

## Robbinsdale Weather Station



Weather station on the roof of Robbinsdale Middle School. Robbinsdale science teacher David Reynolds, at right.

### Robbinsdale Area Schools

Some people might see lightning strike damage as a challenge, but when a bolt knocked out a weather station at Sandburg Middle School, science teacher David Reynolds saw an opportunity.

Reynolds, one of Robbinsdale Area Schools' remarkable staff members, raised donations for a replacement weather station, and embraced the potential of the Internet to share this very local weather data with others. On December 10th, 2007, Mr. Reynolds and Miss Hearne installed the station. It was a warm day (20F) and luckily there was no wind.

Since then, these forecasts have been available online at [weather.rms.rdale.org](http://weather.rms.rdale.org).

"I have received a lot of positive feedback from parents, kids, former residents and alumni. They like that it is local and focused on our area. Twitter and Facebook have extended the opportunities for sharing the information."

*David Reynolds  
Robbinsdale Science Teacher*

"It is a fun hobby and always changes," says Reynolds, who now teaches at Robbinsdale Middle School. "I have received a lot of positive feedback from parents, kids, former residents and alumni. They like that it is local and focused on our area. Twitter and Facebook have extended the opportunities for sharing the information."

The weather station (a Davis Vantage Pro 2) is on Robbinsdale Middle School's roof above Reynold's classroom. He uses the station to help students be "weather aware." The station is solar powered during the day and battery powered at night. It senses temperature, humidity, air pressure, wind

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## "Tech Warriors" provide device support and gain post-secondary skills

*Travis Andries  
Communications Specialist  
School District 197*

With the implementation of 1:1 computing and the shift to personalized, digital learning this year, some 1,400 student laptops have been introduced to Henry Sibley High School. This influx of learning devices carries with it an increased need for technical support, but at the same time creates a hands-on learning opportunity for tech-savvy teens. Seeing this potential, administrators at Henry Sibley created the "Tech Warriors" – a device support resource operated by students, for students.

"We created the Tech Warriors as an opportunity for students to learn some preliminary skills and to support the EmPowerED initiative at the high school," said Matt Burr, Henry Sibley's A/V Coordinator and Tech Warriors advisor. "We already have students with an interest in technology and thought 'why don't we let them help with basic issues.'"

Located in the Henry Sibley media center, the Tech Warrior team provides technical support for students before, during and after school on a variety of topics. Connecting to Wi-Fi, accessing the school's network of printers, or troubleshooting general issues within Google are all within the realm of the Tech Warriors. Password assistance and issues of greater complexity are still referred to the technology office, however.



With 15 members, Tech Warriors are on hand for most of the school day for students to receive help on a drop-in basis. Despite this wide coverage, however, the Tech Warriors are always looking for ways to provide more support for their fellow students, even outside of school hours.

"A lot of the questions we receive are on printers, the Wi-Fi and common issues with Google," said Evan Johnson, a sophomore Tech Warrior. "We are creating video tutorials for our website on some of those questions we've seen a few times, which should be up soon. People can check the tutorials if they aren't able to come in. That way they are still using our resources."

Developing creative problem solving skills and fostering ingenuity were among the intended outcomes for Tech Warriors when the program was created, according to Burr. Tech Warriors has also proven to be an opportunity for students to find their niche at

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**How to Bring Self-Directed Learning to The Classroom**

With help from technology, students are learning on their own outside the classroom, leading Matt Levinson, head of school at University Prep in Seattle, to wonder how teachers can harness this self-directed learning. In this blog post, Levinson explores ways teachers can give students flexibility to pursue their passions and interests.

**4 Strategies to Teach Self-Advocacy Skills**

Educators can help students develop self-advocacy skills by empowering students to speak up for their needs in the classroom, writes National Board Certified Teacher and instructional coach Elizabeth Stein. In this blog post, she shares four strategies for empowering students, including those with disabilities, such as by helping them set their own learning goals.

**How to Rescue a Lesson Plan That Flops**

Not all lesson plans are winners. In this blog post, third-grade teacher Meghan Everette suggests several ways to recover when a lesson simply goes bad. Most importantly, she writes, there is no failure -- only a "First Attempt In Learning."

**Elementary School Lesson Ideas For National Poetry Month**

Teachers can create engaging poetry lessons -- and celebrate National Poetry Month -- by incorporating visuals, writes elementary-school teacher Amanda Nehring. In this blog post, she shares ideas, such as using visuals, coloring and writing shape poems, in which students select an object and write a poem based on it.

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## ECO Opportunities

### Great American Can Roundup

In the Great American Can Roundup, schools compete to recycle the most aluminum beverage cans per enrolled student between America Recycles Day (Nov. 15) and Earth Day (April 22). Open to all PK-12 public and private schools.

Beyond the money your school earns by recycling, the school that recycles the most aluminum beverage cans per capita during the contest period will be named National Champion and win \$5,000. There will also be a State Champion for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia that will receive a prize of \$1,000.

**Deadline:** Register by April 28, 2016.

**Website:** [www.cancentral.com/roundup/](http://www.cancentral.com/roundup/)

### Brower Youth Awards for Environmental Leadership

Earth Island Institute established the Brower Youth Awards (BYA) to honor founder and legendary activist David R. Brower. Each year, the BYAs recognize six young people ages 13-22 living in North America who have

shown outstanding leadership on a project or campaign with positive environmental and social impact.

Each recipient will receive a \$3,000 cash prize, a professionally produced short film about their work, and flight and lodging accommodations for a week-long trip to the San Francisco Bay area.

**Deadline:** Apply by May 16, 2016.

**Website:** [www.broweryouthawards.org/apply/#application](http://www.broweryouthawards.org/apply/#application)

### Ocean Awareness Student Contest

Middle and high school students are invited to participate in the 2016 Ocean Awareness Student Contest. This year's theme is "Making Meaning out of Ocean Pollution," and it challenges you to research, explore, interpret, and say something meaningful about the connections between human activities and the health of our oceans.

This year, students are challenged to focus on ONE type of ocean pollution and "make meaning" of it through art, poetry, prose, or film.

Individual and group submissions are eligible. Cash prizes for the winners, teachers, and their schools range from \$100 to \$1,500.

**Deadline:** Submissions due June 13, 2016.

**Website:** [www.fromthebowseat.org/contest.php](http://www.fromthebowseat.org/contest.php)

### Goddard Prize for Environmental Conservancy

The New Leaders Initiative, a program dedicated to identifying, supporting and sustaining young environmental leaders is honored to administer the Goddard Prize for Environmental Conservancy. The Goddard

Prize will be awarded multiple times a year to enterprising young people who are pursuing environmental projects, and who are looking for funding to bring their ideas to the next level.

**Deadline:** Applications accepted on a rolling basis.

**Website:** [eeintennessee.org/resource/about.aspx?s=124499.0.0.37935](http://eeintennessee.org/resource/about.aspx?s=124499.0.0.37935)

### Environmental Advocacy Grants

The Cornell Douglas Foundation provides small grants to organizations that promote the foundation's vision: advocating for environmental health and justice, encouraging stewardship of the environment, and furthering respect for sustainability of resources.

The average grant awarded is \$10,000.

**Deadline:** Applications are accepted year-round.

**Website:** [www.cornelldouglas.org/apply](http://www.cornelldouglas.org/apply)

### Environmental Curricula Grants

The mission of the Melinda Gray Ardia Environmental Foundation is to support educators in the development, implementation, and field-testing of environmental curricula. The foundation hopes to see integration of field activities and classroom teaching, while incorporating basic ecological principles and problem-solving.

Grants up to \$1,500 are awarded.

**Deadline:** Preproposals are due August 12, 2016. Invited proposals are due August 26, 2016.

**Website:** [mgaef.org/grants.htm](http://mgaef.org/grants.htm)

### Captain Planet Foundation Grants

The Captain Planet Foundation (CPF) funds innovative hands-on environmental projects to encourage youth around the world to work individually and collectively to solve environmental problems in their homes, schools, and communities. The foundation's mission is to promote and support high-quality educational programs that enable children and youth to understand and appreciate our world through learning experiences that engage them in active, hands-on projects to improve the environment.

Grants ranging from \$500 to \$2,500 are awarded.

**Deadline:** Applications are due January 31 and September 30, annually.

**Website:** [captainplanetfoundation.org/apply-for-grants/](http://captainplanetfoundation.org/apply-for-grants/)

### E2 Energy to Educate Grants

Through the E2 Energy to Educate grant program, Constellation Energy Resources, LLC offers grades 6 through 12 and college students opportunities to problem-solve today's and tomorrow's energy challenges. Grants fund projects designed to enhance students' understanding of science and technology and to inspire them to think differently about energy.

Education grants up to \$25,000 each are awarded for grades 6 through 12.

**Deadline:** Applications are due October 1, annually.

**Website:** [www.constellation.com/community/e2-energy-to-educate.html](http://www.constellation.com/community/e2-energy-to-educate.html)

## Robbinsdale Weather Station

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speed and direction, precipitation, UV light and solar radiation. It is also wireless, so if it is hit by lightning again, it will not damage anything inside. The Davis Weatherlink software takes information and creates a forecast, then uploads it to the website.

Mr. Reynolds arranged the website and developed the learning page to be used in class. Some software was donated to RMS. The maps are from Wunderground.com and Midwestern Weather Network. The main page is live. There is a page that updates every 5 minutes and also sends information to Weather Underground and other organizations. RMSWeather is a member of many weather organizations.

"As students learn the different aspects of weather, they can see the site or listen to the TV and know what to expect and understand the terminology," he says. "They also

like to use the classroom's Smart board and pretend to be a weather person, drawing on maps to predict the weather of the day. They like to see what is happening outside and understand why it is happening."

David was recognized as a #RASRemarkable teacher. He has also been featured on NWTV 12 and the Weather Channel.

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## "Tech Warriors"

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Henry Sibley.

"The students in Tech Warriors have become more entrenched in Sibley culture," said Burr. "Some of them didn't have much interest in the other school activities. It's good for the students to be involved and through Tech Warriors they get to meet other techs who are interested in the same kinds of things they are."

Tech Warriors also develop customer service and social skills, even resiliency when faced with a challenging tech-related problem.

For senior Ben Yelinek, Tech Warriors was also an opportunity to stay connected with the school and share his knowledge with other students. On track with credits, Yelinek chose to join Tech Warriors rather than registering for an early release or independent study.

"I have some extra time as a senior, so

this was an opportunity for me to help out students and be here during the day instead of leaving early. It's also cool because we get to learn about the projectors and printers, in addition to focusing on computers," said Yelinek.

While an interest in technology and some free time are needed to join Tech Warriors, not all members are computer experts. Burr and the district's technology department are on hand to provide insight when needed, but students are encouraged to take ownership of the program and trouble-shoot problems independently, exploring their interests and talents through this new opportunity.

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Leah Bott and Tom Frericks  
William Kelley Schools  
Lake Superior School District 381

I am sure everyone has heard the Chinese proverb, “give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for the rest of his life.” We believe the same message applies to teach-



## William Kelley School Garden and Much More!

ing people to garden . . . especially young people. Not only will it provide them with the knowledge and skill to raise their own food, it builds an understanding about where their food comes from and the importance of healthy eating. Overall, it instills a sense of wonder and self-sufficiency to last throughout their lifetime.

The school’s environmental landscape at William Kelley School in Silver Bay contains a 200 square foot school garden, a 40 bed terraced garden, and a garage

garden, along with 400 feet of raspberry and strawberry patches, school greenhouse, brick bread and pizza oven, 60 tree apple and plum orchard, and a 40 acre Bird Hill School Forest. Staff and students can now teach and learn agricultural literacy themes, Common Core, and the MN State Standards through these incredible resources. All of these environmental venues create community, enhance us as human beings, and push students, staff, and community members to eat healthier and become better caretakers of our world.

Students are involved in the process from start to finish. From seed planting in the classrooms in late winter to preparing the beds before the snow flies in the fall, students are engaged in the process and learning every step of the way. There is not the space here to describe all of the learning activities that take place, but below are a few of the highlights.

5th grade students sell produce from the gardens, fruit patches and orchards to the Silver Bay community every Tuesday morning from the first week in September to the first week in October. They harvest, wash, count, package, and weigh the fruits, vegetables, and herbs they sell. In addition to learning valuable math, marketing and sales skills, students are empowered to become positive, active participants in the community. With produce sold at discounted prices to customers on a fixed income, the students see firsthand that making a profit is less important than feeding a person.

One particular place that is special in the garden is the Three Sisters Garden which is planted by the 4th grade students. They learn that many tribes in the Americas grew squash, corn, and beans and how the tribes maintained a special relationship with the Three Sisters. When the time is right, we encircle the Three Sisters Garden as we close read the Penobscot legend and explore the agricultural reasons behind growing

## Silver Bay Educator Recognized by Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom

Tom Frericks Awarded 2016 Outstanding Teacher Award



Tom Frericks, a 5th grade teacher at William Kelley Elementary School in Silver Bay, MN, has been awarded the Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom (MAITC) 2016 Outstanding Teacher Award. The award is given annually to a Minnesota K-12 teacher who exemplifies excellence in the classroom and a passion for teaching agriculture. Frericks will receive a \$500 stipend and up to \$1,500 in expenses to attend the 2016 National Agriculture in the Classroom Conference in June. This annual award is sponsored by the MAITC Foundation.

As the school garden coordinator at William Kelley Elementary, Frericks effectively incorporates food and agriculture concepts into core subjects such as science, social studies, nutrition and environmental education. He uses the 40-bed terraced garden, garage garden, strawberry and raspberry patches, apple and plum orchards located on school grounds, as well as the nearby Bird Hill School Forest, to teach the state curricular standards and provide his students firsthand experience in growing food.

Outdoor learning opportunities, cultural connections, and the science of growing and harvesting local foods are important because Frericks believes students are better able to understand new concepts when they are taught in a real world setting.

“Tom’s efforts to include agriculture into his 5th grade curriculum are amazing!” says MAITC Education Specialist Sue Knott. “The opportunities he is giving his students to apply core curricular concepts in the school garden is not only building agricultural literacy, but he is also empowering these students to be positive and active members of society.”

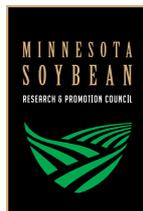
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# Cohasset Elementary School's Garden

*Cohasset Elementary School  
Independent School District 318*

The goal of Cohasset Elementary School was to create a sustainable project, which provides opportunities for increased health (high quality food) and wellness (social and family engagement) within the school community. We believe that school gardens can serve as a great outdoor classroom! Gardens are an excellent way to connect students with the true source of their food while teaching valuable gardening concepts as well as skills, such as math, science, art and health.

The size of the garden is approximately 6' x 60' and comprised of three raised beds. There are paths that serve as dividers among the raised beds. The garden is located adjacent to the school in a fenced in area, which helps keep out animals and reduces the chance of vandalism. The water source is rain barrels and water spigots.

The garden produces tomatoes, cucumbers, summer and winter squash, sunflowers, and kohlrabi. Sunflowers proved to be a fun project for the students to view the plant cycle in action and observe how seeds can be utilized to feed the birds, etc.

The school garden is cross-curricular. From planning to harvest, students improve competencies in language arts, math, science

and technology to expand and communicate their experiences, both inside and outside the classroom. The school garden provides hands-on opportunities that can enrich the learning experience and allow for exploration of student interests. Parents and staff provide supervision for the students during the lessons as well as when weeding, watering and harvesting the produce.

From the beginning, the project was promoted as a family engagement opportunity. The students are involved in the summer months on a voluntary basis, through a sign-up program to be sure who and when someone will be there to maintain the garden.

The garden is accessible to all students. During the school year, special education and support staff work closely with general education teachers to ensure learning projects are accessible, both academically and physically.

School staff is involved in the planning, care and maintenance of the garden. During the school year staff and students take turns with the supervision and maintenance. During the summer they enlisted the help of a local Girl Scouts troop and volunteers from the Minnesota Reading Corps to help supervise and maintain the garden. In the fall they helped to put the garden to "sleep." Itasca County Master Gardeners were also very helpful.



The plan to prevent vandalism proved highly effective. Fences, custodial staff, neighbors and surveillance from the City of Cohasset all worked in harmony to see that the garden was well monitored. A generous grant from The Jeffers Foundation was received and used towards the creation of the garden.

The school staff has support and assistance from the Girl Scouts, Itasca County Master Gardeners, and the Cohasset Community. With this support and help from other different groups the plan is to make this an ongoing project that becomes a legacy of learning and love of nature.

For more information contact: Sue Roy  
— Sroy@isd318.org  
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## William Kelley School Garden

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this type of companion garden. The eldest sister, corn, provides the structure for her little sister, the pole bean, to climb. The bean plant fixes nitrogen onto the roots of the corn and squash, providing valuable nutrients. And finally, the squash plant provides her sisters with shade and protection from sun and pests. We culminate this agricultural adventure by making a Three Sisters soup and baking a flatbread called Bannock.

Produce from the garden is also used in the classroom and given to food service staff to use in the cafeteria. The school district is part of USDA Farm to School and Victory Fund grants that provide training and support to Food Service staff in using produce from the garden and from local producers. A variety of delicious, healthy, organic produce is enjoyed by students and staff during lunch in the fall months. In the classroom, students learn about the nutritional aspects of the garden produce, along with skills in preparing, processing and preserving the harvest. Students make and can

pizza sauce, salsa, and jellies along with freezing, cooking, and eating a wide range of fresh garden produce.

As teachers, we believe that it is our responsibility to make a positive difference in our students' lives. Not only are we applying a teachable concept in a real world setting, but also imparting agricultural experiences that will shape students' health and well-being long into the future. We are thankful to the wide range of organizations and individuals that have helped to make this diverse school garden environment a reality. It provides the entire school and community with a place to connect, grow and learn.

[www.isd381.k12.mn.us/schools/william-kelley-schools](http://www.isd381.k12.mn.us/schools/william-kelley-schools)  
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## Bridges, Boats and Second Graders



Stillwater Area Public Schools

Last May, after learning about bridges in the classroom, a group of 120 Lake Elmo Elementary students had the opportunity to see a real-live bridge construction project from the seats of a river boat.

“We’re getting to see how a bridge is built, and we can ride on a boat,” one student said. “This is the best field trip ever!”

The students took a ride on the Jubilee Riverboat, and learned about the St. Croix Crossing construction project from engineers with the Minnesota and Wisconsin departments of transportation. As they watched workers high up on the bridge piers, the students learned about the

process of bridge construction and had the opportunity to ask their own questions.

“They are so excited to be here,” said teacher Julie Mock. “This is such an incredible opportunity for them to see how everything they are learning comes together. They’re seeing science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics, history and geography right there before their eyes. It’s amazing!”

This riverboat tour was the first of its kind, but many more are expected to follow as students in grades K–12 continue to learn

about the bridge being built in their own community thanks to The Partnership Plan. The educational funding group is a significant sponsoring partner of the Bridging the St. Croix curriculum project, providing 1/5 of the funding for Phase I and 1/3 of the funding for Phase II.

It is all part of a unique partnership the school district has with the Minnesota (MNDOT) and Wisconsin (WisDOT) departments of transportation and Hamline University. A group of seven Stillwater teachers are writing lesson plans and collaborating with Hamline University to design interactive learning modules and multimedia presentations depicting the bridge



Lake Elmo Elementary students visit the bridge construction site by riverboat.

construction from start to finish. They’ve been piloting the curriculum in their classrooms this year, and will be sharing it with teachers across the district next year. It’s written in such a way that schools across the nation can use the curriculum to teach students the engineering and design principals, and environmental impact, of bridge construction.

“It’s not every day we have a huge engineering project like this happening in our own backyard,” said Denise Cote, a curriculum specialist

for Stillwater schools. “It’s providing so many incredible learning opportunities for our students and our staff. It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity and we’re thrilled to be a part of it.”

[stillwater.k12.mn.us](http://stillwater.k12.mn.us)  
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## Students Build and Test Hovercraft



Westwood Middle School  
Spring Lake Park Schools

Eighth-graders in Daniel Kretchmar’s science, technology, engineering and mathematics course at Westwood Middle School didn’t want class to end March 28. They were having too much fun testing hovercraft they built over the last three weeks.

Kretchmar presented students with a basic design that they were asked to modify, working as teams. They watched a video on how to build the hovercraft and then came up with a plan on how they were going to accomplish this. Materials were chosen and the real work began.

Students attached ground effect skirts to slats of wood and used leaf blowers as engines to build their hovercraft.

“None of them floated on the first try; I actually kind of made sure that none of them floated on the first try,” Kretchmar said.

He didn’t tell students how big to make holes in their ground effect skirts so that they would have to experiment to get the

air pressure balance just right.

“It takes a lot of trial and error,” student Andrew Blilie said.

At first, Andrew’s team’s hovercraft didn’t move, but it made a lot of noise, he said. When it finally did take off, students were euphoric.

“It felt very good getting it off the ground,” student Eric Bratsch said.

Students tested their hovercraft March 28, moving up and down the hallway near Kretchmar’s room and zipping around the woodshop.

Brittany Amador said she thought she

might fall at first. “With a skateboard you can feel the wheels on the ground but with this you just slide” she said.

“This has been the most fun project all year,” student Kole Skinner said. “We all pulled together and got this done.”

Teamwork is an important part of Kretchmar’s STEM class. The goal of the class is to develop critical thinking skills through project-based learning.

Days like March 28 are what Kretchmar lives for, he said. “They were all engaged. They want to be in this class.”

“This is why I’m a teacher. This is the most exciting part of teaching STEM,” Kretchmar said. “This was a real-world problem that they all learned how to solve and work on.”

Next up, STEM students will create stop-motion films.

Check out the video!

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gy1XFgZ51qc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gy1XFgZ51qc)

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### About Daniel Kretchmar

I started teaching at Westwood Middle School in 1993. I taught Life Science for 15 years and switched to 8th grade Earth Science to have a chance to teach Astronomy again, one of my favorite subjects! I was then offered a chance to head up the STEM program for Westwood Middle School. Since STEM is such a broad subject, it lets me pursue a wide variety of projects with my students including: programming, hovercraft, siege engines, bridge building, game design, orienteering, rocketry, stop motion animation, and loads of others. I have ADHD, but instead of hiding it, being a STEM teacher allows me to use it as an asset instead of a disability.

I started college studying Architecture and Design, Mythology, and programming but transferred to study engineering. I have been a teacher for 21 years and have won an award from the National Science Teacher’s Association for Exemplary Lesson Planning. I love my job!



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*Please note: This represents a broad and not conclusive list of careers within the world of transportation*

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# MWHS Math Minds Compete In Grueling 14 Hour Challenge



By Becca Neuger  
Westonka Public Schools

While most of their peers were still snug in their beds last Saturday, five Mound Westonka High School students embarked on a 14-hour mathematical modeling challenge that tested their mental acuity, creativity, teamwork and concentration.

Seniors Taran Besant, Mason Elliott, Jaxon Helland and Joe and Sam Maruska joined nearly 5,000 students from around the United States Feb. 27 to compete in the 2016 Moody's Mega Math (M3) Challenge. Organized each year by the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics, M3 Challenge gives high school students the opportunity to answer specific real-world

questions by applying mathematics and quantifying the related variables.

This year's competition involved using mathematical modeling to make recommendations about the future of the auto industry. Automakers are investing millions of dollars in developing new technologies to meet the demands of consumers, many of

them millennials, who want the benefits of using a private car without the costs and responsibilities of owning one. During the intensive M3 Challenge, the MWHS students worked as a team to gather and evaluate data on everything from car sharing to self-driving cars to vehicles that run entirely on alternative fuel or renewable energy.

The 2016 M3 Challenge was the first for MWHS, and neither the students nor their coach, MWHS math teacher Lisa Paul, knew what to expect. Prior to the competition, Paul said, "I have no idea how this will go, as it is a first for our school, but I'm excited for them as they embark on this daunting adventure!"

The MWHS students voluntarily started the

clock at 7:12 a.m. and had until 9:12 p.m. to complete a 20-page solution paper filled with highly rigorous mathematics. They were first charged with building a mathematical model to categorize U.S. individuals by the amount of time they spend using their cars and the number of miles driven each day. Then they were tasked with evaluating four emerging car-sharing business options, taking into account new technologies that are close to entering the mainstream, and predicting which option would garner the most participation in a given city. After a full day's work, the MWHS students submitted their final paper at 9:11 p.m., with 20 seconds to spare.

Elliott said that the hardest part of the M3 Challenge was deciding where to start and how to go about solving the problem. "Once we had an idea to run with, actually computing the data and working through the numbers was the fun part," Elliot said.

For Joe Maruska, the challenge provided a unique opportunity to work collaboratively on a real-world problem that he hadn't previously considered. "I chose to join the challenge mostly because I have never done anything like this before, and we had a great group interested in participating," he said.

The biggest thing that Maruska took away from the competition was that it's OK to have fun while doing something serious. "I think we got it done so well because we had fun doing it,

so we didn't shut down as the day went on," he explained. "The most enjoyable part for me, I think, was the satisfaction of solving the problem and that we had a lot of fun doing it."

Besant echoed Maruska's sentiments: "Going into the challenge I thought that 14 hours was a long time and was hoping we would finish sooner so I could go home. By the end, though, we were having so much fun that we wished we had more time."

"It was definitely difficult and certainly not a leisure activity, but we felt good about what we were doing and enjoyed making real progress towards a difficult problem," Besant added.

After two rounds of judging by professional applied mathematicians over the next eight weeks, six finalist teams will be selected to present their solutions to a panel of mathematical experts at Moody's Foundation headquarters in New York City on April 25. Approximately 90 teams will be recognized with team scholarship prizes, with the champion team receiving \$20,000.

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## Mckinley's Phyllis Haensel Named Elementary Social Studies Teacher of the Year



Communications Department

Phyllis Haensel, a third-grade teacher at McKinley Elementary School in Ham Lake, is passionate about social studies and the impact it can have on young students.

"I just think it makes education relevant for kids," she said. "When kids are little, they don't know much about the world, and they

think social studies is the vehicle that helps them figure out what their place is in the world and who they are."

That passion has led her to take on a leadership role in social studies curriculum development that has impacted thousands of students across the state. Her dedication to her students, excellence in teaching, and impact on colleagues has earned Haensel the admiration of the Minnesota Council for the Social Studies Board, which has named her its 2016 Elementary social studies Teacher of the Year.

Haensel was honored at the 2016 MCSS Awards Dinner on Sunday, March 6.

McKinley Elementary School Principal Mike Koenig said this is a great recognition for Haensel, who will retire at the end of the school year after nearly 30 years of teaching.

"I'm just really excited for her. What a nice way to go out," he said. "She's so passionate about social studies curriculum and so engaged with it as a curriculum writer. This really speaks to the work she's done with it."

And even this close to retirement, she's still not slowing down, Koenig said. "She's still looking to write curriculum into June and

Haensel said she has always loved social studies. "I just think it's fascinating," she said.

To date, she has written three iterations of social studies curriculum for the Anoka-Hennepin School District. According to MCSS, she has also written curriculum for the Minnesota Partnership for Collaborative Curriculum and led professional development for teachers through her school, the district, and the Minnesota Center for Social Studies Education.

In addition, she served on the Minnesota State Social Studies Standards Committee when it was tasked with bringing a more diverse, global view to the curriculum statewide.

Students in her class now spend half the year learning about and comparing three different ancient civilizations.

"I'm teaching ancient Egypt right now and my kids are absolutely crazy about it," she said. "They're saying things to each other like, 'social studies was so fun today!'"

By learning about these ancient civilizations and how they behaved in their daily lives, Haensel said her students are also learning about geography and map skills, economics

"Social studies creates that concrete piece for them, that connection to the real world, where they can apply what they have learned," she said. "I have kids who don't read that well, but they will take this magazine about ancient Egypt and they will pore through it and they will figure out the hard words, because they are fascinated by it. So I see it not only as making education relevant, but I also see it as a huge motivator."

Haensel said she is happy to have the opportunity through this award to express why she thinks social studies is so important to kids.

"It's such an important thing. It is what makes education meaningful, in my mind," she said. "The kids in my class do the math, they do the reading. But when they come alive is when we do the social studies."

[anoka.k12.mn.us/mckinley](http://anoka.k12.mn.us/mckinley)  
(763) 506-3400



### Engineering for You Video Contest

The National Academy of Engineering (NAE) Engineering for You Video Contest challenges students to create a video focused on mega engineering. Most of humankind's biggest endeavors depend on engineering to create solutions that span disciplines, geographies, and cultural boundaries. Some of these mega engineering projects have already been accomplished, while others have yet to even be imagined.

The Best Video Overall is awarded \$25,000, and the People's Choice Award video is awarded \$5,000.

**Deadline:** Video submissions are due May 31, 2016.

**Website:** [www.nae.edu/e4u3/](http://www.nae.edu/e4u3/)

### Google Science Fair Competition

The Google Science Fair is a global science and engineering competition open to students ages 13-18. Students may enter as individuals or in teams. There is no entry

fee. Finalists will compete for internships, scholarships and prizes in front of an international judging panel of scientists and engineers.

#howcanwe make the world better with science? The grand prize includes \$50,000 in scholarship funding. There are also prizes for the top finalists and category awards.

**Deadline:** Submissions due May 18, 2016.

**Website:** [www.google-science-fair.com/en/](http://www.google-science-fair.com/en/)

### Parent Group of the Year

Enter the Parent Group of the Year competition to showcase all your hard work, increase awareness about your group, and win great prizes! There are so many great stories to tell—why not share yours? Brag about an event, activity, or what you do best.

The contest is open to all elementary and middle school (K-8) parent groups: PTO, PTA, HSA, PTC, etc. Parent groups

at other schools such as high schools may still enter, but should be aware that the main audience of PTO Today is K-8 parent groups.

Choose from seven categories, including Outstanding Major Project or Program and Outstanding Community Service Project, and you'll automatically be considered for Judges' Choice and the \$3,000 grand prize of National Parent Group of the Year. Category winners will each receive \$500.

**Deadline:** Entries due June 1, 2016.

**Website:** [www.ptotoday.com/pgy/](http://www.ptotoday.com/pgy/)

### Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring

The Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Mentoring recognizes citizens and organizations that have demonstrated excellence in mentoring individuals from under-represented groups in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education and career paths.

Nominations, including self-nominations, are invited for individual and organizational awards. Individuals and organizations in all public and private sectors are eligible, including industry, academia, primary and secondary education, military and government, non-profit organizations, and foundations.

Up to 16 awards may be made. Each awardee will receive \$10,000 and a commemorative Presidential certificate. Awardees are also invited to participate in

an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. which includes meetings with STEM education, research, and policy leaders.

**Deadline:** Nominations due June 17, 2016.

**Website:** [www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=5473](http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5473)

### Outstanding Earth Science Teacher Award

The National Association of Geoscience Teachers (NAGT) presents its Outstanding Earth Science Teacher Award to K-12 educators who have made exceptional contributions to the stimulation of interest in the earth sciences. Any teacher or other K-12 educator who covers a significant amount of earth science content with their students is eligible.

Ten national finalists are selected, one from each NAGT regional section. Some sections also recognize state winners. Individuals may apply themselves or nominate a colleague for the award.

Sectional winner awards include up to \$500 in travel funds and \$500 in classroom improvement funds, as well as memberships, subscriptions and publications. There are also a variety of awards for state winners, section runners-up, and honorable mentions.

**Deadline:** Nominations due May 1, 2016.

**Website:** [nagt.org/nagt/awards/oest.html](http://nagt.org/nagt/awards/oest.html)

## Armatage Montessori Celebrates National African-American Parent Involvement Day



Abdullahi Aden, Bilingual Program Assistant

Armatage Montessori School  
Minneapolis Public Schools

On Monday, Feb. 8, Armatage Montessori School witnessed something special: African-American and Somali families coming together as part of its annual National African-American Parent Involvement Day

(NAAPID) celebration. For the first time, the celebration included an exhibition of Somali artifacts alongside pieces of African-American history.

Families who attended the celebration were invited to a Gallery Walk in which all students displayed artwork and reports related to Somali and African-American history. Students drew pictures of civil rights icons like

Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and Ruby Bridges. In addition, students completed a multi-step research project, including an essay, timeline and map, on selected African Americans. Armatage students and families also received a unique opportunity to view precious artifacts shared by the Somali Museum in Minneapolis.

Abdullahi Aden, one of the event's organizers, said it can be challenging to see NAAPID as an event that celebrates both African-American and Somali cultures. "This event was very significant because it was the first time the Somali community participated in African-American Parent Involvement Day at Armatage Montessori School," he said. "It's inspiring how our team of staff and families joined together to celebrate all our histories, and we look forward to finding ways to be even more inclusive moving forward."

First- and second-grade teacher Mandy Perna said that Black History Month is not a stand-alone unit — rather, it's a continuation of how the classroom community operates. "All year long, students talk about social justice issues and read fiction and non-fiction books about equal rights and diversity," she said. "It makes you so proud to see how much our kids care about understanding these important issues."

"All year long, students talk about social justice issues and read fiction and non-fiction books about equal rights and diversity. It makes you so proud to see how much our kids care about understanding these important issues."

Mandy Perna  
Armatage Montessori Teacher

Minneapolis Public Schools says it is committed to seeing the histories of students honored and shared through events like Armatage Montessori's NAAPID celebration.

[armatage.mpls.k12.mn.us](http://armatage.mpls.k12.mn.us)  
(612) 668-3180



## More in Common Than You Think



By Carissa Hopkins-Hoel  
St. Cloud Area School District 742

Area students are coming together to discover that they have more in common than they think. Students from Apollo, Tech, Sauk Rapids-Rice, ROCORI and Foley high schools are meeting every month to break down prejudicial barriers and find their shared experiences.

Dr. Eddah Mutua, a communication studies professor at St. Cloud State University (SCSU), created the service-learning, community-based group Communicating Common Ground (CCG) in 2006.

The main objective of the group is to

facilitate conversation about race and culture among high school students. Monthly meetings during the school year are assisted by Mutua's SCSU communication students.

"Kids get to know other kids [from other districts] outside of sports, which can be adversarial, competitive," says Linda Snowberg, a tech intergration coach at Sauk Rapids-Rice High School.

Freshmen through seniors are given the opportunity to join the meetings. It's voluntary and there is no time commitment. They can attend one meeting or all of them.

For Apollo student Mahider Gevrehawari, this CCG session is her first time, and

she comments, "I'm expecting a good conversation."

This month's theme is "Embracing Cross-Cultural Opportunities."

Students are split into groups. Each group has students from each high school along with two SCSU students, who kick-off the conversation. The conversations start simple to discover that common ground.

"If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go?" asks one of the SCSU group leaders.

Each person is given the opportunity to share where and why. Answers include: Spain, Dubai, Loas, Germany, Paris, London, Ireland, Antarctica, Scotland, Bora Bora and Jamaica. Many are surprised to have named the same location for the very same reason.

While the students are gathered in their groups, Mutua gives them the framework. "E pluribus unum. What does it mean?" asks Mutua.

A student raises his hand to answer, "One of many."

"Ubuntu is an African philosophy that means oneness . . . Omoiyari is the Japanese philosophy for oneness. We can borrow from

different cultures and bring them together," says Mutua.

With this ideology in mind, the students are put to the task of continuing to find those common threads amongst themselves.

Games are used as icebreakers. Some groups play Two Truths and a Lie, others carry question charts to obtain as many autographs from their peers as they can.

Once the games are finished, students get down to the nitty-gritty. They discuss personal experiences, how to avoid assumptions, what actions they can take to bring together that "oneness" that Mutua encourages.

The discussions are meaningful, in-depth, intuitive and get to the heart of oneness.

Understanding their common ground, students leave prepared to create a more connected — and *peaceful* — tomorrow.

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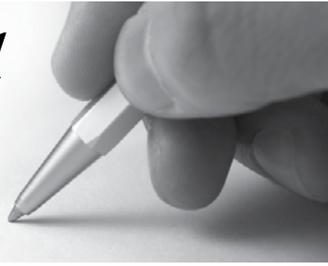
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## Carol M. White Physical Education Program

The Carol M. White Physical Education Program provides grants to local educational agencies and community-based organizations to initiate, expand, and improve physical education programs for students in kindergarten through grade 12. Grant recipients must implement programs that help students make progress toward meeting state standards.

Approximately 15 grants awarded, ranging from \$200,000 to \$800,000 per project year.

**Deadline:** Applications due May 20, 2016.

**Website:** [www2.ed.gov/programs/white-physed/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/white-physed/index.html)

## Project Learning Tree GreenWorks! Grant 2016

Do you have an idea for an environmental improvement project? Need funds to implement it? Apply for a Project Learning Tree GreenWorks! grant! PLT offers grants for service-learning projects that improve schools or restore natural habitats. Grant Amount: \$1,000

**Deadline:** September 30, 2016

**Website:** [www.plt.org/apply-for-green-works-environmental-education-grant](http://www.plt.org/apply-for-green-works-environmental-education-grant)

## The Herb Society of America's Donald Samull Classroom Herb Garden Grant 2016-2017

The Herb Society of America will award four (4) schools each year indoor window sill herb gardens. The classrooms selected will receive three (3) windowsill herb garden kits including pots, soil, seeds and educational materials to use in the classroom. The Herb Society of America will provide the educational materials. Grant Amount: \$200

**Deadline:** October 01, 2016

**Website:** [herbsociety.org/resources/samull-grant.html](http://herbsociety.org/resources/samull-grant.html)

## Environmental Grants

Waste Management, Inc. supports environmental and science education programs, such as science fairs and Earth Day projects targeting middle and high school students. There is also interest in proposals to preserve and enhance natural resources. Local facilities may identify and support other causes that are important to the immediate community.

**Deadline:** Applications are accepted and reviewed year-round.

**Website:** [www.wm.com/about/community/charitable-giving.jsp](http://www.wm.com/about/community/charitable-giving.jsp)

## Community Grants

The American Immigration Council awards grants to fund a limited number of projects for ages seven through 12 that provide education about immigrants and immigration. Applications for immigration-themed projects are considered for all subject areas.

Educators teaching in public or private schools and extension educators and community leaders are eligible to apply. Classroom-based proposals receive strong consideration, and the foundation encourages projects that can be replicated in other classrooms.

Awards range from \$100 to \$500.

**Deadline:** Applications are due July 1 and November 7, 2016.

**Website:** [www.communityeducationcenter.org/community-grants](http://www.communityeducationcenter.org/community-grants)

## Crayola/NAESP Champion Creatively Alive Children

In collaboration with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), Crayola offers an annual grant program entitled Champion Creatively Alive Children. This program provides grants for innovative, creative leadership team building within elementary schools. Up to 20 grants are available from Crayola to help educators explore the "what if..." opportunities to develop a school creative leadership team that deliver professional development and innovative programs that inspire educators to increase arts-infused education.

**Deadline:** Applications are due by June 20, 2016. Applications received by June 6, 2016, qualify for Early Bird Bonus.

**Website:** [www.crayola.com/for-educators/ccac-landing/grant-program.aspx](http://www.crayola.com/for-educators/ccac-landing/grant-program.aspx)

## Instrumental Music Grants

The Fender Music Foundation awards instruments and equipment to eligible music instruction programs that are part of US public schools or qualified nonprofit organizations. The instruments and equipment are lightly used, blemished, or otherwise imperfect and have been collected from manufacturers and retailers.

**Deadline:** Applications accepted year-round.

**Website:** [www.fendermusicfoundation.org/grants/grants-info/](http://www.fendermusicfoundation.org/grants/grants-info/)

## Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers

The Innovative Technology Experiences for Students and Teachers (ITEST) program,

through research and model-building activities, seeks to build understandings of best practice factors, contexts, and processes contributing to prekindergarten through grade 12 students' motivation and participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

**Deadline:** Full proposals due August 10, 2016.

**Website:** [www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm\\_summ.jsp?pims\\_id=5467](http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5467)

## Grants for Grades K-5

The Toshiba America Foundation offers grants to elementary-level teachers for projects that focus on improving science and mathematics education and technology. The goal is to provide teachers with additional funding to support innovative ideas for hands-on classroom projects.

Grants up to \$1,000 are awarded.

**Deadline:** Online applications are due October 1, annually.

**Website:** [www.toshiba.com/taf/k5.jsp](http://www.toshiba.com/taf/k5.jsp)

## Air Force Association's Air Force Junior ROTC Grant

The Air Force Junior ROTC Grant was established to promote aerospace education throughout classrooms and units. AFJROTC grants provide your units and classrooms with up to \$250 every other academic year. Grants are issued twice a year.

**Deadline:** October 10 and February 10.

**Website:** [www.afa.org/informationfor/teachers/k12grants/airforcejuniorrotcgrant](http://www.afa.org/informationfor/teachers/k12grants/airforcejuniorrotcgrant)

## Library Grant Program

The Lois Lenski Covey Foundation annually awards grants to rural, urban, public, and school libraries and agencies that serve children who are economically or socially at risk, have limited book budgets, and demonstrate real need. Funds are earmarked for purchasing books for young people.

Awards range from \$500 to \$3,000 for the purchase of children's books.

**Deadline:** Applications due May 31, 2016.

**Website:** [www.loislenskicovey.org/index.html](http://www.loislenskicovey.org/index.html)

## Roads to Reading Initiative Grants

The Roads to Reading Initiative (RTRI) provides grants of new children's books as educational resources to schools, child-care centers, and nonprofit organizations serving children in need from birth to age 16. Donated books must be used for on-site literacy programs that target underserved communities and are administered by the applicant organization.

**Deadline:** Applications are accepted from

April 1 through June 30, annually.

**Website:** [pwitr.org/register](http://pwitr.org/register)

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# Activity Lockers Provide Energizing Breaks for Students



Edina Public Schools  
Communications Department

The sticker says “Teacher Locker,” but what’s inside is all about students.

In one locker are lacing cards and instructions for “animal walks”; in another, a theraband and ball activity cards; another locker includes exercise dice and a ribbon

stick. These are where Creek Valley students can have a “locker break” – a brief excursion to the hallway to rev students up, “get the wiggles out” and then return to a calm state with a breathing exercise.

“Locker breaks get students ready to learn,” said Amy Fairweather, occupational therapist at Creek Valley, Concord and Countryside. She started the locker breaks at Concord nearly 8 years ago and brought the idea to Creek Valley last month. They are part of a tiered plan to respond in a personalized way to students’ needs.

Elementary teachers know that sitting still in a chair all day goes against the nature of most young learners. “The research is out there showing how important movement is for students throughout the day,” Fairweather said. “When you get to middle school and high school, movement is part of your day. Students change classrooms and carry their books around. But elementary students are, for the most part, in one classroom all day.”

As a proactive strategy, elementary teachers build classroom breaks into their daily schedule so that every student gets an opportunity to let growing muscles stretch and growing brains get ready for the next lesson. “It helps to have some physical movement during transitions, right before work time,” Fairweather said. She often provides the class-

room teachers with ideas for break activities. For students who need a little more, there is a resource bucket in the classroom where they can use a small item, such as putty or another manipulative, to work their muscles. And for students who require more physical activity, there are locker breaks.

While the activities in each locker are slightly different, they all address three areas: movement, “heavy” work for large muscle groups, and a breathing exercise called “Lazy 8,” where the students use a finger to trace the number 8 while taking slow, deep breaths.

Students can have locker breaks only if their classroom teacher or other staff recommend it as something that would benefit the student. While some who access the locker breaks are also receiving special education services, just as many are not. “When it comes to movement, what is good for special education students is good for everyone,” Fairweather said. “Students must have adult supervision to use a locker break, and often that might be a

paraprofessional, the social worker or a case manager, depending on who is available. But locker breaks are for any student that needs it.”

Locker breaks, and muscle movement in general, not only help students release energy, but can also ease anxiety and improve posture. Fairweather said teachers notice a difference. “I hear from staff observations that these physical breaks during the day really help students stay on task in the classroom and transition between subjects or lessons,” she said. “They are less anxious, less distracted and more focused on learning the next thing.”

“The research is out there showing how important movement is for students throughout the day. When you get to middle school and high school, movement is part of your day. Students change classrooms and carry their books around. But elementary students are, for the most part, in one classroom all day.”

*Amy Fairweather  
Occupational Therapist*

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# The Karner Blue Education Center School Garden



Steve Scott, Teacher/Curriculum Support  
Karner Blue Education Center  
NE Metro 916 Intermediate School District

Karner Blue Education Center (KBEC) serves students with emotional and behavior disorders (EBD), autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and development and cognitive delays (DCD). Karner was established in 2014 and is designed to address the specific student needs. A nature and place-based program philosophy seeks to provide students a calming atmosphere in order to build students' connections to the natural world. The development of a School Garden directly supports this program philosophy and students' needs. As students are taught to become keen observers of nature through observation and experiential activities with the natural world. The School Garden provides students and staff with one platform aimed at helping attainment of educational goals.

## Garden Site:

The Karner Blue School Garden is directly adjacent to the school building, near a water source, and is overlooked by the Life Lab and indoor playground. Phase 1 of their garden plan consists of five (3'x8') raised beds, one for each group of classrooms. The future plan is to build 19 raised beds, one for each classroom, with a final garden footprint of 2500 sq. ft (including space in and around beds). Eventually, the plan is to integrate a butterfly garden into the landscaping around the garden as well as establish a separate, in-ground "Three Sisters" garden that is able to accommodate vining plants and corn. Water sources include an outdoor faucet, existing lawn irrigation, with plans to add a rain barrel within the garden footprint to tie into existing building runoff.

The KBEC School Garden contains herbs, vegetables, and flowers. Produce harvested is utilized for educational purposes to illustrate current core subjects as students observe, measure, and document growth and changes. The produce also aids in teaching

transitional skills such as social skills, team building, cooking, healthy eating habits, and appropriate recreation and leisure activities.

## Education:

The garden helps students manage anxiety and behavior, which affects their ability to be successful in the classroom. Teaching students the therapeutic benefits of gardening helps in overall cognitive/emotional development, and exposes students to appropriate recreational activities which is critical in helping students be successful upon graduation. Without appropriate recreational/leisure activities, it is difficult for students of all ages and abilities to reach their true potential. School Garden activities help provide students hands-on activities that they will be able to utilize the rest of their lives. Ensuring their success throughout this process not only helps build the excitement for gardening and a much needed sense of accomplishment, but an interconnectedness with the natural world as well.

Students were actively involved with this project from the very beginning. Students prepped the sodded area, assembled the raised beds, and filled the beds with dirt. Many of the plants utilized in the garden were propagated inside using both conventional methods and hydroponics and then transplanted into the raised beds. In addition to general gardening maintenance, students will also help mow the area in between the raised beds with a non-motorized hand mower. During the summer, a different NE Metro 916 Intermediate School District program that serves students with disabilities aged 18-21, helped care for the garden as well. All students that attend this program have special needs. Therefore all programming to include School Garden was differentiated to meet each student's specific ability levels and social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

## Supervision and funding:

The School Garden Committee is made up of teachers, educational assistants (para-

educators), mental health workers, speech language pathologists, an Autism resource specialist, and eventually, a master gardener. Many of these individuals will be on staff for the Extended School Year (ESY), or summer school program as well. The committee has made connections with community leaders and residents to initiate relationships that will help establish mutual respect regarding the use of school property. In doing so, they have developed a positive working relationship with parents and children of the neighborhood in an effort to minimize vandalism.

The Jeffers Foundation Grant helped provide startup cost of the project and included cedar boards, hardware, soil/mulch mixture, and gardening tools. The program manager has also committed annual budget support of the school garden program by providing it enough resources for not only maintenance, but partially funding expansion efforts as well.

## Sustainability:

Both district and school administration fully support the School Garden program. The School Board is specifically interested in the data gathered on the possible positive impact a School Garden Program could contribute to improved student mental health. The Principal is a major supporter of this program as she

foresees the School Garden as a major asset to the curriculum and instruction and especially the development of the mental health support program. The KBEC program philosophy is tied to nature and place-based teaching models, therefore school staff are very excited and motivated to integrate School Garden concepts throughout the curriculum. Ultimately, the School Garden Committee will ensure that this project is successful not only in its initial establishment, but especially in ensuring that its continued development is meeting the unique needs of the students. Many committee members experienced the physical and mental health benefits of caring for a garden and they are excited to share those experiences with students.

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# Autism Spectrum Disorders

## A legacy fact sheet from NICHCY



### Ryan's Story

Ryan is a healthy, active two-year-old, but his parents are concerned because he doesn't seem to be doing the same things that his older sister did at this age. He's not really talking, yet; although sometimes, he repeats,

over and over, words that he hears others say. He doesn't use words to communicate, though. It seems he just enjoys the sounds of them. Ryan spends a lot of time playing by himself. He has a few favorite toys, mostly cars, or anything with wheels on it! And sometimes, he spins himself around as fast as he does the wheels on his cars. Ryan's parents are really concerned, as he's started throwing a tantrum whenever his routine has the smallest change. More and more, his parents feel stressed, not knowing what might trigger Ryan's next upset.

Often, it seems Ryan doesn't notice or care if his family or anyone else is around. His parents just don't know how to reach their little boy, who seems so rigid and far too set in his ways for his tender young age. After talking with their family doctor, Ryan's parents call the Early Intervention office in their community and make an appointment to have Ryan evaluated.

When the time comes, Ryan is seen by several professionals who play with him, watch him, and ask his parents a lot of questions. When they're all done, Ryan is diagnosed with autism, one of the five disorders listed under an umbrella category of "Pervasive Developmental Disorders"—a category that's often referred to as simply the "autism spectrum."

As painful as this is for his parents to learn, the early intervention staff encourage them to

learn more about the autism spectrum. By getting an early diagnosis and beginning treatment, Ryan has the best chance to grow and develop. Of course, there's a long road ahead, but his parents take comfort in knowing that they aren't alone and they're getting Ryan the help he needs.

### What are the Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders?

Each of the disorders on the autism spectrum is a neurological disorder that affects a child's ability to communicate, understand language, play, and relate to others. They share some or all of the following characteristics, which can vary from mild to severe:

- Communication problems (for example, with the use or comprehension of language);
- Difficulty relating to people, things, and events;
- Playing with toys and objects in unusual ways;
- Difficulty adjusting to changes in routine or to familiar surroundings; and
- Repetitive body movements or behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

These characteristics are typically evident before the age of three.

Children with autism or one of the other disorders on the autism spectrum can differ considerably with respect to their abilities, intelligence, and behavior. Some children don't talk at all. Others use language where phrases or conversations are repeated. Children with the most advanced language skills tend to talk about a limited range of topics and to have a hard time understanding abstract concepts. Repetitive play and limited social skills are also evident. Other common symptoms of a disorder on the autism spectrum can include unusual and sometimes uncontrolled reactions to sensory information—for instance, to loud noises, bright lights, and certain textures of food or fabrics.

### Tips for Parents

Learn about autism spectrum disorders—especially the specific disorder of your child. The more you know, the more you can help yourself and your child. Your state's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) can be very helpful. Find your PTI here on CPIR's website. We've also listed organizations at the end of this fact sheet that can help you become knowledgeable about your child's disorder.

Be mindful to interact with and teach your child in ways that are most likely to get a positive response. Learn what is likely to trigger a melt-down for your child, so you can try to minimize them. Remember, the earliest years are the toughest, but it does get better!

Learn from professionals and other parents how to meet your child's special needs, but remember your son or daughter is first and foremost a child; life does not need to become a never-ending round of therapies.

If you weren't born loving highly struc-

ured, consistent schedules and routines, ask for help from other parents and professionals on how to make it second nature for you. Behavior, communication, and social skills can all be areas of concern for a child with autism and experience tells us that maintaining a solid, loving, and structured approach in caring for your child, can help greatly.

Learn about assistive technology (AT) that can help your child. This may include a simple picture communication board to help your child express needs and desires, or may be as sophisticated as an augmentative communication device.

Work with professionals in early intervention or in your child's school to develop an IFSP or an IEP that reflects your child's needs and abilities. Be sure to include related services, supplementary aids and services, AT, and a positive behavioral support plan, if needed.

Be patient and stay optimistic. Your child, like every child, has a whole lifetime to learn and grow.

### Tips for Teachers

Learn more about the autism spectrum. Check out the research on effective instructional interventions and behavior on CPIR's website. The organizations listed in this publication can also help.

Make sure directions are given step-by-step, verbally, visually, and by providing physical supports or prompts, as needed by the student. Students with autism spectrum disorders often have trouble interpreting facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. Be as concrete and explicit as possible in your instructions and feedback to the student.

Find out what the student's strengths and interests are and emphasize them. Tap into those avenues and create opportunities for success. Give positive feedback and lots of opportunities for practice.

Build opportunities for the student to have social and collaborative interactions throughout the regular school day. Provide support, structure, and lots of feedback.

If behavior is a significant issue for the student, seek help from expert professionals (including parents) to understand the meanings of the behaviors and to develop a unified, positive approach to resolving them.

Have consistent routines and schedules. When you know a change in routine will occur (e.g., a field trip or assembly) prepare the student by telling him or her what is going to be different and what to expect or do.

Work together with the student's parents and other school personnel to create and implement an educational plan tailored to meet the student's needs. Regularly share information about how the student is doing at school and at home.

Source — *The Center for Parent Information and Resources*

<sup>1</sup> Autism Society of America. (2008). About autism. Available online at: [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)

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Autism Society of America 45 Years 1971-2016

# Overcoming Challenges Through Teamwork and Technology



By Carissa Hopkins-Hoel  
St. Cloud Area School District 742

Technology is quickly becoming integrated with today's teaching and learning. Whether it's students using iPods, iPads or Chromebooks, today's students are connected in a whole different way.

District 742's Accessible Educational Material (AEM) team works with teachers and students to make classroom materials accessible for students, including students with print disabilities.

Needs don't get overlooked. Charlene Hopela, an AEM support assistant, helps train students on their electronic devices in regards to their digital textbooks, applications and other electronic materials.

Alexabae Khamsaensouk is an Apollo junior who approached Hopela requesting assistance. Khamsaensouk struggles with reading in her language arts class. Khamsaensouk has a print disability.

"People with print disabilities are people that just have trouble reading," says Khamsaensouk.

One reading assignment in particular was an older article. However, because the text was not recognizable when the article was put into electronic form [scanned] and read with the iPad application, Voice Dream Reader (text to speech), it sounded like gibberish. Hopela sought out Khamsaensouk's language arts teacher, Mary Barron-Traut.

Barron-Traut, wanting to assist, used her speech to text application on her MacBook Air to create a new accessible electronic document. That document was then used into the text to speech app for Khamsaensouk.

"I do really like to work with tech stuff, and I try to look for new ways to use it," says Barron-Traut.

Janet Perske, a special education special learning disability teacher, explains, "This type of technology is helping people with print disabilities be able to access their core curriculum."

The Voice Dream Reader application allows students to customize their learning and make it more enjoyable. They are able to change fonts, colors, backgrounds and the speed at which text is read to them.

AEM is now allowing students to test in their own classrooms. In the past, students would leave the classroom to have a teacher read the test to them. In addition, students are also able to dictate answers (speech to text) for essay tests.

"When I use to take history tests," says Khamsaensouk. "I would get Cs and Ds on my tests. Now I have Bs instead because it's read to me. It's easier not having to look over the page five to six times and getting lost."

District 742 is among the leaders in the nation with AEM. There are not many school districts that offer AEM. The initiative was put into place in the 2014-15 school year.

Perske explains, "District 742 has really supported this so we can help the students."

AEM does not stop at the high school level. It carries on to post-secondary education as well. Students are able to access the applications such as Bookshare through their post-secondary education. Once a student qualifies for Bookshare, the subscription carries on with them.

Hopela says, "I have an open door policy for any student. They can walk in for assistance at any time."

AEM continues to make a difference in district students and teachers alike.

[isd742.org](http://isd742.org)  
(320) 253-9333



## Metropolitan Airports Commission Helps Families 'Navigate Autism'



Many families who have children with autism avoid flying because they are unsure how their children will respond. In an effort to ease the anxiety associated with an airport visit and flying, the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), Fraser and the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM) have teamed up to create the Navigating Autism program. The program includes monthly events, all designed specifically for individuals with autism, that guide families through the steps of an airport visit, from walking in the door to finding their seats on a plane.

During the Navigating Autism event, families will have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with airport and travel procedures. Children will practice entering the airport, obtain a security pass, go through screening at a TSA security checkpoint and walk through the airport to a boarding gate. To culminate their experience, children and their families will board an aircraft and find their seats. Please note that the aircraft will remain on the ground.

In addition to preparing families for a positive travel experience, the Navigating

Autism program also will provide a valuable training and awareness opportunity for airport, airline and TSA personnel to learn how to accommodate children with autism and other special needs.

Families are invited to participate in any of the Navigating Autism event sessions, scheduled for the first Saturday of every month. Join MAC, Fraser and AuSM for a fun, safe practice run, while learning from airport personnel what works and what doesn't work to make your travel experience efficient and less stressful.

### A WOW experience for a participating family:

*We were "wowed" by the Navigating Autism program on so many levels. It is one of the most detailed, organized programs that I have ever attended. The details provided from the beginning were helpful, the check in was so organized, and everything about it was so well thought out. Every person that we had contact with was informed, kind, and helpful.*

*Our son really struggles with new experiences and I feel like the pace was set to what he was comfortable with and the explanations along the way were great. I didn't expect to experience so many things about the airport (actually riding on the tram, seeing the obser-*

*vation deck, locating the "quiet" places around the airport) and all of the details made us so much more confident about traveling in the future. The fact that they even offered water and snacks before we "boarded" was extremely generous after all the walking around. To experience the additional snacks and juice while on the plane was also appreciated.*

*The pilot and flight staff were all so welcoming, professional, and knowledgeable. I really appreciated the pilot's tips for traveling with a child on the spectrum. We don't often get to have "successful" outings and our family truly enjoyed it. We learned a lot and had fun doing so. I really compliment the entire team for all of the little things that made this such a great day for us (the visuals, the one-on-one help through security, and all of the things that we probably didn't even realize were happening). We are so appreciative of everyone's time to volunteer at this event and for all of your behind the scenes efforts to make this happen. Thank you again for offering this program and for letting us attend.*

— Sara L.

For more information go to:

[www.ausm.org/  
navigating-autism.html](http://www.ausm.org/navigating-autism.html)



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- Board a plane and meet a pilot
- Prepare for takeoff
- Gather helpful tips, information and resources

**FOR MORE INFORMATION,** contact Shelly Lopez at 612-726-5239 or [Shelly.Lopez@mspmac.org](mailto:Shelly.Lopez@mspmac.org).

