



**Minnesota District Schools Coordinator Report
WELS Minnesota District Convention
June 9–10, 2026 - Martin Luther College**

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide an update on the educational ministries of the Minnesota District. God continues to richly bless our Lutheran schools, early childhood ministries, teachers, principals, directors, and families as together we carry out the important work of proclaiming Christ to the next generation.

As we look back on the past year, we are reminded that Lutheran education remains one of the most effective ministries our congregations have for discipling children, supporting families, and connecting communities to the gospel. Through God's grace, our schools continue to serve as both mission fields and training grounds for future Christian teachers, pastors, and staff ministers.

I couldn't fulfill the duties of this DSC position without the help of my supporting team:

Early Childhood District Coordinators: LaShawn Smith & Jamie Fischer

Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers Conference(MNDLTC): Jared Christensen

WELSSA Accreditation: Eric Kaesermann

School Principals Counselors Program: Macord Johnson

Special Education: Kelli Green

Lawyer: Sam Nelson

Professional Development and Leadership Support

A major emphasis this year has been the continued support and encouragement of our educational leaders and teachers.

The **Minnesota District Lutheran Teachers Conference** was held October 16–17, 2025, at Martin Luther College. Teachers from across our district gathered for worship, professional development, fellowship, and spiritual encouragement. The conference continues to be one of the most valuable opportunities for our teachers to strengthen their skills and commitment to Christ-centered education.

The **District Schools Coordinator and Early Childhood District Coordinator** also participated in annual meetings with district representatives from across the synod at the WELS Center for Mission and Ministry on September 28–29, 2025. These meetings provided valuable opportunities to collaborate with Lutheran Schools leadership, discuss emerging educational trends, and coordinate support efforts for schools throughout the synod.

One of our most important responsibilities continues to be welcoming and mentoring new teachers entering ministry. The **New Teacher Induction seminar** for the MN District was held on July 30, 2025 at West Lutheran High School, and introduced newly assigned teachers to ministry within the Minnesota District. These educators are beginning their service at a time when Lutheran education faces both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. We thank God for each one of them and ask for continued prayers as they begin their ministries. The next New Teacher Induction gathering is scheduled for August 4, 2026 at West Lutheran High School.

Principal Leadership Development

Strong schools require strong leadership. During the past year, four **Twin Cities Principals' Conferences** were held jointly with the Twin Cities principals. These meetings continue to provide valuable networking, professional growth, and leadership support for our school administrators.

In addition, a unified **Minnesota District Principals Conference was held on April 23** at St. Paul's Lutheran, Jordan, Minnesota. One highlight of that conference was a presentation by Martin Luther College professor **Luke Thompson on Artificial Intelligence** and its implications for Christian education. School leaders discussed both the opportunities and challenges presented by AI technologies, including ethical use, classroom applications, academic integrity, and preparing students to think critically through a biblical worldview.

Leadership development remains a significant focus throughout WELS. We are encouraged by the continued growth of programs such as the **Principal Training Program, Director Training Program, Early Childhood Credential Cohort, and Principal Credential Cohort**. These initiatives are helping prepare the next generation of educational leaders at a time when leadership vacancies remain a challenge across our synod.

WELS School Accreditation

The Commission on Lutheran Schools continues to emphasize the importance of **WELS School Accreditation (WELSSA)**. Accreditation remains far more than a compliance process. It is a continuous improvement model that helps schools evaluate current practices, celebrate strengths, identify growth opportunities, and maintain accountability through annual reporting.

Recent revisions to accreditation standards place greater emphasis on school safety, learner-centered instruction, serving students with diverse learning needs, collaboration, flexible leadership structures, sound financial practices, and a clearly articulated Lutheran identity. These revisions will be completed in the coming months which will help strengthen accreditation while maintaining its rigorous commitment to educational excellence and faithful Lutheran ministry.

Telling the Next Generation

As a former presenter for **Telling the Next Generation** I can tell you that this seminar helps your congregation and school start thinking about all the possible opportunities our churches and schools have to share the gospel message. As our schools become increasingly unchurched, they have incredible opportunities to connect families with the saving message of Jesus Christ.

This seminar helps congregations, schools, pastors, principals, teachers, and lay leaders develop intentional harvest strategies. Rather than assuming families will naturally connect with church life, ministries are learning to create purposeful pathways that introduce families to the gospel and encourage ongoing spiritual growth.

New Theology Curriculum

Our schools are excited for this new **Theology Curriculum** that eventually will be able to serve WELS early childhood centers, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. I know some of the writers that have been asked to contribute and I know they will do a great job. Stay tuned for updates.

Supporting Called Workers

The well-being of called workers continues to receive significant attention throughout WELS. Please make sure your school and congregation have a **Called Worker Care Committee** that will regularly check up on called workers to see how they are doing. We need additional new called workers, but we also can't afford to lose the great called workers we already have due to burnout, anxiety, and lack of support. Please pray for and support your called workers. I recently had a called worker come to me and say, "How can these people be so nice and kind to me in church and to others, and then one thing goes wrong and they yell at me in school?" As congregational members and school parents, remember the tone you have with called workers matters. This will take work from all of us, but we need to retain our called workers.

School Consultations (CLS - DSC)

If you feel your school is struggling in some way and could benefit from outside eyes, please feel free to reach out to me or Jim Sievert at CLS. We often can find a way to visit your school and offer some ideas and strategies.

Abuse Prevention and Student Safety

The MN District will be conducting an all day seminar at **St. Croix on August 11, 2026 from 9am-3pm on Abuse Prevention and Student Safety. Our All Day presenter will be Mr. Victor Vieth.** Please make sure to sign up so we can plan for food and which part of St. Croix will be used for the presentation. This topic is very real as I believe 8 known situations have taken place in the WELS over a 15 month period involving sexual abuse.

Protecting children remains a critical priority for Lutheran schools and congregations. WELS is developing a comprehensive suite of abuse prevention resources designed to help ministries create the safest possible environments for children and youth.

These resources will include best practices for screening, training, supervision, reporting procedures, accountability systems, and ongoing education. Child safety is not simply a policy issue, it is a reflection of our Christian responsibility to protect those entrusted to our care.

Looking Ahead

Several upcoming opportunities deserve special mention.

The **2026 WELS International Youth Rally will be held July 14–17 at Bowling Green State University under the theme "We Are Christ's Ambassadors" from 2 Corinthians 5:18–20.** Thousands of WELS high school students will gather for worship, fellowship, and spiritual growth.

We also celebrate the success of the **2026 National Conference on Lutheran Leadership**, where more than 1,600 participants gathered to discuss ministry opportunities and challenges facing our synod.

Particularly encouraging was the **strong participation of young adults from our WELS high schools (9 of the total 100 high schoolers came from the MN District)**, whose voices continue to help shape future ministry efforts.

Finally, planning has already begun for the next **WELS National Education Conference in 2028**, building on the tremendous success of the 2025 conference that brought together educators from across the synod, including the MN District.

Conclusion

As we consider all these plans, one truth remains constant: Christ continues to bless the educational ministries of our schools.

Whether through early childhood centers, elementary schools, high schools, teacher training, leadership development, accreditation efforts, outreach initiatives, or curriculum development, the mission remains the same, to proclaim Christ crucified and risen for sinners and to equip the next generation of believers for lives of faith and service.

Thank you for your continued prayers, encouragement, and support of Lutheran education throughout the Minnesota District. We ask God to continue blessing our schools, our students, our families, and all those who serve in educational ministry.

To God alone be the glory.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Gartner - MN District Schools Coordinator