

Eastern Carver
County Schools

Exceptional, personalized learning

school
report

CARVER, CHANHASSEN, CHASKA, AND VICTORIA, MN

WINTER 2021

HOOKED ON BOOKS is coming! See back page



MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Commitment to students, staff and community is unwavering



Lisa Sayles-Adams

By any measure, this year has been like no other. In March, districts across the state shifted virtually overnight from in-person to distance learning. As a community, we came together to support each other during that extraordinary time, and we’ve done that time and again.

When I started as your superintendent in July, I had no idea what the fall would look like. I knew no matter what shape our return to learning took, we had to be ready to deliver high-quality education in a safe and healthy environment. I am proud to say we were able to do that, welcoming all of our elementary and middle school students back to some form of in-person learning at the start of our school year, and our high school students later in September.

It was not easy. Countless hours of work, learning, and collaboration by our district staff made possible such a strong start to the year. I could not be prouder of both the leadership teams that put in work over the summer and our entire staff for rolling up their sleeves to make sure our students have what they need to succeed.

In a COVID-free world that would have been challenging enough. On the heels of \$6 million in budget cuts after the failure of the 2019 referendum, we started the year with fewer resources, including the loss of some tremendous staff. Those budget constraints are still very real and amplified by the impacts of the pandemic. There are still difficult choices ahead for our district.

Here is what I can say confidently: our commitment to our students and this community is unwavering. I am so proud to serve in this role with such amazing staff. From our paraprofessionals who work in childcare and in the classroom, our custodians, front office staff, teachers, administrators, and everyone in between, I rank our staff among the finest anywhere. Our work is student-centered, and you can feel it in our buildings, and even through computer screens.

Before we had to pivot to distance learning in mid-November, I had a chance to visit our buildings and see the work happening in classrooms both physical and virtual. Everywhere I looked, I saw kids engaged. I saw teachers innovating, creating new models to support students at home and in person. I saw our students thriving.

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2020: A SCHOOL YEAR TO REMEMBER

The beginning of the 2020-21 school year was a start like no other. Students returned to learning in a variety of ways—attending in-person, hybrid learning at home and at school, or distance learning from home. As the fall progressed, national, state, and county COVID-19 cases numbers increased significantly, creating a huge strain on staffing. Public health concerns and staffing impacts due to positive cases and quarantines made necessary a pivot to distance learning for all students in early November. Staff had been working hard to prepare for this possibility all summer. The smooth transition to distance learning would not have been possible without the commitment of district staff and the remarkable support and flexibility of parents and other caregivers at home. Thanks to this collaboration, students receive high quality education wherever they are learning this year. Everyone—staff, parents, students, and the community—is anxious for our students to get back to in-person learning. By staying safe, following health and safety protocols, and being vigilant, our whole community can work together to help make this happen.

Audit report and reduction of debt service positive news; challenges ahead

Our Finance Department is one of the hardest working in the field, and one of the most diligent in making sure they are good stewards of taxpayer funds. Our district financial audit, which happens on an annual basis, is again a testament to the strength of our district’s financial operation. CliftonLarsonAllen, who conducted the audit, gave the district a “clean audit opinion.” This is the best an organization can do in an audit and has been the case for several years. The audit was approved by the Board at its Oct. 26 meeting.

Another highlight of the financial reporting at the Oct. 26 Board meeting was news of some significant taxpayer savings. Thanks to the proactive work of our finance department in monitoring fluctuating interest rates, the district was able to capitalize on an

opportunity to refinance bonds. As a result of that work, taxpayers will see a savings of \$2.5 million in the coming years. The first reduction in taxes will be seen in 2022, with an additional reduction in 2023. The district’s outstanding AA2 bond rating is a testament to its strong financial management.

ECCS’s strong financial management is more important than ever in this moment, with several budget challenges ahead for the district. On the heels of the failed 2019 referendum, the district cut \$6 million from its 2020-21 budget, with a minimum of \$3.2 million in additional cuts planned for the 2021-22 school year. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented additional financial challenges, with drops in enrollment and other revenue sources

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Stronger Together

Students, staff, and families face the challenges of teaching and learning during this unprecedented year

Whether students were learning in school, at home, or a combination of both, the first half of the 2020-21 school year will be remembered for the challenges and opportunities it created. And through it all, teachers, students, families, and all district staff have worked together to ensure that students stay connected and engaged in high quality learning experiences. Some quick stats: the district distributes more than 21,000 nutritious meals to students through weekly drive-ups and bus deliveries, nearly 100 wi-fi hot spots have been provided to families, and 325 students (many of them children of Tier 1 critical workers in our community) currently receive childcare and academic support during the school day. We look forward to welcoming all students and staff back to our classrooms and buildings in the new year!





View from a Teacher’s Desk

We asked an elementary, middle school, and high school teacher to share their perspective about what it’s been like to teach and learn during a pandemic.



Molly Aker
Bluff Creek
Elementary
School

How did the school year start for your elementary students?

“As we started the new school year, it was extremely helpful to meet with parents and learners in-person during our two Connect & Assess days. They were able to see the safety protocols that the district had put in classrooms and to share their concerns and questions. Whether parents chose to have their child enrolled in Online Learning Academy or return to in-person learning, they have been very pleased with their choice.”

Has technology been a challenge for teaching staff in our district?

“Learning new technology is always a challenge. But the district’s technology team has provided amazing support. There are many new online tools and programs that we now use to engage and connect with students. Teachers spent several days training this summer to prepare for the possibility of distance learning. Since the shift to full-time distance learning at the elementary level, daily assistance and support is available to each of us.”

What has surprised you about teaching elementary students online?

“The students are making the most of this challenging learning environment. During the school day, students ‘visit’ multiple classrooms. They’ve learned to sign in and out of one class and log-in to the next with ease. Our learners have done an amazing job staying engaged in learning and families are really supporting this at home. Most importantly, I have experienced that children just want to learn and stay connected with each other. I see this every single day.”



Cortnee
DePoppe
Pioneer
Ridge
Middle
School

Middle School students started the year in the Hybrid Model. What challenges did this bring for staff and students?

“We kicked off the school year in a hybrid model in middle school and it went better than we expected; however, seeing students in-person only twice a week was tough. In a hybrid model, teachers must teach two different groups of students: those in your classroom, and those learning from home for that day. In addition to academics, when they are in school in-person, students gain social and emotional skills, they get exercise, and they have instant access to mental health support and face-to-face conversations.”

Is there a particular moment that stands out to you?

“Reflecting on last March: I can’t begin to explain how incredible it was to see everyone at Pioneer Ridge spring into action and redesign what education would look like going forward with technology, innovative ideas, detailed family outreach plans, meal deliveries, and individual systems for the needs of every single student.”

What’s important for our community to understand?

“Middle school is a transitional time. It’s full of challenges and change without a pandemic. Despite frustrations and some tough days, we have remembered to lean on each other for encouragement. We have a great deal of support from our building administration and it keeps us motivated!”



Chris Lenius
Chaska
High School

Can you share one highlight from this school year?

“The biggest highlight for all of us was when it was deemed safe for high school students to return to school in person. Having students physically in the same room with each other brought energy, engagement, and connection that hadn’t happened since March—and it was sorely missed.”

What has surprised you the most about your high school students?

“It’s so impressive to see how hard students are working during these incredibly difficult circumstances. In the majority of cases, these high school students are advocating for themselves and rising to the challenges they are facing. My biggest surprise is how hard it has been for students to actually talk to each other online. It’s easy to assume that since kids are so fluent with texting, Snapchat, and Instagram, that they’ll be good at anything online. But when using tools like Google Meets, they’re out of practice with skills like making eye contact and talking to each other. They tell me it feels awkward so at times they withdraw.”

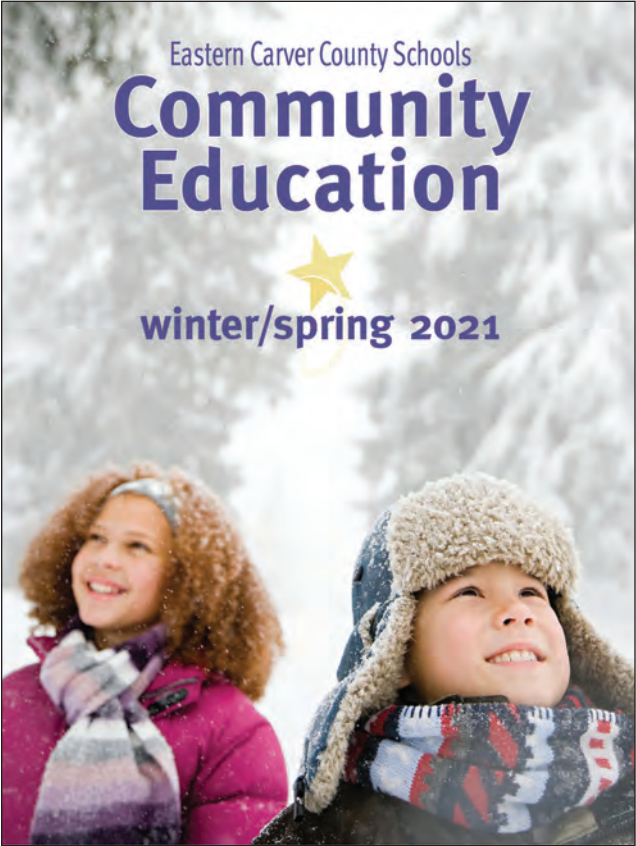
What’s been one of the biggest challenges for teachers?

“Trying to connect with students online is a challenge. Good teachers know how to check-in with a student as they walk into the classroom, how to get groups to work together, and how to build shared responsibility in the classroom. During distance learning, most of those opportunities are gone, so teachers try to figure out creative ways to make those important connections.”

School Board election results

On Nov. 3, Eastern Carver County voters elected Angela Erickson, Sean Olsen and chose to re-elect Jeffrey Ross to the School Board. The two new members will be publicly sworn in during the Board’s meeting on January 11, 2021. Their term on the Board expires in 2025. Other Board members will serve through 2023. At this same meeting, the Board will select its Chairperson, Vice-Chair, and Treasurer. The 2021 School Board includes the following community members:

Lisa Anderson	Sean Olsen
Fred Berg	Jeffrey Ross
Angela Erickson	Jennifer Stone
Tim Klein	



LOOKING FOR FUN, ENGAGING ACTIVITIES THIS WINTER AND SPRING SEASON?

Our Community Education staff has been busy planning safe and creative classes and programs for people of all ages. Choose from a variety of in-person classes, virtual experiences, or one of our new take-home kits. There’s something for everyone! Flip through the Winter/Spring 2021 Catalog at ce4all.org.

school report

Published by the Eastern Carver County Schools’ Community Relations Department.

We welcome questions or comments

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2020-21 District School Board

- Jeff Ross, Ph.D., *Chair* | 763-458-8801
- Amy Logue, *Vice-Chair/Clerk* | 612-201-3047
- Ron Meyer, *Treasurer* | 952-836-9972
- Lisa Anderson, *Director* | 952-361-4267
- Fred Berg, *Director* | 952-474-8394
- Tim Klein, *Director* | 952-513-8767
- Jenny Stone, *Director* | 952-220-4136

Hooked on Books

...and the Arts, too!

Join us virtually!

Saturday, February 6

Family music story time • Ethnic dancers • Elementary art gallery
Create-a-character workshop and more!

Find more information at eccs.mn/hooked

Hooked on Books is a partnership between Eastern Carver Co. Schools Community Education and Carver County Library.

Featuring authors/illustrator
Trisha Speed Shaskan
Stephen Shaskan

Pizza Taco
TOAD on the ROAD
PUNK SKUNKS
Q & RAY

Danielle Raabe named Teacher of the Year

In September, the District 112 Foundation named **Danielle Raabe** as the district’s 2020 Teacher of the Year. Raabe is a Special Education teacher at Chaska Middle School West, where she has taught for the past 14 years. The middle school’s center-based Discover program supports learners who have cognitive or physical disabilities. In a typical year, her classroom includes six to 12 students. In addition to teaching subjects like math, science and language arts, Raabe also supports each individual student in developing personal communications and independent living skills.

Her teaching style enables her classroom to be a place to learn and grow and students are excited to come to school every day. Since she has the same group of students for three years of middle school, she develops strong relationships with each of them and their families.

The 2020 Teacher of the Year finalists included: **Blair Leigh**, Carver Elementary; **Rachel Novotny**, La Academia; **Jody Tellinghuisen**, Bluff Creek Elementary; and **Kristen Volp**, Chanhassen Elementary.



Danielle Raabe
ECCS Teacher of the Year

It's time for... **Kindergarten**

Will your child will be 5 years old on or before September 1, 2021?
If so, it's time to get ready for kindergarten.

Kindergarten is a big step in your child's journey as a life-long learner. We know that when you send your child to school, you are trusting us with your most precious gift. It is our promise to provide a welcoming, safe, and personalized learning environment for your child.

Visit eccs.mn/kindergarten to learn more and enroll by January 15, 2021.

eccs.mn/kindergarten | welcomecenter@district112.org | 952-556-6112

AUDIT REPORT

Continued from cover

putting additional pressure on the district’s finances. The Board will hear updated budget assumptions at its January 2021 meeting.

E. Carver Co. Schools is also among only 10% of districts in the state of MN to be awarded a Certificate of Excellence (COE) for our Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) from the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO). The district has earned this recognition for the past nine years (2011-2019). This award recognizes excellent, comprehensive financial reporting by ASBO. In addition, Pam Jensen, ECCS Finance and Human Resources Manager, was named the Minnesota Association of School Business Officials School Business Official of the Year in May.

Finance and budget documents are posted on the District’s website at eccs.mn/finance.

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

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The exponential rise in COVID cases and strain on our ability to staff pushed us into distance learning in mid-November. This is hard for all of us but we are focused on supporting our students’ social, emotional, and academic growth even from a distance. As we wait anxiously for a return to in-person learning, know that our focus is and will always be delivering the best possible educational experience for our students.

This is a community that rallies. I have seen it, even in my short time as your superintendent. The road ahead may be challenging, but I have faith that no matter what lies ahead, we can emerge stronger by working together. Thank you for your support of our students, our staff, and this district.