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educate, inspire & empower

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# ★ 728 ★ HAPPENINGS

With schools in  
Elk River, Otsego,  
Rogers & Zimmerman

Spring/Summer 2023

## A Fitting End: The Class of 2023 Leaves a Legacy of Learning

Perhaps no class was impacted more by change, unprecedented challenges, and by success (yes, there is impact in success) than the Class of 2023.

As I looked out over the four graduating classes at our three traditional high schools and our community high school, I could only reflect, for a moment, on all that they had been through. They served as a microcosm for all of our students, including those who had graduated from ISD 728 in the past couple of years.

But, for the Class of 2023, the impact was far and wide. First, of course, you have to start with the COVID-19 year - 2020. At its beginnings, it split these students - just freshman and new to the high school experience - apart, sending them home during the final weeks of their first year. It abruptly ended activities, classes, experiences and the togetherness that high school brings.

Then, in their second year (Grade 10), it was a roller coaster. From hybrid learning and alternate scheduling to brief shutdowns and long quarantines, it was impossible for any student or teacher to find some sort of rhythm to their experience. Yet, they persevered.

By junior year, it was a breath of fresh air and an opportunity to experience some "normalcy." But there were still challenges. Beyond the amazing difficulty it is to be a teenager at this time and in our society, there were things like civil unrest, war in foreign countries, economic challenges for families and so much more.

This year - their senior year - things seemed to come together. There was

unprecedented success for students in the classroom, on our stages, and in our athletic competition spaces. Our Class of 2023 members contributed to our arts programs, career and tech education opportunities and other programming like never before. They are, truly, 728 strong.

The last four years in education have been, in short, unlike anything we've seen over my career. Both positively and negatively - there have been things to learn from and countless opportunities to grow. This is, after all, part of our ISD 728 Core Beliefs!

I think I speak for all of ISD 728 when I say we are excited to see what the future holds for these amazing kids. Each and every one of them deserves our congratulations and recognition for the job they have done and the way they have represented our ISD 728 communities.

To close, I'd also like to thank our staff, our teachers, our support teams, administration and School Board for an outstanding school year. And to our families, thank you for letting us educate - and learn with and from - your children. Without a doubt, ISD 728 is a great place to live, work and learn. We are proud to serve and partner with you in ISD 728.



## Jamie Nord Joins ISD 728 Leadership Team



Jamie Nord, former executive director of the St. Croix River Education District, has joined ISD 728 as assistant superintendent of educational services. She joins Dr. Dan Bittman, Superintendent, and Dr. Kari Rock, Assistant Superintendent, as the key members of the ISD 728 leadership team.

Nord's hiring was approved by the ISD 728 School Board earlier this year. She replaces Dr. William Campbell, who left ISD 728 on June 30, 2023.

"We are thrilled to have Jamie's leadership, dedication to all students and experience with special education and implementing a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) as a part of our leadership team," said Dr. Bittman. "Jamie is an

award-winning educator whose portfolio meshes well with our mission, values and dedication to all learners in our ISD 728 communities. We welcome Jamie and her family to our ISD 728 family."

Prior to joining the ISD 728 cabinet, Jamie spent 16 years serving in several different

capacities at the St. Croix River Education District, including time as Executive Director, Director of Special Education, Unique Learners' Manager, and School Psychologist. As a leader, she has extensive experience in creating and implementing a MTSS framework to improve outcomes for all learners. In addition, Jamie is active at the state and national leadership levels, recently serving as the President for the Minnesota Administrators for Special Education.

"I think being a part of a growing, evolving district like ISD 728 is an exciting opportunity for me, and I'm really excited to start this journey," Nord said. "I'm particularly looking forward to the next few weeks, getting to know our District, our leadership, our staff and our dedicated teachers and teams around ISD 728. And of course, not to rush it, but the first day with students will be a wonderful, new experience here, and I'm very much excited about that."

She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Superior, her Master of Education and Education Specialist degrees in School Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Stout (while simultaneously completing the coursework for School Counseling), and her Sixth Year Certificate for Director of Special Education, K-12 Principal, and Superintendent licensure from St. Cloud State University.

# Hundreds Join the Ranks of ISD 728 Alumni



**ELK RIVER HIGH SCHOOL**  
CLASS OF 2023

[VIEW ALL PHOTOS](http://www.isd728.org/2023_ERHS_Graduation)  
[www.isd728.org/2023\\_ERHS\\_Graduation](http://www.isd728.org/2023_ERHS_Graduation)



**IVAN SAND COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL**  
CLASS OF 2023

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[www.isd728.org/2023\\_ISCHS\\_Graduation](http://www.isd728.org/2023_ISCHS_Graduation)





# ROGERS HIGH SCHOOL

CLASS OF 2023

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[www.isd728.org/2023\\_RHS\\_Graduation](http://www.isd728.org/2023_RHS_Graduation)



# ZIMMERMAN HIGH SCHOOL

CLASS OF 2023

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# AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

## CLASS OF 2023

VIEW ALL PHOTOS  
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## Student Leadership Recognized by ISD 728 School Board



The ISD 728 School Board continued its tradition of honoring two students from each school, who show outstanding leadership. Here are four examples of our exceptional student's work.

### Hassan Elementary

Harlan Scharenbroich has been a model student since he first stepped foot in Hassan Elementary. He is a kind and extremely respectful young man, making him an excellent example for his friends and peers. He is a young man of the highest integrity! His work ethic and desire to learn new things will lead him to a very successful future. Harlan goes out of his way to help others, no matter who they are. I could not have chosen a better student for this honor -- respectful, hardworking, and kind -- Harlan exemplifies all of these qualities and more. Congratulations Harlan, on this well-deserved recognition!

Hollis Pfeifer is a consistent example of hard work, creativity, and responsibility. She comes to school every day with a smile and brings enthusiasm to each academic unit. Her academic achievement is evidence of her effort in each class. Creativity is a major passion for Hollis! In addition to all her other creative interests, Hollis helped start up a crochet club this year. The club continues to teach new members to crochet as well as plan a pop up shop to sell their creations. Responsibility is a constant for Hollis. She shows integrity and is a class role model. She served as a student council representative for this year, attending meetings, making announcements, and helping run various drives to benefit our community. Hollis is a kind and helpful leader in the classroom. Way to go Hollis!



### Parker Elementary School

Isabelle Nelson works hard each day. She is always showing her Puma pride. She takes pride in her work and always has her work turned in on time. She is helpful and kind to others and is an all-around great student.

Hunter Smith is a great role model and leader in and out of the classroom. He always comes to school ready to learn. He always participates in class, does his best work, and has a positive attitude toward learning. He makes those around him laugh and he always has a smile on his face. He has a great work ethic and shows puma pride at all times. Hunter is a great student to have in class and a great role model to his peers.



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# ISD 728 Honored the Staff of the Year with Annual Awards



Each year, an ISD 728 committee accepts nominations and selects individuals as Employee of the Year in various categories. The awards are presented and always a surprise for staff.

“Congratulations to the award winners for delivering in many ways on our District mission and exemplifying our core values,” said Superintendent Dan Bittman. “Your efforts continue to make a difference in the lives of our students, and make ISD 728 a great place to work and learn every single day. We just couldn’t be prouder to work alongside of you and support you. But, above all, we learn from you and the amazing example you set for us as educators and volunteers.”

See below for this year’s winners!



**EARLY EDUCATOR  
of the Year  
Jenny Larkin**  
*Evaluator  
Handke Center*



**ELEMENTARY TEACHER  
of the Year  
Tammy Ferrian**  
*Physical Education Teacher  
Meadowvale Elementary School*



**SECONDARY TEACHER  
of the Year  
Melissa Deakins**  
*Intervention Specialist  
Elk River High School*



**SUBSTITUTE  
of the Year  
Karina Brass**  
*Elk River High School*



**STAFF MEMBER  
of the Year  
Michelle Van Horn**  
*Lead Custodian  
Lincoln Elementary School*



**VOLUNTEER  
of the Year  
Odedia Wegsheid**  
*aka “Grandma Odie”  
Lincoln Elementary School*



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## Elk River High School's Mandy Christy Means Business



When it comes to a school district's mission and values, there are words, and then there are actions.

Elk River High School graduate Mandy Christy is practically the ISD 728 Mission Statement personified. Think about it for a moment.

Inspired - Christy has been inspired again and again by opportunities presented through her academic and athletic experiences. Her love for DECA - the student-driven business organization that thrives at Elk River High (as well as Rogers) has led her to multiple, award-winning projects, including a partnership with the Minnesota Zoo that led her to the International DECA competitions (known as ICDC) in Orlando and a seventh place finish.

Empowered - Christy has used her education as power to establish her own business - Mandy Kay Candles. It's an entrepreneurial endeavor that's worthy of someone double her age, but the Class of 2023 honor graduate is taking it and running with it at the ripe old age of 18.

Educate - Named to the prestigious cohort known as GHR Fellows, Christy will continue her education at the University of St. Thomas, earning a full-tuition scholarship. Through the GHR program, she will work in a cohort that focuses on the Four Pillars - the leading guidance for Opus founder Gerry Raunhorst, a Twin Cities business leader and STU partner. The entire package is worth nearly \$250,000.

Beyond these three key values, Christy has also used athletics to move her to other opportunities. A basketball player for the Elks, Christy works as a marketing consultant for 3-on-3 Basketball of Cambridge, turning her love for the sport into a part-time job.

"I guess I'm just kind of a competitive person, and DECA has helped sort of turn that competitive aspect into a way to grow as an entrepreneur and in business," she said. "Really, the access to other businesses in the area and the way we've been able to grow through the program has put me in a position to succeed."

She also finds comfort in being part of a team - as evidenced by her play on the court and her work off of it - as she helped lead this year's DECA chapter, along with many other award winning seniors, one of which earned "the glass" by being one of the top two teams in the world.

"I mean, there's an 'it' factor," said Sonja Weiler, DECA leader at teacher at ERHS. "We had four teams get to the finals, including Mandy's, which finished seventh in the world. One is an accomplishment. So it was a very strong group this year. That made that Orlando experience special. And Mandy has that 'it' factor. It's why she's a GHR Fellow and why she's started two different businesses, already, in her young career."

Christy's seventh-place finish was with a Hospitality and Tourism Operations Research Project - Students worked with the Minnesota Zoo to evaluate its current customer experience and develop a hyper-personalized strategy for the business to implement. She presented the project with Kaelyn Diehl and Ethan Andresen. Additional team members were Adria Kotzian, Brynn Spanier, Hailey Vinje.

"It really was such a fun experience," Christy said. "I think so much of what we've done has prepared us for what's next. I'm looking forward to the collaboration that the cohort brings," she said.

## Pucker Up for a Pig at PES



So...WHY is Principal Kate Loveland puckering up for Cowboy the Pig???? Ms. Loveland challenged Parker Elementary School students for their annual carnival to raise money for the new playground equipment needed at their school. Their response? MORE THAN \$20K raised thanks to the efforts of our students and our PES Puma PAC.

The result? The Delaney family brought in Cowboy - as Ms. Loveland said she'd "Kiss a Pig!" if PES students raised that much cash. Well, it was time to pay up on Friday, and Cowboy didn't seem to mind. As the students cheered on as Ms. Loveland's staff snapped away, it was time to "KISS THAT PIG!"

Congrats, Parker Students!!!

## Lincoln Wins Geography & Book Bowls



Lincoln Elementary made history at the 5th grade geography bowl and book bowl by bringing home their first ever district wins at each competition. Geography Bowl participants: Nathaniel, Grant, Brooke and Elise (Advisor: Mr. Belde). Book Bowl participants: Kinsley, Kaeli, Mason and Nathaniel (Mrs. Vasseur).

## TLES's Artist in Residence



Brian Geihl of Dogfish Media, helped Mrs. Schultz's 2nd and 5th grade art students create two of their own unique screen print designs!

## Elk River High School's Culinary Team Gives Back with Pasta Feed Lunches



Students from ERHS's Pro Start team and foods program fired up the kettles and burners at the Hallway Cafe for a couple of special lunches in March and April. As part of a desire for the team to "give back" to the community, students invited school and community leaders for an old-fashioned "pasta bar," with delicious dishes made right in front of patrons, including fettuccine alfredo, spaghetti Bolognese and more.

"Our students really felt one of the things our program could do was some more community outreach and community recognition, and this is one of the results of that," said Monique Sabby, advisor to the ProStart Team and longtime teacher. "Our community has always been so supportive of the program and the students, so this was a way to give back."

## ISD 728 Bike Fleet Hits the Pavement as Kids Learn Cycling Safety



A creative program put in place by the ISD 728 Prevention and Safety Team – with the assistance of grants including Safe Routes to School – has students across the District hitting the road on two wheels this spring.

The ISD 728 Bike Fleet is making its way around the District's elementary schools, allowing our physical education specialists a hands-on way to teach students about cycling safety before they hit the roads in their neighborhoods this summer.

Teachers and advisers – with the help of the 728 Prevention and Safety Team and even local law enforcement – are setting up "Tour De School" courses in our parking lots. The bikes are unloaded from a special trailer and kids are given a chance to ride. Some have even brought their own bikes – if the student lives within a safe distance to bike to school.

"Any time you can teach safety lessons in a way that is hands-on and gets the kids involved, it's going to resonate," said coordinator Nicole Stottlemeyre. "We're really excited about how this all turned out, and the kids are loving it."

## Ashley Gruwell's Eyes Lead to Prizes, Future



Each year, artists from around ISD 728's three traditional high schools submit works via the National Scholastic Arts competition, aiming for success and, hopefully, a trip to the Big Apple.

In past years, students from all three schools have earned "Gold Key" honors, and landed works in local shops in museums.

This year, Zimmerman senior Ashley Gruwell joined that elite group, becoming just the first senior to win two Gold Key Awards and represent the Thunder at the state and (possibly) national levels.

But for Gruwell, the accolades didn't stop there. Her drawing of someone grabbing a midnight snack at the family refrigerator - a study in shade, light and perspective - earned her awards at the District level (her art will hang in the District Office in Elk River through 2024) and the annual Granite Ridge Conference Art Awards, where she was honored as an outstanding senior. Her self-portrait - lying in shallow water a la "Ophelia" - was also an award-winner for the senior.

In Zimmerman's final year in the conference, it was appropriate that one of its finest artists take home the honor.

"I think my love for the arts really started in elementary school," Ashley said. "In class, out of class, projects - I was always drawing. More than the other kids. I would sit down for hours."

She said her hobby - drawing - turned into a serious pursuit in middle school when she did a colored pencil drawing. She knew in eighth grade art would be a major part of her high school curriculum, and instructor Emily Zahn at ZHS recognized the talent immediately.

"It wasn't hard to get her going on a project. It was a matter of her focusing on each piece and bringing it to a finish. Once she does that, it's truly great work," Zahn said. "She's had success this year - and throughout high school - because she has that love for it."

Gruwell said ISD 728's curriculum allowed her to explore many different media, from drawing and painting to sculpture and pottery. Even photography played a role, with pictures becoming inspiration for works.

"Our curriculum gives us guidelines, but what's awesome is our teachers take that curriculum and then give us the freedom to explore and take creative control of our projects. So that relationship and trust that the teachers have in us is great - it helps you grow," Ashley said. "That feeling that you don't have to meet a certain standard, but meet a criteria of things - that's helpful."

Creating students who find their path and give to their community on a local and global level - that's part of ISD 728's mission statement. For Ashley, the proof has been evident in her journey.

"As an artist, to have that support from someone like Ms. [Emily] Zahn is something that means so much. It keeps you going," she said. "And through this I've been able to see the talent in Minnesota - through shows and competitions. That's really interesting. You don't think of this area having such talent - you go and see exhibits at museums and it's people from other places and all over the world. But we have so much talent here in our backyard."



**ISD 728** INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 728

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★ If you've ever thought "I know someone who would like to join our team!" - OR - "I think ISD 728 would be a great place for (XYZ) to work!" - NOW is the time to act!

★ ISD 728 needs people to #JoinOurTeam and is hiring multiple positions, especially as we look ahead to the 2023-2024 School Year.

★ PLEASE pass it on, and find out how you can help others #JoinOurTeam to keep us #728Strong!

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# School is Cool!

## Photo Gallery



The Ollie Olympics at Twin Lakes Elementary



5th Grade Track and Field Day hosted at Elk River High School



RHS 2023 Graduates visited the students of Otsego Elementary School



Westwood Elementary Field Day



Last Day of School at Parker Elementary