



SCHOOL REPORT



A MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT DR. ERIN RATHKE

As this catalog lands in your mailbox, I will have closed out my first 100 days as your superintendent. Allow me to extend my sincere gratitude to our community for such a warm and supportive welcome. These early months have been filled with invaluable conversations and connections, and I have felt truly embraced by each of you—students, families, staff, and community members alike. Thank you for your time, your candor, and your commitment to this district.

One of my priorities during this initial period has been listening and learning from a wide array of voices across ECCS. Through my listening tour, I asked four core questions designed to reveal what makes ECCS special, where our greatest opportunities for growth lie, how we should prioritize within a constrained budget, and what we can accomplish together. The responses reflect both pride and ambition for ECCS, and they underscore the district's strengths and its potential to be even more effective in serving our students.

I presented those key themes from my 100-day tour at the November 12 Board meeting, which you can find archived on our district website. While I shared insights and ideas I gathered, I assure you that won't be the end of our conversation. I am committed to continued engagement, listening, and responding to our community's input. This feedback is essential as we move forward together.

AMONG THE THEMES THAT EMERGED WAS OUR COMMUNITY'S DEEP PRIDE IN ECCS. OUR STRENGTHS ARE CLEAR: A DEDICATED, TALENTED STAFF; A FOCUS ON SAFE, INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS; AND A COMMITMENT TO FOSTERING EACH STUDENT'S POTENTIAL. THESE QUALITIES REFLECT ECCS'S STRATEGIC PLAN IN ACTION AND ARE FOUNDATIONAL TO OUR WORK MOVING FORWARD.

Of course, the tour also surfaced areas where we can focus our future efforts. One topic that came up consistently was the importance of class sizes to ensure teachers can meet individual student needs. This is especially pressing given the constraints on our budget, which will require careful consideration and community input on priorities. Additionally, there is strong interest in expanding mental health resources to better support our students' social and emotional well-being, a goal that aligns with our commitment to inclusive and safe learning spaces.

Looking ahead, I am thrilled to announce that we will begin a new tradition with a State of the District presentation in January. This event will provide an opportunity to highlight our achievements, discuss our challenges, and share our vision for ECCS with the board, staff, and the broader community. I look forward to a shared celebration of our district and a commitment to the future.

Thank you again for welcoming me into this role and for your continued partnership. I look forward to our shared work ahead as we build an inclusive, supportive, and successful future for all in ECCS.

In Partnership,

Dr. Erin Rathke
Superintendent



2025-2026

KINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT
ECCS.MN/ENROLL

ENROLLMENT OPEN FOR NEXT SCHOOL YEAR

If you have a child who will be five years old by September 1, 2025, it's time to get ready for kindergarten.

ECCS offers three outstanding kindergarten options for families to choose from to best meet their child's needs:

Neighborhood boundary schools offer an outstanding kindergarten program focused on academic, social, and emotional development. Students are introduced to reading skills, writing, problem-solving, and are provided personalized instruction and support as they progress.

La Academia Spanish Immersion is our two-way dual immersion program. A typical day looks very similar to other kindergarten classes, but the curriculum is taught in Spanish.

Kinder Academy is a kindergarten option for young five-year-olds. The program follows ECCS kindergarten curriculum. Students ready to move on to first grade after one year will do so. Students who would benefit from an additional year of kindergarten will stay in the program.



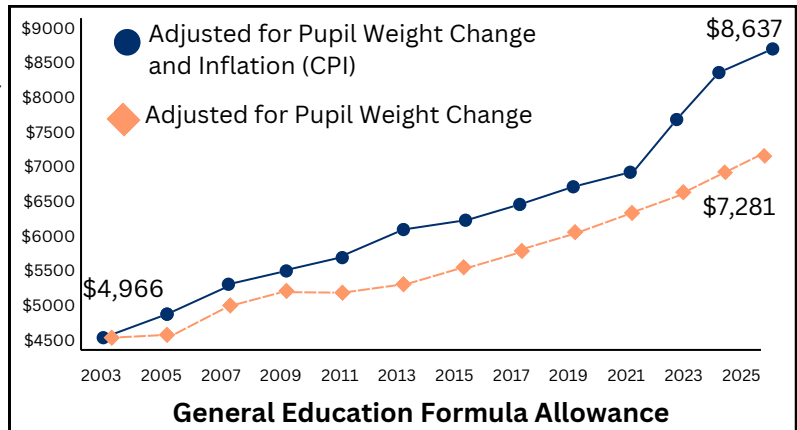
Learn more about ECCS kindergarten and then start your enrollment.

DISTRICT FINANCIAL FUTURE

While the 2023 Minnesota legislative session brought a historic increase in education funding, many districts, including Eastern Carver County Schools, continue to face significant budget constraints. The reality is that several key factors are creating a challenging financial environment for schools, despite the funding increases.

1. Funding Hasn't Kept Up With Inflation

Though we received a 4% increase in the education funding formula for the 2023-24 school year and an additional 2% for 2024-25, this still falls short of keeping pace with inflation. If the basic funding formula had kept up with inflation since 2003, we would have an additional \$1,356 per pupil in FY25. Local Optional Revenue (LOR), another key funding source, has been frozen since inception, leaving us \$196 per pupil behind where we would be if it had kept pace with inflation. Together, the basic formula and LOR make up approximately 75% of our district's general education revenue—the funds we rely on for essential operations like salaries, transportation, and day-to-day costs.



2. New Requirements and Mandates

The 2023 legislative session also introduced new programs and requirements for school districts, some of which were funded, others partially funded, and many with no funding at all. These include universal meals for students, summer unemployment benefits for non-certified hourly workers, and additional professional development for paraprofessionals. While many of these initiatives are positive and support our students and staff, they come with added costs and a significant increase in the demands on our staff's time.

3. Rising Costs and Staffing Challenges

Inflation has impacted nearly every area of our budget—utilities, transportation, supplies, and insurance have all increased in cost. Additionally, we are facing staff challenges in hard to hire areas, which has led to salary increases across several job categories to retain and attract the workforce needed to support our students. On top of that, significant changes to the Public Employment Labor Relations Act (PELRA) are likely to add further costs.

4. The End of Federal COVID Relief Funds

During the pandemic, federal relief funds allowed us to avoid significant budget cuts. However, these funds are not a permanent solution, and are winding down over the next year. As we look ahead to the 2024-25 school year, we are facing an approximately \$4 million estimated budget shortfall, and will need to adjust as part of a multi-year process to right-size our budget.

5. Increased Salary and Benefits

As we continue to prioritize the well-being and success of our students, we also recognize the vital role our staff plays in achieving these goals. Recently, we have adjusted salaries and benefits across all bargaining units to ensure that we continue to attract and retain the dedicated professionals who serve our students each day. While these increases reflect our commitment to fair compensation, they also present budgetary challenges that we must navigate carefully. We remain dedicated to maintaining a balanced budget while upholding the high standards of education our community expects.

In the coming months, we will work diligently to gather feedback from staff and the community to determine how best to manage this shortfall. Our goal remains to minimize the impact on any one school, grade level, or department, while ensuring we continue to provide a high-quality education for all students.



OPERATING REFERENDUM RENEWAL

An operating levy provides funding to the district's general fund to provide critical support and has historically been voter-approved. In 2023, the Minnesota legislature passed a law providing school boards the authority for one-time approval of existing operating referenda. Among the rationale for this change were the high voter approval for renewals, no generation of new taxes, and the investment of district resources both in expenses and staff time in running referendum campaigns. The ECCS School Board used this new authority in 2023 to renew an existing \$150.35 per pupil operating referendum.

The School Board now has the opportunity, using that authority, for a one-time renewal of an existing \$829 per pupil operating referendum that is set to expire after the 2025-26 school year. This referendum must be renewed no later than November 2025 to keep this funding of approximately \$7,500,000 per year. This funding is critical to creating some predictability in the district's financial picture and preventing more significant budget cuts. There would be NO NEW tax impact to taxpayers given it is a previously voter-approved referendum.

Visit eccs.mn/financialfuture for more information about the ECCS financial future and opportunities to give your feedback.

ECCS ADVANCED COURSE OFFERINGS

Students at Chaska High School and Chanhassen High School have a broad range of opportunities in 40 advanced classes to challenge themselves academically as they explore and pursue their interests and passions. Some of these courses also offer an opportunity to earn college credit while in high school.

AP CALCULUS BC

Yes, it's as challenging as what you'd expect. AP Calculus BC is a continuation of AP Calculus AB, so the second-year calculus students in Sarah Roemig's class at Chanhassen High School have a high level of understanding of the presented material. But it was a process to get there.

"This class might be the first time they've struggled. And that's good for them to have that experience. They find out they might need to approach it differently than in the past," Roemig said. "Most of them rise to the occasion. Some of them it takes a while, but they get there."



Chaska High School students in English 10 Pre-AP Advanced spent time collaborating with others to analyze poetry.

ENGLISH 10 PRE-AP ADVANCED

Among new classes for the 2024-25 school year is English 10 Pre-AP Advanced. This course has a high level of depth, rigor and independence aimed at students capable of performing several grade levels above average in language arts skills. Texts are more complex and students are expected to analyze what is read with more depth and independence using the vocabulary of literary analysis in their discussions and writing.

Visiting Jennifer Farrell's class at Chaska High School, the lesson was centered around Marshall Davis Jones' "Touchscreen" slam poetry. "Touchscreen" is described as a serio-comic poem about the ways in which technology is turning humans into zombies. Students first watched the video and were asked to describe Jones's attitude and give examples of how they felt or what they thought before watching it a second time with text copy to circle or underline impactful words or phrases.

CHEMISTRY+INTRO TO PHYSICS

Another new advanced class this year is Chemistry+Intro to Physics. The class covers all of Chemistry at a faster pace plus the essential Physics topics to be ready for AP Physics or AP Chemistry.

"We'll get through the entire Chemistry curriculum by February, allowing us to get into Physics later in the year. The benefit of this class is that they are getting both in one school year. It puts their feet in the water in both, so they can decide whether to go into AP Chemistry or AP Physics in their junior year," Chanhassen High School science teacher Ashley Flynn said.

Having an accelerated pace helps teach students "study skills," Flynn said, as quizzes and unit tests are closer together.

AP DRAWING

Christina Keith looks at her role as more of an organized "theme facilitator or coach" for her AP art students at Chaska High School.

Students, after multiple years in drawing and painting, are allowed space for experimental growth. Students have the opportunity to create more self-directed artwork. While some focus their work on abstract or landscape, others pull from within.

Summer, a senior student, is currently working on recreating a photograph of two family members.

"I love that there aren't any restrictions. In AP art, you have that creative freedom to create what you want. I've done a lot of stuff with my culture, Palestinian. I have a lot of pretty photos from when I was there, so I've tried to tie in my culture with some of my artwork. I feel like it tells a story, and I like to tell stories with my work," she said.

Summer plans to do a landscape drawing of a city and a close-up picture of someone holding an olive, the native tree, in future works. While her current drawing is in pencil, she wants to use charcoal with some of her next projects.

Keith's message in choosing works is subjects where students can sustain intent for nine months. Students create a digital portfolio of their work that will be submitted at AP testing time and may be used for College/Art School admission guidelines.

A complete list of high school advanced courses can be found on the district website: eccs.mn/advancedclasses.

Miss reading news about Eastern Carver County Schools in the Chaska Herald and Chanhassen Villager?

Subscribe to the 112 Online for the ECCS newsletter delivered bi-weekly to inboxes using the online form at eccs.mn/subscribe or use this QR code.



ACHIEVEMENTS AND HONORS

Chanhassen and Chaska high school fall athletes achieved many great things on the field, court, and pool this fall.

Connor Heltemes of Chanhassen (17th place) and **Noella Ross** of Chaska (20th place) were all-state honorees at the **State Cross Country Meet** on Nov. 2 in St. Paul. Heltemes was the top finishing freshman in the boys' field.

Sidney Fuhr (66th place) and **Ivan Peterson** (143rd place) of Chaska, and **Boston Pyle** (88th place) of Chanhassen were also state meet qualifiers.

Defending state AAAAA champion **Chanhassen Football** qualified for its second state tournament with a thrilling 21-14 win over Mankato East in the section championship.

Other fall athletics accomplishments included:

- **Chaska Boys Soccer** was undefeated in Metro West Conference play (4-0-3), finishing second in the league standings.
- **Bella Naples** scored 27 goals for Chanhassen Girls Soccer in a nine-win season.
- **Chaska Volleyball** was a top-10 team in state, finishing with a 22-8 record.



Connor Heltemes
Chanhassen HS



Noella Ross
Chaska HS



PUTTING THE FUN IN FUNDRAISERS

Whether the incentive was watching teachers and staff weave around an obstacle course in inflatable costumes, duct taping the principal to an outdoor light pole, or being wowed by a magician, students supported their schools with fun runs and read-a-thon fundraisers in October.

The support was tremendous across the board with nearly \$250,000 raised among six schools. Donations will be used to support school programming and playground upgrades.

Impressively, students read more than 247,000 minutes for Clover Ridge Elementary's Read-a-Thon.



Stay Connected

- Bluff Creek Elementary: 952-556-6600
- Carver Elementary: 952-556-1900
- Chanhassen Elementary: 952-556-6700
- Clover Ridge Elementary: 952-556-6900
- Jonathan Elementary: 952-556-6500
- La Academia: 952-556-6300
- Victoria Elementary: 952-556-3000

- Chaska Middle School East: 952-556-7600
- Chaska Middle School West: 952-556-7400
- Pioneer Ridge Middle School: 952-556-7800
- Chanhassen High School: 952-556-3500
- Chaska High School: 952-556-7100
- Integrated Arts Academy: 952-556-6200

- STAR: 952-556-6120
- Family Learning Center: 952-556-6100
- Community Education: 952-556-6400
- Welcome Center: 952-556-6100
- Transportation: 952-556-6160
- Nutrition Services: 952-556-6145