SAINT PETER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LEARNING MATTERS

School Highlights

Saint Peter Public Schools

January 2026

"The purpose of human life is to serve, and to show compassion and the will to help others."

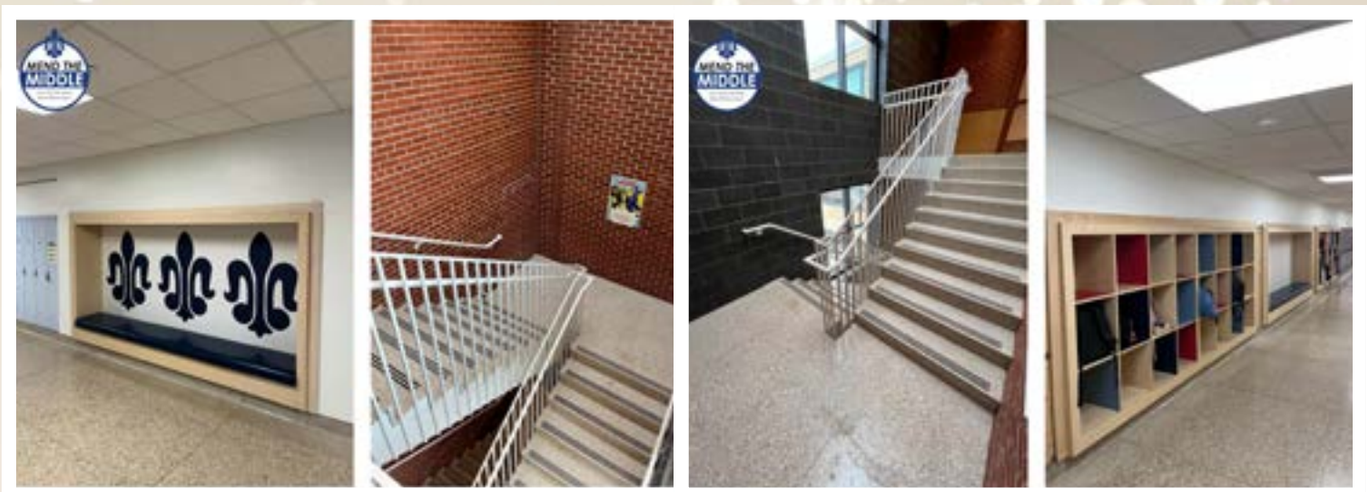
— Albert Schweitzer

St. Peter Middle School renovations making strong progress

After voters approved a $10.965 million investment to renovate and maintain St. Peter Middle School in April 2024, progress continues following a successful completion of Phase 1 this past summer. Throughout this school year, workers have continued to make improvements to the building, including updates to key mechanical systems, painting, and finishes.

"We wanted our students and staff to benefit as soon as possible once these projects were approved, so overhauling things like our heating and cooling systems was our top priority to complete early," said Dr. Jon Graff, district superintendent and former middle school principal.

Crews have been careful to avoid disrupting students and staff, so many of the improvements were completed outside of school hours or in low-traffic areas. Even still, the updates are becoming more apparent.



"We just finished painting and updating finishes in some of the stairwells, and students have noticed the updated painting and fleurs-de-lis graphics throughout the hallways," said Bryce Kinniry, the construction manager overseeing the work.

Additional classroom renovations, the installation of a central elevator, and ongoing indoor air quality improvements are scheduled for this summer, when students and staff are away. Until then, crews are finishing punch list items from Phase 1, procuring materials for upcoming phases, and finalizing a detailed schedule for the upcoming work.

For more information about the Middle School improvement projects and the latest updates, visit MendTheMiddle.org.

Weather-Related Scheduling Decisions: A Complex Task

Dr. Jon Graff, Superintendent of Saint Peter Public Schools



As a middle school principal, students would often approach me to share their thoughts whenever there was even a slight chance of snow.

"Mr. Graff, did you see the forecast? You should definitely cancel school tomorrow." "Mr. Graff, did you see that it's snowing outside? I don't think it's safe for us to be here. You should let us out early."

Relieved that I was not, in fact, the one tasked with making such a difficult decision, I playfully debated their points before ultimately pointing out that the individual they needed to convince worked in the District Office.

Now, serving as superintendent, that individual is me, and I am no longer able to pass responsibility down the hall. During my short time in this role, I have gained a deep appreciation for the complexities behind every weather-related scheduling decision.

Complexities

Student, staff, and community safety are at the heart of every weather-related scheduling decision. If conditions are unsafe, schedules will be adjusted to provide the safest situation possible. However, even with significant advancements in weather forecasting, determining if conditions are, or will be, safe is not always straightforward. Forecasts can shift, road conditions can vary significantly across our district, and timing is a critical factor. Overnight conditions, morning routes, afternoon activities, and dismissal times all present different considerations.

Adding to this complexity is the disruption schedule changes can create, including impacts on family routines, work and childcare schedules, and the district's ability to maintain state-required instructional hours. Because of these factors, each decision is made with great care and deliberation.

Process

When inclement weather is in the forecast, a well-rehearsed process is put into place. We closely monitor weather models and participate in National Weather Service briefings designed specifically for local decision-makers. Communication increases with neighboring superintendents, activities directors, and our transportation partner, Saints Bus. When road conditions are uncertain, a team that includes myself and representatives from Saints Bus, drives predetermined routes to gather firsthand information.

While we work to make decisions as early as possible, uncertain weather conditions sometimes require continued monitoring overnight or into the early morning hours to ensure decisions are based on the most accurate information available.

As we navigate Minnesota winter together, we are thankful for your continued partnership. While we can't control the weather, we are committed to thoughtful decision-making, clear communication, and keeping the safety of our school community at the forefront.

SPHS one-act play to host Section 2AA, Subsection A contest on Jan. 24



Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

Saint Peter High School's one-act play cast and crew will have new leadership this year as Seth Rausch, a 2011 SPHS grad and former member of our school's drama department, has been tabbed as this year's director.

The Saints' entry this season will be "The Visitors" (written by Del Martin). The play's synopsis, according to YourStagePartners.com, "KB is in a coma. How she got there, no one knows. As she lies unconscious on a hospital bed, family, friends, and other well-wishers reflect on KB and how she has affected their lives. But as KB's physical condition worsens and her visitors struggle with their grief, KB embarks on a mysterious journey that will change her forever."

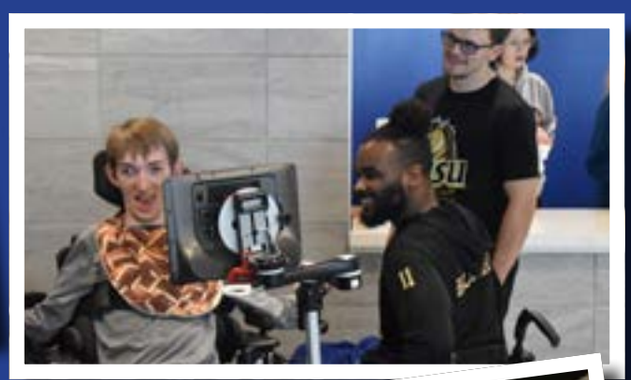
While the unique excitement of performing at a competitive level that a one-act contest provides, the Saints' cast and crew have some added excitement as SPHS's Performing Arts Center will be the site for the Section 2AA, Subsection A Contest! The Saints' subsection contest is set for Saturday, Jan. 24, at the PAC. More details on the subsection contest will be shared as it becomes available, but schools competing here, in addition to St. Peter, include Hutchinson, Jordan, New Prague, Orono, and Mound-Westonka.

SPHS ONE ACT PLAY
(THE VISITORS)
(Cast)
KB Noonan - Rebekah Roemhildt
Mr. Noonan - Zeb Davis
Mrs. Noonan - Paige Marquardt
Doctor Aldridge - Esme Gransee
Terry - Calvin Kuhlman
Janine - Emma Bohmer
Karen Noonan - Lyric Ruble
Anders Davies - Parker Brown
Lanie Mills - Ella Twaddle
Ms. Faye Bingham - Faduma Muhidsin
Derek Smalls - Evan Embacher
Gabrielle Vincente - Maizie Davis
Sam Wellington - Melina Chadwick
The Orderly - Asher Boyd

(Crew)
Jade Anderson, Paul Szybnski, Sadie Albrecht, Dylan Hutchins, Tarynn Bice

Director - Seth Rausch













SPHS hosts Unity is Joy Day activities

Saint Peter High School hosted Unity is Joy Day activities throughout the school day on Dec. 12. Unity is Joy Day was a special day dedicated to celebrating the rich tapestry of human diversity, focusing on our physical and mental abilities and strengths. The entire SPHS student body participated in a full day of engaging presentations, dynamic activities, and inspiring stories designed to broaden perspectives and strengthen our community. Among the highlights of the day were the keynote speech from Minneapolis School Board member Joyner Emerick, a wheelchair basketball demonstration by members of the Southwest MN State University's Rolling Mustangs team, and treats served by the Saints' Brew coffee cart crew.

Here are some photo highlights! Thanks to SPPS Communications Intern Chelsea Klaphake for her photographic assistance in covering these events.



SPHS BLOOD DRIVE UPDATE

Saint Peter High School's annual Blood Drive for students and staff was held in December in the school gym. The event was organized by Mrs. Voeltz's MSU (Mankato) health class with the help of SPPS School Nurse Rachel Fitch. The American Red Cross Bloodmobile collected 39 units of blood during the drive, which was open to SPHS students, staff, and community members. Shown here is SPHS senior Omari Ahmed donating blood. (Special thanks to SPHS students Katherine Callahan, Lathe Bly, Vivian Fredrickson, Maren Swenson, and Sophie Nielsen for their photographic assistance!)





NAPAC tipi painting event is deemed a success!

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

> *"The tipi was painted to help tell stories, show spiritual beliefs, and signify Saint Peter Native American Education's connection to the world."*
>
> ***– Charmayne Klah***

Saint Peter Public Schools' Native American Parent Advisory Committee (NAPAC) hosted a Tipi Painting event the weekend of Dec. 12-13 at the Saint Peter Middle School small gym, and the two-day event was deemed a success by organizers!

"Our students and community came together to paint the tipi," Charmayne Klah, NAPAC committee member, said. "The tipi was painted to help tell stories, show spiritual beliefs, and signify Saint Peter Native American Education's connection to the world.

"With the help of Steven Tamayo, senior Shayla Secatero, artistic designs, NAPAC members, and the Native American families came together sharing cultural teachings, the importance of tradition, and connecting all Native American representation within Saint Peter School District."

Here are some photo highlights of the tipi painting in progress at the SPMS small gym!

Flags and mosaic exhibits spruce up second-floor space at SPHS

Chelsea Klaphake,
SPPS Communications Coordinator

When walking into Saint Peter High School, the flags at the top of the staircase near the media center entrance are often among the first things that catch people's eyes. They are a product of SPHS's newly spruced-up Diversity Center, which visually represents the various cultures of the student body. Additionally, a flower mosaic mural has been added outside the Diversity Center, celebrating the artistry and talent of SPHS students. John Warren, SPHS Equity Coordinator and social studies teacher, has helped lead and facilitate these projects and shares the process and purpose of the flags and mosaic.

The flags represent a variety of cultures, including the United States, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Somalia, and multiple tribal groups. "The wall the flags hang on was big and empty, and because of its visibility as being one of the first things people see when they enter the building, we chose to place the flags there so that students and staff could see themselves represented.", Mr. Warren commented, regarding the location of the flags.

SPHS values uplifting the many cultures and backgrounds students come from, and hanging by the flags in a common space, students, staff, and visitors alike can openly appreciate the community's diversity. Mr. Warren mentioned that there are plans to expand the flags in the future, including those from African and Scandinavian cultures.

In addition to the flags, the flower mosaic mural also has great cultural significance and representation. Mr. Warren shares how this project came to be, "I asked Eva Hendrickson (SPHS art teacher) about creating a piece of art because I was inspired to do a permanent art statement that spoke to our diversity. She decided to use her 3D art class and make the mosaic a project for them."

According to Eva Hendrickson, "Each student crafted a mosaic flower on a 12"×12" panel, choosing a bloom that spoke to their story—some reached for a cherished favorite, while others selected a flower rooted in their cultural heritage. These individual blossoms came together as a shared garden, a vibrant mosaic mural of color and identity that mirrors the diversity and collective beauty of our student body."

It is evident that the mosaic holds great significance for the students who created it, and it is incredibly meaningful that the school is featuring their cultures and artistic talents.













SPMS CELEBRATION DAY PHOTOS!

Saint Peter Middle School students (grades 5-8) participated in the annual Celebration Day activities during the final two hours of the day on December 5th. Students were able to sign up for a variety of activities in one of the classrooms, gyms, media center, lunch room, St. Peter Community Center, and even some of the SPMS outdoor spaces (kickball and soccer). Here are some photos of the fun!

SPHS NHS members help with the Shop With A Hero event



Those SPHS National Honor Society students helping out with the Shop with a Hero event on December 6 included: front row (l to), Melina Chadwick, Tiara Torres, Keira Friedrich, Vivian Christenson, Courtney Domras, Ellie Graham; back row, Owen Potts, Ethan Potts, Lathe Bly, Auden Anderson, Lily Filand, Sada Harmes, Rosalie Jensen, Audrey Menning, Addie Letts, and Ellie Graham.

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

SPHS National Honor Society members helped area law enforcement and emergency services personnel, including St. Peter Police Department and Fire Department members, during the eighth annual Shop With A Hero event. The event took place on Saturday, Dec. 6, at the Fleet Farm store in Mankato, and the SPHS NHS students helped wrap the gifts.

The Heroes were able to take 20 area children holiday shopping that day, along with other gifts that were purchased to be donated to Toys for Tots. This event could not have happened without the generous donations from Helping Minnesota Heroes, the Lions Club, Fleet Farm, Knutson Casey Law Firm, private donors, and charitable gambling from The Red Men Club, The Flame Bar, The Embassy Bar, and the Blue Moon. Minnesota River Valley Transit provided transportation for several families.

Our Heroes represented the Saint Peter Police Department, North Mankato Police Department, Nicollet County Sheriff's Office, Minnesota State Patrol, Saint Peter Fire Department, North Mankato Fire Department, and River's Edge EMS staffed by Allina.



North Elementary third grader Austin Guth shared a storybook about his life and his dealing with Brugada syndrome, a rare, inherited heart condition. Austin and his mother, Tina, wrote the story together.

North third grader shares his story of living with Brugada syndrome

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

North Elementary third-grader Austin Guth, who has Brugada syndrome, read a book he helped write about his life to his fellow third-graders. Brugada syndrome is a rare, inherited heart condition that disrupts the heart's electrical system, leading to potentially fatal irregular heart rhythms and, in some cases, causing sudden cardiac arrest.

Austin, with the help of his Mom, Tina Guth, wrote the story to give students a better understanding of how he lives his day-to-day life with the condition. Austin, who lives an active life like most kids his age, also shared about what he has to watch out for and the precautions he has to take, whether he's at school, at home, or out and about in the community.

"Since our 'Character Strong' theme is empathy during the month of December, learning about health conditions of one of our own students ties in nicely with all of that," Austin's third grade teacher, Mr. Noble, said.

Austin read to two different groups of third graders - his homeroom (Mr. Noble's class), along with Mrs. Woitas and Mrs. Guappones' class in the first session, and Mr. Sindelir, Mr. Malz, and Mrs. Landsteiner's classes in the second session. Here are some photo highlights from Austin sharing his story with his peers.



NORTH & SPHS PEN PALS

Mrs. Nixon's fourth grade class at North Elementary and Mrs. Voeltz's MSU Health class were pen pals during the first semester of this school year. They have been writing back and forth to each other asking and answering questions and getting to know each other. The pen pals had the chance to meet each other at North in early December. Here are some photos of the pen pals meeting each other in person.



RESTAURANT UNIT AT NORTH

North Elementary fourth-grade students took part in a unique math experience on Friday, December 12, through their fast-food restaurant/sweet treats store unit in their classroom. Mr. Friedrich's and Mr. Lewis's classrooms served as the restaurant locations, while Mr. Hassing's room was the site for Customer Service. The other fourth-grade classrooms at North were invited to order food in either Mrs. Friedrich's or Mr. Lewis's classroom by solving math problems, which were checked over in the Customer Service room (Mr. Hassing's classroom). Once they had the correct answers, they were given vouchers to order food and treats! Here are some photo highlights from the fun and educational experience!





EARLY CHILDHOOD GINGERBREAD HOUSE ACTIVITY

K-Ready and Discovery day students in Erin Stueber's classes at the Saint Peter Early Childhood Center took part in a fun classroom activity on Dec. 11-12 where they made their own gingerbread house. "We invited the students' families to come to school as we wrapped up a unit on gingerbread stories by making and decorating our own gingerbread man," Stueber said.





SOUTH FIRST GRADERS CREATE GINGERBREAD HOMES

Students in Ms. Alderman's first grade class at South Elementary had a fun and tasty experience the afternoon of Dec. 12th. The students invited family and friends to visit their classroom to help them build gingerbread houses! With the help of Ms. Alderman and the generous support from the students' families in providing supplies, a good time was had by all who participated in this winter activity!



Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

This month's Get Caught Reading featured guest is Kaari Bly, reading intervention specialist at South Elementary where she has also taught kindergarten as well as first and second grade during her 23-year career at SPPS. Mrs. Bly and her husband, Galen, have three sons – Lathe (senior at SPHS), Laird (sophomore), and Loic (sixth grader at SPMS). The family also cares for their two pet dogs – Pippa and Tank. "My hometown is Fosston, Minnesota, and my favorite place is Ledger, Montana, where my great grandpa homesteaded and we hope to retire," Mrs. Bly said. "In my free time I enjoy attending our boys' sports/activities, reading, walking/hiking, gardening, antiques, nature and rock collecting." The following is a Get Caught Reading profile with Kaari Bly:



What did you read when you were a kid? My parents were both teachers. Language development and reading have been a significant part of my life from very early on. I say I learned to read on Go, Dog, Go and have an old copy from my dad's school that I like to show students. We also have an amazing library in my small hometown which my dad would take us to weekly. I have always loved historical fiction and mysteries. Specifically anything relating to WWII. I remember exactly where the Nancy Drew series was in our library. In high school I read many classics such as Jane Austin books, Anne of Green Gables, The Outsiders, Les Miserables, and War and Peace. Not surprising, I ended up as a reading teacher.

What do you like to read now? As an adult I still love historical fiction—like The Women by Kristin Hannah or any of her books, The Frozen River by Ariel Hawthorn, All the Light We Cannot See by Anthony Doerr are a few recent favorites. Minnesota authors like William Kent Krueger and Allen Eskens. Young adult literature like The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas and Long Way Down by Jason Reynolds.

What do you enjoy most about reading? Growing up I felt like I had the opportunity to "see the world" from my small town in northern Minnesota through reading. I love peoples' stories and believe reading allows us to understand the perspectives of other people and their lives. It develops empathy and compassion, strengthening our humanity. One of my favorite books is The Book of Joy by the 14th Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, and Douglas Abrams. And I had just read Theo of Golden by Allen Levi—AMAZING.



Introduction To Crochet & Amigurumi with Lindsay Sweeney

Learn the basics of crochet and of amigurumi, the art of crocheting toys and 3D stuffed objects. Participants will learn the fundamentals of crochet, including how to read a crochet pattern, and will create a small toy as a final project. Work time will be included in class so participants can ask questions and solve problems with the instructor's guidance. All materials and tools will be provided. Must be 18+.

Mondays, February 2–March 2 (5 class meetings)
6 - 8 p.m., Arts Center of Saint Peter, $95



Sushi 101

For Adults. Sushi does not mean raw fish/seafood. Become your own Sushi Chef and impress your family and friends. Sushi Bob will teach you the techniques for preparing healthy and inexpensive MAKI ZUZSHI (Sushi Rolls). In this hands-on class, you will prepare and eat a California Roll, a Cucumber Roll, and a FAT Roll. Preparation, food safety, knife skills, and etiquette will be covered.

Sess. 2: Wedneday, February 11, 6 - 8 PM
Community Center Room 219, Register by Feb. 2, $26

WATER SAFETY INSTRUCTION

For ages 16 years old and up, by or during the course of the class. This class has an online component and will be a blended learning course. Participants will be responsible for viewing 10 hours of online instruction and videos through the Red Cross website (available only through Internet Explorer). A sound background in all six swimming strokes is required. Classes must be successfully completed and none may be missed. A 7-point written test and a performance test will be given. Candidates will perform several teaching presentations to the class. Certification will be granted only upon successful completion of the course. Students with valid certificates are eligible to apply for open positions at area pools.

Saturday & Sunday, February 21 & 22, March 7 & 8
9:00 AM – 1:00 PM all days
St. Peter Middle School & Community Pool | $136



Register for classes online at stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com or call 507-923-3048 ext. 7002

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
Clay Coil Hearts *Art with Mrs. Nyhammer*		X	X							Jan 27	Tu
Divine Dips *Kids' cooking with Jackie M.*		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		Feb 4	W
Video Game Design *Virtual Tech Academy class*						X	X	X	Gr 7–8	Feb 7	Sa
Serene Winter Landscapes *Art with Mrs. Nyhammer*		X	X							Feb 23	M

School Readiness (Preschool)

OPEN HOUSE

for 2026-2027 Registrations



The Saint Peter School Readiness Program will be hosting an open house for families that are interested in getting more information about the preschool programs being offered in the fall of 2026. Applications for the program will be available and teachers will be on hand to answer questions about the classes offered.

Thursday, February 12, 5–6:30 p.m.

Early Childhood Center, 100 Lincoln Drive
(Broadway Entrance, no registration required.)

School Board

Charlie Potts, Board Chair, 507-351-1042
charlie.potts@stpeterschools.org

Drew Dixon, Board Vice Chair, 507-933-0885
drew.dixon@stpeterschools.org

Kate Martens, Board Clerk, 507-351-4218
kate.martens@stpeterschools.org

Tracy Stuewe, Board Member, 507-380-0339
tracy.stuewe@stpeterschools.org

Ken Rossow, Board Member, 507-931-6859
ken.rossow@stpeterschools.org

Bill Kautt, Treasurer, 507-382-8256
bill.kautt@stpeterschools.org

Rita Rassbach, Board Member, 507-382-0531
rita.rassbach@stpeterschools.org

Administrators

Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Jon Graff
jgraff@stpeterschools.org

High School Principal
Annette Engeldinger

High School Dean of Students
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:

Tami Skinner, Editor
600 South 5th Street, Suite 207
Saint Peter, MN 56082
(507) 934-3048
tskinner@stpeterschools.org

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!