

INSPIRE



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Inspiring Each

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Welcome

from the Superintendent and School Board

Welcome to the inaugural edition of *Inspire*, the Eden Prairie Schools community magazine! We're glad you're here, and we're excited to share with you some of the amazing stories of our students, staff, schools and alumni.

There's so much to be proud of: Within these pages, you'll discover the innovative learning happening in our classrooms, explore the people whose efforts to inspire have made lasting impacts on our schools and community, and learn about ways to join us in our pursuit of inspiring each student every day.

The spirit of that mission – inspiring each student every day – has driven us for more than a century. From Eden Prairie's earliest days, our city has believed deeply in the power of community and the importance of education. That's what we're celebrating this year in our 100th Year of Inspiring Each. And we've come a long way since our earliest days.

Our district is now home to more than 9,000 learners who speak 90 languages at home. They learn to fly airplanes, plan for the future of artificial intelligence, design sculptures using 3-D printers, and create their own businesses – all in state-of-the-art classrooms and co-curricular spaces made possible by our community. It would've been pretty hard for the students in our four original one-room schoolhouses to imagine. And as we look toward the next 100 years, we know our future is filled with the same innovation, excellence and pride that have formed our foundation for the past 100.

You'll read more about our rich history and how we're looking to the future in *Inspire*. We hope you enjoy it! And when you're finished, share it with a friend, family member or colleague who should know about the great things happening in Eden Prairie Schools, where we inspire each student every day.

Go Eagles!

OUR MISSION

Inspire each student to learn continuously so they are empowered to reach personal fulfillment and contribute purposefully to our ever-changing world.



EDEN PRAIRIE SCHOOLS: 100 Years of Inspiring Each

Since Eden Prairie's earliest days, its residents have believed deeply in the power of community and the importance of education.

In fact, the town board of Eden Prairie held its first meeting in a log schoolhouse on May 11, 1858 — the same day Minnesota became a state. That log schoolhouse would remain a hub of community for decades to come.

As Eden Prairie's rolling agricultural fields bloomed into thriving centers of business and community, its schools grew as well. It wasn't long until there were four: the Anderson, Gould, Jarrett and Wolf schools. These one-room schoolhouses eventually came and went, and the city joined others as part of a joint school district. However, in March 1924, the Eden Prairie Consolidated School welcomed students back to their hometown in the brick building at the top of School Road (now known as the Administrative Services Center).

That new, state-of-the-art school continued to be an important gathering place for all residents, providing space for movies, voting, weddings and clothes ironing (since it was one of the first electrified buildings in Eden Prairie). And this new, consolidated school and the community supporting it laid the foundation for the Eden Prairie Schools we know and love today. That's why throughout 2024, Eden Prairie Schools has celebrated 100 Years of Inspiring Each.

"This is really a celebration of community," said **Superintendent Dr. Josh Swanson**. "I've been a part of this district since 2012, and to see the continuous partnership between our schools and our community over that time has been beyond inspiring. For our 100th anniversary, we knew it was important to recognize and honor the legacy of our growth, achievement, and excellence together."



Anderson School



Jarrett School



Wolf School



Gould School

GROWING TOGETHER

Though that early Consolidated School building is still in use today, it would be far too small for 9,000 students. Luckily, thanks to the strong support of Eden Prairie residents and businesses, the district's footprint has grown significantly since 1924.

Today's students learn in a districtwide early childhood and preschool building; six in-person elementary schools, including a Spanish-immersion option; a renovated and expanded middle school; and a 750,000 square-foot high school equipped with classrooms and co-curricular spaces that the earliest Eagles could have hardly imagined. Students ages 18–22 with additional learning needs can continue their learning after graduation in the TASSEL Transition Program (read more on page 24), and more than 500 students from across Minnesota have joined the Eden Prairie Schools community by choosing EP Online as their educational home.

This exciting growth would not have been possible without partnership from the broader Eden Prairie community, which after more than 165 years still believes in the value of an excellent education for its children. Countless people have invested time, energy and resources to nurture our outstanding school system. Along the way, the district's schools and students have given back, too. And becoming a destination district with strong schools has led to high home values and expanded economic opportunities throughout the area.

"For our 100th anniversary, we knew it was important to recognize and honor the legacy of our growth, achievement, and excellence together."

- Dr. Josh Swanson



Families exploring a variety of vehicles during Family Fun Day on May 17, 2024

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY

One hundred years of inspiring each means a lot to celebrate — and the Eden Prairie community certainly joined the party! Several special events made the occasion especially momentous.

On Feb. 13, the 100th day of school in our 100th year, staff and students got creative as they celebrated the history of our schools. To assist teachers in planning a day filled with meaningful learning experiences, the district's **Learning & Innovation team** developed lessons and activities tailored for different grade levels. From math challenges to literary explorations, each activity seamlessly integrated academic concepts with the festive spirit of the 100th day to foster creativity, collaboration, and a love of learning for students.

May 17 offered another opportunity for the community to come together at Family Fun Day. At the event, the district unveiled renovations to the Historic Gym made possible by its close partnership with the **Eden Prairie Historical Society** and the **Historic Gym Taskforce**. More than two dozen community partners added to the fun with special activities for kids, chances to sit in a fire truck or dump truck, and more. The evening ended with a debut performance of the Eden Prairie Community Choir, an intergenerational singing group formed during the district's centennial and led by **Adam Petroski, Central Middle School choir director**.

Few events, though, could top the Citywide Prom held in the Historic Gym on May 18. More than 200 community members gathered for a night of revelry and reminiscing, many dressed in attire from their high school years. Attendees enjoyed food and beverages provided by local businesses and danced to live music from local band Wondercure. **Former Eden Prairie High School associate principal and football coach Curt Connaughty** was crowned prom royalty for his decades of contributions to Eden Prairie Schools, as was **Eden Prairie Historical Society president Kathie Case** for her efforts to preserve iconic spaces across the city — including the Historic Gym. The event culminated with the **Foundation for Eden Prairie Schools** presenting a \$100,000 check to the district in honor of its 100th year.

"I'm sure past mayors and superintendents have thought, 'Hey, this is the best the city's ever been — we've arrived, it's phenomenal,'" **Eden Prairie Mayor Dr. Ron Case**, who spent 33 years as an Eden Prairie Schools teacher, said at the Citywide Prom. "But I will say that today, May 18, 2024, I think is the best we've ever been, and I believe the best is yet to come."

"I will say that today, May 18, 2024, I think is the best we've ever been, and I believe the best is yet to come."

- Dr. Ron Case

LOOKING AHEAD

The district's 100th year started with a strong roadmap. During the 2022-23 school year, district and school leaders asked the Eden Prairie community to share its hopes for students over the next five years. Data collected from multiple surveys and in-person and digital forums showed three clear priorities for the future: authentic and personalized learning experiences, wellbeing among all students and staff, and inclusive learning environments that foster a sense of belonging. This led to the creation of the new 2023-28 strategic plan for Eden Prairie Schools, which prioritizes these three strategies.

"The timing of our strategic plan couldn't be more perfect," said Dr. Swanson. "Building on our community's deeply held belief in the importance of education, and looking to our next 100 years, we're honoring the successes of our district — and we're constantly seeking ways to do the best we can for our students. It's an exciting time to be an Eagle!"

Throughout the 2024-25 school year, Eden Prairie Schools will again work with our community to dream into the future of learning and determine the experiences and skills we want students to have in 10 years. This vision for learning, called Flight Plan 2035, will inform the development of future programs, services and potential facilities that support our mission of inspiring each student every day.

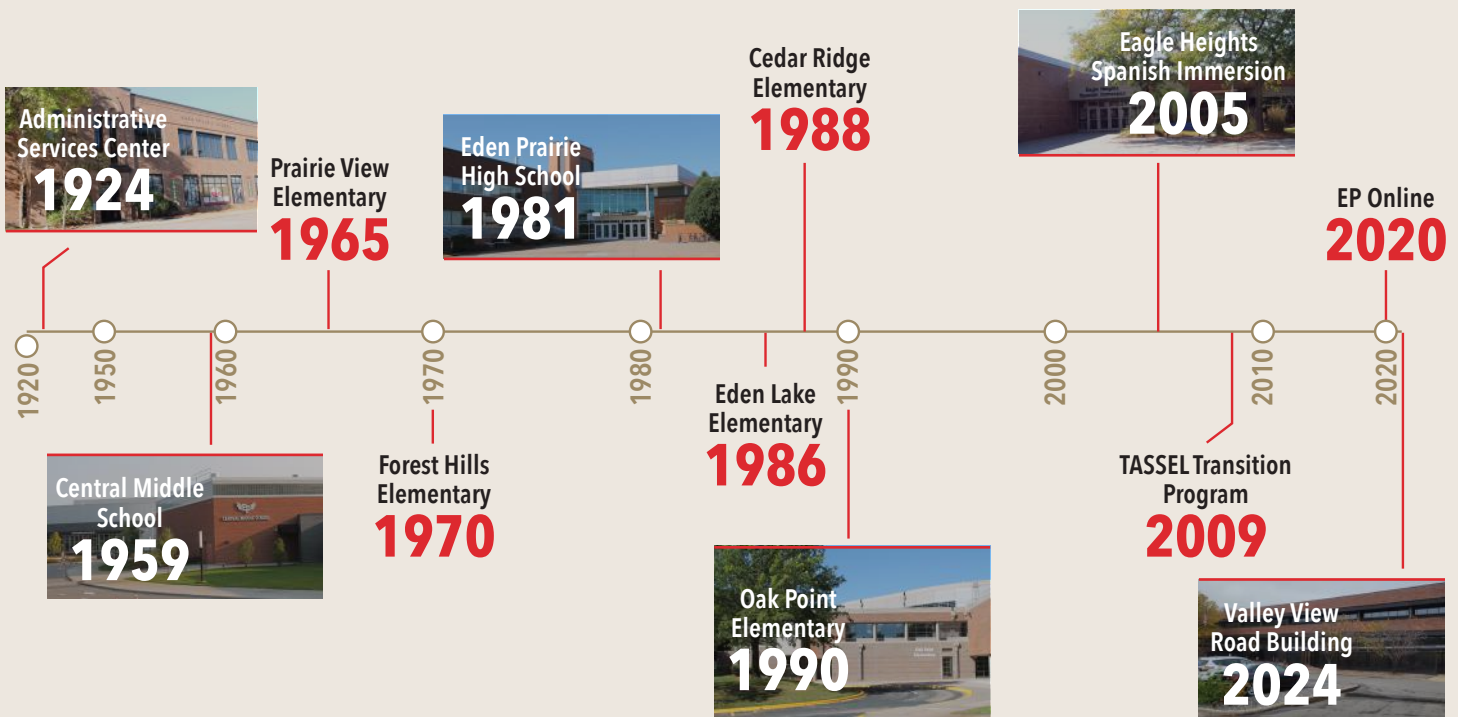


Help build flight plan 2035!
Scan the QR code to learn more and get involved.

Reflecting on this exciting centennial year and looking to the future, Dr. Swanson said, "We have seen how Eden Prairie Schools remains a vital pillar of the Eden Prairie community. And the next century is sure to give rise to many more Eagles who contribute purposefully to their communities, the world, and each other — just like those who have gone before them. Go Eagles!"

Building for the future

After the building that is now the Administrative Services Center opened in 1924, there was still lots to be done to create the Eden Prairie Schools we know today! The city's school communities are incredible places for students to learn and grow.





"I want them to have more freedom and choice regarding what challenges to tackle and how they live their lives."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. NATHAN T. CHOMILO

A Practitioner for Progress

How Dr. Nathan T. Chomilo ('01) drives justice and change in healthcare

"Children learn more from what you are than what you teach," W.E.B. Du Bois, American sociologist and civil rights activist, once said.

Dr. Nathan T. Chomilo is many things: a general pediatrician and hospital internist; a racial and health equity advocate; the Medicaid medical director for the state of Minnesota; an Aspen Institute Ascend Fellow; a board member of Reach Out and Read, a nonprofit that promotes early literacy and school readiness; a University of Minnesota Medical School graduate and adjunct assistant professor of pediatrics; a lifelong soccer player; the son of a Cameroonian immigrant father; a husband to Jenny; and a father to two boys, Nchare and Nji. And he's an Eagle, too — a graduate of the Class of 2001.

He may be a doctor, but Chomilo teaches by example for the children and young adults he encounters every day as a pediatrician, state medical director, literacy advocate, educator, mentor, and dad. One of his great motivators is using his intersectional experiences and healthcare expertise to push our health systems forward for the next generation.

"I've come to realize that many of these conversations we are having about health and racial disparities in health outcomes have been going on for 30 years or more," Chomilo observed. "I don't want my sons to have these same conversations and be in the same place in 30 years. I want them to have more freedom and choice regarding what challenges to tackle and how they live their lives."

Chomilo grew up in Eden Prairie from the age of 10 after his family moved back to Minnesota to be closer to relatives from Cameroon. Despite growing up in a household with a nurse and pharmacist for parents, Chomilo admitted he first dreamed of becoming a fighter pilot in the Air Force. It wasn't until an anatomy lesson in **Linda Turnquist's** biology class at Eden Prairie High School (EPHS) that he began to develop a serious interest of his own in medical studies. It's a lesson he echoes to teens today.

"I tell them that if they are unsure of what they want to do when they grow up, start with thinking about things that you are really interested in or that excite you," Chomilo advised. "If there are classes that you love to go to or come naturally to you, ask your teachers and parents about what careers might be available in those fields. Start there instead of thinking of how much money you will make or how famous you might become. Because if you are able to find work that aligns with your passions and skills, you will be best set up to make the biggest impact possible."

After graduating from EPHS, Chomilo earned a bachelor's degree in zoology from Miami University in Ohio in 2005. He then returned to Minnesota to attend medical school and complete his residencies at the University of Minnesota.

Since entering practice as a general pediatrician and hospital internist, Chomilo credits the patients, families, and communities he has served as personal sources of support, encouragement and resilience.

"The trust that they place in me to share the highs and lows of their lives," he explained, "both fuels my own work to change the healthcare system and remove barriers where possible, and provides perspective into my own challenges and how they compare to those of others in my community."

One of his many passions is literacy, for youth and adult patients alike. Chomilo pointed to data that suggests future outcomes are linked to early childhood literacy, especially within the first five years of development. To help the cause, he joined the Minnesota chapter of Reach Out and Read in 2010. In 2019, Minneapolis was recognized as a "Bookend City" by the national Reach Out and Read organization. For his efforts in helping the city receive the honor, Chomilo was named a 2019 History Maker at Home by the Minneapolis Department of Civil Rights.



Chomilo with his mom Wanda at an EP soccer game

"That award in particular really reaffirmed the work I do," he emphasized. "And it inspired me to continue the work so that I can live up to the legacy of that recognition."



Chomilo with Governor Tim Walz during a vaccination event at the Mall of America in 2021

In January 2020, Chomilo became the Medicaid medical director at the Minnesota Department of Human Services. It wasn't long until he was put to the test by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rising to the occasion as he had so many times before, Chomilo helped lead the state's vaccine response by viewing the data through an equity lens and working directly with community partners.

"We were able to significantly decrease the disparities in our vaccine rates in different communities across Minnesota," he said.

Chomilo is also proud of his team's work on a 2022 report that, per the report, "[built] racial equity into the walls of Minnesota Medicaid" by studying health outcomes for U.S.-born Black Minnesotans. It has helped put a national spotlight on centering "communities most impacted by structural racism" in setting health equity priorities in policymaking.

That report "has also led to the passing of legislation that has already improved access to healthcare for Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, and those from disadvantaged neighborhoods across the state," Chomilo added.

Though he has felt called to "show up" in so many ways to "advance health and racial equity and justice in our society," Chomilo underscored that there are many other ways to affect change and create a "more just, safe and fair world for our children, our grandchildren, and beyond."

"What doesn't help is doing nothing; accepting the status quo," he cautioned. "We as a society got here through a number of actions, small and big, and through many conversations, personal and public. So the way we get to a better place for us all is by everyone doing their part where they can, whenever they can."



On the “World’s Biggest Stage”

The heroic story of Melissa Stockwell ('98)

Melissa Stockwell always wanted to be an Olympian.

Gymnastics was her first love, and she excelled in the sport from an early age. When she was 16 years old, watching the 1996 Atlanta Olympics on TV filled her head with dreams of one day competing on the same stage.

Known as **Melissa Hoffman** at the time, her family moved to Eden Prairie for her father's career in 1994. She spent her high school years at Eden Prairie High School (EPHS), graduating in the Class of 1998.



Melissa and teammates participating in EPHS cheer and track & field

Linda Wallenberg, a 47-year EPHS English teacher and gymnastics coach who taught Stockwell in her Advanced English class, said in a recommendation letter she wrote in 1998 that Stockwell gave "so much of herself to the gymnastics, diving, and track teams of Eden Prairie High School."

Until she couldn't anymore: Despite being named All-Conference, All-State, and All-American during her time on the gymnastics team, a senior season marred by injury concluded with heartbreak. She missed the cut for state by one one-hundredth of a point. It marked the end of her gymnastics career, her Olympic aspirations dashed.

"I got to the elite level, but never the elite-of-the-elite level. I thought I was going to be one of those gymnasts," Stockwell lamented. "That dream had been there for a long time, but it didn't happen."

It started her pursuit of a new dream — a new way to represent her country.

PROUD PATRIOT

The story of Melissa Stockwell cannot be told without an account of April 13, 2004 — it's the day that, as she once described in a TED Talk, her "real story begins."

Only two years after graduating from ROTC at the University of Colorado Boulder, commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army's Transportation Corps, Stockwell deployed to Kuwait and Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Her platoon embarked on daily convoy missions, tasked with the safe transport of soldiers and equipment.



Melissa during her Iraq War deployment

"That day started out just like any other day," Stockwell recalled. "I put my uniform on, Kevlar bulletproof vest, grabbed my weapon, and got into my Humvee as I had done dozens of times before. On this specific day, we were going right into central Baghdad. We went under this bridge — there was a roadside bomb under it. I remember this very loud noise, black smoke, the smell of metal, windshield crashed in, vehicle swerving, and we ended up crashing into this woman's house. To make a pretty long story short, that roadside bomb took my left leg."

"I was 24 years old," she added. "That day, my life forever changed."



Melissa and parents Dave and Marlene during her recovery

A soldier in her convoy trained in first aid applied a tourniquet to stop the bleeding long enough for Stockwell to make it to an American hospital in Baghdad for emergency surgery. When she was transferred stateside, an intense 52 days of additional surgeries and rehab put into perspective how fortunate she had been.



"I felt like I had a second chance to represent our country in a United States uniform. Losing my leg wasn't going to stop me."

Melissa training for the 2008 Beijing Paralympics

"I looked around and saw these other soldiers much worse off than I was," she explained. "Then I looked at myself and was like, wow, I'm the lucky one because all I lost is one leg. So that put things into perspective very quickly."

Stockwell was the first American woman to lose a limb in the Iraq War. She was awarded a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for her bravery in combat and medically retired from the Army in 2005.

Her rehabilitation period was transformational — not only for learning how to live with one leg, but also for inspiring a new path for her life. She fell in love with swimming, for both its therapeutic and empowering effects. After moving back to Minnesota in 2005 and joining the Twin Cities Swim Team, she set a goal that would bring her Olympic dream full-circle: to compete at the Paralympics.

"I felt like I had a second chance to represent our country in a United States uniform," she asserted. "Losing my leg wasn't going to stop me."

PROUD PARALYMPIAN

After three years of intense training, Stockwell earned her spot on Team USA as a swimmer at the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing. The pride she felt walking out of the tunnel, "USA!" chants reverberating off the stadium walls, gave her chills. And yet, when it finally came time to get in the pool and give it her all, she couldn't shake the bittersweet feeling that followed.

"I went to Beijing, didn't have a great competition, didn't make the finals, didn't have the best times in my swimming, and it was devastating because that's what I was there for," she said. "No one wants to get that far and be mediocre, and I was."

It could have been a deeply discouraging experience — but Stockwell once again had her perspective checked when she was chosen to hold the American flag at the closing ceremony.

"Looking back now, that was very much part of the journey," Stockwell reflected. "I realized in that moment it wasn't about the medals, it was about overcoming the loss of a leg and four years later being on that world's biggest stage."

Never one to back down from a challenge, Stockwell competed in her first triathlon in 2009 and fell in love with the sport. When the paratriathlon was first added to the games at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio, she seized the opportunity to redeem her performance in Beijing.

"It was one of the greatest moments of my life," she remembered with a smile. "It was a USA sweep. My teammates got gold and silver, and I got bronze."

It wasn't lost on Stockwell that it was another full-circle moment for her. The paratriathlon in Rio took place on September 11, 2016, fifteen years to the day since the events of 9/11 changed the course of her life by setting the Iraq War in motion.

"Someone recently asked me which means more to me, the Purple Heart, Bronze Star or bronze medal from Rio," she said. "I didn't go into war thinking I'm going to get a Purple Heart or Bronze Star. The bronze medal gave me this sense of accomplishment, representing all of the obstacles I had faced and overcome."

PROUD PARENT

Stockwell's journey after losing her leg even led to finding love.



Melissa and her family

She and her husband, Brian Tolsma, met while working together at a prosthetics company in Chicago. In 2015, they married and had their son Dallas, just a year prior to Stockwell earning her first Paralympic medal in Rio. Their daughter Millie followed two years later.

"I hit the jackpot with Brian. He's a wonderful husband and wonderful father. And my kids..." she paused, looking for the right words.

"Being their mom is the best and hardest job in the world. They challenge me more than I've ever been challenged in my life. They're my biggest motivators."

After fracturing her back less than two months prior to the Paralympics in Tokyo in 2021, Stockwell said she was the "happiest fifth place finisher in the world." She briefly considered retirement, acknowledging she was "older for her sport" at 41 years old. Key word: briefly. Three years later, Stockwell qualified for the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris — her fourth time representing her country at the Paralympics. More than anything, she was excited to share it with her family.

"Everyone will be there, it will be awesome," Stockwell beamed before the Games. "My kids will be cheering 'Go, Mommy!' I can't explain how much that drives me to be better." She placed fifth in her race on Sept. 2 in Paris. Brian, Dallas and Millie cheered her on and tossed her an American flag that she waved behind her as she crossed the finish line with a smile.

Aside from her Paralympic pursuits and parental duties, Stockwell keeps herself busy as a certified prosthetist, motivational speaker and co-founder of Dare2tri, a nonprofit established in 2011 with the mission to "enhance the lives of individuals with physical disabilities and visual impairments by building confidence, community, health and wellness through swimming, biking and running."

"It's another way of giving back and supporting youth, adults and service members that have physical disabilities and showing them what they're capable of," Stockwell said.

Back at EPHS, Wallenberg continues to keep in touch with her former student through email and follows her journey on social media. Every year in her AP Literature class, she parallels Stockwell's story with the classic poem "Beowulf" and asks students to consider, "What makes a hero?"

"They do research based on the Anglo-Saxon heroic ideal and how it relates to modern-day characteristics of a hero — both on a societal and personal level," Wallenberg said. "Students are fascinated with her story."

*This story includes contributions from EPHS Multimedia Story Production students **Tori Schlagel**, **Lauren Rice** ('24), and **Isabel McNulty** ('24).*



Once an Eagle, always an Eagle!

No matter where life has taken you after Eden Prairie Schools, we're here to welcome you home.

Molly Malone ('03), director of community engagement and alumni relations, wants to hear from our graduates and retired staff members! Visit edenpr.org/alumni to update your contact information, submit a milestone, or nominate someone to be featured. You can also explore ways to share your expertise and contribute to our schools!

Learn more and share your ideas for our new and improved alumni experience at edenpr.org/alumni.





PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROBLOX CORPORATION

From Quiz Whiz to Roblox Boss

Exploring the creative mind of David Baszucki ('81)

Albert Einstein once said, "Creativity is seeing what others see and thinking what no one else ever thought."

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that **David Baszucki**, the man who co-created gaming company Roblox in 2006 and remains its CEO to this day, once said in an interview with *Wired*, "We want Roblox to be everywhere that people are being – or want to be – creative."

In creating Roblox, Baszucki and his late friend Erik Cassel were seeing what others saw, video games, and thinking what no one else ever thought: What if there were a video game engine that allowed anyone to create and play their own games? As they say, it was a million-dollar (or in this case, billion-dollar) idea.

From an early age, Baszucki had a penchant for imaginative thinking and creative tinkering. As a Canadian kid growing up in Eden Prairie, he loved spending time outdoors riding dirt bikes and building go-karts. When he wasn't satisfying his need for speed, he enjoyed soaking up facts from the encyclopedia, visiting new worlds in science fiction books and coding on his Apple II computer.

Baszucki attended Eden Prairie High School (EPHS), graduating in the Class of 1981. During his time at EPHS, he kept himself active as a member of cross country and skiing, led the school's quiz bowl team, played saxophone in Eagle Band, and played on the varsity soccer team. The bio next to his 12th grade yearbook photo reads, "David Baszucki plans to go to college...says he remembers messing around during school years most...plans to design space colonies."

"It's fun to think back to my time at Eden Prairie," Baszucki recalled. "I remember doing my physics project measuring the paint on the famous graffiti bridge. I have fond memories and it's a special place."

Baszucki followed through with his plans to attend college at Stanford University, graduating with a degree in electrical engineering in 1985. Four years later, he and his brother **Greg Baszucki ('83)** founded Knowledge Revolution, a company that produced educational physics and mechanical simulation software for kids. The first and most popular application they created, "Interactive Physics," allowed users to learn physics with 2D models. In 1998, MSC Software bought the company for \$20 million.

Encouraged by the fact that children were using his physics software to create their own simulations, Baszucki tapped Cassel, the lead engineer on "Interactive Physics," as creative partner for a new venture that thought outside the box of software development to invent a virtual space for creation and play. Thus, Roblox was born.

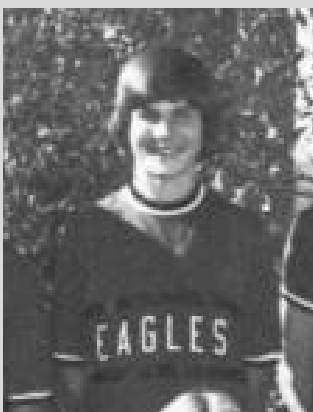
When he isn't pioneering new frontiers in the modern metaverse at Roblox, Baszucki is also known for his philanthropic efforts. Baszucki firmly believes in determination and hard work; as he once said, "persistence is the bridge between dreams and reality."

"Persistence is the bridge between dreams and reality." - David Baszucki

In 2021, Baszucki launched Baszucki Group, a philanthropic organization transforming mental health outcomes by supporting initiatives at the intersection of metabolism, psychiatry and neuroscience. As part of these efforts, Baszucki Group launched Metabolic Mind, a nonprofit working to transform the study and treatment of mental disorders by exploring the connection between metabolism and brain health. Other focus areas of Baszucki Group include supporting nonpartisan electoral innovations and regenerative agricultural practices. His dedication to driving system-level changes continue to make a significant impact.

18-year-old Baszucki dreamed of building space colonies. He has, virtually — and millions of Roblox users will continue to build with him for many years to come.

*This story includes contributions from EPHS Multimedia Story Production students **Santosh Bommarreddy**, **Zander Hemmesch ('24)**, and **Tyler Santy**.*



Junior Varsity Cross Country
EPHS Yearbook, 1978



Senior Picture
EPHS Yearbook, 1981



40 years later, CEO of Roblox

LOVE AT FIRST FLIGHT!

Former U.S. Vice President and Minnesota Statesman Hubert Humphrey once said, “The road to freedom — here and everywhere on earth — begins in the classroom.” In Eden Prairie, the classroom was also the first stop on the road to love for some happy couples!

FROM NO WORDS TO “I DO”

Giang Nguyen ('06) could never have guessed that the cute American girl, **Elizabeth Leppart ('06)**, helping him during his English language lessons at Oak Point Intermediate School would one day be his wife. Sure, he had a crush on her — but he didn't have the English words yet to tell her. It was 1998 and Nguyen had just arrived in Eden Prairie from Vietnam.

Leppart wasn't the only thing catching Nguyen's eye as a newcomer to the U.S. “I have such happy memories of my time at Eden Prairie Schools. The quality of education I received was so high,” Nguyen remembered. “My school in Vietnam — a private, French-sponsored school — had one television for the entire school. At Eden Prairie, I saw overhead projectors in every classroom and multiple TVs wheeled into our rooms for educational programming.”

The two lost touch as they moved through middle school. In high school, Leppart played percussion in Eagle Band and was in the drumline. “The music program with Mr. Whipkey was such fun,” she remembered. They both graduated in 2006, but attended different colleges and took jobs in other parts of the country.

But fate didn't rest long: They were reacquainted as adults in 2018 through a mutual friend and became engaged in June 2022 on the grassy front lawn of Oak Point, where they first met.

After marrying in 2023 and honeymooning in Vietnam, the couple now works in the Twin Cities as a software developer (Nguyen) and nutritionist (Leppart). They've bought a starter home in Eden Prairie, where they love being close to both sets of their parents.

Eden Prairie Schools continues to play a part in the couple's lives, as they watch Leppart's 4-year-old niece learn and grow at her aunt's very own elementary school, Eden Lake.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ELIZABETH LEPPART

Top: Nguyen proposes on the lawn of Oak Point Elementary

Bottom: High school photos of Leppart and Nguyen

EL AMOR COMIENZA EN LA CLASE DE ESPAÑOL

Kristina Holt ('96) didn't quite know what to make of the guy staring at her from across the room in her ninth grade Spanish class in 1992. But she had to laugh at the silly ways **Ryan Fey ('96)** held up pieces of clothing as they were learning how to identify them in Spanish. Working on group projects and hanging out in the band room sealed the deal.

Their first date was "Swing Kids" at the Eden Prairie Center movie theater. She became a competitive cheerleader who had the opportunity to cheer for her boyfriend on the football team. Both Holt and Fey graduated in 1996 with a class of around 500 students. They got engaged the December before their college graduations in 2000 and married a little over two years later, when Ryan was in his second year of medical school.

Twenty-two years later, the Feys have three kids and live in Edina. Ryan is a doctor specializing in trauma and burn care, and Kristina manages their home and three kids.

You might run into two of the Fey kids if you frequent the Eden Prairie Community Center — they were recruited to work there by their granddad, Ed. A neighboring address couldn't keep them away. The Fey legacy continues in Eden Prairie!



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KRISTINA FEY

Top: Fey family at Lake Louise

Bottom left: Holt and Fey in their EPHS jackets

Bottom right: Junior prom at International Market Square

Eden Prairie love over the years

We were overwhelmed by the number of posts about Eden Prairie couples on the "Eden Prairie Remembers" Facebook page. The following couples were mentioned on that page after a Valentine's Day question about Eden Prairie Schools sweethearts:

Mark Nolte & Vicky Thomas, 1977	Jess & Kathy Schwartz, 1964	Sharon Selander & Bennet Morgan, 1981
Cynthia & John Hays	Richard Hays & Phyllis Rogers, 1946	Michael Armstrong & Christopher Armstrong, 1981 & 1980
Angie (MacDonald) & Chris Marsh, 1999	Peg Balfanz Johnson & Jim Johnson, 1964	Eric LeBlanc & LeeAnn LeBlanc, 1987
Kristin (Kolander) & Aaron Martin, 1999	Paul Jacques & Kathy O'Brien	Kris Medd & Wes Bigelow, 1987
Audrey Tobias Pidcock & David Pidcock	Sandy Clark & Jim Schultz	Sam Martin Dustrud & Dave Dustrud, 1979 & 1978
Diane Dredge Simons & Jimmy Simons	Jim Rannow & Ann Berne-Rannow, 1973	Kathy Opheim Johnson & Greg Simons, 1978
Paul Kelski & Beth Bertelson	Jenny Hayden & Don Hayden, 1981	
Peg Swanson & Bob Fifield, 1969 & 1970	Amy Duvik & Todd Anderson, 1981	

SLIDING DOORS

Nancy Vest was only 13 and new to Eden Prairie in 1967 when her future husband, her friend's brother, peeked out from behind a sliding door to check out the girls at his younger sister's party. "I wasn't so sure about him," Vest said, "but he liked me right away. So did my mom when she met him!" Vest ('72) went on to marry that boy behind the door, **Terry Eggan ('71)**. They were just 21 and 22.

Vest remembers idyllic days in Eden Prairie fondly: the big open spaces and the small town feel. Eggan's family had horses then, convenient transportation they could ride and tie up at the Little Red Store when they went in to get a pop. Graduating classes were smaller — only around 100 students.

But there were big-world challenges, too: The Vietnam War was raging, and Vest worried. She was relieved when Eggan's draft number was not called.

Today, Eggan is a real estate agent and Vest is retired from directing a senior services organization. The couple still revels in the Eden Prairie community, where they count their former Eden Prairie High School Assistant Principal Curt Connaughty as a friend. "Curt used to scare me, because he once sent me home from school for wearing a crop top that showed my belly button," Vest laughed.

Connaughty, Vest and Eggan all enjoyed the historic Eden Prairie Citywide Prom, where they celebrated a lifelong connection started by a curious boy at his younger sister's party.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NANCY VEST

Top: Vest and Eggan featured in Neighbors of Eden Prairie, 2020

Bottom left: The couple at an EPHS dance

Bottom right: The couple on their wedding day

Joanie Peterson & Tony Chevalier,
1963

Leslie (Swanson) Reddick
& Randy Reddick

Andrea Peterson &
Lloyd Engler, 1966 & 1963

Larry Lemon &
LaRae Compton Lemon, 1973

Kristin Dustrud &
Doug Schneider, 1982 & 1981

Terry (Boyd) Berens & Gerry Berens

Beverly Tobias Sutton & Burt Sutton

Deb Noel Karulf & Rick Karulf, 1973

Curt & Rita Cruse Conrad, 1965 & 1967

Beth Simons Moran &
Russ Moran, 1981 & 1978

Linda Finholt & Gerd Raetzel
(AFS student), 1967

Mike Wise & Pam Carlson, 1967 & 1968

Lisa Berntsen & Dan Seery, 1984 & 1981

LeAnn Friden & Jeff Kinney, 1972

Ronald Holasek & Audrey Clark

David Gatto & Karyn Jones, 2004

REMEMBERING THE GREATEST GENERATION

The schools in Eden Prairie **Al Picha ('30)** and **Abbie Tuckey ('30)** knew aren't the ones you see today.

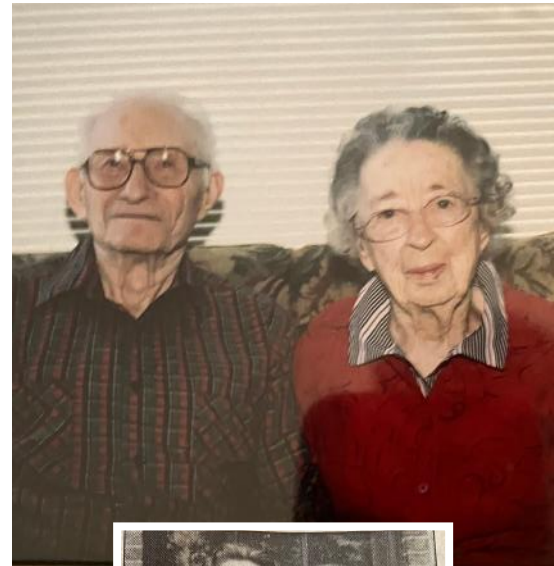
Members of Eden Prairie High School's second graduating class, which was only 13 students in 1930, Tuckey and Picha attended schools surrounded by farmland. They didn't have extracurricular activities like prom and homecoming, and school offered just one official sport: basketball.

Tuckey adored sports and played as a guard on an unofficial Eden Prairie women's basketball team. Al was also a basketball star who made a shot from half-court to win a championship game against Bloomington in 1929. The athletic letters awarded to students for high school accomplishments were actually designed by Picha that year — and he was the first Eden Prairie athlete to receive one. His design lived on for many years as the official Eden Prairie Schools logo.

The arts also played an important part in the lives of these athletes. Tuckey was a skilled pianist. Picha painted watercolors — with his right hand, as required by his teachers at the time, even though he was left-handed.

In the face of the Great Depression, Tuckey and Picha were determined to start their life together on solid ground. Instead of marrying early, they both worked hard on their families' farms for the next 10 years to have enough money to buy their own farm by the time they married. Al took on additional odd jobs, like rock picking for 25 cents a day. They married in 1940. Their son **Ken Picha** was a member of Eden Prairie's Class of 1966 and his brother **Dwight Picha** graduated in 1972.

Al and Abbie stayed on their farm in Eden Prairie well into their 90s, not leaving until 2003. Al passed away in 2008 and Abbie in 2010 — just shy of her 100th birthday. Their farm is now partially covered in Eden Prairie homes (some likely housing today's Eden Prairie Schools students) and also contributed to Bent Creek Golf Course. Just as Al's EP still proudly crowns the Historic Gym stage curtains, the legacy of this quintessential Eden Prairie couple lives on today.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KEN PICHA

Top: The couple in their later years

Bottom: Picha and Tuckey in front of the Consolidated School



Original EP logo designed by Al Picha

Steve Turnbull & Gail Pratt, 1973

Jill Schwartz & Jock Grier, 1968 & 1967

Rick Ravnholdt & Winnie Boyd

Tim Holte & Debbie Vest

Jeff Vohnoutka &
Jodi (Allar) Vohnoutka, 1977

Tom Hoverson &
Jill (Anderson) Hoverson, 1977

Mark Babatz & Louise Babatz, 1977

Todd Bertelson &
Mary (Nordsletten) Bertelson, 1976

Melissa Johnson Nelson &
Mark Nelson, 1985

Mark Freiberg & Patty Freiberg

Spencer Conrad & Janet Maki

Mike Geimer & Rebecca Lacy, 1976

Randy Schulman & Michael Collins,
1968 & 1966

Steve Berg & Angie Geason

Laurie Peterson & Boyd Peterson,
1980 & 1981



HOLLOWAYS

in the Hallways



Malakai with siblings Caleb and Maleah in her classroom



There was a time when no matter which Eden Prairie Schools building you entered, you had a pretty good chance of finding a Holloway or two.

These days, two Holloways work for the district, two attend Eden Prairie High School (EPHS), and two are in college making Eagle Nation proud.

Eden Prairie Schools was an amazing jumping-off point for her children, said mom **Nolana Holloway**, who now works as an inclusion and belonging facilitator at EPHS and first joined the district in 2006.

“We found a community for our kids here in Eden Prairie Schools,” she said. “When we first joined the district, there weren’t a lot of people who looked like us — but there was *always* an incredible teacher or two who connected with and inspired our kids, who saw who they could be.”

“The number of teachers who understand diversity has only grown through the years,” she added.

Now counted among those dedicated teachers is Nolana’s oldest child **Malakai Holloway (18)**, whose lasting connections in Eden Prairie inspired her return to teach visual and theater arts at Central Middle School. A graduate of Bethel University in St. Paul, Malakai believes in the importance of Black students seeing a Black teacher at the front of the classroom. She’s not stopping with representation at school: Malakai is also training to run the 800-meter race for the U.S. in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

“We found a community for our kids here in Eden Prairie Schools.” - Nolana Holloway

Malakai’s younger sister **Niamya Holloway (22)** was a celebrated scholar and athlete at EPHS and now plays on the University of Minnesota women’s basketball team. A government buff, she hopes her policymaking and administrative degree (with a minor in German) will allow her to someday work in urban planning to create safe play spaces in cities.



PHOTO: RICK OLSON, EDEN PRAIRIE LOCAL NEWS

Niamya Holloway playing in an EP basketball game



PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA ATHLETICS

Niamya’s Gophers women’s basketball photo



PHOTO: BRAD REMPEL

Niamya playing in a Gophers basketball game

Nolana's son **Todd Holloway** is on his way to a degree in engineering and cybersecurity at North Central University in Minneapolis. He also excels in sports, but with a twist: Todd is a member of a DI esports varsity team playing Nintendo's "Super Smash Bros."

"He takes competition to a whole new level!" Nolana laughed. "And, of course, I think they all get that drive for success from their mom."

"And, of course, I think they all get that drive for success from their mom."

- Nolana Holloway

Starting their 10th-grade year at EPHS, twins **Caleb** and **Maleah Holloway** also share the drive that defines their older siblings. Maleah is considering a career in pediatric endocrinology after walking alongside her brother during his childhood diagnosis of Type I diabetes. Caleb, meanwhile, doesn't let that diagnosis stop him. He's a four-sport athlete (football, wrestling and track for Eden Prairie, and rugby outside of EP), and is considering becoming a structural architect.

So where does that signature Holloway direction, purpose and momentum come from (besides mom)?

Nolana is quick to credit Eden Prairie Schools staff who helped shape her kids through teaching and mentoring. Teachers have stuck by them through their college journeys, checking in with them or attending their games. And, of course, the focus starts at home.



The Holloway family

"We are a family of educators," Nolana said. "The kids' grandma was an educator, and my husband is a college doctoral advisor. We told the kids they had to focus in school on the three As: arts, athletics and academics. They didn't have to master all three, but have a balance. Eden Prairie has allowed them to do that."

That balance is something Nolana hopes she can continue to help other Eden Prairie Schools students find in her new role. Having witnessed the impact EP staff had in her own children's lives, she knows how important it is to build welcoming and inclusive environments for every Eagle.

"When you're comfortable in the space you're in, you produce better work," Nolana explained. "I'll be creating affinity spaces and building connections with students, staff and families as we dig into our data and test scores to better understand what our school can do to help everyone feel safe and do their best."

"Our community still has work to do, but I'm really proud of the strides Eden Prairie Schools has taken for families like mine who are looking for a good community to settle in."



"I'm really proud of the strides Eden Prairie Schools has taken for families like mine."



Traveling Their Paths

For Eden Lake and Forest Hills' maintenance operations coordinator, work is a chance to uplift others.

Name an Eden Prairie Schools building, and **Jorge Garcia** has probably helped keep it in top shape for students and staff. Since joining Eden Prairie Schools as a day custodian in spring 2017, he's worked at every school except Cedar Ridge Elementary. "It's been a wonderful experience. The opportunities are there," he said of his seven years in the district. "I'm big on helping others and training — paying it forward. I look at it as a community of people, not only our immediate staff, but the whole school. I try to look at the big picture and hopefully give something back."

"I like to learn about their culture, their family, their background. I like to make connections, because I've traveled some of their paths." - Jorge Garcia

As an immigrant who came to America in 1969 not speaking any English, Garcia can empathize with the unique experiences of our staff members and the students and families they serve. "The diversity that we have, just in our department — we probably have, I think, 23 people from different countries," he said. "I like to learn about their culture, their family, their background. I like to make connections, because I've traveled some of their paths."

That diversity came in handy, Garcia remembered, when a family dropped off two young children at Oak Point Elementary not realizing there was no school that day. It was clear English wasn't the students' primary language, so Garcia gave his other four languages a try — Spanish, French, Russian and Italian. Eventually, he realized the students had recently come to Eden Prairie from Ukraine. "I got on the phone, and I called one of my guys who happens to be Ukrainian, and he speaks four different languages. I was like, 'Uh, can you come and help me?'," Garcia laughed. "And the funny part is, after we got all done with this, he said, 'You know, I had to talk to the grandparents. And the grandparents grew up one town away from me, and they kind of knew my family.' So, there. You make a connection. It doesn't take much."

Speaking of connections, Garcia's made plenty of his own. One in particular sticks with him years later. When Garcia supported the TASSEL Transition Program, which serves students ages 18-22 with disabilities, a mother brought her student to school early each day. "He always had a hard time going into his classroom," Garcia recalled. "At that time, I was vacuuming the front entryway, and he would always come over to me. And I asked mom, 'Is it okay if he vacuums for just a few minutes?' So every morning he would come in, and I'd say,

‘Okay, yup, that’s fine, you can vacuum, but you gotta remember this is my job, and my boss is watching. So you can do it for a few minutes,’” he chuckled. “And then he would happily go into his room. So it became kind of a routine for him. And a few months later, his mom talked to me, and she said, ‘You know, he’s never reacted to anyone that way. And he’s becoming more open.’” The emotion on Garcia’s face was clear. “That brings a wonderful feeling in my heart.”

What might others not realize about the EP Facilities team? Their qualifications, Garcia said. “You look at the background that some of these people have — they were engineers, they were master plumbers, they were master electricians in another country. I have somebody that was a doctor,” he emphasized. Certification requirements can pose barriers to employment for people in these professions immigrating to the U.S. “You get people that have their master’s in other countries, people that have doctorates, but they’re cleaning toilets for you.” All facilities team members, he said, are “kind of the unsung heroes of the school.”

The job has become even more personal for Garcia lately — two of his grandchildren now attend Eagle Heights Spanish Immersion. “I try to give all of my accolades. People come to me and say, ‘Hey, you’ve got one of the most beautiful schools, it’s all clean and everything.’ I say, ‘It’s not me — it’s my guys.’”



Garcia in the Forest Hills maintenance room



*Forest Hills Elementary maintenance staff, pictured left to right:
Pastor Sanchez Rubio, John Stewart, Danny Wagner ('06), Jorge Garcia, Mark Hillegas*



Amy Peterson

Fifteen & Flourishing

The sky's the limit for TASSEL

When **Robert “Bobby” Crumrine ('12, TASSEL '14)** attended the TASSEL (Teaching All Students Skills for Employment & Life) Transition Program 10 years ago, the program was tucked into a little corner of the Eden Prairie Schools Administrative Services Center. There was just enough room for the makeshift “apartments” that served as classrooms to teach life skills to students with disabilities ages 18 to 21.

Crumrine, now 31, is a valued employee at Opportunity Partners. TASSEL has grown just like Bobby has, and the program has moved twice since he attended: first to the Eden Prairie City Center and now, this fall, into a spacious new permanent home in the former UNFI building on Valley View Road. A recent Minnesota legislature change expanded the program to include 22-year-old students, and the new building allows TASSEL to continue to grow and serve an increasing number of students with diverse and changing needs.

“TASSEL is an incredibly individualized program, because the needs of every student with disabilities can be so different,” explained **Amy Peterson, director of special services**, who helps to lead the TASSEL program. “We move our students toward independence, and independence may look different for every student.”

“We move our students toward independence, and independence may look different for every student.” - Amy Peterson

The larger building will provide more space for students to develop their life skills, like interviewing, working a full- or part-time job or sharing an apartment with a roommate.



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOBBY CRUMRINE

Bobby Crumrine receiving his diploma at his TASSEL graduation

TASSEL support isn't based on a student's ability to reach state graduation standards, but on how well they have developed skills needed to live independently. Eden Prairie Schools staff members get to know a student's individual needs very well from kindergarten through grade 12, and then refer a student to TASSEL if they decide the student would benefit from an extended transition period after high school. Explained Peterson, "We offer support and services tailored to make every student successful."

"We offer support and services tailored to make every student successful."

- Amy Peterson

Since its start 15 years ago, TASSEL has supported approximately 200 students in their journey to independence. Curriculum ranges from managing money to healthy living to digital citizenship. Adaptive skills students learn might be measuring ingredients for a recipe or understanding and signing a rent agreement. Students who are also working a part-time job learn how to make their own lunches and schedule rides using Metro Mobility, tasks that vary in difficulty depending on a student's transition goals.

A partnership with the south campus of Hennepin Technical College enriches the TASSEL experience for many students, like Bobby, who learned customer service skills in HTC's cafeteria. Students also spend time in the community to learn how to grocery shop, visit the library or exercise in fitness facilities.

A 103-year-old neighbor counts on Bobby to help take out his garbage each week, and Bobby's mom, **Merilee Crumrine**, said she believes TASSEL made it possible for him to have the full life he leads today as a crucial member of his community. She's especially grateful for the socialization opportunities it provided for Bobby and his friends.

"Once kids receiving special education services reach the middle and high school years, they aren't together as much as they once were," said Merilee, who now inspires the next generation as a kindergarten paraprofessional at Eden Lake Elementary. "I was grateful that he could remain close with his friends at TASSEL."

As the well-known saying goes, "It's about the journey, not the destination." And as TASSEL moves into its next phase in a new building, there's no question it will be a key part of Eden Prairie Schools' journey through the next 100 years!

SIBLING SUPERSTARS

A spotlight on siblings who make Eagle Nation proud

In its 100-year history, Eden Prairie Schools has helped foster and inspire thousands of brilliant minds, outstanding athletes, and high-level achievers in all walks of life. Many of these exceptional Eagles have shared their successes with siblings who also made a name for themselves in Eden Prairie Schools.

AVERY & JOSIE WALLACE ('24)

Some believe twins share a sixth sense — an innate ability to tap into the thoughts and feelings of one another. The jury may still be out on that, but one thing is certain: **Avery** and **Josie Wallace** sure have a lot in common.

Both played lacrosse for eight years and shared the same line as midfielders. Both were team captains. Both were selected All-Section, All-Conference, All-State and named Ms. Lacrosse finalists. Both played varsity soccer. And on top of those impressive athletic resumes, both were dedicated to their academics, graduating from Eden Prairie High School (EPHS) with 3.9+ grade point averages. They clearly know what makes them Sibling Superstars.

“Our hard work and dedication,” Avery said. “We strived to make our teams better by being coachable, by being leaders and through our determination.”

Josie added that older sister **Winnie Wallace ('22)** paved the way for the Wallace twins. “All three of us were on the lacrosse team, making our own impacts and showcasing our athletic abilities. Winnie was also a gymnast and a captain for the high school team. We were all great students, captains, teammates and athletes. I am so proud of my sisters and loved making a positive impact with them at EPHS.”

After sharing so much success together in Eden Prairie Schools, including a section championship in lacrosse in 2021, the Wallace twins followed their own paths at separate colleges in Ohio. Josie is attending Kent State, while Avery is attending the University of Akron. Given their bond, it's not surprising those colleges are only 20 minutes apart. And with their respective lacrosse teams playing in the same conference, the sisters will get to experience playing on opposing lines for the first time.

“I think it's going to be interesting how that plays out, because I think we'll know how each other will play,” Avery predicted in an interview with WCCO in May.



Josie (top) and Avery (bottom) playing EP lacrosse



Avery (top left) and Josie (top right) coaching the next generation of Eagles

Perhaps the sixth-sense belief is the product of a deep understanding and bond between siblings, which the Wallace twins have exhibited from the time they were young Eagles to their triumph as champion lacrosse players at EPHS.

“I see being a twin as a strength, because you always have someone there to support you,” Josie emphasized. “We enjoy each other’s company, have a lot of good laughs, and in the end, I think we’re really lucky to have one another.”

MATT, ADAM & MELISSA STEELE (’97, ’99 & ’01)

The Steele siblings are no strangers to adversity. Despite being decorated, multisport athletes in high school, each faced and overcame obstacles tied to competing at the highest level.

This was especially true for **Matt Steele**, a talented hurdler. The oldest Steele sibling set the standard for his younger brother and sister when he became a state champion in the 110-meter hurdles as an 11th grader at EPHS. A three-sport athlete in cross country, downhill skiing and track, Matt credits high school athletics with teaching him resilience and discipline — skills forged when he suffered a hamstring injury in the middle of his 12th grade year.

“It was an injury I couldn’t recover from. It took me out of contention to defend my state title,” he acknowledged. “But I was still a captain and part of the team. Even though I was struggling personally, I was still able to motivate them by having a positive attitude, supporting the team in their successes, and continuing to put in the workouts to try and defeat the odds. The result didn’t turn out the way I wanted, but it taught me the process was more important than the result.”

If it can be said Matt’s achievements cast a shadow on his siblings, **Adam Steele** quickly ran out from under it — literally. He won the state title in the 400-meter sprint as an 11th and 12th grader, plus the 800-meter run and 4x800-meter relay his 12th grade year. A hockey player, cross country runner and track star during his time at EPHS, Adam pointed to the great coaching he received in high school as a cornerstone in helping him build his leadership skills.

A track scholarship took Adam to the University of Minnesota, where he won an NCAA championship in the 400-meter run in 2003. After a thrilling photo-finish, he won the title with a time of 44.57 seconds



Pictured left to right: The Steele siblings, Matt, Melissa and Adam

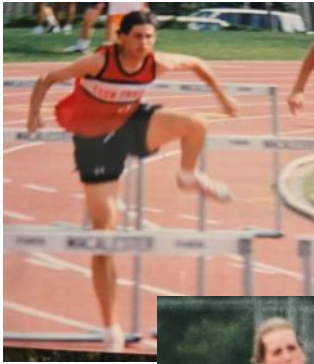
— the fastest 400-meter sprint recorded in the world at that point. The time stands as a school record to this day. He went on to run for Team USA in multiple competitions, including the 2003 World Championships in Paris. Despite his run of success, injuries from overtraining caused him to fall short of his ultimate goal — qualifying for the 400-meter in the 2004 Athens Olympics. While training to qualify for the 800-meter race in the 2008 Beijing Olympics, he suffered an Achilles injury that forced him to retire from his running career.

“I wish mental health was discussed more openly during my career like it is today. I remember a number of days throughout my college and professional career that were very difficult,” he reflected. “I learned how to heal through time and talking. I don’t have control over time, but I had control over talking with former coaches, athletes, and my wife, Katie. As a therapist and former college athlete herself, she understood and knew when to be supportive and when to tell me I had to move on.”

The youngest sibling, **Melissa (Steele) Merritt**, just wanted to keep up with her two big brothers. That was enough motivation to become an outstanding athlete in gymnastics, cross country and hurdles.

“I remember from a young age always trying to keep up with them,” Melissa recalled. “Matt was successful at hurdles, and my gymnastics background made it easy for me to pick up. I loved it. Adam kept me chasing his success and wanting more. Watching

JOHN & STEVE TURNBULL ('71 & '73)



The Steele siblings in EP track & field
Top left: Matt; top right: Adam; bottom: Melissa

him run and train kept me motivated and working hard. They both set the bar high for me to follow, and I loved living up to the challenge."

Melissa competed at statewide championships in all three sports, earning a remarkable three-peat of 300-meter hurdles titles as a 10th, 11th and 12th grader. Her exceptional athletic achievements at EPHS culminated in receiving the Athena Award in her 12th grade year.

After high school, Melissa followed in Adam's footsteps and was his track teammate for the first two of her four years at the University of Minnesota. She won a Big Ten title in the 400-meter hurdles in 2005 with a time of 57.67 seconds, a school record that stood for 13 years. Despite the successes she achieved in her athletic career, it's learning from failures that sticks with her to this day.

"I think the hardest part about competing in a sport is training and working hard, then showing up for a competition and not performing your best," Melissa explained. "Reflecting on that anger and disappointment and putting it into training for the next competition is how you overcome it and become better. I use this a lot in my adult life. I constantly reflect as a parent and elementary educator and ask myself what I can do better next time."

It all started with football in the snowy front yard for **John** and **Steve Turnbull**, brothers who eventually became crucial contributors to the 1970 Eden Prairie football team that won the program's first-ever conference title. John, a 12th grader and co-captain, played halfback and outside linebacker, while Steve, a 10th grader who was bigger than his older brother, played fullback and middle linebacker.

"If I could choose one word to describe that team, it would be tough," John said. "And we became tougher and more unified as the season progressed."

After losing its first conference game to rival Shakopee, the team brought home five straight wins until the title-deciding game against St. Anthony. The scrappy squad snatched victory from the jaws of defeat with a late touchdown and gutsy two-point conversion, winning the game 8-7 and earning the coveted title. John was named team MVP and All-Conference, while Steve was an All-Conference Honorable Mention.

"After the season ended, I wrote the final football wrap-up in *The Eyrrie* and titled the piece 'Eagles Walk On Water,'" John remembered. "That was a dual reference to the success we had as a team and also to describe the field conditions, as that fall was wet and we often played in the slop."

A young man of many talents, in his 12th grade year alone John was co-editor-in-chief of *The Eyrrie*; class president; treasurer of the National Honor Society; choir member; writer and performer of his own song, "Think Blue," at Sno Daze festivities; intramural basketball player; track, ski club and letterman's club member; and, according to him, player in "an absolutely killer performance of 'Fiddler on the Roof.'" He was also co-valedictorian, along with **Merri Lee Patterson ('71)**.

Asked why he felt compelled to participate in so many extracurricular activities and events, John modestly observed that "with family support, and being surrounded by caring and creative kids and teachers, being in that environment of opportunity makes things easy and enjoyable."

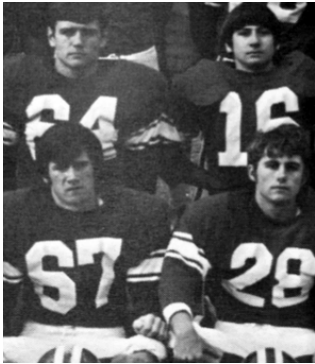
Steve was an exceptionally gifted athlete who led the football team to an undefeated season and another conference title in 1972. That same year, he won the state title in shot put with a distance of 59.475 feet — which stands to this day as the oldest Eden Prairie track & field record. His athletic accolades earned him football and track scholarships to the University of Minnesota.



John with fellow Eyrie staff



Steve throwing shotput for the state title



John, #28



Steve, #32



PHOTO COURTESY OF EDEN PRAIRIE LOCAL NEWS

John, fifth from the right and dressed in black, with the 1970 football team at a reunion at Aerie Stadium

Chronicling Steve's talents and successes, John joked, "Did I mention I was a faster runner than him?"

While the brothers enjoyed many years operating the family business together, being uncles to each other's sons, adventuring on hunting and fishing trips, and recounting the glory days on the football field, John now hopes Steve is "enjoying himself in Valhalla" after passing away on Oct. 22, 2022. After also enduring the sudden loss of his son Jason in March of this year, John expressed sincere gratitude for the Eden Prairie community. He said the love and support he received helped sustain him through his grief.

"Once again, the great people of Eden Prairie stepped up and in, for which I am so grateful." - John Turnbull

"The unexpected appearance of so many classmates and people from my youth at Jason's funeral, as well as the comments and responses posted online — some from people I have not seen since graduation — were a great comfort and encouragement. They gave me the love I could not give myself," John reflected. "Once again, the great people of Eden Prairie stepped up and in, for which I am so grateful. They remain worthy and deserving. Love you guys!"

Hosting a reunion?

Get in touch with our Alumni Relations team so we can support you!

Please send details to Molly Malone at mmalone@edenpr.org so we can spread the word.



Meet Molly Malone ('03), our director of community engagement & alumni Relations!





THE INAUGURAL INSPIRED JOURNEY SUMMIT

Showcasing our students' authentic learning experiences



The Inspired Journey is the vision we have for each student in Eden Prairie Schools. It's the implementation of our mission: To inspire each student to learn continuously so they are empowered to reach personal fulfillment and contribute purposefully to our ever-changing world. Throughout each student's unique Inspired Journey, they discover their talents and interests, explore their options and opportunities, and pursue their goals and passions. These experiences were on full display on May 22 at the inaugural Inspired Journey Summit!

The Inspired Journey Summit was established in 2024 to showcase the individual journeys of students throughout the school year. The first-ever Summit, which took place at Eden Prairie High School (EPHS), was an overwhelming success. Hundreds of Eden Prairie Schools students in grades 5-12 presented projects that showed teachers, community partner judges, families and friends their authentic academic journey during the 2023-24 school year.

"I think two things made the Summit successful," explained **Ethan Dado, the district's Pathways coordinator**, who co-created and organized the event. "One was the engagement from students. There's a big difference between turning in an assignment to a teacher and displaying your work for a thousand people to see. So seeing the buy-in from students when they realized what their project could be in this environment was incredible. And secondly, for the first time, our community could really see what the Inspired Journey looks like — from elementary all the way through high school — and the progression of skills students demonstrate on that journey. Families had the opportunity to see why this is a phenomenal place to go to school, because of the unmatched learning environment we're creating and providing for their students."

Students displayed a wide range of projects in each of our five interest-area Pathways: Business & Management; Communication & Arts; Engineering, Technology & Manufacturing; Human & Public Services; and Natural & Applied Sciences.

"At the elementary level, there was a Harry Potter group, a group that put together some plays, a group that started their own business and actually sold some of their products at the Summit," Dado recalled. "For middle school, students showed off a range of projects inspired by our Pathways, from art projects to cars run on carbon dioxide, metal embossing to pens made on a wood lathe, and even

a stock market challenge game. So students really took advantage of the opportunity to showcase some of the authentic learning they did last year."

Projects from middle and high school students were judged by community partners, who awarded first and second place prizes in each Pathway at the conclusion of the event.

Dado expressed his appreciation for all of the community support the inaugural event received, as well as his excitement to see how students will showcase their Inspired Journey at this school year's Summit. It is scheduled to take place on Thursday, May 22, 2025, at EPHS.

Wondering how students felt about our first-ever Inspired Journey Summit? **Nawal Abdullahi** was a 10th grade student at EPHS at the time of the Summit. She and her project partner, then-10th grader **Cecelia "Cece" Erickson**, won first prize in the Business & Management Pathway for their project "Magnetizing Modesty," which focused on making wearing hijabs safer with magnets. Read on to hear their story!



Signs welcomed families and community members to the inaugural Inspired Journey Summit on May 22

A participant's perspective

A Q&A with Nawal Abdullahi

What was the subject of your Inspired Journey Summit project?

Our project was centered around marketing a product from the company Haute Hijab called the "No-Snag Hijab Magnets." These magnets are an alternative to safety pins, which are used to fasten hijabs at the neck. Safety pins pose a major safety risk when people put them in their mouths [before pinning the hijab], which can lead to serious injury or, in severe cases, death. Haute Hijab was the first company to offer magnets as a stylish, affordable option, which is why we decided to pick their product as the focal point of our campaign.

Did you create this project for a class, activity or the Inspired Journey Summit?

We created this project for DECA, a club designed to prepare emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management.

Why did you choose to do this project? What about the subject interested you?

One of the biggest reasons we chose to do this project is because the cause resonated so deeply with both of us. I am a young Muslim girl and a product like this one would have been incredibly helpful for me growing up. What interested us the most is how they so effortlessly combined modesty, fashion and affordability. Oftentimes, modest style is either outdated or wildly expensive, so it was refreshing to see a product like this be so easily accessible.

How do you feel about how your project turned out? Why are you proud of it?

I am beyond proud of how our project turned out — I got so much more out of it than I expected to. I learned many different skills, whether it was analyzing different pieces of data, thinking on my feet, or simply managing my time efficiently. Surprisingly, I am not most proud of what I was taught *myself*, but what I was able to teach *others*. I had so many judges, parents, teachers and peers marvel at the creativity of our project and commend us for speaking on a topic and issue that many of them didn't even realize was present.



Erickson and Abdullahi with their first-place prize

How did it feel to display your project to so many teachers, students, families and friends at the Inspired Journey Summit? What did people like about it?

It was awesome! We really enjoyed being able to show off something that we had put so much time and effort into. We had lots of fun being able to share the joy we felt about our project with others. People seemed to enjoy the design of our project display and the magnets we had set out. It made it much easier for them to visualize our project.

What was your favorite part of the Inspired Journey Summit and why? Are you looking forward to participating again this year?

My favorite part was really just being able to share something I am so passionate about alongside my best friend. This was a project we had been working on for months, so by the Summit we knew it like the back of our hands. Being able to see how interested people were in our topic was really rewarding and impactful. I am so excited to do it again!

What advice or encouragement would you give to students who might be interested in displaying a project at the 2025 Inspired Journey Summit?

I would tell them not to stress about it too heavily. You are there to display a project you care a lot about and have worked so hard on! Be proud of yourself, let your personality shine through, and let your knowledge do all the talking!



EAGLE MARCHING BAND: A legacy 60 years strong





1934 Eden Prairie Consolidated School Band

The award-winning Eden Prairie High School (EPHS) Band, including its marching band, has never been shy about sharing its music with the community.

"There is something special about Eagle Marching Band practices," said former drum major **Jake Schreifels ('24)**, referencing outdoor practices held from July to October. "They are very loud, so people visit and stop to watch us." That volume – literally and figuratively – has been making the community stop and listen for more than 60 years, since **Emmet "Em" Stark** served as its first director.

Eagle Band connects people within its multiple ensembles and across Eden Prairie, and its rouser is a rallying call for Eagles near and far. "Band connects people through art," said **current director Mike Whipkey**, who has led the program for the last quarter century. "Playing with high discipline creates a performance that evokes extreme emotion both in the player and in audience members."

"Band connects people through art."

- Mike Whipkey

Eagle Band now boasts over 300 students in a range of groups, including wind ensemble, concert band, two jazz bands, jazz combo, two bands specifically for ninth graders, winter drumline, winter color guard and the marching band. Notable achievements include a Grand Champion placement in the AAA Marching Band competition at the 2015 Minnesota State Fair, first-place drumline finishes in the 2022 marching and winter seasons (plus a second-place color guard award that marching season), and an invitation to perform at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., in March 2025.



2023-24 Eden Prairie High School Marching Band

There's also a deep connection between the band and the community. The annual ExtravaBANDza invites Eden Prairie middle school students to join one of four band sections to learn basic skills, meet players, and get excited for the high school program. Prairie Colors, a marching band festival held at EPHS each September, features 12 high school bands from the Twin Cities, Greater Minnesota and Iowa. And the band's bond is strong: Within the last two years, alumni and current band families raised more than \$70,000 to purchase a trailer for taking instruments to events and to support the medical needs of one of the band's directors.

Some band members can't stay away for long, like **Zach Fitzgibbon ('14)**, who instructs winter drumline, or **Ben Anderson ('98)**, who now directs the band at Central Middle School. Others go out to share their talents with the world, like **Molly Watters ('04)**, a trumpet player who became the first female drum major for the University of Minnesota, and **Betsy McCann ('99)**, the current director of the University of Minnesota band.

"Just being able to create music brings people together and creates a special bond." - Jake Schreifels

For former drum major Schreifels, the community has always been at the heart of the band's success.

"Just being able to create music brings people together and creates a special bond," he said. "Whether it's the silly rituals each section of the band has or just being able to make music with your closest friends, band creates a thriving community within Eden Prairie."

*This story includes contributions from EPHS Multimedia Story Production students **Dylan Leung** and **Brooke Tape**.*

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Eagles aren't in our schools forever — eventually, they fly the nest! And when they do, many give back to make an impact for the next generation.



The Eden Prairie Schools Centennial Blend



EPHS students during their visit to Smith Coffee & Café

SMITH COFFEE & CAFÉ

More than 100 years since it was built, Eden Prairie's Smith-Douglas-More House continues to contribute to our city and schools. The historic home now houses Smith Coffee & Café, owned by **Ann Schuster** and operated by her son, **Alex Schuster ('04)**. With deep ties to Eden Prairie Schools — Ann's father was the lead architect who designed Eden Prairie High School (EPHS) — the Schusters were all-in when the district contacted them about supporting its centennial celebration in 2024.

Smith developed and sold a special coffee, the Centennial Blend, and donated one dollar back to Eden Prairie Schools for each bag sold. It also featured a special drink, the "Eagle Spirit Latte," on its menu and gave district staff a 10% discount on purchases during the week after spring break.

"This partnership demonstrated for us how much the staff care about being part of the Eden Prairie community," Alex said. "It's so important for schools to be part of the community — and for the community to be part of our schools."

"It's so important for schools to be part of the community — and for the community to be part of our schools." - Alex Schuster

Alex and the Smith team put that vision into action when an EPHS Science, Research and Design class visited the café to gain real-life experience in the science of coffee and taste various blends.

"It was fun to see our next generation of leaders," Alex reflected. "This project was a nice way to unite our schools and community."

KUUBS MODERN MEDITERRANEAN

Not too far across town, **Mouhamed Koubaytari ('07)** runs Kuubs Modern Mediterranean Restaurant, which has quickly become a community favorite. Koubaytari generously donated delicious cilantro chicken bowls served at the 100 Years of Inspiring Each Citywide Prom.

“Donating food to our citywide prom was a great way to give back while also getting our name and food in front of people,” he said.

The restaurant’s name, “Kuubs,” comes from the nickname Koubaytari earned in the halls of EPHS that sticks with him today. An Eden Prairie native, Koubaytari wanted to create a restaurant that shared the coastal Mediterranean foods he grew up with as a child of Syrian parents – including gyros, kabobs and falafel.

“Growing up, people were fascinated by the foods we ate at home,” he explained. “And my master’s degree in community health helped me understand how important healthy foods are to our overall health. All our food is cooked fresh for each customer.”



Kuubs Modern Mediterranean, soon after its opening in May 2022

Eden Prairie’s exceptional education is possible thanks to the collaboration of community partners like the Schusters and Koubaytari, whose Eagle Pride lasted long beyond their days in our schools.

When our schools and local organizations work together – inside classrooms, at job shadows, or during site visits – we both benefit from the resources, expertise and support we provide each other.

Offer your expertise and empower the next generation of leaders when you **pursue a partnership with Eden Prairie Schools!**

VOLUNTEER

Share your skills by speaking, mentoring, and more – students benefit from your experience.

DONATE

Enhance student learning opportunities through financial support and corporate resources.

PARTNER

Benefit from mutually beneficial relationships. Want to raise your visibility in the community? Looking for interns? Get in touch!





Eagle Excellence

Eagle Pride burns bright! Here are some recognitions earned this past year.

FALL 2023



Oak Point Elementary named a 2023 National Blue Ribbon School

Oak Point Elementary was one of only nine Minnesota schools recognized by the United States Department of Education for closing achievement gaps among student groups on assessments, helping each child find success in school and beyond.

- **Eagle football** finished an undefeated season with its 19th state semifinal in the last 21 years.
- **Brett Lobben ('91)**, then-associate principal of Prairie View Elementary, was named National Outstanding Assistant Principal from Minnesota.
- **Our community** helped us raise \$19,240 on Give to the Max Day to support student programs and opportunities.
- Then-EPHS 11th grader **Andrew "Drew" Ploof** was one of 52 students nationwide selected to participate in a National Swim Camp at the Olympic Training Center.



EP Online's Alice Lee earns chess world championship gold medal

Then-ninth grader **Alice Lee**, the youngest American female to become an International Master elect in chess, claimed an individual gold medal at the FIDE Women's World Team Championship and helped the U.S. women's team to a fourth-place finish. In March, she won the Women's American Cup.

WINTER 2023-24



MAYA BOOKER



KATIE HORSTMANN



SUZANNE NIESON



KATHY SMITH



RACHEL SPESSARD



KRISTEN STRAUSS



KELLY THIERFELDER



Seven EP teachers nominated for Minnesota Teacher of the Year

For the last 60 years, Education Minnesota has celebrated the tradition of excellent Minnesota teaching with its Teacher of the Year award. There were seven EP nominees this year!

- Then-11th grader **Rishi Naagappan** and **Srikar Sannapareddy ('24)** took second place in the Congressional App Challenge.
- **Sasha Allen ('24), Rohil Garg ('24), Neha Karri ('24), Madeline Kaufman ('24), Siona Kaura ('24), Nikhil Kori ('24), Kate Ropchak ('24)** and **Lisa Thayil ('24)** earned perfect scores on the ACT.
- **Ryan Donohue ('24)** became the second-highest goal scorer in the history of the Eden Prairie boys soccer team.
- **Yash Dagade ('24)** earned a spot in the Regeneron Science Talent Search.
- CMS Science Bowl students **Leisha Mekala, Pranavi Peri, Siyona Singh, Swara Sujith, Navaneeth Uditya, Aziyah Presley-Sackman** and **Eli Pudenz** built a standalone solar electric system to bring reliable electricity to a community in East Africa.
- **Jasmine Garry ('24), Lisa Thayil ('24)** and **Anjali Marella ('24)** were named state finalists in the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow competition.

SPRING 2024



Eden Prairie Schools named among National Green Ribbon Schools

Eden Prairie Schools was one of only 10 districts nationwide to receive a National Green Ribbon Schools award for reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring high-quality environmental education programming that prepares students with sustainability skills.

- Then-11th grader **Emily Oberleitner** presented a paper at the Design of Medical Devices Conference at the University of Minnesota.
- Over 60 **EPHS 12th graders** received scholarships from community partners at the Celebration of Excellence.
- **EPHS Health Office Paraprofessional Keshia Deon** saved a student's life by administering the Heimlich Maneuver.
- **Eagle Nation** donated 545 pounds of food to PROP Food Shelf to support families in need.
- The **EPHS DECA team** exceeded the past year's record-breaking success by winning trophies in five events at the International Career Development Conference.



Kristin Cayo's teaching honored

Kristin Cayo, a Forest Hills and EP Online gifted and talented programming teacher, was selected as a 2024 finalist for the prestigious Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST). This honor, administered by the National Science Foundation on behalf of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, recognizes the highest achievements of K-12 STEM teachers across the United States.

SUMMER 2024



SASHA ALLEN



NEHA KARRI



PRANAV NARANAYAN



BRIAN SHI

Four EPHS students named National Merit Scholars

Class of 2024 graduates **Sasha Allen, Neha Karri, Pranav Naranayan** and **Brian Shi** were named National Merit Scholars in the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Corporation competition.

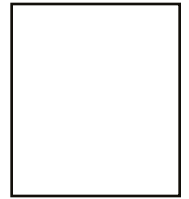
- The **EPHS softball team** won all four Section 2AAAA games and advanced to the state tournament for the first time in five years, finishing third.
- Then-eighth grader **Sahil Parasharami** won first place in the World of 8 Billion international student video contest.
- Then-Eden Lake fifth grader **Atharv Wani** tied for first place in the fifth grade face drill round at the 2024 Math Masters state competition.



Dirk Tedmon named National School Communicator of the Year

Executive Director of Marketing & Communications Dirk Tedmon, APR, was named the National School Public Relations Association's first-ever National School Communicator of the Year. He was selected for leading a team that demonstrates ongoing excellence in connecting our community to our schools.

- **Forest Hills** and **Oak Point** elementary schools were recognized for exceptional leadership in implementing and sustaining PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports).



INSPIRED BY THE STORIES IN THIS MAGAZINE?

THERE'S MORE TO DISCOVER IN EDEN PRAIRIE SCHOOLS!

Community Education provides lifelong learning and programming options for all ages!

Eden Prairie Schools offers Community Education programming for all ages to enjoy! Whether you are looking to kickstart early development in your littlest learner, add some after-school fun for your elementary student, or pick up a new skill of your own, there is so much to explore outside of the regular school day.

Community Education also offers resources and support for all Eden Prairie residents, as well as other fun and rewarding ways to connect with community and give back. Explore volunteer opportunities, learn about renting district facilities, discover how to teach a class through Community Education, and more! We truly have something for everyone!

Discover the wide range of experiences available to you and your family in Eden Prairie Schools!

Learn more at edenpr.org/epcommunityed or give us a call at 952-975-6940.

