

# Educators of Excellence

Celebrating positive impact and leadership

May 3, 2023 | 5:30 p.m.





# 2023 Educators of Excellence

## Agenda

### Welcome:

Paul Drange,  
*Sourcewell Director of Regional Programs*  
Kassidy Rice,  
*Sourcewell Manager of Education Solutions*

### Keynote speaker:

Devin Henderson

### Awards presented by:

Paul Drange,  
*Sourcewell Director of Regional Programs*  
Kassidy Rice,  
*Sourcewell Manager of Education Solutions*

### Closing remarks:

Paul Drange,  
*Sourcewell Director of Regional Programs*

## Celebrating excellence

Educators of Excellence Awards celebrate the dedication, hard work, and leadership of innovative educators throughout Sourcewell's five-county service area of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties.

## How it works

Each school selects a TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE who has demonstrated a commitment to excellence that has led to increased student success.

Special awards recipients are determined by a selection team that reviews nominations for those who have demonstrated innovation and leadership that have positively impacted students and fellow staff.

These special awards include:

**LEADER OF EXCELLENCE**

**PARAPROFESSIONALS OF EXCELLENCE**

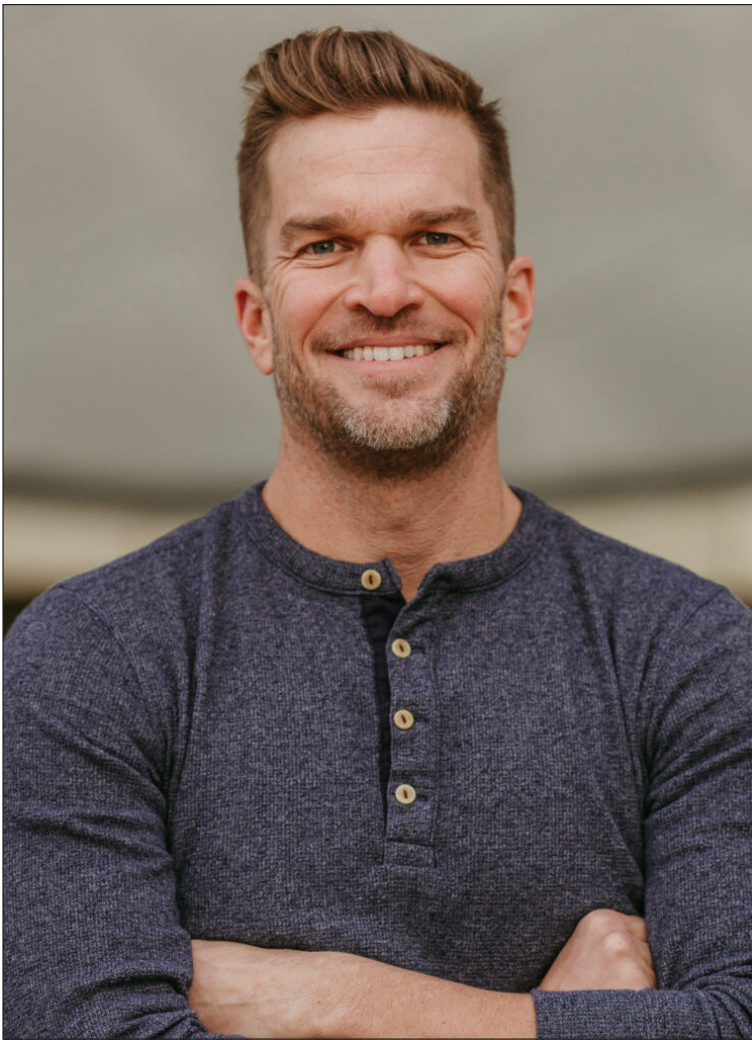
**COACH OF EXCELLENCE**

**SUPPORT STAFF OF EXCELLENCE**

**SILVER LINING AWARD OF EXCELLENCE**

**TEAM OF EXCELLENCE**





## Something Greater is Always Possible

For many individuals and teams, a once-held vision of unlimited possibility gets small and limited as a result of life's daily stressors, persistent insecurities, self-doubt, isolation, and even failure. But what if you and your team could reclaim and even expand your full potential at any time? And what if your truest potential was bigger, richer, and more satisfying than you had previously envisioned?

Seasoned speaker and performer Devin Henderson brings an unforgettable experience of impact and inspiration that helps people and organizations take a break from the worries of the day while breaking free from perceived limits. You will discover practices for maintaining mental strength and resilience to realize your greatness like never before.

## Dr. Tammy Stellmach

Baxter Elementary School – Brainerd



Students know that Baxter Elementary is safe, productive, and fun because of Dr. Stellmach's hard work and dedication. She makes sure every student gets an opportunity to learn and be successful. She also works hard to involve the community with the school to enhance learning experiences for students. Students don't view her just as their principal but also as someone who truly cares about them, staff, and Baxter families.

## Lori Murdock

Freshwater Education District



In her role as Director of Special Education at Freshwater Education District, Lori uses her leadership skills and relationships to improve and increase programming options for students in rural Minnesota. She challenges the status quo and sees a problem as an opportunity to try various solutions. Her objective has always been to remove barriers and help transform perceived problems into possibilities and opportunities for all students.

## Phyllis E. Wake

Northland High School



Phyllis has served in a variety of roles in the district, performing each with excellence. She has incredible skill and dedication and is efficient and effective when working with all learners, regardless of the role. She works with high-needs students, supporting them with their basic needs but also helping them learn beyond their own expectations. She uses best practices and tools to help her nonverbal students learn how to communicate.

## Trudy Kreklau

Sebeka High School



Trudy has been working with Sebeka students since 1983 and redefines a paraprofessional. She makes a point to build and maintain genuine relationships with all, going out of her way to care for even the most difficult of students. In addition to her heart for this work, she's incredibly intelligent. Her academic prowess allows her to impactfully push in and support students in higher-level high school classes, including economics, political science, world history, geometry, Algebra II, and chemistry.

## Mandy Jones

Northland Community Schools



Students know they can always rely on Mandy. As a front office secretary, she brings in a sense of calm, confidence, and competence. She seems to know all of the students in the school and all of the families in the district. She makes everyone feel respected and like they're the most important person in the world. Her interactions with everyone are always welcoming, and each person walks away feeling heard, respected, supported, and always welcomed.

## Tracy Voigt

Pierz District Office



Since 2005, Tracy has not only led one of the most important student services, busing, but she also has served as the go-to in any other area of the school. She trains drivers on the best methods of building relationships with students. She also sets up bus routes where service to children is the most important factor in how they are picked up, what side of the road they are picked up, where they are picked up, and how seating is arranged.

## Bryan Syrstad

Crosby-Ironton High School

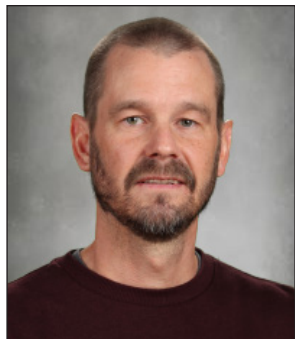


Bryan is an excellent leader. He has high standards and understands the importance of character development. He does all of this while connecting and caring for his students. He is a good coach, and athletes who play on his teams leave not only as more skilled athletes but, more importantly, promising young men. Bryan has worked hard to create an atmosphere where athletes take good care of each other and pushes them to be their best at all times.

# Silver Lining Award

## Cley Twigg

Crosby-Ironton High School



When the former athletic director resigned early in the school year, there wasn't much hope that a qualified candidate would apply at that time of year. However, staff were overjoyed when Cley applied and received the position. The hope Cley brought to the Crosby-Ironton School District is the promise of providing a rich and robust variety of extracurricular and co-curricular activities during a time when fewer kids are going out for sports.

# Northland Community Schools – Childhood Pre-K Team

Stacey Barrick, Leslie Bouchonville, Terry Gilbertson, Brandon Otway, Cheri Parkinson, and Kelly Riewer



The early childhood team at Northland Community Schools takes pride on their ability to shift and meet students where they are and help them grow on a timeline that supports their social-emotional needs every step along the way.

The societal changes made to get through the pandemic had a huge impact on everyone and are very obvious in little ones, regardless of their background. These children arrive without the ability to self-regulate or communicate their needs, and without the knowledge of how to co-exist with peers. The team develops and executes plans to support those needs, helps students express the big feelings that are stuck in their little bodies, and provides the skills to make friends.

The team also teaches children how to move their bodies and learn the pre-academic skills that will prepare them to be successful in kindergarten and beyond.

## Deanne Trottier

Eagle View Elementary School – Pequot Lakes



For 34 years, Deanne has been an educator in South Dakota, Colorado, and Minnesota. In 2021, she implemented a new and environmentally focused STEM (E-STEM) program at Eagle View Elementary School. Most of her days are spent providing students with unique, outdoors, hands-on learning experiences.



Innovative Schools Project (ISP) is a nonprofit organization, funded by Sourcewell, providing matching grants to Region 5 public school districts to support teachers' innovative classroom ideas.

ISP recognizes innovative teachers to highlight creative problem-solving strategies and connect educators. By providing resources to local school groups, ISP helps promote community collaboration and sustainable support networks within each district.

## Jared Hoemberg

Bertha-Hewitt High School



When asked what it means to be a great teacher, Jared responded, “getting them to love school.” While his class has play time, it is loud and fun, but students also know when it’s time to learn. His students genuinely seem to be having a great time in school. Jared uses the Catalyst (formerly ENVoY) nonverbal communication approach, and his students learn, are quiet and respectful when necessary, and loud and playful when deemed appropriate.

## Kacee Barrett

Baxter Elementary School – Brainerd



Personable, compassionate, and hard-working define Kacee. She is an interventionist at Baxter Elementary and an integral part of the school in so many other ways. She earns a great rapport with her students as well as her colleagues. Her passion and drive for the reading and language arts curricular area are evident and strong. Kacee makes a difference in the lives of many students each and every day.

## Jessica Johnson

Lowell Elementary School – Brainerd



Jessica goes above and beyond for the success of her students. Her attention to detail and to individualized programming and plans to support her learners is present each and every day, which leads to high levels of student achievement. She has a great impact on both students and colleagues throughout the school and district.

## Katie Kraft

Brainerd High School



As a special education teacher, Katie works with students who have a wide range of academic and behavioral needs. She is nearly unflappable and is often the go-to person when students are in crisis. Katie listens to students and demonstrates great judgment, knowing when to be firm but also knowing when empathy and care are most needed.

## Heather Larson

Garfield Elementary School – Brainerd



Heather is a master teacher who cares deeply for her students and fills their lives with kindness and a love of music. She builds a classroom environment that encourages students to take challenges, try new things, and find their inner greatness. She strives to grow confidence in all of her learners and fosters teamwork and collaboration in her lessons.

## Lisa Miller

Nisswa Elementary School – Brainerd



Lisa is a born leader and lifelong learner who is always pushing herself and those around her to ensure all learners get exactly what they need to progress forward. She is on several district committees, leads the social committee to ensure Nisswa Elementary is filled with joy for all, and – when there is a need or crisis – she is the one to think outside the box and provide support.

## Tracy Riley

Lincoln Education Center – Brainerd



Tracy works with students in the care and treatment program at Lincoln Education Center. She provides a safe, positive, and constant environment for each student who enters her program and instruction to students in all core content areas. She has written and received several grants to gather additional resources for the students she serves, and her compassion is evident whenever you walk into her room.

## Marti Sauer

Harrison Elementary School – Brainerd



It doesn't matter what student walks through her classroom door – Marti loves them all and will do everything she can to make sure they are successful. She goes out of her way to meet the needs of every child she teaches and has positively affected countless lives in her community, exemplifying the word “excellence.”

## Kristin Deden

Cass Lake-Bena Elementary School



Kristin is a highly devoted educational professional. As math coach/interventionist, building data and testing coordinator, and esteemed colleague, she uses each and every moment to fill gaps, discover, and address potential problems, and help others. She is highly respected among her peers, and staff regard her as a kind, caring, dedicated teacher willing to listen and support at the drop of a hat.

## Kami Berg

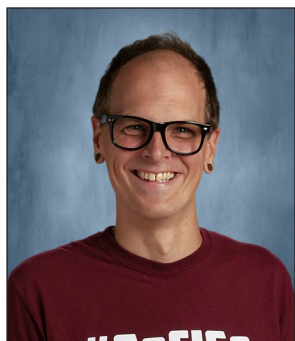
Cuyuna Range Elementary School – Crosby-Ironton



Kami is the personification of awesomeness. She is often at school early or late preparing activities for the week for all of her students. She takes all of their needs into consideration and differentiates the activities so all of the students can succeed in the given concept or be challenged to think outside of the box. She is kind and caring, and her students enjoy being in her classroom.

## Andrew Dirks

Crosby-Ironton High School



Andrew creates a more innovative school culture. He constantly seeks ways to improve his own lesson planning as well as takes on the advisory schedule for the 7-12 school. When Andrew notices an aspect of positive school culture lacking, he immediately seeks advice from other teachers and looks for ways to help fix it. Andrew is a forward thinker and constantly looks to be a part of an evolving and improving school.

## Leah Bloemendaal

Freshwater Education District



Leah is a lifelong learner and treats not only students with respect, but also extends respect to staff, parents, and local districts. As lead teacher at the Staples Area Learning Center, she is often the first contact with them. She has 20-plus years of experience with alternative learning and has worked everything from keeping the books to leading programs.

## Tracy Brown

Freshwater Education District



Since Tracy began as a school psychologist, she has been an example of excellence. Not only does she complete multiple assessments for teams each year, she also is a member of the district's positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) team and is a representative to the regional school psychologists' team.

## Rebecca Jones

Dr. S.G. Knight Elementary School – Little Falls



For over 15 years, Rebecca has supported young learners. Creatively, she meets the needs of each learner and challenges them to be their best. She encourages children to become independent and get ready for kindergarten. Graduated preschoolers are often seen hugging and high-fiving her in the hallway. She is well loved and sought after by parents in the community.

## Heidi Lange

Lincoln Elementary School – Little Falls



Heidi strives to meet the individual needs of her students as she challenges them to grow academically and personally. Heidi is flexible and willing to do whatever it takes to achieve what is best for students. She makes positive connections with her students, and it's because of these connections students work hard to meet her expectations and have fun while learning.

## Julie Roesch

Lindbergh Elementary School – Little Falls



Julie is a passionate fourth-grade math teacher at Lindbergh Elementary School, and her love for math has completely changed how her students feel about learning. Upon entering Julie's classroom, you immediately realize something special is going on. Her passion is evident, and students are always trying to match her energy level as they continue to take on challenges and demonstrate their learning.

## Tanya Bergman

Little Falls Community Middle School



In her role as a special education teacher, Tanya has dealt with several challenging situations in a short period of time. Despite the stress of these situations, she shows up to work each day with a positive attitude, great resolve, and a commitment to serving students. Any parent and student would be very fortunate to have her as a teacher.

## Mike Kaluza

Little Falls Community High School



Mike is not only an outstanding teacher but also an exceptional leader. He wears many hats at Little Falls Community High School, serving as the DECA adviser, concessions coordinator, and Education Minnesota – Little Falls president. He thrives at building positive relationships with students and staff by providing a steady, rational, and calming presence.

## Jamie Etzler

Menahga Elementary School



Jamie's passion for preschool children is evident as soon as you walk in her classroom. It's always filled with love, compassion, patience, and flexibility. Her use of best-practice strategies, including the Catalyst framework, is impeccable. Her engagement techniques with groups of eager learners are very evident in everything she does. She is an incredible educator leading our future leaders.

## Todd Frie

Menahga High School



Todd demonstrates a true desire to educate the student, not only within his curriculums, but what life has to offer them. He believes in real-world lessons and skills. One can see quickly that the time he spends with the students brings these organically into their academic lives. He's a patient teacher and coach who thrives on students' curiosities.

## Janel Poser

Mid-State Education District



Janel has a great relationship with all students and staff. She mentors other teachers and makes connections with all. She is currently enrolled in a master's program, has taken on the task as union representative for teachers, and has continued to champion for students ages 18-21 through her work in the Student Transition Education and Personal Success (STEPS) transition program.

## Raina Boucher

Northland Elementary – Northland Community Schools



Raina makes every day a wonderful day for her students and is the type of teacher you hope your own child will have. Her emphasis is always on learning, growing, and teaching students to be kind and understanding to one another. She holds students to high standards, encouraging them to do their very best every day in their work, learning, and play.

## Rachel Gerhartz

Eagle View Elementary – Pequot Lakes



Rachel is a rockstar kindergarten teacher. She fosters a positive classroom community by greeting students at the door every morning and making positive self-talk and affirmations part of her daily classroom connection meetings. She is committed to providing a rigorous, yet play-based, curriculum and believes in setting high standards for all learners and holding them, and herself, accountable.

## Sherry Pape

Pequot Lakes Middle School



Sherry is an educator who has mastered both the art and science of teaching and is a true asset on campus. With the daily student experience in mind, when you partner competence and compassion in an educator, you have a formula for a great classroom experience for your students. Sherry exemplifies that a successful experience in special education goes beyond classroom instruction.

## Joanna O'Neil

Pequot Lakes High School



Joanna has demonstrated a care for kids and an unwavering support for their academic progress, and she strives to recognize the whole child in her practice. She can be heard chatting up kids in the hallway every day, including many she doesn't have in class. But she still asks about their weekend, hobbies, or other random topics. She is quick to develop a connection with students, and once she has a name, greets them every day and makes them feel seen.

## Gwen Gruber

Pierz Healy High School



Gwen is committed to seeing her students grow as learners and individuals. She has a way of challenging them but also understanding all the variables students face that can impact their ability to succeed. She is passionate about her content, but even more passionate about finding ways to engage her students in the content to be able to demonstrate their learning.

## Aaron Schmidtbauer

Pioneer Elementary School – Pierz



Aaron is a role model to every child who walks into his classroom. He is a natural at building relationships with all children and professionally using those relationships to foster social, emotional, and academic growth. Each of his students consistently demonstrates exceptional levels of growth and knows that academic status is a priority at all times.

## Penny Grimsley

Pillager Elementary School



Penny is committed to creating opportunities for students to become and stay active throughout their lives. Bringing exercise and fun together through lifelong activities like rollerblading, biking, and a highly anticipated track and field day each spring, she doesn't just model that physical activity can be enjoyable, but also shows students why it's important to make these activities possible.

## Tatum Sheley

Pillager Middle School



The atmosphere for learning that Tatum has created allows students to excel to their highest potential. She takes great pride in her work and will go above and beyond to provide her students with an exceptional educational experience. She is able to build meaningful relationships while holding students accountable for their academics and behavior.

## Jamie Prax

Pillager High School



Jamie understands the value of being a team player and is always willing to lead not only in the classroom but also various extracurricular activities and events. She is always willing to do what it takes to make the English department the best it can be and continually builds meaningful relationships with her students.

## Erica Norman

Pine River-Backus Elementary School



Erica has always demonstrated a strong understanding of using data to drive her daily instruction. She differentiates for each individual student in all content areas. Most importantly, she has a deep love for each of her students. Her ability to establish positive relationships with her class and families is outstanding. Students love learning in her classroom each day.

## Katie Verschelde

Pine River-Backus High School



Katie is a teacher who leads quietly by example through her authentic love of learning and a growth mindset. Her innovative leadership and willingness to volunteer to make the best educational experience for all students and staff really set her apart. She cares deeply about the present and future of her school and provides honest and timely feedback to help ensure success in both areas.

## Aaron Meier

Royalton Elementary School



Aaron has been an exceptional physical education teacher at Royalton Elementary for 20 years. During this time, he has created a top-notch program that challenges and meets the needs of the students. The students love going to his class and are excited to have him as their teacher. His teaching excellence and upbeat attitude make him a favorite among staff, students, and parents.

## Sharon Menden

Royalton High School



Sheri has been a longtime College in the Schools composition and senior high English instructor at Royalton High School. She has a great ability to build quality connections with students, including those who may struggle with or dislike English class. Her positive approach with students and staff has contributed to her ability to lead both in her department and in the school.

## Donna Yliniemi

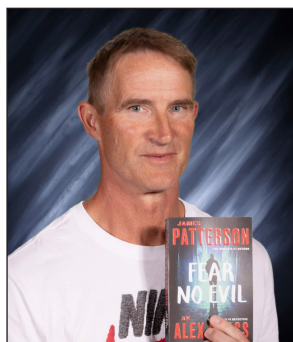
Sebeka Elementary School



Donna knows about every book in her media center and loves to share her passion for reading. That passion is contagious, and she won't hesitate to share her enthusiasm for literacy with students and staff. When a student comes to the media center, she listens to what the student is interested in and guides them toward books to fit their interests.

## Jeffrey Lake

Sebeka High School



Jeff is a quiet and reserved leader who thoroughly enjoys his profession and is always willing to be a support system for others. Teaching physical education and health for over 25 years doesn't seem possible when you meet and visit with Jeff. He displays the energy of a teacher in the early years of his teaching career and lives by the values of being physically fit, regardless of age.

## Heather Wiegand

Staples-Motley Elementary School



Heather sets an incredible example for her students with her dedication and compassion to the teaching profession. She is committed to providing a safe and welcoming learning environment for all students by consistently recognizing their strengths and encouraging their growth. Her students love her because she is kind and warmhearted and has unique handshakes for each of them.

## Erik Johnson

Staples-Motley Middle/High School



When it comes to history, government, and all that social studies encompasses, Erik is a master at keeping students engaged, interested, and thinking. He has a passion that creates a learning environment where students are given the opportunity to not only learn new material but also to connect to the everyday world they are living in.

## Diane Schleicher

Swanville Elementary School



Diane is an outstanding collaborative teacher in a building full of stellar educators. She is a strong leader for the teachers' union, leads the Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services (ADSIS) program, as well as the Reading Corps. She is integral in all aspects of her district, active on numerous committees, and still finds time to lead a large group of kindergarteners through their first year of school, preparing them for first grade.

## Chad Brever

Swanville High School



Chad's positive engagement with students starts at the door and continues throughout their class time. He interacts well with students, staff, and families. He has become a great mentor to new employees, successfully implemented and led the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program in Swanville, and provides thoughtful insights to any committee he serves on.

## Chelsea Fuchs

Upsala Elementary School



Chelsea strives every day to do what is best for her second-grade students and goes above and beyond to make connections with each one of them. She has embraced the idea that each student learns differently and that each student comes into her class with different skills. Her use of interventions in her classroom has helped each one of her students grow.

## Gretchen Schleper

Upsala High School



Gretchen is a teacher who wears many hats. She is the agricultural and tech education teacher at Upsala High School. Along with teaching a variety of courses in these areas, she is also the FFA adviser. Gretchen has built these programs by having a motor that doesn't quit. She also makes sure that each student feels welcome in her classes no matter their abilities.

## Jennifer Cameron

Verndale Elementary School



Jennifer has created a rich and rigorous learning environment for her students by creating interactive lessons and fun engaging games and by forming excellent relationships with her students. She truly cares about each one of her students and strives to have each student become the best version of themselves in the classroom and community.

## Brian Hartwig

Verndale High School



Brian is the epitome of an excellent teacher. He makes his school better every day through his contagious enthusiasm and willingness to go the extra mile to help students embrace the Verndale Way: “Show Grit and Never Quit.” He helps all students reach their potential through his encouragement and positive influence.

## Sara Lenz

Wadena-Deer Creek Elementary School



Sara Lenz epitomizes Wadena-Deer Creek School’s motto of “Building a Legacy of Excellence...One Student at a Time.” You can see her commitment to excellence – one student at a time – in her daily work with students, support staff, and colleagues. This commitment to excellence is evident in her Level 3 programming for students in need of emotional and behavioral supports.

# Lynn Quincer

Wadena-Deer Creek Middle School



Lynn has served as an elementary/middle school teacher at Wadena-Deer Creek for the past 29 years. You will not find a teacher more dedicated to her students or school than Lynn. Taking each student from where they are and working to help each of them see growth and success in their time with her has always been Lynn's No. 1 priority.

# Joseph Woods

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley Elementary School



Joe is the kind of teacher who is willing to look for innovative ways to reach students from all walks of life. He puts his heart and soul into teaching and is an educator who truly cares about kids. The kindness, compassion, and interaction he shares with each and every student, even after they graduate from his fifth-grade class, are amazing.

# Levi Capesius

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley Secondary School



Levi is new to the WHA secondary building, but he was quick to make a positive impact. He is wonderful at establishing relationships with his students. Not only does he help students understand the core material for his content area, but he teaches the material in a manner students can relate to. He embodies the district motto of "We Are WHA."

# Thank you

*“The work of an educator is like writing music. While some are quick to applaud the work, it may take others time to truly see it for all it’s worth. Like a song, educators can leave an impression on the heart and mind, uniting people and creating positive impact wherever they go.”*

— Dr. Chad Coauette, Sourcewell Executive Director/CEO



# Sourcewell: We are driven to serve

## Who is Sourcewell?

Sourcewell is the regional service cooperative for Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties. We are one of nine service cooperatives in the state. We partner with education, government, and nonprofits to boost student and community success. We offer training, student academic programming, and contracted services to our central-Minnesota members. Statewide, we provide a self-funded group health insurance option for public entities. Throughout North America, we offer technology solutions for schools and a cooperative purchasing program for all public entities. Sourcewell staff aim to be force multipliers, empowering you to fulfill your public service mission to help your students, school, and community.

## Our core services

- Cooperative Purchasing
- Community Solutions
- Education and Career and College Readiness
- Regional Low Incidence Project and Collaborative Service Workers
- Insurance and Employee Benefits
- Technology Solutions for Schools