE

Executive Director

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



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

STRONGER TOGETHER

Leadership Through Listening, Planning, and Advocacy

One of the things I am most proud of at Lakes Country Service Cooperative is our ability to bring people together. Superintendents. Principals. Special Education Directors. Teachers. Students. Different roles, different perspectives—but a shared commitment to doing what's best for kids. That's what our core value of Leadership: Transforming the Future for ALL looks like in action.

Recently, we had the opportunity to live that value in a very impactful way. As conversations began around the proposed elimination of Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services (ADSIS) funding, we listened. We gathered input from across our region. We asked questions. We heard stories. We leaned into the expertise of those closest to the work. And what became clear, quickly and consistently, was this: ADSIS matters. It matters to our schools. It matters to our educators. And most importantly, it matters to our students.

Together, we crafted a unified message—one rooted not just in opinion, but in experience, data, and a deep belief in early intervention. That message is now being shared with Governor Walz and legislative leaders across Minnesota.

In that letter, our regional coalition of superintendents wrote: "ADSIS is one of Minnesota's most effective early intervention strategies." And just as importantly: "The core purpose of ADSIS is prevention: delivering timely, evidence-based interventions… to help students succeed in the general education environment." That word—prevention—is at the heart of this work. We know that when we intervene early, students have a far greater chance of success. We also know that when we delay support, the challenges grow—academically, behaviorally, and emotionally.

Our letter also speaks to something we see every day in our region: "For rural districts in northwest Minnesota, ADSIS funding is especially critical."

In communities like ours, where resources can be limited and geography can create barriers, ADSIS provides flexibility and access that simply wouldn't exist otherwise. It allows us to meet students where they are—before they fall too far behind.

And perhaps one of the most important points we shared: "Eliminating ADSIS will shift costs rather than save them." That's not just a financial statement—it's a student-centered one. When early supports disappear, needs don't go away… they grow. What gives me hope—and confidence—is the way our region responded. This wasn't one voice. It was many.

At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, we believe deeply that our role is to convene, to listen, and to lead alongside our members. When we do that well, good things happen—not just for our organizations, but for the students and communities we serve.



Classroom TO COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

JANE EASTES
Deputy
Executive Director

Youth in Civic Life:

Building a Pipeline of Community Leaders

Over the past ten years, we at Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) have expanded our programs widely into areas that affect education and teaching as well as the overall effectiveness of educational organizations. We are now involved in deep partnerships that support a systems approach to educational improvement, focusing across the spectrum from school climate to multi-tiered systems of support. The silos are getting bigger and fuzzier as we work alongside our education and community partners in focusing on a range of outcomes for youth.

LCSC's Minnesota Career and Technical Education (MNCTE) program, in particular, has grown as we've added innovative licensure and mentoring programs since our approval by the Minnesota Professional Educator Licsnsing and Standards Board (PELSB) as an alternative teacher preparation program.

We publish an in-depth look at the state of **CTE teaching** in Minnesota every year with a wealth of information and statistics on CTE teaching pathways.

Our CTE Teacher Induction Program (CTE TIP™) combines in-person support with curriculum and professional development to support early-career teachers at no cost through state grants. On average, 86% of teachers who participated in CTE TIP returned to teach the following year, and more than 80% of participants were still teaching two years later.

Congratulations to our team on their most recent funding awards through MDE. Through these "Grow Your Own Pathway for Adults" funding opportunities, we will focus on supporting teachers of color and American Indian teachers currently serving under temporary teaching licenses in Career and Technical Education to advance to permanent teaching licenses.

The need is urgent, with only .3% of teachers in CTE pathways in Minnesota identifying as American Indian, and about 8% identify as teachers of color. Of this group, a greater percentage are teaching under temporary Tier 1 and 2 licenses compared to the general teaching population. Removing structural barriers to completing a preparation program to achieve permanent licensure is essential to supporting a more diverse career and technical education teacher workforce.

CTE programs across the board have proven positive impacts on students. In a 2024 review of research on CTE programs, the authors concluded, "Across studies and types of CTE programs, student participation in CTE had statistically significant positive impacts on students' high school academic achievement, their likelihood of completing high school, their employability skills, and their college readiness."

(Lindsay, J., Hughes, et al (2024). American Institutes for Research, Career and Technical Education Research Network.)

Kelly Asche and Marnie Werner of Minnesota's own Center for Rural Policy and Development has done excellent research that connects the dots between school programs like CTE and workforce shortages in our communities. Strengthening CTE and related programs in schools, not only effects equitable outcomes for students, but has an impact on our communities as well.

The data shows that the choices students make in high school and that paths they take after high school can predictably guide them to specific states of meaningful workforce participation later on. –Asche & Werner, The Journey to meaningful workforce participation among graduates in Southwest Minnesota, Center for Rural Policy and Development.



Run4Rural is West Central Initiatives' free public leadership training program designed for people interested in growing and strengthening their local communities through elected office and other forms of public leadership. This nonpartisan training will be useful for existing and emerging rural leaders and people active in their community, whether or not they have decided to run for office.

Important Dates

- May 12: 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce
- May 13: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. at the Moorhead Public Library

For further inquiries, please contact Ben Schierer, Director of Civic Partnerships at West Central Initiative, at 218-205-1337.

MINNESOTA SERVICE COOPERATIVE
KNOWLEDGE BOWL

Another Great Season for Region 4 Knowledge Bowl

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

If you spent time around a Knowledge Bowl meet this season, you could feel it right away. The quiet focus as teams leaned in over their papers. The quick glances between teammates before someone took a chance on an answer. The mix of nerves and excitement that builds with every round.

For six Region 4 teams, that feeling carried all the way to the state meet.

Ashby, Fergus Falls, Moorhead, Park Christian, Perham, and Ulen-Hitterdal earned their spots at the Minnesota State Knowledge Bowl Meet, held April 9 and 10 at Cragun's Resort. Out of nearly 1,000 teams across Minnesota, only 48 make it that far.

The state meet also relies on a dedicated group of officials to ensure a smooth and positive experience for all teams. Region 4 was proud to have Harrison Aakre, Casey Foertsch, William Grieger, Chris Hunter, Jim Jacobson, Paulette Jibben, Amanda Meyer, and Molly Schenck serving in those roles.

Region 4 teams turned in strong performances at this year's state Knowledge Bowl meet. Moorhead and Fergus Falls both competed against tough teams in the AAA division, facing some of Minnesota's largest schools. Moorhead led the way with an impressive 7th place finish, while Fergus Falls delivered a strong performance of their own, finishing 14th and showing they belong among the top teams at that level.

In the AA division, Perham had a strong finish, taking 5th place and bringing home medals. Park Christian followed with a 6th place finish, as both teams relied on each other in key moments and showed the confidence and teamwork that define Region 4 Knowledge Bowl.

In the A division, Ulen-Hitterdal and Ashby both delivered strong performances. Ulen-Hitterdal finished 6th in the state, while Ashby had an impressive start, leading after the written round, and stayed competitive throughout the day to finish 7th.

Minnesota Service Cooperatives' KNOWLEDGE BOWL STATE MEET 2026

Trygvie Ronnevik's T-shirt design.



But the story of the season goes beyond placements. Fergus Falls junior Trygvie Ronnevik added a special touch to this year's experience by designing the official State Knowledge Bowl t-shirt, which was worn by students from across Minnesota.

"It's incredible to watch how much these students grow over a season," said Coordinator Monica Thompson. "You see their confidence build, their teamwork strengthen, and the way they support each other through every round."

For Region 4, this season was full of growth, teamwork, and pride. It would not be possible without the dedication of coaches, the support of volunteers, and the commitment of students who bring energy and enthusiasm to every meet.

REGION 4 Teams

Ashby
Tom Gronwold, Coach
Lukas Anderson
Reed Jensen
Jaylee Lohse
Emily Nelson
Kenneth Spielman

Fergus Falls
Amy Drake, Coach
Cloe Brown
Cooper Christensen
Gus Krohn
Trygvie Ronnevik
Eric Swanson

Moorhead
Jeremy Blake, Coach
Chad Olson, Coach
Jett Blankenship
Quade Brown
Steven Carlson
Larkyn Kellen
Ian Qualey
Felix Wolfe, Pocket Box Operator (PBO)

Park Christian
Kyle Kemp, Coach
Cora Buchholz
Alexis Scheid
Magnus Sletten
Jack Ternes
Bridger Weekley

Perham
Matt Lamb, Coach
Nick Stokke, Coach
Ewan Brandvold
Noah Brasel
Peter Carrlson
Sophia Lamb
Maddox Wagner
Kylie Lamb, PBO

Ulen-Hitterdal
Mike Herbst, Coach
Cole Brenna
Hoyt Jensen
Kade Jensen
Madesyn Jirava
Kinzley Svobodny
Dakota Holm, PBO



The Perham Knowledge Bowl Team Secured 5th Place in the AA State Competition













MINNESOTA SERVICE COOPERATIVE
KNOWLEDGE BOWL

LEARN MORE ABOUT KNOWLEDGE BOWL HERE

Four Years of Curiosity and Commitment

Lukas Anderson

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

For Ashby senior Lukas Anderson, this year's state meet marked the end of a remarkable journey that started back in sixth grade. Encouraged by his science teacher, Mrs. Kent, to give Knowledge Bowl a try. "I immediately fell in love with it," he said, and he kept coming back each year. Along the way, he built friendships with students from other teams across the region and always looked forward to seeing them when competition came around.

That passion carried him all the way through high school, where he became the only student at this year's state meet, out of nearly 350 competitors, to qualify for four years. "It felt pretty amazing, but also kind of shocking," Lukas shared. "I remember there being other four-year participants when I first started, so I was looking around to see if there were any others."

He credits much of his success to his team. "They were always supportive and great to be around," he said. That positive mindset showed in both practice and competition. Early morning practices, working through questions with coach Mr. Gronwold, helped build both knowledge and confidence. "We tried not to be too serious about every question," Lukas explained. "It helps you stay calm and keep a level head."
Some of his favorite memories came from those moments during virtual meets in the pandemic and laughter-filled competitions.

This fall, Lukas will attend the University of Minnesota Duluth to study mechanical engineering, carrying with him the same curiosity and determination that defined his Knowledge Bowl career.

"There are moments that might seem small at the time," he said, "but they're the ones you look back on and smile."

-Lucas Anderson, Ashby senior











“I’m good at delivering the conservation message to people–bridging the gap between the science and the public.”

Naomi Baucom, Center Director, PWLC – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

PRAIRIE WETLANDS LEARNING CENTER

Naomi Baucom's Vision for the Prairie



Source: Naomi Baucom, Center Director, PWLC – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Author: Mary Phillipe, Communications Coordinator, LCSC

For Naomi Baucom, the 330 acres of rolling tallgrass at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC) represent more than just a landscape—they act as a bridge linking science and the next generation. As an experienced educator with over 20 years in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Baucom has taken on her role as the Center Director in Fergus Falls with a clear goal: to transform this "living laboratory" into a lively center of community involvement.

The PWLC, a government agency member of Lakes Country Service Cooperative, operates as a leading environmental education destination. It holds a special honor as the first residential environmental education center managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In a program unlike any other in the United States, nearly 200 local 4th- and 5th-graders spend part of their regular school day at the PWLC.

Using the prairie as a "living laboratory," students participate in on-site classroom and outdoor activities, guided in partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Fergus Falls School District staff, to study science, ecology, applied mathematics, language arts, and phenology through nature journaling and field research.

Regular PWLC activities students enjoy include wildlife investigations, prairie restoration, nature journaling, and winter exploration.

Naomi Baucom's Journey to Conservation

Naomi Baucom's passion for the outdoors began in her youth in the small town of Hood River, Oregon, located at the base of Mount Hood.

Growing up fishing and camping with her father sparked an early interest in nature, but it wasn't until high school that she discovered her career path. "I only knew about marine biology; I didn't know there were other kinds of biology," Baucom recalled.



After a biology teacher introduced her to the world of the forest service, Baucom attended a leadership camp that solidified her dream: she wanted to be a wildlife biologist. In her mid-twenties, she earned her degree in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana, where she was first introduced to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Though she started in seasonal biological work, Baucom "accidentally" discovered her true calling while working as a contractor for a nonprofit at the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge. Leading school groups helped her realize she was meant to be an environmental educator. For the last 20 years, she has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service off and on. “It’s really my passion!”

Now a seasoned professional, Baucom understands the specific niche of the refuge system. Unlike the park service, which she describes as "parks for the people," the refuge system focuses on "refuges for wildlife."

However, she notes that philosophy has evolved to recognize that connecting people to nature is vital for the conservation of refuges.

Current Projects and the Future of the Prairie

One of the most significant initiatives underway is the complete restoration of the prairie, in partnership with the United Prairie Foundation. Because previous restoration efforts driven by limited resources in the 1970s and 80s resulted in low plant diversity, the team is now working to return the property to its original ecological state.







Over the next three to four years, they will utilize restoration strategies designed to restore high-diversity native plants through various seedings and aftercare, such as invasive species management, to revitalize the 330-acre tract. “Our goal is to showcase to the public an example of a fully restored and fully functioning native prairie ecosystem and to offer that to our Prairie Science Students as their outdoor classroom,” said Baucom.

Goals and Outreach

At the PWLC, Baucom serves as a liaison for the Friends of the Prairie and assists volunteers. Now that she has been at the PWLC for a year and has "her feet under her," Baucom is looking ahead with several key objectives.

- **Community Involvement:** Increasing outreach to youth groups like 4-H and making the facility's barn available for natural resource education.
- Volunteer Growth: Recruiting for the Friends of the Prairie board and volunteer base, including a recruitment event scheduled for April 15.
- **Expanded Programming:** Restoring the center’s operations to their former heights, including more partnerships and expanded hours for the Visitors Center.
- **Seasonal Events:** Continuing hallmark programs like Earth Day in April and monarch tagging in August.

While Baucom admits she has "grand ideas" that will take time and increased capacity to achieve, her primary focus remains the students. She finds the most joy in seeing children gain a foundation in conservation, ensuring they grow up connected to the lands and resources that define their community.

Get Involved

If you are interested in volunteering, joining the Friends of the Prairie board, or learning more about educational partnerships, Naomi would love to hear from you.

Contact: Reach out to the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center office in Fergus Falls to connect with Naomi Baucom at naomi_baucom@fws.gov directly regarding volunteer opportunities or programs.

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From Silos to System

Perham-Dent Public Schools Builds a Unified Approach to Student Success

by: Erin Spies
COMPASS Continuous Improvement Lead, LCSC

At Perham-Dent Public Schools, a powerful shift is underway—one that is redefining how the district supports students, collaborates across buildings, and uses data to drive meaningful change. Serving students from Pre-K through 12th grade, the district is strengthening its systems through a unified approach to Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), grounded in collaboration, alignment, and continuous improvement.

This work formally took shape in November 2025, with the launch of a district-wide MTSS committee. Comprised of 15 representatives from across elementary, middle, and high school levels—including both certified and support staff—the team reflects a deliberate effort to bring diverse perspectives to the table.

Its formation followed participation in the MnMTSS 6-session course this past summer, where district leaders identified the need for a cohesive, system-level structure to guide and sustain this work.

Using results from their Self-Evaluation of MTSS Implementation (SEMI-DLT), the team established clear priorities and selected co-chairs to lead the effort forward. Just as importantly, Dr. Hannah Frink, District Student Support Director, and Mrs. Michelle Bormann, District Literacy Coach, have built intentional alignment into the process—meeting with the administrative team prior to each MTSS committee session to ensure consistency and shared ownership.

"Before, each building had strong practices in place," Bormann explains, "but they often operated independently. Now, we are much more aligned in our approach, with a clear focus on common goals across the district."

That alignment has been transformative. Where buildings may have once functioned more independently, there is now a strong and growing sense of shared identity across the district. Systems, practices, and goals are increasingly connected, creating continuity for both staff and students.

Frink adds, "Having that shared identity across all three levels—elementary, middle, and high school—has been incredibly important. It allows us to move forward together instead of as separate systems."



Mrs. Michelle Bormann



Dr. Hannah Frink

A key contributor to this success has been the district's implementation of the BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks) framework. By emphasizing relationship-building, data use, and coordinated support systems, BARR has helped lay the groundwork for effective MTSS implementation. The impact is already evident: at the high school, chronic absenteeism has decreased by **50%,** alongside an approximate **30%** reduction in course failure rates.

"We've shifted from asking, 'What interventions do these students need?' to 'What can we strengthen in our core instruction so more students are successful the first time?'" Bormann reflects. "That's been a really powerful change."

At the middle school, chronic absenteeism has dropped from **18%** to **13%** following implementation.

"These results show what's possible when systems and people are aligned," Frink notes. "We're seeing the impact not just in data, but in how we work together to support students."

Instructionally, the district is also evolving. While data has long been used to identify students needing intervention, the focus has expanded to strengthening Tier 1 core instruction. Educators are increasingly recognizing that strong core instruction is essential—and that intervention alone cannot address systemic instructional gaps.

This shift is particularly evident in how teachers use their Professional Learning Community (PLC) time. Teams are now collaborating more intentionally around core instruction, sharing strategies, and analyzing what is working for all students.

Across the district, literacy teams are leveraging tools like FastBridge and Capti to analyze student data and identify opportunities for growth. Even without full formal training in the science of reading, educators are already making targeted adjustments within Tier 1 instruction—seeking small wins that lead to meaningful progress.

At the systems level, one of the most meaningful successes has been the establishment of clear, district-wide goals. Guided by SEMI-DLT results, the MTSS team has prioritized strengthening K–12 data systems and gathering staff feedback through surveys.

"We have a clear, shared mission," Bormann shares. "It's helping us bring together the great work happening in each building and align it so we're all moving in the same direction."

That shared focus has also strengthened communication with families and students, reinforcing a collective commitment to student success.

The district's progress is further supported by its partnership with the LCSC Regional COMPASS Team, whose expertise has helped guide planning, facilitate conversations, and support professional learning throughout the process.

Reflecting on the journey so far, Frink offers simple but powerful advice for others: "Don't be afraid to start. When the work is shared across a team, it becomes much more manageable—and much more impactful."

Through intentional alignment, shared leadership, and a commitment to continuous improvement, Perham-Dent Public Schools is building a system where every student is supported—and where success is truly a collective effort.

ADULT CULTURE = STUDENT CLIMATE



by: Naomi Miranowski
Compass School Climate Regional Lead

COMPASS

In conversations about school climate, we often focus on students: student behavior, student engagement, student sense of belonging. And those things matter. A lot. But there's a piece of the conversation we sometimes skip over: the adult experience in the building. Because the truth is, we cannot create calm, connected, supportive environments for students if the adults in the system are overwhelmed, unsupported, or disconnected from one another.

You may have heard the phrases, "A dysregulated adult cannot help a dysregulated child," or "You can't pour from an empty cup." While these might sound simple, they get at something important. When adults feel supported and steady, they're able to cultivate the relationships, care, and consistency they bring to students every day.

When adults are stretched thin, running on stress, or feeling undervalued, it shows up, not as a reflection of their abilities or dedication, but as a natural human response. And in those moments, even the most skilled and committed educators may find it harder to access the patience, curiosity, and consistency that already exist as strengths in their daily work.

On the flip side, when adults feel trusted, supported, connected to their colleagues, and valued for their work, they are far more able to extend those same conditions to students. In other words, student climate is downstream from adult culture. This doesn't mean schools need one more initiative or program focused on staff. In fact, it often means the opposite.

It's about paying attention to the everyday conditions adults are working in. It's asking the questions, do staff feel safe to ask for help without judgment? Are expectations clear and consistent or constantly shifting? Is there space for honest conversation, or just compliance? Do adults experience the same sense of belonging we want for students?

These questions focus our attention on the conditions where the strengths of educators, and their impact on students, can fully shine. Because no matter how strong a school's systems or programs are, climate is built moment by moment through relationships. And those relationships don't start with students, they start with the adults working alongside each other every day. As adults experience regulation, respect, and support in their work, they are even better able to foster those same conditions for students. Not perfectly, but intentionally. Because when adult culture improves, student climate doesn't just follow, **it transforms.**





CALM HEALTH

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- Mindfulness and Sleep Support: Access guided meditations, relaxing music, and mindfulness exercises anytime through the Calm Health app.
- Personalized Programs: Receive a customized wellness plan with self-guided programs and track your progress towards better sleep and healthier habits.
- Support for Major Challenges: Access expert-designed programs addressing stress, anxiety, and life changes for overall mental well-being in one convenient platform.



Fergus Falls Youth in Government

Building Skills to be a Future Leader

Source: Stephanie Grow, Branch Director, Fergus Falls branch of the YMCA of the Northern Sky; www.ymcanorth.org/locations/center_for_youth_voice/programs/youth_in_government; www.mncivicseal.org

Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

For the students of Fergus Falls, the halls of government are no longer just topics in a textbook—they are a training ground. This year marked the inaugural season of the Civic Leaders group, a local delegation of the Minnesota Youth in Government (YIG) program. Launched this past fall by Stephanie Grow, Branch Director of the Fergus Falls YMCA of the Northern Sky, the program empowers students in grades 8–12 to move beyond being spectators and become active participants in democracy.

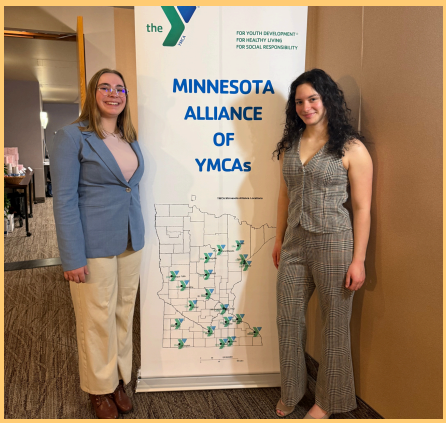
Established by the YMCA in 1946 and overseen by the Minnesota YMCA Center for Youth Voice, YIG offers a "state model government" experience. Participants don't just watch the process; they elect their own leaders, draft bills, and debate policies that reflect their values. Depending on their interests, high school students serve as attorneys, legislators, judges, lobbyists, or media representatives, while eighth graders join the Leadership Corps to explore all areas of the program.

The Fergus Falls cohort, which maintains a supportive 10:1 student-to-volunteer ratio, was guided by Delegation Director Ben Schierer and Delegation Advisor Christine Muller. To ensure the students were prepared for the rigors of state-level debate, Schierer and Muller met with the students weekly at the YMCA of the Northern Sky to mentor the group and prepare them for their cases and conference work.



The impact of the program is already evident. "It was so exciting to listen to their stories," Grow shared. "One of our students, Belle, told me she was able to sit in a legislator's chair, use their microphone, and the voting buttons."

- Stephanie Grow, Branch Director, Fergus Falls branch of the YMCA of the Northern Sky





Local experts also stepped up to help, including attorneys Steve Rufer and Jake Thomason, Otter Tail County Attorney Michelle Eldien, and State Senator Jordan Rasmusson.

A Successful Pilot and the Civic Seal

The launch of the Fergus Falls program was so successful that the group was invited to participate in the Minnesota Civic Seal pilot. Embedded within the YIG season, the Civic Seal is a student-led, project-based recognition for those who take meaningful action in their communities. Students focus on one of five areas:

- **Democratic Engagement**
- **Civic Knowledge**
- **Media Literacy**
- **Community Service**
- **Bridge Building**

Fergus Falls Senior Nadia Carlson, for example, is focusing her project on "Healthy Conflict." Nadia and fellow student Belle Holland were recently invited to Advocacy Day in St. Paul, where they met with Minnesota Senators and Representatives to discuss YMCA-supported issues and share their personal experiences with the YIG program.

The program follows a rigorous schedule, running from September through January. After months of weekly meetings and a "LAUNCH" training event in October, the experience culminates in a massive four-day conference in St. Paul and at the Minnesota State Capitol.

From January 7 to 10, 2027, the Fergus Falls delegation will join students from across Minnesota and Western Wisconsin for the 73rd annual session. A grant from West Central Initiative has been instrumental in this journey, helping cover transportation and registration fees and ensuring that financial barriers don't stand in the way of civic engagement.



From left to right: Fergus Falls high school students Nadia Carlson and Belle Holland; Minnesota Governor Tim Walz; and the Branch Director of the Fergus Falls branch of the YMCA of the Northern Sky, Stephanie Grow.

As the first year comes to an end, Fergus Falls continues to build momentum. Several students are working to complete their Civic Seal before graduation, and a planning meeting for the 2027 conference is scheduled for April. The students are shifting from participants to program architects. By joining the state steering committee, they will help organize next year's conference and keep the path they started open for future Fergus Falls leaders. Though their YIG program is still in progress, it already feels like they are actively shaping the future instead of just preparing for it.

Would you like to learn more about the Youth in Government and Minnesota Civic Seal programs coordinated by the YMCA Center for Youth Voice? Email Stephanie Grow at grow@ymcanorthernsky.org





YOUNG WRITERS AND CREATORS CONFERENCE

May 19, 2026
Students in Grades 3-7
MState in Fergus Falls



The Young Writers and Creators Conference is back this spring with an exciting new addition—STEM! This year, the conference is growing to show students that creativity and STEM go hand in hand.

Students attending the conference will rotate through three engaging sessions throughout the day. Each session is designed to inspire creativity, curiosity, and hands-on learning.

In one session, students will work with an author or illustrator, gaining insight into the creative process behind storytelling and visual art. They'll hear firsthand how ideas turn into books and illustrations, and have the chance to explore their own creativity.

Students will also take part in a STEM-focused session, where they will dive into interactive, hands-on activities that connect science, technology, engineering, and math with creativity and problem-solving. This new addition highlights how STEM can be woven into storytelling, design, and innovation. Another session will feature an artist-led experience, giving students the opportunity to explore different forms of artistic expression while creating something of their own.

Each session is not only filled with engaging information but also includes a hands-on component, allowing students to actively participate, create, and learn by doing.

The goal of the conference is to show students that writing, creating, and STEM are all connected.

Whether they are building, designing, writing, or illustrating, students will leave with new ideas, new skills, and a deeper understanding of how creativity can take many forms.

Online registration for the 2026 Young Writers' and Artists Conference is available by clicking the registration link.

REGISTRATION

If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to reach out to:

Monica Thompson, Academic Challenges Coordinator: mthompson@lcsc.org or
Jolene King, Program Assistant: jking@lcsc.org





FROM DONUTS TO THE DOME

Minnesota Educators Network Their Way to the Roof of the U.S. Capitol

by: Jill Murray, Perkins Coordinator, Lake Superior College & Wright Braudt, Director of Communications, SouthWest Metro Intermediate District 288

Career and Technical Education (CTE) provides students with hands-on learning and skill training that prepares them for college, careers, and industry-recognized credentials in high-demand fields. At the end of March, a group of Minnesota CTE educators and professionals traveled to Washington, D.C., for the ACTE National Policy Seminar.

How did a group of Minnesota public educators end up standing on the roof of the United States Capitol? A quick stop for breakfast, quickly turned into a firsthand look at the impact of Career & Technical Education (CTE) on Capitol Hill.

While there, they met with U.S. Senators Tina Smith and Amy Klobuchar, along with district representatives, to advocate for CTE and share how these programs strengthen students, communities, and the workforce across Minnesota. Between scheduled meetings, the group discovered an unexpected chance to see those pathways in action.



> *I have always been curious about the work that gets done behind the scenes to adapt and preserve these historical buildings; keeping them as functional office buildings and monuments to the country is a tall order. The Architect of the Capitol is a fascinating institution, and the folks who work in these roles are wrapping artisanship, archaeology, and artistry into their work as mechanics, fabricators, and carpenters. I was so grateful to get to join the visit and see the work of Career and Technical Education in action.*
>
> **Siri Livdahl**
> Program Coordinator of Admissions and Advising,
> Lakes Country Service Cooperative

While walking through the underground tunnels connecting the Capitol complex, they noticed signs for electrical, plumbing, and carpentry shops tucked behind the scenes. A carpenter on Capitol Hill spotted their curiosity and led them into the carpentry shop to see the skilled craftsmanship behind the building's upkeep.

Later, a quick stop for breakfast created another surprising connection. One group member noticed a shirt that read "Architect of the Capitol – Sheet Metal Division" and struck up a conversation.

That simple question turned into an invitation to visit the sheet metal shop the following day. During the tour, the educators not only saw the precision, technical skill, and pride that go into maintaining one of the nation's most recognizable buildings, but they were also invited to go to the roof of the Capitol to meet some of Washington, D.C.'s top welders who were actively working on the structure. It was a rare, behind-the-scenes experience few people ever get.



Then came the moment no one expected. They stood atop the Capitol, looking out over the National Mall and connecting in person with the skilled professionals whose work ensures the building remains safe and functional.

Standing atop the Capitol, the group saw more than a remarkable view. They saw the real-world impact of the career pathways they advocate for every day. The building beneath their feet is maintained by highly skilled professionals trained in fields like carpentry, electrical work, plumbing, and sheet metal. It was a powerful reminder that when students choose CTE, they are not just preparing for a job. They are preparing to build, protect, and sustain the communities and institutions we all rely on.

MINNESOTA CTE

Learn more about MNCTE by visiting their website at mncte.org



Let's continue the conversation on what's brewing as the 2026 Minnesota Legislative Session winds down.

Lakes Country Service Cooperative & West Central Initiative invite you to our second virtual Legislative Kaffeeklatsch of the year. Enjoy your morning cup of coffee while listening to regional legislators discuss the legislative updates as the end of the session nears.

REGISTER NOW

LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
Together we achieve

Wi-Fi Survey



Are you experiencing slow and unreliable Wi-Fi? You may be experiencing issues with reliability, speed, or coverage in the wireless networks at your organization, which costs your users time and makes them less efficient. LCSC is proud to present a new service to help address these issues – wireless site surveys.

The Survey Includes

- Radio Frequency (RF) environment mapping
- Interference analysis
- Optimal access point placement

COST

We have a base rate of $1,950 for a two-day engagement: one day for an on-site survey and another for analyzing results and reporting findings. Larger entities or those over 120 miles from Fergus Falls should contact us for a quote.



CONTACT

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SPED TIP

Supporting Special Education Teachers in Region 4

by: Mary Ann Martin, LCSC Associate Director of Special Education Staff Growth and Development

The Lakes Country Special Education Teacher Induction Program (SPED TIP™) is a grant-funded program designed to support early-career special education teachers by building their development, efficacy, resilience, and long-term retention. This initiative supports teachers across Region 4 through mentorship, collaboration, and targeted professional learning, helping participants build confidence and strengthen their practice.

This year, mentors and mentees engaged in monthly "Just In Time" sessions, a fall induction, and ongoing opportunities to connect and learn from one another. Participants consistently shared the value of relevant, practical learning aligned to their needs:

"I'm still learning so much, and I appreciate the topics being chosen because I learn something new every session."

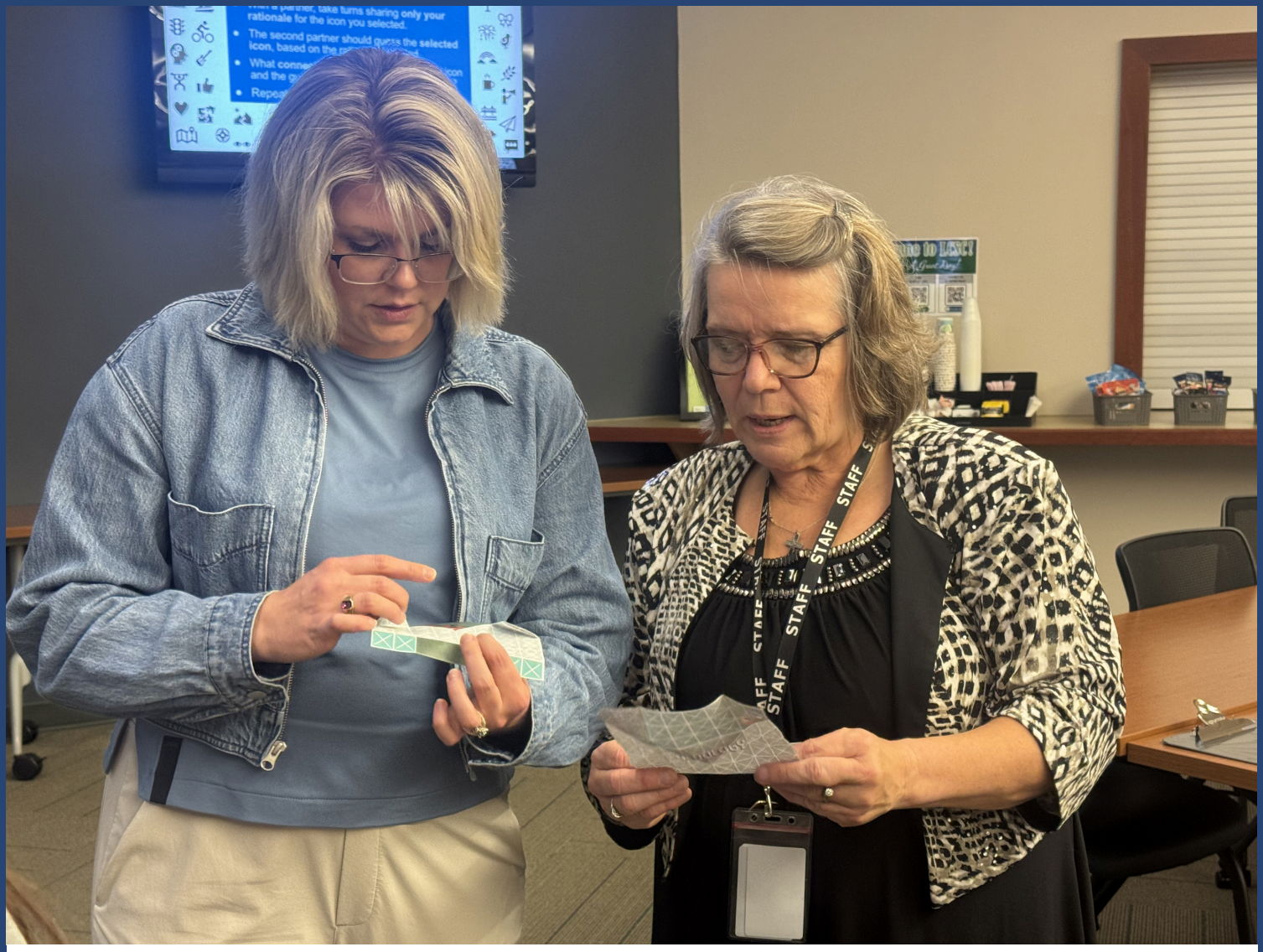
"So far, the topics have been what I wanted to know more about. Thank you!"

"Each session has all been very helpful information!"









SPED TIP aligns closely with statewide efforts to strengthen teacher mentoring and induction. Statewide data highlights that effective mentoring programs across Minnesota lead to increased teacher satisfaction, improved instructional practices, and stronger retention.

Key lessons from this work reinforce what we are seeing in Region 4:

- Connection and collaboration matter. Teachers benefit from structured opportunities to learn together and share experiences.
- Relevance is critical. Professional learning that directly connects to daily practice increases engagement and impact.
- Mentorship supports retention. Ongoing support from experienced educators helps new teachers navigate challenges and remain in the profession.

As we look ahead, SPED TIP will continue to refine supports to meet the evolving needs of mentors and mentees. We look forward to celebrating this work at our End-of-Year SPED TIP Celebration on May 4.

CPC's 2026 Paper Program is now live!

This year, we are excited to offer white copy paper, colored paper, and various types of white papers!

There are two convenient ways to place your order:

· **Order online through Express**

· Download, fill out, and email back a 2026 Cut Paper Order Form or view the **Full Catalog**.

ORDER DEADLINES

- May 5, 2026 - for delivery and invoicing by June 30
- June 18, 2026 - for delivery and invoicing after July 1
- All orders must be returned to CPC – whether through Express or by email – to guarantee pricing.

Full details for ordering both White and Colored paper are available in our online 2026 Paper Catalog.

Paper Questions: Call 888-739-3289



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

five decades of serving our region

Lakes Country Service Cooperative

At LCSC, 2026 marks a momentous milestone: our 50th Anniversary.

For five decades, we have remained steadfast in our mission: "We Advocate for Strong Communities Through Service and Leadership."

To honor this legacy, we are dedicating the entire year to celebrating our region and the people who make our work possible.

Visit our website's **"50th Anniversary"** page to learn more about our celebration and important dates to add to your calendar!

MINNESOTA STATE MOORHEAD

CHECK IT OUT

Are you thinking about pursuing an advanced degree? Take a look at the education programs offered at Minnesota State Moorhead!

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The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership at Minnesota State Moorhead will advance your career at both the P-12 and postsecondary levels by preparing you to be an effective educational leader who can respond quickly and decisively to a rapidly changing, culturally diverse and technology-rich society.

Master of Science and Specialist Degree Education Leadership



Minnesota State Moorhead's Educational Leadership Program provides academic training and professional experience to prepare you for leadership and administrative positions in K-12 schools or in higher education.

Masters in Curriculum & Instruction



The online MS in Curriculum and Instruction at Minnesota State Moorhead provides a theoretical base and opportunity for practical application within the areas of educational foundations, curriculum theory, instructional best practices and educational research.

LCSC COMMUNICATOR

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