

WAYFINDER

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The Heart of One91

Discover how our caring community came together to support, encourage and embrace each other when it mattered most.

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SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

Caring Community - Believe & Belong

What does it mean to be a caring community?

This issue of the Wayfinder is a special one. As a community, we've gone through one of the most trying times I can remember. Families, students and staff experienced fear, confusion and deep uncertainty as Operation Metro Surge unfolded in our neighborhoods and across the state of Minnesota.



As a public school district in Minnesota, our charge is to provide access to quality education to all students who come to us. We don't discriminate and we don't exclude.

As Burnsville-Eagan-Savage School District 191, we are committed to responding in a way that is true to our core values, among which is "Caring Community." We say that our culture will actively encourage and embrace each member of the community, creating a sense of support that fosters their individual growth and pursuit of learning. It's one thing to say that, another thing to do it, and another thing entirely to do it when it's difficult.

I'm incredibly proud of how our staff and our whole community responded. We leveraged our existing systems and resources in new and innovative ways to make sure students could continue their education. We engaged our partners to connect families with needed resources. We communicated clearly with staff so they understood what was happening, their roles and expectations, and had direction to ensure compliance with the law and district policies.

In truth, that work was not surprising and it was not unique, though the situation was extreme. From the dedication of staff members like Cultural Liaison Mary Lopez to programs that encourage and celebrate caring communities like the Harriet Bishop Service Club, you'll see plenty of stories in this magazine, on our website and in our social media that demonstrate how we deliver on being a caring community.

Our logo says "One91" for a reason. We're at our best when we come together for each other. It's who we are and I know it's who we'll continue to be. We are One91.

Sincerely,

DR. LATANYA DANIELS
Superintendent

ONE91 SHOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE COMMUNITY STRONG

How the district jumped into action and supported families during Operation Metro Surge



In the final weeks of 2025, cities across Minnesota found themselves at the center of national and international attention as what was described as “the largest immigration enforcement operation ever carried out” brought at least 2,000 Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and 1,000 Customs and Border Patrol officers to the Twin Cities and the state.

It was a time of confusion for some and a time of immense fear for others. School districts across the state were faced with new challenges as students and families feared attending school, or even leaving the house, while food insecurity grew and uncertainty mounted.

For the team at District 191, the focus was always on holding true to the mission of *Each Student. Future Ready. Community Strong.*

Existing Systems Put to New Use to Serve Each Student

Among the many voices in the district’s response to the surge, a few common themes emerged consistently. The first is that the systems, programs and resources that were used to support families during this time were already in place. Whether it was serving additional students through the One91 Virtual Academy, expanding food resources through the One91 Community Pantry or BrainPower in a Backpack, or leveraging the connections made with the community by the district’s cultural liaisons, these basic systems were already in place.

“We are very fortunate to be a caring community with strong leadership, so we really leaned on that,” said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Chris Bellmont. “We had an all-district staff session where our Superintendent, Dr. Daniels, used a human-centric approach to prepare us to have our core values tested and strengthened. I am proud that we have the tools of cultural proficiency in place and that we don’t pretend that we all have the same needs or that our differences are a deficit.”

Grounded in that sense of pride and service, the district leadership team took a look at what already existed. Unlike during the pandemic, there was no guidance coming from other sources, so it was up to the district to determine the best path forward. It was clear that some families would simply need to access education in a different way than they normally do or receive additional resources during this time.

One91 Virtual Academy serves students across Minnesota who want a true online learning experience with dedicated staff and a strong curriculum. During those challenging months, demand among District 191 students to enroll in the virtual school increased dramatically. The district increased capacity by temporarily reassigning more than a dozen staff members to the virtual teaching environment. Technology was delivered to homes, schedules were adjusted, and ultimately, students were able to get the same educational experience in a different setting.

“We made the choice to move staff that had expertise both in content areas and multilingual instruction to match the need with the best people,” said Dr. Bellmont. “The question was ‘Who needs what and how do we get it to them?’ We didn’t change or violate any policy or create any new programs – we just used our resources to flex what we had and adapt it to the needs of our community.”

The enrollment variance process allowed families to opt in formally, ensuring the district could accurately track enrollment and then assign teachers from other buildings to the Virtual Academy.

Virtual Academy Enrollment

281
JANUARY

660
FEBRUARY

“Because we had established and dedicated clerical support, a collaborative teacher team, student support structures and student intervention, we were able to integrate new students and staff while relying on our support structures already in place,” said Secondary Virtual Academy Principal Kelly Ronn.





Past Connections Lead to Future Ready Responses

Cultural liaisons have been a cornerstone of District 191 for 15 years. The multilingual professionals serve as a vital bridge between the district and families who speak languages other than English, including many who are new to the United States. During the surge, these existing connections, strengthened over the years, became more important than ever.

Director of Educational Equity Isis Buchanan works closely with the liaisons to support multilingual students, and that work took on a whole new meaning during the surge. For students in elementary grades transitioning to the virtual environment, technology deliveries were coordinated with the liaisons. Partnerships with building principals and school social workers were expanded, the transportation department helped to route deliveries, and it was truly all hands on deck.



“We really have the view that all students are everyone’s students,” said Buchanan. “We were ready to go and stayed tight and connected throughout. We had regular meetings and were in constant communication to adjust our approach as needed. It really helped the momentum that our community already had strong connections with our liaisons and felt comfortable reaching out.”

Building on the same systems that were used during the pandemic and using policies and procedures already in place allowed for speed and resilience, but it was the personal connections that really made the difference. Families who were experiencing things firsthand would share with the liaisons, who would connect them with the right resources.

There was also a need to support the staff who were facing these traumas and create safe spaces for people to express frustration, fear and even moments of appreciation.

“It got overwhelming when we were getting all the details of what folks were doing to stay safe, but we were able to bring resources together to help,” said Buchanan. “We all completed a professional development for staff who are dealing with people who are living with trauma, and I would often send a two-minute breathing exercise or inspirational quote in our group chat to remind everyone to care for themselves, too.”

There was also room to share success stories with the group. When a student decided they were ready to return to their brick-and-mortar school, their enrollment was quickly adjusted, and they were welcomed back with open arms. If students shared that they didn’t have food at home, they would be immediately connected with food pantry resources and sent home with the essentials. The goals were simple: help our students feel safe and continue learning.



Look for The Helpers - Community Strong

“When I was a boy, and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers.’ You will always find people who are helping.” - Fred Rogers

The District 191 Community Education department provides a lot to the community, including Adult Basic Education, enriching activities for families, food pantry support and much more. A real standout of this department is the Community Engagement Team, which often serves as the first point of contact for community members and a link between what is needed and how the school district can help. During the surge, this already big role expanded dramatically.



Community Engagement Coordinator Hamde Daoud works with her team of engagement specialists to meet community needs. During the surge, they partnered with community members – including a parent-organized group called “Friends for Good” – to meet growing needs and connect families with resources that provided everything from daily essentials to rent and utility assistance.

“We put together lists of needs from students and families to collect donations that we would keep in a room at Diamondhead Education Center to be packed and delivered,” said Daoud. “The engagement team, which is predominantly composed of people of color, typically carries out its day-to-day responsibilities without concern. However, during this period, there was a heightened sense of fear and uncertainty when engaging in the community because we didn’t know what situations we might encounter. We knew that these families were going through really hard times, and while I had never met some of them before, I was happy to deliver for them.”

Daoud noted that Spanish-speaking community members were particularly affected, and as a result, Spanish-speaking staff members often bore the heaviest emotional weight in responding. She pointed to the steadfast advocacy of Engagement Specialist Eddieca Ontiveros, specifically.

“[Ontiveros] demonstrated remarkable resilience, along with all of our Spanish-speaking liaisons, as their mental health was tested daily, fielding calls from parents and hearing the distress they were living through,” Daoud said.

Items like diapers, baby formula, wipes, feminine products, food and more were collected through community connections. Deliveries were coordinated, often on personal time. Teachers, students, community members and partners all played a role. Even Timberwolves star center Rudy Gobert’s Rudy’s Kids Foundation stepped up to sponsor families that needed more support beyond what could be provided by the district.

When students in Adult Basic Education classes started to share that they had friends and neighbors who were struggling or running out of

food at home, they were sent home with food and supplies to share. It didn’t matter that these people weren’t using district programming; they were treated as neighbors no matter what. When Daoud would go into schools to check on students and ask what would make their day better, some just wanted a coloring book and some crayons or bubbles, which she immediately provided.

The stories that staff members heard made the work extremely stressful but important. Stories of alumni that were detained, stories of a father who left for work and never came home, and his wife who was out of essential items for her infant, and many more like it were hard to hear. While the community engagement team was not immune to the feelings of sadness and even hopelessness at times, their resolve never softened. The word “no” was rarely used when it came to requests for help.

“We did not turn anyone away,” said Daoud. “I don’t know that ‘normal’ will ever return again because there is still fear, there are still needs, and we are still providing things that can help get families back on their feet, but we are proud to do it.”

The overwhelming presence of federal agents in the communities around the Twin Cities in late 2025 and early 2026 impacted real people in profound and long-lasting ways. For District 191, it was a challenge to put existing systems to new uses, to lean into the humanity of staff, students and families, and to show that “Community Strong” isn’t just something we are. It’s what we do.



COMMUNITY STRONG
isn't just something we are.
IT'S WHAT WE DO.



Read more about the incredible work of our Cultural Liasons on page 12.

Former One91 student, teacher



GREG MAY *named* Gopher women's hockey coach

This spring, Burnsville High School graduate Greg May (class of 2003) was named head coach of the University of Minnesota women's hockey team. For May, taking over the Gopher program marks the latest chapter in a journey that began in Burnsville, where his love for the game and a commitment to leadership started taking shape nearly 30 years ago.

"I couldn't be more excited. It's incredible the volume of people who have reached out. I've gotten so much positive support," May said. "It's really cool to know I have so many people in my corner out there."

He steps into the role after serving as associate head coach for the Gophers since 2023. His coaching resume also includes leading the men's hockey program at Augsburg University to a 41-15-2 record and two NCAA tournament appearances from 2021-23, as well as director of operations for the University of Minnesota men's team from 2019-21. Prior to his collegiate coaching career, May coached at both The Blake School and Farmington High School.

Sparking Passion on Skates

Long before his success behind the bench, May was a young athlete growing up in Burnsville, developing his skills on local rinks.

Born in California, May and his family's interest in hockey was sparked along with the rest of the region's when Wayne Gretzky joined the Los Angeles Kings. That passion followed them to Minnesota when they moved to Burnsville at the start of May's first-grade year.

During his time in the district, he attended Sky Oaks Elementary, Nicollet Junior High and Burnsville High School, where he was a standout athlete and heavily involved in leadership groups. He was Student Council President and participated in programs like peer mentoring, Breakfast Club at Nicollet, and the LIFE (Leading, Involving, Facilitating, Educating) and TASK (Teaching to Achieve Success for Kids) leadership groups.

A three-time all-conference hockey player for the Blaze, he also served as captain of both the hockey and golf teams and was named the school's 2003 Athlete of the Year. He credits former BHS coach John Barger for giving him an early opportunity.

"Coach Barger gave me a chance to play as an undersized sophomore," May said. "That belief meant a lot and helped shape my confidence as a player."



May also developed his skills in the rink at Timberland Knolls park, just a short walk from his childhood home, where he regularly played hockey with neighborhood friends and teammates.

"We never even looked at the weather or what temperature it was, we just walked over," he said. "If the ice was good, we were good, and if the ice was bad, we still played! Some of my best memories are from Timberland, and some of the best friends I have are the same kids I grew up playing hockey with when we were 9 or 10 years old in Burnsville."

Fueled by strong community

"I was in Burnsville during the heyday of Burnsville hockey," he said. "There were over 100 kids trying out and six travel teams at each level. In my youth, Burnsville was a powerhouse in every sport. Those black and gold uniforms were intimidating. I remember taking pictures with the coaches and getting the players' autographs."

Those early experiences, along with mentorship from coaches like Steve and Brandon Steege, helped shape his coaching philosophy and passion for developing athletes.

"I learned a lot from them. Steve was my Pee Wee A coach and I coached with him later when I started coaching. They were teachers of the game and developers of the game," May said. So many players now playing professionally or who played Division 1 from Burnsville all went through that family's training and mentorship."

After graduating from Augsburg, May returned to District 191 to teach health and physical education for nine years.

Influential teachers and coaches, including Howie Anderson, Neal Jeppson, Mick Scholl, Mark Riggs and Mark VanderWoude, played key roles in shaping his career path.

"All those guys had a huge influence on me," May said. "They were all coaches and teachers. When I was in school in Burnsville, all I wanted to do was be a high school teacher and coach because I looked up to those guys so much."

Today, as he takes the helm of one of the nation's premier women's hockey programs, May carries with him the lessons he learned in Burnsville.

"I feel like I take pieces with me from wherever I've gone. If I didn't grow up following the path of those ahead of me in Burnsville, I wouldn't be where I am right now!"



CULTURE TRUNK PROJECT

brings Indigenous artifacts, stories and perspective to every One91 classroom



What do woven baskets, beaded jewelry, arrowheads, antlers and grains have in common? As part of District 191's new culture trunks, they help bring Indigenous history, culture and traditions to life.

District 191 American Indian Education program's Culture Trunk Project – made possible by funding from the Minnesota Humanities Center and the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund and distributed to District 191 on behalf of Black Bears & Blueberries Publishing – will help students gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous communities, cultures and traditions, as well as equip educators to honor Indigenous history and voice.

What are culture trunks?

Cultural trunks are traveling, hands-on educational kits filled with artifacts, replica items, photographs and curriculum materials, all designed to teach history, culture and social studies in classrooms.

Leading the project are District 191 Indigenous Specialist Madison McKinney and Indigenous Liaison Marlene Bad Warrior, who have spent months thoughtfully curating items from local artists and Indigenous merchants for grade- and topic-specific trunks.

With support from the American Indian Parent Advisory Council (AIPAC), which serves in an important advisory role to District 191, and in collaboration with the District 191 Teaching and Learning Department, the project aims to create a legacy of understanding and honoring Indigenous heritage.

The project also meets requirements for the Minnesota Indigenous Education For All (IEFA) initiative, which ensures students and educators learn about local Indigenous communities – meeting academic standards and addressing educational gaps.

"This is not just for Indigenous students," said Isis Buchanan, District 191 director of educational equity. "It's knowledge for everyone."



Rooted in storytelling, created with intention

The curated pieces are unique to One91 schools. McKinney and Bad Warrior have carefully picked items with students and families at the forefront, relying on their connections and relationships to source the right pieces for each school's trunk.

"The spirit of the students, who will eventually become protectors of the pieces, is what drives us to collect each piece," said McKinney. "The piece has a story; the artist has their own story of how it was created; and we have the story of how we obtained it."

Through professional learning opportunities, McKinney and Bad Warrior have introduced staff to the project and how to incorporate the trunk pieces into the classroom. They are also in the process of creating an interactive website where items will be cataloged and accompanied by other resources, so staff and students can access and learn about Indigenous arts, culture and heritage at any time.

"We want to make sure we're making an impact, especially in the local Indigenous community," said McKinney. "The culture trunks provide Indigenous perspective right now for the students – the pieces can be touched, felt and experienced by them."

This spring, staff who expressed interest in becoming "Keepers of the Trunks" engaged in additional professional development. Continuous training will help the Keepers gain the confidence and knowledge to incorporate items into the classroom, as well as become mentors to their colleagues.

The plan is to slowly roll out the trunks and begin embedding items into lesson plans during the 2026-27 school year.

Bad Warrior added: "The trunks really lay the foundation for everything else we want to accomplish, including changing school building names, developing Indigenous language classes, incorporating Dream Catcher Project training into special education, and improving graduation rates."

"We are building roots for the children, so that they can be proud of their heritage and identity and feel like they belong."

"The ultimate goal is making this a part of what we do," said Buchanan. "We're not doing this to check a box because it meets the standards. This is part of our curriculum."

BLAZING NEW TRAILS

Celebrating the Class of 2026

Congratulations to nearly 600 students from Burnsville High School, Burnsville Alternative High School and the BEST Transition program who graduated in a ceremony at the Lee & Penny Anderson Arena at the University of St. Thomas on May 31.



WHEN SHOWING UP MATTERS MOST:

Mary Lopez and the Heart of District 191

For nearly two decades, District 191 Cultural Liaison Mary Lopez has been quietly and purposefully building bridges.

She's answered phone calls, translated conversations, connected families to resources and, perhaps most importantly, made sure people felt seen. It's work that often happens behind the scenes, in moments that don't make headlines. But this spring, Lopez's impact got well-deserved attention when she was named the District 191 2026 Community of Excellence "Spirit of Excellence" award recipient.

Ask her about the honor, and she redirects the credit almost immediately.

"This truly belongs to the entire Eagle Ridge Middle School community," Lopez said. "Our team shows up every day with heart."

That instinct to share recognition and to center others is part of what has defined her 19 years in District 191.



COMING FULL CIRCLE:
Tune in to learn more about Mary's story



Building a bridge

Lopez began her career in 2007 as the district's Latino Community Liaison, a role that has since grown into the broader Cultural Liaison program serving multiple languages and communities. If the title feels hard to define, the work is anything but.

"What I needed as a student and what my family needed when I was growing up was the same resources that now I am able to provide to the families and students that I work with," Lopez said. "Cultural liaisons serve as a vital bridge between families and schools because we help navigate the complexities of the educational system, ensuring families have access to opportunities and the support their children need to succeed."

At its core, the role is about relationships — built slowly, intentionally and with trust.

Before joining the district, Lopez volunteered with an organization supporting Latino students with homework. There, she saw both the potential and the gaps.

"I enjoyed working with students and families," she said. "And I saw the growing need for advocacy."

She stepped into the liaison role to fill that need and never left.

Over the years, Lopez has supported families through everyday challenges and milestones. But nothing compared to the urgency and fear that swept through the community during last winter's Operation Metro Surge.

"It was overwhelming and there was a strong sense that we needed to act quickly," she recalled. "The simple act of sending a child to school became a source of terror. Those conversations are impossible to forget."

There was no "typical day" as Lopez and her colleagues answered call after call, coordinated with school staff, and worked to ensure each student could continue learning.

"Families needed a way for their children to keep learning safely," she said. "We became one of their main connections to resources."

Along with many district staff members, she found herself helping families navigate food access, emotional support, or simply helping them to understand what was happening around them.



Focused on showing up

"Being present, responding as quickly as possible, documenting every need," she said. "Doing everything we could to support each family."

She leaned on her colleagues, her supervisor, and her family to find ways to keep going because she knew families were counting on her. That sense of responsibility is what defines the role of a Cultural Liaison, especially in moments of crisis. But it's also what makes the everyday moments so meaningful. Lopez points to her work with student affinity groups as one of the most rewarding parts of her job.

"Seeing the bonds students form, hearing how much those spaces mean to them, it reminds me why we do this," she said.

Those moments may be quieter than a crisis response, but they're just as powerful. They're where belonging takes root. The collective and continuous effort, not only in times of crisis but every day, reflects a broader truth about District 191: care is not a one-person job. It's a shared commitment.

In many ways, Lopez sees her work not as extraordinary but as necessary.

"When families feel supported, empowered, and welcome in our schools, their child has a better chance at success," she said. "That's the goal. And it benefits all of us."

It's a simple idea, but one that requires consistency, empathy, and trust to bring to life. For Lopez, that work continues, one conversation, one family, one moment at a time.

And while awards may recognize her contributions, the real measure of her impact is found elsewhere: in the parent who feels less alone, the student who feels like they belong, and the community that grows stronger because someone took the time to show up.

In District 191, that's what a caring community looks like.

Young Scientists Shine

at William Byrne

On April 2, William Byrne Elementary was abuzz with the sound of students excitedly sharing the results of their research and experiments at the school's Science Fair. Nearly 40 students in Grades 3-5 presented on a wide range of topics to visiting judges, among them former staff members, community members and high school students.

"We are so excited to be bringing the William Byrne Science Fair back after over a decade! It gives students a chance to explore scientific thinking and learn from their experience. Some students may even choose to move on to the regional science fair in Mankato later this month," said Advanced Learning Specialist Sharron Stalock, who organized the event. "When I was asked to coordinate this experience, I gave it a wholehearted 'yes' so our students could experience learning enrichment in another way."



Colin Speer
5th Grade

Question

Do the number of wheels in a pulley system make it easier to lift something?

With some help from his dad, Colin created a pulley system and then added rocks into a cup and measured how heavy the rocks needed to be to pull up a weight with various pulley configurations. Colin said he might be interested in a future as an engineer.

Result

"I discovered that my hypothesis was partially incorrect because the configuration is more important than just putting some pulleys together. It's about how you set it up."

Question

Do video games affect focus?

Hashi's parents told him playing too many video games was affecting his school work, so he put their claim to the test. First he recorded how long it took him to do a math worksheet and how accurate his answers were when he hadn't played any video games. Then he did the same math between sessions of Minecraft and other games.

Result

"I found that my score was not affected, but my time was slower after playing a game."

Hashi Bashir
3rd Grade



Athena Hand
4th Grade

Question

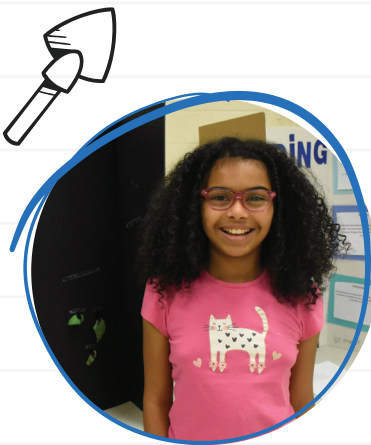
What liquid turns apples brown the fastest?

Athena soaked apple slices in a variety of different liquids and compared how fast they turned brown over the course of three days.

"I thought it would be fun and I've never been in a science fair before. It was a lot of work and the judges said I did a good job."

Result

Distilled white vinegar turned apples brown faster than lemon water, apple juice, lemon juice and plain water. Lemon juice was the best at keeping apples from turning brown.



Maia Izquierdobalbin
4th Grade

Question

What temperature of water works best for growing plants?

Maia had three mint plants and watered them with hot water, room temperature water and cold water, respectively. She also kept some indoors and some outdoors.

Result

Regardless of water temperature, the plants that got natural sunlight grew the fastest. "I liked seeing the plants grow and grow and it was really exciting when the plant got its first two leaves. I really like science and I love all the mysteries that people solve with it."



Juliana Ganz
3rd Grade

Question

Does a bigger speaker produce lower frequencies?

"When I heard about the science fair, I was like 'Oh, wow, what should I do?' I talked to my parents and I figured out my dad works on speakers so that inspired me a little bit."

Juliana tested out different sizes of speakers in three different cars - a Buick, a Corvette and a Cadillac. For the experiment, She set each audio system at the same decibel level and recorded using the same microphone and the same song - "For My Thugs" by Flex and Big Kap.

Result

Larger speakers can play lower sounds and a larger range of frequencies more precisely than smaller speakers. "I was excited to show what I learned," Juliana said.

FINDING HER PATH:

How Karen Hernandez-Rodriguez Discovered Her Future in Education

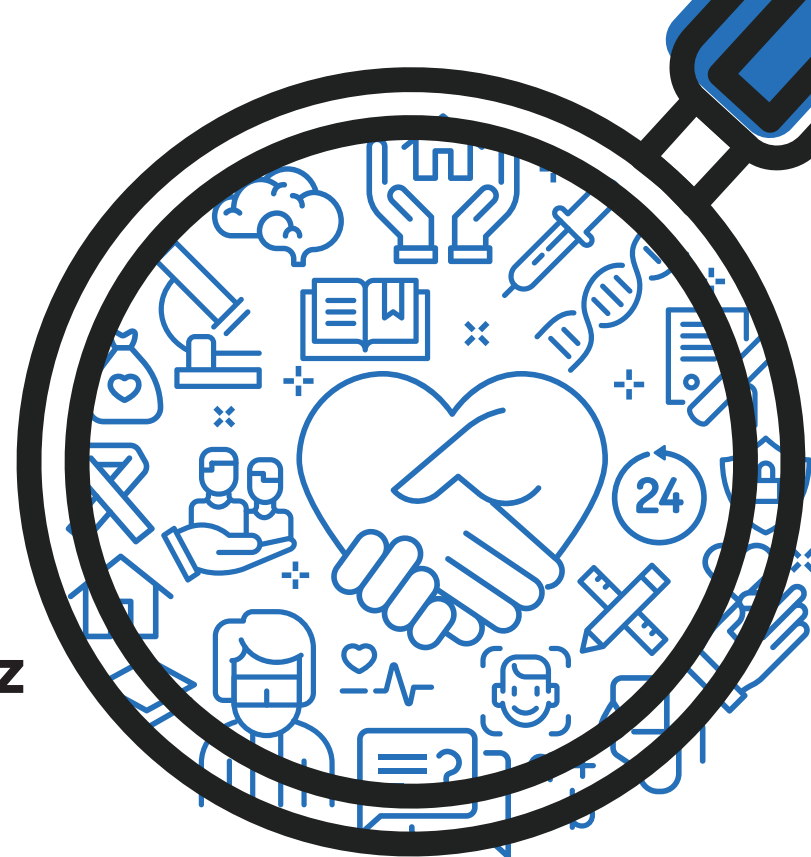
In her early high school years, Karen Hernandez-Rodriguez didn't have a clear answer when people asked what she wanted to do after graduation. Like many students at Burnsville High School, she was an explorer — trying out different electives, figuring out what she liked, and hoping something would eventually spark something in her.

"I never knew what I wanted to pursue after high school," she said. "I was still in the phase of trying out a bunch of electives to see what I liked and what I didn't like."

That clarity didn't come from a career test or a long-term plan. It came from a class she signed up for almost by accident.

During her sophomore year, Hernandez-Rodriguez looked ahead to the next year and decided to try child development classes, including the Preschool Lab. At the time, she admits she wasn't thinking about a future career.

"I thought it seemed like fun because I had that same teacher before," Hernandez-Rodriguez said. "She said it was fun and that if you took the class, it was two credits and two hours. I was mostly in it for the credits."



An unexpected inspiration to pursue a career in education

What started as a way to earn credits became something much bigger: a sense of purpose. For the first time, she could picture a future that felt right. Before high school, Hernandez-Rodriguez never imagined herself working with children.

"It came to me not as a surprise but more like an awakening," she said. "I remember as a junior, I told myself when it came down to choosing classes for senior year, I would put myself in a bunch of education classes."



She enrolled in Child Psychology & Development I and II, followed by Preschool Lab, where she moved from learning about how to work with children to working with them directly. These classes helped her understand not just how kids learn, but how they grow, communicate, and see the world.

Now a senior, Hernandez-Rodriguez is fully immersed in the education pathway. In Intro to Education, she got the opportunity to go into an elementary school and teach — an experience she describes as both exciting and eye-opening.

Standing in front of a classroom for the first time made everything feel real. These hands-on moments taught her lessons no textbook ever could: how to communicate clearly, stay patient, think creatively and adapt quickly. She has also lined up a Pathways Internship, which she calls the highlight of her senior year.



"Being able to get a job at a daycare while also getting a credit was something I didn't know that I could do in high school," she said. "This daycare job really helped me lock in the idea of becoming a teacher or working with kids in general," she said.

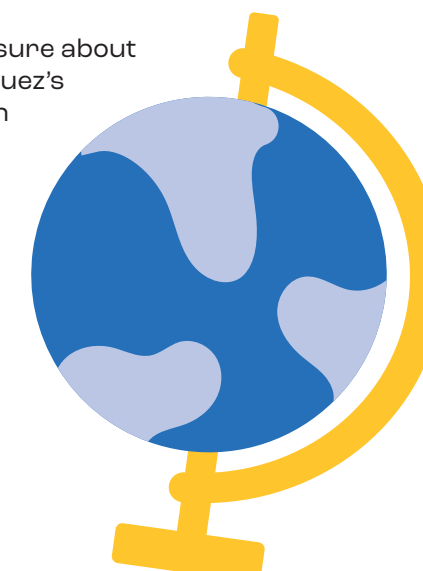
Looking ahead to her future classroom

"I hope to teach kindergarten," she said. "A lot of people say it's a lot of work, not only with the kids, but also coming up with lessons that are fun and interesting for them. I can agree with that, but I can also proudly say I tend to work better with little kids."

What makes Hernandez-Rodriguez's story special isn't just that she found a career path. It's that the pathway helped her find herself. After early exploration, Hernandez-Rodriguez has direction, confidence, and something to look forward to after high school. The education pathway gave her more than skills; it gave her clarity.

For students who might feel unsure about their future, Hernandez-Rodriguez's advice is simple: try things, even if you're not sure they're "your thing."

What started as a class chosen for credits became the beginning of a calling. And for Karen Hernandez-Rodriguez, that calling is clear: shaping young minds, one classroom at a time.



Karen's Journey

9th Grade

Hernandez-Rodriguez entered high school without a clear idea of what she wanted to do after graduation. She focused on exploring classes and didn't yet realize how many electives and opportunities were available.

10th Grade

She began thinking more seriously about her future and briefly considered becoming a nurse because of her interest in helping others. Still unsure, she continued choosing random electives and searching for what felt right.

Hernandez-Rodriguez enrolled in Child Development I and then Preschool Lab. She originally signed up for Preschool Lab for the extra credits and because spots were limited—but the experience changed everything. Working hands-on with young children helped her discover her passion for education.

12th Grade

Hernandez-Rodriguez fully immersed herself in the education pathway and couldn't be happier. She took multiple education-focused classes and participated in a Pathways Internship at a daycare, gaining real-world experience.

Future

She plans to continue her education to become a kindergarten teacher, in Minnesota if possible, and pursue a future working with kids.

This edition of the Wayfinder shines a light on the caring community at the heart of District 191. Our educators, families, neighbors and students who show up for one another in moments big and small. Whether it's gathering around a Peace Pole, cheering on our talented students or sharing a meal made from scratch, community is the force that makes learning feel like belonging.

By sparking wonder in our youngest learners, fueling curiosity and connection in our middle schoolers, and blazing a path toward a bright future at the high school level, District 191 is building more than academic excellence. We're building a community where every student is seen, supported and set up to thrive, no matter what path they choose.



Spark. Fuel. Blaze.

Spark

Elementary students are inspired to approach the world with wonder.



Bringing the forecast to life

In March, Meteorologist Ben Dery from KARE 11, visited Vista View Elementary School to teach second and third graders about weather. Students explored concepts like clouds, fog, radar, lightning, thunder, hail and tornadoes. Hands-on experiments and props kept students thoroughly engaged with Dery's presentation, sparking wonder and curiosity in learning!



Planting peace, year after year

Each year, Hidden Valley Elementary gathers to rededicate its Peace Pole, which stands near the school's main entrance with the saying "May Peace Prevail on Earth." The Peace Pole Project organization plants this message around the globe, with tens of thousands of Peace Poles globally. At this year's ceremony on Feb. 27, students sang songs and shared A-to-Z words and phrases to highlight ways to bring peace to the community. Music specialist Kim Wood, who organizes the annual event, added a quilt-making project to the mix.



Breakfast, books and belonging

Schools across District 191 celebrated I Love to Read Month in February. At Harriet Bishop Elementary, students and staff enjoyed welcoming families to school for "Breakfast with a Book." The community came together over delicious breakfast treats to read their favorite stories. It was a fun, community-strong event centered on the love of reading!

Fuel

Middle school scholars discover new ways to look at the world.



Checkmate, again

The Nicollet Middle School chess team outscored Minnetonka East Middle School by 2.5 points to win its fourth state championship March 7-8 at the Minnesota State Chess Association's 61st Annual State Scholastic Chess Tournament at the University of St. Thomas. Twenty-six Nicollet students participated, with Franklin Briceno earning second-place, the highest individual finish in school history, after defeating a nationally ranked opponent with seconds to spare. Also placing in the top 10 were Khalid Osman, Rafa Avila, Charlie Doll and Gracin Mathews. "It was an exciting, emotional weekend where all 26 kids poured their hearts out," said coach Brian Ribnick. "I couldn't be more proud."



The Eagle Ridge Roast

This spring, students in Eagle Ridge Middle School's FOCUS program — a specialized classroom designed for individuals with a range of developmental and learning differences — launched the schools' first-ever coffee cart. Called the Eagle Ridge Roast, the students deliver tea, coffee, hot chocolate and water to staff every Friday.

Under the guidance of Laura Hermansen and Mark Gonnella, students take ownership of every step of the process, building confidence, skills and community one cup at a time.



A recipe for success

Thanks to District 191 Community Education Burnsville Youth Collaborative (BYC), middle school students learned how to make healthy food choices and prepare healthy meals and snacks through University of Minnesota Extension Cooking Matters classes. From learning the basics of cooking to reading nutrition labels and recipes to identifying healthier food choices and practicing a variety of cooking techniques, teens engaged in hands-on learning while also getting to taste the fruits of their labor. "The cooking part was so fun because we made different things each time and it was fun to see all the foods that we could make," said student Laniyah Jackson.

Blaze

Immersive experiences increase future readiness for high school learners.



Quiz Bowl takes the crown

The Burnsville High School Quiz Bowl claimed first place at the South Suburban Conference championship tournament, held at Burnsville High School on Feb. 5. The varsity team, comprised of sophomores Emery Gehrke and Charlie Morgan, junior Xavier Sachse and senior Sam Morgan, went on to compete at the High School National Championship in Atlanta and Sam also represented BHS at the Individual Player National Championship in Chicago. The junior varsity team, consisting of Connor Joseph, Izaak Menya, Adam Nash and Nav Zeimet also tied for first at the conference. Izaak and Connor also finished ninth and 14th individually.



Back-to-back Blazers

For the second consecutive year, Burnsville High School Drumline took first place at the Minnesota Percussion Association (MPA) Championships, held at the Rochester Mayo Civic Center on April 11. Fifty students in grades 8-12 performed in this year's show, called "One Dot," which explores the journey from oneness and isolation to the realization that, by coming together, our collective power can make something much more. The theme resonated beyond the performance; seniors Exie Soundara and Jacob Lara earned MPA scholarships, and junior Kerry Crawford received the MPA IDEAS (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Social Justice) Award for her essay. "Winning back-to-back titles is incredibly special and so hard to do," said director Paul Connell.



Blazing in the classroom, stage and field

In January, Brooke Gerber and John White were selected as this year's Triple "A" Award recipients at Burnsville High School, one of the most prestigious honors the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) bestows. To qualify, students must maintain a "B" or better grade point average and participate in both fine arts activities and athletics sponsored by the MSHSL. "Brooke and John are shining lights at Burnsville High School," said Kevin Kleiner, BHS athletics director. "They are amazing, well-rounded students and serve as wonderful role models for younger students to follow."

Student voice:

Hallway chatter

Community Strong - Students Stepping Up to Serve

Since 2013, Harriet Bishop's Service Club has connected students across all grades with local and global non-profits through hands-on projects. The youth-led, grant-funded club includes over 80 students each year, who meet twice a month to tackle topics like food insecurity, animal shelters, clean water, spreading cheer and more, and they impact over 10,000 people annually.

Founded by then-fourth-grader Shrey Pothini, the club is now led by his sister Meena, a BHS 11th grader who has been involved since 7th grade. The highlight each year is a city-wide donation drive on Global Youth Service Day, held in partnership with local police, fire departments and local businesses and nonprofits. The club has earned national awards and recognitions for their efforts throughout the years.



We made toys for the shelter for dogs who don't have anything to play with. We got to play with one of the dogs and do a lot of fun stuff.

SPARKUL GAIL



We painted rocks. We put positive messages and drawings on the rocks so if people were sad they would see the rock and it would make them feel better. I like making people feel happy so it made me really happy that we got to do that.

LILY WEINSTEIN



When the firefighters came they taught us how to do CPR and help others ourselves if they're in need.

BRITNEY ATUKE



I like to help people in Service Club. I feel like people in need need these certain things, they need books, they need shoes, they need food that's good and affordable, so I want to help them have a better life.

LIVY RUPERT

