

Superintendent Jeff Elstad's Board Report

February 2025

❖ Important Dates

- March 10: School Board Work Session, 5:30 p.m. at the District Office
- March 17: *The Anxious Generation* Community Book Study, 6:00 p.m.
- March 24: School Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m. at the Crandall Center

❖ District Updates

- At this board meeting, you will be asked to consider a resolution to approve administration to make budget reductions in the amount of \$1.8M. This was discussed at our most recent work session and now will move forward to action by our administration.
- I am pleased to report that Mark Stotts has been offered and has accepted the position of Director of Finance. Mark comes to us with director experience in Austin and most recently in ISD 196 (Rosemount, Apple Valley, Eagan). His experience in school finance leadership is a great addition to our cabinet team.
- I will be inquiring about potential dates that our school board members may want to go up to the Capitol to advocate for our district at our meeting. Please consider going.
- Our first Anxious Generation book study session was last Monday night. The discussion was good and I look forward to continuing the work of making a change in our community to re-engage our students and children.
- I was proud to represent Owatonna Public Schools at the most recent United Way celebration. As community campaign leaders, I was proud to announce the success of our community campaign. These dollars will go toward making a real difference in the lives of many in Steele County.

Human Resources

Chris Picha, Director

- 2025-2026 staffing and budget reduction discussions continue
- Recruitment and selection of staff for 24/25 and 25/26 and onboarding new hires
- Superintendent Search
- Upcoming Job Fairs - River Falls, South Dakota, Iowa State, UNI, Wisconsin Area, University of Iowa, Eden Prairie
- Employee Relations Issues
- Teacher Apprenticeship and GYO programs - reviewing potential for 2nd cohort
- Policy Committee work
- CEU and Lane Changes

Special Services

Dr. Sarah Knudsen, Director

- Social workers and counselors spent the Feb 17th staff development day working on multi-tiered systems of support for social-emotional, behavioral and mental health services across the district.
- Special education paraeducators spent the staff development day on February 17th learning about High Leverage Practices for Paras or Mental Health First Aid. The United Way provided Mental Health First Aid.
- Planning for summer Extended Year Special Education Services.
- Starting the recruiting process for related services staff (Speech-Language Pathologists)
- Caseload and staffing analysis and planning for next year have started.
- Collaboration with building administrators, responding to strengths, needs and concerns at the building level.

Teaching and Learning

Julie Sullivan, Director

As I write this, we are at McKinley Elementary preparing for the second live session for our READ Act training with all elementary classroom teachers, elementary EL teachers, and K-12 Special Education teachers. After today, this group will be through Module 6 of 9 modules of learning. It has been a rich experience that is creating dialogue about how to best teach reading to align with the Science of Reading. At the same time, we have been investigating a new core resource for our K-5 Language Arts instruction. We have looked at different resources, done a site visit, and are narrowing down our options for next year. More to come on that in the near future. Our elementary math team is also looking at a new resource to replace Everyday Math and align to the new standards. We have had Everyday Math since the early 2000s, and it is time to look at replacing this to align to new math shifts and standards. That process will be finished in April after the committee has vetted three resources and done site visits to see them in action. In the meantime, work continues in several areas, including data study and preparation for state testing.

- **Monday, February 17:** READ Act PD, *The Anxious Generation* community conversation
- **Tuesday, February 18:** Math Committee Meeting (looking at presentation on second resource)
- **Thursday, February 27:** Staff Development Committee 3:15-4:15 (virtual)

Lincoln Elementary

Justin Lang, Principal

Important Dates

- 2/20/25 PTO Open Gym from 5:00 to 6:30 in both Lincoln gyms
- 2/25/25 PTO meeting in the Art room at 6:00

Lincoln Updates

- We currently have 54 students signed up for the Lincoln science fair which will take place March 6th.
- February is I love to Read Month at Lincoln. This year's theme is "Wild About Reading." Students will spend the month guessing who the masked reader is, listening to animal stories, learning about animals and even how to draw them.
- Lincoln's student council is selling sticker grams as a fundraiser. They will be deciding at their next meeting how they will spend and donate the funds to help our school.
- We have 28 block 2 teacher candidates from Minnesota State University, Mankato joining Lincoln classrooms one week in February, March and April.
- On January 31st, we participated in our first ever International Day of Fun at Work. This was a day of comradery amongst staff, dressing up, games and overall fun.

McKinley Elementary

Justin Kiel, Principal

It's been a great February at McKinley! We just finished our Family-Teacher Conferences and had a 95% attendance rate from families!

Bowling Trip (Feb 21) - We filled the jar! When our students get McKinleyStrong slips, they work toward filling a jar in our library. We filled it and went bowling on Friday, February 21. The kids love this day - a great way to celebrate our hard work!

ACCESS Testing - Our multilingual learners started ACCESS testing last Wednesday. This testing takes us a couple weeks - it assesses students in speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Our students have worked hard to show their mastery. A huge thank you to Liz Stitzmeyer, Rachael Eickhoff, and Caryn Boetel for organizing and facilitating the testing.

Science Fair - Our McKinley Science Fair is Thursday, March 6. This is a great opportunity for our students to hypothesize, wonder, and test a scientific question. A huge thanks to Jessica Zupansic and Rachel Peterson for organizing this!

Washington Elementary

Libby Zeman, Principal

- Partnering with families has been a highlight this month with conferences and a PTO dance.
- Staff are deep into our learning work through the Read Act and are applying what we learn to our instruction.
- Our students on leadership teams continue to spread kindness across the building and the community.

Wilson Elementary

Cassie Mitchell, Principal

This month, Wilson Elementary has been buzzing with excitement as we celebrate I Love to Read Month, engaging our students in a variety of activities that foster kindness and a deep love for reading. Throughout the month, students have been encouraged to share their favorite books and participate in buddy reading sessions, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere of literacy and friendship. In addition, we are hard at work preparing for our upcoming Science Fair, where we have an impressive 83 entries this year! We can't wait to see all the amazing projects our students have developed, showcasing their creativity and curiosity. Looking ahead to March, our focus on Social Emotional Skills will shift to Empathy, where students will learn how to understand and share the feelings of others. It's a wonderful time at Wilson Elementary, as we nurture both a passion for reading and a spirit of scientific inquiry within our school community!

Important Upcoming Dates:

- Mar. 13 - Wilson Science/Engineer Fair
- Mar. 18 - All City Choir Concert
- Mar. 27 - End of 3rd Quarter
- Mar. 28 - No School - teacher work day
- Mar. 31-Apr. 4 - No School - Spring Break

Owatonna High School

Kory Kath, Principal

We are at mid-quarter at OHS. This is an important time for clear communication in quarter classes and an opportunity to assess progress in semester courses. In order to support this, we have conferences at Owatonna High School on Feb. 20th and will be hosting a COMPASS day at OHS on the 19th to support added teacher time for students that need the connections.

We look forward to a great night and hope for great attendance! On conference night we will also host all 8th grade families for registration information, bring in college finance experts to support our seniors in filling out their FAFSA and host an information session on concurrent enrollment and PSEO options in high school. What a great opportunity to connect with families and bring everyone together for a clear plan for success.

A huge thanks to our Student Council for hosting a great Snow Week! There were fun events and the crowning of our King and Queen, Charlie and Lilly! We also have big events coming as our Gymnastics team is headed to state this weekend and our winter musical opens on February 27th! Join us at OHS for these events and many more where you can see the incredible talents of our students.

Owatonna Area Learning Center (ALC)

Martina Wagner, Principal

- **Winter Week Success:** Students participated in a week-long event focused on both academic enrichment and social-emotional skill development. Activities provided hands-on learning experiences while fostering community and engagement.
- **ALC Conferences:** Held on February 20th, providing families and students with opportunities to discuss progress, set goals, and collaborate with staff for continued academic success.
- **Academic Success Activity:** Students who met academic milestones attended a reward trip to Skateville, reinforcing positive engagement and achievement.
- **Early Childhood Classroom Support:** ALC students are now actively engaging with Early Childhood programming as classroom assistants, gaining valuable experience in child development while supporting young learners.

Owatonna Online (OO)

Martina Wagner, Principal

- **Enrollment Growth:** Student numbers remain steady, with ongoing interest in online learning options from local and partnership district students.
- **Work-Based Learning Development:** Early stages of developing a Work-Based Learning program that will connect students with local businesses and internship opportunities, with plans to expand partnerships across districts.
- **Truancy Protocol Implementation:** A structured process now aligns with Minnesota Department of Education guidelines, including automated notifications, county

attorney letters for local students, and Attendance Review Board (ARB) meetings for those at risk of habitual truancy. Truancy coordination with Minnesota counties has been established for partnership district students, ensuring consistent interventions across districts.

- **Academic Integrity Enhancements:** Collaboration with Edgenuity continues to strengthen academic integrity safeguards, including plagiarism detection and engagement tracking.
- **Owatonna Online Conferences:** Held on February 20th, providing families and students with opportunities to discuss progress, set goals, and collaborate with staff for continued academic success. These were held virtually.