

As educators and SPFE members, we know how important it is to be informed on issues that matter – to ourselves, our families, and our students. And we know how important it is to make our voices heard – in the classroom, at the bargaining table, and in the voting booth.

The 2021 SPPS Board of Education election is an important one. Our district has faced decades of insufficient funding that has increased education disparities in Saint Paul. We need a board that is willing to take bold steps to reimagine public education in our city, that will work with educators and families to truly build the schools our children deserve, and that will provide direction and leadership, not just a rubber stamp.

SPFE COPE has created this guide to help our members track important dates for caucuses and conventions. We will issue an updated guide in the fall.

Thank you for being a member, and thank you for being a voter.

### **What is SPFE COPE?**

COPE is the Committee on Political Education and serves as the political arm of the Saint Paul Federation of Educators.

COPE drafts candidate questionnaires, screens candidates, makes recommendations for endorsement to the executive board, makes campaign contributions to endorsed candidates, and hosts phone banks and door knocks.

### **SPFE COPE Members**

SPFE COPE is a volunteer committee that meets monthly and reports to the SPFE Executive Board. The current committee is:

Annaka Larson, Chair

Laurel Kuhner Berker, Treasurer

Beth Swanberg, EdMn PAC Board

Janey Atchison, EdMn LAC Board

Sarah Bosch

Joan Duncanson

Jeff Garcia

Mercedes Lee

Yasmin Muridi

SPFE COPE is staffed by the SPFE Political Organizer

## CRITERIA FOR ENDORSEMENT

- ◇ **Support for Public Education** – Our public schools belong to all of us, and our endorsed candidates must be committed to strengthening our publicly-owned schools.
- ◇ **Advocate for Racial Equity** - Our endorsed candidates must be willing to join with us as we advocate for students and work diligently to repair the harms caused by centuries of white supremacy in our schools and our communities.
- ◇ **Fully Fund Our Public Schools** – Public education is the heart of our democracy and it is our collective responsibility to keep the system healthy. Our endorsed candidates will actively advocate, bargain, and organize for increased funding in public education.
- ◇ **Reject Market-Based Education Reforms** – Our endorsed candidates must commit to rejecting contributions from organizations and individuals that support the imposition of market-based education reforms that do not represent the best interests of the students of Saint Paul Public Schools.
- ◇ **Support a Moratorium on New Charter Schools** – Our endorsed candidates must support a moratorium on new charter schools and the expansion of existing charter schools until a study is done on the impact charter schools have on traditional public schools and our communities.
- ◇ **Support for SPFE and Our Values** – We will continue to support candidates that have supported us in the past.
- ◇ **Uphold the SPPS Gender Inclusion Policy** – Our endorsed candidates must work to create a safe and nurturing environment for all our students, including those who identify as LGBTQ. This includes referring to students by their name, gender, and pronouns, and protecting students' privacy.
- ◇ **Commit to Community Engagement** – We believe that parents, students, community members and educators must come together to create the schools our children deserve.
- ◇ **Support Bargaining for the Common Good** – As educators and union members, we know that students and families are impacted by much more than what happens in our schools. Our endorsed candidates must support us as we use our collective power to negotiate contracts that not only address wages and benefits, but also serve to effect long-term structural, economic and social change in our communities.
- ◇ **Walk a Day With SPFE** – Only candidates who have shadowed an educator for one full school day will be considered for endorsement. *For safety reasons, this requirement shall be waived in the event that SPPS is in Distance Learning*

## What's on the 2021 ballot?

2021 is an "off year". This means there are no statewide elections, and no regular Minnesota House and Senate elections.

Minneapolis will have city council and mayoral races. There may also be ballot initiatives, and a city charter amendment. The city council and mayoral race use the rank choice voting system, so there will NOT be a primary.

Saint Paul has will have a mayoral race, and SPPS Board of Education elections. The mayoral election uses rank choice voting, and all BOE seats are city-wide. There is no primary scheduled in Saint Paul for 2021. There are two distinct BOE elections:

- Regular election: The four year term for Board Chair Foster, Board Vice Chair Vue, and Director Brodrick expire this year. Candidates elected in November, will be seated in January.
- Special election: Director Marchese is resigning. There will be an appointment to fill his seat through the November election. Whoever is elected as his replacement in November will be seated at the next board meeting directly following the election. This person will serve the remainder of the term, which expires in 2023.

Information for Wisconsin elections can be found [here](#).

### How do I vote early?

**In Minnesota**, you can vote early with an absentee ballot Friday, September 17, 2021 either by mail or in person. You do not need a reason to vote early. To vote by mail, you must request a ballot. Information on how to register to vote, early voting, and sample ballots can be found at the [Minnesota Secretary of State](#).

*In Minnesota, registered voters do not need to provide ID to vote. You can register to vote on Election Day. There are several ways to show proof of residence, you can find that list [here](#).*

### 2021 Caucuses and Conventions

The Saint Paul precinct caucuses, ward conventions and city convention will be virtual this year. When details have been finalized this section will be updated.

**SPFE COPE strongly recommends that all members apply for an absentee ballot and vote early.**

## What's at Stake in 2021

It's been a challenging year for educators. On March 9, 2020 we said goodbye to our students and walked out of our classrooms and buildings and early in the morning of March 10 we walked on to the strike lines, to fight for the resources our students need. By the time our strike was settled, COVID 19 had closed our schools, and educators across the state were doing what they do best – making it work as best they could.

The rush to return to buildings that began in February have put us in a tough spot-- members have been choosing to go without pay to keep families safe, quarantining in rental properties to keep families safe, and working in so many layers of PPE it's hard to recognize one another. Reopening school buildings prior to vaccinating teachers and without all of the layered safety measures we've all learned over the past 11 months is unconscionable; and yet our State and District leaders are so eager to reopen schools that they've forgotten the science, just so that we could return to "normal".

As educators, we know that a return to "normal" isn't enough. This year had shown others what we already know. Normal isn't good enough for our students, our families, and ourselves.

The 2021 Board of Education elections, will be about values. Elected officials will need to make decisions about how we repair harm – the harm caused by a global pandemic, the harm caused by economic policies that have turned our public schools into the last social safety net, and the harm caused by white supremacy.

One way to begin to repair these harms is to elect candidates that share our values, and will make decisions with us, not for us. In 2021, we must have school board members that see educators as partners, not enemies.

At SPFE, we know how to build power with each other. We know that our students and families look to us to advocate for them. We know what we need to build the schools our students deserve. Elections are a powerful tool we can use to fight for ourselves, our students, and our families. By voting together to support education champions across the city, the state, and the country, we can win.

## How local lawmakers impact education policy and funding

**Governor (four year term):** The Governor impacts education directly through their budget proposal and through appointments, including the Commissioner of Education and the members of the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board.

**Minnesota State Representative and Senator (two and four year terms, respectively):** The Minnesota House and Senate impacts education directly by serving on education specific committees (in the House: Education Policy, Education Finance, Early Childhood Finance and Policy, and Higher Education Finance and Policy; and in the Senate: E-12 Finance and Policy, and Higher Education Finance and Policy) and by voting on gubernatorial appointments and budget proposals.

**County Commissioner (four year term):** County Commissioners do not impact education funding or policy directly. However, they have oversight over all county programs, many of which impact our students, including public health, parks, and zoning.

**Mayor (four year term):** Mayors do not have direct oversight of local school districts, and, depending on the city they may have either more or less power than the city council. However, mayors do impact public education indirectly through their budget proposals – specifically in any funding that impacts the day-to-day lives of city residents. Mayors also occupy a unique position as cheerleader for their city.

**City Council (four year term):** City Council also has no direct oversight over education funding or policy. In addition to zoning and passing ordinances, they impact funding for essential supports to many of our families in areas like afterschool care, mental health, and affordable housing. In some cities they can call for tax levies that directly fund programs that our students rely on.

**School Board (four year term):** Local school boards have the most direct impact on education spending and policy implementation. In addition to hiring and supervising the Superintendent, the school board is responsible for finalizing contracts with bargaining units, fiscal oversight, and determine when to call for a referendum.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How does SPFE make endorsements?**

Any candidate seeking the SPFE endorsement must meet the criteria for endorsement, complete a candidate questionnaire and participate in a screening. Questionnaires will be posted on the SPFE website, and screenings are open to SPFE members and the general public. SPFE COPE will make recommendations for endorsement to the SPFE Executive Board. For safety reasons, the requirement to shadow an educator (Walk a Day with SPFE), has been suspended.

### **How can I share my opinion about a candidate?**

The best way to share your feedback is to attend a screening. If you cannot attend a screening, please contact any member of SPFE COPE or the SPFE Political Organizer.

### **What if a candidate asks to meet with me?**

This is great! The more time we can get candidates to spend with educators the better. Please take lots of notes. If possible, check in with the political organizer before you meet so that you can walk the candidate through the SPFE endorsement process. After your meeting, please share your notes with SPFE COPE or the political organizer, and please share the candidates contact information with the political organizer.

### **Why does SPFE only endorse Democrats?**

While political party is not a part of our endorsement criteria, it is also rare that Republicans or Libertarians will meet our endorsement criteria. All public candidates in any given race that meet our minimum criteria are invited to screen in any race we choose to endorse in.

### **What is the political organizer's role in endorsement?**

The political organizer has no vote in determining who will receive an endorsement. The political organizer's role is to gather information, make recommendations when asked by COPE, and to provide support to COPE in this process.

### **Why are members asked to volunteer?**

The most effective way to win elections (and to build power) is through face-to-face interactions. That's why door knocking is so important. In close elections, those conversations with real people were most often the deciding factor. Being able to turn out volunteers also sends a message to candidates about our ability to hold them accountable. Two of the most politically powerful unions in Minnesota (AFSCME and MNA) hold that power in part because of their ability to turn out volunteers. If SPFE wants to be taken seriously by elected officials, we need to increase our capacity to turn out members.

As educators and SPFE members, we go to work each day hoping to create the best learning environment we can for our students. It can be hard to look up from the parent phone calls and ungraded tests to pay attention to an election, but being politically active is just another way of taking care of our students. Educators are the experts on what our kids need and at every level of government, our leaders need to be listening to *us*. If you're ready to take on a larger role as an education activist, please talk to Political Organizer Lynne Bolton or one of Committee about joining COPE. We hope this guide is helpful and we are grateful to stand with you in 2021.

In solidarity,  
Annaka Larson, COPE chair  
Beth Swanberg, EdMn PAC Board  
Janey Atchison, EdMn LAC Board