

School Pages

Spring 2024-25



A Message from Superintendent Eric Melby

Steady Schools in Unsteady Times

Across the nation, we're seeing the impact of fast-moving changes within the federal government, including the U.S. Department of Education.

As policies shift and priorities evolve, I know that many of you - parents, educators, and community members alike - have questions about what these changes could mean for Bloomington Public Schools.

The truth is, at this moment, so much remains unknown. However, what I can assure you is this: Our commitment to students and their academic growth and well-being remains unchanged and unwavering.

Education is, and always has been, a deeply local endeavor. While federal decisions may influence certain aspects of our schools, we are not defined by what happens in Washington, D.C. We are defined by the strength of our district and school leaders, educators and staff, by the resilience of our students, and by the support of our School Board and community. This has always been true in the 100-plus years of our school district.

As we monitor potential impacts, our approach will be guided by these core principles:

- **Stability for students and staff.** Our schools will remain places of learning, growth, and opportunity. Regardless of

political shifts, our teachers will teach, our students will learn, and our schools will continue to be safe and welcoming environments.

- **Practical adaptation.** Should federal policy changes require adjustments, we will be thoughtful and proactive in our response. We will evaluate what's necessary, advocate where needed, and make decisions that prioritize the well-being of our students.
- **Transparency and communication.** I firmly believe trust is built through honesty. As we gain clarity on how any federal changes may affect the district, I will ensure you have the information you need. We will keep you updated, answer your questions as best we can, and work together to navigate whatever comes next.

In times of uncertainty, it's easy to feel unsettled. I understand, because at times I, too, share similar thoughts. But if there's one thing I know about BPS, it's that we are stronger than any challenge that comes our way. Our focus remains where it always has - on the success and well-being of every student. That won't change, no matter what happens in Washington.

Thank you for your partnership, your patience, and your unwavering support of our students and staff. I have full confidence in our ability to move forward together.

St. Paul to D.C. School Board Pushes for School Funding

The Bloomington School Board is taking an active approach to advocating for public education funding - going as far as bringing its message directly to U.S. lawmakers in person. The Board began the new year by finalizing its legislative priorities, urging Minnesota lawmakers to address funding shortfalls, modernize testing, and enact safety policies.

Prior to the start of this year's legislative session, the Board's Legislative Committee met with our legislators on school visits. The Board's legislative priorities include:

- Fully fund special education services, English learner (EL) and extended time programming
- Permanent state funding stream for unemployment insurance of unlicensed employees
- Increase per pupil funding in 2026 and into the future to account for inflation
- Replace Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) with the ACT as the standardized test for high school students
- Develop a plan to share educational information with student families about the importance of safe and secure firearm storage

The Board shared its legislative priorities with lawmakers again during the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA) and Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) Joint Day at the Capitol event in March. They didn't stop at Minnesota funding though.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES CONTINUED

The School Board and superintendent Dr. Eric Melbye attended the National School Boards Association's (NSBA) Advocacy and Equity Institute conference in Washington, D.C. last month, and also took time to meet with U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith, and U.S. Rep. Kelly Morrison to share the district's federal legislative priorities. They urged U.S. lawmakers to increase funding for special education and mental health services, and to continue Title programs funding.

"We rely on funding from state and federal sources to offer the best education for our students. The Board and I appreciated the opportunity to share information on the impacts of federal funding, for Bloomington and the state of Minnesota as a whole," said Dr. Melbye.

Everyone's voice matters. We encourage parents, caregivers and community members to join us in contacting their lawmakers to advocate for our students, staff and schools.



Bloomington School Board and Supt. Dr. Eric Melbye with U.S. Rep. Kelly Morrison

Future Ready: Helping Students Explore Paths Early

With high school graduation approaching, seniors frequently hear the question, "What are your plans after graduation?" It's often met with uncertainty or anxiety. In Bloomington, however, students start exploring their future paths as early as middle school.

"I feel so much more confident in school with college decisions and internships thanks to my counselors," said Jefferson junior Laken Kennedy.



Students entering sixth grade begin a Personal Growth Plan with activities focusing on life skills and career exploration. For high school students the emphasis shifts to career and college, with course planning, career interest inventories and hands-on learning experiences. All designed to prepare students to be future-ready.

A majority of students who responded to a class of 2025 survey say they intend to pursue an associate's or bachelor's degree after high school. Many students take advantage of opportunities to earn college credit while in high school.

Nearly a third of students at Jefferson and Kennedy high schools took college level Advanced Placement (AP) courses last year. Qualifying scores on an AP test may be considered for credit by some colleges and universities. BPS also partners with Normandale Community College to offer college courses in the high schools through concurrent enrollment.

Bloomington Career and College Academy (BCCA) introduces students to career fields through hands-on coursework taught by college faculty and offering college credits from higher-education partners. BCCA reported more than 450 college credits were earned by high school students in the first trimester alone this year.

In the past seven years, post-secondary enrollment options (PSEO) has grown by nearly 50 percent at both the high schools. This spring 300 Kennedy and Jefferson students in grades 10-12 are taking courses at local colleges.

"I think it's important for students to meet with their career and college counselor to talk through all the options to see what is going to benefit them most in their future and be the best fit," said Becky Wallerick, career and college counselor at Jefferson High School. "What's most important to us is making sure students understand all the options available to them before they leave BPS."

Imaginative Talent

Jefferson and Kennedy students earned 34 high honors in the 2025 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-25



ADDISON KRIEG
Inanimate Existence



AUDRY FORTNER
Yuck.



LUCY CARLSON
Polybius the Haunted
Arcade Machine



Volunteer-powered tutoring program sees record growth

Volunteer Connection operates the thriving Study Buddies homework help program, which continues to expand year after year. In its 11th year, Study Buddies is assisting 121 students—up from 80 attendees last year.

Volunteers provide free one-on-one tutoring for learners of all ages, from kindergarten through adulthood, in subjects such as reading, writing, and math. Bloomington Public Schools is proud to partner with Hennepin County Libraries to offer this valuable resource in a welcoming, community-centered space.

"My son looks forward to Study Buddies every week. The one-on-one help has been beneficial in reading and math. He brings whatever he's working on at school and also picks out a book from the library. It's helped him enjoy homework more and get more out of it," said the parent of a 6th grade student.

Study Buddies runs on Tuesdays at Penn Lake Library and Wednesdays at Oxboro Library from 4-6 p.m. Students can sign up in advance, or walk-ins are welcome. Volunteers are always needed too. Sign up or learn how to volunteer at bit.ly/bps-volunteer

New Teaching Strategies: How the READ Act is transforming student learning

Erin Hanson slides the letters 'I' and 'N' onto her big green board and her kindergarten students do the same with colorful magnet letters on trays sitting in their laps.



"Learning to read this pattern will help you be able to read so many words. 'In' can be a word without another beginning sound, but when we put a new beginning sound in front, it builds a whole new word," Ms. Hanson explains to her students.

She goes on to give students clues that lead them to build the words Win, Bin, Fin and Tin. Then as a challenge, the words Spin and Twin, which needed two letters for a new beginning sound.

It's a familiar lesson in learning to read, but this year Bloomington elementary teachers are incorporating new ways to teach the fundamental life skill. In 2023 the MN Legislature passed the READ Act, requiring all Minnesota schools to train their teachers in the structured literacy approach, with a goal of having every Minnesota student reading at or above grade level every year.

Hanson has been teaching kindergarten at Poplar Bridge Elementary School for 24 years and shared her deep passion for helping young students learn to read. Now, she is incorporating a fresh set of tools and embracing a new approach after completing most of the dedicated training days focused on evidence-based instructional practices for literacy.

"A big change for me has been incorporating more awareness of phonics. We will play with sounds by listening and speaking without even seeing letters in print. It really starts with hearing words and our language as individual sounds and manipulating those sounds," explained Hanson. "Then when phonics comes in, students will be able to see those sounds in letters and words and be able to blend and read those sounds together," explained Hanson.



A visual representation of the new teaching strategies is a giant Sound Wall that Hanson built with her students throughout the school year. There are photos of how your mouth should look when speaking each sound, photos of animals and objects that begin with the sound, and cards with sound spellings. The whiteboard was empty when the school year began and has grown, evolved and become a reference that students often look at as they are reading and writing.

This year's READ Act training was largely for K-5 classroom and English Learner (EL) and special education teachers across all

grades. More staff will complete similar training over the next two years. Teachers are pleased with the early results.

"I've seen high engagement and kids are seeing success. They are using the skills we've taught them to blend sounds together to read. Best of all, they are excited to read," said Hanson.

Strategic budget decisions finalized

The plan to reduce the district's 2025-26 operating budget by \$4 million was approved by the School Board last month. Reductions include changes to staff ratio, repurposing Washburn Elementary to create a district-wide early childhood center, and cutting \$1.74 million in administrative/Educational Services Center costs through restructuring, retirements, and operating cost shifts to other funding sources where possible.

This is part of a sustainable budget planning process to address fiscal challenges including state funding that continues to fail to keep pace with inflation, evolving student needs, declining or flat enrollment, and rising inflationary increases.



Learn more about the process on our website: bit.ly/bps-rsb



Kennedy Hockey's Farewell Tour

Proudly carrying their JFK Eagles flag, the Kennedy boys hockey team took one last lap around the Bloomington Ice Garden on Feb. 8, marking the end of an era with their final home game. With participation numbers steadily declining over the years, Kennedy will merge with Jefferson's hockey team next season, beginning a new chapter as a co-op program.

Bloomington Kennedy, synonymous with the phrase "East Side Pride," dubbed this season its Farewell Tour, marking the end of 60 years on the ice. Over those six decades, the program made seven state tournament appearances, claimed the 1987 state championship, finished as runner-up in 1984, and developed numerous college and professional players.

The Eagles ended their regular season with an away game on Feb. 15. You can watch the final home game and special ceremony on BEC-TV: bit.ly/khs-hockey-farewell



Make Your Summer Plans

Get ready for a summer of learning, fun and connection for all ages. Registration is now open for Bloomington Community Education summer programs.

SPOTLIGHT PROGRAMS:

- **Youth Enrichment:** Class offerings for preschool-age children through age 18. Dance, sports, driver's education, pickleball and so much more.
- **SLAM:** Weekly summer camps featuring sports, arts, technology, and more.
- **Kids' SAFARI Childcare:** Engaging and enriching all-day childcare for school-age children.
- **Early Learning:** Programs that foster creativity, development and a love of learning. A perfect head start for little ones.
- **Swim:** Swim lessons for all levels, energizing evening water fitness, and lifeguard/instructor training for summer-guaranteed jobs.
- **Adults with Disabilities:** The Learning Exchange offers amazing classes through Bloomington and Richfield Schools.



Scan to browse the catalog.



Register at bloomington.ce.eleyo.com. Call 952-681-6132 for assistance.

Points of Pride



Read full details at
bit.ly/bps271-news



Seniors **Ben Wadzinski**, **Owen Woods** (JHS), **Arthur Colvin**, and **Emily Kwon** (KHS) are finalists in the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program. bit.ly/bps-nm-finalists-25

Jodi Carufel, Olson Middle language arts teacher, is one of 31 semifinalists for Minnesota Teacher of the Year. She was selected from a group of 142 candidates across the state that included five BPS teachers, including the following:



- **Lisa Berthiaume**, SpEd EBD Teacher, JHS
- **Laura George**, Kindergarten, IM
- **Zach Semon**, SpEd ABS Teacher, JHS
- **Jake Wypyszynski**, SpEd DAPE, KHS

bit.ly/bps-toy-semifinal-25



Seniors **Megan Schrooten** and **Brenden Lucas** (JHS) and **Emma Skibbie** and **Roosevelt Osano** (KHS) are this year's Academics, Arts and Athletics (Triple 'A') Award nominees. High school seniors are selected for their participation in MSHSL sponsored arts and athletics while maintaining high academic standing. bit.ly/bps-AAA-2025



Senior **Jenny Wen** (JHS) is a National Honorable Mention recipient of the 2025 Aspirations in Computing High School Award program. bit.ly/bps-wen-aic

Jefferson assistant football coach **Aaron Swartout** received the 2024 Butch Nash Award, which recognizes the top assistant football coaches in the state. He's the first Bloomington coach to earn the award since 1992. bit.ly/jhs-butch-nash



Jefferson senior **Anders Westanmo** was the runner-up at the state Nordic ski meet in the boys pursuit race. Junior **Avery Rich** placed ninth in the girls' pursuit. bit.ly/bps-nordic-state25

Jefferson freshman **Evie Clarke** placed in the top half of the field at the state Alpine ski meet. She and sophomore **Reece Tollefson** competed at state for the first time.

Jefferson's competition cheer team earned its sixth consecutive national championship at the 2025 UCA National High School Cheerleading Championship in Orlando, FL. The team placed first in the Small Varsity Game Day Division I competition. bit.ly/jhs-cheer-champs-25

BPS teachers **Patti Lang** and **Allison Lindman** (OGM), **Cindy Nelson** and **Jonathan Swanson** (OLM), and middle school media director **Kristi Johnson** won the Minnesota History Day Team Teachers of Merit Award for their teamwork to make History Day a success in the district. bit.ly/bps-hd-staff-award25



In the Know

State of the Schools

BPS is launching its inaugural State of the Schools on Tuesday, April 15, spotlighting the game-changing impact of community partnerships in education. Invited business, parent and community leaders will get an exclusive look at how our Strategic Plan, academic innovations, and financial strategies are shaping students for success.

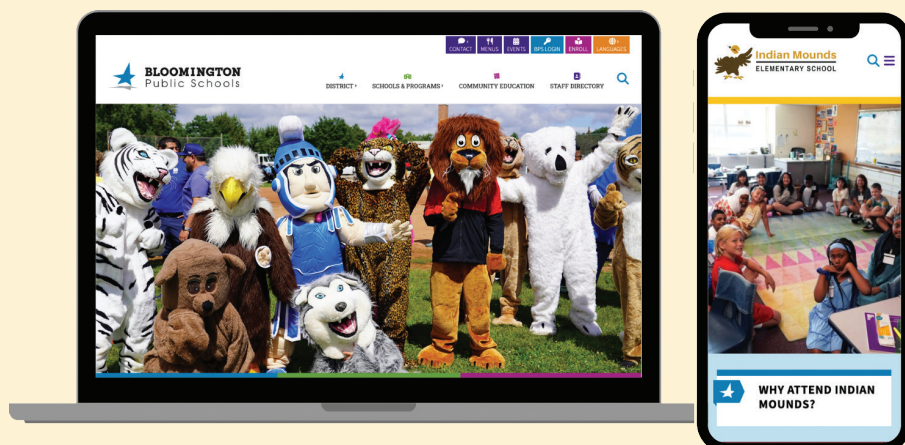
Facility Updates

Groundbreaking for the new high school stadiums are scheduled for mid-May with a projected completion date in time for fall sports activities. Construction was pushed back a bit to allow spring lacrosse practices to occur on the current turf fields. The Bloomington Stadium at the former Lincoln High School was originally constructed in 1956. It has served the District well as the home field for all of our high schools for that time. It was in need of significant maintenance. The School Board approved to divert that money to create stadium facilities at each of the Kennedy and Jefferson sites. This investment will significantly benefit our high schools by eliminating the need to transport for home events, increase pride and participation at events, and help each of the schools further define and celebrate their identity.

We are also excited with the renovations currently underway at Bloomington Ice Garden (BIG) as part of a project to modernize the community rink, enhance energy efficiency and improve the experience for participants and spectators. BIG will remain closed until the project is completed in fall 2025. Reopening is anticipated prior to the start of the high school hockey season. Bloomington Jefferson boys and girls hockey teams will each have dedicated exclusive use locker rooms as part of an agreement reached with BPS. For more details on the project, visit bloomingtonforward.org/big.

Website Design Refresh

The BPS website is getting its first fresh new look since we launched on a new platform in 2019. Staff and family stakeholders were involved in guiding this visual update. The biggest improvement will be in the mobile experience to meet users where they are: their phones. Check out the new look on bloomingtonschools.org after March 31.



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