

# THE DISTRICT DISPATCH

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

**Stability  
& Support**

**VOTE NOV. 7**



## DISTRICT SEEKS VOTER APPROVAL OF TWO LEVIES

School District 197 is seeking voter approval for two levies this fall. One levy would renew an existing technology levy set to expire, and the other would invest in a new operating levy to maintain class sizes and avoid cuts to programs and staff. These levies will be on the ballot for the November 7, 2023, election.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Most school districts in Minnesota have an operating levy to support student learning.

For more information about the Fall 2023 Levy, please see pages 4-5.



*Students are greeted as they arrive at the Early Learning and Family Resource Center.*

## From the Superintendent

What an exciting time to be part of the School District 197 community!

As I visited schools on the first few days of the new school year, the repeated theme I heard from students, teachers, and staff alike was that this is one of the strongest and best starts we've ever had.

Our excitement for our schools is matched by many within our community. In the last year, our enrollment has significantly increased, and while these numbers may fluctuate, we're on track to achieve our highest enrollment ever across the district. Our district also remains at or near the top of our comparable districts for test scores in reading, math, and science—a testament to our dedicated staff, who help our students learn and grow in many ways.

I invite you to read through this issue of the District Dispatch because we have some important information to share with you. On November 7, we will have two questions on the ballot to continue the excellence and growth mentioned above—the district's request for a new operating levy and technology levy renewal (see pages 4-5) and the election of four community members to serve on the School District 197 School Board (see pages 6-8). We also warmly introduce this year's School Board Student Representatives (see page 9) and share information on the Kindergarten Showcase events scheduled for November at each of our elementary schools (see page 11).

There is a lot of information in this newsletter and more online at [www.isd197.org](http://www.isd197.org). My best wishes to the School District 197 community for a great fall!

Peter Olson-Skog, Superintendent

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

# Capturing the Magic: First Days of School Photos

From the Early Learning Center to the High School and Branch Out Transition Program, we were so happy to see students back last month—ready to learn and grow together.



## Celebrating Staff: Welcome Back Celebration

Before the school year started, we celebrated our district team at a welcome-back staff celebration. Nearly 600 of our team members showed up on Warrior Field to help kick off the new school year, connect with colleagues, hear words of encouragement from students, and compete in a friendly team challenge! Special thanks to community partner South Robert Street Business Association for generously providing the funds to make our staff celebration happen, along with the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights Rotary Club.



# 2023 LEVY INFORMATION

School District 197 is seeking voter approval for two levies this fall. One levy would renew an existing technology levy set to expire, and the other would invest in a new operating levy. These levies will be on the ballot for the November 7, 2023, election.

Stability & Support

VOTE NOV. 7

SCHOOL DISTRICT 197

Question 1

Increased Tax Rate

### INVEST in New Operating Levy

- The additional funds will enable the district to:
- Maintain class sizes and instructional support.
  - Provide financial stability to continue our excellent academic programs and services for students.
  - Retain and attract the best teachers and staff.

If this question were approved, property taxes would **increase \$153 per year for the average home in our area (around \$12.75 per month).**

As a comparison, our neighbors in South St. Paul approved levies last year that increased their tax rate by \$50 a month, or about \$600 a year.

Question 2

No Tax Impact

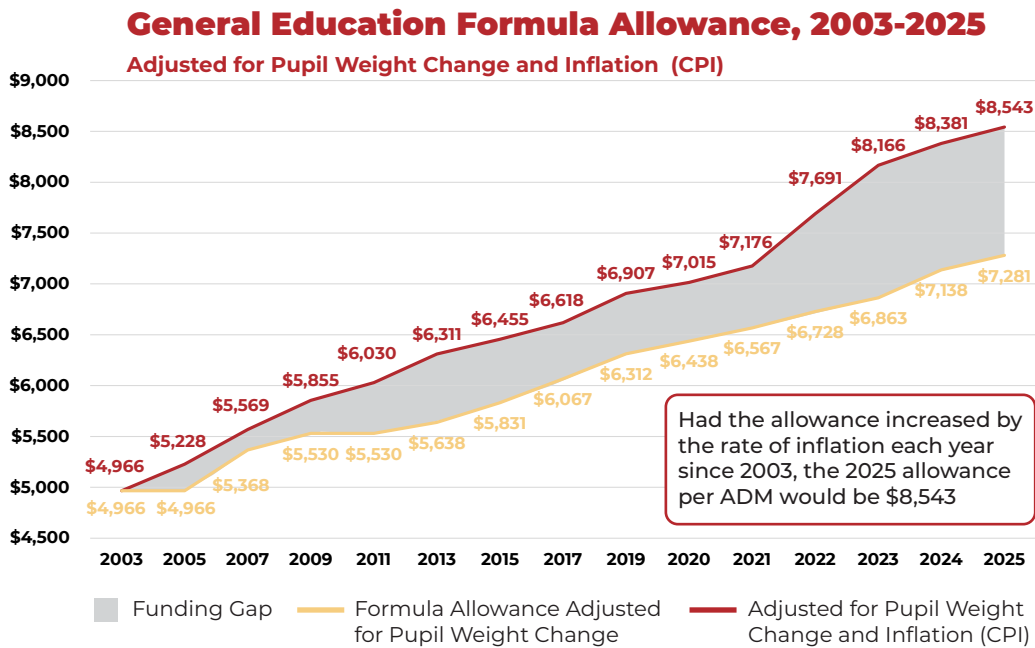
### RENEW the Capital Project Levy (also called the “technology levy”)

- The renewed technology levy funds will be used to:
- Provide district-wide technology infrastructure and network improvements.
  - Purchase and maintain technology devices for students and staff.
  - Pay the salaries of technology staff and the cost of training.

If this question were approved, it would result in **no increased cost to taxpayers.**

### The Ongoing Funding Gap

For decades, state education funding has not kept pace with inflation and the cost of educating our students. If education funding had kept pace with inflation, our schools would have \$6.9 million more in buying power every year—the equivalent of up to 80 more teachers in our classrooms today.

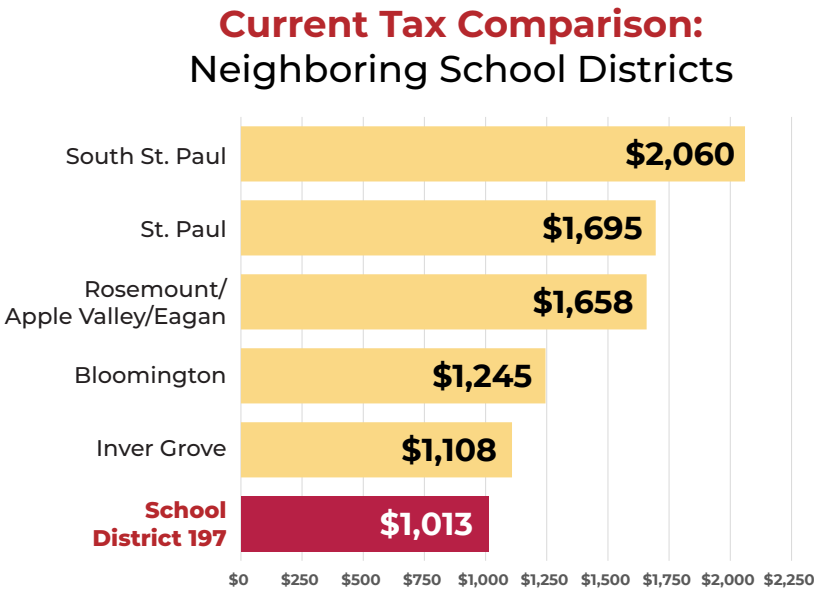


To narrow this gap, more than 90% of Minnesota school districts—including School District 197—rely upon voter-approved funds to support student learning.

### TAX IMPACT: Lower Than Almost All Metro Districts

For a home value of \$350,000 (the average home value in our school district), School District 197 has **lower total school property taxes than almost all districts** in the Twin Cities. Of the 47 school districts in the metro area, School District 197 ranks #45 in total school property taxes—the **third lowest tax rate.**

When you look closer to home, we have the lowest tax rate of all of our neighboring districts.



### A Strong Return on Investment

With some of the lowest school property taxes in the Twin Cities and **test scores consistently ranking at or near the top among comparable districts**, School District 197 provides an excellent return on the community’s investment. **If both levies are approved, our school district taxes will still be at or near the lowest in our neighborhood and the metro area.**

BALLOT QUESTION	MONTHLY TAX IMPACT*
Question #1	\$12.75
Question #2	\$0

**Calculate Your Tax Impact**

To calculate the tax impact for your property, visit [isd197.org/vote2023](https://isd197.org/vote2023) and use the Tax Impact Calculator.

\*This amount is based on the average ISD197 home (\$350,000 home value).

### Community Information Meetings

Join us for an in-person community information session where you can gather information and ask questions.

- OCT 12

6:30pm - 8pm  
Two Rivers High School  
1897 Delaware Avenue  
Mendota Heights, MN 55118
- OCT 25

6:30pm - 8pm  
Two Rivers High School  
1897 Delaware Avenue  
Mendota Heights, MN 55118

### Voting Information

Voters in School District 197 will be asked to go to the polls on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, to elect four school board members, vote on a capital project technology levy renewal, and vote on a new operating levy. You can now absentee vote in person OR via the mail. For more information about elections, voting, sample ballots, and more, visit [isd197.org/vote2023](https://isd197.org/vote2023).



Stability & Support

VOTE NOV. 7

SCHOOL DISTRICT 197

### LEARN MORE

If you have questions or need additional information about the school funding request, please reach out via one of the following ways:

VISIT  
[isd197.org/vote2023](https://isd197.org/vote2023)

EMAIL  
[levy@isd197.org](mailto:levy@isd197.org)

ATTEND  
a community meeting

# School Board Candidate Profiles

## School Board Election on November 7

The School District 197 School Board has seven members elected at large to four-year terms. The terms of four school board members (Brenda Corbett, Joanne Mansur, Byron Schwab, and Terry Stamman) will expire at the end of December 2023. On November 7 (or earlier via absentee ballot), voters will select up to four individuals to fill four open seats on the School District 197 School Board. Following are profiles of the candidates (in alphabetical order) who have filed to be on the ballot. For information about how and where to vote, please visit [isd197.org/vote2023](https://isd197.org/vote2023).



**Tim Aune**  
He/him/his

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

**City of Residence:** Mendota Heights  
**Number of Years as a District Resident:** 20  
**Family:** Luke, 2021 Graduate of Henry Sibley, enrolled in ISD 197's Branch Out Program. Bjorn, Senior Two Rivers High School  
**Education:** B.S. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) 1985. Grand Rapids (MN) High School 1981. Chartered Financial Analyst.  
**Occupation/Professional Background:** Retired. Former Executive at FactSet Research Systems (NYSE:FDS). Last positions held were President, FactSet Pacific, and Senior Vice President of Business Development.  
**Community Involvement:** Member of Augustana Lutheran Church and its Senior Choir. Member Buck Hill Ski Patrol. MIT Education Counselor. Former Chair MIT Annual Fund, and current member of MIT's Corporation Development Committee and Varsity Football Alumni.

**School District Involvement:** I am a regular volunteer working concessions at Warrior Boys Basketball games and helped with float preparation for Warrior Rally. Helped staff the Warrior Store during it's inaugural semester.

### CANDIDATE STATEMENT

*Hello. My name is Tim Aune and I am running for ISD 197 School Board and I am asking for your support. I have benefitted as a student and parent from strong public schools. Creating sound policy requires good communication and problem-solving skills. It also requires board members to not be afraid of asking "Have you ever considered this." These are skills I bring to the table.*

See page 7 for the rest of **Tim Aune's Candidate Statement**.



**Rowen Elsmore**  
She/her

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

**City of Residence:** West St. Paul  
**Number of Years as a District Resident:** 5 years  
**Family:** Elaine – 3rd grader at Garlough  
**Education:** B.A. Biology from Metro State, M.A. Teaching from Western Governors University.  
**Occupation/Professional Background:** Digital Learning Specialist at Jefferson High School in Bloomington, MN.  
**Community Involvement:** I have been involved in several local political races.  
**School District Involvement:** I am a mother of a 3rd grader at Garlough.

### CANDIDATE STATEMENT

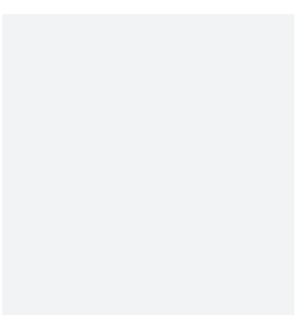
*I am an educator in Bloomington Minnesota, where I taught science for five years before my current role as a digital learning specialist. I am a mother, renter, and West Saint Paul resident. I have a third grader attending Garlough elementary.*

*I believe that every student deserves a high-quality education and know that students cannot learn unless they feel a sense of belonging. My areas of focus include equity, community, and opportunity. Equity means providing targeted resources and opportunities to meet people's unique needs. As our responsibility is to all students that we serve, we must frame everything we do through an equity lens. With a community focus, I believe that school board members need to deeply understand the interests of the students, teachers, administrators, caretakers, and community members they serve in order to meet their needs. To this end, all of these stakeholders must be directly engaged by members of the board in order to best understand their needs. Real opportunity needs to be available to students from all backgrounds. This requires removing barriers and increasing supports so that we see all of our students in all of our advanced courses. For this to be realized we need to support our elementary and middle school students to provide access to these options.*

### Tim Aune's Candidate Statement continued

*Education has models, methods, and processes that are evolving. I believe that's a good thing. And it requires organizations to plan (long and short term) and adapt such that students, teachers, staff, and parents can expect continuity and opportunity in a positive learning environment. An environment where everyone is treated with fairness, respect, and gratitude.*

*ISD 197 is a great district. When viewing broad measures our District has done well, but I agree with the Administration there are multiple area that need to be kept front and center to ensure all students thrive. If elected to the Board I would explore how the district could better encourage and tap the volunteer resource within our community to help students succeed. I will work to ensure we are partnering with teachers and parents when creating policy, and all students see school as a place that provides inspired learning, fun, and opportunity for everyone.*



**Barbara Kessler**

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

**City of Residence:**  
**Number of Years as a District Resident:**  
**Family:**  
**Education:**  
**Occupation/Professional Background:**  
**Community Involvement:**  
**School District Involvement:**

### CANDIDATE STATEMENT



**Byron Schwab** (Incumbent)  
He/him/his

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

**City of Residence:** West St. Paul  
**Number of Years as a District Resident:** 40 years  
**Family:** Wife Mary, retired teacher from the Wayzata Public Schools; two daughters, Erin Schwab and Michael Todaro, daughter Sophia, Freshman at Western Kentucky University and Hannah Schwab Lang and Michael Lang, son Bryson, grade 7 at Heritage M.S. and Harper, grade 1 at Garlough. All are residents of West St. Paul.  
**Education:** 1-12 High School diploma from Minnesota Lake High School, MN (now part of Maple River Public Schools); B.A. Music Education, Gustavus Adolphus College; M.Ed. University of Minnesota and Specialist in Education Administration, University of Minnesota.  
**Occupation/Professional Background:** Music Education, 19 years in ISD 833 (K-12 choral and classroom teaching experience); Elementary Administration, 17 years (4 in River Falls, Wisc, and 13 in ISD 197).  
**Community Involvement:** U.S. Army Veteran, Augustana Lutheran Church Choir, Retired Principals of Minnesota (MESPA), Minnesota Association of Charter Schools License renewal board, Svenska Sallskapet Swedish men's group.  
**School District Involvement:** 40-year School District resident, two daughters are graduates of Henry Sibley High School and current residents in ISD 197, Principal of Pilot Knob Elementary for 13 years, 12 years on ISD 197 School Board, 6 years representing ISD 197 on the East Metro Integration School Board and 5 years representing ISD 197 on the Intermediate 917 School Board.

### CANDIDATE STATEMENT

*I am completing my third, four year term on the ISD 197 School Board and would like to continue to serve my School District and community for an additional term. I bring unique experience and expertise to this School Board with my background in education, longevity in District 197, employment in District 197 and commitment to life long learning.*

*ISD 197 is an outstanding School District with many unique qualities including staff, resources, facilities, opportunities, size, location, diversity, and a very supportive community. In my 40 years in ISD 197 I have seen many, many changes, progress, innovation, successes, challenges and most of all engagement and ownership. I think history is important to know, remember, learn from and to inspire growth. I would like to continue to bring that experience and knowledge to ISD 197.*

*I am committed to excellence, rigor, opportunity and achievement in education; creativity, responsibility and innovation in fiscal management; and professionalism, acceptance, empathy and understanding in character. Together, we as a team can move District 197 students and community into a more successful, productive and influential future.*



**Morgan Steele**

She/her/hers

**CANDIDATE INFORMATION**

**City of Residence:** West St. Paul

**Number of Years as a District Resident:** 8.5 years

**Family:** I live with my husband, Rob, two daughters, Noelle (8) and Aurora (5). We have two dogs, Maggie and Lola, and two cats, Sunny and Broccoli.

**Education:** Bachelor of Arts in French and Secondary Education from Cornell College (2007). Master of Arts in Teaching with an emphasis in Teacher Leadership from Grand Canyon University (2011).

**Occupation/Professional Background:** I am the French teacher at Richfield High School and this will be my 7th year there. I'm also a member of the building instructional leadership team there and work with Education Richfield (union) as the Get Out The Vote lead. I'm the chair for our winter dance as well. Prior to landing in Richfield, I was part time in Stillwater schools (split between SAHS and SJHS) for one year and spent two years at Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists. Before moving home to Minnesota, I spent 7 years teaching in Houston, Texas in Aldine ISD. I taught 5th and 6th grade for my first two years and then moved to a high school in the district after.

**Community Involvement:** I try to volunteer and do as much as I can. I took over hosting our night to unite a few years ago from a neighbor. I have also volunteered at West St. Paul Pride for the last two years and volunteer at ROCC events when I am able. As a family, we believe in a strong community and donate to various community organizations and events as they come.

**School District Involvement:** In addition to following district news and paying attention to changes as they come, I've volunteered at the Somerset carnival. I've also attended the Somerset Social fundraiser while my kids have been there. I've chaperoned field trips when I can and try to take off a day or half day every year to volunteer/go to a school event with my girls.

**CANDIDATE STATEMENT**

*I am running for school board, first, because I believe in public education and what it can and should be for all students. I believe that every student deserves to feel safe, seen and valued in their learning environments so that they are able to succeed and be ready for the next steps in their lives. Our district has worked hard to put the social-emotional needs of our learners at the center of those environments and I would like to see that work continue along with the equity work being done so that all of our students feel safe and seen in the curriculum and classroom.*

*I also believe that there is room for improvement in our communication with families and the community and would like to advocate for more transparency to continue to build the trust between the district as a whole and the community that is vital to the success of our students. Sometimes, slowing down and simply addressing the "why" of an issue or even the "why" behind why information cannot be shared is enough to help families understand decisions being made.*



**Randi Walz**

She/her

**CANDIDATE INFORMATION**

**City of Residence:** West St. Paul

**Number of Years as a District Resident:** 6 but our kids have gone to school here for 11 years.

**Family:** My husband Brady and three children: Gabriela, 11th grader at Two Rivers; Mia, 9th grader at Two Rivers; and Nico, 6th grader at Friendly Hills.

**Education:** Bachelor of Arts Speech Communications/ Media, College of St. Catherine and Master's of Education, University of Wisconsin – River Falls.

**Occupation/Professional Background:** Caretaker to our children, former teacher, paraprofessional, substitute teacher.

**Community Involvement:** Community organizer and advocate in favor of the Guild/Dakota County Crisis and Recovery Center which aids people suffering a mental health or substance abuse crisis.

**School District Involvement:** Library Services Volunteer, Classroom Volunteer including Minneapolis Institute of Arts – Art Adventure program, Two Rivers Athletics Boosters Volunteer, Volunteer Artist-In-Resident program.

**CANDIDATE STATEMENT**

*I embody a deep commitment to our schools. As a mother of three, I've been an engaged parent at the Early Childhood Center, Somerset, Friendly Hills, Nexus International School, Garlough, and Two Rivers. My investment in our students' success is personal and profound.*

*Growing up on the East Side of Saint Paul, I was shaped by an array of cultures, experiences, and ideas that the rich diversity of my community offered. This upbringing cultivated a foundation of broad perspectives that I have continued to carry with me. I learned firsthand the unmitigated value of public education and its capacity to shape not only individual lives but also the trajectory of an entire community.*

*My journey has spanned numerous roles – parent, volunteer, organizer, substitute teacher, paraprofessional, community education teacher, homeschool instructor, and classroom teacher. My diverse experience includes charter schools, private schools, and public schools including ISD197. My family's international experience enriched our kids' education and enhanced my global outlook.*

*My diverse background bridges gaps, connecting with various communities. This wide-ranging experience equips me to understand our district's complex challenges deeply. I am determined to help guide our district to exceed its goals as a well-rounded school board member.*

# Get to Know Our Student School Board Representatives

At School District 197, we believe that students should have a meaningful voice in shaping their schools and classrooms. To amplify student voice and ensure that students are a part of the decision-making process, we have two high school students to serve as School Board Student Representatives each school year. Their primary role is to provide insight from a student lens, support and enhance the Board's understanding of student issues and how students experience their education, and expand student voice.

This year's Student Representatives are seniors LaRae Dodson and Sam Villa. They shared with us why they serve on the school board, things they have learned by participating in meetings, and how they stay involved in our community. You can read their responses below.



**LaRae Dodson**

**What does your role as a School Board Student Representative entail?**

**Sam:** Our role is to be the student body's voice for the ISD197 school board. We do this by writing reports about what is happening at each school in the district during our monthly meetings, and asking questions about topics that would heavily affect students.

**Why did you want to become a School Board Student Representative?**

**LaRae:** I am passionate about education and believe that student input is essential to creating positive change for all students at Two Rivers High School and across the district. As a student representative, I can offer a unique perspective and understanding of issues affecting students.

**Sam:** I wanted to be able to be a voice for not just the high school but all grades. I also think it's really important for the members of the board and community to also know what is happening with the kids in elementary and middle school—they are the future of the district and community.



**Sam Villa**

**What are your goals this year as a School Board Student Representative?**

**LaRae:** My ultimate goal is to ensure that all of the student voices in School District 197 are heard and seen by the people with the power to make change. As well as it is important that the students are aware of the changes happening in the district.

**Sam:** We both want to be able to do our best and be very interactive with the board. That could be asking more questions we have or bringing students in to highlight some of their accomplishments.

**What advice would you give this year's juniors interested in being a School Board Student Representative?**

**Sam:** You should definitely think about applying if you want to learn more about local government and how policies work. It's like a behind-the-scenes of why things are happening the way they are at school and it's really cool to learn about.

**LaRae:** You get as much out of this role as you put into it. And become friends with the other student representative—it makes working together better, and who doesn't want another friend!

# Warrior Hall of Fame

School District 197 and Two Rivers High School are proud to introduce the inaugural class of the Warrior Hall of Fame. This honor recognizes individuals who have significantly contributed to the School District 197 community and excelled in various fields, including athletics, activities, the fine arts, academics, and philanthropy. This year's inductees have not only left a mark during their time at Henry Sibley/Two Rivers High School but have also continued to make a positive impact in their post-district endeavors.

The Warrior Hall of Fame is an all-inclusive, nomination-based collection of former Warriors who have distinguished themselves in the area of athletics, activities, the fine arts, academics, and service while at Henry Sibley/Two Rivers High School and beyond. The Warrior Hall of Fame pays tribute, recognizes, and enhances School District 197's tradition of excellence by honoring alums, educators, advisors, coaches, and friends for their accomplishments.

The inaugural class of the Warrior Hall of Fame includes individuals who have achieved excellence in their respective areas are:



★★ Ann Bancroft ★★

Henry Sibley Class of 1974 and founder of the Ann Bancroft Foundation. Ann is a nationally renowned explorer, educator, speaker, and philanthropist.



★★ Helen Fisk ★★

Henry Sibley Class of 1975, Sibley Debate Team State and National Tournament Award Winner, and former Henry Sibley Principal. Helen has been a teacher and administrator for the past 43 years.



★★ Tom Gustafson ★★

Former teacher and coach in School District 197. Tom taught and coached in the district for 33 years, and received the Breaking Barriers Award from Girls and Women's Sports Day.



★★ Dean Verdoes ★★

Former teacher, coach, and athletic director at Henry Sibley High School. Dean worked for the School District for 20 years, and currently serves on the ISD197 Educational Foundation.



This year's inductees were celebrated at the homecoming football game on Friday, September 22. The event brought together current and former members of the School District 197 community, as well as friends and family of the honorees, to celebrate their remarkable achievements.

# SHOWCASE 197

The elementary principals and kindergarten teachers from School District 197 are excited to meet you and tell you all about our five fabulous elementary schools.

Mark your calendars for Showcase 197 events coming your way in November!

## Our Elementary Schools

**Garlough Environmental Magnet School**  
1740 Charlton St., West St. Paul, MN 55118  
garlough.isd197.org • 651-403-8100

November 15, 9 a.m.  
November 16, 6:30 p.m.

**Mendota Elementary**  
1979 Summit Ln., Mendota Heights, MN 55118  
mendota.isd197.org • 651-403-8000

November 14, 9 a.m.  
November 16, 5:30 p.m.

**Moreland Arts & Health Sciences Magnet**  
217 W. Moreland Ave., West St. Paul, MN 55118  
moreland.isd197.org • 651-403-7800

November 13, 6:30 p.m.  
November 17, 9 a.m.

**Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School**  
1436 Lone Oak Rd., Eagan, MN 55121  
pilotknob.isd197.org • 651-403-7900

November 13, 6:30 p.m.  
November 17, 9 a.m.

**Somerset Elementary School**  
1355 Dodd Rd., Mendota Heights, MN 55118  
somerset.isd197.org • 651-403-8200

November 14, 6:30 p.m.  
November 16, 9 a.m.



## About Us

Our elementary students (kindergarten through grade 4) feel connected, trusted, and affirmed. Visit our website at [isd197.org](https://isd197.org) to learn about how our students learn in innovative environments that promote curiosity, creativity, and courageous action!



Visit the "Get to Know" pages on each school's website to learn more about our elementary schools



Fill out and return the enrollment paperwork you will receive by mail in December



Enrollment Questions?  
Call 651-403-7030

Nurture. Inspire. Prepare. Together, we thrive!



West St. Paul + Mendota Heights + Eagan Area

1897 Delaware Ave.  
Mendota Heights, MN 55118

**isd197.org**

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Twin Cities, MN  
Permit No. 2015

# ARE YOU RETIRED?

## Our Community Needs Your Help!

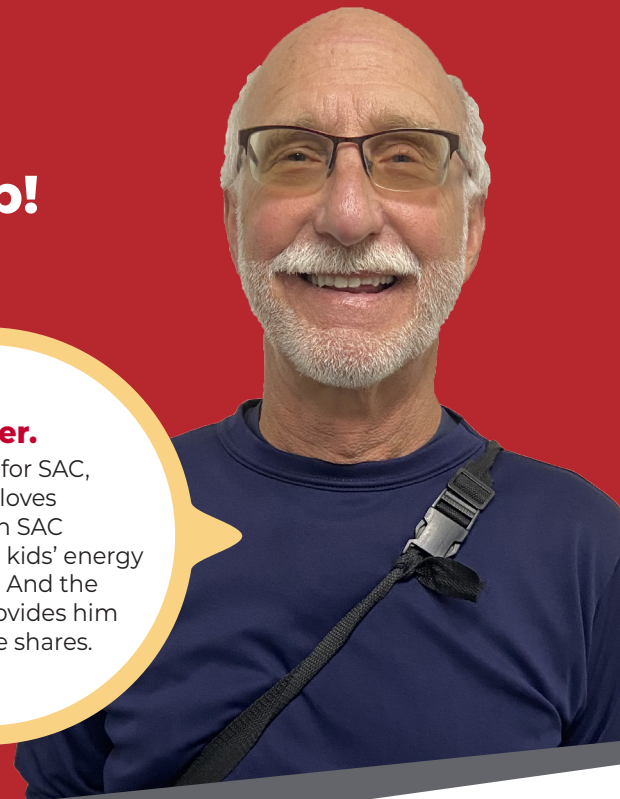
We're hiring for School-Age Care Support Staff that help provide a fun environment for local students before and after school.

### WORKING AS A PARAPROFESSIONAL

- ✓ Flexible Days and Hours
- ✓ School Year Monday-Friday
- ✓ Before School 6:30am-8:45am
- ✓ After School 2:00pm-6pm
- ✓ \$15.68/hour plus hourly stipend up to \$2+ hour

### Meet Peter.

Peter works for SAC, and says he loves working with SAC because the kids' energy is infectious. And the activity it provides him is healthy, he shares.



### QUESTIONS OR TO APPLY:

[lisa.grathen@isd197.org](mailto:lisa.grathen@isd197.org) | 651-403-8521

**APPLY ONLINE:** [isd197.org/work4sac](https://isd197.org/work4sac)

Keyword Search: Care