



## Hands-on Learning Brings Science to Life for SANB Students

In the halls of St. Anthony Middle School (SAMS), you'll find eighth grader EJ Caines and seventh grader Devon Martin — two students whose curiosity about the world reaches far beyond textbook memorization.

EJ, who has dyslexia, admits that traditional methods like reading a passage and filling out a worksheet don't always work for him. He prefers hands-on experiences that bring scientific concepts to life. Devon, meanwhile, is driven by a different kind of curiosity: an unshakable need to understand why things happen the way they do.

"I enjoy certain sciences," Devon says. "Like chemistry and physics, because I get to learn the why of everything, how you can predict what may happen next based on what you already know." He explains this as he's trying to figure out the mechanics of a fidget in SAMS Principal Amy Kujawski's office.

EJ's imagination stretches even further, beyond the school's walls and straight into outer space. "I'd like to study space. Take samples, learn how we can use the materials to our advantage," he said. EJ is also an animal lover. "If I get to study how to keep the others and other adorable animals safe, I would take that job instantly!"

When Minnesota adopted new science standards in 2020, schools across the state began shifting from memorization to helping students understand how scientific ideas connect and apply to experiments and real-world situations. The standards emphasize skills such as identifying patterns, cause-and-effect relationships, systems and models, and more. School districts had to pick a curriculum that best aligned with their goals and Minnesota's new standards. SANB's new curriculum is Inspire Science, created by McGraw Hill.

This new curriculum was chosen by teachers who collaborated to determine which curriculum option would work best for SANB. "It was a very collaborative process that took into account a wide range of perspectives," SAVHS science teacher, Steve Rice said "In the end, I think we picked the curriculum that had the most tools to help the most learners."

"I like how there are a lot more labs in this new curriculum," EJ agrees. "We're doing a lab almost every day, compared to last year. It was less consistent. This is really nice for a student like me because the hands-on stuff sticks better for me."

The move to Inspire Science has given students like EJ and Devon new ways to connect what they learn to the world around them. By emphasizing collaboration and hands-on discovery, science feels more relevant and engaging this year. SANB's commitment to meaningful teaching and learning keeps curiosity and creativity at the heart of every lesson.

St. Anthony  New Brighton  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 282

3303 33rd Ave NE, St. Anthony, MN 55418  
isd282.org  
612-706-1000

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# Ever WE ARE BRIGHTER.

## Building Reading Stamina in High School

Reading is a skill that goes beyond tests and grades—it's a habit that shapes how young people think, imagine, and grow. At St. Anthony Village High School, English teacher and St. Anthony Village Education Association (SAVEA) Union President Joan Nelson is tackling one of the biggest challenges facing schools: helping students build stamina and enthusiasm for reading. "I had a couple of English teachers that were just amazing, and I try to emulate them in my teaching in different ways," said Nelson. She meets the challenge by making reading relevant and grounded in relationships, including classics like *Romeo & Juliet* by William Shakespeare. "Romeo and Juliet is not a love story," she said. "Romeo and Juliet is a story about stupid teenagers who don't listen to their parents. And ninth graders can relate to that, because it's not about them (of course), it's about their friends."

She uses humor and honesty to help students see themselves in literature while connecting lessons to adolescent development. "You're supposed to be making mistakes right now," she explained. "It's okay ... that stress and tension that they're going through with their family, and the idea that their friends are just making really silly choices ... that's normal."

Nelson brings this same perspective to her role as SAVEA's union president. "This job wouldn't exist without the students," she said. "I try to put faces of specific students in my head when I'm collaborating with teachers and the district, asking myself how do these decisions impact them?"

So how can families help their students build focus and a love for reading? "Simply have reading materials in your home – newspapers, magazines, things that your kids are interested in," advises Nelson. "If they love sports, get them a subscription to a sports magazine. If you can get print in their hands, as opposed to having them read online, that's even more beneficial." She also recommends parents model reading habits: "Talk to your kids about what you're reading. Go to the library and check out books. It doesn't have to always be serious. Reading can be fun about fun topics."



**JOAN NELSON**

SAVHS English Teacher & SAVEA Union President



# Nurturing BRILLIANCE

The Official Newsletter of ISD282

Winter 2025-2026

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## A Note from Superintendent Corneille about Student Voice at SANB



At St. Anthony-New Brighton Schools, student voice isn't just something we talk about, it's a vital ingredient of how we grow and make decisions about our path forward. Through my Superintendent's Council, I get to meet directly with students to hear their perspectives on issues that matter to them most. So far we've discussed everything from credits and grading to social media, AI, cellphones, and post-secondary planning. Their insights shape and guide our district priorities and remind me every day that the people most affected by our decisions deserve a real seat at the table.

I value these conversations deeply because students are often direct and specific about what they like and don't like, and they hold multiple perspectives with such openness. It's really inspiring! There isn't a week that goes by that I don't reference something I've learned from them – including in conversations with our state legislators, which gives additional depth to the stories in our schools. For me, this work is more than just listening; it's practicing citizenship together. The Superintendent's Council allows students to use their voices and take responsibility for how our school community continues to improve.

## Peter Vnak and the Superintendent's Council

Peter Vnak is a senior at St. Anthony Village High School (SAVHS) who likes to get involved. He is the president of the Huskiepreneurship Club, a standout member of the Superintendent's Council, and he helps manage the scoreboard for Huskie basketball games.

### His attitude about school?

*"Establishing relationships and actually making meaning out of school has always been important to me,"*

he said. "I think it's super important for the superintendent and the school board to know our [student] feedback when they're making decisions."

An important issue for Peter was reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at SAVHS. "At St. Charles, it was something that we did everyday. When I came to St. Anthony, we weren't saying it all." He did what probably every 17-year-old would do, he researched the school's policies and found Policy 531 on the Pledge of Allegiance. "It says students will recite the pledge at least once a week. I thought, if we're not doing that,

then someone needs to speak up. And it's not for political reasons. The Pledge of Allegiance is something that can unite all of us in support of a strong democracy and the people who fight for our democracy."

Peter was also involved when the district was discussing removing phones from SAVHS, a policy that was fully implemented in the 2025-2026 school year. K-12 students must have their phones off and out of sight from the first bell to the last bell each day.

"I don't consider myself addicted [to my phone], but some students have a really hard time discerning when to use their phone or not," Peter explained. "In the real world you're going to have full access to your phone, you'll have to know when to put it down to produce quality work. This new policy is helping students have more self control."

Before leaving our interview to go check out the limited edition Huskie Paw doughnut at local doughnut shop, Whaddup Dough, Peter said his final policy push would be focused on ensuring proper use of Artificial



# BEST BUDDIES

CHAPTER AT ST. ANTHONY MIDDLE SCHOOL

At St. Anthony Middle School (SAMS), the Best Buddies Chapter focuses on creating friendships and opportunities for individuals with and without disabilities. Participating students meet up monthly to take part in activities that give students a space to build real, lasting friendships that go beyond the classroom.



Eighth graders Jack and Karma are in a one-to-one friendship, and together they've spent time laughing, learning, and helping each other through day-to-day school life. When we sat down with Jack and Karma, Jack leaned back in his chair as he talked. A moment later, Karma did the same, smiling as if to match him. It was a simple moment that showed how comfortable they are together.

"I've learned how to be patient and help when things get hard," Jack said. Whether that's giving a hand during class or playing catch at recess, the two have built a connection rooted in kindness and understanding.

When asked what makes Best Buddies special, Jack didn't hesitate: "You make new friends, and it's just a good environment to be in. Everyone should join Best Buddies. It's fun." Karma added "I loved bowling with Jack and his mom and dad!"

Special Education Teacher Corey Hughes is the Best Buddies advisor whose connection to the program started long before she began teaching. "I started in seventh or eighth grade, so I had a buddy and we would have monthly events like a Secret Santa," she explained.

That early experience led to leadership roles through college and now to bringing the program to SAMS. "I just knew that every Best Buddies event was going to be so much fun," she said. "It's not something we should be thanked for. Best Buddies is there for everyone in the club, not just the individuals with disabilities."

As a teacher, Corey said the impact of the program is visible every day. "In a perfect world, Best Buddies shouldn't have to be a club, because being friends with everyone should be the norm," she said. At SAMS, she has seen meaningful connections form through joint events with help from groups like student council and during field trips. "Everyone deserves a friend, and everyone deserves a chance to be loved and to have opportunities as anyone else," Corey said. "Every single person has special strengths, and seeing those flourish in everyday life is really important."

Best Buddies shows that friendship does not need to be complicated, just consistent. It is a program where students like Jack and Karma remind everyone that dignity begins with inclusion, patience, and the simple act of showing up for one another. Karma also had one wish for the community to know: "SAMS should have ice cream at school every day!"



## 2025 School Board Election Results

On November 4, 2025, St. Anthony-New Brighton voters elected Annie Bosmans, Laura Haas, and Prachi Striker to four-year terms on the ISD 282 School Board.

Voters also elected Daniel Turner to a two-year term to complete the remainder of the seat vacated by Ben Phillip, who resigned in June.

Turner was officially sworn in and seated at the December 2, 2025 meeting. Bosmans, Haas and Striker will be seated in January, joining Turner, Dr. Cassandra Palmer and Laurel Hood to complete the six-member Board.

## Building Bridges Through Dialogue

### SCHOOL BOARD CONSIDERS NEW ENGAGEMENT PLAN CENTERED ON TRUST, INCLUSION AND TRANSPARENCY

The St. Anthony-New Brighton School Board is exploring new ways to connect with the community through more intentional, structured engagement. Building on insights from the May 2025 Community Conversation, board members recently discussed how they can deepen two-way communication, strengthen trust, and ensure that community voices help shape board governance.

During their September 30 professional development session, the board reviewed a draft School Board Engagement Plan developed in alignment with the district's new Strategic Communications Plan. The proposed framework outlines ongoing, monthly, and quarterly opportunities for board members to listen and engage, from informal small-group listening sessions to structured community conversations like the "Nurturing Brilliance, Together" community conversation held in May 2025.

That spring dialogue brought together more than 70 participants to share perspectives on district strengths and challenges. The board has since reflected on how that model could guide future engagement while continuing with existing practices. In addition to continuing their work on committees and as school liaisons, Board members will remain accessible through listening sessions at regular meetings and will continue to support the updates provided through board briefs in the *Brighter Bulletin*, keeping families, staff, and community members informed about key actions and priorities.

The draft plan emphasizes both flexibility and predictability, pairing informal listening sessions in accessible community locations with larger, topic-focused dialogues held quarterly. Board members also discussed forming a small engagement subcommittee to guide and coordinate this work.

"True community engagement requires more than just good intentions. It requires rebuilding trust where it has been lost and intentionally connecting with the community members who aren't as often represented," noted Clerk Laurel Hood, who was identified by her peers to lead and facilitate the proposed subcommittee. "We are still in the planning stage and, like so many things, there will be successes and stumbles. However, the early feedback we are receiving from community members who haven't previously felt heard confirms this intentional work is beginning to pay off."

While details are still being refined, the conversation reflects a broader commitment to transparency, belonging, and accountability — values at the heart of SANB's strategic plan.

"Engagement isn't a one-time event," said former Board Chair Barry Kinsey. "It's an ongoing conversation between the board and the community we serve."



**"The community told us they value being heard in respectful, structured spaces. We want to build on that momentum in a way that's authentic and sustainable."**

- Vice Chair Dr. Cassandra Palmer

