

Sharing stories and information that connect our families, schools and communities.

Be seen. Be heard. Be bold.



The Power of Giving Back: AVID, Kids Club and SoWashCo CARES Partner on Service Learning Project

South Washington County Schools (SoWashCo Schools) has been awarded an Innovation in Service Learning Grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. With the support of the grant, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Kids Club will expand on their partnership, which began as an opportunity for AVID students to give back to their community and mentor younger students in the Kids Club program.

AVID is a school-wide system to develop successful leaders in their communities and society offered for grades 7-12. AVID students represent our community's economic and cultural diversity. Service learning is an essential part of the AVID curriculum. Through service learning, students practice mentorship, leadership, and empathy skills outside of the classroom.

"The partnership offers a valuable learning experience for both AVID and Kids Club students," explained Julie Onken, AVID Coordinator and Teacher. "AVID students are leaders and mentors." Kids Club students get to see older students from similar backgrounds in leadership roles.

Throughout the school year, Woodbury High School (WHS) AVID seniors and Kids Club students at Bailey, Pine Hill and Woodbury elementary schools will complete three service learning projects addressing genuine community needs, including winter clothing, nutritious snacks and school supplies. They have partnered with the nonprofit, SoWashCo CARES Education Foundation, for community outreach and distribution.

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Winter Break Information

Winter break for SoWashCo Schools starts Monday, Dec. 23 and runs through Friday, Jan. 3, with students returning to school on Monday, Jan. 6.

Check out winter break activities with SoWashCo Community Education at bit.ly/SWnsd.





Dear South Washington County Community Members,

As we enter the holiday season, I want to take a moment to express my gratitude for the community support for South Washington County Schools. This time of year reminds us of the importance of community, kindness, and caring for one another. I am thankful for the trust and partnership you place in our staff.

As you'll read in our community newsletter, our students and staff are doing some amazing things. Our core values – Connections, Integrity, Equity, Excellence and Innovation – are demonstrated and modeled each day in our students' lives.

A group of seniors at Woodbury High School, alongside Kids Club students at Bailey, Pine Hill and Woodbury elementary schools are partnering with the nonprofit SoWashCo CARES Education Foundation to complete three service learning projects addressing genuine community needs, including winter clothing, nutritious snacks and school supplies.

SoWashCo Schools is also piloting a new Food Rescue Program that is a partnership between our Nutrition Services Department and the local nonprofit Basic Needs to cut down on food waste in our schools while addressing food insecurity in our community. Students are able to drop off packaged items and fruit that they do not plan on eating, into bins in the cafeteria that will be donated to Basic Needs.

By working together, we create a community where all students can thrive, grow and succeed. For that, I am deeply grateful. On behalf of South Washington County Schools, I wish you and your loved ones a warm and joyful season filled with peace, reflection, and togetherness.

With gratitude,

Julie Nielsen

Julie Nielsen, Superintendent

SoWashCo Nutrition Services is Piloting a Food Rescue Program

On Monday, Oct. 21, SoWashCo Nutrition Services began a Food Rescue pilot program at five SoWashCo schools, East Ridge High School, Oltman Middle School and Crestview, Grey Cloud, and Hillside elementary schools. With the state-funded Free School Meals program in place, the district served 2.7 million meals during the 2023-24 school year, a 10% increase from the previous year. However, this increase has also led to more food waste. To ensure the safety of all students, particularly those with severe food allergies, uneaten food cannot be redistributed in our schools. To cut down on waste and address food insecurity, SoWashCo Nutrition Services teamed up with the local nonprofit Basic Needs to start the Food Rescue pilot program.



"This initiative not only addresses food insecurity but also empowers students to play an active role in their community by turning surplus food into a valuable resource for families in need," said Opey James Peñaloga, Executive Director of Basic Needs. "It's wonderful to see students learning about food rescue and sustainability firsthand, helping to create a stronger, more compassionate community."

Collection carts are available in the cafeteria for students to drop off unwanted, unconsumed foods. Food is available during the week at the free Basic Needs Food Market (8475 East Point Douglas Road, Ste. 106 in Cottage Grove) on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and on Tuesday and Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Food is also available on the weekends at the Basic Needs Free Little Pantry in the Park Grove Library. Nearly 10% of residents in Washington County worry about running out of food before they can afford more. Please encourage families facing food insecurity to visit the free market or pantry for help.

Learn more about Basic Need Food Market or become a food rescue volunteer at basicneedsmn.org.

Keeping Our School Communities Healthy

During the winter months, SoWashCo Schools see an increase of students experiencing symptoms of illness including fever, cough and sore throat.

If your student is feeling ill, we request they remain at home until they are well enough to return to school. If your student has a temperature above 100 degrees, is vomiting or is not well enough to participate in school, please keep your student home and seek the advice of a healthcare professional as needed.

Our schools continue to keep classrooms, buildings and shared spaces clean to help reduce the spread of illness.

Our priority remains the health and safety of students and staff. If you have questions regarding your student's health or the district's illness protocols, please contact your school health office. More information can be found on your school's website under Services > Health or at sowashco.org/health.

Thank you for your help in keeping our school community healthy.





Securing Our Future.

Supporting Our Students.



OMS Classroom Pod - Draft



WMS Entry Lobby - Draft

Construction Updates

Over the past year, architects have met with design teams to form the design work for the additions and renovations at the secondary schools that were approved by voters last year. Drafts of design concepts for Oltman and Woodbury middle schools and East Ridge, Park and Woodbury high schools are available to view online.

Recently, the School Board heard a middle school construction update from Assistant Superintendent Tyrone Brookins. The update included draft floor plans and renderings of project areas within Woodbury and Oltman middle schools.

Woodbury Middle School's remodel consists of:

- Remodel existing space (old pool area) for additional multipurpose space
- Creation of a secure entry / Moving the main office
- Music suite renovations / Creation of 3rd music room
- Create new bus road to revise traffic flow for safety

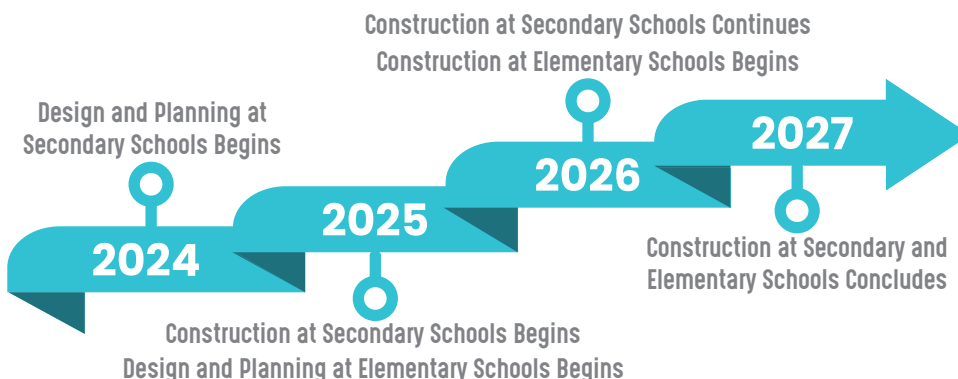
Oltman Middle School's remodel consists of:

- Additional classrooms, increasing capacity to approximately 1,300 students
- Expansion of cafeteria and kitchen serving areas
- New STEM and special education spaces

After the design phase is completed for each project, construction permits for the work will be secured and the request for proposals (RFP) bidding process for the construction will begin. Later this year more draft design concepts will be released for the other secondary schools.

The design process will begin for Pine Hill, Bailey and Grey Cloud elementary schools in early 2025, followed by Red Rock, Pullman, Crestview, Royal Oaks and Hillside elementary schools later next year.

Learn more at sowashco.org/construction.





"It is an opportunity for the students to give back to the school community and get more involved with their school community," said Amy Saldana, Kids Club Out of School Time Support Specialist.

"I got to know all these wonderful kids and got to be a mentor to them," said AVID student Adriyana Lolar.

AVID students learn about each topic, practice teaching it, and then present the lessons to elementary students at Kids Club. The first-trimester project covered winter clothing and consisted of three sessions with each Kids Club site. In the first session, AVID students taught lessons on preventing hypothermia, and the importance of waterproof gear and had a relay race to put on winter clothing. In the second session, AVID and Kids Club students worked together to budget and order approximately \$9,000 of boots and waterproof gloves.

"One thing I really enjoy about doing the Kids Club activities was talking to the kids and seeing what they enjoyed," shared Owen Spores, AVID student.

The students wrapped up the Winter Clothing project by writing personal notes and tucking them into the boots and gloves for the recipients to find. Then SoWashCo CARES picked up the items in the Skoolie bus to distribute to students in need.

AVID students are beginning to raise funds for the second-trimester nutritious snacks project. Grant money will not pay for snacks, so the students have organized a district-wide fundraiser. "It's truly our community, helping our community", said Cheryl Jogger, Founder of SoWashCo CARES.

If you would like to donate please visit sowashcocares.org/donate.

Tips for Families to Engage Readers of All Ages

As SoWashCo focuses on literacy, we wanted to share some simple tips for families to help readers of all ages. We often hear a lot about learning to read, especially focusing on phonics and sounding out words. These are essential skills, but it's also important to build strong comprehension skills from a young age. Understanding what they read is a skill students need through high school, and it can be part of conversations with older learners, too. The best thing you can do is read with your child and talk about what they're reading—no matter their age!



Curran Mahowald shares six ways families can support reading comprehension at home in her article, *Six Reading Comprehension Strategies Families Can Practice Together At Home*. Here's a quick overview of each:

- **Activate background knowledge:** Help your child connect new words and ideas to things they already know. Ask questions like, "What does this remind you of?"
- **Make predictions:** Ask your child what they think will happen next and why. After reading, talk about whether their predictions were right or surprising.
- **Monitor comprehension:** Encourage your child to pause and think about what's happening in the story as they read.
- **Ask questions:** Ask questions to help your child connect ideas, understand details, or guess what might happen next.
- **Retell:** Have your child retell what they read in their own words. This helps them understand the story better and remember details.
- **Embrace storytelling:** Make reading fun by using different voices for characters and making storytelling playful.

For more examples of these strategies and other ideas to support your child's reading, check out the full article at parentpowered.com/blog/science-of-reading/comprehension-strategies

Get Screened at Age 3

Early Childhood Screening is recommended at age 3 and is a quick and simple check of how your child is growing, developing and learning.

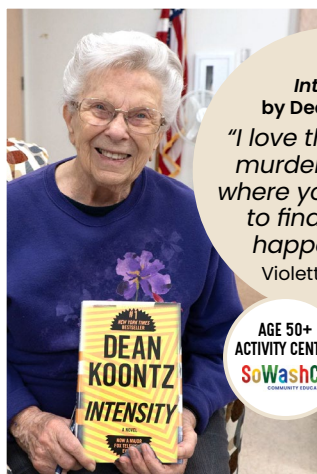
Why screen at age 3?

- Find out how your child is growing and developing
- Have more time to provide support if needed
- Get connected to early education programs and resources
- Take care of it before Kindergarten begins

If your child has not yet been screened and is between the ages of 3 and 5, please call the Early Learning office to schedule an appointment at 651-425-6175 or visit sowashco.org/screening.

Early Childhood screening is required by the State of Minnesota for any child entering kindergarten in a public school and is provided free of charge.



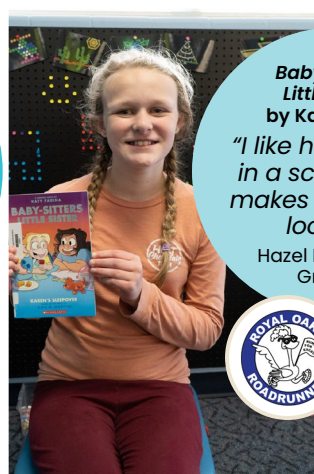


Intensity
by Dean Koontz
"I love thrillers and murder mysteries where you can't wait to find out what happens next."
Violette Weeber

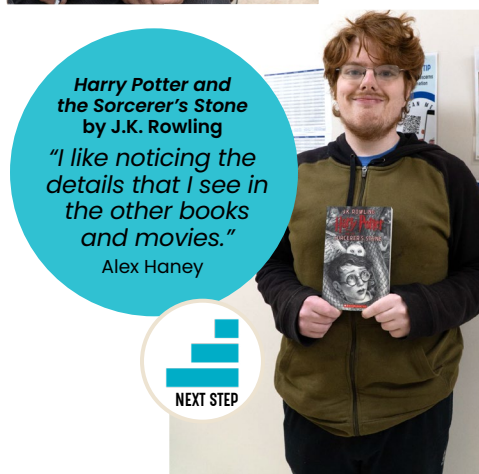
AGE 50+
ACTIVITY CENTER
SoWashCo
COMMUNITY EDUCATION



Measuring Up
by Lily Lamotte
"I like Measuring Up because I like to cozy up in my bed while it's snowing and read it."
Olivia Calil,
Grade 4



Baby-sitters Little Sister
by Katy Farina
"I like how it is set in a school and it makes babysitting look fun."
Hazel Isenhower,
Grade 5

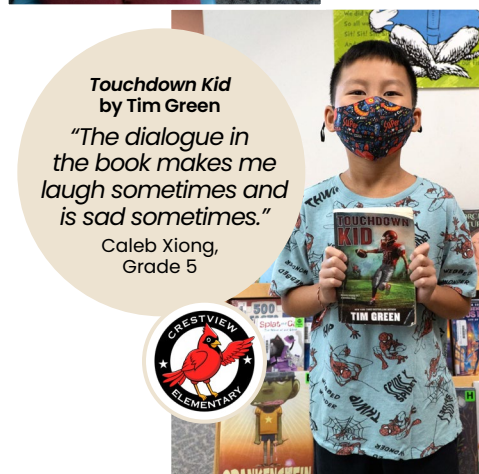


Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone
by J.K. Rowling
"I like noticing the details that I see in the other books and movies."
Alex Haney

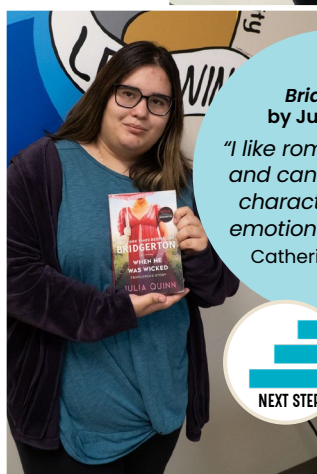


SoWashCo Voices

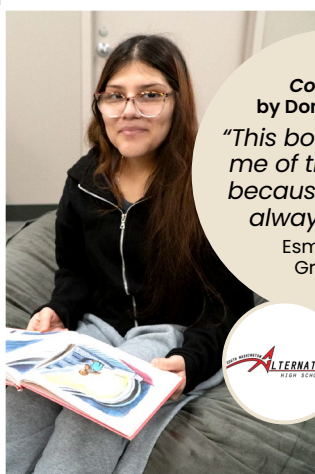
BOOK
RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM AROUND THE
DISTRICT



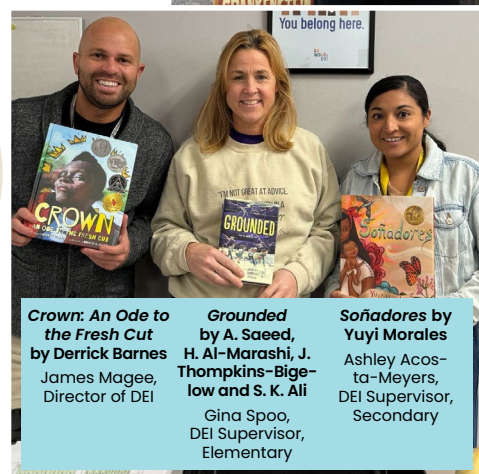
Touchdown Kid
by Tim Green
"The dialogue in the book makes me laugh sometimes and is sad sometimes."
Caleb Xiong,
Grade 5



Bridgerton
by Julia Quinn
"I like romance books and can relate to the characters and the emotions they have."
Catherine Cramer



Courdroy
by Don Freeman
"This book reminds me of the holidays because we would always read it."
Esme Trejo,
Grade 12



Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut
by Derrick Barnes
James Magee,
Director of DEI

Grounded
by A. Saeed,
H. Al-Marashi, J.
Thompkins-Bigelow and S. K. Ali
Gina Spoo,
DEI Supervisor,
Elementary

Soñadores
by Yuyi Morales
Ashley Acosta-Meyers,
DEI Supervisor,
Secondary



Recomendaciones de libros de Nuevas Fronteras Spanish Immersion

La Guerra de Mascotas por Allan Woodrow,
Lincoln Saindon

Un día más y otras historias: Cuentos sobre animales en peligro de extinción por Edna Iturralde, Katie Beer

Diario de Nikki por Rachel Renée Russell,
Mae Wright

Diario de Greg ¡Sin Salida! por Jeff Kinney,
Raegan Baker

Beverly, Aquí Mismo por Kate DiCamillo,
Charolette Wilson

Tips to Dress Safely for Cold Weather

Dressing safely for cold weather will help you avoid hypothermia and frostbite.

- Wear several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight, warm clothing. The layer of air between each piece of clothing acts as extra insulation.
- Outer garments, including gloves and mittens, should be tightly woven, water repellent and hooded to keep out wind, rain and wet snow.
- Wear a hat to prevent heat loss.
- Cover your mouth to protect your lungs from extreme cold.
- If you begin to feel too warm, remove layers to avoid sweating and chill.

SoWashCo Schools encourages families to monitor their children's clothing selections to make sure they are appropriately dressed for cold weather. Students who do not have the appropriate winter clothing will not be able to participate in outdoor recess. For more safety information and tips visit [weather.gov/safety](https://www.weather.gov/safety).



Review Emergency Procedures Before Winter

Throughout the school year, SoWashCo Schools may enter into an emergency closure due to bad weather or other situations in which school cannot be held in person.

An emergency closure may be caused by a rare storm or situation that requires all learning activities, including Community Education activities, to be canceled and for district buildings to be closed.

In anticipation of the winter season, please review all of the emergency procedure information at sowashco.org/emergency.

Winter Activities are Coming Soon

SoWashCo Community Education's winter catalog will arrive in mail-boxes in early December. Discover a wide-variety of classes, camps and activities for youth and adults.

Browse the latest classes and register online at sowashco.ce.eleyo.com.

Learn more at commed.sowashco.org.



Donations Needed for Winter Clothing Drive

SoWashCo Community Education and SoWashCo CARES Education Foundation are partnering to provide students in need with new winter coats, waterproof gloves, snow pants and boots.

Give Help

Community members and organizations are invited to contribute financially, purchase items from the Amazon Wish List or complete the form to sign up to donate new winter clothing. Financial contributions are the most helpful, allowing us to quickly buy what's needed. For group donations, please contact Cheryl Jogger at cjogger@sowashco.org. Visit the 'Give Help' section at sowashcocares.org.

Get Help

Families who complete the Winter Clothing Request form will be invited to no-cost shopping events where students can try on clothing, and even pick out the styles they like. If unable to attend, clothing will be delivered to the child's school. While we try to meet all requests, they are not guaranteed. Learn more in the 'Get Help' section at sowashcocares.org.



Pictured: Fused glass art class.

Connecting Generations Through Bingo



For the past four years, the Wolfpack Boys Soccer Team has partnered with the Norris Square Retirement Community to play bingo with their residents. The partnership was created to instill the importance of community within their players beyond their time at Park High School.

Each soccer player teams up with a resident to play bingo together. The Norris Square residents say they look forward to it every year and enjoy sharing their time with the young athletes.

"I enjoy hearing their past stories and what they did in their lives," said Senior Captain Terry Espinoza-Garibay.

"It's fun hanging out with them and talking with someone older we've never met," said Senior Captain Mac Maluski.

The bingo get-togethers have been a huge hit with both parties. The athletes develop a sense of fulfillment through contributing to their community and the senior residents enjoy having an opportunity to engage with younger generations.

Head Coach Andrew Bourgoine said, "We started only doing one visit during our soccer season but we had so many players wanting to participate that we go twice now."

"I like seeing when we go over to visit them that it gives them joy," said Senior Captain Tristan Lee.



Kids Club School-age Child Care

Space is available now for full or part-time care before and/or after school at most locations.

- Year-round program
- 6:30 a.m.-6 p.m., Monday-Friday
- Fees apply

Learn more at sowashco.org/kidsclub or contact kidsclub@sowashco.org

Para más información, visite el sitio web sowashco.org/kidsclub



SoWashCo Schools Celebrates Veterans Day

On Nov. 11, many of our schools honored Veterans Day by celebrating with family, friends and community members who have served in our armed forces. Here are some photos from the celebrations at Royal Oaks Elementary and East Ridge High School. Thank you veterans for your service!



VIP Red Carpet Dance Thank You!

Together we raised over \$14,000 for youth financial assistance so more kids can participate in SoWashCo Community Education activities!

Thank you to ALL of our VIPs...especially our students, staff, community volunteers and sponsors!





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7362 East Point Douglas Rd. S.
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Immediate openings:

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- Paraprofessionals
- Special Education
- Athletic and Activity Coaches

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community
you live in!



Apply at sowashco.org/careers



Hmong New Year Celebration, Dec. 14

Woodbury High School is hosting the annual SoWashCo Schools Hmong New Year Event on Saturday, Dec. 14 from 1-5 p.m.

The event features traditional Hmong food, dance performances, art, games and a fashion show. The event is free and open to the public; food will be provided.

For more information, contact,
hfac.sowashco@gmail.com.



COMING SOON
2025-26 School and
Enrollment Guide

Enroll online at
sowashco.org/enroll