

— Our mission is to —
educate, inspire & empower

www.isd728.org

★ 728 ★ HAPPENINGS

With schools in
Elk River, Otsego,
Rogers & Zimmerman

Summer 2020

Message from Superintendent Bittman

FALL PLANNING UPDATE

On June 18, 2020, Minnesota Superintendents were directed to develop three contingency plans to prepare for the 2020-21 school year using the scenarios described below. ISD 728 teams have begun working on these scenarios, and will use information received from families (i.e. surveys), data from the Department of Health, and guidance from the Department of Education to formulate plans. While we will be ready for each of the scenarios, the Governor will ultimately decide what all Minnesota school districts will do. We will know the Governor's decision the week of July 27, 2020, and will be ready to communicate ISD 728 plans within the first couple weeks in August. We recognize everybody would like information sooner and appreciate everyone's patience as we work to ensure our children are kept safe, cared for, and provided a quality education.



Scenario 1

In-person learning for all students. In this planning scenario, schools should create as much space between students and teachers as is feasible during the day, but will not be held strictly to enforcing six (6) feet of social distancing during primary instructional time in the classroom. Activities and extracurricular programming would likely continue to follow the Guidance for Social Distancing in Youth Sports.

Scenario 2

Hybrid model with strict social distancing and capacity limits. In this planning scenario, schools must limit the overall number of people in school facilities and on transportation vehicles to 50% maximum occupancy. Sufficient social distancing with at least six (6) feet between people must occur at all times.

Scenario 3

Distance learning only. However, schools may be open to provide emergency child care or other functions.

Please Note: Governor Walz's Office, in consultation with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), is expected to announce the model under which schools will reopen for the 2020-21 during the week of July 27, 2020.

We will continue to provide information as it becomes available.

ISD 728 SUPPORTS ALL STUDENTS, FAMILIES IN THIS CHALLENGING TIME

Many of our students, families, and staff have reached out to us over the last month stating how challenging and emotional it has been lately because of the death of George Floyd. We recognize that navigating these situations can be particularly difficult during a pandemic and when people are forced to do so without the in-person support and guidance of ISD 728 employees or others.

There is no place for discrimination or racism in our schools. In fact, our District's Strategic Plan prioritizes equity and access for all learners. We are aware of the struggles and needs of our students, staff, and families, and remain committed to serving and supporting ALL learners.

For those who have reached out, our community hears you, supports you and stands with you.

Our hearts are broken now and anytime there is injustice and violence. We all can do better at identifying and addressing injustice when it occurs, and we promise to do so both collaboratively, and purposefully.

The Minnesota Department of Education has provided various resources (education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/safe/bprev/MDE071470) to help all of us. We must continue to be part of the solution, facilitate discussions, and make changes where and how we are able in order to best support our students, families, and each other.

You matter and we are in this together!

Please contact your child's school should you or your student be in need of support. Summer staff will be on hand to assist you.



Sign-up!
Receive our online newsletter
www.isd728.org/eConnection

William Campbell Joins ISD 728 Leadership Team

ISD 728 has hired William Campbell as the District's new Assistant Superintendent. As a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet, Mr. Campbell will oversee the Elementary School portion of Educational Services. The hiring was recommended and approved at the ISD 728 School Board meeting on Monday, June 8, 2020.

Mr. Campbell has a history of success in education, and has served as an elementary teacher, assistant principal, principal, and Superintendent in Tennessee, Georgia, and in Minnesota. He has also taught and coached at the Middle School level.



"We are excited about having him part of ISD 728, and know he will help us accomplish the District's mission and strategic initiatives," said Superintendent Dan Bittman. "He is incredibly knowledgeable, highly-qualified and charismatic about his work and ISD 728. He will be a terrific fit."

The District began its search for a new Assistant Superintendent in March, assembling an interview committee to field candidates and conduct interviews. Members included representatives of the ISD 728 School Board, the school district leadership team, administrators and other district employees. Committee members expressed excitement and overwhelming support for his appointment, noting his commitment to ALL learners, desire to serve in ISD 728, love for the arts, and his experience leading.

"A transition plan will be put in place to bring Mr. Campbell to ISD 728 with the help of Dr. Hennen-Burr, Assistant Superintendent, Tim Caskey, Executive Director of Human Resources, and the entire District Office team. ISD 728 is a wonderful place to work and learn, and we look forward to a bright future and continued success with Mr. Campbell as part of our team," Bittman said.

ISD 728 Finance Team Earns Award for Financial Reporting

The ISD 728 finance team has earned recognition for its excellence in financial reporting and transparency, awarded by the Association of School Business Officials.



ISD 728 is one of about 550 school districts nationally who received ASBO International's Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting (COE) for the fiscal year ended 2019.



The COE program recognizes school districts for excellence in the preparation of their Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR).

We are proud of the work our finance team does to responsibly educate our kids, feed our staff and students and so much more - all while being mindful of our stakeholders and families. Congratulations to the finance team.

Mark Huss, RMS Principal, Named 2019-2020 Central Minnesota Middle School Principal of the Year

Mark Huss, principal at Rogers Middle School, was named the 2019-2020 Central Minnesota Middle School Principal of the Year by the CMASSP (Central Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals) in April.

The award puts Huss, who is retiring from ISD 728 on June 30, in the running for Minnesota Middle School Principal of the Year. He has served in education for 33 years, 13 as an administrator. He has been the top man at Rogers Middle School since 2015-2016. Huss is the first award-winner from ISD 728 since the late Susan Romane won in 2015 as an assistant principal at Rogers High School. Congratulations, Mr. Huss!



Graduation Rates at Historical Highs

The Minnesota Department of Education recently released graduation rates for the Class of 2019. Results from the report and the three-year historical averages indicate good news across the board for ISD 728. The District's overall four-year graduation rate of 91.4 percent was a three-year high, and 7.7 percent higher than the state average of 83.7 percent. Rogers High School led the way, overall, with 97.6 percent of its senior class graduating. Zimmerman High showed the best three-year growth, with its graduation rate increasing by 3.2 points to 95.1 percent in 2019.

"It takes an entire team to get a student through graduation day, so this is a great reflection on our District team delivering on our mission to create learners who are ready to accomplish their dreams and contribute positively to our local and global communities," said Dr. Daniel Bittman, superintendent of ISD 728 schools. "I'm really proud of our teachers, staff and administrators across the District, who are ready to help kids and families on their journey to life beyond our schools. We feel we prepare them well, and are getting better each and every day."

Breaking down four-year graduation rates by race/ethnicity, ISD 728 has shown significant improvements in the graduation rate for American Indian/Alaskan Native students. In Minnesota, students within this group saw just over half of its seniors graduate - but the graduation rate here in ISD 728 is at 80 percent - nearly 30 points higher. ISD 728 has also closed the achievement gaps for Black and Hispanic students - two groups that saw major gains in graduation rates statewide. Nearly 70 percent of Black and Hispanic students in Minnesota graduate, which is markedly up since 2010. But in ISD 728, that rate is at 85.7 percent for Black students and 88.5 percent for Hispanic students - both more than 15 percent higher than the state average.

Other highlights from the report:

- ISD 728's English Learners - those who have a home language that is not English - hit a three-year high with a 95.7 graduation rate in 2019.
- Students identifying as two or more races have shown steady increase in graduation rates over the last three years, hitting a nearly 94 percent graduation rate last year.
- Students receiving discounted or free lunch continue to be below the average graduation rate in the District, while this group scores more than nine (9) percent above the state's average. We recognize there is more work to do. ISD 728's rate for students in the FRP category was just over 80 percent.

ISD 728 Honors with Annual Awards

Each year, employees are able to nominate individuals to be recognized as Staff and/or Volunteers of the Year. The nominations are always humbling to read, and provide just another reminder how wonderful our ISD 728 team is! Over the last week, we were able to surprise each of the individuals chosen by the committee, present a plaque and certificate, and to give a personalized yard sign for each honoree. Below you will find a list of those recognized as well as some pictures of the events.

EARLY EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

Jessica Monson

Handke Center



STAFF MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Jim Gornick

Zimmerman Elementary School



ELEMENTARY TEACHER OF THE YEAR

James Knaresboro

Parker Elementary School



DISTRICT-WIDE TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Joe Samek

District Office



SECONDARY TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Monte Bloom

Zimmerman Middle/High School



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

Judith Free

Handke Center



ISD 728 Retiree Road Show

ISD 728 Superintendent Dan Bittman, Human Resources Executive Director Tim Caskey and Communications Specialist Mike Schoemer “hit the road” to visit the 2019-2020 Retirees. Normally honored with a year-end ceremony, Director Caskey and team took the ceremony to these hard-working staff members’ homes with a certificate, plaque and “virtual” handshake. All told, the more than 30 retirees had more than 700 years of experience in our school district. “We were able to present a plaque, hear about their journey and plans, and to thank them for their service. It was a wonderful opportunity for all,” said Dr. Bittman. “We thank them for their service and leadership over these years.”

- | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| <p>Louis Arenz
<i>Custodian</i>
Rogers High School
17 years</p> | <p>Debra Crane
<i>Special Education Assistant</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
15 years</p> | <p>Susan Hudak
<i>Phy Ed Teacher</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
34 years</p> | <p>Pamela Moriarity
<i>ABE Instructor</i>
Community Education
27 years</p> | <p>Joann Skar
<i>Kitchen Helper</i>
Zimmerman Middle/High School
2 years</p> |
| <p>Crystal Benedict
<i>Supervision Assistant</i>
Salk Middle School
15 years</p> | <p>David Crocker
<i>Counselor</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
23 years</p> | <p>Mark Huss
<i>Principal</i>
Rogers Middle School
33 years</p> | <p>Sonja Nelson
<i>Administrative Assistant</i>
Elk River High School
21 years</p> | <p>Pamela Story
<i>Social Worker</i>
Rogers Elementary STEM Magnet School
20 years</p> |
| <p>Michelle Bertrang
<i>Speech Clinician</i>
District-Wide
36 years</p> | <p>Susan Davies-Polzine
<i>Art Teacher</i>
Rogers Elementary STEM Magnet School
20 years</p> | <p>Sandra Kregel
<i>EBD Teacher</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
21 years</p> | <p>Therese Newstrom
<i>ECSE Teacher</i>
Zimmerman Elementary School
36 years</p> | <p>Cynthia Sykes
<i>Social Studies Teacher</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
15 years</p> |
| <p>Monte Bloom
<i>Teacher</i>
Zimmerman Middle/High School
32 years</p> | <p>Patricia Dusbabek
<i>Special Education Assistant</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
7 years</p> | <p>Katherine Kurmis
<i>English Teacher</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
27 years</p> | <p>Peter Pouliot
<i>Math Teacher</i>
Zimmerman Middle/High School
33 years</p> | <p>Valerie Williams
<i>Music Teacher</i>
Lincoln Elementary School
33 years</p> |
| <p>Shirley Bolin
<i>Cook Helper</i>
Elk River High School
1 year</p> | <p>Cynthia Eversman
<i>Kindergarten Teacher</i>
Zimmerman Elementary School
33 years</p> | <p>Elaine Maher
<i>Speech Clinician</i>
District-Wide
33 years</p> | <p>Jill Rauenhorst
<i>Speech Clinician</i>
District-Wide
32 years</p> | <p>Patricia Wilsey
<i>Occupational Therapist</i>
District-Wide
23 years</p> |
| <p>Robin Botts
<i>Grade 2 Teacher</i>
Twin Lakes Elementary School
34 years</p> | <p>Sonya Hanson
<i>Special Education Assistant</i>
Westwood Elementary School
13 years</p> | <p>Dan Marsh
<i>Head Custodian</i>
Lincoln Elementary School
38 years</p> | <p>Therese Seitz
<i>Science Teacher</i>
Ivan Sand Community High School
28 years</p> | <p>Deborah Witzman
<i>Special Education Assistant</i>
VandenBerge Middle School
14 years</p> |
| <p>Lisa Christensen
<i>Evaluator</i>
District-Wide
23 years</p> | <p>Thomas Hoffman
<i>Principal</i>
Ivan Sand Community High School
7 years</p> | <p>Diane Midboe
<i>Special Education Assistant</i>
Elk River High School
12 years</p> | <p>Vicki Sizen
<i>Assistant</i>
Otsego Elementary School
17 years</p> | |



District Hosts Chess Tournament at Parker Elementary

On Saturday, February 22, 2020, Parker Elementary hosted the 10th Annual District Chess Tournament for Grades 2-5. With 38 elementary students participating from throughout the district, it was a very fun and successful event. Congratulations to all who participated!

WINNERS

GRADE 2-3



From Left to Right: Logan Berg - Twin Lakes Elementary, Eli Schulz - Parker Elementary, Cooper Perry - Hassan Elementary, Alexandra Thom - Parker Elementary

GRADE 4-5



From Left to Right: Koen Peterson - Prairie View Elementary, Pryor Deusterman - Lincoln Elementary, Owen Ostmoie - Parker Elementary, Jake Lohn - Hassan Elementary

Six ISD 728 Students are National Merit Semi-Finalists

Six ISD 728 Students are among 15,000 semi-finalists named as part of the annual academic competition. The students, who were selected based on scores on a PSAT qualifying test, will compete for some 7,500 scholarships worth more than \$31 million, to be awarded this spring.

The group includes:

- Benjamin Fisher, Gretta Jensen and Ethan Loukusa of Rogers High School
- Jamison Ward of Zimmerman High School
- Josh Bauer and Meghan Bentz of Elk River High School

“To be considered for the Merit Scholarship Award, the semi-finalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the National Merit competition,” said Assistant Superintendent Jana Hennen-Burr, who honored the students at the ISD 728 School Board Meeting on Monday, Jan. 13. “We wish them luck as they continue in the process.”

After completing the finalist application, the six students from the District are now among hundreds of finalists from around Minnesota. Not all will receive scholarship funds, but the majority have qualified for some sort of scholarship due to their place on the National Merit Semi-Finalists list.

The Board and administrators recently appreciated the district’s participation in the National Merit process, which aims to shine a “spotlight on brilliant students and encourage the pursuit of academic excellence at all levels of education,” a message the group believed fits the district’s strategic plan and goals.



Benjamin Fisher



Gretta Jensen



Ethan Loukusa



Jamison Ward



Josh Bauer



Meghan Bentz



Visit us on Facebook & Twitter!
facebook.com/isd728 • twitter.com/isd728



Virtual Graduation, Drive-Up Ceremony, Presented for ISD 728 High Schools

ISD 728 students and families can check out the Class of 2020 via a Virtual Graduation Ceremony created for each high school at www.isd728.org/2020-graduations.

We have collected greetings from your ISD 728 School Board, your Superintendent, Dr. Daniel Bittman, your principal and representatives from your school to keynote this ceremony, which is one-of-a-kind for the Class of 2020.

We also have footage from the special drive-through graduation ceremonies thanks to the ISD 728 theater staff, technology team and communications staff. We wound up with picture perfect days (despite a rain delay on Ivan Sand's night!) for all four of our graduating classes.

The production also includes musical presentations and more, so be sure to check out all of the videos at your leisure.

The Class of 2020 will be forever remembered for their perseverance during this unprecedented time. Thank you, we wish you all the best. And while this might not be the ceremony any of us dreamed of having - it is your ceremony to remember.

Congratulations, Class of 2020! You are 728 Strong.



Elk Buddies Program Brings Students Together

For much of the school day, students in the Elk River High School special education program are in their classroom wing, working on their curriculum, bonding together. But, the question was once asked, how can these special needs students be a greater part of the high school experience? How can the so-called traditional high school student bridge the gap, and bring in those with Down's Syndrome, neuro-muscular diseases or other special needs that have them separated from the rest of their class for much of the day?



"The first step was kind of admitting there was a problem," said Sonja Weiler, Elk River High DECA leader. "We did a student survey, and, without a doubt, the special education students didn't feel like it was part of the bigger school family. To the tune of like, 85 percent saying they felt left out."

Enter, with the help of ERHS graduate Emily Novotny, the Elk Buddies Program. Novotny used the Buddy program – which has been started at other schools around the metro, including nearby Andover – as a way to bridge the gap. However, her high school career has come and gone, and she's now rubbing elbows with big shots in Washington, D.C.

Who would pick up the ball? "We saw it as a way to keep something that had been started going, but really use this year to spread awareness about Elk Buddies," said Lindsay Strecker, who, with fellow DECA junior Jayna Hager, has taken on the program. "Emily did a great job getting it started. It just kind of fell by the wayside for a bit, and now we've picked it up. It's been growing with every event we've done this year."

Hager said she had heard of Elk Buddies – the program is now in its fourth year – but really didn't know who was behind it, or how to get involved. The two juniors – with Weiler – brought the Buddy program back under the DECA umbrella, and have it running full steam ahead once again. There have been a half dozen events this year so far, including Homecoming Banners, Valentines Day Boxes, a Pumpkin Party and a few others. More events are planned for spring, including a special take on March Mayhem (since that other term is copyrighted).

"If you want to get more from the school community, you have to let people know. Everyone is super busy, but there's a feeling that you want to be connected to everyone in the building," Hager said. "We see our special education students every day. How can we be a better friend? This is the way to go."

With so many other factors dividing kids, finding a program that brought people together seemed like a great idea for DECA, Strecker said. "There's a social gap – and it's not really anyone's fault. But the goal is for them to feel like they're not going to a separate school. They're part of our school. And it's definitely working. You can see them smile when they see someone they recognize from Elk Buddies in the hallways. There are hugs and high-fives. It's really made an impact that we didn't know it could."

The future of the program is in good hands, the two juniors said. "We're kind of just getting started, so it's great that we can keep going with it next year, and really use next spring to find people to pass it on to," Hager said.



Rogers Elementary Hosts Author Laura Purdie Salas for I Love to Read Month!

"Reading Can Be..." was the theme of I Love to Read Month at Rogers Elementary and is based on three Can Be... books written by author Laura Purdie Salas. She spent three (3) days sharing her love of reading and writing with all students in grades K-5 in grade level presentations and in poetry writing workshops. During her visit, she toured the school to see decorated doors and spaces showing what reading can be. Families also attended an evening event to learn from Laura and to do some writing of their own!



District Artists Honored Virtually

Each year, ISD 728 honors artists from around our schools for their creative work. That recognition normally comes at one of the year's last board meetings, but was moved to a virtual presentation this year, due to the pandemic.

We will still honor these amazing artists – some of the best selections from our nearly 14,000 students – at the District Office in Elk River in 2020-2021. When buildings open, we hope you can stop and enjoy their work on display.

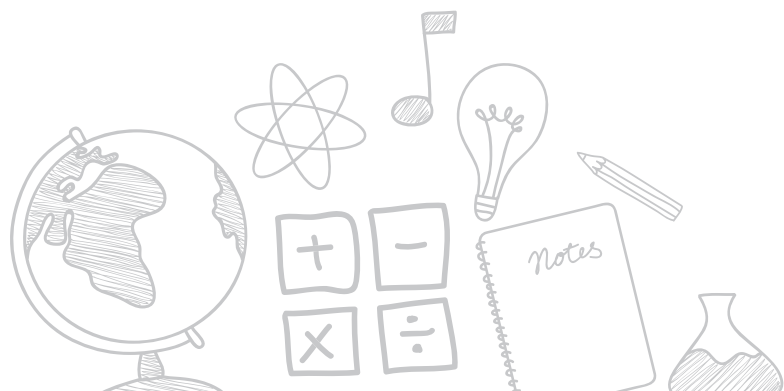


Ben Whiting 1st Grade

Enjoy the 2019-2020 ISD 728 Artist video at www.isd728.org/2020-Artists.



Sign-up
 to receive our online newsletter!
www.isd728.org/eConnection



School is Cool!

Photo Gallery



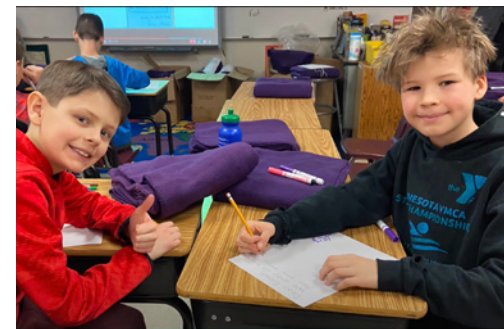
Fifth grade students at Westwood Elementary designed and raced derby cars to see which car would roll the farthest.



Students from Prairie View Middle School took part in a job-shadowing day at the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office.



Celebrating I Love to Read Month went to the penguins, as Lincoln Elementary went wild for "Mr. Popper's Penguins."



Fifth graders at Parker Elementary took part in making blankets for the homeless through a project called "Blankets of Hope."

Zimmerman High/Middle School female student athletes in a special photo. Congrats to these girls for representing the Thunder throughout the 2019-2020 school year and doing a sensational job of it.