

Photo by Scott Knight

A Message from Superintendent Les Fujitake

The hardest decisions



Since the beginning of our COVID-19-related closures, we’ve all experienced the challenges of decision-making, even for the simplest choices.

Decision-making is often complicated, never more so than during this pandemic. I suspect we’ll continue to experience the “you got it right” and “I respect your decision, but it was wrong” responses.

The pandemic has upset many of the daily routines that keep us grounded and comfortable. We all long for a return to normalcy and daily routines, like putting our children on the bus to go to school, watching them run up and down the field, gathering with other parents for a school PTA meeting or joining little ones for lunch. These routines lead to a sense of calm and certainty.

Certainty makes it easier to make decisions. But the pandemic has created more uncertainty than certainty, especially for stakeholders with specific interests in the outcome or impact our decisions have on their children, families or themselves. People have an emotional investment in decisions. It is human nature to react to our emotions before we consider the facts, and then reconcile that reaction later.

All this to say that as we make decisions affecting thousands of students, staff and community members, we should expect conflict and

disagreement. We hear you. And, we acknowledge that your responses for or against these decisions offer us a view of the tension and anxieties they create for you and your family. We will continue to listen and address your concerns.

We are grounded in the significant responsibility we have to maintain the integrity of our educational mission. Our pandemic-related decisions must rely on the most informed public health data, and work toward ensuring the safety and well-being of our students, staff and community.

We are incredibly thankful for our partnership with Bloomington Public Health and the leadership its staff provides. With their guidance and increasing scientific knowledge of COVID-19, we are more assured that our pandemic-related decisions are made with the best data and science available.

We will continue to keep students, staff and community as our top priority, while adhering to state and local public health guidance.

We must continue to come together for the good of all students and families, and our community. It is a collective effort that will minimize the spread of COVID-19, so schools can reopen and our students can return to the activities and sports they love.

Best wishes to all for a safe and healthy winter break.

Board welcomes new student reps

Juma Waganda (Jefferson) and Tristan Phay (Kennedy) are the newest student school board representatives following their virtual swearing in earlier this year.

Waganda and Phay will attend monthly school board meetings to provide their input on discussion items, and report on school events and activities. The non-voting members of the School Board also co-lead meetings of the high school representatives of the Board Student Advisory Council.



Juma Waganda, a senior at Jefferson High School, is co-president of the student council and president of Pathfinders and National Honor Society. She plays tennis and

is the dance captain of the Connection varsity show choir. She also runs her own photography business.

“My mission is to promote unity,” said Waganda upon her swearing in. “Even though we are going through struggles, I’m excited to stand in solidarity with everyone and get through it together.”



Tristan Phay, a senior at Kennedy High School, is vice president of student government and participates in National Honor Society, Green Club, Minds

Matter, Youth for Youth and track and field.

“What I love about being a part of these groups is the unity and feeling of community, and how everyone is sharing a common goal to work together,” said Phay.



2020-21 School Year at a Glance

Early learning and elementary students returned to distance learning due to COVID-19 case counts in Bloomington and across Hennepin County. Middle and high school students have remained in distance learning since the beginning of the year, with various opportunities for in-person activities and support. Although this year has been challenging, we want our families to know that we are here to support you. Here's a snapshot of the supports and services we're providing to families. This data reflects our efforts since the start of the 2020-21 school year.

Learning Model and Instruction Planning

>750 hours of collaborative planning for the school year
1,822 hours of professional development sessions focused on digital/distance learning attended by BPS staff



Health Services

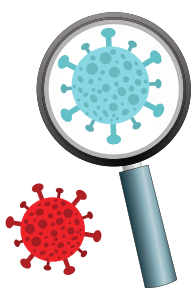
Contact tracing is completed by the district's COVID coordinators and school nurses. Hundreds of follow-up messages on exposure and isolation or quarantine dates to confirmed cases and contacts were composed and sent by Community Relations during this three-month period.



Food Service

130,569 student breakfasts
120,034 student lunches
22,084 student snacks
19,526 student dinners
60,102 meals for adults

Grab and go meals are available for students at Jefferson or Kennedy high schools from 11 a.m.–1 p.m. Monday–Friday. Through Dec. 30, meals are also available for adults in our community, whether or not they have school-aged children.



160 lab confirmed cases = **80 hours**
922 contacts (quarantines) = **354 hours**

Source: Neustar, a tech company that provides real-time information and analytics for state and local health and human services (HHS) departments across the U.S. for contact tracing systems. For each COVID-positive case it takes nearly 130 minutes of tracers' time: 23 minutes for contacts, 30 minutes for cases, 72 minutes for follow-up calls for cases and contacts, and missed dials.

Tech Support

1,603 tech support phone calls from families and staff members
4,936 tech support emails from families and staff members
4,544 tech work tickets created and worked on
1,018 students and families served at tech exchange locations

In distance learning, tech resources are more valuable than ever. BPS was well-equipped for distance learning, with 1:1 student devices and resources available to fill gaps in internet access for students while learning at home.

Tech exchange is available at Kennedy High School, Door 34, from 8 a.m.–4 p.m. Monday–Friday. Tech support is available via email or chat at techhelp@isd271.org or phone at 952-681-6750.



Childcare

308 children of essential workers have been provided childcare

SUCCESS STARTS HERE!

Bloomington Public Schools Kindergarten

We know you want the best for your child. Our neighborhood-based schools welcome new kindergartners to take the first step on their pathway to school success. Find out how we challenge all students to learn and grow with strong academics, enriching activities and a supportive school community.

If your child will be five years old by Sept. 1, 2021, we welcome them to enroll in kindergarten. We invite you to join us at the kindergarten welcome event at your neighborhood school.

We hope to hold the welcome events in person if we are able to do so safely. If events must be held virtually, that will be communicated to families and through the district website.

Hillcrest Community School	Feb. 9, 2021—4:15 - 5:30 p.m.
Indian Mounds Elementary School	Jan. 21, 2021—5 - 6:30 p.m.
Normandale Hills Elementary School	Jan. 28, 2021—6 - 7 p.m.
Oak Grove Elementary School	Jan. 26, 2021—6 - 7:30 p.m.
Olson Elementary School	Jan. 28, 2021—6 p.m.
Poplar Bridge Elementary School	Jan. 26, 2021—6 p.m.
Ridgeview Elementary School	Jan. 28, 2021—5:30 - 6:45 p.m.
Valley View Elementary School	Jan. 28, 2021—6 p.m.
Washburn Elementary School	Jan. 26, 2021—5 - 6 p.m.
Westwood Elementary School	Jan. 28, 2021—6 - 7 p.m.

bloomington.k12.mn.us/enrollment



We still dance, sing, laugh, play, read, and learn just like we would if we were together—we just do it in a different way.

Kindergarteners Rowan and McKenzie are in Kristen Fett's online class. When they met at the BOS school picture day, they wore masks but still recognized each other from the connections they'd built in their virtual classroom. They were so excited to see each other and within a minute were playing together, masked and giggling.



Kristen Fett calls her makeshift classroom in her unfinished basement the "KinderCave".

Bloomington Online School offers virtual connections

Bloomington Online School (BOS) launched in September as a fully remote learning option for K-12 students. The new program builds on the success of delivering online instruction for our high school students for the past few years.

Some 1,200 students are enrolled in BOS for the current school year. Although the program launched during the pandemic, BOS is a long-term strategy to meet a growing preference among families seeking increased stability, flexibility or a learning environment that meets the individual needs of their children.

BOS curriculum is aligned with the district's curriculum to meet the same high level of academic rigor present in traditional school. Courses and content are tailored to the developmental needs of students at each level with the focus of creating an online learning community.

BOS leadership worked in collaboration with the University of Minnesota (U of M) to establish the online program based on research and best practices. Online learning research has driven decisions about how to build the student schedule and determine professional development needs for teachers. Additionally, the U of M team is conducting surveys with BOS students, families, and staff throughout the school year to determine areas of strength and growth opportunities.

For elementary students, classroom communities maximize opportunities for students to form relationships with each other and their teachers while supporting social skill development. Middle school focuses on opportunities for students and teachers to connect and collaborate.

Students have a balance of direct teacher instruction, independent and group work, and hands-on practice and creation with access to all the academic support and services that exist in an in-person classroom.

High school online courses are those that have been offered at Jefferson and Kennedy high schools since 2017. Last year, 38 percent of our high school students were enrolled in at least one online course. BOS high school provides a consistent schedule of online live sessions and independent work.

As with any new program, the start-up year involves creating and building new lesson plans and activities, professional development and planning time.

Kristen Fett is an 18-year veteran kindergarten and first grade teacher. "I am really proud of the program we're building. All of us at BOS have taken on the challenge of building an interdisciplinary program that is not only standards-based, but also high in academic rigor. I know it's the right fit for so many students and families, mine included."

Everything in our world is different this year, but kids are still kids, good teaching is still good teaching, and the importance of real and meaningful relationships is still at the foundation of every classroom, whether online or in person.

"Everything in our world is different this year, but kids are still kids, good teaching is still good teaching, and the importance of real and meaningful relationships is still at the foundation of every classroom, whether online or in person," said Fett.

As parents of a young five-year old, Becca and Aaron Effertz were torn about sending their daughter McKenzie to school in the middle of a pandemic. "We chose Bloomington Online School for the consistency and couldn't be happier with that choice," said Becca. "BOS has been such a positive experience."

bloomington.k12.mn.us/academics/bos



POINTS OF PRIDE



Becky Wallerick, a counselor and Personal Growth Plan (PGP) coordinator at Jefferson High School,

received an Educator of Excellence award for her use and advocacy of BestPrep classroom programs. She was one of 16 teachers to be recognized with the award.



- **The Kennedy High School boys soccer team** are section champions after defeating Worthington High School 1-0 in overtime. In a typical year, the win would advance the team to the State Tournament.

- The College Board Advanced Placement (AP) program has recognized one National AP Scholar, 19 AP Scholars with Distinction, 21 AP Scholars with Honor and 65 AP Scholars from Bloomington **Jefferson** and **Kennedy** high schools. View the full list of AP Scholars at bit.ly/AP-scholars.

- **BPS Buildings & Grounds** earned the 2019 Customer of the Year Award from CenterPoint Energy for consistent use of rebate programs and energy conservation efforts. The BPS Buildings & Grounds team has implemented a host of energy conservation efforts to save over 117,000 dekatherms of energy over the last three years, equivalent to eliminating 1,180 homes' average natural gas annual usage.



Jefferson High School seniors **Alexander Carpenter, Benjamin Carpenter, Joseph Carpenter, Amy Wang** and **Xiaoxin Zeng** have been named National Merit Scholarship semifinalists. The nationwide pool of 16,000 semifinalists represents less than 1 percent of U.S. high school seniors and includes the highest-scoring entrants on the qualifying PSAT in each state.



IN THE KNOW

EFB Fundraiser

The Education Foundation of Bloomington (EFB) has partnered with BPS to provide more stable Internet access to our BPS families. EFB also assists students by providing resources to support our meal distribution efforts, educational opportunities and basic needs. This is made possible with funds from current EFB fundraising and other donations. Please consider a gift to help our students.

www.efbm.org

Winter Weather Days

We've learned to adapt during this pandemic so students can continue to learn. That will be the case for any school days impacted by inclement weather this winter.

If the district is in the hybrid learning model, students will switch to virtual learning at home when schools are closed due to snow days or inclement weather. Elementary students will be provided with learning activities for the day and teachers will be available online to support students.

Students learning online and during distance learning will operate as usual.

Mask Donations

Through the generosity of individual community sewists, businesses, and local organizations, nearly 2,600 cloth and disposable surgical masks have been donated since the beginning of the pandemic, with a value of over \$5,500. We are especially grateful for the hundreds of child and adult masks hand-sewn by area sewists, including volunteers with Boomerang Bags of Minneapolis, and a local T-Mobile representative.



Solar Power On the Rise in Schools

Since 2014, the number of K-12 schools in the U.S. using solar power increased by roughly 81 percent, and now more than 5.3 million students go to a school using solar energy, according to a new report.

That increased capacity represents a 139 percent surge in the amount of solar installed over the past five years, according to the report.

Two years ago, Bloomington Public Schools joined thousands of educational institutions across the country embracing solar energy. It began using solar power from Sun Edison/Ecoplexis, a solar garden in Dakota County, and is finalizing plans with Nokomis Partners, another remote solar garden.

Projects are currently underway with a third partner, Ideal Energies, to install on-site solar panels at Indian Mounds Elementary School, Valley View Middle School, and Kennedy and Jefferson high schools. District officials are also considering adding a solar garden at Washburn Elementary School.

The district currently gets about 40 percent of its energy from solar power, a percentage that will increase with future projects.

By installing solar panels and updating facilities to be more energy efficient, the district is cutting its yearly energy consumption and is on track to save an estimated \$7 million over the course of the 25-year contract.

"I can't think of a better way or a better place to demonstrate environmental stewardship," said Tim Rybak, operations director for the district. "For years to come, the community will benefit from our commitment to green energy."

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