

ORONO SCHOOLS

TODAY



July 2026

Message from the Superintendent

Dear Orono Community,

This summer, I am filled with gratitude for the students, staff, families, and community members who make Orono Schools such a special place. This edition of "Orono Schools Today" celebrates the Class of 2026, highlights spring Points of Pride, and showcases the many ways we are focusing on our strategic goals.

Throughout the year, our students demonstrated excellence in academics, arts, athletics, activities, and service. These accomplishments are a reflection of their hard work, the support of dedicated educators and families, and a community that values learning and growth.



Kristine Flesher, Ed.D.

Our "Engagement in Action" section in this issue illustrates how learning takes place in and beyond the classroom and how strong partnerships between our schools and community create meaningful opportunities for students to engage and thrive.

This summer you will see heavy equipment and contractors hard at work on campus. Maintaining high-quality facilities and grounds is an important part of our commitment to providing safe learning environments and protecting the community's investment in our schools. Several long-term-maintenance projects are underway, including parking lot and pathway replacement, construction of new tennis courts, and continued restoration at Schumann Elementary following the December flood.

Thank you for your continued support of Orono Schools. Together, we are building on a strong foundation while preparing for the opportunities ahead. We look forward to welcoming students back this fall for another year of learning, growth, and achievement.

FALL SCHOOL INFO

E-12 FAMILY RESOURCES
[ORONOSCHOOLS.ORG/BTS](https://oronoschools.org/bts)

Still soaking up summer? We are, too! When you're ready to start thinking about the new school year, our back-to-school hub has everything you'll need in once place:

- school supply lists
- important dates
- orientation and open house events
- picture day details
- opportunities for student engagement
- and more!

Visit oronoschools.org/bts any time for the latest information and updates.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2-3 Congratulations, Class of 2026!
- 4-5 Spring 2026 Points of Pride
- 6-7 Engagement in Action
- 8 Thank You to the Community!





155 Honor
Graduates

93 AP Scholars*

5 AP Capstone
Diplomas*

16 AP Capstone
Candidates



During their final week on campus, the Class of 2026 attended the senior retreat, devoted a full day of service to the community, participated in the Grad Walk, and gathered with family, friends, staff, and community members for the 75th annual Commencement. When severe weather prompted the ceremony to move indoors, graduates and their guests met the change with grace and good spirits, creating a joyful and memorable celebration.

We wish you well!

**as of May 2025*



POINTS OF PRIDE

From the classroom to the stage, the playing field to student activities, Orono Spartans continue to inspire with their talent, dedication, and accomplishments. We are proud to celebrate so many achievements that reflect the hard work, creativity, leadership, and commitment of our students, staff, and volunteers. Spring 2026 was truly a season of success!

ACADEMICS

- 620 OHS students took 1,150 Advanced Placement exams this spring. Steady growth reflects increased access in grades 9-12. Cumulative exam results will be published this fall.
- College matriculation rates continue to be exceptional, with many receiving admission offers to highly selective schools.
- At the annual OHS junior and senior academic awards event, 123 juniors were recognized for achieving a 3.5 GPA; 155 seniors were named Honor Graduates.
- Seniors participating in Senior Spartan Experience and AP Research showcased their work and experiential learning at the annual Senior Showcase.
- Junior Book Awards went to: [Sophie Middleton](#), Dartmouth; [Ethan Weiss](#), Harvard; [Ella Palm](#), St. Lawrence; and [Simon Forbes](#), Yale.
- Nearly \$90,000 in locally raised scholarships were awarded to 95 different seniors. Thank you to all our donors!
- Nearly 200 second-grade students shared their passion projects in the annual Schumann Elementary Imagination Fair—an optional opportunity!
- 62 fifth-grade students chose to bring their curiosity to life at the first ever Intermediate School “World’s Fair” showcase.
- 37 fifth-graders attended the annual Math Masters competition. Eight students placed individually in a field of 122 students. The Yellow team placed second: [Tommy Crane](#), [Andrew Haagenson](#), [Charlie Kurth](#), [Griffin Schoen](#), and [Landon Van Camp](#).
- [Nathan Baird](#) earned 4th place in the Junior Paper category in the 7th-grade State History Day state-level competition. Four students also received Honorable Mention: [Freya Blessing](#), [Harold Campbell](#), [Lissie Toppin](#), [Evelyn Verplank](#), and [Quinn Rodgers](#). Nathan and Freya’s papers were two of only 12 chosen to compete in the statewide Paper category.
- 8th-grade students participated in the 11th annual Capstone Festival. Students selected a global issue based on the theme, “Breaking Barriers.” 70 high school seniors participated as judges.



Simon Forbes, 3rd place at Nationals

- Orono High School launched Spartan Scholars, an initiative centered on engagement, integrity, and connection. Six students who exemplified these characteristics were recognized this year: [Isaac Hess](#), [Gretchen Fandel Thompson](#), [Geovani Narvaez Sanchez](#), [Anthony Perrill](#), [Daria Mayo](#), and [Sidney Newcomer](#).

ARTS

- OHS students submitted their best work to the MSHSL art show, earning eight Superior awards and five Excellent awards. Superior honors went to [Lila D'Alessandro](#), [Aya Hanson](#), [Grace Loehmann](#), [Daria Mayo](#), [Annalisa Tedlund](#), and [Charlett Winkler](#). Excellent awards went to [Jordan Flesher](#), [Anya Muhonen](#), [Layla Nick](#), [Lydia Richardson](#), and [Evelyn Schwarzkopf](#).
- [Lydia Richardson](#) earned a Merit Award at the Metro West Art Awards.
- OHS Choir traveled to Boston where they performed at several notable venues across the city, including the JFK Library and Faneuil Hall.
- The OHS Chamber and Treble Choirs earned 16 Superior ratings and 6 Excellent ratings at the state Solo and Ensemble Contest. Five Best-in-Site awards went to [Drew Gronholz](#), [Cooper Jonas](#), [Alex Knorp](#), [Alex Peterson](#), and [Gabi Quiroz](#).
- [Gabriella Daly](#) was selected into the 2026-2027 Minnesota All-State Soprano-Alto Choir.
- [Elise Meyer](#) (flute) and [Kaia Erickson](#) (clarinet) earned Superior ratings at the state Solo and Ensemble Contest.
- Orono High School staged the spring performance of “Blithe Spirit,” a Noël Coward comedy.

STAFF

- [Sarah Craig](#) was named Girls Softball Section Coach of the Year by the Minnesota Fastpitch Coaches Association.
- [Brian McCollar](#) was named the Boys Nordic Ski Coach of the Year by the Nordic Ski Coaches Association.
- [Grace Nohner](#) was honored with the Regional Earl Reum Award for outstanding work in mentoring student activity advisors.
- [Mark Vonder Haar](#) earned Educator of the Month for May from the LocoRobo (LocoDrone) company for his work with our OHS drone flight program.

ATHLETICS

- Mya Moore earned the Athena Award.
- State champion diver Gideon Fish was named Athlete of the Year at the All-State banquet. He had an undefeated season, won the 2026 MSHSL Class A Diving State Championship, and also earned All-State honors as a swimmer.
- Boys Golf won its first-ever Metro West Conference Championship and finished in 3rd place at State. Dylan Kringen earned 5th place individually.
- Senior Nora Benson was a Girls Golf three-time state competitor, tying for 30th place this year.
- Girls Lacrosse: Metro West Conference Champion and Section Runners-Up.
- Dylan Collins was named Ms. Lacrosse, an annual award presented to the most outstanding senior girls lacrosse player in Minnesota. Layla Nick was named *Star Tribune* Player of the Year.
- Boys Tennis: Metro West Conference Champion and Section Runners-Up.
- Boys Tennis Doubles State 4th Place: Anthony Perrill and Max Skanse.
- Baseball earned Section Runner-Up in the winningest season in more than a decade.
- Softball won the Section Championship, qualifying for State for the first time since 2014.
- Boys Volleyball won Round 1 of the Section tournament.
- Boys Track and Field earned the Class AA True Team State 2nd Place, Section Championship, and a 6th place State finish, with eight individual qualifiers. State medalists were: Gabe Hallen (2nd place, 1600m and 8th place, 800m), Cooper Munsch (7th place, 1600m and 6th place, 3200m), Luke Withrow (2nd place, pole vault), Nicolas Pasulka (7th place, discus), Liam Barkley, Sean Henkelman, Davis Kelly, Sam Chapman (8th place, 4x800m Relay)
- Girls Track and Field earned the Class AA True Team State 2nd Place, Section Championship, and the program's first-ever State Championship! The girls earned state titles and new state records in both the 4x800m and 4x100m relays.
 - Abby Dasari, Addison Mushitz, Taydem Ide, Mia Bailey (4x100m Relay, State Champions)
 - Taylor Walsh, Maryn Leary, Delaney Stephens, Rynne Andreen (4x800m Relay, State Champions)
 - Mila Bailey, Alivia Uselding, Abby Dasari, Taydem Ide (4x200m Relay, 2nd Place)
 - Alivia Uselding (100m hurdles, 3rd place)
 - Delaney Stephens (1600m, 8th place)
 - Lydia Richardson (triple jump, 3rd place)
 - Rynne Andreen (800m, 6th place)
 - Alivia Uselding (300m hurdles, 3rd place)

ACTIVITIES

- The OHS DECA chapter earned Gold Chapter certification for its School-Based Enterprise—the school store. 17 students competed at the International Career Development Conference. Junior Carly Rausch placed in the Top 20 out of 160 state champions who competed.
- Orono High School yearbook staff and advisor Sarah Cole have earned Gold recognition in the 2026 Jostens Yearbook Program of Excellence.
- Speech took 1st in the Metro West Conference. At Sections, the team took 1st overall (the first time in program history) with 12 speakers qualifying for State. At State, Maya Haugen placed 2nd, Sophie Middleton, 2nd; and Ruby Gehrman, 8th.
- Simon Forbes competed in the Tournament of Champions in Extemporaneous Speaking where he placed 4th and 6th in Impromptu Speaking. At the National Speech & Debate Tournament, Simon earned 3rd place in Impromptu Speaking and was an Octafinalist in U.S. Extemporaneous Speaking.
- Cora Palm has been elected Vice President of Service for the National Association of Student Councils for 2026-2027. No student from Minnesota has ever been elected to this national board.
- Orono Student Senate earned a National Gold Council of Excellence Certification for the first time—one of only four schools in Minnesota to earn this recognition.
- Ella Palm was elected president of the Minnesota Association of Honor Societies for 2026-2027.
- Simon Forbes was elected president of the Hennepin Division of the Minnesota Association of Student Leaders.
- Girls Flag Football completed its inaugural season with more than 40 girls competing.
- 183 students participated in the Unified Polar Plunge, raising \$18,079 to support team activities and Special Olympics Minnesota.
- The Spartobots Robotics Team earned the “Gracious Professionalism” and “Granite City Regional Safety” awards.



Orono Girls Track & Field Class AA State Champions for the first time!

ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Meaningful relationships, authentic learning experiences, and strong community partnerships create a sense of belonging that helps every Spartan thrive.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Orono's strong sense of community is one of our greatest strengths. Together with families, volunteers, businesses, alumni, and community partners, we create *meaningful experiences* that enrich learning and strengthen connections across generations.



Orono's Retired Police Chief, Correy Farniok, was recognized with The Orono Coalition **"Member of the Year" Award**. Happy retirement, Chief! Thank you for supporting Orono Schools.

2026 PARENT SURVEY

Thank you for participating!
We will evaluate responses this summer and fall.



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Every day, meaningful stories unfold across Orono Schools. Through social media, we celebrate student success, spotlight staff, highlight events, and keep our community informed. **Thank you** for staying engaged with all that's happening!

FACEBOOK FOLLOWERS

4,145 (335 new this year)

INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS

720 (beginning January 2026)

STAFF SPOTLIGHTS

34 weeks | 212,512 views | 4,482 interactions



I BELIEVE IN YOU

In fall 2025, the district released **"I Believe in You,"** a video that celebrates the spirit of connectedness in our schools. View at <https://bit.ly/ORONO-BELIEVE>



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DISTRICT UPDATES

Superintendent Kristine Flesher invites you to sign up for her **"District Update" newsletter** issued via email through the school year. Archived editions are on the Administration webpage. Sign up at <https://bit.ly/ORONO-NEWS>

FOUNDATION
SPARTAN
SOIRÉE RAISES
\$250,000

ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

ADD TO YOUR CALENDAR

Now | High School Fall Athletics registration open in MyPaymentsPlus

July 8 | Pop In & Read, 10 a.m.
Discovery Center

July 9 | Tech Buddies, 9:30-10:30 a.m.
Orono Activities Center

July 14-28 | School Board Candidate Filing Period

July 23 | Tech Buddies, 9:30-10:30 a.m.
Orono Activities Center

August 5 | Pop In & Read, 10 a.m.
Discovery Center

August 6 | Family Color Dash, register by July 22 at <https://bit.ly/COLOR2026>

August 20 | Orono Foundation Summer Spartan Social, Iron Exchange

September 22 | Art in the Park, Veterans Memorial Park, Maple Plain

October 2 | Homecoming parade, Football game, and Foundation tailgate



MAY BREAKFAST

The Orono Coalition Director Ali Chorley presented, *"Ordinary Moments, Extraordinary Impact: The Science of Community Connectedness"* at the community breakfast to first responders, local clergy, and mental health professionals.



COMMUNITY EDUCATION ANNUAL WELLNESS EXPO

- 50 vendors
- 700 visitors
- 8 service projects totaling 1,105 snack bags, toiletry kits, household kits, and flower arrangements



STUDENT PERFORMANCES GRADES 5-12

- 3 high school theater productions
- 7 band concerts
- 8 choir concerts

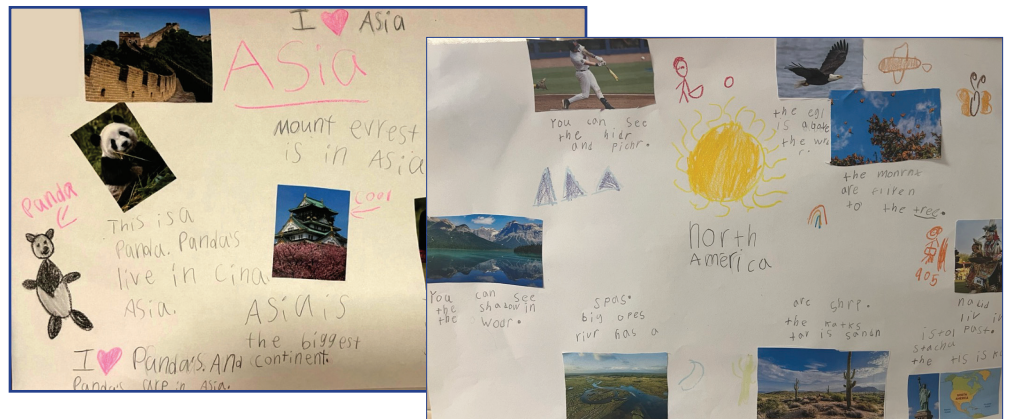
LEARNING BY DOING

Students learn best when they are actively involved in the process. Across all grade levels, Orono students engage in hands-on learning, real-world problem solving, creative exploration, collaboration, and authentic experiences that *deepen understanding* and *inspire curiosity*.



KINDERGARTEN EXPLORATION

Kindergarten students visited the Western Hennepin Pioneer Museum in Long Lake, a closing bookend to their **Arts & Letters module**, "America, Then and Now." Students learned about artifacts and loved seeing them in real life.



Kindergarten students self-selected a continent for further research and created posters showing what they learned.

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL INTERESTS



Headlamps on, teamwork in action! Fifth-grade Arts & Letters learning came to life in a cave-themed escape room, featuring collaboration and problem-solving skills inspired by "All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team."



Students chose to make clay bowls during their art "special." Bowls were sold at the Wellness Expo to benefit IOCP and WeCAN.



History stood still in fifth grade! Students studied major milestones of the American Revolution and then created a "wax museum" featuring living reenactors, multi-media presentations, and outstanding (silent) performances.

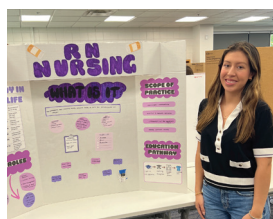


Orono Middle School sixth-graders participated in an engaging in-house field trip, examining taconite and iron ore from the Iron Range, volcanic rock from the North Shore, pipestone, granite, and more. Through hands-on learning and interactive Rockhound Field Guides, students explored the state's unique geological regions.



Seventh-graders showcased their Minnesota History Day projects, exploring this year's theme, "Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History." Students self-selected research topics and developed creative presentations that highlighted their skills in inquiry, thoughtful learning, and collaboration.

HIGH SCHOOL HIGHLIGHTS



SENIOR SPARTAN EXPERIENCE

30+ seniors devoted 20 hours in May to job-shadow and explore a field of interest.



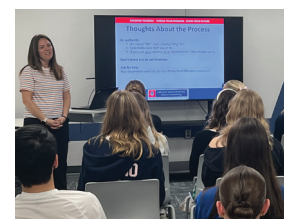
40+ ACTIVITIES

Students gained valuable experience through clubs & activities, like DECA, Student Senate, Yearbook, and more.



BAND & CHOIR

Vibrant music programs provided opportunities for students to grow through performance, competition, and travel.



FUTURE PLANNING

Our high school counselors met with students one-on-one and in small groups to help with future plans.



Orono Public Schools, ISD #278
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2025-2026

THANKS TO YOU

*Every act of **generosity** helped create opportunities that would not have been possible otherwise.*

As we reflect on the 2025–26 school year, one thing is abundantly clear: the generosity, partnership, and commitment of our community continue to shape the success of Orono Schools. On behalf of our students and staff, thank you to everyone who shared their time, talents, and resources throughout the year.

Hundreds of volunteers devoted countless hours to classrooms, activities, performing arts and athletic events, and field trips. These efforts helped create meaningful opportunities for students and strengthened the connections that make Orono Schools such a special place.

We are especially grateful to our parent organizations, whose dedication brought learning to life. Through behind-the-scenes efforts, they created experiences that sparked curiosity, celebrated achievement, and enriched learning at every grade level. Throughout the year, our volunteers found new, creative ways to recognize and honor our staff members.

That spirit of giving was also reflected in the extraordinary work of the Orono Foundation for Education. Thanks to more than 600 families and local businesses, the Foundation awarded more than \$700,000 in grants during the 2025–26 school year. These investments enhanced school safety, expanded academic opportunities, strengthened literacy initiatives, supported teacher professional development, enriched character education, increased college and career readiness, and provided resources that benefit learners across the district. Since its founding in 2001, the Foundation has invested nearly \$11 million in Orono Schools, creating opportunities that continue to benefit students, educators, and our entire community.

Thank you for believing in our students, championing our educators, and investing in the future of Orono Schools. Together, we are strengthening our foundation and opening doors for students that will create opportunities for generations to come.

Visit oronoschools.org/partners for links and information on how to get involved.

