

NEWS RELEASE

Orono Public Schools (ISD 278)

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Orono Schools Named 2024 CHARACTER COUNTS! Exemplary School District

Orono Schools is honored to be one of only three U.S. recipients of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Exemplary School District Award. This honor recognizes the district's focused and intentional character education program that has impacted the lives of Orono students for more than 20 years.

Dr. Gary Smit, CHARACTER COUNTS! Trainer and Consultant, traveled to Orono to present the award during the district's February Professional Day. "Orono has previously been recognized at both the national and state level," Dr. Smit said. "But beyond the awards, it is evident that CHARACTER COUNTS! is an integral part of how Orono puts their core values into action. What you do—through planning, staff training, and implementation—ensures that character growth and development are sustainable." Dr. Smit recognized Orono for believing that every child—at every developmental level—thrives within a common language of character and ethics.

It's that sustainability that is so highly valued by the Orono Schools learning community comprised of students, parents, guardians, and residents. Superintendent Kristine Flesher is a longtime leader of the Character program that was started under the direction of retired Superintendent Dr. Karen Orcutt. Dr. Flesher said, "In our daily journey toward excellence, our commitment to character has remained steadfast over time. We are first educators; but we don't just seek academic achievement for Orono students. We believe it's critical to nurture individuals who possess the ethical compass to navigate the complexities of the world and make sound decisions along the way."

In a recorded address to the district, Scott Raecker, Executive Director, The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center, home of CHARACTER COUNTS! said, "Orono Schools' commitment to ongoing professional development—with the integration of character champions in each building—has helped build strong school cultures that value character development and ethical leadership. Your commitment to making data-driven decisions, and involving the entire community in your implementation, illustrates your intentional efforts to continuously evolve. Orono schools are a model of CHARACTER COUNTS! best practices and we are proud to announce that you have earned the distinction as a CHARACTER COUNTS! Exemplary School District."

Orono Public Schools serves more than 2,900 students in grades K-12 from the communities of Independence, Long Lake, Maple Plain, Medina, Minnetonka Beach and Orono.

Orono Schools District Office: 685 Old Crystal Bay Road N, Long Lake, MN 55356
www.oronoschools.org

In Orono Schools, character is a Strategic Goal: "Students and staff will understand and model core ethical values for a life of integrity."

You can learn more about Orono's Character program at oronoschools.org/character.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is housed at The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. As a global initiative that transforms lives and strengthens communities, CHARACTER COUNTS! supports our mission to improve civility through character development and ethical leadership.

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