



LPSD SHINING STARS, FEBRUARY, 2026



NAME	LOCATION	REASON	NOMINATOR, POSITION
Justin Zimin	Palmer	Justin contributes to the culture of our school district in a way that feels both grounding and uplifting. He is consistently kind, patient, and deeply understanding, listening with true intent to hear and learn from others. His calm and approachable presence builds trust and ease, and he brings a warmth to everyday interactions that helps people feel comfortable and supported. He approaches his work with persistence and care, especially in his advocacy for culturally responsive teaching and classes. Justin regularly seeks outside perspectives and welcomes feedback in order to see the bigger picture and better understand the systems that influence our processes. With that understanding, he works thoughtfully to make those processes smoother and more supportive for everyone involved, always keeping students at the center of his decisions. He has also been a wonderful cubicle neighbor and the kind of colleague whose presence quietly makes the workday better. I admire his passion and the intention he brings to making education, especially education connected to culture, more accessible to students across our region. His quiet leadership, integrity, and steady encouragement leave a lasting and meaningful impact on our school community.	Cassie McArthur, Student Data/Federal Programs
Dawna French	Palmer	Dawna brings a bright and joyful energy into the office that truly feels like sunshine. Always bubbly and kind, her presence naturally lifts the spirits of those around her. It is impossible not to smile or feel a little lighter when she is nearby. She offers a listening ear without judgment and provides encouragement in the moments it is needed most. Dawna is a true gem who cares deeply not only about the work she does, but about the people around her as well. Her passion and giftedness shine through in both big and small ways, creating a sense of connection and belonging. The warmth and positivity she brings each day make a meaningful and lasting impact to those around her.	Cassie McArthur, Student Data/Federal Programs
Melody Schilke	Chignik Lake	Melody serves our south sites with a presence that is both visible and deeply supportive. She actively engages with students and families within her communities, building genuine connections and fostering a strong sense of belonging. I especially appreciate the way she shares the happenings at her schools, celebrating students, staff, and everyday moments that reflect a healthy and engaged school culture. She is equally supportive of staff and works diligently to ensure that documentation, compliance, and operational details are handled with care and consistency. The role of a principal carries many complexities and behind the scenes responsibilities, and she navigates these demands with steadiness and professionalism. Even in challenging or nuanced situations, she leads with grace and ensures that the focus remains on students and the communities she serves. Melody's commitment and balanced leadership make a meaningful and positive impact across our south sites.	Cassie McArthur, Student Data/Federal Programs
Ed Lester	Newhalen	Ed Lester goes above and beyond for not only his school, but the entire school district and all students. He is a great leader for the students of Newhalen school to look up to. He works hard, gives selflessly and is an all around great person. Thank you Mr. Lester for all that you do for our school we are thankful for the generous amounts of time and love you pour into our school and community.	Administrator, Iliamna Village Council
Evelynn Trefon	Newhalen	Evelynn is equally the Jill of all trades. Evelynn is the calm in all the chaos she prepares for meetings well in advance, keeps our teachers, students and community well informed, ensures all kids are accounted and cared for. Evelynn is someone everyone can look up to and learn from. Evelynn cares for everyone, for example during this cold spell we are having she went out of her way to make sure all students stayed inside after school until parents picked them up, she made sure all elders had enough heating fuel. She truly is one of a kind. Thank you for all your hard work Evelynn.	Administrator, Iliamna Village Council

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Stephanie Barthelman	Iliamna	This school year, Steph has taken on the role of Student Government Advisor at Newhalen and it has been a joy to watch her step into the role. She is at every event, supporting our youth in learning skills such as responsibility, ownership, money management, and the importance of supporting your peers and community. She has helped students bring exciting events to the school this year such as a Glow Run / Turkey Trot and gingerbread decorating night. Quyanas Steph for your continued advocacy for our youth and supporting them as they develop into leaders!	Patricia McCasland, Career Guide
Ed Lester	Newhalen	I am a better human and educator every day because of Ed's leadership at our school. He is an incredible role model for what it means to be an educator, to advocate for you, to create safe spaces for them to feel like their most authentic selves. He brings a humorous approach to the school that many of the students enjoy. He meets students where they are and holds everyone to high expectations. He is selfless and never complains which is what makes him an incredible leader. He supports students in everything they want to do, no matter how crazy the idea. He helps provide guidance and expertise based on all of his years working in the district. He leads morning workouts to provide youth with an opportunity to engage in healthy lifestyle choices. He steps in when staff are out and subs are not available. He jumps to help you when you are in need, no questions asked. Ed is an incredible human and the influence he has doesn't stop at his office or our school days, it radiates into the community. When students are visiting from other sites, he makes an effort to say hi to each and every one of them. He makes a personal connection with them because he cares about them as students and as humans. I am grateful to know Ed and work alongside him to support youth all across our district. Quyanas for all that you do Ed, it does not go unnoticed!	Patricia McCasland, Career Guide
Eric Oba	Nondalton	I am nominating Mr. Oba for a Shining Star because he is an incredible addition to our LPSD family. He jumped in day one and has built incredible rapport with his students. When I meet with students from his school, I can see that rapport in the way that they interact with him and especially when they joke with him. He is a great advocate for his students and pushes them to be creative problem solvers that care about their community. He brings them outside to engage in place based science lessons, he makes personalized music playlists to play during the school day, writes daily jokes and riddles on the board, and supports students in seeking external opportunities outside of the classroom such as BBRCTE courses and . Little things like these really make a difference in cultivating a school environment where students feel safe, connected, and excited to learn! Quyanas for all that you do Mr. Oba!	Patricia McCasland, Career Guide
Diana Hejtmanek	Chignik Lake	Diana is an incredible supporter and advocate for her students. She cares for them deeply and that is evident in her ability to seek out professional development opportunities to strengthen her craft, her willingness to answer my emails and phone calls to collect student paperwork or hear about new opportunities, her encouragement in students taking BBRCTE courses both online and in person, and the list goes on! When students are navigating challenges, she is proactive and forward thinking to best meet their needs while creating a safe and welcoming space for her students to be their most authentic selves. Her genuine love and care for her students shines through each and every day. Keep up the great work Diana!	Patricia McCasland, Career Guide
Courtney Boskofsky	Chignik Lake	I wanted to take a moment to recognize Courtney for all of her hard work this school year! She has taken a lot of interest in seeking out opportunities to learn and grow outside of the classroom. She jumped into District Student Government mid year after we had an opening, accepted an opportunity to serve on an advisory board, has expressed interest in advocacy even though it can be scary to use your voice. She was offered an opportunity to serve in a support role in our upcoming Sugt'stun Language course. Her desire to better her community and be involved in language revitalization efforts is admirable. She is a role model for students in our region and watching her grow into a leader has been such a joy this year! Keep up the great work!	Patricia McCasland, Career Guide

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Cassie McArthur	Palmer	Cassie does an outstanding job turning around files for transfer students and responding to special requests for records. She is very speedy, gracious, and cheerful. In recent months, she has also been programming special reports that support principal, teacher, and student services efforts to increase student learning by having easy access to data. She is a Shining Star for our district!	Nate Davis, Principal
Patti Brock	Port Alsworth	Patti Brock is a steady and faithful teacher. She is successful in teaching our youngest students their reading, writing, and arithmetic. Her quiet spirit adds calm to the room and her students and aides respond in turn. In addition, Mrs. Brock helps the high school students by doing the scorebook for their volleyball and basketball games- always saying, "yes," when asked. Patti Brock is a Shining Star for Tanalian School.	Nate Davis, Principal
Niki Thurkow	Port Alsworth	Niki is a vital part of our basketball and volleyball officials team. She keeps the scorebook or scoreboard at nearly all of our home games. We are so thankful for her willingness to serve and to be available to support our student activities! Her sweet spirit and easy smile can only nearly be disrupted by very exciting ball games with her at the controls! Niki Thurkow is a Shining Star for Tanalian School!	Nate Davis, Principal
Mark McGee	Port Alsworth	Mark is a vital part of Tanalian School's activity scene, always calling in advance to volunteer to help out with anything. In recent years, he has become our head volleyball and basketball official, not only getting certified on his own accord, but also constantly learning. He watches recordings of expert trainers as well as recordings of himself to strive to improve. He also recruits, trains, and motivates younger sports enthusiasts to get certified, officiate our games, and to improve. Mark McGee is a Shining Star for Tanalian School!	Nate Davis, Principal
Nicole Metzgar	Port Alsworth	Nicole Metzgar is a longtime, dedicated educational professional, supporting our whole district as our Curriculum Director and Meshik School as principal. In addition, she coaches Tanalian girls basketball, training them to strive for excellence in character and skills. In this, her last year, we remember her 20 years in LPSD at several of our schools, supporting student learning as mentor, writing prompts guru, classroom learning, and so many other hats well-worn. Nicole Metzgar is a Shining Star for LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal
Bill Cornell	Newhalen	Bill Cornell has served LPSD so well and so graciously for 20 years. In this his last year, we remember his teaching days, Curriculum Director days, the wild game he has harvested and shared, and his Director of Personnel days among a few great hats he has worn. And, oh, the number and quality of the teachers, tutors, student-teachers, principals and other staff he has recruited and trained! Bill Cornell is a Shining Star for LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal
Cam Metzgar	Port Alsworth	Cam is a steady-eddy in the classroom, quietly and calmly teaching up students in LPSD for 20 years. His students consistently score at the top of the state in Reading, Writing, and Math! He has it figured out-systematic and comprehensive instruction! In addition, he prepares his students for Battle of the Books, where his teams often make it to state and won the State Championship in 2023. He is also our Tech Liaison, fixing all he can and keeping our tech up and running to support learning. Cam Metzgar is a Shining Star for LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal
Sherri Davis	Port Alsworth	Sherri is not only a successful long-term aide for our elementary students, but continues to take parapro courses to improve herself and student learning and assessment. In addition, she is a key part of our sports officials team, keeping the scorebook or the scoreboard for nearly every home basketball or volleyball game. She also multiplies herself by training other officials, helping make Tanalian School even more robust in hosting excellent activities. Sherri Davis is a Shining Star for Tanalian School and LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal

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Brandey Voran	Port Alsworth	Aunt Brandey is a fan favorite of her students, teaching them their standards diligently with energy, smiles, and accountability. She also instigates school wide projects with her students, teaching them community service as they often decorate the whole school with their projects, Thanksgiving turkeys, Valentine hearts, and Easter bunnies, among others. She also leads her high school math students to sponsor Pi Day for all the K-12 students, complete with out of class math activities and eatable pie for the winners. Brandey Voran is a Shining Star for Tanalian School!	Nate Davis, Principal
Matthew Grossmann	Port Alsworth	Matthew Grossmann is a servant leader of the highest caliber. Not only does he teach the full LPSD schedule with multiple subjects over seven grade levels, but he goes out of his way to help in many, many other ways. Mr. Grossmann jumps in to help with custodial, maintenance, lunch, and live streaming- wherever sees a need. This year, he said "yes" to the Knik Tribe's initiative to get GlowForge and 3D printing into rural schools. He not only hosted the weeklong STEM teachers and projects for all of our students, but has continued to engage the students and the GlowForge in STEM projects throughout the year. His leadership with LPEA is an example of even one more service to teachers and LPSD. Matthew Grossmann is a Shining Star for Tanalian School and LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal
Nathan McArthur	Palmer	Nathan McArthur underwent a major shift this school year by taking on the Teacher Coordinator position for LakeView Homeschool in addition to his educational technology position. Going into this new structure for our LPSD homeschool, there were a lot of unknowns. However, the creation of this new position, with Mr. McArthur taking the lead, has worked wonders for students. He has given students and parents more time and expertise than we could ever have accomplished under the old system. In addition, his skills in technology have been a great complement to his experience as a teacher in providing both improved learning opportunities and organization for students/parents/principal. Nathan McArthur is a Shining Star for LakeView Homeschool and LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal
Christian Meneskie	District-wide	Christian Meneskie has been a teacher in the LPSD Distance Program for many years. His expertise and persistence in mathematics has been a real asset to LPSD as he provides daily, personal, and skilled instruction for so many students. He provides excellent opportunities for students to progress in math, to receive extra help in math, and to make up any assignments they may have missed. In addition, his service allows onsite teachers more time to focus on the other subjects with their students when mathematics is not their strength. Christian Meneskie is a Shining Star for our Distance Program and LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal
Marli Nikolaus	District-wide	Marli is a bright and energetic teacher who provides joyful English instruction to more than sixty students in LPSD. She inspires them to completion and strives for excellence in her teaching of Reading and Writing standards. She is prepared, organized, and relentless in her pursuit of student progress. In addition, since she is teaching English for so many sites, she is a blessing to so many onsite generalist teachers who then have extra time to aim for student progress in the other subjects. Marli is a Shining Star for the Distance Program and LPSD!	Nate Davis, Principal

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Ed Lester	Newhalen	I'd like to stream those shining star beams on Ed Lester. His tireless involvement often goes without thanks, not because it goes unnoticed, but because it's just his character and it has just become expected of him. Ed's obvious love for our district and every kid that has come through it began years before he even had kids of his own here. His willingness to step in wherever needed speaks volumes about his character and his unwavering love for the district, every student that has passed through it and his staff. I have included (sent in an email) a few pictures of Ed donning just a few of the many hats he often wears, which include (but are not limited to) a principal, sports director, friend, counselor, mentor, teacher, fan, coach, referee, cook, dishwasher, janitor and let us not forget perhaps the most important of all, a husband and a father. Ed, thank you for your unmatched commitment and dedication to our district, our students, your staff and peers; YOU ROCK!!!	Sarah John, Paraprofessional
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