

Education

State Representative Peggy Bennett of Albert Lea, the Republican Lead on the Minnesota House Education Policy Committee, says the state's 83.3% graduation rate is disappointing. Bennett says it reflects an overall failure of Democratic strategies that have been initiated. She says since 2019:

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[trgradresponse1.mp3] :11 "IN GRADUATION RATES"

(We've had a 16-percent decline in reading proficiency, a 17% decline in math proficiency, and a 23-percent decline in science proficiency, and now we see a stagnation in graduation rates)

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Bennett says this shows we have a problem:

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[trgradresponse2.mp3] :06 "WE HAVE A PROBLEM"

(It's kind of like red lights blinking in the system that's crying out for reform and saying, Houston, we have a problem)

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Bennett believes that changing the state's educational playbook, including giving school districts more local control, would improve these numbers.

Students enrolled at the Fergus Falls campus of M State are recipients of scholarships facilitated by the Fergus Area College Foundation.

The foundation recently hosted its annual scholarship reception on November 2 at Legacy Hall, situated on the Fergus Falls campus of Minnesota State Community and Technical College.

This event serves as a platform to celebrate both scholarship donors and recipients, offering attendees the opportunity to gain insight into how contributions to the foundation positively impact students and the campus as a whole.

Each year, thanks to the generosity of FACF supporters, the foundation can provide financial support to students pursuing their academic goals through scholarship awards.

These scholarships empower Fergus Falls Spartans to elevate their aspirations, attain greater achievements, and realize their academic dreams.

Notably, a total of \$225,000 was awarded to 108 students for the 2023-24 academic year.

"We offer a variety of scholarships to both first and second-year students for classes taken on the Fergus Falls campus of M State," **said Jacki Maethner, interim executive director of the Fergus Area College Foundation.**

"For the first time, EVERY student with a grade point average of 2.5 or higher who is taking classes on the Fergus Falls campus was offered the opportunity to receive an automatic scholarship for the 2023-24 academic year. Students also had the opportunity to apply for additional funding which was awarded according to their demonstrated skills in leadership and community stewardship."

The Fergus Area College Foundation is dedicated to providing financial assistance to the Fergus Falls campus of M State.

It is one of two separate foundations actively working on behalf of M State and its students.

The other foundation, M State Foundation and Alumni, extends its support to the Detroit Lakes, Moorhead, and Wadena campuses.

Both foundations are currently accepting applications for the 2024-25 academic year.

For those interested in applying or seeking more information about scholarships, please visit facfmstate.org/scholarships.

Former GOP House Speaker Daudt Retiring from Legislature

(St. Paul, MN) -- A high-profile Republican at the Minnesota Legislature, former House Speaker Kurt Daudt (DOWT), says he's resigning his House seat February 11th, the day before the start of the 2024 session. Daudt, from the tiny community of Crown just north of the Twin Cities, was known for his relentless and frequently fiery style in floor debate, particularly when Republicans were in the minority. Daudt was House speaker from 2015 through the end of 2018, pushing for tax cuts, reduced government spending and education reform. Governor Tim Walz must now call a special election to choose Daudt's successor.

>>Walz Touts USDA Summer Nutrition Program for Children

(Maplewood, MN) -- The U-S Agriculture Department says Minnesota this summer will be among 35 states to launch a new summer grocery benefits program for children, called Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer. Governor Tim Walz says, "Minnesota's going to participate in that. We're receiving the federal money that will go into (it). We'll use our funds to help match that, of making sure there's no gap in the summer, that students are able to get this." Walz says he's "somewhat amazed" that Iowa and Nebraska are not participating. Iowa Republican Governor Kim Reynolds says in a statement: "Federal COVID-era cash benefit programs are not sustainable and don't provide long-term solutions.... An EBT card does nothing to promote nutrition at a time when childhood obesity has become an epidemic."

Governor Tim Walz is rejecting calls for "means testing" of families' ability to pay, even though free school breakfast and lunch -- now available to all students regardless of income -- is costing the state more than originally forecast:

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[bwschoollunch75.mp3] :08 "ARE INCOMPATIBLE"

"Really curious about the folks who say, we just can't afford to do this, who've been advocating for (tax) cuts to the wealthiest Minnesotans. Those two things are incompatible."

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Republicans say children who can't afford school meals should certainly get them, but they say taxpayers are also providing free school meals to families who can afford to pay. The governor's Education Commissioner, Willie Jett, says struggles to keep up with demand when the school meal program was launched are "a wonderful problem to have."

Minnesota State Community and Technical College music instructor Jeff Sands is having a moment in the national spotlight as one of School Band and Orchestra Magazine's "50+ Directors Who Make a Difference." The magazine's December 2023 issue recognizes one outstanding music director from each state and the District of Columbia, and Sands is Minnesota's honoree.

Sands has been conducting bands and teaching music courses for M State's Associate of Fine Arts degree program since fall 2021. His teachings over the past 11 years of his career, along with his many active involvements in local and statewide musical events and organizations, have impacted the lives of thousands of students, parents, colleagues and community members.

In his published comments, Sands states that, *"The most important lesson I try to teach students is to take ownership over their lives and education. I hope that I can help them achieve their goals and instill a sense of self-confidence, positivity, perseverance and generosity. Learning a scale or memorizing facts and dates isn't what matters most in music, it's the self-discipline and other things not in the curriculum that set our students on a path of success."*

M State held a brief public celebration for Sands, including a small ceremony and presentation of a commemorative desktop plaque, during the college's holiday concert on Dec. 3.

The North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) Alumni/Foundation has announced a substantial donation of \$500,000 from Linda Kosel Patterson, underscoring her unwavering commitment to advancing agricultural education in the region.

This transformative contribution is poised to revolutionize the NDSCS agriculture program through the establishment of a state-of-the-art ag technology for both current and future students.

This noteworthy donation follows a substantial contribution from the Yaggie family in December, facilitating major enhancements to the NDSCS agricultural center, now proudly named the “Yaggie Family Agriculture Center.”

The newly established “Kosel Family Agriculture Lab” is positioned to become a fundamental pillar of the remodeled and updated facility.

The NDSCS community expresses profound gratitude for the continued support and partnership of the Kosel family, significantly enhancing the educational experience and opportunities for students in agriculture.

The University of Minnesota (U of M) Extension is offering a free online class to farmers and farm operators that want to learn how to better sell directly to consumers.

Ryan Pesch, the Ag Business Management Educator at U of M Extension and teacher of the classes, thinks that both new and seasoned farm operators can benefit from attending,

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“If somebody is completely new to selling direct to consumer, I hope that they kind of hit the basics and walk away with a plan that they can employ here in 2024. But certainly there’s a lot of operator’s who’ve done marketing direct to consumer, and I think they would make new insights into how they would go about that in the next season.

Pesch encourages operators to attend, saying that,

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“There’d be no harm in attending the class series. It’s geared towards people even considering going into direct to consumer, and if they choose to pursue it or not, that’s great. You might have saved yourself a lot of stress, time, energy, and effort of getting into something that maybe you’re not positioned to get into right now. And that’s fine, I’d consider that a real success.”

The class will consist of three sessions, happening February 6th, 13th, and 20th at 6 p.m.

>>Minnesota Public Colleges Sought \$1B For Building Projects but Walz Plan Offers Less

(St. Paul, MN) -- Minnesota's public colleges and universities will get more than 200 million dollars for construction projects under Governor Tim Walz's infrastructure plan. That is far less than what the schools requested. The University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State system of colleges and universities each asked for roughly 500 million dollars to help repair and upgrade old buildings. Leaders at both systems offered thanks after going over the governor's proposal but made clear that they would continue to seek more funding.

The state Education Department is looking for schools, local governments and nonprofits to sponsor the federally-funded "summer meals for children" program in areas of Minnesota not currently served. Emily Honer (HOE-ner) with the state Education Department says the benefit of U-S-D-A's Summer Food Service Program...

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[bwsummermeal20.mp3] :10 "MIGHT NOT HAVE THAT"

"We know so many of our children get their healthy meals, get their interaction with other kids, from that school environment. And so (in) the summer, they might not have that."

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Honer says sponsor organizations receive government funding and are allowed to serve children up to two meals daily at each site. Parents who want to locate the closest summer meal site should get the "Free Meals for Kids" app in the Google or Apple stores

Minnesota State Community and Technical College (M State) has announced a new collaboration with cannabis education and training leader Green Flower to offer three new certificate programs designed to prepare students for careers in the cannabis industry.

M State is the first two-year college in Greater Minnesota and the third among all Minnesota State system colleges and universities to offer cannabis education.

“We’re excited to be one of the first higher education institutions in the state to offer cannabis education,” says GL Tucker, Executive Director of M State’s Workforce Development Solutions (WDS).

“We have a longstanding reputation for aligning our training programs with the workforce needs of our region, and these new cannabis certificate programs are a continuation of that tradition. We know cannabis is a fast-growing industry, and we know there’s a need for skilled cannabis workers and entrepreneurs. These new certificates create a credible pathway for people to get into the workforce and fill that need.”

Each certificate program is nine weeks long and offered entirely online.

Students can register and begin at any time and can complete the program at their own pace. Top industry leaders teach the programs, which each cost \$750 with a payment plan option available.

For more information, visit cannabis.minnesota.edu.

>>M State Moorhead Announces Cannabis Certificate Programs

(Moorhead, MN) -- Minnesota State Community and Technical College in Moorhead is the latest school in the state to offer cannabis certificate programs. Students can earn certificates in cannabis cultivation, retail, and extraction and product development. Each online program is nine weeks and costs 750 dollars. M State is partnering with cannabis education company Green Flower, which will provide instruction and training. St. Cloud State University and St. Paul College also have cannabis certificate programs.

>>MDA Returns to Winter Fancy Food Show in Vegas

(St. Paul, MN) -- The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) exhibited four local food and beverage businesses at the 2024 Specialty Food Association's Winter Fancy Food Show in Las Vegas. The four brands that participated included Janet's Finest Compotes, Maazah Chutney, Mixly Cocktail Co., and Plucky Pickle Dip. The M-D-A's Pavilion Program supports state food and drink companies in attending national shows, offering discounted booth spaces, and promotional and logistical support for show attendance.

>>Regent expects more than one finalist for U-of-M president this time around

(Minneapolis, MN) -- Regent Mary Davenport says she anticipates there will be more than one finalist for University of Minnesota president when the Board of Regents one week from tomorrow (Fri 2/9) decides which of four recommended candidates move into the public vetting process. University officials faced criticism in 2018 when Joan Gabel was the only finalist for University president, but Davenport says in 2024 "this is... one of the top jobs out there.... It's very desirable and I don't anticipate having just one [finalist]." Finalists' names become public after the Board of Regents votes February 9th. Public forums follow at the University's five campuses, then private interviews. Davenport expects a final decision by late February, with a July 1st target start date for the U-of-M's next president.

Minnesota BCA Investigating Officer-Involved Shooting in Fargo

(Fargo, ND) -- The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) is investigating a shooting across the border in Fargo involving a North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation agent. Officials say it happened Tuesday in south Fargo as the B-C-I agent was helping the Cass County Drug Task Force serve a felony warrant. No Fargo police officers were involved in the incident and no one was seriously hurt.

>>DFL Lawmakers Unveil Bill to Address School Resource Officers

(St. Paul, MN) -- Democrats in the Minnesota House and Senate unveiled a bill they say will provide a uniform system across the state for districts that choose to have officers on-site in school buildings. Backers say the proposed legislation provides the clarity that law enforcement and school districts sought last fall about use-of-force by officers in school settings. Limitations on use of chokeholds would remain, and the bill would set standards that school resource officers would have to follow to minimize use of prone restraints and other physical holds, de-escalate conflict, and build relationships with students, administrators, and staff. At the Capitol today (1pm Wed), supporters unveil a bill they say will better protect the Boundary Waters from four high-risk sulfide-copper mining practices: waste tailings storage, waste rock handling, separating metals from ore by cyanide leaching, and air pollution from high-temperature smelters.

>>Senator Erin Murphy Tabbed as New Minnesota Senate Majority Leader

(St. Paul, MN) -- Senator Erin Murphy of St. Paul is Minnesota Democrats' new majority leader after Senator Kari Dziedzic (DEED-zick) of Minneapolis decided to step down due to recurrence of cancer. Murphy lauded the outgoing majority leader and said Dziedzic showed, "that if we chose to stick together and act together, we can do important things for the people of Minnesota to improve their lives. And we together are committed to the same thing." Republican Party of Minnesota Chairman David Hann says Murphy voted for nearly every tax increase proposed by Democrats and supports abortion up to the moment of birth.

The 2024 Minnesota Legislature is in session, and it didn't take long for debate to begin on clarifying state law that governs use-of-force by on-site school resource officers -- a holdover issue from last year. House Republicans attempted to bring a bill up immediately for a vote, Minority Leader Lisa Demuth (DAY-muth) arguing it can't wait any longer:

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[bwsro50.mp3] :07 "DID NOT HAPPEN"

"We heard our governor say that he wanted a quick fix on this. A quick fix would have been a special session the end of August. That did not happen."

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But New Hope Democrat Cedrick Frazier says:

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[bwsro51.mp3] :10 "THERE ARE MANY"

"We are engaging and we will continue to engage all stakeholders, which is why it's important to have these committee hearings. We're gonna hear from the people, all the stakeholders involved, because there are many."

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Speaker Melissa Hortman indicated the goal is to have a bill on House floor next week. Democratic Majority Leader Erin Murphy says she expects a bill on the Senate floor in the next two to three weeks.

>>School Resource Officer Bill Passes Minnesota Senate Committee

(St. Paul, MN) -- A bill aiming to clarify when school resource officers are allowed to use force barely cleared a state Senate committee yesterday (Wed) and is stalled in the Minnesota House. One sticking-point appears to be having the Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Board develop statewide policies, which Republican Senator Zach Duckworth from Lakeville is lawmakers' job. But Public Safety Commissioner Bob Jacobson says the bill addresses confusion about when prone restraints and force can be used. He says, "what would be in state law will assure police officers that they can use their best discretion to use force as needed, in a school setting or anywhere else in the state of Minnesota, consistent with their training." Duckworth called for repealing the S-R-O law and starting over.

>>Minnesota House Bill Would Give Students More Time for Lunch

(St. Paul, MN) -- A Minnesota House committee is working on a bill that would require schools give students at least 15 minutes to eat their lunch, prompted by long lines during lunch periods in some districts. Tracy Area Public Schools Nutrition Director Michele Hawkinson told lawmakers, "Lunch is supposed to be the time for students to relax, catch up with friends and enjoy a good meal." Hawkinson says more time to eat lunch is a proven strategy to help students reach their full academic potential. There are still questions about whether it would lengthen the school day and affect teacher contracts, and how special-needs students would be accommodated.

>>Key lawmakers noncommittal on U-of-M's plans to buy back teaching hospitals from Fairview

(St. Paul, MN) -- "Wait and see" is the stance of key players at the State Capitol about the University of Minnesota's plans to buy back its teaching hospitals from Fairview. Governor Tim Walz says, "We are committed to working together with them. What that actual plan looks like, ...I don't know that at this time.... This was meant to be the roadmap and now we're on that path. U-of-M leaders are also talking about a new billion-dollar state-of-the-art medical center on the Minneapolis campus, in addition to buying back the teaching hospitals. House Speaker Melissa Hortman says, "Until we get a new leader installed at the University of Minnesota and a clear and coherent vision, I'm not sure that we're ready to move on that issue." Three finalists for U-of-M president are visiting the five campuses this week and next. Regent Mary Davenport said she expects a decision by the end of this month.

>>Rescheduled Madonna Concert Tonight at the Xcel Energy Center

(St. Paul, MN) -- Madonna is in Minnesota for a concert tonight (Tues 8:30pm) at the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul. The show was originally scheduled for July 30th but had to be cancelled when she was hospitalized with a bacterial infection. The Material Girl rescheduled several dates on her "Celebration Tour." There are some tickets still available. Madonna was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2008.

Advocates say Minnesota, averaging over 500 students per school counselor, has some of the poorest access in the country to an important resource for young learners. Calli Moreau, president-elect of the Minnesota School Counselor Association, says they're asking lawmakers to set a recommended ratio of 250-to-1:

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[bwcounselors2.mp3] :13 "MAKE THIS HAPPEN"

"If the state says, this is important and we value this role for the education and the success of all of our learners, then our districts will start to see, okay, this is important; they want us to do this; how can we make this happen?"

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Democratic Representative Kaela (KAY-luh) Berg from Burnsville is sponsoring the bill and advocates say they also have possible Senate authors. No committee hearing has been scheduled, but they say one is likely.

>>St. Paul's Gothard Named National Superintendent of the Year

(St. Paul, MN) -- Doctor Joe Gothard of St. Public Schools is being honored as the 2024 National Superintendent of the Year. Superintendent Gothard was named this year's winner Thursday by the American Association of School Administrators. He's been superintendent in St. Paul since 2017 after four years as superintendent with the Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District. State Education Commissioner Willie Jett congratulated Gothard and in a statement said, "this well-deserved recognition is a testament to his passion for student achievement; and we applaud and thank him for his tireless work."

>>Chisago County Authorities Release More Info on School Bus Crash

(Rush City, MN) -- The Chisago County Sheriff's Office says a 59-year-old woman from Harris is facing D-W-I and other charges after crashing a school bus into the ditch in Rush City. Deputies say there were 49 students onboard when the Rush City Public Schools bus went off the roadway Thursday morning. No one was hurt and another bus brought the kids to school. A sheriff's sergeant says he observed signs of alcohol impairment when interviewing the bus driver and she was arrested and booked in jail.

>>Man Found Dead in House Fire Near Ely

(Morse, MN) -- A man has been found dead after a house fire near Ely in Morse, Minnesota. First responders responded to the scene around 1:20 p.m. Sunday after a 911 call reported an elderly homeowner was still inside the burning residence. The victim was later found dead inside the home once the fire was under control. The Midwest Medical Examiner's Office is working to identify the victim and the cause of death. The fire is currently under investigation

>> U of M President to be Named Today

(St. Paul, MN) -- It's expected the Board of Regents will make their choice later Today (Mon) for the next president of the University of Minnesota, and they're interviewing the three finalists this morning -- Doctor Laura Bloomberg from Cleveland State University, Doctor Rebecca Cunningham from the University of Michigan and Doctor James Holloway from the University of New Mexico. Bloomberg, former dean at the Humphrey School, says leadership is a team sport and "building relationships is key." The three finalists individually participated in forums the past two weeks at the University's campuses in Crookston, Morris, Duluth, Rochester, and the Twin Cities. The Board of Regents begins its public deliberations this afternoon, which are live-streamed on their website.

West Central Initiative is excited to announce the Frolic Nature School Fund, a new component fund to support nature-based education initiatives in the Fergus Falls community. The fund will provide resources for infrastructure, supplies, programming, facilitator education, administration, and partial scholarships for families in need.

The Frolic Nature School Fund will help foster a deeper connection to oneself and nature through child-led and place-based education. With a focus on instilling a love for learning and curiosity, the school will begin as a pre-K program with plans to expand into a small elementary cohort and eventually offer infant care.

The activities of the Frolic Nature School Fund will be overseen by an advisory committee of community members who will ensure the effective allocation of resources and the realization of the fund's objectives.

Strong demand for free school breakfast and lunch has pushed costs beyond what lawmakers anticipated and we asked Governor Tim Walz, with the larger projected budget surplus...

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[bwschoollunch80.mp3] :11 "FIRST GONNA CUT"

...is that an area that you would see that you'd like to put some additional money in?

Walz: "Yeah, that's the hill I'm gonna die on. Our friends in the other caucus said that's the place they're first gonna cut."

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Republicans say, with a budget deficit looming in 2026-27, families who can afford it should not get free school breakfast and lunch at taxpayers' expense. Democrats respond free meals must be universal to avoid stigma in the lunchroom.

House Speaker Melissa Hortman says Democrats' commitment to continuing universal school meals is "very strong" and "kids out there" that she's talked to...

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[bwschoollunch81.mp3] :08 "MORE GOOD CHOICES"

"What they would like us to focus on is improving the quality of the food that they're eating. They're very happy that they're not paying for it, but they would like more good choices."

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(NO OUTCOPY)

>>Twins will honor fallen Burnsville officers, paramedic during April 4th home opener

(Minneapolis, MN) -- The Minnesota Twins plan to honor the three Burnsville first responders killed in the line of duty during their home opener April 4th. Twins spokesman Matt Hodson says the purpose is "not only [to] take time and remember and pay tribute to those three brave individuals who tragically lost their lives, but to also honor and celebrate the heroic men and women that every day are risking their lives." Hodson says there will be a video and moment of silence for Officers Paul Elmstrand and Matthew Ruge (ROO'-ghee) and Firefighter/paramedic Adam Finseth. First responders from Burnsville, Dakota County and Minneapolis will be on the field during player introductions.

>>Repubs asking Dems to delay new school mandates three year, citing districts' budget crunch

(St. Paul, MN) -- Minnesota Senate Republicans are asking the Democratic majority to give school districts up to three years to implement dozens of new mandates included in last year's education funding bill, plus any new ones this year. Hibbing Senator Rob Farnsworth says despite historic funding, districts are laying off teachers because of the cost of state mandates ranging from curriculum to mascots. Farnsworth says, "A 600-thousand dollar cut from a small school district like Deer River is an enormous cut." Pine City Senator Jason Rarick says one year isn't enough for districts that must change their mascots. He says for one school district he represents, "950-thousand dollars is what they're projecting the cost would be for them to change everything in their school that's affiliated with that mascot, and that would come directly out of their general budget." Rarick says he has "no illusions this is gonna pass this year, but it is something we have to talk about."

>>Transgender Weightlifter's Bias Case Heads Back To Minnesota Court

(St. Paul, MN) -- The Minnesota Court of Appeals is sending a bias case filed by a transgender weightlifter to trial. The ruling made yesterday states a Ramsey County District Court needs to reconsider whether USA Powerlifting violated state law when it barred Cooper because she's transgender. The decision overturns a Ramsey County judge who ruled there was enough evidence to show discrimination last year without the case going to trial. USA Powerlifting argues that it barred Cooper from competition because she went through puberty as a male and had a physiological advantage over other female competitors.

>>MSU-Mankato to Continue Reciprocity for South Dakota Students

(Mankato, MN) -- Minnesota State University-Mankato is continuing tuition reciprocity for students from South Dakota. Officials say any student from that state enrolled in the fall semester of 2024 will pay the same tuition as they previously did. South Dakota ended its reciprocity agreement with Minnesota on January 30th. M-S-U says current undergrad students from South Dakota will continue to receive the reciprocity rate for tuition until they graduate.

>>One Million Dollar Powerball Ticket Sold in Minnesota

(Roseville, MN) -- Someone is a million dollars richer today. Falls Standard Inc. in Zumbro Falls sold the winning ticket in last night's drawing. The next Powerball drawing is tomorrow (Wed), with an estimated \$687 million jackpot up for grabs. Tickets must be purchased by 9 p.m. on drawing days. The winning Powerball numbers drawn Monday night were 10-17-20-39-44, and the Powerball was 16.

>>Free School Milk Program Push

(St. Paul, MN) -- A free carton of milk at school for every student who brings their lunch from home -- something that's **not** in Governor Tim Walz's 226-million-dollar supplemental budget plan, but Walz says the legislature is working on it. Backers say free milk will limit unhealthy beverages that students bring with their lunches and prevent food waste from those who take free meals to get the milk. However, some Republicans warn that a free milk program could saddle school districts with unaffordable costs if state funding must be cut due to a looming budget deficit.

>>Albany Man Accused of Sexually Assaulting Two Young Girls

(St. Cloud, MN) -- An Albany man faces criminal charges after allegedly sexually abusing two girls under the age of 14. The criminal complaint says the girls were visiting 48-year-old Billy Wolbeck earlier this month when the assaults happened. Records show one of the girls told her mother about the incident when they returned home. The girl said she didn't know why Wolbeck was doing those things to her and that he told her to keep it a secret. The charges state the mother then talked to the other girl, who said Wolbeck did similar things to her. Wolbeck faces felony charges of 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct and three counts of 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct. His next court hearing is May 1st.

At Monday's meeting, the Fergus Falls City Council listened to Molly Stoddard and Rud Wasson speak about their request for the City to support the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center. Wasson, former President of Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center, began by explaining that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have not been properly staffing the Center. There are only two staff members, Director Joanne Ryan and a maintenance worker, and Ryan is set to retire at the end of March, 2024.

Stoddard, a private citizen who had previously worked at the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, and had spent 18 years of that time working at the Prairie Wetlands, highlighted that the Fish and Wildlife Service is obliged to provide staff for the Learning Center due to a formal, written partnership agreement between the department and the City of Fergus Falls. She then requested that the Council prepare a resolution to be shared with the Regional Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the area's Congressmen to indicate the City's support of the Service fully funding and staffing the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center. The Council unanimously passed the resolution.

During the discussion, Mayor Ben Schierer said, "I don't think I'm alone in saying that the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center is a valuable asset to our community, to our educational system, to the city as a whole. I would certainly think it's appropriate for us to offer a resolution to send to Senator Klobuchar, Senator Smith, Representative Fischbach, just stating the importance of the facility to our community and urge them to fund it and staff it appropriately."

Members of the community are encouraged to contact their members of Congress, either by phone call or by mail, to show their support for the Learning Center.

Saint Paul, MN —The Minnesota House of Representatives on Monday approved a bill to improve school safety after a change in law last year resulted in school resource officers (SROs) to be removed from many schools throughout the state.

State Representative Jeff Backer issued the following statement reacting to Monday's vote:

"The safety and security of students, teachers, staff, and our schools should be something that brings all Minnesotans together," said Backer. "That's why it is so disappointing that it took Democrats until March to swallow their pride, admit they were wrong, and join us in fixing this."

"This is an issue we have known about for months and could have been addressed before the school year started. Instead, Democrats refused to include Republicans in any conversations about remedying this situation until recently. Now, with our help, we can provide the clarification that law enforcement and schools need to make sure SROs can return to middle and high schools."

The issue traces back to an omnibus education bill (HF 2497) Democrats enacted in 2023 that imposed prohibitions on the use of force in schools, banning certain physical holds by "an employee or agent of a district, including a school resource officer, security personnel, or police officer contracted with a district."

Language in the new measure provides updates which exclude SROs as employees or agents of a school district, exclude SROs from the prohibitions on prone restraints and physical holds; revise the "reasonable force standard" and mandate school districts and charter schools use only trained SROs and establishes new training and model policy requirements for law enforcement.

The House approved the bill 124-8 and it now awaits action in the Senate.

>>Rep. Craig Announces 2024 Congressional Art Competition

(Eagan, MN) -- Representative Angie Craig says the 2024 Congressional Art Competition for Minnesota's Second District students has begun. The annual contest, hosted each spring, is open to all high school students living in the Second District, with the winner being displayed in the U.S. Capitol Building for one year, alongside artwork from other congressional districts across the nation. Instructions can be found on Craig's House website (<https://craig.house.gov/services/art-competition>). Submissions are due by April 19th, 2024.

>>Minnesota Zoo Nominated For USA Today Reader's Choice Award

(Apple Valley, MN) -- Minnesota Zoo fans are urged to vote in an online contest to determine the most popular zoo in the United States. The zoo is one of 20 nominated for the USA Today Reader's Choice award. The Apple Valley attraction sits 15th on the leaderboard, and fans can vote once a day until the contest ends on March 4th. The top ten will be announced online on March 15th.

M State is enhancing its educational and entrepreneurial support services for women and gender-expansive students, thanks to a new \$150,000 "We Thrive" grant award from the Women's Foundation of Minnesota. Designed to foster the long-term success of women and their families through the growth of intergenerational wealth, the "We Thrive" grant program invests in organizations and initiatives that address inequities in women's access and opportunity. M State will use the grant funds to bolster its wraparound support services for women and gender-expansive students, such as career planning, childcare, transportation, laptops, and mental health services. In addition, and in alignment with the entrepreneurship goals of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, the West Central Minnesota Small Business Development Center will provide women with one-on-one business consultation services.

>>Man Dead After Minneapolis Gas Station Shooting

(Minneapolis, MN) -- A man is dead after a shooting outside a Minneapolis gas station this morning (TUES). Fourth Precinct officer responded to a shooting report around 12:20 a.m. finding a 23-year-old man suffering from a life-threatening gunshot wound in the alley behind a gas station. Despite life-saving measures, the man was pronounced dead at the scene. Investigators say the shooting happened after a verbal altercation, which turned into violence. No arrests have been made so far.

>>MN House Republicans Urge Gov. Walz to Veto Social Studies Standards

(St. Paul, MN) -- House Republicans are calling on Governor Tim Walz to veto the proposed social studies standards, citing 'academic deficiencies.' In a letter to Walz, Republicans express concern that the Minnesota Department of Education's standards review process has been influenced by "extremists aiming for the political radicalization of public schools." The final standards, recently submitted to Walz after addressing legal deficiencies, await his approval or veto within the next 14 days.