

WAYFINDER

WINTER 2023 | VOLUME 5



- + **Adult learners gain confidence and independence through One91 School for Adults**
- + **How One91 Virtual Academy supports one student's Olympic dreams**
- + **Experienced coordinators are the foundation of success for Project KIDS programming**



BEYOND K-12
Supporting lifelong learning for everyone in our One91 community

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SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION BEYOND K-12



When you think about public schools, the main thing that comes to mind is probably students in kindergarten through grade 12 working their way toward graduation, and all of those fun after-school athletics and activities.

That's definitely the biggest part of what we do in Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191, but it's not even close to all we do.

In this issue of the Wayfinder, we invite you to get to know some of the people and programs beyond K-12 in District 191. I think you'll see that when we start our mission statement with "Each Student," we truly mean each and every learner from birth through senior citizens.

Without a doubt, these programs and the people who make them happen change lives for the better.

For instance, I don't know that there is any event more full of pride and joy than our annual School for Adults recognition ceremony, where we celebrate students who've earned their GED, professional certifications, or even become U.S. citizens. (Plus, there is always food at that event!)

And imagine the impact of a quartet of educators who have provided safe and enriching experiences before and after school together for three decades, or the lives changed by the brothers teaching Tae Kwon Do for more than 25 years.

Learning doesn't start in kindergarten or stop when we graduate from high school. Learning is for all the phases of our lives, and I'm proud of how we help make that happen in One91.

Dr. Theresa Battle,
Superintendent



***Sparking a love of learning
for the district's youngest students***



Early Childhood programming at District 191 supports families through a variety of options starting at birth!

Public school districts are known for the hard work that goes into educating students from kindergarten through 12th grade, but that is not the whole story. Thanks to programs like Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE), which is unique to the state of Minnesota, students can get a great start at a young age.

With services from birth to three years of age in early childhood family education and special education, leading to preschool options like Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK), District 191 has programming that meets the needs of students, creates strong connections with families and provides invaluable resources. These dedicated educators work together to provide resources, special education services, and truly personalized instruction for families.

Birth-to-3 ECFE Programming

Sparking connection through resources and support

Through One91 ECFE, families can find the right fit, meet other parents, learn from experienced teachers and get the support they need. Programs give children developmentally appropriate learning activities and routines, support parents and caregivers and empower families to provide the best possible environments for their child's learning and development

Infant and toddler classes are set up with age-appropriate activities in a safe environment geared toward building skills and confidence. Classes like Celebrating Babies, Growing Babies on the Move and Toddler Topics provide opportunities for children to learn and explore, and for parents to get important resources. Some classes use a co-teaching model with special education and general education teachers leading the class together.

"This is a great way for parents to be involved in their child's first educational experience," said Early Childhood Special Education Teacher Sarah Erbes.

"Children have been learning at home and can now learn out in the world. We hear from parents how happy they are to see the growth over the course of these classes and I like to pause and reflect with them on that success."

Less about learning to count or the alphabet, ECFE classes are more about learning to share, developing relationships and how to express feelings and emotions. Parents spend time with their children in a classroom setting, but they also get dedicated parent-only time with a teacher to have discussions about issues they are facing. Danny O'Brien and Sarah Allcock are parent educators for the ECFE program who try to build a community with each class.

"Our ultimate goal is that parents know that they're not alone," said O'Brien. "They might feel like they are going through something unique to them and their experience, but other parents can commiserate or lift them up in some way."

"Parents are human and they may yell at their children," added Allcock. "What is important is how you deal with that afterwards to repair and strengthen the relationship. I really love working with parents and watching how they take information and adjust their parenting style."

Classes range from being very structured on a specific topic to being more open where parents can share their joys and concerns for their child. Parents are able to see a window into a world that they may not experience in a safe and supportive environment that is focused on giving them the tools they need to help their child succeed.



“I love what I get to do,” said Allcock. “I get to help parents be their child’s best and first teacher and make sure they understand regulation and development.”

Parents share concerns about issues ranging from separation anxiety, tantrums, preschool readiness, screen time and others. If teachers identify a need for additional resources or services for a child or their family, they can bring in members of the Early Childhood team.

Birth-to-3 Special Education Services

Fueling success through Early Intervention

Another opportunity is the Early Intervention Program with Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers who work with families of infants and toddlers via home or daycare visits. If a child qualifies for services, a provider connects with the family to develop a plan for them and their child.

“There are many structures an ECFE class might have such as age specific classes, play and learn classes, separation classes, drop off classes, and sibling care,” said ECFE teacher Jessica Domiano. “ECFE partners with early childhood special education to really bring extra support for families.”

Children can qualify because of a health condition or if they are showing a delay in areas of development like communication, cognitive skills, play skills, adaptive skills or motor skills. Anyone can refer a

child for an evaluation through the Help Me Grow portal with most referrals coming directly from parents.

“Early intervention is really supportive to parents to learn new strategies as well as key to students,” said Erbes. “We ask families what is important to them, what is going well, what we can build on, as well as areas that we can support or guide. We can partner with other professionals like occupational therapists or speech therapists and if I don’t know the answer, I can find it with my team.”

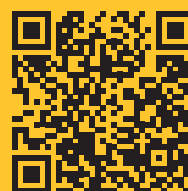
Parent concerns vary but often involve delays in speech, getting into routines and preparing for the transition to the next step, which for most children is preschool. Ultimately the goal is to provide resources so families can learn about and support the development of their child.

“We have a stronger understanding now about how the brain works through development,” said Allcock. “We are able to offer things that we just didn’t know even ten years ago.”

Ready for what comes next

Through learning experiences provided by ECFE, One91 Preschool or One91 Community Education, the focus is sparking a love of learning. Children learn and grow best through play experiences, which is why skill-building is embedded into play to promote healthy development of the whole child. One91 Preschool is directly aligned with Pathways learning in kindergarten, enabling our students to take full advantage of the rich Pathways experiences built into the rest of a child’s learning journey in District 191.

“We know that early intervention and these early learning experiences make a big difference,” said Erbes. “I don’t like the wait and see approach and we find that early intervention will never hurt, but that it gives more practice and more resources and can help prepare kids for preschool, kindergarten, and life!” ■



Learn more about the One91 ECFE and get support for your child at community.ed.isd191.org/early-childhood/ecfe

Project KIDS

Providing incredible elementary before and after school activities guided by experienced leaders



Pictured left to right: Jeanine Kristjanson, Stacey Konopa, Martha Dudley, Shar Lattery

Meet the Project KIDS leaders

Martha Dudley studied human relations at the University of Minnesota. She applied for a Program Coordinator position with Project KIDS after seeing an ad in the newspaper. She's been part of Project KIDS for 34 years.

Stacey Konopa started as a Program Supervisor after graduating with a degree in elementary education from Minnesota State Mankato. She's been part of Project KIDS for 33 years. "My intent was to continue to apply and interview for a teaching position outside of the district, but after a few months of working at Project KIDS, decided it was just as fulfilling and engaging as being a classroom teacher," she said.

Jeanine Kristjanson started working for Project KIDS as a senior in high school after hearing about it during social and family living class at BHS. She earned her degree in Family Education and Youth Studies from the University of Minnesota and has been part of Project KIDS for 35 years.

Shar Lattery graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a degree in child development and counseling. She started as Program Supervisor after hearing about the position from a friend. She's been part of Project KIDS for 29 years. Kristjanson and Lattery are both Burnsville High School graduates.

PROGRAM PROFILE

Project KIDS (Kids Individualized Developmental Services) has provided before and after school educational, recreational and developmental activities for elementary students in District 191 since 1976. The Community Education program started at Rahn Elementary and has since expanded to every elementary school in the district. About 400 students are currently part of Project KIDS, and that number often increases by 100 or more students over the course of the school year.

Another 500 or so students attend The Edge, a Project KIDS summer program that builds community and promotes independence and socialization in a fun, recreational and educational environment. The Edge serves students ages 12-15 from District 191 and surrounding communities.

The school sites and program offerings have changed over the years, but one constant has been the leadership of four coordinators - Martha Dudley, Stacey Konopa, Jeanine Kristjanson and Shar Lattery - who have a combined 131 years of experience working in Project KIDS.

Read the Q & A with Jeanine, Stacey, Martha and Shar on pages 6-7.



You have all been a part of Project KIDS for a long time. How has the program's approach to engaging with students evolved over time?

JK: In the beginning children were expected to participate in only staff-led activities, no choice. As the years went on our leadership team recognized that children need to be offered choices and opportunities to empower themselves while attending out-of-school-time programming. Today, children actually plan and implement the activities they participate in.

What are some of the activities that kids get really excited about?

SL: Non-school days are offered as full-day care for Project KIDS participants. On these days, staff plan bigger and better activities including off-site field trips. Taking kids to places like trampoline parks, apple orchards, Valleyfair, zoos, local community businesses like Grand Slam, Sky Zone, Skateville and various restaurants, museums, 4H University of Minnesota Extension programs, and to meet city fire and police officials.

MD: Many parents sign their children up for those days, even though they may not need care on a particular event day.

What's an example of a change you've made to Project KIDS programming that has been beneficial for students?

SL: We created and implemented The Edge summer program for children going into 6th grade until they turn 16 to get kids out in the community, interacting, learning and having fun. It just finished its 20th summer!

JK: We're always finding creative ways to make programming work for children in grades K-5 all at one time versus the regular school day where kids are in same grade classrooms all day.

Collectively, how does your wealth of experience working with kids help this program be successful?

SK: The four of us have worked together for 29 years in our leadership roles. We all know each other's strengths and weaknesses and know how to work together and work off of each other to provide the One91 community with the out-of-school-time program they have grown to know and expect.

What are some of the skills your fellow coordinators possess that makes them great at their job?

SK: Shar is fantastic at working with the older kids.

JK: Martha and Shar always find exciting activities and new ideas for trips and summer programming.

SK: Jeanine is good at developing spreadsheets and ways to track specific programming pieces like participants with special needs and staffing and tracking and documenting The Great Start Compensation Support Payment Program.

JK: Stacey helps to move us forward with technology. She set up our billing system so families can now register online and manage their monthly schedules electronically.

SL: The four of us work so well together. We depend on each other and support each other daily. I believe that the success of our program is because we're united in our goals and beliefs. We rely on each other and respect and trust each other. When I think of the word "team," I think of us!

SK: We respect each other as not only Community Ed leaders and co-workers but as long time friends, recognizing the challenges women face with working full-time and having families of our own. Each of us, unsolicited, helps one another and likewise none of us hesitate to ask for help from each other.

What role does Project KIDS play in supporting families and how does it benefit the community as a whole?

MD: Project KIDS is a necessity for the majority of our families. It is very convenient for the kids to come down to us right before or after class. Parents love the convenience of our program being in the schools and many times close to their homes, and it also allows them to attend a school from out of district since care is available at the school and bussing isn't an option for those students. Teachers like the fact they can have kids stay late in the classroom or get additional help if necessary.

In addition to consistent leadership, what else has helped Project KIDS be successful?

MD: We also need to give credit to the staff we have had work with us over the years in making our job easier and more fun. We have had some incredible staff who have stayed for many years too. That says a lot about a program where we have so many staff who stay for years or come back from college year after year to work in the summers. We are doing something right!

Who motivates you to continue your work with Project KIDS?

JK: Working with children, we get to hear their stories, jokes and celebrate their daily accomplishments. This always brings a smile to all our faces!

MD: This is what brings us back each day. Every day is different with more stories, celebrations and fun!

SL: A lot of kids are getting experiences they'd never have the opportunity to have. Having them active, socializing, having fun and feeling safe with us is fun to see. It's so rewarding. ■



BLAZING THROUGH OBSTACLES

Nguyen School of Tae Kwon Do - Community Education partnership has provided impactful experiences for over 25 years



Kick or to strike with the foot



Fist or to strike with hand



Discipline or art/the way of

Martial arts classes have long been a popular activity for children and adults alike. For members of the District 191 community, a partnership between One91 Community Education and the Nguyen School of Tae Kwon Do provides a truly exceptional experience.

Nam and An are brothers who grew up in the district after their parents immigrated to the area from Vietnam in the 1970s. Nam graduated from Burnsville High School in 1994 and got a degree from the University of Minnesota in computer science, but martial arts always played an important role in his life.

Beginning karate when he was seven years old, Nam went on to achieve his black belt in karate, black sash in kung fu and black belt in tae kwon do. Nam studied tae kwon do under instructor David Lee who, in 1998, handed over the reins of his school to the Nguyen brothers.

Classes take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Sky Oaks Elementary with options for youth beginners as well as youth advanced and adults. Classes start at the beginning of the school year and go through mid June and are broken up into sessions of eight classes, with each class only costing eight dollars.

“We keep the price reasonable to take away barriers to participate,” said Nam. “Tae kwon do is not only a good exercise program but it teaches self defense and the five tenets that you live by: courtesy, integrity, perseverance, self-control and indomitable spirit. We teach our students that life isn’t fair and that sometimes you’re going to get hurt, but you have to get back up.”

One91 Community Education Enrichment and Marketing Coordinator Jennifer Green works to provide opportunities for community members to gain new skills, talents, and social experiences through experiential learning, right in their own school district.

“We seek instructors who are experts in a subject, who have a desire to share their passions with the community,” said Jennifer. “The Nguyens are invested in building strong connections and



Studies indicate that lifelong learning supports healthy aging, which in turn is a benefit to the whole community.

Jennifer Green
One91 Community Education
Enrichment and Marketing
Coordinator

empowering their community through martial arts. They have grown and evolved as instructors and proven themselves to be valuable partners for over two decades.”

Classes fill up quickly and typically have a waiting list. Students have some time to connect with one another at the beginning of each session and then work on techniques, moves and exercises to improve their skills. When it comes time to test for a color belt, students have to demonstrate techniques as well as successfully complete a board break, which can be frustrating.

“They get three attempts and if they can’t break the board, they have to retest in the future,” said Nam. “Some students feel like they are failing but I keep encouraging them, we practice, and when they can come back and break the board, they are so excited. Seeing that feeling of accomplishment is why we teach.”

Some people think martial arts teaches aggression or fighting, but the truth is that the teaching involves having students control their emotions, control their words, learn how to accept defeat and how to learn from mistakes. Students are often able to achieve their black belt in about four years of consistent work with a very intense test that includes breaking boards and bricks as well as an essay about what they have learned.

Participation helps to form strong bonds of friendship for participants of any age and bigger important life concepts are ultimately part of the class.

Henry Page is a parent who has participated in the adult program in the past whose six year old son has been participating for two years.

“Socialization, networking and creating friendships are fundamental to social emotional growth, health and development,” said Henry. “This class gives kids a sense of belonging and confidence because they belong to a community that grows progress



in important things like honesty, listening, discipline and focus. It’s like snow, it falls soft but it sinks deep.”

There are many benefits to lifelong learning through programs like One91 Community Education. Classes provide fun and engaging, hands-on experiences in a casual learning environment to get an introduction to a new topic or skill that often exercises the mind and body, increases social connections, and connects participants to others who share a common interest.

“As a highly diverse community, we also invite people to come together across differences, encouraging folks to develop an understanding or common ground on a topic they may not be familiar or comfortable with,” said Jennifer. “Studies indicate that lifelong learning supports healthy aging, which in turn is a benefit to the whole community.”

Nam and the other instructors continue to learn new updates on techniques and the proper way to execute and teach forms. He says that as long as he can kick, he will teach.

“One91 Community Education has all these awesome classes and to continue learning is good for the brain and the mind,” said Nam. “I love it so much and will keep going as long as my body allows me to. My son is a purple belt now and working towards his black belt, maybe someday I can hand the school over to him.” ■



Virtual Academy offers independence, flexibility for Olympic-bound curler Kenna Ponzio



“

My favorite part (about One91 Virtual Academy) is that I get to think on my own and I don't have interruptions. I can go as slow or fast as I want. It's a good feeling to have that independence.

- Kenna Ponzio

It was just this summer that sophomore Kenna Ponzio decided to enroll in One91 Virtual Academy.

Ponzio thought the virtual option might be a good fit after she missed several days of school at a time while traveling to curling competitions during her freshman year at Burnsville High School. It had been a challenge to catch up on all her school work and Ponzio suspected she might be absent more and more as she continued to advance as a curler.



She didn't take long to prove herself correct. Ponzio and her teammates traveled to the Denver Curling Club in Colorado in early September and won the Junior Olympic Trials. Thanks to that first-place finish, she will compete for Team USA in January at the 2024 Youth Olympic Games in Gangwon Province, Korea.

"I don't even know if I could believe it. I was really focused on thinking of it as another game and not getting caught up in my head. Once we won I was just super excited," Ponzio said. "I think one of the main things I first thought of was that I get to be with my friends on my team for much longer because I love the people on my team."

Ponzio started curling with her uncle and cousin when she was 7 or 8 years old. She started competing in fifth grade, traveling to tournaments around the Midwest. The next year she began school at Eagle Ridge Middle School and during that time competed in Nationals at the Chaska Curling Club and she later placed third in her region at U18 Nationals in Indiana. The busier she got with curling, the more she started to consider her educational options.

"It was always an idea. I was hearing how well the Virtual Academy was doing, and the teachers I had in person were talking about hosting some classes online so it kind of piqued my interest," Ponzio said. "I feel like it's been a good fit for me personally because I have moments when I really focus and get a bunch done and in school it was kind of hard because I had to switch to different classrooms, people are talking, the teacher is talking. Now I can really focus."

Ponzio starts each day by taking her dog for a walk, which she said wakes her up and is something she wouldn't be able to do if she had to rush out the door in time for a first period class. She then does her school work for a while, has lunch at home, and works on her assignments some more before traveling to BHS for band in the afternoon. She said that freedom and flexibility helps her learn best.

"It's helpful to be able to do different things. I'll watch a video, read something, do an assignment, or sometimes I'll watch all the videos and learn first, then do something else and come back to it. I get to do it my way," she said. "My favorite part is that I get to think on my own and I don't have interruptions. I can go as slow or fast as I want. It's a good feeling to have that independence."

Ponzio still gets the opportunity to socialize with her friends before and after band class. She also attends school events like homecoming. She interacts with teachers via email or Zoom if she needs clarification or additional instructions, but said she's able to work mostly independently and that has actually made her more excited to learn.

"I've asked for help a few times and they're very quick to respond and very helpful," she said. "I've been learning new things every day. It's been fun. Math is one of my favorite subjects and I think doing it online is easier. I feel like I have more time to think about what I'm learning when I'm at my house. It's less stressful because I have as much time as I need to learn something." ■



Learn more about
One91 Virtual Academy:
virtualacademy.isd191.org

Empowering students with disabilities

Internship program paves the way for inclusive skill development and future employment



Thanks to a partnership with Fairview Ridges Hospital and Project SEARCH, a program that helps secure competitive employment for people with disabilities, six Burnsville-Eagan-Savage Transition (BEST) students who will graduate from the BEST program this spring are working as interns this year.

The goal of Project SEARCH is for interns to obtain competitive, integrated employment within nine months after the completion of their internship experience. According to Fairview's Workforce Pathway Consultant Melissa Siebenaler, about 75% of students who participate in the program find gainful employment.



On Sept. 15, a kickoff celebration of the Project SEARCH partnership with Fairview was held at the hospital, where Siebenaler introduced the newest group of interns to an audience that included healthcare professionals, hospital administrators and community stakeholders.

BEST student interns include Kowsar Abdille, Matthew Angara, Jordan Gosen, Ridthy Keo, Charlotte Portwood and Bethlehem Zerihun. This is the first time that BEST students are participating in the program.

To qualify for the internship, students participated in a skills assessment and interviewed with the Project Search team, which included the county providers, vocational rehabilitation service providers and hospital staff.



During the nine-month internship experience, students build a variety of skills, including communication, teamwork and problem solving. While most of the students' days consist of hands-on work in their assigned department, they also have one hour of classroom instruction where they'll cover additional topics like health and wellness, technology, self-advocacy and financial literacy.

Through a series of three internship rotations every 10 weeks, students acquire competitive, marketable and transferable skills as they are fully immersed into a job within a department, such as pediatrics, research lab, nutrition services, environmental services and more. BEST instructor Shelly Erickson, along with skills trainer Sharon Frank, support students throughout their experience at the hospital. Not only do they teach the curriculum, but they also float between departments to support the application of students' learning.

"This internship opportunity is extremely exciting because it is a culmination of all the skills the students have learned through BEST and now gives them the opportunity to apply those skills," said Dr. Jennifer Middendorf, District 191 student support services supervisor and BEST program supervisor. "It also

provides them with the opportunity to explore career options within the hospital setting, which supports their goals of being competitively employed when they leave the BEST program. I am proud to see how much growth they have made through their hard work.”



Matthew worked in the supply chain department during his first rotation and enjoyed meeting his new co-workers and learning new skills through job training. One of his goals was to make sure he asked questions when he didn't understand something. He was also curious about the personal protective equipment that he used during the day.



Bethlehem was thrilled that she got the opportunity to work in pediatrics during the first rotation. Since she has taken care of her younger brothers and sisters, she felt confident and ready to care for babies in the pediatric department. Bethlehem, who is Ethiopian and speaks fluent Amharic, was a little nervous about the language barrier. However, she found comfort in knowing there were Fairview employees in her unit who spoke her language and could help her navigate any problems she might face.



Jordan was feeling pretty calm about starting the internship and was excited to meet his new team. Over the years, Jordan has said his passions have changed, but working at the hospital provided him with a variety of new experiences that helped him narrow down what kind of job he wants once he graduates.

“We are very excited for the Project SEARCH and BEST partnership with Fairview Ridges Hospital,” said Amy Piotrowski, District 191 director of student support services. “The employment and social skills the students will gain from this experience will prepare them for their future. It is evident that Fairview Ridges is an inclusive, safe environment where young adults with disabilities can learn and grow and truly become Future Ready and Community Strong.”

The BEST program serves young adults who are ages 18-21 years and have an individual education program (IEP) plan targeting preparation for adult life. Students have a graduation plan that identifies skills they need to reach their employment, postsecondary, and independent living goals. Skills are acquired in the classroom, community and various postsecondary settings. ■



Learn more about the BEST program in ISD 191:
isd191.org/learning/special-education/best-transition

Helping adult learners gain confidence and independence through skill development



PROGRAM PROFILE

The One91 School for Adults currently serves about 350 students from ages 17 to 81. These students come from 45 different countries and speak 27 languages.

In the One91 School for Adults, 14 instructors lead 22 adult basic education classes, including several English learner courses, GED classes, driver education, ParaPro prep, a computer skills class, a citizenship course, and a pre-Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) course. Through these courses and partnerships with local business, educational institutions like Dakota County Technical College, and resources like CareerForce of Burnsville, the One91 School for Adults helps students gain skills, reach their academic and career goals, and create a bridge between where they are and where they want to go.

Our students share how One91 School for Adults has helped them improve their lives.

SHUAI SHENG

Adult Basic Education student Shuai Sheng credits the One91 School for Adults at Diamondhead Education Center with “bringing (his) life back to normal.”

When Sheng came to the United States from China in 2021, he quickly realized just how much the language barrier would affect his everyday life. He had taken some introductory English classes in middle school and high school, but was far from fluent. That turned even the simplest tasks into challenges for Sheng as he attempted to navigate his new surroundings.

“Two years ago when I first came here, I couldn’t find the bathroom because everything said ‘restroom’ and I didn’t know the word ‘restroom.’ In China I was a normal person and could do everything and in the United States I couldn’t,” Sheng said. “It felt like an injury - I needed help with everything. It’s so important for us to be able to communicate with other people.”

Soon after arriving in the Twin Cities, Sheng saw an ad in a magazine for the One91 School for Adults. He quickly signed up with the goal of improving his English. Over the past two years, he’s taken just about every class available, including courses in English, technology, paraprofessional courses, and GED courses. He has passed three GED tests and needs to pass just one more to complete his GED.

“In Adult Education, not only are the courses free, but also every teacher is friendly and they encourage you to participate in various courses that are suitable for you,” Sheng said. “It has enabled me to express myself in English. Being fluent in English will be true freedom. I think District 191 provides an excellent learning platform for adults. As a 35-year-old person, I can once again enter school to learn, and I cherish this opportunity because it is so rare.”

Sheng is now helping give other adult learners the same opportunities as an administrative assistant for the Adult Basic Education program.

“The job is a new challenge for me, and I enjoy the feeling of being busy with this job. Burnsville Adult Education has helped me be successful through its various coursework that I can apply in my new job,” he said. “It’s a really cool job to help other people and kind of give them that freedom.”



SOCORRO MARTINEZ



Socorro Martinez's path to learning English has been a long and winding one. Born in Tijuana, Mexico, and growing up in a Spanish-speaking household in San Bernardino, California, Martinez didn't start picking up little bits of the language until adulthood when she'd watch Sesame Street with her children.

Martinez and her family moved to Minnesota in 1981. Raising multilingual children, she learned a few phrases here and there, but still didn't have the vocabulary she sometimes needed for activities like returning items to a clothing store.

"I would get frustrated and leave the store and cry because I couldn't say what I wanted to say because I didn't have the words," Martinez said.

That's begun to change in the last year. In the summer of 2022, Martinez saw the District 191 Community Education catalog and decided to enroll in an English class. Through that class, she's increased her vocabulary and improved her grammar to the point where she feels comfortable having conversations in situations where she used to avoid them.

"As a banquet server, I used to not leave the kitchen at parties. Now I feel more confident going out and talking to people," she said. "I feel so much more secure now about myself, now that I can really say what I want to say. Now I know how to say it the right way."


Martinez has now taken classes in math and computer basics, as well, with the goal of earning her GED diploma. She then hopes to attend culinary school like her son, who is a chef.

"I want to show my grandkids that if I can do it, they can do it," she said.


Martinez credits the teachers in the One91 School for Adults for helping her improve her English so quickly.

"The teachers are the best. They stop the class to explain things and answer questions," she said. "I'm very thankful to have 191 schools help me achieve my goal to get my GED." ■

2022-23 Student Achievements


13 
students passed their citizenship tests


7 
attained new jobs thanks to a new skill or certification earned in class

34 
students received their Northstar Digital Literacy certification

6 
CNA graduates

6 
GED subject graduates

13 
students were published in the Journeys Anthology of Adult Student Writing

2 
GED students passed all four subject tests

6 
paraprofessional graduates



Read more stories about how adults from places like Kenya, Costa Rica and Somalia are gaining confidence and independence with the help of One91 School for Adults at isd191.org/school-for-adults.



Be a Santa to a Senior

Showcasing our caring One91 community

Throughout the year, the Burnsville Senior Center is buzzing with activity. The collaborative program between District 191 Community Education and the City of Burnsville at Diamondhead Education Center provides area senior citizens with a place to meet up for coffee, play cards, enjoy a meal, access health and wellness services, and even learn skills like painting, Tai Chi or woodcarving.

The busiest time of the year is over the holiday season when Senior Center members come together to lift the spirits of those who aren't able to participate in such activities. Hundreds of volunteers from the Senior Center, Community Education and the community teamed up again this year to participate in Be a Santa to a Senior, which provided gifts to around 350 local senior citizens, many of whom reside in assisted living facilities across Dakota, Scott and Rice counties. It's the 16th year the Burnsville Senior Center has participated in the event.

"It is specific to seniors who are isolated at the holidays, at a time when we associate Christmas with children and collecting items for them. Most people would actually rather buy for someone else than receive a gift themselves," Senior Center Director Michele Starkey said. "This is a very generous and caring community."



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I volunteer because my hands have to stay busy and there's a need. It adds color to my life and to other peoples'. I'm sure that's why everybody does it.

- Sherry Beason



Seniors are nominated by community members, senior housing groups or organizations like Meals on Wheels, City of Burnsville or Dakota County Public Health. The Be a Santa to a Senior team then creates a wish list for each person, which is written on an ornament that's then placed on one of a dozen trees throughout the community in places like the Burnsville Senior Center, City Hall, assisted living homes, and grocery stores. Community members then select the ornaments, purchase the items and donate them to the Senior Center. Other gifts are donated by organizations like the Rotary, Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops, and school groups. Senior Center knitting and quilting groups also provide gifts like blankets.

Volunteers then come together for a festive wrapping party where they organize and wrap the gifts. The next day, they're delivered by a group of over 50 volunteers.

"This program is volunteer based and this program continues to grow year after year because of the support from the community. From the generous items that are donated, to all who show up to wrap and deliver the packages to seniors in our community. We could not continue to do this program without the help of all the volunteers," Starkey said.

Shirley Blix has been part of the knitting group at the Senior Center for over 20 years. In addition to knitting and crocheting extra mittens for students at District 191 elementary schools, Blix sews about 100 treat bags a year for Be a Santa to a Senior.



Another volunteer, Sherry Beason, is following in the footsteps of her late mother, who she said knit over 50 lap robes a year for 20 years for residents in local assisted living facilities. The lap robes Beason knits are given out through Be a Santa to a Senior.

"I volunteer because my hands have to stay busy and there's a need," Beason said. "It adds color to my life and to other peoples'. I'm sure that's why everybody does it."

Starkey said the district's participation in Be a Santa to a Senior demonstrates not only its core values of Caring Community and Inclusive Partnership, but promotes its mission of Future Readiness as well.

"We have a number of families who have volunteered for this event for years and the students think this is just a part of what they should be doing in terms of thinking of others in need," she said. ■





This edition of the Wayfinder has focused on how we are supporting lifelong learning for everyone in our community beyond the K-12 experience. Still, each day inside our schools, our One91 Pathways program is providing exceptional learning opportunities for students at every level to discover their passions.

By sparking curiosity, fueling student passions, and allowing them to blaze their own path, District 191 continues to be an educational leader in college and career readiness that is constantly innovating our approach to student preparation and success.



Spark. **Fuel.** **Blaze.**

Spark

Elementary students are inspired to approach the world with wonder.



Students bring stories to life in comic book workshop

In October, Gideon Pond Elementary fifth-grade students in Jes Rau's and Hannah Selby's classes had the unique opportunity to take part in a comic book workshop aimed at celebrating diversity and cultural heritage in comic books. With guidance from Leorian Ricardo, the creative director of the largest comic book publisher in the Dominican Republic, the workshop provided a creative platform for students not only to hone their artistic skills but also to create stories infused with elements from their own experiences and cultural backgrounds.



Students get active on annual Walk to School Day

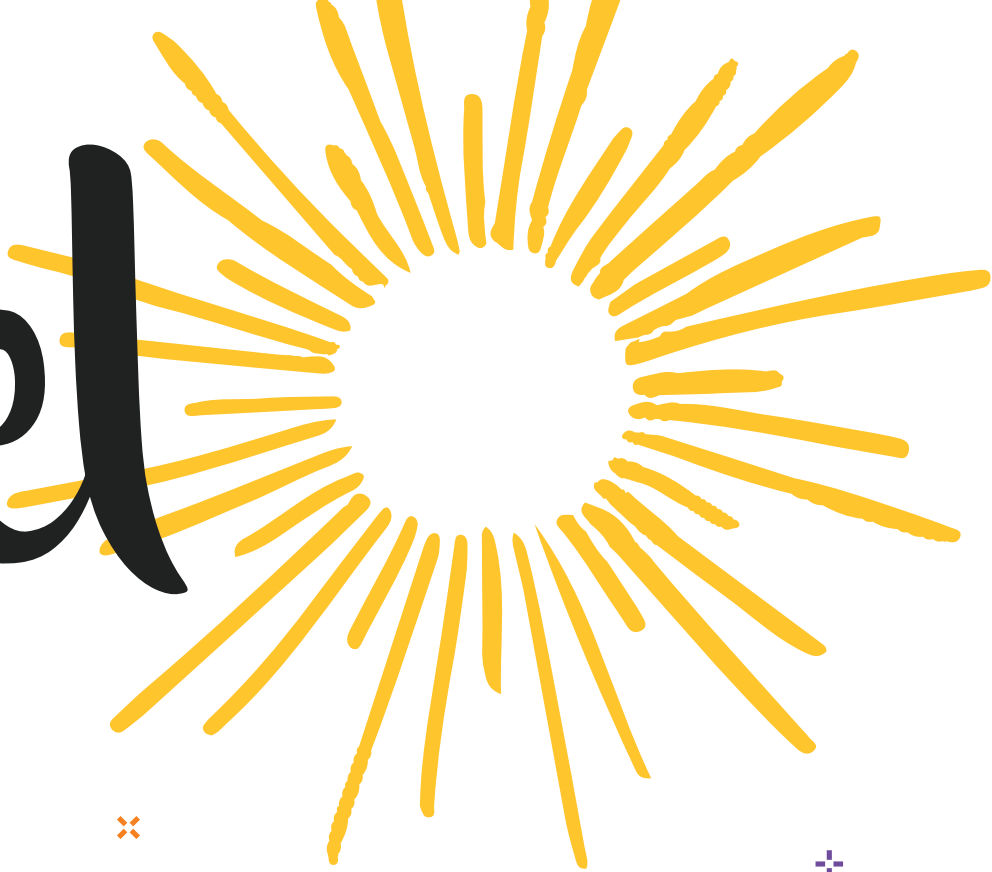
On Oct. 4, Rahn Elementary participated in Walk to School Day. The entire student body met outside Peace Church and walked the half mile together back to school. The event encourages physical activity and promotes safety in neighborhoods and near schools. Students enjoyed the walk alongside their classmates, teachers and family members.



Parent volunteers provide memorable experiences

On Sept. 22, Edward Neill Elementary hosted a Fun Run, which included an obstacle course and a bouncy house. Parent volunteers from the Edward Neill PTA organized the event. It's just one example of the many activities parent groups around the district plan to provide memorable experiences and support for One91 students.

Fuel



Middle school scholars discover new ways to look at the world.



Green Team students plant seedlings in new rain garden

Thanks to a grant funded by the Bosch Community Fund, Eagle Ridge Middle School (ERMS) has a new rain garden. The garden helps protect area ponds and streams by slowing down runoff from storms and winter melting, and by filtering pollutants such as salt, fertilizer and silt before water enters the city storm water system. The ERMS Green Team environmental club and other volunteers planted 600 native prairie seedlings in the garden this fall.



Nicollet News puts students in the spotlight

Over the course of the school year, every seventh and eighth grader at Nicollet Middle School gets their chance to step into the spotlight on the Nicollet News. The weekly broadcast gives students an opportunity to appear on camera and ask questions to their classmates or teachers, answer questions, and even show off their locker. Behind the camera, students develop teamwork while learning production skills like script writing, organizing segments and thinking of creative new ideas for the show.



Another successful fall sports season at Eagle Ridge and Nicollet Middle Schools

In addition to boys and girls soccer, boys and girls cross-country, and girls tennis returning and all seeing increases in participation and all seeing increases in participation in their second year, girls volleyball was offered and 80 students participated. When Eagle Ridge and Nicollet met on the court, the BHS volleyball team attended and cheered on both new teams. Likewise, the soccer teams from each school came together for a Battle of the Blaze and played under the lights at BHS as the Blaze varsity team cheered them on.



Blaze

Immersive experiences increase future readiness for high school learners.



Virtual reality helps students experience trade jobs

In September, Burnsville High School students had the opportunity to participate in simulated trade jobs, including heavy equipment, painting, welding and carpentry. Instructors from Big Ideas Inc. worked with students and helped them experience the trades through an Oculus or virtual reality headset.

Skilled trades are in high demand and the need for them is expected to continue to grow in the coming years. At Burnsville High School, the Design, Engineering & Manufacturing Technology Pathway helps jumpstart students' journey into skilled trades!



Celebrating the American Latino community

In partnership with the City of Burnsville, Minnesota - Municipal Government and ISD 191 Community Education, the Latinos Unidos affinity group at Burnsville High School hosted a family event in celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month.

Through food, dance and artistic creations, this wonderful community event recognized and celebrated the many contributions, diverse cultures, and extensive histories of the American Latino community.



Students shine in "Matilda"

In November, the Burnsville High School Theatre Guild kicked off its 63rd season with six performances of the musical "Matilda." A talented cast, including two actors sharing the role of Matilda — junior Allie Stuart and sophomore Greta Dickhausen — graced the Mraz Center stage. The combined efforts of the pit musicians, designers, lighting, sound and other crew members made for an exceptional production.

TO THE ISD191 RESIDENT AT:

Student Voice: Hallway Chatter

Gideon Pond fifth-grade students had a unique opportunity to be part of a comic book workshop this fall. Hear about a few of the stories they created below.

READ MORE ON PAGE 19!



I really loved the workshop. My comic book is called "The Stranger," and it's about someone getting kidnapped.

Bariira's favorite part of the workshop was Leorian talking about how the most important part of doing a comic is having fun.

**BARIIRA
AZIZ**



Bariira, who also incorporated Somali clothing in her illustrations, based her comic book on her dad's experience of almost being kidnapped when he was a young boy in Somalia.

He said you don't have to be a really good artist, but you have to have a good story.

WHAT I LOVED ABOUT THE WORKSHOP IS LEARNING THAT I COULD PUT MY IMAGINATION INTO A BOOK!



**JOSHUA
SCHMITZ**

Massimiliano created a story about a teleporting device that sends him back to Mexico to help a man defeat a robber. Massi, who is of Hispanic heritage, feels inspired to create more comic book stories that include aspects from his family's background.

**MASSIMILIANO
GOMEZ MUNOZ**



I really like to read graphic novels, and this is like the same thing. It's really fun.