

Mark French, Osseo Area Elementary School Principal, Selected Minnesota National Distinguished Principal



Mark French, principal of Rice Lake Elementary in the Osseo Area Public School District, and a member of the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association, is Minnesota's 2015 National Distinguished Principal.

I believe things have to start with me," said French. "One of my most impactful learnings this past summer was reading the book *Teach Like a Pirate*. Although nothing in the book was new and earthshattering, the messages resonated with me and I gained some new mantras. My attitude is infectious and I get to control the way I show up each day. Are the people I interact with at the end of the day getting my best as the people at the beginning of the day do? I believe I have to role model, be visible, have a positive attitude, enjoy my job, and have fun."

Principal French not only collaborates with his staff, but also works with parents and the school community: "I share student, school,

and district achievement data regularly with parents. I want them to be knowledgeable about our strengths and challenges so we can work together to find ways to become more engaged in supporting our goals through volunteering, providing resources, and advocating for what we need."

Tammie Epley, a parent and former school board member in Osseo, summed up French's character best when she said, "Our school community has always been impressed with Mark's empathy, compassion, and ability to creatively solve problems with win-win solutions." She continued with an example of his compassion: "I was volunteering at school one frigid January morning when a mom brought her child in late. Though the boy was wearing a coat, the mom was not. A few minutes later, the mom left the school office, smiling, wearing Mark's long wool coat. His example of service caused those around him to ask themselves what they could do to help too."

Speaking to his three most significant accomplishments as a principal, French cited:

- **Students Connecting Through International Service Project** — "Working with a parent volunteer I created the impetus for a project of international community service that has grown to include six Osseo district elementary schools that collect donations to purchase school supplies and equipment for an elementary school in Sasabe, Sonora, Mexico. One 5th grade student representative from each of the participating schools along with the parent organizer and a district principal (I chaperoned in 2007 and 2013)

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Connected Kids

Why after-school time is a key to academic success

Mounds View Public Schools

It's 2:05 p.m., and the high school day has just ended. But for many students, the best part of the day is just beginning.

Seniors Grant Delaune and Etisha Punia are racing off to cross country practice at Mounds View High School, but not before a few stops along the way. Grant checks in with his student council advisor for a quick meeting. Etisha chats about the day with her friends near her locker, before meeting with her favorite math teacher for some extra help.

Both consider this time a golden opportunity for connecting.

"That time period between school getting out and activities starting — I really like it," says Etisha. "We have plenty of time to get things done."

That's by design. Both Irondale High School and Mounds View delay the start of activities up to an hour to allow students time to connect with teachers. And once activities begin, student connections soar.

"If I wasn't as involved after school, I wouldn't know as many of my teachers or other students as well — especially students from other grade levels," says Etisha.

Grant Agrees.

"When I was an underclassman, I remember feeling super cool whenever a senior would say hi to me in the hall," he says. "Now that I'm the senior, I always try to do the same to freshmen. It's cool listening to their music and hearing about their day. Activities are a great way to get to know students you wouldn't normally know."



Student Connectedness

They may not realize it, but what Grant and Etisha are building in those moments after school is just as critical to their development as their classroom experiences. It's called student connectedness. And studies show it's an essential component to the overall health and well-being of students.

"Students who feel connected to school... report high levels of emotional well-being."

—Journal of School Health

"Students who are connected are less likely to have emotional problems, suffer from eating disorders or experience suicidal thoughts."

—Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

"Increased student connection to school promotes motivation, classroom engagement and improved school attendance."

—Educational Leadership magazine

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From the Teaching Today MNTM Educational Blog
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A Place for All Abilities at Camp

Our amazing Program Manager, Erin LaVine, shared her thoughts about the article as it relates to camp and True Friends. "As someone who is one of the first to share stories of people with disabilities achieving great feats, I find this article wonderfully written and eye opening."

Can working memory get a boost from mindfulness meditation?

A study in the Journal of Adolescent Health showed an improvement in the memory scores of adolescents enrolled in a mindfulness meditation program, compared with no improvement among those in the yoga or wait-list groups. Researchers evaluated 198 public middle-school students, most of whom were female, ages 12 to 15.

How to use projects to teach financial literacy

Financial-literacy classes can teach students about the real-world math of balancing a checkbook and sticking to a budget, Ohio teacher Carol Troxell writes. In this blog post, she offers guidelines to develop an effective class that uses projects to teach financial topics.

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Anoka-Hennepin Transportation Director Keith Paulson Named Top in the State



Anoka-Hennepin School District

Keith Paulson, the director of transportation for the Anoka-Hennepin School District, has some shiny new hardware in his office: a plaque naming him as the state's top transportation administrator for 2015 by the Minnesota Association for Pupil Transportation (MAPT).

"I've never really thought about doing things to be recognized. I do things to help and serve others," he said. "So it's humbling. This award not only means the work I do for Anoka-Hennepin is important, but that the work I do in the state organization and other state-wide committees has, in some way, been helpful to other transportation professionals."

Paulson, who has been with Anoka-Hennepin as director of transportation for eight years, was named this year's recipient of the award at

the MAPT's annual banquet in July. The organization is an association for transportation professionals in the state that holds conferences, offers training sessions and has input in school bus safety legislative initiatives. It also helps transportation departments throughout the state stay on top of the latest safety items, rules and regulations, according to Paulson. He's been an active member of MAPT since 1984, and over the years has served on its board of directors, and as president.

Turns out he was nominated for the award by three colleagues: Anoka-Hennepin's chief operations officer Chuck Holden, who is Paulson's superior; and Jeff Mueller, the district's transportation safety coordinator, and Mary Higgins, the lead secretary in the transportation department.

"It's an honor to think that staff I supervise and my supervisor would nominate me for something like this," he said. "It's a great team to work with, and I am very fortunate to do what I get to do each day."

In the nomination letter to MAPT, Holden, Mueller and Higgins said Paulson is a dedicated individual who not only supports Anoka-Hennepin, but "contributes to the overall safety and efficiency of transportation" across the state.

"(He's) the consummate transportation administrator . . . and we highly recommend him for this greatly esteemed award," they wrote.

Within Anoka-Hennepin, Paulson is known for his positive attitude and sense of humor. The reason, he said, is simple. "I have the choice each day, each hour, each moment to make a positive or negative difference for those I come in contact with," he said. "I choose a positive difference when and where it is possible."

In addition to efficiently running the transportation department, which provides daily service to 34,000 students at 19,000 bus stops with 325 buses, Paulson recently spearheaded the implementation of a new school bus routing software at Anoka-Hennepin. He's also a board member on the state Safe Routes of School Advisory Committee.

While this is the first time he's won the award, Paulson said this isn't the first time he was nominated for it. In 2006, just months before he came to Anoka-Hennepin, his superintendent at South Washington County Schools, where he was working previously, nominated him. "I left to come to Anoka-Hennepin and was taken out of the running," he said. "I didn't know at the time — it wasn't until years later I found out."

While the award is humbling, and even fun to look at, Paulson said it doesn't change how he'll do his job. "My mission is to provide safe, reliable and efficient service for students — so when students arrive at school they are ready to learn. That has been, is and continues to be my focus," he said. "That stays the same. I enjoy what I do. I like the challenge each day brings and I really enjoy the team of folks I work with — from our district staff to each bus company; the drivers, bus paraeducators, crossing guards, traffic control staff — it's a great team all focused on serving students."

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Metropolitan Airports Commission Helps Families 'Navigate Autism'

Many families who have children with autism avoid flying because they are unsure how their children will respond. In an effort to ease the anxiety associated with an airport visit and flying, the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), Fraser and the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM) have teamed up to create the Navigating Autism program. The program includes monthly events, all designed specifically for individuals with autism, that guide families through the steps of an airport visit, from walking in the door to finding their seats on a plane.

During the Navigating Autism event, families will have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with airport and travel procedures. Children will practice entering the airport, obtain a security pass, go through screening at a TSA security checkpoint and walk through the airport to a boarding gate. To culminate their experience, children and their families will board an aircraft and find their seats. Please note that the aircraft will remain on the ground.

In addition to preparing families for a positive travel experience, the Navigating

Autism program also will provide a valuable training and awareness opportunity for airport, airline and TSA personnel to learn how to accommodate children with autism and other special needs.

Families are invited to participate in any of the Navigating Autism event sessions, scheduled for the first Saturday of every month. Join MAC, Fraser and AuSM for a fun, safe practice run, while learning from airport personnel what works and what doesn't work to make your travel experience efficient and less stressful.

A WOW experience for a participating family:

We were "wowed" by the Navigating Autism program on so many levels. It is one of the most detailed, organized

programs that I have ever attended. The details provided from the beginning were helpful, the check in was so organized, and everything about it was so well

thought out. Every person that we had contact with was informed, kind, and helpful.

Our son really struggles with new experiences and I feel like the pace was set to what he was comfortable with and the explanations along the way were great. I didn't expect to experience so many things about the airport (actually riding on the tram, seeing the observation deck, locating the "quiet" places around the airport) and all of the details made us so much more confident about traveling in the future. The fact that they even offered water and snacks before we "boarded"

was extremely generous after all the walking around. To experience the additional snacks and juice while on the plane was also appreciated.

The pilot and flight staff were all so welcoming, professional, and knowledgeable. I really appreciated the pilot's tips for traveling with a child on the spectrum. We don't often get to have "successful" outings and our family truly enjoyed it. We learned a lot and had fun doing so. I really compliment the entire team for all of the little things that made this such a great day for us (the visuals, the one-on-one help through security, and all of the things that we probably didn't even realize were happening). We are so appreciative of everyone's time to volunteer at this event and for all of your behind the scenes efforts to make this happen. Thank you again for offering this program and for letting us attend.

— Sara L.

For more information go to:

www.ausm.org/navigating-autism.html

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Bridge Engineering Project at Grey Cloud Elementary

South Washington County Schools

The Bridge Engineering Project

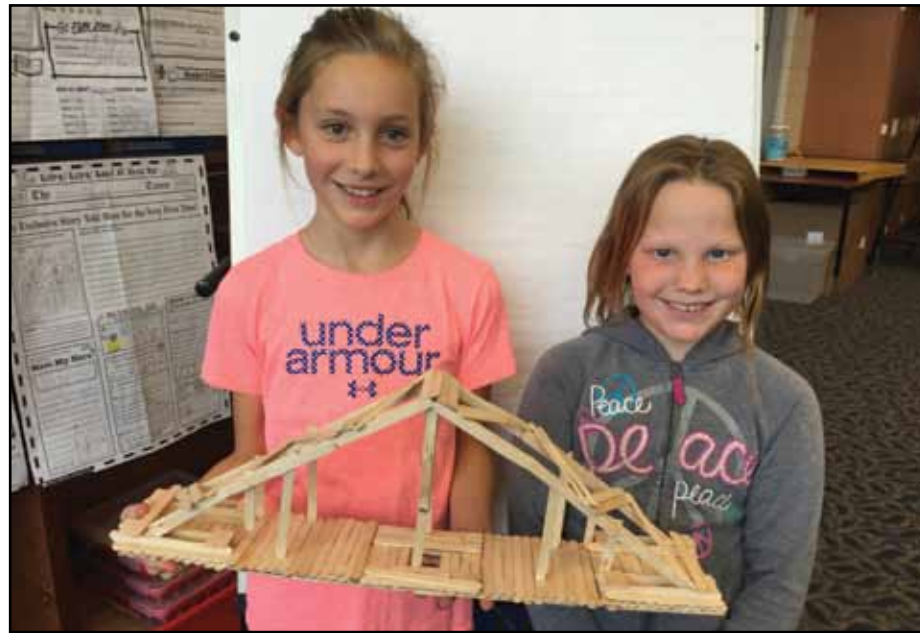
Fifth graders in Mr. Justin Wakem's class at Grey Cloud Elementary School learned about force and motion through a hands-on Bridge Engineering Project. The class studied forces on structures - specifically bridges. Students learned about tension, torsion, and compression.

The engineering project took these lessons to a whole new level of hands-on learning. Mr. Wakem delivered a challenge to his students: design and build a bridge that can hold twenty pounds. Oh, by the way, these bridges are to be built out of Popsicle sticks and your budget is 300 sticks.

The students accepted the challenge and went to work.

Mr. Wakem was joined by Minnesota Department of Transportation Bridge Engineer and Cottage Grove resident, Jim Pierce, who spent several days with the class. He worked with individual groups, answered questions, and gave them visual examples of various types of bridges. He also gave presentations to the class.

Students started by drawing 3D-scale models. Then, with Mr. Wakem and Mr. Pierce close at hand, the construction took place.



Student comments:

"We are working on triangle trusses because triangles are supposed to be strong."

"We are trying to make it as strong as we can."

At the end of the unit, students, teachers and parents gathered together to watch the aspiring engineers test their bridges to see how

much weight each could hold. There was a lot of hype about the testing of the bridges and the level of excitement was high.

Each team's bridge was suspended between boards well above the floor and a bucket was hung from the bottom. Weights were placed in the bucket until the structures broke or until twenty pounds was successfully supported.

Student comments:

"I liked watching them break."

"Seeing how much they can hold was my favorite."

"It's fun how it takes a while. It's fun to actually relate it to real life."

In response to this last comment Mr. Wakem said, "This engineering project does exactly that. Hopefully it creates a love for science and math concepts and will empower and motivate them to study these things down the road. It gives them a little taste of what they can do with some of these skills."

Editor's note – The information in this article came from an excellent video about the project. The video can be seen at www.sowashco.org/news/video-bridge-engineering-project-grey-cloud-elementary or youtube.com/ISD833. I highly recommend watching it!

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Westonka Buses Get Connected

By Sydne Klohn '17,
Westonka Communications Intern

With all of the new technology upgrades in Westonka Schools, the district decided its buses needed a touchup as well. This year, students are able to work on online assignments on their way to the soccer field or concert hall, thanks to the addition of wireless Internet to the district's activities buses.

According to Director of Technology Services Cory Wolf, Wi-Fi connectivity on buses was initiated to respond to parent requests for the service and to support the district's Edge 21 1:1 Google Chromebook initiative. This year, every Westonka student in grades 5-12 has a Chromebook to use at school and at home.

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Mark Femrite understood that the demand for students to access the Internet on their way to and from activities was high. "When moving curriculum to a digital platform and expecting our students to access that curriculum through our learning management system, Schoology, the district felt it was important to offer Wi-Fi on our activities buses so that students could work on homework assignments and collaborate with other students on projects while traveling to and from activities and athletic events," Femrite said.

"It's a win-win for students to use their time efficiently on busy school days and evenings while participating in co-curricular activities of their choosing," Femrite added.

The district's technology services department started by testing a few buses in December of 2014 and eventually added Wi-Fi capabilities to all six activities buses. The average cost per bus to have Wi-Fi connectivity was around \$34 per month this fall, according to Wolf.

With much high school coursework based online, the update was especially helpful for students who are involved in multiple after school activities. Mound Westonka High School junior Rachel Kuehn, who participates in soccer and DECA, said that she loves being able to go online and finish her homework on the bus so that she has less to worry about later. Kuehn also said, "I usually use my personal hotspot from my iPhone. When I use the Wi-Fi on the buses, I save data and get a better connection."

westonka-edge21.westonka.k12.mn.us

Minnesota Department of Transportation

Minnesota Aviation Art Contest

Eligibility

All children (entrants) must be residents of Minnesota between the ages 6-17 as determined by their age on December 31, 2014. Entries are judged in three classes:

- Group I – Junior Category, or Ages 6–9
- Group II – Intermediate Category, or Ages 10–13
- Group III – Senior Category, or Ages 14–17

Entries in each age category will be judged and the top four will be selected. Winners will receive a certificate and be honored at a recognition ceremony (date and location to be announced). Additional awards include a certificate for a Discovery Flight.

Theme

This year's theme is "air sports in harmony with nature." The beauty of the earth is never clearer than when seen from

the air. Every day, thousands of people flying in airliners look at the earth with a new perspective from above. Another group of boys, girls, men and women involved in air sports are fortunate to have a special view of the grandeur below them as they soar in gliders or float through the air in balloons. Others feel the rush of air as they parachute down to a beautiful field or cross the sky in an ultralight or helicopter.

So grab your favorite pen or brush and capture the connection between the land and the air. Create a work of art that shows air sports and nature in harmony. Good luck!

Deadline

Deadline for entries must be postmarked or delivered no later than 4:00 pm, Friday, January 22, 2016, NO EXCEPTIONS, and must be mailed or delivered to: Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Office of Aeronautics, Attn: Art Contest Entry, 222 East Plato Blvd., Saint Paul, MN 55107-1618.

Details at:

www.dot.state.mn.us/aero/aviationeducation/aviationartcontest/artinfo.html

Students Create Interior Panels For Display in MVTA Buses



Students enrolled in Eastview High School's Multimedia class have produced interior panels for display in local and express Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA) buses. The panels focus on themes involving school spirit and transit.

The students from three Multimedia classes, taught by Nick Fornicoia, had their work reviewed by MVTA staff, with winning entries from each class selected in the two categories.

The students received a \$25 gift certificate for their efforts and all participating students received an "actual size" panel of their work. All panels are installed on MVTA

buses operating throughout the seven cities served.

As part of their class, students were to complete a project using software such as Photoshop, along with a variety of graphics and images.

Students enrolled in Burnsville High School's Interactive Design, a business elective class taught by

Dr. Tyler Krebs, have also produced interior panels for display in MVTA buses. The panels focus on themes involving school spirit, transit and in cooperation with the City of Burnsville, Beyond the Yellow Ribbon.

The City of Burnsville program was added to enhance the student's experience of creating bus panels for insertion on MVTA buses and also to help promote Burnsville as a "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" City. The goal of "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" is to create a statewide network of volunteers, agencies, organizations and services that can provide military families with assistance and support

at a moment's notice. Individual Yellow Ribbon cities are tasked with developing and maintaining that network within their communities.

Burnsville Mayor Elizabeth Kautz and Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Foundation President Mike Huddleston participated in the presentation of the panels to the students. "It is exciting to see what the students create and we appreciate the opportunity to partner with Burnsville High School," said Mayor Kautz. Huddleston added, "Thank you for allowing us to participate in this activity and to help spread the good word about our Foundation."

"It is so much fun to see the creative efforts of today's students," said Robin Selvig, MVTA Customer Service Manager. "Students are very sophisticated in using graphic tools and techniques to complete their projects. We hope it is fun for the students to receive life-size copies of their bus



panels and we invite them to ride the buses to see their work," she said.

MVTA is the public transportation provider for the businesses and residents of Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan, Prior Lake, Rosemount, Savage and Shakopee.

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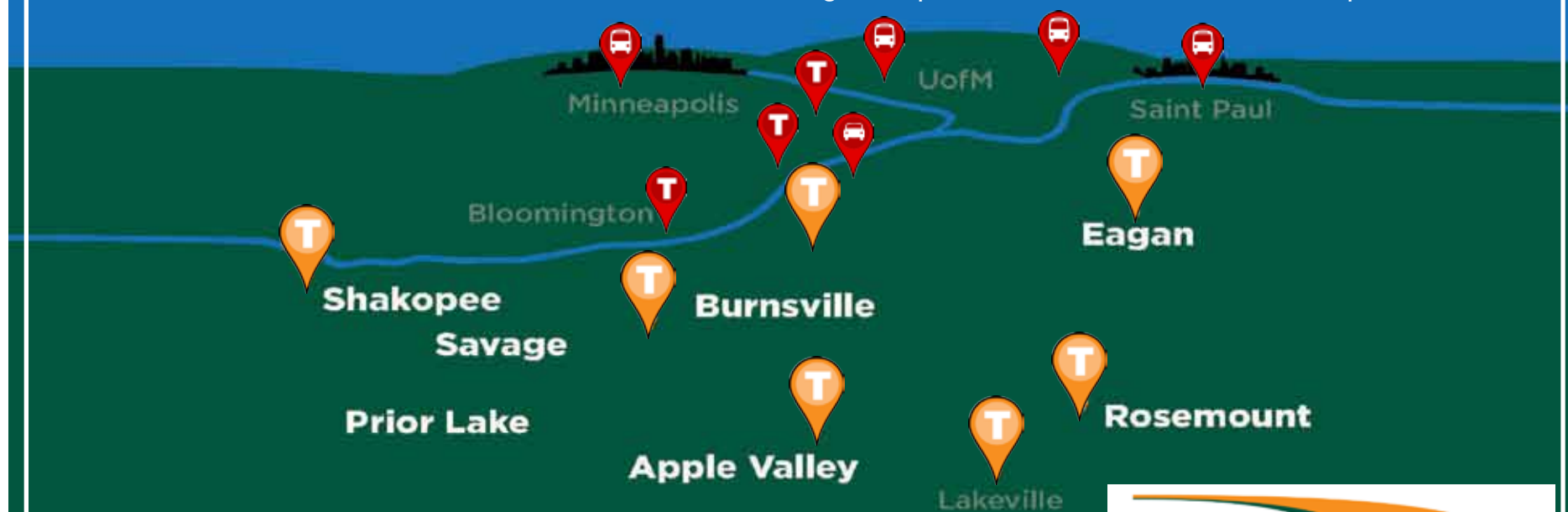
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Karner Blue Education Center Creates a Healing Learning Environment for Special Education Students

Innovative school design focuses on healthier space for students to learn and heal



*Alyssa Diamond, Communications Coordinator
Northeast Metro 916 Intermediate School
District*

The new K-8 Karner Blue Education Center (KBEC) located in Circle Pines, MN is groundbreaking in many ways. While most special education classrooms have been retrofitted from conventional classrooms, KBEC is the first school of its kind to create an innovative educational environment designed specifically to support the unique learning styles and behavioral and mental health needs for the students being served—students with

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Emotional/Behavioral Disorder (E/BD), Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCD) and other health disabilities.

With the goal of creating an environment that supports and encourages learning for students with disabilities, KBEC draws inspiration from the surrounding natural environment, as well as employs design strategies from hospitals and mental health facilities to create what is called a “healing learning environment”.

“The learning environment needs to be

a place where these students feel they can succeed and also be a place where teachers and staff have the opportunities to help them grow,” said Val Rae Boe, KBEC principal. “This environment presents those opportunities for everyone, more so because it’s an environment shaped by the vision and experiences of the staff.”

The 70,000 square-foot education center may be similar in size to a typical elementary or K-8 school, but with a capacity of 130 students with 6-8 students per classroom, the floor plan departs from traditional school floor plans to create four unique learning communities and more open and daylight spaces that accommodate different learning styles and encourage exploration. Features of the KBEC healing learning environment include:

- **Lighting** – LED and natural lighting, instead of traditional fluorescents, creates a calming effect, keeping students on task and regulated.
- **Connection to Nature** – Design elements bring nature indoors to provide a soothing atmosphere and create a controlled outdoor space for students to learn, play and relax.
- **Circulation** – Increased hallway widths and multiple entrance points reduce crowding to limit stress and anxiety.
- **Open Design** – Students can access common space areas for alternative learning spaces and movement breaks.
- **Levels of Intervention** – A series of sensory, breakout, and alternative spaces allow teachers to support students’ individual needs.
- **Acoustics** – Multiple acoustical considerations create an exceptionally quiet and peaceful learning environment.

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The school services work performed by WMLC’s Special Education Professionals has grown from the professional reputation and contacts of Debra Schipper, founder, owner of WMLC, and well-known and respected ASD Specialist. Schipper won the Minnesota Department of Human Services 2013 Innovation Award and WMLC has an A+ rating with

the Better Business Bureau.

For more information about Special Education Services, contact Nancy Olson, School Services Coordinator at 612-860-1701 or nolson@wmlc.biz.

WMLC’s role is that of a collaborator with schools and parents.

WMLC works closely with all parties to design the best possible plan of services for each student. WMLC has had the honor and privilege of working with approximately 1500 special education students and social skills clients since 2001.

During evenings, weekends, and summer breaks, WMLC offers social skills groups, sleepovers, day camps, and other recreational activities to children and young adults with the ultimate goal of helping them live and work independently, develop meaningful relationships, and contribute gainfully to their communities. Success stories of clients becoming happier and gaining confidence,

positive behaviors, and coping skills abound. Many clients and their parents report that one of the best things about WMLC is that the staff truly understand them, especially their gifts and needs, really like and care about them, and are their friends.

Guided play and therapeutic recreation include activities such as horseback riding, picnics, dinners out, and many more in a variety of social settings. Learning about and practicing skills in natural environments with support and guidance not only allows clients to learn how to make and keep friends, but also helps them to develop social cognition that enables them to transfer newly learned skills to future situations. WMLC’s therapeutic recreation model was applauded by leading autism experts from around the world at Michelle Garcia Winner’s Social Thinking Summit.

For more information about Social Skills and Therapeutic Recreation, contact Mary Wyatt, Director of Admission at 952-474-0227 x 204 or mwyatt@wmlc.biz.

New Program at OHS is 'Setting Kids Up For Success'

Kim Hyatt

A new program at Owatonna High School has special needs students punching the clock and getting real work experience. The Practical Assessment Exploration System lab is a comprehensive curriculum giving students as young as freshmen to those 21 years old basic career skills in a simulated work environment.

Staff members are currently orienting 40 students to the new lab that is equipped with a kitchen, cash register, washer and dryer, computers and tools. Getting students in the mindset that the lab is not a classroom, but instead a workplace, is part of that orientation. Students don't refer to staff as teachers, but supervisors and they are employees.

PAES is "less of a classroom and more like a training facility," said assistant principal Jeff Miller.

The only requirement for students to participate in the program is they have to be on an individualized education plan (IEP), which all students receiving special education services have.

During the first year, time will solely be spent in the lab, but special education teacher Jennifer Jenó is hoping the program will expand to the community with supervised work experiences.

Jenó was the instigator to bring this program to Owatonna. She works with students ages 18 to 21 who are done with academics, but still need life skills to transition into independent living.

She wanted to get a program in place that focuses on "setting kids up for success after they graduate," Jenó said. Last November and December, Jenó toured labs in Austin and Eden Prairie to get an idea of how it could work in Owatonna.

"The lab is giving them greater exposure and getting them ready for the world of work," said Sheri Willrodt, the director of special services in Austin. This is the third year the program has been in place at Austin where there are 20 kids who participate on average. Willrodt said it helps the district find in what areas students are proficient, which guides volunteer placements. Businesses in the community open their doors to have students practice the skills learned in the lab and from there, the next goal is competitive pay.

Jenó got approval to move forward with the program that she said is "ramping up" transitioning programs for students with IEPs. Before, transition plans were done on an individual basis, but there was never a program in place.

One key areas of this program, Jenó said, is that students have a choice in doing things that interest them.

These jobs can be tasks like putting nuts and bolts together or computer data entry. All jobs are in color-coded boxes stacked around the perimeters of the lab and each contain instructions and set time to complete. The goal is to have students accomplish 100 jobs and data is collected every day by supervisors. Beyond effi-



ciency and number of attempts, students' interest levels are gauged so by the end of their time in the program, a comprehensive report is available for staff and future employers.

Jenó said some businesses could see people with disabilities as having "no skills whatsoever, but they prove they can do these skills," and the proof is in the report.

When jobs are completed, students will earn a simulated paycheck twice a month to "buy" goods that are donated from school staff, such as books and beverages. Supervisors will also be collecting data on work ethic and conduct. Fines are given for misbehavior.

Jenó said it will take at least a month for students to get acclimated to the lab and there are still some finishing touches in the kitchen. But come December or January, an open house will welcome parents to come check out the most recent addition to OHS.

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Cornelia named 'Seizure Smart School'

Presentations help staff, students understand epilepsy

Edina Public Schools Communication Department

"It's like a hiccup or a sneeze – people who have seizures can't help it." Caroline Olstad brought that and several other messages to staff and students at Cornelia Elementary last week. She is program manager for Seizure Smart Schools, an initiative of the Epilepsy Foundation-Minnesota (EFMN), with a goal of increasing understanding of epilepsy and decreasing the stigma attached to seizures.

Now that staff and all 2nd and 3rd grade students have participated in the program, Olstad told them to pat themselves on the back – Cornelia is a Seizure Smart School.

Olstad came to Cornelia on Oct. 2 at the invitation of School Nurse Laurie McNamara following a conversation with a parent. "We talked for about half an hour about her son's epilepsy and how he explained the condition to his middle school friends," McNamara said. "She [the parent] had thought that Cornelia was already a Seizure Smart School and wanted to know more about it. So I called the Epilepsy Foundation and we decided that we should be seizure smart."

Cornelia joined about 90 schools in the state with the Seizure Smart designation.

EFMN has set a goal to have 300 Seizure Smart Schools by the end of this school year. They are getting help to reach that goal from Jerry Kill, coach of the University of Minnesota Golden Gophers football team, who has put a familiar face to epilepsy in Minnesota as he has dealt with his own condition very publicly. He wants to be sure that everyone with epilepsy receives the same understanding and support that he receives. So in May 2014, the Kill family donated \$100,000 to establish the Chasing Dreams Fund, which supports the Seizure Smart School program and Camp Oz for kids with epilepsy.

Olstad and Jack Graham, EFMN information and referral manager, gave three presentations to Cornelia staff and the two grade levels, adapting each to the audience. "We have presentations geared to older students, too," Olstad said, "with videos of actual seizures, trivia games and worksheets."

There are approximately 83 students and several staff members throughout the district with conditions that can cause seizures. People who have epilepsy look the same as anyone else, but seizures can look scary, Olstad told a room full of 3rd graders. She described different kinds of seizures and a story that she read to the class described a seizure as

"a little spark" that happens in the brain and makes the body tingle.

Olstad made sure the students knew that epilepsy is not contagious and that in every other way, someone with epilepsy is just like them. "They can still play on the playground, go to a sleep over, and do all the things you like to do," she said.

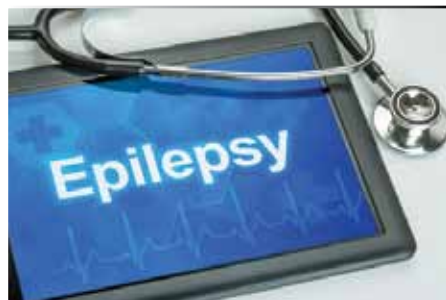
Most importantly, she reviewed what students should do if they see someone having a seizure: stay calm, find an adult, roll the person onto their side if they can, and stay with them. She also told them that they should not put anything in a person's mouth if they are having a seizure, a common misconception. "They will not swallow their tongue," Olstad said.

"After the seizure is done, they might feel really tired and need to rest for a while,

or their muscles might be really sore," Olstad said. "It is important to be their friend. Don't be scared of them or make fun. Let them know you are still friends."



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RESOURCES

Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR)

This website has links to information related to incidence, characteristics, diagnosis and treatment, and school services related to children who have epilepsy.

Website: www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/epilepsy/

Epilepsy Foundation

This website has information for parents and professionals related to epilepsy disorders. It has a link to an "Epilepsy 101" module that provides basic information related to diagnosis and treatment. It also has a link to a "toolbox" and provides information on forms and information parents may want to have available in

case of an emergency. Information about other support groups and services is also on this site.

Website: www.epilepsy.com/information/parents

National Seizure Disorder Foundation (NSDF)

The mission of NSDF is to bridge the gap between diagnosis and cure by providing online and offline resources for positive seizure management that increase the quality of daily life for individuals with epilepsy. The organization believes there is no higher purpose than to help people with Epilepsy/Seizure Disorders to be more than a diagnosis. Links are provided to online community blogs as well as a Facebook group.

Website: nationalseizuredisordersfoundation.org/

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

The "NINDS Epilepsy Information Page" has an extensive list of resources related to epilepsy. Includes information on diagnosis, treatment, as well as links to other agencies that provide support and information to individuals with epilepsy.

Website: www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/epilepsy/epilepsy.htm

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Website: www.asvabprogram.com/

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mySkills myFuture helps laid-off workers and other career changers find new occupations to explore. Users can identify occupations that require skills and knowledge similar to their current or previous job, learn more about these suggested matches, locate local training programs, and/or apply for jobs. (www.mySkillsmyFuture.org)

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The Occupational Outlook Handbook is sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics

Website: www.bls.gov/ooh/

Coon Rapids High School Student Showed Quick Thinking, Compassion Responding to Bike Accident

Derrick Williams, Communication Specialist
Anoka-Hennepin School District

Harris Racek, a Coon Rapids Middle School (CRMS) student, is thanking his lucky stars for a Good Samaritan high school student who came to his rescue after a bike accident left him lying unconscious in the street.

"I was biking home from school when I took a side road, and I suddenly blacked out," Racek said. "The next thing I remember is Ian standing right above me, asking what happened."

Ian McDeid, a ninth grader at Coon Rapids High School (CRHS), was riding down that same road when he came upon Racek lying in the street, not moving.

As he approached, he saw that Racek's face was covered in blood.

"You could tell he was just out of it. He was very dazed. His bike was up in a yard about ten feet away from him," McDeid said.

McDeid immediately pulled Racek out of the road and called 911.

"I asked what happened but he couldn't remember," he said. "I was thinking maybe he got struck by a car, because it seemed peculiar that his bike was up in the yard and he was in the middle of the road."

McDeid, who recently completed first-aid training through the YMCA, stayed with Racek until the paramedics arrived.

"If the ambulance hadn't gotten there in the next minute I was going to take off my shirt and wrap it around his head, because he was bleeding pretty badly," he said.

McDeid also called Racek's mother to let her know her son was being taken to the hospital.

"Doctors did a whole bunch of testing on me to make sure I didn't have any internal bleeding or broken bones, and after I checked out of the hospital that day, I spent the rest of the week recovering at home with a whole bunch of bruises on my face and stitches," Racek said. "It was really painful."

Racek had a mild concussion and several lacerations on his face, his left eye was swollen shut, and his teeth shifted under his braces.

He did avoid more serious injuries, however. The ER doctors told Racek's mother that if he hadn't been wearing his helmet, he would have had a major head injury.

Racek is now a staunch advocate of helmets. "After that experience, I'm telling all my family members to just wear your helmet at all times. It could happen to anybody," he said. "If you're going biking, skiing, snowboarding,

even skateboarding, wear your helmet at all times."

Dr. Patricia MacGillivray, school nurse at CRMS, said she was really moved when she heard Racek's story.

"How wonderful it was that Ian came along and knew exactly what to do," she said. "We're very happy Harris is back to school and not seriously injured, and he's surrounded by teachers, students and nurses who care about him and have been supporting him in his healing."

What actually happened to Racek that day remains a mystery; he has no memory of the moments before the accident. But he said he will always be grateful to McDeid for being there in his time of need.

"He actually came to my house and gave me a Get Well card a few days later, and I'm still forever thankful for that," said Racek, who has now been inspired to learn first-aid thanks to McDeid.

McDeid said he was happy he could help.



"It makes me feel really good inside, knowing that I helped someone in their time of need," he said. "And I just hope that someone would do the same for me."

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Building Community With Mendota Cougar Time



Travis Andries, West St. Paul — Mendota Heights — Eagan area Schools School District 197

New to Mendota Elementary this school year has been a monthly program where students can break from their routines and build new friendships. Known as Mendota Cougar Time, the program helps build community within the school by connecting students across grades, while also dedicating time to focus on this year’s all-school theme of “water.”

The Mendota Cougar Time sessions, lasting roughly one hour, bring around five students from each grade (K–4) into a classroom for a series of hands-on and group activities. All students in the school participate in the activities, creating a new mix of students and teachers for each monthly session.

“The idea to create Mendota Cougar Time was really a collaboration between the Mendota PTA and myself,” said Mendota Principal Steve Goldade. “I drew some inspiration from other

programs in the District, such as STEM Sparks at Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School. But one of our goals with Mendota Cougar Time was really to develop a sense of community within the school.”

Away from their typical classroom, students form new friendships and participate in art or science projects. In addition to getting to know their peers, students also get to know other teachers in the school. For older students, Mendota Cougar Time may present an opportunity to reconnect with a teacher from second or third grade, while younger students get a sneak preview of a future teacher.

To come up with ideas for the activities, Mendota Cougar Time organizers, including Principal Goldade, have turned to the all-school theme for the 2015-16 school year.

“Our all-school theme this year is water and every month has a different theme,” Goldade said. “Last month was lakes, and this month we’re focusing on Minnesota and Wisconsin rivers.”

To learn more about lakes during the debut Mendota Cougar Time, students used their artistic skills to create “Lake Mendota,” as well as the frogs, fish, loons and other wildlife that might live there. After discussing what you might expect to see on a river, including different types of boats, students grouped up to construct their own boats out of tinfoil, later

testing their boat’s buoyancy using marbles.

From art to science and even social studies, students are able to learn more about each other and the world around them. They even learned the origin of the name Mendota, which is derived from the Dakota word for “junction of one river with another.” With the help of Google Earth, students were able to see the nearby confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers and determined that it was an appropriate name.

Mendota Cougar Time has been made possible through the support of parents and guardians at the school. Many of the materials used in the Mendota Cougar Time activities have been provided by the PTA, while parent Mel Demulling has served as a program coordinator. According to Goldade, Demulling has been integral in developing the monthly activities and tying them to the all-school theme. Parent volunteers have also donated their time to help supervise the classroom activities.

The next Mendota Cougar Time is scheduled for November 24, when the students will investigate other major rivers in the United States.

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EHS Club Connects High School and Elementary Students

Edina Public Schools Communication Department

Named for the time it begins, Club 350 at Countryside Elementary School gives students who participate in KIDS Club another outlet for their creativity, as well as a chance to learn from and spend time with “cool” high school students.

Edina High School (EHS) seniors Emma Rochlin and Vince Zingale created the club at the beginning of their junior year. “We wanted to do something with kids, but there were not any clubs like that available,” Rochlin said. “Countryside seemed very interested in helping us start.”

Club 350 meets every Monday after school at Countryside. Each week the activities change. “We usually pick a theme based on the seasons or upcoming holidays,” Rochlin said. “We did a chemistry week where the kids got to test various household items with pH paper. Then we made a baking soda and vinegar volcano to show them how acids and bases react when mixed.”

When students start to arrive for KIDS Club, Erica Koller, out-of-school time program manager at Countryside, stands outside of the room where Club 350 meets to invite interested students inside. “The kids who are in there are really getting a

lot out of it,” Koller said. “They see these high school students as role models, and are able to make a connection with somebody one-on-one. They might not have that experience within the big KIDS Club group.”

There are normally about 10-12 students who opt to spend an hour with high school students instead of playing with peers. As the club increases in popularity among Countryside students, Koller said they would try to keep it as close to a one-on-one experience as they can.

“My goal with Club 350 was not to be a tutoring club, but instead to create an opportunity for elementary students to connect and develop healthy relationships with high school students,” Rochlin said. “I think the kids understand that we are volunteering and that we genuinely want to spend time with them.” “I hope the club helps the kids develop a sense of maturity and continues to create respect for their peers and non-teacher adults,” Zingale added.

Club 350, which consists of high school students from every grade level, has evolved from last year with the addition of post-meeting debriefings, which allow the club to continuously improve throughout the year. Another resource for the high school students in the club is the KIDS Club staff, which is available to offer pieces of



advice on working with young kids.

The benefits of the club are two-fold. With each meeting, the high school members become more confident in working with kids. And with each meeting, kids who participate become more outgoing and confident in trying new things. At the end of last year, kids wrote thank you notes to the high school students, recalled Rochlin. She mentioned one note in particular, in which a

student wrote, “Thank you for playing with me and coming when you could be doing other stuff!”

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Commissioner Cassellius Visits Grandview

Learns 'Best Practices' from Four-Time Reward School



Becca Neuger
Communications Coordinator
Westonka Public Schools

When a school is named one of the top schools in the state four years in a row, people take notice. On Oct. 29, Minnesota Department of Education Commissioner Brenda Cassellius visited Grandview Middle School during a statewide tour of multi-year Reward Schools.

The Reward School designation is given

each year to the highest-performing Title I schools in Minnesota, as indicated by the Multiple Measurements Ratings. Grandview is one of only 30 Minnesota schools to earn the Reward School distinction four times.

Cassellius has been visiting successful schools like Grandview this fall to learn "best practices" that have contributed their academic achievements.

"It's great to know that our intentional work is making a difference for kids," said

Grandview Principal Christy Zachow. "We've always known what we do makes a positive impact on student achievement, but to know that we are one of the best performing schools in this capacity is something I am very proud of."

Zachow said the commissioner's visit was a great way to recognize the continuous efforts of Grandview staff, students and families while also learning about successful practices seen in other districts.

"We were able to share what we feel are factors contributing to our success but also we were able to learn more about what other successful schools are doing," Zachow said. "It helps us to know what to hold onto and what new ideas we might want to consider as we are always working to improve."

Joining Zachow in a roundtable discussion with the commissioner were Grandview teachers Julie Thomas, Ali LaLonde and Beth Harstad, guidance counselor JeanAnn Thayer, Westonka Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Mark Femrite and Superintendent Kevin Borg. The group shared various practices that have helped Grandview, and the Westonka district as a whole, excel in academics year after year:

- Block scheduling, which allows students to have only two or three classes each day
- Co-taught classes with regular ed. and special ed. teachers
- The Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services (ADSIS) program for students who need additional academic or behavioral support
- Purposeful data tracking and analysis
- Professional Learning Communities for staff support and development
- Morning Meeting daily interaction
- The Where Everybody Belongs (WEB) middle school orientation and transition program
- Personalization pilots
- Learning targets that are communicated with students and families
- Caring, supportive and dedicated administrators, teachers and staff

Another topic discussed was Westonka's "small school advantage," which ensures that no child falls through the cracks and provides

Continued on Page 17

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Commissioner Cassellius Visits Grandview

Continued from Page 16

opportunities for collaboration and innovation. “Being a smaller district gives us the opportunity to get everyone around the table and learn from each other,” Borg explained. “We have the flexibility to pilot different programs and adapt them to meet our needs.”

During the meeting, Femrite described conversations he has with other school administrators about Westonka’s high achievement results.

“I get calls from other districts about our high test scores, and they ask what curriculum we’re using,” Femrite said. “When I start to describe all of the factors that contribute to our success—personalization, our technology plan, learning targets, interventions, our engineering program—the other end of the line gets very quiet.”

“You can’t just buy curriculum to get these kinds of results,” Femrite said.

Cassellius agreed, saying, “It’s about the people, intentionality, being very deliberate, using resources widely and feeling like a family.”

Cassellius explained that, through her Reward School visits, she has been able to draw connections about programs that are really working for kids. For example, every Reward School she visited this fall is using a Morning Meeting to start the day. At the end

of her tour, Cassellius will share the Reward School insights and best practices with other schools throughout the state.

Going forward, one of MDE’s goals is to have increased networking opportunities for successful schools. She said that she thinks the Reward Schools, which are already achieving on a high level, are in a position to push innovation and experiment with new ideas.

At the end of the discussion, Cassellius asked the Grandview staff for the top three reasons for their success. In an email to Grandview staff later that day, Westonka Superintendent Kevin Borg wrote:

As answers were given, it was clear to me that one reason stood out from all the rest. It is easier felt than described; one could call it ‘The Grandview Way.’ You are committed to your students, team and profession and are impressively focused on improvement. For this, I am very proud and I say thanks.

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Mark French Selected Minnesota National Distinguished Principal

Continued from Page 1

accompany the students to Arizona and Mexico where they connect with pen pals, learn about the culture of the area, and deliver the supplies in person. Without the school supplies generated from this project, many of the Mexican students would be unable to attend school.”

- **Technology Learning and Leadership** – “Yes, you can teach a veteran principal new tricks! Because of my own personal interest, great role models, and professional development time, I have become engaged with technology to support my work and learning and promote digital learning for teacher instruction and student engagement. I believe I need to role model for teachers what I want them to do for students. When teachers see me learning, taking risks, and making mistakes, they become more comfortable with taking action themselves.”
- **Creating a Positive School Culture** – “I look at the entire school community as being my classroom and make it my goal to create a positive, friendly, welcoming, and purposeful school culture. Some of the things I have done to accomplish this include: the creation of our school theme ‘Rice Lake Roadrunners Model Respect, Learning, and Responsibility’; using my culinary skills to provide dinner for teachers during one night

of fall and winter conference; the implementation of the “Roving Roadrunner Award” to recognize the contributions of a particular staff member each week; hosting VIP Days for parents to visit Rice Lake during a regular school day to develop positive ambassadors in the community; broadcasting a welcome back video for staff and families at the beginning of each school year sharing my summer adventures and the exciting changes for the new year; and implementing monthly activities to thank staff and show my appreciation.”

French first served as a principal in 1997, as an Assistant Principal at North End Elementary in Saint Paul, MN. He then became the principal of Oak View Elementary in Maple Grove, MN in 1998. He served as the principal of Oak View Elementary until he became the principal of Rice Lake Elementary in 2005.

The other finalists for this honor were: John Piotraschke, principal at Hayes Elementary, Fridley Public Schools; and Willie Fort, principal at Valley View Elementary, Columbia Heights Public Schools.

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Connected Kids

Continued from Page 1

“There’s been a consistent theme throughout our work, and it’s student connectedness,” says School Board member Greg Madsen. “Connectedness affects the emotional health of students. It promotes academic achievement. It even supports co-curricular success.”

As evidence of its support, the School Board recently committed to an annual \$800,000 investment to support high school co-curriculars, paying for transportation, uniforms, officials and some essential equipment.

Strategies for success

So what else has the District done to promote student connectedness?

- Every school has a specific priority goal related to connectedness.
- Every school works with every student to provide meaningful goal setting and mentoring.
- Elementary schools offer a variety of after-school activities and family fun nights.
- Student interests have prompted new after-school activities added to middle schools.
- Middle schools offer an activity bus at 4:15 p.m.
- High schools run after-school buses at 3:30

and again at 5 p.m.

- Sliding-scale fees, needs-based scholarships and family caps encourage participation in co-curriculars at all school levels.
- The first day of school for sixth- and ninth-graders offers them the entire school building focused on them.
- The ninth-grade respect retreat has become a popular tradition.
- High schools have launched campaigns promoting the responsible use of social media.

Strategies to improve student connectedness may look somewhat different in every school, but staff throughout the District share the same goal: Making frequent, personal and positive contacts with every student.

“We know that kids who feel more connected do better in school and in life beyond our walls,” says Superintendent Dan Hoverman. “If our students feel connected, we’re confident their experience here will be positive and successful.”

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Apply for a Grant



Ezra Jack Keats Minigrant Program 2016

The Ezra Jack Keats Foundation created a funding initiative called Minigrants, through which awards of \$500 are given to public schools and public libraries for projects that foster creative expression, working together and interaction with a diverse community.

Grant Amount: \$500

Deadline: March 31, 2016

Website: www.ezra-jack-keats.org/section/ezra-jack-keats-mini-grant-program-for-public-libraries-public-schools/

Academic Enrichment Grants

The McCarthy Dressman Education Foundation offers Academic Enrichment Grants designed to develop classroom and extracurricular programs that improve student learning. The foundation considers proposals that foster understanding, deepen students' knowledge, and provide opportunities to expand awareness of the world around them.

Grants up to \$10,000 are awarded.

Deadline: Online applications are accepted January 15 through April 15, annually.

Website: mccartheydressman.org/academic-enrichment-grants

Educational Assistance and Training Programs

The Cruise Industry Charitable Foundation (CICF) encourages the creation and expansion of learning experiences and opportunities at the primary, secondary, and higher education levels, particularly for minority and disadvantaged students. Areas of special interest to CICF include educational and training programs designed to improve literacy, teach basic life skills, promote good citizenship and public services, and increase reading, mathematics, and science proficiencies.

Awards range from \$2,500 to \$15,000. CICF limits grant donations to any single organization to a maximum of a three-year commitment.

Deadline: Applications are accepted year-round.

Website: www.cruisefoundation.org

Instrumental Music Grants

The Fender Music Foundation awards instruments and equipment to eligible music instruction programs that are part of US public schools or qualified nonprofit organizations. The instruments and equipment are lightly used, blemished, or otherwise imperfect and have been collected from manufacturers and retailers.

Deadline: Applications are accepted year-round.

Website: www.fendermusicfoundation.org/grants/grants-info

National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards

The National Arts and Humanities Youth Programs Awards recognize and support outstanding after-school and out-of-school arts- and humanities-based programs for underserved children and youth that operate on a regular basis in the afternoon, on weekends, or during the summer. This annual award is presented to 12 programs that best meet all award criteria. The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities presents the awards, with a ceremony at the White House.

Grants of \$10,000 are awarded to 12 programs.

Deadline: Applications for the 2016 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Awards are now open.

Website: www.nahyp.org/how-to-apply/

College Board Award for Excellence and Innovation in the Arts

The College Board presents an annual award to public and private schools serving students in grades 6 through 12 that have implemented an arts program that promotes student learning and creativity in exemplary and innovative ways. Eligible arts programs must be in place a minimum of one year prior to the application date.

Three schools (one school from each category) will receive \$5,000 each, with one school named national winner to receive an additional \$2,500.

Deadline: All applications are due in April, annually

Website: artsaward.collegeboard.org/award.php

Kinder Morgan Foundation Grants

The Kinder Morgan Foundation awards grants to programs that benefit kindergarten through grade 12 youth and focus on science, math, art, and music. The goal of the foundation is to help these students become engineers, educators, and musicians who will support diverse communities in the future.

Awards range from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

Deadline: Applications are due the 10th of every other month beginning in January.

Website: www.kindermorgan.com/community

Student Contests and Awards



t-MBA Project World Contest

Students in grades 9 through 12 across the world can take part in the t-MBA Project World Contest in which they can create joint projects, compete for t-MBA funds, interact with students globally, and have the opportunity to meet influential people in the business world.

Deadline: Project submissions are due December 14, 2015.

Website: www.t-mba.com/t-mba-projects/annual-project-world-contest

The DuPont Challenge Science Essay Competition: Middle School/High School Divisions

The DuPont Challenge aims to help increase science literacy among students and motivate them to excel in communicating ideas in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Students write and submit essays that address a topic of their interest within four categories of challenges. Students compete in the Junior Division for grades 6, 7, and 8, or the Senior Division for

grades 9, 10, 11, and 12.

Deadline: Essays are accepted through January 31, 2016.

Website: thechallenge.dupont.com/essay/teachers

National Geographic Bee

The National Geographic Bee, a contest and educational outreach program of the National Geographic Society, is designed to encourage the teaching and study of geography in grades 4-8.

The top 100 students from the school-level bees (selected based on qualifying test scores) will compete in state-level bees. State winners will be invited to National Geographic headquarters to compete in the national finals.

The competition is open to public schools, private schools, and homeschools in the United States Atlantic and Pacific territories, and Department of Defense Dependents Schools. Schools with financial need can apply for discounted registration.

Deadline: Early registration ends December 18, 2015.

Website: www.nationalgeographic.com/geobee

The DuPont Challenge Science Writing Competition: Elementary Division

The DuPont Challenge Elementary Division is designed to help teachers motivate students to become tomorrow's science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) innovators. This Science Writing Competition provides classrooms with challenges specifically geared toward students at each level kindergarten through grade 5.

Deadline: Entries are accepted through March 1, 2016.

Website: thechallenge.dupont.com/elementary

World of 7 Billion Video Contest

Create a short video – up to 60 seconds – about human population growth that highlights one of the following global challenges: deforestation, public health, or water scarcity. All videos must include how population growth impacts the issue and at least one idea for a sustainable solution.

Consider narrowing your focus by con-

centrating on a subtheme within your topic. Possible subthemes include:

- **Deforestation** – erosion, clearing for agriculture/pasture, impacts on climate, biodiversity or habitat loss
- **Public Health** – spread of communicable disease, air quality, sanitation, maternal/reproductive health
- **Water Scarcity** – aquifer depletion, water conflicts, pollution, impact on girls' education, irrigation

All students in grades 6-12 worldwide are eligible to participate and win. Four winners will be chosen for each global challenge at the high school level. Prizes include: first place \$1,000; second place \$500; and honorable mentions \$250. Two winners will be chosen for each global challenge at the middle school level. Prizes include: first place: \$500 and runner-up \$250.

Deadline: Submissions due by 5 p.m. February 25, 2016.

Website: www.worldof7billion.org/student-video-contest



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Winterfest XIV

Rochester, MN

January 28th — February 14th

WinterFest serves to promote wintertime activities for all ages while raising awareness and funds for area nonprofit organizations. There is a wide variety of activities happening in the Rochester area so all can enjoy the Cabin Fever Days of February! There is something for everyone, young or old, indoors or out.

Find a list of all events at:

www.rochesterwinterfest.com



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