



We're Wild About Our Friends!

2024 Friends of Education Recognition Reception

An American Education Week Celebration of School Volunteerism

Sunset Hill Elementary – Altrusa

Dedicated volunteers from Altrusa make a remarkable impact on Sunset Hill students, generously giving of their time to read with students, practice essential literacy and math skills one-on-one, and engage in fun, educational math games with small groups. They have also helped with our school store and gave donations to ensure students have the resources they need to succeed!

Langston Hughes Elementary – Michael Cook

A true friend to Langston Hughes, Mike generously repaints our playground basketball and four-square lines, updates the large playground map, and refreshes the safety lines, crosswalk, and curbs in front of our school every summer. He makes sure our school is ready to go each fall!

Billy Mills Middle School – Gwen Clark

We have Gwen to thank for our productive and supportive parent organization. They do so much for us, including supporting our entire staff by feeding them during conferences. Gwen is most deserving of this recognition from Billy Mills Middle School.



Woodlawn Elementary – Gary Greer

Always seeking the best for Woodlawn, Gary has led our Lunch Buddy program for two years, organizing one-on-one mentoring, positive role models, and partnership with our students. Our Lunch Buddies are supportive, compassionate, great listeners, and truly inspiring people who positively impact the lives of our students.

Prairie Park Elementary – Kris Leggins

A longtime Prairie Park educator turned volunteer, Kris retired last year from teaching and continues to come back for more fun! From volunteering with the Marathon Club, helping in the garden, and supporting MANY PTA events, her positive presence continues to be felt all around Prairie Park school.

West Middle School – Mandy Grindstaff

We appreciate Mandy's generous contributions and unwavering support of West. She has provided yard signs for events, activity nights, and the tennis team, and treated tennis players to pizza at their end-of-year celebration. Since moving here last year, Mandy has made an immediate impact, including donating hygiene products for students, and always showing encouragement to our staff.

New York Elementary – Leslie Arnold

Leslie's exceptional efforts in organizing volunteers, reading with students, and ensuring that school events are fully supported make a profound impact on our New York school community. We are incredibly grateful for the time and energy she gives to help students thrive and school events run smoothly.



Free State High – Mike Urish, Lawrence Shirt Factory

Mike and his team at the Lawrence Shirt Factory have provided discounts on T-shirts, so we can offer them at a reasonable price for our students to wear and show their pride in supporting childhood cancer, breast cancer, and serving as members of LINK Crew. What high school student doesn't love a T-shirt?

Deerfield Elementary – Nicole Beatty

Our PTO President, Nicole, is a passionate advocate, tirelessly supporting teachers and students and ensuring needs are met with empathy and dedication. She creates vibrant, engaging events to build community and fosters a strong sense of belonging. Her advocacy and proactive involvement make her an invaluable bridge, strengthening the partnerships that fuel Deerfield's success!

Community Connections at Pinckney – Judy Labbe & Joan Justice

Valued volunteers, Judy and Joan have dedicated countless hours unpacking and organizing our new school home. Their meticulous efforts in setting up the clothing closet, shoe room, and laundry room created welcoming spaces that provide essential resources for students in need. Their compassionate approach and attention to detail ensure students can access clean clothes, properly fitting shoes, and laundry services with dignity.

We're Wild About Our Friends! (Part II)

Schwegler Elementary – Amber Baranski

From PTA and Site Council to lunch supervision and more, Amber has been essential to our success! It is impossible to list all the ways she has helped us while Max and Ava have attended Schwegler. As Ava moves to middle school, we will miss Amber's presence, yet continue to benefit from her legacy work for many years to come.

Sunflower Elementary – Anjali Kansal-Rill

With great pride and admiration, we recognize Anjali for outstanding dedication and unwavering commitment to our school community. She embodies true generosity, commitment, organization, and kindness. Deeply invested in the success of our students, she helps in classrooms, boosts morale, and fosters a nurturing and supportive environment for our entire Sunflower community.



Liberty Memorial Central Middle School – Michel Loomis

In addition to her decades of teaching, Michel continues to be an asset to our school by raising funds to expand our Smart Strength program. It supports in-class students in accessing trainers and exercise experts during their school day. Michel is an advocate for our students and teachers and a longtime positive asset to our Liberty Memorial Central school community.



Lawrence College & Career Center – Annie Dark, Brown Industries

Brown Industries has generously donated steel to support student welding instruction for nearly 20 years. This makes it possible to use district resources to enhance the program. Brown Industries also supports students with job shadowing opportunities and internships. We appreciate this longstanding partnership with the Lawrence College & Career Center.

Hillcrest Elementary – Elizabeth "Day" Beck

Hillcrest thanks Elizabeth for incredible dedication to making a difference by organizing our Running Club, Hawkathon. These efforts, including managing every detail and coordinating additional volunteers, inspire nearly 200 children to stay active and lead healthy lives.

Southwest Middle School – Carly & Justin Salb

The Salbs have dedicated countless hours to the Southwest Theater Program. This includes spending time designing and building sets, supervising student actors, and providing snacks for the cast and crew. Their support has been invaluable to our theater directors, students, and the program overall.

Cordley Elementary – Marlon Wesley

A parent and volunteer, Marlon can be found in the cafeteria or on the playground almost every day of the week! Kids know they can count on him to help them get what they need in the cafeteria or give them a little extra challenge at recess. We appreciate his positive support, constant presence, and the high expectations he sets for Cordley students as another amazing, caring adult in their lives.

Lawrence High – Connie Grimes

A vital asset to Lawrence High School, Connie has generously volunteered her time to improve our school community. She serves as secretary of our Lion's Pride PTO Committee and as our recognition chairperson. We appreciate her dedication and unwavering support!

Quail Run Elementary – Beth Pavisian

Beth is such a blessing to Quail Run Elementary School. She always has a smile and a positive word for everyone with whom she comes in contact as she volunteers. We're so lucky to have Beth helping to make our school a special place.



Lawrence Public Schools, USD 497 – Jan Hurst

As a City of Lawrence school crossing guard, Jan has guided students, staff, and families in getting to and from school safely for 35 years! Her loyalty, commitment, and dedication to the safety of our community – in all kinds of weather – is truly exceptional! She's also a consistent presence, and friendly face, greeting students before and after school every day.

Special thanks to this year's Friends of Education, all school volunteers, principals & presenters, volunteers Coleen Martin, Joyce Tallman, Susan DeSandre, Deb Colby, James Jarvis, Dr. Jeanice Kerr Swift, Lori Greenfield, Carole Cadue-Blackwood, Julie Boyle, & student emcees Elle Cormaney & Kinsey Lake, Free State High School, & Mimi Rosado-Schmitt & Bryndal Hoover, Lawrence High School.