

ELLIS EAGLE GAZETTE

September Parent Newsletter

Message from the Principal, Dewey Schara



Dear Ellis Families,

Community Before-School Program

We want to make families/caregivers aware of several before- and after-school opportunities available to IJ Holton and Ellis students in our community.

Youth for Christ (YFC), an independent community organization, operates a before-school program at Bethlehem Church near Ellis Middle School. The program operates from 6:55 to 7:45 a.m. Students who participate walk from Bethlehem Church to Ellis Middle School or I.J. Holton Intermediate School before the school day begins. Youth for Christ operates this program independently and is not sponsored, supervised, or endorsed by Austin Public Schools. Families/caregivers interested in information about the program should contact Youth for Christ directly.

Safety Reminder

Students participating in the program may walk from Bethlehem Church to school. We ask families/caregivers to drive carefully and watch for students near the school parking lot entrance during morning drop-off.

YMCA Teen Center and After-School Transportation

We are also excited to continue to bus our students to the YMCA so they can access the Teen Center, which provides students with a free, supervised environment after school. The Teen Center offers homework help, games, activities, snacks, special events, and opportunities for students to connect with friends in a safe and positive setting.

To make accessing the Teen Center even easier, the YMCA provides free after-school transportation from Ellis Middle School.

Important transportation information:

- The YMCA bus picks up students in Lane 1 in front of Ellis.
- The bus can transport up to 18 students at a time and will make additional trips if needed.
- A school staff member will supervise students during transportation.
- During unsafe weather or other conditions that make waiting outside unsuitable, students will be brought indoors and supervised near Door 26 until transportation arrives.

To ensure a safe and positive experience for all students, riders are expected to follow school and bus expectations and cooperate with staff directions. Students who are unable to meet these expectations may lose transportation privileges.

We would like to thank these community organizations for providing additional opportunities for students and families/caregivers.

Safety Reminder
Students attending the morning program will walk from Bethlehem Church to school. We ask families to help keep everyone safe by driving carefully and watching for students near the school parking lot entrance during morning drop-off times.



Message from the Assistant Principal, Joni Irvin

Ellis Families,

The school year has started off well and as we enter the month of September, we begin to look towards District STAR assessments, Homecoming Week, 7th grade field trips to Hormel Nature Center and our first Parent/Communication Event! Dates for these events can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. Information about Homecoming activities and field trips will be communicated directly to your students. A reminder for the Parent/Communication Event will be portal pushed to all families.

STAR Assessments will take place on September 1st (Reading) and September 3rd (Math). Please encourage your EMS student to have their laptops fully charged in preparation for these days and to put forth their greatest effort. Scores obtained from this testing assist EMS in making course placement for your student. Those who score in the intervention or urgent intervention category for reading will be required to take an additional assessment called the CAPTI in early October. Ellis has worked hard to put a scope of programming in place within the building to support our students who have academic struggles, grade level needs, as well as advanced programming opportunities. These tests support our mission of "**Every Learner. Every Day**" at Austin Public Schools and guide our work.

Strategic Priorities Update

Strategic priorities:

Priority One: Support and resources to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment:

- We have refined our parent communication events for the school year in lieu of conferences.
- We are using Talking Points to improve communication with all families.
- We are also working on student information documentation for all teachers

Priority Two: Packer Profile for all learners:

- 7-12 activities alignment to make sure all activities are accessible and communicated.
- We now have all our exploratory classes required and are sequenced for all students
- We are implementation the Career Project
- Emily Hoveland will support the development of the Career Project
- Our Digital Music class is now in place

Priority Three: District-wide multi-tiered systems of support for all learners:

- ALC Math Intervention
- Math Standards learning work and upcoming new curriculum purchase process
- Tier 2 Reading Intervention – Power Up Reading
- HITS-Vocab w/AHS
- PLC's
- OL/LA Language Arts Teachers
- Attendance – Student Focus

Priority Four: Excellence in resource management:

- We have reallocated resources to improve attendance tracking
- We have allocated resources for our math and reading intervention

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Message from the Dean of Students, Dr. Gabrielson



Families-
As the year starts, I want to ensure that every student has the best opportunity to learn, grow and succeed in a focused and respectful environment. One important way we support this is by minimizing distractions during the school day, especially those caused by cell phones. Below is a reminder of our district cell phone policy:

No cell phones are to be used or visible between the hours of 8:00AM-3:00PM. Consequences for cell phone use are as follows:
1st Incident: The student may retrieve their phone in the office at the end of the school day.
2nd incident: The student will NOT be allowed to get their phone; a parent will have to pick it up.
3rd incident: A parent will be required to come pick up the cell phone again.
4th incident and all following: Parents will be required to retrieve the phone, and a cell phone plan will be created with parents/guardians and school administration. This may include, the phone being held by administration during the day or not allowed on site.

If you need to reach your child during the day, please contact the office and we will ensure they receive your message. We appreciate your support in reinforcing this expectation at home.
If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Dr. G

Note from the Office

Families,

Student Pick-Up Reminder
When picking up your child, please provide as much advance notice as possible. This helps us ensure your child is waiting in the office upon your arrival. Last-minute pick-ups can result in delays, as students may be in the gym, at lunch, or participating in activities outside the classroom.

School Zone Safety Reminder
Please remember to slow down when driving down the school driveway to pick up your child. We have noticed several vehicles speeding while turning around or parking to wait for students. This is a school zone, and with nice weather, our classes will be spending more time outdoors. While safe driving is always expected, it is especially important now with more students outside.

We truly appreciate your cooperation and continued support in helping us keep our students safe and dismissal running smoothly.

Thank you!

Emergency Contacts

📞 **Keep Emergency Contacts Up to Date!**
To help us ensure your child's safety, please take a moment to review and update your emergency contact information. If your phone number, address, or emergency contacts have changed recently, let us know as soon as possible. Accurate contact details help us reach you quickly in case of illness, injury, or other urgent situations.
You can update your information by logging into the parent portal.

Thank you for helping us keep our records current!

BARR Updates

Ellis Families,
I am excited to continue as the BARR Coordinator at both IJ Holton & Ellis as Ellis enters Year 3! The staff completed a full day training from the BARR Center on August 13, 2026. This engaging training was titled "Fostering Resilience through BARR". The focus was on defining the concept of resilience, understanding how BARR fosters resilience on a student, staff, & systems level, discussing the value of including multiple perspectives to ensure a holistic approach, and identifying opportunities to engage community resources to meet and support the needs of the whole student & their families. The BARR strategies are listed below as well as a little information about our I-Time sessions coming

up in August & September. Please always feel free to reach out to my with any questions that you may have.
Sincerely,
Karen Dunbar, IJ Holton & Ellis BARR Coordinator, karen.dunbar@austin.k12.mn.us

BARR Strategies
Focus on the **whole student**.
Provide **professional development** for teachers, counselors, and administration.
Use BARR's **I-Time Curriculum** to foster a climate for learning.
Create a **cohort** of students.
Hold **regular meetings** of the cohort teacher teams.
Conduct **community connect meetings**.
Engage **families** in student learning.
Engage **administrators**.

I-Time Sessions Grade 7
8/26/26 House Rules
All students learned about BARR and I-Time lessons in their Social Studies classes. Then, they came up with House Rules that will be used for every I-Time lesson. They also completed a questionnaire so that staff can learn more about their interests, hobbies, and plans for their future.
9/2/26 Freeze & Thaw
Students understand the power of positive & negative group dynamics. The class discusses what is effective when working with a group and what is ineffective. Then, they complete an activity that requires cooperation to accomplish the goal.
9/9/26 Creating Connections
The students will learn to recognize and appreciate that we all have something in common that connects us. They practice starting and engaging in conversations with a student partner that they do not know well.
9/23/26 Kindness Counts
The students will explore the idea of what it means to be kind. They will pledge to be kind in 5 different ways over the next 3 weeks. They may also work with a group to create a poster that advertises kindness.
9/30/26 Conversation Dice
Students will get to know their partner by taking turns answering a variety of questions; the question they end up answering each round is determined by the role that they get.

I-Time Sessions Grade 8
8/26/25 House Rules
All students learned about BARR and I-Time lessons in their Social Studies classes. Then, they came up with House Rules that will be used for every I-Time lesson. They also completed a questionnaire so that staff can learn more about their interests, hobbies, and plans for their future.
9/2/26 Mix It Up Moment
The facilitator will split the class in half with each student ending up with another student across from them. The facilitator reads a question. The students have two minutes to answer this question.
9/9/26 And the Survey Says
This lesson helps participants to see commonalities within their community. As a small group, students develop a multiple-choice survey question with 4 answer choices.

9/23/26 Rainbow in the Clouds

Students are given time to think about who has shown them kindness when they were going through a tough time. The class watches the short Maya Angelou video: Maya Angelou - Rainbow In The Clouds

9/30/26 The First Follower

The purpose of this lesson is for students to understand the qualities of leaders and be discerning followers. The participants will watch a video clip by Derek Sivers titled, "How to Start a Movement."



Counselor Updates

Dear Students and Families

SUICIDE AWARENESS and PREVENTION offered for Grades 7-12

Ellis Middle School-Tuesday, October 6
Austin High School-Wednesday, October 7

Austin Public Schools recognizes the importance of addressing mental wellness for our students. Unfortunately, suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for teenagers in the U.S. In acknowledgment of potential struggles students may face, we are excited to partner with Aidan's Light to bring "My Ascension" to Austin Public Schools.

Aidan's Light is a non-profit suicide-prevention charitable organization started by Jennifer and Ryan Hegge, the parents of Kasson-Mantorville student, Aidan Hegge, who sadly died by suicide on July 27, 2020. Through generous funding offered by Aidan's Light, we are privileged to bring Emma Benoit and “My Ascension” to all students grades 7-12.

"My Ascension" is a feature length documentary which chronicles the story of 16-year-old Dutchtown High School varsity cheerleader Emma Benoit, who was paralyzed by a suicide attempt. This attempt propelled her on a mission to use her painful experience to help others find hope and stay alive. The screening of the documentary will be followed by a live Question and Answer session for students at both Ellis Middle and Austin High School.

"My Ascension" highlights Emma's inspiring journey, as she works to bring Hope Squad, a school-based suicide prevention program, to Louisiana. The film also shares the stories of two remarkable young people who tragically did not survive their attempts, and we learn first-hand from their families, friends, school officials and suicide prevention experts about the devastating effects of suicide and what can be done to prevent it.

Ellis Middle School students and staff will view the documentary on Tuesday, October 6th and then participate in the panel discussion featuring Emma along with other panel members for questions and answers. Austin High School students and staff will view the documentary on Wednesday, October 7th and then move to the panel discussion. Both buildings will operate on an abbreviated bell schedule for the remainder of the day following their respective program's participation.

Austin Public School support staff will be available throughout both programs in the event a student wishes to seek immediate support. If caregivers have questions, concerns or reservations about their child's participation in this event, please contact your student's school at:
Ellis Middle School Main Office at 507-460- 1500 or
Austin High School Social Worker, Julie Hale at 507-460-1810 .

For any caregiver interested in previewing the event, there will be a community presentation of "My Ascension" on Monday, October 5th at Knowlton Auditorium, Austin High School. The documentary will be shown at 6:30 p.m. with the Panel presentation featuring Emma Benoit following the documentary. A mental health resource fair will be offered prior to the documentary.

"Emma's story captures the severity of mental health and suicidality pandemic amongst the adolescent population in the United States. My Ascension is a serious yet uplifting story that provides hope, clarity, and support to its audience from a personal perspective."

Saro Altinoglu, PSY.D, ROWI Teen and Parent Wellness Center

Ellis Support Staff
Kirstin Norby, Grade 7 counselor 507-460-1536
Lea Oelfke, Grade 8 counselor 507-460-1517

Austin High School Support Staff
Grade Level Counselors: 507-460-1812
Sarah Schmit, Last names beginning A-E
Stephanie Emanuel, Last names beginning F-Lopez G
Farin Delaney, Last names beginning Lopez H-Reh
Cassidy Hartmann, Last names beginning Rei-Z
Julie Hale, School Social Worker 507-460-1810

Austin Area Learning Center and Austin Online Academy
Sheridan Stenbeck, ALC and AOA Counselor 507-460-1812

Your Ellis Counselors,
Lea Oelfke, 8th grade counselor lea.oelfke@austin.k12.mn.us 507-460-1517
Kirstin Norby, 7th grade counselor kirstin.norby@austin.k12.mn.us 507-460-1536

From the School Resource Office Blake

Drop off and pickups at Austin Public Schools: Reminders and Tips



As we begin another school year, please help us keep our students safe by following this important safety checklist during drop-off and pick-up times:

Safety Checklist

- Do not drop off or pick up children in the street.
- This reduces the risk of injuries and accidents.
- Please do not rush during drop-off or pick-up times.
- Encourage children to use designated crosswalks.
- Make sure drivers can clearly see children before they step into the roadway.
- Remind children to look both ways before crossing the street.
- Allow extra travel time during inclement weather.
- Drive slowly through drop-off and pick-up areas and watch carefully for children who may unexpectedly enter the roadway.
- Remember that all school property is a **Smoke-Free Zone**. Smoking is prohibited anywhere on district grounds.

Traffic Flow Reminder

When leaving the drop-off or pick-up area in front of **Door 1 at Ellis Middle School and IJ Holton Intermediate School**, please **exit to the RIGHT (East) onto 4th Ave SE**.
This traffic pattern helps improve traffic flow and keeps everyone safer. Traffic approaching from the west can become heavily congested, making it difficult to exit in that direction. For this reason, drivers are asked to exit to the east. Please note that there is also a **No Left Turn** sign posted to assist with traffic management.
Your cooperation helps create a safer and more efficient experience for students, families, and staff.

Electric Scooters and Electric Bikes

We have also attached a flyer regarding electric scooters and electric bicycles. Please take a moment to review the information. If you have questions, please contact the **Austin Police Department** at **(507) 355-0150** for clarification.

Thank you for your cooperation and commitment to student safety. We wish everyone a safe and successful school year!



Athletics

Sports Information from EMS Athletic Director



As the school year gets underway, Ellis Middle School fall sports have officially started! We are still accepting registrations through **September 4**, after this date, we will no longer accept any other athletes for fall sports. If you have questions about practice schedules, game times, or team expectations, please contact your coach directly, as coaches have the most up-to-date information for their teams. Coach contact information can be found on the Ellis Athletics Page, and game schedules are available on GoBound. We look forward to a great fall season and wish all of our student-athletes the best of luck!

If your athlete is currently not participating in any activities but may want to in the future, I encourage you to have them get a physical now so they can start practicing on time when their season arrives. Physicals can be emailed to nichelle.gabrielson@austin.k12.mn.us or dropped off in the office.

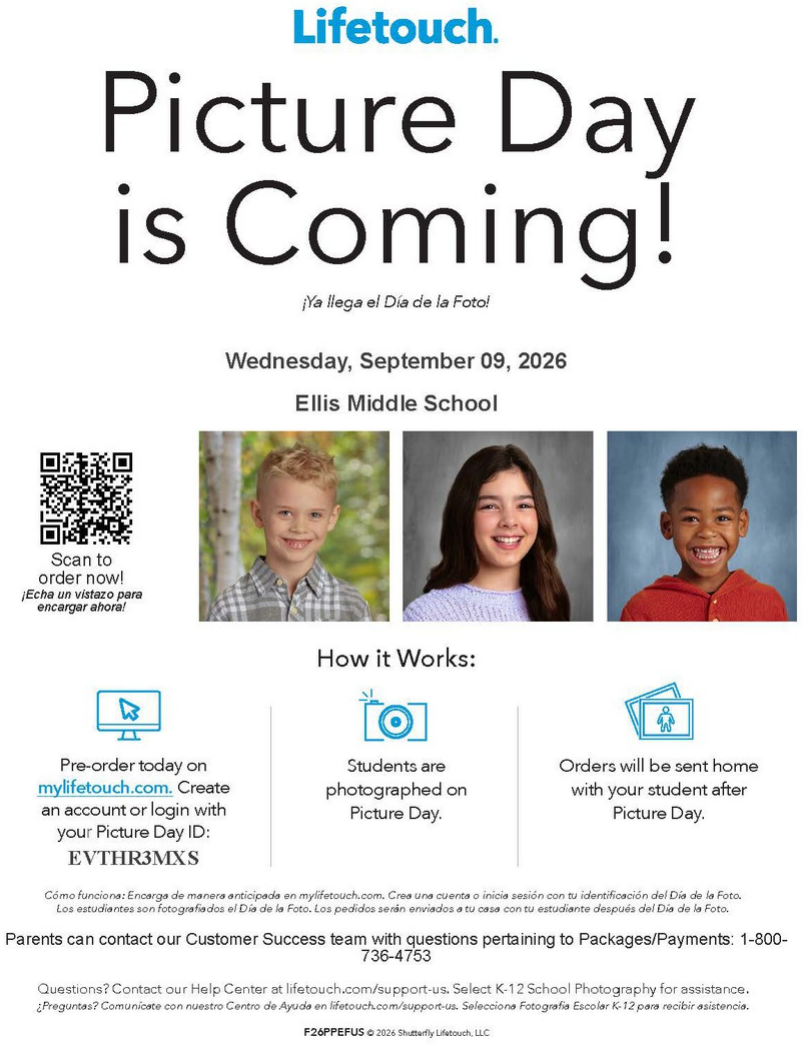
Thank you,
Dr.G

Bowling

Are you interested in joining the bowling team?!
This is an open opportunity for 7th and 8th grade boys and girls.
Practice: Echo Lanes
Wednesday and Thursdays from 6:00-7:30pm
No prior bowling experience is required.

Questions? Contact Joel Buttshaw - 507-440-9107

Know





Important Dates to Remember



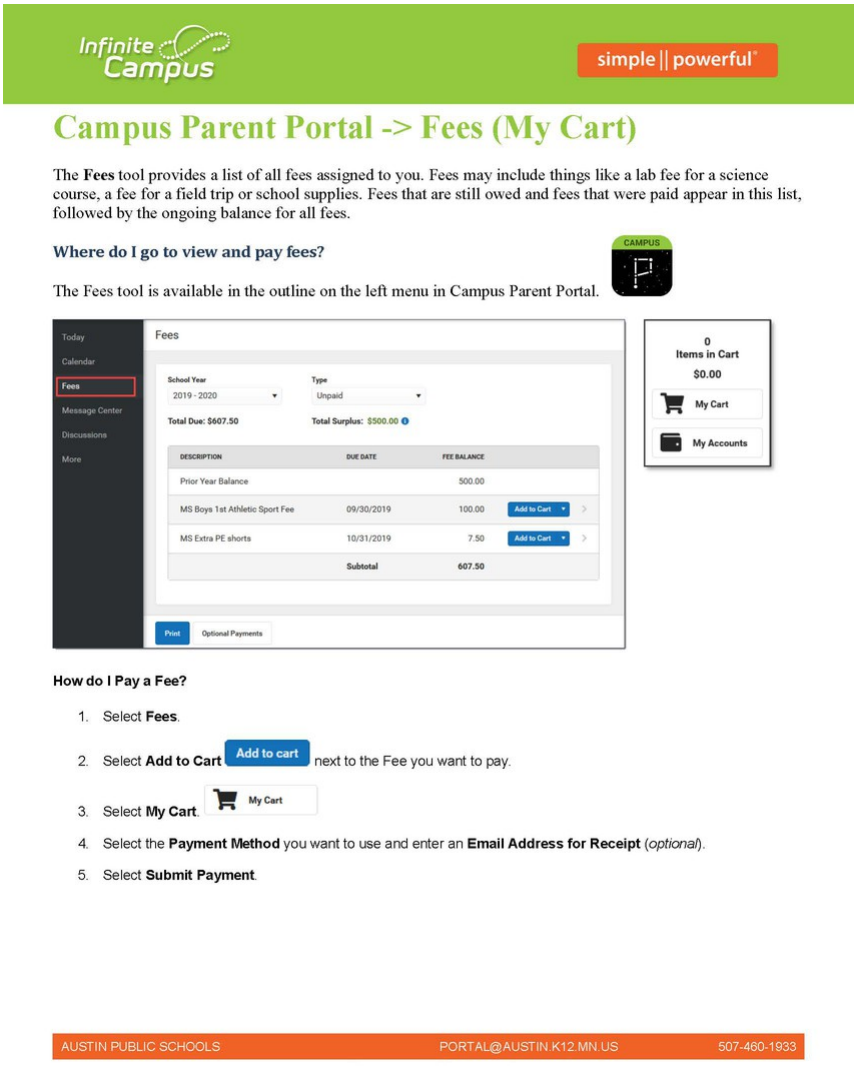
September

September 1 - Star Testing-Reading
September 3 - Star Testing-Math
September 7 - No School
September 8 - Fall Play Auditions 3pm-5pm, Ellis Auditorium
September 10 - Fall Play Auditions 3pm-5pm, Ellis Auditorium
September 15 - 17 - 7th Grade Nature Center Field Trip
September 18 - Austin Homecoming
September 22 - Flu Shot Clinic, 10:30am-1:30pm, Ellis Auditorium
September 23 - Progress Communication Event, Teachers reaching out from 3:40pm-5:15pm to parents
September 25 - Fire Drill #2
September 28 - No School for Students (Staff PD Day)

Do

Fees

Please see below if you want to pay your fees online. You may always pay at the school with check/cash/or credit card also.



Infinite Campus

simple || powerful

Campus Parent Portal -> Fees (My Cart)

The **Fees** tool provides a list of all fees assigned to you. Fees may include things like a lab fee for a science course, a fee for a field trip or school supplies. Fees that are still owed and fees that were paid appear in this list, followed by the ongoing balance for all fees.

Where do I go to view and pay fees?

The Fees tool is available in the outline on the left menu in Campus Parent Portal.

Today
Calendar
Fees
Message Center
Discussions
More

Fees

School Year: 2019 - 2020
Type: Unpaid
Total Due: $607.50
Total Surplus: $500.00

DESCRIPTION	DUE DATE	FEE BALANCE	
Prior Year Balance		500.00	
MS Boys 1st Athletic Sport Fee	09/30/2019	100.00	Add to Cart
MS Extra PE shorts	10/31/2019	7.50	Add to Cart
	Subtotal	607.50	

Print | Optional Payments

0
Items in Cart
$0.00
My Cart
My Accounts

How do I Pay a Fee?

1. Select **Fees**.
2. Select **Add to Cart** Add to cart next to the Fee you want to pay.
3. Select **My Cart**. My Cart
4. Select the **Payment Method** you want to use and enter an **Email Address for Receipt** (*optional*).
5. Select **Submit Payment**.

AUSTIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS PORTAL@AUSTIN.K12.MN.US 507-460-1933

PDF **CP_Fees.pdf** Download 289.4 KB

Share

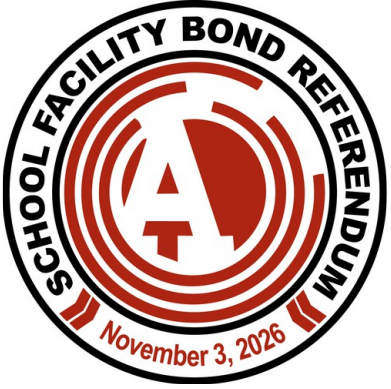
School Bond Referendum

The Austin Public Schools have placed a $24.9 million bond referendum on the November 3 ballot. The proposed funding would address identified facility needs across the District, including:

- Improving safety and security
- Increasing accessibility
- Addressing water infiltration
- Updating aging building systems and finishes
- Completing needed repairs to keep the Ellis Middle School pool operational

Community members are encouraged to learn more about the proposal, review project information, and submit questions through the District's referendum website.

Learn more or submit a question:
https://www.austin.k12.mn.us/district-resources/referendum-2026



Message from the YMCA

The **YMCA Teen Center** is a **FREE, supervised space** designed to give youth ages **10–18** a safe, welcoming place to spend time, connect with friends, and participate in fun activities. Younger children are also welcome when accompanied by an adult. All youth and adults must check in with the Teen Center attendant upon arrival.

The Teen Center offers a variety of opportunities for youth and families, including **homework help, free snacks, open gym time, games, crafts, and weekly activities**. Throughout the month, teens can also enjoy special programming such as **monthly hot meals, themed activities, tournaments, and other special events**.

To make getting to the Teen Center easier, we offer **FREE after-school transportation from IJ Holton and Ellis Middle School to the YMCA through Smart Bus**. The YMCA Smart Bus is located in **Spot #1 of the regular bus lineup** at the schools. Youth can ride directly from school to the Y, giving families a safe and convenient transportation option at no additional cost.

We also offer **Family Fun Pool Time**, giving Teen Center participants and their families an opportunity to enjoy the pool together at no cost. These special family activities help us extend the Teen Center beyond a place for teens to hang out and create opportunities for families to connect and have fun together.

Our goal is to provide a positive environment where youth feel safe, supported, and connected to their community. As the Teen Center continues to grow, we look forward to expanding our activities, special events, meals, and opportunities based on the interests and needs of the youth we serve.

Come hang out, grab a snack, join an activity, get some homework done, or simply spend time with friends — all for FREE

Ellis Middle School
https://ellis.austin.k12.mn.us

1700 4th Avenue SE
Austin, MN 55912
507-460-1500

School Hours:
8:00AM - 3:00PM

