

## NEWS COLUMNISTS

# Why Milwaukee schools deserve better — and how our reporters are making it happen



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Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

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### Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

The Journal Sentinel is expanding its education team through a community-funded journalism project.

This effort is supported by a leadership grant from Herb Kohl Philanthropies and donations from the public.

Our education team covers a wide range of topics, from lead paint in schools to teacher vacancies. But we are stretched thin.

We are seeking further public support to sustain and expand our education coverage.

You may have noticed a new byline as part of our education team – [Kayla Huynh](#), who previously covered K-12 schools and higher education for the CapTimes in Madison.

We hope to see her byline for a long time.

You can help make sure we do.

We were able to add Kayla to our staff – just in time for the start of the school year – thanks to our [Community-Funded Journalism Project](#) administered by the Local Media Foundation. Specifically, thanks to a leadership grant from [Herb Kohl Philanthropies](#), a nonprofit with a sharp focus on making our schools stronger by listening better to those in the classroom.

Now, make no mistake: Our education team is the strongest in the state. We do important work on schools – city and suburban; public, choice and charter; kindergarten through college – every single day.

That means more than 50 stories about lead-paint issues in Milwaukee Public Schools, after a student tested positive for lead poisoning. [What went wrong](#), yes, but also [how to get your kids tested for free](#), [which schools were affected](#) and [how MPS will pay for it](#).

That means our two-year statewide Kids in Crisis project, focused on mental health in students, from the impact of [chronic absenteeism](#) and [food insecurity](#) to [cops in schools](#), [climate anxiety](#), the [burden of first-generation students](#) and [differences between urban and rural areas when it comes to getting help](#).

That means “[The Lost Class](#),” a just-published [look at 23 MPS students](#) – as young as 4 years old – who in the last school year had their lives cut short amid the city’s epidemic of gun violence.

And it means the ongoing work of Rory Linnane, who through the O’Brien Fellowship in Public Service Journalism at Marquette University has done groundbreaking work around a perpetual issue in Milwaukee schools – vacancies among teachers and staff.

By gathering data that [MPS itself collected but never bothered to analyze](#), she exposed how the schools filled with [students who need the most help bear the brunt of vacancies](#). Her work is shaping the future of our children, forcing district officials to get more teachers in classrooms.

Still, we want to do more. We want to do better.

Like Herb Kohl Philanthropies and many civic leaders, we believe that our community is strongest when schools are strong, and that schools are stronger when students, parents, teachers and taxpayers have the information they need to make good decisions.

That's where we come in – with powerful, independent journalism that elevates voices, exposes problems and points to solutions.

But we need your help, too.

## Who is on your education team now?

**Rory Linnane** and **Kayla Huynh** have a primary focus on K-12 schools in Milwaukee – MPS, but also choice and charter schools. **Alec Johnson** focuses on suburban districts.

**Kelly Meyerhofer** covers colleges and universities, while **Cleo Krejci** covers technical colleges and the intersection between education and the workforce. (She came to us in 2023 through Report for America, which helps pay for reporters in newsrooms to focus on areas where coverage is lacking.)

The editor of the team is **Debi Young**. She also oversees team members at the Green Bay Press-Gazette (**Nadia Scharf**) and Appleton Post-Crescent (**Rebecca Loroff**).

That team is responsible for covering everything from policy debates in Madison to decisions made about principals and superintendents at your local school board. There are 41 districts in the greater Milwaukee area alone, with 388 schools – plus dozens upon dozens of religious, choice and charter schools.

At the same time, we are reorienting the focus of our coverage to also better help parents and students amid the always-changing education landscape, from how to pick a good preschool to navigating the college application process.

With all that is happening, we are stretched thin.

## What does the future for the team hold?

Well, first and foremost, it holds more good journalism. That is our calling card. And that is our way forward during a period of great uncertainty in the news business.

That said, we want to secure long-term support for Kayla, as well as for Cleo (her three-year stint with Report for America ends in mid-2026). Going forward, we hope to add a reporter focused on early childhood education and to add more data reporting expertise to the team.

Finally, and importantly, we want to do more outreach and engagement, such as delivering more of our stories via video on social media, translating more articles into Spanish, better tapping into student voices and holding more community meetings to drive awareness and solutions.

Your support can help make all of that happen.

## What else should we watch for?

We will soon be launching two panels of teachers, one focused on those in Milwaukee and one on teachers elsewhere, to help us better understand issues in the classroom, point us to ideas that work, and help us refine our coverage.

If you are interested, or know a teacher we should be talking to, please email Rory ([rory.linnane@jrn.com](mailto:rory.linnane@jrn.com)) or Kayla ([khuynh@gannett.com](mailto:khuynh@gannett.com)) for more information.

## How can I support this effort?

We are working to build a broad coalition of support around our education team, including foundations and groups beyond Herb Kohl Philanthropies. Those interested in learning more about how they can help should contact Erin Richards, our director of development, at [erichards@gannett.com](mailto:erichards@gannett.com).

The project is administered by Local Media Foundation, tax ID #36-4427750, a Section 501(c)(3) charitable trust affiliated with Local Media Association.

To make a direct, tax-deductible contribution to the Community-Funded Journalism Project, administered by the Local Media Foundation, go to [jsonline.com/support](https://jsonline.com/support). Meanwhile, checks can be addressed to Local Media Foundation with “JS Community Journalism” in the memo, then mailed to: Local Media Foundation, P.O. Box 85015, Chicago, IL 60689.

In recent months, I have written [about the many partnerships we have built, our Community-Funded Journalism project](#), and the [guidelines we follow](#) to assure we remain independent and put our readers and the community first.

Since then, we have received support from dozens of new individuals – from \$25 to \$1,000, even more. Every one is a vote of support for this newsroom, but also for our community.

We need you. We appreciate you.

Thank you.

*Greg Borowski is executive editor of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. You can follow him on X, formerly known as Twitter, [@GregJBorowski](https://twitter.com/GregJBorowski) and reach him via [greg.borowski@jrn.com](mailto:greg.borowski@jrn.com).*

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