



**Dr. Michael Thomas, Superintendent**  
**Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools**  
*Prior Lake American/Savage Pacer*  
Column run date: February 18, 2023

## Helping students find their voice

One theme that emerged during my Listening and Learning Tour this fall was the feeling of renewed excitement this school year. I felt it too and continue to feel that energy each week as I visit our schools and talk with students and staff.

Now, roughly halfway through the school year, we have kept that momentum going. We remain laser focused on high-quality academics and creating a positive learning culture, along with building strong relationships with students. I believe this combination is the pathway to student success.

Our Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) teachers and support staff are responsive to student needs and get to know students as individuals. This is helping to get students back on track after two very challenging years due to the pandemic.

Our students have an amazing ability to articulate what they need to be successful. This has been evident in every grade level during something called, Caring and Committed Conversations where we set aside time to seek student input.

During Caring and Committed Conversations, students learn life skills such as how to talk with adults, work as a team, collaborate and develop critical thinking. Students also create new friendships that help them feel part of their larger school community, learn leadership skills and feel empowered to create positive change in their building.

One example of this is at Redtail Ridge where students had expressed interest in trying more ethnic foods. Thanks to the Nguyen family and our Child Nutrition Services (CNS) staff, students were able to try Chinese Fried Rice. It was so popular, the CNS staff served the dish to all PLSAS students during a World Wednesday celebration at the end of January.

Prior Lake High School and Bridges students recently focused on the topic, "The Purpose of School." Students studied the mission of the federal and state education departments and talked about how each individual student can get the most out of the investment their community makes by showing up to school every day, striving to reach their full potential.

We also empower student voices by conducting a voluntary survey each year, which is underway now for grades 3-12. This confidential survey helps us evaluate our strengths and opportunities for improvement. Summary survey results will be posted to our website in the coming weeks at [www.plsas.org](http://www.plsas.org)

It is my goal to take what we learn from gathering student input and work with various stakeholders to create a PLSAS Profile of a Graduate that details what each one of our students should learn in their K-12 journey and be able to embody before they graduate. This will help build future-ready students who are poised to thrive in college, the workforce and in life.

I believe the energy and excitement we are experiencing this school year, combined with student input, excellent staff and strong family/community partnerships, will propel PLSAS to be the premiere district of choice in the south metro.