

School Pages

Staff Development builds teacher success, student achievement



First-year teacher Don Gramenz helps 5th grader John Vang get started on a new Science unit about Energy. Gramenz, a former professional soccer player, teaches Science to all grades at Washburn Elementary School. Bloomington hires the best teachers—and continues to develop their professional skills to achieve the District's mission. See pages 2 and 3.

Awards recognize excellence in Bloomington's education

Art Education Leadership Award tops state

The opportunities Bloomington offers students for arts education earned the Bloomington School Board a leadership award from the Minnesota Alliance for Arts in Education. Among many strengths, the alliance cited Bloomington's commitment to:

- K-12 arts instruction in spite of financial challenges,
- renovating facilities to support arts instruction and performances and
- cross-cultural art forms.

Business-School Partnerships best in state

Prepare Bloomington: Business-School Partnership program was chosen best in Minnesota and will be honored at the national convention of the American Association of School Administrators. The Civic Star Award recognizes school districts that have successfully teamed with local communities to develop innovative programs that advance learning. Bloomington's 15 schools and Early Childhood Family Center have formal partnerships with 27 Bloomington businesses.

2004 Elementary School of Excellence

Poplar Bridge joined Indian Mounds and Washburn as Bloomington's third Minnesota Elementary School of Excellence. The award is presented by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association. Selection for the honor is based on a systematic self-assessment that measures a school against the Minnesota Standards for Quality Elementary and Middle Schools. The standards combine current research findings and the best practices of successful principals. The assessment data in turn is used to plan further improvements for successful schools.

SHAPE instructor Kristine Kelly is semifinalist for Minnesota Teacher of the Year

Kristine Kelly, SHAPE instructor, recently was named one of 29 semifinalists for 2004 Minnesota Teacher of the Year. Kelly teaches 17 - 21-year-old students in the high school program at Community Education Campus. South Hennepin Adult Programs in Education is an adult education consortium of the Edina, Richfield, Bloomington and Eden Prairie school districts.

Social Studies standards are too many, in wrong grades and add another unfunded mandate

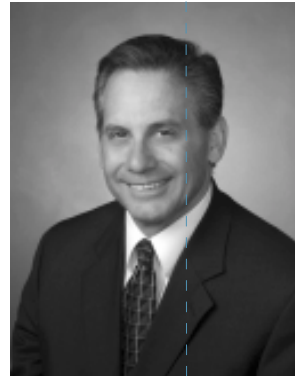
A message from Superintendent Gary Prest, Ed.D.—

Dear Friends of Education:

Ethical Education

During my all-day school visits, I drop into classrooms to watch our Bloomington teachers and children in the exciting process of teaching and learning. Recently, I was touched by a fourth grade lesson on "Courage." Students researched courageous people in history and reported to their class through illuminating posters and essays.

These children have a remarkable grasp of what it means to have courage. They focused on day-to-day perseverance to do what is right. They admired those who reach for a noble goal despite overwhelming odds. They recognize that courage is a character trait of heroes and of each fourth grader. Such lessons in ethical living abound in the Bloomington Public Schools. It is our mission to "assure each learner has the knowledge, skills and ethics to thrive in this rapidly changing world."



New Social Studies Standards

The 2004 Legislature will debate the proposed new Social Studies standards. Three main reasons Bloomington Public Schools staff is concerned about the proposal are:

Too many Standards—There are twice as many standards as in Science so teachers will need much more class time to

cover Social Studies requirements. Much material will be "skimmed" to accommodate the many standards and benchmarks.

For example:

6th graders will study:

- Minnesota history from Paleo-Indian to the present,
- World history from 1450 to the present,

- Geography of Minnesota,
- The United States and links to the world, and
- assorted other "essential skills." (Onosko, 1/04)

Grade level placement—Second graders will need to "understand and explain that the Declaration of Independence is the founding document that sets forth the guiding principles for the government of our nation and declares that individuals have rights, including life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." We believe that sophisticated concepts, such as those in the Declaration of Independence, need serious

discussion by students with some maturity and historical background.

Implementation—The proposed standards add content in specific grades and move standards to different grades. Costs of age-appropriate textbooks, required materials and teacher training will be funded by districts and schools. The state will not provide new funds for these mandated changes.

Continued on page 3

Kindergarten choices match children's readiness, families' needs



Unsure if your child is ready for Kindergarten? See page 4 for suggestions about how to decide.

Bloomington offers Kindergarten options so families can choose the one that is best for their child. All Kindergarten teachers are fully licensed and use the District's broad, carefully planned curriculum.

- **Traditional Half-Day Kindergarten**
- **All-Day Kindergarten-Plus**—Enriches and deepens the curriculum. Includes specialist instruction and lunch. (There is a \$275 monthly fee because the state funds only half-day kindergarten.)
- **Kinder SAFARI**—Enriched childcare at school during the half-day the child is not in Kindergarten. Available one to five days a week for a fee.
- **Make Tracks to Kindergarten**—Free summer program for children who have not attended preschool and/or who speak limited English.

For more information on Bloomington's Kindergarten options, call 952-681-6478.

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Educational Services Center
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Bloomington teachers carefully selected, mentored to grow professionally

Bloomington's excellent teachers don't just happen. Applicants are widely recruited, carefully screened, rigorously tested and face team interviews before they are selected for the School District's candidate pool. Then, each school with a teacher opening interviews applicants to assure a good fit within its instructional program.

But new teachers don't just fend for themselves. Bloomington methodically plans to help new teachers succeed in several key ways, according to Dr. Rich Germundsen, staff development director.

"We know from experience and research that no new employee in any organization is as effective

on their first day as they can be once they learn how their organization works," said Germundsen.

"Successful organizations that achieve their missions always continue to train and support their employees as the organization moves forward to new challenges," he said.

Germundsen previously was Education Department Chair at Augsburg College. He was responsible for faculty training and worked with more than a thousand student teachers.

Bloomington's Staff Development program

• **Mentors**—All beginning teachers work with a mentor for

two years. Mentors are master teachers who guide and support new teachers to help them effectively apply their knowledge and skills in their own classrooms. Mentors also suggest approaches and methods when classroom problems arise.

• **New Teacher Orientation**—For four days before school starts, new teachers learn about curriculum expectations and support systems, creating classroom learning environments, using instructional technology and serving diverse students. New teachers also meet with their principal and master teachers to discuss teaching a specific grade and/or subject area.

• **Continuous Improvement Plans (CIPs) at Each School**

Each school's CIP sets goals for academic achievement, educational equity, school climate and collegiality and professionalism. Staff development funds support training that meets unique needs for one or more schools.

• **Staff Development**—School staff meetings focus on specific school goals, after-school

workshops on District goals and Saturday mornings on building technology skills.

• **Districtwide Teacher Workshop Days**—K-12 workshop days during the year support the School District's Strategic Plan with specific kinds of training. (See April 12 example below.)

Monday, April 12

K-12 Teacher Workshop day is carefully planned to support Mission

Here's how plans are developing for a K-12 teacher Workshop Day on April 12:

Strategic Plan is Foundation Strategy 2.3—Teachers will provide students with a variety of appropriate instructional strategies to assure students will meet or exceed District and State standards.

Strategy 7.4—All District staff will have the knowledge, skills and strategies to provide interracial learning opportunities for all learners.

District Staff Development Plan focuses on Student Achievement

Help teachers apply best instructional practices. Build instructional skills in serving diverse learners.

K-12 Staff Development Day

Monday, April 12, will be a day off from school for students. Meanwhile, teachers will be gaining knowledge and teaching methods to help them improve achievement for all students in Bloomington's increasingly diverse community.

The day's activities specifically focus on instructional strategies that will help all Bloomington students succeed.

• **Elementary: English as a Second Language**—teachers will gain practical knowledge of proven methods to improve learning of students whose first language is not English.

With more students needing to learn English, Bloomington will expand ESL services to two more elementary schools next fall. (Currently, 561 of Bloomington's 10,500 students are learning English at school. An additional 180 students are monitored to assure that their English skills are strong enough for successful academic work.)

• **Secondary and Student Services**—Training will focus on methods to strengthen Reading skills to assure that students can understand content as well as decipher words.

• **High Expectations for All Students**—National researcher and education consultant Larry Bell will speak on "The Power of a Teacher Through High Expectations."

The former teacher will:

- highlight research-based instructional practices that both challenge and support the achievement of all students in a climate of high academic expectations.
- connect his research with the Bloomington Strategic Plan's expectations for student success.
- motivate teachers to reflect on their own role in increasing student achievement.

In August, Bell also will present a back-to-school seminar and teacher work session on "Closing the Achievement Gap," which will be a major focus of the 2004-05 school year.

Emergency school information online or via media

Parents may sign up to have emergency school announcements emailed to their home computer when bad weather changes school schedules. Just go to http://www.bloomington.k12.mn.us/News/out_sub.htm to register.

Announcements of school cancellations, early dismissals, late starts or other emergency information also are carried by these media:

- Radio — WCCO 830AM
- Television — WCCO Ch.4, KARE Ch. 11, KSTP Ch. 5, KSTC Ch 45; Fox 9 News, BEC-TV Ch. 15, Ch. 98
- Bloomington Public Schools INFOline—952-681-6407

Pro athlete trained for second career in teaching

Master's degree, coaching, volunteering built teaching skills



Elementary Mentor Tracy Vermilyea suggests a method Washburn Science Specialist Don Gramenz can use to help a student improve classroom behavior. As mentor, Vermilyea observes new elementary teachers, suggests instructional options and serves as a sounding board for problems. She is one of five Bloomington teachers who are Certified by the National Board of Teaching. Assisting teachers who undergo rigorous National Board certification is a feature of Bloomington's Staff Development Program.

Now that he's blocked his final ball as a professional soccer player, former Minnesota Thunder defenseman Don Gramenz is scoring goals in his second career. Gramenz teaches Science to K-5 students at Washburn Elementary School. "I always knew there's an end to a career in professional sports," said Gramenz, 32, "so I prepared for a second career in teaching while I was a player."

After a busy day of constructing simple machines with 5th graders and exploring weather and climate with 4th graders, Gramenz reflects that there are many connections between athletics and education.

"Both of them take a lot of work and creativity," he said, and added with a grin, "You need a lot of stamina, too."

The new teacher is as conscious of his responsibilities as a role model in the classroom with students as he was on the soccer field.

"Don was the epitome of a positive role model," and served as the Thunder's captain for five years, according to Thunder General Manager Jim Froslid.

"He is exceptionally good with kids," said Froslid. "He has the ability to inspire and challenge children to become better people in every way."

While a soccer player, Gramenz volunteered as a tutor and as a coach. He also worked as a substitute teacher in St. Paul for three years while earning a master's degree in education at the University of St. Thomas.

Experience with coaching and being coached helps him benefit from Mentor Tracy Vermilyea's help as he builds his classroom skills. All new Bloomington teachers work with a mentor during their first two years in the classroom.

"She really helps me with positive feedback and great ideas for different approaches" to delivering a lesson, said Gramenz.

Vermilyea isn't surprised that Gramenz is succeeding in the classroom. She describes him as "a teacher who continually tries to make real world connections for his students so that they see purpose in their learning."

The international travel Gramenz experienced as a soccer player provided many cross-cultural experiences that help him work effectively with students today, he said.

Nearly 30 percent of Washburn's 500-plus students come from diverse backgrounds. Gramenz currently serves on the District Diversity Advisory Committee.

Teacher's classroom dream comes true in middle school

Career change means challenges, rewards of teamwork and lifelong learning



Science Teacher Rena Hall quietly but firmly anchors her classroom universe at Valley View Middle School as her students study Space and Flight in small teams. Hall created and assigned cross-word puzzles that build her students' vocabulary so they can understand and discuss aeronautical concepts. "With two robots crawling around on Mars right now, it's a great teachable moment," said Hall, "because students are following the rovers' progress on the news."

As the teams work, students offer suggestions, challenge ideas and consult their notes and textbooks. Hall moves quietly among them, pointing to a problem here, asking a question there and drawing a silent student into the group. If voices rise, she blows a long "toot" on a big wooden whistle.

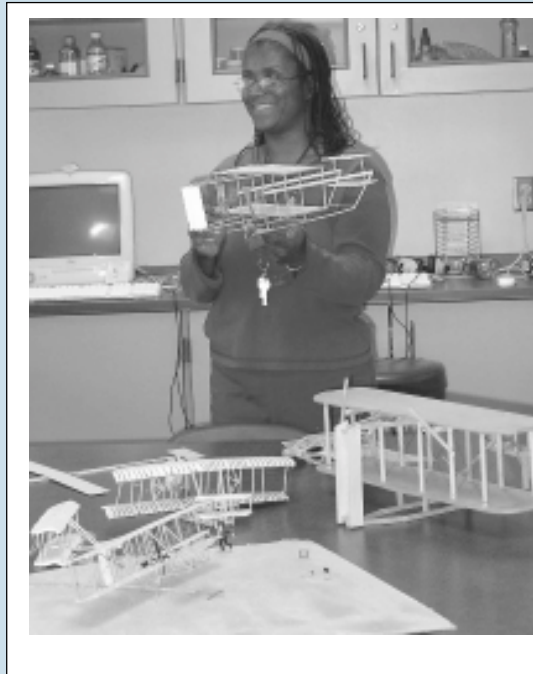
Classroom management—this daily, continuous process of keeping students at work in a learning environment—gets the least attention in teacher training programs, Hall observed with a chuckle. Building relationships with kids so they work toward expecta-

tions requires humor and mutual agreement, she noted, so her class has agreed that a "toot" will be their reminder to get back to working quietly.

As an African-American woman, Hall knows that she is a first-time experience for many of her students. "It's good for all kids to see themselves represented, to see someone who looks like them working in a position of authority and respect in their schools," she said. At the same time, all kids learn to connect, respect each other and work together.

Hall deeply enjoys each day as an adventure in learning for her middle school students and herself. Previously, Hall, 46, used her bachelor's degree to teach Chemistry and Spanish part-time at Bloomington Christian School while working full-time in Northwest Airlines' international freight department.

While NWA was a great employer, Hall said, the time came to follow her dream into her own classroom. She earned her master's in education and a teaching license through Bloomington's Teacher of Color program. The state-funded



Valley View Middle School Science Teacher Rena Hall evaluated the "Space and Flight" projects some of her 6th grade students constructed for extra credit. Students seeking the challenge of extra credit meet with their teacher over lunch three times during the term for feedback on their work.

program helped Bloomington build a teacher corps that reflects the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of Bloomington's families and students. After earning a master's degree in education and student teaching, candidates could compete for a job through the District's rigorous hiring process.

Now in her third year at Valley View—following experience at Oak Grove Intermediate and Middle Schools—Hall believes

that "the best thing about teaching is getting students to think. Those 'Aha!' moments (when a student suddenly understands the lesson) are so powerful!"

But creating those golden moments for energetic and easily distracted middle school students is demanding as a teacher analyzes and plans the best method to help each student understand and apply a new concept, skill or idea.

Teaching with a team helps generate that instructional creativity, Hall believes. "A team provides support, interaction and communication about the needs of our group of students," said Hall. "We all know these students well and we set consistent high standards for academic work and student behavior" that help students focus on learning instead of figuring out what each teacher expects. Team meetings with parents build home-school partnerships that support student success.

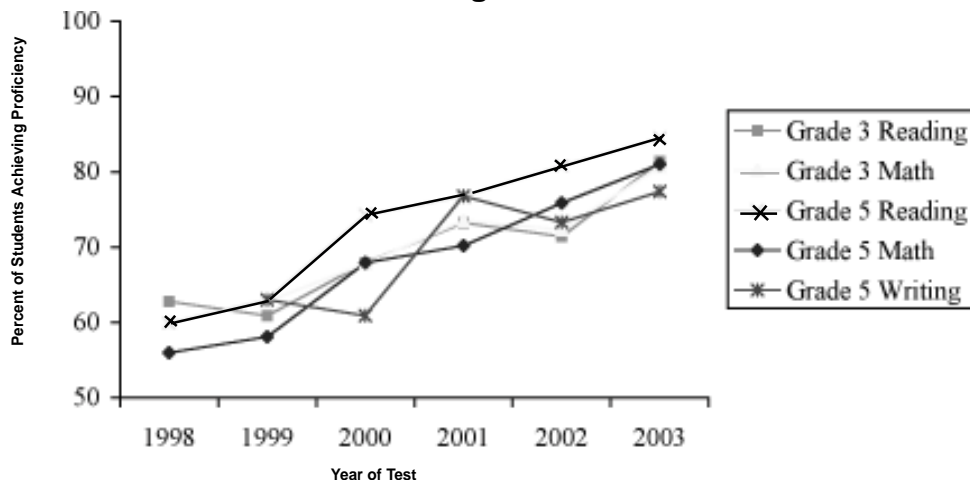
"It's also good for kids to see teachers working as a team," Hall observed. "The teamwork that teachers display helps students understand how adults work together."

"Teachers are lifelong learners," concluded Hall. "I really enjoy being part of an environment where everyone keeps learning and growing both personally and professionally." Hall serves on the Staff Development Committee that shapes the District's professional training activities.

Superintendent's Message, continued

Bloomington's public schools compete academically even with low state, local revenue

**Bloomington MCA Scores 1998 - 2003
5-Year Trends for Students Achieving Proficiency
in Reading and Mathematics**



The Legislature will hold hearings and likely vote on the proposed standards in this session. We will continue to communicate with our legislators so that they can make the best decisions possible on this challenging subject.

No Child Left Behind

In the previous **School Pages**, I highlighted the Federal No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB continues

to be implemented nationally, statewide and in our own schools.

Bloomington students in 3rd, 5th and 10th grades are taking the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) this winter and spring. These state tests measure a student's standing in Reading, Math and Writing among peers, state and nation on one day. Scores determine whether a school has made Adequate Yearly Progress in its

students' academic development. If a school receiving Federal Title I funding fails to make AYP, the school will be subject to sanctions by the state.

The Legislature set standards in Reading, Mathematics and Writing and designated the MCAs to measure how well a school or district is teaching the standards. MCAs do not measure academic growth of

individual students or one group of students over time. At best, MCAs compare last year's students to this year's students in a given grade. If students or small subgroups of students score poorly, the entire school is tagged as failing to make AYP.

The problem is that a school's status is not based on scores of its current students but upon scores of past students. In short, the MCAs give us a "dipstick" measure instead of a "line graph" of year-to-year student progress.

Fixing NCLB—Many efforts are underway to correct problems in NCLB, which continues in current form unless Congress acts.

Several states are challenging the Federal NCLB law based not on partisanship but on financial costs to the states. Virginia's Republican Legislature recently voted 98-1 to exempt itself from NCLB due to the high state cost of implementing the federal law. You likely will hear more about the NCLB issue during the upcoming presidential election campaign.

How does Bloomington compare?

Academically, Bloomington students out-perform students nationally and statewide on nearly all achievement measures. For detailed information, go to www.bloomington.k12.mn.us and click on the **Test Results** link.

Financially, Bloomington Public Schools ranks:

- 167th out of 340 Minnesota school districts in state and local revenue per student.
- 305th out of 340 school districts in state revenue.

You can see that local referendum support is increasingly important since the state took over most responsibility for school funding and as a result faces a substantial deficit. This is why we especially appreciate the support of the good citizens of Bloomington for your public schools.

Jay S. Pres



Lake Conference honors Joe Dolan with Achievement Award for Distinguished Service

Bloomington's Athletics Director Joe Dolan will receive the Lake Conference 2004 Achievement Award for Distinguished Service.

Nominators cited Dolan as a leader in:

- athletic programs for students with disabilities,
- middle school athletics
- developing the high school activity centers and
- gender equity in athletics.

Dolan twice chaired the Lake Conference Athletics Directors group and served two terms on its executive committee. Dolan also was instrumental in restructuring the Lake Conference after the conference split in 1993.



Athletics Director
Joe Dolan

Hired as a Kennedy Social Studies teacher in 1968, Dolan coached baseball, football and boys' and girls' basketball and golf before being appointed Athletics Director in 1993.

Early Childhood Family Center renovations begin: all 15 K-12 schools are finished

Renovations at Pond and Southwood Early Childhood Family Centers are bringing workers to those sites. "Excuse our mess" signs at Kennedy's entrance are gone and the construction trailer has rolled away after parking for three years near the Activity Center.

Construction and renovation projects at Bloomington's 15 K-12 schools accomplished these goals to support academic programs:

- added and/or updated classrooms, science labs
- upgraded instructional technology
- improved spaces for arts education
- improved safety by relocating offices and entrances
- healthy natural light to improve learning
- meeting spaces for parent and community use
- better air quality, and more efficient air conditioning and heating,
- improved handicapped accessibility and
- added activity centers at Jefferson and Kennedy for student and community use.

The project will be completed under budget and just about on time this summer. Renovations were funded by overwhelming approval passage on May 25, 1999, of what was then the largest capital bond election in the history of Minnesota schools.

Bloomington Public Schools Mission

In partnership with our world-class, diverse community, the Bloomington Public School System assures that each of our learners will develop the knowledge, skills, and ethics necessary to achieve educational excellence and thrive in a rapidly changing world by providing dynamic learning experiences in a supportive environment and by integrating Bloomington's unique local and global assets.

2004 Bloomington Board of Education

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 Mark Hibbs, Clerk Chuck Walter, Director
 Superintendent Dr. Gary Prest, Ex-officio

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School Pages is printed and delivered by mail to 38,000 Bloomington households at a cost of 12-cents each or about \$5,600 to help keep Bloomington residents informed about their public schools.

Results of a recent School District survey show that **School Pages** is a valuable source of school information for 62% of Bloomington residents; 34% say it is a major source of information.

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Two new Directors, one incumbent take School Board Oath of Office

Attorney Kingsley Holman (right) administered the Oath of Office to School Board Directors elected by Bloomington voters in November. Swearing to uphold the Constitution and policies of the Bloomington School District are, from left, first-term director Chuck Walter; Jim Sorum, fifth term; and Maureen Bartolotta, first term. Continuing Directors are Christine Scanlon, Arlene Bush, Mark Hibbs and Tim Culver.

The School Board sets policies for the operation of the School District and hires the Superintendent to administer its policies and programs and assures accountability to the community.



Minnesota Public Schools rank #1 nationally; contribute to State's quality of life

Minnesota public schools are making great strides nationally and statewide, according to numerous assessments and rankings of excellence. Additional awards and high rankings for Minnesota's fine quality of life are based in part on our premier system of public education:

Minnesota Ranks No. 1 on National Assessment of Education Progress

- **No. 1 — Overall Academic Achievement**
- No. 1—Gr. 4 and Gr. 8 Math in 2003
- No. 2— Gr. 8 Science in 2000
- No. 2 Tie—Gr. 8 Reading in 2003
- No. 3—Gr. 4 Reading in 2003
- No. 6—Gr. 4 Science in 2000
- No. 4 Tie—Gr. 4 Writing in 2002

Minnesota No. 1 Rankings Education-Related Social Quality Factors

- No. 1—Well-being of kids—*Kids Count, 2002*
- No. 1—Children's Health—*United Health Foundation State Health Rankings, 2001.*
- No. 1—Public schools are doing an Excellent or Good job preparing children for the future, *StarTribune Minnesota Poll, 2003.*
- No. 1—State of Caring Index of 32 leading social and economic indicators, *United Way 2001*
- No. 1—Professional qualifications of public school teachers, *Education Week.*

Ready for Kindergarten means ready to learn

When parents wonder if their five-year-old will be ready for Kindergarten in September, they usually think about numbers, letters and colors.

Knowing these things could mean a child is ready. But even more importantly, "ready for Kindergarten" means ready to learn.

To help you decide if your child is ready, here are ten basic behaviors that can help you decide:

Does your child:

- Understand and practice the idea of sharing and taking turns?
- Follow directions and ask for help when she needs it?
- Work independently for small amounts of time?
- Resist distractions?
- Listen and respond when others speak to him?
- Dress and undress with just a little help?
- Successfully change from one activity to another?
- Make choices?

- Handle small frustrations?
- Clearly express her ideas to others?

A confident child already has a good start. Encourage these behaviors over the next few months, remembering that every child is different and will learn some things more quickly than others. How much a child already has learned is not nearly as important as how she learns.

The Bloomington Richfield Family Center also offers a Parent Information Packet on Kindergarten Readiness— among 20 topics about raising children.

Request the "Kindergarten Readiness" packet in writing: Bloomington-Richfield Family Center, 9600-3rd Ave. S., Bloomington, 55420. Include a check for \$5 for each packet, payable to ISD #271. Allow two weeks for delivery. Questions, call 952-681-6200.



Super Sign-Up Saturday is April 17 at Civic Plaza

Super Saturday Sign-Up for Summer Spectrum classes moves to a new location on Saturday, April 17, 9 - 11 a.m.

Families can register at one time and place for a wide variety of summer activities at Bloomington Civic Plaza, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Rd.

Summer Spectrum, an eight-week collaboration of Bloomington Parks and Recreation, Bloomington Public Schools Community Education and the Bloomington Art Center, combines summer activities with transportation and childcare.

Summer Spectrum catalogs will be delivered in late March. For details, go to www.ci.bloomington.mn.us, keyword "spectrum."