SAINT PETER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LEARNING MATTERS

School Highlights

Saint Peter Public Schools

February 2026

*"Do things for people not because of who they are or what they do in return, but because of who you are."*

***— Harold S. Kushner***

# South Elementary to host Kindergarten Open House on March 5th

***Kurt Hildebrandt,***
***School Information Coordinator***

South Elementary's annual Kindergarten Open House is set for 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 5 (make-up date: Thursday, March 12). St. Peter area families with children who will be age 5 by September 1, 2026, are encouraged to attend!

The Kindergarten Open House offers families an opportunity to visit South Elementary, meet staff, tour the building, and learn more about the kindergarten experience. Families will gain insight into daily routines, learning opportunities, and the supportive environment that helps students feel confident and excited about starting school.

"Kindergarten is an important milestone for both children and families," South Principal Jana Sykora said. "Our Open House is a chance for families to explore the building, meet our staff, and begin building connections that will support a successful start to their child's school journey."

> *"Our Open House is a chance for families to explore the building, meet our staff, and begin building connections that will support a successful start to their child's school journey."*
>
> ***– Jana Sykora, South Principal***

Additional details about the event can be found on the accompanying flyer, which includes a QR code to register for kindergarten. We look forward to welcoming our future kindergarten students and their families to South Elementary!



South Elementary kindergarten teachers include: front row (l to r), Sarah Hartfiel, Karissa Minks, Janaye Roulliard; back row, Bridget Powell, Joyce Harvey, and Tressa Gruenzner.

# Connected Communities, Stronger Schools

***Dr. Jon Graff,***
***Superintendent of***
***Saint Peter Public Schools***



One of the things I am most proud of in our school district is the strong sense of community that surrounds our students every day. The success we see in our classrooms, activities, and programs doesn't happen in isolation. Instead, it is the result of ongoing collaboration among families, staff, students, and the broader communities that make up our school district.

Across the district, I see countless examples of people working together to support students: families staying engaged in learning, staff going above and beyond to meet student needs, and community members offering their time, resources, and encouragement. These connections are a powerful reminder that when we stay connected, our schools are stronger, and our students benefit.

I often hear things like, "I was going to call you the other day, but I didn't because I know how busy you are." In response, I want to emphasize that your voice is an important part of our work. Strong partnerships depend on continued conversation. I invite you to email, call, or set up a meeting if you have questions, ideas, or simply want to share feedback on how the district is doing. The role of the superintendent can be busy, but it is never too busy to take the time to connect with you.

# Dirks, Moelter named as SPHS's 2025-26 ExCEL Award winner

*Kurt Hildebrandt,*
*School Information Coordinator*

Saint Peter High School recently announced that juniors Ella Dirks, daughter of Rachel and Zach Dirks, and Ryan Moelter, son of Candi and Kurt Moelter, are Saint Peter High School's ExCEL Award recipients for the 2025-26 school year.

Established in 1988, the Minnesota State High School League's ExCEL – Excellence in Community, Education and Leadership – Award is a unique recognition program designed exclusively for Minnesota high school juniors who are active in school activities, leaders in their schools, and who demonstrate a strong commitment to community service. This award is sponsored by the League's corporate partner Wells Fargo.

The following is a profile of this year's SPHS ExCEL Award winners:




**Saint Peter High School juniors Ella Dirks (left) and Ryan Moelter (right) are this year's SPHS winners of the ExCEL Award.**

## ELLA DIRKS

Ella maintains an active schedule in fine arts at Saint Peter High School through her participation since her freshman year, including the SPHS choir program, the Concert Choir, Saints Choir, and Varsity Choir. She is a three-year member of The Bellas (a treble ensemble for grades 9-12).

The junior standout has a stellar academic record at SPHS with a weighted GPA of 4.06 (regular 4.0) and has been on the "A" honor roll regularly. She is an active member of the SPHS National Honor Society chapter and Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), and a two-time Academic All-State award winner for track and field.

"I am very honored to have won the ExCEL Award for Saint Peter High School," Dirks said. "So many great SPHS students (in the past) have won this award, many that I have looked up to over the years. I hope to carry the same honor and respect that they did, and always represent SPHS to the best of my ability.

"I am thankful for all the support from my family, teachers, and coaches who have pushed me to new goals and supported me to always strive to do my best in all things. I look forward to continuing to make an impact at St. Peter High School and being a role model for younger student athletes, just as I had.

Athletically, Dirks is a three-sport athlete who has earned varsity letters in track and field, basketball, and tennis. She is a Minnesota State Girls Track & Field state champion, capturing the gold medal in the 800-meter run last spring at the state meet, and has also won state medals in the 4x400-meter relay, 800-meter run, and a state qualifier in the 4x800 relay. She was also a member of the Saints' girls' tennis state-tourney team in the fall of 2025 and a letter winner for the 2024 Saints girls' basketball team, which placed fifth at state. She has also earned multiple All-Big South awards in track and field and tennis.

Away from school, Dirks has been very active in the community having donated her time as a youth basketball camp volunteer, a youth basketball referee, a volunteer assistant coach, a concession stand volunteer, a kids' ministry helper, and a church communion server.

Her future plans include attending college and majoring in the medical field as well as competing in track.

## RYAN MOELTER

Ryan is the epitome of what it means to be a well-rounded student-athlete at Saint Peter High schools as he has earned a weighted GPA of 4.06 in his coursework so far at SPHS. He is an active member of the SPHS chapter of the National Honor Society and a member of the A Honor Roll. He is a member and leader of the local chapters of Project for Teens (P4T) and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA).

"Winning the ExCel Award means a lot to me because it shows how much dedication, hard work, and time I have put into not only sports, but also in the classroom," Moelter said. "It also motivates me to become a better person, better role model, and leave a valuable impact on the younger kids."

In fine arts, Moelter has been a three-year member of the Saint Peter High School choir program (Concert Choir, Saints Choir, and Varsity Choir).

Athletically, Moelter is a three-sport standout for the Saints as part of the varsity football, wrestling, and baseball teams. He is a two-sport captain in football and wrestling and earned a trip to the Minnesota State Wrestling Tournament last season. He is a four-time All-Big South Conference performer on the mat for the Saints, a two-time All-Red District football player, as well as being named All-Big South for baseball.

Outside of school, Ryan volunteers his time by assisting at youth football and wrestling camps, installing and taking down horse stalls at the Nicollet County Fairgrounds, working the concession stand at sporting events, serving soup at church events, Oktoberfest clean-up crew, and helping out at North Elementary's Celebration Day activities.

Ryan's future plans include attending college and playing football at that level.

# Friedrich, Bly named as SPHS's 2025-26 Triple A Award winners

*Kurt Hildebrandt,*
*School Information Coordinator*

Saint Peter High School seniors Keira Friedrich, daughter of Jennie and Jed Friedrich, and Lathe Bly, son of Kaari and Galen Bly, are this year's winners of the Triple A Award for Saint Peter High School.

"The Triple A Award is a great award through the MSHSL that focuses on well-rounded students who achieve success in the classroom, in the arts, and in athletics," SPHS Activities Director Shea Roehrkasse said. "Keira and Lathe are both incredible representatives of St. Peter for this award. They both truly embody what it means to get a full high school experience by being involved in multiple sports and activities, and excelling in the classroom. "

The following are brief profiles of this year's SPHS Triple A Award winners:



SPHS seniors Keira Friedrich (left) and Lathe Bly (right) are this year's winners of the school's Triple A Award.

## KEIRA FRIEDRICH

Friedrich maintains a well-balanced schedule during her time at SPHS and has a 4.3 weighted grade point average (GPA), which includes several AP and College in School Concurrent Enrollment courses. She has been a regular part of the SPHS A Honor Roll throughout her high school career and is also a member of the SPHS chapter of the National Honor Society.

"It is an honor to represent St. Peter for this award," Friedrich said. "There are a lot of really talented girls in my class, and I'm grateful to be selected. "

Friedrich is very active here in the fine arts, having been a member of the SPHS Concert Choir since her ninth grade year, as well as being a section leader as well and a member of the Bellas ensemble group.

Athletically, Friedrich has already had a stellar career with the Saints in both cross country and track & field. The senior Saints' long-distance running standout is a two-time Minnesota state champion already in her career, with the spring season still ahead of her. Keira won the 1,600-meter run as a junior at the Minnesota Class AA State Track & Field meet last spring, and this past fall she was the Minnesota Class AA State Cross Country individual champion, the first-ever in school history. The Saints' girls cross country team also turned in a best-ever fourth-place finish at state in the fall of 2025.

Friedrich has earned All-State honors in three sports – cross country, soccer, and track & field. She has also been a top-10 placewinner at the state cross-country meet for three years in a row. She has also won numerous other state-level track medals, including the 800-meter and 1,600-meter runs and as a member of the 4x800 relay team. She was a key member of the Saints' girls soccer team through her junior season and set a school record for goals in a season in 2024.

Keira recently signed to attend classes at the University of Minnesota (Twin Cities) and also compete as a member of the Golden Gophers' women's track and field and cross country programs.

## LATHE BLY

Lathe Bly has maintained an active schedule during his time here at SPHS, all the while earning a 3.894 GPA. During his time, he has taken several concurrent college in the school courses. He is currently a member of the SPHS chapter of the National Honor Society and the A Honor Roll as well.

"I feel very honored and proud to win the Triple A Award at the high school," Bly said. "I've spent a lot of time working on a lot of different things, and want to thank everyone who's supported me."

From a fine arts perspective, Bly has been a part of the stage crew for four SPHS theater productions, including serving as assistant stage manager for the past two years. He was part of the SPHS Concert Band for three of his four years in high school, where he took part in solo/ensemble contests.

Bly is a four-year letterwinner in cross country and was a two-year captain for the Saints varsity program. He also has earned varsity letters in baseball and played basketball through his sophomore year. This past fall, in addition to his cross country duties, the junior standout was the placekicker for the Saints' varsity football team for the second year in a row.

Lathe plans to attend Marquette University (Milwaukee, Wis.) in the fall and major in education/political science. He also hopes to participate in club sports as well as band or theater.

# SPHS 9TH GRADERS ATTEND CAREER NAVIGATOR AT SCC

**Saint Peter High School freshmen made their annual trek to South Central College in North Mankato on Friday for the Career Navigator event. This event provided our 9th graders with the opportunity to explore various career fields and occupations. They also participated in some group activities. Here are some photo highlights from Mrs. Hendrickson and Mr. Vander Linden's advisory groups.**





# SPHS Baking & Pastries students host their annual bake sale

*Kurt Hildebrandt,*
*School Information Coordinator*







Saint Peter High School students in the Baking and Pastries class recently had the chance to put their culinary talents to the test as instructor Courtney Shoemaker and her students hosted their second annual Bake Sale. The students prepared a wide variety of homemade baked goods during class for the big sale event on January 22!

SPHS students and staff across were given fake "culinary cash" to purchase baked goods from their fellow students. According to Mrs. Shoemaker, this year's Bake Sale served as an opportunity for students to showcase their newfound culinary skills while creatively implementing business strategies learned in class.

Here are some photo highlights from the January 22nd Bake Sale, as well as shots of the students' prep work for the sale items!

# Sixth graders collaborate with P4T on 'bystanders vs. upstanders'

*Kurt Hildebrandt,*
*School Information Coordinator*




**Saint Peter High School Project for Teens met with sixth graders in Mrs. Evans' room to talk about the differences between being a bystander vs. an upstander.**

Saint Peter Middle School sixth graders had the opportunity on Jan. 15 to interact with members of Saint Peter High School's Project for Teens (P4T) chapter to discuss the differences of being a 'bystander' and an 'upstander'. The SPHS P4T chapter advisors are Dani Roehrkasse and Heidi Niemeyer.

A bystander is someone who witnesses a situation but does not intervene, while an upstander is someone who takes action to stop something harmful. The purpose of the sessions was to make the younger students aware of potentially harmful social situations and to provide them with strategies to deal with real-life situations in their own lives.

A large contingent of SPHS P4T students helped out with the morning and/or afternoon sessions in Mrs. Evans' classroom at SPMS, working with the younger students. They staged a variety of situational skits as well as one-on-one and small group conversations with the younger students on the 'bystander vs. upstander" topic.

Project for Teens (P4T) encourages healthy, responsible decision-making among youth through peer-to-peer education. P4T covers various topics, such as face-to-face communication, healthy relationships, consent, kindness, and being an upstander. P4T seeks to foster a sense of connection between middle school and high school students and to provide students with information and skills to prepare them to respond responsibly should they find themselves in an at-risk situation.

For more information on Project for Teens, please go to the following link: https://www.projectforteens.org/



**Masazumi Shindo is an exchange student from Japan who is spending the 2025-26 school year at Saint Peter High School.**

# Japanese exchange student adjusting to life at SPHS

*Kurt Hildebrandt,*
*School Information Coordinator*

Saint Peter High School is fortunate to have foreign exchange students attend classes here during most school years. These students provide a valuable opportunity for our students and staff to learn about a new country and culture, and to learn about life in the U.S.

This year, SPHS has two exchange students attending classes for the 2025-26 school year: Masazumi Shindro from Japan began classes in the first semester, and Henry Miranda Erbst from Germany began classes on Tuesday, Jan. 26.

The following is a Q&A profile of Masazumi:

**Parents and family members in Japan** - My family consists of five people, and I have two younger brothers.

**Host family members** - My host family consists of my host parents (Katherine and Steve Anderson of Cleveland) and two younger sisters and four younger brothers.

**Hometown in Japan** - I live in Tokyo (pop. 14 million).

**Hobbies and interests** - Hanging out with my friends.

**What is/are your favorite class(es) here at SPHS?** - Outdoor education (with Mr. Hanson)

**What activities are you involved with here?** - I'm on a basketball team.

**Have you visited the U.S. before?** - No I haven't. This is my first time here!

**What was the biggest adjustment(s) you had to make when you moved here for this school year?** - That is the difference in language. I haven't been able to express my feelings as well as I hoped. I don't think I've shown even 10% of my true self to my friends here, which I hope to keep working on during the year.

**Are there any new things you've tried here that you've really enjoyed?** - I shot a gun during an outdoor education class.

**What do you miss most about life in Japan?** - Hanging out with my friends. In Japan, I hang out with my friends almost every day when I'm back home.

**Will you have to return to high school back in Japan, or will you move on to college/post-secondary school?** - I will return to high school

**Is there anywhere here in the U.S. you'd like to visit before returning back to Japan?** - I want to visit the Mall of America!







# North's Kindness Crew kids teach fellow students about perseverance

*Kurt Hildebrandt,*
*School Information Coordinator*

North Elementary's Kindness Crew members are visiting each classroom over the next week or so to teach their fellow students about perseverance. The Kindness Crew members lead a series of group and small group activities during these 10-minute visits at the start of the school day.

"Every month, the Kindness Crew goes into the classrooms to help teach the theme of the month, and this month's theme is perseverance," Ms. Zitur, North's Kindness Crew advisor and fourth-grade teacher, said. "The group goes in and runs one of the relationship-building games from our SEL curriculum, Character Strong."

Here are some photos from some of the activities taking place in Ms. Feyereisen and Mr. Noble's classrooms during the Kindness Crew's visit.

# New faces at the main offices at North & SP Middle School

Visitors to Saint Peter Middle School and North Elementary will see some new faces greet them in the main office. (Left photo) Jonathon Smith and Sarah Sullivan are the new main office staff at SPMS. (Right photo) Rachel Dauk is the new principal's secretary at North Elementary. Welcome all three of them to the SPPS family!

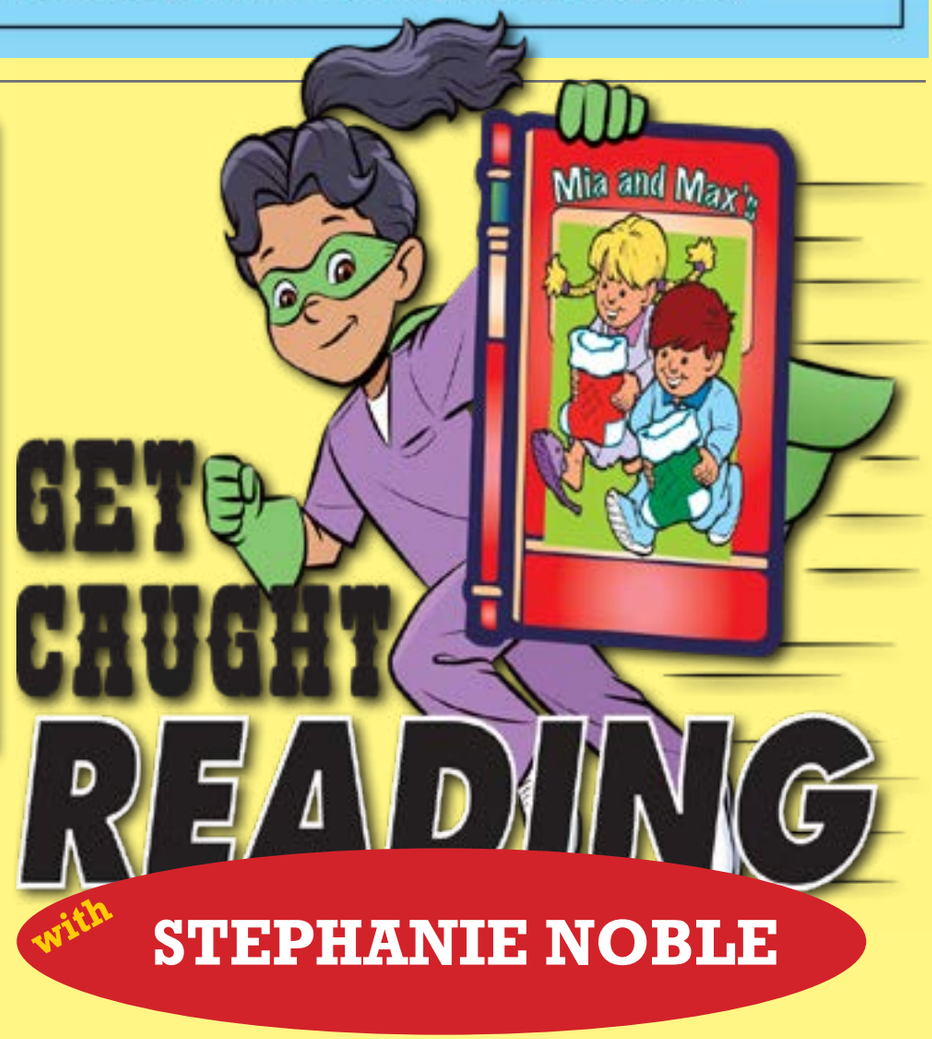











***Kurt Hildebrandt,***
***School Information Coordinator***

This month's Get Caught Reading featured guest is Stephanie Noble at South Elementary where she is the Multilingual Teacher. "This is my 13th year teaching here," Stephanie said. "My husband, Mr. Noble, teaches 3rd grade at North Elementary. We have three children who keep us very busy—Cameron (6th grade), Avery (3rd grade), and Kennedy (Preschool). When I'm not teaching or chasing kids around, you can usually find me curled up with a good book!" The following is a Get Caught Reading profile with Stephanie Noble:



Stephanie Noble, South Elementary's English Language Learner teacher, enjoys how reading a good book can take you to a whole new world!

**What did you read when you were a kid?** As a kid, I loved anything mysterious. My absolute favorite series was "A Series of Unfortunate Events" and "Harry Potter". I read every single book and couldn't put them down! Now I'm having fun introducing the series to my own kids and watching them fall in love with the same stories.

**What do you like to read now?** As a kid, I loved anything mysterious. My absolute favorite series was "A Series of Unfortunate Events" and "Harry Potter". I read every single book and couldn't put them down! Now I'm having fun introducing the series to my own kids and watching them fall in love with the same stories.

**What do you enjoy most about reading?** I love how reading can take you to a whole new world. It's an escape, a way to slow down, refocus, and reset. No matter how busy life gets, reading always gives me a moment of calm and joy.

# An Evening with KATE DICAMILLO

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026 | 6 P.M.**

SAINT PETER HIGH SCHOOL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

LECTURE AND BOOK SIGNING | FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

CLEAN WATER LAND & LEGACY AMENDMENT

CITY OF SAINT PETER RECREATION & LEISURE SERVICES

CITY OF SAINT PETER TOURISM BUREAU

Friends of the St Peter Public Library

# Tech Academy

By Computer Explorers

**Tech Academy offers at-home VIRTUAL workshops for Winter 2026!**
***Home technical requirements for ALL classes:***

- **Computer: PC [Windows 10 or later] or Mac [OSX] with at least 2GHz processor and 4GB RAM**
  ***Chromebooks, tablets and phones typically DO NOT work***
- **Internet: Broadband internet**
- **Webcam, microphone and speakers**
- **Zoom installed on computer**
- **Students should be comfortable using PC, mouse, and keyboard**

**• Intro to AI Coding**

**Grades 3–6.** We will introduce kids to the fundamentals of coding and artificial intelligence through Scratch; a visual programming language designed for young learners. Campers engage in hands-on projects and collaborative activities that build foundational coding skills while exploring how AI works in fun and creative ways. *Additional technical requirements: Scratch Website, Scratch account (sign-up info will be provided before class).*

**Sat., Feb. 28, 9–11 a.m., Register by Feb. 17, $40 per student**

**Call Saint Peter Community & Family Education at 934-3048 ext. 7002 to register, or sign up online at stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com.**

# Serene Winter Landscapes

*Art with Mrs. Nyhammer*

**For children in grades K & 1.** Celebrate the season through art! In this after-school class, students will learn to create peaceful, imaginative winter landscapes using a variety of media, including watercolor, pastel, and collage. We'll explore techniques for drawing snowy scenes, adding depth and atmosphere, and using color to capture the quiet beauty of winter.

**Mon., Feb. 23, 3-4 p.m.,**
**South Elementary Art Room**
**Register with Community Ed by Feb. 16, $10**
**Sign up online at stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com or call 507-934-3048 ext. 7002.**

***Please note that this class is only for grades K & 1. The art projects are designed to be age-appropriate and engaging for this age group.***

That's Community Ed!
Saint Peter Public Schools – ISD 508

# Saint Peter Community & Family Education

600 South Fifth Street, Suite 207
(507)934-3048 ext. 7002 | stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com

## CHILDREN & YOUTH CLASSES

| Activity *Completed grades:* | Gr. K | Gr. 1 | Gr. 2 | Gr. 3 | Gr. 4 | Gr. 5 | Gr. 6 | Gr. 7 & up | Date of activity | Day(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Drama Kids** *Register directly with Drama Kids* | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | Through May *(new enrollments end 3/1)* | W |
| **Private Percussion with Justin T.** *Call Community Ed for available lesson times* | | | | | X | X | X | X | Mar–Apr | M |
| **Serene Winter Landscapes** *Art with Mrs. Nyhammer* | X | X | | | | | | | Feb 23 | M |
| **Intro to AI Coding** *Virtual Tech Academy class* | | | | X | X | X | X | | Feb 28 | Sa |
| **Pass the Popcorn Please** *Kids 'cooking with Jackie M.* | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | Mar 23 | M |
| **Prized Pancakes** *Kids 'cooking with Jackie M.* | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | Apr 22 | W |

## Minnesota Starwatch Program with WCCO's Mike Lynch



Discover the cosmos over St. Peter! Use some of Minnesota's largest mobile telescopes for stunning close-up views of Jupiter, Venus, and star clusters. New, light pollution-proof astronomical cameras will display live, vibrant images of distant galaxies and nebulae. Learn to recognize constellations (Big Bear, Orion, Gemini) and their fascinating myths. A complimentary handout package includes star maps, charts, and a practical guide to buying your own telescope. Mike Lynch is a retired WCCO Radio meteorologist and has been hosting star parties and teaching astronomy classes for over 50 years. He also writes a weekly stargazing column for the St. Paul Pioneer Press and is the author of the book "Stars, a Month-by-Month Tour of the Constellations." It'll be available for purchase at the program. Select Mike Lynch celestial photos, and super cool glow-in-the-dark star shirts will also be available for sale. This program is best suited for adults and children ages 8 and up. An adult must accompany children. Bring a lawn chair to make yourself comfy! Class will be held rain or shine. Min. 20, max. 50.

*Fri., Apr. 17, 8–10 p.m., SPHS Commons Area*
*Register with Community Ed by Apr. 13*
*$15 per person, $45 per Household*

*Heart Nebula*
*photo by Mike Lynch*

### School Board

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Shari Karlsrud

**Activities Director**
Shea Roehrkasse

**Alternative Schools & Programs Administrator**
**South Elementary Principal**
Jana Sykora

**Middle School Principal**
Jon Graff

**Middle School Dean of Students**
Steve Alger

**North Elementary Principal**
Darin Doherty

**Special Programs Administrator**
Ytive Prafke

**Community & Family Education Director**
Tami Skinner

**Technology Director**
Gus Sorbo

**Operations & Maintenance Supervisor**
Seth Putz

**Business Services Director**
Megan Gracia

stpeterschools.org

The school district newsletter, *Highlights*, is distributed monthly through the office of Community & Family Education. Any questions or suggestions regarding *Highlights* should be directed to:

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**(507) 934-3048**
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### *Is your family on the school census?*

The Saint Peter School District keeps a record of all families in our school district. Being on the school census ensures:

- You will automatically receive ECFE mailings.
- You will be notified of Early Childhood Screening.
- The elementary school will be expecting your child when it is time for kindergarten.
- That maximum funding is received by our district from state/local government.

Please call 934-3048 ext. 2018 if you are new to the district or your family has grown with additional births or adoptions!