

From Concept to Career: How ROCORI's Technology Center is Transforming Students into Makers



Ryan Hauge,
ROCORI 6-12 Secondary Principal
ROCORI Public Schools

Just half a mile from our high school and middle school campuses, a leased industrial park space is changing the trajectory of hands-on learning at ROCORI. Secured through a lease levy, the ROCORI Tech Center (RTC) was opened to provide middle and high school students with broad, immersive experiences that simply cannot be replicated within traditional classroom walls.

At its core, RTC was built around a key educational philosophy: Students learn to become makers and problem-solvers, rather than simply users of technology. Instead of absorbing isolated engineering concepts from a textbook, students step into a fully equipped, self-standing robotics and

advanced manufacturing facility during the school day. The facility functions as a small-scale modern production environment where students move through the complete industrial workflow—taking an initial concept to CAD design, running digital simulations, producing prototypes through CNC machining or 3D printing, and managing final assembly, testing, and redesign.

By blending mechanical engineering, electrical systems, computer science, materials science, and automation, the center breaks down traditional subject silos. Students gain hands-on proficiency with cutting-edge Industry 4.0 equipment, including industrial and collaborative robotics, sensors, PLCs, computer vision, digital twins, and

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Congratulations 2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year David Davis!



We are beyond excited to announce that Señor David Davis, Music Teacher at Park Spanish Immersion, is the recipient of the 2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year award!

"A major issue in public education is that students often have too little ownership over their own learning," Davis said. "The future of public education can be meaningful, relevant and joyful when we trust students' inherent brilliance, creativity and intrinsic motivation."

We couldn't agree more. We are so proud of your leadership and authenticity, and look forward to seeing you continue to see, inspire and empower each student!

St. Louis Park Public Schools

David Davis believes music belongs to everyone.

As a music teacher at St. Louis Park Public Schools, David Davis has built his

career around breaking barriers and expanding access to learning opportunities for students. His innovative teaching, student-centered approach, and commitment to equity are part of what makes him the 2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

In 2022, Señor Davis had an innovative idea, and he applied for a grant through the Park Public Schools & Community Foundation to purchase groove boxes. These electronic music-making platforms allowed students to create beats, rhythms, and original compositions. Pushing against traditional music norms and standards, his goal was to work against a system rooted in rigid structure, so students who did not see themselves reflected were able to take part in something bigger.

The grant transformed possibilities inside his classroom.

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PUBLISHER/EDITOR: Renee Feight
EDITOR: Andria Reinke
PAGE COMPOSITION: Andrew Clausen
WEBMASTER: Scott Bayerl
SPECIAL ASSISTANT: Allie Zacharias

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New Course Connects Students to the World of Technology



Spring Lake Park Schools

What's happening when you tell a robot to move from Point A to Point B?

Students in Spring Lake Park High School's new Machine & Technology Essentials class are finding out. While working in Scratch, a beginner's coding software, students are learning how to give a machine instructions to help the robot make its way through a maze.

The task is simple enough, but the

thought process needed to code the action is not. Coding is just one small piece of what students will learn in the new, trimester-long elective for grades 9–12.

"This course is kind of the intersection between software and hardware," says Karen Kutz, Innovative and Personalized Learning Specialist.

While coding has been an important part of Spring Lake Park High School's Technology, Engineering and Design (TED) Pathway, educators wanted students to have opportunities to

experience other aspects of the sector - including the physical world of machines and the systems that connect and protect technology.

"We identified that we needed more structure and sequence inside of the TED Pathway," says Martin Lohman, course co-instructor. "We landed on machine and technology to be able to synthesize connections between coding, the physical world - like mechatronics - and then also cybersecurity and building projects for kids to do that weave between them."

The course allows students the opportunity to build foundational skills and knowledge in each area while also exploring their connections.

"We wanted a course that would lay the foundation for students to get an introduction to these areas and explore to see if there is a career path within for them," says Karen.

Zac Humphrey, course co-instructor, understands students may not have a clear career path or technical skill set when entering the classroom. For him, giving students the opportunity to try, explore and follow their interests is at the heart of the class.

A Little Bit of Everything – With a Purpose

The course begins with the study of coding

"Right now, students are essentially learning the ABCs of coding," says Zac.

Using Scratch, students are learning concepts such as sequencing and commands while trying to get a digital robot through a maze. The purpose of the activity is to allow students to build foundational coding knowledge while also seeing how direct communication with machines works.

"I like learning about how robots think," says 11th grader Radwan. "They are very direct and much different than humans - they just do what you tell them to do."

The next unit covers mechatronics - the physical world of machines. Students will learn measurement, drilling, tapping and how to identify different tools.

The final unit is the study of cybersecurity and networking. The goal is to learn how these technologies communicate and connect.

Ultimately, the three areas will come together for a final project where students will be challenged to use the skills they've learned to complete a number of tasks with a robot and robotic arm.

"The coding is all of the software side," Martin explains. "Mechatronics is building. But a lot of those machines run on software. So being able to understand how we code also helps us understand how machines run and how we better support them."

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Building the Future: Hands on Innovation in Wayzata High School's Manufacturing & Technology Programs



Wayzata Public Schools

At Wayzata High School education extends far and traditional textbooks and whiteboards. Within our Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Technology Education department students step into the dynamic, hands-on learning spaces designed to simulate, modern industry environments. By combining technical knowledge with real world application, our students' manufacturing and engineering programs prepare the next generation of innovators problem, solver, and skilled trade professionals

Empowering Students Through Practical Learning:

In an increasingly automated and technology-driven world, providing high school students with exposure to advanced manufacturing and design processes is crucial. At Wayzata,

our curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, structural reasoning, and collaborative problem-solving.

Through introductory and advanced coursework in manufacturing, engineering design, and materials processing, students gain direct experience working with industry-standard machinery, digital design software, and specialized hand and power tools. Whether crafting precision components, working with wood and metals, or troubleshooting mechanical systems, students learn that engineering and manufacturing are as much about process and perseverance as they are about the final product.

From Digital Blueprints to Physical Creations

One of the cornerstones of our manufacturing and technology pathway is the

integration of computer-aided design (CAD) with computer-numerical control (CNC) manufacturing. Students begin by conceptualizing their ideas in 3D modeling environments, learning how to engineer parts to precise tolerances.

Custom Precision Fabrication:

Students design and construct custom functional prototypes, learning how to analyze material properties, calculate exact dimensions, and safely operate equipment such as millers, lathes, and routers.

Prototyping & Additive Manufacturing:

Incorporating 3D printing into traditional manufacturing setups allows students to quickly test, evaluate, and refine their concepts mimicking the rapid prototyping cycles used in modern production facilities.

Cross-Disciplinary Team Projects:

Working in groups, students tackle complex design challenges where they must assign project management roles, budget materials, and ensure quality control throughout the manufacturing lifecycle

Pathways to Post-Secondary Success

Our manufacturing and engineering classes serve as a launching pad for a wide range of future careers. Many graduates move on to two- or four-year degree programs in mechanical, industrial, or manufacturing engineering. Others leverage their hands-on skills to transition directly into high-demand technical apprenticeships, trade certifications, or advanced manufacturing careers across Minnesota.

By bridging the gap between theoretical concept and practical execution, Wayzata High School equips students with the foundation needed to shape the future of industry. Through continued investment in technical education, we remain committed to inspiring the makers, builders, and engineers of tomorrow.

Essential Skill Sets for High-Demand Careers

Beyond technical proficiencies, Wayzata's manufacturing programs focus heavily on developing transferable employability skills.

Safety protocols, precision measurement, quality assurance, and technical communication are integrated into every lesson. Students learn how to read blue-prints, apply applied mathematics to real-world dimensions, and maintain safety-first habits required in industrial and engineering environments.

Equally important are soft skills. Team-based projects push students to communicate clearly, divide work efficiently, adapt to unexpected design flaws, and manage production timelines. These experiences build confidence and foster a strong work ethic that serves students regardless of their post-secondary path.

The Mission of Wayzata Public Schools is to ensure a world-class education that prepares each and every student to thrive today and excel tomorrow in an ever-changing global society.

wayzataschools.org



From Concept to Career Continued from Page 1



embedded controls. When real-world equipment behaves unpredictably, students learn to troubleshoot, diagnose mechanical or

software issues, and iteratively refine their solutions—preparing them for industries as diverse as aerospace, medical technology, defense, energy, and electronics.

Because modern technical fields rely on collaboration, students work in multidisciplinary teams where members specialize in programming, machining, circuit design, testing, or project documentation. This mirrors actual industry practices, teaching students how to communicate effectively and manage complex, multi-faceted projects alongside their technical learning.

The center also serves as the dedicated home base for ROCORI's FIRST Robotics team, who won Minnesota state championships in both 2023 and 2026. The RTC gives this team a place to call home and allows them to take their learning in this dynamic classroom space and transfer it into extra-curricular excellence. RTC instructor and Robotics Coach Jay Femrite highlights the distinct practical advantage the facility brings to the team:

"Having a dedicated space to design, manufacture, and test robotic components has given our varsity team an advantage typically only available to larger school districts. Our facility includes a classroom for design work, a CNC machine that is readily available for cutting parts, and enough floor space to fit a quarter of the game field, which allows us to reliably test autonomous routines on current field elements."

As Alec Tomovic—a computer science professor at Eastern Florida State College who partners with us to lease the facility — observes: "I have seen the program open doors for students that may not have been available to them otherwise . . . The experience they gained working with robotics, advanced manufacturing, 3D printing, CNC equipment, programming, automation, and engineering projects gave them an opportunity to develop practical skills beyond traditional classroom learning. Just as importantly, they learned how to approach real-world engineering problems, work as

part of a team, and take a project from an initial concept through design, fabrication, testing, and improvement. For these students, the facility became a bridge between the classroom and industry. It gave them tangible projects and technical experience that they could discuss with employers and demonstrate during interviews."

By giving ROCORI students space to tinker, fail, iterate, and build, the ROCORI Tech Center is doing more than teaching technology—it is equipping the next generation of innovators and leaders to shape it.

If you are interested in learning more about the ROCORI Technology Center, taking a tour, or how you can incorporate this model into other areas of need in your community, contact Principal Ryan Hauge: hauger@rocori.k12.mn.us

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Career Pathways Take Center Stage at Manufacturing, Engineering and Robotics Open House

Marisa Vette, APR

Director of Communications and Community Relations

White Bear Lake Area Schools

White Bear Lake Area High School recently opened its doors to students, families, community members and industry professionals for a Manufacturing, Engineering & Robotics Open House, offering an inside look at the hands-on learning opportunities available through the school's Career Pathways programs.

Throughout the evening, attendees toured the high school's Manufacturing and Engineering facilities, explored modern design and fabrication labs, connected with students and watched live demonstrations from the White Bear Lake FIRST Robotics Team 2207, the "Bright Bears."

The event highlighted how White Bear Lake Area Schools is preparing students for careers in technical fields through learning experiences that combine creativity, problem-solving, engineering and real-world application.

Guests participated in self-guided and guided tours of the Manufacturing and Engineering Facility. The tours provided industry professionals, parents and community members with an opportunity to see the state-of-the-art spaces where students are developing technical skills and putting classroom learning into practice.

The facilities are a direct result of the community's support of the 2019 Building Our Future Bond Referendum, a \$326 million building bond request that addressed facility needs across the district. A substantial investment was made at White Bear Lake Area High School as part of the effort to bring all district high school students together in one building.

The Manufacturing and Engineering facilities were designed to support Career and Technical Education pathways and create opportunities for students to work with equipment, tools and technologies that mirror those found in today's technical and manufacturing industries. The Open House gave industry partners a firsthand look at the spaces and,



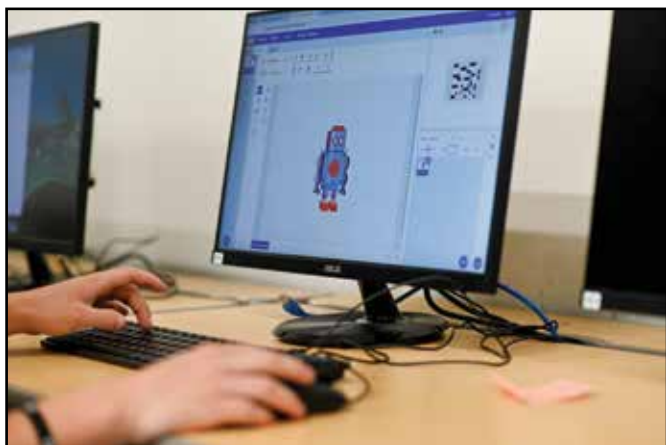
equally important, the students who are using them.

Throughout the evening, live robotics demonstrations in the Student Union showcased the technical innovation and teamwork taking place at the high school. Team 2207

"Bright Bears" demonstrated custom-built competitive robots, highlighting students' skills in programming, mechanical design, engineering and strategy.

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New Course Connects Students to the World of Technology Continued from Page 4



Networking, then, literally connects the areas of study.

"How do we keep it all safe and secure and connected?" Martin asks.

Meeting Students Where They're At

One of the unique things about this course is that students may enter the course with different levels of experience.

Some students have been writing code at home for years; others may not have any coding experience at all. The course was designed to support students with varying degrees of experience.

"We teach it brand new for those who are coming into this course without much knowledge of the course topics," says Martin. "But we are also aware that some students have knowledge or experience that they want to

expand upon. We are going to meet each student where they are at as much as possible."

Radwan is learning and growing a lot in this course.

"I didn't have any knowledge of coding coming in," he says. "The most challenging part is just learning about coding in general. But I am starting to get the hang of it."

Cheemeng, a 9th grader, on the other hand, has prior coding experience. He took the EPIC game design and STEM classes at Westwood Middle School. He is enjoying expanding his knowledge.

"I like the hands-on opportunities and working with a team," says Cheemeng.

Collaboration is Key to this Course.

Before students got started on their coding unit, they participated in a number of team-building activities that helped build communication and collaboration skills that will be needed as they work together on projects.

One of the first activities involved a manufacturing challenge where students participated in designing an assembly line and building paper-bag 'bricks' that met certain criteria. Teams that finished the most bricks while maintaining the integrity of their design

won the challenge. The winning team built 37 bricks.

The activity was intended to show students there is more to the class than building just technical skills.

"A big part of what we're asking or wanting kids to get out of any Pathways course are the career and life competencies," says Karen. "This includes collaboration. It's also about self-direction, learning about yourself, and what you like and what you're interested in."

Discovering Where Technology Can Take You

Students in this course got a taste of career exploration early on when they completed a career-interest project.

"Students began by taking a career profiler to identify potential career paths that might be a good fit for them based on their interests and skills," says Zac. "From their top five career matches, they selected one career to research and compared it to a career related to one of the industries highlighted in this course."

Students researched a number of factors related to both careers. This included job responsibilities, education requirements, the time and money needed to obtain the education, job availability in the metro, and the projected future outlook for the jobs.

Students then used Canva, a graphic design software, to create a poster compar-

ing the two careers and sharing their thoughts on which career they would choose for each category.

The activity allowed students to make connections between what they are learning in class and their potential career interests after high school.

"I am looking to go into the trades after high school," says Cheemeng. "I am planning to take a lot of classes to explore the different options."

Radwan is interested in engineering as a career path after high school.

"I wanted to take this course because I want to go into engineering after high school," he says. "My brother is an engineer and that's a big reason I want to learn more and explore it."

The course also gives students a chance to discover what they don't want to pursue.

"For some kids, maybe this is ruling out that this area doesn't interest them, and that's okay," says Karen. "It's really about the exploration."

Students who find something that interests them, whether software or physical machines or the networking that connects them, will have the opportunity to explore those areas more deeply. There may also be an entirely new interest that they hadn't even considered before taking this course.

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Mark Gravelle's 25 Years Building Futures at Northland



Northland Community Schools

Mark Gravelle, an anchor of the Northland Community Schools staff, is celebrating 25 years of teaching Industrial Technology (IT) classes in Remer. While he started his professional journey as a machinist in the Twin Cities, a desire to return home to Bemidji and an encouraging conversation with a friend led him

to explore a career in education.

Mark entered a fast-track pathway to complete his 5–12 Industrial Arts teaching license in just a year and a half. After student teaching in Blackduck, he found his calling at Northland, accepting the Industrial Tech position—and the rest, as they say, is history.

Mr. Gravelle's program is designed to

guide students through the Construction and Manufacturing Career Pathways. The curriculum offers a comprehensive experience, starting with foundational Exploration classes for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders (IT 6, 7, and 8, and Jr. High Intro to Carpentry). "It really sets the foundation for the things we want to do when they are in high school. They can get started on more challenging projects earlier," Mark says of the integrated middle school courses. Students then progress through technical Experience classes like Woodworking, Welding, Carpentry, and Product Development, leading to high-level Excel courses such as Engineering, Outdoor Recreation Manufacturing, and Super Mileage.

Mark's teaching philosophy centers on value and relevance. "We want to make sure that whatever we produce—whether the students keep it, or if it is for the community—is something that is valued and people remember it," he emphasizes. A testament to this approach is the instant popularity of the Outdoor Recreation Manufacturing class. Last year, students weren't just learning skills; they were applying them by building fish spears, decoys, and fishing rods, culminating in a hands-on fishing field trip to test their creations! The program also engages in valuable community work, with students

recently making a sign for the City of Longville and a fence for the City of Remer.

The skills learned in Mr. Gravelle's classes are universally beneficial. Advanced manufacturing students, Charity and Casey, are a great example. Though they are top-notch in the shop, they are pursuing careers in nursing (Charity) and social work (Casey), respectively. Casey notes, "These are all good skills to have no matter what career you are going into." Both students credit Mr. Gravelle's classes for teaching them vital technical skills like welding, forging, and machine operation. Charity perfectly summed up the value of the experience: "You learn more when it is hands-on."

Northland Community Schools is located in beautiful north central Minnesota. We serve over 350 students in the communities of Outing, Remer, Longville, Boy River and Federal Dam and surrounding areas.

We are the Northland Eagles and we encourage and celebrate "Eagle Pride, School-wide." The mission of Northland Community Schools is to educate and inspire all learners to reach their full potential.

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Labor and Industry Announces 2026 Youth Skills Training Grant Recipients



Seventeen partnerships across Minnesota are receiving funding to develop and expand programs to offer meaningful career exposure and paid work experience for students aged 16 and older.

The grants are part of the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry's (DLI) Youth Skills Training (YST) program.

The YST program encourages, promotes and supports the development of local partnerships between schools, employers and community organizations. These local partnerships provide students with related classroom

instruction, safety training, industry-recognized credentials and paid work experience in high-growth and high-demand occupations in the industries of advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care and information technology.

"Youth Skills Training continues to create meaningful opportunities for young people in communities across Minnesota. With this latest round of grants, we are proud to support 11 new and six returning partnerships as they expand access to safe work experiences for high school students. The strong response

to this grant round reflects the continued momentum and value of this program," said Nicole Blissenbach, DLI commissioner. "We are grateful to our partners for their commitment to helping students build skills, explore careers, and prepare for future success."

The following 17 partnerships will receive and split a total of \$1.5 million in funding for programs operating from July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2028. The partnerships will offer safe, meaningful work experience in advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care and information technology.

- Big Lake Schools
- Breckenridge Public Schools
- Children's Dental Services
- Cloquet High School
- Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton Public Schools
- Eden Prairie Schools
- Farmington High School
- Fergus Falls High School

- Great River School
- HAP (Hmong American Partnership)
- Hopkins Public Schools
- Itasca Area Schools Collaborative
- Parkers Prairie School District
- St. Cloud Area School District
- Stillwater Area High School
- Warroad Public Schools
- Westonka High School

Grants can be used to create programs, recruit students and employers, provide training, transport students and pay for industry-related student certifications. A 10th round of grant applications will open in winter 2026.

More information

For more information about Youth Skills Training, contact us at YST.DLI@state.mn.us or 651-284-5354.

www.dli.mn.gov/yost



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Head of the Class

More high schools opt for programs that lead to manufacturing careers.



It's early June, and even before the bell for fourth hour rings at Centennial High School in Circle Pines, students in Joel Depies' Pathways to Manufacturing class get to work.

They trickle into the expansive shop room and go right to their individual projects. One uses a press brake to shape an anchor she's making for her family's boat, while two others begin manually milling a fixture to be used in cutting and shaping a bolt for snowplows.

Other students have fabricated metal fire pits as they develop their skills. They have also built fixtures for the classroom, such as the metal shelf that Cole Skoy built to store up to 2,000 pounds of materials donated by local companies.

"The welds have to be pretty strong to hold up that kind of weight, especially the ones at the bottom," says Skoy, a senior in that Centennial classroom who hopes to pursue a career in fabrication and welding. "I like working with my hands. I like making things that are useful and work and have their place."

The manufacturing program at Centennial is only in its fourth year, says Depies, but interest among students is high and growing. Centennial is one of dozens of high schools in Minnesota that are strengthening industrial technology and other skills-based programs to help students find careers in the trades. According to Minnesota Career and Technical Education, a statewide organization that recruits and trains teachers, the number of Minnesota high schools offering programs in trades and industry increased by 9% between the 2023-24 school year and the 2024-25 school year.

In the past two years, Centennial's shop has gone from what Depies calls a "hodge-podge of stuff" to a place where students have

equipment similar to what they might use on the job someday, much of it donated by local companies. The classroom includes several welding booths, a sheet metal shear, a press brake, CNC machines and lathes, tools for manual milling, and metal for projects. "We could not have done this without our business partners," Depies says, who has taught for 10 years and joined the staff at Centennial a year ago. "I had not been planning to move here, but when I walked through and saw what they have done, it was amazing."

Independent School District 12, where Centennial is located, has made growing its manufacturing-focused offerings a funding priority in the past few years, says principal Tom Breuning. Like other high schools around the state, Centennial's program has found willing partners among local business leaders, who are eager to introduce students to the skills and opportunities in manufacturing. "We have local companies banging down our door to be part of this," Breuning says.

Same mission, varied approaches

Of Minnesota's 329 public school districts, 253 have some kind of program focusing on construction, transportation, or manufacturing. However, the programs' approaches, even among those dedicated to manufacturing skills, vary widely. What they share is a focus on teaching basic skills to students and introducing them to equipment they might use on the job. Many programs allow students to earn an OSHA-10 certification as part of their coursework.

In the Cambridge-Isanti school district, students can take multiple classes in welding, machining, and computer-aided drafting and design. To give students even more experience,

the district launched the Bluejacket Advanced Manufacturing Program (AMP) in 2025, which introduces students to local manufacturing companies and job opportunities. In addition to plant tours and weekly seminars, students can apply for paid internships at local manufacturers to gain experience.

"We wanted a specialized work-based program for manufacturing," says Katie Soler, career and college coordinator at the district. Funded through a Youth Skills Training grant from the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, 22 Cambridge-Isanti students found jobs at 12 businesses in the area during the 2025-26 school year. "My goal was twofold," says Soler. "I wanted to get the kids on their track, realizing that not all kids are going to go to college and not all should. I also wanted kids to find out they could be contributing members of society, that they could go to work and contribute while still in high school."

Matching students to companies and teaching them job-seeking skills proved an interesting challenge, Soler says. Because they

had to apply for the jobs — something most had not done before — teachers worked with them on job hunting basics, such as writing a resume and making a phone call to set up an interview.

For a generation raised on texting and social media, making a professional phone call and leaving a message was a stretch, Soler says. At the same time, the school sought out companies with a culture that had the flexibility and communication styles younger workers thrive on. "The work ethic is different," Soler says of younger workers. "It's not that they don't want to work. But they have to feel a connection to their work. They want things to be more relevant to them."

The district's matchmaking efforts paid off, Soler says. Most of the students who were placed earned \$14 to \$18 an hour. "Across the board, 100%, students loved working with the companies we partnered with," she says.

In addition to placing students in jobs, Hutchinson High School created an in-house

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Career Pathways Take Center Stage

Continued from Page 8



The event also served as the official kickoff for the 2026-27 FIRST Robotics season. During a special session, students learned how they could become involved with Team 2207, while parents learned about opportunities to support the Bright Bears community. The program includes a high school varsity team for students in grades 9-12, as well as a mentoring program for middle school students in grades 6-8.

The evening offered more than a tour of impressive facilities. It provided a glimpse into the ways White Bear Lake students are learning to design, build, create and solve problems — while gaining skills that can serve them well in college, careers and beyond.

The energy and excitement of the Man-

ufacturing, Engineering & Robotics Open House was captured in the September 25 edition of The Week in 62.4 Seconds, the district's weekly video highlighting happenings, achievements and learning experiences throughout White Bear Lake Area Schools.

For students, families, community members and industry partners, the event was an opportunity to see Career Pathways in action — and to witness firsthand the innovation happening inside White Bear Lake Area High School.

Watch some highlights from the open house here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzD-YOUvslU>.

www.isd624.org



Head of the Class Continued from Page 11



Students working at Tiger Manufacturing at Hutchinson High School

manufacturing center. Tiger Manufacturing has operated for eight years as a student-run company, doing projects for local manufacturers, according to Gary Koehring, technology teacher at the high school. It's received more than \$4 million in donations of cash and equipment from local partners.

Working at Tiger Manufacturing is the capstone to many students' high school careers. Students start taking classes in woodworking, welding, drafting, and machine tooling in ninth and 10th grade, Koehring says. In their junior or senior years, they must apply to work with the student-run company. "We want the program to be impactful," he says. "We want the right kids to be there."

Student projects range from building gates for the local elementary school to producing laser-cut maps of nearby lakes. They've done projects for local manufacturers, as well as the city of Hutchinson. In addition, some students are placed in internships at area companies, such as a Hutchinson-based manufacturer of precision cutting tools.

The company got approval from OSHA and the Youth Skills Training program to have students work in its production facilities. To become an intern, students go through the same interviewing process as regular applicants, says Katie Bruns, chief human resources officer.

Those accepted are trained by skilled company employees and can work three to four hours a day for up to 90 days. "If they enjoyed their time and were a good fit for our company, we would work with them as they furthered their education at the local community college," says Bruns. In the past five years, the company has hired more than a dozen students full or part time through the program; some have worked their way up to leadership positions.

"Getting to work with the candidates when they are young allows us to develop in them the culture and work ethic that our team has," says Bruns. "It helps them with soft skills. If individuals possess good soft skills, everything else is trainable."

Not all students go on to careers in welding or manufacturing, Koehring says, but no matter what their career choice is, students gain valuable life and work skills. "The main benefit is the students learn job responsibilities," says Koehring. "They learn to meet deadlines and maintain quality standards, and they know that is important because they are doing work for a real company, a real project."

Responding to demand

Ten years ago, Westonka High School in Minnetrista formed the Tonkabots, a robotics team that has gone on to win state and regional championships. "When we started looking for mentors for the team, we found them in the manufacturing fields," says Mark Femrite, assistant superintendent for the school district. "That led to great discussions about the needs those companies have."

Next year, the high school will complete its first significant remodel since the building opened in 1972. As part of that \$93.4 million project, a manufacturing lab will be available to students, including a Haas CNC mill, as well as equipment for manual milling, computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing programming, welding, and other skills that machinists need. The machining program is one of three trades-oriented programs the school is introducing in the new building. Along with programs to train students in nursing, emergency medicine, and construction, the manufacturing programs are part of a "recalibrating" of the high school curriculum to reflect industry needs as well as student interest.

More than twice as many students applied for the machining program as slots were available its first year, Femrite says. The nursing and construction programs saw similar levels of interest.

"For us, this was a great opportunity," says Femrite, "because we needed to remodel the high school and we could move this need into the remodeling process."

The goal was to give the students expo-

sure to what manufacturing is and what a career pathway in machining would be.

"We know there is a need," Femrite says. "There are jobs to be filled in these areas."

Beyond the skills

Trades-centered programs also attract students who might not have considered a technical or manufacturing career without this exposure. Margaret Turgeon, a Centennial senior, signed up for metal shop because of her interest in art. In Depies' class, she worked on a bouquet of metal flowers, carefully shaping each petal using a metal snip, then welding the blooms to a metal rod for a stem. "I've always enjoyed doing more hands-on stuff," she says. "I registered late for school and was surprised they had a metal shop. I knew immediately that I wanted to do it. I kind of fell in love with it."

Nearby, seniors Tim Knott and Indy Jones reworked a fixture they made to hold a bolt during CNC shaping. When the pair first took

on the project, they decided to use a 3D-printed plastic fixture, but on the first test run, the fixture cracked. Seeing the problem, they decided to switch to steel, hand-milling a fixture that would give them the same shape but more strength. Learning to troubleshoot problems and solve them is one of the main benefits for students in the class, says Depies.

"Some students just look at things and can figure it out instantly," says Depies, but most build skills gradually through instruction and trial and error. "It's like math," he says. "We start with the lower-level skills. When the machine stops working, they have to troubleshoot."

Original article by Mary Lahr Schier for the Fall, 2026 issue of Enterprise Minnesota. Reprinted with permission.

This article was edited for space. To read the full article, go to <https://www.enterpriseminnesota.org/articles/fall-2026/head-of-the-class>

From Classroom to Company: Montevideo High School Students Launch "HawkBuilt" Manufacturing

Montevideo Public Schools

Walking into the Industrial Arts wing at Montevideo High School, you'll find more than just a standard woodworking class; you'll find a fully operational business. HawkBuilt is a student-run manufacturing educational program that is officially open for business which gives students a front-row seat to the world of professional trade and entrepreneurship.

While some shop classes focus solely on the build, HawkBuilt students are responsible for the entire conception of a product. This comprehensive approach includes:

Client Relations: Students take direct orders from community members and local businesses, maintaining professional communication from the first inquiry to the final delivery.

Project Management: Once an order is placed, students organize their own build teams, delegating tasks and managing timelines to meet deadlines.

Operations & Logistics: Beyond the craftsmanship, the team handles the essential "business" side of the shop—calculating material costs for accurate pricing and ensuring products are professionally packaged for their new owners.

"HawkBuilt is about more than just sawdust and safety glasses," says Industrial Arts teacher Matthew Olson. "It's a career and technical education program designed to provide students with high-level job skills. We are using advanced machinery to create custom products, but we are also building the



soft skills—like communication and problem-solving—that local employers are looking for."

The program specializes in a variety of custom-made goods, including: Wood cutting boards, Corn Hole boards, Cribbage boards, Handcrafted furniture and custom signage to name a few.

By blending traditional woodworking with modern business management, Montevideo High School is ensuring that its graduates are prepared for the workforce.

Support our Student Builders

Are you interested in commissioning a project or learning more about the program? Visit the HawkBuilt website to see our current work and find out how you can support our student entrepreneurs. <https://sites.google.com/montevideoschools.org/hawkbuilt/home>

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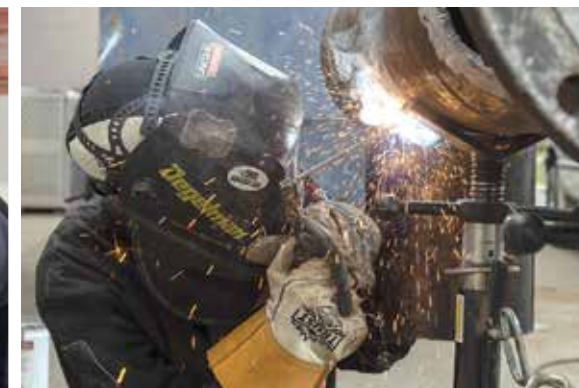
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Hands-On Learning Drives Faribault's Automotive Program



Faribault Public Schools - ISD 656

At Faribault High School, students interested in automotive technology have the opportunity to learn by doing. With approximately 230 students enrolled in automotive courses this year, the program gives students hands-on experience with the systems, tools and technology used in today's automotive industry.

Faribault offers a variety of automotive courses, including Automotive 1, Automotive 2, Exploring Automotive, Powersports, Automotive Services 1 – Brakes, and Automotive Services 2 – Electrical Diagnostics and Engine Performance. The courses allow students to explore automotive technology at different

levels while developing skills that can be applied in the workplace and beyond.

"Automotive Technology is a comprehensive gateway to the skilled trades by combining electrical, mechanical, fabrication, HVAC, hydraulics, and computer diagnostic systems into a single hands-on learning environment," says automotive instructor Greg Boyd.

The program's automotive shop gives students the space and equipment to put those skills into practice. The facility includes six automotive lifts, an alignment rack and diagnostic equipment for multiple vehicle brands. Students also work on vehicles that have been donated to the school, providing opportunities to apply

classroom learning to actual vehicles.

At the beginning of the school year, students focus on safety and shop procedures before moving into the technical skills and systems covered throughout the program. As students progress, they work with increasingly complex automotive systems and learn how to diagnose and solve problems.

"I hope students who have taken any of the classes in the automotive program obtain the confidence to solve complex puzzles and fix real-world problems," says Boyd.

Those real-world connections extend beyond the classroom. Faribault High School has partnerships with Ford and General Motors that provide students with brand-specific training. Students can also take ASE certification tests and have opportunities to earn certifications through Ford and GM.

The program also connects students with local employers through the school's work-based learning program. Current students are working in local automotive shops, giving them an opportunity to experience the industry while still in high school.

Work-based learning allows students to see how the skills they are developing in the classroom translate to an actual workplace. They gain experience working alongside professionals while learning more about the expectations and responsibilities that come with a career in automotive technology.

The program provides a variety of pathways for students after graduation. Recent graduates have gone directly into work at local automotive shops, while others have continued their education at technical colleges.

For students considering a career in automotive technology, the combination of classroom instruction, hands-on experience, industry partnerships and work-based learning provides an opportunity to explore the field before graduation.

The skills students develop also have applications beyond automotive careers. Diagnosing a vehicle problem requires students to gather information, consider possible causes, use technology and equipment, and determine a solution. Learning to approach those challenges with confidence is one of the most important outcomes of the program.

With access to industry equipment, brand-specific training and opportunities to work in local shops, Faribault students are gaining practical experience while exploring what a future in the skilled trades could look like.

The goal is not simply to teach students how to work on vehicles. It is to give them the knowledge, experience and confidence to solve problems—both in the automotive shop and wherever their future takes them.

www.faribault.k12.mn.us



Partnership With a Local Dealership Connects Students to What Happens in a Real Shop



*Brian Kemmy, Industrial Technology Teacher
Foley Public Schools, I.S.D. 51*

One of the things I try to do in our automotive program is make sure students understand that what we do in class connects directly to what happens in a real shop. This spring, we had a great opportunity to strengthen that con-

nection through a partnership with a local, family-owned, Chevrolet dealership.

Dealership technicians Sam and Jordan, along with General Manager Chad, came into our program and worked directly with students on several hands-on diagnostic labs. We focused on scan tool diagnosis, smoke machine leak detection, fuel-injection testing, and battery load testing.

The goal was not just to show students how the equipment works. We wanted them to go through the same kind of process they would be expected to use in an actual shop.

For each lab, students had a worksheet where they had to record their test results, explain what they found, and communicate the problem in a way that would make sense to a shop foreman or customer. That part was important because being a good technician is about more than knowing how to turn a wrench or hook up a scan tool. You also need to be able to explain what you found and why a repair is needed.

During the scan tool lab, students worked with diagnostic trouble codes and live vehicle data instead of simply reading a code and guessing at a failed part. The smoke machine lab gave them a chance to see how small leaks can be found in systems that would otherwise

be difficult to diagnose. In the fuel-injection lab, students used testing equipment to evaluate fuel-system operation, while the battery load test showed how test results can be used to make a repair decision instead of simply replacing a part.

Having technicians from the dealership lead these activities made a difference. Students could hear directly from people who do this work every day and see that the procedures we teach in class are the same ones being used in the field.

We also took a field trip to the dealership so students could see how a working dealership operates and learn about the different careers available in the automotive industry. Becoming a technician is one option, but students also saw opportunities in parts, service advising, sales, management, and other areas of a dealership. For some students, automotive class may be their first time seriously considering a career in the field, and seeing those jobs firsthand makes those options feel much more real.

The partnership also worked well with some new equipment we were able to add to our program through grant funding made available by Resource Training. That equipment included Autel bidirectional scan tools, digital multimeters, smoke machines, fuel-injection testing

equipment, and other diagnostic tools.

That has allowed us to do more than basic maintenance and repair. Modern vehicles require a lot of electrical and computer-based diagnosis, so students need experience reading scan data, using test equipment, following wiring diagrams, and working through a problem logically.

I think that problem-solving side of automotive work is especially important. A student may not remember every procedure they learn in high school, but if they learn how to test a system, gather information, and make a decision based on the evidence, that skill will carry over into almost any technical career.

For our program, the biggest benefit of this partnership is keeping what we teach connected to the industry. Schools can teach the fundamentals, but having local employers involved helps students see how those skills are actually used on the job.

We hope to continue working with the dealership and build on what we started this spring. It has been a good way to give students real-world experience, expose them to current diagnostic practices, and help them see where the skills they are learning can take them.

www.foley.k12.mn.us





From Classroom to Indianapolis: OHS Students Shine in Global Engineering Competition

Bob Statz for the Mille Lacs Messenger

More than 400 high schools across the state of Minnesota offer classes in what was once called “Industrial Arts,” or more colloquially, “Shop Class.” In the past, shop was often a required class for male students in junior high.

Afterward, elective Industrial Arts courses, including auto mechanics and the building trades, were offered to senior high students.

Times have changed over the past 50 years. The field is now known as Career and Technical Education (CTE), with a greater emphasis on exposing students to what are commonly referred to as the “skilled trades” where students gain experience in career fields such as welding, machining, electronics, construction, coding, automation, and much more.

With the growing popularity of the trades as lucrative and in-demand career paths, school districts across the state are facing a dilemma: they want to offer these popular classes, but there are not enough certified teachers available to fill the positions.

Recently, both Onamia and Isle schools have posted vacancies within their respective CTE departments.

For the past several decades, Onamia High School has been fortunate to have quali-



fied teachers on staff, especially in the field of manufacturing. OHS has produced a number of students who have gone on to find well-paying careers in iron-working, automotive repair, auto-body repair, and automotive recycling.

Since joining the Onamia School District in 2008, Tom Kohl has served as the CTE instructor at OHS, teaching courses in Engineering Design, Metal Fabrication, Super Mileage, Hot Rod Fabrication, Manufacturing Technology, and Intro to Technology for seventh-grade students.

One class in particular, Super Mileage, has provided notable experiences for students and has recently put Onamia High School on the map across both the state and the country.

Super Mileage is a capstone course typically taken by juniors and seniors. This automotive engineering-based course incorporates concepts and skills from throughout Mr. Kohl’s curriculum.

The class begins with the Engineering Design Process, teaching students how inventors

and designers communicate ideas to people and machines that help bring those ideas to life.

Students then move into automotive design and engineering, where they learn about the automotive industry, its role in the economy, and how fuel consumption has become one of society’s most pressing concerns. They then apply what they have learned to design and build a highly fuel-efficient vehicle.

The process begins with sketches on

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Flying a Plane Before Driving a Car: EPHS Students Build Career Skills in Aeronautics Classes



Eden Prairie Schools

“Can you make it do a barrel roll?” a voice called out from the upper level of the EPHS South Commons. The question was just loud enough to be heard over the whirring buzz of two small drones, which several students on the first floor were flying through the open space.

“Not with this model,” one of the students chuckled in response.

It was a Friday afternoon, and Eagles in the Aeronautics: Unmanned (Drones) class were practicing their flying skills. A few students in the group — and even more in the nearby Aeronautics Lab — had just passed the Part 107 exam, the test for remote pilots to fly under the FAA’s Small UAS (Unmanned Aircraft Systems) Rule. That meant these students now had a lifetime certification to fly non-recreational unmanned drones under 55 pounds,

the first Eagles in EPHS history to earn that certification in the class, offered in EPHS’s aeronautics program in the Engineering, Technology & Manufacturing Pathway.

“This is giving me a good picture of what my future is going to look like,” said 12th grader Brynja Potter, one of the seven students who have so far passed, or are scheduled to take, the Part 107 exam. Earning her remote pilot certificate meant Brynja didn’t have to take a written final, so she was hard at work on a final project promoting the EPHS Aerospace Club. She leaned over to look at her classmate’s laptop to see how their drone footage of a rocket launch turned out. Nidhi Mahankali gave a little frown. The 11th grader wasn’t sure if she, Brynja and the rest of their team had captured everything they wanted to for a solid promotional video for the club. They started discussing the weather over the next few days. Would it be too cold for another launch?

Other students around the room were also collaborating with their teams to deliver drone-filmed video projects that fulfilled the need of a real-world client. 12th graders Adam Aanderud and Tobin Day — who had also just passed their Part 107 tests — were working with Associate Principal Mariah Pringnitz to create an informational parking video for the high school. “She’s really excited about it and willing to work with us,” Adam said. Working with an actual client was offering students the opportunity to practice collaboration and communication. Teacher Andy Bailey, who leads the aeronautics program, was amazed by “just how much of young professionals these students have become by being given the opportunity.” Hands-on learning was important, he explained, because even given everything the students had learned for the Part 107 test “without an experience like this, the knowledge doesn’t necessarily mean anything.”

This resonated strongly with 12th graders Calvin Kearney and George Junttila, who were filming a new introductory video for the Eagle News Network (ENN), which included drone footage of EPHS and surrounding areas. They liked how the class had a built-in career focus. Instead of simply filling a notebook with lecture notes and closing it at the end of the term, they explained, students were applying their knowledge to something real, and getting a chance to see what a career in that field could look like. “I think it’s something that will stick with us for a long time,” Calvin said.

For a number of students in the class, aeronautics was the planned focus after graduation. Brynja had already committed to an aeronautical university, and 11th grader Nitesh Amin also wanted to fly. “I would prefer to become an actual airline pilot,” he said, “but this [unmanned drone work] would be a cool opportunity.” Class visits from professionals



in the field, hands-on project work, and the chance to take the Part 107 test made drone work a very real career option for many students in the class.

As Bailey continues to build the EPHS aeronautics program, he wants to extend the program’s authentic learning experiences, from studying for industry certifications to diving into airplane mechanics and, of course, flying. Last year, Bailey introduced “Discovery Flights” for students in the introductory aeronautics course, meaning students no longer had to wait until the Capstone class to try flying a plane for the first time. “Now I have ninth graders flying a plane before they can legally drive a car,” Bailey said proudly. But what he experienced after the flights, after seeing students work with clients in his unmanned drone class, was what impressed him most: Students were more confident, more professional and more excited about the work they were doing. There were “visible shifts” he explained, “when I gave them the chance to try something authentic.”

www.edenpr.org



From Classroom to Indianapolis Continued from Page 15

paper, followed by clay and cardboard models. Students then transition to SolidWorks — the industry-standard design software used around the world.

Once the 3D digital model is complete, students create sponsorship proposals and seek financial support. After securing funding, they build and test their vehicle.

The year-long course culminates at the MTEEA Super Mileage Competition, the largest high school Super Mileage competition in the world, held each May at Brainerd International Raceway. This two-day event hosts approximately 60 schools and more than 100 vehicles, competing not for speed, but for efficiency—determining who can travel the farthest using the least amount of fuel. Some schools have achieved more than 1,000 miles per gallon.

Last year, the Mille Lacs Raiders Super Mileage Team caught the attention of organizers from the Shell Eco-marathon, an international competition that primarily features collegiate-level teams. As a result, the team received an invitation to compete at the 2026 Shell Eco-marathon Americas at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Onamia students immediately got to work, spending the year modifying their vehicle to meet the competition’s specifications. Along with three other Minnesota high schools, the team loaded onto a coach bus and made the journey to Indianapolis.

At the Shell Eco-marathon, the team competed against colleges and high schools from across the Americas, including institutions such as the University of British Columbia in

Canada, Penn State, Duke University, Michigan Technological University, and the University of Engineering and Technology in Peru.

Not only did the team design and build a vehicle that successfully passed an intensive 194-point inspection, but they also placed fifth in the world among high school teams and 19th overall.

Following their return home, the team competed in the Minnesota state event with a second vehicle and earned a third-place overall finish.

Looking toward the future, the team hopes to attend the Shell Eco-marathon every other year.

Students who attended the event said it was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Onamia Technology Education instructor, Tom Kohl, commenting on what has transpired

in his classroom over the years, said, “the team is grateful for the sponsorship and support it has received, not only this year but throughout the program’s 18-year history. Countless businesses, organizations, and community members have contributed to its success along the way.” Kohl went on to say, “the team is proud to represent the Onamia School District and the Mille Lacs community not only at the state level, but also on an international stage.

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www.onamia.k12.wi.us





Spudnik Students Engineer Confidence for a 1st Grader



Moorhead Area Public Schools

Ellen Hopkins Elementary student, Amarah Ramirez, experiences limited mobility in her arms, making it difficult for her to raise her hand in class. During the last school year, Renee Wolf, a special educator at Hopkins, was hoping to find a way to help Amarah do just that—so she reached out to Moorhead High School's Spudnik Robotics

team to see if they could help.

The robotics students used LED lights in their competition robot, and they applied that experience to design a custom device for Amarah. Robotics coach Matthew Craig met with Renee to discuss her vision for the project, and the team quickly began brainstorming.

Four students took on the challenge of

helping Amarah: one focused on the 3D design of the box, two worked on integrating the LED hand display and one handled programming. They shared that the device is set up so Amarah can tap a button with her head to raise the LED hand, then tap again to lower it.

A major part of robotics is adapting and problem-solving to make things work even better. The students completed their first version of the device and identified improvements they would like to make for the final product. Their adjustments include rounding the corners, incorporating a sound to indicate when the hand is raised and changing the color of the hand to Amarah's chosen color, blue.

Coach Craig notes that this project feels different from the team's usual robotics work. "It's robotics, and when we're working on the robot it feels removed from real life. But the skills that the students practice applying in robotics are useful for everyday things too. If you ask kids why they do robotics, many will say that it's because of the other people involved in robotics. And this is sort of an extension of that. It's doing a robotics thing because it is for another person."

One student working on the project shared that this experience has been meaningful for him because it is helping a younger student succeed. "Everyone should be able to participate in class and helping to make that possible feels rewarding".

The project to help Amarah also shows other students that robotics can make a real difference and help people in tangible ways. Typically, Spudnik works on one large project throughout the year. They have to wait to see the results until the competition in the spring. It has been exciting for the team to see immediate results and watch their efforts come to life.

Based on how this project delivers the intended outcomes for Amarah, it could serve as something of a pilot for Spudnik to engineer one or two products each month for students and peers in need across MAPS. Coming together to help others and using a shared passion to create something meaningful is what MAPS is all about.

www.isd152.org



High School Forensic Scientists Engage in Hands-On Evidence Collection



South St. Paul Public Schools

At South St. Paul High School, learning doesn't stay confined to a textbook it comes to life in the hallways, classrooms, and even carefully staged "crime scenes" scattered throughout the building. In the forensic science class, students recently stepped into the role of investigators, applying their knowledge in a hands-on lab designed to engage their curiosity, educate them in real-world practices, and empower them with critical thinking skills.

Before entering the lab, students explored the work of Dr. Edmond Locard, a

pioneer of forensic science whose exchange principle remains foundational to modern investigations. His theory, that every contact leaves a trace, guided the lab assignment. According to this principle, anyone who enters a crime scene will both bring something in and leave something behind. That subtle exchange called trace evidence can become the key to solving a case.

With that concept in mind, students set out to examine multiple mock crime scenes around the school. Their task was to determine whether a transfer of evidence had occurred and to carefully collect any trace

materials left behind. The scenes contained a variety of evidence types, including a sock, liquid samples, carpet fibers, plastic fragments, dirt, and even strands of hair on the upholstery.

This lab assignment wasn't just about spotting and collecting clues, it was about doing it the right way. Students practiced professional protocols used by real forensic investigators. Each piece of evidence had to be carefully sealed in a bag, properly labeled, and documented. They completed a chain of custody log for every item and secured it to the bag, reinforcing the importance of maintaining integrity from collection to analysis.

After the collection phase, the class shifted from investigators to analysts. Students reflected on their process, asking critical questions: Could anything have compromised the evidence? Were there tools that might have reduced contamination? Why is it essential for the same person to seal, log, and sign the evidence?

These discussions pushed students



beyond simple observation and helped them learn that even small mistakes can affect an investigation's outcome. Through this immersive experience, students not only learned the concepts but applied them in practice, engaging their curiosity, educating them on proper procedures, and empowering them to think like professionals in the field.

www.sspps.org





From Curiosity to Creation: Ian Lange's Engineering Journey



Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191

When Ian Lange talks about engineering, he doesn't start with equations or credentials. He starts with wonder and possibility.

"One time my dad told me he was working on code for an artificial pig heart," Lange said. "That was crazy!"

Lange, a student at Burnsville High School (BHS), grew up surrounded by that kind of curiosity. His father is a software engineer at a major medical system, who works mostly from home, so engineering tools and materials were always part of his environment. Long before Lange could name a career path, he was watching firsthand how problems could be broken down and solved. Engineering felt big and almost unreal at first, but it stuck with him.

"It started out as this huge, crazy, cool thing," he said. "But now I can break it down, and it's really interesting."

Exploring the Possibilities

When Lange entered high school, he didn't immediately dive into engineering. Like many students, he tested the waters first.

"When I entered high school, I found that there are so many ways you can go and so many things that are offered," he said.

He started in the business pathway, curious to see if it fit. While he found value in the subject matter, something was missing. The work didn't spark the same excitement he felt when he thought about designing, building and experimenting.

He learned quickly that the Pathways Program at BHS is purposefully designed for exploration.

"There's a lot of emphasis on trying different things to find out what your interests are," Lange said. "I think that's what high school should be all about."

Engineering was always there in the background, one of several Pathway options

that students are introduced to early on, along with courses that support students in their journey. For Lange, it wasn't a leap as much as a decision to commit to something he had been circling for years.

"I just wanted to try stuff out," he said. "I always thought the engineering pathway was just there and I could take some classes if I wanted."

Finding His People — and His Passion

Lange began taking engineering classes during his sophomore year, and the experience felt different than his other classes right away. The days were full of activities that were collaborative, hands-on and creative.

"The general theme for engineering for me is I meet someone who is good at their job, and then learn from them," he said.

His first engineering teacher, Sergei Raspel, made a lasting impression. "He's crazy good at his job," Lange said, crediting Raspel with helping him see engineering as both challenging and approachable.

In that first class, Lange worked alongside friends to design and 3D print a mini RC race car. The project didn't work the first time — which turned out to be part of the appeal.

"When something fails, you want to get to fix it," Lange said.

The group came back to the project the following year, determined to make it work. This time, it did.

"There's so much you can do in a group setting," he said. "It feels good to work on a problem and come up with a solution together."

Lange's next teacher, Orion Patrie, gave students the freedom to explore their own interests, encouraging experimentation and creativity along the way.

"That's what engineering is all about," Lange said. "It's not always so structured. A lot of people don't realize how creative it really is."

He's quick to push back on stereotypes, too.

"There's a connotation around engineering, like you're a nerd," he said. "In reality, you can be a really interesting person outside engineering and still be good at it."

Falling in Love With 3D Printing

If there's one word Lange uses often, it's "cool." And nothing earns that label faster than 3D printing.

"It's the coolest thing ever," he said.

Last year, Lange learned the fundamentals of 3D printing while building the RC car, printing each component piece by piece. This year, he has more access to the printers — and more freedom.

"You send something to the printer, and it works on it overnight," he said. "The next day, it's like Christmas morning going into school and starting to put all the pieces together. If it works, it's such an exciting feeling!"

Lange has already built a mini train powered by a battery-operated motor. Now, he's focused on an individual project that blends engineering with environmental responsibility.

A passionate fisherman, Lange wanted to tackle a real-world problem: the environmental impact of lost or discarded fishing lures.

"I decided to work on how to solve environmental issues caused by fishing," he said.

His solution is a biodegradable fishing lure — 3D-printed and coated with a material designed to break down over time.

"You have to see things around you and how to make them better for everyone," Lange said. "That's what engineering is all about."

Skills that Go Beyond the Classroom

Engineering hasn't just changed what Lange knows or how he sees his future; it's

changed how he thinks about his present.

"It's improved the way my brain thinks in so many different ways," he said.

Pattern recognition and problem-solving skills from CAD (computer-aided design) show up in unexpected places, from playing the piano to a chess match.

"When you break patterns down, it's all the same fundamentals," he said. "That applies to a lot of things."

Those skills, he believes, will last far beyond high school.

"I think these skills will help me for the rest of my life," Lange said. "They won't go away."

Looking Ahead

After high school, Lange plans to pursue a career in a STEM field. At a larger college, that likely means engineering; at a smaller one, math or physics. Either way, he sees engineering as a foundation for what comes next.

"No matter what I study, it will still be beneficial and interesting," he said. "My dream is to start an engineering company. I want to solve problems and to help people."

He's already thinking about combining engineering with entrepreneurship, and about learning for learning's sake.

"I value learning more than the grade, honestly," Lange said. "Grades are just a means of getting access to more learning."

For students unsure about engineering, Lange keeps the message simple.

"The coolest thing about engineering is the freedom of it," he said. "It's designed to make everyone's life easier. It's not for everyone — but the skills you build in it can make an impact for everyone."

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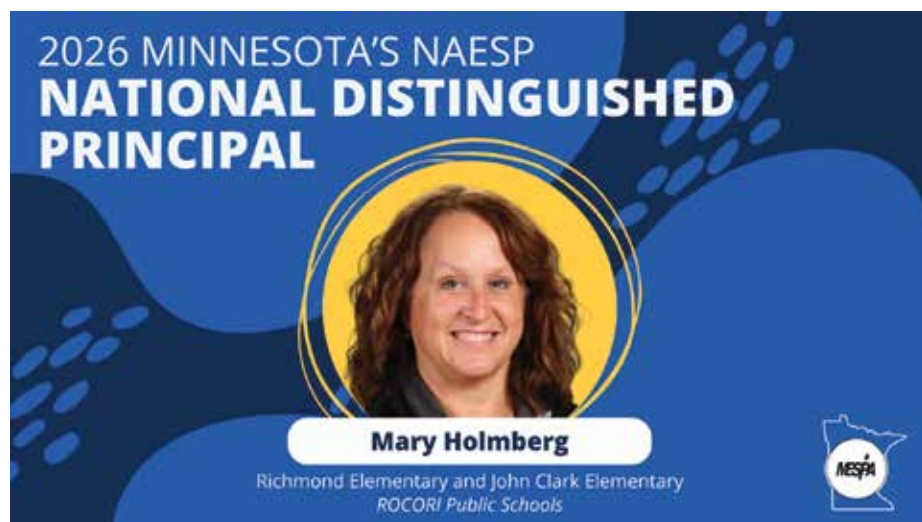
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MESPA Names Mary Holmberg as 2026 National Distinguished Principal



The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) proudly announces Mary Holmberg, principal of Richmond Elementary School and John Clark Elementary School in ROCORI ISD 750 as a 2026 National Distinguished Principal (NDP) from Minnesota.

Holmberg was selected for her exceptional instructional leadership, commitment to student growth, and ability to cultivate strong school-community partnerships that elevate outcomes for all learners.

A Leader Focused on Student Growth and Excellence

At the core of Holmberg's leadership is a relentless focus on student success. Under her direction, Richmond Elementary School earned designation as a National Blue Ribbon School and has been recognized by U.S. News & World Report as an award-winning school in 2025 and 2026—demonstrating sustained academic excellence and equitable student outcomes. "Student growth is my most signif-

icant accomplishment as a principal and the foundation of our school's success," Holmberg wrote in her application.

Holmberg attributes this success to a collaborative, data-driven approach to teaching and learning. Through structured "Data Dig Days," staff analyze and triangulate data points for academic and behavioral data to design targeted interventions and enrichments for students.

Through her leadership, she partners with teachers to model best teaching practices, active participation in administrative coaching, and consistent walkthroughs. These strategies reinforce professional development, sustainability and ultimately student growth.

Best Practices That Drive Better Schools

Holmberg's leadership is distinguished by a set of proven best practices that enhance teaching, learning, and school culture:

- **Instructional walkthroughs & feedback loops:** Non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs paired with ongoing

coaching conversations strengthen instruction and build teacher confidence, leading to measurable student growth.

- **Innovative systems:** Holmberg developed master schedules that maximize instructional time and intervention access while fostering collaboration and leadership with staff.
- **Strong Community Partnerships:** Holmberg maintains a visible presence at school and community events, building trust and leveraging partnerships to support students and families.
- **Student Leadership Opportunities:** Initiatives like Student Senate empower students to lead school improvement efforts and promote positive behavior.
- **Integrated PBIS, SEL, and Data Systems:** Monthly lessons and data collaboration ensure alignment between academic instruction and social-emotional development.

Together, these practices create a cohesive system that supports the whole child and fosters a positive, inclusive school climate.

Strengthening Family and Community Engagement

Recognizing families as essential partners, Holmberg has worked in close collaboration with parent-teacher organizations to strengthen and expand opportunities for engagement through events such as family picnics, school carnivals, color runs and community celebrations. "Recognizing the need to engage families as essential partners in learning, I prioritize creating welcoming, inclusive opportunities for families and community members to reconnect with our schools in meaningful ways" Holmberg emphasized in her application.

Her intentional outreach has increased participation and strengthened collaboration and trust between schools and families, resulting in improved student engagement and a greater sense of belonging.

Recognition from MESPA Leadership

"Mary Holmberg exemplifies the very best of school leadership," said Michelle Krell, Executive Director of MESPA. "In addition to her extraordinary impact on students and schools, Mary has made meaningful contributions to the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association. Not only is she a member of the second cohort of MESPA Fellows, she has also been a mentor in Leadership Launch from the very beginning. She is helping develop and inspire the next generation of principals."

About the National Distinguished Principal Program

The National Distinguished Principal program, established in 1984, recognizes outstanding elementary and middle-level principals who set high standards for instruction, student achievement, character, and climate for the students, families, and staff in their learning communities.

Do you know an amazing Principal? Nominate them to recognize them for their work! We will notify the nominees when the application becomes available (fall). Nominations are due Nov 1. Applications are due Monday, January 5, 2027. <https://www.mespa.net/Honors>

Courtesy of the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association.

www.rocork12.mn.us



David Davis is Minnesota Teacher of the Year Continued from Page 1

His classrooms became places where student voice and creativity lead the learning. Students help shape playlists, new genres are introduced regularly, and project-based learning opportunities allow students to connect music to their own experiences and identities. Students who once doubted their musical abilities begin creating and sharing their own music with confidence.

Not only do these grants serve as a way to support students, but they provide an opportunity for teachers and staff to express themselves in their teaching.

"The whole inherent brilliance that our students have, teachers have too. We want teachers to feel fulfilled, and their brilliance also needs to be reflected in the curriculum," he shared.

Teacher of the Year Award

Davis is the 62nd recipient of the prestigious award and the second from St. Louis Park Public Schools to be named Minnesota Teacher of the Year. An independent selection committee representing Minnesota 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.

"A major issue in public education is that students often have too little ownership over their own learning," Davis said. "The future of public education can be meaningful, relevant and joyful when we trust students' inherent brilliance, creativity and intrinsic motivation."

"David is, quite literally, a living monument to change in both mindset and practice," wrote Jess Davis (no relation), the 2019

Minnesota Teacher of the Year, in a letter of recommendation. "He has been open about the ways his perspectives have evolved and uses that growth to build learning spaces where students see themselves as artists, thinkers and collaborators."

At Park Spanish Immersion Elementary, Davis teaches music to students in kindergarten through fifth grade, designing a curriculum that emphasizes student voice, creativity and cultural responsiveness. His students compose original music, collaborate in bands and connect their learning to their own identities, families and communities.

Davis has earned national recognition for his work in music education and innovation. He was the first Minnesotan named a top 25 semifinalist for the GRAMMY Music Educator Award and has received honors including the Give A Note Foundation Music Education

Innovator Award, the Music for All Elementary Excellence Award and Yamaha's "40 Under 40" recognition.

A leader in advancing more inclusive, student-centered education, Davis serves on the National Association for Music Education's Council of Innovations, participates in the Minnesota Department of Education's Culturally Responsive Arts Education cohort and is part of Education Minnesota's Racial Equity Advocate program. He also leads the Changemakers in Music Education project, connecting educators across Minnesota who are working to expand access and opportunity in music education.

Courtesy of Education Minnesota and St. Louis Park Public Schools

www.slpschools.org





The Gilder Lehrman Institute Selects SFMS's Ted Gehring as 2026 State History Teacher of the Year



St. Francis Area Schools

Ted Gehring, a St. Francis Middle School 6th grade social studies teacher, was named the 2026 Minnesota History Teacher of the Year by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. Since 2004, this distinguished award has recognized exceptional K-12 educators for their remarkable work in teaching American

history. In addition to the recognition, Gehring received a \$1,000 prize, a curated collection of classroom resources, and is a finalist for the national award.

About Mr. Gehring: Gehring is entering his 20th school year in the district (14 at the middle school and five at St. Francis High School). Last school year, Gehring was named the Isanti

VFW Post 2735 and Regional District 7 Middle School Citizenship Teacher of the Year. He was honored at banquets in December for his exceptional work in the area of civics/social studies. Last fall he guided his students in collaborating with district and area experts to write the history of the Blue Earth Reservation, which was published on Wikipedia. He was a 2025 Minnesota Teacher of the Year semifinalist.

"It is truly an honor to be recognized by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History as their 2026 MN Teacher of the Year. They are an amazing organization truly dedicated to helping teachers deliver the highest quality of history instruction. For over a decade, our middle school has been a Gilder Lehrman Affiliate School giving our social studies teachers free access to an amazing library of primary sources, interviews with leading historians, and top notch professional development opportunities," Gehring stated about this award.

Gehring added, "My goal is that my students leave our classroom better understanding the craft of a historian and have the opportunity to help create public facing history that helps tell a better, more complete story of our past. The Blue Earth Reservation Wikipedia page was just

one example of these types of opportunities. I can't wait to see the history that this next year's class will produce."

About the Award: The annual recognition program, presented by the Gilder Lehrman Institute—the nation's leading nonprofit for K-12 American history education—celebrates one outstanding teacher from each state, the District of Columbia, Department of Defense schools, and U.S. Territories. It recognizes educators for their dedication, creativity, and effective use of primary sources. Nominees are recommended by students, colleagues, or school leaders and selected by state committees of historians and educators.

"History teachers play an essential role in helping students understand the past, build critical thinking skills, and develop a deeper appreciation for the people and events that shaped our nation," says James G. Basker, president and CEO of the Gilder Lehrman Institute. "We are proud to recognize educators who go above and beyond to make history engaging, meaningful, and relevant in their classrooms."

www.isd15.org



Career Academy's Strand-Rysgaard and Johnson Earn Annual CTE Honors

Moorhead Area Public Schools

The Minnesota Association for Career and Technical Education (MnACTE) recognized two standout leaders from the Moorhead High School Career Academy for their dedication to student success and workforce development. Assistant Principal Holly Strand-Rysgaard was named Administrator of the Year, and Alison Johnson received the Career Guidance Teacher of the Year award.

These state-wide honors highlight the Career Academy's commitment to providing students with practical, high-impact educational paths that prepare them for the modern workforce.



Administrator of the Year: Holly Strand-Rysgaard

As the assistant principal who oversees the MHS Career Academy, Strand-Rysgaard manages all Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs along with several other academic initiatives. Her colleagues describe her as a lifelong advocate for CTE whose leadership is rooted in a blend of personal experience and professional expertise.

"To be recognized by colleagues through MnACTE is incredibly meaningful," said Strand-Rysgaard. "The peers who are part of this organization understand the complexity,

challenges and passion behind Career and Technical Education. Having their support and affirmation makes this award especially gratifying."

Under her guidance, the academy has continued to expand its reach, ensuring that vocational training remains a top priority within the district. Her strategic vision has been instrumental in aligning school curriculum with industry needs, fostering an environment where students can thrive in both traditional and technical fields.

"Without question, this is a team award," she added. "Any movement we have made within Moorhead Area Public Schools—particularly within our Career Academy—is the direct result of committed and ambitious CTE teachers, a supportive administrative team and the strong partnership I have with Tom Dryburgh, our Community Outreach Coordinator."



Career Guidance Teacher of the Year: Alison Johnson

Alison Johnson was honored for her innovative work in a unique dual capacity. Johnson serves as both a family and consumer sciences educator and the work-based learning (WBL) coordinator. This 50/50 hybrid role allows her to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world application, giving students a direct line to local employers and hands-on experience.

Johnson's impact is clearly visible in the rapid expansion of the work-based learning program. Since she began, student participa-

tion has surged from nine students in her first semester to 23 students currently. By facilitating these practical opportunities, Johnson helps students navigate their career interests before they even graduate high school.

"The growth of our work-based learning program shows that more and more students are taking what they are learning in their CTE and core classrooms and seeking opportunities to expand on it," said Johnson. "Students are looking for real-world experiences, industry connections and meaningful career exploration opportunities. The growth of the WBL program highlights not just increased participation but deeper student engagement in CTE and a stronger connection between classroom learning and their future career pathways."

The recognition of these two educators underscores the important, impactful work happening daily within Moorhead Area Public Schools. Their efforts ensure that Moorhead students are not just earning diplomas, but are also gaining the specific skills and guidance necessary to succeed in their future careers.

www.isd152.org



Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP), Principals of the Year 2026

2026 High School Principal of the Year



Rob Reetz
Mounds View High School
Mounds View Public Schools

Rob Reetz has been named the Minnesota High School Principal of the Year in recognition of his people-first leadership and transformative impact at Mounds View High School. Across students, staff, administrators, and families, consistent themes define his work: an unwavering commitment to safety and belonging; authentic, trust-centered relationships; meaningful student voice and shared leadership; a deep dedication to equity in action; and a relentless focus on academic growth and innovation. Guided by his philosophy of being a “human being before human doing” and grounded in the values of ONE H.E.R.D.—Health and Well-Being, Engagement, Relationships, and Dignity & Inclusion—Mr. Reetz has cultivated a culture where students feel supported, empowered, and challenged to succeed.

moundsview.mvpschools.org

2026 Middle Level Principal of the Year



Mai Chang Vue
Anthony Middle School
Minneapolis Public Schools

The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals proudly recognizes Mai Chang Vue as the Minnesota Middle Level Principal of the Year. At Anthony Middle School, she has built a culture where students feel safe, valued, and able to be their true selves. By grounding the community each day in the belief that the school is “committed to creating a calm and caring environment,” she has led with restorative, non-exclusionary practices that have dramatically reduced suspensions while strengthening belonging and achievement. Through her commitment to equity, culturally responsive instruction, student voice, and innovative IB programming, Ms. Vue exemplifies compassionate, courageous, and student-centered leadership that makes a lasting difference in her school community.

anthony.mpschools.org

2026 High School Assistant Principal of the Year



David Ruehs
Tri-City United High School
Tri-City United Public Schools

David Ruehs, Assistant Principal at Tri-City United High School, has been named the Minnesota High School Assistant Principal of the Year for his student-centered leadership, commitment to safety, and dedication to building a culture where every student is known, supported, and challenged to succeed. Through innovative programs like Titan Achievement Academy, strong restorative practices, and a deep investment in staff and student leadership, David has strengthened systems and elevated learning across the school community. His visible presence, thoughtful decision-making, and unwavering belief in students have made a lasting and meaningful impact on Tri-City United High School.

hs.tcu2905.us

2026 Middle Level Assistant Principal of the Year



Rachel Sandquist
Monticello Middle School
Monticello School District

Assistant Principal Rachel Sandquist is a transformative leader whose impact is felt by students, staff, families, and the entire school community. Known as a “true ray of sunshine,” Rachel leads with empathy, consistency, and joy, always placing student well-being “at the forefront.” She builds strong relationships, listens deeply, and creates systems that are “simple, consistent, and effective,” ensuring every student feels supported, valued, and capable. Through her commitment to equity, growth, and belonging, Rachel has helped cultivate a culture where students and adults alike feel “trusted, capable, and proud” to lead. We are proud to recognize Rachel for the lasting difference she makes every day.

mms.monticello.k12.mn.us

Courtesy of the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals

Brooklyn Middle STEAM School’s Kayla Schilling named Minnesota Social Worker of the Year

Osseo Area Schools

Brooklyn Middle STEAM School’s (BMS) social worker, Kayla Schilling, has been named Minnesota Social Worker of the Year through the Minnesota School Social Work Association.

Schilling was nominated by some of her co-workers at BMS for the award and said she



felt “really honored” to be chosen and recognized by her peers, even if public recognition isn’t the impetus behind her work. Schilling was formally recognized at a Minnesota School Social Work Association event in Coon Rapids May 29.

Schilling went into social work after a related college class piqued her interest in the career path. She double majored in psychology and social work for her undergraduate degree, then went on to earn a master’s degree in social work. While she originally didn’t intend to pursue school social work, an internship experience changed her mind, and she

has now been on staff at BMS since 2021. Schilling said she loves how the school setting often allows a longer timeframe to build relationships with clients than some other settings allow for, such as in hospitals.

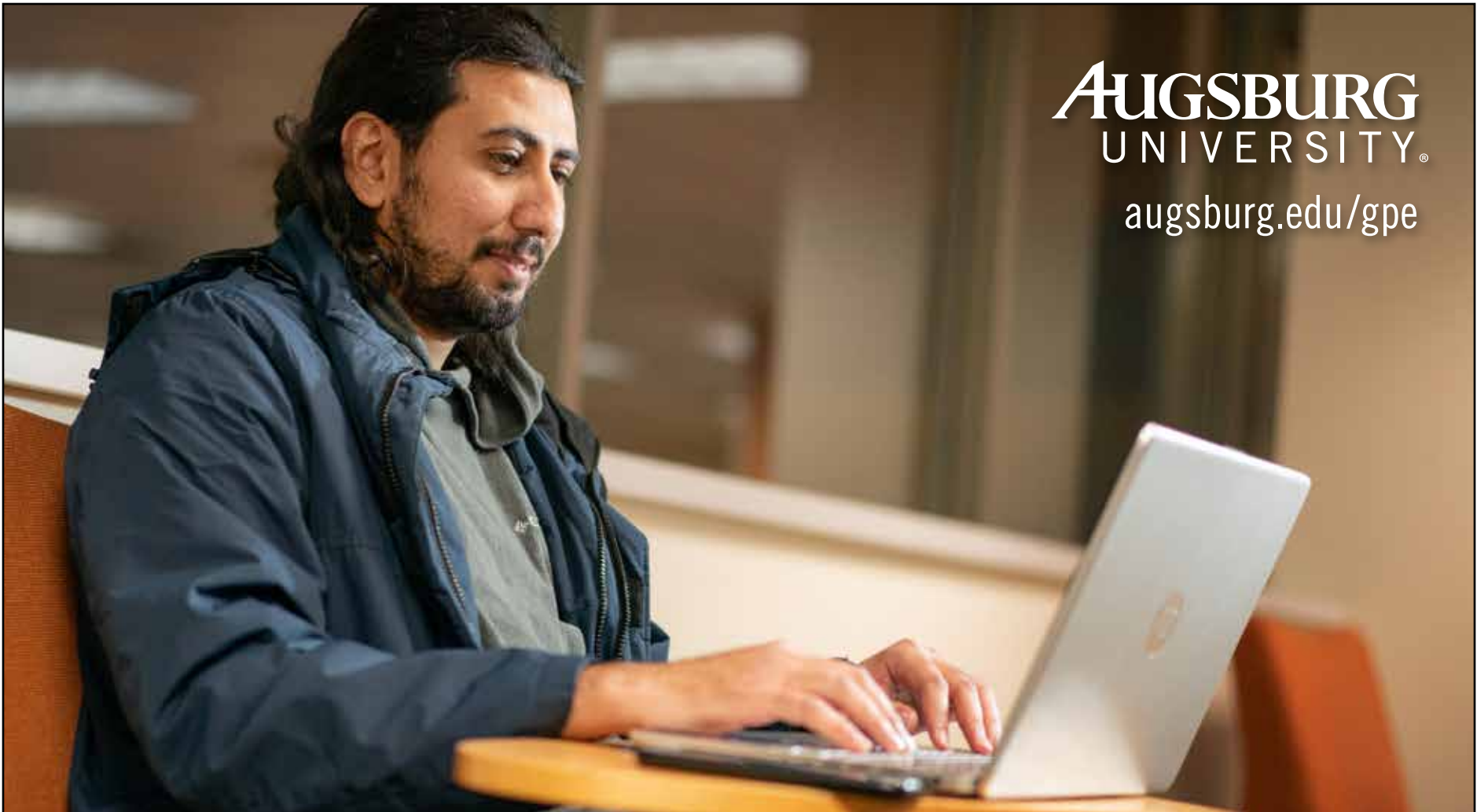
On a typical day, Schilling works with both special education and general education students and said she spends a lot of time helping students work through feelings and emotions but also on helping to ensure students have the resources they need to be successful inside and outside of the classroom.

“Kayla’s heart shows in so many ways, she always puts students and families first,”

said BMS Principal Kim Monette. “She is endless in her desire to ensure that students and families’ needs are met, are cared for, safe and always know that they belong. She is one of a kind!”

“I truly do this because I love these students,” Schilling said. “I want them to know that they have a person here to support them, especially in middle school, which can be a challenging time in a child’s life. You see such a growth from sixth to eighth grade.”

www.osseoschools.org



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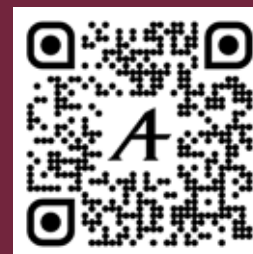
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