

C Laker CONNECTIONS



A Publication of Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools • May, 2024

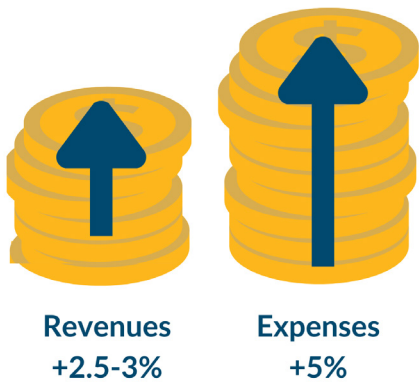


PLSAS maintains focus on long-term budget planning

Along with planning the budget for 2024-2025, the Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) district leadership and school board continue to focus on providing financial stability to the district for the next several years.

Like many other school districts in Minnesota and across the country, PLSAS is facing serious budget challenges. Our costs are increasing faster than our revenue is growing. This is mainly because prices are going up (inflation) and student enrollment (revenue) has slowed, mostly due to low birth rates.

Budget Projections from 2023/24 to 2024/25



In the short term, we are looking at options to cut at least \$4 million from our budget and use some of our savings (fund balance) for the 2024/25 school year.

Proposed Reductions

In order to have a balanced budget for 2024/25 (meaning expenses do not exceed revenue), PLSAS must reduce expenses by \$4.6 - \$5 million dollars.

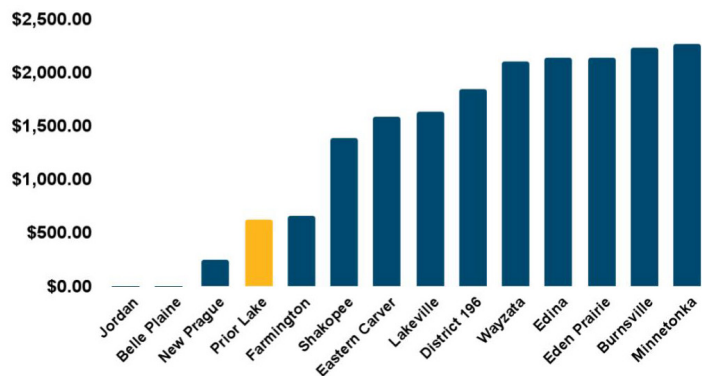


District operating lowest among neighboring districts

While the largest portion of the district's funding comes from the state, our local operating levy is an important source of revenue and helps to fund programs and services to meet the needs

of students. PLSAS' current operating levy is one of the lowest in the state, which means our district has less money than neighboring districts to operate our schools and provide programming for students. Additional operating levy revenue would strengthen the district's overall financial sustainability while allowing further investment to enhance programs and services that we know are valued by families and students.

Voter-Approved Operating Levy Comparison (2023-24 per student)

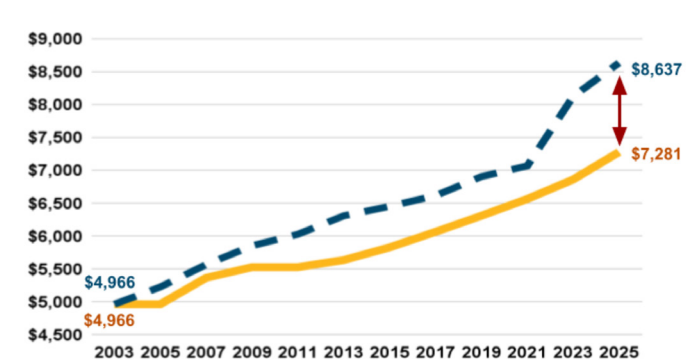


Legislature mandates how district spends much of state funding

In 2023, the Minnesota Legislature allocated significant funding to schools. However, this financial support came with many new mandates that added extra costs to our schools.

While the new funding is appreciated, school districts including PLSAS continue to be underfunded or even unfunded by the state. If state funding levels would have kept pace over the past several years, PLSAS would have received at least \$9 million more last year alone.

State Basic Education Funding, Per Student (2003-2025)



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E-STEM Days



Jeffers Pond students study insects and pollinators and the vital role they play in our ecosystem

Environmental Education - Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (E-STEM) Days are popular learning days that take place in all of our elementary schools. Rain or shine, students spend time outdoors and gain an abundance of knowledge through hands-on activities.

Guests such as Naturalists from the Three Rivers Park District share their knowledge by incorporating the E-STEM approach to instruction and learning. From pond studies and lessons on reptiles and amphibians, to earth worm and soil studies, students display a love of learning for science and the natural world.

It's time for kindergarten



We can't wait to welcome the class of 2037! Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools' kindergarten enrollment for the 2024-25 school year is open. If you haven't enrolled your student yet, please do so today at www.plsas.org/enroll

Recently each elementary school held a Kindergarten Open House where students had an opportunity to ride a school bus and see their school.

Next up: Great Start to Kindergarten assessment days July 29- Aug. 9, 2024. Specific dates and information will come from your child's school.

Engaging community voices



Dr. Michael Thomas
Superintendent

As we navigate the ever-evolving landscape of education, one thing remains constant: the pivotal role strategic planning plays in shaping the future of our schools. At the heart of the process is community engagement and the transformative power it holds.

Strategic planning can be a daunting task. It demands meticulous planning, commitment and, perhaps most importantly, a willingness to engage in difficult conversations. Yet, it is within these interactions that we see real progress in our schools.

In January, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) set out to update its own strategic plan. A large group of more than 50 Core Team members, comprising a diverse mix of parents, students, staff, community members, city leaders and school board members, began working together to form a draft that identifies key priorities and defines the roadmap for learner success in PLSAS. In addition, we held community engagement meetings February - April to gather input from an even wider audience.

Hundreds of comments were gathered, reviewed and synthesized into overarching themes that were again reviewed by the Core Team. As you can imagine, there was a wide variety of ideas, many of which not everyone could agree with.

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www.plsas.org

Congratulations 2024 retirees



Laurie Davis-Friedges
Hidden Oaks Middle School
Special Education Teacher
24 years of service



Catherine Edwardh
Jeffers Pond Elementary
Kids' Company Assistant
23 years of service



Trodee Jore
Edgewood School
Early Childhood Teacher
26 years of service



Sasha Kuznetsov
Hidden Oaks Middle School
Principal
18 years of service



Lorrie Niemann-Pederson
Glendale Elementary
Kids' Co. Asst, Student
Support & Noon Supervisor
12 years of service



Janet Olson
Five Hawks, Redtail Ridge,
Hidden Oaks, Twin Oaks
Occupational Therapist
15 years of service



Julie Pyle
Hidden Oaks Middle School
Art Teacher
33 years of service



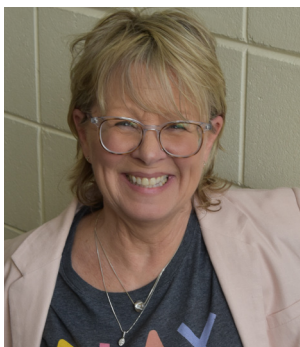
Linda Roach
Child Nutrition Services
Administrative Assistant
33 years of service



Gina Schumacher
Glendale Elementary
2nd Grade Teacher
27 years of service



Maria Sullivan
Redtail Ridge Elementary
5th Grade Teacher
23 years of service



Kristi Tsalhis
Edgewood School
Speech & Language Pathologist
17 years of service



Kathryn Winkelman
Hidden Oaks Middle School
FACS Teacher
3 years of service

Not Pictured: Deb Beuch, Dale Boltz, Candace Jenkins, Mary Lezer, Lori Nowacki, Jeff Panitzke

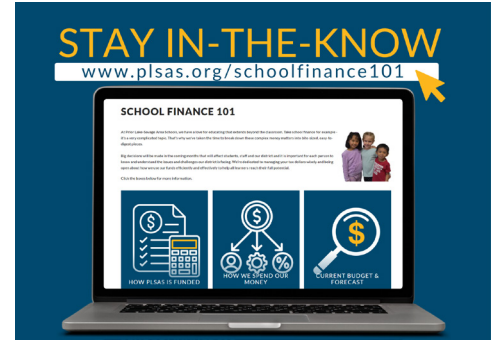
Budget planning from Page 1

District 'per student spending' well below state average

PLSAS manages taxpayer dollars wisely with the educational cost per student nearly \$2,500 below the state average. While this shows we spend tax dollars wisely, it also highlights a challenge: we lack the necessary funding to address priorities identified by many in our community, such as improving safety measures in our schools, enhancing personalized learning experiences and expanding career pathway opportunities for students.

School finance website created to share budget information

At Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools, we have a love for educating that extends beyond the classroom. Take school finance for example - it's a very complicated topic. That's why we've taken the time to break down those complex money matters into bite-sized, easy-to-digest pieces. We have put together information in an easy-to-understand format on our website that explains how we are funded, how we spend our money and our current budget and forecast. You can visit www.plsas.org/schoolfinance101 for more information.



Survey results provide valuable insights about district

Every two years our district works with a research firm to conduct a community-wide phone survey about PLSAS. The results are in and have provided valuable insights. Here are just a few highlights:

<p>Personalized Learning Almost 90% agree PLSAS meets the learning needs of all or most students</p>	<p>Safety and Security Over 90% say that PLSAS provides a safe and secure environment for students and staff</p>	<p>Community Pride 81% indicate they are proud of PLSAS and would recommend the district to friends</p>	<p>Communication Effectiveness Almost 80% agree PLSAS does a good job of communicating important issues and decisions</p>
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PLSAS earns financial reporting award

Our district has once again earned the Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting award from the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) International. Our district has been an award recipient for the past 15 years!

According to ASBO, PLSAS earned the Certificate after providing a high quality Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the fiscal year-end 2023. This award represents a significant achievement and reflects our commitment to transparency and high-quality financial reporting.

Attainment of the Certificate signifies that the district has met the level of excellence required by the ASBO and is a testament to the integrity and technical competence of our district's business staff.

DID YOU KNOW? PLSAS provides a Financial Dashboard offering real-time district financial data, including high-level charts and detailed reports for schools and programs: plsas.org/financials

PLSAS holds Town Hall Meetings on School Finance twice per year to engage with the community and explain the budgeting process. Meetings are recorded and posted at plsas.org/events

Community Partner Awards Celebration

PLSAS Community Education held its inaugural Annual Community Partner Awards Celebration on April 18. We proudly recognized several outstanding staff and community members for their exceptional service and contributions to our School District and community. Congratulations to all the deserving award recipients!

In addition to the award recipients, Community Education Advisory Council members were recognized with a certificate for volunteering their time and their dedication to serving our community. Advisory Council members include: Lisa Atkinson, Dan Brettschneider, Connie Carlson, Mary Frantz, Steve Hart, Allison Hopkins, Michelle Miller, and Leanne Weyrauch.

Anchored in the Laker Way Award
Linda Carlson, Kaitlin Hauck, Renee Hogen, Trodee Jore, Laken Meyer, Deb Tribby and Brandon Weideman

Outstanding Service Award
Gina Fern, Gina Hendrickson, Amanda Sales and Martha Walz

Outstanding Community Partner Award
Dar Brooks

Outstanding Youth Service Award
Emerson Tabatt

Happy 50-year Anniversary ECFE

Did you know that Minnesota is the only state in the nation offering Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) programming through public schools? Our state is also unique in that it requires its early childhood teachers and parent educators to be formally licensed. Now celebrating its 50-year anniversary, Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS) is reflecting on the evolution of ECFE.

Rooted in a commitment to nurturing families and fostering the healthy development of children, ECFE has evolved over the years but has always stayed true to its core mission to support and strengthen families - the first and most important teacher in a young child's life.

ECFE supports families with children from birth to kindergarten entrance offering classes, events, home visits, parenting education, guided play for children and resource information. Visit ew.plsas.org for more information.





Visit www.plsas.org/strategicplan for details

Community voices from page 1

Still, in the realm of education, where diverse perspectives converge, embracing these difficult conversations is not merely an option but a necessity. Whether it's addressing disparities in academic achievement or confronting systemic inequities, these discussions are where meaningful change happens.

At the end of every Core Team meeting, we ask the group what their key takeaways are. After our April meeting, we heard things like, "The Core Planning Team leaned into tough/robust conversations," "Space was provided for differing opinions/values/perspectives to be openly expressed and respected," and "Trust is growing in the Core Planning Team."

We have also learned that amid the challenges lie opportunities for celebration. Throughout our process, one of the questions we asked stakeholders was what they believe is going well in PLSAS. Through these discussions we were able to witness the triumphs that arise when our communities unite in pursuit of a common goal. From the milestones of student achievement to innovative programs, these moments are also guiding our strategic goals forward.

What we have also found to be an important part of effective strategic planning is our capacity to listen. In the pursuit of educational excellence, we recognize that the solutions to our most pressing challenges do not reside solely within the confines of our boardroom or administrative offices. Rather, they are embedded within the lived experiences of those we serve.

Engaging community voices is not merely a checkbox on the strategic planning agenda; it is a fundamental principle that supports our commitment to inclusive governance. By fostering partnerships with parents, students, staff and community members, we not only cultivate a sense of ownership but also gather the collective feedback needed to bring meaningful change. Moreover, the benefits of community engagement extend far beyond the confines of the planning process itself. When stakeholders see their voices reflected in the practices of their schools, trust is fostered, relationships are strengthened and a sense of belonging is realized.

Now in the final stages of our strategic planning process, the school board will take action in June on a new plan to unveil to all stakeholders leading into the 2024/25 school year. By leaning into difficult conversations and amplifying community voices, we know we will pave the way for a future where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

Standard Response Protocol coming in 2024/25



Ensuring the safety of our students and staff remains our top priority. As we prepare for the upcoming school year, we're excited to announce the implementation of a comprehensive Standard Response Protocol (SRP) plan.

Developed by the I Love U Guys Foundation, this protocol provides clear and consistent protocols for responding to a wide variety of emergencies such as fires, lockdowns, evacuations, severe weather, and medical situations. Our emergency response partners are also learning about the SRP, giving us common terminology for improved communication between responders and the school district.

Stay tuned for more details in the coming months as we roll out this important initiative. Together, we're creating a safer environment for everyone in our school community.

School Resource Officers reinstated in PLSAS

In light of recent legislative developments, the Prior Lake and Savage City Councils, along with the School Board, voted to reinstate School Resource Officers (SROs) in Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools (PLSAS).

On March 14, Governor Tim Walz signed a bill into law clarifying use-of-force standards for SROs, addressing concerns surrounding the presence of SROs in educational settings. The clarification in the law resolves previous ambiguities that prompted both cities and the PLSAS School Board to suspend their joint powers agreement for the SRO program until clear direction was provided from the state.

Officer Baker serves at the middle schools, while Officer Kelch is based at Prior Lake High School. Throughout this school year both police departments continually provided support by patrolling our schools during the school day and after school hours.



Community Education offers a variety of classes and events for all ages. Registration is now open for our Summer session. Visit www.priorlakesavagece.com or call 952-226-0310 for more information

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24-25
SCHOOL
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Students sign National Letters of Intent

Congratulations to these six Prior Lake High School student-athletes who signed National Letters of Intent (NLI) this spring. The NLI is a document used to indicate a student athlete's commitment to participate at an NCAA college or university.



Finn Bloomquist - Wrestling - UW-Eau Claire; Annaliese Cundiff - Diving - Air Force Academy; Lauren Domer - Cheer - University of Minnesota Twin Cities; Isabelle Dwire - Dance - University of St. Thomas; Kyla Nauertz - Cheer - University of Minnesota Twin Cities; Alexis Tuma - Volleyball - Bethel University

Athena Award winner



Annaliese Cundiff,
2024 Athena Award winner

Congratulations to Prior Lake High School senior, Annaliese Cundiff, on receiving the 2024 Athena Award for athletic achievement.

Annaliese has participated on the PLHS Swim & Dive, and Track & Field teams for four years where she earned a Varsity letter in both sports in each one of those years. She has achieved 11 diving records and holds the Section 2AA diving record. She was also named captain of both teams during her senior year. Annaliese has been a Board Scholar for the past three years, and is also on the National Honor Society.

After high school, Annaliese plans to attend the Air Force Academy where she will be a member of the dive team while majoring in Political Science and minoring in German.

Are you new to the district?



Welcome to Prior Lake-Savage Area Schools!

If you have school-age children, you can enroll them online at www.plsas.org/enroll or visit the District Services Center, 4540 Tower Street SE in Prior Lake.

For more information, call 952-226-0000. We look forward to welcoming your child into our school district as a Laker!

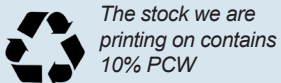
Become a Laker!
Enroll today at www.plsas.org/enroll

Connect with us

To get more news, photos and events, check out our social media channels.



facebook.com/PLSAS
instagram.com/isd719
youtube.com/isd719



About this Newsletter

For questions or comments regarding *Laker Connections*, contact Kristi Mussman, Director of Communications, kmussman@plsas.org or 952-226-0014

Our mission is to educate all learners to reach their full potential as contributing and productive members of our ever-changing global community.

2024 Board of Education

Chair
Mary Frantz

Vice-Chair/Clerk
Amy Bullyan

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PLHS Shines at the South Suburban Conference Visual Arts Exhibition



L to R, back row: Kristi Malmgren, Emersyn Wilson, Avery Thurston, Brian Perry, Kally Herdering and Steven Showalter. L to R, front row: Daniel Stordahl, Aubrie Sutherland, Abby Johnson, Brandon Kaisersatt, Abigail Carr and Maksym Khutorianski

Ten talented students from Prior Lake High School participated in the 38th Annual South Suburban Conference Visual Arts Exhibition, showcasing artwork from various schools in the conference. During the Awards Ceremony, four students were honored for their exceptional work.

Emersyn Wilson (11th grade) received the Normandale Award of Excellence for her charcoal piece titled, "Love for Father, Grandfather and those who came before." Aubrie Sutherland (10th grade) earned an Award of Excellence for her charcoal and pastel piece titled, "...but he's hungry." Daniel Stordahl (12th grade) was also recognized with an Award of Excellence for his digital art piece titled, "Caesar Departs from Rome." Additionally, Orest Kolesnik received an Award of Achievement for his digital photography piece titled, "The Movement."



Scan the QR code to view student art work



Laker Educational Foundation

Each year, the Laker Educational Foundation offers Teacher Tributes for graduating seniors along with Gratitude Greetings. It's a thoughtful way to say "thanks" and teachers and support staff are thrilled when they receive one.

For every tax-deductible donation of \$30 made to the Laker Educational Foundation, your chosen staff member(s) will receive a personalized Gratitude Greeting or Teacher Tribute, and a \$25 gift card to a local restaurant of your choice.

The deadline for donations is May 28th. Visit www.lakereducationalfoundation.com