

# School Pages

Summer 2023-24



*A Message from Superintendent Eric Melby*

## Turning the Page: Farewells and Reflections

Spring is an exciting time in school districts. There are so many wonderful events and celebrations happening in our schools, and I love being part of these memorable moments.

Our Jefferson and Kennedy high school seniors will say goodbye, embarking on new journeys that await them beyond the familiar classrooms, stages and playfields they've flourished in for the past four years. I find myself reflecting on their growth, achievements, and memories they've created during their time with us.

This moment is also bittersweet. While we feel a sense of pride in their accomplishments and anticipation for bright futures, we also recognize the deep connections, friendships, and experiences they leave behind. Each has contributed in their own unique way to the vibrant tapestry of our school community.

Of course, we owe a tremendous gratitude to our families, teachers, counselors, and all the school staff who have supported and nurtured our graduating seniors throughout their educational journey. Their guidance, encouragement, and belief in their potential are the foundation upon which they have built their successes.

To our graduating seniors, remember you carry the knowledge, skills, and values instilled in you during your time in Bloomington Public Schools. Embrace the challenges that lie ahead with confidence, curiosity, and resilience. Continue to learn, grow, and make a positive impact on the world around you. And, when you get the chance, thank your families and teachers for getting you to this milestone moment.

**Embrace the challenges ahead with confidence, curiosity, and resilience.**  
- speaking to graduating seniors

Turning my thoughts to the rest of our students and staff, know that summer break is a few short weeks away. For many of our students and staff it will be a time for rest, fun, travel and new adventures. In July, we'll welcome back students attending summer school as an opportunity for continued academic growth, and a chance to explore, discover, and create lasting memories.

Wishing you all a safe, relaxing, and rejuvenating summer break. May it be filled with laughter, love, and cherished moments with family and friends.

Thank you for another unforgettable year. Here's to a bright and promising future ahead, filled with endless possibilities and opportunities for growth.

## A Lifetime of Dedication

Each year, in the final issue of School Pages we honor our longest serving retiring employees. Individual tributes are reserved for those with the most years of service, but we extend our gratitude to all retirees. Each of them will leave an indelible mark on our school district.

This year, a somber shadow falls on Bloomington Public Schools as we bid farewell to the longest-serving employee who stood as a steadfast pillar for five of the nine superintendents to lead the district.

Deb Bunkholt, executive assistant to the superintendent and secretary for the Board of Education, was set to retire in June culminating 53 years of service. She passed away in late April.

Deb grew up in Bloomington, having attended Southwood Elementary School, Penn Junior High, the Bloomington Annex (when it was all 10th grade students), and graduated from Lincoln High School. Upon graduation, Deb began working in the district's Personnel Office, then the Office of Assistant Superintendent before becoming the Executive Assistant to the Superintendent in 1987.

The passion of her work was infectious, inspiring all of us to strive for excellence and to never settle for anything less than the best. Her loss is deeply felt across the district and community, as Deb was not just a colleague but a cherished member of our Bloomington Public Schools family.





## MENTAL AND CHEMICAL HEALTH

# Prioritizing Student Well-being

Nearly three years into the district's comprehensive mental health support plan, staff training and practices are focused on the overall well-being of students, including providing vital mental and chemical health services.

This school year, the chemical health program staff working with PhaseZero Recovery Services provided more than 150 individual student sessions, up from 63 sessions during the previous school year.

"These numbers demonstrate our commitment to meeting the growing needs of our student body," said Jennifer McIntyre, executive director of student services.

The district's tailored program offers a comprehensive range of services:

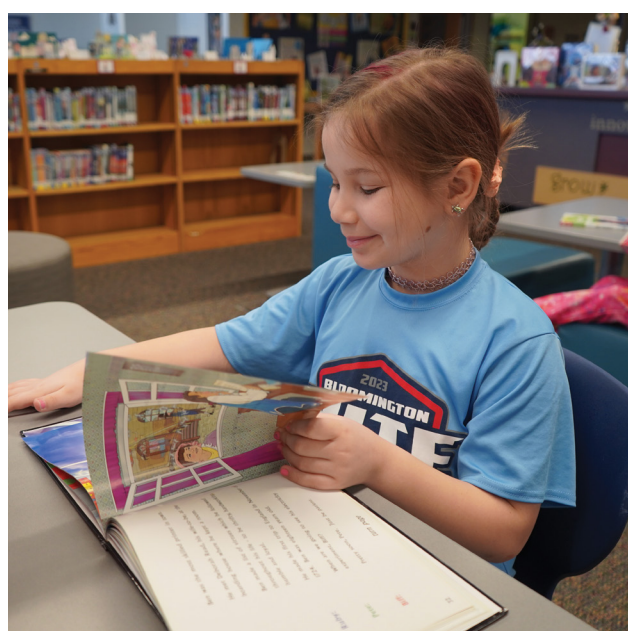
- Confidential one-on-one sessions to address chemical health concerns.
- Support for students struggling with substance use/misuse, along with the involvement of families in the recovery process.
- Case consultation to staff and caregivers navigating student needs.
- Interactive workshops and programs for students and staff to promote chemical health awareness, coping skills, and healthy decision-making.

McIntyre said these efforts resulted in successful placements for students in inpatient treatment programs for substance use/misuse.

"Our collaborative approach connects students with the resources they need to thrive," she added.

Students struggling with mental or chemical health concerns are strongly encouraged to reach out to a trusted adult, or any member of their school's support team of school counselors, social workers, psychologists or nurses.

"Together, we can create a safe and supportive learning environment where all students can reach their full potential," said McIntyre.



# Leadership Updates

## JEFFERSON PRINCIPAL SEARCH



**Dr. Jaysen Anderson** will become the new principal of Eden Prairie High School, effective July 1, 2024. BPS extends a heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Dr. Anderson for his dedicated service and contributions to the Jefferson community the past eight years.

The district is expected to complete the interview process and name a new JHS principal by early June. As we do with all new principal hires, staff and families will be involved in the selection process.

## NEW COMMUNITY EDUCATION DIRECTOR



**Darrell Young** is the new Director of Community Education, effective July 1, 2024.

Mr. Young is currently the youth enrichment program manager for St. Louis Park Schools, where he has grown youth enrichment and after-school programs while securing funding for student scholarships. He is an adjunct professor at the University of Minnesota where he teaches a course on effective leadership.

Other leadership changes for the 2024-25 school year include:

- **Anthony Sicoli** is officially principal of Valley View Middle School after serving as interim principal since January 2024.
- **John Polhill**, assistant principal of Oak Grove Middle School. Polhill served as an interim A.P. this school year.
- **Kristin Krenz**, assistant principal of Olson Middle School following the retirement of Brenda Becker. Krenz is leaving her A.P. position at Kennedy High School.
- **Latiesha Bogar**, dean of students for Choice Academy. Bogar served as an assistant principal at Valley View Middle School.
- **Megan Willrett**, administrator on special assignment overseeing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Willrett was principal and assistant principal at Valley View Middle this year.

## Graduation Rates Align with Strategic Vision

The impact of disrupted learning during the pandemic continues to be reflected in graduation rates throughout Minnesota. Graduation rates for 2023 are significant because they mark the graduation of students who began high school during the first year of the pandemic.

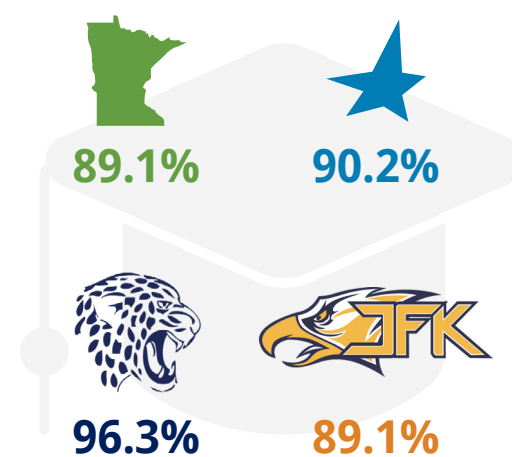
BPS's four-year graduation rate in 2023 dropped slightly to 80.3 percent from 80.9 percent the year before. The statewide four-year rate also slightly declined 0.3 points to 83.3 percent.

Bloomington tracks the longer seven-year rate as a measure of the impact of the district's vision and strategy to ensure students graduate career and college ready. The district's seven-year graduation rate was 90.2 percent and continues to exceed the state average of 89.1 percent.

Despite the additional challenge of including students who began their senior year during the pandemic's first year, the seven-year graduation rate for Jefferson and Kennedy high schools remains strong at 96.3 percent and 89.1 percent respectively. The seven-year rates for Asian and Black/African American students are 96.3 percent and 88.5 percent respectively, ranking as the second highest since 2015. Read more at [bit.ly/bps-grad-rates-2023](https://bit.ly/bps-grad-rates-2023).



## 7-YEAR GRADUATION RATE



## Calendar Changes for READ Act

Elementary teachers will participate in professional development related to the new Minnesota READ Act next school year. The READ Act aims to ensure every child reads at or above grade level by the end of each school year.

To accommodate the time needed for this training, expect changes to the 2024-25 academic calendar resulting in up to six additional PD/no school days at the elementary level. The dates are still being finalized by administration and the school board, but will likely be added onto the front- or back-end of pre-existing breaks. There is likely to be no calendar changes for secondary students. See the most up-to-date calendar online at [bit.ly/bps-calendar](https://bit.ly/bps-calendar).



# A Fond Farewell

## Thank you for 810 years of service

A Celebration of Service will honor 33 employees with a combined 810 years of teaching and supporting students. The annual reception recognizes employees with 15 or more years of employment at the time of their retirement or departure. Congratulations to our longest serving employees on their hard work and dedication to Bloomington Public Schools. We wish them the best in their future.



**Debbie Belfry**, 41 years  
Career Development Coordinator

Belfry began her career as a teacher in early childhood before it became Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE). She also taught family and consumer sciences (FACS) and work-based learning at Jefferson High School. For the past 25 years, Belfry has worked as the Career and Technical Education Director and coordinator for school-business partnerships and Volunteer Connection.

She has served on numerous curriculum and advocacy committees at the district, state and national levels.

"I've been fortunate to work with quality teachers and dedicated staff in multiple departments who are committed to student success. Our community partners also support our students and staff by contributing their time and resources to create outstanding learning environments."



**Jennifer Sauke**, 35 years  
Intervention Specialist

Sauke was the first ever intern in the Bloomington Mentorship program at Poplar Bridge Elementary before going on to teach grades 1-5 and reading intervention at Washburn Elementary.

"I feel so honored to have been able to spend my entire career teaching in Bloomington. It was a privilege to work with so many talented teachers and make a difference in many students' lives."



**Brenda Becker**, 34 years  
Assistant Principal, Olson Middle School

Becker taught physical education and health, and coached before becoming a dean of students, curriculum coordinator, and finally assistant principal at Olson Middle. As a longtime educator, she helped implement professional learning communities, multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS), and positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) district-wide.

"I have considered BPS and Olson my home. I will sincerely miss the families, hardworking staff and students, especially the ones who school me up on what tennis shoes are in style. It has been an amazing journey."



**Chris Cegla**, 36 years  
Program Management Support Paraprofessional

Cegla spent her career as a paraprofessional helping students be their best at Valley View Elementary. She looks forward to continuing to serve Valley View students as a sub and volunteer during her retirement.

"Working at the best school with the best staff has been a pleasure each and every day. Working over eight years beyond the 'rule of 90' makes me feel like I won the lottery."

*We thank the following dedicated professionals for their years of service and wish them a happy retirement.*

**Deb Bunkholt**, 53 years  
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and School Board

**Debbie Belfry**, 41 years  
Career Development Coordinator

**Chris Cegla**, 36 years  
Program Management Support Paraprofessional

**Jennifer Sauke**, 35 years  
Intervention Specialist

**Brenda Becker**, 34 years  
Middle School Assistant Principal

**Mary Beiersdorf**, 34 years  
Security Attendant Paraprofessional

**Ellen Spika**, 33 years  
Science Teacher

**Anne Girton**, 30 years  
Art Teacher

**Anita Witta**, 27 years  
Program Management Support Paraprofessional

**Laurie Abrahamson**, 26 years  
2nd Grade Teacher

**Kathryn Haddad**, 26 years  
Language Arts Teacher

**Carol Low**, 26 years  
5th Grade Teacher

**Maria Brening**, 25 years  
Cook Manager Secondary

**Connie Theis**, 24 years  
High School Lead Secretary

**Marylynn Dvorak**, 23 years  
Data Management Clerk

**Terri Frankovich**, 23 years  
Cook Manager Elementary

**Anne Robertson**, 23 years  
ESL Teacher

**Jacqueline Conrad**, 22 years  
Administrative Clerk

**Ronny Doncavage**, 22 years  
Bus Driver

**Aaron Sullivan**, 22 years  
Social Studies Teacher

**Julie Hannibal**, 21 years  
Program Management Support Paraprofessional

**Robin Toboz**, 20 years  
Program Management Support Paraprofessional

**Colleen Dillaway**, 18 years  
Program Management Support Paraprofessional

**Dorothy Jones**, 18 years  
Health Teacher

**Margaret Soll**, 18 years  
Attendance Clerk

**Elizabeth Bagyan**, 17 years  
ESL Teacher

**Orestes Castro**, 17 years  
Bus Assistant

**Christine Reano**, 17 years  
Bloomington Transition Center Teacher

**Yvonne Farish**, 16 years  
MSMI Teacher

**Jennifer Hofman**, 16 years  
Program Management Support Paraprofessional

**Jill Swanson**, 16 years  
Literacy Coach

**Teresa Wolner**, 16 years  
Cook Manager Elementary

**Mary Jelleberg**, 15 years  
Confidential Executive Assistant

## Thank You Volunteers!

A big shout out of thanks to the more than 2,800 incredible volunteers who work with our students and staff. Your contributions have a lasting impact on students and help make our schools a better place. We look forward to seeing you again next school year. Learn about volunteering at [bit.ly/bps-volunteer](http://bit.ly/bps-volunteer).

  
**2,800**  
AND MORE  
VOLUNTEERS!

**2,166**  
SCHOOL & FAMILY  
VOLUNTEERS

**64**  
COLLEGE  
STUDENTS

**177**  
COMMUNITY  
VOLUNTEERS

**16**  
MN READING  
CORPS MEMBERS

**35**  
STUDY BUDDIES  
TUTORS

**367**  
OTHER SCHOOL  
VOLUNTEERS



# Points of Pride



Read full details at [bit.ly/BPS-News](https://bit.ly/BPS-News)

Valley View Elementary 5th grade teacher **Sarah Dallum** was one of 11 finalists for Education Minnesota's 2024 Minnesota Teacher of the Year. This is her fifth year of teaching in Bloomington. Colleagues say she pours her heart into her students, which inspires them to work hard and believe in themselves. BPS was honored to have eight teachers named as candidates this year. [bit.ly/bps-toy-finalist24](https://bit.ly/bps-toy-finalist24)



**Maren Myers** (Jefferson HS) and **Kelsey Cruz Rojas** (Kennedy HS) are this year's Athena Award winners, presented each year to outstanding female senior athletes from high schools across the metro area. [bit.ly/bps-athena-24](https://bit.ly/bps-athena-24)



Senior **Ryan Kardell** (Kennedy HS) carded a hole-in-one at the Bloomington Invite golf tournament at Dwan Golf Course. Kardell used a 9-iron on the Par 3, 134-yard 18th hole for the ace. [bit.ly/khs-hole-in-one](https://bit.ly/khs-hole-in-one)



**Angelica Mey** (Kennedy HS) won the bronze medal in humorous interpretation at the MSHSL Class AA State Speech tournament last month. [bit.ly/khs-speech](https://bit.ly/khs-speech)



Olson Middle School 7th graders **Steven Koutroupas**, **Gabe Desroches** and **Josiah Brecheisen** will be the first students to represent BPS in the National History Day competition, taking place at University of Maryland in June. They qualified with a first place finish in the state-level competition in Minneapolis. [bit.ly/olm-history-day](https://bit.ly/olm-history-day)



Assistant superintendent **Dr. Jenna Mitchler** received the Outstanding Central Office Leader Award from the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA). She was recognized for her willingness to take risks, possessing strong communication skills, being a leader for change, and having high expectations for herself and others. [bit.ly/bps-leadership-award](https://bit.ly/bps-leadership-award)



Kennedy High School career and college counselor **Timmy Nguyen** received the City of Bloomington's Pioneer Award. The award is part of the city's Pioneers and Changemakers series, which recognizes local Black leaders working to advance Civil Rights, remove barriers to equity and make a difference in their communities. [bit.ly/khs-pioneer](https://bit.ly/khs-pioneer)



Poplar Bridge fifth graders **Aria Wobbema**, **Fiona Madetzke**, **Ayla Rogers** and **Willa Bishop** won the district's Battle of the Books competition. Students from nine elementary schools were quizzed on story details from books they read throughout the year. [bit.ly/bps-battle-books-2024](https://bit.ly/bps-battle-books-2024)

**Superintendent Dr. Eric Melbye** won the 2024 Champion for Communications award from the Minnesota School Public Relations Association, which recognizes an educational leader for outstanding support for school public relations and communications. [bit.ly/bps-supt-minnspra](https://bit.ly/bps-supt-minnspra)

More than 30 Jefferson and Kennedy students and an Oak Grove Middle School student earned nearly 60 high honors in the 2024 Minnesota Scholastic Arts competition, the nation's longest-running and most prestigious art recognition program for creative teens. All of the student artwork can be viewed online at [bit.ly/bps-scholastic-art-24](https://bit.ly/bps-scholastic-art-24).



This year 131 Bloomington 10th-12th graders passed the state recognized Bilingual and Multilingual Seals test, which is an official recognition by the state of Minnesota for students who are proficient in more than one language. It can help students earn college credit and open doors to career opportunities.

**School Pages** is published by Bloomington Public Schools. It is printed and delivered by mail to 39,700 Bloomington households at a cost of 15 cents per copy to inform Bloomington residents about their public schools.

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Superintendent **Eric Melbye, Ed.D.**, Ex Officio

## In the Know

### Learning LinkUp

Save the date for Saturday, Aug. 17 for Learning LinkUp, a free resource fair hosted by Bloomington Public Schools in partnership with the City of Bloomington and community organizations. The event is meant to help connect families with resources and services to help students and families thrive. The event runs 12-4 p.m. at the Valley View playfields, 9000 Portland Ave. S.



### Food Drive Recap

The 14th District-wide Food Drive totaled over 8,600 pounds of non-perishable food and \$8,220 in monetary donations during its week-long run late last month. The collection totaled 38,200 pounds when the cash donations to pounds conversion is applied, and will provide 114,600 meals. All food and cash is donated to Volunteers Enlisted to Assist People (VEAP), serving low-income families and individuals in Bloomington, Edina, and Richfield.

Business and civic partners participating in the drive included Bloomington Acura Subaru, Bloomington Fire Department, Cafe Fusion, Dance Endeavors, Early Learning Advisory Council, Jerry's Do It Best Hardware, Martin Luther Care Center, My Credit Union, Northstar Tavern, Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, MSU School of Nursing (Pond Clinic), Perk Up Kitchen/West Side Perk, Planet Fitness, and St. Stephen Lutheran Church.

### Chip-In for Schools

Register now for the annual Chip-In for Schools Golf Classic. It's the Education Foundation of Bloomington's largest fundraising event. Tournament proceeds help students through the Children's Food for Thought program, student success stipends, classroom innovation grants and scholarships. The event is July 30 at The Wilds Golf Club in Prior Lake. Learn more and register to golf or volunteer at [bit.ly/efb-24-chip-in](https://bit.ly/efb-24-chip-in).

