A MESSAGE FROM SUPERINTENDENT LES FUJITAKE

SCHOOL BOARDS MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Freshmen attending Jefferson and Kennedy high schools became the first group to pilot the newly developed Personal Growth Plans (PGPs), a tool to support students in identifying and successfully navigating a pathway through graduation. Each student’s PGP will be housed in the Hub, the portal and data site for students, parents and staff. PGPs provide information in one place and help students plan for their futures while tracking progress in three areas:

- Academic indicators, such as grades, test scores and academic goals.
- Life and social skills, including attendance data and inventories.
- College and career planning (grades 6-12), such as career interest inventories, resume tools and course planning.

PGPs help students to take ownership of their education and create opportunities for teachers to connect with their students about long-term goals and plans. Since the PGP pilot rolled out in the fall, 94 percent of ninth grade students have reported interest in collecting information to help make long-term plans for life after high school.

“The students have found the PGP activities interesting and engaging,” said Susan Bianchi, Jefferson teacher and site coordinator for the PGP rollout. “As we move forward, we hope students will use this tool to take charge of their learning and create their future plans.”

To learn more about PGPs and view an informational video, visit bloomingtonschools.org/PGP.
Early college STEM program successful in second year

Bloomington Public Schools’ newest program for academically-gifted students is thriving in its second year. Dimensions Academy High School, the only program of its kind in the state, offers an early-college experience for high-ability high school freshmen and sophomores interested in pursuing a career in a STEM-related field.

In a unique partnership with Normandale Community College, students take college math and science classes at NCC and high school classes at Kennedy or Jefferson high school. DAHS is open to Bloomington students and open-enrolled students, with a capacity for 24 students in each of the two grades. “DA High School was created out of a real need,” said Erin Boltik, director of gifted programs and services. “Students were thriving in our elementary and middle school gifted programs but needed challenging options once they entered high school.” While both high schools offer many options for concurrent enrollment and Advanced Placement courses, some 9th and 10th grade students needed a greater challenge until they could access those options, which are not available until junior year.

The collaboration with Normandale is ideal because of its location and the college’s careful selection of instructors with experience working with high school students. “Normandale really embraced this idea,” says Boltik. “We appreciate their creativity and flexibility in helping us build a successful program.”

Lia Thomson, a Kennedy sophomore, came to Bloomington for the DA program in middle school. She dreams of being a biologist, and now enjoys the challenging work in DAHS. “I’m learning to manage my time,” she said, adding that the classes are harder than she has experienced before. “College classes demand more from you, and that’s a good thing.”

Thomson’s class load includes the DAHS math and science sequence for 10th grade: calculus I and II, intro to engineering and design and calculus-based physics. She also takes AP biology, AP government, AP world history and honors world literature. Like many students, she finds scheduling time for homework a challenge and spends much of her time outside of school tackling assignments.

With a demanding schedule, she acknowledges that some days are just really hard. What keeps her motivated? “I don’t want to quit,” she said. “By taking college classes in high school, I’m seeing first-hand that it’s not scary. I think I will be very prepared for college, finish faster and save money on tuition.”

The rigorous curriculum is especially important for high-ability students. “Academically gifted students tend to go through school without ever being challenged, which sends them to college without learning how to ask for help or how to study,” said Meredith Aby-Keirstead, DAHS Coordinator.

“This program helps gifted students learn important self advocacy skills.”

For Thomson, DAHS provides that challenge while still giving her the opportunity to experience high school with her friends and peers.

For more information on Bloomington’s Elements, Dimensions Academy High School programs, visit bloomingtonschools.org/DA or call 952-681-6494.

New pathways help Career and College Academy students train for in-demand jobs

High school students in Bloomington and surrounding communities now have expanded opportunities to learn and train for in-demand, well-paying careers, thanks to the new Bloomington Career and College Academy (BCCA).

BCCA, housed in the district’s Community Education Campus (formerly Lincoln High School), opened its doors in September and has a current enrollment of 265 students. The enrollment is expected to increase with two new career pathways to be added in the fall.

BCCA currently offers courses in eight career areas, including building and construction, cosmetology, criminal justice/law enforcement, EMT/EMR, information technology, nursing assistant/home health aide and relaxation massage therapy. The new career pathways—automotive technician and manufacturing technology—will be based at Hennepin Technical College (HTC), providing flexibility in blending career learning with required high school standards.

“Our new hub at Hennepin Tech gives students more time in the career classes, allowing them to progress more quickly through the program,” said Gary Kressin, director of BCCA. “We also anticipate that these programs will be more appealing to students outside of Bloomington, as students will spend their school day at HTC.”

BCCA will have a dedicated space at HTC and on-site staff to support students as they complete their high school requirements in a hybrid model. Bloomington Public Schools teachers will teach the hybrid courses.

“We appreciate the commitment by HTC and our industry and funding partners to help students prepare for careers that pay well and are in-demand locally, in Minnesota and the Midwest,” said Kressin. Bloomington students can register for BCCA classes during the registration process at their high school. Students living outside the district who wish to enroll in BCCA should contact Gary Kressin at 952-681-6133 or visit bloomingtonschools.org/bcca.
The district’s Next Technologies for Learning plan is now in its third year of implementation. It includes the distribution of Chromebooks to all middle and high school students, and teachers creating digital content and training in technology integration to help students learn. The combination of readily available devices, skilled teachers and quality content to support learning has produced exciting student experiences.

Olson Elementary School: iPads in second grade

Olson Elementary School teacher Nick Schmidt has been a leader in using iPads with students over the last few years. As the district prepares to incorporate iPads into grades K-2 this fall, Schmidt has developed a model of what works in the classroom. He helps students use iPads to practice math, explore interactive maps and create content through drawing and audio and video recording.

Normandale Hills Elementary School: Mastery-based learning

For the past four years, teachers Kelsey Nash and Holly Skadsem have used the flipped classroom model to transform their classrooms into mastery-based and individualized learning environments. Through a combination of repurposing homework time outside of school and using in-school math periods to provide individualized support, their students are moving through learning outcomes at their own pace. This has allowed some students to slow down and master math concepts at their own pace, while other students have moved into sixth and seventh grade math concepts.

Middle schools: Coding Club

Technology, data and computers are central to our daily lives, and students who understand programming basics are more adaptive to the changing needs of the workforce. Middle school coding clubs use creative problem solving and computer science to collaboratively compete in design challenges. With the support of teachers and mentors from The Nerdery, a Bloomington-based web development firm, students create projects that utilize coding programs and programming languages to interact with electronic controllers.

Under 21 at Metro South: Self-paced learning

The Metro South Under 21 diploma program provides an alternative to the traditional school setting in order to meet the needs of students. Social studies teacher Carianne Anderson often has students working on different parts of her courses, including world history, American history and civics. To meet this challenge, Anderson uses online courses she created in Moodle to allow her students to engage with the content they need to learn in order to work toward career and college readiness.

BUDGET CHALLENGES PERSIST

District preparing ’16-17 budget with additional reductions

Poplar Bridge is partnering with Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

As part of its mission as a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) school, Poplar Bridge Elementary School is partnering with the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to offer extended outdoor learning opportunities. Poplar Bridge students attended a field trip last month to learn about the various plants and animals that call the refuge home.
Washburn plans for outdoor classroom

Washburn Elementary School is partnering with the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and Students for Design Activism from the U of M Department of Landscape Architecture to design an outdoor classroom. Staff kicked off a multi-year fundraising campaign for the project with groundbreaking for the outdoor classroom planned for this fall.

Target program suspension impacts school donations

Since 2006, Bloomington schools have received $158,000 in donations from Target stores’ Take Charge of Education program. The program allows REDCard holders to send one percent of their total purchase to a school of their choosing.

While schools have benefitted from the additional resources to fund school-based programs, scholarships and field trips, the Minneapolis-based retailer announced in September it will end the program in May 2016 as the company shifts its corporate giving focus to health and wellness.

Registration for Early Learners Academy now open

Early Learners Academy (ELA), an all-day early education program for children ages 3-5, is now enrolling students for the 2016-17 school year.

Focused on preparing students for kindergarten, the program features a curriculum that aligns with Bloomington elementary curriculum and is based in three elementary schools: Poplar Bridge, Hillcrest and Westwood. For the 2016-17 school year, ELA will offer a five-day-per-week program at all three schools, as well as two- and three-day options at Westwood. The program is open from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. (including winter and spring breaks, and other non-school days).

For more information, visit www.earlylearnersacademy.org or contact Diane Simkins at dsimkins@isd271.org or 952-681-6125.

New School Board Officers

Maureen Bartolotta will once again chair the seven-member Bloomington School Board. Bartolotta—who has served on the school board for 12 years, including four years as chair—was elected by her fellow members at the board’s annual reorganization meeting. Bartolotta served as chair in 2015.

Other officers elected are Dawn Steigauf, vice chair; Tom Bennett, clerk; and Jim Sorum, treasurer.

Indian Mounds Elementary School hosted students and parents at a family breakfast earlier this year. Parents toured their students’ classrooms and met with teachers and school staff.