



Background on the Intentions, Settings, & Resources for the 2026 CAC

Makhóche kiŋ de Dakhóta Makhóche hécha do.
This land is Dakhóta land.

At the University of Minnesota we begin many events with land acknowledgements to honor the Dakhóta people on whose land we learn, work, and live. Too often though, land acknowledgements imply that this is Dakhóta *ancestral land*, failing to recognize that many Dakhóta currently live and work here and historical and ongoing injustices persist. To learn more about challenges inherent in land acknowledgements, see [Where We Stand: The University of Minnesota and Dakhóta Treaty Lands](#).

This proposal goes beyond acknowledgement by committing to engage with Indigenous educators and leaders in meaningful ways, as called for in the [TRUTH Project Report](#) by the 11 Tribal nations that share borders with Minnesota. In addition to Dakhóta land, northern Minnesota is largely Anishinaabe Ojibwe country, where Indigenous education and language revitalization are underway, including through the [Wezhinoo'igejig: Ojibwe Scholars in Early Childhood](#) program jointly developed in collaboration with the Tribal Colleges. Through the conference, we aim to advance collective recognition, understanding, and healing.

Why Minnesota?

The Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul), Minnesota, partly separated by the great Mississippi River, is a vibrant metropolitan area and home to a Delta hub (MSP International Airport), making it an attractive and easy-to-reach location. It is also the home base of Sun Country, for conference participants who are looking for a lower-cost airline alternative.

To provide the broadest and most capable team to develop and deliver the conference, members from three organizations collaborated to prepare this proposal, including the College of Education & Human Development at the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Education, and the Minnesota Assessment Group. In addition, the University of Iowa is a committed and important partner in this effort and others. Each of the partners has committed members to the program committee that established this call for proposals, and will review proposals and develop the final conference program.

The University of Minnesota (UMN) is a large, comprehensive, research-intensive, land-grant institution. The [College of Education and Human Development](#) (CEHD) and its [Quantitative Methods in Education](#) program have a long history in evidence-based educator preparation and the advancement of measurement and assessment research and practice. It houses the [National Center on Educational Outcomes](#), the [Institute on Community Integration](#), the [Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement](#), and several smaller centers in the areas of [computing education](#) and [Indigenous education](#) that have active projects in the improvement of school policies and practices, including assessment. In addition, CEHD partners with [AugmentED: Reimagining Teaching and Learning for the Age of AI](#).

The [MN Department of Education](#) (MDE) developed two tools for teachers regarding testing and assessment. [Testing 123](#) is a resource for teachers to eliminate learning barriers and evaluate classroom instruction through deeper understanding of the power of assessment and data, with a focus on balanced assessment and the formative uses of assessment to support teaching and learning. In addition, the [Collaborative Minnesota Partnership to Advance Student Success](#) (COMPASS) is integrating multiple efforts across the state including American Indian education, culturally responsive school literacy, multilingual learner language development, school culture, climate, and wellbeing, and data and assessment literacy; including opportunities for professional development and learning communities.

The [Minnesota Assessment Group](#) (MAG) is a network of school district assessment coordinators and directors of research, evaluation, and assessment from across the state. MAG meets regularly to provide support and professional development and learning opportunities for its members. MAG and CEHD have collaborated for years; several members of MAG are graduates of the measurement program in CEHD. MAG is currently utilizing the [Classroom Assessment Principles to Support Teaching & Learning](#) (Shepard et al., 2020) and collectively working to implement the recommendations regarding what school and district leaders can do to support the vision articulated in the *Principles*.

In addition, MN is one of five states with four or more land grant colleges and universities, including the University of Minnesota, [Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College](#), [Leech Lake Tribal College](#), [Red Lake Nation College](#), and [White Earth Tribal & Community College](#); each contributes to teacher preparation and collaborates with K-12 schools. Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, including teaching, learning, and assessment, will be a core component of the conference program.

Conference Goals

Through the 2026 conference, we strive to advance innovative classroom assessment practices by convening researchers, educators at all levels, youth leaders, and Indigenous communities, among others. We commit to building upon the excellence established by previous conferences by sharing evidence-based strategies to enhance and improve classroom assessment practices. In the goals outlined below, we convey our intent to provide learning and networking opportunities through the exploration of classroom assessment research and practice. We highlight a number of special focus areas, given the unique experiences of the conference partners. Among them are the high-quality translation of research to practice, meaningful and useful learning opportunities for classroom teachers, and being responsive to cultural and linguistically diverse communities with a special focus on Indigenous communities—we all have a great deal to learn from Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Minnesota is an excellent place to explore Indigenous practices, sharing borders with 11 Tribal nations, 4 Tribal K-12 schools, and 4 Tribal colleges.

Hosted in Minnesota, the conference will bridge the gap between academic research and classroom application while emphasizing culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining approaches. Through focused learning and networking opportunities, participants will gain

practical tools and strategies for immediate classroom implementation, with special attention to Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems.

Building on feedback from the 2024 conference evaluation, the 2026 conference will incorporate several key enhancements to strengthen its impact. We explicitly address the following recommended areas for improvement:

- Encourage greater involvement of PK-12 teachers
- Expand the 2-day conference to include a pre-conference evening event and additional time during meals and breaks for networking
- Provide comprehensive digital access through QR-enabled codes to meeting schedules and materials (we plan to utilize QR codes in multiple ways)
- Elevate culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining assessment practices
- Ensure access and broad participation by covering most of the cost for in-service teachers—we are considering similar reduced fees for pre-service teachers (students)
- Provide hands-on activities—design reciprocal sessions for teachers to interact with other participants to provide robust professional development with time for practice-focused learning opportunities

Our commitment to diversity extends to content and presenters, featuring voices from varied lived experiences and expertise in culturally responsive assessment practices. To maximize perspective sharing, each expert will lead only one session, allowing for a wider range of perspectives, experiences, topics, and approaches.

Location & Venue

The conference will be held at the [Mall of America](#), which opened in 1992 and is one of the top tourist destinations in the country. Annually, the Mall hosts over 400 events and is visited by 32 million people from around the world. The Mall has been home to two public schools over the years, including most recently, the Minnesota Transitions Charter School, which moved there following the destruction of its original Minneapolis site during the 2020 civil unrest.

Sustainability

The Mall boasts 11,000 year-round employees. Among its efforts to engage in cutting-edge green initiatives to minimize its carbon footprint and waste, it nurtures over 30,000 live plants and 400 trees reaching as high as 35 feet, deploys natural pesticides, logs 32,000 tons of recycling per year, and provides 2,400 tons of food waste to local hog farms, resulting in over one million hog meals annually! In 2011, the Mall converted over 5000 light bulbs to LED, reducing energy costs by two thirds. The Mall and its residents contribute \$25,000 every day in cash, products, and in-kind support to charities and nonprofits across Minnesota. The Mall raises over \$12 million annually with community partners through a variety of events and donations for charitable causes.

Safety

The Mall of America's 150 security officers undergo over 400 hours of training in safety, guest relations, and emergency operations. The security team employs bike patrol, a special plain-clothes unit, and a K-9 program.

Meals and Refreshments

All-day beverage service will be available, including a full breakfast buffet and lunch buffet the first day of the conference, Friday, November 13—we encourage participants to explore the huge variety of options for dinner throughout the MOA and the Minneapolis area. The second day, Saturday, November 14, also will include all-day beverage service, but we encourage participants to explore the MOA for breakfast, lunch, and dinner options.

Technology

The Radisson Blu employs state-of-the-art video conferencing capacity in its meeting and event spaces, including quality audiovisual technology with built-in screens and displays. The Radisson Blu offers free high-speed Wi-Fi in every room and conference spaces, plus free wired internet access if needed. The Mall of America provides free Wi-Fi to visitors, with over 600 access points for continuous connection.

Transportation

One of the most attractive aspects of hosting the conference at the Mall of America is its accessibility. The Radisson Blu offers complimentary airport shuttle service daily from 5AM to 11PM, which only takes 6 minutes from the MSP International Airport.

In addition, there is free light rail (Blue Line) from the Minneapolis-St. Paul (MSP) international airport to the Mall of America, with a stop adjacent to the Radisson Blu. The trip is about 6 minutes with trains running both ways every 15 minutes, continuously from 5 a.m. to midnight.

For attendees who plan to rent a vehicle or are local, there are over 16,000 free parking spaces in the adjacent parking ramps flanking the east and west sides and lots on the north side of the Mall.

Attractions

The Mall is home to over [500 stores](#), the 13-screen [B&B Theaters](#), the [SEA LIFE Aquarium](#), a 24,000-square-foot [M&M's experience store](#), the [Crayola Experience](#), and [Nickelodeon Universe](#) indoor theme park. Many people visit the Mall simply to walk, window shop, or people watch—there are over 4 miles of corridors and if you spent 5 minutes in each store, it would take over 40 hours to visit the entire Mall of America.

If participants wish to visit downtown Minneapolis, they could take the Blue Line (\$5 day pass, 25 minute trip) directly from the Mall to multiple stops in Minneapolis, with easy walking access to galleries, museums, numerous award-winning restaurants, pubs, and more shopping! In addition, the light rail travels through the University of Minnesota campus, for those participants hoping to connect with University colleagues. It is only a 20 minute (ride-share) trip

to [Paisley Park](#), the home and museum of Prince. Historic [Fort Snelling State Park](#) is only 3 miles away, with 18 miles of hiking trails near the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers.

As an example of additional activities provided for participants, we intend to host a tour of Indigenous Sacred Sites along the Mississippi River, with a focus on opportunities for enhancing instruction and assessment in PK-12 classrooms around Social Studies broadly and ethnic studies more specifically. Iyekiyapiwiŋ Darlene St. Clair, a CEHD research professor and Dakhóta scholar from the Lower Sioux Community, is a regional expert on sacred sites and leads the development of Indigenous and Dakhóta curriculum (targeting MN 6th grade social studies standards): [Mni Sota Makoce, The Dakota Homelands Curriculum](#).

Dining

The Radisson Blu has an exceptional hotel restaurant, [FireLake Grill House & Cocktail Bar](#). In the Mall, there are [60 restaurants](#) with a wide range of fast food, made to order quick restaurant spots, and fine dining options, as well as several bars.

The light rail provides access within 25 minutes to downtown Minneapolis, home of numerous award-winning restaurants and pubs.

One special restaurant, requiring reservations a month in advance, is [Owamni by the Sioux Chef](#), a James Beard finalist and home of the James Beard award-winning cookbook, [The Sioux Chef's Indigenous Kitchen](#). Owamni is located on the Mississippi River, near the historic [Stone Arch Bridge](#), adjacent to the UMN campus, and is dedicated to Indigenous knowledge and practices regarding food sustainability and preparation, “highlighting true agricultural products of North America, such as corns, beans, squashes, wild game, birds, fish and Native plants.” It is a truly uniquely delicious and relational experience.