



MN DISTRICT SCHOOLS COORDINATOR

It has been enjoyable seeing our early childhood centers, elementary and high schools in the MN District back to normal and the high majority are experiencing growth. Here is a synopsis of items happening with our schools as well as with special education in the MN District.

On September 21-22, 2023, all the district school coordinators and early childhood district coordinators met at WELS Center for Mission and Ministry – Waukesha, WI. This meeting helps set the tone for all that will be happening at Commission on Lutheran Schools (CLS) during the year as well as speaking about what is being planned in each person's district. Each year CLS puts out a yearly report and I have included

[Commission on Lutheran Schools Report and Agenda March 2024](#) . This report addresses many things happening in synod. Here is a list of some of the topics in the CLS Report to encourage you to open and read: Spring visits by the Commission, Telling the Next Generation, Non-WELS Early Childhood Ministry Task Force, July WELS Connection: MLC Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators, Theology Curriculum Task Force, Collaboration & Curriculum Support for Schools, Accreditation Standards Revision, Non-WELS Teachers in Accredited Schools, 2025 WELS National Education Conference(Green Bay, WI- June 22-25,2025), New Resource Opportunity - Herzog Foundation, and WELS Student/Standardized Testing.

One very important topic that was discussed this year synod wide was how to address the issue of having a vacancy and you were not able to receive a graduate from the assignment committee and you don't have a person ready to step into your program who is W/ELS. There were 11 step-by-step instructions for our ministries to go through in an effort to fill our teacher vacancies. [Filling Teacher Vacancy Guidelines.2024](#) Share this document with your leadership team to better navigate during these times of called worker shortages.

The MN District on its own had several things taking place. This year our Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers Conference (MNDLTC) took place October 19-20 at Bethany Lutheran College, Mankato. **We had a total of 330** early childhood, elementary, and high school teachers present with amazing keynotes for all grade levels along with sectionals that were valuable to be used immediately back in the classrooms. This upcoming MNDLTC will be held on October 17-18, 2024 and hosted by St. Croix Lutheran Academy, West St. Paul. For the last two years now MNDLTC has had a committee member focus on high schools so ECM, elementary, and high school teachers can all partake in the same teachers conference and enjoy great fellowship.

Several principals from the Metro have been exploring what it would look like to have a full-time Curriculum Coordinator for part or all of the MN District. They have met many times, created a VTO, had talks with other principals and schools, and now wait to see if schools would be willing to fund this position. This position would save many hours of work that principals put into curriculum preparation as well as aligning our WELS schools in curriculum. There are several

other Districts that already have a Curriculum Coordinator and have found it extremely beneficial both for the teachers and helping the principals. We will keep you informed in the coming months on the progress. This same group of principals is also working to get all the principals in MN together 1-2 times per year to discuss ways to help one another, share resources for professional speakers, and share ideas on ministry. This last year they got one step closer as they had the Metro principals and the SW MN Principals get together at Living Hope, Shakopee for a conference. Next year they will meet in Belle Plaine and we hope to add other principals conferences and so if you are a principal from one of the other conferences in MN please find me this week so we can discuss the possibility of this.

Another big push right now is to find a way to have regular early childhood teacher and director meetings. The principals want their teachers and directors to get together but it is difficult to get subs or to have a day off of school as families rely on the centers to be open. Since EC teachers and directors have such long hours it is hard to take away their weekends for a conference. The principals and directors will continue to work on a way to get them together more often.

This MN District Schools Coordinator position does have a team that assists me:
LaShawn Smith – Jesus Loves Me Learning Center, North Mankato (Early Childhood District Coordinator)
Jared Christensen – St. Paul's, St. James (MNDLTC) MN District Lutheran Teachers Conference
Eric Kaesermann – St. Paul's, Arlington (WELSSA Accreditation)
Macord Johnson – Prairie Lutheran Schools, Fairfax (School Counselor)
Kelli Green – MLC (Special Education)
Lawyer Sam Nelson - (School Law)

EARLY CHILDHOOD

MN Early Childhood District Coordinator (ECDC) - LaShawn Smith

1) We were able to present a variety of workshops specifically for Early Childhood during the Teacher's Conference. This brought many Early Childhood teachers together to collaborate and network.

2) We were also able to present an opportunity for training on the following topics:

**Address Caregiver Burnout and Parenting Overwhelm

**Deal with challenging "Behaviors."

**Recognize children who require additional support

**Cultivate stronger relationships with the children in your life

******There were a total of 6 teachers in the district who were able to take part in this training.**

3) I was able to consult on a few different situations in the district to offer guidance and support, but others could have benefited from extra support.

It is our goal / recommendation that with over 45 ECMs in Minnesota, over 70 ECE called teachers in our district, and well over another 100 hired ECE staff in the district, we can find another ECDC assistant to help split the duties and serve the needs of the district more efficiently together.

4) I am truly blessed and humbled to serve the district in this capacity, and pray and ask for your prayers for continued wisdom and perseverance.

SPECIAL EDUCATION - DR. KELLI GREEN

Special Education

Minnesota is possibly the last state in the Union to include statutes that public school districts must offer and provide services for students with qualifying disabilities in nonpublic schools through Shared Time [126C.19, subdivision 4](#). How do we navigate the blessing we have in this statutory situation with our community resources? In the Spring of 2023, the WELS CLS Special Education Leadership Team met with the Twin Cities principals to consider the blessings and challenges being faced as our schools look to serve a diverse population. Challenges included enrollment practices, special education file data retention, public and nonpublic collaboration for child find and special education, negotiating delivery of services, transportation, state law, ongoing faculty professional development, the role of a learning coordinator or special educator in our schools, access to structural support for this work, and more.

Over the 2023-2024 school year, Dr. Kelli Green continued to work with the Twin Cities principals. She attended two quarterly conference meetings presenting on the importance of accessing academic and behavioral processes as student data shows the need for support, such as: The accommodation process (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1073) and academic and behavioral multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). These preventative processes stack evidence-based practices to close gaps for students and, for students who continue to struggle, help schools make the most appropriate referrals for special education evaluation. Four principals requested ongoing classroom observation, recommendations, and educator coaching. One learning coordinator and Dr. Green have been writing an MTSS handbook in collaboration with two public school districts surrounding the school locations. Minnesota rolled out Chapter 55, Article 3, the [READ Act](#) over the past year. Drs. Rathje(St. Croix) and Green shared with the principals the valuable training opportunities our educators can receive through the Read Act work of our state. Dr Green is currently working with ISD#112 to navigate the collaboration between the district's public and eleven nonpublic schools. This collaborative work aims to identify a model that could be repeated in our state and beyond by public school special education, nonpublic school leaders, and our shared families. We are working to meet our diverse learners right where they are with God's grace and blessing.

Green, K.L. (2024) *Power up!: Evidence-based practices in your instruction*. Salem Lutheran School, Greenfield, MN.

Green, K.L. (2023) *Tiered behavioral interventions & supports for private school professionals (building-wide initial practices for three schools: Salem-Stillwater, Salem-Greenfield, and King of Grace-Golden Valley)*. Salem Lutheran School, Stillwater, MN.

Green, K.L. (2023) *The accommodation process for private school professionals (K-5, middle and high school sectionals)*. MN District Teachers' Conference, Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN.

Green, K.L. (2023) *Public and private collaboration and interventions for students with special needs*. Twin Cities Principals' Conference, St. John's Lutheran School, Golden Valley, MN.

Green, K.L. (2023) *Multi-tiered systems of supports for private school professionals*. Bloomington Living Hope Lutheran School, Bloomington & Shakopee, MN.

Green, K.L., Murphy, M., & Rademan, J. (2023) *Special education in MN nonpublic schools*. Twin Cities Principals' Conference, St. John's Lutheran School, Golden Valley, MN.

One area that I get to work with in our district is consulting with schools. I am willing to help in whatever way I can and if I feel that a different kind of help or more focused degree of help is needed, I work with Jim Sievert who works part-time at synod offices. He can help set up a lengthier visit of 1-3 days for consulting and doing a congregational assessment.

I know this is said very frequently lately, but please speak to those members in your congregation about being a called worker. We are seeing many second career individuals, many teachers who used to teach in the public school sector and are coming to teach in our W/ELS schools, and some who stepped away from teaching for a while and now are ready to teach again. **Teachers, PLEASE share why you became a teacher and your love for the position. Pastors and staff ministers encourage those that may have the gifts and share why you became a called worker.** All too often I hear from my high school students and other high school students, “Why would I want to be a teacher? I see how hard it is and even my called worker parents say it is tough and you don’t get paid very much money.” We need to change the narrative. We need to show the joy we have in what we do. God never said ministry was going to be easy! I always tell people, I have the greatest job a person could have. I believe it. I love what I do. Telling people about Jesus and helping them get through some of the toughest years of their lives. We have vacancies and we need more people to teach the next generation. Families are flocking through our doors. God’s got a plan and he has us right where he wants us right here and right now.

It is a pleasure to serve the MN District and so please let me know if I can be of any help to your early childhood, elementary, or high school ministry. Blessings to our called workers and lay workers in the MN District.

In Christ’s Service,

Mr. Dave Gartner
MN District Schools Coordinator
West Lutheran High School
Principal
dgartner@westlutheran.net
507-430-3789