INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

728 HAPPENINGS

Our mission is to educate, inspire & empower

With schools in Elk River, Otsego, Rogers & Zimmerman

www.isd728.org

Fall 2019

ISD 728 Poised to Enter 2020, Beyond



Welcome back ISD 728 families, students, staff and friends. We are excited to enter a new decade of learning, with our sights set on the Class of 2020 when all is said and done this school year.

We hope families are getting acclimated to their school, building, teachers and staff as they take on this first quarter of learning, and dive into the 2019-2020 school year. We know that this summer went by so quickly, but it seems like the weeks fly by with even more speed when the kids are in school and doing their work.

We start the year on a few high notes. First, we have **maintained our excellent performance as a district** in the North Star Accountability ratings, released by the Minnesota Department of Education. More information will be made public at our board meetings, as we continue to shine bright as one of the top-performing, large school districts in the state. This is a credit to our teachers, our students and to our ISD 728 families, who work together to attain this success. We have also placed the highest number of students in the National Merit Scholarship program the District has had in more than five years, this year.

We **continue to grow as a district**. From adding an eighth grade class at Prairie View Elementary and Middle School in the southwest, to growing neighborhoods and developments all around our ISD 728 communities, we start the year with our **largest enrollment in history** - a streak that shows no signs of stopping, as we know that we will continue to grow throughout this school year and into the next decade.

Together, we are 728 Strong! We are so proud of our students, families, staff and community and the work that they do, and we are happy they are part of our ISD 728 family. As we welcome our nearly 14,000 students and hundreds more preschool and adult learners back into our buildings, we hope you'll join us in the mission to make this ISD 728's best decade yet. — *Dan Bittman, ISD 728 Superintendent*

Activity Passes for ISD 728 Residents 62 and Older are Now FREE



New for the 2019-2020 school year, ISD 728 is offering a Senior (62+) Activity Pass for free admission to all regular-season home games for one year. The pass is available to any ISD 728 resident who is at least 62 years of age. The passes are available at the High School offices or the District Office during normal business hours. Simply provide a current ID showing your address, within ISD 728 District boundaries, for your pass. The pass is not valid for conference, state or section tournaments and other exclusions may apply.

ISD 728 Continues High Performance in State Assessments

Independent School District 728 (ISD 728) continues to demonstrate high levels of achievement on the state's accountability assessments, which include the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments Version III (MCA), based on the results released by the Minnesota Department of Education late last month.

A major change in the accountability system occurred two years ago with the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In the past, students who did not take the exam were not included in proficiency calculations. Now, **students who do not test are counted as "not proficient" which has lowered the accountability proficiency rate for districts across the state**.

Even with this change, **ISD 728 continued to outpace the state by a wide margin in both reading and math.** In addition, the district's achievement level in math and reading placed it in the top spot compared to the ten largest school districts in the state.

The district's proficiency rate of 70.34 percent in math topped the state average by more than 16 percent and was tops among the state's large districts (in terms of student population). In reading, ISD 728 placed first among the 10 largest school districts in the state with a 69.48 proficiency rate. This rate was more than 11 points higher than the state and represents an increase in proficiency for the fourth straight year.

Although science results are not included as part of the ESSA accountability system, ISD 728 demonstrated strong results in this area as well. The district ranked second among the 10 largest districts in the state with a proficiency rate of just under 63 percent on the MCA, and it was more than 12 points ahead of the state average.

"It's a credit to our staff, our students and to the leaders of ISD 728," said Dr. Jana Hennen-Burr, ISD 728 Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services. "Student success is the result of a lot of teamwork and belief in each and every student. Across the board, we can see the result of our teachers, our leadership and our efforts to create an atmosphere where everyone can learn, which is one of our core values."

"We are thrilled with the efforts of our students, teachers and staff. The excellence they show each year is a testament to the teamwork between our schools and our community," said Superintendent Dan Bittman. "We know the effort it takes to maintain this level of proficiency, and hope we can even continue to shine even brighter in the future as one of the top large school districts in Minnesota."

MORE INFORMATION

Drill deeper into MCA test results by visiting **http://rc.education.state.mn.us**.

Continued Growth in ISD 728 Pushes Need for Space

In the Spring of 2019, area counties and cities participated in a demographer's study that showed the communities that make up ISD 728 will add a projected 2,000 kids over the next 10 years.

The report might have hit the nail on the head with that eye-opening number, if the last three years are any indication.

With housing developments sprouting up in major communities like Rogers, Otsego, Zimmerman and Elk River, along with the ISD 728 attendance areas of Albertville and St. Michael, the wave of kids coming into ISD 728 schools has already hit land.

The district has about 465 new students in the last 3 years (2017-2018 week one numbers vs. 2019-2020 week one numbers) and just shy of 800 over the last 5 years. That's despite just a 27-student increase between 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, when the district closed some open enrollment prior to the opening of Prairie View Elementary and Middle School and some boundary changes in Elk River effecting Twin Lakes Elementary, Parker Elementary and Lincoln Elementary schools.

"Growth is a challenge we can face, and one that a district really doesn't mind having, frankly," said Superintendent Dan Bittman. "However, there is a real issue that's developing – and that's the fact we don't have the space for the resident students who are coming in next year. And when you project 2,000 over the next 10 years, that's something boundary changes and shifts in class sizes can't cover. We have to build more space."

The new students are coming at almost every grade level, according to Dr. Joseph Stangler, Director of Research and Assessments who made his presentation to the ISD 728 School Board in early September. The high schools have seen an increase of nearly 200 students since 2015, while elementary grades are up 370 students, and middle schools have about 130 more than they did in 2015.

All told, ISD 728 started the current school year with 13,653 students, up 277 from a year ago – a number Stangler predicts will rise.

Official "start of the year" enrollment was taken on Oct. 1. Those results will be discussed at a future board meeting.

The bulk of ISD 728's growth is evident in the southern communities of Rogers and Otsego. Since 2015, that area has boomed from about 4,930 students to 5,570 this year – or nearly 550 new students since 2015.

But Zimmerman is also adding students at a steady clip, with 2,271 the first week of school in 2015-2016, climbing to 2,433 this school year.

In the center of the district, Elk River schools are holding fairly steady at around 5,500 students. That's projected to tick upward when developments on the northeast side of town – including one approved by the Elk River City Council near Twin Lakes Elementary School – get fully built out, staff said.

To illustrate the growth on the south side – Prairie View, a school that didn't exist just a couple of years ago, is now home to more than 1,100 students. It has 611 kids in elementary, with 516 students at the middle school level. The elementary school grew by 60 students from 2018 to this year alone.

"We have developers in the south talking about 500 more new homes in that area," said Cory Franson, Director of Community Engagement and Community Education. "They're wondering how we are going to accommodate those families."

The answer, of course, is proposed in the 2019 referendum, which would add a middle school in the Otsego area, most likely adjacent to Prairie View. The district's Facilities Commission – a group of parents and teachers who have met to help guide the district's growth – has made that recommendation. Adding a middle school now is expected to meet growing enrollment for seven to ten years.

"We are proud of the fact the families who live in our district believe in our schools and in what we do," Bittman said. "We know there are choices out there, but the families here have embraced our mission and our plan for the next decade of learning. We're excited for that opportunity."

ISD 728 Implements eLearning Days in 2019-2020

In Spring 2019, the ISD 728 School Board took action to approve the implementation of eLearning Days, implementing the use of the "online learning" days starting with the 2019-2020 school year.

The eLearning days are intended to provide access to learning on days when there are school cancellations due to inclement weather.

"While these days can't replace the face-to-face time students have with their teachers, it can provide continuous learning when school is cancelled," said Kelly Stanton, ISD 728 Director of Teaching and Learning. "eLearning days also eliminate the need for makeup days at the end of the school year, helping staff and families plan summer activities."

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Cancellations will be announced via phone, email, district website and social media indicating that there will be an eLearning day.

Teachers, principals, and other licensed professionals will be available by email or phone (via voicemail) from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Staff contact information can be found in the ISD 728 Staff Directory at **www.isd728.org/Staff**. Staff will respond to all communication requests in a timely manner during scheduled hours.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance will be based on the completion of the work for eLearning Days. Students who do not have the necessary resources may make arrangements with the teacher for additional time to complete the work.

PARENT INFORMATIONAL VIDEO

Parents can watch the informational video to learn more about the eLearning plan by visiting w**ww.isd728.org/eLearning-Parent-Video** or they can visit the eLearning website at **www.isd728.org/eLearning**.

The eLearning plan will vary by grade.

2019 Referendum: Strong Schools. Strong Communities.

On November 5, 2019, residents of ISD 728 will decide whether to increase school funding through two referendum questions. The School Board unanimously approved holding a referendum after a year and a half of community input, research and planning.

WHAT WILL BE ON THE BALLOT?

QUESTION 1

Increase the operating levy to fund school materials, student support and academic programs.

If approved, the $750 per student increase would generate approximately $11 million per year, providing more predictable and stable funding, while adding support and resources for students throughout the district.

The funds would be used for such things as:

- **Supporting** struggling students.
- **Working to reduce** class sizes.
- **Supporting** student mental health.
- **Updating** curriculum and other classroom materials.
- **Improving** career and technical programs for students.

QUESTION 2

Request $113 million in bond funding to address enrollment growth, deferred maintenance needs, flexible learning spaces and facility inequities. Question 2 can only pass if Question 1 is approved.

The new bonding money would be used to:

- **Build** a middle school to address enrollment growth.
- **Address** deferred maintenance needs across ISD 728, such as roofs, HVAC systems and parking lots, to maintain the community's investment in our schools.
- **Update** indoor physical education and outdoor athletic facilities at all three traditional high schools to ensure they are equitable and adequate for students across the district.
- **Create** more flexible learning spaces across the district and at all levels to support different student learning styles.

IF VOTERS APPROVE BOTH QUESTIONS

- Both questions would address classroom, budget and building needs across the district and at every level — benefiting ALL students.
- Funds would support our community's values as outlined in the community-developed Strategic Plan and identified in community surveys.
- ISD 728 would have more stable funding while being able to:
  - **Address** growing enrollment
  - **Improve** equity and access to quality learning environments for ALL students
  - **Help** protect our community's investment in its schools.

IF VOTERS DO NOT APPROVE BOTH QUESTIONS

There would be continued budget cuts and inadequate funding for our school buildings, resulting in:

- Increased class sizes.
- Decreased academic support for struggling students.
- Fewer and outdated classroom resources for students.
- A growing list of deferred maintenance needs without adequate funding to address them.
- Spaces that are not equitable or adequate for students from one area of the district to another, such as classroom spaces, indoor physical education and outdoor athletic facilities.
- Elimination of some learning spaces dedicated to art, music and early childhood to accommodate student enrollment growth in grades K-12.
- Increased walking distance at all levels, because fewer students would be eligible for bus transportation.
- Boundary changes to accommodate space for enrollment growth.
- Some pressing building needs would be funded through a lease levy, **which costs more for taxpayers** and is more limited in what it can cover.

LEARN MORE!

VISIT:
www.isd728.org/728Strong

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728strong@isd728.org

CALL:
763-274-6277

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2019 Referendum: Did You Know...

Including reductions for the 2019-2020 school year, ISD 728 has cut more than **$20.2 million** from its budget in 7 years.



Cuts have impacted staffing, programming, classroom resources and class size.

According to the community survey done by Morris Leatherman Company, 9 out of 10 of those surveyed said ISD 728 is performing at "**good**" or "**excellent**" levels when it comes to areas such as educational quality, staff and academic programs.



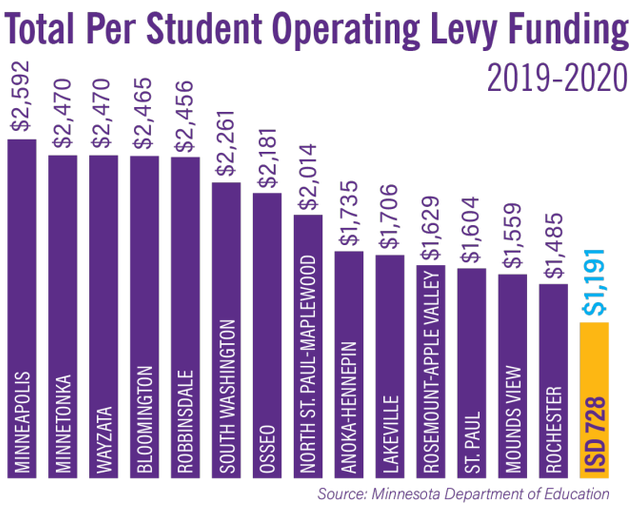
The estimated tax impact on the average homeowner ($250,000 value home) would be less than $32 per month.

QUESTION/ REDUCTION	MONTHLY TAX IMPACT
Question 1	$27.75
Question 2	$6.75
Subtotal	**$34.50**
Reduction of Other District Levies	- $2.75
Total Per Month	**$31.75**

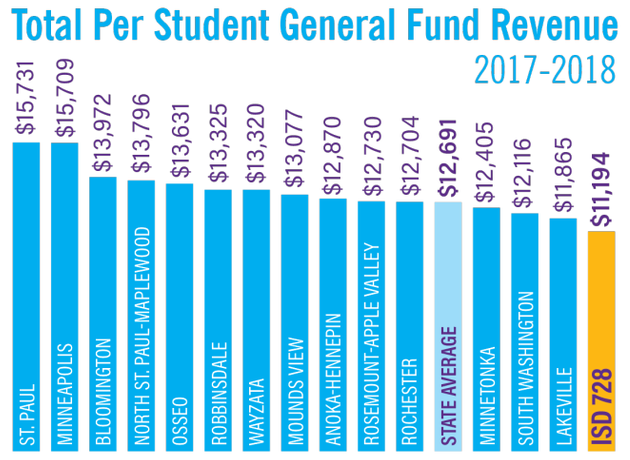
2019 Referendum: The Challenges ISD 728 Faces

ISD 728 FUNDING COMPARED TO OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS

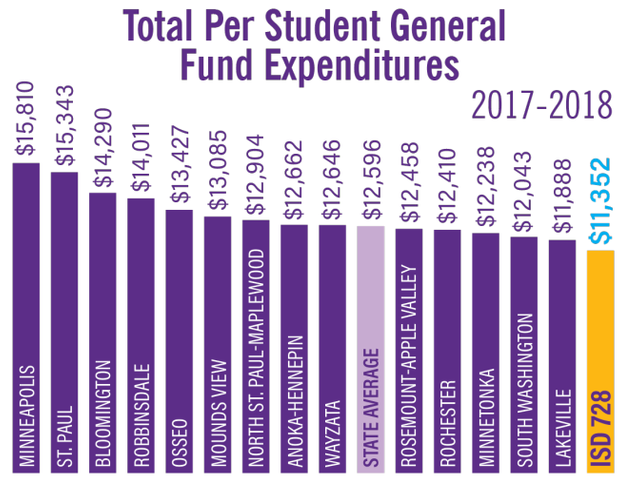
ISD 728 is the 8th-largest school district in the state, yet receives the least amount of funding from the state when compared to the top 15 districts in terms of student enrollment. And, ISD 728's spending is below the state average. Why? Our award-winning finance department has, over the past 20 years, consistently done more with less. But years of inflation outpacing funding increases from state and federal sources has placed increasing pressures on our budgets. We've attempted to manage those challenges as long as we can, but more is needed to keep ISD 728 among the top districts in the state in terms of student achievement. See the charts below:



Source: Minnesota Department of Education



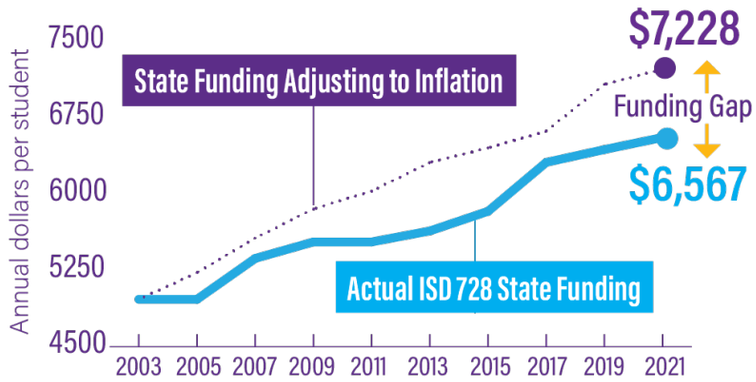
Source: Minnesota Department of Education



Source: Minnesota Department of Education

BUDGET PRESSURES

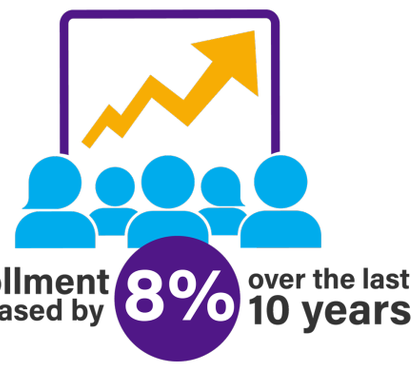
Public schools — just like families homes, and businesses — have increasing costs every year. However, our State education funding hasn't kept up with the costs of inflation. If State funding had kept up with inflation since 2003, ISD 728 would have received nearly $9 million more in 2018-2019. In addition, ISD 728, like other school districts, is required to pay for unfunded mandates related to special education each and every year. ISD 728 pays $10.5 million dollars annually out of the General Budget to covers costs that are not reimbursed from state or federal sources.



If state funding had kept up with inflation since 2003, ISD 728 would have received nearly **$9 million more** in 2018-19. This gap is projected to increase.

A GROWING DISTRICT

Our enrollment has grown 8% in the past 10 years, and it is projected to grow even more rapidly in the next 10 years. Projections estimate an additional 2,000 students in the next ten years or an average of about 200 students per year. In addition, a demographer recently reported that more than 2,300 new single-family homes are expected to be built within our district in the next three years. Our growth is exciting, but something that requires additional resources to serve all of our community's students.







Online and Blended Courses Continue to Grow throughout ISD 728

Take a stroll through any of the flexible learning spaces at Elk River, Rogers or Zimmerman high schools and you are bound to see several students clustered together or working individually on their online or blended coursework. Teachers and administrative teams are now creating learning environments that reflect a college and career atmosphere.

ONLINE 728 HIGH SCHOOL

For the 2019-20 school year, ISD 728 has a record number of students enrolled in the online program with 491 students taking at least one full online class. This year marks the sixth year of the online program in ISD I28.

Online728 HIGH SCHOOL
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 728

"Each year we continue to see growth in the program, and it is no doubt related to our dedicated online teachers who have helped to develop or revise our online curriculum with courses ranging from Online PE to Online Economics," stated Troy Anderson, Assistant Director of Instructional Technology.

BLENDED COURSES DEBUT

New for the 2019-20 school year is the introduction of Blended Courses for students in grades 9-12. In just the first year, we are offering nine Blended Courses and have 365 students enrolled.

In contrast to a fully online course, blended courses incorporate a face-to-face component into the instructional model while still allowing students similar flexibility. This blended model allows staff the opportunity to work with smaller groups of students to better differentiate instruction while teaching students the content as well as valuable skills such as time management and self-discipline.

STUDENTS TELL THE STORY

Here are a few quotes from our online and blended students:

- *"I am able to work on other priority schoolwork during the day. If I have a test coming up, I'm able to prepare with this more flexible schedule."*
- *"I love it! I play volleyball and this schedule helps me keep pace and not miss any school work because I can access my assignment whenever I want."*
- *"Blended and online learning courses helps to keep me accountable."*
- *"Taking online classes allows me to work at my own pace, which helps me have a better understanding of the content."*
- *"I decided to take online classes to better prepare me for college since I will most likely have some type of online component at some point."*
- *"I just tend to learn better through this method."*
- *"I am taking online math and this approach really lets me slow down and really understand what I am doing."*





NAMM Honors ISD 728 for Fourth Straight Year

ISD 728 has been honored once again with the Best Communities for Music Education designation from The NAMM Foundation (National Association of Music Merchants) for its outstanding commitment to music education. The school system and our supporting communities have received this designation each year since 2016. The Best Communities for Music Education designation is awarded to districts that demonstrate outstanding achievement in efforts to provide music access and education to all students.

2019 BEST Communities for MUSIC EDUCATION
Brought to you by The NAMM Foundation®

To qualify for the Best Communities designation, ISD 728 answered detailed questions about funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time, facilities, support for the music program, and community music-making programs. Responses were verified with school officials and reviewed by The Music Research Institute at the University of Kansas. This award recognizes that ISD 728 is leading the way with learning opportunities as outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA recommends music and the arts as important elements of a well-rounded education for all children.

Thank you to our music educators, school staff, administrators, school board members, parents, and communities for your ongoing support of musical opportunities for our students!



Kindness Rocks at Otsego Elementary GARDEN

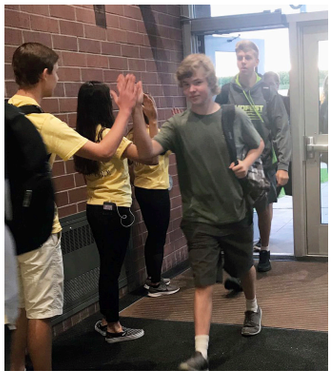
Otsego Elementary School now has a constant reminder of what it means to show kindness. Thanks to Sarah Simonton for coordinating all the efforts, now every student and staff at OES has contributed to the Kindness Rocks Garden by painting a rock to be a part of the garden. With all of the vibrant colors and meaningful messages of kindness, not only is the garden beautiful to look at, it is also a reminder to just be kind!



First Day of School 2019-2020












Six ISD 728 Students Earn National Merit Letters of Commendation

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) recently announced the names of approximately 16,000 semifinalists in the 65th annual National Merit Scholarship Program.

Students from each of the three ISD 728 high schools made the list:

- **Elk River High School:** Joshua Bauer, Meghan Bentz
- **Rogers High School:** Benjamin Fisher, Gretta Jensen, Ethan Loukusa
- **Zimmerman High School:** Jamison Ward

Students score a spot on the Semifinalist list by participating in the PSAT assessment and scoring among the top test-takers in the nation.

These academically talented high school seniors now have an opportunity to continue in the competition for some 7,600 National Merit Scholarships worth more than $31 million that will be offered next spring. To be considered for a Merit Scholarship award, semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the finalist level of the competition.

More than 90 percent of the semifinalists are expected to attain finalist standing, and about half of the finalists will win a National Merit Scholarship, earning the Merit Scholar title.


Joshua Bauer


Meghan Bentz


Benjamin Fisher


Gretta Jensen


Ethan Loukusa


Jamison Ward

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Elk River Football Coach Steve Hamilton Named Vikings Coach of the Week

Steve Hamilton of Elk River High School was named the week one Gatorade Coach of the Week. Hamilton took over the program in 2011 after coaching in Michigan and Georgia. The Elks are currently 62-28 under his guidance including winning the 5A state championship in 2016. He also is the Varsity Track Coach. Hamilton teaches Social Studies and is the co-creator of the Economics curriculum. Hamilton believes in positivity as a way of developing young people through sport. The Vikings state: "The panel pinpointed Steve as a coach who not only makes a difference in the lives of his players on the field, but also in the classroom and the community."

The Vikings and Gatorade are teaming up to honor a Gatorade Coach of the Week after each week of games during the high school football season. Coaches are chosen based on their contribution on the football field, but more importantly on the impact they make within their community and for their student athletes. In addition to being recognized in local media for the achievement, the school's football program receives Gatorade product for the season and a $1,000 donation on behalf of the Minnesota Vikings!



Sportech Donates Backpacks to ISD 728

Longtime ISD 728 partner Sportech made Back-to-School a bit sweeter for students across the district, collecting backpacks for 30 students and school supplies for many others!

Sportech also works with the district's many CTE programs, welcoming students for tours, participating in Manufacturing Day and helping pilot the internship programs.

We are very thankful for their support!



Pictured above: Rachel Hilyar, Assistant Director of Prevention & Safety, and Sheila Dokken, Coordinator of Prevention & Safety

AFSCME Honors Becky Grupa of Rogers High School with Award



Rogers High School special education paraprofessional, Becky Grupa, received some special recognition from AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) in June.

Grupa, who has been working in special education for more than 23 years, has served students for more than 15 years at the high school. Her focus is on students with emotional and behavioral disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder, anxiety or autism.

For "her service to her community and for being an inspiration to co-workers, she is a winner of AFSCME's Never Quit Service Award, which recognizes public service workers who go above and beyond the call of duty."

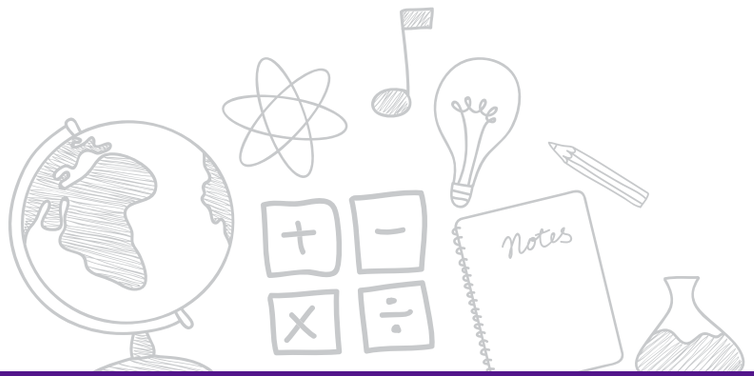
Read the full article by visiting **www.isd728.org/RHS-Grupa**.

Congratulations, Becky!



ISD 728 INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 728
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School is Cool! Photo Gallery



Otsego Elementary School held their third annual walk-a-thon and dunk tank festivities Friday, September 20. Students had a chance dunk their teachers and help raise money for the school.



Mrs. Reining's PVEMS Kindergarten class learned how to be good friends, made a friendship fruit salad and promised to never ever be a rotten banana.



VandenBerge Middle School students who conquered the summer math challenge were treated to a special breakfast!



Zimmerman Thunder volleyball players volunteered at the Fire Department Open House.



Meadowvale Elementary students learned about school bus safety and bus evacuations.