



# COMMUNITYConnections

A newsletter for the stakeholders of Stillwater Area Public Schools

FALL 2021

## Back together again!

Kids and teachers are back in school and we couldn't be happier!

While we had hoped desperately that this year would return us to normal, that certainly hasn't been the case so far. COVID's impact is far-reaching and has touched us in ways we never could have imagined.

Once again we have had to rely on the goodwill and ingenuity of our community and staff to help us navigate new challenges. I've been so impressed by the way everyone has responded. Neighbors have helped out with childcare when a shortage of staff has meant long wait lists for Adventure Club. When we were short staffed in our cafeterias, administrators and teachers volunteered to don a hairnet and gloves to serve our kids. Instead of getting angry when buses don't show up, parents have found ways to get their children to and from school. Staff have volunteered to come in early or stay late to hang out with students who don't have a bus.

Our community, once again, has extended grace, offered encouragement and worked together to care for our kids.

We're doing all we can to address the issues before us and provide the services our community expects. In the meantime we're so grateful for all you're doing to support our students.

Thank you,

*Malinda Lansfeldt*

Superintendent Malinda Lansfeldt



## WELCOME BACK TO SCHOOL

See more back-to-school photos at [Facebook.com/Stillwater834](https://www.facebook.com/Stillwater834)



## Stillwater student named among the best in national STEM competition

Stillwater Area High School ninth grader Coolsjes Singhvi has been named to the prestigious Top 300 Broadcom MASTERS list - the nation's premier STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) competition for middle school students.

Singhvi was recognized for his science fair project "D-PREDICT: An Artificial Intelligence Model to Predict the Likelihood Of Early Diabetes". He developed an artificial intelligence model to predict prediabetes based on behavioral and physical attributes. Singhvi's model was able to predict prediabetes with greater than 98% accuracy, which is remarkable given that published work had not surpassed 85% accuracy. It was written in the Python programming language, which he learned at Stillwater Middle School.

The Top 300 MASTERS were selected from more than 1,800 applicants. Singhvi is one of just four Minnesota students who made the list.

### In Their Words

*"I hope everyone takes a moment to appreciate what a fine thing we have here in the Stillwater district. We have wonderful staff and a great student population!"*

– District parent

Get more district news at [stillwaterschools.org](https://www.stillwaterschools.org)



## Good News!

Stay up-to-date by subscribing to the Pony E-News at [stillwaterschools.org/subscribe](http://stillwaterschools.org/subscribe)

### Stillwater FFA earns Grand Champion Award at State Fair

Stillwater Area High School's FFA Chapter earned a Grand Champion Award and Blue Ribbon in the FFA Landscape Design and Construction Competition at the Minnesota State Fair. Stillwater FFA members designed and constructed the display to meet the theme of Native Minnesota Gardens.

### Hundreds earn academic awards

Congratulations to our Stillwater Area High School students who earned academic letters for their school work! Letters were given out during a virtual ceremony to 637 students who earned a 3.75 grade point average and above during the 2020-2021 school year. 117 of those students earned a perfect unweighted 4.0.

### Students named National Merit Semifinalists



Stillwater Area High School seniors Adeline Foote and Ryan Potter have been named semifinalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program. They are among just 16,000 students from across the country to receive the honor. Semifinalists must have an outstanding

academic record throughout high school, be endorsed and recommended by a high school official, write an essay and earn either an SAT or ACT score that confirms their earlier performance on the qualifying test. The two will go on to compete for 7,500 scholarships worth more than \$30 million dollars next spring.



# Teachers and students return to classrooms



After two years of interrupted learning due to COVID-19, teachers and students are thrilled to be back in school once again.

"It feels incredible to be back in-person with all students this year!" said Amy Budion, a French teacher at Stillwater Middle. "I feel like everyone has renewed energy now that we can meet face-to-face every day, and the level of engagement is off the charts."

The majority of district students are back in classrooms full time. Keeping kids learning in school this year is a priority at the state level, as well as in our local schools. Many students do better academically, socially and emotionally when they have the structure, routine and support offered within the school setting.

"My students have been excited to see their friends, play with them outside at recess and do the 'normal' back to school activities and routines," said Yoko Cheatham, a 3rd grade teacher at Lake Elmo. "At the end of the day when I tell my class it's time to get ready to go home, several of them groan. That's all the validation I need!"

## Teachers go out of their way to make door-to-door connections

Teachers and support staff from Oak-Land Middle School stepped out of their classrooms and into the community to connect with some of their students and families.

More than 25 staff from the Lake Elmo school, including several bilingual staff members, went door-to-door to say hello to their kids and talk with Spanish-speaking families about the school year. Calendars and important contact information translated into Spanish were also handed out.

"Our families were surprised and happy to see us," said Principal Andy Fields. "It was a great way to connect with our students and start a new school year!"





## Everyone pitches in to serve our kids

Cafeteria workers are in short supply this year across the district, but especially in our busiest kitchen at Stillwater Area High School. Thankfully our amazing educators are willing to step in and help wherever they can. Teachers, principals, administrators and even the superintendent donned hairnets and aprons to serve lunch to high school students for several days this fall.

## Kids start year with new school supplies thanks to Stuff the Bus campaign

Thanks to the generosity of district residents, more than 460 students (representing 200 families) received school supplies to start the new year.



The 2021 Stuff the Bus campaign, organized by United Way - Washington County East and Community Thread, had its biggest year ever. More than \$47,000 was raised for school supply donations - an increase of 46% from last year. In addition, 65 teachers were able to pick up free supplies for their classrooms and 53 teacher kits were given to teachers at two of our schools.

# Back to school, but not quite back to normal

Kids and teachers are back in our schools this fall, but the new year is still far from normal. The COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to impact how we teach and learn.

Here are just a few of the ways we've adjusted to the third year of learning during a pandemic:

### In-Person Learning

Our goal is to keep our kids learning and our school buildings open this year. We're continuing to implement safety protocols to keep everyone safe while in school.

- Masks are required in the school setting for all individuals in our elementary and middle schools and recommended in all other buildings.
- Visitors and volunteers are limited in many of our buildings, and elementary field trips are on hold for the first semester.
- Learn more about our safety protocols at [stillwaterschools.org/COVID](https://stillwaterschools.org/COVID)



### Online Learning

Nearly 150 elementary students are participating in 100% online learning this fall. Students in grades K-5 who are not yet vaccine-eligible have been offered an online option.

### Mental Health Support

Teachers and support staff are working hard to build connections with students, identify those who are struggling, and provide additional support to help them transition back into routines.

### Staffing Challenges

We're getting creative as we try to fill a number of open positions and cover for staff who are out on vacation or with an illness. We're still hiring for many positions in the district, from paraprofessionals and substitute teachers to food service staff, bus drivers and Adventure Club before and after school workers.

**Want to join our team? Apply online at [stillwaterschools.org/jobs](https://stillwaterschools.org/jobs).**

**In Their Words**  
"Thank you for all the staff who work so hard everyday to provide the best for our students."

– Comment posted on [facebook.com/stillwater834](https://facebook.com/stillwater834)



# Our Kids. Our Community. Our Future.

District taxpayers will be asked to replace an expiring operating levy on November 2, 2021, as well as consider new funding to help maintain quality learning and invest in technology for kids and classrooms.

## The Challenge

### Time is running out on operating levy

The operating levy, which was originally passed in 2013, expires at the end of the 2021-2022 school year. If a new levy is not approved this November, the district will lose between \$11 and \$12 million (based on enrollment) in annual funding.

### Funding gap is growing

State funding has not kept pace with inflation for more than 15 years, resulting in a significant funding gap. At the same time, our students' needs are also increasing which creates even more demand for educational services.

## The Ballot Questions

### Question 1: Replacement levy

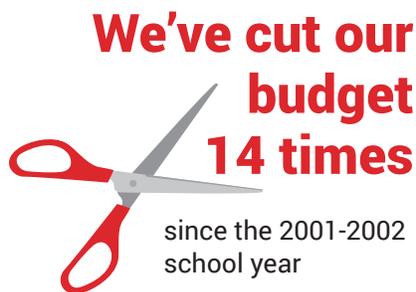
Renew the expiring levy and provide additional revenue to address the state funding gap, inflation and rising costs. It's all about maintaining the quality learning our community expects.

### Question 2: Technology levy

Provide technology for kids and classrooms and ensure a dedicated funding source for ongoing technology needs. It's all about providing kids the tools they need to learn.



because state funding hasn't kept up with inflation



since the 2001-2002 school year



since the expiring levy was approved in November 2013



### Question 1

\*Tax increase for district's average homeowner



### Question 2

\*Tax increase for district's average homeowner

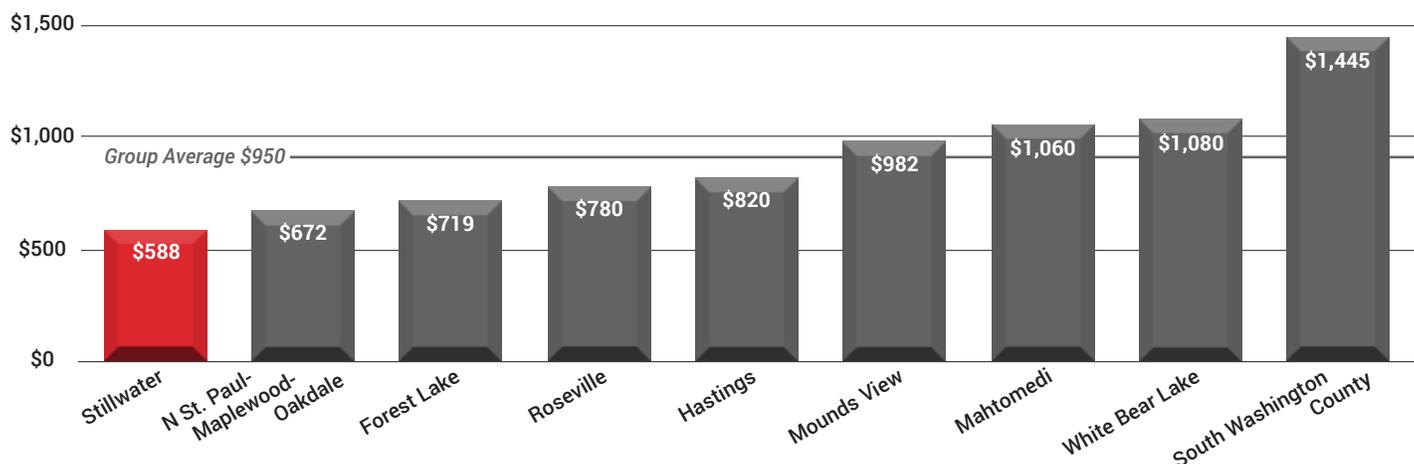
\*Estimated tax impacts are based on district's \$350,000 average value home.

# Our residents pay less in school taxes than residents in comparable districts.

If you could pick up your home and move it to any other school district in the county, you'd pay more in school taxes. That's because the tax rate in Stillwater is lower than our neighboring districts as well as many other comparable districts.

## Estimated Voter Approved School Property Taxes, Payable 2021

Amount of school taxes paid based on \$350,000 residential homestead



Tax Base Source: Final values from Washington, Dakota and Ramsey Counties.

Levy Source: Taxes Payable 2021 Levy Certification Reports for voter approved operating referendum, capital project levy and debt only

	If Approved	If Not Approved
Question 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help stabilize the district's budget:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address state funding gap, enrollment change, rising costs/inflation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Retain teachers, support staff</li> <li>• Continue to support academic achievement for all students</li> <li>• Maintain existing programs and services</li> <li>• Minimize - but not eliminate - future budget cuts</li> </ul>	<p>Without an operating levy in place, the district would face an estimated \$12 million deficit in 2022-2023 and more in future years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly higher class sizes</li> <li>• Reduction of more than 100 full time teachers and support staff</li> <li>• Fewer staff to support students with mental health and emotional needs or to help students who are struggling academically</li> <li>• Cuts to electives classes, specialized programs (such as GATE, dual language Spanish immersion) and art and athletic opportunities</li> </ul>
Question 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide student and teacher computers and classroom devices</li> <li>• Keep technology up-to-date</li> <li>• Give students reliable access to technology tools at school and at home</li> <li>• Provide students and staff with technology support and training</li> <li>• Support infrastructure, software and security needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No dedicated funding source for technology, equipment, support staff and purchases                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No regular replacement cycle for classroom technology</li> <li>• No funding for the replacement of student computers and other learning devices</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Limited technology support staff</li> <li>• Minimal technology access for students</li> </ul>



**VOTING INFORMATION:** Polls will be open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Tuesday, November 2, 2021. Absentee/early voting is underway and can be done in person at various locations or by mail. Learn more at [www.mnvotes.org](http://www.mnvotes.org).

[stillwaterschools.org/Levy2021](http://stillwaterschools.org/Levy2021)

This publication was prepared and paid for by Stillwater Area Public Schools and is not circulated on behalf of any candidate or ballot question.

# STORIES *From Around the District*



## Students promote the Inclusion Revolution

Over the summer, a group of Stillwater Area High School students had the opportunity to talk with teachers from across the midwest about the high school's Inclusion Revolution. Members of the Ponies TRUST Club (True Respect Unifies Together)

spoke to physical education teachers from around the region at the PhysEd Connections Conference. The TRUST Club members shared how the group brings together students, with and without disabilities, through a variety of activities, events and classes. The group promotes inclusion and celebrates students of all abilities.



## Recent grad's donation is music to choir director's ears

A recent Pony alum, Jacob Helke, donated \$3,000 from his graduation party money to the Stillwater Area High School choir program. The Class of 2021 graduate says choir has been a huge part of his life and he wanted to give back to the program that meant so much to him.

Helke first started singing in choir in 5th grade at Stonebridge Elementary. He sang at Stillwater Middle School and SAHS where he performed in the 9th grade men's choir, Varsity Tenor/Bass choir, The Stillwater Choir and The Vagabonds.

Because Helke wouldn't need his grad party money for college (he's enlisted in the Air Force) he felt it was better suited for the fine arts program at SAHS.

Choir director Angela Mitchell was blown away by his generosity. She plans to use some of the money to help students in need of financial assistance attend The Stillwater Choir tour to San Diego next spring.



## Students recognized nationally for academic excellence

Three Stillwater Area High School students have been honored by the College Board National Recognition Program. They are among just 32,000 students from across the country to earn the academic honors.

The following students were recognized for their exceptional academic achievements and outstanding performance on the AP® Exam and in the classroom:

**Oyinpreye Porbeni** - College Board National African American Recognition Program Scholar

**Oyintare Porbeni** - College Board National African American Recognition Program Scholar

**Ava Roots** - College Board National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholar

The awards are proof of our students' hard work and superior performance, which is even more remarkable in the face of a particularly challenging year. Congratulations!



## SAHS ranks among best in state

Stillwater Area High School ranks among the top 10 percent in the state! The latest rankings released by Niche gives SAHS an overall grade of A-. The data analysis company looks at a variety of criteria in determining a grade including academics, teachers, and diversity.

Here's how Stillwater Area High School fared in the rankings:

- Overall grade: A-
- Best High Schools for Athletes in Minnesota 27 of 641
- Best College Prep Public High Schools in Minnesota 37 of 383
- Best Public High Schools in Minnesota 44 of 451

Niche said its 2022 best schools rankings offer a more "personal" view of schools than its rankings in recent years. Significantly less importance was placed on SAT and ACT scores this year, reducing it by one third.

The company combined ratings from students, alumni and parents with quantitative data from the U.S. Department of Education and other sources to evaluate teachers, resources, facility, extracurricular activity opportunities and other factors.

# CONNECT WITH YOU LOCAL SCHOOLS



**Go to a Sporting Event**



**See a Show**



**Enjoy a Concert**

Visit our Pony Fan Hub for a calendar of high school sporting events, concerts and shows  
[goponies.stillwaterschools.org/fan-hub](http://goponies.stillwaterschools.org/fan-hub)

Buy tickets online at [stillwaterschools.org/tickets](http://stillwaterschools.org/tickets)

## Get Your Free Senior Citizen Pass

Community members age 62+ can enjoy complimentary admission to many high school events. Pick up your pass in person at the Central Services Building, 1875 South Greeley Street in Stillwater or call 651-351-8340 to request your pass by mail.

## Exercise At The PAC

The Pony Activity Center (PAC) at the high school features an indoor walking track, weight room, cardio room, and more.

Adult memberships are just \$11 a month for track access and \$22 a month for full access.

[stillwaterschools.org/PAC](http://stillwaterschools.org/PAC)

**PAC**  
PONYACTIVITYCENTER

## Take A Class

Community Education offers learning opportunities for residents of all ages - infants, children, teens, parents, adults and seniors.

Learn new skills, be active, get fit, or explore your creative side. See our full course catalog online at [stillwaterschools.org/CE](http://stillwaterschools.org/CE)



## Make A Difference

We're looking for local businesses to provide hands-on learning experiences to our students as part of the Pathways Career Exploration program.

We also need mentors, guest speakers and more. Share what you know with our kids.

[stillwaterschools.org/pathways](http://stillwaterschools.org/pathways)

Stillwater Area High School  
**PATHWAYS**  
create YOUR path



# \$12 MILLION LEVY EXPIRES THIS YEAR

Stillwater Area Public Schools  
Independent School District 834  
1875 South Greeley Street  
Stillwater, MN 55082

Non-Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Stillwater, MN  
Permit No. 192

District taxpayers are being asked to renew an expiring operating levy, as well as consider new funding to help maintain quality learning and invest in technology for kids and classrooms.

- The two ballot questions, if approved, would cost the average taxpayer less than \$12 per month.
- If a new levy is not approved, the district will lose about \$12 million in annual funding and will face significant reductions in staff and programs.
- Early voting through Nov. 1 or vote in person on Nov. 2.

More details inside or at [stillwaterschools.org/levy2021](http://stillwaterschools.org/levy2021).

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta acerca de esta hoja informativa, pro favor llame a la oficina de su escuela para hablar con un interprete.

ECRWSS  
POSTAL PATRON

## Our Kids. Our Community. Our Future. Vote Nov. 2, 2021

### Pony Pride Homecoming 2021

Thousands of Ponies - past, present and future - came together to celebrate Homecoming 2021. During the weeklong celebration, SAHS students Painted the Town Red by decorating windows of businesses across the district, and thousands of people attended the free Homecoming Carnival.

See more photos on [Facebook.com/Stillwater834](https://www.facebook.com/Stillwater834).

#### In Their Words

*"This is such a wonderful experience for our community."*

— Carnival volunteer

