

# Spotlight

Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools



**DISTRICT196**  
One District. Infinite Possibilities.

Winter 2020 | Volume 61 • Number 2

At District 196, the sky's the limit. That's because our committed team of educators is dedicated to helping learners explore the outer limits of their vast potential.

## IN THIS ISSUE

- Calendars for next two years ..... p.2
- Attendance area review paused ..... p.4
- Magnet school applications ..... p.10



## Highland climbing

Students at Highland Elementary School in Apple Valley climbed to new heights in 2020 in this pre-pandemic photo. And in November, the entire Highland community celebrated the school's 2020 National Blue Ribbon School Award from the United States Department of Education. The annual award recognizes schools (eight in Minnesota and 367 nationwide this year) for their exemplary work in closing the achievement gap between groups of students. Principal **Chad Ryburn** said intentional focus on school climate and culture is behind Highland's success in eliminating barriers and reducing achievement gaps. See article on p.8.

## District will be in distance learning through at least January

Entering winter break, all District 196 students will be participating in a full-time distance learning model and will remain in distance learning through at least January. The district switched from the hybrid learning model to distance learning for all grades in November based on local COVID-19 data and state guidance.

District leaders hope to resume limited in-person learning opportunities in December or January for students selected by their schools based on need.

Students currently enrolled in the 196 Digital Academy will remain enrolled at least until a change in learning models. Before that happens, the district will give all families the option to change their child's enrollment, either from the 196 Digital Academy to the base learning model (distance, hybrid or all in person), or vice versa. If no change is requested when the survey is offered, the student's current enrollment will continue through the remainder of this school year.

Although students are participating in distance learning, it remains important that families and staff continue to report positive cases and quarantines to their school nurse. This data is critical to helping district staff conduct contact tracing for local and state health officials.

### Free food

All students age 18 and younger are eligible to receive free meals for the entire school year, funded by the federal government. Seven-day meal kits are distributed

<< continued on page 11 >>

## AVHS recognized for protecting health care workers

Apple Valley High School was a finalist for a Minnesota Technology Association Tekne Award in recognition of efforts of school staff to provide local health care workers with protective equipment at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Each year, the Tekne Awards showcase and celebrate the best and brightest of Minnesota's diverse science and tech-based industry. Apple Valley was one of 10 finalists competing in the COVID-19 Community Response category and was honored during the virtual awards ceremony Nov. 18.

"I am very proud to work with the staff at Apple Valley High School," STEM educator **Chris Lee** said. "What we did this past summer is just a reflection of the culture at our school and in our school district. We always strive to do the best for those in our community."

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools in March, the hands-on curriculum in Apple Valley's fabrication lab came to a halt. Lee and a team of others at Apple Valley immediately shifted focus of the fab lab to helping the community stay safe. Within 48 hours, Lee found a design online, had a prototype face shield built and was already reaching out to AVHS graduates in the local medical field to test

<< continued on page 5 >>

## Infinite Possibilities

District 196 is nationally recognized for providing boundless opportunities in which students can learn and grow. Whether they have an affinity for academics, arts or athletics, our goal is to expose students to the infinite possibilities within the district and throughout our communities. Together, we encourage them each day to pursue excellence as they experience their exciting journey along the road of life.

### Spotlight Newsletter

This quarterly publication is mailed to every household in District 196 to inform parents and other residents about district news.

Send comments on **Spotlight** to [tony.taschner@district196.org](mailto:tony.taschner@district196.org)

### NONDISCRIMINATION

**NOTICE:** District 196 does not discriminate in employment or in any of its programs and activities, including vocational opportunities, on the basis of sex, race, religion, color, creed, national origin, marital status, familial status,\* disability, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, membership or activity in a local human rights commission,\* age or genetic information.\* District 196 provides equal access to designated youth groups.

The Director of Human Resources, Tom Pederstuen (651-423-7859 – [tom.pederstuen@district196.org](mailto:tom.pederstuen@district196.org)) has been designated to respond to employment-related inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies including Title IX. The Director of Elementary Education, Sally Soliday (651-423-7782 – [sally.soliday@district196.org](mailto:sally.soliday@district196.org)) and the Director of Secondary Education, Michael Bolsoni (651-423-7712 – [Michael.Bolsoni@district196.org](mailto:Michael.Bolsoni@district196.org)) have been designated to respond to student-related inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies including Title IX. The Director of Special Education, Janet Fimmen (651-423-7629 – [janet.fimmen@district196.org](mailto:janet.fimmen@district196.org)) has been designated to respond to inquiries concerning the rights of a student with a disability including Section 504. The mailing address for all directors is 3455 153rd Street W, Rosemount, MN 55068.

\*Asterisked categories are limited to employment-related discrimination and harassment.

## Board ready to approve calendars for next two school years

The School Board reviewed proposed calendars for the next two school years Nov. 9 and was expected to approve them at its Dec. 14 meeting when this issue of *Spotlight* went to press.

Calendars for the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years are both based on an all in-person learning model. The district does plan to continue to offer the 196 Digital Academy as an all distance-learning option for families. Each calendar has 172 days of instruction for elementary students and 171 days for secondary students.

The biggest change in the proposed calendars is the addition of two “Student Success and Assessment Days” for all students the week before the first day of regular instruction. During these two days, elementary students would meet their teachers and take literacy assessments, same as in recent years. Beginning next year, middle school and high school students would also attend orientations and meet with their teachers individually and in small groups on these two days, much like what happened this year before the start of in-person instruction in the hybrid model. The administration recommended continuing based on the success of these days this year.

There are no changes to normally scheduled breaks in the proposed calendars. The MEA teachers’ convention is the third Thursday and Friday of October each year and spring break is the last full week of March. In 2021-22, winter break would begin Friday, Dec. 24 and students would return to school Monday, Jan. 3. In 2022-23, winter break would begin Monday, Dec. 26 and students would return to school Tuesday, Jan. 3.

**2021-22 School Year** – Student Success and Assessment Days would be Sept. 1-2, 2021; the first day of regular instruction would be Tuesday, Sept. 7, and the last day of school would be Tuesday, June 7 for all students.

**2022-23 School Year** – Student Success and Assessment Days would be Aug. 31 and Sept. 1, 2022; the first day of regular instruction would be Tuesday, Sept. 6, and the last day of school would be Tuesday, June 6 for all students.

There are also dates in each calendar when there will be no school for some or all students for holidays, conferences and staff development days. Graduation ceremonies for Apple Valley, Eagan, Eastview and Rosemount high schools are typically the Saturday before the last week of school.

## District recognized again for excellence in financial reporting

Earlier this year, for the 18th year in a row, District 196 earned the Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO).

The certificate of excellence is the highest recognition of school district financial operations offered by ASBO, a professional organization with more than 6,000 members. The program reviews and critiques district accounting practices as represented in the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, and recognizes school districts that meet or exceed the program’s high standards for financial reporting and accountability. Fewer than 1,000 school districts nationally apply for the Certificate of Excellence each year.

“This award represents a significant achievement and reflects your commitment to transparency and high-quality financial reporting,” said ASBO International Executive Director **David Lewis**.

This year’s Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting recognizes the preparation and issuance of the district’s Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for fiscal year 2019. The report is available on the Finance Department page of the district website at [District196.org](http://District196.org), along with financial reports and annual budgets for the current year and previous nine years.

The District 196 Finance Department has also received ASBO’s Meritorious Budget Award for the last four years for excellence in preparing and communicating the school district budget.

## Making 'SEA Change' in District 196 requires civility, collaboration and compromise

By **Mary M. Kreger**, superintendent

The end of each year provides opportunities to reflect on the joys and challenges of the past year, as well as resolve to make improvements in the year that lies ahead. In this year of tremendous change in 2020, the administrative leaders of District 196 have been engaged in reflection for personal and professional growth, specifically in the areas of racial and educational equity.



This year has been especially demanding on the physical and mental well-being of our students, families and staff. I have talked with many parents and heard how the pandemic is affecting their children academically, socially and emotionally. I feel for our children and families, especially those most in need, for what we are facing together and how it is affecting our lives.

In addition to the pandemic's impact on education, the political polarization of the nation also made its way into our schools this fall. In a span of just nine months – from when the pandemic forced schools to close in March, to the killing of George Floyd in May, to the election in November – the communication I received became more angry, opinionated and strident on opposite sides of most issues and decisions. I know many were well intended, and come from places of hurt, fear and desperation for relief from the pandemic. However, I am concerned about the lack of civility in the digital world and how that will impact our ability to collaborate and compromise during the difficult conversations that will be necessary to make systemic change.

We need to come together as a District 196 community, focus on our common goal and work together to provide students the best education we can. We have a history of collaboration in this district that we need to rely on now more than ever. To come out of this pandemic better than when it started, we must work together to purposefully change the trajectory for the students we are failing. As a district, this is our opportunity to dismantle practices that are harmful and build anew using an equity lens.

Safety, equity and achievement have been the focus of our work in 2020 and will continue to be in 2021 and beyond. We are truly in a time of sea change in the world and in our local learning community. Sea change is a substantial change in perspective which affects a group or society at large on a particular issue. This is our time to change perspective, grow as a district and give our students the infinite possibilities they deserve and we want for them.

**SAFETY** of our students and staff continues to be the primary consideration in our district's response to COVID-19. We were very disappointed to have to transition to distance learning in November. When we started the school year in the hybrid learning model, we hoped to be spending more time at school by now, but that is not possible with the rampant spread of COVID-19 and its impact on our health care facilities. At this point, we are considering numerous factors as we look for a return to in-person learning. Change is the only constant this year. The expectations that guided us this summer have changed from relying heavily on a single data point to a "scalpel approach" with multiple data

points to consider. The challenges of accelerating cases, spread in our schools and lack of staff forced us to shift to distance learning. We hope people will follow health protocols to reduce community spread so we can get kids back in school sooner.

**EQUITY** in our schools and communities is paramount to our future success. Each student should feel respected and appreciated for who they are. They should have the love, support and opportunities they need to thrive academically, socially and emotionally. We have unacceptable achievement gaps in District 196 between white students and other groups of students by race, poverty and those receiving special services. We must use this opportunity to end systemic racism in our schools and close those unacceptable achievement and opportunity gaps. In June, our School Board approved a resolution affirming the district's commitment to equity. In October, members of our district's new Equity Advisory Council began meeting. Members who applied and were selected for appointments provide input, guidance and support for our equity conversations and work moving forward. We are also reviewing our curriculum, pedagogy and hiring to ensure every child sees themselves in our schools and learns about others throughout their educational experience. We have been successful in increasing the number of teachers and staff of color in our district and are encouraging students to consider teaching as a career.

**ACHIEVEMENT**, social engagement and academic growth are legitimate concerns in a year of disrupted learning like this. We are providing more support in these areas with

*<< continued on page 11 >>*

## Enrollment down due to family choices and options for education

After hitting an all-time high of 29,233 students last year, District 196 enrollment declined by 215 students (0.74 percent) this year, according to the official enrollment report presented to the School Board Oct. 12. This is the first time in seven years there are fewer students attending District 196 schools than the year before.

Compared to projections, enrollment was down 685 students (2.3 percent). The declines in actual and projected enrollments are consistent with school districts across the metro area, according to a survey by the Association of Metropolitan School Districts. The reason is family decisions to keep kindergarten-eligible students out of school this year or pursue education alternatives like private schools and homeschooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Student Information Supervisor **Kim Reis** said. At 1,764 students, kindergarten enrollment is down 13 percent (262 students) compared to projections, and the number of residents enrolled in private schools and homeschooling are both higher than last year.

The largest class in the district this year is grade 10, with 2,307 students, and the smallest is kindergarten. The breakdown by level shows that on Oct. 1, 2020, the district had:

- 11,921 elementary school students (grades K-5), a decrease of 469 students from last year;
- 6,567 middle school students (grades 6-8), a decrease of 54;
- 8,978 high school students (grades 9-12), an increase of 349;
- 1,070 students in center-based special education programs, an increase of 41, and
- 472 students in early childhood special education, a decrease of 82 students from last year.

## Attendance area review paused to focus on COVID response

The district has put on hold plans to review school attendance areas this year in order to focus efforts on its ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in the areas of safety, equity and achievement in this year of “SEA Change” in District 196.

Earlier this year, the board authorized the administration to begin a process of reviewing specific attendance areas in different parts of the district, with a goal to better utilize existing school space. The attendance area review is one of the first steps in a larger review of the district’s current and projected space needs. That process continues, but has been slowed because of the pandemic.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic last spring, Rosemount High School was operating considerably above the school’s 2,000-student capacity, while Apple Valley High School had space available. Similarly, Scott Highlands and Rosemount middle schools were over capacity, while Black Hawk Middle School in Eagan had space.

Most of the current and future housing growth is in the southern and eastern portions of the district, in Lakeville and Rosemount. Demographer **Hazel Reinhardt** was scheduled to present an updated enrollment study for the district at the Dec. 14 School Board meeting, after this issue of *Spotlight* went to press.

The attendance area review will likely resume in 2021, led by Director of Teaching and Learning **Steve Troen**. In addition to building capacities and enrollments, the process will also factor in any lasting impacts from the pandemic, such as continuation of the district’s full-time online learning option, the 196 Digital Academy, or other programmatic or schedule changes that may be considered moving forward. The soonest any attendance area changes would be implemented would be for the start of the 2022-23 school year, and there would be an option for students to stay at their current school through completion of that level.

### District 196 By the #s

**110** square miles

**9** communities

**160,000** residents

**29,000** students

**4<sup>th</sup> largest** in the state

**4,000+** staff

**38** buildings

**4.5 million** square feet

**1,000** acres

## Board ‘extremely pleased’ with superintendent’s performance

The District 196 School Board praised Superintendent **Mary Kreger’s** leadership and performance over the last year during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, Chairperson **Jackie Magnuson** reported at the Sept. 14 board meeting.

Magnuson said the board met in closed session Sept. 8 for the purpose of conducting the superintendent’s evaluation. “Looking over the challenges and successes of the past year, the board is extremely pleased with the leadership shown by Superintendent Kreger,” she said. “Her ability to empower the people around her, her ability to define and refine the district goals, and her ability to communicate effectively with all stakeholders are a few of the qualities the board highlighted.

“(Kreger’s) leadership, her dedication and her passion have helped move the district through all of this crazy for the past year,” Magnuson said. “Superintendent Kreger always likes to say, ‘We have the right people in the right place for the right work.’ And she is right. We also have the right superintendent in the right place to do the right work.”

Kreger is in the third and final year of her current contract. She served as the district’s director of special education for 13 years before taking over as interim superintendent in March 2018. State law limits superintendent contracts to no more than three years. At its Nov. 9 meeting, the board unanimously approved a new three-year contract with Kreger. The contract includes the same terms, with a 2.5-percent annual salary increase.

**Tekne Award finalist** << continued from page 1 >>

it out. After getting their approval, Lee and fellow educator **Isaac Johnson** used the fab lab's 3D printers and a steady stream of donated material to print and distribute more than 5,000 shields to area hospitals, clinics and organizations by the end of summer.

"We were extremely fortunate to have received many financial donations from the community to support our effort," said **Jim Lynch**, STEM program coordinator. "The outpouring of donations far exceeded our expectations."

"This team has demonstrated a tremendous commitment to supporting our local and regional essential workers," Apple Valley Principal **Drew Mons** said. "This is a much-deserved recognition of their work and the difference we can all make when we have our arrows aligned. Problem-finding and solution-making is alive and well at Apple Valley High School and in District 196."

The winners of the Tekne Award in the COVID-19 Community Response category were 3M, the Irondale High School robotics team and the University of Minnesota Technology Commercialization Research Institute. Though Apple Valley didn't take home the trophy, Johnson said the experience was worth more than the award.



Apple Valley High School STEM educator **Isaac Johnson** and his twin sister, **Lisa**, both Apple Valley High School graduates, wore the face shields made in Apple Valley's fabrication lab. Lisa is a local health care worker who helped test the shield prototype.

"This was my opportunity to showcase love and support for all whose work would curtail the spread while risking their own health," he said.

"What started as protecting those close to me became so much more as we heard the stories of thankfulness and gratitude from the groups we were able to supply when the national reserves of personal protective equipment was unavailable to them."



**Chris Lee**

**More than 750 students earn AP scholar honors**

The College Board recognized 771 District 196 high school students for their performance on Advanced Placement (AP) course exams taken during the 2019-20 school year.

To see the names of all 771 AP scholars in District 196 last year, go to [District196.org](http://District196.org), click on News under About, and search "AP scholars" to find the news release dated Aug. 20.

**Parenting in a Pandemic: Free five-part series**

Parents are being asked to do more than ever to support their children in digital learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. District administrators and educators recognize the difficulties parents are experiencing and are committed to providing families with additional support in these efforts.



**Erin Walsh**

Beginning Feb. 10, District 196 Community Education is sponsoring a free webinar series called Parenting in a Pandemic. The five-part series will be presented by **Erin Walsh** of Spark & Stitch Institute. Walsh created Spark & Stitch with her parents, **Dr. Dave** and **Monica Walsh**, to serve parents and educators by translating research in the fields of child and adolescent development, digital media and youth thriving. The organization is committed to sparking greater understanding of why kids need courage and connection to thrive and how to foster it in the digital age.

Parenting in a Pandemic consists of the following five webinars, all of which will begin at 6 p.m.:

- Feb. 10 - Working and Parenting at Home: Dreams, Realities and Survival
- Feb. 17 - Parenting in a Pandemic: The Many Faces of Stress
- March 3 - Staying Engaged in Learning and Work: The Science of Motivation
- March 31 - Screen time During COVID-19
- April 14 - Setting Limits and Avoiding Power Struggles

The webinars are free, but pre-registration is required. To register for one or all five of the webinars, go to <https://bit.ly/3pW3kNX>.



Health care workers at Children's Hospital wore their face shields from AVHS.

## Pursuing Infinite Possibilities: Andrea Singh, MD, Apple Valley High Class of 1994

As a young child, Apple Valley High School graduate **Dr. Andrea Singh** had her sights set on being in the medical field, specifically as a pediatrician. She loved learning, even briefly entertaining the idea of becoming a teacher, and had the drive to help people be their very best. But it was a foundation of grit and determination built at Apple Valley that helped propel her into a successful career as a local pediatrician for HealthPartners Park Nicollet.

Singh sharpened her communication skills on her high school speech and debate teams. She learned the importance of active listening and the ability to explain complex topics in a clear manner. She credits these skills for her ability to help families make decisions about their health, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a leader in the pediatric department, Singh has leaned on her ability to reinvent her own methodologies and those of the department as they work to keep children healthy.

"Being a doctor during a pandemic has been challenging and exhausting, but rewarding as well," Singh said.

### Stats

A 1994 graduate of Apple Valley High School; attended the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities for her undergraduate and medical degrees;



completed her pediatric residency at Montefiore Medical Center in Bronx, New York, and is currently a pediatrician at Park Nicollet Clinic in Lakeville, along with being the chairperson of pediatrics for Park Nicollet Health Services and co-lead of the Children's Health Initiative at HealthPartners.

### Fun fact

She is a proud resident of District 196 and mother of two sons attending Falcon Ridge Middle School and Apple Valley High School. Outside of her work and family, Singh also serves on the Governor's Children's Advisory Council and the Minnesota American Academy of Pediatrics' Board of Directors.

### What do you remember most fondly about your time in District 196?

"I have so many happy memories related to my time in District 196, but perhaps my most fond memories are the friendships I made with all my fellow Apple Valley speech and debate team members. Lots of great times were made in Room 108!"

### How did District 196 prepare you for life after high school?

"The education I received in District 196 helped me become a well-rounded graduate who understands how to organize my priorities and push myself to go further," she said. "I was taught that striving for excellence while never sacrificing ethics, empathy, energy and education was the key to long-term success. I think about these things everyday as a pediatrician and pediatric leader."

### Which District 196 teachers made the biggest difference in your education?

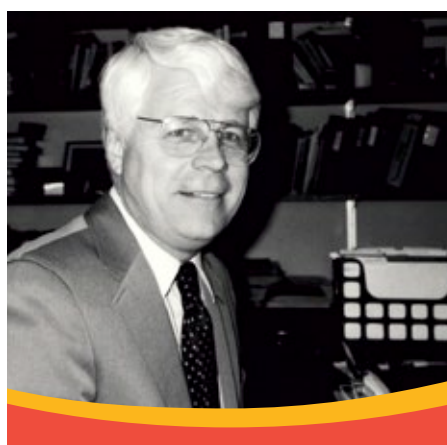
"Mrs. Wycoff (now retired) is one of many remarkable teachers who helped me shape who I am and what I do," Singh said. "She had faith in me as a freshman to push me to reach heights I didn't know I could achieve. When I talk to teens who are interested in medical school, I always tell them that anyone who wants to be a successful physician needs to prioritize their communication skills."

## Fund honors former principal's commitment to Triple-A philosophy while at AVHS

The family and friends of former Apple Valley High School Principal **Gary Embretson** are honoring his memory by establishing the Gary Embretson Educational Support Grant to provide ongoing support to Apple Valley High School students with financial need.

Embretson moved to Apple Valley from Iowa in 1976 to help open the high school as an assistant principal and its first athletic director. In 1994, he became Apple Valley's second principal for the last five years of his career before retiring in 1999. Embretson died Sept. 18, 2020, at age 83, from complications of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases.

Throughout his time at Apple Valley, Embretson went out of his way to



identify students who needed support in their education or to participate in athletics or other activities. Similarly,

money donated to the Embretson fund will be available to school leaders to identify students in need and provide them the financial support to keep them engaged and fully participating in their high school experience.

These needs may include things like activity participation fees, supplies, technology support, transportation, uniforms and field trips.

People wishing to donate to the Embretson fund can mail contributions to the Apple Valley High School Sunshine Fund, Apple Valley High School, 14450 Hayes Road, Apple Valley, MN 55124. Checks should designate "Gary Embretson Educational Support Grant" in the memo line.

## The shows go on (distanced and virtual) for Eagan and Eastview fall productions

The glow of a ghost light kept the hope of a fall theater season alive at two District 196 high schools where student actors and crew members flipped the script on performing arts in the time of COVID-19.

A socially-distant yet equally as riveting production of “Les Misérables” took the stage at Eagan High School in November. And a tech-savvy group of Eastview High School actors brought their hilarious performance of “The Perfect Ending” to Zoom.

“Instead of waiting around to find out what was going to happen this fall, we made a decision, which was that we knew we had to keep these kids together and keep them actively involved in theater,” said **Scott Durocher**, theater director at Eastview.

Fall plays began auditions and rehearsals in the summer, and by the time the hybrid learning model was approved for the start of the 2020-21 school year, students at both high schools had already completed months of practice. Rehearsals were conducted electronically, cast members Zoomed after school and on weekends, and as a group, they committed to seeing the shows go on.

“They were really all in and took ownership over the whole process,” said **Amy Jo Cherner**, vocal director and producer of Eagan’s performance. “They all made a pact to stay healthy, work hard and make this the best show it could be.”



The Eagan High School cast of “Les Misérables” took a final bow after filming their fall musical.

At Eastview, the production of “The Perfect Ending” was adapted for a virtual audience, and brought to life the spoof on a family in the 1950s who is staring down the end of the world. Using “broad strokes” to reinvent the play, Durocher and his crew incorporated a classic comic book theme, complete with makeup, sound effects and set design.

“The comic book theme worked perfectly on Zoom,” he said. “Each video square represented the comic book square with the white borders. And actors leaving the stage or moving from one moment to the next on videoconference presented a challenge. So, we edited in a page turn of the comic book. It might seem

like a small element, but it was one in a whole sequence of elements that brought to life the comic book feel.”

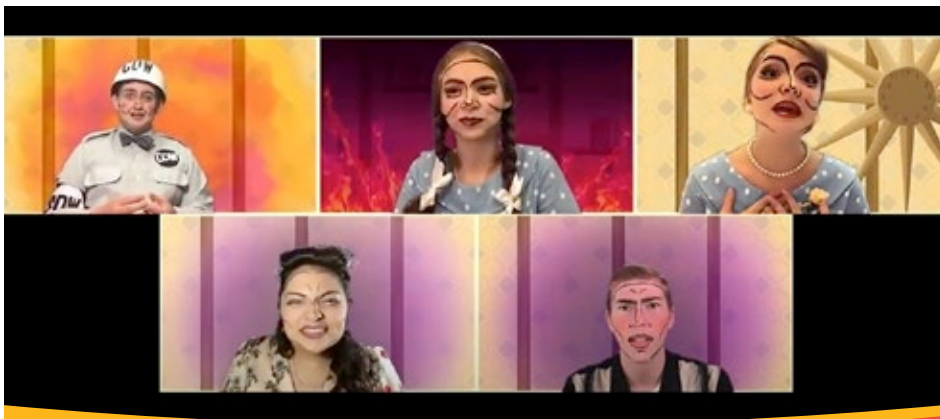
Another challenge the actors faced was the typical dot-style comic book makeup, which had to be re-applied exactly the same each time the actors would film. To ensure accurate detailing, students took photos of their look and referenced it over the several days of filming. For Durocher, the performance presented a unique opportunity for him to grow as a director.

“I direct for the stage, but had to learn how to direct for the camera, which was interesting and enlightening,” he said. “I stepped through a lot of things I never dreamt about doing. And instead of just one stage, we had 23 stages.”

Across the district, Eagan was tackling “Les Misérables,” a massively popular musical adapted from Victor Hugo’s namesake novel. Because the show required a number of large props and particular set design, Cherner said they moved forward with an in-person performance conducted in the style of a concert. However, as the pandemic worsened locally, their rehearsal time was cut short and their film date moved up twice.

“This was very worrying, as we in the theater department can always use

<< continued on page 11 >>



The Eastview High cast of “The Perfect Ending” reinvented the performance for YouTube.

## Highland Elementary is a National Blue Ribbon School for closing achievement gaps

Highland Elementary School in Apple Valley is one of only eight schools in Minnesota and 367 nationally to be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School for 2020 for its exemplary work in closing the achievement gap between groups of students.

"We have always known what a fabulous school we have here at Highland," said Principal **Chad Ryburn**. "That is in large part to our outstanding students, families and staff who make up our Highland family. We are very proud and humbled by this recognition."

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Blue Ribbon School Program recognizes schools across the country who have demonstrated consistent excellence and progress in closing gaps in student achievement. In the application, Ryburn wrote that

Highland staff is united in the mission that all students can achieve at high levels.

Students receive engaging and rigorous curriculum, academic interventions and consistent exposure to schoolwide behavior expectations. One method used at Highland is the Appropriate Behavior Counts ABC program, which is a schoolwide positive behavior initiative that celebrates students for positive behaviors and random acts of kindness. In collaboration with students, appropriate behavior is based on shared power and personal accountability. Ryburn said this intentional focus on school climate and culture is behind Highland's



success in reducing achievement gaps and eliminating barriers.

"This award is an incredible reflection of the culture that has been built at Highland," Superintendent **Mary Kreger** said. "The staff work collectively every day on behalf of each and every student. This national recognition is a testament to that commitment."

Highland and the other 2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools were recognized during a virtual awards ceremony hosted by the U.S. Department of Education Nov. 12 and 13.

"Highland Elementary is one of so many wonderful schools in District 196," Ryburn said. "We could not do this important work of educating our children without the endless support of our parents and community over the years."

## Fifty-six District 196 seniors recognized as National Merit scholars, 12 are semifinalists

Fifty-six District 196 seniors earned special recognition this fall for scores they achieved on a national standardized test taken last year as juniors. Twelve are semifinalists in the 2020 National Merit Scholarship Program and 44 are National Merit commended students.

The 12 National Merit semifinalists from District 196 are:

- **Amy Monsen** of Apple Valley High School;
- **Ryan Diaz, Ryan Madigan, Morgan Madsen, Colin Roberts** and **Samyak Tiwari** of Eagan High School;
- **Carter Henning, Thor Reimann** and **Anne Warren** of Eastview High School, and
- **Anika Jackson, Alexander Owens** and **Jake Zimmer** of Rosemount High School.

Students are selected for recognition in the National Merit Scholarship Program based on their scores on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/

National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), which they take as juniors. Semifinalists rank in the top 1 percent of the more than 1.5 million juniors at 21,000 U.S. high schools who took the test last year. The semifinalists may submit additional information to be considered for selection as a finalist. Students named National Merit finalists this spring will compete for some 7,600 scholarships totaling more than \$30 million awarded by businesses, colleges and universities, and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

Students whose scores on the PSAT/NMSQT rank them in the top 5 percent of students nationwide receive letters of commendation in recognition of their outstanding academic promise. In District 196, the following 44 seniors are 2020 National Merit commended students:

- **Ashley Chen, Mia Eisenberg, Matthew Hage, Arush Iyer, Samantha Lee, Claudia Liverseed, Michael Marshall, Echo Nelson,**

**Sriram Nutulapati, Eric Patton, Julia Marie Peterson, Carson Powell, Sydney Waldrop, Samuel Wendolek** and **Lauren Woods** of Eagan High;

- **Ariq Chowdhury, Ella Erdahl, Udaya Keerthy Gadiparthi, Nikhitha Gollamudi, Allison Hering, Makenna Huetten, Carter Jensen, Henry M. Johnson, Madeline E. Johnson, Kyle Kunisaki, Akshara Molleti, Jack Odette, Daniel Panikkar, Hannah Scholen, Olivia Supina, Andrea Wallick** and **William Zhu** of Eastview High, and
- **Kathleen Bartz, Rachel Leholm, Samantha Meznarich, Ethan Ockwig, Isaac Olson, Virinch Pandari, Anders Roback, Nyah Rudd, Audrey Stenger, Chelsea Stoner, Sara Troseth** and **Aaron Zhu** of Rosemount High.

In addition to being named a National Merit semifinalist, **Anika Jackson** of Rosemount was an honoree in the College Board's Indigenous Recognition Program.





## EHS and RHS enjoy new home turf

Teams at Eagan and Rosemount high schools played on new home artificial turf fields this fall before sports and activities were postponed statewide Nov. 20. The Eagan girls' soccer team (pictured above at home vs. Prior Lake Oct. 8) finished its season as the Section 3AA champions, while the Rosemount High football team (pictured at right at home vs. Burnsville Nov. 6) finished its pandemic-shortened season as Metro South Conference champions and one of only three undefeated teams in Class 6A. Turf fields will be added at Apple Valley and Eastview high schools in 2021, with completion of their stadium fields, track and turf practice fields scheduled for August. The two-year, phased-in project was approved by the board in April.



## District students top state's highest-in-nation ACT average

District 196 students scored higher than the state and national averages on the ACT college admissions test in 2020, according to results released in October.

The average composite score for District 196 students was 22.7 out of a possible 36. The district average is 2.1 points higher than the national average of 20.6 and 1.4 points higher than the Minnesota average of 21.3, which is highest among the 17 states where more than 90 percent of all students took the test.

Since 2016, Minnesota law requires that all high school juniors have an opportunity to take a college entrance exam during the school day. In

District 196, approximately 2,100 students in the graduating class of 2020 took the ACT at least once.

The 2020 average composite scores for individual District 196 high schools are as follows:

- Apple Valley High School – 21.0
- Eagan High School – 24.2
- Eastview High School – 23.8
- Rosemount High School – 22.4
- School of Environmental Studies – 22.2

District 196 high schools are tentatively scheduled to administer the ACT on March 30, 2021 to all students in grade 11 and some students in grade 12 who did not take the ACT in March or October.

## State tests are scheduled but uncertain if in person

District 196 is preparing to administer statewide assessments this spring based on previous guidance from state and federal education officials.

To meet requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, Minnesota school districts must annually administer statewide assessments in reading, math and science (listed below). U.S. Department of Education officials waved the testing requirements last spring due to the pandemic, but have told districts they do not anticipate granting a waiver this year.

When this issue of *Spotlight* went to press, officials at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) had instructed school districts to prepare for the spring 2021 assessments to be administered in person at school, following established health and safety protocols for in-person learning.

Students in grades 3-8, 10 and 11 take the standards-based Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) in reading, math and science. Students who receive special education services and meet eligibility criteria take the Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS). Students receiving English Learner (EL) services in grades K-12 take the ACCESS test, which measures English language proficiency in reading, writing, listening and speaking. EL students who receive special education services and meet eligibility requirements take the Alternate ACCESS.

Below are the testing windows (all tentative) for each of the assessments. Schools will share information about when the tests will be conducted.

- ACCESS test for EL students only (grades K-12) – January 25 to March 19
- Reading MCAs (grades 3-8 and 10) – March 8 to May 7
- Math MCAs (grades 3-8 and 11) – March 8 to May 7
- Science MCAs (grades 5, 8 and high school) – March 8 to May 14

## Magnet school lottery applications being accepted for 2021-22 school year

Parents interested in having their child attend a District 196 magnet school for the 2021-22 school year must submit an application by Jan. 6 to be considered for enrollment at one of the district's five elementary magnet schools and by Feb. 10 for Valley Middle School of STEM. The elementary and middle school applications are available at [District196.org/magnetschools](http://District196.org/magnetschools).

Magnet schools offer parents increased choice in their child's education by providing a concentrated focus that offers innovative ways to meet students' learning goals through a particular theme. Magnet schools still provide the district's core curriculum in the areas of science, math, language arts and social studies.

The five elementary magnet schools are Cedar Park Elementary Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) School in Apple Valley; Diamond Path Elementary School of International Studies in Apple Valley; Echo Park Elementary School of Leadership, Engineering and Technology in Burnsville; Glacier Hills Elementary School of Arts and Science in Eagan, and Oak Ridge Elementary School of Leadership,



Glacier Hills students posed for a pre-pandemic photo in their outdoor classroom.

Environmental and Health Sciences in Eagan. Secondary students can apply for Valley Middle School of STEM and the School of Environmental Studies.

District 196 offers a K-12 STEM pathway that includes Cedar Park and Echo Park elementary schools for grades K-5, Valley Middle School of STEM for grades 6-8 and Apple Valley High School for grades 9-12.

Any District 196 student entering elementary or middle school in the 2021-22 school year can apply to attend a magnet school. Enrollment

at magnet schools is determined by lottery and is limited to space available at each school and grade level. Students residing in the district who are selected for magnet school enrollment receive transportation if they live more than one mile from the elementary magnet school they will attend or more than one and one-half miles from Valley Middle School of STEM.

The elementary magnet school lottery will be held after the Jan. 6 application deadline. Parents of students selected for enrollment will be notified by the end of January and will be asked to confirm their child's enrollment for the 2021-22 school year. The lottery for Valley Middle School of STEM will be held after the Feb. 10 application deadline and parents of students selected for enrollment will be notified by the end of February. Students not selected for enrollment in the lotteries will be placed on a waiting list.

More information about District 196 magnet schools and the application process is available at [District196.org/magnetschools](http://District196.org/magnetschools) or by calling **Tony Eatchel**, magnet schools and innovative programs teacher on special assignment, at 651-423-7810.

## Join the adventure and environment at SES

Hidden among the trees of the Minnesota Zoo is the School of Environmental Studies (SES), a unique magnet school experience open to all high school juniors and seniors.

SES students learn about the world through an environmental lens and true-to-life experiences that routinely take them out of the classroom and into the natural world of their own back yard and places all over the world. Students learn about natural and human systems, such as sustainable urban development, planning and cultural diversity.

SES is a state and nationally recognized environmental magnet school offering interdisciplinary, hands-on learning focused on understanding the importance of relationships between the physical and cultural worlds. SES has risen to the challenge during the pandemic and continues to adapt to provide students with safe, positive and unique learning experiences. SES is one of few schools that have official consultative status with the United Nations.

SES is accepting enrollments for the 2020-21 school year. Learn more at [ses.district196.org/explore-ses](http://ses.district196.org/explore-ses) and on SES social media accounts. Interested families can also call the school at 952-431-8750 to ask questions or schedule a tour (reservation required).

## Fall plays << continued from page 7 >>

every rehearsal we get, but COVID-19 restrictions really messed that all up," said Eagan senior **Kevin Kodalen**, who plays Enjolras, a charismatic leader in the French Revolution. "It was really scary, the feeling that all of our hard work would be for nothing. However, we stuck it out, stayed safe and got over the finish line."

"Les Misérables" opened Dec. 12 and is available for virtual viewing through Jan. 27. Tickets for a single view are \$12, or \$25 for a four-pack of tickets. Purchase tickets at <https://www.showtix4u.com/event-details/41692>.

"After all of this was done, we saw that a lot of good came out of what could have been a really negative situation," Cherner said. "The kids had the right

attitude and the hope that we could do this. As a teacher, I felt it was my job to make sure they had that opportunity and that we were able to find hope in a time of darkness."

Though opening night of "The Perfect Ending" was conducted virtually, Durocher said he was happy that an opening night even happened. The production ran for two weeks in November on YouTube.

"The most important part of all of this was that we were together and we were making art," he said. "We believed in our kids from the beginning, and I'm so proud of them for jumping in and trusting each other and trusting this artistic process. This was weird, really weird, but fun, and worthwhile."



## Distance learning << continued from page 1 >>

weekly at every school. To participate, families need to complete a one-time registration available on the district's Food and Nutrition Services web page, located under the Services tab at [District196.org](http://District196.org). Families can pick up meal kits each week during the schools' scheduled pickup times. Schools can help coordinate pickup for families with need. There is no reason any child in the district should go hungry.

Families who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals under federal income guidelines are still encouraged to complete the application, also available on the Food and Nutrition Services web page. Schools with greater poverty receive additional funding based on their percentage of eligible families registered to receive free or reduced-price meals.

### Technology help

All District 196 students in kindergarten through grade 12 have a district-owned iPad to use for their learning. Students who do not have reliable access to the internet should contact their school for assistance. For additional technology help, contact the help desk at [www.district196.org/techhelp](http://www.district196.org/techhelp) or email [Schoology@district196.org](mailto:Schoology@district196.org). Families can also find help on the iPad 1:1 program resources page at [www.district196.org/academics/digital-learning](http://www.district196.org/academics/digital-learning).

### Child care

The district continues to provide daily child care at all elementary and middle schools for children of Tier I critical workers, as defined by the state. This requirement was in the governor's initial executive order related to the COVID-19 pandemic. To be eligible for child care, all adults in the household must be Tier I workers, and no adult is at home during the school day.

### Co-curriculars paused

All in-person arts, athletics and other co-curricular activities ended Nov. 20 by executive order of the governor. Winter season activities will remain paused until further notice from the state and/or the Minnesota State High School League. Winter season coaches are exploring possibilities for virtual opportunities.

## Change << continued from page 3 >>

an improved schedule for teacher engagement and peer interaction via Zoom, Schoology and SeeSaw. We also have expanded support services with social workers, guidance counselors, school psychologists and nurses to help students and families navigate the stresses of distance learning and the normal pressures of living through a pandemic. From time to time, I hear encouraging stories from parents whose children are thriving in distance learning. Unfortunately, more often they are heartbreaking stories about students and families who are struggling in distance learning and losing motivation. And then there was the story of the high school student who made a long walk to school on a cold Wednesday morning in November, without a winter coat to keep him warm. It took effort for him to get to school, but he wanted to get there. For him, school is a safe place to be, with reliable internet service to study, food to eat and adults who care about him.

SEA Change is our calling as we look toward 2021. Our journey of continuous improvement is imperative to ensuring every student has equitable opportunities to pursue their infinite possibilities and District 196 continues to be a district of choice.

Be well and take care. *Mary M. Krager*



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**Community Education**

**Connect & Share: Virtual visit sheltering seniors**

*A warm smile is the universal language of kindness.*

-William Arthur Ward

The pandemic has been incredibly hard on our seniors living in health care facilities. Connect with them and brighten their day!



From the comfort of your home, you can connect with others and enhance their lives. Online visits are 20 minutes and may be scheduled by you, weekday daytimes, some evenings and

some weekends. Sign up now to receive an email from a senior living facility with a link and instructions to schedule your virtual visits. Just chat, read a book or a poem, play an instrument, sing, talk sports, share your pet or anything else you have in mind to share.

**All ages are welcome and it's free!**

Adult participants complete an application, an online interview, a background check and receive online training (youth skip this process).



155 adults with disabilities had fun at an Outdoor Halloween Bash. The evening included dancing to a DJ, trunk-or-treat, a costume parade led by AVPD Officer Shaw and much, much more!



**Find your passion ... Learn now!**

We are working hard every day to ensure a variety of lifelong learning opportunities for your engagement, enrichment and inspiration. Also, please know the safety of you, your family and our staff is our top priority. Learn more at [ce.district196.org/COVID19](http://ce.district196.org/COVID19).

Little bodies can gain athletic skills in football, soccer and basketball through in-person, socially distanced, fun activities in our **Super Tots/Skyhawks** programming. This fall, there was an increase in these program registrations by more than 100 registrations from last fall! Other popular activities include our art and **STEM Do-At-Home** kits. These activities provide students with lesson plans and activities that they can do in the comfort of their own homes.



Adults are busy 24/7 learning new skills to update their resume by earning certificates in monthly online classes taught by instructors that are experts in their field. Our popular fitness classes are offered in person and live online, so there is no reason not to get active! Many have enjoyed discovering a new dish to make in our live online cooking classes and some have tried crochet, creating cards and canvases during in-person classes.

Swim lessons for all ages are offered in our pools, along with sports skill development, lap swimming and water exercise. We are happy to provide activities that fit your unique interests and your preferred method of delivery. The sky's the limit! Learn more at [ce.district196.org/learnnow](http://ce.district196.org/learnnow).

**Family School uses a hybrid learning model this year, with parents learning English live online, and in-person Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes. Live online classes are available for all adults that want help learning English and reaching their educational goals. ECFE offers all families a variety of virtual and in-person classes. More information at [ce.district196.org/ecfe](http://ce.district196.org/ecfe) or [ce.district196.org/abe](http://ce.district196.org/abe).**



*I was happy to move here and come to Family School and to learn with my kids!*

-Ubah Abdulle, Family School student



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