

News for residents and friends of Alexandria Public Schools



Welcome to our newest members of the A Team

When Alexandria Public Schools opened its doors to begin the new school year, teachers and administrators were on hand to welcome the youngest Alexandria Cardinals - the Class of 2037!

In Alexandria Public Schools, we have developed an outstanding all-day, every day kindergarten program. Our primary goal is to inspire in children a love of learning. Providing children with experiences that help them become confident, successful learners and achieve personal growth is at the heart of the district's mission.

Every kindergarten student receives a free t-shirt welcoming them to the A Team. The t-shirt serves as their first official Cardinal spirit wear and commemorates their graduation year with a number 37 on the back.

Kindergarteners have quickly settled into their day-to-day routines and any nervous anticipation from the first day of school has been replaced with enthusiasm for new and exciting adventures in learning.















Alexandria Area High School Girls Cross Country athletes had fun dressed as playing cards for the homecoming parade. Alexandria Echo Press photo

The A Team Talk is published by Alexandria Public Schools, Independent School District 206. Send correspondence to Jill Johnson, Alexandria Public Schools, Communications & Marketing Director, PO Box 308, Alexandria, MN 56308, email jjohnson@alexschools.org or call 320-762-2141 ext. 4202.

EDITOR

Jill Johnson

DESIGN

Palmer Creations

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Select Digital Memories Jill Johnson

SUPERINTENDENT

Rick Sansted

SCHOOL BOARD

Angie Krebs, Chair Dave Anderson, Vice-Chair Pam Carlson, Clerk Maureen Eigen, Treasurer Laura Knudsen, Director Shawn Reilly, Director Alan Zeithamer, Director



School Year Off to a Great Start!

By Rick Sansted, Superintendent, Alexandria Public Schools

Thank you to our students, parents, and staff for helping our school year get off the ground and into rhythm and routine as we launched on September 5th. The school year started with fun traditions, including open house, picture

day, and homecoming week. The homecoming parade was a fantastic spectacle of community spirit and pride, followed by the dedication of a new flagpole and flag donated by the 1974 Jefferson Senior High School state championship football team. I know the announced attendance at the homecoming football game was 48,317, and many of you know that our PA announcer, Tim Urness, likes to add a little fun to the day. We all felt a surge of pride and excitement as our team won the game that night.

Before the school year started, we had our district staff kick-off. The theme for this year is **Be a Cardinal. Be a Champion!** We are celebrating our students on a billboard on I-94 heading east, demonstrating some of the champions from the 23-24 school year. Celebrated students include the FFA Ag Mechanics team, DECA Finance Operations Research, Boys Diving, Girls Discus, and Girls Track and Field. We are proud of the accomplishments of our champions.

We also know that the word champion has multiple definitions. One definition is to finish first or be the best at your activity. Another definition is to be an advocate for something you are passionate about. Our students' success often has an adult champion behind them. I think about the hours of time and energy our coaches and advisors put into the practices and contests supporting student growth and development. As we kicked off our school year, we encouraged staff to choose an area that they could champion. It might be providing the best experience during lunch or helping kindergarteners become independent as we approach winter by practicing the on and off of snow pants and coats.

In my back-to-school message to staff, I shared the story about my mother, Marion Sansted, who contracted the polio virus at age 11 in the small town of Strandburg, SD. She spent two years at Sister Kenny Institute in Minneapolis while she learned how to use the muscles that the virus had impacted. Her experience as a child turned her into a champion for the employment of people with disabilities in Fargo, ND, where our family resided until her passing in 2018. I was blessed to have a role model who was passionate about using her energy to help others succeed. I hope this is a definition of a champion that all of us can connect with.

As our school year progresses, our parents continue to champion their children to be their best at school, be kind to their classmates, and partner with teachers and staff through parent-teacher conferences, volunteering, and regular communication between home and school. Our staff identify challenges and take that energy to champion solutions to support student success. Our community continues to support students through volunteering in our vision and hearing screening, AAHS FAN Coaching, and guest speakers, as well as providing authentic opportunities for students to apply their learning in business partnerships!

To be a champion doesn't mean you have to finish in first place. It means that you have passion and commitment toward a cause you care about. **Be a Cardinal. Be a Champion!**

BE A CARDINAL BE A CHAMPION!



Investing in students

*Based on FY'24 final (unaudited)

The General Fund supports the majority of our school district operations. For every dollar of the total General Fund budget, 72.8 cents goes to instruction. The General Fund dollar is divided below with examples of the type of expenditures covered.

72.8¢ Instruction & Instructional Support Regular classroom instruction,

Regular classroom instruction, vocational instruction, special education, media services, curriculum, activities, technology, etc.

12.1¢
Operations & Fixed Costs Utilities, custodial, insurance, etc.

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Pupil Support -

Transportation, health services, counseling, social workers, etc.

4.2¢
District Support Payroll, accounting,
human resources,
communications, etc.

> 3.9¢
District & School Administration

- Principals, district administrators, school board, etc.

Alexandria School District preliminary tax levy decreases

The Alexandria School Board has approved a preliminary gross certified tax levy for 2024. Based on information prepared by MDE, the proposed 2024 Payable 2025 preliminary property tax levy limitation is a **decrease** of \$81,370.20 (or 0.44%) for a total levy limitation of \$18,257,748.93.

The final 2024 (payable 2025) levy is subject to change and will come before the School Board for consideration at its December meeting.

The preliminary levy is

22.2%

of the district's 2023 adjusted net tax capacity, significantly lower than the state average of 32.4% (estimated).

District receives clean audit

According to information presented at the October 21 regular school board meeting by Trevor Peterson, Director of Finance & Facilities, the district received a clean, unmodified financial audit opinion.

Further, the district received a clean, unmodified opinion on compliance for the major federal award programs report. A clean, unmodified opinion is the best designation a school district can receive.

The district finished the year with favorable budget variances for both revenues and expenditures, resulting in the unassigned fund balance to stand at \$5,204,172.88. General fund expenditures in fiscal year 2023-24 were \$59,861,315.24, meaning the district's unassigned fund balance for the general fund stands at 8.7% of annual expenditures. The board-adopted fund balance policy calls for the district to have a fund balance between 11% & 16% of annual expenditures.



HOMECOMING 2024



Alexandria's weeklong Homecoming 2024 celebration was a success!

Enthusiastic Cardinal spirit and events designed for the entire community contributed to an exciting week. Homecoming activities are sponsored by the AAHS Leadership Council. The organization's advisors are Kelly Hilbrands and Jordan Scherber.













A community homecoming parade in downtown Alexandria drew large crowds. Community members cheered on the parade participants, which included representatives from Alexandria Schools teams and activities, community groups and local businesses.

Elementary Science in the Classroom

Elementary students are diving into all kinds of science wonders right in the classroom and as nature explorers!



Kindergarten students at Lincoln Elementary are turning into little leaf detectives! Students are exploring all kinds of leaves and learning how to describe what they see - veins, points, colors, shapes, and sizes. They even discovered how leaves feel and smell!



These young scientists at Voyager Elementary have been on an amazing journey through the life cycle of Monarch butterflies!



Fifth graders in Ms. Johnson's class at Lincoln have been hard at work planting a 'Farm in a Glove,' combining science and agriculture in a hands-on way!

Curriculum **Review** 6-12 Math

In October, the District began a math review for 6-12. A team of teachers will work through the process similar to the district process for literacy review in recent years. The team will report to the Curriculum Advisory Council in the spring of 2025.



An 8th grade student reviews math content by traveling to the exciting destination of "Pi Peninsula".

Youth Skills Training (YST)



through the Youth Skills Training last school year. The program is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry.

SCAN ME

Students at Alexandria Area High School have a unique opportunity to participate in Youth Skills Training (YST) which is a job placement program. This program is sponsored by the MN Dept of Labor and Industry and is designed to benefit both students and local industries in our communities. YST allows high-demand, high-growth industries to hire 16-17 year-old students in jobs that traditionally require applicants to be 18 years of age or older. These local partnerships provide students with related classroom instruction, safety training, industry-related credentials and paid work experience. The industries included are advanced manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, healthcare and information technology. This is a great way to get a jump start on employment skills and job specific training that can provide college and career readiness, or direct career employment. Currently we have four students getting YST experience thanks to industry partner Douglas Machine. View our studentproduced YST video here or by scanning the QR code from your mobile device.



MEASURING STUDENT SUCCESS IS MORE THAN A SINGLE TEST SCORE.

RELEVANT COURSEWORK THAT OFFERS AUTHENTIC LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN REAL-LIFE SKILLS, COUPLED WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS TO MENTORS (FAN COACHES, APPRENTICESHIPS, INTERNSHIPS) HELP STUDENTS EXPLORE CAREER FIELDS TO BETTER PREPARE THEM FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER AFTER HIGH SCHOOL.

DID YOU KNOW THAT IN THE 2023-24 SCHOOL YEAR...





GROUPS OF STUDENTS WERE



107



IN CAPS CLASSES, STUDENTS EARN HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT AND IN SOME CASES COLLEGE CREDIT AT THE SAME TIME.









INTERNSHIPS



STUDENTS OBTAINED THEIR THROUGH AAHS COURSEWORK

CNA (CERTIFIED NURSE ASSISTANT)
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PROGRAM IN 2015. 249 STUDENTS HAVE RECEIVED THEIR CNA CERTICIFICATION.









AND STUDENTS

Voyager Elementary Awarded Minnesota School of Excellence

The Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA) is thrilled to announce that Voyager Elementary in Alexandria, Minnesota has been named a 2024 Minnesota School of Excellence (SOE), one of only six schools in the state to receive this esteemed designation.

The Minnesota School of Excellence program, designed and implemented by MESPA, is a rigorous school improvement process that aligns with national and state standards for quality and effectiveness. Schools awarded the SOE designation have undergone a comprehensive self-study, driven by input from staff, students, and the community, and have demonstrated exceptional dedication to enhancing educational practices, fostering a positive school culture, and promoting continuous improvement.

Excellence is a process. Everything done in an effective school community focuses on ensuring the learning of adults and students. The MN SOE program supports this focus by combining the findings of current research on effective schooling with the practical on-site experience of working principals and education staff.

Voyager stood out for embodying learner-centered leadership. As they reflected in their application, "First, we have excellent coaches who meet regularly with teachers to work on the implementation of curricula, reflect together on successes and challenges, and even set up peer observations when necessary. Second, we offer meaningful and relevant professional development, such as collective teacher efficacy, restorative practices, and trauma awareness. Third, our Professional Learning Communities are a means for teams to examine data, reflect, and learn from each other and coaches." These practices matter because they create a culture of continuous improvement and collaboration, ensuring that every educator is equipped to meet the diverse needs of students. By prioritizing professional growth and reflective practices, Voyager not only enhances teacher effectiveness but also fosters an environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

"In education, it's tempting to rest on the status quo, but in today's ever-changing world, it's important to assess where we are and how we might improve," reflected Dana Christenson, principal of Voyager Elementary. "The SOE Program provides a research-based process to do just that. The process helped us identify and celebrate strengths and target growth areas. All staff - custodians, secretaries, kitchen staff, paraprofessionals, and teachers - are hard working, dedicated and committed to students. This award recognizes them for their hard work, their care for students, and their investment in their craft."



The SOE program evaluates schools across standards:



1. Learning-Centered:

Balance management and leadership roles to lead schools in ways that place student and adult learning at the center.

- 2. Diverse Communities: Set high expectations and standards for the academic, social, emotional, and physical development of all students in an environment that acknowledges, fosters, and celebrates diversity.
- 3. 21st Century Learners: Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement.
- 4. Quality Instruction: Create a culture of continuous learning for adults, tied to student learning and other school goals.
- 5. **Knowledge and Data:** Manage knowledge and data to inform decisions and measure the progress of student, adult, and school performance.
- 6. **Community Engagement:** Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student performance and development.

"We are proud to recognize Voyager Elementary as a Minnesota School of Excellence," added Michelle Krell, the executive director of MESPA. "The Minnesota School of Excellence program is more than just a recognition. It's a comprehensive improvement process that empowers schools to reflect on their practices, engage with their communities, and strive for the highest levels of academic and personal growth for all students."

"It takes commitment and teamwork to honestly and thoroughly assess areas of strength and at the same time identify a plan for continual growth," explained Tami Staloch-Schultz, chair of the Minnesota School of Excellence Committee. "The SOE process asks the entire school community - parents, students, staff, administration, and more – to reflect on and celebrate the collaborative work being done in school communities. Schools that receive validation have had important data-driven conversations about what a high-quality learning experience should be for all students and have plans to make that learning experience a reality for many years to come. Honoring the important work of dedicated staff, eager students, and supportive communities is an essential component of becoming a School of Excellence."

The Minnesota School of Excellence designation is valid for seven years, during which Voyager Elementary will continue to uphold the high standards set forth by the program.

Let's Talk - AROUND THE DISTRICT



The Carlos Parent Activities Committee kicked off the first-ever "Dads at the Door" activity, which is intended to be a bi-monthly tradition. The Carlos Elementary Dads welcomed students with smiles and highfives for a bright start to the day! A video of this activity on the district's Facebook page has gone viral, with many comments about others wanting to implement something similar at their schools.



Alexandria Area High School held a **9th Grade Career Expo** on October 3. Six area school districts participated, with 682 local ninthgrade students registered to attend. The Expo featured more than 40 local businesses, and the keynote speaker was Matthew Carlsen, Class of 2020, EMTNR student and now manufacturing engineer for Sportech in Elk River. Big Ideas mobile lab from New Ulm offered industry-level simulator experiences for students in heavy equipment, welding, painting, and carpentry. Students were able to attend two career speaker sessions of their choosing from the twelve different speaker sessions offered.



MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION for COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELING

Alexandria Area High School hosted a Minnesota **Education Fair** on September 25. MEFs are college fairs held in mid-fall and spring throughout Minnesota at high schools and other venues. They are a result of the collaborative work of MACAC, public and private post-secondary schools, and high schools. College representatives from postsecondary schools throughout the Midwest and other states attend to share information about their educational programs with students and parents.

"Many post-secondary representatives approached me during the fair to share that our students were some of the most prepared students and made a strong impression" stated Meghan Orgeman, AAHS School Counselor. Orgeman shared the following points of pride from the event:

- 2,163 interactions between students and reps on the day of the fair
- 160 "connections" where students and reps connected after the fair
- Reps spoke highly about the quality of guestions the AAHS students asked



Alexandria Area High School Building Trades students at work on the shelter structure.

Alexandria Area High School Building Trades students are helping to fill a community need by **building a shelter structure** designed by McCarten Design with materials donated by Hilltop Lumber. The shelter will ensure this year's Garden of Lights volunteers will be warm.

Brought to you by the Friends of Christmas, **Garden of Lights** is a walk-through festive light display in the Legacy Gardens that will run the length of the holiday season.



AAHS National Honor Society students writing gratitude notes to area veterans.

In honor of Veterans Day, Alexandria Area High School National Honor **Society (NHS) students** will send handwritten thank you notes to veterans and active duty service members. The names were requested from local veteran organizations (VFW, the Vietnam welcome home event coordinator, etc.) and school staff members.

This annual initiative will involve over 30 NHS students creating heartfelt notes to put directly into the hands of our honored Veterans, expressing appreciation for their selfless service to our country.

Thirty-six students earn AP Scholar honors

The College Board recently recognized 36 Alexandria Area High School graduates and current students as 2024 AP Scholars based on their performance on Advanced Placement (AP) exams.

AP courses are taught by high school teachers who follow course guidelines developed and published by the College Board. AP courses are an option for high school students to access college-level learning opportunities while enrolled at Alexandria Area High School and taking courses on the high school campus. Most colleges and universities nationwide offer college credit, advanced placement, or both, for qualifying AP Exam scores.

The AP Scholar Awards given and students recognized include:

- AP Scholar designation is granted to students who receive scores of 3 or higher on three or more AP Exams. Congratulations to Elias Aamold, Olivia Aker, Cooper Angland, Kiera Christensen, Owen Corle, Owen Draper, Autumn Ehlert, Andrew Fleming, Monroe Glade, Samara Groetsch, Owen Jensen, Tatum Ketelsen, Kylie Lattimer, Madison Lynch, Evan Moore, Faith Odland, Carter Olson, Joaquim Ramos, Erik Rodewald, Grace Shurson, Caleb Staples, and Ning Zhang.
- AP Scholar with Honor are students who receive an average score of at least 3.25 on all AP Exams taken, and scores of 3 or higher on four or more of these exams. Students that earned AP Scholar with Honor status include Erick Bergerson, Madeline Boe, Maxwell Chinn, Owen Gilbertson, Aidan Larson, Elise Magaard, Julia Nelson, Emily Olson, Cooper Running, and Ellen Sansted.
- AP Scholar with Distinction is granted to students who receive an average score of at least 3.5 on all AP exams taken, and scores of 3 or higher on five or more of these exams. Congratulations to Josephine Hochsprung, Hannah Larson, Jaelyn Miller, and Greta Oldenkamp who each earned the AP Scholar with Distinction award.



Molly Eken honored with A Champion in Education (ACE Award)

Molly Eken is the 2024 Alexandria Public Schools annual ACE Award (<u>A</u> <u>C</u>hampion in <u>E</u>ducation) recipient. The award recognizes individuals who support public education through advocacy, partnership, service, or donation of resources.

Over the years, Molly has demonstrated her commitment to public education in a multitude of ways. She has volunteered in various capacities, from classroom support to leading several groups of Junior Great Books. Her engagement in parent and superintendent advisory councils, principal connect opportunities, and service on the district high potential advisory committee, as well as her roles in picture day, yearbook volunteer, and supporting special events throughout the year, showcase her diverse and inspiring contributions.

We are deeply appreciative of the significant impact Molly's extraordinary contributions have had on Alexandria Public Schools staff and students. Her dedication and service have greatly enriched our school community, and we are truly grateful for her ongoing support.



Molly Eken (left) accepts the ACE (A Champion in Education) Award from Angie Krebs, Chair, Alexandria School Board.

Alexandria Public Schools increases overall student enrollment

Enrollment in the Alexandria Public Schools is stable and showing an increase of 62 students over the school district's 2023-24 school year ending enrollment count recorded in June.

Director of Finance & Facilities, Trevor Peterson presented the official October 1 enrollment report at the October 21 School Board meeting. The report shows that as of October 1, there were 3,922 students in grades K-12. This number is above district projections and 62 students above our 2023-24 school year ending enrollment count.

Annually, enrollment projections are calculated in February using the most current enrollment data available to assist the School Board in budget planning for the upcoming school year. The district considers a number of sources when

calculating enrollment projections, including district enrollment history, birth rates for Douglas County, and 0-4 year old school census data.

The enrollment report reflects student counts on October 1 as: 1,690 elementary; 899 middle school; and 1,333 high school. In addition to the 3,922 students, the district also receives revenue for service hours provided to ECSE students, approximately an additional 70 students.

Let's Talk - EDUCATION FOUNDATION



L to r: Kelli Minnerath, AEF executive director, John Anderson, and Pat Ellingson. Not pictured: Tom Haugen and Merle "Skip" Hall.

The **Alexandria Education Foundation** (AEF) partners with Alexandria Public Schools to provide financial support for unique learning experiences for students in grades PreK through 12. Projects funded by the Foundation expand classroom experiences beyond the boundaries of the school district's budget.

EDUCATION

FOUNDATION

Recently, the Foundation hosted their annual Alumni Hall of Fame event to honor deserving alumni and staff for excellence, accomplishments, and recognition in their field. This year, four individuals were inducted as the Hall of Fame Class of 2024 -John Anderson, Tom Haugen, Merle "Skip" Hall, and Pat Ellingson.

Watch the video of the Hall of Fame Induction to hear their stories, https://alexeducationfoundation.org/2024/09/2024-hall-of-fameinduction-video/

Visit https://alexeducationfoundation.org/nominate-someone/ to nominate a deserving individual.

Donate Now!

Thanks to your support, the Alexandria Education Foundation is helping more students each year reach their full potential, which in turn, makes the future of our community that much brighter. Donations can be made online at www.alexeducationfoundation.org, or by mail to AEF, P.O. Box 308, Alexandria, MN 56308.

Alexandria Education Foundation adopt a CLASSROOM

AEF has started a new program called "adopt a classroom". Teachers often spend hundreds of dollars to provide supplies for classroom use. The goal of the

program is to connect community members to classrooms to help provide needed supplies and show appreciation to APS teachers. Supporters can "adopt" a classroom in the fall of each year by making a contribution to AEF. This year's campaign ended October 18th, but look for the program again next fall!

Classroom Innovation Grant Spotlights

Hydroponic Grow Towers and Food Table



Project Title: Hydroponic Grow Towers and Food Table

Teacher: Linnay Schweisthal

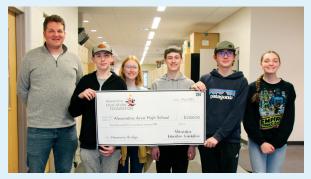
School: Alexandria Area High School

Students Impacted: 100 students 9th-12th grade

Amount Funded: \$4,574

The agriculture classes at AAHS will receive Hydroponic towers and a food table. Hydroponics are a way to grow food without soil and in different environments. Students will have the ability to learn about different ways food and plants can be grown and produced. With technology integrated into the hydroponic towers, it will give students a look at how technology can play a role in growing food and keeping plants healthy.

Harmony Bridge



Project Title: Harmony Bridge

Teacher: Nick Mason

School: Alexandria Area High School

Students Impacted: 130 students 9th-12th grade

Amount Funded: \$2,500

Harmony Bridge is a musical initiative designed to help bridge the generational gap between teenage students and the senior living community using chamber music. The materials that will be purchased by the Ed Foundation are designed to be an approachable intro to chamber music that students can use in student-led rehearsals and recitals, and then apply those skills at performances in senior living residencies.



Free to attend unless otherwise noted

AAHS Fall Orchestra Concert 7pm | <u>PAC</u>





AAHS Fall Band Concert 7pm | PAC

DMS Fall Play "Play within a Play"

Written by the 8th grade playwrights
5:30pm & 7pm
DMS Auditorium





AAHS Fall Musical "Into the Woods"

Nov 14-16 | 7pm | PAC Nov 17 | 2pm | PAC

\$10 adults; \$8 students | Tickets: https://gofan.co/app/school/MN19590 Tickets: https://gofan.co/event/1726531?schoolId=MN19590

Shaun Johnson + The Big Band Experience Dec 9 7pm AAHS PAC DEC 9



The AAHS Jazz Ensemble is opening for this event.
Shaun Johnson returns to the stage with his Jazz Pop holiday show.
As the lead singer of Tonic Sol-fa - and an Emmy® winner Shaun reworks classic Christmas fare with a charismatic charm.

Tickets: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/alexandria-mn-cool-yule-tickets-tickets-1005954947327



Tickets:

AAHS Christmas Concert 3pm & 5:30pm PAC

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/alexandria-mn-cool-yule-tickets-tickets-1005954947327

Nutcracker Ballet Continental Ballet Company 4pm | AAHS PAC



Tickets: online, GoFan, phone or at the door 320.762.3310 | communityed.alexschools.org Advance: \$19 adults; \$7 students • At the door: \$25 adults; \$10 students



Independent School District 206 PO Box 308 Alexandria, MN 56308

☐/alexmnschools☐@alexmnschools⊕alexschools.org

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RESERVE THE CAROLERS FOR YOUR HOLIDAY EVENT

The talented Alexandria Area High School Carolers are now available for performances in late November and early to mid-December!

We'll bring the festive cheer with a 15-minute set – completely free!

Donations are always welcome to help us keep spreading joy, but we'll never charge a fee! To book, contact Colt Lien, AAHS Director of Choral Activities at clien@alexschools.org, or (320) 762-2142 ext. 4601.