



MINNDEPENDENT

April 2026 Newsletter

Dear Friends of Private and Independent Education,

According to the calendar, Spring has sprung, but I'm a little skeptical.

With just one month remaining in the legislative session, many important issues are still being decided. For MINNDEPENDENT, our top priorities include expanding school safety and security funding to support students in *all* schools—public, nonpublic, charter, tribal, and cooperative—and extending access to counseling services for elementary students in nonpublic schools. [Visit our advocacy page](#) to view the full list of legislation MINNDEPENDENT is actively monitoring.

The 18th annual [Private and Independent Education Awards](#) takes place on Sunday, April 26. This gathering serves as an uplifting event where we recognize and honor those who make private and independent schools special communities. Learn more about our [2026 honorees here](#). Thanks to our generous and faithful sponsors who support this annual recognition.

Setting your 2026-27 calendar? Make sure to add the [STEM Education Conference](#) (August 12) and the [School Leadership Conference](#) (September 28-30) to your schedule!

Without the faithful support of members, donors, and funders, MINNDEPENDENT could not provide a consistent, forceful, and unified voice on behalf of private and independent schools. Your [generous donation](#) is important to ensure the interests of students and families across Minnesota are valued and respected.

Thank you for your support of MINNDEPENDENT and nonpublic education in Minnesota.

Tim Benz
President

ASK THE PRESIDENT

Have a question about busing or Title funds? Curious about the legislative session? Want Tim to present the state of private/independent schools in Minnesota to your school board or advisory council? Click the link 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

Member schools can post job listings for free.

[READ MORE](#)

Make a [gift today](#) in honor of the



MINNDEPENDENT 50th Anniversary Factoid

Did you know.....

In 2010, after 34 years as a membership organization for Minnesota's private and independent high schools, MISF/MINNDEPENDENT opened membership to private and independent elementary schools. This strategic move was to fully represent the entire K-12 sector of private and independent schools in Minnesota. In the first year of eligibility, 43 elementary schools became members. By 2013-14, membership grew to more than 100 schools. **Today, MINNDEPENDENT membership stands at a historical high of 188 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

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Below are stats of the impact Thrivent clients made in the Twin River Valley area which includes the Twin Cities and Southern Minnesota.



Contact us today to explore ways to bring Thrivent generosity programs to your school.



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ADVOCACY UPDATES

Following last year's successful effort to protect nonpublic pupil aids and nonpublic pupil transportation services, **MINNDEPENDENT** and our collaborative partners continue to **monitor and engage on key legislative priorities and issues. Please click the button below to read about specific issues we are currently supporting and opposing.**

As a reminder, **MINNDEPENDENT** takes a three-pronged approach in its advocacy efforts:

Advocate for:

- Inclusion and participation of private and independent school students and staff

Protect:

- Programs and services that support private and independent school students and staff

Defend against:

- Legislation that overreaches or infringes on unique missions

[Click HERE to Read ADVOCACY UPDATES](#)

Advocating at the Capitol for Minnesota's Private and Independent Schools



Pictured L to R – Tim Benz, MINNDEPENDENT, Jay Schutte, King of Kings Lutheran, Dr. Jules Nolan, Phoenix School Counseling, Dr. Dan Ahlstrom, Smith Jewish Academy, Maggie Dawson, St. Vincent de Paul Catholic School, Ann Weiss, MAIS

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT....

MINNDEPENDENT encourages all private and independent schools in Minnesota to complete the **Private School Survey**. Recently, an email from pss@census.gov was sent directly to schools with a link to the online survey. It only takes 20 minutes to complete this important survey.

What is the Private School Survey (PSS)?

- The PSS is designed to generate biennial data on the total number of private schools, students, and teachers, and to build a universe of private schools to serve as a sampling frame of private schools for the Institute of Education Statistics' (IES) **National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)** sample surveys and assessments. It also generates data for the NCES [search for private schools](#) resource.
- The PSS is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau (Census) on behalf of NCES.

Why is the PSS Critical?

- PSS data provides a snapshot of the contribution private schools make to K-12 education in the United States.
- Responses ensure every private school's NCES-ID remains active and on the NCES school search tool which parents use to find local private schools that meet their needs.
- Completing the PSS is voluntary, but the Office of Non-Public Education strongly encourages K-12 private schools to complete it so that policy makers have access to accurate and timely data on private schools.

Lose Your Original Email, or Need Other Help?

- Schools may contact pss@census.gov or 1-888-329-5890 for assistance.

THE STEM SCOOP

SAVE THE DATE!
Registration Opens in Mid-May!

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



Join fellow educators, STEM specialists, and school leaders for a high-energy day of innovation, inspiration, and collaboration! Gain fresh insights, explore new trends, and bring back creative strategies to enhance student learning and engagement.

- Expand your knowledge with a variety of 1-hour breakout sessions.
- Participate in hands-on experiences to reconnect with student perspectives
- Explore new curriculum, products, and resources
- Earn CEUs
- Registration opens in mid-May!

[Learn More Here](#)

Congratulations to the following MEMBER SCHOOLS selected as 2026 STEM grant recipients! The awarded projects will be implemented during the 2026-2027 academic year. [LEARN MORE](#)

INNOVATION GRANTS

Holy Spirit Catholic School - St. Paul
Legacy Christian Academy - Andover
Maranatha Christian Academy - Brooklyn Park
Mary Queen of Peace Catholic School - Rogers
Risen Christ Catholic School - Minneapolis
Rochester Arts and Sciences Academy
St. Boniface Catholic Elementary School - Cold Spring
St. Croix Montessori School - Stillwater
St. Michael Catholic School - St. Michael
Totino-Grace High School - Fridley

STARTER GRANTS

Saint Agnes School – St. Paul
Saint Joseph School - Rosemount
St. John the Baptist Catholic School- Vermillion

SUSTAINABILITY GRANTS

Carondelet Catholic School - Minneapolis
St. Francis of the Lakes Catholic School - Brainerd

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP GRANTS (WE SHARE SOLAR)

Pacelli Catholic Schools - Austin
St. Vincent de Paul School – Brooklyn Park

The 2026-2027 STEM Grant Program opens in November 2026. All MEMBER SCHOOLS are eligible to apply!



[Explore FREE Educator Resources](#)

FREE Educator Resources

- [STEM Reading Videos](#)
- [MN Resources for Educators](#)



Acts of Science: Connected is a featured live event series during Citizen Science Month (April), part of a collective effort to reach 2.50 Million *Acts of Science* in celebration of America's 250th Birthday.

This spring season, you may wish to bring **Acts of Science: Connected** to the classroom experience. The weekly virtual sessions will each spotlight a different scientific project and lead researcher, encouraging participants to learn, engage, and contribute to real scientific discoveries together, whether in school, at the library, or from home. [LEARN MORE](#)

Integrating Data and Computing into K–12 Education Is Critical- National Academies

[This new National Academies report](#) offers a roadmap for states and districts to weave data and computing across K–12, identifying seven foundational competencies that build from kindergarten through high school. It underscores the need for aligned curricula, teacher preparation, and professional learning so every student engages with data, computing, and AI ethics as part of core STEM learning.

MINDEPENDENT Preferred Partner Spotlight



Minnesota Nonpublic School Accrediting Association

Vicki Kalina Marvin

Executive Director

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507-222-9205

The core of MNSAA's mission is to enhance the quality of education

[Email Vicki Marvin](mailto:vicki.marvin@mnsaa.org)

Meet Our Preferred Partners for 2025-2026

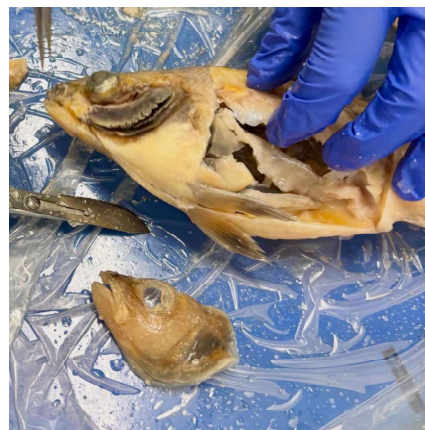
This exclusive program recognizes the top 30% of our partners who have demonstrated a strong commitment to our mission and member schools. By partnering with Preferred Partners, schools can access a comprehensive ecosystem of trusted resources to provide the best possible products and services to their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



Member School News

Northside Christian School - Blaine

Students in the Marine Biology class dove into the anatomy of a perch — one of the most successful groups of fish on the planet. Students carefully dissected and identified all the key fins that help these bony fish thrive. Plus, they explored other incredible adaptations like their scales, gills, and swim bladder that give them buoyancy control.





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](#)

DO YOU FOLLOW US?

Be sure to follow us on social media! That way, we can tag your school when posting about activities, grant or award recipients, or other news that includes your school. Share and share alike!



The MINNDEPENDENT Newsletter is sponsored by

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Connect with Our Experts!



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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. Register today using the link below.
Note: Registration closes Wednesday, April 15, 2026.



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 ON APRIL 26

Note: Registration closes Wednesday, April 15, 2026

2026 AWARDS SPONSORS

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Dr. Ken & Linda
Holmen



Teri & Kevin
McCloughan



Chuck & Mary
Killian

Josh & Sue
Killian

Anna & Jason
Lima

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

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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