



# Orono Schools

Where Excellence is a Tradition and a Goal

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District News • December 20, 2024



## From the Superintendent

Dear Orono Families and Staff,

As we prepare for winter break, I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for each of you—our incredible students, dedicated staff, and supportive families. Together, we've had a fantastic start to the year, and I am deeply thankful for the strong partnerships that make our community so special.

This season is a wonderful time to rest, relax, and create cherished memories with family and friends. I hope your break is filled with joy, laughter, and meaningful moments that rejuvenate your spirit for the year ahead.

A special thank you to our parent organizations—[PTO](#), [OMSPA](#), and [SPA](#)—for coordinating efforts to make this season bright for our staff. The generosity of our parent community is deeply appreciated. As we continue to strengthen our connections, I encourage all parents/guardians to opt-in to newsletter communication and contribute your annual dues as we head in to 2025 (please click the bold links, above). Newsletter communication helps you stay abreast of activities, volunteer opportunities, and the ways our parent organizations enhance our students' learning. Your generosity and involvement truly make a difference!

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to our schools and for making our district a place where students thrive and grow. I look forward to an exciting and productive second half of the year together.

Wishing you and your loved ones a safe, happy, and restful holiday season!

With warmest holiday wishes,  
Kristine Flesher, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

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No School E-12

WINTER BREAK  
DECEMBER 23-27  
DECEMBER 30-JANUARY 3

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### First-grade Programmers Direct Their Bee-Bots

First-grade students dove into the world of programming this week by learning to code Bee-Bots, simple robots designed for young learners. Teams of two practiced giving the Bee-Bot instructions for moving through different grid challenges. Bee-Bots continue to offer a fun, hands-on activity that strengthens problem-solving skills and perseverance. Thank you to Ms. Nett and Ms. Nellis for guiding our students in this exciting activity!



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### "Anastasia" Recognized through Hennepin Theater Trust Spotlight Awards

This fall, Hennepin Theater Trust sent trained theater professionals to view a performance of the OHS fall musical, "Anastasia." Congratulations to cast and crew for receiving great feedback! Receiving **Outstanding** honors: Overall Technical Production, Costume Crew, and Sound Crew. Individual Outstanding awards went to Henry Shafer as Dmitry, Axel Duke as Gleb, McKenna Monger as Countess



Lily, Lucy Keating as Costumer, and Ava Klug as Board Operator. We are thrilled that Orono High School theater continues to draw attention for its outstanding productions. Thank you to Director Kelsie Balon Peck for her visionary leadership.





**Orono High School Theater**  
January 17, 2025  
6 p.m. | OHS Auditorium  
**Free Performance!**



### Spirit of Giving Benefits Orono Community Families

A message of gratitude goes to the Orono Schools' staff and [Orono Cares](#) for making this holiday a lot brighter for our families in need. Orono staff generously contributed enough funds to purchase and fill 72 meal boxes—the largest number to date. Boxes were overflowing with all the ingredients to make a special holiday dinner! Orono Cares collected \$28,980 (!) to purchase Target gift cards that were delivered along with the meal boxes.

Individual thank-yous go to: Ms. Abby Saatzer, Orono Schools Social Worker, for organizing this year's effort; Orono buildings & grounds staff for assembling the meal boxes; Genna Torney, Donna Ostvig, and Mia Hansen for managing the distribution to families. **Well done!**

### Community Honors Retiring School Board Members



December 9 was the final School Board meeting for retiring members Mike Bash and Ali Howe. Thank you for your many years of service to our learning community! Ali was sworn in January 2020 and Mike in January 2004. Both have served countless hours on committees and in their governance role. [Listen as Dr. Flesher summarizes their outstanding contributions.](#)

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### Orono Debate has a Fantastic Season

After a several year hiatus, Orono Debate reemerged and had a fantastic season. The team finished its 2024 Season at the State Classic Debate Tournament, held at Two Rivers High School December 6-7. The team of Simon Forbes and Ethan Weiss reached the Octafinals, and the team of Owen Marks and Keagan Klaers narrowly missed qualifying; both teams went 3-2 in the preliminary rounds.

Orono competed in four tournaments this year, in each tournament competing against at least 20 teams and 40 speakers—all five of the members pictured were on a team that went undefeated and won at least one tournament, and all members placed either first or second in speaker points in at least one tournament. The hope is the returning members will be joined by other Orono students who would like the opportunity to debate. Classic Debate focuses on two different topics through the course of a season, and in each debate tournament the speaker will argue the Affirmative side twice and the Negative side twice. Thank you to coach John Malone for stepping into this role and bringing debate back to OHS! Well done, Spartans!



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### ExCEL and Triple A Awards

Congratulations to our MSHSL ExCEL and Triple A Award Winners!

Our Junior ExCEL winners, Evelyn Miller and Eli Fish, demonstrate achievement in community service, education, and leadership. **Evelyn** plays volleyball and basketball and is a member of the OHS band. She



is an outstanding mathematician and is active in Women in Leadership and Morgan's Message (athlete mental health). She is working toward her Girl Scout Gold Award. Her favorite activity is Basketball mentor to younger players. **Eli** is a stand-out member of the Boys Swimming & Diving team, participates in OHS choir, is a peer tutor, and Chinese Club President. His favorite activity has been Girls Swim Team Manager.



Our senior Triple A Award recipients are Sulli Neubauer and Brady Wooley. **Sulli** has been an active member of student senate all four years, managing social media as part of her Communications role. She participates in choir and Tri-M, the music honor society. She is dedicated to competition dance and was named Miss Dance Team Minnesota in 2024. **Brady** is an AP student who excels at math and Spanish. He is saxophone section leader in band and participates in Wind Ensemble, pep band, marching band, and tour band. He has played basketball all four years and is currently leading the team as Captain.



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## Winter Sports Highlights

Winter sports are off to a great start with outstanding performances and teamwork. Keep up the good work, Spartans!

### **Dance**

Jazz has taken first place in the first two conference meets of the season, kick has placed 2nd in both meets. The conference championship is tonight.

### **Boys' Basketball**

Overall record of 3-1 and ranked #2 in the state.

### **Girls' Basketball**

Overall record of 8-1 and ranked #5 in the state.

### **Boys' Hockey**

Overall record of 4-4-2 and ranked #14 in the state.

### **Girls Hockey**

Overall record of 8-3-2 and ranked #3 in the state.

### **Boys' Swim and Dive**

Defeated New Prague in the opening conference meet of the season. Currently ranked #5 in the state.

### **Nordic Ski**

Congrats to the boys' nordic ski team on taking 1st place in the most recent Metro West Conference sprint race. Girls earned 3rd place.

### **Alpine Ski**

Congrats to the boys' alpine ski team on taking 1st place at the first Metro West Conference race of the season at Buck Hill.

### **Wrestling**

Congrats to the wrestling team on earning its first win of the season in Thursday's match against South St. Paul. Congrats to 7th grader Emery Soukup on taking 1st place in the 100lb girls' varsity division at the Andover Invitational. Congrats to 7th grader Anthony Schoeller on taking 1st place in the 107 lb boys' varsity division at the Andover Invitational.







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## Enrollment Reminders for 2025-26

Our enrollment staff are busy planning for the 2025-26 school year. Resident families with incoming Kindergarten students have been notified and provided instructions on how to begin the enrollment process. If you are an open-enrolled family with another child (e.g., incoming Kindergartener) to be considered for 25-26 enrollment, please know that [you are required to complete an open enrollment application for that child](#). The state deadline for first-pass consideration is **Wednesday, January 15, 2025**. Thank you for helping us plan for next year!

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## Orono School Board Meeting Highlights

**Monday, December 9, 2024** | [Agenda](#)

- Superintendent's Report on Excellence | [Watch the Presentation](#)
- Board Reports & Comments | [Watch the Presentation](#)
- Public hearing on the proposed extension of the Operating Referendum by School Board approval | [Watch the Presentation](#)
- Truth in Taxation hearing and 2024 Pay 2025 School Property Tax Levy for Fiscal 2025-2026 | [Watch the Presentation](#)

The next meeting of the Orono School Board is scheduled for Monday, January 13, 2025, at 7 p.m. in the District Office Assembly Room. If you are interested in participating in the Public Comment session at 7 p.m., please learn more and register on the [School Board's Public Comment webpage](#).

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## Important Dates

- December 23-31 and January 1-3 | Winter Break (No School E-12)
- January 6 - Classes Resume
- January 20 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day (No School E-12)
- January 24 - End of Semester 1
- January 27 - Professional Day (No School E-12)

Please see the [Calendars page](#) on the Orono Schools website for more information.



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