

# ORONO SCHOOLS

## TODAY



June 2024

## Message from the Superintendent

Dear Orono community,

As we conclude another outstanding school year, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the success we have witnessed across our school community. This year has been marked by numerous achievements, including the successful completion of our Strategic Planning process (see pages 2-3), which sets a clear direction for our future.

While building relationships has long been a strategic goal, the Board-adopted Strategic Plan clearly places broad community connectedness in the spotlight. We invite our community to engage with the district through the Orono Activities Center, Community Education programming, student mentorship



Kristine Flesher, Ed.D.

opportunities, and more. Your role as a supporter of our public school district is valued and appreciated!

Reflecting on the year, I am incredibly proud of our entire team: E-12 teachers, paraprofessionals, child nutrition staff, administrative support, custodial and buildings and grounds teams. Each Orono staff member plays a critical role in maintaining an engaging, safe, clean, and welcoming environment where everyone feels like they belong. Please see the Points of Pride on pages 4-5 for a summary of achievements this year, including remarkable athletic achievements at the conference, section, and state levels.

As we look forward to the 2024-2025 school year, I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. Together, we will continue to build on this year's successes and strive for even greater heights. Thank you for your dedication, hard work, and unwavering commitment to our students and school community.

Wishing you all a restful and enjoyable summer.

## Exemplary Character

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.

Thank you to the Orono Foundation for Education and its generous donors for supporting the district's Character Education program.



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# Orono Schools Strategic Plan

*Where Excellence is a Tradition and a Goal*

More than a year ago, the Orono Schools administrative team and School Board declared 2023-24 a “strategic planning year” with robust plans to make it an unparalleled community engagement effort. The district conducted surveys, held community conversation events at all schools, and sought volunteers to serve on the Core Planning Team. We are so grateful to the students, families, staff, and community members—more than 1,000 individuals in all—who lent their voices during the months-long process. Special thanks to our 31-member Core Planning Team that engaged in several feedback sessions and revisions to ensure all community perspectives were heard. The final product you see here is a **true reflection** of our school community and we are incredibly proud of the results.

For additional details, please visit [www.oronoschools.org/strategic-plan](http://www.oronoschools.org/strategic-plan)

## Vision

*Our highest aspiration*

Orono Schools will inspire lifelong learners and ethical citizens who positively impact our world.

## Mission

*The unique purpose of our school district*

Inspiring and empowering every student to achieve their highest potential through exceptional experiences.

## Strategic Goals

*Desirable end results for students, staff, and the community*

### Scholarship

Through personalized and rigorous learning across all disciplines, we will ensure all students possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to thrive in any post-secondary experience and achieve their life goals.

### Character

We will instill in every child a strong foundation of ethical decision making, responsibility, and integrity, nurturing them to become caring and trustworthy individuals who contribute to their communities.

### Connectedness

We will foster a connected learning community in which empathy, belonging, and strong relationships are cultivated to empower students and staff.

## Values

*The fundamental convictions of our school district*

### Excellence

Strive for the highest quality in everything we do through commitment to continuous improvement.

### Resilience

Develop the grit to meet challenges with courage, perseverance, and determination.

### Relationships

Build healthy connections of trust, respect, care, and understanding in our learning community.

### Inclusion

Embrace unique needs, backgrounds, ideas, and talents.

### Global Perspective

Inspire learners to be engaged and adaptive citizens in our interconnected world.

### Stewardship

Demonstrate accountability through ethical management of finances, facilities, and human resources.

### Community

Create connections and support where all individuals grow, thrive, and positively contribute to our collective well-being.

*Strategic Plan approved and adopted by the Orono School Board  
June 2024*



# Profile of an Orono Graduate



*A graduate of Orono Schools is the embodiment of our strategic goals, with demonstrated strengths in academics, character, and connectedness.*

A graduate of Orono Schools will identify with a fulfilling path for their life based on...

## Scholarship

- Motivated, lifelong learner
- Scholar of rigorous academic content
- Flexible, critical thinker
- Creative problem solver
- Designer of innovative solutions
- Effective oral and written communicator
- Curious and confident learner

## Character

- Ethical decision maker
- Empathetic and caring
- Resilient and persistent
- Trustworthy
- Self-aware
- Self-managing and responsible
- Civic-minded citizen
- Humble

## Connectedness

- Kind and connected
- Collaborative team-player
- Adaptive problem solver
- Respectful and encouraging of others
- Culturally competent
- Socially aware
- Leader and consensus-builder
- Effective conflict manager





# CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

## ACADEMICS\*

- Class of 2024 National Merit Finalists were Jack Eugster, Emily Middleton, and Walter Royal.
- National Merit Commended Scholars were Leah Barry, Dexter Benson, Spencer Bowe, Alexander Engle, and Joseph Mariani.
- U.S. Presidential Scholar Candidates were Jack Eugster, Emily Middleton, and Walter Royal.
- For the first time, OHS achieved Platinum level in the Advanced Placement (AP) School Honor Roll, the highest level.
- College matriculation rates continue to be exceptional for all students, with many receiving offers of admission to highly selective schools.
- In the *U.S. News and World Report* "2024 Best High School" rankings, OHS ranked #1 for college readiness (see page 7).
- At the annual OHS junior and senior academic awards event, 94 juniors were recognized for achieving a 3.5 GPA; 108 seniors were named Honor Graduates.
- Junior Book Awards went to: Henry Shafer, Dartmouth; Quinn Martini, Harvard; Ashley Ishaug, Yale; Alex Paulsen, St. Lawrence
- More than \$87,000 in locally raised scholarship dollars were awarded to graduating seniors. Thank you to our generous donors!
- 18 seventh-grade OMS History Day projects qualified for state competition.
- 156 second-grade students shared their passion projects in the annual Schumann Elementary Imagination Fair.

*\*A complete academic summary for the 2023-24 school year will be shared in September 2024.*

## ARTS

- Hennepin Theatre Trust awarded honors for the fall musical, "Bright Star." For Outstanding Performance in a Leading Role, Lily Quale; for Outstanding Technical Leadership, Adam Charrier, Klaire Hillman, and Lucy Keating.
- Students selected for All-state Choir were Isabelle Courteau, Henry Shafer, and Lily Quale.
- Freshman Miriam Naisbitt was selected for the Minnesota 9-10 Honor Choir.
- J.T. Burns was selected to play trombone in the All-State Orchestra.
- The OHS Music Listening Team of Jorja Kenworthy, Ella Johnson, and Claire Erb scored in the top 10% in the nation.
- Competition One Act Play, "The Final Call," took 5th place at the Metro West One Act Play Festival. This is an original play by OHS student, Greta Rolfzen.
- 10 art students were recognized at the Metro West Conference Visual Arts Exhibition including Andrew Carlson with a blue ribbon Award of Excellence.
- Andrew Carlson was honored at Representative Phillips' Congressional Art Competition.
- Kaelin Carpenter and Olivia Monger received a Silver Key Award through the Scholastic Art Competition.
- Henry Shafer was one of 15 semifinalists in the National Student Auditions.
- Thank you for supporting the OHS spring play, "The Play that Goes Wrong" with record ticket sales!
- The OHS Yearbook staff was honored for excellence in Josten's *Look Book* 2024 celebrating the best-of-the-best in yearbook design and inclusivity.

## ACTIVITIES

- The OHS Student Senate and Well-being Club co-sponsored the second annual "You Matter Week" to support student and staff mental health and well-being.
- Carys Summers served as President of the MN Association of Student Councils.
- Orono Youth in Government participated in the YMCA's 2024 Conference with leaders and presenters: Madeleine Dore, McKenna Monger, Eshaan Ambrose, Hannah Ferber, Simon Forbes, and Ella Palm.
- 86 DECA participants qualified for the state Career Development Conference; from there, 16 students qualified for the International Conference with three students selected to attend the DECA Leadership Academy.
- Orono Speech Team named Metro West Conference Champions for the first time. State qualifiers were Maddie Dore (2<sup>nd</sup> place), McKenna Monger, Maya Haugen (7<sup>th</sup> place), Sydney Sloneker, and Oliver Berg (8<sup>th</sup> place).
- Maddie Dore and McKenna Monger qualified for the NSDA National Speech Tournament.
- In the Stock Market Game, Hayley Aseltine, Dominic Roux, Ethan Weber, and Jackson Von Kaenel placed 4<sup>th</sup> of 836 teams.
- The OHS Student Voice Club hosted a celebration that combined National Hispanic Heritage Month and Día de los Muertos; they also presented at the National Youth Leadership Conference.
- 34 fifth-grade Math Masters turned in top results, including Leo Phillips' 1<sup>st</sup> place and Nathan Ratcliffe's 2<sup>nd</sup> place finishes in the Individual Round. In the Team Round, Linden Hermansen, Nathan Baird, James Vossen, Frank Whiting, and Leo Phillips placed 1<sup>st</sup>.
- The OMS Solar Boat Team earned two 1<sup>st</sup> place trophies at the MN Renewable Energy Society Solar Boat Regatta.



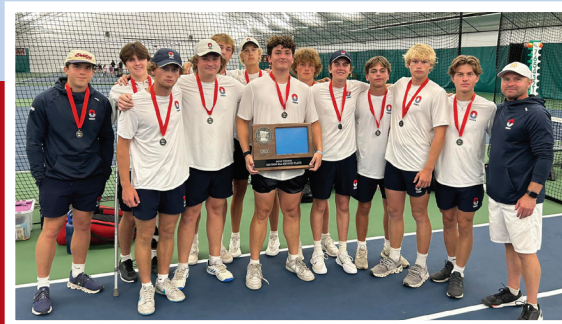
The following achievements represent *only a few* highlights from the year, including state-level results in athletics. Through the year, Orono Spartans sent teams or individuals to **22 MSHSL state tournaments**. We celebrate the character, teamwork, outstanding achievements, and remarkable performances along the way. Way to go, Spartans!

## ATHLETICS *(2023-24 state team, individual qualifiers and special awards)*

- Orono earned the national designation, "Unified Champion School."
- Boys Cross Country finished 4<sup>th</sup> at State.
- Girls Cross Country qualified for State for the first time as a team, finishing 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Football went to State for the second time in three years.
- The MFCA Class 4A Individual Academic All-State honors went to Victor Ruhland and Brady McPherson.
- Brady McPherson was awarded the National Football Foundation Honorable Mention Scholar Athlete award and a MSHSL Most Valuable Teammate.
- Orono Football earned the Gold Award for team GPA from the Minnesota State High School Coaches Association.
- Boys Soccer finished second in State.
- Girls Swimming & Diving had the best team results in school history: Metro West Conference Champions, True Team Section Champions, True Team State Champions, Section Champions, and State Championship Runner-Up.
- Girls Swimming & Diving Coach Mark Seguin named Class A Coach of the Year.
- Ashley Ishaug was the ExCEL winner.
- MSHSL Triple A Award Winners were Lila James and Victor Ruhland.
- Boys Swim and Dive placed 5<sup>th</sup> at State.
- Alpine Ski State competitors were Jack Shideman, 3<sup>rd</sup> place; Fletcher Stoen, 7<sup>th</sup> place; and Jonathan Burns, 16<sup>th</sup> place.
- Nordic Ski State competitors were Walter Holmes & Johnny DiPrima, 3<sup>rd</sup> place; Erica Kazin, 6<sup>th</sup> place; Drew Hutori, 25<sup>th</sup> place; and Sindri Bonner, 42<sup>nd</sup> place.
- Girls Hockey took third place at State.
- Girls Hockey Asst. Coach Claire Bjerke was Class A Coach of the Year.
- Boys Swimming & Diving State qualifiers were Justin Barry, Eli Fish, Owen Gagne, Ben Mitchell, Stewart Royal, Walter Royal, Mitch Volk, and Bjorn Jaenchen (Diving). Top 5 State finishes were: 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 200 Medley Relay (Volk, Gagne, W. Royal, Barry); 4<sup>th</sup> place in the 100 Fly, Walter Royal; 4<sup>th</sup> place in the 200 Free Relay (W. Royal, Volk, Fish, Barry).
- Brady McPherson competed at State in Wrestling.
- Jazz and High Kick Dance Teams earned 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> places at State, respectively.
- Boys Hockey was the State Tournament Consolation Champions.
- Boys Basketball has gone to State for the last two consecutive years.
- Nolan Groves set a new Boys Basketball single-game scoring record with a 50-point performance.
- Grace Bickett was the 2024 Athena Award winner (hockey, soccer, and golf).
- Anthony Perrill and Quinn Martini won State Tournament Doubles Runner-Up. Hugh Perrill qualified in Singles.
- In Girls Golf, Nora Benson and Ava Hanneman qualified for State. Ava finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in her 4<sup>th</sup> appearance.
- Dylan Kringen qualified for State in Boys Golf with a top 15 finish.
- Boys Track & Field State competitors: Victor Ruhland (2<sup>nd</sup>, 100m); Owen Chapman (8<sup>th</sup>, 1600m; 6<sup>th</sup>, 3200m); relay team of Johnny Skoog, Gabe Hallen, Charlie Gronholz, Owen Hirt (2<sup>nd</sup>, 4x800). Also competing were Luca DeCubellis, Dane Heinen, and Trevor Stundahl.
- Girls Track & Field State competitors: relay team of Alivia Uselding, Taylor Walsh, Sindri Bonner, Ryanne Andreen (8<sup>th</sup>, 4x800), and Mila Bailey in the 200m.
- Boys and Girls Lacrosse had remarkable seasons, advancing to the Section semifinals.
- Girls Lacrosse Head Coach Jane Kolar named 2024 MSHSL Coach of the Year.

## SERVICE

- 1,500 pounds of food was collected for the WeScare Hunger food drive.
- OMS Unified program and Where Everyone Belongs (WEB) promoted a hat, mitten, glove, and coat drive.
- 374 hours of service and volunteer work was completed by 13 Youth in Action students.
- 13 students volunteered to assist community members with technology assistance through the Tech Buddies program.
- Orono staff donated \$4,000—with a special donation from Orono PTO—to purchase food for 70 families during the holiday season.
- OMS students took mini field trips to Stonebay of Orono Senior Living to engage with residents, play games, and build community.
- Student mentors volunteered over 540 hours in SPARKS, the after school mentoring program.
- The Orono DECA program raised \$5,000 for the Troncones School District in Mexico.
- The second annual Senior Service Day was organized by OHS National Honor Society leaders.
- The Unified Polar Plunge fundraiser raised \$27,481 for Special Olympics Minnesota.



- Orono Community Education's annual Wellness Expo greeted more than 850 attendees who engaged in activities, informative displays from wellness providers, and the Empty Bowls fundraiser.

## FINANCE

Orono again earned ASBO's Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 2023 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.

# 2023-24 Alumni Awards

Nominate an Orono alum today: <https://bit.ly/AWARDS-FORM>

Each year, the Orono Alumni Association conducts a call for nominations, interviews nominees, and selects recipient(s) of the **Orono Distinguished and Promising Alumni awards**. Honorees are individuals who have demonstrated excellence in their chosen field or occupation, exhibited leadership and character, and/or made a lasting contribution in their community. An annual part of this recognition is the awarding of scholarships based on criteria set by the honoree. *Congratulations* to our Alumni Award winners and our Class of 2024 scholarship recipients!

## Distinguished Alumni

### Adam Carlson

Adam graduated from Orono in 2000 where he actively engaged in numerous athletic teams and clubs, persevering through the challenges of being a deaf student. After graduation, Adam worked in special services for Minnetonka Public Schools for more than a decade. In 2012, he bravely pursued a career change with his cousin to start Chip Theory Games, a Plymouth-based company focused on delivering premium board game experiences. Today, Chip Theory Games—best known for Too Many Bones—is growing rapidly and giving back. Adam's company values community involvement and inspiring creativity. They have financially supported and advised other start-up companies and have provided class tours of their workspace to encourage students to achieve their dreams.



### Maria Veach

Maria is a 2003 graduate and a mother to two third-generation Orono students. Alongside her brother and sister, Maria owns and operates six Culver's restaurants in the Metro Area. She has served on the board of Hospitality Minnesota and represented the northern states on the Culver's Franchise Advisory Board. Maria is also heavily involved in the local community and has participated on the board of Orono Westonka Soccer Club, contributed to the Orono Action and Orono Child Nutrition Committees, and holds a co-chair position for Corn Days. As if that weren't enough, Maria coaches and manages kids sporting activities and was recently appointed to serve on the Orono City Council.



**Scholarship recipient:** Grace Bickett, University of Wisconsin-Madison

## Promising Alum

### Danny Striggow

Danny is a 2020 graduate of Orono High School. He is currently pursuing a master's degree from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in Human Resource Development. He's in his 5<sup>th</sup> year on the Gopher football team. Danny currently serves as Team Captain and has received All Big-10 and All-Academic Big 10 Honors twice. While he was a student at Orono, Danny was heavily involved in Orono Unified Club and Letters of Love. He has been a Special Olympics Unified Partner for more than five years, participating in a variety of sports and serving as the Vice President of the Special Olympics Minnesota Student Board of Directors. He was recently named the 2026 Special Olympics USA Games Honorary Co-Chair (along with Orono alum Jenna Perkins '22) and has returned to Orono numerous times to speak with and help coach students.



**Scholarship recipient:** Owen Hirt, University of Miami, Coral Gables

**Scholarship recipient:**  
Cayden Effertz, Junior Hockey

ORONO  
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FOR EDUCATION



# Orono's Future-Ready Students

*Orono High School leads Minnesota in all indicators of college readiness*

In fall 2023, Orono High School (OHS) was placed on the **Advanced Placement (AP) School Honor Roll at the Platinum Level** based on 2022-23 student achievement. The Honor Roll recognizes schools that have done outstanding work to welcome more students into AP courses—some beginning in 9<sup>th</sup> grade—and support them on their academic pathway. College-level rigor in AP courses prepares students for post-secondary pursuits by building essential skills and confidence. AP courses also allow students to study topics of interest in depth. We are proud that Orono students are challenging themselves, and finding success, through appropriate levels of rigor!

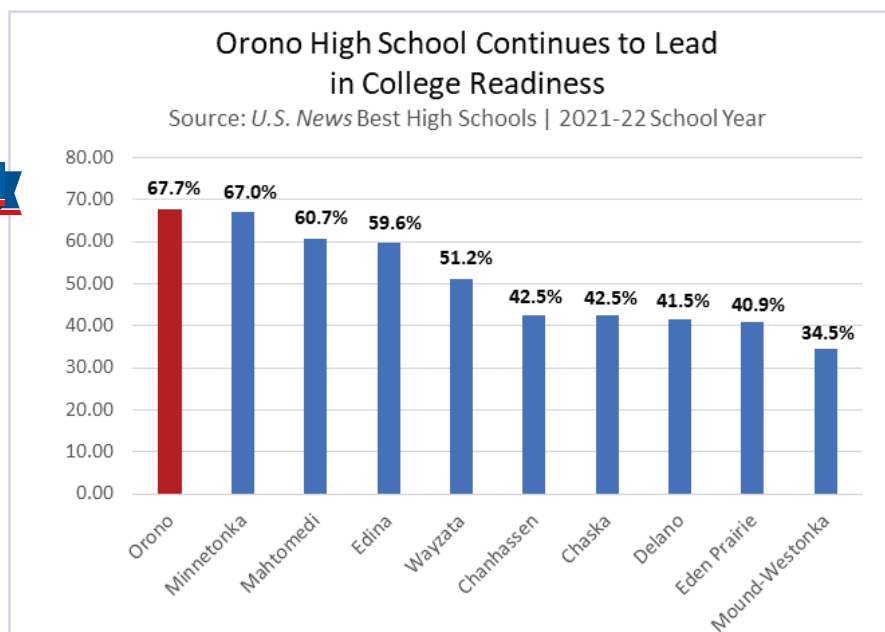
In late spring, *U.S. News* released its latest “Best High School” rankings based on six weighted indicators: college readiness 30% • state assessment proficiency 20% • state assessment performance 20% • underserved student performance 10% • college curriculum breadth 10% • and graduation rate 10%.

On indicators of **college readiness**, *U.S. News* ranks Orono High School at the top of traditional high schools in Minnesota (weighted 30% in rankings). College readiness is, “the proportion of seniors who took and earned a qualifying score (3+ out of 5) on at least one Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate exam.” Current rankings are based on data from the OHS Class of 2022 with 233 students. At nearly 68%, the college readiness indicator looks at the percentage who

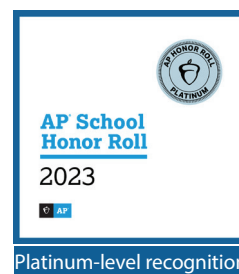
took (77%) and earned a qualifying score (65%) on at least one AP exam, the highest percentage among our neighboring and comparative districts. OHS also came out on top in **college curriculum breadth**, defined as the percentage of seniors who took and earned qualifying scores on *multiple* AP exams. Looking at the Class of 2023, the exam passing percentage held steady at 66% with an outstanding 86% of the class completing at least one AP course and a total of 92% enrolled in academic programs that could lead to college credit.

It is important to note that several agencies, including *U.S. News*, include statewide assessment proficiency and performance in overall ranking calculations. While we honor choice for our families and recognize the test-optional shift, we have found over the last several years that **too many students are opting out** of Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs). With our high school juniors this past spring, the opt-out percentage for MCA Math was nearly 31%.

As a data-driven organization, Orono Schools values the MCA metrics that help us evaluate individual student needs and develop collective, continuous improvement efforts. This school year, we plan to take even greater steps to partner with our families and school community to encourage full participation on state test days. This way, our MCA data will more accurately reflect the academic excellence of Orono students.



*The college readiness indicator is the proportion of seniors who took and earned a qualifying score on Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams.*





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## Orono School Board Election November 2024

Interested in running for the Orono School Board this fall? Three seats will be on the ballot Tuesday, November 5. For key dates and information, please visit the Board election website at <https://bit.ly/2024-BOARD-ELECTION>. Here you can also download the brochure, "Serving on the School Board. What does it really mean?"

We also invite you to visit the School Board website at [www.oronoschools.org/school-board](http://www.oronoschools.org/school-board) to learn more about the six-member Board and its governance role, review agendas, view recorded meetings, and check the calendar for upcoming meeting dates.



### 2024 Key Dates

- **July 30 to August 13 at 5 p.m.**  
Candidate Filing Period at District Office
- **August 13 • 6:30-8 p.m.**  
Candidate-Only Information Session  
Orono District Office Assembly Room
- **August 15 at 5 p.m.**  
Candidate Withdrawal Deadline at District Office
- **September 10 • 7-8:30 p.m.**  
**School Board Candidate Forum**  
Open to the public; event will be recorded  
Hosted by the League of Women Voters  
Orono High School Auditorium
- **November 5 | Election Day**  
Polls open 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.