



# COMMUNITYConnections

A newsletter for the stakeholders of Stillwater Area Public Schools

Winter 2022

## Message from the superintendent

Dear Pony Community,

Oh, how I wish I could bring you into our schools to see the amazing things happening every day. I think you would be both proud and amazed to see the resiliency and strength of our students and our staff. Despite all the turmoil and uncertainty in our world these past two years, our schools remain a safe, stable and welcoming place for kids to learn. Our staff is working harder than ever to support students, and while they are tired and stretched thin, they remain committed to doing all they can to care for our kids.

In this newsletter we're providing just a glimpse into our classrooms, and sharing stories to help you understand what it's like to be a student at this time. You'll also learn about some of the things we're doing differently in year 3 of the COVID pandemic to better meet the needs of our kids.

In addition we are providing highlights of the 2021-2022 school year as part of our annual Shareholder's Report. We are changing the way we'll be sharing this report with you moving forward to make it a more timely and relevant recap of the school year. Watch for a new and improved Shareholder's Report coming out this summer.

Thank you for your continued partnership. We are so grateful for your support of our kids, our staff and our schools.

*Malinda Lansfeldt*  
Superintendent Malinda Lansfeldt

## Alumni shine on international Olympic stage

Stillwater Area High School alumni are shining bright in the 2022 Winter Olympics and Winter Paralympics.



Courtesy: U.S. Ski & Snowboard Team

**Jessie Diggins** (Class of 2010) brought home both a silver medal and a bronze medal from the 2022 Olympic Games in Beijing. She also has a gold medal from the 2018 winter games - which gives her a medal of every color and makes her the winningest cross-country skier in U.S. Olympic history. Diggins earned the silver in the women's 30-kilometer freestyle and the bronze in the women's freestyle sprint.



**Noah Cates** (Class of 2017) made his first appearance in the Olympics as assistant captain of the U.S. men's hockey team. He scored a goal in the team's first game, but ultimately the U.S. was eliminated in the quarterfinals.



Courtesy: IIHF



Courtesy:  
Sydney Peterson's  
Instagram @sydney.j.p

**Sydney Peterson** (Class of 2020), will be competing in the 2022 Winter Paralympics in March as part of the U.S. Nordic Skiing team. Peterson won three medals in women's standing competition at the recent Lillehammer 2021 Para Snow Sports World Championships.

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

# Pandemic continues to change how we do school

## Investing in our kids

The district has received nearly \$5 million in one-time funds to address the impact of the COVID pandemic on students and help make up for gaps in learning.

### COVID Funds



#### **Social & Emotional Support:**

Temporary social workers, psychologists and support staff to address mental health needs



**Academic Support:** Temporary intervention teachers, English Learner teacher, Student Engagement specialists; academic tutors; instructional materials



**General Support:** Substitute teachers and paraprofessionals, technology, classroom materials, and childcare



#### **Health Supports & Testing:**

Temporary health paras and nurses, masks and personal protective equipment, COVID test kits

### In Their Words

*"I'm very optimistic that this will give us the support we need to finish the year on a strong note. We're all hoping we'll be back to normal next fall and that students will be positioned as best as possible to come back to the new school year engaged, supported, and ready to learn."*

— Kyle Kane, Assistant Principal, Oak-Land Middle School

## Federal funds helping staff meet changing student needs

The weight of the pandemic has had a significant emotional impact on our youth and they've brought their stress, anxiety and uncertainty with them into our school buildings.

While students of all ages are adjusting to life back in our schools, staff say the challenges are most evident at the middle and high schools. They are seeing more mental health concerns, more relationship issues between students, and less engagement in class.

"Change is difficult, but it is especially difficult for adolescents," said Kyle Kane, assistant principal at Oak-Land Middle School. "Our students struggle because they are aware of what is happening [in the world], but are still developing the coping mechanism to manage these big emotions and these times."

Doing school as normal just hasn't been an option this year. Instead, teachers and support staff are utilizing federal funds to adapt what they are doing to meet the needs of their students. Beyond academics, they are focusing on the emotional needs of kids. Here are just a few examples:

- Hiring temporary staff to work through the emotions students are processing and help address learning gaps.
- Expanding the BARR program to reach more kids. BARR has been used successfully at the high school to reduce the number of students failing courses, and build stronger relationships between students and staff.
- Revamping Green Rooms, which give elementary kids a safe place to go when they are feeling anxious or struggling to manage their behaviors. Staff are also considering ways to create similar spaces in secondary buildings.





## Learning doesn't stop when the bell rings

The classrooms of Stillwater Area High School are abuzz on a Wednesday afternoon, even after the final bell has rung. Nearly one-third of the school's 2,800 students are staying after school to catch up on learning, make up missed assignments and tests, or get the extra support they need to be successful. It's all part of a response to address learning loss that has resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The high school is running a shortened class schedule each Wednesday to provide office hours at the end of the school day. Students who are in need of academic support remain at school to meet in-person with teachers or in small groups with classmates. Lunch is served before office hours begin and students are able to catch a bus home at the end of the day as usual. This ensures everyone has access to the help they need and that no barriers exist for students.

Office hours are designed for the approximately 30% of students who are earning a 70% or lower in any given class this year. Teachers communicate with families to let them know when they'd like a student to stay after school for support. For those who are caught up in school, the early dismissal allows them flexibility and time to complete their assignments and collaborate with classmates. With parent or guardian permission, they can even leave campus to study at home, go to work, or enjoy free time.

**View the full story online at**  
[stillwaterschools.org/SAHSofficehours](https://stillwaterschools.org/SAHSofficehours)

## Band-Aides and contact tracing: The role of school health staff in a pandemic

The health office has become the busiest place in the school buildings during the pandemic, and the role of school nurses and health paraprofessionals has changed significantly. Once the place where kids went for medications, Band-Aids and comfort, the nurse's office has now become the center of all COVID-related activities. Staff spend hours on the phone each week with families and staff to answer questions and help navigate positive COVID cases. They distribute testing kits to families and staff who request them and help answer questions that come up. They are responsible for contact tracing, communicating positive cases within the building and determining when it is safe for sick staff or students to return to school. They also track cases within the district and report each case to the state's department of health.

One-time federal funding has made it possible to hire additional float nurses to help fill in when health staff are out of the office and to assist with the increased volume of sick kids in each school. Funds have also paid for testing kits and personal protective equipment.

"Last year our staff worked every evening and all weekend to try to keep up," said Paula McDonald, Supervisor of Health Services. "The extra funding this year has allowed us to hire more people to manage it during the day. Our health staff is crucial - we can't safely operate our school buildings without them."



## Schools look to Central Services staff to help out

Evan Perry was hired in 2020 as the district's part-time webmaster. But recently he's taken on some new duties as milk carton opener, recess supervisor and door monitor at schools across the district. Perry is just one of many Central Services staff members taking a short break from their regular duties to ensure our schools are operational. With a shortage of substitutes and high numbers of absences in the midst of the Omicron surge, schools have scrambled to keep their doors open. Dozens of support staff from various departments

at Central Services - including finance, communications, Community Education, Human Resources and Teaching and Learning - have spent a few hours away from their desks to assist with kids in the schools.

"It's been fun to engage with the students," Perry said. "And the school staff are so happy to see us. They are stretched thin and it's great to be able to pitch in to help."



# Annual Shareholders Report 2020-2021

Here are a few highlights from last year. Watch for a new and improved Shareholder's Report coming out this summer to review the current school year.

## OUR STUDENTS

**8,290** STUDENTS



**45** LANGUAGES SPOKEN



**15.9%** Special Education



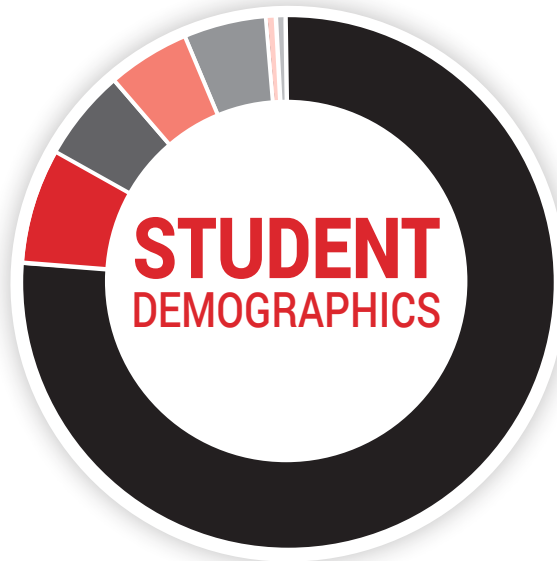
**12.9%** Free or reduced price meals



**2.1%** English Learners



Student demographic information is based on the 2020-2021 Minnesota Report Card: [rc.education.mn.gov](https://rc.education.mn.gov)



**77.6%** White

**5.0%** Black/African-American

**6.8%** Hispanic/Latino

**0.2%** American Indian/Alaska Native

**5.3%** Two or more races

**0.1%** Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

**5.0%** Asian

## ACT Composite scores 2021



**24.0** Average



**21.6** Average

## MCA

Despite an anticipated decline in scores due to the pandemic, Stillwater area students continued to perform above the state average on the 2021 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, which measure proficiency in math, reading and science.

[stillwaterschools.org/Assessments](https://stillwaterschools.org/Assessments)



## POINTS OF PRIDE

- A team of middle school students earned 2nd place in the international NASA Rover Challenge for designing and building a fully-functional land rover.
- Hundreds of students were recognized by the AP College Board for academic achievement: 89 students were named AP Scholars, 44 students were named AP Scholars with Honors and 58 students were named AP Scholars with Distinction.
- Student athletes earned 12 conference championships and 13 section titles.
- Student musicians continued the longest streak of superior ratings in Minnesota State High School League competitions involving the bands, orchestras and choirs.
- Rob Bach, high school principal, was named the 2021 Administrator of the Year by the Minnesota Association of Secretaries to the Principals.
- Katelyn Larson, high school choir teacher, was named the 2021 Young Choral Director of the Year.

## STUDENTS

- 637 students earned a 3.75 grade point average (GPA) and above in 2020-2021
- 117 students earned a perfect unweighted 4.0 GPA
- 84% of graduates attend a 2 or 4 year college, university, trade school or vocational school
- 2 seniors were named 2021 National Merit semifinalists

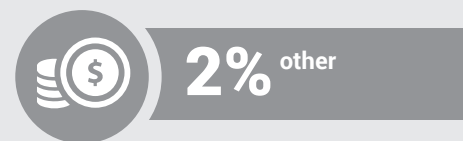
## TEACHERS

- 465 teachers in our district
- 70% hold an advanced degree
- 92% of teachers have 3 or more years of experience

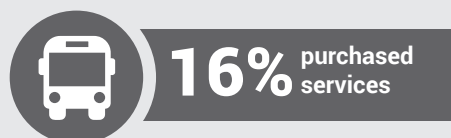


## Investing in excellence

We're committed to investing our resources in ways that benefit all of our students.



All financial data is based on the audited 2020-2021 budget: [stillwaterschools.org/audit](https://stillwaterschools.org/audit)



# STORIES *From Around the District*



## Students develop app to predict diabetes

Stillwater Area High School student Coolsjes Singhvi and Stillwater Middle School student Riddhi Singhvi have been named winners of the 2021 Congressional App Challenge in Minnesota's District 3. It's the most prestigious prize in student computer science.

The Singhvi's DPREDICT app is the first application in the world that takes physical and behavioral inputs like loss of hair, irritation and obesity and predicts if the person has prediabetes. The app has been able to predict prediabetes with greater than 98% accuracy, which is remarkable given that published work had not crossed 85% accuracy.

## Students bring dreams to life

Typical amusement parks aren't always the most welcoming places for young people using wheelchairs or other adaptive equipment. But that could change in the future, thanks to several innovative designers at Oak-Land Middle School.

A group of 7th and 8th grade special education students and their general education peers worked together to imagine, design and build an interactive model of what an inclusive and adapted park could look like. They chose a fairy garden theme for their amusement park concept. They used reclaimed materials to build the model, which features twinkling lights, flowers, and several colorful fairies. They also built three miniature rides and one carnival-style game that utilize adapted buttons and switches so people of all ability levels can play and participate in the fun.



## Ancient skills making a comeback

Stillwater Area High School students are learning the ancient skill of tanning hides. Members of the Native American Student Alliance (NASA) are being taught the brain tanning tradition by James Tom, a local Choctaw elder and co-chair of the Stillwater Native American Parent Advisory Committee (NAPAC).

It takes about 30-40 hours to process each deer hide. When the students are finished they will use the leather they create to make moccasins. When offered the choice of purchasing "commercial" leather to make their moccasins or learning to tan the hides themselves, all students opted to learn the labor intensive process with Tom.

The NASA club includes students who are enrolled in Native communities as well as those who are interested in learning about Indigenous culture, history, and issues. The tanning unit is just one of several hands-on Native projects the NASA students are working on this year, including creating beadwork and ribbon shirts and skirts.







## Pony alum returns to talk viruses with 7th graders

Stillwater Middle School students learned about viruses from a former student who is now studying at Harvard Medical School. Ph.D. candidate Tom Frost (Class of 2013) shared his knowledge with students in Ms. Chaplinski's 7th grade science class during their pathogen unit.

He talked about his interest in the sciences and the skills and experiences needed to get into Harvard. Students discussed the differences between RNA and DNA viruses, the specific research he is involved in, and what his favorite video game was in 7th grade. Tom will be graduating this spring.

### Want more great news?



Follow us on Facebook  
[facebook.com/stillwater834](https://facebook.com/stillwater834)



## Student journalist recognized nationally

Student journalist  
 Kady Peltier

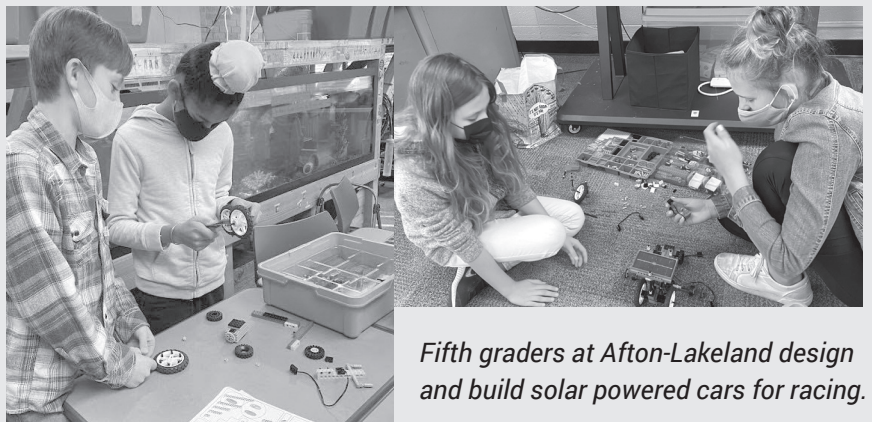
has been named a finalist in the National Scholastic Press Association individual story contest for her Climate Change News story called "Environmental Conservation Club works to get solar panels". This is an incredibly competitive contest with only 9 students from across the country recognized in this category. You can read Peltier's article in the Stillwater Pony Express newspaper at [sahponyexpress.com](http://sahponyexpress.com).



## Robotics team competes at state for 3rd straight year

The Stillwater Middle School robotics team placed 7th in the First Lego League state championship. Gaters 2.25 competed in the Cargo Connect Challenge with more than 60 teams from across Minnesota. The teams had to build a robot; re-imagine our global transportation system and explore ways of improving how we access and deliver goods; and give a presentation about their solution. Gaters 2.25 were presented with the Judges Award, given to a team that had significant accomplishments but didn't fit into other categories.

## Learning in action



*Fifth graders at Afton-Lakeland design and build solar powered cars for racing.*



*Kindergartners at Stonebridge explore the sights and sounds of nature as they investigate seashells.*

# THANK YOU, PONY COMMUNITY!

Stillwater Area Public Schools  
Independent School District 834  
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In November 2021 the community approved a new operating levy and technology levy. The funding from both of these levies will become available to the district in July 2022, just in time for the start of the 2022-2023 school year.

- The operating levy doesn't provide money for new programs, but will help stabilize the district's budget and address rising costs due to inflation.
- The technology levy will allow us to update classroom technology and provide devices to our students. We'll also be able to improve cybersecurity and provide more technology support for students, staff and families.



ECRWSS  
POSTAL PATRON

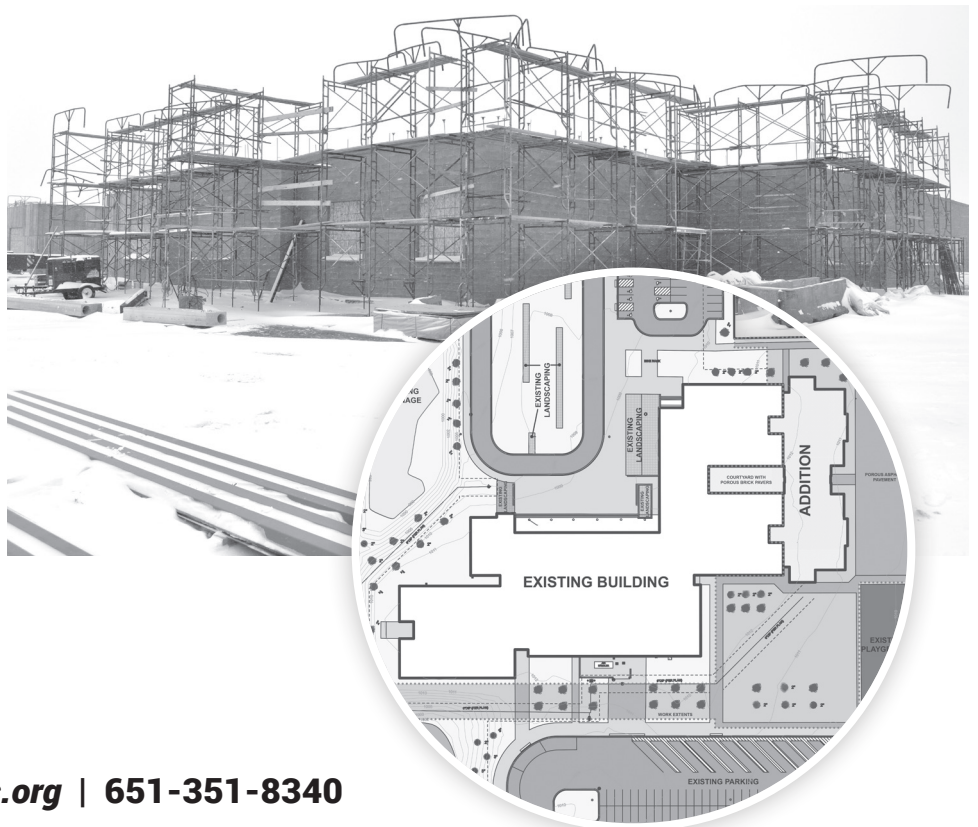
Si usted tiene alguna pregunta acerca de esta hoja informativa, por favor llame a la oficina de su escuela para hablar con un interprete.

## WE ARE PONIES ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022 ON PAGES 4-5

### New learning spaces for our kids

Eight classrooms are under construction at the district's newest school, Brookview Elementary in Woodbury. The spaces will be ready for students next fall. The new addition will allow enrollment at the school to grow by about 200 students, helping to address growth in the southernmost part of our school district.

The district also recently adjusted attendance boundaries to help address growth and overcrowding in the southern portion of the district - primarily at Lake Elmo Elementary School. Learn more at [stillwaterschools.org/boundarychange](https://stillwaterschools.org/boundarychange).



[stillwaterschools.org](https://stillwaterschools.org) | 651-351-8340