

Excellence in Community Education Leadership (EXCEL) Awards are presented annually to individuals and groups for their outstanding contributions to the continuum of Lifelong Learning in District 622.

Heart of the Community EXCEL Award

Nominated by Brenda Gilbert

Nichole Price is nominated for the Heart of the Community Award for her outstanding dedication to our Senior Program. She consistently demonstrates patience, compassion, and a genuine commitment to making every participant feel supported and valued. Whether greeting individuals at Gladstone or assisting over the phone, Nichole brings a calm, steady presence and never makes anyone feel rushed. She remains composed in all situations and is always willing to step in and support others, no matter the need. Nichole's teamwork, leadership, and care for our community truly embody the heart of Community Education, making her highly deserving of this recognition.

Heart of the Community EXCEL Award

Nominated by Amanda Farr

Susan Niemeyer is nominated for the Heart of the Community EXCEL Award for her 32 years of dedicated service and lasting impact on our program. She is a caring, patient, and trusted presence for students, families, and staff, building strong relationships and making every child feel safe and valued. Sue's consistency, kindness, and deep commitment to the community continue to shine each day. Our program would not be the same without her, and she is truly deserving of this recognition.

Community Partnership EXCEL Award

Nominated by Scott Helland

Good in the Hood, accepted by Reverend Shawn Morrison, is nominated for their outstanding partnership with Harmony Adult Basic Education and their commitment to serving our community. Through monthly food distributions, they ensure students and families have access to nutritious food in a way that is convenient, dignified, and responsive to their needs. Their flexibility—especially during Operation Metro Surge—demonstrates true servant leadership and a willingness to meet families where they are.

Their collaboration with staff is seamless, and their work supports students beyond the classroom by helping meet essential needs like food security. Good in the Hood's leadership, compassion, and teamwork make them an invaluable partner and a vital part of our community.

Senior Friend EXCEL Award

Nominated by Jordi Teillard-Cui

Katie Dockter & Emily Nelson and the students they represent are the recipients of the *Senior Friend Excel Award*. Katie, Tartan's National Honor Society Advisor, continues a meaningful tradition of student service that has been part of Tartan since 1971, with strong support this year from Emily Nelson. NHS students remain deeply engaged with our senior community, from playing BINGO at Oak Meadows to hosting the beloved Sweetheart Dance at Gladstone, where they create a warm, joyful experience complete with decorations, music, and thoughtful details seniors look forward to each year. Emily jumped in during her first year to help make the event a success, and together their leadership and organization truly shine. We are also grateful for the students who volunteer their time—whether dancing with seniors or supporting fundraising efforts through Twin Cities In Motion events—helping sustain this special tradition. Their dedication, compassion, and commitment make a lasting impact on our community.

Lifelong Learner EXCEL Award

Nominated by Jordi Teillard-Cui

Ledelina Bunao is the recipient of the *Lifelong Learner Excel Award*. Ledelina joined Harmony Adult Education at the end of 2024 and has quickly become a valued member of our learning community. Now 74, she brings a positive attitude, warmth, and a strong sense of curiosity to every class she attends. In just over a year, she has advanced two class levels—an impressive achievement—while balancing work and learning how to navigate public transportation to attend both morning and afternoon classes. She embraces new challenges with determination and humor, often calling the weekly computer lab her “favorite subject.” Ledelina's dedication, perseverance, and joyful presence make Harmony a better place, and she is truly missed when she's not in class.

BJ Haak EXCEL Award

Nominated by Brenda Gilbert

Tracy Tessier is the recipient of the *BJ Haak Excel Award*. For nearly 30 years, Tracy has been a cornerstone of District 622's Community Education program, dedicating her career to supporting and strengthening early childhood education. Her deep passion for young children and families is evident in everything she does, from her daily work in ECFE to her unwavering advocacy for the importance of early learning in our community.

Tracy's commitment goes far beyond her role as an employee. She is a true leader and champion for early childhood education, consistently advocating for programs that support families, empower caregivers, and give children the strongest possible start. Her ability to connect with families, colleagues, and community members has made her a trusted and respected voice in the field. She leads not only through her expertise, but through her compassion, integrity, and tireless dedication.

Like B.J. Haak, Tracy exemplifies a life of service, leadership, and commitment to education. Her decades of dedication, her advocacy for early childhood, and her genuine desire to give back to the community make her a truly deserving recipient of the Bette Jayne Haak Community Service Award.