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LCSC Communicator

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Regional News, Views, and Information

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

PORTRAIT OF A LEARNER

WORK BASED LEARNING

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN STEVENS COUNTY

ROTHSAY PUBLIC SCHOOL CREATING LIFELONG LEARNERS

CPC VENDOR SPOTLIGHT

BRANDON EVANSVILLE RAISING A READER

YOUTH ECO SOLUTIONS (YES!) AT MINNEWASKA

SANVELLO MEDICA WELLNESS

STUDENT ACADEMIC CHALLENGES ADDS NEW PROGRAMS

LCSC TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

OTTER TAIL COUNTY K12 NAVIGATOR

AESA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL A CONVERSATION WITH SECRETARY CARDONA

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EDUCATION-
Electronic Edition
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Source: Kristie Sullivan, Superintendent, Breckenridge Public School
Author: Mary Phillipe, Communications Generalist, Lakes Country Service Cooperative

Portrait of a Learner

"It's the wind blowing the storm windows," commented Kristie Sullivan, Superintendent of Breckenridge Public School, about the loud crashing sounds radiating from her office windows. When I sat down in her office to begin our interview, Sullivan was working on preparing her weather alert text for the winter storm arriving later in the week. Preparing the school for weather-related issues is another important responsibility of superintendents.

Breckenridge Elementary School is where Sullivan's office is located and where her grandmother, Dorothy Murphy, graduated from high school in 1952. "I have stood on the same steps as a superintendent where my grandmother stood as an high school student," said Sullivan. The school was built in 1934, is now 88 years old, and still uses storm windows. There have been four additions added between 1949 and 1998. When the floodwaters of 1997 reached the Breckenridge community, many buildings were devastated. The flood water damaged the elementary school's basement, which is now condemned and closed for the safety of staff and students.

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Superintendent
Kristie Sullivan

Several teachers where she went to high school were able to see Kristie struggling. The caring and dedicated group of teachers worked together to provide the support she needed to succeed. “They were not going to let me fail,” said Sullivan. “They provided the support I needed to turn things around, and I could not have done it without them.” Sullivan shared that she also wants to be that same strong support system for children.
Portrait of Learner presentations are intended for graduating seniors to present to audiences as a final capstone project of their secondary education. Students chose an artifact which can be a project, paper, presentation, and more. At the end of their senior year, students are asked to reflect upon their artifacts and speak about how they are ready to move into their next phase.

Sullivan grew up not far from Breckenridge in Rothsay, MN, and after graduating, she taught at the high school in Breckenridge for a few years. Sullivan also spent some time at Lakes Country Service Cooperative as a Regional Center of Excellence School Advocate. When asked what the Center of Excellence has provided for her in her new role as Superintendent, she stated that the tools she learned help her with everything she does daily.
Kristie went into education to help kids gain confidence to be successful. She went on to tell of a time in her life when she was devastated by losing a family member. Before this tragedy, she was an excellent student, and good grades came easily. Following the loss of her brother, she just gave up and didn’t feel the need to study and do well in school.



> “The power is in the reflection.”

“The power is in reflection and personal growth,” said Sullivan. Students need to take the time to reflect and think through the process of their artifacts. Otherwise, this becomes a checklist.” Students may present to family members, school board members, teachers, and more. It is essential to consider the student's comfort level and to whom they present their artifact.
What does she need to help her students continue to be successful? Sullivan stated she has a few critical roles to fill at the school. A special education teacher, several paraprofessionals, and a custodian.
This is Kristie Sullivan’s first year serving as a superintendent, and she is enjoying the variety and challenges and has immense respect for her team at Breckenridge Public School. With a little over 600 students, she stated that what makes her school great is the kids’ character and their families. “It is a small enough environment to create a feeling that everyone needs to pitch in and help one another to be successful.”
Do you want to learn more about Breckenridge Public School or the Portrait of a Learner program? **Visit their website at www.isd846.org.**

RURAL CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION GRANT RECIPIENT



WORK BASED LEARNING

Author/Source: Josh Nelson, Deputy Director of Educational Programs, Lakes Country Service Cooperative

Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) joined forces with our state parent organization, Minnesota Service Cooperatives, to apply for a $6 million grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. After engaging in a process to assess needs around the state, LCSC effectively made the case that we need funds in our region for equipment purchases for schools, new equipment training, and tuition assistance for teachers pursuing additional Career and Technical Education (CTE) licenses. In total, LCSC was directly allocated $495,000 in year one and $365,000 in year two to carry out the work in our region. Additionally, our statewide colleagues collectively agreed that a top priority is to increase the number of teachers with appropriate CTE licenses. Given the fact that LCSC has the only service cooperative program approved by the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board to deliver CTE programming that leads to licensure, the statewide grant allocation will flow through our region to provide tuition assistance to any CTE teacher wishing to add on a license in the related field.

LCSC currently has an RFP open to purchase computer numerically controlled (CNC) routers for schools in our region using the funds. Each machine will come with instructor training and accessories. We hope to have the equipment in schools by the first of the year.

Dustin Steenblock

LCSC Alternative Teacher Preparation Program Leader





A Unique Twist on School-Based Mental Health Services In Stevens County

AUTHORS: JACKIE WOLLSCHLAGER, MSW, LICSW & MOLLY WESTERMAN, MSW, LICSW

Children and youth spend most of their time in school and schools play a large role in supporting students by providing a safe and supportive environment. Just as we've incorporated specialized services such as speech within school buildings, why not incorporate access to mental health services that can support prevention, early intervention, and treatment through a school-based mental health professional? This is a question various partners in Stevens County had been asking, as we know mental health is an important part of children's overall health and well-being.

Mental health affects how children think, feel, and act. It also plays a role in how children handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices, which are all essential aspects for excelling in school. Having a mental health professional within the school building not only reduces barriers for students and families, such as transportation challenges and additional time outside the classroom, but also easily connects students with mental health services they may not otherwise receive. Early diagnosis and appropriate services for children and their families can make a difference in the lives of children with mental health needs and has been shown to improve truancy and discipline rates, increase the rates of high school graduation, and help create a positive school environment in which students can learn and be successful (youth.gov).

"So, what can this look like in rural Minnesota?"



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Through a partnership between Stevens County Human Services and the Chokio-Alberta and Morris Area School Districts, school-based mental health services are being provided on a consistent basis. Initially, it was one mental health professional employed through Stevens County Human Services providing individual therapy services to students in all school districts, though it was quickly realized that one clinician was not enough. As a result of high demand and an extensive waitlist, monetary contribution from Morris Area Schools, Chokio-Alberta Schools, and the Midwest Special Education Cooperative allowed for an additional mental health professional to be employed by Stevens County Human Services. As a result, not only are individual therapy services provided to three school districts, but consultation and training opportunities for school staff as well as the additional option of school-based group therapy services is now being established for the 2022-2023 school year.

“THE BENEFITS HAVE PROVEN TO BE WORTH THE EFFORTS.”

The services are available to all students, regardless of insurance status (thanks to the Minnesota Department of Human Services’ School-Linked Mental Health Grant), and regardless of a student’s qualification for an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Referrals can come directly from school personnel, easing the processing of getting students connected to needed services, but can also come directly from parents or county-based case managers. A significant benefit of having the mental health professionals employed through Stevens County Human Services is that the collaboration between collaterals, such as county case managers or special education case managers, is enhanced due to the partnership with having a county-based mental health professional providing services within the school. This approach increases communication between providers and with the family, enhances service delivery, and improves support for all involved in order to best support the student and their unique needs.

Getting to this point has taken a lot of communication, collaboration, and open-mindedness. It has taken resilience and persistence. This initiative and the desire to include increased mental health support for students in our schools has had strong support from the Stevens County Board of Commissioners, Morris Area School Board, Chokio-Alberta School Board, and the Midwest Special Education Cooperative, who collectively believe in the positive impact of mental health services for the students of Stevens County. The benefits have proven to be worth the efforts, and as we know in rural communities, thinking outside the box is required in order to meet the unique challenges we face.

ROTHSAY PUBLIC SCHOOL



CREATING LIFE LONG LEARNERS

"You can hear the sounds of truck drivers blasting their horns when they see the Friday night lights of the new football field," said Rothsay Superintendent Wade Johnson about the school's most recent improvement project. Two years ago, Rothsay Public School moved the football field closer to the school, which can now be seen from Interstate 94.

I recently had the pleasure of heading west on I-94 to tour this small, rural school during one of its workshop days. On arrival, I appreciated the facility their community had invested in for their children. This magnificent facility stands out along the roadside, surrounded by farmland.

Rothsay Public School is a state-of-the-art facility that was completed in 2015. Students who are excited to learn arrive on morning buses from the communities of Rothsay, Barnesville, Fergus Falls, Erhard, Elizabeth, Pelican Rapids, and Foxhome.

The mission at Rothsay Public Schools is "To educate our students to become responsible citizens and lifelong learners." The school is home to 350 students in Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grade, with a current 2023 graduating class of 18. The school is also home to a licensed childcare center which is immensely important to working parents in the community. Johnson added, "Our school is the smallest school district in Minnesota that does not co-op with surrounding school districts for our education or athletic programs.

Source: *Wade Johnson, Superintendent, Rothsay Public School*
Author: *Mary Phillipe, Communications Generalist, Lakes Country Service Cooperative*

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Superintendent, Wade Johnson

With our excellent team of 80 dedicated employees, we can provide a robust list of opportunities for our students." Rothsay Public School also offers various extracurriculars, including sports, FFA, band, choir, speech, drama, and musicals. Johnson is incredibly proud of the music program. "Choir and band participation is high, and the Performance Center is filled with friends and family whenever they perform," said Johnson.

Before his assignment in Rothsay, Johnson worked in the Detroit Lakes School District for 15 years as a Social Studies teacher and basketball coach. When he began his career, Johnson initially focused on coaching basketball but quickly fell in love with teaching Social Studies. Johnson has been the Superintendent of Rothsay School for the past six years and joined the school district three years after the new school building opened in 2015. "The job has its challenges, but I like it! I feel I have more opportunity to positively impact kids than when I was teaching," said Johnson. What worries Johnson is the future of staffing teachers. Right now, it's not an issue at their school, but he admitted it could change quickly. He shared that at least five schools in the area are without a Phy Ed teacher. "Rothsay and Minnesota schools are not alone in this shortage," said Johnson.

"This is a nationwide problem, and we need to start promoting what our teachers are doing well if we want to attract college graduates to this critical job of educating our children.

You can see that what Rothsay Public School is doing well is looking at our local business's needs and matching students and curriculum to meet those needs. The popular welding class was recently added to the list of Rothsay School electives. Last year the school was able to take a portion of the bus garage and repurpose it into a welding shop. Lakes Country Service Cooperative's Health and Safety team worked with Rita Olson, the school's AG instructor, to ensure the facility met the health and safety requirements of a welding training facility. The shop provides six welding booths where two students can work safely. Regular and advanced welding instruction is offered to the students. Olson currently has 19 students enrolled, which grew from 10 students last year. "Kids don't know what they don't know until you show it to them," said Olson about the growing interest in this trade.

RITA OLSON, AG INSTRUCTOR



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Prior to the pandemic, Rothsay Public School partnered with the North Dakota School of Science (NDSCS) to host an on-site job fair in their performance center focused on trades. Leslie Shirek, NDSCS's Program Outreach Specialist, worked with Rothsay Public School to coordinate this well-attended event. The job fair was a success and is on the calendar for 2023. They will again partner with NDSCS to allow students to connect with local business trades like Bobcat, Galaxy, and local plumbers and electricians.

Rothsay Public School's website states, "Teachers at Rothsay Elementary are dedicated to creating learning space that caters to students' individual needs and focuses on the growth of each and every child." As I toured the school and asked questions of the staff, I felt a real sense of their pride in making a difference in the lives of the children in their school and community and the importance of working together to accomplish their mission.



Do you want to learn more about this rural Minnesota school? You can visit their website at www.rothsay.k12.mn.us.

VENDOR SPOTLIGHT

COOPERATIVE Purchasing CONNECTION



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WHEN A DISASTER STRIKES

Brandon Evansville

Raising A Reader

Author: *Deb Berry, LCSC Raising a Reader Coordinator & Early Childhood Teacher*

Brandon-Evansville Raising A Reader literacy program celebrated its first round of programming with two Blue Bag Celebrations this Spring/Summer. This was the first official year the school has conducted the program, with approximately 50 Early Ed families and two home Childcare participating. This Fall, the program will expand from two ECFE classes, Head Start and 3 yr. old Intro to PreK families to include three 4yr. old School Readiness classes, two Kindergarten classes, and an additional 3 yr. old Intro to PreK class.

Raising A Reader is a program where red bags of age-appropriate books go home with Early Ed children, and families are encouraged to engage in "book cuddling" with their children.Each week the child brings their "red bag" back to class and gets a new one to take home. The kids get excited to see what books they have this week in their bags. Teachers and staff at the BE School also share the books from the bags in their classes and sometimes even do activities with them as they fit into their lessons.





This builds a bridge from home to school; children see adults in many places modeling how fun reading is. We know reading is one of the most critical skills a person can have, and it is vital that little ones learn to do so in the laps of those who are a child's first teacher at home.

Families are also encouraged to visit the library throughout the program, so it seemed fitting to hold the first celebration at the Douglas County Library on May 19. The celebration is called our "Blue Bag Celebration" because children who participate get a blue library bag with a book in it to add to their home libraries. The blue bag is what they use to continue coming to the library or bookmobile to get books and take them home. Brandon-Evansville's first celebration was attended by approximately 100 children and adults from BE Head Start, Intro to PreK, and the Evening ECFE group. Many children were running around in red RAR t-shirts and engaging in a scavenger hunt, bookmaking activity, and story time with our wonderful children's librarian, Sarah.

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The bells rang out as each child came to their teacher to receive their Blue Library Bag and book. “It’s a wonder how many people have never been to the library and are so excited to get this opportunity to explore it and get their library card,” said BE Early Ed Coordinator Linda Saari.Brandon-Evansville is piloting this program for Lakes Country Service Cooperative. Hence, staff from that organization volunteered at the event, and First Security Bank in Evansville staff provided the RAR program with an LA Amundson Ohana grant at the end of last year.



The second celebration was held in Evansville City Park on July 1. It included a collaboration with the Viking Library System and Evansville Art Center. They brought a group called The Jolly Pops for an afternoon and evening concert of family-friendly music. Children and adults danced to the music and formed a train throughout the park. There was laughter and smiles on their faces, both young and old. Following the afternoon concert, families got the opportunity to tour the Viking Library Book Mobile, which graciously stopped in the park at the end of their busy day. Then, a picnic supper was enjoyed, and each child from the Daytime ECFE group got their Blue Library Bag and book. Throughout the Spring, the Daytime ECFE group has held classes at different businesses and organizations throughout Evansville. Everyone enjoyed learning more about the Evansville community. Our second celebration started the 4th of July weekend with a gorgeous day and concerts in the park, which approximately 140 people attended. Some attendees participated in both events as The Jolly Pops, which was so much fun!

“The Blue Bag celebration is one of my favorite moments as Raising A Reader Coordinator,” says Deb Berry, who also teaches ECFE in Brandon-Evansville. “To see our kids and families learning to love reading, enjoying our local library and bookmobile is what we as educators hope for.”

A shout of “thanks” to every organization supporting this project and impacting the lives of many in our communities. Local supporters include the Evansville Historical Foundation and farther-reaching organizations such as United Way of Douglas & Pope Counties, the DC Early Childhood Initiative, West Central Initiative, and the LA Amundson Ohana Foundation. Also, a huge thank you to Lakes Country Service Cooperative for allowing us to pilot this program in the Brandon-Evansville District.

As community members who want to see literacy celebrated in our families, keep an eye out for little ones in red RAR t-shirts or carry a Blue RAR Library bag and ask the child about the books they read with their families. We are excited to see this program grow throughout the coming years and to celebrate how amazing it is to share books each year!

YOUTH ECO SOLUTIONS (YES!) AT MINNEWASKA



Source: Ben Velani, West Central Initiative AmeriCorps Fellow
Author: Yaiza Kinney, West Central Initiative, Climate Action Project Intern
Photo Credit: Clean Energy Resource Teams

Students may wonder about their extracurricular options with another school year upon us. What if these activities could also help conserve the environment and save money? Last year, 48 students at Minnewaska's W.I.N. Academy founded a Youth Eco Solutions (YES!) project team to accomplish that.

For the last fifteen years, students from all around Minnesota have participated in YES!, a statewide after-school program that "empowers youth to create solutions to today's ecological challenges through hands-on action projects." Each year, middle and high school teams do the hands-on work developing and implementing solutions that match their community's needs.

Minnewaska Schools is starting a Trash-to-Art project and a water quality improvement project this school year; Minnewaska Schools is beginning a Trash-to-Art project and a water quality improvement project. Students at Parkers Prairie High School will focus on improving our region's beautiful lakes by testing water quality at Lake Miltona and other local lakes and conducting lakeshore clean-ups.

Students may do much of the legwork on these local projects, but they also have the support of a YES! Coordinator. YES! Coordinators "work intensively with teams to assess community assets and needs, create action plans, identify and involve community partners, and link teams with further funding resources to match the students' passion with a real need and opportunity in their community."

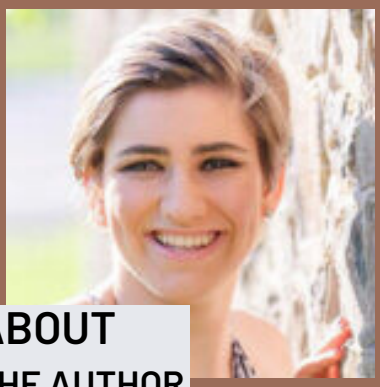


Ryan Rooney, Manager of Energy Services with Runestone Electric Association, volunteered to help Minnewaska students figure out how to reduce their energy and water consumption at home.

Rooney said he was pleased "that the project was not only about cleaning the environment but also was about making the most out of the resources we already have."

Rooney explained how he, along with the YES! The coordinator "helped the students set up a 19-point checklist to keep them on track in meeting their goals." This checklist asked students to write down their household's energy consumption, including details about water, heating, lighting, and HVAC systems.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yaiza Kinney was a Climate Action Project Intern with West Central Initiative during the 2021-2022 academic year. She graduated from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, in May 2022 after studying Earth and Environmental Science. Kinney plans to pursue a graduate degree in environmental communication.

To add incentive, each completed checklist would receive a 30-dollar reward. After students completed checklists and created a baseline of energy and water consumption data, they participated in a workshop on energy efficiency. “Students were provided with kits that included LED lights, a faucet aerator, a water flow test bag, and leak detector tablets. They then monitored their household’s energy consumption and compared it to the data collected earlier to see if their habit changes led to more money being saved,” Rooney said.

The impacts were staggering.

In just one year, through simple lifestyle changes, like turning off the water in the shower when you’re lathering your body with soap, and the efforts of W.I.N Academy’s Youth Eco Solutions project team, a network of 455 community members, was reached, saving 25,496 kW h (kilowatt-hours) of energy. That’s enough energy to power 85 large refrigerators for over a year!

Energy and water saved were not the only success of the project. One of the greatest triumphs, Rooney said, “was how the student's enthusiasm for their kits carried over to their parents once they discovered how much money they could potentially save. Energy efficiency doesn’t always have to be done on large scales. Even little changes compounded over time can make a huge impact and can save the planet and Minnesotans’ wallets as well.”

Sanvello

MEDICA Wellness Program

***This program is only available to current Insurance Pool Members.**

This app provides coping tools, daily mood tracking, guided journeys, and weekly progress check-ins to stay engaged and manage symptoms.

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Support - Find encouragement through your Sanvello peer community.

Student Academic Challenges ADDS NEW PROGRAMS



Monica Thompson, Academic Challenges Coordinator
Jolene King, Program Assistant.

To win the U.S. presidency, a candidate must have 270 out of how many possible electoral votes?

Spell MURRAYA: a genus of tropical Asiatic and Australian trees having pinnate leaves and flowers with imbricated petals.

Design and build an innovative and futuristic city with a climate change adaptation and one mitigation strategy to keep residents healthy and happy.

These are the types of questions and challenges students experience when participating in academic challenges!

Lakes Country Service Cooperative offers several Student Academic Challenge programs throughout the school year. We strive to provide high-quality programs offering new experiences that enrich and challenge students. This year we are excited to offer two new programs! We will host Math Master competitions for grades four through six and the Future City Competition for grades six through eight.

Student Academic Programs offered through Lakes Country Service Cooperative:

Knowledge Bowl is a team academic competition for junior and senior high students that encourages teamwork, collaboration, effective communication, and strategic thinking. Students work together to solve oral and written round questions related to all areas of learning typical of elementary or secondary educational programs. Questions test students' recall, problem-solving, and critical-thinking skills.

Future City starts with a question—how can we make the world a better place? To answer it, sixth, seventh and eighth-grade students imagine, research, design, and build cities of the future that showcase their solution to a citywide sustainability issue. This flexible, project-based learning experience helps students utilize their science, math, and engineering knowledge to create cities that exist for at least 100 years in the future. The program's deliverables appeal to various skill sets and interests, like creative problem solving, building scale models, researching, writing, and public speaking—making it accessible to various students and relevant for educators with multiple areas of subject matter expertise.

Math Masters is a competitive program that challenges fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students to use critical thinking and problem-solving skills in mathematics. Students compete as individuals and on teams in eight rounds of competitions held in March and April each year. Students' academic effort and achievement are recognized with awards in each competition element: Fact Drill, Individual Round and Team Competition.

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Author: *Monica Thompson, Academic Challenges Coordinator, Lakes Country Service Cooperative*

Spelling Bee is a competition geared towards students in grades five through eight and is designed to help students improve their spelling and vocabulary development. The series of spelling contests starts at the school and district levels, with winners advancing to regional events. Regional winners may participate in the Multi-Region State Spelling Bee, and the winner advances to the National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C. All schools wishing to participate in the Multi-Region State Spelling Bee must enroll with Scripps National Spelling Bee for District materials and with Lakes Country Serve Cooperative for the Regional Spelling Bee.

The Young Writers' Conference provides students in grades three through seven with an opportunity to attend classes presented by Minnesota authors and other artists. Other artists include storytellers, cartoonists, puppeteers, creative drama teachers, creative dance instructors, illustrators, and others. Each year, approximately 400 students attend the event in Fergus Falls. The students can purchase the authors' books and have them personally signed. Each participant receives a Young Writers' Conference notebook.



If you have any questions or want more information about these programs, please reach out to Monica Thompson (mthompson@lcsc.org), Academic Challenges Coordinator, or Jolene King (jking@lcsc.org), Program Assistant.

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- Wireless Design and Maintenance
- Firewall Installation and Maintenance
- Technology Helpdesk Ticket System

Lakes Country Service Cooperative's (LCSC) dynamic team of IT professionals provide affordable, high-quality hardware and software solutions for members.

Otter Tail County

AND CENTRAL MINNESOTA MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION (CMMA) LAUNCH AN ONLINE TOOL TO CONNECT SCHOOLS AND EMPLOYERS

The **K12 Navigator** is an online directory that allows employers of all industries and sizes to engage with schools and students interested in exploring careers within the career fields that they offer. The tool will also allow schools and students to connect with employers excited to build the future workforce and provide activities for students to do work-based learning. The expansion of the **K12 Navigator** includes adding all industry types and the ability to search based on the Minnesota Department of Education's (MDE) career wheel. Several school districts in Otter Tail County use the MDE career wheel for student career interest assessments. With the expansion of the **K12 Navigator**, students and teachers can take career exploration a step further and connect the student with a business that offers careers in their field of interest.

Otter Tail County was awarded a Youth Skills Training Grant from the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry to fund the expansion project and further the County's Youth Workforce Navigation Program.

Otter Tail County is partnering with Amy Johnson of Cardinal Consulting Solutions to be the Program Manager of the Youth Workforce Navigation Program. Johnson said, "The Youth Workforce Navigation Program will build the future workforce of Otter Tail County and bridge relationships between schools and businesses. We needed a technology tool to create sustainability for this program and were impressed with the simplicity and functionality that makes the **K12 Navigator** such a powerful tool. We also knew the CMMA spirit of collaboration would make them the ideal partner."

CMMA is a manufacturing trade association that serves manufacturing, distribution and supplier, professional service, and K-12 education members in the St. Cloud region. "The **K12 Navigator** was a sleeping project for many years," said Les Engel, CMMA President. "We started to work on it the first time in 2009 but hit some snags. We finally got it funded and off the ground in 2020. We started the **K12 Navigator** with only manufacturers, but it was only natural that the next step was to expand it to include all industries. We are happy to partner with Otter Tail County and get this valuable tool in the hands of more educators, students, and parents."

Otter Tail County and CMMA encourage employers of all sizes and industries to register their company on the **K12 Navigator** tool to engage the future workforce.

To register, go to www.k12navigator.org.

More information about the K12 Navigator and the Youth Workforce Navigation Program can be shared by contacting Amy Johnson at ajohnson@ccsworkforce.com.



AESA EXECUTIVE COUNCIL A CONVERSATION WITH SECRETARY CARDONA

Back Row: Mark Hoffman (PA), Josh Wenning (IN), John Welch (WA), Secretary Miguel Cardona (USDE), Tom Danehy (CT), Joan Wade (AESA), Jeremy Biehl (WI), Ted Alejandre (CA)
Front Row: Craig Burford (OH), Jeremy Kovash (MN), Pat Sublette (OR), Dan Schnoes (NE)

Nearly 100 AESA members attended this year's Educators' Call to Action Conference in Washington, DC. We are very grateful for the work of Noelle Ellerson Ng and Tara Thomas, our legislative team dedicated to the programming, and the members who attended.

Secretary Cardona left us with three important takeaways from our conversation.

First and foremost, we need to be bold in our leadership. Bold leadership is imperative for making necessary changes in our public education system. Secretary Cardona shared his confidence in the ESAs to lead the change needed to reach all students in every school district.

Next, he asked that we push out an important message to our members about the pending October 31 deadline for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and information about the Affordable Connectivity program.

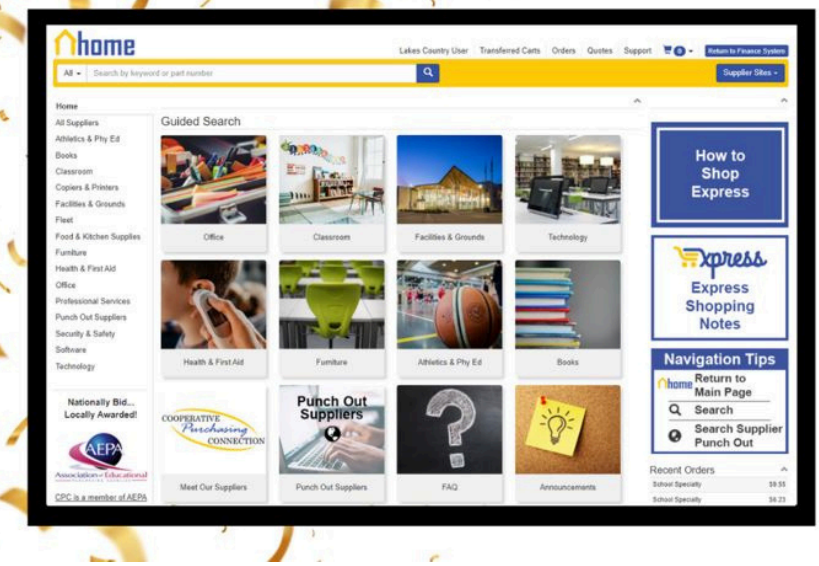
October 31 Deadline for Temporary Changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program: Temporary changes allow student borrowers to get credit for payments made on loans from the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program, Perkins Loan Program, and other federal student loans. These borrowers must apply to consolidate their loans into a Direct Consolidation Loan before the October 31 deadline to qualify for the program under the temporary changes. Additionally, under the temporary changes, past repayment periods count whether borrowers were on a qualifying repayment plan or whether or not borrowers made payments. Most borrowers who work or worked for a non-profit or federal, state, Tribal or local government since 2007 and who have been repaying their loans are eligible. Borrowers can also combine multiple sources of part-time employment to qualify, and months in service do not have to be consecutive.

Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP): The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) established the ACP, providing eligible households up to $30 a month off internet bills and a one-time $100 discount off a connected device. The Administration secured commitments from internet service providers across the country to offer fully-covered high-speed plans, meaning millions of families can get high-speed internet at no cost. An estimated 40% of households qualify for the ACP, including those with an income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level ($55,500 for a family of four) and those participating in certain federal programs (without regard to income). GetInternet.gov is a one-stop shop to check eligibility and sign up. Moreover, the Department released a Back to School ACP Toolkit with a ready-to-use backpack flyer that schools and community partners may use to help students and their families enroll.

Finally, the Secretary asked that we support the work being done in Puerto Rico's education system, specifically around designing a regional education system.

Secretary Cardona is invited to speak in a Fireside Chat with Dr. Wade at the AESA Annual Conference later this fall.

Source/Author: Joan H. Wade, Executive Director, AESA



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