

News from ORONO SCHOOLS



Orono Schools' commitment to ongoing professional development with the integration of character champions in each building has helped build strong school cultures that value character development and ethical leadership."

Scott Raecker
Executive Director
The Robert D. and Billy Ray
Center, Drake University
Home of CHARACTER COUNTS!

Orono Schools Named 2024 Exemplary CHARACTER COUNTS! District

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

Dr. Gary Smit, CHARACTER COUNTS! Trainer and Consultant, traveled to Orono to present the award during the district's February Professional Day. "Orono has previously been recognized at both the national and state level," Dr. Smit said. "But beyond the awards, it is evident that CHARACTER COUNTS!

is an integral part of how Orono puts their core values into action. What you do—**through planning, staff training, and implementation**—ensures that character growth and development are sustainable." Dr. Smit recognized Orono for believing that every child—at every developmental level—thrives within a common language of character and ethics.

It's that **sustainability** that is so highly valued by the Orono Schools learning community comprised of students, parents, guardians, and residents. Superintendent Kristine Flesher is a longtime leader of the Character

program that was started under the direction of retired Superintendent Dr. Karen Orcutt. Dr. Flesher said, "In our **daily journey toward excellence**, our commitment to character has remained steadfast over time. We are first educators; but we don't just seek academic excellence for Orono students. We believe it's critical to nurture individuals who possess the ethical compass to navigate the complexities of the world and make sound decisions along the way."

Dr. Flesher also shared that Orono Schools is the **only district in the nation** that has received national recognition

through Character.org and now exemplary recognition through CHARACTER COUNTS! "When you visit Orono Schools, you see reminders everywhere about our commitment to this initiative and developing well-rounded students," Flesher said. "Character is woven through our fabric and is an important Strategic Goal: 'Students and staff will understand and model core ethical values for a life of integrity.'"

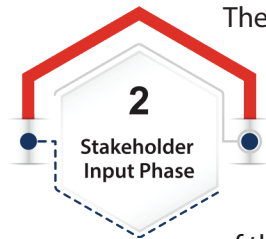
You can learn more about Orono Schools' Character program at oronoschools.org/character.



Dr. Gary Smit (center back) joins Dr. Flesher (center front) and Orono Schools' Character Champions in celebration.

Strategic Planning Process Moves from Stakeholder Input to Core Planning Team Phase

The Core Planning Team will review key findings from several stakeholder input efforts during its March 2024 retreat



The Orono Schools learning community has been busy at work gathering and contributing input during Phase 2 of our Strategic Planning process, “Stakeholder Input.”

During this time, we heard from recent Orono graduates, parents/guardians, staff, and members of the broader community. Data was gathered through surveys, in-person meetings and community conversations hosted by Orono Schools’ principals.

Key findings: What our stakeholders value in common. In preparation for discussions with the Core Planning Team, Dr. Flesher, Superintendent, and Dr. Ruhland, Executive Director of Learning & Accountability, synthesized data from these efforts. The Core Planning Team will retreat in mid-March to carefully review the data and emerge with recommendations, strategic goals and an action plan for School Board review and approval. In the meantime, we want to share key findings from our stakeholders:

- **Community & Relationships:** The connected community, strong relationships with caring and passionate teachers, and a character-driven culture emphasizing kindness and respect are vital to our stakeholders. This sense of belonging and connectedness is deemed crucial for both current success and post-secondary preparation.
- **Staff Commitment & School Pride:** There’s a notable pride among staff and community members in our commitment to excellence in academics, character, and relationships. The hard work and dedication of the staff to foster an environment of growth, excellence, and belonging are recognized and valued.

We will continue to share updates with the community as we move through the Strategic Planning phases. To see additional stakeholder feedback, please visit: oronoschools.org/strategic-plan



Orono Public Schools, ISD #278
Kristine Flesher, Ed.D, Superintendent
685 N. Old Crystal Bay Road
Long Lake, MN 55356

Community Survey Results

Residential Study Conducted January 2024 | The Morris Leatherman Company

As part of our Stakeholder Input phase, the district contracted with Morris Leatherman Company to conduct a statistically reliable study of individuals living within district boundaries. Surveyors gathered feedback from 800 respondents who had/did not have children attending Orono Schools.

It is common for school districts to periodically call on independent surveyors to ensure that community members have a voice in setting the direction for their local district. Thank you to community respondents who shared priorities, commendations and concerns during the detailed phone survey.

The district is very pleased with the insight and responses from our community; in particular, the survey confirmed alignment between community priorities and current district goals.

