



MINNDEPENDENT

March 2026 Newsletter



Celebrating 50 Years of Impact

Fifty years ago, the Minnesota Independent School Fund, Inc. was established as a nonprofit in Minnesota. The foresight and vision of our founders set the stage for what is now MINNDEPENDENT, the largest and most impactful organization serving Minnesota's private and independent school community.

Dear Friends of Private and Independent Education,

MINNDEPENDENT is proud to announce the recipients of the [2026 Private and Independent Education Awards](#). These annual awards recognize and celebrate individuals and programs that lead, support, and strengthen private and independent schools throughout Minnesota. As part of our 50th anniversary celebration year, MINNDEPENDENT will present the James B. Field Legacy Award to Doug Jaeger. This special award is named in honor of Jim Field, who led the organization for a quarter century. The recipient of this award embodies all that Jim held dear — a deep and unwavering passion for the vital role of private and independent education, a collaborative spirit that strengthens our shared voice in service to Minnesota's students, and a special appreciation for the diverse populations and communities that enrich our schools and our state. Doug led the organization through a pivotal period of change and growth.

The legislative session kicked off on Tuesday, February 17. As I wrote last month, MINNDEPENDENT and our fellow nonpublic school partners have been clear that any school safety and security legislation must include ALL students in all educational sectors. The time to act is now. Check out our [advocacy page](#), which includes our legislative agenda and written testimony regarding this vital issue. Watch for further updates and ways to engage and elevate the voices of our private and independent school communities. MINNDEPENDENT membership continues to grow!

Our [membership](#) stands at a record 188 schools. A warm welcome to our newest members, [Trinity Lutheran School \(Nicollet\)](#), [Northside Christian School \(Blaine\)](#) and [St. Edward Catholic](#)

ASK THE PRESIDENT

Have a question about school transportation or Title funds? Curious about the legislative session? Want Tim's take on how to fix the Twins' problems? Ask the President! Click the button below.

[Ask Tim](#)

Social Media & Advertising

MINNDEPENDENT has negotiated a discounted rate for member schools interested in participating in the [#SocialSchool4EDU](#) Membership Program

[READ MORE](#)

[MINNDEPENDENT Jobs Board](#)

[School \(Minnesota\)](#). Not a member? [Contact me](#) to learn more about our services, benefits and our trusted voice for private and independent schools.

Member schools can post job listings for free.

SAVE THE DATE! The 2026 [School Leadership Conference](#) is set for September 28-30, 2026 at Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort. This gathering remains the premier (and most fun!) gathering of private and independent school leaders across Minnesota. More details to come, but place a hold on your calendar today!

[READ MORE](#)

Thank you for your ongoing support of MINNDEPENDENT.



Tim Benz
President

Make a [gift today](#) in honor of the 50th anniversary of MINNDEPENDENT

MINNDEPENDENT 50th Anniversary Factoid

Did you know.....



The MINNDEPENDENT [STEM Program](#) began in 2004 as the MISF Math & Science Education Initiative. MINNDEPENDENT's STEM Program strengthens school and teacher capacity while fostering hands-on learning through three integrated initiatives – STEM Grants, professional development and community partnerships. Since its inception, the STEM Program has distributed more than \$1.9 million in grants and programming to member schools.

Ways to support MINNDEPENDENT

There are many ways to support MINNDEPENDENT. Please consider assisting with one of the following:

- Empower our work with schools by supporting our annual fund
- [Sponsor a MINNDEPENDENT conference or event](#)
- Simply click on the donate button

[DONATE](#)

To learn more about serving as an MINNDEPENDENT partner, please contact Lisa Vosbeek, MINNDEPENDENT Director of Development and Programs, at lvosbeek@minndependent.org

The MINNDEPENDENT Newsletter is sponsored by



Harness Our Expertise to Empower Your Unique Mission

We've leveraged the unique combination of our industry-leading expertise, client-centered team and integrated design-build project delivery model to successfully deliver dozens of athletic facilities within the public and private educational/institutional sectors – everything from fieldhouses to activity centers, athletic fields, natatoriums and more – for both K-12 and collegiate level clients across the country.

If you're contemplating a new or renovated facility, we'd love to hear what you have in mind and share how we can bring the depth and breadth of capability to support your mission, while delivering on time, on budget and with maximized value

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“Opus set the standard for me. I can't point to another person or contractor that did such great work for me. I will use them as the standard. They were outstanding. And I would not hesitate to get them on another project ever.”

Frank Miley
President, Cretin-Derham Hall
(Retired)

Connect with Our Experts!



Scott Shifflett
Vice President, Construction
952.656.4471
scott.shifflett@opus-group.com



Jay Fourniea
Vice President, Architecture
952.656.4830
jayfourniea@opus-group.com

Strategies to Maximize Charitable Impact for Your School

Practical approaches to expand charitable giving, strengthen endowments, and support long-term sustainability

WEBINAR

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

10:00-11:00 am

WEBINAR DESCRIPTION

This session will explore how private and independent schools can incorporate charitable planning into their advancement and long-term financial strategies. Participants will learn practical giving options to engage donors—such as alumni, grandparents, and supporters with non-cash assets and planned gifts—who are interested in making a lasting impact.

Through examples, the session will highlight how thoughtful charitable planning can support endowments, tuition assistance, and mission-driven priorities. The presentation will conclude with an overview of how organizations like Thrivent Charitable can partner with schools to support these efforts.

Please forward to colleagues, administrative staff, and board members who may be interested!



PRESENTER BIO

**Benjamin C. Boline, J.D., Charitable Solutions
Consultant, Thrivent**

Ben Boline joined the Thrivent Charitable Giving Services team in 2015, assisting donors and their financial advisors with charitable gift planning. His work includes helping to identify and execute gifts that meet donors' charitable interests while also serving the donors' financial and tax needs. Ben also helps nonprofits that seek to establish and build their endowments as well as planned giving programs. Because of Ben's faith and that of his family, he is especially driven to do work that is meaningful and supportive of faith-based nonprofits.

Ben is a graduate of Gustavus Adolphus College with a degree in political science and criminal justice, and received his law degree from the University of St. Thomas School of Law. Before joining Thrivent Charitable, Ben worked in private law practice in the Twin Cities, concentrating on estate planning and estate administration. Ben and his wife live in Blaine, Minnesota, with their four children, where he and his family are active members of Artisan Church. You can often find Ben and his family making memories while road tripping across the United States as they find new adventures.

Register Now

Registration closes March 23 at 12:00 pm

This webinar is sponsored by:

Please see the recent letter to the House Education Finance Committee. Click the image to download and print.



February 23, 2025

Rep. Ron Kneha, Co-Chair
Education Finance Committee
Carnegie Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Rep. Cheryl Youslin, Co-Chair House
House Education Finance Committee
Carnegie Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Co-Chair Kneha and Youslin:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we are submitting this letter to the House Education Finance Committee to highlight the urgent need in Minnesota to make sure students in all our schools are secure and safe, particularly given recent horrific attacks in Minnesota and across the country. We believe that the state must play a leading role in ensuring all students – regardless whether they attend public, charter, or nonpublic schools – are safe and secure in our schools.

For background, there are approximately 72,000 students enrolled in Independent, Catholic, Jewish, Christian, Lutheran, and other nonpublic schools in our state. In Minnesota, as you know, the majority of our schools face social media targets for harassment aimed to cause significant harm to students and staff. Legislators should commit themselves to equity in student safety funding.

Back in 2023, nonpublic schools directly advocated with Gov. Walz to include nonpublic schools in a program proposed by his administration called the Building and Cyber Security Grant Program. Unfortunately, in the end, nonpublic schools were not included in this program. And since 2023, nonpublic schools have been advocating to be part of the Safe Schools Program that provides funding to school districts for emergency response training, security upgrades, mental health services and security resources. This legislation was re-introduced this year under HF3483 (Lamare), among several bills appropriated funding for safe schools.

We urge the committee to consider re-introducing legislation and funding forward that includes safe school funding for all schools and students in all sectors – public, charter, independent, religious, and faith schools. Legislation aimed to protect and allocate funding to some schools but not all only makes the schools who are unfunded as vulnerable against future tragedies. This is unacceptable.

We cannot change the terrible tragedies that have taken on our schools in the past 20 years, but we can change the future and prevent these tragedies from happening in the first place. We strongly urge you to take action and provide this critical funding for all schools this legislative session.

Respectfully,

Tin Benz
President
MINNDEPENDENT

Jason Adkins
Executive Director
Minnesota Catholic Conference

Ethan Roberts
Director of Government Affairs
Jewish Community Relations Council

Zahner Baber
President
Islamic Center of Minnesota

Dan Beckering
Head of School, SW Christian HS
Minnesota Representative, ACSI

James C. Davis
Education Superintendent
Minnesota Conference of Seventh-day
Adventists

Dean Martens
Minnesota Catholic Education
Executive LQMS, Lutheran Schools

ADVOCACY

MINNDEPENDENT advocates with a focused and united voice for the interests of private and independent schools.

We implement a three-pronged legislative strategy:

- Advocate for... Inclusion/participation of private/independent school students and staff
- Protect... programs and services that support private/independent school students and staff
- Defend against... Legislation that overreaches or infringes on the unique missions of private/independent schools

[Click here to learn more and share with your communities!](#)

THE STEM SCOOP

SAVE THE DATE!

2026 STEM Education Conference

Innovation Across the Curriculum



Wednesday, August 12, 2026

Host Member School
Heritage Christian Academy
15655 Bass Lake Road, Maple Grove, MN 55311



MINNDEPENDENT invites you to [submit a proposal](#) to present at the **2026 STEM Education Conference**.

We encourage session proposals exploring **interdisciplinary approaches** that connect STEM with language arts, creative arts, social studies, and beyond. Presentations focused on **innovation, social entrepreneurship, social-emotional learning, social justice, college/career readiness, and Minnesota's Science Standards** are also welcome.

[Learn More Here](#)



High Tech Kids is offering two (2) FTC Recreational Events this year. These events are for teams who either did not compete in qualifiers/leagues, or for teams who would like to compete again.

The Recreational Event will look just like a regular qualifier with inspection, judging, qualifying matches, elimination matches and a full set of awards. The key difference is that there will be no advancement to the post season from these events.

Event Dates:

- April 19 - Prairie View Middle School, Otsego

Teams who have advanced from their Qualifier to the MN State Championship are ineligible. For details see [FTC Recreational Event Information](#)



Start a free Girls Who Code Club

Bring computer science to life with a **free Girls Who Code Club!** Clubs are flexible and can run after school, during free periods, or as part of an existing STEM or CS class—no technical background needed to lead.

Club Facilitators receive a complete curriculum for 3rd - 12th grade, self-paced training, and access to funding and swag, while students build coding skills, confidence, and community.

With a flexible, **ready-to-use curriculum for 3rd–12th grade**, Clubs help students build confidence, leadership, and real-world coding skills. Eligible Clubs can also receive funding to buy snacks and supplies.

Sign up to start a free Club at girlswhocode.com/clubsapply.



MINNESOTA
STEM
ECOSYSTEM

Minnesota STEM Day at the Capitol

Wednesday, April 15, 2026, from 12:00 PM – 4:00 PM

On April 15th, the Minnesota Capitol will be a buzz with STEM! SciMathMN and the Minnesota STEM Ecosystem invite you to join us for an afternoon of STEM! You can expect to see and hear members of the STEM Learning Community who represent in-school and after-school STEM learning, and workforce development. This is an opportunity to come together and discuss the future of STEM learning in our state.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Minnesota STEM Curriculum

Minnesota Science Standards | Generation Genius Videos and Lessons

K-8 Science for Any Classroom Ready in 30 Seconds. Videos, Worksheets, DIY Activities. Alignment for grades K-2, 3-5, and 6-8 [LEARN MORE](#)

Center for Global Environmental Education at Hamline University provides a full list of K-12 Classroom Resources by Topic. Featured K-12 Resources include:

- American Indian Cultures
- Climate Change
- Ecology
- Engineering
- Geology
- Hawai'i
- Lake Superior
- Marine Environments
- Mississippi River
- Storm Drain Stewardship
- Water and Watersheds
- Waters to the Sea™

[LEARN MORE and LINK to Resources](#)



Share your school's news!

Whether it's a noteworthy student achievement, a remarkable teacher initiative, or a collective success that deserves recognition, we want to share it! Drop us a line below.

[EMAIL US](#)

MINNDEPENDENT Preferred Partner Spotlight



EnquiryTracker

Kristen Jackson

Business Development & Trainer

kristen@enquirytracker.net

314-712-0413

Inquiry to Enrollment Solved

- [Enquiry Tracker video](#)
- [Email Kristen Jackson](#)



Meet Our Preferred Partners for 2025-2026

This exclusive program recognizes the top 30% of our partners who have demonstrated a strong commitment to our mission and member schools. By partnering with Preferred Partners, schools can access a comprehensive ecosystem of trusted resources to provide the best possible products and services to their communities.





The MINNDEPENDENT Newsletter is sponsored by

thrivent®

Unlock Your School's Future in 2026?

Are you ready to benefit from the Great Wealth Transfer?

With a historic \$84 trillion set to change hands, now is the time to secure new planned gifts for your school. [Thrivent Charitable](#) experts are here to guide you.

Who is Thrivent Charitable? Thrivent Charitable Impact and Investing takes a holistic, personalized approach to help your donors create strategic charitable plans, illuminating new paths to personalize generosity for causes they cherish...YOUR SCHOOL 😊

What areas does Thrivent Charitable offer guidance on?

- 1. Flexible Endowment Solutions:** Endowment funds offer an additional layer of long-term, stable income for your school.
- 2. Education on a variety of giving options:** Thrivent Charitable can come alongside your school to help bring in more planned gifts, and complex gifts such as real estate, stock, farm equipment/grain/cattle, crypto, etc. Plus, Thrivent Charitable can help your donors illuminate new paths of giving to benefit the organizations they care about. Examples are **Give Now, Give Later, Give and Receive.**

SAVE THE DATE: Wednesday March 25, 2026, 10am – 11am
Professional Development Webinar presented by Thrivent Charitable:
Strategies to Maximize Charitable Impact for Your School

Practical approaches to expand giving, strengthen endowments, and support long-term sustainability (Webinar information and registration below)

If you want to learn more today, here is the link for more information: [Thrivent Charitable - Thrivent Charitable](#)

Let's build your school's legacy together-- contact us today to explore new giving opportunities!



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Bruce Plautz
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Announcing the Recipients of the 2026 Private and Independent Education Awards

Every year, we have the honor of celebrating remarkable individuals and programs whose contributions profoundly shape Minnesota's private and independent schools. This year's recipients embody creativity, commitment, and exceptional leadership, serving as dedicated champions for their communities.

Join us in celebrating these remarkable recipients on Sunday, April 26, from 4:00 - 7:00 PM at the Mendakota Country Club. The registration link is below.



JAMES B. FIELD LEGACY AWARD

Doug Jaeger
Ulteig



LEADERSHIP AWARD

Kelly Roche
*St. Joseph School
Rosemount*

LEADERSHIP AWARD

Ross Douma
*Avail Academy
Edina, Fridley & Blaine*



HONOR TEACHER AWARD

Nick Pennell
*Our Lady of Peace
Minneapolis*

HONOR TEACHER AWARD

Ben Gapinski
*Hill-Murray School
Maplewood*



BEHIND THE SCENES AWARD

Michelle Youness
*Community of Saints
Catholic School
West St. Paul*

**COMMUNITY CHAMPION
AWARD**

Teri McCloughan, JD
*Attorney
Stapleton & McCloughan, PLLC*

PROGRAM AWARD

Pioneer Pathway
*Hill-Murray Middle School
Maplewood*

REGISTER TO ATTEND THE AWARDS DINNER AND CEREMONY

2026 AWARDS SPONSORS

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School Leadership Conference

Save the dates: September 28-30, Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort



RFP: Session Proposal Form

MINNDEPENDENT invites you to submit a proposal to present at the 2026 School Leadership Conference. This event is a premier gathering of school leaders, principals, and leadership teams from our 188 member schools across Minnesota.

The conference sessions are designed to address relevant issues affecting schools and educational leadership - from technical issues to leadership development to educational innovation. We are seeking session proposals that provide practical tips, strategies, and best practices for school leaders to implement in their own schools.

Breakout sessions, typically 75 minutes in length, are a vital part of our conference. We welcome proposals that address a wide range of topics pertinent to educational leadership.

All interested presenters and community partners must complete the SESSION PROPOSAL FORM before June 30, 2026 for your session to be considered for the 2026 School Leadership Conference.

Thank you for your interest in supporting leadership development at private and independent schools in Minnesota.

[Click here for the session proposal form](#)

Important Dates to Remember

March 25, 2026

Webinar: Strategies to Maximize Charitable Impact for Your School

10:00-11:00 am (registration closes March 23 at 12:00 pm)

April 26, 2026

Private and Independent Education Awards

Mendakota Country Club, Mendota Heights

August 12, 2026

STEM Education Conference

Heritage Christian Academy, Maple Grove

September 28-30, 2026

School Leadership Conference

Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort

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