

June 2025

THE TORCH

In This Issue



Sycamore Community School District 427 is proud to announce the renaming of its annual Young Author Awards to the Jim Dombek Young Author Achievement Award in honor of former Board of Education President, Mr. Jim Dombek.





embraced what it means to support one another, learn alongside each other, and ensure every student feels seen, supported, and challenged.

We are excited to officially debut the Bridges in Mathematics curriculum across our elementary schools to start the 2025-26 school year. This new curriculum will transform the way our youngest learners engage with math, making it more interactive, conceptual, and accessible. It's a great example of how we're growing in our instructional practices and meeting students where they are.

Strategic planning has also been a major focus. The Board of Education has engaged in a goal-setting process for the 2025-2026 school year that includes goals for academic achievement, further implementation of our Portrait of a Spartan, and both financial and facility planning. We also launched our Strategic Technology Plan (2024-2027), developed by our Technology Advisory Committee. These efforts represent our dedication to the long-term success of our school district.

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Superintendent Steve Wilder

As the 2024-25 school year comes to a close, I am so grateful for all we've accomplished together as a district. This year has been marked by meaningful progress, purposeful planning, and a renewed commitment to our students, staff, and families.

This year's theme, Growing, Empowering, Belonging, has been more than just words. It has guided our decisions, inspired our initiatives, and strengthened our sense of community. In our classrooms, we've

JIM DOMBEK YOUNG AUTHOR ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS: CELEBRATING STORIES, HONORING A LEGACY

April 22, 2025

Sycamore Community School District 427 is proud to announce the renaming of its annual Young Author Awards to the Jim Dombek Young Author Achievement Award in honor of former Board of Education President, Mr. Jim Dombek. This meaningful change reflects Mr. Dombek's longstanding commitment to students and his deep appreciation for the creativity and voice of young writers.

During his 27 years of service on the Board of Education, Mr. Dombek consistently demonstrated his passion for student achievement. Among the many student celebrations he attended, recognizing the Young Author honorees was one of his most cherished. Each year, he took time to read every student's story and personally recognize each award recipient during a Board of Education meeting. He engaged students in thoughtful conversation about their work, ensuring that every author felt seen, heard, and valued.

"I will fondly remember the joy that Mr. Dombek took in reading the Young Authors stories, talking to winners, and connecting with the students and their parents," said Superintendent Steve Wilder. "There was always a gleam in Jim's eye during those Board Meetings, and I can't think of a more appropriate way to honor Mr. Dombek and to elevate this award."

Renaming the award in his honor is a fitting tribute to his enduring impact on the Sycamore community and his dedication to uplifting student voices.

We are proud to recognize the 2024-25 recipients of the Jim Dombek Young Author Achievement Award:

Kinley Vogeney, Kindergarten-1st Grade Winner from North Grove Elementary, wrote Kinley's Rescue Animal Barn, a heartwarming tale about showing all animals the love they deserve.

Another major highlight this year was the conclusion of our Portrait of a Spartan video series. Over the school year, we visited every school, Pre-K through 12th grade, to showcase how our eight dispositions come to life in classrooms and beyond. Our students showed us the many ways they are already growing into the graduates we envision.

None of this happens without our dedicated staff, families, and incredible students. Thank you for your continued trust and partnership. As we look ahead to the summer and beyond, I'm confident that the seeds we planted this year—through instruction, innovation, and connection—will continue to grow in the months and years to come.

Have a safe, restful summer and thank you for making this a year to remember.



LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR PORTRAIT OF A SPARTAN INITIATIVE BY VISITING

syc427.org/portraitofaspartan



Charlee Courtemanche, 2nd-3rd Grade Winner from South Prairie Elementary, penned The Garden's Secret, an enchanting story filled with magic and garden fairies.

Kellan Edic, 4th-5th Grade Winner from North Grove Elementary, created Shadow's Adventure, an exciting journey with a story inspired by his dog.

Ellie Ferro, 6th-8th Grade Winner from Sycamore Middle School, authored Sara, a thoughtful narrative exploring belonging, strength, and what it means to be a friend.

These student authors exemplify the creativity, imagination, and voice that Mr. Dombek so deeply valued. Their stories are a testament to the power of writing and the importance of encouraging young people to share their perspectives with the world. Congratulations to our 2024-25 honorees!



"Now You See Me" - Richied

"Brain to Heart, Heart to Brain" - Cuautle

"The Protector" - Minchala

WINNING WITH STYLE: SYCAMORE ART STUDENTS EARN HIGH HONORS AT SHOWS

April 15, 2025

Sycamore High School art students made a strong impression this semester, earning top honors at the Kishwaukee College Juried High School Student Art Exhibition and securing first place overall at the I8 Conference Art Show. Works were submitted across a wide range of categories, including drawing, photography, ceramics, and painting.

At the 2025 Juried High School Student Art Exhibition, held February 17-27, Sycamore students brought home four awards. Senior Courtney Richied received Best in Show for her piece "Now You See Me." Second-place honors went to senior Brenda Cuautle in Mixed Media for "Brain to Heart, Heart to Brain," senior Hannah Hart in Color Drawing for "Resistance," and sophomore Samantha Minchala in Black & White Drawing for "The Protector."

"Receiving Best in Show twice this year is an extraordinary achievement that speaks volumes about our students' talent and dedication," Sycamore Art Teacher Samantha Butkus said. "As art teachers, we get a front-row seat to watch creativity, growth, and resilience unfold—but this year, our students truly went above and beyond."

EMPOWERING ALL LEARNERS TO SUCCEED IN THEIR WORLD

CLAUDIA BEREK GAINS LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE THROUGH GIRLS LEAD PROGRAM

May 12, 2025

When Sycamore Middle School sixth grader Claudia Berek learned about the Girls Lead Program, it wasn't just another extracurricular; it was a spark. Encouraged by strong women in her life, Claudia saw the program as a rare opportunity to grow into the kind of leader she's long admired.

Launched by the Office of the Lieutenant Governor in collaboration with the Illinois Council on Women and Girls, Girls Lead is a statewide initiative designed to empower young women through direct engagement with public service and government. The program offers participants the chance to shadow female leaders, fostering skills in leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution, and consensus-building within a progressive working environment. Structured across different age groups, it provides tailored experiences—from spending a day with a member of the Illinois General Assembly for younger participants to engaging in policy research projects for high school students.

"I think a lot of different people inspired me to take part in the Girls Lead Program," Berek said. "My elementary school principal, Ms. Waller, is the one who first told me about the Girls Lead Program and got me hooked on the idea of getting to shadow a female leader at the state level."

Ms. Waller left an imprint on Berek by introducing her to Girls Lead and modeling the type of leadership that listens, includes, and uplifts. Claudia's mother is equally influential, a powerhouse in her professional and personal life.



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