

# ORONO SCHOOLS

## TODAY



April 2025

## Message from the Superintendent

Dear Orono community,

As signs of spring emerge, I want to take a moment to celebrate the many achievements of our students, staff, and community. This season is always a time of renewal, and in our district, it is also a time to reflect on the incredible work being done.

First, I want to recognize our outstanding student-athletes who have brought us together for exciting competitions this winter. Their perseverance and sportsmanship make us all proud. Likewise, our students continue to shine in the arts and on the speech team, for example, earning accolades that showcase their creativity and hard work. These accomplishments reflect the commitment of our educators, coaches, and families in supporting our students' passions and making them feel like they *belong*.

This year, we are focused on our strategic goal of *connectedness*—



Kristine Flesher, Ed.D.

ensuring that every student and staff member feels valued and engaged. One important initiative is *The Orono Coalition* (see page 2) tasked with building community partnerships in a unique and impactful way. We are committed to strengthening the bonds that make our district a place where all thrive.

Please join us Thursday, May 1, from 5-7 p.m. for the **Wellness Expo** at the Activities Center. This free event brings together more than 50 wellness organizations for hands-on service activities, resources, and the Empty Bowls fundraiser for IOCP & WeCAN.

In this edition we are proud to honor three outstanding alumni who have devoted their time and talents to making a difference in the lives of others. Their community impact serves as an inspiration to us all.

We are incredibly fortunate that our enrollment remains strong for the 2025-26 school year, a testament to the trust our families place in our schools. This stability allows us to continue offering high-quality programs, supporting our dedicated staff, and ensuring every student has opportunities to grow and find success. We are grateful for your commitment to children's education.

Thank you for being part of our shared journey.

With gratitude,

## Orono Schools Guiding Torch Award



At its April 3 Community Breakfast for Connectedness, Orono Schools staff and School Board honored former Independence Mayor **Marvin Johnson** with the inaugural "Orono Guiding Torch Award." To receive the award is to be a light for others, to stand as a role model, and to ensure that no one walks the path of education and growth alone. You can learn more about the award and how Mayor Johnson touched lives, developed connections, and built a lasting legacy at [oronoschools.org/news](https://oronoschools.org/news)

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# Community Connectedness

## ORONO THE COALITION A Comprehensive Look

In September 2023, Orono Schools was awarded the federal Drug-Free Communities (DFC) Support Grant for The Orono Coalition. The DFC program is the nation's leading effort to mobilize communities to prevent and reduce youth substance use. Through evidence-based strategies aimed to promote connectedness and well-being and decrease risk factors associated with mental health and substance misuse, the hope is to create sustainable, positive community transformation.

The coalition, directed by Ali Chorley, consists of 40 different individuals representing 15 organizations and 12 community sectors: youth, school staff, parents, law enforcement, local business, government officials, media, treatment and recovery groups, religious leaders, healthcare, youth-serving organizations, and mental health care professionals.

The spirit of the Coalition work revolves around fostering connectedness and supporting well-being through promoting and growing the positive that already exists in the community, providing resources and support, and increasing community partnerships.

The coalition aims to be positive, informative, data-driven and community-focused. Doubling down on growing protective factors is one of the ways the coalition sticks to its values.

Sharing the powerful research around Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs), which began at Kaiser Permanente in the 1990s and continues to evolve today, has become a cornerstone of the work of the coalition. PCE research focuses on understanding how supportive, nurturing, and safe environments during childhood contribute to long-term well-being and resilience and can also buffer negative experiences. Research has shown that positive experiences—such as feeling loved and supported, having a sense of belonging, participating

in community traditions and having supportive non-parental adults—are associated with improved mental health, better coping mechanisms, and healthier life outcomes. By fostering supportive environments for children to thrive where these PCEs are commonplace, the coalition hopes to increase lifelong positive health outcomes for children and adults.

The Orono Coalition meets monthly during the school year and is open to all. Passion and energy are more important than expertise! For more information about meeting dates and locations or for additional information about the coalition, you can visit The Coalition website at [www.theoronocoalition.org](http://www.theoronocoalition.org).

## Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs)

### Family-centered



Being able to talk openly to family about feelings AND feeling heard, supported and accepted



Feeling safe and protected by an adult in the home



Belief that family stood by during difficult times

### Community-centered

Feeling supported by friends



Having a sense of "belonging" or connection to a larger group

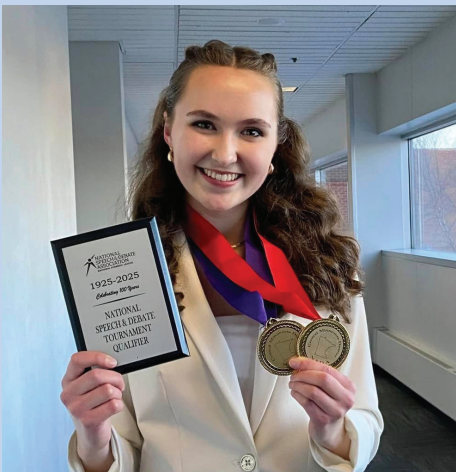
Relationship with at least 2 non-parent adults who take a genuine interest in you



Enjoyment in the participation of community traditions

Drs. Bethell, Jones & Gombojav, Johns Hopkins

## Speaking of achievement...



McKenna Monger ('26), National Qualifier

The Orono Speech Team, under the direction of Ms. Barb Shofner, was recently named **Metro West Conference Champions!** This year, 26 high school and 10 middle school students are participating. Some love to perform and others come to improve their public speaking skills. All have competed in tournaments across the Metro where week after week they turn in outstanding performances and earn top honors.

This spring, six students took nine entries to the annual National Speech & Debate Association qualifying tournament. Congratulations to McKenna Monger ('26) who qualified in "Program Oral Interpretation" with her second-place finish. The national tournament will take place this June.

Congratulations to semifinalists Owen Marks ('26) in International Extemporaneous and Jane Stavitzski ('28) in Humor. McKenna also placed fourth in Drama.

To the entire team: Good luck at your section and state tournaments in April!

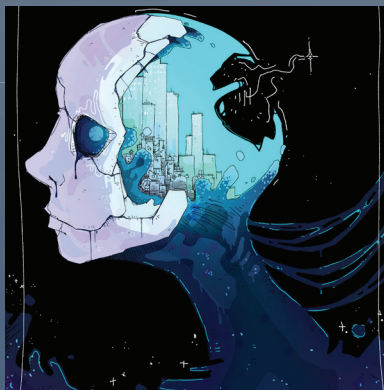




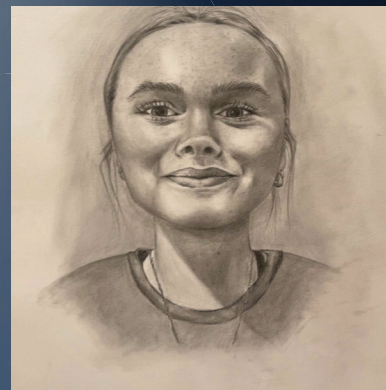
# Student Art Awards



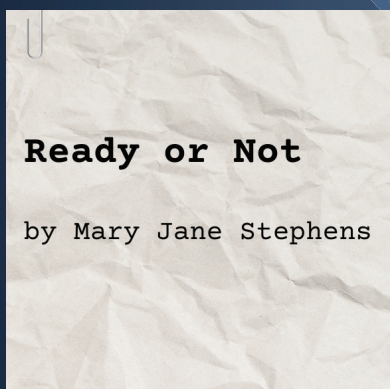
**Annalisa Tedlund (Class of 2026)**  
*Scuba Diving Cats*  
Acrylic on canvas  
Metro West Excellence Award  
one of only five awarded



**Andrew Carlson (Class of 2025)**  
*Porcelain Shell*  
Digital drawing  
Metro West Achievement Award  
one of only 10 awarded



**Leyla Lyu (Class of 2025)**  
*Abby*  
Drawing & Illustration  
Scholastic Art & Writing Awards  
Honorable Mention



**Mary Jane Stephens (Class of 2028)**  
*Ready or Not*  
Personal Essay & Memoir  
Scholastic Art & Writing Awards  
Honorable Mention



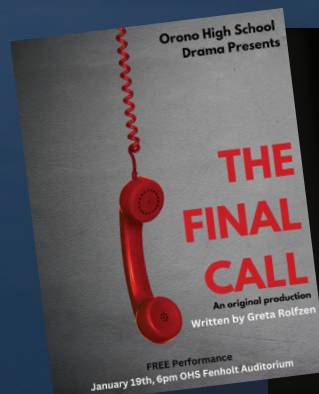
**Abigail Henry (Class of 2025)**  
*A Pomegranate Bargain*  
Mixed media  
Metro West Achievement Award  
one of only 10 awarded



**Linden Cooper (Class of 2026)**  
*Summers Over*  
Painting  
Scholastic Art & Writing Awards  
Honorable Mention



**OHS Theatre Competition One Act Play**  
*The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon*  
Metro West First Place  
Section Competition Fourth Place



**Greta Rolfzen (Class of 2025)**  
*The Final Call\**  
Dramatic Script  
Scholastic Art & Writing Awards  
Gold Key  
\*OHS Winter 2024 One Act Play









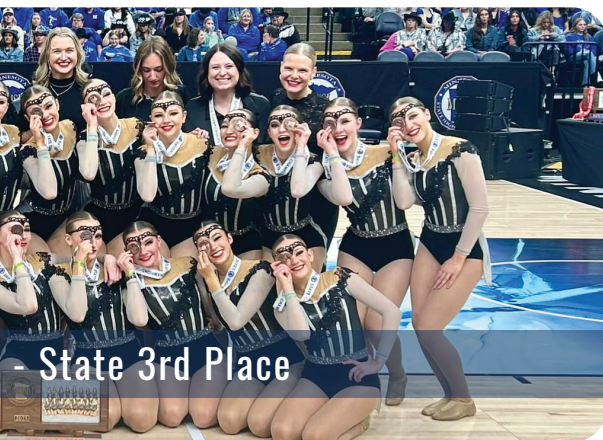
member. Great work, Spartans!



m for MMEA Midwinter Convention



- State 3rd Place



- State 3rd Place



- State 2nd Place



Wrestling - Individual State 3rd Place  
Emery Soukop & Brett Kiecker



Girls Basketball - Section Runner-Up



Nordic Ski State Qualifiers  
Walter Holmes & Johnny DiPrima  
State 3rd Place - Sprint Relays



Alpine Ski - State Qualifiers  
JT Burns & Danny Kinzer



# 2025 Alumni Awards

Nominate an Orono alum today: <https://bit.ly/AWARDS-FORM>



Each year, the Orono Alumni Association conducts a call for nominations, interviews nominees, and selects recipient(s) of the **Orono Distinguished and Promising Alumni awards**. Honorees are individuals who have demonstrated excellence in their chosen field or occupation, exhibited leadership and character, and/or made a lasting contribution in their community. An annual part of this recognition is the awarding of scholarships to three graduating Orono High School seniors based on criteria set by the honoree. *Congratulations* to our 2025 Orono Alumni Award winners!

## Distinguished Alumni

### Ali Chorley Dzieweczynski '04

Ali Chorley has made outstanding contributions and driven positive change in community health and youth well-being. Her leadership, compassion, and commitment to supporting others have had a remarkable impact on the Orono community.



Ali currently serves as the Director of The Orono Coalition, a community-wide initiative focused on increasing connectedness, promoting positive childhood experiences, and reducing youth substance use. From the Coalition's inception, Ali has played a pivotal role in securing the grant that funds its work, and in just one year has built a strong foundation for sustainable impact. Ali's leadership is marked by her ability to bring people together, inspire collaboration, and initiate meaningful change. Colleagues describe her as someone who makes everyone feel seen, heard, and valued, and who challenges students to make choices that promote their health and well-being. Her ability to connect people and inspire collective action has had a transformative impact on Orono students and families.

As a student at Orono herself, Ali participated in basketball, soccer, volleyball, DECA, National Honor Society, Student Council, and Yearbook. Following graduation, she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Gustavus Adolphus and later received a Master's in Counseling Psychology from the University of St. Thomas. Ali has worked at Bethel University and St. Olaf College, and in addition to the Coalition, currently teaches classes in the Addiction Studies program at Metro State University. Prior to starting the Coalition in Orono Schools, Ali led a similar initiative, Wayzata Partners in Prevention, for ten years in the Wayzata School District. Ali chose to return to Orono to give back to the community that shaped her, and her work is already creating a lasting legacy.

In addition to her work, Ali has a strong commitment to community and showing up for others. She spent the

summer of 2010 in Haiti working with families that were torn apart by the earthquake and its aftermath. Ali has volunteered to lead grief groups for her church community since 2012, has been a sexual assault advocate, and volunteers each week as a Crisis Counselor for the Suicide Crisis Line. As a mother of four, Ali also finds time to help coach her kids' sports teams which she thoroughly enjoys.

Ali's advice to current students – "Build a life as you see it, rather than how you think it should unfold. Don't let the 'shoulds' be your architect."

### Tex Ostvig '84

Tex Ostvig has centered his life work on servant leadership, community building, and inspiring youth – values deeply rooted in his Orono experience and carried forward throughout his astonishing 30-year career at the University of Minnesota. In his 30 years, he has led and directed numerous programs within Student Services, increasing post-secondary education awareness and access for over 100,000 underprivileged youth across Minnesota. In addition, he has been an instructor at U of M for 15 years, teaching classes in both Leadership Development and Religion. Currently he advises undergraduate and graduate students in the College of Food, Agriculture and Natural Resource Sciences and serves as a University representative with the White Earth Reservation.



Tex credits many of his teachers and coaches at Orono for instilling in him the values of hard work, compassion and perseverance. He speaks fondly about Mr. Erickson, Mr. Sohn, Ms. Jones, Mr. Brown, Mr. Pesonen, Ms. Shaughnessy and many others who taught these values in the classroom and on the wrestling mat, track, football field and baseball diamond. "At the time that I was graduating, I was the only identified Mexican American at Orono," Tex shared. "There were times it wasn't easy, but my teachers and coaches never let me forget that I belonged. They encouraged me to



use my voice and to push through adversity. They also taught me about the value of giving back.”

And Tex has been doing just that. Since 1991, Tex has given back as a volunteer coach for Orono High School and community athletics. He has inspired and mentored youth in wrestling, varsity football, youth football, track and field, rugby and soccer. He has also coached the Speech Team since 2016, helping students find their voice and build confidence. Tex believes in meeting young people where they are, guiding them through challenges and helping them see their own potential.

Tex’s accolades include being named one of Minnesota’s Top 25 Latinos on the Rise, receiving the Lud Spolyar Distinguished Service Award, and being recognized as a University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts Notable Alumni. Yet, despite his many awards, Tex remains most proud of the relationships he has built and the lives he has impacted. Whether he is coaching on the mat, mentoring in the classroom, or facilitating cultural connections, Tex leads with heart, humility, and an unwavering belief in the power of community.

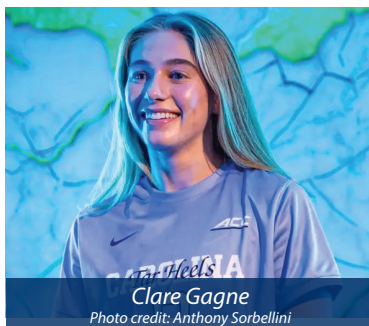
Tex’s Orono roots run deep as he married his high school sweetheart, Donna Ostvig, who also serves the community as the Orono Community Education Engagement and Integration Coordinator. Together they have four children who are all Orono alumni!

Tex encourages students to “never stop learning because life never stops teaching” and “when things don’t work out ask yourself what you can learn and take another shot—keep striving for excellence until you achieve what you want.” We are proud to honor Tex with this award. His example of leadership through service is a testament to the core values of Orono Schools—values that Tex has carried forward and shared with the world.

## Promising Alumni

### Clare Gagne ‘20

Clare’s journey since graduating from Orono High School has been extraordinary – a testament to her relentless drive, passion for service, and commitment to making a difference in the world. Following graduation, Clare attended Brown University, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in Health and Human Biology while playing for the Women’s Soccer Team. Despite losing her freshman season to COVID-19, Clare and her team won three consecutive Ivy League Championships during her sophomore, junior and senior years. She was named team captain in her senior year, demonstrating the leadership and character that have defined her throughout her life.



During her time at Brown, Clare also dedicated herself to community service, working with Project Goal—a non-profit organization that provides free soccer coaching, mentoring and academic tutoring to underserved students in Providence, Rhode Island. Her work on Project Goal reinforced her belief in the power of sports to build community and inspired her commitment to public health and social justice.

Clare’s passion for global health equity and her growing interest in public health led her to pursue a Master’s of Public Health (MPH) at the University of North Carolina. There, she also played for the UNC Women’s Soccer Team, helping lead the team to a National Championship in 2024.

In addition to her success on the field, Clare continued her service work, representing the Ivy League Women’s Soccer programs as a team representative for the Ivy Justice Coalition. Clare also worked with Team Impact, pairing collegiate sports teams with children facing chronic or terminal illness to foster a sense of community and support.

Clare’s desire to create meaningful change has been evident since her time at Orono High School. As a student, she was a standout goalkeeper, two-time team captain, and Minnesota State Ms. Soccer Finalist. Beyond athletics, she was an AP Scholar with Distinction and took her leadership abroad through an AFS project in Kenya in 2018, using art, music, and athletics to empower children.

Clare’s dedication to service, equity, and community has remained a guiding force in her life. Whether mentoring young athletes, advocating for social justice, or excelling on the soccer field, Clare has consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to using her platform for good. “Clare has always been someone who sees the world through a different lens and seeks to make it better for others,” shared Erin Murray, one of her former coaches. “She is already a force for good, and we know she will continue to make a profound impact in the world.”

In early 2025, Clare took the next monumental step in her career—signing her first professional contract with the Kansas City Current of the National Women’s Soccer League. As the first female athlete from Orono to “go pro,” Clare is paving the way for future student-athletes and inspiring them to dream big.

Alongside her burgeoning professional soccer career, Clare is continuing her work toward completing her MPH, with a focus on community preparedness and disaster management. Clare’s journey of excellence, service, and leadership is an inspiration to all Orono students and alumni. Clare’s story is a reminder that with hard work, compassion, and determination, anything is possible.





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## Spartobots Robotics

Back after an eight-year hiatus, the Orono Robotics Team, "The Spartobots," recently earned the **2025 Rising All-Star Award** at a three-day regional event in March.

Orono Schools is very excited about the future of robotics. Special thanks to Perry Haislet, Carson Miller, Wendy Lundsgaard, and the Spartobots boosters for supporting our students' interest in this wonderful application of STEM education. We can't wait to see what's next!



## Restoration & Renewal Across Campus

In the coming weeks, the district will be focusing on restoring and enhancing key areas across campus. Work and planning are underway to revitalize our science classrooms, sports fields, parking lots, and—thanks to a generous community donor—build a new Orono High School College and Career Center that will serve students for years to come.

Following a thorough assessment by our architectural and engineering consultants, we have determined that the student center located south of Orono Middle School—formerly used as a child care center—has reached the end of its useful life. We are unable to invest further public dollars

given the substantial structural needs. The building was gifted to the district decades ago and will be razed in the coming months and repurposed to better serve the district's evolving needs.

Thank you to the Orono Buildings & Grounds staff and the Facilities and Finance Committee for careful planning and use of resources. These projects reflect our ongoing commitment to maintaining safe, functional, and future-ready facilities for the entire community.

## The Red & Blue Bash!

Please join us for the annual Orono Foundation for Education Red & Blue Bash on Saturday, April 26. The evening schedule and full details are on their website at [oronofoundation.org](https://oronofoundation.org).

The Foundation is hosting an **online silent auction** with bidding beginning April 21 at 8:00 a.m.

Thank you to our amazing community—your support benefits every Orono student and staff member every day.

ORONO RED & BLUE BASH  
**THE SILVER SCREEN**  
SATURDAY APRIL 26, LAFAYETTE CLUB  
TABLE PACKAGES AND INDIVIDUAL TICKETS  
★ ON SALE NOW ★  
JOIN US FOR THE FOUNDATION'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY  
SUPPORTING ORONO SCHOOLS!  
[ORONOFUNDATION.ORG/BASH](https://oronofoundation.org/bash)  
ORONO Foundation  
FOR EDUCATION