INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

728 HAPPENINGS

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With schools in Elk River, Otsego, Rogers & Zimmerman

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Fall 2018

Message from Superintendent Dan Bittman



Since joining ISD 728 in July of 2017, the School Board and I have prioritized communication, relationships, visibility and partnerships. We have demonstrated this commitment in numerous ways such as by creating monthly video messages, hosting community listening sessions, empowering our residents to create the District's strategic plan, and through the establishment of countless partnerships with local businesses to help create workforce opportunities for our students.

As a result of these efforts and community feedback, as well as my responsibility to continuously evaluate our system, I continue to navigate and communicate factors that affect school finance, work with others to project student growth and enrollment, assure adequate and timely facility maintenance and construction, and address issues related to class sizes and the adequate allocation of resources to meet student needs. While each of these tasks are complex, understanding and addressing them appropriately are essential to student, school, and community success.

Currently, ISD 728 is working with a demographer and city/county officials to evaluate and assess growth throughout each of our communities, which will provide us with an idea of what our schools and communities will look like in the next ten years. You won't be surprised to know that we are expected to continue to grow throughout the district, especially in areas such as Otsego and Rogers. The report is expected to be available by December and will be posted on the District's website. ISD 728 is also working with Morris Leathermann to conduct a survey throughout the communities we serve to better understand your priorities, and ways we can best meet your expectations and needs. This survey will be completed in November, and results will be available and communicated in December.

In addition, individuals throughout our schools and community are working tirelessly to develop recommendations related to strategies you identified as priorities, which are now embedded into the strategic plan. These include, but are not limited to such things as providing all students with opportunities in career and college readiness, offering expanded opportunities in music, art, physical education and world languages, providing safe educational spaces designed for student needs, ensuring access to relevant technology, increasing mental health support, and providing equitable, high quality extra curricular programs and facilities. These recommendations will be shared with you and the school board later this spring. Finally, I continue to assess funding streams and to work with the Legislature to ensure our children are well represented and supported. Current state and federal allocations have created hardships for our children historically, as evidenced by reductions of more than $10.2 million dollars over the last five years in ISD 728 alone. We cannot continue to provide the same level of support and programs for our kids with less and less funding, and remain committed to exploring solutions. Your involvement in this process will continue to be important and is always appreciated.

In addition to all of these things happening behind the scenes, it has been an exciting start to the school year as we have seen much success and reasons to celebrate. Our children continue to perform amongst the best in the state and nation on achievement tests, are thriving in athletics and activities, and are performing at an extremely high level in the fine arts. Our staff and administration are working harder than ever, modeling our mission and core values in everything they do. ISD 728 leadership continues to work tirelessly to develop and maintain partnerships that ensure success for all, and awards and recognition for things such as fiscal management, music, removing barriers, and access to support are plentiful. These things would not be possible without you, and we are extremely thankful and humbled by your support and engagement. Thank you for being part of ISD 728, and for making it a special place to work and learn!

Construction Buttons Up at Salk, Continues at Prairie View

Safety and accessibility were driving forces behind upgrades and updates at Salk Middle School, while growth has spurred the major expansion project at Prairie View Elementary/Middle School as ISD 728 continues dozens of projects around the school district. Many of those have buttoned up, as teachers and staff made their way back into ISD 728 buildings, but Prairie View's expansion and gym addition will continue well into the school year, with space possibly opening to students by the end of the spring quarter in 2019. All spaces at Prairie View will be open for the 2019-2020 school year, when the eighth grade is added to the Hawks' home.

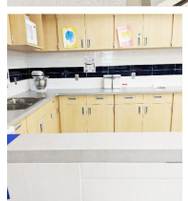
Remodeling has also taken place in our early education hub – Handke Family Center. Community Education offices have shifted, as have some learning and meeting spaces, as changes continue at the historic building – the district's oldest. There have been outdoor projects, as well, including improvements to the Elk River High football field, the tennis courts between VandenBerge and ERHS, and the baseball fields. A special tip of the cap to the buildings and grounds and operations teams as the district continues to change into a new decade.

















ISD 728 Schools Shine in New State Education Reporting System

Students from ISD 728 continue to outperform the state in annual assessments and multiple schools were designated as award winners by the Minnesota Department of Education in the new North Star Accountability System which was unveiled on Thursday, August 30.

North Star is the latest system utilized by MDE in accordance with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) passed into law in 2015. The system meshes well with the school district's core value of "everyone can learn," utilizing criteria to identify proficiency, graduation rates, attendance and multiple areas of progress as the tenets of success. Under the North Star system, nine ISD 728 schools were identified as award-winners for progress in English Learners, Math, Reading, and Consistent Attendance. Rogers Middle School was recognized in nine different areas one of only four schools in the state to achieve this level.

ESSA INDICATORS

District assessment results showed ISD 728 is again outpacing the state on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments in both math and reading. ISD 728 scored 71.2 proficient in math scores as a district, 15 points higher than the state average of 56.2. In reading, that gap was more than 10 points, with 69.4 percent of students in ISD 728 scoring proficient or better. The state's average was shy of 59.2 percent.

Academic Progress is a new measurement in the North Star system that evaluates student achievement levels from year to year. Again, ISD 728 again outscored state averages with 77 percent of students either maintaining or increasing their achievement level compared to 65 percent for the state. In reading, 75 percent of ISD 728 students tested in 2018 maintained or improved their achievement, versus approximately 69 percent of state students.

In addition to achievement and progress scores, ISD 728 demonstrated strong performance on the other ESSA indicators. The district's four year graduation rate was 91.0 percent, compared to a statewide average of 82.7 percent and the district's seven year graduation rate of 92.8 percent also exceeded the state average (87.0 percent).

In the area of English Learner Progress ISD 728 was more than 5 percent higher than the state with 53.7 percent of students meeting individual targets for growth on English proficiency, compared to only 48.5 percent of the state meeting the targets.

Consistent Attendance, the final ESSA indicator, measures the percentage of students who attend school more than 90 percent of the time. Consistent Attendance is a new ESSA indicator but the results for the district remain the same as the consistent attendance rate for ISD 728 was 90.5 percent, approximately 5 percent higher than the state's rate of 85.6 percent.

"ISD 728 cultivates an innovative environment and is committed to providing exceptional opportunities for all learners," said Dr. Daniel Bittman, Superintendent of ISD 728 School District. "Our most recent results throughout the District are yet another example of student, school, and community success. While we are proud of the results, we recognize there is more to do and will continue to work tirelessly to ensure all learners achieve our mission, core values and learner outcomes. As Superintendent, I could not be more proud of our students, families and staff and appreciate being part of their journey."

ISD 728 also scored higher than state averages in three-year models, now gathered by MDE under the North Star system. The district outpaced state averages on all indicators and ranked very high compared to other districts throughout the state.

RECOGNIZED SCHOOLS

The district has schools recognized for proficiency levels in multiple areas at the elementary and secondary levels, and for indicators such as English Learner proficiency and attendance. Rogers Middle School, as stated, led the way. Other schools recognized included Otsego Elementary, VandenBerge Middle School, Zimmerman Middle School, Salk Middle School, Twin Lakes Elementary, Hassan Elementary, Elk River High School and Online 728, the district's state-approved online school. It's the first sort of recognition for the district's online program.

Congratulations to the 2018-2019 Homecoming Royalty



Zimmerman High School
King Tucker Budreau and Queen Mikayla Pramann



Rogers High School
King Chance Sprague and Queen Josie Lynde



Elk River High School
King J.T. Lucas and Queen Grace Miller

Elk River Student Named National Merit Semifinalist



The National Merit Scholarship Program announced that 283 students from Minnesota have been named semifinalists for 2019.

Included this year is Elk River High School senior Sydney Redepenning, representing ISD 728.

Minnesota seniors are among about 16,000 semifinalists 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.

Five ISD 728 Students Earn National Merit Letters of Commendation

The national Merit Scholarship Program has named five ISD 728 high school students Commended Students, recognized for their academic promise.

Rogers High School's Gavin Lien, Zimmerman High School's Miranda Muckenheim and McKenna Miller, and Elk River High School's Joe Anderson and Ben Greni will each be receiving a Letter of Commendation from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

The five students join nearly 34,000 other high school students around the country at Commended Students, meaning their scores on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test placed in the top 50,000 out of the 1.6 million students who entered the 2019 competition.

Recently the National Merit Scholarship Program announced that 283 students from Minnesota were named semifinalists for the 2019 competition, including Elk River High School senior Sydney Redepenning, representing ISD 728.

Semifinalists, 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.

Commended Students do not qualify for PSAT/National Merit Scholarships, but their scores are considered by many colleges and university programs when awarding scholarship money for future applicants.


Gavin Lien


Miranda Muckenheim


McKenna Miller


Joe Anderson


Ben Greni

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ISD 728 Receives more than $75,000 in Safety Grants from State Department of Education

ISD 728 was recently awarded more than $75,000 in safety grants from the Minnesota Department of Education, as announced by Education Commissioner Brenda Casselius on Monday, October 1, 2018.

The funds will be used for safety and security improvements at Hassan and Westwood Elementary Schools as the district continues to upgrade entrances and improve security measures in buildings throughout ISD 728. "Safety is one of our top priorities throughout the school district, and we're working with the state to continue to improve measures," said Rachel Hilyar, Assistant Director of Prevention, Safety and Grants. Dr. Daniel Bittman, ISD 728 Superintendent added, "Families expect and deserve safe educational spaces that are designed for the needs of their children, and they place their trust in us each and every day. We're thankful for the funding, and will continue to explore ways to enhance the school environment in all schools throughout the District."

While ISD 728 submitted twenty (20) different grant applications, which included one for each school, the Minnesota Department of Education chose applications randomly due to the number of requests and available funding. Hassan and Westwood elementary schools were each awarded $39,000. Funds are dedicated to improve external communications, building access controls, electronic emergency and visual notification systems including cameras and lights.

The state issued more than $25 million in grants to 90 different school buildings throughout Minnesota. There were more than $255 million in requests for the grants, approved by the Minnesota State Legislature and Gov. Mark Dayton in May 2018 as part of the state's Safe and Secure Schools Act. "When we have more than 1,000 schools applying for more than $250 million in funding to secure their buildings, we must respond with urgency," Casselius said. "The school safety grants announced recently scratch the surface."

Kim Eisenschenk Joins ISD 728



ISD 728 has hired Kim Eisenschenk as the District's new Executive Director of Business Services. As a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet, Eisenschenk will oversee finance, health & safety, purchasing, transportation, food service, facilities, IT and custodial services. The hiring was recommended and approved at the ISD 728 School Board at its meeting on Monday, July 23, 2018.

Eisenschenk has a long history of successful service in school districts around Minnesota. She has served as a school district business manager since 2000, when she joined Dassel-Cokato. She's also served Hutchinson, Sauk Rapids-Rice and Intermediate School District 916 over the last 18 years. Prior to that, she was a school district auditor for the accounting firm of Kern, Dewenter and Viere. Eisenschenk has also served as president and board member of the Minnesota Association of School Business Officials, served as treasurer of the Minnesota Liquid Asset Fund, treasurer and board member of the Central Minnesota Educational Research and Development Council and served on the Hutchinson Area Foundation for Health Care.

"We are excited about having her be part of ISD 728, and know she will help us accomplish the District's mission and strategic initiatives," said Superintendent Dan Bittman, who worked with Eisenschenk at ISD 47 in Sauk Rapids-Rice. "She is incredibly gifted, highly-qualified and passionate about her work and ISD 728. She will be a terrific fit."

Elk River High School Gives Back with Tackle Cancer Week

The students used a week's worth of "Elk Time" to hear two presentations from individuals who have been on the front lines of the cancer fight.

First was Kristen Burma, mother of Zachary, who at the young age of 1 was found to have a brain tumor. Zach fought, and won, but Kristen and her husband, Aric, discovered so many kids at the Children's Hospital could use things like games, toys and more to lighten their lengthy hospital stay. "You can only lie in bed and watch TV for so long," Kristen said. "These are kids, they want to have fun and smile." Together, the Burma's started Bags of Smiles, packing backpacks filled with lots of goodies for kids who are in local children's care centers fighting multiple diseases, including cancer.

ERHS students responded to Kristen and Zach's presentation on Tuesday, October 2, by packing their own bags the next day, and will bring dozens of Bags of Smiles to local hospitals.

On Thursday, October 4, KARE 11 News anchor and high school sports fan Randy Shaver was at the school, telling kids about his SECOND round with cancer, which started earlier this summer, when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Shaver, who survived Hodgkins Disease in 1998, is using the motto 2FOR2 as he fights a second time. He urged boys – men, especially – to be smart, go to the doctor regularly and not be in the dark. "Men are stupid. Don't be. Get a physical every year. Just stop being stupid," he said with a smile, adding that he wouldn't be here without some of the innovation that was funded by programs like the Shaver Foundation and Tackle Cancer.

"Acts of kindness are what started these things," he said. "It doesn't take but a second to be kind, to have a conversation. Now, we've raised more than $1.3 million for cancer research and for programs all over the Twin Cities. Every dollar stays local. That's pretty incredible."

The week concluded Friday with the football game vs. Roger High School at Elk River's Schempf Field. The game was a GOLD OUT for both teams, as they focus on Childhood Cancer and the students who are fighting the fight against this awful disease.



ERHS students posing with Kristen & Zachary.



ERHS students making Bags of Smiles.



ERHS students posing with Randy Shaver.



Randy speaking to students about 2FOR2.

Back to School and Bigger Than Ever



ISD 728 will have a record number of students – again – in 2018-2019 as the school district continues to "boom" with population. ISD 728 Director of Research and Assessment Dr. Joe Stangler gave a presentation to the school board Monday, Aug. 27, showing that the district will have more than 13,200 students on Day One of the 2018-2019 school year, our largest population to date and an increase of around 1 percent in students across the board from the last day of school last year.

The growth is biggest on the south end of the district, of course. Otsego's Prairie View Elementary and Middle School will add seventh grade to the building this year, and nearly 900 kids will call PVEMS their school this fall. That's incredible growth – and the reason the district is adding onto the school that just opened last school year with new space set to open this spring. The biggest "movement" – or variations from projected number of students – were increases at Otsego and Twin Lakes elementary schools, as well as at Rogers and Elk River High Schools.

"Growth is a challenge that won't be going away any time soon, but it's a good problem to have and one that we embrace as a district," said Superintendent Dan Bittman. "We're excited to have new families and new students coming to our district, and happy to be part of their journey in education and to have these families in our communities."

ISD 728 Finance Department Earns National Certificate of Excellence

The Finance Department at Independent School District 728 has earned accolades from the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) again in 2018.

ISD 728 was awarded the ASBO's Certificate of Excellence for financial reporting for the fiscal year ending 2017. While the District's Finance team has already celebrated one local award this year, earning the Minnesota Department of Education Certificate of Excellence back in April for its excellence in school finance, this award recognizes the District amongst the best in the nation.

"The Association holds districts to a very strict set of criteria when determining recipients of the Certificate of Excellence, so this award is particularly special," explained Shane Steinbrecher, Board Chair.

"We are proud to celebrate this effort and dedication to fiscal responsibility with our financial team and entire community, while keeping an eye on our mission to provide inspirational and empowering educational services to all children in ISD 728," said Superintendent Dr. Daniel Bittman. "Together, we will continue to provide amazing opportunities for our children in a fiscally responsible manner."

The Association also provides feedback in its report to the district, which will help us continue to improve the finance team's reporting for the next fiscal year, as ISD 728 looks to maintain its award-winning status in business management.

"This award represents a significant achievement and reflects your commitment to transparency and high-quality financial reporting," said John D. Musso, Executive Director of the ASBO.

Salk Middle School Earns Science Grant

Salk Middle School's STEM programs will be receiving a $3,000 grant this year, thanks to the science team and teacher Megan Heitkamp.



Salk Middle School teacher Megan Heitkamp

The Society for Science and the Public recently announced the organization will be giving a total of $100,000 to 24 middle school science teachers across the country to support STEM research activities in their classrooms. Each teacher receives a grant of up to $5,000 to spend on scientific research equipment, such as Raspberry Pi computers, water and soil testing kits and computer software for data analysis. To date, the Society has provided $120,000 in grants to STEM teachers through this program.

Heitkamp and Salk were one of 24 schools to earn the award, and just three from Minnesota.

"I'm excited to be providing this financial support to middle school teachers who encounter students at such an important point in their lives," said Maya Ajmera, President & CEO of the Society for Science and the Public. "During this crucial time, students start setting the stage for their future path in high school while some young people begin drifting away from their interests in STEM. By providing these teachers with the resources to build a meaningful STEM research program, we are helping to engage the next generation of leaders in engineering and science."

The Society's STEM Research Grant Program supports educators who are implementing fresh and innovative teaching methods to shed light on discoveries that can be made through original STEM research projects. The one-time grants, in large part, are provided to educators in schools serving in low-income areas or underrepresented students.

Heitkamp said the $3,000 would be used to purchase supplies including:

- Heat lamps
- Geothermal, biofuels, solar car STEM kits
- Infrared thermometers
- Multimeters
- Water quality monitoring kits
- Aquaponics kits
- Venier go-direct probeware

In 2017, the program provided $120,000 to nearly 30 high school teachers. In 2018, the society chose to focus on middle school teachers. The 2018 recipients represent 18 states and the U.S. territory, American Samoa.

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ERHS Hosts Minnesota Education Fair

Elk River High School teamed up with the Minnesota Association for College Admission Counseling (MACAC) to host a college education fair Wednesday, September 26.

This is one of just 41 Minnesota Education Fairs held throughout the state, placing students in contact with dozens of colleges, vocational and technical schools and professional schools as well. More than 90 organizations were present at this year's event.

Students rotated from the college fair to a special presentation in the Zabee Theater, as well as time with advisory career and college preparatory activities.






Rogers Elementary Media Specialist Recognized by Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Holly Dragisich, media specialist at Rogers Elementary STEM Magnet School, was recently featured in the September edition of Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom (MAITC). MAITC is a Minnesota Department of Agriculture program that provides resources and training for agricultural producers and professionals to interact with K-12 teachers and students. They also provide high-quality workshops tailored to the needs of teachers.


Mrs. Dragisich showing 2nd grade students different types of seeds from plants we eat.

In her interview, Holly spoke about why she chose to become an educator, her agriculture-based projects, how she has implemented agriculture into her classroom and why it's so important for our student's to learn about agriculture and how it fits into their world. Check out the whole article at www.minnesota.agclassroom.org/about/news/Holly_Dragisich.pdf.

First Day of School 2018-2019















Evening of Exploration Opens Doors to Careers

Rogers High School, the ISD 728 Career and Technical Education (CTE) team and dozens of local businesses teamed up Thursday, October 11 for a first-ever Evening of Exploration at the Royal Fieldhouse.

The event was held concurrent with parent/teacher conferences, allowing both parents and students to meet with representatives of dozens of career fields, from automobile repair to law enforcement training.

Colleges from the region and technical schools were also on hand with information about those looking to further their education after graduation.












Two Years, Thousands in Savings with powerED

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Energy Savings top 18% and $900,000! ISD 728 will be continuing its relationship with powerED and using the People Power Plant portal to promote energy savings throughout the school district this year. In just 2 years, school district staff and students have reduced overall energy use by 18% and avoided costs of over $900,000. Our third year kicked off in September and will have an additional focus: reduce/reuse/recycle. Way to go ISD 728 staff and students!

Rogers Elementary Students About Farm Life

Rogers Elementary STEM Magnet first-graders recently visited the Oliver Kelley Farm in Elk River and experienced what life was like on an 1860s farm. They learned first-hand what farmers do, where food comes from and why animals live on a farm. They also discovered, through a variety of farm and domestic chores, how each family member contributed to the farm's success. Students helped make crackers in the kitchen, picked citron melons in the garden, harvested sorghum and helped take care of the animals.

The Oliver Kelley Farm, a National Historic Landmark, was the home of Oliver H. Kelley, founder of the Grange, the first successful national farming organization. The 1860s farmstead, modern visitor center and farm lab showcase the story of farming, food and agriculture—past and present.









Elk River High School Football Players Visit Twin Lakes

ERHS football players took time out of their busy Homecoming Week schedule to visit Twin Lakes Elementary students for some good ole fashion reading time. We love it when our high school students who have "been through it" are willing to give back by visiting their old elementary or middle school to lend a hand!




Youth Frontiers Makes Kindness Waves at Parker Elementary

Youth Frontiers and Parker Elementary fifth-graders teamed up for a Kindness Retreat Wednesday, Sept. 19. During the retreat, students were reminded how they could be a "hero" to younger kids by showing kindness to all. They used singing, dancing and role-play to make the day an engaging experience for everyone.

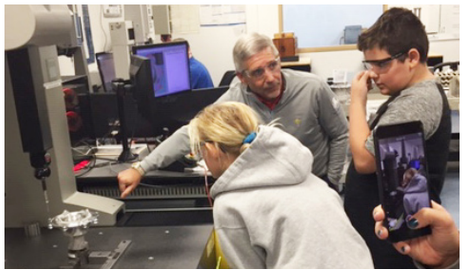


Based in Edina, Youth Frontiers is created by young people for young people, using activities and humor to teach leadership skills, citizenship and kindness at all levels. The Youth Frontiers team works with groups large and small around Minnesota with retreats designed to make the school environment a better place for kids.



Local Businesses Host ISD 728 for Cool Jobs Tour

As the economy continues to grow across the United States, manufacturing is one of the industries leading the way. To capture that momentum, ISD 728 teamed with several local manufacturers to introduce students to an array of "Cool Jobs" in the field, celebrating Manufacturing Day on Oct. 16 with a "Cool Jobs Tour."


The night began with a presentation and dinner for students and families at Preferred Powder Coating in Elk River. Speakers talked about the potential for careers in the manufacturing industry. Owners and district partners also talked about the potential for great wages and jobs locally, in our school district communities, and the pathways students can take to qualify for those jobs. From there, students – in grades 6 through 12 – could sign up for two tours at more than a half dozen local manufacturers and labor companies, including Sportech, Metal Craft, Abra Auto Body and Glass, Alliance Machine and Elk River Machine. Students were able to tour with family members and get a sense of what it looks like inside those manufacturing warehouses.

"Really, it's a look behind the wall, because people don't normally get an opportunity to see what's going on at a Sportech or a machining company like Alliance," said Amy Lord, ISD 728 Career and Technology Education Coordinator. "We're really fortunate to have great partnerships with some of these local companies to give our students an opportunity to learn, not only on a night like this, but with internship opportunities as well."

The evening was also made possible thanks to partnerships with Sherburne County and the Elk River Chamber of Commerce. Look for more CTE opportunities for parents, teachers and students in the future on our website at **www.isd728.org/CTE**.

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School is Cool! Photo Gallery



Hassan Elementary students in Mr. Willenbring's class enjoying a walking field trip to Rogers City Hall to learn about city government.



Prairie View's Mrs. Rehnblom, AKA Foreman Rehnblom, put the crew to work for a tough day of building numbers in first grade.



Zimmerman Elementary students learning about Mexico.



Westwood Elementary students sporting some jerseys for Zimmerman Homecoming Week.



VandenBerge Middle School 7th graders having fun with their blended science cell project.