

# MEA weekend: It's an October tradition in Minnesota, but why?

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It's the third week in October in Minnesota, which means social media and parent group chats are lighting up with the same question: What to do with the kids for the four-day MEA weekend?

The break from class is typically one of the busiest travel days of the year, a Minnesota tradition rivaling

Thanksgiving and the winter holidays. That's because the statewide teachers union, Education Minnesota, has held its annual conference during this time for more than a century — giving families and educators time off just two months into the new school year.

"It gives them a chance to catch up a little bit," said Scott Croonquist, executive director for the Associa-

tion of Metropolitan School Districts. "The run up to the school year and up through MEA is quite a sprint."

Here are four things to know about the MEA weekend:

## What is MEA?

The Minnesota Educators Academy is a one-day conference held annually at the St. Paul RiverCentre.

See **MEA** on B3 ▶



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University of Minnesota student teachers, from left, Ciera Eckert, Samaa Baig and Sabrina Abdelal, visited the U booth Thursday in the trade show area at the MEA conference.



# While teachers learn, students get a break

◀ **MEA** from B1

Its origins date back to 1861 and Education Minnesota has the conference scheduled on the third Thursday of October each year through 2033.

Education Minnesota spokesman Chris Williams said the mid-fall timing allows educators to assess their classrooms and the skills they need to hone after the first few weeks of school. This year's event will feature sessions on literacy, mental health and tips on how to address bias incidents in the classroom, among others. Nearly 1,200 teachers and university students majoring in education registered for the conference.

Lauren Hansen, a freshman education major at Augsburg University, is attending sessions on classroom management and how to support transgender students.

"I think it's important that we learn to support the character and identity of our students," said Hansen, who wants to teach high school.

This year's keynote speaker is Brittany Wagner, who starred in the Netflix sports documentary "Last Chance U." (In 1998, the Star Tribune reported that "Happy Days" and "Barry" star Henry Winkler was also in attendance.)

## **The conference is one day, so why do students take two days off?**

The MEA conference was spread out over two days until 2018. That's when the union opted to scale it back to one day after a U.S. Supreme Court decision that changed who could be required to pay for collective bargaining.

But many districts already had their academic calendar set for that year. Education officials said at the time that they kept Friday



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Minnesota Teacher of the Year Michael Houston of Harding High School was part of Thursday's opening session.

as a professional development day for teachers because it didn't make much sense to have kids come back to class after a Thursday off.

## **Some students get more than two days off for MEA**

Ten of the state's 25 largest school districts — including Anoka-Hennepin, Minneapolis and South Washington County — give students three days off during MEA week. Together, those districts enroll nearly 1 in 5 of the state's public school students.

All those districts set aside Wednesday, the day before the MEA conference, for teacher training or parent-teacher conferences.

In Hopkins, which enrolls more than 6,800 kids and ranks among the state's 30 largest districts, middle



University of Minnesota student teacher Hannah Marik listened during a training session.

and high schoolers are taking the standard Thursday and Friday off. But the district's elementary students have the whole week off for parent-teacher conferences.

"We have heard strongly from our families that the preference has been to have the week as a confer-

ence and professional development week," district spokesperson Jolene Goldade said.

## **It's one of the busiest travel days of the year**

Airport officials said 46,000 people are expected to move through MSP on Wednesday. MSP spokesman John Welbes said the airport expects 49,000 passengers Thursday and 35,000 on Sunday.

He also said the airport projected 414 departing flights on Wednesday and 460 on Thursday. Welbes said MSP averages 406 departures per day during October.

"For parents and kids, it's obviously a long weekend and a chance to get away," Croonquist said.

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