

THE DISTRICT DISPATCH

School News & Updates
for the School District 197

Community

Fall 2025



Community members play cards at Thompson Park Activity Center (TPAC).

WHAT'S INSIDE

Ways We're Serving the Whole Community

Class of 2025 Warrior Hall of Fame

Meet Two Rivers Leadership

Alum Spotlight: Sergeant Peter Renteria

Kindergarten Enrollment for 2026-27

And more!

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Sending you district news for less than \$1.

The District Dispatch is a cost-effective way to share important updates and show how your tax dollars are used. We keep costs low by printing twice a year, using competitive bids, and producing it in-house. Share your feedback at district.communications@isd197.org.

From the Superintendent

Two months into the new school year, and I'm filled with excitement, gratitude, and hope. This time of year always brings positive energy and the promise of what's possible when we work together to support our students. I'm grateful to be part of a school district that cares deeply about kids and trusts in our collective ability to do what's best for them. I'm also grateful to be part of a district that serves so many in our community.

In this issue of the District Dispatch, you'll see that spirit reflected throughout. On page four, you can read about all the ways we're serving the community. We're proud to offer a range of programs and services for community members of all ages—including those who don't currently have school-age children. On pages eight and nine, we provide a budget update and share how we're tackling rising costs while continuing to strengthen programs and supports for students and families. By using thoughtful budgeting, maximizing state funding, securing grants, and building strong community partnerships, we're stretching every dollar to make the greatest impact on our students and school community.

While financial challenges remain, I believe in our community's shared commitment to overcoming them. We've achieved so much together, and that gives me confidence in our path forward. As we look ahead to the rest of the school year, my focus remains on excitement, gratitude, and hope. Thank you for your support and partnership.

Peter Olson-Skog, Superintendent

Back-to-School Spirit Across School District 197

The school year kicked off with plenty of energy and Warrior pride, marked by first-day smiles, the community-filled Warrior Rally, the Warrior 5K and Family Mile, and Homecoming celebrations. Here's a look back at some of our favorite moments so far!



Points of Pride

Our students, staff, and schools continue to make us proud! Here are just a few recent highlights that showcase the incredible things happening across School District 197.

Two Rivers Earns Top 5% Ranking

Two Rivers High School has again secured a spot on this year's U.S. News and World Report's Best High Schools list! Of 880 high schools in Minnesota, Two Rivers achieved a ranking in the top 5% based on test scores, access to and participation in college-level learning, and more. This honor reflects the dedication of our staff, the hard work of our students, the support of families and community, and the strong educational foundation built from our early learning programs through graduation.



Adaptive Water Skiing Brings Inclusive Fun to Students

This summer, School District 197 partnered with the Shockwaves Adaptive Ski Squad to host its inaugural adaptive water skiing event, providing 30 students with physical and cognitive disabilities the opportunity to safely experience the thrill of the sport—many for the first time—using specialized equipment and volunteer support.

Four Warriors Earn Commended Honors

Congratulations to Two Rivers seniors Bryn Christopherson, Brendan Monroe, Kaia Smith, and Hannah Trudeau for being named Commended Students in the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program! This honor, based on their outstanding PSAT performance, recognizes their exceptional academic talent and bright future ahead.



Pilot Knob Receives National STEM Distinction

Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School has earned the Project Lead the Way 2024-25 Distinguished School recognition. This highlights their commitment to increasing student access, engagement, and achievement in STEM programming.

Dakota County Honors LiveGreen with Public Health Award

School District 197 LiveGreen clubs were honored with the 2025 Public Health Achievement Youth Award by the Dakota County Board of Commissioners. This award, presented during National Public Health Week, recognizes their outstanding contributions to public health.



90%
Education
Quality



92%
Learning &
Achievement



89%
Teacher
Approval

Positive Community Feedback on Progress

In our most recent community survey, families expressed strong confidence in our schools: **90%** rated the overall quality of education positively, **92%** were satisfied with student learning and achievement, and **89%** gave positive ratings to our teachers.

Proudly Serving the Whole Community

When people think about public schools, they often think only of K-12 education. But in School District 197, our work extends beyond the classroom walls and school years. We're proud to offer a range of programs and services for community members of all ages—including those who don't currently have school-age children. Here's a look at how we're serving our whole community.

THOMPSON PARK ACTIVITY CENTER FOR ADULTS 55+

Thompson Park Activity Center (TPAC) offers adults 55+ a welcoming place to learn, socialize, and stay active. Located in Thompson County Park and sponsored by School District 197 Community Education, TPAC provides classes, day trips, fitness programs, health services, volunteer opportunities, and special events. Participants enjoy activities like book clubs and educational workshops on topics like Medicare and scam prevention. TPAC also offers support services, including memory screenings and caregiver resources. Made possible through a partnership between Dakota County, the City of West St. Paul, and the district, TPAC is all about connection and community. Call 651-403-8300 to learn more.



ACCESS PROJECT: OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

School District 197's Access Project offers a wide variety of activities and classes designed to help adults with disabilities learn new skills and build friendships in a welcoming, supportive environment. Participants can enjoy programs like Friday Fun Night, cooking and crafting classes, bingo, and special events.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION: FREE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

TriDistrict Community Education's Adult Basic Education (ABE) program offers free classes to help area adults build skills and achieve their goals. Whether you want to earn your GED diploma, learn English, or gain career and workplace skills, ABE offers flexible day, evening, and online classes to meet a variety of needs.

ADULT ENRICHMENT

Adult Enrichment offers classes and activities for adults ages 15 and up. Some of the most popular classes include Gentle Yoga, Write Your Own Will, Knitting, Home Repair Basics, and Salsa Dancing. Most classes are held during the evening on weekdays.



SCHOOL DISTRICT 197 AQUATIC CENTER

The School District 197 Aquatic Center is a community resource for swimmers of all ages. Youth swim lessons help young swimmers build skills and confidence in the water. Lap swim is open to anyone ages 18+ who can swim 50 yards continuously, offering adults a great opportunity to stay active and swim at their own pace.

COMMUNITY USE OF DISTRICT FACILITIES

School District 197 opens its gyms, fields, and school spaces to community members and organizations when school programs are not in session. Rentals are available weekdays from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. and weekends from 8 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Community access is scheduled after district programs are finalized, ensuring shared spaces are utilized effectively for everyone.



To learn more about these programs, scan the QR code or visit isd197.org/community.

Alum Spotlight

Sergeant Peter Renteria, Mendota Heights PD

Meet Sergeant Peter Renteria, a 2010 graduate of Henry Sibley (now Two Rivers High School) and a police officer for the City of Mendota Heights. Sergeant Renteria has been with the Mendota Heights Police Department for eight years and is passionate about serving the same community where he grew up.

What do you remember most from your time in School District 197?

I remember the impact that my favorite teachers had on me. I was not always the best student, but the teachers in ISD 197 did not give up on me and helped me when I needed it.

What was your path after graduation, and what led you to a career in law enforcement?

After graduating from Henry Sibley, I attended Inver Hills Community College for a year and then transferred to Winona State University, where I received my bachelor's degree in sociology, with a focus on criminal justice. My father and grandfather were both police officers, so after switching majors several times, I found my way back to law enforcement. It is in our blood to be police officers.

What do you enjoy most about our community?

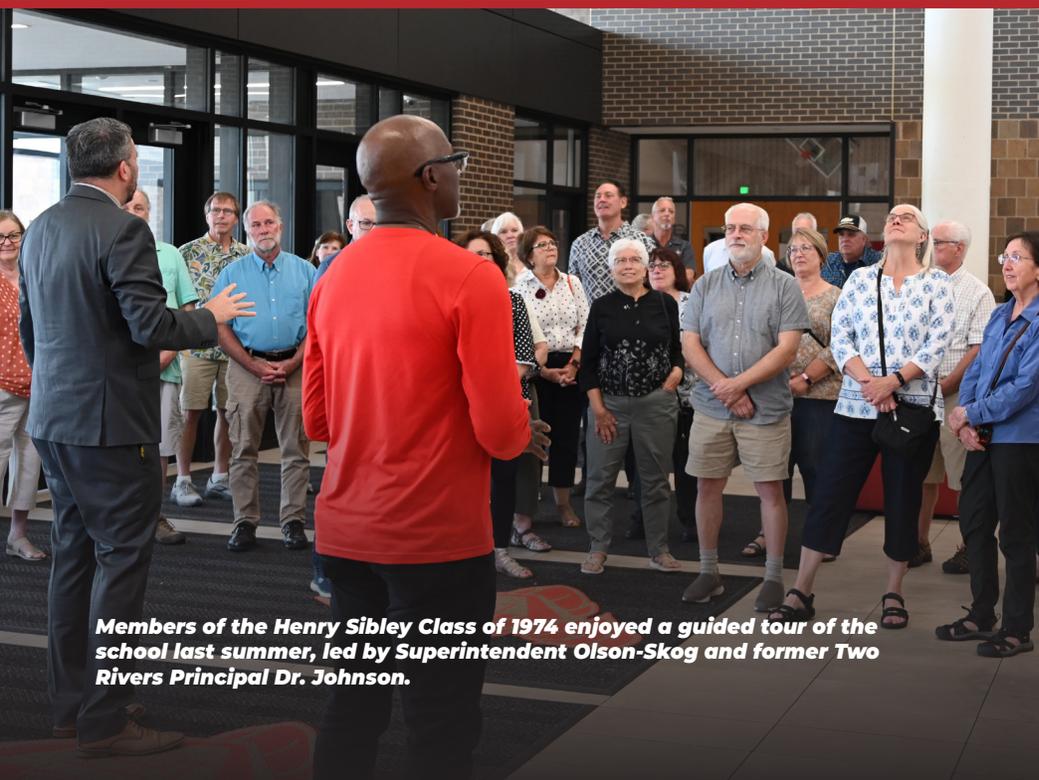
I enjoy the people in the community; everyone has a different background, and you can learn a lot from the people in the community. I enjoy the friends that I have made in the community that I am still friends with today.

What advice would you give to current students who are interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement?

Do not be afraid to challenge yourself and step out of your comfort zone. Do not be afraid to fail. If you fail, make sure you learn from those failures because it will make you a better person.



“Do not be afraid to challenge yourself and step out of your comfort zone. Do not be afraid to fail.”



Members of the Henry Sibley Class of 1974 enjoyed a guided tour of the school last summer, led by Superintendent Olson-Skog and former Two Rivers Principal Dr. Johnson.

Calling All Alumni!

We'd love to welcome you back to School District 197. Whether you're planning a class reunion or simply want to see how the high school has grown and changed, we're happy to arrange a tour—email district.communications@isd197.org to set it up.

Want to stay connected and be part of our growing alumni network? Email alumni@isd197.org to receive updates and find ways to get involved.

Meet the Two Rivers Leadership Team

This year, Two Rivers High School welcomes an updated leadership team. With both returning and new leaders, the team remains committed to fostering strong relationships and supporting the success of every student.



Two Rivers leadership team L-R: Prentice Smith, Tom Orth, Dr. Jessica Cabak, Megan Ahlberg, Scott Karlen

Dr. Jessica Cabak Principal

Now in her fifth year at Two Rivers—but first as principal—Dr. Cabak brings a focus to instructional leadership and meaningful relationships. Her favorite part of Two Rivers is the incredible community of students, staff, and families.

Megan Ahlberg Associate Principal

In her first year with School District 197, Ms. Ahlberg supports ninth-grade students and collaborates closely with BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks) teams to ensure a strong transition into high school.

Scott Karlen Associate Principal

Mr. Karlen has served in School District 197 for 25 years, including 18 at Two Rivers. He works with students in grades 10–12 and has coached baseball for nearly three decades.

Tom Orth Associate Principal

Now in his 37th year with the district, Mr. Orth supports students in grades 10–12. A longtime coach and community member, he loves that Two Rivers offers big-school opportunities in a close-knit setting.

Prentice Smith Activities Director

Mr. Smith is in his ninth year as Activities Director and 24th with the district. He oversees all athletics, clubs, and activities at Two Rivers and serves on the Warrior Hall of Fame Committee.



“We care deeply about every student’s success. Our goal is for all students to feel supported, safe, and encouraged, and we want them to leave prepared for their next step after high school.” -Dr. Jessica Cabak

Meet Your School Board Student Representatives

Each year, two high school students serve as representatives to the school board, sharing student perspectives and helping inform board decisions. Meet this year’s student representatives—seniors **Evangeline Fuentes** and **Rhys Walsh**.



Student Representatives L-R: Evangeline Fuentes, Rhys Walsh

Evangeline Fuentes serves as the National Honor Society president, Key Club vice president, Women in STEM club president, and a captain on the Two Rivers High School tennis team. Evangeline shares, “My goals are to help students communicate their opinions and ideas effectively to the school board and to also provide updates on current district-wide events to keep people connected.”

Rhys Walsh serves on the Warrior Leadership Council, is a National Honor Society member, is a Two Rivers track team captain, and volunteers as a summer track coach. Rhys shares, “I’m interested in serving as a student representative to the school board because I believe every student deserves to feel seen, supported, and heard.”



WARRIOR HALL OF FAME

Class of 2025

School District 197 and Two Rivers High School are proud to announce the 2025 inductees into the Warrior Hall of Fame. This honor recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the School District 197 community through athletics, activities, the fine arts, academics, and philanthropy.

The 2025 inductees into the Warrior Hall of Fame are:



Brenda Corbett



Over the past five decades, Brenda Corbett has worn many hats in School District 197—teacher, gifted and talented coordinator, club advisor, school board member, parent, grandparent, and community member. Her dedication to teaching has shaped countless programs, from launching Odyssey of the Mind to leading reading clubs. After retiring from the classroom, Brenda continued to serve the district for three terms on the school board. Brenda's legacy is one of creativity, compassion, and unwavering dedication to students and education.



Tom Johnson



Tom Johnson, a 1961 graduate of Henry Sibley High School, has dedicated his life to the School District 197 and the West St. Paul community. A standout student-athlete, Tom captained the football, basketball, and baseball teams. After college, Tom dedicated all 34 years of his teaching career to School District 197, during which he also coached. In retirement, Tom has helped maintain Heritage's animal habitat displays, including the construction of the school's 700-gallon aquarium. Tom's legacy is marked by the thousands of students and community members whose lives he's enriched.



Tori Nelson



Tori Nelson, a 2019 graduate of Henry Sibley, distinguished herself as a multi-sport athlete and exceptional scholar. A five-time basketball MVP and Metro East Conference Player of the Year, she became the school's all-time leading scorer. In softball, she earned four letters and was twice named Defensive Player of the Year. Academically, Tori earned Academic All-State honors and received the Athena Award. At South Dakota State University, she was a five-year basketball player who helped lead her team to multiple championships, graduated summa cum laude, and co-founded Her Turn, a nonprofit providing athletic camp scholarships for young girls.



Jim Probst



A 1979 Henry Sibley graduate, Jim Probst has spent decades uplifting students and strengthening his community through service and leadership. As a Kiwanis member and advisor, Jim has supported the Two Rivers Key Club for over 10 years—donating prizes, snacks, and supplies, and helping students lead with purpose. Jim has also worked to secure thousands of dollars in scholarships for seniors at Two Rivers and other local high schools. A recipient of the Minnesota-Dakotas Key Club District's Gold Key and Creativity in Leadership awards, and the current president of the South Robert Street Business Association, Jim continues to be a driving force behind student activities and opportunities.



Nominate a Warrior Hall of Fame Honoree!

Know someone who's made a lasting impact on our Warrior community? We welcome nominations for former students, coaches, teachers, and community supporters who have distinguished themselves in athletics, arts, academics, activities, or service. Submit your nomination using the QR code.

School District 197 Budget Update

In our spring District Dispatch, we shared that—like nearly every school district across the metro area—we’re facing financial pressures from rising costs and state funding that hasn’t kept pace with inflation. To address this, the school board approved a \$750,000 budget reduction in June—about 1% of the total budget—for the 2025-26 fiscal year, with more reductions planned in the coming years. These adjustments aim to rebuild the district’s fund balance while minimizing classroom impact.

Today, our financial outlook is still shaped by inflation outpacing state funding, rising costs, and growing student needs. To contain expenses while protecting programs and staying competitive as an employer, we’ve reduced office supply budgets, shifted print publications to digital, launched solar and HVAC projects to generate savings, cut some technology subscriptions, and left some district office positions unfilled. While our tax rate remains among the lowest in the metro, we’re navigating a tough financial reality, especially with projected cuts to special education funding.

Our financial outlook would be significantly worse were it not for our community’s strong support. Your support makes a difference, and we are grateful for your partnership!

Did You Know?

If state education funding had kept pace with inflation over the last 20 years, our schools would have \$6.9 million more each year to support students, staff, and programs.

INFLATION
vs.
STATE
FUNDING



+\$6.9M
annually

Investing in Solar to Keep More Dollars in Classrooms

This summer, new rooftop panels were installed at Friendly Hills, Heritage, and Two Rivers High School. These systems will supply about 13% of the district’s electricity and save roughly \$50,000 every year—adding up to about \$1.25 million over 25 years. The project was funded in part by a Minnesota Solar for Schools grant, which helps schools lower greenhouse gas emissions and keep more dollars in classrooms.

School District 197 already uses rooftop solar at five schools, a solar heating system at the Aquatic Center, and community solar garden subscriptions that have saved \$1.2 million in the last five years. Thanks to these efforts, we’ve already reduced our greenhouse gas emissions by 17%—and we’re working toward a 50% reduction in the next decade.

Solar for Schools

School District 197 schools are three of 92 schools in 45 school districts across the state that are on track to receive grants from the Minnesota Department of Commerce Solar for Schools Program to install solar power. Learn more about the program at mn.gov/solar4schools.



Expanding Access Through Sustainable Investments

School District 197 continues to expand access to important programs and supports for students and families. By maximizing state funding, securing grants, and strengthening community partnerships, the district is providing new opportunities in health care, early learning, career pathways, and family support—while being careful with every dollar.

SCHOOL-BASED HEALTH CLINIC OPENS AT TWO RIVERS HIGH SCHOOL



This fall, School District 197 launched Warrior Care, a new school-based health clinic inside Two Rivers High School. In partnership with Riverland Community Health and funded through a Minnesota Department of Health grant, the clinic provides students and staff with convenient, on-campus access to licensed medical care—reducing time away from school and supporting overall wellness. By bringing healthcare directly to where students spend their day, Warrior Care removes barriers to care, supports preventive health, and helps improve attendance. The clinic currently serves Two Rivers students and staff, with plans to expand services to more district families in the future.

EXPANDING EARLY LEARNING ACCESS WITH FULL-DAY PRE-K AT PILOT KNOB

School District 197 is expanding early learning access by using new Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) state funding to launch full-day pre-K at Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School in Eagan. Previously a half-day program, Pilot Knob now offers five hours of preschool each day—including breakfast, lunch, and bus transportation—free for eligible 4-year-olds. This change removes financial and transportation barriers, making high-quality early learning more accessible.

The district's Early Learning and Family Resource Center in West St. Paul also offers full-day pre-K, providing an additional option for families. With these programs, the district is reaching more families—particularly those in the southern part of the district—while also supporting long-term enrollment growth. Located within an elementary school, Pilot Knob's pre-K classrooms give families a natural place to start and grow, supported by a dedicated space built during the 2015 community-funded renovation.



TWO RIVERS SENIORS RECEIVE EARLY COLLEGE ADMISSION THROUGH STATE PROGRAM



Two Rivers High School is participating in Minnesota's Direct Admissions program, a statewide initiative that makes college more accessible by automatically admitting seniors to Minnesota colleges and universities based on their academic record and projected graduation. This removes barriers like application fees and the uncertainty of "will I get in?" with an early "YES!" In October, Two Rivers seniors received personalized emails listing the schools where they already qualify for admission, allowing them to choose which schools to move forward with and apply at no cost.

SCHOOL DISTRICT 197 SECURES YOUTH SKILLS TRAINING GRANT

School District 197 has received a Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Youth Skills Training (YST) grant to help students gain meaningful career exposure and paid work experience in high-demand fields such as manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, health care, and technology.

The grant will expand career-connected learning at Two Rivers High School by strengthening partnerships with local businesses and creating more hands-on learning opportunities. A central focus will be a new work readiness center that provides students—including those with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)—with career counseling, resources, and real-world experience. The program aims to increase the number of students with IEPs participating in paid internships in growing industries like agriculture, environmental science, computer science and technology, while also developing a long-term plan to help all students with IEPs explore and prepare for future careers. Local businesses interested in partnering can contact miles.lawson@isd197.org.

CONFLUENCE

Literary Arts Publication

We're proud to present this year's Confluence literary arts publication that showcases an impressive collection of writing and art by School District 197 fourth graders—all focusing on this year's theme: *Adventure in Every Draft*. Inside this publication, you'll discover the amazing paths our young authors have taken, embracing the challenges and triumphs of each draft to bring their unique adventures to life.

Four of the submissions are featured here, and the rest can be found at isd197.org/confluence2025 or by clicking on the QR Code.



Into the Emerald Deep

By: Manhaa Moien, Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School

In a twilight's hush, where the vines entwine.
Maya steps forth, with a heart divine.
The jungle depths, with a mystery to share.
She ventures forth, without a care.

With a machete's swing, she clears her way,
Through ferns and blooms, in a graceful array.
Exotic birds, in chorus sing as she discovers,
The jungle's hidden spring.

The rustling leaves, a hidden stream, reveals its
source, in a secret dream. She follows the path,
where ancient trees, guard secret whispers,
on a summer breeze.

With every step, a tale unfolds. Of a world untamed,
where legends hold. Maya's brave heart beats strong
and free. In harmony with the jungle's symphony.



Small Details

By: Leif Arneson, Somerset Elementary School

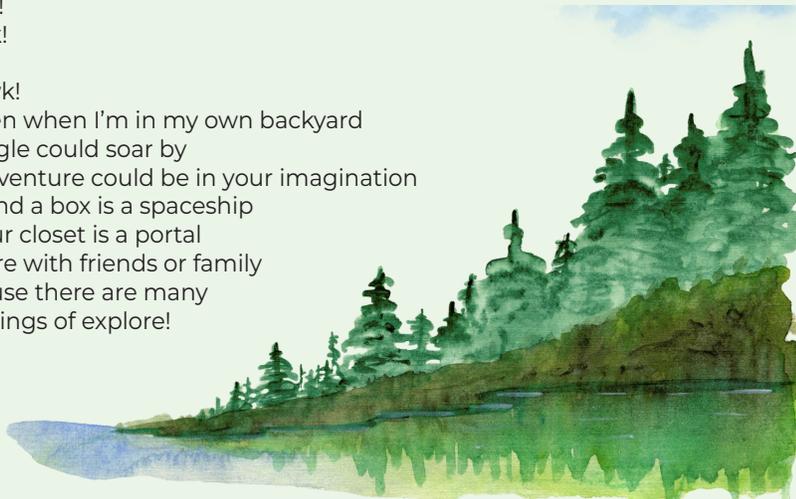
Feel a breeze
the trees, a vine
leaves are whispering, so divine
A rush of wind, a roar of air
Sensory is everywhere



Meanings of Explore

By: Liam Schindeldecker, Moreland Arts & Health Sciences Magnet School

If I'm out in the woods or down by the river
it's always an adventure...
a tree!
a rock!
a bee!
a hawk!
or even when I'm in my own backyard
an eagle could soar by
an adventure could be in your imagination
pretend a box is a spaceship
or your closet is a portal
explore with friends or family
because there are many
meanings of explore!



Outside

By: Noelle Steele, Somerset Elementary School

The outdoors
Is not just
A place
But a
State of mind
we could
Never replace
The outdoors
Is not just
A state of mind
But a place
That could never
Be left behind



KINDERGARTEN SHOWCASE

Kindergarten registration for the 2026-27 school year opens in January! To help families prepare, our elementary principals and staff will be hosting Kindergarten Showcase events in November. We invite you to meet teachers, tour the school, and ask questions.

Mark your calendars for Kindergarten Showcase events coming your way in November!

Our Elementary Schools

Garlough Environmental Magnet

1740 Charlton St., West St. Paul, MN 55118
garlough.isd197.org · 651-403-8100

Wed., Nov. 12, 9 - 10 a.m.

Thur., Nov. 13, 6:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Mendota Elementary

1979 Summit Ln., Mendota Heights, MN 55118
mendota.isd197.org · 651-403-8000

Tues., Nov. 11, 9 a.m.

Thur., Nov. 13, 5:30 p.m.

Thur., Nov. 13, 7 p.m.

Moreland Arts & Health Sciences Magnet

217 W. Moreland Ave., West St. Paul, MN 55118
moreland.isd197.org · 651-403-7800

Mon., Nov. 10, 6:30 - 8 p.m.

Fri., Nov. 14, 9 - 10:30 a.m.

Pilot Knob STEM Magnet

1436 Lone Oak Rd., Eagan, MN 55121
pilotknob.isd197.org · 651-403-7900

Mon., Nov. 10, 6:30 p.m.

Fri., Nov. 14, 9 a.m.

Somerset Elementary

1355 Dodd Rd., Mendota Heights, MN 55118
somerset.isd197.org · 651-403-8200

Tues., Nov. 11, 6:30 - 8 p.m.

Thur., Nov. 13, 9 - 10:30 a.m.



Kindergarten Enrollment Night:

January 22, 2026

If your child will be 5 years old before September 1, it's time to sign up for kindergarten! Enrollment paperwork will be mailed in December, and registering at Kindergarten Enrollment Night is strongly encouraged.

About Kindergarten in School District 197

In School District 197, our kindergarten classrooms are vibrant, joyful spaces where children explore, learn through play, and build strong relationships with peers and caring adults. We focus on fostering a sense of belonging for every student while supporting well-rounded growth in all developmental areas.

Learn more by visiting isd197.org/kg or by clicking on the QR code.



Visit the "Get to Know" pages

on each school's website or check out their Facebook pages to learn more about our elementary schools.

Fill out and return the enrollment paperwork you will receive by mail in December.

Enrollment Questions?

Call 651-403-7030

We can't wait to meet your future kindergartners! We encourage families to bring their students to Kindergarten Registration Night in January, which is a wonderful chance for them to get excited about their new school.



West St. Paul + Mendota Heights + Eagan Area

1897 Delaware Ave.
Mendota Heights, MN 55118

isd197.org

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JOIN US!

We'd love to see you at these upcoming community events that bring families, neighbors, and students together.



MAKERS MARKET CRAFT SHOW

Saturday, November 8
9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Two Rivers High School Gym

Explore and shop unique creations from local artists—many of them students—featuring handmade crafts, artwork, and more.



COFFEE WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT

Monday, November 24
8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

Ze's Diner, Mendota Heights

Join Superintendent Peter Olson-Skog for an informal Coffee with the Superintendent to connect, ask questions, and share feedback.



MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY OF SERVICE

Monday, January 19
9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Two Rivers High School Gym

Join Two Rivers Key Club for their annual MLK Day of Service—an opportunity for the community to honor Dr. King's legacy through meaningful service projects.