

ORONO SCHOOLS

TODAY



October 2025

Message from the Superintendent

Dear Orono Community,

As a district, we are committed to continuous improvement—always seeking new ways to engage our students, strengthen learning, and support the educators who make that work possible.

Thanks to the generosity of our community and the Foundation's Educator Excellence Fund, we've been able to bring high-quality professional learning experiences to our staff, helping us grow together as a teaching and learning community.

In this issue, we're proud to share outstanding achievement by our high school students—a reflection of their hard work, creativity, and

staff and families. You'll also read about our new Arts & Letters literacy program, now being implemented in elementary classrooms, which is sparking curiosity and a love of reading in our youngest learners.

Every initiative we undertake is grounded in our belief that belonging and engagement are at the heart of student success. Whether through passion projects, creative pursuits, activities, or athletics, we strive to nurture the whole student—helping each one find purpose, connection, and joy in their learning every day.

We invite you to celebrate the accomplishments of Orono students at our upcoming band and choir performances, the annual Veterans Day program on November 11, and the fall musical, "Tuck Everlasting," opening November 14. You'll find details on the "Student Performances" news item on the district website landing page.

As we look ahead to the winter months and a joyful holiday season, I wish you good health and time to connect with family and friends.



Kristine Flesher, Ed.D.

PROSPECTIVE STUDENT OPEN HOUSE

Join us to learn more about Orono Schools for the 26-27 school year!

Tuesday, November 18
5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Tours scheduled at all schools

PLEASE
RSVP



or <https://bit.ly/OPEN-HOUSE-2025>

Please learn more:
www.oronoschools.org/enroll

Contact us:
enrollment@oronok12.mn.us
telephone: 952-449-8312

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Class of 2025 Graduation Rate • 100%

College-level opportunities in high school equip students with advanced skills, knowledge, and experiences that prepare them for the rigor of higher education and the demands of the modern workforce.



93%

of the Class of 2025 enrolled in a college university two-year college or technical school

College Admissions Fast Facts:

- 93% matriculation
- 71% overall acceptance rate
- 23% accepted to a most-competitive college; 6% attending

Highly Selective Admissions:

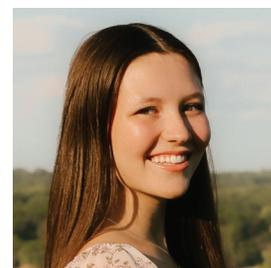
Boston College, Boston University, Dartmouth College, Duke University, Georgetown University, Harvard College, University of Notre Dame, Yale University, and many Honors programs

Class of 2025 Top Choices

University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
University of St. Thomas
Minnesota State University, Mankato
Iowa State University
University of Wisconsin - Madison
Indiana University at Bloomington

2026 National Merit Scholars

These students from the Class of 2026 scored among the nation's best on the Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) taken in fall of junior year. The top 1% in the nation are named National Merit Semifinalists; generally, the top 2-3% of PSAT scorers receive Commended Scholar status. These students will be recognized by the School Board in November 2025.



National Merit Semifinalists
Evelyn Miller and Parker Stephens

National Merit Commended Scholars
Kaia Erickson, Cannon Lewis, and Kiara Vaughan

Expanding Opportunities, Achieving Excellence

Orono High School's (OHS) commitment to expanding opportunities for students to take advanced coursework earlier is already producing remarkable results.

Last year, OHS restructured its Advanced Placement (AP) program to open access to AP courses at earlier grade levels. Nearly half (45%) of Orono's freshmen enrolled in **AP Human Geography**, a widely recommended introductory AP course. Sophomores were also given the opportunity to take **AP Seminar**, which fulfills an English credit and serves as the first step toward the

prestigious AP Capstone Diploma. An impressive 42% of sophomores chose to take on this challenge.

We are proud to share that these pioneering students not only embraced the opportunity but also excelled on their AP exams taken in spring 2025. The results speak for themselves:

- 92% of ninth graders passed the AP Human Geography exam.
- 99% of sophomores passed the AP Seminar exam.

AP Seminar and AP Research together form the foundation of the

AP Capstone Diploma, an advanced academic credential recognized by colleges and universities nationwide. Students typically complete AP Research in 11th or 12th grade, building on the critical thinking, writing, and presentation skills developed in AP Seminar.

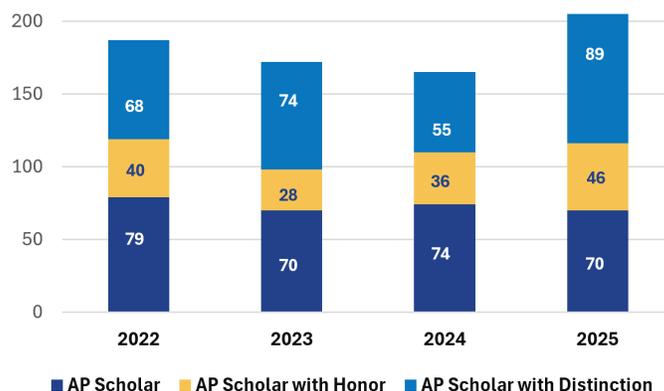
These outstanding outcomes reflect the talent and dedication of our students, the expertise of our teachers, and the strong partnership of our families and community in supporting academic excellence.

**AP HUG
Freshman
pass rate 92%**

**AP Seminar
Sophomore
pass rate 99%**

AP Exams & Enrollment	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of students tested	388	421	454	562
Number of exams administered	772	810	855	1,020
Percent of exams resulting in a score of 3+	83%	79%	82%	91%
Percent of graduating class taking and passing at least one AP exam	65%	66%	69%	76%
Percent of graduating class completing at least one AP course	81%	86%	84%	90%

AP Scholar Recognition



College-level Experiences and Opportunities to Earn Credit	Class of 2025
OHS Advanced Placement (AP) (23 courses)	90%
OHS Dual Enrollment (College Accounting, Computer Applications for College, Project Lead the Way pre-engineering)	25%
Hennepin Technical College	13%
PSEO - Full time	3%
PSEO - Part time	14%
Total percent of class taking courses with the potential to earn college credit	98% (unduplicated)

ACT[®]

88% of graduates tested

ACT	Middle 50%-ile: Top 100
English	24-32
Math	26-32
Reading	26-32
Science Reasoning	25-31
Composite	25-31
Minnesota Composite	20.7 (66% tested)



DR. ADAM LAMPARSKÉ
Principal
Orono Schumann Elementary

Lessons That Shape Who We Become

In Orono's kindergarten through second grade classrooms, school days include instruction in reading, writing, and math but also something just as important: lessons in kindness, respect, responsibility, and empathy.

Dr. Adam Lamparske, principal at Orono Schumann Elementary, says the approach is intentional. "We see ourselves as laying the foundation of character work that students will experience and engage in all the way through graduation," he explains. "These are the universal ideals our district has always valued through the CHARACTER COUNTS! program."

A Common Language

Each classroom teacher builds in a daily practice lesson focused on self-awareness and interpersonal skills.

"Every class is teaching the same values and vocabulary," says Kindergarten teacher Jenni Drake. "When you hear five-year-olds naturally talking about respect or empathy—using those words to describe their actions and feelings—that's when you know it's working."

Families have noticed, too. Weekly home connection letters invite families to continue the conversation

Strong Character from the Start

after school. "Parents tell us they hang them on the fridge and refer to them throughout the week," says Kindergarten teacher Hannah Stolhammer. "It's become a bridge between home and school; the lessons come full circle when we're using the same language."

That shared language is visible in behavior and classroom culture. Students are not just following rules; they are understanding why their choices matter. "Instead of saying, 'Please get in line,' we might say, 'Join a respectful line,'" Ms. Stolhammer explains. "Because they've talked about what respect means, they know exactly what that looks like. The language becomes part of who they are."

Character Every Day

Dr. Lamparske emphasizes that the goal is not enforcing rules but nurturing understanding. "It's about helping kids learn how to navigate the world... how to be part of a community... how to take responsibility for themselves and care about others," he says.

That sense of belonging starts with simple, daily interactions. Teachers now make a point to greet every child by name each morning — a practice inspired by the "Four at the Door, Plus One More" strategy. "It's such a small thing," Dr. Lamparske says, "but it has a huge impact. When kids are seen and welcomed every day, it sets the tone for everything that follows."

As Ms. Drake puts it, "We're not only teaching academics. We're teaching kids how to collaborate, persevere, show empathy, and respect others. These are the skills they'll use for the rest of their lives."

And as those lessons take root, the results are clear in the smiles, the teamwork, and the everyday kindness visible in Orono's youngest learners.



"Character isn't a subject we teach once a week," Lamparske says. "It's part of who we are, every single day."

4 at the Door + 1 More

In the classroom...



1 Eye to Eye

Ensure each student feels seen.



2 Name to Name

Greet each student by name.

3 Hand to Hand

Fist bump, high five, or other.



4 Heart to Heart

Quick connection (Examples: "How are you? I'm glad you're here!")



+1

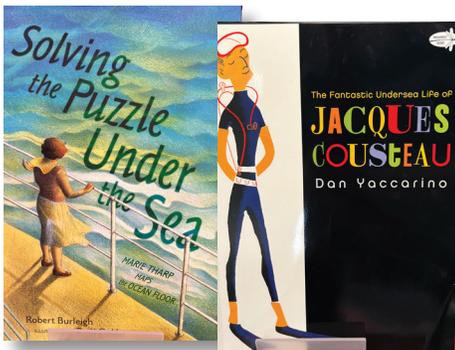
Entry Task

Have something quick ready for students to do when they enter the classroom.

A Community Effort in Literacy

Orono Schools' new K-5 literacy curriculum, **Arts & Letters**, is sparking excitement in classrooms, empowering teachers, and giving students the tools they need to thrive. Through A&L, students are engaging with thousands of authentic, high-quality books on a wide range of topics, from the sea to the human heart.

A&L emphasizes not only reading but writing, speaking, listening, and knowledge-building. The curriculum includes a framework that helps children analyze texts at increasingly sophisticated levels, moving from "notice and wonder" observations to distilling key ideas. Teachers say this structure gives students a toolkit for deep thinking that transfers across subjects.



"This work is essential," said Executive Director of Learning & Accountability, Dr. Aaron Ruhland. "We have already seen strong gains in literacy at IS, but instead of resting on our success, we are focusing on practices aligned with the science of reading. The result is students who are not only better readers, but stronger thinkers and communicators."

Families report that children are bringing home new vocabulary, engaging in thoughtful dinner-table conversations, and eagerly sharing what they've learned. In third and fourth grades, fluency practice is a family activity, with parents reading alongside their children and offering feedback to teachers.

Rich Texts, Rigorous Thinking

"Our students are producing work that would surprise people," Dr. Ruhland said. "The reports, essays, and conversations happening in classrooms show how deeply students are engaging with complex texts."

Technology plays a balanced role: print books anchor learning, while digital assessments provide quick feedback to help teachers tailor their lessons. "The focus is on authentic reading, with tech supporting growth," Ms. Jodl said.

Collaboration and Consistency

Principal Mary Jodl credits teamwork and preparation for the successful rollout of A&L. "Our teachers are passionate about literacy and deeply committed to students," she said. "Before we ever began implementation, we invested in study, training, and building support systems for teachers. That foundation has made a huge difference."

One support is the IS Instructional Leadership Team, which meets regularly to gather feedback and share strategies across grade levels. District Literacy Specialist Beth Pearson sees the impact firsthand: "The hopes teachers expressed early



MARY JODL
Principal

Orono Intermediate School

on—collaboration, consistency, and shared experiences—are exactly what we're seeing play out now. It's exciting to hear teachers talk about common assessments, shared successes, and how students are applying their learning."

A Community Investment

The successful launch of A&L was possible thanks to braided funding from district resources, PTO support, and generous contributions from the Orono Foundation for Education. "That community partnership allowed us to provide the full curriculum package right away," said Dr. Ruhland. "It's a testament to the incredible support our schools receive."





KIM VAN EYLL
Principal

Orono Middle School

“Middle school can be a time when students question where they fit in, which is why staff are intentional about building strong connections,” Principal Van Eyll said. “We want every student to feel seen and valued at Orono Middle School.”

This fall, staff helped students get to know each other quickly through simple steps like wearing name tags and implementing “Four at the Door + One More,” greeting



Creating Connections That Last

students by name to create a consistent, positive connection. OMS’ spring 2025 survey confirms this work is paying off: more than 97% of middle school students report feeling like they belong.

When students indicate they’re struggling, counselors and the mental health team follow up individually to make sure those students find their place, whether through friendships, activities, or new opportunities.

Beyond the Classroom

Connectedness goes beyond the classroom. Teachers and staff often organize building-wide events that brings students together in a fun, low-pressure way. Field trips like sixth-grade Base Camp and seventh-grade experience at Camp Ilduhapi also strengthen bonds.

Clubs and sports provide additional outlets for belonging. From creative writing and art to Math Masters and performing arts, students can explore their interests while forming connections with peers, teachers, and coaches.

“Without a sense of belonging, it’s hard for students to be ready for learning,” Principal Van Eyll said. “When kids feel connected, they’re more engaged, more confident, and ready to try new things.”

◀ Students participate in the annual Unity Walk at OMS

Phones Away

With the “Away for the Day” cell phone policy, phones are put away from bell to bell. Lunchrooms are now filled with conversation, laughter, and games rather than silence and screens.



▲ 6th grade students at Base Camp

Belonging & Safety

While connectedness boosts learning, research also shows it strengthens school safety. When students feel they belong, they’re more likely to reach out to a trusted adult if they or a friend need help. “Connectedness is really our biggest prevention measure,” Principal Van Eyll said. “It makes our schools safer because our culture helps students feel known and valued. Students know that staff care about them and will listen.”

Preparing Every Orono Student for Life After High School

At Orono High School (OHS), “future ready” means more than preparing students for college and career—it’s about helping every student discover their strengths, explore interests, and build the skills to thrive in whatever path they choose. Dr. Amy Steiner, Principal, and Erin Head, Associate Principal, say the school’s programs and culture all align around that goal.

AP for All

Over the past several years, OHS has expanded opportunities for students to challenge themselves through Advanced Placement (AP) courses—both in number and variety (see page 3). AP Human Geography now offers a rigorous option for ninth graders, and new courses such as AP Art and AP Computer Science open doors for students with diverse interests. “Our goal is that every student takes at least one AP course before they graduate,” Dr. Steiner said. “It’s about access and a belief that this level of learning is attainable for everyone.”

Research supports that approach. “Taking just one college-credit course can have a significant impact on a student’s readiness for college or career,” said Ms. Head. “It builds higher-order thinking skills and confidence that carry over into any path a student chooses.”

That belief is shared across OHS. Teachers in every department

collaborate through professional learning communities to align instruction and help students develop the skills needed for success in advanced coursework. “We really see this as everyone’s work,” said Dr. Steiner. “Every class prepares students for the next level.”

Connected to the Future

Orono is proud of the new **College & Career Center** that has become a vibrant hub for important planning and learning. “It’s a warm, visible space connected to our counseling offices,” Dr. Steiner said. “When freshmen walk by and see students planning their future, they start thinking, ‘This is for me, too.’”



The school’s Media Center is a flexible learning hub where students can collaborate, study independently, or meet with staff. “It’s really about empowering students to own their learning,” said Ms. Head. “They know their goals, have access to support, and understand how to move forward.”

That focus on responsibility is reinforced through Spartan



DR. AMY STEINER
Principal

Orono High School

Scholars, a school-wide initiative rooted in character education. Developed through student input, it centers on three themes: engagement, integrity, and connection. “We’re helping students define what those principles look like in their own lives,” Ms. Head explained. “It’s about showing up, doing the right thing, and building community.”

Counseling Support 9-12

From freshman family meetings to individualized discussions with juniors and seniors, OHS counselors work closely with students to plan for life after high school—whether they are headed to a four-year university, technical college, military service, gap year, or directly into a career.

“Our goal is to open doors for students based on their experiences here,” said Dr. Steiner. “No matter their next step, we want them to leave Orono with confidence, skills, and a strong sense of direction.”





Orono Public Schools, ISD #278
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Creating Connections That Last: The Orono Coalition in Action



ALI CHORLEY
 Director
 The Orono Coalition

What makes Orono a special place to live and learn is our people. It's my colleagues pouring their heart and soul into their work. It's neighbors looking out for one another. It's community members filling the stands to support Orono students. *And it's a shared belief that we're in this together.* That same spirit is alive in the work of The Orono Coalition.

Positive Childhood Experiences Come to Life

Grounded in both data and heart, the Coalition focuses on strengthening community-based Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs). These include: feeling supported by friends, having a sense of belonging to a larger group or purpose, participating in community traditions, and having at least two non-parent adults who take a genuine interest in you.

Research shows that community-

anchored PCEs aren't just "feel-good" moments, they're linked to immediate and lifelong positive outcomes.

When children feel supported, connected, and part of something larger, those positive experiences can buffer against the impact of adversity. Higher levels of PCEs are linked to stronger mental health and resilience and lower rates of substance misuse, anxiety, and depression.

We've learned that resilience doesn't come from erasing hardship—it grows in the soil of relationships, belonging, and everyday positive experiences.

Fostering belonging, connection, and shared traditions is proven prevention and well-being in action.

Our Initiatives

The **More Than a Meal** campaign encourages families to turn mealtimes or car rides into moments of connection, supported by our Conversation Starter decks (available from the Community Education office in English and Spanish). The **988 campaign** promotes awareness of mental health supports, and Orono staff show visible solidarity for student well-being through events like **National Awareness Day**.

Community Connections

Everyday interactions—warm greetings, shared traditions, simple kindness—help weave a culture of

belonging across our schools and community. Families, educators, and neighbors all play a role in building that fabric.

How you can help:

- Attend a Coalition meeting, open to all (next meeting November 13).
- Volunteer as a mentor, tutor, or coach.
- Create small moments of connection at home or in the community.
- Support our efforts through advocacy, partnerships, or donations.



The Orono Coalition's work is fueled by optimism and shared responsibility. By showing up, mentoring, and fostering everyday connection, each of us helps create a stronger, more connected Orono for our children and for one another.



theonocoalition.org
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