

# Spotlight

Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools



**DISTRICT196**  
One District. Infinite Possibilities.

Summer 2024 | Volume 64 • Number 4

At District 196, the sky's the limit. That's because our committed team of educators is dedicated to helping learners explore the outer limits of their vast potential.

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## Scholarship surprise!

Apple Valley High School Japanese Teacher **Satomi Ariga** and senior **Megan Nguyen** shared a moment of joy after Ariga surprised Nguyen with news that she had been selected as a recipient of a 2024 Wallin Scholarship. Minnesota-based Wallin Education Partners provides high-potential students from low-income backgrounds with the financial aid, advising, and other support they need to succeed in college. Nguyen will study computer science and data science at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. "I felt so fortunate to witness one of Megan's happiest moments in high school," Ariga said. Nguyen was one of five Apple Valley seniors who received the surprise scholarship news in April (see p.11).

## Bolsoni knows 196 and is ready to lead district forward



After interviewing three finalists and deliberating publicly during a special meeting April 23, the District 196 School Board unanimously selected Director of Secondary Education **Michael Bolsoni** to be the district's next superintendent. On July 1, he will replace **Mary Kreger**, who is retiring at the end of this school year after serving as superintendent of the state's third-largest district for the last six years (see p.3).

Bolsoni was selected over two other finalists the board interviewed, **Thomas Ahart**, an independent consultant and former superintendent of the Des Moines Public Schools, and **Latanya Daniels**, assistant superintendent of Richfield Public Schools.

"I am thrilled to welcome Michael Bolsoni as the next leader of our District 196 community," Board Chairperson **Cory Johnson** said after the meeting. "Michael brings a wealth of knowledge and experience, commitment to equity and inclusion, and exceptional thought leadership. I am confident he will be an exemplary leader to move our district forward."

Bolsoni has 28 years experience working in District 196, starting in 1996 as a social studies teacher at the School of Environmental Studies. After 11 years teaching, he spent the next five years as a peer leader and instructional coach for the district's Q Comp Program. In 2011, Bolsoni was named assistant administrator to both Valley Middle School and Apple Valley High School. Two years later, he

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## Board wants early learning opportunities expanded

A committee will be meeting this summer to review the district's early learning programs and develop recommendations to improve alignment with K-3 curriculum and how to more than double the number of early learners attending preschool in District 196 in the next few years.

At the June 10 School Board meeting, Community Education Director **Khia Bruse** reported that the district's Connections Preschool program started in 2012 with two sections at one school and has grown to 29 sections in 12 schools this year. However, despite a waiting list of more than 200 students, a lack of space in elementary schools has prevented the district from growing the program further.

Currently, District 196 provides preschool to 20% of 4-year-olds and 5% of 3-year-olds, compared to 40% and 14% in comparable districts. Bruse said the goal is for District 196 to serve 50% of 4-year-olds and 25% of 3-year-olds.

Increasing the number of students served has not been the issue for Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), which the district is required to provide for students with more complex needs. Special Education Director **Janet Fimmen** said ECSE enrollment has grown by 200 students, or approximately 30% over

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## Infinite Possibilities

District 196 is nationally recognized for providing boundless opportunities in which students can learn and grow. Whether they have an affinity for academics, arts or athletics, our goal is to expose students to the infinite possibilities within the district and throughout our communities. Together, we encourage them each day to pursue excellence as they experience their exciting journey along the road of life.

### Spotlight Newsletter

This quarterly publication is mailed to every household in District 196 to inform parents and other residents about district news.

Send comments on **Spotlight** to [tony.taschner@district196.org](mailto:tony.taschner@district196.org)



### District 196 Day at the Capitol

Superintendent **Mary Kreger** presented the district's legislative priorities to **Reagan Greene**, education policy advisor for Governor Walz, during a meeting in the Governor's Reception Room at the Minnesota Capitol Feb. 14. Kreger led a group of 16 student, citizen, and staff members of the district's Legislative Advisory Council on a whirlwind schedule of meetings with individual legislators during the LAC's annual District 196 Day at the Capitol. Two citizen positions on the LAC remain open for two-year terms that begin this fall. If interested, send an email to [allyson.garin@district196.org](mailto:allyson.garin@district196.org).

## School Board seat up for election, filing period is July 30–August 13

One of the seven at-large positions on the District 196 School Board is up for election in the Nov. 5, 2024 election. The special election is to fill the remaining year of the term of former School Board member **Bianca Virnig**, who resigned in February after she was elected to the state Legislature. The School Board appointed **Leah Gardner** to fill the vacancy until an election for the open seat could be held. The term runs through the first Monday in January 2026.

The two-week filing period for candidates interested in seeking this School Board seat opens Tuesday, July 30 at 7:30 a.m. and runs through Tuesday, Aug. 13, at 5 p.m. All candidates must file during this two-week period in order to be placed on the ballot.

The School Board is responsible for developing policy to ensure the proper care, management and control of district affairs, and supporting the district's mission.

Any individual may be a candidate who:

- is eligible to vote in Minnesota;
- would be at least 21 years old upon assuming office;
- is a resident of the school district for at least 30 days before the election, and
- is not a sex offender who has been convicted of an offense for which registration is required.

Affidavits of candidacy are available during office hours (7:30 a.m.–4 p.m., Monday through Friday) in the Superintendent's Office of Independent School District 196, 3455 153rd St. W., Rosemount. Completed affidavits of candidacy must be filed at the Superintendent's Office by 5 p.m. Aug. 13, along with a \$2 filing fee or a petition with at least 500 signatures of eligible voters in place of the filing fee.

An application signed by at least five voters and filed on behalf of an eligible candidate will also be accepted, if service of a copy of the application has been made on the candidate and proof of service is endorsed on the application being filed. The same filing fee requirements and timeline apply.

Persons considering running for the open position may call the Superintendent's Office at 651-423-7736 for more information or to schedule an informational meeting.

### NONDISCRIMINATION NOTICE:

As required by Title IX and other state and federal nondiscrimination laws, District 196 does not discriminate in employment or in any of its education programs and activities, including vocational opportunities, on the basis of sex, race, religion, color, creed, national origin, marital status, familial status,\* disability, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, gender identity, membership or activity in a local human rights commission,\* age or genetic information.\* District 196 provides equal access to designated youth groups.

The Director of Human Resources, Shelly Monson (651-423-7859 – [shelly.monson@district196.org](mailto:shelly.monson@district196.org)) is the designated Title IX Coordinator and has also been designated to respond to employment-related inquiries regarding the district's non-discrimination policies. The Director of Elementary Education, Jeremy Sorenson (651-423-7782 – [jeremy.sorenson@district196.org](mailto:jeremy.sorenson@district196.org)) and the Director of Secondary Education, Michael Bolsoni (651-423-7712 – [michael.bolsoni@district196.org](mailto:michael.bolsoni@district196.org)) have been designated to respond to student-related inquiries regarding the district's non-discrimination policies. The Director of Special Education, Janet Fimmen (651-423-7629 – [janet.fimmen@district196.org](mailto:janet.fimmen@district196.org)) has been designated to respond to inquiries concerning the rights of a student with a disability. The mailing address for all directors is 3455 153rd Street W, Rosemount, MN 55068. Title IX inquiries may also be referred to the Assistant Secretary of the US Office for Civil Rights.

\*Asterisked categories are limited to employment-related discrimination and harassment.

## A Fond Farewell

By **Mary M. Kreger**, superintendent

As I write this, I find it hard to believe that my time as your superintendent is coming to an end. Over the past six years, we have accomplished so much together. From implementing new educational programs and advancing technology in our classrooms to improving our facilities and focusing on the advancement of equity and inclusion in our spaces, the progress we've made is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our entire community. Of course, our journey has not been without challenges. Most notably, the pandemic tested our resilience and adaptability in ways we never anticipated. Yet, we embraced new ways of teaching and learning, supported each other through difficult times, and emerged stronger than before.



I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the exceptional staff who go above and beyond every day to serve our students. To the parents and community members, your support and involvement have been crucial to our success. To our students, thank you for inspiring me with your curiosity, resilience, and potential. And to the School Board, your visionary leadership has been instrumental in guiding us forward. Together, we have all built a strong foundation to remain committed to our shared mission of educating, developing, and inspiring students for lifelong success.

As I move on to the next chapter of my life, I am filled with hope for the future of District 196. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your superintendent. Thank you for the opportunity to be a part of your lives.



### Dakota United sweeps adapted softball state titles

The Dakota United Hawks adapted softball teams won both championships at this year's state tournaments May 18 in Chanhassen. In the PI division, the Hawks defeated long-time rival Robbinsdale/Hopkins/MoundWest 5-4 in the championship game. In the CI division, the Hawks won by the same 5-4 score over Burnsville/Farmington/Lakeville in the title game. Members of the PI team (top photo) are **Dominik Albus, Bryce Andrews, Jae Bahma, Dylan Burns, Amisha Etter, Liv Grossbauer, Bennett Herrmann, Sam Holland, Sammy Jordheim, Reece Martin, Cayden Needham, Foreign Rollins, Ben Schussler, and Chloe Shibata**. Etter, Martin and Needham were named to the All-Tournament Team. **Brett Kosidowski** is the head coach and assistant coaches are **Scott Kunze** and **Doug Wattson**. Members of the CI team are **Sam Cluff, Henry Eisele, Logan Healy, Kyle Jacobson, Myles Johnson, Ada Kramer, Chelsea Ludvigson, Mark Manwarren, Colin Price, Makai Smith, Natalie Sole, Jacob Staats, Delaina Van Doren, and Nick Vaughn**. Jacobson, Manwarren and Price were named to the All-Tournament Team. **Scott Oxley** is the head coach and assistant coaches are **Jeff Anderson** and **Jenni Klotz**.

## Rosemount's Larson named Minnesota Juvenile Officer of the Year for work in schools

Rosemount Police Officer **Paul Larson**, who serves as school resource officer (SRO) for Rosemount Middle School and High School, was recently named Juvenile Officer of the Year by the Minnesota Juvenile Officers Association. The award recognizes one outstanding officer each year for going above and beyond the call and serving as a role model for how to effectively work with students.

"Paul has done an amazing job supporting a safe and secure environment and building positive relationships with students, staff, and parents," Rosemount High School Principal **Pete Roback** wrote in support of Larson's nomination. "He is incredibly visible, engaged, and proactive in everything he does."

"He set the tone with a high standard of service," Rosemount Police Chief **Mikael Dahlstrom** wrote about Larson, who joined the department in 2021. In his nomination letter, Dahlstrom praised Larson for becoming a role model at the school by approaching each day with optimism, compassion, and a strong work ethic. He wrote that one student remarked, "Mr. Larson makes kids want to be police officers."

Dahlstrom shared stories of Larson eating lunch with struggling students, teaching history classes about the Fourth Amendment (unreasonable search and seizure), and pitching in to mop the lunchroom floor. Larson also helped start a district-wide "First Responders Club" for students that meets monthly to learn about law enforcement, fire, and emergency services.

"Being an SRO is the most gratifying position I've held in law enforcement," Larson said. "Watching the students grow, develop their conflict resolution skills, and mature into adults is tremendous to witness and be a part of."

Eight officers from the Rosemount, Apple Valley and Eagan police departments, and the Dakota County Sheriff's Office serve as SROs in the district's six middle schools, four comprehensive high schools, the Area



**Paul Larson** is one of eight school resource officers who work to maintain a safe and supportive learning environment in District 196 schools.

Learning Center, and Dakota Ridge School. The district has partnered with these departments for many years to have SROs in its secondary schools. At the start of last school year, however, the police chiefs reluctantly removed their SROs from the schools because of a change in law about use of prone restraint and related liability concerns. The SROs returned to schools after just a few days, when additional guidance from the Attorney General offered a temporary solution.

Finding a permanent solution to ensure SROs will be in schools was

one of the district's main legislative priorities in the recently completed 2024 session. Legislators worked on the issue last fall and early winter, and were able to approve the necessary changes the first week of the session.

Students overwhelmingly support having police officers in their schools. In the 2022 Minnesota Student Survey, more than 90% of students in District 196 and statewide answered "yes" to the statement, "I believe it is a good idea to have an SRO or police officer at our school."

### Bolsoni

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became assistant principal at Apple Valley High, then served as principal from 2016 to 2019, spearheading implementation of the school's E3 STEM Program and overseeing a significant school renovation project before he was named director of secondary education in 2019.

In addition to overseeing the district's middle schools and high schools, as a director Bolsoni helped develop and present two successful referendum election campaigns, was part of a team that led the district through the challenges of the pandemic, and has been instrumental in supporting efforts to enhance the district's American Indian Education Program.

"I will continue to be a champion for equitable, student-centered outcomes, and will lead collaboratively around our strategic priorities to achieve the mission of educating, developing, and inspiring our students for lifelong success," Bolsoni said.

Bolsoni holds a specialist degree in educational leadership from Minnesota State University, Mankato, and a master's degree in education from the University of Minnesota.

## Graduation rate increases slightly, but gaps persist between groups of students

The four-year graduation rate for District 196 students as a whole increased slightly in 2023, from 88.5% in 2022 to 88.7%, and was 5.4% higher than the statewide rate, according to graduation data released by the Minnesota Department of Education this spring.

Graduation rates increased for American Indian, Asian, Black and Hispanic students in District 196 last year, as well as for students in poverty and those receiving English Learner services, but gaps persist between the graduation rates for White students and other groups of students.

Of the 2,373 District 196 seniors included in the 2023 graduation data, 2,104 (88.7%) graduated in four years. Statewide in 2023, the graduation rate for all students decreased 0.3% to 83.3%.

The state goal by 2025 is for all school districts to have a graduation rate of at least 90% for all students and at least 85% for each group of students. In 2023, District 196 met or exceeded the state average for each of the student groups and met

the state goal for Asian and White students, and students who are two or more races. In District 196 in 2023:

- 76.3% of American Indian/Alaskan Native students graduated compared to 61.3% statewide;
- 94.8% of Asian students graduated compared to 85.4% statewide;
- 84.5% of Black students graduated compared to 72.1% statewide;
- 77.5% of Hispanic students graduated compared to 69.2% statewide;
- 91.5% of White students graduated compared to 88.7% statewide;
- 85.2% of students who are of two or more races graduated compared to 80.3% statewide;
- 72.1% of students receiving English Learner services graduated compared to 63.4% statewide;
- 65.6% of students receiving special education services graduated compared to 65.6% statewide, and
- 78.8% of students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals graduated compared to 71.9% statewide.

Students who graduated in the Class of 2023 were in 9th grade when the COVID-19 pandemic started in spring 2020, and were sophomores for the school year most disrupted by shifting learning models and limited in-person learning. A larger number of high school students struggled during the pandemic years and fell behind on credits needed for graduation. District 196 high schools increased focus on credit recovery work during the pandemic and continue to support students who need to make up credits to get on track for graduation in four years.

The state also shared seven-year graduation rates as part of its annual release of graduation data. The seven-year rate for District 196 in 2023 was 92.96%, down slightly from 2022, but 4.2% higher than the district's four-year rate in 2020 when some of these students could have first graduated. Similarly, the seven-year rate of 84.9% for special education students in 2023 is 22.4% higher than the four-year graduation rate for special education students in 2020.

## Calendar changes approved for this school year

This spring, the School Board approved a committee recommendation to make changes to the 2024-25 calendar to convert three student contact days to professional development days for staff, with no school for all students. The three additional days are needed to provide teacher training required under the Reading to Ensure Academic Development (READ) Act, which was approved by the Minnesota Legislature last year.

The three days that are now no-school days for all students are Monday, Nov. 11, 2024; Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025 (day after the Presidents Day holiday), and Monday, March 31, 2025. After converting these days, the district still remains well above state requirements for instructional hours at each level.

The other change to the 2024-25 calendar eliminated kindergarten

transition days, two kindergarten-only half days in late August used to help students transition to school. The administration believes kindergarteners' transition to school can be supported in individual scheduled meetings with teachers during elementary assessment days Aug. 28 and 29, which are also the first days of school for middle and high school students. As a result of eliminating kindergarten transition days, all elementary students will start school on the same day this fall, Tuesday, Sept. 3. Under the previous calendar, the first full day for kindergarten would have been Sept. 4.

The complete 2024-25 school year calendar for District 196 is available at [District196.org](http://District196.org).

## Homeschools required to report to district

Families living in District 196 who plan to homeschool their children for the 2024-25 school year must submit a completed Compulsory Instruction Report to the director of Community Education by Oct. 1.

Information about the report and other programs and services will be addressed during a virtual meeting Aug. 20 at 3:30 p.m. Families who are already registered as a homeschool will get an email invitation to participate. If you are not already registered as a homeschool and would like to be invited to the meeting, call 651-423-7722 with contact information.

More information is available at [District196.org](http://District196.org), under Academics, Homeschool and Nonpublic Education, or call 651-423-7722.

## New coordinator experienced in student transportation

This spring, the district said goodbye to one transportation coordinator, who retired after more than 25 years of service to the department, and welcomed their new coordinator, who comes with more than 25 years experience in transportation.



**Michael Turitto** was most recently the director of transportation for White Bear Lake Area Schools, where he had worked since 2015. Prior to that, he was director of transportation for Technology and information Educational Services in St. Paul for 10 years, and supervisor of pupil transportation and student information for Minnetonka Public Schools from 1998 to 2005.

As transportation coordinator for District 196, Turitto is responsible

for creating safe and efficient transportation services for students, including bus route planning and maintenance oversight. With more than 300 employees and 225 vehicles, District 196 operates the largest district-owned school bus fleet in the state. These employees and buses travel nearly three million miles each year, transporting more than 23,000 students twice every school day, from and to more than 5,500 bus stops located throughout the district.

"I'm excited to bring my experience to District 196 and to be a part of a team that is designing the future of education," Turitto said. "The District 196 community has always been a leader in education and I am thrilled to be a part of that."

Turitto has a bachelor of science degree in elementary education and sociology from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

## Firpo promoted to lead Facilities Department

**Sam Firpo** started working as the district's new facilities coordinator in April to fill the retirement of **Mike Schwanke**.



Firpo started working for District 196 in 2003 as a custodian at Apple Valley High School and had been the building engineer at the School of Environmental Studies since 2016.

"I look forward to using my experience working in the schools to help create a more sustainable and efficient culture for all district buildings," Firpo said.

As coordinator, Firpo will be responsible for overseeing more than 4.5 million square feet of space in the 39 building sites in the district, including schools, learning centers, and offices.



# JOIN OUR TEAM!

District 196 is a Forbes Best-in-State employer.



Paraprofessionals | Custodians | Bus Drivers  
Nutrition Services Associates | and more!



**APPLY NOW!**

## New East Lake Elementary principal has varied experience, from music to culinary arts

This spring, the district hired **Emily Wyse Moore** to be the next principal of East Lake Elementary School. She will start in the position



July 1 to replace **Miles Haugen**, who is retiring after a 40-year career in education, including 35 years in District 196 and the last seven as the first principal of East Lake.

Wyse Moore was the assistant principal of Excelsior Elementary School for the last two years. Prior to that, she worked for the Eastern Carver County Schools

for 10 years, first as a culinary arts teacher, then a personalized learning coach, and was lead instructional coach for elementary when she accepted her current position as assistant principal with the Minnetonka School District in 2022.

"It is an honor to be selected as principal in District 196," said Wyse Moore. "I look forward to joining the East Lake community and meeting students, parents, and staff in the coming months."

Wyse Moore started her career in education in 2005 as an elementary band director with the Edina Public

Schools, where she graduated from high school. In 2010, she moved to Australia and pursued her passion for cooking. She taught home economics/hospitality classes at high schools in Australia for parts of two school years before returning to Minnesota in 2012 to teach culinary arts at the Integrated Arts Academy in Chaska.

Wyse Moore has a bachelor's degree in music education from the University of Colorado, Boulder, and earned her masters in educational leadership and specialist degree in school administration from Concordia University-Saint Paul.

## Hughes to lead Instruction and Achievement Department

Thomas Lake Elementary School Principal **Rachel Hughes** was selected to be the district's new director of Instruction and



Achievement, formerly Teaching and Learning. On July 1, she will replace **Steve Troen**, who is retiring after a 35-year career in District 196 as a middle school teacher, principal and director for the last 15 years.

Hughes has been principal at Thomas Lake since coming to District 196 in 2020 from District 191, where she had been an associate middle school principal and principal of Sioux Trail Elementary School. She started her career in 2004 as a science teacher in the South Washington County Schools, where she also served as a middle school dean of students for six years before leaving in 2013 for an assistant principal position at Lakeville South High School. She worked in Lakeville for three years before returning to the middle school level in Burnsville.

In her four years at Thomas Lake, Hughes led development and implementation of a data-driven school improvement plan that has increased student achievement and fostered an inclusive school

culture that is based in a growth mindset and culturally responsive teaching. In addition to overseeing the department, as director of Instruction and Achievement Hughes will be responsible for helping lead the district through implementation of a structured literacy curriculum and Minnesota Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MnMTSS) for student learning. She will also be a member of the superintendent's cabinet.

"I am honored to take on the role of director of instruction and achievement," Hughes said. "I look forward to continuing our work advancing student success through innovative and inclusive educational practices by establishing an MnMTSS framework that ensures aligned, equitable experiences and increased student achievement in District 196."

### District Job Fair set for August 5

Learn about employment opportunities in District 196, a five-time Forbes' Best-in-State Employer, at the District 196 Job Fair on August 5. On-site interviews will be offered for nutrition services, custodial, bus driver, and paraprofessional positions. More information coming soon at [District196.org](http://District196.org).

## Gonsioroski is ECFS manager

This spring, the district hired **Zachary Gonsioroski** to be the new manager of the district's Early Childhood Family Services (ECFS) program.



Gonsioroski has been the assistant administrator at Northview Elementary School for the last two years. Prior to that, he was the assistant administrator for Early Childhood Special Education, and a teacher and instructional math coach at Rosemount Elementary School.

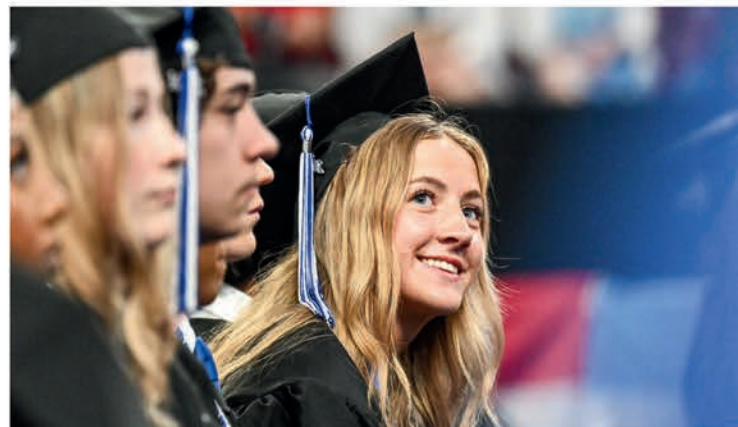
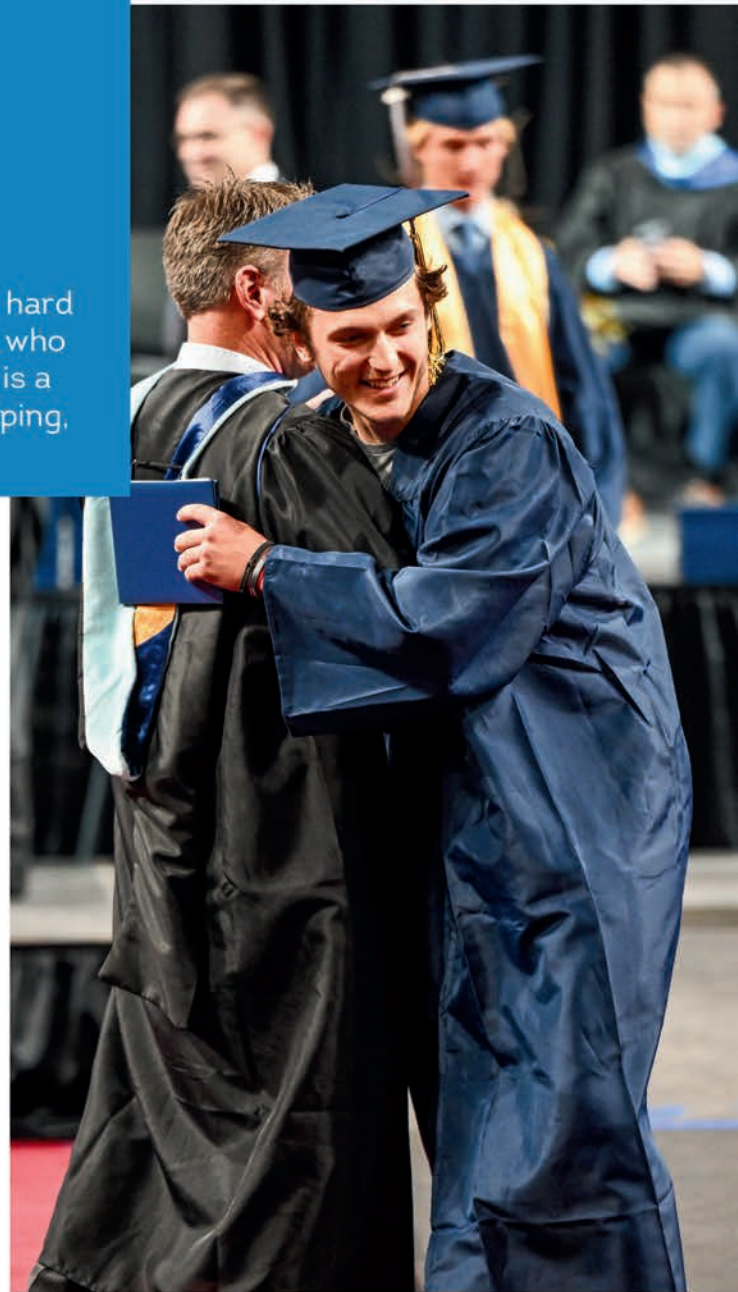
As ECFS manager, Gonsioroski will lead the Early Childhood Family Education Connections Preschool and Family School programs, which provide opportunities for families with children ages birth to grade three.

"I am so honored and grateful for the opportunity to join this team and to support the growth and success of our district's youngest learners," Gonsioroski said.

Gonsioroski holds a bachelor of arts degree in elementary education and early childhood education from Winona State University, and a master's of education in learning design and technology from Saint Mary's University.

# CONGRATS, Class of 2024!

The 2024 commencement ceremonies celebrated the hard work and determination of more than 2,000 students who reached this significant milestone. Their achievement is a testament to our shared mission of educating, developing, and inspiring students for lifelong success.







**RELIVE THE  
EXCITEMENT!**

Visit [youtube.com/district196tv](https://youtube.com/district196tv) to relive the pomp and circumstance!

## District 196 students win three of 13 titles and 23 total medals at state speech

District 196 students won three of 13 state championships and 23 of the 104 total medals awarded at this year's Class AA state speech tournament in April.

Medals are awarded for places one through eight in the final round of each of the 13 categories of competition at the state tournament. In the team sweepstakes, Apple Valley High School finished runner-up to Moorhead High School, and Eastview and Eagan high schools finished in third and fourth, respectively, among all Class AA schools with students participating in the tournament.

Apple Valley students won nine medals, including state champion **Mfaz Mohamed Ali** in original oratory. Eastview students won six total medals, including state champions **Sahiti Atluri**, who repeated in creative expression, and **Arkhya Arikath** and **Max Espena** in duo interpretation. Eagan students won eight total medals.

State runners-up are Apple Valley students **Zoey Meier** in informative speaking and **Brandon Vergara Villalobos** in prose; Eastview students **Tess Douma** in humorous interpretation, and **Monisha**



**Arkhya Arikath** and **Max Espena** of Eastview High School reacted after receiving their state championship medals in duo interpretation.

**Suresh** and **Neal Rajvansh** in duo interpretation, and **Maddie Maack** of Eagan in extemporaneous reading.

Third-place medals were awarded to Apple Valley students **Elli Stumbo** in informative speaking, and **Aquilla Dunn** and **Isaiah Craig** in duo interpretation, and Eagan students **Olma Wakjira** in poetry and **Jada Lapastora** in storytelling

District 196 students who medaled in places four through eight are as follows:

**4th Place** - Two medals: **Sherry Muthiga** of Eagan in dramatic interpretation and **Claire Murray** of Eastview in extemporaneous reading.

**5th Place** - Three medals: **Isra Yasin** of Apple Valley in original oratory; **Aayush Pandey** of Eagan in extemporaneous speaking, and **Max Huberty** of Eastview in discussion.

**6th Place** - Two medals: Apple Valley students **Theo Pollock** in humorous interpretation and **Kenza Benlamlih** in great speeches.

**7th Place** - Two medals: **Naema Mohamed** of Apple Valley in extemporaneous reading and **Varshini Bomma** of Eagan in informative speaking.

**8th Place** - Two medals: Eagan students **Alexandra Fierst** in humorous interpretation and **Saanvi Seth** in great speeches.

A total of 56 District 196 students qualified for 52 spots at this year's state tournament and the 26 named above advanced to the final round in their category to earn medals.



Apple Valley High School took second in the team sweepstakes, led by top finishers **Zoey Meier**, second in informative speaking; state champion **Mfaz Mohamed Ali** in original oratory, and **Brandon Vergara Villalobos**, runner-up in prose.

### Student handbook to be sent by email in August

In mid-August, all families with a child enrolled in District 196 will receive an email with a link to the *Overview of Student Rights and Responsibilities* handbook for the 2024-25 school year. When the message arrives, families are encouraged to take time to review the handbook with their children and expectations for their behavior at school.

The handbook is reviewed and updated annually to ensure compliance with state and federal notification requirements and school district policy. Suggested changes to the handbook were solicited from school and district department staff, recommendations were developed by the administration, and then approved by the School Board.

Most of the revisions to this year's handbook are to conform with statutory changes made by the 2023 Legislature, including a notification related to lead in drinking water, the addition of gender identity as a protected class, numerous changes to student disciplinary rights and processes, and changing the age of eligibility for special education from 21 to 22.

The table of student behaviors was reorganized this year into seven general subject areas to make it easier for families and staff to find what they are looking for. The seven areas are: 1) abusive, discriminatory, threatening or bullying behaviors; 2) disruptive or nuisance behaviors; 3) physical behaviors; 4) property-related behaviors; 5) sexual, explicit or lewd behaviors; 6) tobacco, alcohol or chemicals, and 7) weapons or prohibited materials.

In years past, the district mailed a copy of the handbook to each family in the district, one per family. By delivering it electronically this year, the district will save approximately \$50,000 on printing and postage costs. The handbook will be posted on the district website in three languages, and some printed copies will be available for request at each school.



The five Wallin Scholarship recipients from Apple Valley High School this year are seniors (left to right) **Vivian Chen, Ellen Stumbo, Amanda Bren, Megan Nguyen** and **Samira Mohamed**.

### Nonprofit surprises grateful graduates with scholarships

On a sunny Tuesday morning this spring, five Apple Valley High School students made their way to the school's theater for what they thought was going to be an interview for a teacher appreciation week video.

One by one, they arrived and were mic'd up by the crew before sitting down to start the interview. Each shared a few sentences about a teacher they appreciated. Then, to their surprise, that very teacher walked up to them and presented an envelope containing news that they'd been selected to receive a 2024 Wallin Scholarship!

After the emotional reveal, the students shared the impact of the scholarship, expressing how it would enable them to attend school and focus on learning with less burden of financial stress. Wallin Education Partners is a Minnesota based college and career success program that provides high-potential students from low-income backgrounds with the financial aid, advising, and access scholars need to rise. Each scholar will receive up to \$16,000 over four years, in addition to advising, career programming and access to other support.

This year's class of Wallin scholars come from more than 70 high schools and will be receiving nearly \$7.5 million in support through the scholarships. The five recipients from Apple Valley are **Amanda Bren, Vivian Chen, Samira Mohamed, Megan Nguyen, and Ellen Stumbo**.

"Each student inspires us to continually strive for excellence and champion their success, as they shape their futures and our community," said **Mohamed Sallam**, president and CEO of Wallin Education Partners.

**Win Wallin** was an executive at Pillsbury and CEO of Medtronic. In 1992, he and his wife **Maxine Wallin** established Wallin Education Partners to help students with need overcome the many barriers to earning a college degree. They believed education was the key to making communities more equitable. To date, the nonprofit has provided \$65 million in scholarships and other support to more than 6,000 scholars.



Scan the QR code to watch the emotional surprise video!



### Marking three decades of Panther pride!

The Black Hawk Middle School community is celebrating 30 years in 2024. Black Hawk was the district's fifth middle school when it opened in 1994 on Deerwood Drive just west of Pilot Knob Road in Eagan. Proud students and staff members came together to show their support for Black Hawk's 30-year anniversary. Five elementary schools feed into the Black Hawk attendance area, which feeds into Eagan and Eastview high schools.

## High schools select Students of the Year for 2024

Students of the Year for the Class of 2024 were selected by teachers and administrators at all four comprehensive high schools in District 196 this spring. Students were selected based on their academic performance and participation in specific subject areas during their high school career.

### APPLE VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

**Nora Tsai, Joe O'Brien, Jariah Ratcliff, Ellie Stumbo, Jorge Calvillo, Makayla Johnson, Sarah Schaefer, Sean Litterer, Charles Krohn, Brooks Mertens, Samuel Cluff, Andrew Prochnow, Zuber Mohamed, Orlando Vergara Villalobos, Moises Delgado Bahena, Kevin Aguilar-Elias, and Charlotte Gram.**

### EAGAN HIGH SCHOOL

**Trinity Riordan, Tyler Walkosz, Maria Peterson, Kathia Gonzalez Pichardo, Emma Fetzych, Agustin Moya Belaustegui, Kaira Cullen, Huy Vo, Drew Novak, Alex Newton, Carter Will,**

**Omer Mitha, Brady Sternberg, Louis Hurd, Jacob Olson, Sebastian Esquivel, and Laura Casper.**

### EASTVIEW HIGH SCHOOL

**Awa-Bilan Amarreh, Gabriella Acostancano, Isaac Traynor, Raegan Bates, Isabel Schindler, Athena Zahn, Lucy Warren, Loc Xuan Ngo, Favlin Hetland, Ethan Phua, Connor Barry, Natalie Berry, Scott Needham, Kevin Vo, Sam Kenney, Clare Murray, Vanessa Wright, Kyle Jacobson, Raavi Singh, Jonathan Stauffer, and Chloe Rousseau.**

### ROSEMOUNT HIGH SCHOOL

**Julia Pearson, Yavra Kpetsu, Allison Boche, Chloe Onsgard, Peyton VeDepo, Binty Mansare, Annabelle Jahn, Matteo Pasillas, Gabrielle Hoover, Jacob Storm, Avery Flanders, Mia Nelson, Noah Foster, Michael Thomas, Miriam Dalum, Joshua Ngwendson, Grant Morstad, Ahmad Ali, Landon Bade, and Finn Nowlin.**

## Early learning

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the last 10 years, and finding space to serve these students is becoming increasingly difficult.

"We often talk about the achievement gap and everything we have tried ...," Vice Chairperson **Sachin Isaacs** said. "(Early learning) is perhaps the most under-levered pathway to fixing the achievement gap. This is beyond an ROI conversation. This is a conversation about access to opportunity and equity."

Research shows that early learning, encompassing the years from birth to age five, is foundational for a child's cognitive, social, and emotional growth, Bruse said. These formative years set the stage for lifelong learning and development, establishing critical habits and behaviors that reduce the need for future remedial services, and significantly increase the likelihood of high school graduation and career success.

"I can't stress more my desire to move the narrative from 'as space becomes available' to 'make space available,'" Isaacs said. "We can't be comfortable with the lack of opportunities we are providing our kids. We can't take a passive approach on this, and the next time we see this we have to demand these numbers change. So I would love the committee to put us on the spot. If you want this, this is how we get it. That is what we are elected to do. I am happy to see us moving, I would just want us to move as fast as we responsibly can."

All other board members echoed Isaacs's comments, and said they look forward to seeing the committee's recommendations this fall.

Fimmen said the committee will conduct its review and develop recommendations this summer and fall, then get public input and possibly adjust the recommendations before presenting them to the superintendent's cabinet and ultimately the School Board.

## Capital projects levy will require renewal to continue funding for essential technology

The funding that provides the technology that supports student learning and other critical systems in District 196 comes from a 10-year capital projects levy that was approved by district voters in 2015. The levy and the funding that comes with it – approximately \$8.5 million in 2024-25 – is set to expire after 2025, unless renewed by referendum election or School Board action, if allowed.

Later this year or early 2025, the administration will likely recommend that the School Board consider calling a referendum question to renew the 10-year capital projects levy in the November 4, 2025 scheduled School Board election. That would be the last opportunity to renew the capital projects levy without experiencing a gap in funding. A renewal would be a continuation of these taxes, but not an increase in taxes.

As technology became part of the daily learning experience in our schools, the state did not provide sufficient increases in capital funding or local levy authority to pay for this mission-critical technology. The capital projects levy referendum election is one way the state gives school districts the ability to request additional annual funding for ongoing expenditures like technology hardware and software.

The law limits the length of a capital projects levy to 10 years, meaning districts must repeatedly conduct elections and gain voter approval to continue receiving this essential funding. Since 2017 in Minnesota, 23 school districts have conducted capital projects renewal elections and all 23 have been approved, many with overwhelming majorities.

Similarly, straight renewals of operating levy referendums, which

supplement funding for daily operations, are also approved by voters more than 95% of the time. Based in part on this fact, along with the cost and time of conducting elections, the 2023 Minnesota Legislature approved a law giving school boards the authority to renew an operating levy one time, for up to 10 years. School boards can now renew a previously approved operating levy without conducting an election.

The district made it a legislative priority in the 2024 session to ask for this same school board authority to renew a capital projects levy that would continue but not increase taxes. Bills were introduced to do this, but did not become law in the 2024 session. The same request will likely be one of the district's 2025 legislative priorities.



### Future site of Rosemount Middle School

This photo looking northeast shows land the district is in the process of purchasing from the University of Minnesota to be the future home of Rosemount Middle School. The 75-acre site is located in the southeast corner of Biscayne Avenue (left side) and County Road 42 (top). Director on Special Assignment **Mark Stotts** said the school district and university are still finalizing language, but agree to key business terms of the purchase agreement. The final agreement will be brought to the School Board and University of Minnesota Regents for approval, and it could take until October to close the sale. Because the process of locating available land and purchasing a site has been lengthy, the scheduled opening of Rosemount Middle will likely be delayed up to one year, from fall 2026 to fall 2027. Less than a mile from this site, earthwork has begun on the site of the new elementary school, at the intersection of Akron Avenue and Bonaire Path. Both new school projects are part of the Building Our Future bond referendum that district voters approved in May 2023.

# Congratulations!

A sampling of recent achievements in academics, arts, and athletics

**Lenora Gold** of Black Hawk Middle School finished third in the Twin Cities Regional Spelling Bee. **Rebecca Epstein** of Dakota Hills Middle School and **Zara Khan** of Scott Highlands Middle School also qualified to compete at the event by winning their school bee and scoring in the top 50 in the state in an online exam.

The Eastview High School chess team won the school's second straight state championship this spring.

**Isaac Traynor, Ethan Phua, Jackson McGregor, Kartik Saravanapandi, Nirav Singhal, and Suhaas Pothula** placed in the top 20. Other team members are **Edward Levin, Todd Ostler, Drew Jones, Xander Severson, Nadim Boulos, Tarakesh Rameshkumar, Saharsh Srikanth, Ruven Perera, Logan Konsor, Madhav Narayan, Karthi Sella, Evan Nguyen, and Peter Pham.**

**Dwyne Smith, Jr.** of Apple Valley High School won the 400-meter dash, finished runner-up in the 200-meter dash, and took fourth-place in the 100-meter dash at the boys' state track and field meet in June. Rosemount High School won the team event and had several top individual finishers (*see photo on this page*). Other district students who placed in the final events are **Bryson Mwaura** of Eastview High School, who finished seventh in the 100-meter dash, and Eagan's **Blake Koenen**, third in the 200-meter dash, **Noah Daniel**, sixth in the 800-meter run, the 4x100-meter relay team of **Nicholas Tesdall, Brooklyn Evans, Tyler Sperl**, and Koenen finished fourth, and the 4x400 relay team of **Adam Dorsey, Owen Ford, Jake Sondag**, and Daniel finished in seventh place.

The **Rosemount High School softball team** finished third in the Class AAAA state tournament in early June. After winning their quarterfinal game, the #1-seeded Irish lost in the semifinal round and came back to defeat #2-seeded Forest Lake for third place.

The **Eastview High School baseball team** qualified for the Class AAAA state tournament in June.



## Two straight state team titles for Rosemount boys' track

The Rosemount High School boys' track and field team won its second straight Class AAA team title at the state tournament in June. Senior **Maki Whelan** won an individual state title in the 300-meter hurdles and finished third in the 100-meter hurdles.

The 4x100-meter relay team of **Riddick Collier, Jackson Ganser, Kavari Flowers, and Kwabena Yawson** also earned a third-place finish, as did **Andrew Schultz** in the 3,200-meter run; the 4x400-meter relay team of Whelan, **Levi Cinnamo**, Flowers, and Ganser took fourth; **William Riddel** was fourth in discus throw, and **Jayvon Maternowski** was sixth in high jump.

The **Dakota United Hawks' PI** team won the adapted floor hockey state championship in March, and the CI team took third place in their state tournament.

The **Eagan High School boys' basketball team** took third place in the Class AAAA state tournament in March. It was Eagan's first trip to the state tournament in 19 years and they made it a memorable one. The Wildcats upset #2-seeded Park Center in the quarterfinal round, were defeated by eventual champion Minnetonka in the semifinals, and came back to defeat Cretin Derham Hall in the third-place game. **Alex Schroeffer** and **Liam Madigan** were named to the All-Tournament Team.

The **Rosemount High School girls' basketball team** qualified for the Class AAAA state tournament in March and finished 1-2, losing to Lakeville North for the consolation title.

Five District 196 high school students won silver or gold key awards in the

Scholastic Arts Competition: **Bishesta Amatya** of Eastview High School, four gold key awards in digital arts; **Raegan Bates** of Eastview, gold key in painting; **Aevyn Nguyen** of Eastview, silver key in digital art; **Sarayah Newton** of Apple Valley High School, silver key in ceramics and glass, and **Eddy Corpman** of Eagan High School, silver key in drawing and illustration.

**Tabitha Sentry**, who teaches a network and cybersecurity course at Apple Valley High School, received a Cybersecurity Pipeline Educator of the Year Award from Teach Cyber, a nonprofit devoted to cybersecurity education in secondary schools. Sentry's network and cybersecurity course, part of the district's Career Development Program, offers dual enrollment for college credit.



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## Congratulations

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Six District 196 employees were selected by an employee committee to receive Outstanding Service Awards in 2023-24. They are: **Todd Beach**, teacher on special assignment/social studies teacher, District Office/Eastview High School; **Jan Moynihan**, math teacher, Apple Valley High School; **Elizabeth Perona**, Spanish teacher, Eastview High School; **Mary Spychalla**, gifted and talent development teacher, Valley Middle School of STEM; **Sharon Steinberg**, 10-month secretary, Echo Park Elementary School of Leadership, Engineering and Technology, and **Michelle Zappa**, administrative assistant to the principal, Woodland Elementary School. They were recognized along with this year's retirees at the district's annual Partners in Education banquet in May. **Mitch Snobeck** of Eagan High School was named an Assistant Coach of the



### Educating and inspiring

Deerwood Elementary School student **Kip** achieved a significant milestone this year thanks to his kind and caring bus driver, **John Thomas**. At the start of the school year, Kip needed to use a stroller or lift to get on and off his bus #682. Recognizing Kip's potential, Thomas patiently worked with him to master stair climbing, empowering Kip to get on and off the bus without the stroller or lift.

Year (Class AAA) by the Minnesota Track & Field Coaches Association.

Southview Elementary School Principal

**Christine Evans**

received a Division Leadership

Achievement Award

for the south suburban division of the Minnesota

Elementary School Principals'

Association (MESPA). The award

recognizes principals for their work promoting a positive school culture,

guiding instruction, and providing

leadership at their schools and within MESPA.

Seniors **Grace Alagbo** of Apple Valley High School, **Drew Buslee** of Eagan High School, **Emily Percival** of Eastview High School, and **Ava Thompson** of Rosemount High School were selected by their schools as 2024 Athena Award recipients. The awards are given each year to the outstanding senior female athlete at more than 50 Twin Cities-area high schools for their excellence and achievements in individual and/or team sports.

**Grace Mensink** and **Alexis Olson** of Rosemount High School had a top-10 finish in the buying and merchandising team event at the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) International Career Development Conference in April in Anaheim, Calif.

The following 17 students had top-10 finishes or won an award at the Business Professionals of America (BPA) National Leadership Conference in Chicago this spring: Eagan High School's **Sai Kasireddy**, **Soham Kundu**, **Tyler Walkosz** and **Evan Wodele** in visual design team; **Isaac Bortscheller**, **Jack Corcoran**, **Henry Friend** and **Carter McNally** in virtual event eSports team, and **Eva Abe**, **Sowmik Garishakurti** and **Athira Nair** in virtual event social media marketing campaign team; Eastview High School's **Lana Lei** and **Isabel Schindler** in global marketing team, **Shreyansh Satapathy** in business law and ethics, and **Nirav Singhal** in personal financial management, and Rosemount High School's **Arhith Prem**



in python programming and **Allison Boche** earned the Ambassador Level Torch Award.

The following 27 Eastview High School students earned the opportunity to advance to the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) National Leadership Conference this summer in Seattle: **Himani Mondal**, **Sahiti Atluri**, **Jonica Willete**, **Norah Brusco**, **Avani Marahatta**, **Naomi Cook**, **Reya Rejul**, **Mekdelawit Tesfaye**, **Advika Chaudhari**, **Janhitha Guntimadugu**, **Kaajal Bahl**, **Sarah Yusuf**, **Avery Losie**, **Caden Peltier**, **Savannah Bear**, **Hailey LaCount-Newland**, **Fatimah Yusu**, **Aimee Birmingham**, **Kendyl Thelen**, **Amy Nguyen**, **Abby Ward**, **Emily Ward**, **Evelyn Clark**, **Alyse Bradley**, **Faylin Hetland**, **Mica Nunez**, and **Himani Mondal**.



### A 'thousand cranes' thank you

Shannon Park Elementary School 5th grade student **Lana Lee** posed with a "thousand cranes" she made for the school. "I am thankful for all the teachers and staff who have helped me along the way to be a good and successful student, and made school life something I looked forward to every single day," Lana wrote in a note explaining the gift made of origami papers. "This is a Japanese traditional artwork and symbol of celebration, happiness, peace, and hope."



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Mon. | July 29-Aug. 12 | 6:15-7:15 p.m. | \$29 | Rosemount Elementary

Wed. | July 31-Aug. 14 | 6-7 p.m. | \$29 | Rosemount Elementary

**Adult Graduates**

Seventy-eight adults earned their high school diploma or successfully completed the GED exam in 2023-24. You, too, can begin to achieve your educational goals with the help of our caring and patient teachers.

Summer session begins July 8.

Visit [ce.district196.org/abe](http://ce.district196.org/abe), call 952-431-8316 or email [abe@district196.org](mailto:abe@district196.org) to learn more.



**Celebrate summer with Early Childhood Family Education | ECFE**

ECFE offers a variety of classes designed to help strengthen families through interactive play and relevant, research-based parent education. Visit [ce.district196.org/ecfe](http://ce.district196.org/ecfe).

**Babies: Birth Through 11 Months (Non-Separating, Parents with Babies Only)**

Join other parents of infants and learn how to make the adjustment to 'being a family'. Ask your questions and we will share ideas about building a solid base for your family. Sing songs and play some games too!



Tue. | July 9-30 | 8:30-10 a.m. | 4 sessions | Free | DVLC

Tue. | July 9-30 | 10:30 a.m.-noon | 4 sessions | Free | DVLC

Tue. | July 9-30 | 5:30-7 p.m. | 4 sessions | Free | DVLC

**Project Explore**

Project Explore friends love getting together to cool off on a hot summer evening. The pool is reserved for two nights at the outdoor Redwood Pool in Apple Valley. Bring a swimsuit and towel and join the fun! \*Caregivers can join too! Visit [ce.district196.org/projectexplore](http://ce.district196.org/projectexplore) for more information.



\*No fee for caregivers.

Fri. | July 19 | 7-9 p.m. | \$7 | Redwood Pool

Fri. | Aug. 9 | 7-9 p.m. | \$7 | Redwood Pool

Visit [ce.district196.org](http://ce.district196.org) or call 651-423-7920



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