LCSC Communicator
May 2025
Regional News, Views, and Information
LAKES COUNTRY Service Cooperative
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Honoring a Voice for Others



Perham's Kasey Wacker Receives Education Minnesota's Human Rights Award

Kasey Wacker, a dedicated educator at Perham Public Schools, was recently honored with the Human Rights Award from Education Minnesota. The statewide award was created to recognize educators and Education Minnesota members who protect and advance the human and civil rights of educators and students.

This prestigious recognition underscores her deep commitment to fostering voice, community engagement, and creating opportunities for students to connect with and serve others.

Continued on next page

Source: Kasey Wacker, Perham Public Schools' English Teacher and Speech Coach, Education Minnesota Press Release
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Generalist

"The experience of coming into teaching a little later helped me to learn something about the voices of the students... I had this newfound appreciation for what happens in this school and what happens in the classroom."

-Perham Public School's English Teacher and Speech Coach, Kasey Wacker





From left: Sandra Wieser-Matthews and Kasey Wacker

Wacker's journey into teaching was significantly influenced by her former teacher and current collaborator, Sandra Wieser-Matthews. When Wieser-Matthews retired, Wacker took her place in Perham in 2017. Their partnership continues through an AI-powered Education Podcast, "Vodcast," a video podcast exploring the impact of artificial intelligence on education. This initiative emerged from Wacker's master's research and her commitment to sharing this vital topic with fellow educators.

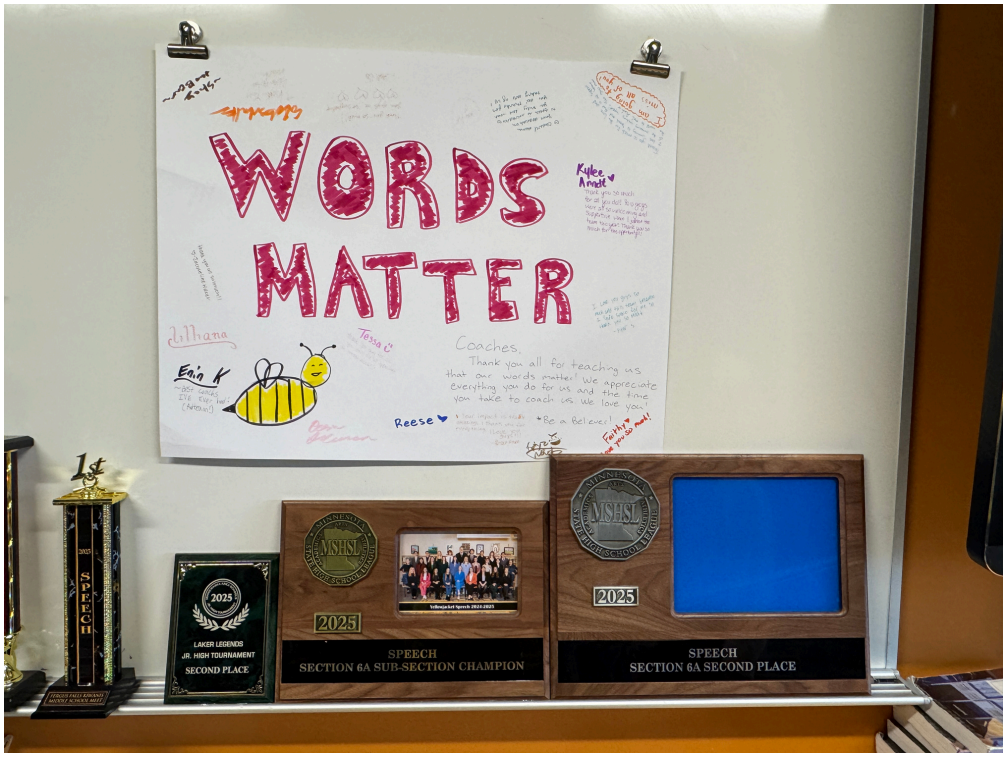
This past January, Wieser-Mathews shared with Wacker that she nominated her for the Education Minnesota Human Rights award. “This award suits you,” said Wieser-Mathews to Wacker. Initially, Wacker didn't dwell on it, but a few weeks later, she received an email from Education Minnesota about the nomination, requesting supporting materials.

Reflecting on the nomination process, Wacker realized the interconnectedness of her various initiatives: "I realized that all of it surrounds finding a voice, and helping others find their voice. Whether that’s students or colleagues of mine at school, or community involvement within my classroom." This philosophy permeates her work in several key areas.

One significant aspect of Wacker's commitment is evident in her role as the head coach of the Perham Public School’s Speech program. She emphasizes the power of communication with her students, stating, "Part of what they do on the team is discuss the value of your words and how to choose them wisely, recognizing that words matter and you have an impact."

Continued on next page

“The Speech team has always been a place where students can find their voice.” -Perham Public School’s English Teacher and Speech Coach, Kasey Wacker



The Speech team's recent success, including a second-place finish at the sectional tournament and a sixth-place finish at the Minnesota State Competition, along with Wacker's first state champion, highlights her ability to empower students to find and use their voices effectively.

Wacker's dedication to community engagement is another pillar of her human rights work. A prime example is her partnership with the Elevate program in Perham Health. This past year, her College English students collaborated with Elevate on a service-learning project focused on bridging the generational gap with the aging population.

This initiative led to the successful "Adopt a Grandparent" program, in which students engage in activities with residents, fostering connections and understanding. Wacker shared her pride in this project, highlighting its impact on the community.

Furthermore, Wacker coordinates the school's annual Veterans Day program. Her Video Productions Class works directly with the local VFW and auxiliary, interviewing veterans to ensure the program reflects their wishes. "This is just another way my students get involved with people in the community," Wacker explained, emphasizing the opportunity for students to connect with and honor those who have served.

Even in her Public Speaking classes, Wacker prioritizes student voice. "Sometimes we dictate a lot of what students do, say, and learn, and in this classroom it’s more open," she stated, explaining that students choose their topics, allowing them to represent what truly matters to them.
Wacker's journey to becoming such an impactful educator was somewhat unconventional.

After graduating from Perham Public Schools, she initially pursued a degree in sales and business at St. Cloud Technical College. However, she eventually returned to Perham and reconnected with her former teacher, Sandra Wieser-Mathews. Wieser-Mathews became a crucial mentor, encouraging Wacker to pursue a degree in education. Wacker now holds degrees in communication, arts, and literature, and she also has a master’s degree in communication and literature, as well as a master’s degree in administration.

Kasey Wacker's deep roots in Perham, where she grew up and feels a strong sense of belonging, fuel her passion for serving her community.

She views her students' projects as an investment in and a care for her community and the people who live there. This dedication, combined with her efforts to empower student voice and foster meaningful connections, has rightfully earned her the Human Rights Award from Education Minnesota. Wacker humbly acknowledges the support she receives, stating, "The administrators here are great leaders for giving their educators space to find their passions and pursue them. They are very supportive, and I recognize this award is not an accomplishment that I achieved independently."

Would you like to learn more about the Speech team in Perham?

Education Minnesota created a video to commemorate Wacker receiving the award, which was played at the convention and is available on YouTube here:



Visit their website at PERHAM SCHOOLS.

You can also learn more about Education Minnesota's Human Rights Award at Education Minnesota.



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The Fergus Falls Chamber and Lakes Country Service Cooperative are teaming up through the High Tech Kids and Future Ready Workforce Grants to incentivize paid student internships in high-demand and STEM careers. Employers, this is your chance to access talent and receive wage reimbursement. Invest in tomorrow, today!

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FROM THE

Executive Director

"Learning, Leading, and Innovating to Achieve Vibrant, Inclusive Communities."



Jeremy Kovash
Executive Director

Investing in Our Greatest Resource:

Reflections from South Korea and Singapore

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." – Mark Twain

This quote, from my favorite author, resonates more deeply than ever after returning from an inspiring international delegation with the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA). I had the honor of joining leaders from across the country on a journey to South Korea and Singapore—two nations with a profound commitment to education, innovation, and human development.

Our purpose was ambitious yet clear:

- To enhance science and innovation competencies in youth through collaborative, real-world, and inquiry-based learning;
- To foster cross-cultural understanding and global citizenship from an early age;
- To strengthen teaching methodologies and professional practice through educator exchanges and research partnerships;
- To establish sustainable institutional partnerships to scale innovation and align programs and policies;
- And to create equitable and scalable access to international learning through in-person and virtual models.

“This work is about human connection. About building the “broad, wholesome, charitable views” that Twain so eloquently captured. Views that can only be formed when we open ourselves to other perspectives, traditions, and systems of thinking.” **-Jeremy Kovash**

In South Korea, we engaged in meaningful dialogue and exchange with several prestigious institutions and organizations, including Hansung Science High School, the Seoul Ministry of Education, the Korean Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Creativity (KOSAC), and Hongik University. These visits emphasized the nation’s robust commitment to scientific research, innovation in education, and global cooperation.

Singapore offered a masterclass in educational excellence. From discussions with the Minister of Education, Mr. Gan, to visits at the Urban Redevelopment Authority, Temasek Polytechnic University, Gardens by the Bay, and the National Institute of Education, it became clear that their systemic success is rooted in rigorous professional development, educator respect, and intentional national investment. We also explored ideas with leaders from the Singapore Teachers' Union, St. Stephen’s School, Gan Eng Secondary School, and Knightsbridge House International School, as well as the U.S. Embassy in Singapore.

There are already immediate opportunities available for students and educators in our region as a result of this delegation:

- Young Envoy Scholars program (China)
- Global cooperation in science research and education (Korea)
- Lakes Country Early Childhood visiting scholars program in Shandong Province, China

We are also actively exploring future initiatives, including:

- Science-Centered Collaborative Learning and Innovation Labs
- Visiting Scholar and Educator Fellowships
- Thematically-Purposed Online Classroom Exchange Projects
- Summer Enrichment Opportunities
- A Teaching Methodologies and Research Exchange Hub

This journey was not only professional—it was personal. We cannot expect our students to become globally competent citizens if we ourselves are not willing to cross borders—geographical, cultural, and intellectual. At Lakes Country Service Cooperative, we are committed to building these pathways. Because learning is not confined by geography, and neither is growth.

In both countries we visited, one theme was constant: while their natural resources are limited, they make no mistake about what their greatest resource is—**their people.** These nations are unequivocal in their commitment to human capital. They invest in teachers, in research, and—above all—in children.

This is the message
I brought home with me.

****Children are our most important resource.****
It’s time we refocus our national priorities to reflect that truth. Our future depends on it.



Classroom TO COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

JANE EASTES
Deputy Executive Director

Youth in Civic Life:

Building a Pipeline of Community Leaders

Did you know there are 89 Family and Mental Health Collaboratives across Minnesota? The Collaboratives are community organizations that come together to work on the complex problems of supporting children and families for the long-term health of our communities. By bringing together schools, public agencies, nonprofits, and community members, Collaboratives are designed to prevent duplication of services, understand and work on root causes, and include community voices in a, well … collaborative framework!

The Collaboratives are primarily organized by county boundaries, and we have active community collaboratives in our region.

I had the opportunity to attend the Otter Tail County Family Service Collaborative annual meeting this month. We heard presentations from several schools who have implemented the BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risk) program and the Promise Fellows program of the Minnesota Alliance for Youth.

We have written extensively about the BARR program in past issues of the Communicator, and it was exciting to hear stories of the benefits with data to back it up. Schools using the BARR model are seeing significant improvement in students passing their classes.

Likewise, Americorp Promise Fellows serve as caring adults to work one-on-one with youth to support, mentor, and build positive relationships with young people in 6-12th grade. This program has a proven impact on attendance and student engagement.

What was particularly striking at the meeting were the comments about the effect these programs have on school faculty and staff. Teachers and staff from different disciplines meet regularly to discuss student needs, breaking down silos and forming stronger professional relationships.



Minnesota Collaboratives

In 1993, the State Legislature approved a set of laws to create COLLABORATIVES as special districts in our state. Special districts are local government units created or authorized by state law to perform specific duties or to provide specific services in a limited scope (ex. Public Schools.)

Graphic provided by the Ramsey County Children's Mental Health Collaborative

This intentional collaboration strengthens the entire school team, and stronger teams lead to stronger student outcomes.

Community Family Services Collaboratives play a vital role in making this progress possible. They provide the infrastructure and partnerships necessary to support innovation, align services with needs, and amplify the impact of evidence-based practices. In doing so, they help communities build more resilient, responsive, and equitable systems to serve children and families well into the future.

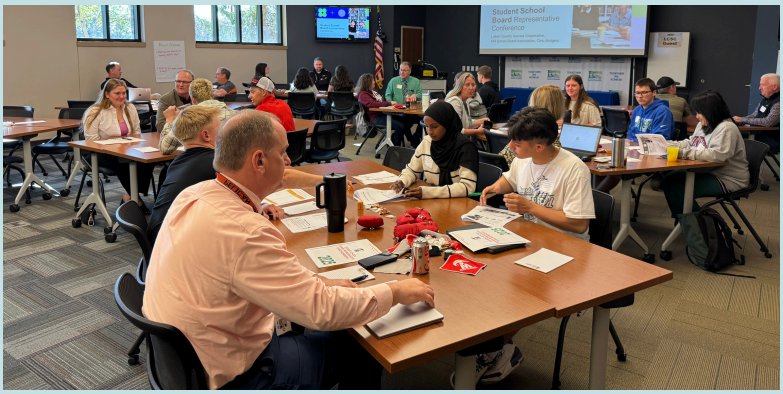
MOVING FROM YOUTH DEVELOPMENT TO PARTICIPATION

LCSC hosted MSBA and Civic Bridgers for a workshop on school board and student engagement. A mix of students, school board members, and school staff—fifty participants from fifteen districts—participated in a day of learning and networking. Together, the group built a shared understanding of student representation in school governance and explored the Youth Engagement Continuum. Students and adults broke into groups and engaged in rich intergenerational dialogue. The day demonstrated the power of truly listening to students, talking with them—not about them—and valuing their daily experiences as essential to shaping school policy and culture. Including youth voice on school boards should not be just symbolic—it brings critical perspectives into conversations about education, equity, and improvement. Students experience school firsthand and can offer insights that ground decisions in real needs and opportunities. At the same time, serving on a board builds skills in leadership, communication, and critical thinking for students, helping them grow into informed, engaged citizens. The workshop was a meaningful step in encouraging school communities to embrace youth as partners in governance. LCSC will be developing and hosting more of these opportunities for students and board members in the future.

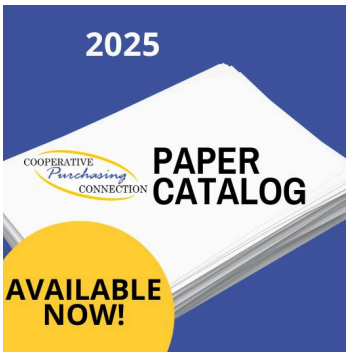
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ALEXANDRIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CULTIVATING CONFIDENCE AND CHARACTER

THROUGH INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Source: Alexandria Public Schools Superintendent, Rick Sansted; Carlos Elementary Dean of Students and Social Worker, Paula Dougherty-Davis; Discovery Middle School Teacher and Robotics Coach, Jennifer Engle; Alexandria Public Schools District Policy Manual – Code of Conduct
Author: Mary Phillipe, LCSC Communications Coordinator

The foundational values of Alexandria Public Schools' Code of Conduct—respect, honesty, kindness, responsibility, and fairness—serve as the guiding stars for extraordinary learning and teaching. Superintendent Rick Sansted witnesses these virtues in action daily, engaging with both students and staff, and takes great pride in celebrating the accomplishments of their nationally acclaimed robotics team. This team not only sets a shining example of compassion for others but also helps to set the stage for the Cardinal Flyers program at the Carlos Elementary School.

Alexandria Mechatronics Robotics Team

"Other superintendents ask me why Alexandria is doing so well in activities? We are very fortunate to have many adults who are willing to dedicate their time and energy," shared Sansted. "When you have a lot of adults who are willing to dedicate their time and expertise, you see the results of that investment. We see it in our sports teams and programs like robotics," said Sansted.

This past April, the Alexandria Mechatronics Robotics Team was awarded a trip to compete in the World Robotics Championship (WRC), which was held in Houston, Texas. This year marks their third trip to the WRC, a large, international robotics competition held annually. Jennifer Engle, a seventh-grade science teacher at the middle school, has served as the high school robotics coach for Alexandria Public Schools for eight years.

Engle explained that there are two ways to qualify for the WRC. Teams must be in the top alliance, which consists of three high school teams competing against three others. If you are the winning alliance in the entire regional competition, you qualify for the WRC. The other opportunity is through the Impact Award, considered the most prestigious award in the FIRST Robotics program. Winning the Impact Award grants direct access to the WRC, regardless of a robot's performance at regional competitions. "Robotics is more than just robots," said Engle. "It's also about the impact you're making through Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM), not only to your team but to the younger generations."



“Making it to Worlds this year was phenomenal!”

-Mechatronics High School Robotics Team Head Coach, Jennifer Engle

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At the regional competition in Grand Forks, known as the Great Northern Regional, Alexandria Mechatronics won the Impact Award, competing against 54 teams. To win the Impact Award, they must write a 10,000-character essay, complete executive summaries, and present themselves to judges, who will conduct an interview and facilitate a question-and-answer session at the end. “Robotics students are not always the most outgoing humans, so it’s a really good way for them to get outside of their box,” said Engle. This award was primarily attributed to their innovative project of building a driver's station ramp for a fellow team member who uses a wheelchair. Engle noted that from behind the driver’s station, it was difficult for our driver, who uses a wheelchair, to see. FIRST Robotics, the company that hosts the competitions, provided a ramp, but the initial experience for their team member was not great.

Brenton Engineering in Alexandria collaborated with the Mechatronics team to design and engineer a new driver’s station ramp suitable for individuals in wheelchairs. This was the team's big innovation for the year, and with two prototypes completed, they will soon share the design worldwide. They are currently working on a grant to complete the ramp for the next regional competition. Engle expressed pride in the accomplishments of the 18 students, stating that they are like family to her. “They are utilizing their strengths and putting them all together,” shared Engle. In addition to partnering in the development of the ramp, the team also assists in coaching the middle school and elementary school robotics programs and provides support during robotics summer camps.



> "We are figuring out how we as adults may need to get out of the way so the students can have leadership opportunities."
>
> -Alexandria Public Schools Superintendent, Rick Sansted

Community of Character

Sansted also shared that they are currently working with a program called Youth Frontiers to become a "Community of Character" and determine how they, as business leaders, faith communities, educators, and healthcare providers, can work together and build character in their community. The Alexandria community gathered 21 individuals around a table to discuss the possibilities of the program and how it could benefit their youth and community. "There are many people in our community who are willing to reach out, call their friends, and engage their network," said Sansted about the many people in attendance.

Maureen Eigen, a member of the Alexandria Public Schools Board and the Lakes Country Service Cooperative Board of Directors, recommended the Communities of Character Initiative for their school and community. She enthusiastically recalls the Youth Frontiers program from her time as a student at Alexandria Public Schools.

Eigen shared that they will initially request a few changes to the framework proposed by Youth Frontiers, but will plan to move forward and seek grant funding to support this community initiative. "We have an outline for the first year and plan to grow it from there," said Eigen.

Cardinal Flyers

During the fall 2024 school year, Carlos Elementary, a single-section school with just over 100 students enrolled, launched a leadership program for students in grades three through five.

Superintendent Sansted said about the program, "One of the things we struggle with today is how to grow student confidence." Sansted believes that one of the challenges for young people today is helping them overcome their fear. "One of the reasons," he explained, "is that children today are not afforded the same ability to explore as they were in the past, as parents are more protective of their outdoor play spaces.

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Carlos Elementary Dean of Students and Social Worker, Paula Dougherty-Davis and Carlos Elementary Cardinal Flyers.

We look for ways to create safe places in school for students to demonstrate skills, to try something, and lead something without an adult controlling the learning environment."

Before serving as the Dean of Students at Carlos Elementary School, Paula Dougherty-Davis worked as a social worker at Discovery Middle School for Alexandria Public Schools. Here, she oversaw the student council program. When she began working at Carlos Elementary School, within a couple of weeks, she shared that she could not believe what the teachers were taking on independently to enrich the school for the students. She took the time to evaluate what was already in place and developed a program for elementary students that would help them soar. The program focuses on building character, and Dougherty-Davis strives to make it inclusive for all the children at Carlos Elementary. "The kids chose the name Cardinal Flyers for the program. We are the Alexandria Cardinals, so we decided to adopt the Flyers' name. When you think about the Flyers, you think about soaring high," explained Dougherty-Davis.

She emphasized that while some children naturally take on leadership roles and quickly rise to the top, she wants the experience to be accessible to all children who aspire to be leaders, rather than a popularity contest.

Students involved in the Cardinal Flyers program are in grades three to five. Each group of Cardinal Flyers engages in the program for about six weeks before a new group is chosen. To participate, students simply need to show interest to their teacher. A few students were hesitant due to uncertainty about what the program would entail, however nearly all students in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades have taken part in the program. "Our main challenge was conveying to the younger grades that they would need to wait until they reach 3rd grade to join," said Dougherty-Davis.

One of the most cherished activities among the Carlos students is the Jamboree event. This celebration serves as a gathering for all students within the school. Previously organized by teachers, the activity is now led by the Cardinal Flyers. A highlight of the Jamboree was the performance by the Carlos Elementary orchestra, a talented ensemble of six musicians who entertained the school during the festivities.

FLYERS

“Every teacher works hard in their setting. But I couldn’t believe what these teachers did to create this beautiful, small environment.”

-Carlos Elementary Dean of Students and Social Worker, Paula Dougherty-Davis

Teachers are still acknowledging the Code of Conduct traits for students during the Jamboree event, but they have now introduced a peer-to-peer initiative called Code Kid. This is where the student Cardinal Flyer leadership team recognizes fellow students for exemplifying the code of conduct. Dougherty-Davis shared that it means so much more to the students receiving a peer-to-peer honor for their conduct.

Enrichment activities led by the students are also included as part of the Cardinal Flyers program. This has included Spirit Week, Veterans Day, Recess Ambassadors, supporting Parent Advisory Council activities, serving on an advisory group to the administration, and presenting to the school board. “Roll call” is a favorite activity among the students. Each class had to create its unique “roll call,” letting the remainder of the students know, “I’m here loud and proud; listen to me.”

Dougherty-Davis enjoys hearing positive feedback from the parents about the Cardinal Flyers program. A parent of a fifth-grade student shared with Dougherty-Davis that the leadership skills they are practicing in school are showing up in other activities in 4-H group. “Once allowed to be a leader, and successfully taking the opportunity, I think it allows it to occur in other places,” said Dougherty-Davis. She sees the program's impact on other clubs, sports, faith-based activities, and wherever kids are in groups.

The Cardinal Flyers program guidelines are developing and emerging, said Dougherty-Davis. She shared that as the year has progressed, they have learned some valuable insights about the program, and she can envision the next school year as an opportunity to develop a skills training model. “The students love it, and the teachers love it as well. Where we need the work,” said Dougherty-Davis, “is building the backbone of the leadership skills, and I think that is what our focus will be next year.”

From the Alexandria Mechatronics Robotics Team's innovative spirit, as showcased by their wheelchair ramp design and Impact Award win, to the Community of Character initiative, bringing community leaders together around positive support of children, and the emerging Cardinal Flyers program, which fosters leadership in elementary students, Alexandria cultivates an environment where young people are empowered to explore, lead, and overcome challenges. The success is largely thanks to the outstanding support from community volunteers and dedicated teachers. As Superintendent Sansted points out, they’re all about giving students chances to build confidence and succeed.

If you would like to learn more about Alexandria Public Schools’ core values and initiatives, visit their website at alexschools.org

elevate teaching

2025 SPRING CONVENING





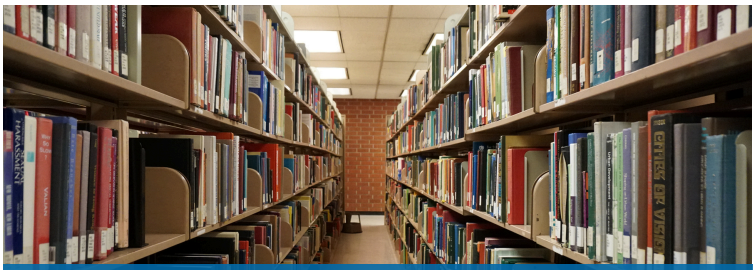
- **SATURDAY, MAY 31, 9:30AM-3PM**
- **Concurrent events across Minnesota at Roseville Area High Schools, St. Cloud State University, and Lakes Country Service Cooperative in Fergus Falls**
- **Keynote Speaker: Tracy Byrd, 2024 Teacher of the Year**

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Keynote Speaker: Tracy Byrd, 2024 Teacher of the Year

This **FREE** event is open to everyone, so bring a friend and help us celebrate the incredible teachers and educators in our lives. Can't make it in person? Parts of the event, including the keynote, will be livestreamed!

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BETTER TOGETHER

June 11, 2025
Registration
Begins at 8:30 a.m.

If you'd like to attend, send an email to Kathy Enger at: Kathy.Enger@nlln.org

You are invited once again to Lakes Country Service Cooperative for our "Better Together" workshop on June 11, 2025, starting at 9 a.m. (coffee, tea, and caramel rolls at 8:30 a.m.). There is no charge for the workshop and librarians of all types are invited, along with educators. **Lunch is also provided and 6 CEUs will be given to participants.**

We meet to support each other in our work. Sometimes, we find ourselves as one of the few library workers in our respective systems. Conversations take place throughout the day and we come together at "Better Together" to learn from one another and to create an ongoing community of professionals who love all things "library", including our collective love of literature!

This year, we're happy to have David Larochelle and Mike Wohnoutka join us to discuss their children's books. See:

- **See the Cat**
- **On the Road with Dave and Mike**
- **MOO**

In addition, Louie Lauer will be back to present recent amazing children and young adult titles.

Participants will also be introduced to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how it relates to Information Literacy. Minitex will be on hand to discuss new initiatives there, along with Electronic Library of Minnesota (ELM).

Annual Minnesota School Hearing Screening Equipment Calibration

Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) has proudly hosted Midwest Special Instruments for many years, supporting their efforts to conduct the Annual Minnesota School Calibration Event.

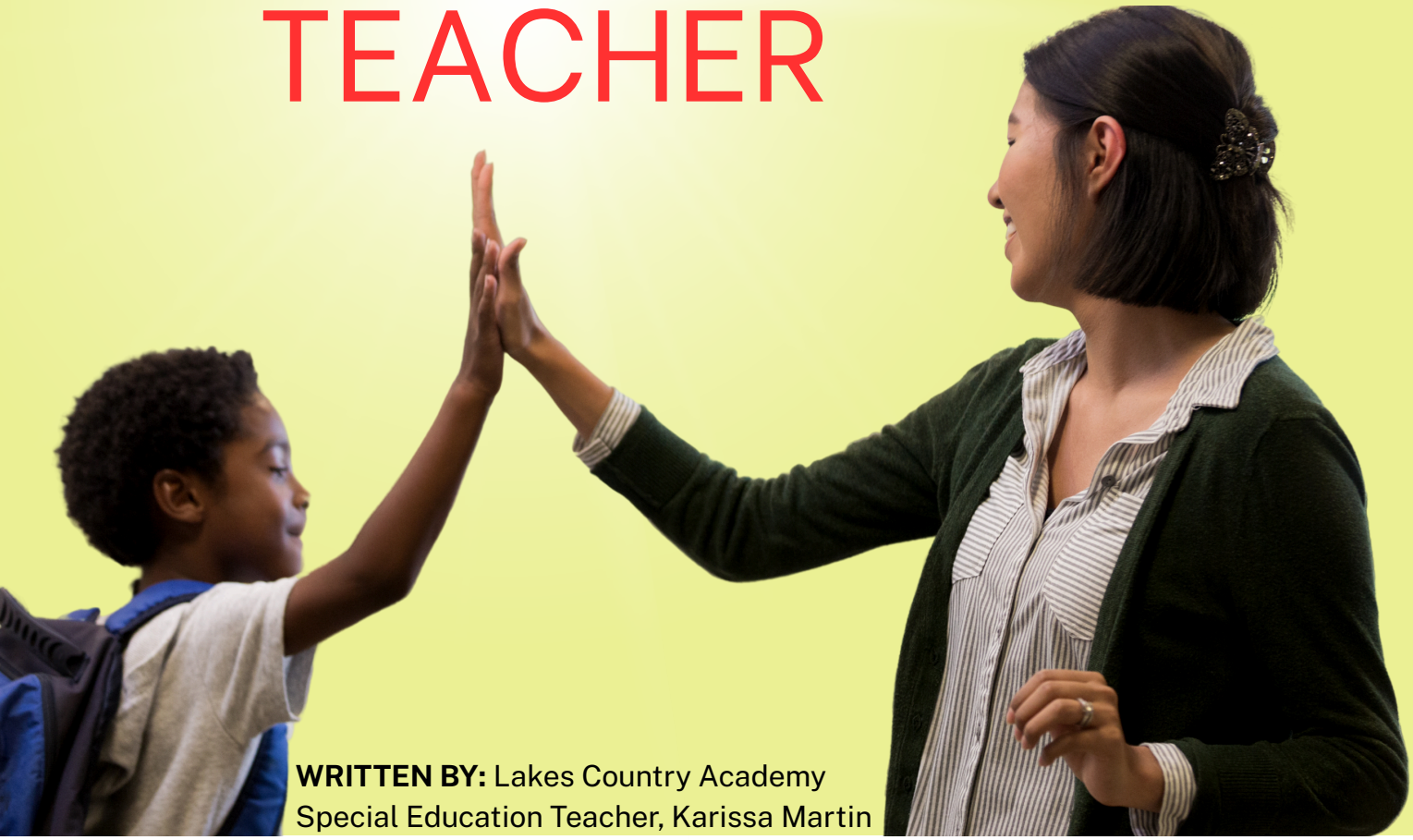
By providing space for this important service, LCSC helps facilitate the space needed for Midwest Special Instruments to offer the calibration event for over thirty organizations within our Region IV district, calibrating over one hundred devices while here. Annual calibration of hearing screening equipment is recommended by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Minnesota Department of Health to ensure the accuracy and reliability of each machine's readings.

Please check out Midwest Special Instruments website for further details on the event.



Midwest
SPECIAL INSTRUMENTS

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER



WRITTEN BY: Lakes Country Academy Special Education Teacher, Karissa Martin

The alarm sounds way too early, I am tired, yesterday was hard. I know I need to get to work early to put my classroom back together after it got destroyed yesterday. My head throbs, and I can feel the swelling in my cheek from where I got hit yesterday. Maybe I should take the day off, but my students need me. I sigh, and force myself out of bed, today will be better! I hustle off to the gym, I know if I don't go before work, I will be too tired after work. I feel better after a good workout and ready to face the day. We got this!

Once I get to work, I am immediately struck by the overwhelming mess. No one quite understands how disheartening it is to have the space that you pour your heart and money into, get torn apart, but that's part of the job. I push aside the sadness and get to work putting it back together; the kids deserve a nice and comfortable classroom.

I think the classroom is mostly back in order, now I have 15 minutes left to get the students' work ready for the day. I manage to fill their work drawers and have their lessons ready before the Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) stops in to chat about the behavior yesterday. We have a good talk, and make a solid plan for today, but now I am out of time. I panic a little as I realize that I did not get morning meeting slides done, but that's okay, I can try to do it while they eat breakfast, oops, I forgot to eat my own breakfast! I quickly eat a Cliff Bar as I greet the students. Seeing them smiling and happy to be at school reminds me why I am here.

I try to remember in each difficult moment that the brief and fleeting trials I face in this job are nothing compared to the difficulties they face every single day as a result of their disability. They need a place where they know, for five hours a day, they are wanted, valued, and can be successful.

Continued on next page

“I have four students in my classroom, each one challenging but creatively gifted, beautifully unique, full of love and wonder, and searching for belonging in a world that can be so harsh.”

-Lakes Country Academy Special Education Teacher, Karissa Martin

We start our day with a morning meeting, truly one of my favorite times of the day. We chat about our evenings, what to expect for the day ahead, and share some fun things we have coming up, all while laughing at our silly joke of the day. We always end the morning meeting with a growth mindset statement and a character trait of the week to be working on.

As we continue on through reading and math stations, I am filled with pride as I watch them push through challenging new academic concepts, choose to use a coping skill when their classmate frustrates them, or a problem feels too hard. I even tear up a little when one of them does his “reset” that we have been working so hard on. We celebrate with high fives when one student finally understands multiplication, and another can read a full paragraph!

We celebrate a successful morning with a 15-minute reward time before lunch, where students who have completed all their morning work can play with LEGO sets before lunch. I always breathe a sigh of relief once we reach this point in the day and brace myself for lunch and gym, a time of potential upheaval as all the students in the building come together in the cafeteria.

I spend the afternoon putting out small fires, I can feel my mental fatigue growing as the day goes on. I start accidentally calling the students by the wrong name, they think it is funny, but I can’t help but feel bad for it. I tell myself that I will try to get more sleep tonight, that will help. We wrap up the day by going over their point sheets together. We celebrate each small victory and send them on their way with a high five.



Continued on next page



Lakes Country Academy Special Education Teacher, Karissa Martin

Now I need to reset the classroom, message their parents, answer emails, and work on an IEP but suddenly all I can think about is how hungry, thirsty and tired I am. My brain can't seem to focus on anything as I work to decompress from the chaos. For a moment I think despairingly about my job; this is too hard. Then I remember the look of pride on their faces when they used their new knowledge of spelling patterns to sound out a word, the way their eyes lit up when they solved a division problem for the first time, how they paused and used one of their newly learned coping skills to deal with a tough situation. I remember the smiles on their faces as they walked out the door today and I know it is all worth it. Despite the hardship, I will wake up tomorrow and do it all over again, because they deserve it and they are worth it and I love getting to make a difference in their lives!

Want to learn more about the Lakes Country Academy and the Special Education Programs provided at LCSC? Visit our website at lca.lcsc.org

A Day at Lakes Country Academy

This poem was crafted with the creative assistance of ChatGPT and inspired by prompts from Karissa Martin.

In morning hush, the sky still gray,
A teacher drives at break of day.
Past glassy lakes that gleam and glide,
with care and purpose as her guide.

The hallways hum with muted sound,
a haven where all hearts are found.
She unlocks her room, puts on the light,
and sets the space to make things right.

Visual schedules, tactile tools,
flexible minds and loving rules.
The chairs are small, but dreams are
grand, and every child will understand.

Her students enter, one by one,
each shining like the morning sun.
Some may speak and some may not,
but all are heard, and none forgot.

Behavior charts, a gentle hand,
lessons drawn up, carefully planned.
Patience worn but spirits strong–
She finds the strength to carry on.

A meltdown brews, a trigger flares,
she breathes in deep, she meets their
stares. No anger here, just steady grace–
she helps them find a calmer place.

Lunch is late, but that's okay,
there's laughter in the mess today.
A puzzle finished, a high-five earned,
another small but mighty turn.

The end bell rings, the buses roll,
another day of heart and soul.
She shuts the door, the silence near,
and wipes away a tired tear.



ULEN-HITTERDAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ART DEPARTMENT RECEIVES GRANT

Lake Region Arts Council

Source/Author: *Therese Vogel - Ulen-Hitterdal Public School*

SARAH MENDIS

Art teacher Sarah Mendis is excited to announce that she received a spring Project Grant from the Lake Region Arts Council.

The grant helped to fund a K-12 student artist residency program that tool place May 5-8 with artist Jammie Niemeyer, who worked both in doodling creations and woodburning. Throughout the week she worked with each grade so students were able to create their own age-appropriate projects. The 7-12 grade art students had the opportunity to create complex woodburning projects, with elementary grades worked on innovative drawing techniques.

There was a public artist talk and demonstration by Jammie on the evening of Thursday, May 8, in conjunction with an Ice Cream for Books literary event.

Jammie discussed how she draws her doodles and creates her innovative woodburning techniques. She shared about her week working with Ulen-Hitterdal students and her background on how she has achieved her high level of expertise in these art forms.

Jammie has been creating art since she was very young and believes it has helped her personally throughout the years. In addition to creating her own art and teaching classes, she also does public speaking events on the effects of art on mental health. “My goal with my art is not only to help myself with many struggles, but to help others find their voice through art.”

"This activity was funded in part by a grant from Lake Region Arts Council through a Minnesota State Legislative appropriation."

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Fergus Falls Lakes Country Academy Students

Celebrate Earth Day!

To celebrate Earth Day on April 22nd, Lakes Country Academy students joined the TRASH DASH adventure!

On Wednesday, students and staff collected litter, making it a fun event. This is our second year participating in the community cleanup.











The Minnesota

Career and Technical Education Teacher Induction Program

The Minnesota Career and Technical Education Teacher Induction Program will continue to support early-career teachers in Career and Technical Education (CTE) through our mentorship program during the 2025-26 school year! Applications are now open. Please encourage early-career CTE teachers to apply now at: **https://mncte.org/ctetip/.**

Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, and Out of Field Permission early-career teachers in CTE with less than five years of experience are encouraged to apply. Please share this information and application with others who may be interested.

Written by: Lavyne Rada, Ph.D., Associate Director of Recruitment & Retention | Director, CTE TIP

Further information:

The purpose of the Minnesota Career and Technical Educators Teacher Induction Program (CTE TIP) is to function as a professional learning community for early career teachers in CTE and to support their development, efficacy, success, resilience, and retention. This program has a 90% teacher retention rate. Regardless of the pathway to the classroom, our team has a professional development program ready to meet the unique needs of early-career CTE teachers.

Participation provides access to FREE just-in-time monthly professional development, mentorship, curriculum and resources, instructional coaches, and a cohort of support specifically relevant to CTE teachers in Minnesota. The grant provides funding for participation including reimbursement of substitute teachers, mileage, lodging, meals, and supplies.

Important program dates to consider:

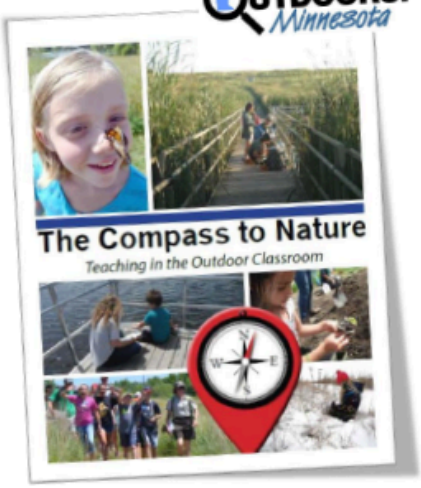
Orientation Meeting (select one option): August 20 from 3:30 - 5:30 p.m.; August 26 from 3:30 - 5:30 p.m.; or September 8 from 3:30 - 5:30 p.m.
Induction Seminar (St. Cloud): Sunday, September 21 - Monday, September 22
Monthly Virtual Meetings: October 6 at 4 p.m.; November 3 at 4 p.m.; December 1 at 4 p.m.; January 5 at 4 p.m.; February 2 at 4 p.m.; March 9 at 4 p.m.; April 6 at 4 p.m.; May 4 at 4 p.m.
Summer Seminar (St. Cloud): Monday, June 15 - Tuesday, June 16, 2026
Space is limited for this program. Apply now! Application review will begin in July and remain open until available space is filled. Applicants will be notified by July 15 if selected to participate and on a rolling basis for applicants after the initial deadline.

Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, and Out of Field Permission early-career teachers in CTE (i.e., Agriculture, Business, Family and Consumer Science, Communications Technology Careers, Construction Careers, Cosmetology, Early Childhood Careers, Hospitality Service Careers, Law Enforcement, Medical Careers, Manufacturing Careers, Transportation Careers, Work-based Learning) are encouraged to apply. Please share this information and application with others who may be interested.

Experienced teacher opportunity

We are also accepting applications for experienced CTE teachers to apply as mentors, so share the opportunity with your experienced (including retiring) CTE teachers today!

Teach Outdoors! Minnesota



EDUCATOR WORKSHOP

All Who Teach Children are Invited to ...

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State Low Incidence Projects
Regions 1, 2, 3 and 4

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

SAVE THE DATE

Northern Low Vision Clinic To Be Held On November 19, 2025!

NOVEMBER 19

SOUTH SHORE HOTEL
1019 Paul Bunyan Dr. S
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NECESSARY PAPERWORK WILL INCLUDE:

- Consent Form
- Pre-Evaluation Information from Parents/Guardians
- Pre-Evaluation Information from Teacher
- Photo/Video Consent

CONTACT YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER FOR THE BLIND/VISUALLY IMPAIRED FOR ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

REGION 1 & 2 CONTACT
NICOLE ECK
218-760-6684
NECK@BRIC.K12.MN.US

REGION 3 CONTACT
HEIDI HALKER
218-348-7368
HHALKER@ISD6070.ORG

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MOORHEAD HIGH SCHOOL SPEECH TEAM WINS 9TH CONSECUTIVE CLASS AA TEAM CHAMPIONSHIP

Submitted by: Moorhead Area Public Schools

Moorhead Area Public Schools is proud to announce that the Moorhead High School Speech Team claimed their ninth consecutive Minnesota State High School League Class AA State Team Championship on April 26 at the State Speech Tournament in Shakopee, MN. The Spuds compiled 88 points and won 17 medals, tied for the third most by a school in a single year.

The team's remarkable performance was led by three students who claimed state titles in their respective categories. Evan Froslie and Eleanor Culloton were repeat winners, earning their second gold medals, with Allie Skauge claiming her first.

2025 Spud State Medalists include:

- Eleanor Culloton (1st, Informative Speaking)
- Evan Froslie (1st, Storytelling)
- Allie Skauge (1st, Humorous Interpretation)
- Sami Jama (2nd, Serious Interpretation of Poetry)
- Menkayla Kruah (2nd, Serious Interpretation of Drama)
- Tim Gabbard (3rd, Serious Interpretation of Poetry)
- Ashlyn Kanuch (3rd, Humorous Interpretation)
- Tristan Sullivan (3rd, Creative Expression)
- Elise Froslie (4th, Extemporaneous Reading)
- Nakrie Kha (4th, Great Speeches)
- Jinu Lee (4th, Serious Interpretation of Prose)
- Jack Simon (4th, Informative Speaking)
- Isaac Leiseth (5th, Creative Expression)
- Miriam Culloton (6th, Creative Expression)
- Ashton Baker and Maggie Burns (7th, Duo Interpretation)
- Sophia Paszkiewicz (7th, Storytelling)
- Elise Halvorson (8th, Great Speeches)

The team's success is a testament to the tireless efforts of both students and coaches who have dedicated countless hours to honing their craft and perfecting their performances. Moorhead High School's Speech Team, coached by Rebecca Meyer Larson, continues to set the standard for excellence in speech competition, inspiring future generations of students to pursue their passions and strive for greatness.



Lakes Country Service Cooperative is excited to launch into the 2025-26 school year with the Ignite Learning Summit on August 6, 2025, at Kennedy Secondary School in Fergus Falls, MN!

Get a spark of inspiration from our opening keynote speaker, Patrick Kirby, and then engage with area educators as you fuel your learning through a variety of dynamic breakout sessions. From technology integration to educational innovation, this summit is just what you need to get fired up for the new school year!

REGISTER NOW

Keynote Highlight

Patrick Kirby – Mastering Curiosity, Boldness, and Creativity in the Age of AI – Like a 5th Grader Would!

What do fearless 5th graders have in common with professionals tackling AI and technology? More than you might think!

Drawing from his book Fundraise Like a 5th Grader, Patrick will show how curiosity, creativity, boldness, and resilience—straight from the classroom—can transform how educators approach partnerships, relationships, and technology integration. You'll leave inspired to face today's rapidly changing landscape with the optimism and courage of a 5th grader, ready to foster innovation, build connections, and leverage AI and technology in meaningful ways.

Minnesota State Knowledge Bowl Meet

Author: Monica Thompson, Lakes Country Service Cooperative, Coordinator of Technology Integration and Academic Challenges

The 2024-25 Senior High Knowledge Bowl season was packed with excitement, with 150 teams competing. After a great season, the top six teams from Region 4 earned their spot at the 2025 Minnesota State Knowledge Bowl Meet! Ashby, DGF, Fergus Falls, Wheaton, Moorhead, and Park Christian all advanced to the state meet after strong performances throughout the season and at the regional meet.

The State competition was held April 10-11 at Cragun's Resort near Brainerd. Each team brought their own mix of strategy, knowledge and teamwork. Their success is a true reflection of all the hard work and team spirit that make Knowledge Bowl such an awesome experience! Congratulations to all the teams and coaches!

Region 4 State Rankings:

A Division

Ashby – 12th place

Wheaton – 15th place

AA Division

Park Christian – 3rd place

DGF – 8th place

AAA Division

Fergus Falls – 13th place

Moorhead – 16th place

John Biebighauser's Four-Year Journey: A Legacy of Dedication and Fun



2025



2024



2023



2022

Among the standout stories this year is senior John, who has made it to the Minnesota State Knowledge Bowl Meet an impressive four years in a row. His journey through Knowledge Bowl is filled with unforgettable moments, like the time a teammate literally fell out of his chair when they were State champions during John's first year at state.

John, who has long dreamed of becoming a meteorologist, still laughs about the day he finally answered a weather question correctly—a question about Chinook winds. His favorite subjects to tackle in competition are British history and grammar, where he and his team often found their stride.

Reflecting on his experience, John encourages new students not to shy away from joining.

"It's so much fun! People always say, 'I'm too dumb to be in Knowledge Bowl,' but that's not true. There are so many ways to be good in Knowledge Bowl beyond academic achievement," he shared.

As John looks to the future, he's heading to Gustavus Adolphus College to study chemistry, with hopes of starting a Knowledge Bowl club there too—continuing his passion for the activity that shaped so much of his high school experience.

PARK CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Park Christian Earns Third at State Knowledge Bowl in the

AA Division

It was a thrilling finish for the Park Christian School Knowledge Bowl team at this year's State Knowledge Bowl Meet, ending their season with a hard-fought third-place finish after a dramatic tie-breaker round. The victory capped off a season full of laughter, teamwork, and special traditions that made the journey just as memorable as the destination.

When asked what's been the best part of being on the team, the students were quick to share their favorite moments. "We really enjoyed coming together as a team and practicing some team traditions! We all went together to a thrift store and bought sweater vests together for the state meet! We also like to do a lot of small silly things that make us all laugh. And we love Knowledge Bowl!"
The memories made outside of competition were just as meaningful—sipping juice out of wine glasses while watching Child Genius on TV and exchanging snacks with the Cook County team added lighthearted moments to a high-stakes weekend. The highlight, however, was the incredible excitement of clinching third place in a tiebreaker, an accomplishment that will be remembered for years to come.

Coach Matt Larson

Wrapping Up an Incredible Chapter



This season was also bittersweet, as it marked the final year for longtime coach Matt Larson, who will be stepping into a new career after the school year wraps up.

Whether coaching 5th-grade girls' basketball, varsity football, or Knowledge Bowl, Matt's focus was always clear: build strong relationships and lift students up. Matt expressed, "The success of the team is the students, not me as a coach". "I just get to spend time with an awesome group of kids and watch them enjoy themselves."
Some of Matt's favorite moments came when he saw students find their voice and confidence within the team. He especially loved seeing the pride on a student's face after correctly answering a question tied to something he had taught them —a full-circle moment every teacher treasures.
Championships or not, Matt found joy in every season. "They're all amazing, they have so much fun, and they're just great kids," he reflected. "What I'll miss most are the students."
As Park Christian celebrates a season filled with milestones and memories, they do so with full hearts—thankful for the victories, the friendships, and the mentors like Coach Matt who made the journey unforgettable.



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