

# THE DISTRICT DISPATCH

School News & Updates  
for the School District 197  
Community  
**Summer 2023**



*Friendly Hills Middle School students participate in the Middle School Career Fair.*

## WHAT'S INSIDE

**A Look at Our English  
Learner Program**

**Graduation Photos and  
Senior Profiles**

**Fourth-Grade Confluence  
Literary + Arts Publication**

**Middle School Career Fair**

**Alum Feature: Mason Young**

**School District 197  
Budget Breakdown**

**Upcoming Events &  
Back to School Guide**

**And more!**

## From the Superintendent

I'm excited to share the summer edition of our District Dispatch newsletter with you. Inside, you'll find stories highlighting our commitment to helping every child succeed. We'll showcase established, new, and expanding programs designed to maximize every student's potential.

You'll read about our program for students who are newcomers to the country and the English language. We're also featuring a few graduates from the Class of 2023 who share their experiences and exciting next steps. You'll hear about a literary and arts publication featuring incredible work by some amazing fourth graders, a spotlight on one of our alums, our Middle School Career Fair, and more. We'll wrap it up with an overview of the budget and how we distribute our resources to sustain and improve the programs and results that help every student thrive.

I hope you're having a safe and fun summer, and we look forward to seeing you in the fall.

Peter Olson-Skog  
Superintendent

**Nurture. Inspire. Prepare. Together, we thrive.**

# Preparing & Empowering Multilingual Students Through the English Language Development Program

School District 197 values our vibrant and diverse student population, representing a rich tapestry of cultures and languages. With over 40 languages spoken, our commitment is to provide exceptional educational opportunities for students learning English as an additional language, known as English Learners (ELs) or multilingual learners (MLs), and equip them with skills and support to acquire English proficiency while meeting state academic standards. We prepare all students, including English Learners, to succeed in an interconnected, multicultural, and multilingual world.

## Supporting English Learners

Led by Andrea Sáenz, English Learner Program Coordinator, the English Language Development (ELD) program helps students who speak home languages other than English gain the necessary skills and proficiency to succeed in the academic English of school.

“The EL program helps students to access the language of content classes—also known as mainstream classes, like algebra or social studies—and gives them the support to be successful in school,” shares Andrea. “We aim to leverage a student’s home language to create as much access to grade-level content standards as possible by explicitly teaching the language functions and features of those particular content areas.” Andrea shares that the ultimate goal is for students to exit the program and continue their educational journey in mainstream content classes independently.

That educational journey and support can look different for each student based on several factors. “For newcomer students specifically, or those that are new to the country, there is often trauma involved in making the transition to a new school system in a new country with a new language,” shares Andrea. “A student who arrives in a U.S. school with a strong academic background from a stable educational system has different needs than one whose family fled war or government instability and who may have interrupted schooling.”



**The EL program helps students to access the language of content classes—also known as mainstream classes, like algebra or social studies—and gives them the support to be successful in school.”**

## A Growing Program

Since 2021, the EL population in School District 197 has increased by nearly 25 percent, with the largest population of EL students attending Two Rivers High School. Teachers licensed in English as a Second Language work closely with classroom teachers to provide a well-rounded education for EL students, bridging classroom content with academic English language instruction.

Andrea highlights, “Students from other countries come here with many skills and abilities; they just may not know how to communicate those ideas in English. That’s why our EL teachers are essential in providing a linguistic and cultural bridge until the students reach a level of English proficiency that allows them to access and succeed in the curriculum independently.”

## Successes and Highlights

School District 197 celebrates the achievements of our EL students, with a record number of seniors pursuing higher education and a record number of ELs or former ELs achieving Bilingual Seals certification. These accomplishments stand as a testament to the hard work of our students and the effectiveness of our EL program—which fosters a sense of connection, community, and welcoming environments that nurture academic and personal growth.

Our dedicated EL teachers (in close collaboration with content teachers, counselors, cultural liaisons, interpreters, and administrators) are vital in creating a warm and inclusive environment for new EL students. Recognizing the significance of fostering a sense of belonging, they invest considerable effort into building strong academic support and a culturally sustaining atmosphere.



# EL Program Student Features

Meet Two Rivers students enrolled in the EL Program!



**Engy Soliman**  
Class of 2023

*Loves making little books to write goals in—and soccer!*

**About me:** My name is Engy Soliman. I am 19 years old and I moved from Egypt to the U.S. when I was 15 years old. I speak English and Arabic and I am looking to learn more languages.

**Favorite class at Two Rivers:** Math.

**Favorite part of the EL Program:** Gathering with people that speak different languages and trying our best to understand each other. Also, having help from the teachers was so helpful during my high school.

**Tell us about a teacher or staff member who has impacted you:** I want to thank all the ESL teachers because they help us a lot in school work and help us improve our language. They helped make us more confident, feel safe, and gave us a supportive environment that made us grow and learn successfully.

**Plans after Two Rivers:** I will go to Saint Paul College, then transfer to the University of Minnesota. I am thinking of studying architecture, but I am not sure yet. I also want to travel around the world and go to most of the places I want to see.



**Víctor Feria**  
Class of 2026

*Plays soccer every weekend with his dad. The original interview was completed in Spanish.*

**About me:** Hello, my name is Víctor Feria Ramirez. I am from Mexico, specifically from the state of Veracruz. I am 15 years old, and I live here in Minnesota with my father and my two brothers.

**Favorite class and part of the EL Program:** My favorite class is English because, in addition to being one of the most important subjects for me, it is a class that I enjoy. I am fascinated by the idea of being able to learn a new language, and my favorite part of this program is that I met students from other countries who, in the same way, are learning a new language, and it is interesting to be able to live with them because you learn about their culture, more about them and their country.

**Tell us about a teacher or staff member who has impacted you:** Personally, there are two teachers to whom I am very grateful for having helped not only me but also all my classmates—Mr. Kokila and Mr. Vernon. They have always been there for us at all times and are examples to follow. They are excellent teachers and very good friends.

**Plans after Two Rivers:** I plan to graduate to start a university career and become a surgeon.



**Rena Legesse**  
Class of 2024

*Plays soccer for the Two Rivers soccer team and loves listening to music.*

**About me:** My name is Rena Legesse, and I am from Ethiopia (Addis Ababa). I came to Minnesota last year and am in 11th grade at Two Rivers High School.

**Favorite class at Two Rivers:** My favorite class is ELL 3 because I learn a lot of new English. I want to improve my English, and the teacher is helping me with everything.

**Tell us about a teacher or staff member who has impacted you:** I just came last year, so my first year was scary because I didn't know anyone, but my teachers, Mr. Vernon, Ms. Morgart, and Ms. Sáenz, really helped me learn many things about English. It has been hard for me, but they didn't give up on me.

**Advice for students new to the EL program:** Don't be scared to speak English and talk freely and confidently. If you don't understand or are confused, ask the teachers—they are always there for you.

**Plans after Two Rivers:** I want to go to university to study nursing and help people.



# CONGRATULATIONS

## Two Rivers High School Class of 2023!

The Two Rivers High School Class of 2023's commencement ceremony occurred on Sunday, June 4, at Roy Wilkins Auditorium, RiverCentre, in St. Paul. Congratulations to the more than 250 students who graduated this year. We are proud of you all!



## Senior Profiles

Meet four newly graduated seniors who have accomplished so much in academics, arts, athletics, and supporting a positive atmosphere. Be sure to watch them closely as they move beyond Two Rivers High School!



### Erik Essen

**What have you enjoyed most about your School District 197 experience?** I've enjoyed growing up with my friends along the way, some going back to elementary school.

**What have been your most rewarding academic experiences?** The first was my junior year class, Precalculus (or Precalc). Precalc was the hardest class I have taken in terms of workload and rigor. However, my teacher, Mr. Chhoun, helped me understand Precalc better. The other is being in the National

Honor Society (NHS). NHS is a program that requires you to volunteer in the community, and I am so glad to have done it. Giving back to a community that has given so much to me is a great feeling.

**What athletics, activities, and/or clubs have you been involved in?** Football, Basketball, Baseball, Track & Field, National Honor Society, Link Crew, and SuperFans.

**What are your plans after high school?** I plan to study business at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

**What would you like to share with your teachers?** To each and every one of you, I truly thank you for helping me become a better student, but more importantly, a better person.

**What is your hope for the future?** To make the world smile, at least just a little bit more.



### Ava Warford

**What have been your most rewarding academic experiences?** I have enjoyed the Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) and art courses. I have taken sewing classes and have made many clothes, and courses in interior design, painting, drawing, pottery, and photography. I enjoyed taking these classes because I could express my creativity, which was a nice mental break in my day.

**What athletics, activities, and/or clubs have you been involved in?** Tennis,

gymnastics, track & field, Link Crew, National Honor Society, and Warrior Leadership Team.

**What are your plans after high school?** I will be attending the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

**What advice would you give to younger students/future Warriors for their educational journey?** Always ask questions, try your best to stay on top of your work, and build relationships with teachers and staff, and clubs and activities are a must!

**What would you like to share with your teachers?** I would like to thank every one of my teachers from kindergarten to my senior year. I would not be where I am today without every one of them, and would not have achieved any of my goals if it weren't for their support.

**What is your hope for the future?** My hope for the future is to eventually return and have the opportunity to give back to all the amazing people who have inspired me to be who I am today.



## Gabe Goldenman

### **What have you enjoyed most about your School District 197 experience?**

One of my favorite things about School District 197 is its diversity. You get a ton of different demographics in our schools, so it's easy to learn about other cultures.

### **What have been your most rewarding academic experiences?**

Human anatomy and physiology. It was a fun time to learn about it, study it, and get a good grade in the class.

**What are your plans after high school?** I will be going to Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter to study exercise physiology in hopes of eventually becoming a physical therapist. I will also be playing football and maybe running track and field.

**Has a particular teacher, counselor, coach, or advisor impacted you?** The person who made the biggest impact on me is my football coach Mr. Orth. He has supported my athletic career through every sport I have participated in.

**What would you like to share with your teachers?** Thank you for being the amazing people that you are and being in the position that you are in. I am very thankful that you all have taken part in growing me into the man I am today.

**What is your hope for the future?** My hope is that everyone can find peace with who they are and who other people are. I think that people, myself included, can be too judgmental of others without seeing or knowing everything happening in their lives. Without knowing what is going on with someone, how can we have a say in what they think or do? My hope is that everyone will realize that.



## Ellie Reiff

### **What athletics, activities, and/or clubs have you been involved in?**

Volleyball team, softball team, link crew, and the community building club.

### **What have been your most rewarding academic experiences?**

My favorite class I took throughout high school was personal finance. Personal finance put money into perspective for me. We learned about budgeting, investing, and how to stay out of debt.

### **What are your plans after high school?**

I plan on going to DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois. I am

double majoring in marketing and psychology. After school, I hope to be the head of an advertising company.

### **Has a particular teacher, counselor, coach, or advisor impacted you?**

Coach Katie Naughton. Katie has been my coach for five years of high school volleyball. She has always been a stable person I can go to with whatever is going on in my life. She always makes a little time each day for students.

**What would you like to share with your teachers?** I am grateful for the helping hands that guided me through high school, as it can be a tough time. From freshman year social studies, where Mr. McCarthy taught us how to take proper notes, to senior year AP Composition and Language, where we spent a month on a research paper, all of my teachers prepared me for my next steps.

### **What advice would you give to younger students/future Warriors for their educational journey?**

Manage your time wisely. High school is super fun and has a lot of opportunities, but students need to learn how to manage their time. Managing their time will allow them to become more organized, which allows them more freedom to do the things they want to do.



# CONFLUENCE

## Literary and Arts Publication

We are proud to present this year's Confluence Literary and Arts Publication that showcases an impressive collection of writing and art by School District 197 fourth graders—all focusing on this year's theme: *Building Bridges, One Story at a Time*.



Thank you to all elementary school staff who played a role in developing this literature publication, especially Kortnie Unzen, one of the Gifted and Talented Specialists at Somerset Elementary. And special thanks to all 13 of our creative and talented writers and artists. Three of the submissions are featured here, and the rest can be found at [isd197.org/confluence2023](https://isd197.org/confluence2023) or by clicking on the QR Code.

### Bridge of Hope

By: Amélie Warden

A bridge does not need to be built by hand, it's just as simple as anything.

May 1. Jessica, Miami, United States

I feel left out like when we play soccer, I feel like a ragdoll getting pushed around. Then Lexi takes me on the team (she isn't a captain even though she is in 6th grade). I want to fit it in and play soccer like everyone. Be normal, be understandable.

I am Jessica, an 11-year-old shy girl. I live on Maple Rd. Everyone except Boys think I'm cute but all I say is "Shut up!" when they try to talk to me romantically.

The only thing that I'm looking forward to right now is visiting Paris during spring break. It's my reward for getting good grades.

I learned French this year. *Bonjour, au revoir*, etc.

I desire Paris to change me...

May 1. Juliette, Paris, France

Bonjour. I'm Juliette, a very self conscious 13-year old. I sit in the corner of the class, thinking "I'm not good, am I?" I probably failed my French test but I don't care. All I care about is finding a friend. But who in the world would like to be friends with me? Real friends that care... I want to build bridges with someone who is willing to pick me up if I fall. Make me smile even if it's raining or like being in the darkness and feeling happy.

May 1. Ashley, London, Britain

Hi! I'm Ashely, I go by Ash. I'm moving to France today - it's really hard to leave twelve years of memories.

My dog Biscuit is going to be sold. It's very sad, especially because I have all the pressure on my shoulders... like being blamed for everything.

I hope France is better.

Epilogue. One week later. Paris, France

The cold steel touched Jessica's hand, as she headed up to the top of the Eiffel Tower. She bumped into two girls on the stairs. "Hi?" - Jessica said, puzzled. There was a pause. "Hi! I'm Juliette, and this is Ash." Juliette pointed to a blond-haired girl. "Do you want to go up with us?" The three of them spent the rest of the evening talking about problems and dramas in their lives.

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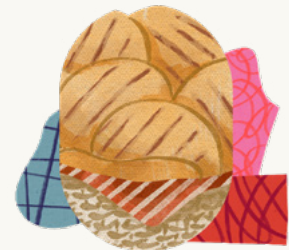
For me, life is a river that always flows under a bridge. Sometimes flows rugged, sometimes nice. But it will never be perfect for everyone. A bridge can be built between different people, no matter who you are, what you believe in. You can always make a bridge even at the darkest times. It connects cultures, people, and problems, like in the story.



### Middle School

By: Avani Raghuvanshi

"I'm super worried about Middle School!" Says Beria. "Why?" Says Bona. "Because it's a new life! I wished someone felt how I feel." Says Beria. "Someone does! And you can make a bridge to find out!" "A bridge?" Asks Beria. "Yeah! A connection, like what's your favorite food? Mines Pizza" "Same!" Says Beria.



### Arepas

By: Camilo Bicanich

We get around arepas as a family to share old traditions. Arepas are a very important part of our week. We have them at least once a week, and as we eat them we talk about our favorite ones.

Arepas connect me to part of my Venezeulas culture. And I love to share it with you.

# Middle School Career Fair

Guiding students to reach their full potential and exposing them to the endless possibilities in their future is something we strive for at School District 197. This school year, the district's curriculum department hosted its first-ever Middle School Career Fair for seventh and eighth-graders at Friendly Hills Middle School and Heritage E-STEM Magnet School. Middle schoolers rotated between breakout sessions, mock interviews, and a college panel—all presented by local community leaders, businesses, and students.

We talked with a few middle schoolers after the event, and they shared that the real-life advice from college-aged young adults was appreciated, and their favorite part was the mock-interview experience. *"I really liked the advice from the college and high schoolers on the panel. They were talking about good study habits, expectations in high school and college, and how to balance it all. They have real-life examples of success and learning opportunities."* – Esther, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Friendly Hills (and now an incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grader at Two Rivers)



Esther, 8<sup>th</sup> grade

**A special thank you to our Two Rivers High School student volunteers, college students, local businesses, and community members for your time and inspiration!**







# Warrior Alum Profile

## Mason Young

**Mason Young, an alum of School District 197, has come full circle in his educational journey—returning as a teacher and wrestling coach in the district that helped shape him.**

Meet Mason Young, the At-Promise Coordinator at Heritage E-STEM Magnet School and wrestling coach at Two Rivers High School.

During his time as a student in School District 197, Mason attended Somerset Elementary and Heritage E-STEM Magnet School before graduating from Henry Sibley (now Two Rivers). Reflecting on his high school experience, Mason remembers the invaluable guidance of the teachers—many of whom continue to impact students' lives positively today. He attributes his success to the connections he forged through sports, which instilled valuable life lessons and propelled him toward his current achievements.

Now as a staff member at Heritage, Mason serves as the At-Promise Coordinator—a role that allows him to work closely with students facing academic or behavioral challenges. As an advocate for these students, he provides guidance and support, empowering them to overcome obstacles and thrive in their education.



**Many teachers still working in the district today helped me through high school. I truly believe all the connections I've made through sports and the lessons they taught is why I was successful."**



**What makes our district great is the people who work in it. Heritage is a great example of that. My coworkers always consider the student's best interests above all else."**

One of Mason's ideas that have found success at Heritage is Power Hour—a before-school program at Heritage that offers students a safe space to release stress and energy while engaging in sports and weight room basics. Since its start in the 2022-2023 school year, Power Hour has experienced growth and popularity among students. Starting with just five participants in the first two weeks, the program quickly gained traction and attracted more students. By December, Power Hour had reached its maximum capacity with 32 participants.

The impact of Power Hour on students has been significant, Mason shares. "While some students utilize the program to get a workout in, for many, it serves as a valuable social outlet and motivation to arrive at school on time. Power Hour allows students to connect with their peers. It fosters a sense of belonging, contributing to a positive school culture."

As Power Hour continues to evolve and impact students' lives, it serves as a testament to Mason's dedication and commitment to students and the school community. Through Mason's work, students are empowered to embrace physical activity, explore their passions, and build a foundation for a healthy and successful future.





# Energy Efficient and Healthy Schools Award



On June 28, School District 197 was recognized as a 2023 Energy Efficient and Healthy Schools award winner by the Department of Energy, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Education. The award recognizes schools and districts for planning efforts and for outstanding implementation of solutions to improve energy efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, and support healthy learning environments.

Here are a few examples of our district sustainability platform in action:

- Implemented energy-efficient solutions as part of recent bond projects, achieving top 5% energy efficiency amongst schools nationwide—from installing high-efficiency condensing boilers and automated HVAC systems to completely offsetting our electric use through on-site and community solar generation.
- Installed solar panels on five school buildings and one solar thermal on top of the Aquatic Center that generates the primary heat source for the pool.
- Partnered with Great River Greening to plant more native grasses and wildflowers across the district. This year, more than 5,000 native plant plugs were planted at Two Rivers and Garlough with their help.
- Runs LiveGreen, the district's sustainability program that promotes energy saving, recycling, and other green initiatives. Each school in the district has a LiveGreen team that consists of students and a teacher. These teams help support low-cost or no-cost energy efficiency strategies to reduce energy, promote recycling and composting, and focus on conserving resources.



**Special thanks to our LiveGreen team and community partners for helping in our energy efficiency and sustainability efforts!**

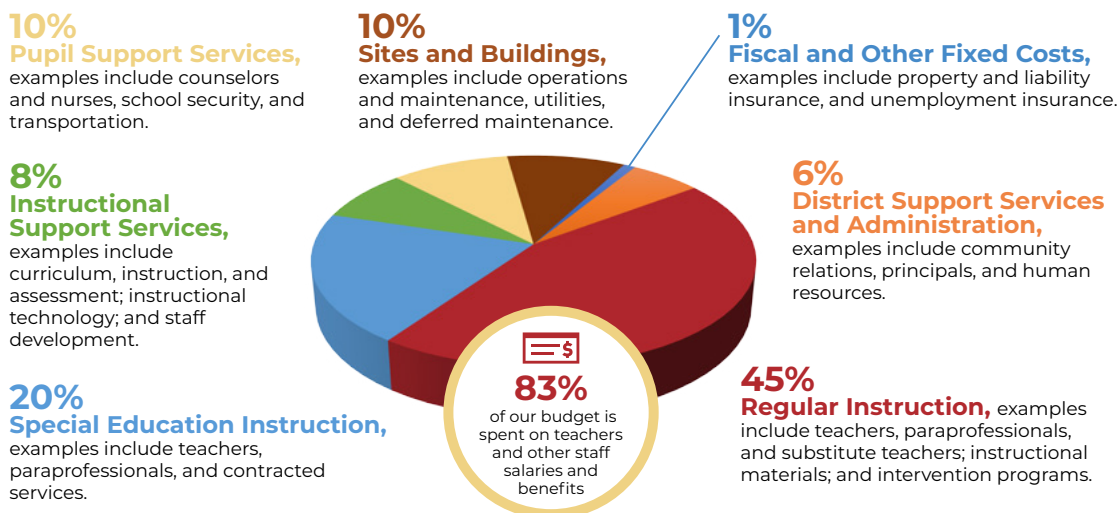


## School District Budget Breakdown

We're excited to introduce a new feature in our District Dispatch—a School District 197 budget overview. In the spirit of transparency and keeping our community informed about how funds are allocated to support our schools and students, each newsletter will include a budget overview in a particular area—from a breakdown of our district's financial resources to highlights of key investment areas that enhance educational experiences.

**In this issue, we're highlighting our general fund expenses. Basically, how we spend money.**

From instructional materials and technology advancements to faculty salaries and facility maintenance, how a school district spends money directly impacts the quality of education and overall student experiences. Here's a look at our general fund expenses by program type:



We sent out a special-edition budget newsletter last month, and you can find more information about our budget projections for the next three years and the anticipated impact of this year's legislative session by clicking on the QR code.



**NOTE** We spend one-third less than the metro average on all forms of administration costs—things that students don't directly see. And the money we save is money we put into the classrooms.

# ISD 197 Educational Foundation Awards 2023 Grants

The ISD 197 Educational Foundation is proud to announce that it has awarded 18 grants to School District 197 teachers and staff for the 2023-2024 school year. Thank you to everyone who took the time to submit grant applications!

This year's grants will cover curriculum kits and supplies, positive behavior program support, digital learning options for new English learners, a 3D printer, books, and more.

We couldn't do this without the community's support. Thank you to everyone who attended the foundation's May luncheon and for supporting the Annual Warrior 5K Family Run/Walk. Save the date for this year's Warrior 5K on September 30, 2023!



## Dollars for Scholars: A Legacy of Supporting Students



Dollars for Scholars is a national organization that mobilizes community resources to provide scholarships and financial assistance to high school students pursuing post-graduate training and education. Led by a passionate team of volunteers, our local Dollars for Scholars program has been instrumental in bridging the gap between academic aspirations and financial barriers. Through fundraising initiatives, community partnerships, and generous donations, Dollars for Scholars has raised substantial funds to award scholarships to thousands of School District 197 students.

At Two Rivers High School, Jennifer Lutz has been leading our local Dollars for Scholars for the last 12 years. During Jennifer's tenure, she has helped raise more than \$1 million to award to nearly 1,500 Two Rivers and Henry Sibley scholarship recipients. As Jennifer steps down as President of the Two Rivers Dollars for Scholars program, please join us in thanking her for her incredible contributions to our school community.





# Community Education

School District 197's Community Education provides engaging, high-quality lifelong learning opportunities, enriching the lives of our diverse community with programs spanning early childhood through adult education. Come learn and grow with us! Here are a few classes offered this summer—scan the QR code to learn more and register!

## Access Project (Adults with Disabilities)

### Crafting for Our Furry Friends Service Project

Spread some joy to our animal friends with handmade blankets and toys on Tuesday, August 15, at 5 pm. Your creations will be donated to a local Humane Society, or feel free to take one home to your own furry friend. Caregivers are welcome.

### Second Annual Picnic Party

Celebrate the end of summer with great food, yard games, music, and, most importantly—friends! Join us Friday, August 18, at 5 pm at Thompson Park in West St. Paul. There is no cost for caregivers to assist.



## Adult, Family, and Youth Activities

### Let's Probate an Actual Minnesota Estate

This class will walk through a Minnesota Probate Estate from filing the Application for Probate to the Final Accounts and all the steps in between. The class is on Monday, August 21, 6:30-8:00 pm at Two Rivers High School for \$15.

### Rootin' for the Arts Show

Enjoy a rootbeer float and live music, and observe artists' work at this free event on Wednesday, August 24, 1:00-3:00 pm at Thompson Park Activity Center. If you'd like to present your art, register by scanning the QR Code.

### Kung Fu Classes (Ages 5-Adult)

Learn kicking, punching, and self-defense skills and build muscle, power, flexibility, and agility. Improve your awareness, self-esteem, and confidence. Join a Friday evening fun, progressive, full-participation class and learn skill-building exercises to strengthen the mind and body. Beginning October 6 at 6:15 p.m.



# BEST JOB EVER!

## ISD 197 SCHOOL AGE CARE (SAC)

### Support Paraprofessional, Flexible Days & Hours

- Various ISD 197 locations
- Monday-Friday
- Up to 17 hrs/week between 2-6 pm
- Up to 6.25 hrs/week between 6:30-7:45 am
- \$15.92/hr + potential for additional \$2/hr stipend
- Must be 16 to apply



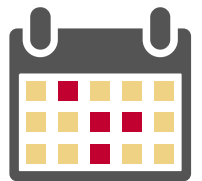


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## Mark Your Calendars



### Save the date for the following district-wide events!

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|---------------------|--|
| <b>August 1</b>     | School Board election information session at the District Office, 5 pm |
| <b>September 5</b>  | First day of school for kindergarten, fifth grade, and ninth grade     |
| <b>September 6</b>  | First day of school for grades 1-4, 6-8, 10-12                         |
| <b>September 22</b> | Homecoming parade and home football game                               |
| <b>September 30</b> | Warrior 5K Family Run/Walk at Warrior Field                            |



### BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDE

Find the 2023-2024 school calendar and important dates, updates to the school meals program, bus registration information, fall season registration dates for athletics and activities (including important information on sports physicals), summer community resources, and more.

