



Board Meeting Date: January 12, 2026

Title: Namibia 2027 - International Travel Request - Edina High School Global Scholars - Lindsey Smaka

Type: Action

Presenters: Jody De St. Hubert, Director of Teaching and Learning; Jenn Carter, Edina High School Assistant Principal; and Lindsey Smaka, Edina High School Science Teacher and Global Scholars Staff Coordinator

Background: In accordance with Policy 538, the following international student travel experience for up to 32 Edina High School students for one week in June 2027 has received support from the school's administration. Participating students will miss no school days for this travel experience.

This experience is coordinated by Yavola Tours, a Namibia-based organization specializing in sustainable, community-led travel and ecological education. All guides are Namibian, with deep expertise in local ecosystems, cultural heritage, and conservation initiatives.

This journey allows students to explore the intersection of ecology, environmental science, and cultural identity, highlighting how Namibians balance conservation, indigenous knowledge, and development.

Summary of the Travel Experience:

Dates: June 14–28, 2027 (14 days)

Destinations: Windhoek, Sossusvlei, Namib-Naukluft National Park (Gobabeb Research Centre), Walvis Bay, Swakopmund, Skeleton Coast, Etosha National Park

Themes: Global Citizenship, Sustainability, Culture & Identity, Environmental Stewardship

This 14-day immersion through Namibia invites students to engage deeply with questions of identity, culture, and humanity's shared responsibility for the planet. Coordinated in partnership with Yavola Tours, a Namibian-owned organization dedicated to community-based and environmentally responsible travel, the experience blends cultural exchange, service learning, and reflective inquiry.

Students will travel across diverse Namibian landscapes, from deserts to coastal ecosystems to savanna wildlife reserves, meeting people and projects that model sustainable living and resilience. Guided by local educators, artists, scientists, and community leaders, participants will explore how Namibians preserve cultural heritage while addressing environmental and social challenges.

Program Highlights:

- Cultural exchange in Windhoek with local youth and artisans exploring post-apartheid identity, education, and entrepreneurship.
- Service collaboration in a community-led conservation or education initiative (such as supporting a school, assisting a youth environmental club, or helping with habitat restoration projects near Gobabeb).
- Dialogue on sustainability with Namibian guides and conservationists—connecting local perspectives to global issues like water scarcity and climate justice.
- Cultural storytelling and reflection sessions that encourage students to consider their roles as ethical travelers and global citizens.
Wildlife observation and environmental education in Etosha National Park, connecting ecological understanding with stewardship ethics.
- Daily reflection and journaling linking experiences to Rotary's Global Competencies: compassion, intercultural understanding, and global responsibility.

This journey will help students broaden their worldviews, deepen empathy, and strengthen their sense of purpose as global changemakers, aligning directly with the Edina Global Scholars Capstone framework and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4, 13, and 17).

Overview of Standards That Will be Taught on the Travel Experience:

This experience supports the Edina Global Scholars Capstone outcomes and the Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards for Social Studies (World Geography, Human Rights, and Global Studies strands). It is designed to help students grow as empathetic, informed, and engaged global citizens.

Through this program, students will:

1. Develop Global Competence

- Investigate the world beyond their immediate environment by engaging directly with Namibian communities, cultures, and ecosystems.
- Recognize perspectives by examining how history, culture, and environment shape identity and decision-making in Namibia.
- Communicate ideas effectively across cultural and linguistic boundaries through collaboration with local partners and youth.

2. Foster Civic Engagement and Ethical Global Action

- Participate in service-learning projects that address sustainable development challenges such as conservation, education, or social enterprise.
- Reflect on ethical travel practices, privilege, and equity in global mobility.
- Identify ways to take meaningful, locally grounded action upon returning home.

3. Deepen Cultural Understanding and Intercultural Empathy

- Explore Namibia's diverse heritage through interactions with indigenous communities, artists, and local guides.
- Examine the country's post-apartheid reconciliation efforts and their impact on social justice and environmental sustainability.

- Engage in structured reflection to connect personal values with global citizenship and social responsibility.

4. Connect Learning to Global Frameworks

- Link experiences to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly:
 - SDG 4 – Quality Education
 - SDG 13 – Climate Action
 - SDG 15 – Life on Land
 - SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals
- Synthesize insights through journaling, storytelling, and a post-trip action project that extends learning into local community impact.

Cost:

Approximate total cost per student: \$5,000 USD. This includes international flights, in-country transportation, lodging, activities, most meals, guide services, and park fees.

Fundraising:

Coordinated through Edina Rotary and Global Scholars student initiatives (service projects, community partnerships, and grants). A detailed fundraising plan will be attached.

Transportation:

Air Travel: Minneapolis → Windhoek (Hosea Kutako International Airport), round-trip.

In-Country: Private charter buses and safari vehicles operated by Yavola Tours.

Accommodations:

Combination of eco-lodges, research centers, and national park guesthouses (Windhoek, Sossusvlei, Gobabeb, Swakopmund, Etosha). All lodging facilities meet safety and quality standards, featuring single-gender student rooms and private accommodations for educators.

Supervision:

Lead Teacher: Lindsey Smaka

Additional Chaperones: 2-3 additional Edina Staff

Local Support: Namibian naturalists and guides from Yavola Tours accompany the group throughout.

Administrator: Jenn Carter

Recommendation: Review the international travel request.

Desired Outcomes from the Board: Review the international travel request for approval.

Attachments:

1. [Appendix III Board Policy 538 , Extended Field Trip and Travel Application Preliminary Approval](#)
2. [Namibia Itinerary](#)
3. [Fundraising Plan](#)