



Experience as Theater's Lighting Director Led BHS Senior to Pursue Electrical Engineering



Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191

Lucas Croatt prefers to stay out of the spotlight. In fact, the senior found his niche at Burnsville High School by putting the spotlight on other students - literally.

As lighting director at the school's Mraz Center for Performing Arts, Lucas does a little bit of everything behind the scenes to make sure productions go off without a hitch. In addition to planning and setting up the lighting, he helps run the audio systems and builds sets. He's worked on 15 plays and musical productions, the most recent being "Clue" in February, and dozens of other events over the last four years.

Lucas started in theater as a freshman because his older sister acted in plays throughout her time at BHS. He wasn't interested

in acting, so he found a different way to be involved that better suited him.

"I wasn't going to be on that stage, so I went to the tech side and really enjoyed it, so I stuck with it," he said.

Lucas appreciates the freedom he's allowed in his role as lighting director. He gets to be creative in how he lights each show, which makes it that much more satisfying for him to see the final production come together.

"We do a shot and it's kind of up to me what I want to do for it, how I want to go about doing it," he said. "When the show comes on, the work you put in pays off because you get to see it."

In the classroom, Lucas has been exploring his interest in engineering by taking

Teacher of the Year Candidate Field Narrowed to 31 Semifinalists

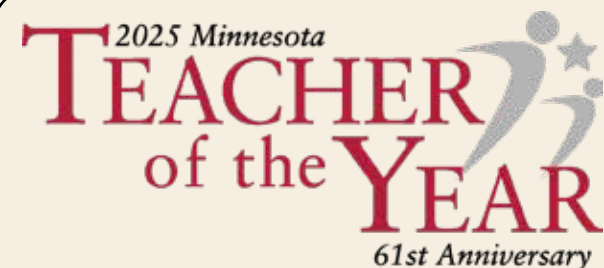
This year's program will name the 61st Minnesota Teacher of the Year. The program celebrates the tradition of excellence in teaching in Minnesota. Eligible candidates include pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade, Early Childhood Family Education and Adult Basic Education teachers, from public or private schools.

The field of possible candidates for this year's Minnesota Teacher of the Year honor has been narrowed to 31. An independent selection panel of 21 community leaders chose the semifinalists from an initial field of 142 candidates from across the state.

The panel will review the semifinalists' portfolios again, along with semifinalist video submissions. The panel will select about 10 finalists from among the group. The current Minnesota Teacher of the Year, Tracy Byrd, will announce his successor at the Minnesota Teacher of the Year banquet, scheduled for May 4 at the Saint Paul RiverCentre.

Eligible nominees must meet these criteria:

- Teach in a public or nonpublic pre-kindergarten-12th grade school, or in an Adult Basic Education or ECFE program, working at least 50 percent of the time directly with students.
- Have a Minnesota teaching license.
- Hold a bachelor's degree and a Minnesota teaching license.
- Have completed at least five full years of teaching by the nomination deadline.



- Intend to teach in Minnesota during the 2025-26 school year.

Semifinalists for 2025 Minnesota Teacher of the Year are listed alphabetically by last name below, including the district and school:

- **Stacy Bartlett**, Stillwater Area Public Schools, *Stillwater Area High School*
- **Garrett Bruce**, Robbinsdale Area Public Schools, *Robbinsdale Cooper High School*
- **Katelyn Bruce**, Minneapolis Public Schools, *Lake Harriet Lower Campus*
- **Jodi Carufel**, Bloomington Public Schools, *Olson Middle School*
- **Ryan Collins**, Mahtomedi Public Schools, *Mahtomedi Middle School*
- **Ben Cuevas-Rengstorff**, Minneapolis Public Schools, *Roosevelt High School*
- **Christoph Dundas**, Austin Public Schools, *Austin High School*
- **Laura Eid**, Eden Prairie Schools, *Central Middle School*
- **Ted Erickson**, Anoka-Hennepin School District, *Blaine High School*

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'Scrub Club' Highlights Medical Careers



Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose School District

Dozens of Buffalo High School students recently enjoyed a hands-on, behind-the-scenes opportunity to explore careers in the medical field at AH Buffalo Hospital.

The Oct. 14 "Scrub Club" event featured the emergency department, and included the chance to visit with ambulance and Life Link helicopter crews, short talks by various staff members about their career paths, and hands-on opportunities to practice CPR, suturing,

splints, bandaging, and even intubation.

"I came because I just like learning about things in the medical field," said BHS sophomore Ireland Morris. "I think it's fun, and you never know what kind of situation you might need these skills in. It's what I want to do when I'm older, so it's exciting to be able to look into it now."

Modeled on similar programs at other AH locations – and following a pilot event that highlighted surgical services last spring – the

evening was just the first of ongoing monthly Scrub Club gatherings planned for the remainder of this school year. Each event will focus on a different hospital department and the various jobs found in each.

Strong Student Interest

BHS Assistant Principal Ed Cox said about 50 students signed up for the October event, although scheduling conflicts reduced the number who actually attended to about 35.

"We really appreciate AH offering this to students in the area. They stepped up and were creative in making this work in their setting," said Cox, explaining that some of the high school's advanced classes require students to do some form of job shadowing, which is ordinarily difficult in the medical field. "As a school, we really appreciate when our community partners offer their time and their talent. Having that interaction and experience where our kids are able to work with adults is invaluable because it allows our kids to see themselves in those different positions that were highlighted. It personalizes it. It's not just a list of theoretical classes."

While enjoying pizza during a break in the evening's activities, students said they appreciated the kindness and enthusiasm of the hospital's staff in sharing their knowledge

and experience, the opportunity to ask questions, and the practical instruction.

"You learn skills you haven't learned before, but then it also helps you know – like suturing, maybe you don't like that – so you know you don't want to go into a field that involves that," said sophomore Lauren West-erlund. "It helps you know what you like and what you want to specialize in. And you pick up some basic skills, like CPR, which is really nice."

Illuminating Pathways

Along with the hands-on aspects of the evening, students had opportunities to hear from a variety of hospital staff about why they undertook careers in medicine, and the pathways they followed to their current positions.

"There's a lot of variety in medicine," said Emergency Physician Dr. Laura Contreras, adding that anyone with an interest should be able to find a good fit. "If the sight of blood bothers you, you can work in radiology or something else."

Those staff stories helped students conceptually bridge the gap from high school to a professional job, offering examples of how others went about pursuing additional education and training.

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EMTs in Training Put in “Pressure Cooker”

Spring Lake Park Schools

Visitors arriving at Spring Lake Park High School on Saturday, February 22, found what appeared to be a major emergency event. Instead, nearly 70 high school students training to become Emergency Medical Technicians were testing their skills at the State Youth EMS competition.

The 39th annual State Youth EMS competition included 17 teams, four members each, representing 15 schools. With a growing shortage of emergency medical technicians, these efforts to train the next generation of emergency responders are more important than ever. While teams were full of smiles and sporting fun names like Floo Fighters and Awesome Aorta's, the purpose was serious.

“This is a pressure cooker,” says Bill Neiss, conference chair and director of the Opportunities in Emergency Care program at Spring Lake Park High School. “We want it to feel real. Each scenario is taken from a real situation. Students’ skills and knowledge are tested on everything from patient assessment to oxygen administration to bleeding control to CPR and more.”

Three Real-Life Scenarios

What does an EMS competition look like? Well, it looks a bit like a mass casualty

event. There are three different scenarios running simultaneously. Teams are split into groups, and they rotate between the three scenarios along with a stop for a written exam.

The scenarios are based on real situations and kept secret from coaches and students until the moment they enter the situation. Past scenarios have included pool rescues, simulated vehicle accidents, the release of radioactive material in a crash, and other high stakes situations. Students go into each scenario blind and are scored on how well they handle each situation.

At the pool, the teams scattered around the pool deck. They were handed a piece of paper with a brief situation report. They read quickly.

A young adolescent hit his head in the water. The lifeguard performed a rescue, and the child is lying unconscious on the pool deck. The near drowning has resulted in multiple injuries and imminent cardiac arrest. The victim’s grandmother, who is nearby, is agitated and wheezing. At some point in the situation (they’ll learn later), she will refuse care.

After reading the initial situation, the EMT team quickly communicates with the judge their plan of action. The judge’s response is tailored to the plan the team shares. With each step and check, more



information is revealed – similar to a real life emergency.

“Wipe all the water before shocking,” says one student.

A Gentle Cadence Continues

“Checking airway. Checking breathing. Checking pulse. Applying pressure to laceration.”

Over the course of 15 minutes, the situation escalates to chest compressions and

full CPR. You can hear the intensity in their voices.

Then an abrupt, “Stop all action.” Everyone freezes. Teams slowly come back to life — and gradually put away their gear. The judges convene for scoring and the teams prepare to move to the next scenario.

In the Panther Gym, a diabetic patient has accidentally overdosed after taking the

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'Scrub Club' Highlights Medical Careers Continued from Page 4



"As a mother of high school-age students, I know there is so much pressure to know what you want to do next," said nurse and Surgical Services Manager Jill Bjornson. "Everyone asks, 'What are your plans after high school?' It is really hard to know if a specific career fits not only your interests, but also the long-term goals and lifestyle that one desires to achieve. So many things have to be considered, and it's

hard to sort out the route to achieving goals. Getting the students in an environment and exposed to people working in these careers helps them [understand] what the career path might look like."

Each speaker explained how their role fits into the hospital's larger mission of helping those in need.

"It isn't just about being a doctor or nurse.

There are careers in radiology, emergency medicine, physical therapy, medical equipment, respiratory therapy, nutrition, support services and more," said Bjornson. "Participants can attend any or all meetings that they have a desire to learn more about."

"It's a team sport," Contreras told students, adding that each hospital position addresses essential aspects of care.

Students found that professional insight helpful as they explored various aspects of the emergency department.

"The reason I'm here tonight is because my dad's a doctor," said sophomore Claire Martin. "So I've always kind of seen what it's about, but I've never gotten to actually experience it, and I just want to see if it's an option for my future."

Partnership Opportunities

Gaining that personal access to a professional setting is a powerful thing, according to Cox.

"My dream is that we could eventually have kids do something similar, on site, in a variety of other career fields too," he said. "We invite area business people, if they are curious about how they can partner with us, to reach out. We want to create opportunities for kids, and sometimes we don't know what that

could look like in different types of business settings."

Bjornson added that the experience isn't just a one-way opportunity for students, but is mutually beneficial.

"I personally get a lot out of planning and presenting the program," she said. "Reflecting on my journey and talking about my career journey reminds me of my reason why I became a nurse and why I chose to work in a community hospital. I also can see in other staff who volunteer for this program the energy and excitement that they bring to the club, sharing their story of how and why they went into their chosen profession."

Anyone with an interest is welcome to connect with Cox at the high school. His contact information is available at www.bhm-schools.org.

www.bhmschools.org



EMTs in Training Put in "Pressure Cooker" Continued from Page 5

wrong medicine. Her boyfriend, coming to her rescue, has fallen down the bleachers. Teams split up to address each victim closely monitored by two judges.

Down the hallway, in a pod of classrooms, spaces have been set up with real car seats. The scenario is a car rollover. One victim was ejected from the car. The other wore their seatbelt (safety lesson!) and remained in the vehicle. Again, each victim requires a different response.

Volunteer Victims

At each stop, volunteers fulfill important roles. The competition relies on more than 100 volunteers to assist as scenario evaluators, victims, runners, registration, photographers and more.

Victim volunteers wear pink shirts that proudly state – I'm the victim here. When victims gather for their briefing, they seem almost giddy for what lies ahead. Volunteer victims include many students in first aid courses and National Honor Society. Their briefing covers how to "act" like a victim. Over the course of the day, they will be poked, lifted, prodded, wrapped, rolled, and more.

Paige Olson and Anna Gilardi (at right) wear yellow vests indicating they are the vol-



unteer leads for one of the scenarios. Both are graduates who regularly volunteer their time to the program because they know firsthand what that volunteer commitment meant to their own experience as students.

"I wanted to help students have the same experience I did," says Anna. "The volunteers are so important for making it realistic."

Paige graduated in 2024 and works as

an EMT. She's also attending pre-PA school. Anna graduated in 2023 and works as an EMT.

They both recall how their state competition experience helped them improve their skills and prepare them for what they are doing today.

Outcomes

At the end of the day, The Backboard Battalion team comes in first. Spring Lake Park High School's Opportunities in Emergency Care program sweeps every category.

"We work hard to create a culture where students don't mind failing, and they learn how to do hard things," says Bill. "If I do everything right, there comes a point when they can coach themselves."

Overall, the experience is much less about who wins. The focus is on using this experience to improve.

Everyone who comes to this event is better when they leave. Across the board.

Opportunities in Emergency Care is part of the Health and Human Services pathway at Spring Lake Park High School. There are three Career and College Pathways that each represent a need for future jobs. Students explore careers, gain skills, work on real-world projects and even earn college credit and certifications.

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Buffalo Lake-Hector-Stewart
Schools

Ag Program at BLHS is About Preparing Students for Success

Within the communities of Buffalo Lake, Hector, and Stewart is the agricultural program that is built on a foundation of hands-on learning, real-world applications, and collaboration. BLHS graduates about 30-35 students each year as we serve around 100 students each year in the agriculture department. Our courses include Welding 1 & 2, Home Maintenance, Small Gas Engines, Woodworking, and Ag Construction; as well as classroom courses of Food Science, Vet Science, Middle School Ag, Natural Resources, and Horticulture. Our small, but mighty program encourages real-life experiences to advance students' careers in agriculture.

BLHS partners with nearby businesses and colleges to provide opportunities for our students to see local career options after high school. Each year, we tour a local manufacturing business with the welding classes. We also host a career fair for grades 9-12 that foster a connection between our students and potential employers. In addition to the career fair, BLHS partners with a nearby college for a "Teacher Takeover". This event features 10-15 various programs, instructors and even some of their students "takeover" the agriculture department during the day to interact with students to develop an interest in post-secondary education.

Welding 1 and 2 are immersed in hands-on learning techniques to practice various beads in MIG, stick, and TIG. There is also an 8 x 4 CNC plasma cutting table that practices CAD software skills. We create fire pits for the Buffalo Lake annual ice fishing contest raffle as well as other items that support positive school culture. In Welding 2, students complete the OSHA-10 General Industry certification to utilize beyond high school. Two years ago, a local manufacturing business, Schweiss Doors, generously donated new welding booths, customized welding tables, storage cabinets, and a manifold system. We also received Perkins funding and a MAELC grant to purchase new Miller welders and a hand held plasma cutter. This has greatly increased the quality of students' education and opportunities for welding projects which meet current industry standards.

A favorite among students is the Home Maintenance class, where students complete 14 lab scenarios that could be done in a real home. Labs include framing a wall, wiring an outlet, wiring a 3-way switch, PEX plumbing that connects to a sink, insulation, sheetrock, mud and taping, repairing a hole, and painting. Each of these labs simulate as if they are on a job, and students are tasked to complete the job and write a report with materials used.

Within the Ag Construction class, students are building a new 8' x 12' garden shed

for the greenhouse class to store extra pots, soil, and materials in. Students have been learning hands-on carpentry skills including laying out the walls and floor joists, framing, and making a gambrel roof. To round out the year, students will be shingling, installing the door, and finishing trim. Through these hands-on situations, students not only gain technical expertise but also improve their problem-solving, critical thinking, and teamwork abilities.

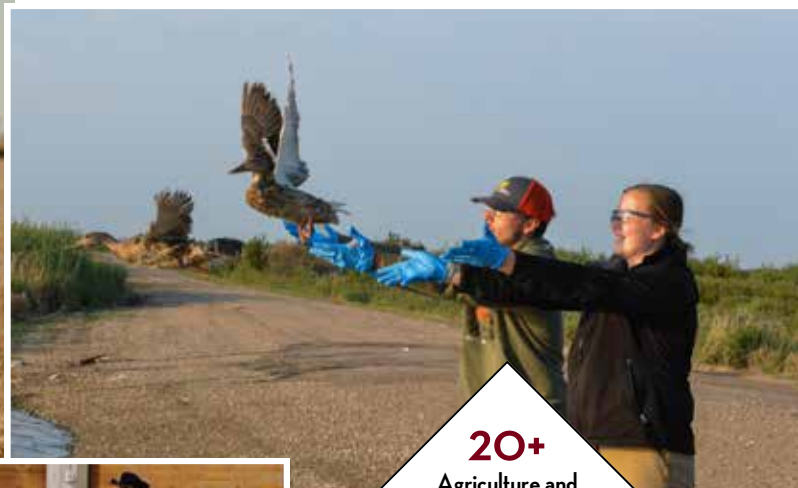
The Woodworking class completes a variety of projects each year, ranging from duck houses, cutting boards, outdoor furniture and games, to coffee tables, nightstands, and personal projects. Last year, over 30 students enrolled in Woods 1, resulting in two different sections. We were fortunate to have a community expert, Brad Dobberstein, come in each day for over a month to help students with their woodworking projects. Additionally, he assisted with teaching about machine maintenance in the shop. He is a fantastic mentor that greatly helped our program.

Ultimately, our agricultural program is about preparing students for success, whether that means pursuing a career in agriculture and trades, entering the workforce, or continuing their education in the field. We have a strong support system through the BLHS FFA Alumni, who provide immense funding and networking opportunities to further advance our program.



The skills our students acquire and the experiences they share with others will serve as the foundation for their future endeavors in the ever-changing world of agriculture.

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Eagle Ridge Pilots Hydroponic Garden System, Connecting Students to the Food They Eat

Building agricultural literacy in students while providing fresh greens for meals



Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191

Thanks to a collaboration between District 191 Food and Nutrition Services and Eagle Ridge Middle School (ERMS) staff, students at the school have the exciting opportunity to harvest greens through hydroponic technology.

Hydroponics is the technique of growing plants using a water-based nutrient solution rather than soil. Hydroponic systems are used mostly by small farmers, hobbyists and commercial enterprises, but they are becoming increasingly popular among schools and nonprofits as a way to grow their own food.

After determining a school with ample kitchen space and identifying staff to facilitate the growing process, One91 Food and Nutrition Services Director Julie Kronabeter partnered with a hydroponics manufacturer to bring a vertical hydroponics system to ERMS. It's the first school in District 191 to install an indoor garden to harvest food for school meals and snacks.

The indoor garden is also an impactful way for students to learn how to grow fresh food. Students learn about the science behind hydroponics, fostering a deeper understanding of STEM, agricultural technologies and sustainability practices. Not only does the garden empower students to grow their own leafy greens, herbs and vegetables for their school, but it also provides a cost-effective way to produce fresh food on site for the school.

"I'm thrilled to be a part of this project and introducing students and staff to hydroponic gardening," said District 191 Food

and Nutrition Services Director Julie Kronabeter. "We are excited to partner with the school and with sixth-grade science teacher Liza Nicklin, who has helped get the system up and running. Food grown at ERMS may supplement or possibly replace some of our current food purchases. If successful and future school or community partners are identified, we hope to add more units."

Fueling Exploration Through Hands-On Learning

The hydroponics lesson and curriculum is currently a stand apart curriculum each day during the students' FLEX time, when they rotate through math and reading support and other learning opportunities.

At every stage, from the initial set-up of the system to the first harvest, students were involved in the growing process. While there were some students who had a basic understanding of gardening, others had no experience at all.

"I've planted vegetables in a garden with the help of my grandmother, but I've never used a system like this before," said Lillian Torres Garzon, sixth grader. I thought it was pretty cool to have this machine where we could plant vegetables indoors.

"I really enjoyed watching the plants grow. Seeing that we actually made that happen was pretty exciting," Lillian added.

Sixth-grader Heidi Guerrero Hernandez has had a lot of experience gardening with her family members — growing a variety of fruits and vegetables such as cucumber, strawberries and squash. She

has never used a hydroponics system either, but she was excited to use one because her mom has been interested in getting one for their family.

"I really enjoyed learning how to build the hydroponics system and also working with my friends and classmates to grow lettuce and basil," said Heidi. "I think hydroponics is a great alternative to growing foods outdoors."

By the end of the school year, it's expected that each sixth-grade student will participate in the growing process in some way, but all ERMS students will have had the opportunity to observe the garden and taste the food that is grown.

"The hydroponics garden system has been a great addition to Eagle Ridge," said ERMS Principal Dave Helke. "There are so many careers in the food industry, so we are fortunate to have this opportunity for exploration. Not only have students been excited to learn the science behind growing their own food, but they have been eager to eat what they've harvested!"

Teacher Liza Nicklin says that, while there has been a steep learning curve to hydroponics, the plan this year is to perfect the growing process with students. Students and staff alike are already learning what's working and what's not. Nicklin looks forward to growing new types of fruits and/

or vegetables next year but wants to ensure that students have a voice in the planning.

"Kids have really enjoyed the opportunity to be hands-on with all aspects of this garden — germination, planting, testing the soil, harvesting and, of course, tasting the fruits of their labor!" said Nicklin. "The hydroponics project has transformed our classroom into a living laboratory, where hands-on experience meets scientific inquiry. Students have gained valuable skills such as teamwork, problem-solving and critical thinking. This hands-on approach has not only reinforced scientific concepts but has ignited students' passion for learning."

At the middle school level, Pathways learning is designed to foster exploration and nurture creativity as students consider their future. We're serious about building inclusive spaces because it gives students the best chance to continue healthy self-discovery as they bridge into our high school experience.

Learn more about District 191 Pathways at www.isd191.org/pathways.

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Forest Hills Fourth Graders Build Bee Houses for Pollinators

Eden Prairie Schools

Did you know that Minnesota has more than 400 species of bees? How about the fact that 15 percent of bees nest in cavities like hollow plant stems or holes in wood?

If you didn't, don't let it sting you that you might not be smarter than a fourth grader at Forest Hills Elementary! These budding bee experts were buzzing with excitement as they learned about these crucial pollinators from a community partner on Thursday, Oct. 24.

The crisp and sunny fall day made for the perfect conditions to take advantage of the school's outdoor classroom. Bundled in their hoodies and windbreakers, the fascinated fourth graders learned about all things bees from Mary Beech, an intern in the University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardener volunteer program and grandma to a Forest Hills first grader.

"During this lesson, students learned about the vital role that bees play in the ecosystem," said Cori Johnson, a fourth grade teacher at Forest Hills. "Ms. Mary helped raise awareness about the challenges bees face, such as habitat loss and pesticides. This knowledge helped foster a sense of responsibility and encouraged students to think about their impact on the environment." Beech focused the lesson on species of



bees small enough to live in plant stem nests. She taught students that nesting bees use mud, leaves and other materials to build walls and divide tunnels into a series of small, sealed cells. Each cell contains a lump of pollen and an egg, with the complete life cycle usually taking one year — which is why bee houses make a yard pollinator-friendly all year long.

She then showed students how to create simple stem nests using paper cups and different-sized plant stems, some of which could be found in the outdoor classroom. Once students stuffed their cups full of stems, the ultimate test was holding them upside down like Dairy Queen blizzards to ensure the stems were packed enough to stay in place.

"I think the students were very engaged and interested," Beech observed. "They asked a lot of good questions and listened to the responses."

They were pretty awesome!"

One student who had a blast learning about bees was Omar, who beamed with pride at his bee house. "I'm proud of it because of how many bees could fit and live in here," he said while dangling his creation on its string. When asked how many bees he thought would make a home in his bee house, he optimistically answered, "More

than 50!"

When Beech isn't volunteering her time teaching students about pollinators as part of her Master Gardener training, she also volunteers two times a week in her granddaughter's first grade classroom at Forest Hills. "It is an awesome school, with great staff and the best students in Eden Prairie!" she proclaimed like the proud grandma she is.

Johnson said she appreciates opportunities for her students to learn from community partners like Beech, who enrich students' educational experiences. "Through these experiences, students learn about community needs and how they can contribute positively to our Eden Prairie community, fostering a sense of purpose and belonging."

In addition to introducing students to the role we all play in environmental conservation, Beech hopes that students learned "about nature and all of its beautiful wonders, including pollinators."

If you ask the class, it sure seems Ms. Mary succeeded in passing on her passion. "I love bees!" Omar exclaimed.

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Tyler Clair '25 Named Regeneron Science Talent Search Scholar

Minnetonka Public Schools

Earlier this year, Minnetonka High School senior Tyler Clair was named a 2025 Regeneron Science Talent Search Scholar. He is one of only 300 students from across the country to earn the honor.

Clair has been involved in research since sixth grade, where he worked with a peer on a project to detect microplastics in local lake water. His Minnetonka Research project during his junior year allowed him to follow his curiosity around chemistry and water treatment; he sought to find ways that biocoagulants (in his project, dried avocado) could be used to remove microplastics from drinking water, rather than chemical coagulants. This year, he is looking at ways food waste could be used as a catalyst to degrade dyes in wastewater.

Last year, he earned places at state, national and international competitions to share his research with others. In 2024, he competed for the Stockholm Junior Water Prize as well as at the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), in addition to applying for and earning the Regeneron STS honor, which was announced in early 2025. The presentation process in all fairs required stamina, he noted, as during some days, he

was sharing his research in a fair setting from 8:00am to 4:30pm. Research has also developed his perseverance and problem-solving skills, as well as his ability to look at roadblocks as opportunities. "My teacher Mr. Burns always says if you're not running into any problems, you're doing something wrong. Part of research is the process of, when something doesn't work, taking a step back and asking why. Then you change it, and continue to approach it in new ways until you get some data that makes sense."

Other researchers, both judges and fellow student competitors, have inspired him along the way. "When I went to ISEF last year, it was really cool to be there with 1,700 people from around the world," said Clair. "I met people from Taiwan, which is where my family's from, and I got to speak to them in Chinese." Clair spoke with many people about their areas of passion, and he had the opportunity to learn about the many different scientific categories outside of his environmental engineering niche. "There are 20 categories within ISEF, from chemistry to animal sciences, and in all of those categories, I was able to learn about research ideas I hadn't considered before."

During his time at Minnetonka High School, Clair also competed through DECA, and he remains interested in ways that bring-

ing a business mindset to research can allow science to move out of the lab and into the real world. "I love looking at things that we can change about processes, like water treatment, to then make them more effective and sustainable," said Clair. "Many projects that I know of do things where they invent a completely new process, but it's something that isn't feasible on an industrial scale. I have been really focused on environmental engineering and not just the sciences, and I want to look at something that's really applicable." He has also been a leader in Minnetonka High School Student Government.

To others considering becoming involved in science fair competitions or research projects in general, Clair shares enthusiastic encouragement. "I think that the more people and unique perspectives we can get, the closer we can get to solving big world issues and getting new kinds of ideas into different fields like chemistry and biology," said Clair. "In all those areas, we need a lot more help and a lot more effort toward progress. So, you just need to be motivated and doing something you're passionate about, and the rest will come to you, as you move forward and as you work with others."

After graduation, Clair plans to study a combination of chemistry, environmental



engineering and chemical engineering, following his curiosity around water treatment and sustainability.

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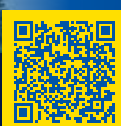


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Carrie Allord is Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom's 2024 Outstanding Teacher



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

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

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

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

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

All Minnesota licensed K-12 educators who creatively integrate agricultural concepts into non-agricultural education classroom settings are eligible for the MAITC Outstanding Teacher Award. Applications are reviewed by a committee of MAITC Foundation board members, who select the recipient each winter.

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



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

"These outstanding teachers recognize that agriculture also is a perfect foundation for teaching biology, chemistry, climatology, math, and literacy, in ways that any

age or level of students can understand, value and apply to their daily life," said USDA NIFA Director Dr. Manjit Misra. "When a student makes that real-life connection to the lessons and activities their teachers share, students continue to learn and value the true meaning of those lessons when they leave the classroom. Innovative teachers like these are often responsible for awakening a student's love of learning, nature and science."

St. Francis Catholic Grade School was opened in 1909 in a two-story, eight classroom building. In 1952 a new facility and gymnasium were built, and in 2010 a major renovation and expansion project was completed. The student base includes those from Brainerd/Baxter as well as Aitkin, Breezy Point, Crosby, Crosslake, Cushing, Deerwood, Nisswa, Pequot Lakes, Pillager and Pine River.

stfrancis.catholicschool.org



School Garden/Ag Grants

\$189,000 in Competitive Grants Available for Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (AFNR) Education



The Minnesota Agricultural Education Leadership Council (MAELC) is now accepting grant applications for the improvement of agricultural education across Minnesota. Funds will be awarded in two competitive grant areas – Strategic Initiatives and Common Fund.

Nearly \$189,000 is available between these competitive grant programs. All grant applications must be completed online at www.mn.gov/maelc/grants.html before midnight on April 15, 2025.

"MAELC grants aim to enhance agriculture, food, and natural resources (AFNR) education by supporting innovative programs that expand access to AFNR learning, improve

curricula and course delivery, and foster professional development for educators. We are committed to cultivating the next generation of agricultural leaders and educators," said Sarah Dornink, Executive Director of MAELC.

Common Fund grants are awarded to applications having a statewide impact. New and innovative ideas are encouraged to support increasing quality of instruction, increasing the numbers and types of students reached by programs, and projects that improve the understanding of AFNR education.

Strategic Initiative grants focus on promoting access to AFNR education, improving current programs, and providing teacher professional development. These grants support programming at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels in Minnesota.

Grant applications can be obtained online at www.mn.gov/maelc/grants.html.

FFA Living to Serve Grants

Living to Serve Grants provide an opportunity for FFA chapters and state FFA associations/foundations to seek funding to support various types of service projects through a competitive application process.

Applicants must identify a community need that falls within one of four focus

areas: community safety; hunger, health and nutrition; environmental responsibility; or community engagement.

Yearlong Grant

Yearlong grants provide middle and high school FFA chapters with up to \$3,000 to support a service-learning project that spans an entire school year.

2025-2026 Application Dates:

- Application Open: April 15, 2025
- Application Due: June 17, 2025
- Award Notification: Aug. 1, 2025

Semester-Long Grants

This grant provides middle/high school FFA chapters with up to \$1,200 per semester to implement a service-learning project in their community for one semester.

Fall 2025 Semester Application Dates

- Application Open: July 25, 2025
- Application Due: Aug. 29, 2025
- Award Notification: Sept. 15, 2025

DAY of service mini-grant

Apply now! This grant provides alumni, middle and high school chapters with up to \$400 to conduct a one-time service event.

For more information on how to apply go to <https://www.ffa.org/livingtoserve/grants/>

Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Program

Do you know of a local school, nature center, after-school care program, community center or youth group in need of funding for a native garden or habitat? If so, please invite them to apply for an SFE grant. All public and private schools, non-profits such as nature centers, youth organizations and community youth centers in the US are welcome to apply so long as the project uses native plants or seeds to educate youth. Please note SFE grants do not fund vegetable gardens.

For more than 25 years, this vital Wild Ones donor-funded program has provided grants ranging from \$100 to \$500 for native plant gardens and landscaping projects throughout the United States. The funds are designated for acquiring native plants and seeds for outdoor learning areas that engage youth (preschool to high school) directly in planning, planting and caring for native plant gardens.

Applications will open in mid-to-late July 2025 at <https://wildones.org/seeds-for-education>

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"A Place Here for Everyone"



Eastern Carver County Schools

Bennett Eriksrud is involved in many things at Chaska High School. He's a state qualifier in DECA, a member of Key Club and National Honor Society. He's a shining star academically. But when he's in the technical education wing of the high school, his passion comes out.

"My brother (Max) was always into woodworking and when I was able to see what he was able to do, it inspired me to want to get into it. He's been more of a furniture guy, while I'm more of a nick-nack guy. Making something I can hang in my room or practical stuff," Eriksrud said.

Wanting to extend his talents beyond the standard cutting board or bird feeder projects in Woods class, Eriksrud went to work with Sam Porthan, the school's new technical education teacher. Using a CAD (computer-aided design) machine that had primarily been used for the robotics team, Eriksrud took his vision of a map of the United States of America with engrainment of stars and stripes of the country's flag and turned it into reality.

He worked with one of his close friends, Gavin Moen, captain of the Chaska Robotics



team, to learn to convert a 2D design into 3D, then how to cut out the project using a 3D rendering tool.

Eriksrud was able to create a hand-held version during the first semester. Weeks into the second semester, he had created a much larger version of the work. "Once we had the small one programmed, there was a tool in the software to scale it up, so it was just about changing some bit sizes," said Eriksrud, who figured it took the CAD about 30 minutes to cut out. "I really wanted to take the initiative to learn how to use the software. There is so much more creativity that can be done with that machine and this program."

Classmates used the CAD to make cribbage boards in the early stages of the semester as well.

Following In Their Footsteps

If the name Porthan rings a bell, it's because Sam is a Chanhassen High School graduate, the Class of 2017, the oldest of four siblings. His parents, Janae and Tony, are teachers at Victoria Elementary and Chaska Middle School West. He worked at Waconia High School previously before coming back to Eastern Carver County Schools this school year.

"I'd say I really started being interested in becoming a teacher in high school. Being at Chanhassen High School, I loved the tech ed program with Mark Lacy and Peter Mommsen, who was there at the time. They kind of pushed me into that direction. I knew what the teacher lifestyle was with my parents. The positive impact they have had on so many kids throughout the district, I was really drawn to that," Porthan said.

Porthan is currently teaching Introduction to Robotics, Design and Fabrication Metals, Know Your Car, and Design and Fabrication Woods.

Hands-On Experience

Junior Ethan Roberts is in his first woodworking class this semester. He took Architectural Drafting 2 last semester with Mr. Porthan and came away impressed. The class designed a shed on the computer and then brought it to life in the shop, framing the walls, adding a door and windows, and finishing with a roof.

"We designed a miniature shed in a program called Revit and then we actually got a chance to build it, to set it all up. Going from square one to see how people would design it, then build it, then put it together; it was so important for me. It was so nice to be in the shop, learning how to frame a wall, and to learn the process after the architecture and drafting piece," Roberts said.

Porthan believes the opportunities in his classes are important for all students to learn.

"This area is great for all students, whether they are interested in 4-year degrees, 2-year degrees or apprenticeship programs. We want to show them there are many options for them to explore, wherever their passion lives," he said.

Porthan and students presented examples of recent student work at registration night in January.

"It's so useful," said Roberts of technical education classes. "I learned how to frame a wall down here. Something I could actually use ahead of me in life. It's so important to learn these skills. Why pay someone a ton of money someday to do some of these projects when I can learn to do them now?"

"Part of the (metals) class was learning how to weld. I was able to weld on a tangible thing I'll be able to use in the future. When you have a project you need to get done, and the skill you're learning will help you achieve that, you're really wanting to get to work on it. I think Mr. Porthan is really good with not only the how, but the why behind his teaching," Eriksrud said.



The Future

Porthan has enjoyed his first year being back in the district. He envisions adding more technical education classes in the future such as Building a Tiny House.

"I'm very excited for the future. I know next year I'll be taking more wood classes and it will be fun to develop ideas for what my next projects could be, said Roberts, a junior. "The projects we're working on right now are challenging for my level right now, but once I'm able to build these skills up, I'm excited to see what I could do in the future."

"In my last job, we had a wide variety of students in my classes. It was students that wanted to try something they weren't proficient at and wanted to learn some problem solving skills and build life skills. They're actually doing a hands-on task. We had kids that were interested in being a plumber or electrician to someone interested in being an aerospace engineer all in one class. There's a place here for everyone," Porthan said.

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Students Bring Big Ideas to Life in 'Shark Tank' Style Competition



Spring Lake Park High School students in the year-long Marketing and Entrepreneurship class recently stepped into the spotlight to pitch their creative business ideas in the annual "Shark Tank"-style competition. After months of hard work, 12 student groups showcased their product or service ideas to local judges.

Dressed to impress and full of confidence (and a few jitters), students delivered pitches covering everything from marketing strategies to financial plans. The judges, professionals from local industries, listened closely and offered valuable advice and feedback.

Students dreamed big. There were AI-powered glasses to sharpen your golf game. There was an eco-friendly mobile thrift shop. There was a sturdy case intended to extend the life of baseball gloves, and a closet organizer app designed to simplify busy mornings.

In the first round, students presented three times to different panels of judges. Judges were then tasked with rating the pitches. After the scores were tallied, six teams advanced to the final round. On December 18, the finalists pitched their ideas one last time to a group of experts.

We caught up with the finalists to hear about their ideas, how this unique class is shaping their future goals and what it's like to pitch their ideas to real-world business pros.

Editor's note – These are the first two of six interviews with the finalists. Watch the next issue of Teaching Today MN™ for the other four, including the winners! The full article is also available at: <https://www.springlakepark-schools.org/news/news/~board/district-news/post/students-bring-big-ideas-to-life-in-shark-tank-style-competition>

Finalist #1: Hunter C. and Aaron J.

Product: Competitive Compressions

Describe the product or service you are pitching and why:

Aaron: Our idea is copper-lined compression braces that are completely customizable to the individual and different sports. For example, volleyball players might wear knee or elbow pads and basketball players might wear a knee brace for protection. We chose this product because we are both athletes, and actually, we both have knee problems.

Hunter: We thought it was a good idea because it's something that hasn't been done yet, and both of us could benefit from this product.

What has been the biggest learning you've had

in this class so far?

Hunter: Learning about finances was the biggest learning curve so far. Finding out and determining what you need or don't need.

Aaron: I agree going through the financing was the hardest part, the liabilities and assets. It was overwhelming at first, but we learned a lot through Ms. Welken.

How is this class helping you think about your future and what you might want to do?

Hunter: I'm a senior, so I already knew when registering for this class that I wanted to major in business management after high school. This solidifies it for me now that I know this is actually something I enjoy. I'm not guessing anymore...I know that this is what I'm interested in and this is my path.

Aaron: Since I'm only a junior, I don't know yet where I may want to go to college, though I am potentially considering going into finance or marketing.

What has it been like pitching to judges?

Aaron: I was nervous at first but I reminded myself that the "sharks" are human, too. As soon as you start, you forget about the nerves.

Continued on Page 18



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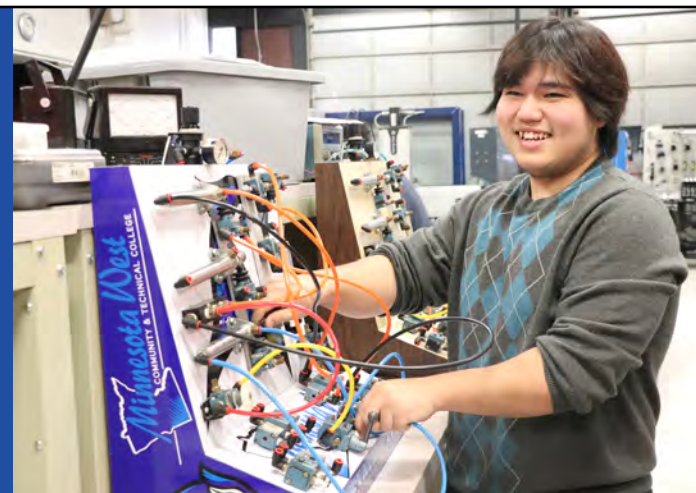


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A way we can ALL share the great future in manufacturing (and trades) is to promote and/or host a Manufacturing Day Tour/event as part of the [Statewide Tour of Manufacturing](#). Last Fall I was on the panel for a webinar series to promote the Statewide Tour through the [Minnesota State Advanced Manufacturing Center of Excellence](#). Although October is generally Manufacturing Month, hosting a tour (large or small) doesn't have to be in October — you can open your doors to students and your community anytime! Why not reach out to your local community and invite them to visit your school or company? If WE don't reach out, how will people know about the GREAT opportunities that await through careers in manufacturing?

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Productivity® helps promote (and encourage) today's generation — and even OUR generation — to look at what they can DO to make a difference and even carry on legacies is by supporting Manufacturing Education. One of the ways we do so is through our Biennial Machine Tool Show called "Oktoberfest" and by devoting the first day TO Education by holding an event called "Oktoberfest Student/Career Day" in which we invite High School (including Administrators and Counselors) and Post-Secondary students to come and explore Manufacturing Careers by showing them the latest (and greatest) technology in Manufacturing, as well as connect students with Industry during the event. Student/Career Day is coming up September 22 and planning is underway!

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A Dynamic Teaching Duo and Cutting Edge Technology at Pine City High School



Pine City Public Schools

Students at Pine City High School have been able to learn some cutting edge technology which is widely used in industry today. The Career and Technical Education department recently purchased a plasma arc cutting table with Perkins Grant funding. This

machine can cut any type of metal including aluminum up to 4x4 feet in size, and up to about 3/8 inch thick material. The machine uses what is called Computer Numeric Controlled (CNC) technology which can take any shape, symbol, graphic, etc. and convert into what is referred to as g-codes. Within seconds, hundreds of lines of g-codes are created into precise tool paths and other functions for the plasma cutter to perform. The plasma cutter has a 45 amp cutting tool which uses a combination of compressed air and an arc (which is simply a short electrical circuit) to pierce and cut the material in whatever it is programmed to do. The 4 x 4 table is filled with a combination of water and a cutting

solution which prevents smoking and rust from forming while it cools the dross created from the cutting process.

In the realm of Career and Technical Education (CTE), Pine City High School's Department stands as a fantastic example of



experiential learning and skill development. With nearly 50 years of combined educational expertise, the team spearheads initiatives that empower students to personalize their education journey.

Jared Eichten is known for his knack for fixing anything. He teaches the renowned Pine City wood duck project and recommends "Hatchet" and "The Car" to students. Hailing from St. Croix Falls WI, he enjoys

fishing, hunting, and champions a hands-on approach in his teaching, blending traditional and modern tools.

Tim Schlichting boasts military tank-driving skills. He teaches CNC Plasma cutting and 3D printing, fondly recalls high school hockey victories, and recommends technical manuals. Embracing both traditional and

Continued on Page 18



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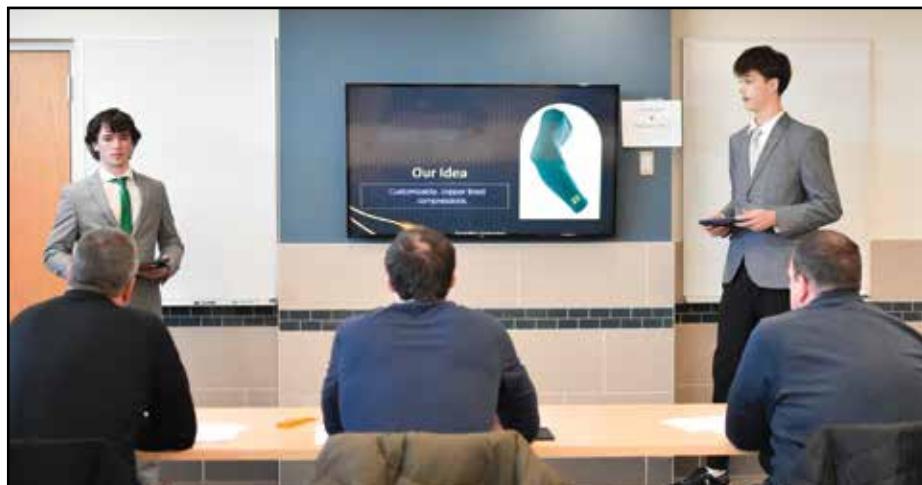
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Students Bring Big Ideas to Life in 'Shark Tank' Style Competition

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Hunter C. and Aaron J. present their idea for copper-lined compression braces.

Hunter: Now we're going to work through the feedback portion from the first round and how to add in relevant aspects. We're ready to go back and edit our presentation slides and different parts of our financials.

Finalist #2: Matthew G. and Lincoln S.
Product: Diamond Cases

Describe the product or service you are pitching and why:

Lincoln: Our product is a case for your baseball glove to help protect it and make it last longer. It's essential for a glove to hold its form. The goal is ultimately to reduce the number of gloves you have to buy in a lifetime. We wanted a case that could be stored within your bag, which reduces the number of bags you have to carry while traveling, and keeps it safe.

Matthew: I have been playing baseball for 12 years now. One of the key points of our presentation was comparing against the

competition, which I own for my own glove. I've seen a lot of negatives with the product that exists right now, and I thought we could maybe find a way to improve it. At the end of the day, it's an expensive item so you don't want to damage it. It's like a form of insurance for your glove.

What has been the biggest learning you've had in this class so far?

Matthew: Figuring out how we work together and how to communicate together.

Lincoln: Finding our own strengths and weaknesses. We had to lean on each other to build a really great product.

How is this class helping you think about your future and what you might want to do?

Matthew: As a junior, I think I want to do business, but I don't know what area quite yet which is why I signed up for this class. It's been helpful communicating with other groups too, since there's a lot of smart people in this class. I've enjoyed problem-solving,

figuring out ways to get through when you don't know the answer. We've had to branch out and figure out a lot of specifics on our own to develop the project.

Lincoln: As a senior, I want to go into the business field. I've been taking most of the business classes in Pathways. Creating your own business is cool and something I can take into my future. We've had a lot of conversations with peers to build connections in the class, with people you wouldn't otherwise meet. This has been great preparation for college.

What has it been like pitching to judges?

Matthew: I actually really enjoyed it. At first when I saw where the judges were seated I thought, 'Woah, they are close!' But we got up there and said what we needed to get through. One feedback moment that stands out to me was getting praised for shaking hands at the end of the presentation because

that hadn't happened yet with the other groups. We are bringing the business professional aspect. We felt very comfortable and didn't doubt ourselves.

Lincoln: We didn't necessarily practice much, but we did know our presentation really in-depth. We also prepared for what questions could come up. You can practice as much as you want, but if you're only memorizing and don't know your product, it will show. During the first round we got immediate feedback, so we even made quick adjustments right before the next presentation. Matthew and I shared a lot of non-verbal communication during their questioning to decide who could answer the best. It was great we could rely on each other in that way.

springlakeparkschools.org



Matthew G. and Lincoln S. demonstrate their product, a case for a baseball glove.

A Dynamic Teaching Duo and Cutting Edge Technology at Pine City High School

Continued from Page 16

modern techniques, his team integrates hand tools with laser engraving and 3D printing for innovative projects.

Mr. Eichten's 7th grade CTE students (photo on page 16) have been working diligently on the traditional wood duck project. In 7th grade CTE classes, the students concentrate on traditional drafting and woodworking applications. They do not use computers for drafting, it is all done by hand drawing using traditional drafting tools. In the woodworking part of the course, the students do not use power tools either. The wood duck project is cut, filed, sanded, and varnished all by hand. The students will start using power tools and computers in 8th grade CTE courses. It is almost time to let this batch of ducks migrate to their new homes and start a new flock in the fourth quarter.



Mr. Eichten's woodworking classes (photo at left) are crafting walleye hat racks, honing band saw skills. Students face challenges in cutting smooth curves, resorting to hand filing and sanding. Some opt for laser engraving details. They made personal clocks in November, many choosing to engrave whitetail bucks due to it being deer hunting season.

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Andover High School Grad ‘Plows’ Forward With Sixth-Grade Dream, Future Business Plans

Anoka-Hennepin Schools

Max Minakov, Andover High School (AndHS) alum (22’), realized a potential career pathway at Oak View Middle School (OVMS) when his sixth grade Science project kick-started an idea that has snowballed into a pretty ‘cool’ invention: A snowplow robot.

His Science teacher, Tim Quigley, tasked students with completing a project — around the same time that Minakov had turned a cold shoulder to a chore at home: Shoveling the driveway.

Minakov designed and presented a robotic snowplow to his class, creating a buzz in school that earned him a reputation as the “robot kid” before advancing to the districtwide Science Fair.

Focused on his dream

From there, Minakov embraced the rigor of advanced placement (AP) chemistry and calculus courses at AndHS. While he participated in basketball, tennis and track with his friends — he remained focused on school and refining his robot in his free time.

As a junior and senior, Minakov earned college credits through the Post-Secondary Education Option (PSEO) at a local community college part-time. While there, he kept in touch with his past teachers. “They really cared about my growth and helped me find ways to connect

my learning to the real world,” he said.

Minakov credits Industrial Technology teacher Thomas Gallagher for teaching him about CAD and 3-D printing; Ann VanGheem with challenging him in AP Chemistry; Kate Tverberg for assisting with writing algorithms for his robot outside of Calculus; and Justin Brama, a history teacher who supported him in his business journey. “They were genuinely excited to work with me on problems I encountered [with the robot]. That mentorship was invaluable and set the foundation for what I’m building today.”

Snow business

Minakov will graduate this spring with a degree in entrepreneurial management — in just three years. He remains focused on turning his middle school idea into a sustainable business.

Nivoso, the Latin word for “snowy,” is the company he has launched — specializing in snow removal robots — already gaining significant recognition.

- In 2023, he took first place in a business competition at the U of M among 3,200 applicants.
- Last year, he earned second place at the University of St. Thomas’ e-Fest®, an undergraduate entrepreneurship competition, adding \$30,000 to Nivoso’s funding.

The goal is to adapt the robot for lawn mowing and agricultural applications. “Snow is a great testing ground because of its harsh and unpredictable nature, but the technology has potential far beyond that,” he explains. His current design is built for commercial use, but Minakov plans to launch a pre-order for a residential grade of snowplow robots after he graduates this summer.

Coming full circle

Minakov enjoys collaborating with other dreamers at the U of M, where he serves as a director for Atland Ventures — a student-run Venture Capital firm that invests in technology-based startup companies. His involvement offers opportunities to understand finance, research prospective investees, listen to business pitches and network with business leaders. He and fellow undergrads raised \$1 million over the past year to replenish the fund for future startups developed by aspiring inven-

tors like him.

“It’s cool to think that what started as a sixth-grade project has turned into something real, and I’m excited to see where it goes next.”



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Engineering Custom Bathroom Passes



Spring Lake Park Schools

Bekah, a junior at Spring Lake Park High School, has aspirations of becoming a prosthetist. She's exploring that path as she takes the year-long Introduction to Engineering course. Recently, students test drove a design process by engineering custom bathroom passes for their "clients" – their high school teachers.

This is Martin Lohman's first year as a Computer Science and Engineering teacher at Spring Lake Park High School. The goal of the class is to get students excited about engineering while teaching the design process. Students learn a six-point design process to develop products.

The bathroom pass project gives students a real, tangible outcome for their efforts and the opportunities to put the six-point design process into action. Teachers were the students' "clients" and students designed and 3D printed the teacher's requested custom bathroom pass. Students learned to design and manufacture their product and practiced soft skills like communication, teamwork and problem-solving.

"I wanted students to have a project with a tangible result," says Martin. "It's a unique opportunity for students to work with a client and see their designs being used in real life. It's a great sense of accomplishment."

From Process to Product

The project began with students meeting their "client" – teachers from various departments – to understand their needs and interests. They created surveys to gather insights, brainstormed ideas and developed prototypes on CAD software.

Once their designs were approved, students printed the passes and assembled the final products. The result was a custom-made bathroom pass that teachers can use in their high school classrooms – replacing the need

for paper passes or other off the wall items (like a giant toilet prop used as a bathroom pass in health class).

For Nathan, an 11th grader, this project was an opportunity to connect his personal interests with his studies. Encouraged by his father, who has a background in computer chip design, Nathan joined the course to explore his own potential in the field.

For this project, his client was Bill Neiss, Opportunities in Emergency Care (OEC) instructor. Nathan has known Bill since freshman year, and he said the relationship helped the project go smoothly.

After settling on the design, which was the program's logo, Nathan finalized it in CAD and printed the pass which now hangs proudly on a skeleton outside of the OEC classroom.

"I used to do concept-based drawing, but never thought I'd see my ideas come to life in a 3D-printed product, so this has been cool," says Nathan.

Micah, a 10th grader, decided to take the Intro to Engineering course to test the waters for a future in engineering. He collaborated with science teacher, Kyle Greene, to design a bathroom pass inspired by a video game they both enjoy.

"I started with a survey to understand what he liked, and then I created a design for a circuit board from the game," says Micah.

Sami, another 10th grader, worked with Language Arts teacher, Beatrice Bruyers, who shared her interest in Legends of Zelda, knitting and cross-stitching. Sami decided to design a bathroom pass inspired by the game, merging his interest with his client's.

With little prior knowledge in CAD, he's dedicated time to learning the program step by step. Collaboration has been his favorite part of the course so far.

"I've enjoyed working with others and sharing ideas," he said.

Learning About Themselves

Bekah has known since she was young that she wanted to pursue her medical degree to become a prosthetist one day.

"In fourth grade, I went on a field trip to Century College, where I saw prosthetics being made and I've been hooked ever since" says Bekah.

She sees this course, and each project, as a step toward her career goal. Working with choir teacher Stephanie Phelps, Bekah created her silhouette of a singer for the bathroom pass. Although it came together in the end, the project wasn't without challenges.

"Some letters and symbols didn't print properly at first, but I kept problem-solving until I got it right," she said. "This course has taught me how to start a project and see it through to the finish line, using both the available tools and my brain to make it all come together."

Other students also learned about themselves in the process. Despite initial setbacks, such as thin lines that didn't print well, Micah adjusted his design to include bolder letters. Overcoming the challenges and making something useful has been a highlight of the course



for him. Sami learned how to set aside his own biases and rely on classroom learning.

Students interested in taking a next step in the engineering path can build on their experiences by taking Principles of Engineering. Other engineering-aligned courses include How to Make Almost Anything, Computer Science and Intro to the Trades.

springlakeparkschools.org



Experience as Theater's Lighting Director Led BHS Senior to Pursue Electrical Engineering

Continued from Page 1



that experience is something I really enjoyed," he said. "It's a great opportunity when you get into something as a freshman and stick with it. You have more time to develop and understand what you're doing and see where that can go for you."

Lucas said his experiences both at the Mraz Center and in his Pathways classes have him feeling well prepared for college.

"Just having that experience in engineering classes gave me an idea of what to expect going forward and made me more confident that I'll succeed in an engineering path," he said. "The engineering Pathways at Burnsville High School gave me the chance to dip my feet in the water and see what was out there. It was all really fun and just gave me a variety of experiences in that field."

From preschool through graduation, District 191's Pathways model provides all students with age-appropriate experiences through which they explore possibilities, develop the skills and attributes they'll need to succeed, find their passions and prepare for their futures.

pathways.isd191.org





Eden Prairie Schools' Dr. Mitch Hegland Named 2025 NAESP National Outstanding Assistant Principal from Minnesota



Congratulations to Dr. Mitch Hegland, associate principal at Eagle Heights Spanish Immersion, for being named the 2025 NAESP National Outstanding Assistant Principal by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association! The prestigious recognition honors Dr. Hegland's exceptional leadership, dedication and contributions to students, staff and families at Eagle Heights and beyond.

The NAESP NOAP program highlights assistant principals who excel in

fostering school cultures where students thrive, staff flourish, and families feel connected. This award reflects Dr. Hegland's unwavering commitment to building a lifelong love of learning and community among all stakeholders.

Another hallmark of Dr. Hegland's leadership is his dedication to fostering an inclusive, positive, and proactive school culture. With his help, Eagle Heights Spanish Immersion has been recognized as a PBIS Sustaining Exemplar School, thanks to the implementation of a school-wide approach that focuses on proactive interventions, restorative practices, and amplifying diverse cultures. "He has led our PBIS initiative with passion, teaching children to learn from their mistakes and develop skills for lifelong success," asserts Hernán Moncada, Principal at Dr. Hegland's school. "He champions an approach that values personal growth, building resilience in both our students and staff."

Dr. Hegland also champions professional growth for staff, partnering with educators to implement transformative practices like Responsive Classroom,

MTSS, and the Science of Reading. His commitment to fostering teacher efficacy ensures that students at Eagle Heights benefit from innovative, high-quality instruction.

A cornerstone of Dr. Hegland's leadership is his strong focus on parent and community relations, working tirelessly to ensure families feel heard, valued, and supported. Whether greeting students with a smile at drop-off or attending community events, Dr. Hegland models the joy and connection that makes Eagle Heights a vibrant, welcoming school community.

Dr. Hegland's influence extends far beyond his professional role. "One of Mitch's most outstanding qualities is his selflessness," noted Felicia Thames, Ed.S., assistant superintendent of elementary education in Eden Prairie Schools. "He is a volunteer at the Simpson House, a homeless shelter in Minneapolis and PROP, the local food shelf in Eden Prairie. He demonstrates a deep commitment to giving back to those in need."

MESPA Executive Director Michelle Krell praised Dr. Hegland, saying, "Dr. Mitch Hegland exemplifies the trans-

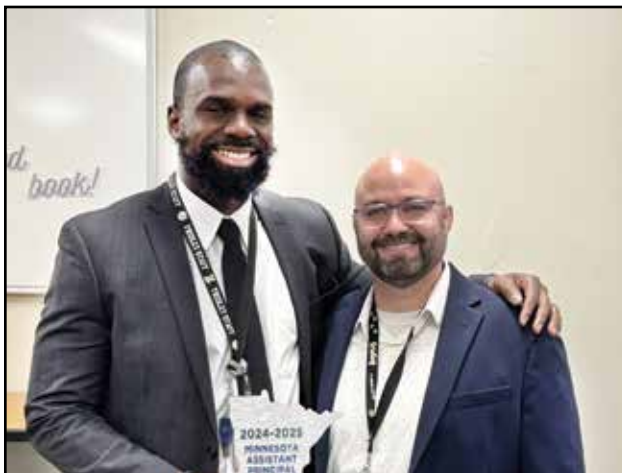
formative impact exceptional assistant principals have on their school communities. This award honors his dedication to fostering inclusive, thriving environments and highlights the critical role assistant principals play in shaping the future of education." Congratulations to Dr. Mitch Hegland's incredible achievements and his well-deserved recognition as the 2025 NAESP National Outstanding Assistant Principal from Minnesota.

For the second year in a row, an Eden Prairie Schools associate principal has received this honor! Dr. Hegland joins last year's recipient, former Prairie View Elementary Associate Principal Brett Lobben, as an NOAP winner. Please join us in congratulating Dr. Hegland on this incredible achievement and well-deserved recognition!

www.edenpr.org



Fridley High School Assistant Principal Named Minnesota High School Assistant Principal of the Year



During a staff meeting in a full FHS media center, the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) Executive Director, Bob Driver, surprised Assistant Principal Lamii Zarlee with an incredible honor. Accompanied by Lamii's family—his mother, wife, daughters, and in-laws—Driver announced that Lamii has been named the Minnesota High School Assistant Principal of the Year for 2024-2025. The room erupted in applause,

with staff giving a heartfelt standing ovation.

The journey to this award began with Lamii being selected as the Hennepin Division Assistant Principal of the Year. From there, he advanced to the state level, where he completed a rigorous application process. A 24-member MASSP board reviewed applications from across Minnesota and chose Lamii to represent the state as Assistant Principal of the Year.

Lamii's impact on the Fridley High School community stood out in testimonials from students, teachers, and his principal.

- A student shared: "I feel very well supported and safe at our school. Mr. Zarlee has a great relationship with students, remembers their names, and takes time to check in on us."

- A teacher praised Lamii as a "champion of restorative practices with a community-first approach, who brings his authentic self to everything he does."
- Principal Kelly McConville highlighted Lamii's leadership: "He has the enormous task of being one assistant principal for 900 students, and he excels in supporting their social, emotional, and academic needs. He leads the PBIS team and fosters a collaborative culture. Lamii's growth as a leader has been incredible to watch."

Lamii's humility, dedication, and connection to the school community earned him this well-deserved recognition. Overwhelmed with emotion, Lamii expressed his gratitude to the staff and his family for their unwavering support.

From MASSP - *Lamii Zarlee, Assistant Principal at Fridley High School, has been named the 2024-2025 Minnesota High School Assistant Principal of the Year for his exceptional leadership,*

focus on student success, and dedication to fostering a positive school culture. Known for his approachability and strong relationships with students, Zarlee builds connections by being present and engaged with them, offering support and checking in on their progress. Teachers and staff praise his promotion of restorative practices and his active role in community engagement, using methods like community circles to repair relationships and create open communication. As a leader, Zarlee effectively balances the demands of his role, ensuring systems of support are in place to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs while fostering a collaborative culture among staff.

fridleyschools.org





National Teacher of the Year for Family and Consumer Sciences



ISD 196 Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan

Mia Battistone, a Family and Consumer Sciences teacher at Eastview High School, is the National Teacher of the Year, honored by the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS). Family and

Consumer Sciences equips students with real-world skills in financial literacy, nutrition, child development, housing, interior design, and consumer education.

On Wednesday, February 12, Eastview staff, students, and national association representatives surprised Battistone with the award at school. During the celebration, Principal Bruce Miller recognized her dedication, innovation, and impact on Family and Consumer Sciences education.

"Mia's compassion for all learners is evident, creating a nurturing learning environment where she believes every student can learn," said Eastview Principal Bruce Miller. "Her ability to connect with students, differentiating her teaching to their unique needs, sets her apart. Her creative approach empowers her students for whatever is beyond the classroom. Mia's impact on our school community, in the classroom, and through her mentorship of our Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America

(FCCLA) club make her an exceptional candidate for this well-deserved recognition."

"Mia has provided curricular and co-curricular opportunities to help her students thrive," said Superintendent Michael Bolsoni. "She is dedicated to her students and their interests and puts time and energy into finding meaningful career pathways. She has been a positive member of the District 196 community in her classroom and beyond. Her thriving FCCLA organization at Eastview provides leadership development and connects students with district and industry leaders."

"Mia Battistone exemplifies the highest standards of excellence in FCS education," said Krysten Dane, past president of the Minnesota Family and Consumer Sciences Association. "Her innovative approach to teaching and unwavering dedication to her students truly set her apart. She prepares her students for success and inspires the next generation of family and consumer sciences

professionals."

Battistone will be recognized during the AAFCS National Conference in Kansas City this summer. The professional association has more than 6,000 professional members.

The honor of National Teacher of the Year adds to a long list of Battistone's accolades, including her recent recognition as Minnesota Teacher of the Year from the Minnesota Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (MAFCS). Last year, she was also a finalist for the National Adviser of the Year Award as the Advisor of FCCLA (Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America), solidifying her reputation as a leader in Family and Consumer Sciences education.

www.district196.org



Cedar Island Elementary School Music Specialist Named Elementary Music Educator of the Year



ISD 196 Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan

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Finalists Announced for 2025 NAESP National Distinguished Principal from Minnesota

The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA), in partnership with the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP), is proud to announce the three finalists for the prestigious National Distinguished Principal award from Minnesota. This award recognizes 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.

The finalists for the 2025 National Distinguished Principal award are:

Ashley Farrington, Principal of Birchview Elementary, Wayzata Public Schools

Ashley Farrington has made remarkable contributions to Birchview Elementary by rebranding the school's core mission to #AtBVYouMatter, fostering a welcoming, safe, and connected environment where each student feels valued. Farrington also established MESPA's BIPOC Affinity Group, providing



crucial support and empowerment for BIPOC principals. Under his leadership, Birchview Elementary saw a significant increase in reading proficiency through focused work in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) around literacy and small group instruction.

wayzataschools.org/
birchview

Jeff Radel, Principal of Glen Lake Elementary, Hopkins Public Schools

Jeff Radel has transformed Glen Lake Elementary by leading the implementation of a House system that promotes structure and a strong sense of belonging among students. He collaborated to create the COMPASSion Invasion program, fostering inclusion for students with disabilities and complex medical needs. Radel also empowered 5th and 6th grade students to lead a fundraising effort that



raised over \$900,000 to build an accessible playground, ensuring that students who use wheelchairs have a space to play and engage with their peers.

glenlake.
hopkinsschools.org

Chad Ryburn, Principal of Highland Elementary School, District 196

Chad Ryburn, principal of Highland Elementary, has been named founding principal of Emerald Trail Elementary, opening in fall 2025 in District 196. A National Board-Certified educator, Ryburn led Highland Elementary to earn a National Blue Ribbon Award for Exemplary High Performance. He champions innovation, inclusion, and academic excellence, engaging parents, staff, and students in decision-making. His leadership includes transitioning Highland's Site Council to an active



PTO and restructuring building leadership teams to focus on building goals and student data.

hl.district196.org

In May, these finalists will be interviewed by 13 principal leaders from across the state of Minnesota. Based on the interviews and the scores they've received on their application and recommendations, one outstanding principal will be chosen to represent Minnesota as the 2025 National Distinguished Principal.

"We are thrilled to celebrate the accomplishments of these exceptional leaders who have made significant impacts in their schools and communities," said Michelle Krell. "Their dedication to student success, inclusivity, and continuous improvement exemplifies the core values of MESPA and NAESP."

For more information about the National Distinguished Principal award and the selection process, visit www.mespa.net/NDP

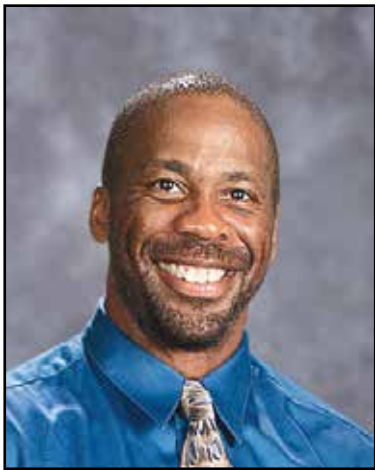
Teacher of the Year Candidates Continued from Page 1

- **Megan Frantzen**, South St. Paul Public Schools, *Kaposia Education Center*
- **Ted Gehring**, St. Francis Area Schools, *St. Francis Middle School*
- **Jonathan Gilmer**, Lakeville Public School District, *Lakeville South High School*
- **Megan Hill**, Minnetonka Public Schools, *Groveland Elementary*
- **John Horton**, Saint Paul Public Schools, *J.J. Hill Montessori*
- **Amanda Jagdeo**, Saint Paul Public Schools, *Hamline Elementary School*
- **Travis Koupal**, Minneapolis Public Schools, *Justice Page Middle School*
- **Zoe Kourajian**, Mounds View Public Schools, *Edgewood Middle School*
- **Tim Larson**, Medford Public Schools, *Medford High School*
- **Criselda Martinez**, Rochester Public Schools, *Riverside Elementary*
- **Katherine Norrie**, Northfield Public Schools, *Northfield High School*
- **Michael Okwabi**, Eden Prairie Schools, *Eden Prairie High School*

- **Soren Olesen**, Roseau Community School District, *Roseau High School*
- **Sean Padden**, Roseville Area Schools, *Roseville Area Middle School*
- **Araceli Pastrana**, Eden Prairie Schools, *Eagle Heights Spanish Immersion*
- **Michelle Rada**, Eden Prairie Schools, *Eden Prairie High School*
- **Marcela Roos**, Eden Prairie Schools, *Eagle Heights Spanish Immersion*
- **Morgan Steele**, Richfield Public Schools, *Richfield High School*
- **Andrew Sundberg**, Grygla Public School
- **Averi M. Turner**, Roseville Area Schools, *Emmet D. Williams Elementary*
- **Kong Vang**, Saint Paul Public Schools, *Washington Technology Magnet School*
- **Linda Wallenberg**, Eden Prairie Schools, *Eden Prairie High School*

One Last Round of Applause

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



Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

Byrd, a graduate of Washburn, came to a career in education later in life. In 2008, he left a career in the financial field to work in the Wayzata school district, first as a hall supervisor and a coach in football and track and field. During that time, he decided to pursue a teaching degree. He enrolled in a teacher licensure program and took a position as an achievement specialist to prepare him for full-time teaching.

Upon receiving his teaching credentials from Metropolitan State University in 2017,

Byrd chose to return to his alma mater to teach.

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

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

Courtesy of Education Minnesota

washburn.
mpschoos.org

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