# Fall 2024 MINNESOTA'S K-12 EDUCATION CONNECTION



# Carrie Allord is Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom's 2024 Outstanding Teacher



Carrie Allord, a third-grade teacher at St. Francis Catholic School in Brainerd, has been recognized as Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom's (MAITC) 2024 Outstanding Teacher Award winner.

This award recognizes the teacher for his/her creative efforts to integrate agriculture into his/her classroom and curricula to increase agricultural literacy. An agriculturally literate person is defined as "one who understands and can communicate the source and value of agriculture as it affects our quality of life."

The winning Minnesota teacher receives \$500 and can have up to \$1,500 of his/her related expenses paid to attend the National Agriculture in the Classroom (NAITC) Conference

Allord uses a wide range of agriculturethemed books, lessons, and materials to support the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in her students, and is always looking for opportunities to connect plants, animals, and food to the learning activities happening in her classroom. She also uses a classroom chicken named Pearl as well as a chick hatching program to help students investigate lifecycles and connect to important science concepts.

"To be agriculture literate is to understand and respect where our food comes from. It is important for teachers and students to share the knowledge of agriculture so that everyone around us understands how agriculture impacts our world, and our daily lives," said Allord.

All Minnesota licensed K-12 educators who creatively integrate agricultural concepts into non-agricultural education classroom settings are eligible



**Continued on Page 8** 

# Detroit Lakes High School Career Academies and Youth Skills Training Grant

#### **Preparing Students for Real-World Success**

Joshua Omang, Principal Vern Schnathorst, Work-Based Learning Coordinator

Detroit Lakes High School

At Detroit Lakes High School (DLHS), we are dedicated to equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to thrive in today's dynamic job market. Our Career Academies provide hands-on learning in high-demand fields. Last spring, we were awarded a \$77,500 grant from the Minnesota Department of Labor's Youth Skills Training (YST) program. This grant enables us to further enhance our academies in areas crucial to both local and state economies.

#### **Practical Skills and Career Readiness**

DLHS's Career Academies focus on pathways in Engineering Design, CNC Manufacturing, and Transportation Technology — fields chosen based on regional industry needs and future workforce demands. With the YST grant, we're enhancing these programs by providing students with access to cutting-edge technology and real-world work experiences that will better prepare them for life after high school.

The grant connects classroom learning with practical, on-the-job training. By collaborating with local businesses and industry experts, students gain valuable experience through internships, job shadowing, and hands-on projects. These experiences allow students to better understand their chosen fields while developing critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork skills.



Whether they enter the workforce directly or pursue further education, our academies ensure students have a strong foundation.

# **Strategic Investment in Career Pathways**

The \$77,500 grant is helping us expand key areas. In the Engineering Design pathway, new 3D modeling software and equipment empower students to take concepts to prototypes. The Advanced Manufacturing pathway will feature advanced machinery that mirrors industry standards, giving students practical skills to succeed in precision manufactur-

**Continued on Page 18** 

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The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) are the top honors bestowed by the U.S. Government to K-12 STEM teachers. Each year, up to 110 outstanding educators from across the country may be recognized by the White House for their passion, dedication, and impact in the classroom.

In addition to receiving the honor of a lifetime, each Presidential Awardee receives:

- A \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation
- · An all-expenses paid trip to a recognition event, which includes an award ceremony and opportunities to meet with policymakers in a series of professional development activities

Anyone—principals, teachers, parents, students, or members of the general publicmay nominate exceptional individuals who teach science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in grades K-12.



Nominations may be submitted for more than one teacher.

Once a teacher is nominated or initiates an application, they will receive an email invitation to begin the application process. The invitation will include login information for accessing the online application system.

Applications for 7-12th grade teachers are now open. Applications must be completed by February 6, 2025.

For more information or to apply go to https://paemst.nsf.gov

# Math + Science = Plants + Partnerships



Spring Lake Park Schools

In a winning equation, Spring Lake Park

Schools students are applying their math and science learning to a community garden. Thanks to a partnership between the schools, Coon Creek Watershed District, Northtown Library, the Lions' Club and Growing Green Hearts, the learning will result in a native land-scape in the community.

Westwood Middle School Math teacher Angela Skauge is in her 4th year of teaching 7th grade math concepts through gardening. This year, elementary students are lending a hand as they learn about plant life cycles in science

"In addition to the math, the idea this year was that 7th graders become student leaders," says Angela. "They created videos on how to do the planting, and they are leading the elementary students through the process. They will also teach them what they have learned about native prairie plants."

This is a community effort. The Northtown Library is the planting site. The Coon Creek Watershed District is providing financial support and education along the way. The Lions Club is helping fund sod cutters and mulch. Growing Green Hearts is providing expertise in the prairie planting. The students are doing the work – of learning and planting.

"Every year, I never know for sure if I am going to do it the next year again," says Angela. "But then, seeing students through the process and on planting day makes this project worth it. I really want my students to find real life application to the math concepts we are learning in the classroom and discover that they are being student leaders in our community with this project."



#### **Seventh Grade Math**

In 7th grade math, students learn about ratios and proportions. They calculate area. There's nothing more powerful for learning than connecting the concepts to something real – even better if it's a little dirty. One of the first tasks for this project is figuring out the ratio and proportion for the plant starter mix.

"I tell them the recipe for the starter mix - to help get the plants started," says Angela. "They have to figure out 'four servings' per seed tray. They determine how many supplies they need. If you go to the store, one bag has how much? How many cups, how many bags, and then the costs."

Once the site was selected, students found the planting area based on measurements.

They came up with a garden design and determined how many plants are needed if each requires a square foot. On planting day, 170 plants are ready to go in the ground. Students even made newspaper pots for the seedlings that will decompose as the plants take root.

"On the days we created the starter mix, transplanted the plants, measured the growth, etc., students said they actually enjoyed math and didn't feel like they were doing math," says Angela. "Students don't even realize that they are using many of the math and science concepts they learned throughout the year to complete various tasks within this project."

#### **Elementary Science**

The elementary learning looks and sounds a little different. They studied the science concepts of systems and structures. They are recognizing plant life and the environment as a system and are learning more about the structure of a plant itself.

their plants (and pick out some books for their summer reading!).

#### **Planting Day**

All of the learning comes together on planting day at Northtown Library. Groups of 7th graders cycle through the site and work alongside elementary students here for the occasion.

There are three different stations. One is hosted by Coon Creek Watershed District where students learn about the prairie and engage with a native roots display. There's a planting station equipped with small shovels and plants ready to go. There's also a station where students can watercolor paint with pond water a bookmark to donate to the library.

Jessica Lindemyer, from the Coon Creek Watershed District, is impressed with the questions student ask.

"There have been a lot of questions about the pond itself and great questions about how



Katrina Davis, elementary science specialist, has two groups of first and second graders who are helping with the planting.

"My students are quite impressed that 7th and 8th graders have taken the time to send them information and teach them something," says Katrina. "Students have done a lot of learning about plants: why plants are important to us, plant needs and what happens if the needs aren't met, plant parts and the special job each plant part does."

When students planted the native prairie plant seeds, they learned about the pollination process and why it's important. They viewed posters and videos from the older students and then made their own with more science information.

Des Gillis' first grade scientists created seed balls and are contributing them to the garden. They won't make it to planting day, but Des has told them to visit the library to see the grasses we mow and these grasses we are planting are different," she says. "It's also fun to see the students engage in the root display. They are really impressed with the length of the roots and how deep they go."

At the planting station, the younger students are having fun trying to identify the plants. They race back and forth from a sign showing the different plants to the planting area. They are busy discussing leaf shape. Saban, a first grader, kneels by the hole she's dug and slowly coaxes a seedling out of a paper cup. She doesn't know what kind it is, but she does know some things about plants.

"I learned that plants start as seeds," she says, "And, bees stick to pollen."

Seventh grader Amelia is planting nearby and has really enjoyed meeting the first and



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# **CTE/Agriculture**

# Born, Hatched, and Planted at AFSA



Stephanie Forliti Marketing and Communications The Academy for Sciences & Agriculture

One beautiful fall day, Over 200 Students, 16 locations, 1200+ hours of community service. That is Farm and Community Service Day (FCSD) by the numbers. The Academy for Sciences & Agriculture has always emphasized the importance of service. In fact, service hours have been a requirement for graduation since the school

opened in 2001.

A school focusing on agriculture in an urban setting brought into focus how many students had not been exposed to the many areas of agriculture including the farm. The school took this opportunity to combine service hours with their emphasis on agriculture and thus Farm and Community Service Day was born, hatched and planted. Students not only see how local farms and other businesses are managed but they are able to understand the level of work it takes to run those businesses. Owners and employees also pass on new work skills and leadership skills to our students. Over the years FCSD expanded from being held once a year to twice a year. This fall the 7th-12th

graders helped at local farms, community parks, county parks, and even a couple of historical farms. What do the locations have to say about the school's days of service?

"It was inspiring to see young minds engage with history, agriculture, and nature, and your teamwork exemplified the spirit of community service."

> — T.J. Malaskee, Executive Director and the entire MAHS team (FCSD Fall 2024)

"The AFSA students were friendly and helpful. They asked great questions and exhibited impressive problem solving skills when a few tasks didn't go quite as planned."

> — Summer Kuehn, Blueberry Fields of Stillwater (FCSD Fall 2024)

Service is only one aspect of what this PreK-12 student-centered charter school focuses on. Bringing the community together is another. The school hosts many public events including the Potato Hug, Safety Night, and Gearing Up for Summer. These events include inviting local businesses and organizations to come in and share their expertise and opportunities with families. Students are making community while bridging the gap between the young and the old. Elementary students often visit a local senior living facility to read, sing and create with residents. At both the elementary and high school, older and younger students pair together for a variety of activities. AFSA high schoolers are making connections with elementary students through lunchtime visits and classroom activities. Recently, members of the high school FFA Officer team visited the preschool classroom to talk about farm animals.

You never know where inspiration can come from, whether seeing a female firefighter in person on Safety Night, connecting with older students who visit you at lunch or while



volunteering at a local farm for FCSD. AFSA PreK-12 combines the importance of service, community, education, sciences and agriculture all in one.

Don't miss AFSA's annual plant sale this spring, May 8–10, 2025 at AFSA High School. Looking for a way to get involved? Sign up to be a science fair judge. Learn more about AFSA PreK–12 by visiting the website below.

www.afsak12.com



# Math + Science = Plants + Partnerships Continued from Page 4

second graders. As for the math, some steps in the project stand out.

"I most remember figuring out and adding up how much it would cost," she says.

Another student, Grace, chimes in, "It was also fun to create videos with some friends to show the younger kids how to plant."

There is obvious enjoyment for many students as they get their hands dirty and put the plants in the ground. They are also having fun looking for wildlife, and they've seen a family of ducks – with ducklings – and some baby rabbits.

"It's so rewarding to see kids getting their hands dirty and working together to help restore native prairie plants to the pond," says Kellie Weidinger, youth services librarian. "I also think it's important for kids to learn that the library is so much more than just books. Although books are extremely important and valued by libraries, the library is also a place for communities to come together."

#### **Impact**

For the library, planting day is a realization of their goal to create an example garden for the community. Staff have observed growing interest in native gardens, but many people don't realize what that could look like

or see how it helps benefit bees, butterflies and other wildlife. The garden helps them see how it might look in their yard.

Heidi Ferris, with Growing Green Hearts, has embraced the growing and the learning with this project and others across the community. She started Growing Green Hearts to work with schools, community groups and other organizations to create site-specific projects that help strengthen community connections and educate about the environment. She's worked with Angela since the first garden year.

"Kids don't know what prairie is and some adults don't know," says Heidi. "This is a great way to learn more about

prairie, biodiversity, succession and on what makes the prairie. The idea that we plant this plant now and the seeds will spread and heal this land – it's nature working and healing and people get to be a part of it."

The idea of impact resonates with the members of the Westwood Conservation



Club who are onsite to provide leadership. Eighth graders Amelia and Macy have played an instrumental role in the project. They put together videos and posters and recently represented the garden planting project at a state-wide Conservation Club event.

"It was fun to see what other schools

are doing," says Macy. "We learned about really cool, different ideas. People also really enjoyed hearing about our planting project."

Amelia has learned a lot about planting, and likes being in the club because the people are supportive and nice and have time and passion for this work.

"I love the impact we're having today!" says Amelia.

As an elementary science specialist, Katrina also appreciates the connection and application of learning to the real-world experience. Watching the seventh graders side-by-side with first and second graders brings another level of appreciation.

Each of the variables has come together in an equation that works.

"By creating experiences for students to apply their classroom learning to a situation outside of the classroom, we are enhancing their learning and engaging them in a positive way," says Angela. "I also point out that when or if they come to the library with a sibling or by themselves this summer, they will be able to see the plants they helped to grow."

springlakepark schools.org





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# **CTE/Agriculture**





Brooklyn Center Community Schools

October is Farm to School Month, and at BCCS, we are proud to have dedicated staff

and community partners who ensure our students are fed with nutritious, fresh food options. From local, cultural cuisines at lunch to produce from school gardens, students at BC are active participants in the process from growing food to consuming it.

At Brooklyn Center Middle and High School STEAM (BCS), Visual Arts Teacher Chloe Cotherman has led the development of the school garden and its programs and activities in recent years. In partnership with Hana Blissett from the Three Rivers Park District. Cotherman tends to the garden with students throughout the year, makes produce available for FACS classes and at district events like the Centaur Block Party, and offers educational opportunities for students. In the summer of 2022, she launched a summer internship program for high school students to earn wages while working in the garden, and that program grew in the summer of 2023. "Offering a learning experience along with a paycheck responds to all of their needs and values their work in a very tangible way," Cotherman said. "The garden is work and we need to compensate accordingly." The internship program, called Guardians of the Garden, is paid for by a grant and Cotherman hopes to continue to grow the offerings in the years to come.

"One of the key take-aways that our

interns got from our program is that they have an increased awareness and appreciation of living things, and for how food is produced," Cotherman said. "Sharing food from the garden, getting into conversations while weeding, getting curious about the natural world, taking time to be quiet and listen to the world around us – these moments have all brought us a lot of joy and contentment this summer."

The partnership with the Three Rivers Park District also extends to the school garden at Brooklyn Center Elementary STEAM, where partner Hana Blissett meets with classes and educates on local produce and nutrition.

During the school day, kitchen staff at BC strive to incorporate cooked-from-scratch, sustainable, culturally diverse cuisines. One way they do this is through Minnesota's Harvest of the Month program, a farm-to-school program that highlights a new seasonal local food item each month and provides educational resources to schools.

"Nutrition is the basis for students to be in a position to be able to learn and thrive," said Michelle Auld, wellbeing specialist. "It's a critical component of education and learning where food comes from and how to procure whole fresh foods."

With all of these nutrition programs and opportunities available to students, there are more big plans ahead. Brooklyn Center Community Schools is looking for a Healthy Meals Specialist that will lead BC's participation in the Harvest of the Month program, expand opportunities such as nutrition education and

taste tests for students of locally-sourced foods, work with kitchen staff to incorporate more cooking from scratch, and create a Healthy Meals Advisory comprised of students and families who will identify recipes they would like to see on the school menus. This will be a two-year position, funded by a grant, with a goal of establishing these systems for long-term sustainability.

At the BCS school garden, Cotherman plans to expand its offerings with a pollinator garden, shrubs, and more space for classrooms to come engage and incorporate STEAM learning. BCS also aims to expand its work with community partners and get more families and Indigenous community members involved to share their knowledge on cultural and agricultural practices.

"The garden is just one way that we can address food (in)justice in our communities, by teaching young people how to grow their own food and cook with the produce, giving produce

and seeds away to families, helping young people expand their palette for less processed foods, and teaching folks about how they can challenge the systems in our society that keep marginalized people in cycles of poverty and ill-health," said Cotherman. "The cool thing about the garden is when I walk kids out there, it doesn't matter how old they are. Once you get them in that space and start handing them a leaf of mint or a blade of chives, it ignites their inquiry . . . Gardening is my art form, and also a deeply therapeutic practice. Being outside, being connected to land, water, and animals puts things in perspective."

Keep up with the BCS school garden on Instagram at @centaurgardeners.

www.bccs286.org



## Carrie Allord Continued from Page 1

for the MAITC Outstanding Teacher Award. Applications are reviewed by a committee of MAITC Foundation board members, who select the recipient each winter.

#### Allord One of Eight Teachers Selected for the 2024 National Excellence In Teaching About Agriculture Award

In addition to the state-level award, Allord was also recognized as one of eight Excellence in Teaching about Agriculture Award winners by the National Agriculture in the Classroom Organization.

"These outstanding teachers recognize that agriculture also is a perfect foundation for teaching biology, chemistry, climatology, math, and literacy, in ways that any age or level of students can understand, value and apply to their daily life," said USDA NIFA Director Dr. Manjit Misra. "When a student makes that real-life connection to the lessons and activities their teachers share, students continue to learn and value the true meaning of those lessons when they leave the classroom. Innovative teachers like these are often responsible for awakening a student's love of learning, nature and science."

St. Francis Catholic Grade School was opened in 1909 in a two-story, eight class-

room building. In 1952 a new facility and gymnasium were built, and in 2010 a major renovation and expansion project was completed. The student base includes those from Brainerd/Baxter as well as Aitkin, Breezy Point, Crosby, Crosslake, Cushing, Deerwood, Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Pillager and Pine River.

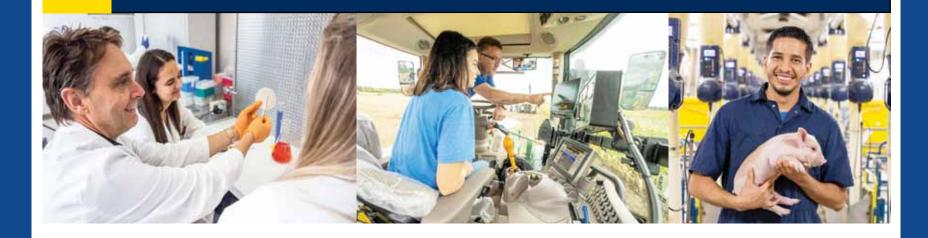


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# **Students Advance Skills Through Junior Master Gardener Program**



Robbinsdale Area Schools

In 2020, Zachary Lane created a school garden. A grant supported the cost of materials and parent volunteers built the garden beds. During the first few growing seasons, the school partnered with the UM Extension Hennepin County Master Gardeners for consultation and support. Master

Gardeners offered free youth education gardening lessons to each grade level.

It wasn't long before teachers expressed interest in scheduling multiple garden topics throughout the year.

During the summer of 2023, in partnership with Master Gardeners who helped develop other local programs, members



of the ZLE Green Team (parents who volunteer and support the garden at Zachary Lane), and Robbinsdale's curriculum and instruction staff, the Grow Lab was born. An empty classroom was transformed into a space dedicated to year-round garden lessons, complete with grow lights for indoor growing during the winter months.

The new grow lab supported the implementation of the Junior Master Gardener (JMG) program, launched this past fall. The new space provides 'hands-on' group and individual learning experiences that provide a love of gardening and develop an appreciation for the environment all year long.

The Junior Master Gardener lessons are taught by a team of Hennepin County Master Gardener volunteers. All students at Zachary Lane get to participate.

Students have the opportunity to earn a level 1 certification as a Junior Master Gardener by completing a group and individual activity per teaching concept, and a service/leadership project. This year's kindergarten

class will be the first class eligible for certification by the end of their fifth-grade year if they complete all the requirements.

By participating in the Junior Master Gardener program, students will gain knowledge in the areas of plant growth and development, soils and water, ecology and environmental horticulture, insects and diseases, landscape horticulture, fruits and nuts, and vegetables and herbs.

They gain experience working in small groups to conduct scientific experiments - writing a hypothesis, setting up variables in the experiment, making observations and collecting data, and drawing conclusions. They will have exposure to scientific vocabulary and different areas of study within the scientific field. Students will walk away knowing how to design, plant, maintain, and harvest a garden.

www.rdale.org



# The Demand for Agriculture Education Programs is Growing Exponentially in Classrooms Across Minnesota.



Amy Smith, answers questions about the current state of agriculture, food and natural resource (AFNR) education.

What role does ag education play in classrooms across the state?

Ag education is the best kept secret in today's educational system. It informs about topics like food safety, agricultural mechanics, agribusiness, fish and wildlife. This valuable, yet practical, knowledge is

crucial for understanding and appreciating Minnesota's economy and natural resources.

Agricultural education programs for grades 5–12 provide students with hands-on learning experiences. In some cases, these courses also fulfill requirements in science, art or economics.

How do these courses benefit students?

Agricultural education grows leaders, builds communities and strengthens agriculture. Programming not only consists of classroom and laboratory instruction, but also work-based learning opportunities through Supervised Agricultural Experience projects and social-emotional learning and leadership development through the National FFA Organization.

These three integrated components are important as they teach students skills to ensure students are ready for college or careers after high school.

Why is the demand for ag education growing?

Demand for, and interest in, agricultural education is impacted by interest in food systems, sustainability and the environment. Agriculture extends far beyond learning

about livestock production and row crops. As such, new programs and additional teaching positions have popped up all over Minnesota. Career exploration and technical skill development can both lead to a variety of occupational opportunities after high school. Agricultural education fills a vital role for districts desiring to offer robust, relevant and rigorous career and technical education opportunities.

Are there enough agriculture teachers to fill these critical roles?

Unfortunately, not even close! On a national scale, the annual collection of national data found that 474 new positions and 223 new programs were added across the nation last year. Nearly 40% of the approximately 1,500 new hires were non-licensed or completing an alternative licensure route. Closer to home, some districts have unfilled vacancies in School-Based Agricultural Education and many have hired individuals who have not yet completed teacher preparation in agriculture, food and natural resource education. An agricultural education degree by no means restricts career options to teaching in a formal setting.

What role does the U of M play in educating these future educators?

The University of Minnesota plays a major role in preparing future agricultural educators by offering an undergraduate program, graduate program and additional option for those pursuing teacher licensure. We are one of three institutions in Minnesota that offer an undergraduate degree, but the only institution that offers graduate coursework in ag education.

Ag education faculty and staff at the University of Minnesota support new and beginning teachers by coordinating the Minnesota AFNR Teacher Induction Program (TIP). This program provides year-long professional development and mentorship. TIP's support and resources contribute to increased teacher retention between year one and two, a critical period for educators.

Amy Smith is an associate professor in Agricultural Education, Communication and Marketing in the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences at the University of Minnesota. She conducts research centered on teacher recruitment and retention in school-based agricultural education. Additionally, Smith serves as the Director of the Minnesota Teacher Induction Program (TIP) for agriculture, food, and natural resource educators.



# AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION & MARKETING



Students at the University of Minnesota with a major in the department of Agricultural Education, Communication & Marketing will gain:

- Hands-on learning experiences
- Engaging field experiences and internships
- · High job placement after graduation in careers such as:
  - School-based Agriculture Teachers
     Sales Representatives
  - Extension Educators

- Conservation **Technicians**
- Youth Outreach Coordinators

#### **TEACHING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES:**

- Minnesota has over 320 teaching positions in agriculture, food, and natural resources (AFNR) and demand continues to grow!
- · Average starting salary for new AFNR teachers in MN in 2023-24: \$51.417
- Scholarships and state/federal student loan forgiveness available





#### **DID YOU KNOW?**

#### **TEACHERS AND STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO FREE RESOURCES** FROM AECM:

- Campus and classroom visits
- Workshops for clubs and organizations
- AgriCast online resource platform
  - Lesson plans
  - Podcasts
  - Virtual field trips
  - Video library, and more!

#### **NOMINATE A FUTURE TEACHER**

Do you know someone with an interest in agriculture, food, and natural resources who would excel as a teacher?



**TEACHER!** 









# BHS Computer Lab Provides Real-Life Experiences, Business Training and Serious Competition





Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191

Picture a computer lab from your high school. What do you see? Maybe it's a room full of huge desktop computers with towers and monitors that take up half the desk. Maybe it's got floppy disks (large or small depending on how old you are) or maybe your high school simply didn't have one. At Burnsville High School (BHS), students are now using a refreshed and revamped computer lab for a wide variety of activities to prepare them for their future.

The lab was built over the 2022-23 school year and when it opened in the fall of 2023, it featured all the software needed for traditional classes and esports. The lab is a hub of activity throughout and beyond the school day. No matter the subject, classes are able to use the lab in all seven periods of the day, and before and after school, members of the Blaze esports teams use it to practice or for competitions. The main goal of the lab is to provide students with a sneak peek of what awaits them in their chosen pathways, whether that is the workplace or higher education.

"We teach to industry standards, so we use software that's industry standard," said Michele Carroll, a Career Technical Education (CTE) business education teacher, and high school building leadership team leader for CTE. "We use Adobe and Microsoft to start so that students see what businesses would have them do since those are seen in most work-places."

A digital version of real-world situations

The lab uses software and systems that give students a unique digital perspective, including simulations of a wide variety of career pathways.

"Our biggest emphasis is marketing, so they're creating videos — PSAs (public service announcements), commercials — posters, you name it," Carroll said. "We also use simulations where students can see customers walking around on the screen. Sometimes they get mad at you and a little bubble will pop up and say 'I'm not shopping here ever again.' It's good for kids because that's sometimes what customers do."

The lab fosters a collaborative environment, with virtually every Pathway using its resources to take learning to the next level. Engineering students use computer-aided design (CAD). Construction students collaborate with students from manufacturing, engineering, design and technology to build houses and design the interiors. Culinary students share notes on recipes and make adjustments according to the number of people a meal will serve.

"It's a seamless transition from traditional methods to digital files." said Carroll.

Carroll added that the use of technology has allowed students to feel more assured and comfortable as they learn.

"It's enhancing learning now, and it gives students a better understanding and more confidence," she said. "They have a much better understanding of what they're studying and what they're getting into."

Students also have the opportunity to take a Microsoft course where they can earn dual credit with a community college. "Learning how to use all the functions of the [Microsoft] Office suite is something that helps them to be career-ready," said Carroll.

There's no Oregon Trail here. A look at esports at BHS

For the members of the Blaze esports teams, the lab serves as a practice and competition space with equipment that can handle the fast-paced world of competitive gaming.

One of the pros and cons of esports is that students can practice on their own as long as they have the equipment at home, but not all schools have computer labs that allow students without their own equipment to practice at school.

The new lab allows teams of students to gather together to practice and compete.

Unlike traditional sports, there's no set schedule, so having the lab available to them is a huge advantage for BHS students. The team will practice in person at least once a week when possible, but different games have different schedules. One may play on Wednesdays and another on Thursdays, so the team's practice schedule has to be flexible.

Esports is a growing enterprise with a bright future. Blaze esports is made up of several different teams playing different games with most players being part of multiple teams. It's fairly casual at the high school level, but it still presents gamers with opportunities to continue after graduation. Colleges, especially smaller ones, are using esports to attract students with fierce competition and tournament play getting national attention. Some have paid staff and labs dedicated solely to esports. At the college level, they've also introduced physical training so that participants' minds

and bodies are in top shape.

It doesn't quite get the attention of college football yet, but the team helps students learn about what scholarships might be available and connects them with colleges so they can make the best choices for themselves.

Like their counterparts in traditional sports, gamers benefit from participation by learning how to work as a team, sportsmanship, setting high expectations and exploring new challenges.

The new lab shows a student-focused commitment from District 191 to provide students with the opportunity to grow their skills in an activity that is growing in popularity. With access to these tools, there's no question that students will continue to excel not only in the esports world but will continue to develop the computer and life skills that will serve them well as they pursue college and career opportunities.

www.isd191.org







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# **CTE/Manufacturing**



Launch Your Future Today (LYFT) believes potential is limitless when we know our strengths. Through the alignment of industry and education, we create relevant and engaging opportunities for students to discover, pursue, and achieve the career path that best fits them.

LYFT Pathways is a rural career and technical education (CTE) pathway initiative with the purpose of rebuilding Career and Technical Education (CTE) in southwest and west central Minnesota.

LYFT Career Pathways has funded nearly 100 projects. More than 20,000 students in southwest and west central Minnesota were impacted by these projects, and 65 of the projects were new CTE courses.

The goal of LYFT Pathways funds is for every student in the region, grades 7-12

## **Launch Your Future Today (LYFT) Impact Funding**

to gain marketable skills leading to further education and careers that match our region's labor market needs. The CTE project criteria include 1) support and engage students to gain greater exposure to careers and/or build work skills through innovative hands-on learning, 2) include the collaboration of at least one school and one or more businesses or industry-related partners, and 3) align to local/regional career opportunities.

For more information, contact Eriann Faris, CTE Project Coordinator at SWWC Service Cooperative by email at eriann.faris@swwc.org or by phone at 507-537-2271.

www.lyftpathways.org

#### Jackson County Central Schools \$15,000 LYFT Innovation Grant - CNC Plasma Table

The funded project will help to better prepare students for working in the 21st century fabrication industry. Many of the businesses in our local area have some form of CNC operating system that they use to either design, prepare material, or build the products



that they sell or supply their customers. The addition of the CNC Plasma Table will allow students to experience and prepare for industry ready careers through hands on use. Students will be able to program, set-up, troubleshoot, maintain, and use the tool prior to entering a career where they would have the experience

and skills to enter the job day-one and be able to work. Students will gain knowledge and skills in CAD and 3D design to model and design a project before being able to physically create and build their own projects as well as the experience and practice creating from set plans and tolerances.

Instruction will take place in the classroom/shop with experts coming in to teach and work with students. There will also be field trips to see and learn how similar machines or the principles

the students learned with the tools are used in industry.

With the addition of the plasma table, we will be able to serve a wide range of students from grades 9–12. All those interested in metal

**Continued on Page 16** 



# Four Questions with Clint Link Principal, North Branch Area High School



Clint Link, principal of North Branch Area High School, turned heads at the regional rollout of Enterprise Minnesota's 2023 State of Manufacturing® in North Branch when he discussed the proactive role of public education in the future of Minnesota's manufacturers. Link has been principal at North Branch since 2022. Before that, he served in several positions in the Waseca Public Schools district beginning in 2000 — including as a teacher, director of innovation and career pathways, and girls' basketball coach.

"My entire education career is built on creating systems and content that allow learners to first better understand the world around them but second, to see their futures in it," he says. "The world around us is constantly changing. How we teach and learn needs to reflect that." Describe your tech-oriented evolution as an educator.

Clint: I was a high school social studies teacher. I started drifting from traditional teaching methods when I saw how Chromebooks provided tools for more independent learning. So, I started learning and teaching a little bit differently. I eventually left the classroom to teach teachers how to leverage technology to personalize education for kids with different backgrounds and skill sets.

I moved from just technology into career pathways as career and technical education evolved. High schools went away from career tech ed in the late '90s because reading and math standardized tests — and later science — were being pushed on schools. So, we put our resources into those spaces. But labor markets were looking for students with skilled-based understanding. When I moved to North Branch as a principal, I found a growing district that shared my vision. We have the facilities and the postsecondary partners to execute it. I think we are what the modern high school should be.

Parents understand that most kids don't need a four-year postsecondary path. I worked in Waseca for 20 years of my career. Sixty percent of jobs in that region required a certification or a two-year degree. Only 20% of those jobs required a four-year degree, but we still had 80% of our graduates going to four-year institutions. They were becoming educated and under-skilled for the labor market — and they were also getting severely in debt.

### How meaningful is the relationship between secondary schools and tech schools?

Clint: It's essential. We need each other. At the high school level, I need a postsecondary partner with the resources — either teachers or equipment — to help kids get higher levels of skill training in areas like industrial, machining, welding, or auto courses. These are very expensive courses to run. We have several postsecondary partners like Pine Tech, in our case, that have equipment and have those teachers. And then it's up to us to be creative in how we partner together. Do we share equipment for a duration of time? Do they bring a trailer to our campus so that we can use some equipment for a period of time? Do we do tours? Can kids work at night up there? It's a good partnership: They need our students to go into their pathway, and we need their skilled training and equipment.

### What about the relationship with manufacturers?

Clint: The Perkins V Federal Grant for Career and Technical Education helps us supplement the associated expenses and requires that we have an advisory board composed of more than 50% of industry partners. Those industry partners help guide what and how we're teaching kids and give us a direct partnership in resources. For example, our local Ford dealership Anderson & Koch helped us get a free curriculum for our auto classes. And the more we use that curriculum, the more equipment that comes to us at no cost. Our advisory committees also help the work-based

learning program. Those internships help them evaluate the talent pipeline of new entry-level workers who could move right out of high school and into their field.

You're fairly bullish about how North Branch is progressing on all of this. What's your vision for how that educational process might evolve?

Clint: My vision for this school is built around a concept called "Choice, not Chance" that I used as a basketball coach. We have choices every day that directly influence our future. Once high school kids understand how things they do now will impact their future — and how those things are within their control — then it's up to me and our staff to provide them with relevant opportunities. Those choices are going to evolve with what the industry needs.

The second part is called the Big Blur, a concept that blends the high school setting and post-secondary classes with work-based learning. I see that scaling out more in the next five years: More kids taking college-level courses in career and technical education and more kids leaving school during the day to do internships, externships, or apprenticeships. So, when they leave high school, they feel confident about whatever education choices they need to make to start their professional career faster.

Courtesy of Enterprise Minnesota





# **2024 Youth Skills Training Grant Recipients**



Seventeen partnerships across Minnesota will receive funding to develop and expand programs to offer meaningful career exposure and paid work experience for students 16 years of age and older.

The grants are part of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's (DLI) Youth Skills Training (YST) program that was signed into law in 2017 with bipartisan support to create and provide employment training for student learners ages 16 and older in high-growth, high-demand occupa-

"These Youth Skills Training partnership grants will help high school students throughout Minnesota find pathways to high-growth, high-demand occupations and

allow them to participate in safe, meaningful work experiences in their community," said Nicole Blissenbach, DLI commissioner. "Thank you to everyone who has supported this program."

lowing 17 partnerships, which will receive and split \$1.5 million in funding to be used for programs operating from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2026. The partnerships will offer safe, meaningful work experience in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care and information technology.

Albert Lea Area Schools

YST grants will be awarded to the fol-

https://www.alschools.org

**Bemidji Career Academies** 

https://bemidjicareeracademies.com

Cambridge-Isanti Public School District

https://www.c-ischools.org

**Detroit Lakes Public Schools** 

https://www.dlschools.net

Fergus Falls High School

https://www.fergusotters.org

**Great River School (St. Paul)** https://www.greatriverschool.org

**Hennepin West Consortium** 

**Hermantown Community Schools** 

https://www.hermantown.k12.mn.us

**Itasca Area Schools Collaborative** https://www.iasc.k12.mn.us

Minneapolis Public Schools - Camden

https://www.mpschools.org

Minneapolis Public Schools - Wellstone **International High School** 

https://wellstone.mpschools.org

**Moorhead Public Schools** https://www.isd152.org

New Prague Area Schools

https://www.npaschools.org

Parkers Prairie School District https://www.isd547.org

**Perham Schools** 

https://perhamschools.org

**ROCORI School District** 

https://www.rocori.k12.mn.us

**Staples-Motley School District** 

https://www.isd2170.org

Grants can be used to create programs, recruit students and employers, provide training, transport students and pay for industry-related student certifications. An eighth round of grant applications will open in winter 2024.

For more information about Youth Skills Training contact Rich Wessels, program manager, at 651-284-5184 or rich.wessels@ state.mn.us; Jo Daggett, program consultant, at 651-284-5354 or jo.daggett@state.mn.us; or Fave Blough, program specialist, at 651-284-5341 or fave.blough@state.mn.us; Learn more online at dli.mn.gov/YST.

# Launch Your Future Today (LYFT) Impact Funding Continued from Page 14

fabrication or CAD/3D designing will be able to use the programs and the machine itself.

Local businesses have expressed interest in partnering with us to help our students to be career and industry ready upon completion of high school. Each of these partners will help with the operation, maintenance, and education needed so that students will be able to learn and use industry-grade tools and equip-

For more information contact Adam Manderfeld at adam.manderfeld@jccschools. net or 507-847-5310.

www.jccschools.com



#### Ortonville School District

\$7,500 Lyft Innovation Grant - Welding Simulator

Students will use the welding simulator to improve their skills and will transition to actual welders that are state-of-the-art equipment. The students will be able to use the simulator to stick weld and mig weld without actually using metal and all of the supplies required for real welding. It also will be in a format similar to a gaming system, allowing



students to overcome any fears they might have and concentrate on learning the skills required to weld.

Having a welding simulator in our school will benefit students in some of the following

#### Increase practice opportunities and repetition without increasing consumable cost.

All students will have the opportunity to improve all the skills needed to weld without the worry of high voltage, hot metal, damage to their eyes, or wasting other consumable resources.

#### To build confidence prior to live welding.

Students will have the time to concentrate on building skills without worrying about making uncorrectable errors that are associated with live welding.

#### The welding simulator will enable our students to refine all welding skills.

They will learn proper techniques and explore welding career paths while saving on costly consumables. With a simulator kids can pick up the electrode and start working to build muscle memory and skills.

#### To attract students to the welding program.

The simulator can be used at any school event, like career day or an open house, to let students see what welding is like. Students can try welding on the simulator without having to worry about sparks, the heat, or fire that might turn students away from welding.

With this welding program, we will be able to better engage today's students in high demand, high skill, high wage, careers. Using virtual reality simulation tools which help CTE instructors step out of their comfort zone and engage students in welding and manufacturing careers, provides hands-on, real-world opportunities to learn many valuable trade skills.

A local manufacturing business has taken an interest in the success of our program in hopes of sparking an interest in the students to consider a career in welding and fabrication. They have donated material, helped provide guidance to the teacher and will be actively participating with the students to help

provide real-time knowledge and experience. They have expressed a commitment to donate resources now and in the future to the students and this program.

With this school's dedication to teaching lifelong skills, the business partnerships, the needed tools, and the instructor's passion to bring this all together, students will find accomplishment in the completion of each of the classes offered and have a great foundation for a lifelong career in welding and fabrication.

For more information contact Joe Eustice at joe.eustice@ortonville.k12.mn.us.

ortonville.k12.mn.us



#### **Montevideo Public Schools**

\$11,250 Lyft Innovation Grant - Montevideo Fabrication and Manufacturing

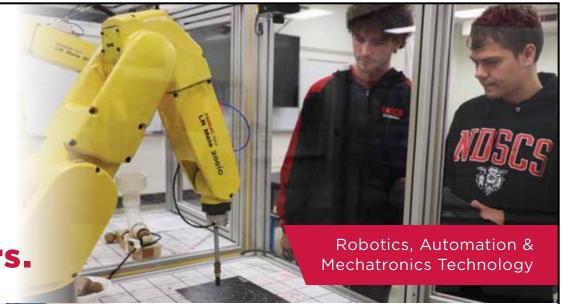
Montevideo Fabrication and Manufacturing will be a student-run business beginning within the Furniture Production class in the Industrial Arts/Technology department.

This project will create a new pathway

**Continued on Page 20** 

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# **CTE/Manufacturing**

# Building the Next Generation of Manufacturers — It's up to ALL of us!



Hope Riska, Productivity Inc Education & Events

How many times have you looked at different products in your home and wondered, "How was this made?" Or, when you go to the doctor (or even hospital) and ask yourself, "Who had the idea for THAT life-saving device?" Better yet, do you ever drive by companies and ask, "I wonder what they do or make?" Well, you are asking about MANUFACTURING

When we look at anything in our daily

lives — from things as simple as our toothbrush, cereal box (or bowl), the spoon you eat the cereal with . . . or even anything to do with technology (phone, electronics, automotive, etc.) or look around in vour home . . . what about the house itself? Everything we see, feel, hear has been manufactured. What would happen if it all went away and you

couldn't BUY anything anymore?

One of OUR responsibilities is to help the next generation (and current) keep the world going! But how do we encourage them to do so? By educating them on HOW and WHY things are made and how THEY can help to continue (or improve) for the future generations. Today's generation is all about making a difference, being sustainable and let's face it ... THEY are responsible for the FUTURE.

Productivity Inc helps promote (and encourage) today's generation — and even

OUR generation — to look at what they can DO to make a difference and even carry on legacies is by supporting Manufacturing Education. One of the ways we do so is through our Biennial Machine Tool Show called "Oktoberfest" and by devoting the first day TO Education by holding an event called "Oktoberfest Student/Career Day" in which we invite High Schools and Post-Secondary students to come and explore Manufacturing Careers by showing them the latest (and greatest) technology in Manufacturing. Our next event is Fall of 2025.

Another way we focus on building the next generation is to host private tours for schools and robotics teams at Productivity to highlight why they should consider Manufacturing Pathways. We also participate in Career Fairs, as well as Educator Conferences to try reach out and encourage teachers to keep on making a difference in the future of manufacturing by continuing to share their passion for the industry.

A way we can ALL share the great future in manufacturing (and trades) is to promote and/or host a Manufacturing Day Tour/event as part of the Statewide Tour of Manufacturing. Recently, I was on the panel for a webinar series on the Statewide Tour through Minnesota Manufactured and the Minnesota State Advanced Manufacturing Center of

Excellence. Although October is generally Manufacturing Month, hosting a tour (large or small) doesn't have to be in October – you can open your doors to students and your community anytime! Why not reach out to your local community and invite them to visit your school or company? If we don't reach out, how will people know about the GREAT opportunities that await through careers in manufacturing?

A FUN way to get students excited about careers in manufacturing is the Statewide Tour Student Video Contest. Students are encouraged to create a video that highlights the importance of manufacturing in Minnesota. Three prizes will be awarded to the winning students as determined by the Statewide Tour Video committee. Click on the link about to find out how to get started.

Why a career in Manufacturing? I always use my Mom as my best example. She has a Medtronic Pacemaker and Defibrillator. She is still with us today because of MANUFACTURING. If nobody had the IDEA, nobody had the SKILLS to design, build and sell the life-saving device, she would not be here. I thank God and Manufacturing every day – we are truly blessed.

What has manufacturing done to make a difference in YOUR life?

# **Detroit Lakes High School** — *Preparing Students for Real-World Success*

**Continued from Page 1** 



ing. The Transportation Technology pathway, focusing on automotive and diesel technology, will provide students with the tools they need to enter high-demand technical careers.

These investments are part of our vision to create sustainable career pathways. Our academies blend academic learning with technical training, meeting the evolving demands of the job market and providing students with valuable skills for their future.

#### **Building Strong Partnerships**

One of the pillars of our Career Academies is our strong partnerships with local businesses and industry leaders. These relationships are key to the program's success,

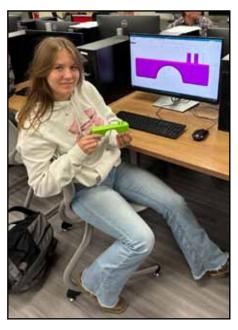
offering students exposure to real-world situations and mentorship from professionals. Local employers not only provide valuable work-based learning but also help shape our curriculum to ensure it stays relevant and aligned with industry standards.

By working closely with these partners, we ensure our students graduate with a clear understanding of available career opportunities and the skills to seize them. This collaboration also benefits the local economy by cultivating a skilled workforce for high-demand sectors like engineering, manufacturing, and transportation.

#### **Looking Ahead**

The Youth Skills Training grant marks an important milestone in the growth of DLHS's Career Academies. Our mission is to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality education that prepares them to be "College Ready, Career Ready, and Life Ready!" By focusing on career readiness, we empower students to make informed decisions about their futures.

DLHS remains committed to expanding our programs, strengthening our partnerships with local industries, and preparing students to tackle tomorrow's challenges and opportunities. With the ongoing support of our



community, educators, and industry partners, we will continue to provide students with the skills and experiences they need to succeed.





# Forging Tomorrow's TALENTS Today



Let's forge the next generation of manufacturing innovators together. Productivity Inc provides the tools, technology, tours, and partnerships you need to ignite your students' passion for cutting-edge careers that will shape our world.

## **Scholarships and Internship Opportunities**



- The only program of its kind in Minnesota
- Creating a direct career pathway for graduates
- Offering eligible students scholarships and internship opportunities





Scan for more information about the CNC Service Technician program.













## **Sponsorship and Team Scholarships**

# Productivity's Manufacturing Education Initiative with Haas Automation Inc.

We are proud to partner with Haas Automation, Inc. to support manufacturing education by providing training, support, demonstrations, tooling applications, and school discounts on CNC machines, as well as scholarship and sponsorship opportunities through the Gene Haas Foundation.





Scan for more information about the Gene Haas Foundation.

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For more information on careers at Productivity, contact hrapply@productivity.com





Sponsorships & Scholarship opportunities for schools through the Gene Haas Foundation. Learn more at ghaasfoundation.org

## **CTE/Manufacturing**



# Albert Lea Area Schools Receives Significant Grant to Enhance Career and Technical Education for Students



Jeff Halverson Executive Director of Careers, Technology, and Innovation Albert Lea Area Schools

Albert Lea Area Schools — Independent School District 241 is excited to announce it has received a grant of \$77,600 as part of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's Youth Skills Training (YST) program. This initiative is focused on enriching career and technical education and providing meaningful work experience for students aged 16

and older throughout Minnesota. The funding is scheduled for use over 2 years.

Over \$33,000 from the grant will be allocated for state-of-the-art purchasing welding machines, giving students access to the modern and relevant tools currently used in the industry. This investment comes at an opportune time, as there is a significant demand for skilled welders in the Southeast Minnesota region. The funding will be directed towards enhancing our career and technical education programs, with a specific focus on advanced welding. Enrollment in Welding courses at Albert Lea High School (ALHS) is at its highest since the school

moved to its current location in 2000. This year also marked the first time ALHS offered a welding course for college credit in partnership with Riverland Community College, taught by ALHS faculty member Jeff Jenson. Currently, the course is conducted at Riverland's Albert Lea campus because our high school's equipment does not support the diverse welding techniques required for the course objectives.

Moreover, a portion of the grant funds will be allocated for the appointment of a

part-time Youth Skills Training Coordinator, which will be a high school teacher licensed as a Work Based Learning instructor will serve as an ambassador for the program and serve as a bridge between the high school and area employers. This assignment will include supervision of the students enrolled in these career experience opportunities. This role is vital for the development of our local program and ensures coherence between the training students have received within their Career Technical Education classrooms and their onsite experiences with area employers.

In addition to technological enhancements, the grant supports our students in obtaining their Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10 (OSHA10) safety certification, ensuring students have fundamental knowledge and training on essential workplace safety and health practices.

Students from grades 6–12 will also benefit from several career exploration field trips funded by this grant. One such field trip includes a 6th grade field trip to area manufacturers as a means to introduce students to the manufacturing pathway. These excursions are designed to widen students' perspectives and introduce them to potential career paths in high-demand sectors.

This funding coincides with our decadelong partnership with a local manufacturer that has been providing youth apprenticeships to our students. These apprenticeships offer students invaluable learning experiences, integrating real-world manufacturing experience with our educational curriculum, in addition to wages and academic credit.

"We are very excited about what this means for our students and the Career and Technical Education opportunities that will follow. While this grant application focused on the manufacturing arm of the Youth Skills Training program, we are eager to expand our local program into other career areas. As such, we look forward to engaging with our local partners and employers within those industries."

Jeff Halverson,
 Executive Director of Careers,
 Technology, and Innovation

Albert Lea Area Schools is committed to utilizing this opportunity to improve our educational offerings and to equip our students with the skills needed for both current and future job markets. We are grateful for the support from the YST program and eagerly anticipate our students' success as they gain hands-on experience and insight into potential future careers.

www.alschools.org

# Launch Your Future Today (LYFT) Impact Funding Continued from Page 16

option in Manufacturing and Fabrication for our students by aligning with industry norms, incorporating job related skills within a business, and creating specialty or marketed items to fill a need.

The students will design, manufacture and fabricate products to be sold in the community. A local graphics/print business will partner with us by being active in our classrooms, working with students and designing software, using technologies and discussing business principles. The students will also be participating in the workspace at the graphics business.

Additionally, the project will reach students in other classes (Marketing, Accounting, Special Education, Agriculture, Art, CADD, etc..) as cross-curricular lessons will be implemented.

The manufacturing and fabrication business course will be open to 10th through 12th grade students. Special assignments (project manager, project lead, marketing, designer, woodworker, etc..) may be assigned based on student experience and interest as assessed during the class.

The class will decide on a few standard



products that will be available for customers to order. Additionally, the custom order side of the business will be designed to engage the student from the beginning to end of the manufacturing and sales cycle, holding students accountable to complete a quality product.

Example products could include cutting boards, cornhole boards, coffee and end tables,

live edge works of art, and home decor signs.

We will also utilize connections with manufacturing companies in our area, many of which attend our annual career fair. Local industry tours will be planned, and our local industry experts will be asked to come into our classroom to see the students' work in various stages.

Students will be involved in the whole business process and will learn about related occupations as well, such as retail sales, management, finance and entrepreneurship.

Our goal for Montevideo Fabrication and Manufacturing is that it will become a self-sufficient program within our school and community. We believe the class will grow exponentially and are continually seeking out more business partners, purchasing equipment that aligns with industry standards, creating communication skills through client/fabricator relations and bringing a real-life model for cross-curricular subjects to be involved. We will be investing in our students, community, and local businesses by continually growing this class for years to come.

montevideoschools.org

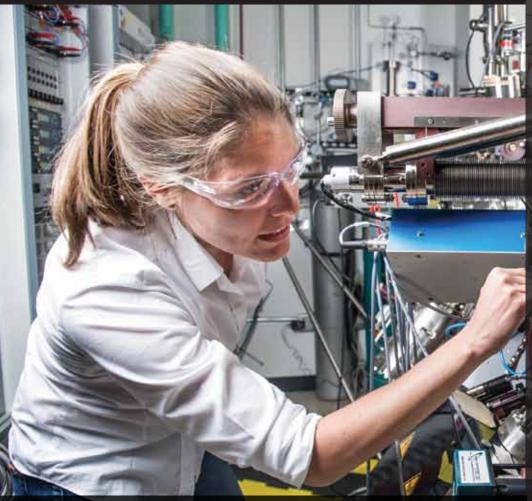




# College of Science and Engineering

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- DEED Grant for RoboticsTeams and STEM InternshipPrograms
- Huskies Invent A non-stop weekend "inventa-thon" for collaboration with businesses and students.
- Husky Make It Space Bring ideas to life, from design to the creation of visual models/ functional prototypes.

#### America's Cutting Edge (ACE) CNC Training

- CNC training to Minnesota for high school students, teachers and industry employees.
- Program includes mobile HAAS mills and Forest Scientific mills.
- Training, equipment and supplies available at no cost.

#### **Degree Options**

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 An applied construction field that provides knowledge and skills to manage construction of residential and commercial properties.



Technology Education
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Manufacturing
 Engineering Technology

An applied algebra-based engineering field that looks for better ways to manufacture products. This includes reducing cycle times, maintaining quality, increasing safety, and keeping costs reasonable.



(Scan the QR codes to learn more about each program)

- Graduate Programs
  - Technology Education Master's Degree
  - Career and Technical Education (CTE)
     Graduate Certificate
  - Work Based Learning (WBL) Graduate Certificate

Contact: Kurt Helgeson E-mail: krhelgeson@stcloudstate.edu Phone: 320-308-3127

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www.stcloudstate.edu/ets



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## **CTE/Manufacturing**



# **Saints Manufacturing Student Success**



By Ian Wreisner, ABC Newspapers

Walking into Saints Manufacturing, it would be easy to mistake the space as a bona fide factory floor. Each machine is stationed by a knowledgeable student, product is getting prepared for real-world use and the communication making sure everything is running smoothly and safely is constant. The only difference is that this is taking place in a St. Francis High School classroom.

The Saints Manufacturing program, headed by instructor Erik Trost, is a series of elective classes that teaches students aspects of manufacturing like welding, machining, machine programming, print reading and more — ranging from quoting a job to running a shop floor.

"In this class, the learning objectives change daily because it's a live, living thing," Trost said. "Different tasks come in, different orders come in, so then we have to shift gears. They're still working on the skill building things they've learned in the prerequisite courses, but now we're talking about sequencing jobs, logistics, making sure we're processing the right materials."

The Saints Manufacturing class is the highest step in the manufacturing program, which has three prerequisite courses that teach students how to safely operate each piece of equipment in the lab, including a machine tools class, that qualifies students for the manufacturing class.

Saints Manufacturing takes on orders from the community, with its largest collaborator being the Minnesota Department of Transportation. As Trost talked about the program, students were currently working on manufacturing carts that would store plows during the off-season and suspension pieces that would support them on their trucks during next season. Students are involved during the whole process, from quoting MNDOT for time and supplies up to shipping the parts out.

"Our students are having to take a look at a project from start to finish," Trost said. "It's a real job, for a real customer, for real money."

All of the funds received by Saints Manufacturing goes right back into the program. A pre-pandemic expansion to the lab saw the space double in size, and slots for the elective classes continue to fill up. Saints Manufacturing is operating at a capacity that Trost previously hadn't expected.

"I never thought in a million years we'd have three CNC (computer numerical control) mills sitting on our floor at a high school, where there's times we could use a fourth," Trost said. "I never thought we'd be running weld positioners. With some of the MNDOT stuff we've had to upgrade our welding fleet. These are jobs that students have quoted and worked through."

Trost emphasized that the class does not take out contracts, but work agreements. That means that there's less of a focus on deadlines and a greater emphasis on learning, with the understanding that the job will happen at a pace the students can handle. Customers are receptive to the agreement, and happy to provide the work as Brian McDonald with MNDOT explained.

"We understand it's a class," McDonald said. "I'm heavily involved, I'm training my guys here to have that understanding that we look down the road to the stuff we need so we can give those guys plenty of time to get the things completed. Some of the simpler parts, they're turning them around as fast or faster than we'd get from private industry."

The agreement works well for Trost, too, who intentionally tries to select jobs that will be most beneficial for his students. Reasonably sized orders lead to more learning for students who will have to switch parts more often, keeping students engaged and on their toes. Large orders aren't out of the ques-

tion, but "lose their educational value" when students are making one kind of component across multiple class periods.

McDonald was receptive to the partnership ever since Trost reached out about it. MNDOT was looking for such an opportunity, and were happy to provide opportunities to train the next workforce.

"It's been awesome," McDonald said. "It's a great program, it's a win-win for both of us. Obviously the kids are getting an education out of it and we're getting a quality product in a timely fashion. He's building the next workforce, that's what he's doing. Those kids, the benefits they're getting out of it are going way beyond welding and machining. They're building real-world skills."

With the way that the program has come together, with an education-first approach and with understanding partnerships, Trost says that this sort of self-discovery is exactly what's intended within the program.

"It's a great opportunity," Trost said. "If students think maybe they want to go into welding, that student can come in and try it — and if they don't like it, they can try machining

or another facet of manufacturing. The important part is that it's not a business, it's a class. You can

switch gears."

Trost has received welcome responses outside of the program, as well. Saints Manufacturing finds plenty of support with the St. Francis School Board.

Local businesses have donated equipment and experience to Saints Manufacturing, with

Trost reporting one business donating upwards of six figures in equipment and materials. For Trost, though, the most important thing that his students can receive is knowledge.

"I'm not worried as much about the financial piece as we've got most of that covered," Trost said. "The way that you can be most beneficial to this program is your intellectual support. We can always use help with machining, help with fabrication and working with students."

Looking forward, Trost hopes the program can give more back to the students. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Saints Manufacturing program was in talks with the state legislature to get a bill passed that would allow program profits to go toward scholarships for its graduating students.

"Within five years, the biggest thing I'd like to see moving forward is that scholarship program put in place," Trost said. "How can this become more advantageous, more beneficial to my students? . . . I want to make sure I'm doing what's best for students from a scholarship perspective. ... When COVID hit, not only were we on the backburner, we fell off the stove at that point. We're trying to figure out what that looks like moving ahead. Who do we need to get to the table to start having those conversations again?"

In the meantime, though, Trost and Saints Manufacturing will continue to focus on building well-rounded learners and workers, maintaining and growing partnerships with their local community and putting students ahead of the curve when they take their next steps outside of the program.

"When kids get done with Saints Manufacturing they have a leg up," Trost said. "They can say they're from Saints Manufacturing, and people know what that means."

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www.isd15.org





## **MESPA Announces Six Schools Awarded Minnesota School of Excellence Designation**

The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) is proud to announce that six outstanding schools across the state have earned the prestigious Minnesota School of Excellence (SOE) designation for 2024.

The Minnesota School of Excellence program, designed and implemented by MESPA, is a rigorous school improvement process that aligns with national and state standards for quality and effectiveness. Schools awarded the SOE designation have undergone a comprehensive self-study, driven by input from staff, students, and the community, and have demonstrated exceptional dedication to enhancing educational practices, fostering a positive school culture, and promoting continuous improvement.

Each of the awarded schools has excelled in different ways, reflecting the diverse strengths of their communities.

#### Cohasset Elementary in Cohasset, MN Led by Principal Jill Wheelock



Cohasset Elementary excels in holistic, experiential learning by connecting students with community experts. Their initiatives include an overnight trip to the Laurentian Environmental Learning Center, where students explore American Indian traditions, winter survival skills, and wildlife. They also learn from phenology expert John Latimer, who leads nature walks and classroom discussions on the relationship between seasons, nature, and human impact. Students then share their findings on a local radio station. These opportunities enrich students' education by extending learning beyond the classroom, fostering a deeper connection to their community and the environment.

"All of us at Cohasset Elementary are proud to accept the MN School of Excellence Award," reflected Jill Wheelock, principal of the school. "We strived to create a system for high levels of student achievement for all students in our community school. Through hard work, dedication, collaboration and shared leadership over the past nine years, we have achieved our

goal and have put practices in place that will continue to increase student achievement in years to come."

www.isd318.org cohasset



#### Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Elementary in Dilworth, MN Led by Principal Wayne LePard



Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Elementary, stood out for the way they capitalize on the leadership skills of others. As they reflected in their application, "This involves recognizing and leveraging the diverse strengths, expertise, and experiences of individuals within our school. By empowering and supporting emerging leaders, fostering collaboration, and creating opportunities for growth and development, we are attempting to maximize the collective potential of our school team." Ultimately, after merging two schools two years ago, they developed a shared vision and created over 30 leadership opportunities for stakeholders. This approach strengthens the school community, enhances teamwork, and ensures that diverse perspectives contribute to the school's success, leading to a more cohesive and effective educational environment.

"We have so much school and community pride in our school," reflected Wayne LePard, principal of Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Elementary. "We strive for excellence each day in the best interest of our students. I am so proud of our leadership team, all of our school staff members, our parent and community support and most importantly to our wonderful students. It's always a great day at DGF Elementary School."

www.dgf.k12.mn.us/ schools/dgf-elementary

# Humphrey Elementary in Waverly, MN

**Led by Principal Jennifer Olson** 



Humphrey Elementary stood out for its Laker Proud initiative and community engagement. As they reflected in their application, "Kindergarten through 4th grade students forge a unique 'family' partnership that transcends age and grade levels. [...] A newer initiative and additional achievement is our 4th grade mentorship program which nurtures student relationships beyond our school walls. It extends to the broader community, linking elementary students with their high school counterparts." These efforts strengthen the school community by fostering a sense of belonging for each student and builds a supportive network, strengthening the Waverly community.

"The School of Excellence application and validation process was an in-depth and a collective team effort." reflected Jennifer Olson, Principal of Humphrey Elementary. "It offered an opportunity to highlight our strengths as a broader school family (students, staff, families and the greater community), as well as give us a focus on growth areas and a path in which to invest our time moving forward. As we commit to continue improving upon an already great school community, we are honored to receive the School of Excellence Award. As Humphrey Elementary's principal, I am incredibly proud of our Laker family, the dedication, time, talents invested, and our relationships built with our students, school and community to make Humphrey a wonderful place to learn and grow. Every Laker, Every Day!"

hlww.k12.mn.us/hes



#### Prairie Elementary in Worthington, MN Led by Principal Heidi Meyer



Prairie Elementary stood out because of its inclusive and effective family outreach. As they reflected in their application, "We continually have [conference] attendance hovering around 95%. We believe conferences are so highly attended because we have created a welcoming space for all families and make every effort to communicate with each and every one of them, regardless of language barriers. Our school also understands the importance of communicating with diverse populations by having onsite interpreters available every day, sending home information in multiple languages, and striving to make sure that all families have the ability to receive information." As Prairie Elementary fosters strong family engagement, it ensures that every family, regardless of their background or language, is actively involved in their child's education, leading to better student outcomes and a more connected school community.

"The staff at Prairie Elementary embrace a focus on student-centered continuous improvement," commented Heidi Meyer, Principal of Prairie Elementary. "Each year, our leadership team conducts a comprehensive needs assessment, which informs our strategic plan for the year. The six standards identified in the School of Excellence process aligned perfectly with our priorities. The leadership team accepted the challenge and rigor of the SOE's evaluation protocols, gathering information and analyzing the data from the stakeholder surveys. In many ways we were validated for the amazing work we do every day-while also providing a road map for what we can do to strengthen and improve. Receiving the SOE award is a testament to a highly talented and dedicated staff."

> www.isd518.net/ schools/pe



## Melissa Oberg Celebrates 2024 National Rural Teacher of the Year Award



National Rural Education Association (NREA) and Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA) are excited to announce and introduce the 2024 National Rural Teacher of the Year – Minnesota's very own Melissa Oberg! Melissa, a special education teacher at Cook County Schools in Grand Marais, was a 2023 MREA Educator of Excellence.

Melissa began her work in education as a paraprofessional. After some gentle nudging and support by teachers, Melissa began working toward her special education licensure and earned this through the Naadamaadiwin Tribal Special Education Cohort and later earned her master's in education. Melissa is committed to overcoming obstacles and ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive, driven by the belief that challenges can lead to growth and success with the right support.

Oberg creates unique experiences, meaningful peer-to-peer connections with other students and career skills opportunities for her special education students. She continually goes above and beyond to give her students incredible opportunities.

#### A Career that Chose Her

After leaving the corporate world searching for something more meaningful, Melissa Oberg fell in love with the hard, but rewarding work, of teaching special education at Cook County Public Schools in Grand Marais, Minnesota.

Sue Nelson, a former teacher, co-worker and parent at Cook County Schools nominated Melissa for the Educator of Excellence award saying "We may be one of the most isolated districts in the state, but thanks to Melissa Oberg we are the most inclusive."

Melissa spends her days at Cook County schools pouring into students with significant disabilities, helping them reach their goals and potential and feel a sense of belonging.

In her decade at Cook County Schools, Melissa has developed many programs that focus on helping special education students feel included, safe, and that they belong. A few of these programs are the Unified Club, Special Olympics bowling, Unified Gym,



Cathy's Coffee Cart, daily Staff errand runs by special education students, Common Ground Curriculum, and Special Education Track and Field Day at University of Minnesota Duluth. Melissa has also spearheaded a successful program within the school where mainstreamed high schoolers are paired up with special education students. This program helps foster a school culture of inclusiveness, empathy, and relationships.

#### **Rural Community Involvement**

One of Melissa's passions in serving her students is preparing them for and helping them find meaningful employment within their small community. That often involves including the local community to support the efforts of her classroom.

In her reflection statement, Melissa

shared. "When students were showing up without basic hygiene completed, I was able to find a donor to fund a "Feel Good Cart" for students to access when they didn't have necessary hygiene supplies. I found mentor students to assist with combing and braiding hair, trimming nails and giving reminders that everyone is beautiful. In recognizing the need for and importance of transition and work skills, I found a

local donor to purchase start-up supplies for a Coffee Cart. Now, my classroom has its very own student run business where my students can focus on communication, social and work skills, reading, following task instructions and more. Sometimes you can even find us taking our Coffee Cart into the community to help establish community relationships and spread awareness of inclusion in the workplace. As a Minnesota rural educator, I am proud of how my community has shown up for my students."

Melissa will be honored at the MREA Awards Banquet, which kicks off the 2024 Greater Education Summit on November 17.

cookcountyschools.org



# Four Were 2023 MREA Educators of Excellence

In addition to Melissa Oberb (above) three other educators were named 2023 Educators of Excellents by MREA.

## Carin Hagemeyer Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa School District



For 42 years, Carin Hagemeyer has been making the 60-minute drive each way to teach in the Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa School District. Her passion and commitment for her students can easily be seen within the school

building. The respect Carin has earned in her four decades of teaching is evident as she connects with students of all ages, teaching them real-life skills from her classroom.

www.bbejaguars.org



**Kristin Doeden**Worthington School District



Known for going the extra mile for her students, Kristin Doeden is a leader in her classroom, school building, and district. Kris continuously goes out of her way to help her students, many of whom are from immigrant families, feel welcomed, respected, and supported. Kris's impact can also be seen in the way she's helped create avenues for paraprofessionals to achieve their license – helping fill a much-needed gap in Worthington.

www.isd518.net



**Angie Hurtig** Bertha-Hewitt School District



There's no shortage of energy when you walk into Angie Hurtig's second grade class-room at Bertha-Hewitt Public Schools. Her hands-on teaching style gives her students a unique, interactive learning experience that is often remembered for a lifetime. From Hurtig's Hospital to Camping Week, Angie's creativity and love of teaching shines bright.

www.isd786.org



This is the second year in a row that a rural Minnesota teacher has earned the National Rural Teacher of the Year honor! In 2023, Jenny Maras from Morris Area Public Schools was NREA's National Rural Teacher of the Year.

MREA is both proud and honored to elevate such incredible educators and have their work recognized and celebrated nationwide

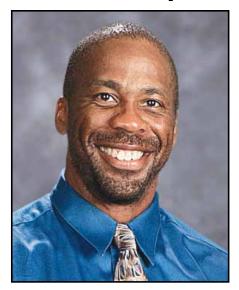
Courtesy of Minnesota Rural Education Association

www.mreavoice.org

# W

## **Congratulations!**

## Minneapolis Educator Tracy Byrd is 2024 Minnesota Teacher of the Year



Tracy Byrd, a ninth-grade English language arts teacher at Washburn High School in the Minneapolis school district, is the 2024 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

Byrd is the 60th recipient of the prestigious award, and the third from the Minneapolis district to be named Minnesota Teacher of the Year. An independent selection committee representing Min-



nesota leaders in education, business and government chooses the Teacher of the Year from individuals who are nominated and who then choose to become a candidate

Byrd, a graduate of Washburn, came to a career in education later in life. In 2008, he left a career in the financial field to work in the Wayzata school district, first as a hall supervisor and a coach in football and track and field. During that time, he decided to pursue a teaching degree. He enrolled in a

teacher licensure program and took a position as an achievement specialist to prepare him for full-time teaching.

Upon receiving his teaching credentials from Metropolitan State University in 2017, Byrd chose to return to his alma mater to teach.

Providing fair access to education for all students, something Byrd found lacking in his own experience, is his teaching goal. "True access to education can change the trajectory of a student," he said. "It could be the spark that ignites the flame for a young student into a field they didn't know existed. To me, that is the purpose of education: Not to give them something they already know, but to show them something new and authentic so they can learn and grow."

"Tracy Byrd is the epitome of excellence and integrity in public education," said Katie Murphy-Olsen, an English as an additional language teacher at Minneapolis Edison High School, in her nomination letter for Byrd. "His dedication to the students at Washburn through educating, coaching, advocating and leading is palpable in his work. He exudes a dynamic energy, a kindness to all, and he is incredibly supportive to fellow educators and the Minneapolis community."

washburn.mpschools.org



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# Mahtomedi's Teacher of the Year Builds Connection for Impactful Student Learning



Mahtomedi Public Schools

"These young learners need that caring touch to help them know that they matter. This has lifelong impacts on people. To feel included, important, and that they belong, will set the tone for successful emotional and human development. That starts with Kindergarten. That starts with me."

Lisa Mathies, the 2023-4 Teacher of

the Year at Mahtomedi Public Schools, is a beloved teacher and leader with a reputation for being an impactful mentor to others. The kindergarten team at Wildwood Elementary School describes her as "welcoming, kind, forward-thinking, and a leader who is respected by her team and her colleagues."

Ms. Mathies has taught kindergarten at Mahtomedi Public Schools for 30 years. Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Science degree from St. Cloud State University and a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction. One of the education initiatives she is most proud of being a part of was being on the initial team of teachers who implemented full-day kindergarten at Mahtomedi Public Schools. She notes that receiving the Mahtomedi Teacher of the Year for 2023-24 has made her "feel valued and honored for the work I do."

Building a solid academic and socialemotional foundation for students with a strong classroom community is key to Mathies' teaching philosophy. "As a kindergarten teacher, I get to build a strong educational foundation for young minds, which is very rewarding," she said. "It is a fulfilling job, and I love seeing the progress that each child makes throughout the year, both socially and Mathies working with students academically." Mathies sees building a positive classroom environ-



ment as a critical component of teaching. She shared, "To be effective at that, students need to feel accepted, cared for, and have a sense of belonging. Building relationships with my students is the key to being able to meet that need. This is something that I enjoy and our classroom reaps the benefits of it every day. When students feel like they have a connection with their teacher, it demonstrates to them that they are cared for, acknowledged, and an important part of our classroom."

Mathies shared this about working at Mahtomedi Public Schools, "I feel blessed to work in a school district where the community is involved and supportive of the schools."

Mahtomedi Public Schools covers approximately 28 square miles including the east shore of White Bear Lake and serves Willernie, Mahtomedi, Dellwood, Pine Springs, and portions of Hugo, Lake Elmo, Grant, and White Bear Lake.



## Minnesota Schools of Excellence Continued from Page 23

#### Southview Elementary in Apple Valley, MN **Led by Principal Christine Evans**



Southview Elementary stood out for how it continuously seeks to engage all parents as equal partners in supporting student learning and growth. In their application, they reflected, "...we actively involve diverse perspectives in decision-making processes through forums such as the PTO, Superintendent's Parent Group, and PBIS Team. Additionally, our staff led parent classes, such as the Building Strong Families series, based on principles from the book 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families, fostering a strong partnership between school and home. At Southview Elementary, we leverage diversity as a catalyst for growth and inclusion, ensuring

that every member of our school community thrives academically and socially." This focus on meaningful parental engagement matters because it builds a strong, collaborative community that supports student success. By valuing and incorporating diverse perspectives, Southview creates an inclusive environment where every family feels connected and invested in the educational process, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for all students.

"This recognition is a testament to the dedication, hard work, and collaboration of our entire school community. We have worked diligently to gather feedback from families, students, and staff to assess where we are and to make thoughtful plans for continuous improvement," said Christine Evans, Principal of Southview Elementary. "This award is a reflection of the unwavering commitment of our teachers, the enthusiasm and hard work of our students, and the incredible support from our families. We are so proud of what we have accomplished together, and this recognition is a powerful reminder of what we can achieve when we work as a team. At Southview, we strive to provide the best possible education for every student."

sv.district196.org



#### **Voyager Elementary in** Alexandria, MN **Led by Principal Dana Christenson**





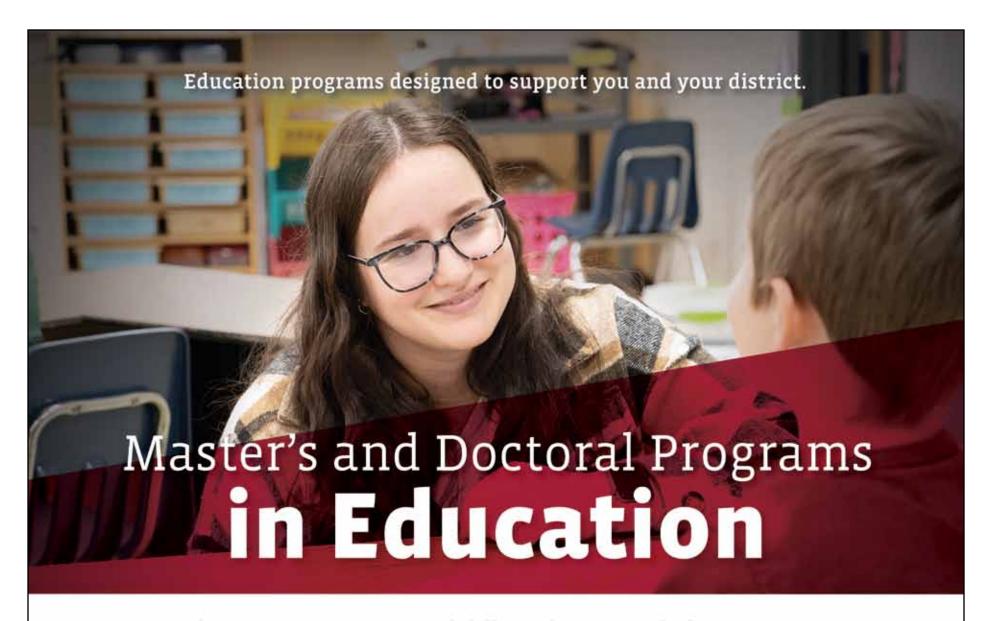
Voyager stood out for embodying learnercentered leadership. As they reflected in their application, "First, we have excellent coaches who meet regularly with teachers to work on the implementation of curricula, reflect together on successes and challenges, and even set up peer observations when necessary. Second, we offer meaningful and relevant professional development, such as collective teacher efficacy, restorative practices, and trauma awareness. Third, our Professional Learning Communities are a means for teams to examine data, reflect, and learn from each other and coaches." These practices matter

because they create a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration, ensuring that every educator is equipped to meet the diverse needs of students. By prioritizing professional growth and reflective practices, Voyager not only enhances teacher effectiveness but also fosters an environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

"In education, it's tempting to rest on the status quo, but in today's ever-changing world, it's important to assess where we are and how we might improve," reflected Dana Christenson, principal of Voyager Elementary. "The SOE Program provides a research-based process to do just that. The process helped us identify and celebrate strengths and target growth areas. All staff - custodians, secretaries, kitchen staff, paraprofessionals, and teachers are hard working, dedicated and committed to students. This award recognizes them for their hard work, their care for students, and their investment in their craft."

voyager.alexschools.org

For more information go to https://www. mespa.net/soe



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