



Southeast  
Service  
Cooperative

# *Connections*

January 2021

Stress  
Management

P2



Career Exploration  
During COVID

P8



SSC Wins Top  
Wellness Honor

P12



*Adapting Together*

# Stress Management for Teachers

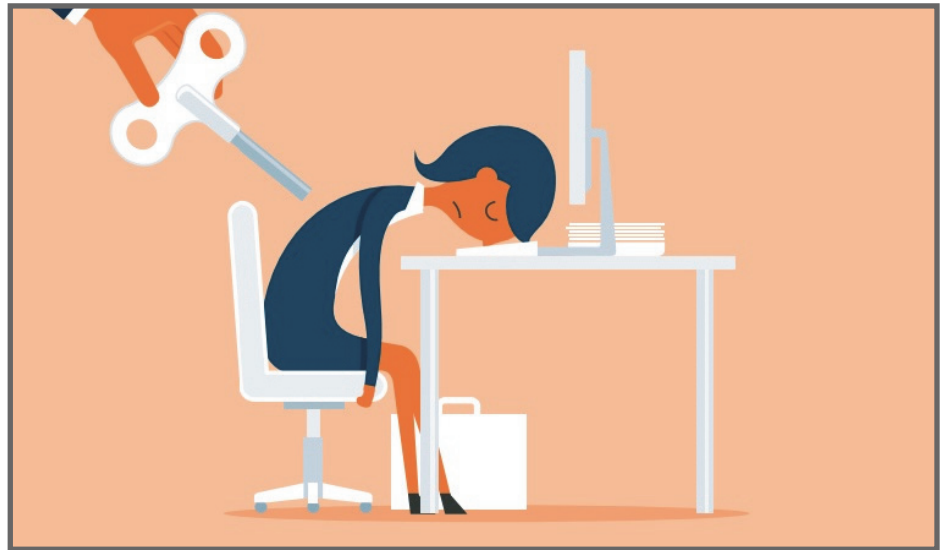
*This is an excerpt from the article “Wellness 101: A Teacher’s Guide to Surviving COVID-19” by Chloe Eckberg, published on The Mattress Nerd website on December 3, 2020.*

With the coronavirus pandemic in full swing, teachers around the country are struggling to juggle the responsibilities of their job while adjusting to a new “normal.” Along the way, they’ve faced new challenges and stressors that have taken a toll on their mental health. In a recent survey of 100 teachers across the country, teachers were asked to share their struggles teaching during COVID-19.

## How Teachers are Handling Stress

According to survey’s respondents, a staggering 92% of teachers say they feel more stressed now than before the pandemic. Among them, 70% say they’d label their stress level as “significantly higher” compared to before COVID-19 began.

This is not a surprise according to Dr. Sabrina Romanoff, a Harvard trained clinical psychologist working at Lenox Hill Hospital, Northwell Health, in New York City. “Many teachers at this point in the pandemic are experiencing burnout, which occurs when motivation or incentive loses its sustainability because one is not able to produce the anticipated results,” Romanoff states. “In other words, when effort is not equivalent to the outcome, motivation to continue to sustain determination begins to waver,” Romanoff continues.



She goes on to mention that stress can also be stored in the body and can have psychomotor symptoms such as stomach pains, headaches, and body pain.

But not all hope is lost, there are still ways for teachers to manage their stress even when they are going through a time in their careers that looks significantly different and poses unique challenges.

## Ways Teachers Can Manage Stress

Teachers, the results of our survey have given us a clearer picture of the sacrifices you have made for our students and children all around the country, and we are here to share your struggles and help you manage your stress during these challenging times.

Use the following stress reduction tools so that you can take care of your needs and be the best teacher you can for your students:

### Talk to other teachers.

A meta-analysis published in the journal *PLoS Medicine* found that

having a good social network keeps us healthy and, in fact, increases survival by 50%. Unfortunately, government-mandated closures and stay-at-home orders to stop the spread of COVID-19 have isolated many of us. But social distancing doesn’t mean you cannot reach out to others, especially colleagues! So give your fellow teacher friends a call, vent on FaceTime, or set up a time to take a walk. Doing so will reassure you that you are not alone in your suffering. And, you may even find ways to laugh about your challenges. Laughter, studies show, can actually be pretty good best medicine.

### Get outside.

When pressure builds and feels almost unbearable, take a break and head out into nature. Whether it’s a stroll through your neighborhood or a trail in a nearby park, just getting outdoors can be hugely therapeutic. As Albert Einstein once said, “Look deep into nature, and you will understand everything better.”

*Continued on the next page...*

## Stress Management for Teachers continued...

### Escape for a weekend.

Yes, it is possible to head out of town for the weekend and safely social distance. While escaping the confines of your stay-at-home desk may sound daunting it is essential to take time for yourself to recharge and reset, even if it means taking a break from online grading. So consider renting a cabin in the woods or a condo on a lake with an equipped kitchen so you can prepare your own meals and make yourself at home. Just a few days away can help you de-stress and prepare yourself for the week ahead.

### Let it go.

Just like the *Frozen* song that never seems to make its way out of your students' heads, it is time to *let it go*! The online quizzes you need to grade, or the progress reports you have due can wait until the morning. Take a deep breath. Try to release that tight grip you have on trying to control the chaotic world around you. Focus on what you can manage and accept that you can't control everything and keep hope, knowing that pandemics eventually end and one-day things will get easier.

### Take care of yourself.

You're teaching kids, managing anxious parents, and trying to keep your family safe. But, despite teachers being the closest thing we have to real-life superheroes, you can't do any of it if you don't take care of yourself first! Take time to be alone and unwind by listening to music or using guided meditation.

Unsure about meditating? There are some apps available that can talk you through the process.

Meditating enables you to focus your attention and eliminate intrusive thoughts. By taking a few minutes to meditate, you reap the benefits of relaxation and stress reduction.

Sierra Hillsman, a licensed associate counselor, at Legacy Speaks, encourages teachers to increase self-awareness by identifying their needs and making peace with parting with what no longer serves them.

*"This [self-awareness] will lead to strengthening self-advocacy skills and help teachers communicate and stand up for themselves based on their current experiences. Practicing relentless honesty with where you are emotionally and mentally helps create checkpoints before you find yourself at the end of the rope."*

-Sierra Hillsman

Another thing you can do, according to Dr. Romanoff, is to shift your thinking. Learn to shift your bias from the negative and all you cannot do to all that you can. One way of doing this is with the 3 good things exercise.

"Every night write down three things that happened that day for which you are grateful. Research

has found this to be an effective way to increase happiness because it increases gratitude and appreciation for all that you do have," says Romanoff.

Still struggling to cope? Make an appointment to talk to a therapist who can help you process and may be able to lift some of the weight you have been carrying with you. Interested in learning more about the survey results as well as learn about ways to improve sleep and wellbeing and maintain a healthy work/life balance? Click [here](#) to access the full article.

## A Little Stress Relief

By Kari Kubicek

Speaking of stress relief, probably like a lot of other people during the pandemic, I have found a few binge-worthy series to watch while socially distancing at home. While it has been out for a few years, I recently discovered *Schitt's Creek* on Netflix and can't seem to stop watching it. I found this video of the *Schitt's Creek* cast singing a tribute to teachers and wanted to share it with you to hopefully provide a little bit of stress relief or just a laugh in another long pandemic day. This has been out since June 2020, so there are some references to "this moment" of COVID while we all are very well aware that it has been much longer than "a moment", but I still think it is worth sharing. Enjoy!



## SSC Offering Virtual Cultural Competency and Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Trainings



Two virtual training opportunities in teacher relicensure areas are being offered by SSC.

**A Cultural Competency: A Deeper Dive into Self Reflection and Personal Bias** virtual training is scheduled for Monday, March 1, from 12:30 – 3:30 PM. Click [here](#) to learn more and register.

**A Suicide Prevention and Mental Health: Be Present, Be Patient, Be Persistent** virtual training is scheduled for Monday, March 8, from 12:30 to 3:30 PM. Click [here](#) to learn more and register.

## Long Term Professional Development Supports through SSC

By Kari Kubicek

A few districts in SE MN have taken advantage of long term professional development support options through SSC. Consultations, professional development sessions for all staff, small group meetings, observations, follow-up meetings, as well as options for educators to contact the faculty member directly during the school day, are just some of the services available through these contracts.

Northfield's Greenvale Elementary recently finalized a contract with SSC for SSC Faculty member Angie Ellsworth to provide self-care supports for their staff for the next few months. Angie facilitated a time management session prior to the holidays for Greenvale staff as a part of the service.

Melissa Larson, Instructional Coach - Behavior and Social Emotional Learning, commented on the experience. "With the roles and responsibilities for educators having increased significantly during the last few years and even more so since the pandemic, many educators are struggling to find a way to balance it all. Angie provided us with some simple time management tips to help us start

on our journeys to being more balanced."

Winona Area Public Schools has contracted with SSC for the next several months to have Ellsworth support their staff in the area of behavior management.

Dr. Sarah Knudsen, Director of Special Education at Winona Schools, stated, "Angie's services have been just what we were looking for. She has been willing to collaborate with us in identifying our current strengths and needs, followed by a professional development plan to support staff in providing high quality EBD programming."

Faculty members in other content areas are also available to provide both one time professional development opportunities, as well as long term supports. Please **contact** Kari Kubicek at SSC to hear more!





# Outstanding Educator Awards Announced

By Sarah Ness

STEM Forward's Outstanding Educator, Jessica Marquardt Elementary Educator from Kasson Mantorville Public Schools, and fellow nominees Blake Julian (Dover-Eyota Public Schools), Chelsie Dietrich (Rochester Public Schools), Lynne Gaunt (Austin Public Schools), and Mick Wendland (Red Wing Public Schools), were celebrated at the STEM Forward Outstanding Educator Awards presented virtually on Wednesday, January 20.

This annual celebratory event, where we recognize and celebrate southeast Minnesota's finest STEM educators, was extra special as we recognized the major role our educators and support staff played in the pandemic. In a year when many educators and staff were wondering if they were enough and if they were doing enough to support our



students, parents, and community, we recognized their efforts and applauded their perseverance and resiliency to deliver an outstanding education to our region's youth regardless of the many barriers before them.

## *Interested in Joining STEM Forward?*

STEM Forward brings multiple stakeholders in education and industry together to:

- Advance southeast Minnesota's knowledge and resources in computer science, engineering, mathematics, and science.
- Access direct partnerships with nonprofits and post-secondary organizations like CSTA, Engineering Alliance, HealthForce MN, and many more.
- Priority access to STEM grants in computer science, STEM career pathways and workforce development initiatives.



# STEM FORWARD

VIRTUAL SPRING  
EDUCATOR FORUM  
04.14.2021  
4:30 PM

STEM Forward is hosting this event to provide engaging peer-to-peer learning opportunities for educators, administrators, future educators, and all other stakeholders vested in providing quality STEM education to students.

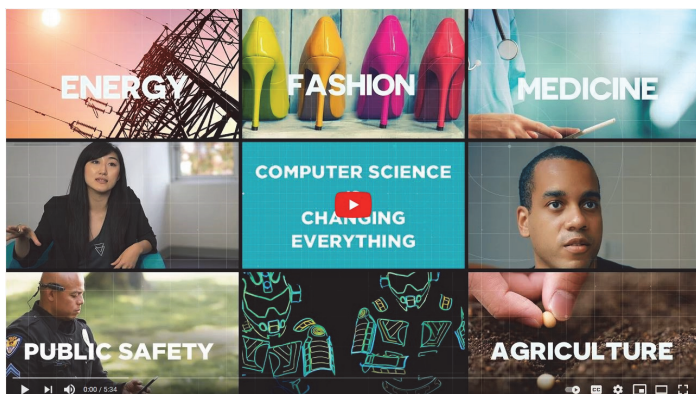
Apply to facilitate  
a breakout session

Register to attend

BUILD STRONG STEM FOUNDATIONS | INCREASE DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION IN STEM | PREPARE STEM WORKFORCE FOR THE FUTURE | CHANGING MN SCIENCE STANDARDS | DEVELOP & ENRICH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS | ENGAGE STUDENTS WHERE DISCIPLINES CONVERGE | BUILD COMPUTATIONAL LITERACY | INCREASE PARENT ENGAGEMENT

# Computer Science Is Changing Everything Literally... Everything

By Sarah Ness



Computer science is everywhere you look today, from the software used to purchase your groceries, the portal used to pay your electricity bill, or the app on your phone that connects you with friends and family during a pandemic. It is the one thing that supports every industry in our economy; to help organizations drive efficiency, save time, and complete complex tasks. Computer science is so deeply embedded into our lives, it can be hard to remember how we did things without it.

So what does this mean to SSC members and the communities we serve? Regardless of the industry you work in (education, government, etc.), our organizations need people who can help us solve problems to execute our mission. With the world changing at the speed of light, we look to education to help develop our youth, the future workforce, into critical thinkers equipped with an arsenal of skills to aid them in creatively solving problems.

Equity has been a major focus in education over the past few years and computer science is bubbling to the top of the priority list in these discussions. In a technology-driven world, having computer science skills is a means to ensure all youth have an even playing field to be successful contributing citizens after graduation. Minnesota schools and community partners recognize this and are starting to make shifts in our educational delivery models to provide these opportunities to students.

I recently had the pleasure of sitting in on a one-hour webinar with Counselors 4 Computing, the National

Center for Computer Science Education and Hermantown School District's Counselor, MaKenzie Johnson, and Technology Integration Specialist, Mike Pothast, who shared some amazing easy examples of strategies they are implementing to embed equitable practices for computer science into their students' K-12 educational experiences. With their enthusiastic blessing, they have given us permission to share the recorded webinar and strategies with you. Below you will find a taste of the many strategies in their presentation.

## 1. **Computer science is not just for students gifted in math and science.**

Computer science is an artsy language. Look for students who are creative and abstract thinkers. Look for students with this aptitude who have interests in art, graphic design, music, fashion, etc..

## 2. **Create a referral system for computer science classes and clubs by integrating unlikely partners like counselors, language arts teachers, and art teachers.**

Ask your colleagues for referrals on potential students to reach out to. Don't limit yourself to the science and math teachers, other teachers like music/choir, arts, and language arts teachers are great resources. Also, be intentional about partnering with other women educators if you are looking to recruit female students. Other classroom educators have already had the pleasure of getting to know each student and would be able to identify those who might have an interest or the creativity to enjoy computer science. Also they have trust developed with the students. Students are more likely to listen and follow through with suggestions from educators with whom they have a rapport and an established connection.

## 3. **Expose unlikely partners to what computer science looks like in today's world.**

Partner with your local community colleges to share their training programs and offerings they provide to students after high school graduation and highlight what careers look like that require these degrees and training. Having this background knowledge of industry needs in computer science will help

*Continued on the next page...*

## Computer Science continued...

counselors and educators understand what to look for and how to hold meaningful conversations with youth to pursue engagement in K-12 computer science programming.

#### 4. Reframe your ask to students from “What do you want to be when you grow up?” to “What problem do you want to solve in the world?”

Simply reframing this question allows responses that are driven by passion and interest, instead of money and/or exposure. This provides more meaningful responses from the kids who don’t know what they want to do when they grow up. Tech jobs are everywhere. Information technology was the one industry in Minnesota that didn’t take a huge hit during the pandemic. Since our world is mobile and coded, computer science is something that compliments any career path.

#### 5. Review your school's course catalog for barriers.

Examine the course schedule for unintended course problems. If your school holds a computer science class for a single hour, put it in a place and time where it isn’t going to conflict with other popular courses for your desired populations you want to engage with. Don’t allow it to compete with other singleton classes.

Does your course catalog or marketing materials show diversity in ethnicity and genders? Intentionally put pictures of females next to the computer science class to increase female participation.

[View Recorded Webinar](#)

[View Full Slide Deck](#)

## Let's Be Friends on Social Media

*It's lonely on Facebook when you don't have enough friends (sniff, sniff). Can you take a moment to like and follow our Career Navigator social media accounts? Posts include ways to connect your students with career-connected learning, scholarship and grant information opportunities, industry information, best practices, and access to many resources.*

East	Dover-Eyota, Lake City, Plainview-Elgin-Millville, St. Charles, Wabasha-Kellogg	 Katie Hendrickson	<b>Facebook</b> @CareerNavigatorEastMN
SMEC	Glenville Emmons, Grand Meadow, LeRoy-Ostrander, Lyle, Southland, SMEC	 Heather Schutte	<b>Facebook</b> @CareerNavigatorSMEC
Olmsted County	Bryon, Kasson-Mantorville, Stewartville, Triton	 Jami Schwickerath	<b>Twitter</b> @jamischwick
Bluff Country Collaborative	Caledonia, Houston, La Crescent-Hokah, Lewiston-Altura, Mabel-Canton, Rushford-Peterson, Spring Grove	 Mary Anne Smith  Nick Wobig	<b>Facebook</b> @BCCNavigators



# What Does Career Exploration Look Like During a Pandemic

By Sarah Ness

Like most other things in 2020, COVID-19 restrictions have put a halt to in-person, interactive, hands-on exploration activities for K-12 students. Thus, the work of your regional Career Navigator team shifted to support the changing needs of southeast Minnesota CTE educators. Below is a snippet of the innovative support Career Navigators provided to our region during 2020.

## Alumni Networks

**SMC** - Heather Schutte works with high school teachers to identify students who have graduated and live and work in the area to connect them to classrooms. Graduates sign in to FutureForward™ as professionals. K-12 staff and students reach out to them to share their career and the pathway they took to get there. K-12 students find these experiences very engaging and can easily relate to professionals close to their own age.

## Mentorship Program

**Byron** - Jami Schwickerath worked in collaboration with the guidance staff to create 60-hour mentorships for students for the third quarter to go onto the job and learn more about various careers. Melanie Brennan of ExercisAbilities was quick to agree to allow an interested student to observe her. Before going on the mentorship, the students research the company on the FutureForward™ portal and assimilate themselves with the company and individual jobs offered there.

## Culinary Program Gets Revamp Thanks to Two Special Partners

**Triton** - Another grant has been submitted for Triton to update and replace ovens in the Food and Consumer Science room. This grant also helps to secure partnerships with Pasquale's Neighborhood Pizzeria and Terza Ristorante. Both chefs are willing to help teach curriculum and share culinary expertise.

## FutureForward in Action!



K-M students with tools donated from Rochester Area Builders. They will be used in the district's new middle school Woods class, which will allow students to acquire foundations in woodworking prior to high school.



Marge O'Laughlin - Flex Craft, Houston, MN



Samantha Grabau - Harmony Ambulance Service



Stewartville students with tools from Halcon. Learners use them in Woods classes or are welcome to take them home for use in distance learning.

## Local Chamber Partnerships Lead to Career Videos for Local Employers

**Byron** - Thanks to partners like each community's local Chamber of Commerce, Elias Construction, LLC, opened their doors and allowed Career Navigators in to record some of their workers creating amazing new homes in the community. A chamber Lunch and Learn meeting helped to build this relationship. Mickey and crew were great to work with!

## Live Flex Time Q&A Sessions Using FutureForward™

**Mabel Canton** - MaryAnne Smith and Nick Wobig help staff get set up on FutureForward™ and coordinate weekly live Q&A sessions with local employers.

The topics are shared ahead of time. Students can participate according to their interest and availability. These experiences take place on Tuesdays during FlexTime as to not cut into other parts of the day. Students watch a video on Monday or any time before the Tuesday call and write two questions for the professional related to the job, training to get there, etc. Following the live Q&A, students complete a five question survey on FutureForward™ to provide feedback to the professional.

## Mock Interview Engage 28 Students with 22 Local Professionals

**Spring Grove** - 28 Students participated in mock interviews with 22 regional

*Continued on the next page...*



## Career Exploration continued...

professionals from the Bluff Country Collaborative. Each student was asked their careers of interest prior to the event. MaryAnne Smith and Nick Wobig used FutureForward™ to find professionals in those industry areas to conduct the interviews. This was a win for students as they were able to network with professionals in the industry and were able to speak industry language. It was a win for professionals as they were able to network with highly interested students who plan to pursue a career in that industry adding to their pipeline recruitment strategy.

### Welding Simulator

**Glennville-Emmons** - Riverland Perkins Consortia recently purchased a Lincoln Electric Welding Simulator with Carl D. Perkins grant dollars. This welding simulator will be shared by the Riverland Perkins Consortia districts for virtual welding exploration for students. The simulator has been in use at Glennville-Emmons High School in Mr. Larson's classes and will head off to the next school district later this month.

### Welding and Sanding Equipment

**Triton** - The Career and Technical

Education departments at Triton got a big boost in December. The Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council awarded a grant to Robert Olson and Ashley Zimmerman to make improvements to their programs. Robert will be receiving new welders and Ashley will be updating her sanders. The goal is to give their students some very real hands-on training with the correct tools and technology before they leave school and begin their careers.

### Construct Tomorrow: Construction Month

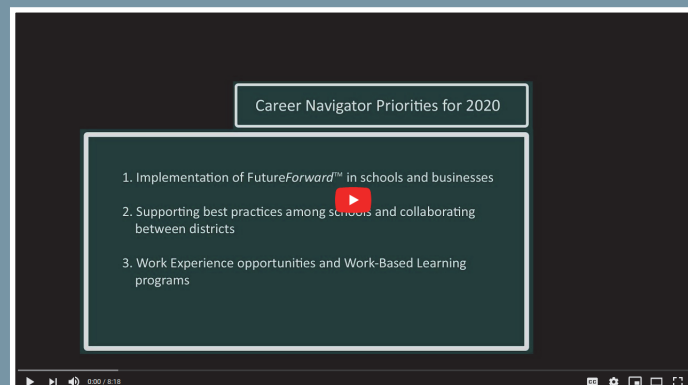
**Kasson-Mantorville** - Students in the construction program are signed up for the virtual "Construct Tomorrow" event happening on the FutureForward™ portal. SSC has partnered with DEED and Construct Tomorrow to offer students an option to explore construction careers virtually through watching videos and lining up live Zoom calls to talk with individuals in the industry. Many companies are willing to

participate and share their skills and knowledge. Sheldon Torkelson was instrumental in lining up videos of those in the construction field.

### Career Exploration Event Cancelled this Year? Nah, Let's Go Virtual!

Students in **Lake City** were able to have their annual career exploration event, but this year they used the FutureForward™ platform. Having career speakers in the high school wasn't feasible, so advisory teachers worked with sophomore students to easily access hundreds of career videos featuring local and regional business owners and professionals. Videos are from 16 career clusters, so students could investigate a wide variety of career paths and do a deeper dive into industries that interest them.

## Career Navigator Year in Review



## January Kicks Off A Series of Career Awareness Months - First Up... Healthcare!

By Heather Schutte

Healthcare is projected to be the leading source of job growth in Minnesota over the next decade. With a growth rate of 16.5%, jobs in Healthcare and Social Assistance are growing three times faster than all other industries.

Students in Southeast Minnesota have the unique opportunity to explore careers in health care throughout the month of January. In a partnership with HealthForce Minnesota, your students can learn about careers in healthcare from local professionals and companies.

Contact your Career Navigator or [Mike Schnell](#) to get your log-in credentials for FutureForward™ and register your students. Live and recorded events run the duration of January. Be sure to check out these resources!

- Healthcare Month Toolkit
- Live Virtual Q & A sessions with healthcare professionals
- Pre-recorded site tours and interviews

Classroom activities aligned to state and industry standards.

### Upcoming Events

**January/February**  
Healthcare

**March**  
Post-Secondary Education

**May**  
Hospitality

**October**  
Manufacturing

**December**  
Construction

# FutureForward™ Frequently Asked Questions



By Sarah Ness

## What is FutureForward™?

FutureForward™ is a software platform designed to connect students, educators, and local professionals to connect and coordinate in-person and virtual experiential learning. This tool provides value for:

- **Students** – Students learn by doing. Experiential learning provides the means to give youth in-person and virtual hands-on learning experiences that are relevant to their interests and passions.
- **Educators** – Make the world a smaller place by connecting with employers and professionals who have opted in to working with students and educators to do career-connected learning. Capture feedback from students to measure the impact of the experiences.
- **Professionals** – Engage with a pipeline development tool to execute recruiting, training, and skill development for your workforce needs.

It's a win-win-win!

## How are other teachers and counselors using FutureForward™?

See examples from *What Does Career Connected Learning Look Like During a Pandemic* article.

## What features are available in FutureForward™?

Search for professionals, companies, lessons, and videos to help you provide career connected learning opportunities for students.

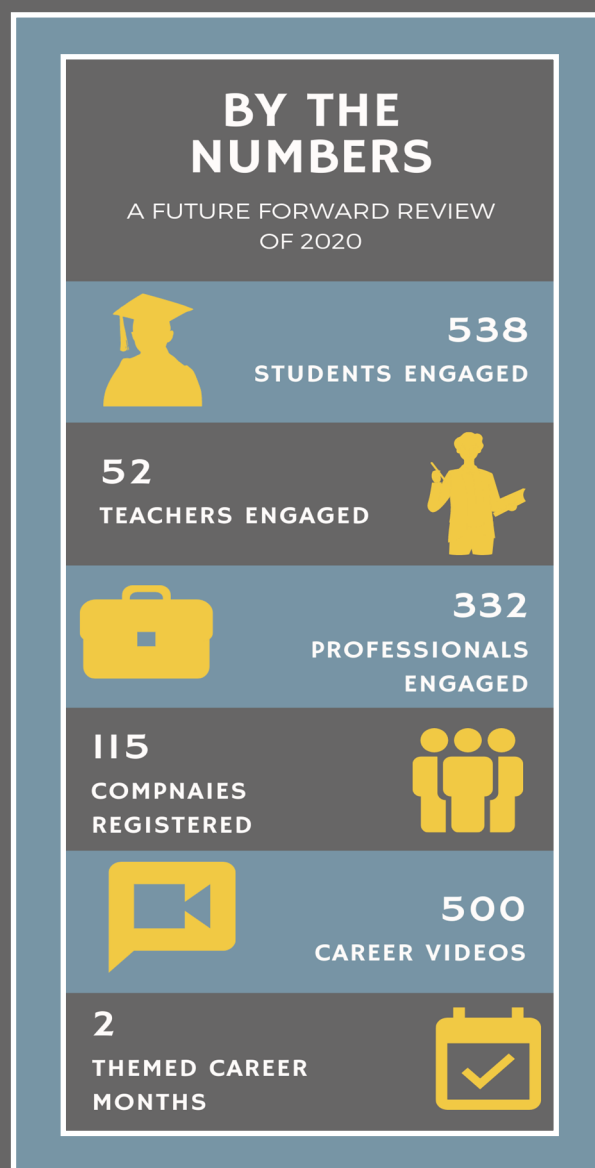
Learning experiences can include apprenticeships, career fair hosting, career projects, expert presenters, in-school events, informational interviews, internships, job shadows, mentors, reverse career fairs, student projects, student shadows, site visits (including virtual), teacher extenderships, virtual informational meetings, and work experience.

## What school districts and communities are signed up to use it?

Currently there are over 50 schools and hundreds of professionals signed up to use FutureForward™. Click [here](#) to email Mike Schnell to see if your school is one of the registered schools. If not, no worries! Your district can join at any time!

## Should I wait to use FutureForward™ when my school returns to in person learning?

No. FutureForward™ has hundreds of pre-recorded and virtual learning opportunities included. Many of these include lesson plans for self directed student learning or live virtual group video conference calls. FutureForward™ can meet any educator where they are at regardless of the education deployment model they are in.



# “You’re On Mute!”

## *Staying Connected and Keeping Meetings Engaging During COVID*

By Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski

A portion of our members have been working from home, at least part of the time, for many months. You may have heard some or all of these tips at some point, and if so, hopefully you’ll find the reminders helpful.

### Grounding

*Just like in-person meetings, having a grounding at a virtual meeting can be a great way to set the tone of your time together.*

- Offer participants a few minutes of stretching, yoga, or walking in place.
- Share a brief breathing exercise, such as belly breathing.
- Have each attendee share one good thing about their day or something they’re grateful for.

### Agenda

- If possible, send out an agenda and meeting goals in advance. Ask attendees to read and comment on them to save time in the meeting.

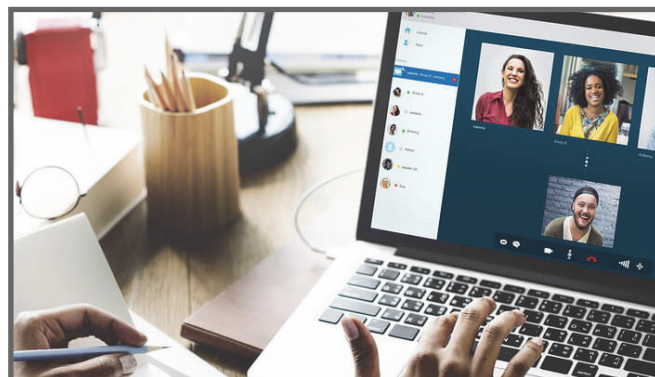
### Roles

- Share duties—split and rotate roles between staff members: facilitator, timekeeper, and scribe. In addition to keeping the group moving through the agenda, the facilitator also makes sure everyone has had a chance to speak. The scribe records action points and decisions made. Rotating roles helps keep people engaged.

### Engagement

*For some people, meeting virtually by video is exhausting. It is much harder to read body language and notice the nuances of non-verbal communication via video. Consider offering some meetings by phone or with video off to give team members a break.*

- Introverts may have an especially hard time with meeting virtually, and may end up not participating in conversations. One way of making sure everyone gets a chance to have their opinions heard is by posing questions where everyone’s input is shared by “going around the virtual room”.
- Appearing on screen, especially for long periods of time, can be uncomfortable for some people. Remove judgement and expectations around



appearing on video for every meeting. Let team members know there is an option to “Hide Myself” on Zoom.

- If possible, keep meetings to 40-60 minutes in length. For meetings 90 minutes or longer, schedule a short break.

### Staying Connected and Having Fun

*For some employees, the workplace is where they experience the majority of their social interactions. Many employees forge strong friendships with their colleagues. Not having this time to connect can leave team members feeling isolated and lonely. Fortunately, there are many ways to stay connected, build rapport, and have fun while physically distanced.*

- Host optional “social video sessions”. These are times for employees to engage in light, upbeat conversation, and activities. Activities can include guessing the employee by their baby photo or celebrity doppelganger, trivia contests (the Kahoot! App is very easy to navigate), displaying images of at home workspaces, sharing funny memes or favorite coffee mugs, and introducing pets or kids. If an organization is not able to offer dedicated social time, reserve 10 minutes at the end of already scheduled meetings for connection activities.
- Encourage virtual backgrounds - these can be employees’ own photos of travel, or a web search will bring up a multitude of options.
- Theme Days - foster creativity by encouraging employees to organize and participate in theme days. Hawaiian shirt day, hat day, pajama day are all fun ways to laugh and connect.

***To read the full version of this article, click [here](#).***



# SSC Wins Top Prize in National Wellness Award

*SSC is One of Two Small Organizations in the Nation to Receive Gold Status in the American Heart Association's Workplace Health Achievement Index*

SSC achieved national Gold Level recognition for taking significant steps to build a culture of health in the workplace. SSC is one of 776 organizations that completed the Index assessment this year.

The Index is a web-based scorecard that looks at organizational best practices and aggregates employee health data to evaluate the overall quality and comprehensiveness of workplace health programs. Studies show that worksites with a culture of health with comprehensive, evidence-based policies and programs, and senior leadership support are more likely to have engaged employees and a healthier, more productive workforce.



SSC Executive Director Steve Saltee shared, "We are so honored to receive the Gold workplace wellness recognition this year. This has been a goal of our staff and we are proud to have earned it. Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski leads our efforts in wellness and has embedded the importance of it into our everyday culture at SSC. Even during the pandemic, our staff continues to participate in monthly wellness challenges, which has helped with our physical and mental wellbeing, while working remotely. It's especially critical during these challenging times."

A unique feature of the Index is that it calculates an average heart health score for employees of participating companies that securely submit aggregate health data through Life's Simple 7®, the American Heart Association's definition of ideal cardiovascular health based on seven risk factors. Life's Simple 7® includes smoking status, physical activity, weight, diet, blood glucose, cholesterol and blood pressure. Companies receive benchmarking reports, which allow them to identify potential areas of improvement so that they can advance their annual performance and recognition.

## *Here to help our members...*

Through Gov. Tim Walz's recent Executive Order, all public school districts and special education programs in Minnesota once again received cloth and disposable masks as well as face shields for students and staff. SSC served as a distribution point for these supplies for our public schools within our region of service. SSC staff members spent a day hard at work helping get these supplies into schools' hands.



# Working From Home Ergonomic Tips

By Dan Fitch, IEA

With many employees working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's important to keep ergonomic safety factors in mind that apply to different workspaces. Staff working from home are facing ergonomic challenges.

## Workspace

- Choose a table or desk with adequate clearance for your knees, thighs, and feet to slide under
- Avoid working on the couch – it causes the spine to curve unnaturally and will result in soreness and pain over time
- Find a spot away from harsh lighting; if near a window, sit perpendicular (at a 90° angle) to avoid glare in eyes or on your screen

## Chair

- Your chair should have a firm back and is low enough so feet can touch the floor, with thighs parallel to the ground. A DIY footrest can be added, if necessary (e.g. boxes, stack of large books, an empty trash turned on one side, etc.).
- If possible, chair height should be adjusted so that your forearms, wrists, and hands are in a straight alignment; and your shoulders are relaxed and down while using keyboard or mouse.
- For increased lower back support, consider adding a small pillow or rolled up towel to the backrest where it meets the curve in the small of your back.

## Laptop/Monitor

- While using a laptop, an external keyboard and mouse is recommended so the top of the screen can be adjusted to eye level while typing.
- Avoid hunching forward and down over the computer

screen. This may be okay for a few hours a week at home, but when doing it for 40+ hours per week, it can lead to back, shoulder, and neck strain.



## Additional Tips

- You should take frequent breaks and set a reminder to get up and stretch every 30-45 minutes.
- While typing, keep your elbows and upper arms comfortably at your sides and your wrists as straight as possible.
- While using an external mouse, grip it lightly and move it using the elbow as opposed to bending at the wrist.
- Reduce eye strain and headaches by following the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

For more information on environmental health and safety, call Angie Radel at the Institute for Environmental Assessment at (507) 281-6682, or e-mail [angie.radel@ieasafety.com](mailto:angie.radel@ieasafety.com).

## Happy New Year From CPC!

We've started 2021 off with a **Guided Search** update to our online marketplace **Express** and we'd love to walk you through the new look. Please join CPC Representatives Julia Dangerfield and Jerome Evans for a training on Express on February 3, at 3:00 PM. They will provide you and your team with a tour of the new Guided Search update, answers to your burning questions, and give you some pro tips on how to best source using CPC's online public procurement platform!



Date: February 3rd

[Register for the Express Virtual Training](#)

# SSC Upcoming Events\*

## February

2021 Legislative Forum  
February 5

SAC Meeting  
February 23

MASA Region 1 Winter Session  
February 24

Board Meeting  
February 24

## March

Cultural Competency: A Deeper Dive  
into Self Reflection and Personal Bias  
Virtual Training  
March 1

Suicide Prevention and Mental  
Health: Be Present; Be Patient; Be  
Persistent Virtual Training  
March 8

SAC Meeting  
March 23

Board Meeting  
March 24

## And Beyond...

Virtual STEM Forward Educator Forum  
April 14

SAC Meeting  
April 27

Board Meeting  
April 28

*\*Check our webpage for the most  
current information. Most sessions will  
be held virtually.*

## New Year, Healthy Buildings!



More than ever, healthy buildings are critical for our communities this year. ICS and Obernel teamed up to talk about practical next steps to guide your facilities' comprehensive management using healthy building principles. Here are some of the key takeaways:

- Instead of focusing on a single pandemic, we need to recognize the challenges facing us today represent a new normal – indoor air quality (IAQ) will continue to be a focus in the future.

- There are four specific categories you can look at to improve IAQ – outdoor air, airflow, dedicated air, and treated air.
- Occupant comfort leads to improved mental and physical health and addresses things like lighting, temperature, furnishings, learning spaces, etc.
- To run your building efficiently, you need to address the performance of existing systems, recognize and correct system problems, identify opportunities for energy savings, and address all building system components of your facility.
- To help you better assess your facilities, we've put together a Healthy Buildings Checklist. Find it [here](#).

For more information including viewing the entire presentation, click [here](#) or reach out to Karen Klein at [karen.klein@ics-builds.com](mailto:karen.klein@ics-builds.com).



# SSC Board Actions and Information

In addition to routine fiscal and routine business actions, the Board took the following actions in recent meetings. Complete SSC Board of Directors meeting minutes are available on the SSC website at [www.ssc.coop](http://www.ssc.coop).

## September

- Approved the Gallagher recommendation to bring everyone to the minimum of the pay range for their new band/grade, which includes an increase for Sarah Ness, retroactive to 7/1/20.
- Approved a rate increase for Alicia Bredesen, Meeting Center Coordinator, retroactive to 9/15/20, when she assumed the role.
- Approved the hiring of a new Administrative Assistant up to 30 hours per week (with the potential to increase to 40 hours) through an employment agency.
- Approved the 2020-2021 Board of Directors election schedule, the 2020-2021 Call for Nomination form for the Education category, and the 2020-2021 Call for Nomination form for the Local Government category.
- Approved the 2020-2021 Annual Plan.
- Approved the contract with Holmes, Murphy, and Associates (contingent upon correcting an incorrect date) to provide consulting services related to health insurance pools.

## October

- Approved the updated Bylaws.
- Approved Dylan Mackey's resignation effective October 16, 2020.
- Approved the Regional Insurance Specialist job

description and Gallagher recommendation for band/grade.

- Approved the 2020-2021 Executive Director's goals.
- Approved Cannon Valley Special Education Cooperative joining the health insurance pool, effective January 1, 2021.

## November

- Accepted the 2019-2020 Fiscal Audit.
- Approved staff increases effective January 1, 2021 as recommended by the Personnel and Finance Committee.
- Extended the employment of Jami Schwickerath, Mike Schnell, MaryAnne Smith, Katie Hendrickson, and Nick Wobig to December 31, 2021 (currently expires June 30, 2021) paid through the Rural Career and Technical Education Consortium grant.

## December

- Accepted \$35,000 to support the Mobile Science Lab program from Mayo Clinic's Research Department and Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology.
- Approved posting of the new Regional Insurance Specialist position.
- Approved the 2019-2020 Annual Report.
- Appointed Mike Christensen for a one-year term to the SSC Board of Directors (1/1/21-12/31/21).
- Approved the election of Tess Arrick-Kruger and Don Leathers for new four-year terms to the SSC Board of Directors (1/1/21-12/31/24).

### SSC Service Consultants



**Bill Colopoulos**  
Health and Benefits  
Consultant  
[bcolopoulos@ssc.coop](mailto:bcolopoulos@ssc.coop)



**Karen Klein**  
Regional Manager,  
Coop Member Services, ICS  
[Karen.Klein@ics-builds.com](mailto:Karen.Klein@ics-builds.com)



**Angie Radel**  
Regional Manager, IEA  
[angie.radel@ieasafety.com](mailto:angie.radel@ieasafety.com)

*Connections* is a publication of the Southeast Service Cooperative, published three times per year for members, associates, and the general public.  
Editor: Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski, [nlachapelle@ssc.coop](mailto:nlachapelle@ssc.coop)

Southeast Service Cooperative  
210 Wood Lake Drive SE  
Rochester, MN 55904  
Phone (507) 288-1282  
Fax (507) 288-7663

Office Hours:  
Monday - Friday  
8:00 AM - 4:30 PM  
[www.ssc.coop](http://www.ssc.coop)

*Shaping the Future*  
for communities of leaders and learners

# About Southeast Service Cooperative

## Southeast Service Cooperative Staff



**Steve Sallee**  
Executive Director  
[ssallee@ssc.coop](mailto:ssallee@ssc.coop)



**Alicia Bredeesen**  
Meeting Center  
Coordinator  
[abredeesen@ssc.coop](mailto:abredeesen@ssc.coop)



**Amy Grover**  
Associate Director  
[agrover@ssc.coop](mailto:agrover@ssc.coop)



**Chris Hancock**  
Accounting Coordinator  
[chancock@ssc.coop](mailto:chancock@ssc.coop)



**Katie Hartman**  
Program Manager  
[khartman@ssc.coop](mailto:khartman@ssc.coop)



**Katie Hendrickson**  
Career Navigator  
[khendrickson@ssc.coop](mailto:khendrickson@ssc.coop)



**Kari Kubicek**  
Program Manager  
[kkubicek@ssc.coop](mailto:kkubicek@ssc.coop)



**Nicole LaChapelle-Strumski**  
Program Manager  
[nlachapelle@ssc.coop](mailto:nlachapelle@ssc.coop)



**Sarah Ness**  
Program Manager  
[sness@ssc.coop](mailto:sness@ssc.coop)



**Mike Schnell**  
Community  
Engagement  
Coordinator  
[mschnell@ssc.coop](mailto:mschnell@ssc.coop)



**Heather Schutte**  
Career Navigator  
[hschutte@ssc.coop](mailto:hschutte@ssc.coop)



**Jami Schwickerath**  
Career Navigator  
[jschwickerath@ssc.coop](mailto:jschwickerath@ssc.coop)



**MaryAnne Smith**  
Career Navigator  
[msmith@ssc.coop](mailto:msmith@ssc.coop)



**Kim Swanson**  
Accounting Assistant  
[kswanson@ssc.coop](mailto:kswanson@ssc.coop)



**Dale Walston**  
Director of Operations  
[dwalston@ssc.coop](mailto:dwalston@ssc.coop)



**Nick Wobig**  
Career Navigator  
[nwobig@ssc.coop](mailto:nwobig@ssc.coop)

## Regional Center of Excellence Staff



**Jeff Aamot**  
SE/Metro Director  
[jaamot@mnce.org](mailto:jaamot@mnce.org)



**Isabella Anderson Eggen**  
Advocate  
[ieggen@mnce.org](mailto:ieggen@mnce.org)



**Raymond Blackledge**  
Advocate  
[rblackledge@mnce.org](mailto:rblackledge@mnce.org)



**Jennifer Bordonaro**  
Advocate  
[jbordonaro@mnce.org](mailto:jbordonaro@mnce.org)



**Erik Durand**  
Advocate  
[edurand@mnce.org](mailto:edurand@mnce.org)



**Joe Jezierski**  
Climate Advocate  
[jezierski@mnce.org](mailto:jezierski@mnce.org)



**Ashley Karlsson**  
Advocate  
[akarlsson@mnce.org](mailto:akarlsson@mnce.org)



**Melanie Lawrence-Smith**  
Education System  
Specialist  
[mlawrencesmith@mnce.org](mailto:mlawrencesmith@mnce.org)



**Keitha-Gail Martin-Kerr**  
Advocate  
[kmartinkerr@mnce.org](mailto:kmartinkerr@mnce.org)



**Shana Moses**  
Advocate  
[smoses@mnce.org](mailto:smoses@mnce.org)



**Cindy Mullins**  
Advocate  
[cmullins@mnce.org](mailto:cmullins@mnce.org)



**Jane Stevenson**  
Advocate  
[jstevenson@mnce.org](mailto:jstevenson@mnce.org)



**Carol Swanson**  
Advocate  
[cswanson@mnce.org](mailto:cswanson@mnce.org)



**Perry Wilkinson**  
Education Equity and  
System Specialist  
[pwilkinson@mnce.org](mailto:pwilkinson@mnce.org)



**Sarah Zeigler**  
Advocate  
[szeigler@mnce.org](mailto:szeigler@mnce.org)

## SSC Board of Directors

**Mary Blair-Hoeft**, Chair  
City of Byron

**Brein Maki**, Vice-Chair  
Lewiston-Altura Public Schools

**Lynn Gorski**, Treasurer  
City of Owatonna

**Jean Roth**, Clerk  
Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools

**Theressa Arrick-Kruger**  
Houston County

**Mike Christensen**  
Red Wing Public Schools

**Don Leathers**  
Austin Public Schools

**Jason Marquardt**  
Mabel-Canton Public Schools

**Monica Sveen-Ziebell**  
Plainview-Elgin-Millville Public Schools