



# SCHOOL REPORT



## A MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. ERIN RATHKE

I am delighted to greet each of you as the incoming superintendent of Eastern Carver County Schools, starting on July 1.

**TAKING ON THIS ROLE BRINGS ME GREAT EXCITEMENT AND HUMILITY, AS I AM FULLY COMMITTED TO SERVING OUR COMMUNITY AND FURTHERING OUR SHARED VISION OF EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE.**

As we embark on this exciting new chapter together, I'm eager to share some key priorities that will guide my work in the months ahead. One of my first goals was to hire an Assistant Superintendent who shares our values and embodies our vision for educational leadership. I am excited to welcome Nate Manaen to our team in that role.

I'm fully committed to implementing a 100-day superintendent entry plan strongly emphasizing listening, learning, and engaging with our community. Please watch for upcoming opportunities in the late summer and fall to provide your thoughts. The four key questions that I will be asking are:

- 1. What is great about our schools and school district?
- 2. What are three opportunities we have?
- 3. What is on your ECCS wish list?
- 4. What should the district prioritize as the budget remains a challenge?

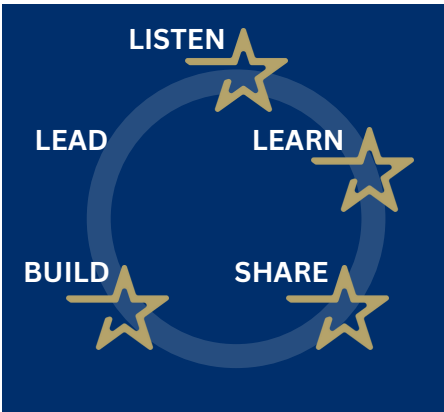
With our shared commitment to our students' success and collective dedication, I'm confident we will continue to achieve remarkable things together. I eagerly anticipate listening to your insights in the weeks and months ahead as we embark on this journey of growth and discovery together.

Once again, I sincerely thank you for your warm welcome and ongoing support of our ECCS students. Together, we will continue to make a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of our community's most precious resource: our children.

In Partnership,

Dr. Erin Rathke  
Superintendent

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



As Dr. Rathke begins her leadership of Eastern Carver County Schools, she will be engaging the community in a series of listening and feedback sessions centered around these four questions:

WHAT IS GREAT ABOUT OUR SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICT?

WHAT IS ON YOUR ECCS WISH LIST?

WHAT SHOULD THE DISTRICT PRIORITIZE AS THE BUDGET REMAINS A CHALLENGE?

WHAT ARE THREE OPPORTUNITIES WE HAVE?

### Save the date

**Full community session**  
**September 24, 2024**  
5:00 p.m.  
Location TBD

**Sesión en español**  
**October 10, 2024**  
5:00 p.m.  
Ubicación por determinar

**Full community session**  
**October 24, 2024**  
5:00 p.m.  
Location TBD

**Fadhi ku hadla af-soomaali**  
**September 24, 2024**  
5:00 p.m.  
Goobta lagu go'aamin doono



More information about the community engagement opportunities and Dr. Rathke's 100-day entry plan can be found at <http://eccs.mn/100dayplan>.



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# NEW LEADERS



## Dr. Erin Rathke ECCS Superintendent

The Eastern Carver County School Board has selected Dr. Erin Rathke as the next superintendent effective July 1, 2024.

Rathke is currently serving as interim superintendent for the district. Her selection concluded a rigorous search process that started with six semifinal candidates and narrowed to two finalists in April.

The ECCS School Board contracted with superintendent search firm, Ray & Associates, to assist with identifying and interviewing superintendent candidates. Ray & Associates consultants met with board members, school staff, parents, students, and community members individually and in focus groups to help create a desired superintendent profile.



## Nate Manaen Assistant Superintendent

ECCS is excited to name Nate Manaen as the next assistant superintendent.

Manaen will start in July and succeed Dr. Erin Rathke, who was earlier named superintendent.

Currently Director of Student Services at Anoka-Hennepin School District, Manaen brings almost 20 years of transformative leadership experience to the role. Before joining the Anoka Hennepin School District, where he started as Principal of Mississippi Elementary, Nate served as Principal at Ravenswood Elementary, a Prek-8 school in Chicago Public Schools. Nate started his career in education teaching third grade.



## Sam Blank Principal Carver Elementary

Sam Blank has been selected as the next principal of Carver Elementary School.

Blank will succeed Ryan Finke, who is leaving the role for a principalship at an international school abroad. Blank has over 13 years of diverse experience in education. He served as the administrative dean at Chaska Middle School West since 2022. Before his time at West, Blank served as dean, summer school coordinator, classroom teacher, and reading interventionist at the elementary level in the Wayzata School District.



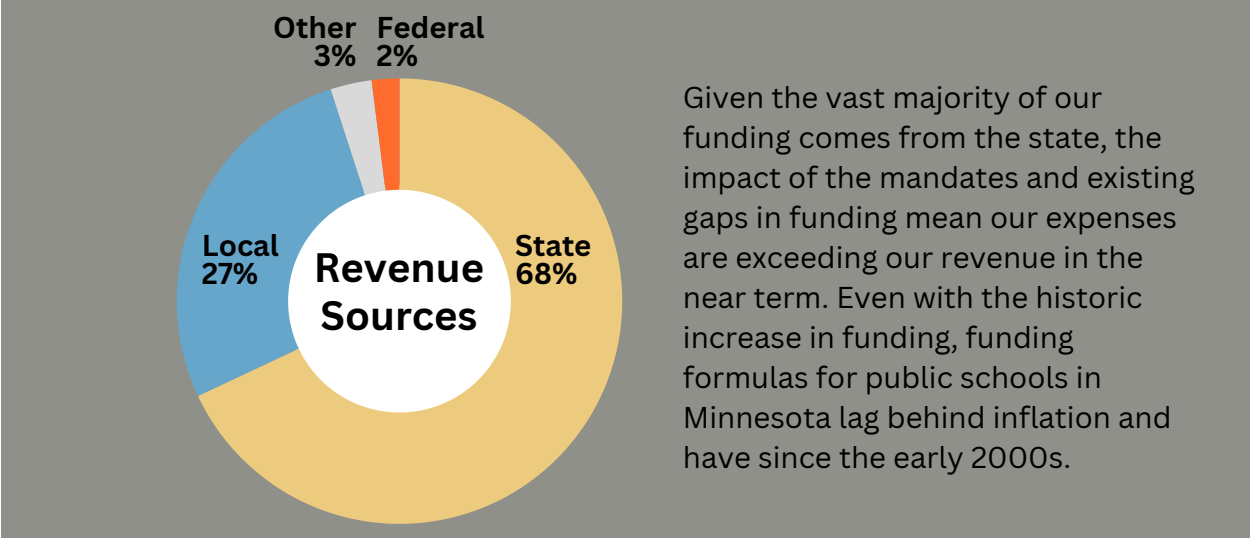
## David Brecht Director of Finance and Operations

David Brecht has been named Director of Finance and Operations.

Brecht started in ECCS in 2005, he has served in the assistant and principal roles at Chaska High School, and the district's student services administrator. Before ECCS, he held a variety of positions in the Hopkins School District.

# SCHOOL FINANCE CHALLENGES

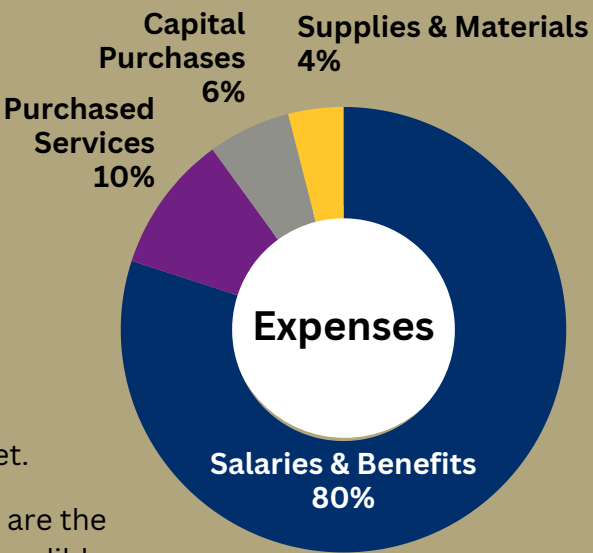
School districts across the state, including Eastern Carver County Schools, are facing significant budget challenges. It's important to understand that despite breathless news coverage this past legislative session of a financial windfall for school districts, the end result for ECCS and other districts across the state was a mixed bag. Yes, there were historic increases in school funding, for which we are very grateful. But with that increase in funding came a historic number of mandates, many of which are either funded for one or two years or not at all. As a result, much of that increased funding is already tied to programming and not available for other district needs.



School districts are not immune from the inflationary pressures felt by individual households. Significant increases to the cost of utilities, transportation, supplies, health insurance premiums, property and liability insurance and cost of living increases are having lasting impacts on school budgets.

80% of our expenses are staff salary and benefits and the pressures to provide competitive packages to our district employees also puts a strain on the budget.

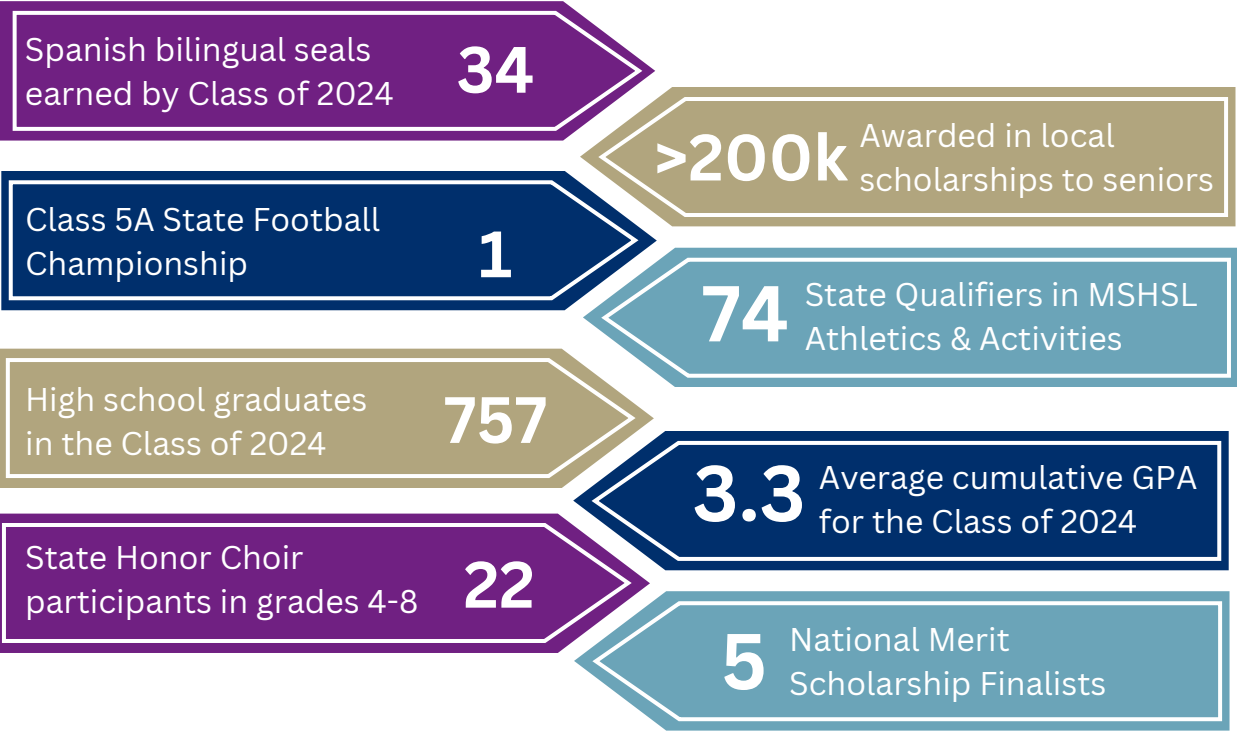
We highly value our staff and believe they are the best in the state. We want to retain the incredible staff we have and recruit strong talent to the district.



All of these factors combined have led to an anticipated deficit for the 2024-25 school year that will have an estimated \$3.8 million dollar impact on the district's unassigned fund balance. Thanks to responsible management of resources aligned with our strategic priorities, we have an unassigned fund balance available to cover that difference. That is not a responsible long-term strategy however. During the upcoming school year, ECCS leaders will continue examining all elements of the budget to map out cost containment strategies aligned with our strategic plan. Our focus continues to be student-centered, with a goal of minimizing impacts to classrooms and the student experience to the largest extent possible. Throughout this process, there will be opportunities for engagement, and many more updates to come.

Watch a short video explaining more about school finance.

# OUR YEAR BY THE NUMBERS





# ACHIEVEMENTS AND HONORS

## Teacher and Staff of the Year Awards

**Lani Grafelman** of Chaska Middle School West was named the Teacher of the Year by the District 112 Foundation on May 8 during an open house celebration at Chanhassen High School. Grafelman has worked in the district since 2013.

Other finalists were **Susan Busch** of Chaska High School, **Kelly Johnson** of Chaska Middle School East, **Chris Lenius** of Chaska High School, and **Annie Nakagaki** of Chaska Middle School East.

A new award this year, the Support Staff of the Year, was given to three individuals. They were **Vanessa Frank** of Chaska Middle School West, **Mary Ellen Sandberg** of Chaska Middle School West, and **Jillian Tenwinkel** of Carver Elementary.

Other finalists were **Michael Hanson** of STAR, **Lisa Papp** of Chaska High School, and **Janet Purdy** of Chaska Middle School West.



Integrated Arts Academy teacher **Amy Spinello** was named one of 27 semifinalists for the 2024 Minnesota Teacher of the Year award. The program celebrates the tradition of excellence in teaching in Minnesota. The candidate pool began with 159 educators from across the state. Spinello has worked in ECCS since 2012 and was part of the team to design and open IAA as the visual arts teacher.



The Teacher of the Year finalists with Dr. Erin Rathke.



The Staff of the Year finalists with Dr. Erin Rathke.

## High school students excel in the arts and activities

**VISUAL ARTS:** Chanhassen Storm had 14 art students earn recognition at the Minnesota Scholastic Art Awards. This summer, the Gold Key winners will be featured at the MN Scholastic Art Exhibition and Awards Ceremony at the University of Minnesota's Regis Center and Weisman Gallery.

- Gold Key: **Eva Vermeij** (Portfolio), **Katie Colleran**, **Jonas Dillon**, **Sophie Shafer**, **Eva Vermeij** (Single Artwork)
- Silver Key: **Jonas Dillon** (Portfolio), **Katie Colleran**, **Rachel Hakanson**, **Georgia Thoene** (Single Artwork)



**SPEECH:** **Emmet Carlson** (Informative) and **Caroline Williams** (Drama) competed in the 2024 National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) National Tournament in Des Moines, Iowa. Carlson and Williams were joined by **Eliza Jost** and **Sophia Grancarich** in speech and **Mahi Madhan Kumar** in debate at the NCFL Tournament in Chicago, Ill.

State qualifiers in speech this spring were **Emmet Carlson**, **Anna Reed**, **Caroline Williams**, **Sophia Grancarich**, **Olive Tritabaugh**, **Alex Weiner**, **Clara Christenson**, and **Sneha Kharel**. Additionally, Chanhassen sent eight speech students to the National Individual Events Tournament of Champions (NIETOC) in Nebraska. They were **Carlson**, **Christenson**, **Grancarich**, **Ellen Rosengren**, **Kennedy Seibert**, **Tritabaugh**, **Weiner**, and **Williams**.

**DECA:** **Sophie Cook** and **Billy McNeely** placed third in Innovation Plan at the Minnesota DECA State competition, advancing to the DECA International Conference in Anaheim, California, where they competed and represented Chanhassen.

**BAND:** The **Chanhassen Storm Band** competed at Region 2AA Contest and received the highest rating of "Superior."

**HOSA:** Chanhassen students **Josie Hauck** and **Sophia Klein** finished in second place in Creative Problem Solving at the HOSA Minnesota State Leadership Conference earning a qualification to the International Leadership Conference in Houston, Texas, in June.

**QUIZ BOWL:** The Chanhassen Quiz Bowl team of **Wesley Erpelding**, **Will Leatham**, **Jason Laabs**, **Luke Mullen**, and **Daniel Walsh** competed in Nationals in Atlanta, Georgia.

**VISUAL ARTS:** Chaska Hawks had nine art students earn recognition at the Minnesota Scholastic Art Awards. This summer, the Gold Key winners will be featured at the MN Scholastic Art Exhibition and Awards Ceremony at the University of Minnesota's Regis Center and Weisman Gallery.

- Gold Key: **Sofia Berggren**, **Mackenzie Melquist**
- Silver Key: **Mara Jones**, **Taylor Ingram**, **Mackenzie Melquist**, **Kallie Wilson**, **Taylor Kaelyn**



**SPEECH:** **Halle Browning** (Informative) competed at the 2024 National Speech & Debate Association National Tournament in Des Moines, Iowa. State qualifiers in speech this spring were: **Greta Flaten** and **Gracie Lougheed**, **Samsam Hassan**, **Adonai Yidnekachew** (seventh place), **Browning** (third place), and **Joelle Sihombing**.

**DECA:** **Zoey Myers** (Hotel and Lodging Management Series) and **Nicholas Paul** (Business Growth Plan) qualified for the DECA International Conference in Anaheim, California, at the Minnesota DECA State Tournament this spring.

**MUSIC:** The **Chaska Hawks Concert Choir**, **Symphonic Band**, and **Wind Symphony** competed at the Region 2AA Contest and received the highest ratings of "Superior."

**HOSA:** **Lisha Veerakumar** finished in first place in both Clinical Speciality and Research Persuasive Writing/Speaking at the Minnesota HOSA State Leadership Conference. She qualified for the International Leadership Conference in Houston, Texas, in June.

**KNOWLEDGE BOWL:** The Chaska Hawks Knowledge Bowl team of **Sophia Clements**, **Allison Diminnie**, **Lucas Igl**, **Luke Johnson**, **Varun Sridhar** took sixth place at the Minnesota Knowledge Bowl State Meet. The team also placed second at Nationals.

**SCIENCE BOWL:** The Chaska Science Bowl team of **Sayan Majumder**, **Lucas Igl**, **Thomas Schenk**, and **Varun Sridhar** placed seventh at the Minnesota Science Bowl State Meet.

**QUIZ BOWL:** The Chaska Quiz Bowl team of **Sophia Clements**, **Allison Diminnie**, **Lucas Igl**, **Luke Johnson**, **Evan Raukar**, and **Varun Sridhar** competed in Nationals in Atlanta, Georgia.

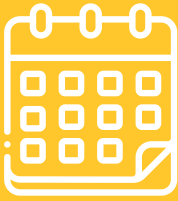


# Congratulations to the Class of 2024!

Whether you're continuing your education, joining the workforce, traveling the world, or serving our armed forces, may you continue to **SOAR** and take the world by **STORM**.



## MARK YOUR CALENDAR



Aug. 27-28: Connect & Assess Days (K-5)  
Sept. 3: First Day of School  
Oct. 17-18: No School - Education MN  
Oct. 21: No School - Conference/Workshop  
Nov. 1: No School - Conference/Workshop  
Nov. 27-29: No School - Thanksgiving Break  
Dec. 2: No School - Conference / Workshop  
Dec. 23-Jan. 1: No School - Winter Break  
Jan. 20: No School - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day  
Jan. 21: No School - Conference / Workshop  
Feb. 28: No School - Conference / Workshop  
Mar. 31-April 4: No School - Spring Break  
April 18: Late Spring Break  
May 26: No School - Memorial Day  
June 3: Last day of School K-5  
June 5: Last day of School 6-12

## School Board filing opens July 30

The Eastern Carver County School Board will have three seats open for election in November 2024. The term is for four years. The filing time frame for interested candidates is July 30 - August 13.

Find out more information about filing to run for the school board at [eccs.mn/schoolboardfiling](https://eccs.mn/schoolboardfiling).

Contact Sara Skar at [skars@district112.org](mailto:skars@district112.org) or 952-556-6110 for more information.

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## SCHOOL REPORT

Published by the ECCS Community Relations Department. We welcome questions or comments:

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Tim Klein, Director / 612-963-1150  
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## Have you been following the Eye on ECCS?

The Eye on ECCS series spotlights the incredible work our teachers and staff do on a daily basis for our students and showcases the incredible work our students produce as well. Catch up at: [eccs.mn/eyeeoneccs](https://eccs.mn/eyeeoneccs)