

Students stop by Washburn Elementary School to pick up grab and go meals.



A Message from Superintendent Les Fujitake

# We are all in this together



Superintendent Les Fujitake meets with members of the district's leadership team.

We begin each school year with hopes and dreams. Where ideas are born and achievements celebrated. We typically end our school year by reflecting on individual and collective accomplishments. Then, our world forever changed. We're ending our school year with new hopes and dreams, shaped by a pandemic that is impacting every facet of our personal, professional and school lives. Often the things we love the most are those that hurt the most when they are taken away. This was evident as we faced the daunting tasks of serving our students, families and staff in very different ways. Despite the COVID-19 madness that swirled around us, our team of leaders, teachers and support staff faced daily challenges and continued to adapt to an ever changing landscape. We want to honor our students, families and staff in some small way for their sacrifices, and their grace and understanding. This issue of School Pages is a special edition focused on the uplifting stories from this crisis. The persons and voices reflected in these stories represent our employees, families and partners. We are thankful for the collaboration of partners like the City of Bloomington, Bloomington Public Health, the Education Foundation of Bloomington, and many individual and corporate stakeholders who donated to help in our COVID-19 response efforts.

## Looking ahead

There is no doubt we all dream of a time when students can once again hug their new teachers and return to school this fall. According to our state and local health partners, the reality is that the new school year will be different. We are creating plans based on the unknown and unexpected. As hard as it may be to digest, these plans must consider in-person and online learning. There will likely be a hybrid system whereby students are in school in smaller numbers to maintain social distancing and learning through remote methods away from school. Epidemiology modeling suggests we consider that surges in the pandemic or other realities may require periodic closures of schools. Other issues we are addressing include transportation, school schedules, custodial and food services, professional development, technology, curriculum and instruction, and human resources. In all of our work preparing for and responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, we have and will continue to prioritize the health and well-being of our students, staff and families. Through these uncertain times I'm reminded of growing up in Hawaii, where I often sat on a beach watching the sunrise and sunset over the Pacific. However long the night, dawn will break.

## Teachers rise to new challenges

When schools across the state closed in March, many didn't anticipate the closure would extend to the end of the school year. This lengthy distance learning period has presented many unforeseen challenges, but we're so proud of our staff, students and families for their commitment to learning and teaching even during these difficult circumstances.

*"Distance learning has been one of the most difficult times I have ever experienced as a teacher. However, one upside of teaching from home I'm very proud of is I've learned to use puppets to engage my students and keep them connected. It has helped me stay creative and encouraged my students to find their inner puppeteer and start exploring how to entertain while at home."*

— Abby Olson, K-2 EL teacher, Oak Grove Elementary School

*"Distance learning definitely has its challenges, but I have enjoyed seeing many of my students thrive and do amazing work from home. I feel proud that they are understanding concepts that we have been working on all year and communicating them in their own creative ways."*

— Maren Magsam, 1st grade teacher, Indian Mounds Elementary School

*"Distance learning has taught me to be more patient with my students and show grace in an unprecedented time in education. As a parent in the district, I have been so impressed with the dedication and creativity of our Bloomington teachers."*

— Allison Lindman, social studies teacher, Oak Grove Middle School

*"I've been heartened by the tremendous support and communication I've received from more Kennedy parents than ever. The distance learning situation is forcing us to try to connect more, and the personal messages, from both students and parents, have been daily boosts."*

— Dan Richardson, English teacher, Kennedy High School

*"I've been really proud of our students' grit and ingenuity during distance learning. Even though it's been really tough not seeing our students on a daily basis, so many of them are working hard to engage with their classwork in a meaningful way. One of my students completed a rhetorical analysis assignment by creating a hopscotch with sidewalk chalk!"*

— Katie Juul, English teacher, Kennedy High School



# Families find challenges, rewards in distance learning



A former teacher, Kristi Lenz creates a daily distance learning schedule for her sons, Harry and Artie, eighth and sixth graders respectively at Olson Middle School, on colored post-it notes. She organizes their course work into columns, which includes time for brain breaks, naps, work outs, daydreaming and house chores.

The boys also have a dedicated space to work from, which education experts say helps children because the setup is more like school.

“It’s nice to have flexibility for those good days and bad days,” said the one-time elementary teacher who chose to stay home after the boys were born.

“We’re fortunate Kristi is home and a teacher. She has one-on-one time with the boys, so she knows where they need help, or when they could use a break,”

said Mike Lenz, the boys’ father and an executive with Allina Health/Aetna. Pre-pandemic, Mike split time working from home and his St. Louis Park office. Today, he’s managing a myriad of online meetings and supporting the boys in their classwork.

As for Harry, 14, and Artie, 12, they agree that while adjusting to the “new norm” is still a work in progress, there are more upsides than challenges to distance learning.

Harry enjoys sleeping in longer, nearly two hours more each day before getting up in time to log in to access assignments or connect with his teachers. “I like that I have more free time and flexibility because I can choose when to do my work and take breaks, but I don’t like not being able to talk [more frequently] with my teachers,” he said. Harry is also looking forward to moving on to high school this fall, though has mixed feelings. “I want to see my schedule and know how to get around school.”

Artie echoes his brother’s comments, but says he longs for school “so I can see my friends every day. I miss my friends.”

For some students and their families, distance learning has been difficult to navigate. Others find it may not be challenging enough, and some say it’s the right mix, according to Andy Kubas, executive director of learning and teaching, who is overseeing the district’s distance learning program.

Mike and Kristi believe distance learning provides parents with greater personal connections and a better understanding of what it takes for their children to succeed.

“It’s definitely challenging, but more rewarding,” said Kristi. “I get more quality time with the boys and see what they’re learning, their interest level in classes and studies.”

Thuy Ros, mom to a toddler, and Hayden, 10, and Sophia, 9, who attend Valley

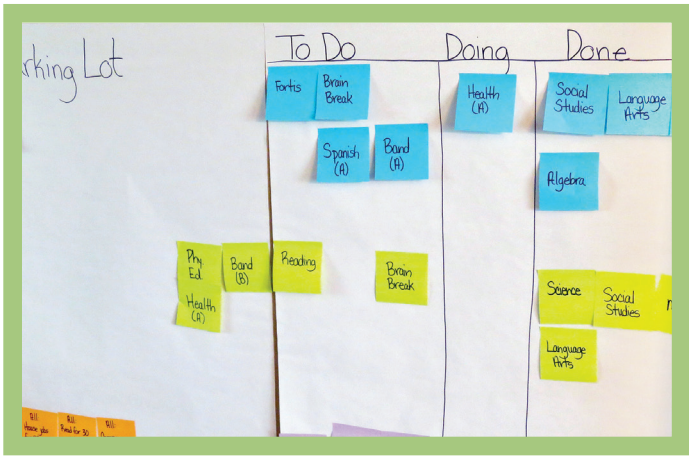
View Elementary School, focuses on the positives of the kids being home. “I enjoy spending more time with them, and being a part of their learning,” she said. Ros is “especially proud of their hard work, self motivation and discipline” in completing assignments.

As a very active family, Kristi said in a normal school year they would be going to museums, nature centers and the like to expand on what the boys get out of school. “We miss those experiential learning opportunities.”

Mike Lenz and Thuy Ros expressed concerns with the lack of interaction their children are experiencing with peers and friends. “This pandemic will have an impact on their personal social development,” Mike added.

For now, the Lenz and Ros families will focus on the end of the school year by helping the kids find balance between school and free time, and get outside for physical activity.

“Getting outdoors is an incentive to get their work done,” said Mike.



## Seniors bid farewell

**ALLY STARKS**, Kennedy



**Hope.** It seems like a cliché thrown around when no one really knows what to expect. “Man, I hope I did well on that quiz” when you know all too well that you didn’t study. “I hope the weather is nice”

when the other day there was a blizzard but the forecast said 60 so you really don’t know what to believe anymore. “I hope today is a good day” when it seems naive. Too good to be true.

In reality, hope is something much more tangible. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said “But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough can you see the stars.” I think we can all agree the world is in a dark place. But we are the stars. We are the hope this world needs, the hope that our families need, that our friends need. Some of us may be the first to graduate high school in our family. Some may be taking care of our siblings while balancing online school work. Some of us may be counting the days until we move into our dorms this fall. I know I am. That’s hope. You are hope. We are hope. In our education system. In family. In relationships. Hope in the future.

**JALISA SANG**, Kennedy



**To my fellow seniors,** when we imagined what our senior year would look like, we didn’t think of encountering something like this. We imagined that we’d hear our names called out for the last time on senior

night, go to all of the school/sporting events and celebrate prom. Most importantly, we’d hold onto each other for the “last” time before venturing into our paths after high school. I know this wasn’t the ending we all hoped for, but if anything, this can teach us something valuable. This can be a time for us to reflect back and not take things for granted, to value the time we have with others. We will become stronger from this.

When I look at our class, I see the next generation of leaders: future doctors, teachers, actors, entrepreneurs, engineers and so much more. Always follow your dreams no matter how big they are, because you never know where they will lead you.

**ZAK FARAH**, Jefferson



**Seniors!** I know that the end of our high school careers has come more abruptly than we expected, but don’t let this overshadow the great memories we all made together over the last four years.

Luckily, we live in a time where we are all interconnected via the internet and our friends are only as far as our phones.

I know that we did not get sufficient time to say goodbye to all of our classmates and JHS, but I urge you all to take advantage of your devices and stay in touch with your high school friends as we go our separate ways in the fall.

I wish you all success, health, happiness and a whole lotta clout.



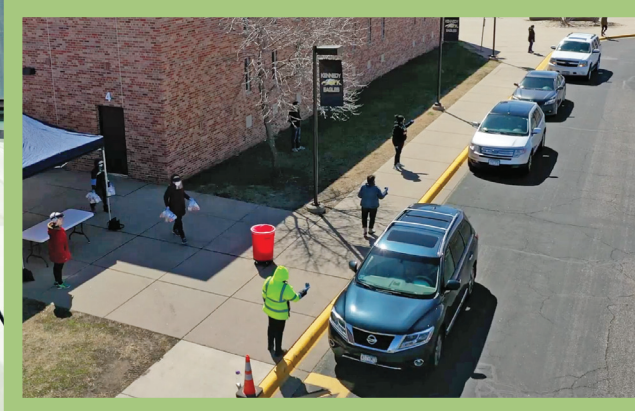
# CAFETERIA TO CURBSIDE: Launching grab and go meals



Paraprofessionals Kim Neuenfeldt (Poplar Bridge Elementary) and Kim Pawek (Jefferson High School) were key in smoothing out the initial meal distribution plan at Kennedy and Valley View. Their revised process ensured the efficient flow of hundreds of vehicles matched with the number of meals requested.

“It was a lot of trial and error,” said Pawek. “This was a first for all of us, so it was a huge learning experience.”

What started with families parking and leaving their vehicles to pick up meals quickly transformed into a drive-thru-style system where families could drive in and out quickly with their meals, with minimal contact and without leaving their vehicles.



We know our families rely on schools for nutritious breakfast and lunchtime meals. In response to school closures brought on by COVID-19, our staff have answered the call by providing meals at a time when families need them most.

Grab and go meals are served each school day at two large sites—Kennedy High and Valley View Middle schools—and two satellite sites, Washburn and Westwood elementary schools. Families receive a hot lunch and pre-bagged breakfast, fruit, vegetables, a healthy snack and milk. On Fridays, families receive additional bags containing shelf-stable food that includes breakfast, fruit and milk for the weekend.

More than 327,000 meals have been served since March 18, and district officials project another 106,000 meals will be served by the end of the school year.

“Nutrition plays an important role in the health of our students, whether they’re in school or not,” said

Rynetta Renford, food service production supervisor for the district. “Proper diet is essential and fosters growth in our students’ minds and bodies.”

Getting the grab and go meals program off the ground quickly came with a few challenges: Renford and a team of cook managers had to rework the production model to ensure staff and family safety.

“From wearing masks and standing in one location for extended periods, to wrapping and bagging products rather than serving and seeing students daily, our food service and district staff adapted quickly to meet the incredible demand,” said Renford.

The new program has required coordination by staff who don’t typically work in food service, including paraprofessionals, who help distribute food to families every day; bus drivers, who transport food to various sites and help with distribution; and custodians, who help move pallets of food, organize freezers and coolers and more.

The challenge of building a new system has also fostered bonds between district staff who don’t normally work together.

“We’ve had a chance to interact with other employees in the district that we might not have met before,” said Pawek. “So some new friendships have been made.”

Above all, Neuenfeldt and Pawek agree that serving families in whatever way possible is their favorite part of working for Bloomington Public Schools.

“Knowing that we’re meeting a need in our community makes this rewarding work,” said Neuenfeldt. “It’s amazing how quickly we all came together and developed a plan to serve our students.”

Pawek agreed: “My favorite part of this work has been seeing the students and families. Even if you don’t know them, they are always smiling and saying thank you. That’s the best feeling.”

## School nurses, leader meet virus head-on



Oak Grove Elementary School nurse Shelly Junjak works a rotation at Poplar Bridge Elementary School, our childcare site for children of essential workers.

For schools across the state, COVID-19 has meant adapting how to deliver education, how to interact with students and families, and often, job responsibilities.

The shift for Hannah Hatch has led to hours of researching and consulting with state and local health agencies on the novel coronavirus as the

situation has continued to develop and evolve. As supervisor of the district’s Health Services, Hatch was tapped to co-lead the district’s COVID-19 Response Team, along with Rick Kaufman, the executive director of community relations and emergency management.

Hatch provides timely information that district officials need to make informed decisions. She provides workplace health guidelines and coordinates personal protective equipment (PPE) for employees to ensure their safety in essential operations. Her team of school nurses help coordinate student care, plans for special education students, and consultations with families. The nurses also staff the district’s current childcare program for children of essential employees in the healthcare and emergency response fields.

“Our nurses have been amazing in adjusting to these new circumstances to care for our students, families and staff,” said Hatch. “Working in a health office during this time poses heightened risks, yet they are all willing to help out wherever the need.”

As the nurse at Oak Grove Elementary School, Shelly Junjak’s day-to-day job pre-pandemic was managing a busy health office: coordinating care, administering medicines, assessing and caring for sick students, and treating the occasional injuries.

Now? “The biggest challenge is not being able to see the kids’ smiling faces everyday,” said Junjak. “They are the reason I’m here.”





# IN THE KNOW

## Celebration of Service

The district held its annual Celebration of Service in a virtual format this year, honoring 58 employees with 10 or more years of employment at the time of their retirement or departure from the district. We congratulate and thank our longest serving employees for their dedication and wish them the best in their future endeavors.

[bloomingtonschools.org/farewell](https://bloomingtonschools.org/farewell)

## 2020 Golf Classic Cancelled

The Education Foundation of Bloomington (EFB) has cancelled its 2020 Chip-in for Schools Golf Classic, originally scheduled for late July. While Minnesota golf courses are currently open, tournaments are on hold. EFB is proud to offer a top-notch event for participants and sponsors and is looking forward to 2021.

[www.efbm.org](https://www.efbm.org)

## Community Donations

We extend a sincere thank you to our community and partners for their donations to help the district continue to meet the needs of our students and families during this time.

We are also accepting donations of cloth masks for our staff working in essential services. Visit [sewing.com/cloth-mask-diy](https://sewing.com/cloth-mask-diy) for instructions on sewing masks, and email us at [commrelations@isd271.org](mailto:commrelations@isd271.org) to arrange a time and location to drop off mask donations.

[bit.ly/BPS-donate](https://bit.ly/BPS-donate)



Office of Educational Equity staff members deliver meals to families who may be unable to access grab and go meals due to scheduling or transportation limitations.



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**Editor:** Rick J. Kaufman, APR  
Executive Director of Community Relations  
952.681.6403

**Writers:** Andrea George, Kate Martin  
**Photos:** Andrea George

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# POINTS OF PRIDE

■ The **Kennedy High School Science Olympiad team** finished 9th in the state tournament.



■ Kennedy High School senior **Ingrid Anderson** was named a regional Triple “A” (Academics, Arts and Athletics) Award winner.

■ BPS students, programs and volunteers are among this year’s Bloomington United for Youth Recognition Award winners:

- **Ally Starks**, Kennedy
- **Riley Mathiasen**, Kennedy
- **Shonte Brown**, Jefferson
- **Jefferson football team**
- **Brian Schulte**, volunteer, Jefferson Robotics Club
- **Jefferson clay target club**

■ **Katrina Van Ruyven** (Valley View Middle School) was one of 36 semifinalists for MN Teacher of the Year.

■ Normandale Hills Elementary School Principal **Dr. Andrew Vollmuth** is the recipient of the 2020 Minnesota Elementary School Principals’ Association (MESPA) Division Leadership Achievement Award for the West Suburban Division.

■ **BEC-TV** received several awards from the Upper Midwest Emmy Foundation:

- Football coverage led by **Joe Wickland** (Kennedy) won Best Live Sports Production
- Junior **Zach Vacura** was selected as an AV All-Star
- Kennedy graduate **Alex Redding** was selected for a scholarship to continue his education in broadcasting. Redding currently attends Hennepin Technical College for video production.

■ Bloomington seniors **Phoebe Sinner** and **Mae Yurecko** (Kennedy) and **Sam Wallace** (Jefferson) earned medals in the 2020 National Scholastic Art Competition. Sinner’s colored pencil drawing “Mumble” was awarded a gold medal and will be included in a national exhibit of gold medal-winning works in New York City. Wallace’s ceramic form “Cathedral Vase” and Yurecko’s

marker drawing “New Year” were awarded silver medals.

■ **Jefferson High School** is ranked No. 15 of all high schools in the state of Minnesota according to recent rankings by U.S. News & World Report.

■ **Joy Adanene** (Kennedy) qualified to compete in oral interpretation at the National Speech and Debate Association’s National Tournament.

■ **Kennedy High School** received a bronze Star of Innovation Award for its Career Pathway Advisory Model.

■ Three Bloomington seniors have earned Minnesota Aspirations in Computing Awards: **Jeanne Chan** (Kennedy) was selected as a state winner, and **Jillayne Clarke** and **Renee Liu** (Jefferson) received honorable mention.



■ Jefferson High School juniors **Benjamin Carpenter**, **Joseph Carpenter** and **Amy Wang** earned perfect scores of 36 on the ACT. On average, less than one-tenth of one percent of students taking the ACT earn a top score of 36.

■ The following Oak Grove and Olson middle school students earned awards in this year’s State History Day competition:

- **Emily Strahan**, first place national qualifier, individual website
- **Esther George**, topical prize winner, individual documentary
- **Jessie Pham**, honorable mention, individual paper
- **Evelyn Stockinger**, honorable mention, individual paper
- **Zara Bertram**, honorable mention, individual paper
- **Ben Wadzinski** and **Jenny Wen**, honorable mention, group website
- **Audrey Jensen** and **Emily Kwon**, honorable mention, group website

■ Jefferson senior **Colden Longley** and sophomore **Robbie Holzman** placed first and second respectively in the American Mathematical Association of Two Year Colleges (AMATYC) Student Mathematics League competition at Normandale Community College.