SAINT PETER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LEARNING MATTERS

School Highlights

Saint Peter Public Schools

October 2026

"Always walk through life as if you have something new to learn and you will."
— *Vernon Howard*

Three SPHS students honored by College Board program

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

Saint Peter High School is proud to celebrate students who earned academic honors through the College Board National Recognition Program (bigfuture.org). This year, three of our students were among the more than 300,000 recipients nationwide—the highest participation in the program's history. Those students include senior Melina Chadwick and juniors Grace Penner and Lucia Penner.

"Our students have been recognized for their dedication and excellence, and we're incredibly proud of them," SPHS Principal Annette Engeldinger said. "This honor reinforces their exceptional achievements in high school and will support them in their pursuit of a big future."

To be eligible, 10th- and 11th-grade students must earn a cumulative GPA of B+ or higher and either score 3 or above on two or more AP Exams by the end of 10th grade. They also qualify if they're one of the top 10% of test takers—in their high school, among first-generation college students in their state, and/or among rural and small-town students in their state.

"For students across the country, the award represents more than an academic honor. It signals their achievement to colleges and scholarship programs that may not actively recruit in their communities," Amy Reitz, senior vice president of BigFuture at College Board, said. "We congratulate all students at Saint Peter High School who earned an award by demonstrating exceptional academic achievement."



Three SPHS students were honored recently by the College Board National Recognition Program for academic testing success. Pictured here are SPHS junior Grace Penner, Principal Annette Engeldinger, SPHS senior Melina Chadwick, and SPHS junior Lucia Penner.

Building Progress: District Facility Updates

Jon Graff,
Superintendent of
Saint Peter Public Schools



Maintaining our school facilities is a perennial focus, and as a district, we have a lot to celebrate. Thanks to an exceptional facilities team and the community's support, our facilities, overall, are in good shape. Recent major investments include the 2017 district reconfiguration, which included the addition of the "new" high school, early childhood classroom renovations, South Elementary HVAC upgrades, and the three phase Mend the Middle project that began in 2025.

Mend the Middle Update

In 2025, the District launched the three-phase Mend the Middle Project to modernize aging systems and refresh learning spaces at its Middle School.

Phase 2 wrapped up this past August, bringing significant enhancements just in time for the school year:

- **Comfort & Efficiency:** Continued HVAC upgrades to ensure consistent heating, cooling, and air quality.
- **Modern Classrooms:** Fresh updates to hallways and classrooms, including renovated space for two science classrooms, a special education classroom, and two updated restrooms.
- **Accessibility:** A second elevator was installed near the main office, making the building significantly more accessible for all students, staff, and visitors.

The project will reach its final milestone next summer with Phase 3, which will focus on replacing the building's original 1958 boiler system to ensure safe, efficient heating for years to come.

Managing Ongoing Challenges & Planning for the Future

While there is much to celebrate, the district is experiencing facilities related challenges, each having an impact on the budget. Some of the challenges, such as aging buildings, parking lots, and roofs, are expected, and others are not.

Unexpected: This past summer required quick action outside of the typical summer maintenance/cleaning plan.

- **High School Chiller:** In early spring, the high school cooling system broke down, requiring extensive underground piping repairs over the summer to keep the facility cool.
- **Gym Floor Restoration:** The high school gym floor required a major refresh to repair water damage caused by exterior drainage issues.
- **Hail Damage:** A significant spring hailstorm resulted in damage to building roofs and vehicles. While protected by insurance, the damage has expedited the need for roof repairs and shifted funding from other planned projects.

Expected: At the conclusion of the Mend the Middle Project, all buildings will have experienced relatively recent HVAC upgrades except North Elementary.

- **North Elementary HVAC:** Frequent repairs on the building's original 1964 boiler and increasingly inconsistent temperatures in parts of the building suggest the need for careful planning and budget considerations. As a result, the district has started to set aside funds to support potential future HVAC upgrades similar to those at the Middle School.

Maintaining our schools is an ever-evolving responsibility that requires ongoing planning and fiscal care. Whether responding to sudden summer weather or preparing for multi-year capital projects, thoughtful planning ensures every dollar is spent wisely, and every classroom remains a safe, comfortable, and welcoming place to learn. With strong long-term strategy, continued care, and community support, our facilities will remain a source of pride for years to come.

Information on the Permanent School Fund question on the Nov. 3rd ballot

During the November 3rd general election in Minnesota, voters will see the Permanent School Fund question on their ballots.

The Permanent School Fund was established in 1858, when Minnesota became a state, as a way to support public education through revenues generated from school trust lands and investments held for the benefit of Minnesota students.

View the following short videos to learn more about the amendment, Public Trust Lands, and the Permanent School Fund:

Video 1: What is the Amendment?

Video 2: What are the Trust Lands?

Video 3: What is the Permanent School Fund?

The Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA) also has comprehensive information available on the Permanent School Fund at https://mreavoice.org/permanent-school-fund-statewide-informational-campaign/

The Minnesota School Board Association also provided these infographics about the Permanent School Fund question. *Please note that school districts may publish educational information about the Permanent School Fund ballot question, as long as the information remains factual and objective.*





WHAT ARE MINNESOTA TRUST LANDS?

Many acres of public land were set aside and put into a trust in the Minnesota Constitution in 1858 for a single and specific purpose: to generate revenue for public schools. This trust is called the **Permanent School Trust.** In the late 1800s much of the land in southern Minnesota was sold to private interests to promote development and agriculture. Today, over 2.5 million total acres plus 1 million acres used for mineral rights remain.

2.5 million total acres

$2.3 billion fund value

$388 million distributed in past 10 years

WHAT IS ON THE BALLOT AND WHY?

Passed in a strong bipartisan effort by the 2026 Minnesota Legislature, the November 2026 constitutional amendment would modernize how the existing fund is distributed.

- ✓ **Almost doubles** the annual distribution percentage from 2-2.5% to 4.5% annually.
- ✓ Will **Increase** per pupil annual distribution by an estimated $33 per student.
- ✓ Allows **more stable** and **predictable fund** distributions.

ONLY modernizing existing fund distributions

NOT raising existing taxes

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR MINNESOTA

Every community benefits

Every district. Every public school student. Every corner of Minnesota. Urban, suburban, rural. Traditional public, charter, and tribal school. Money sent directly to districts or schools with no strings attached.

Financial best practices

The proposed amendment is based on recommendations from a multi-year review of the existing fund structure in order to update the fund with current financial best practices.

More money per pupil

The proposed constitutional amendment would almost double per pupil payout to districts. Without raising any existing taxes for Minnesota residents.

Protecting the future

If passed, this amendment will better support today's students while ensuring the fund's balance is preserved for future generations.

THE PROPOSED BALLOT QUESTION

OFFICIAL BALLOT LANGUAGE

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to increase the funding going to all school districts from the permanent school fund, which is a fund that supports school districts without raising individual income or property taxes, effective July 1, 2027?"

CRITICAL MINNESOTA VOTING RULE

LEAVING THE BALLOT QUESTION BLANK IS A "NO" VOTE.

If you or any other voter skip this question on their ballot but votes for other races, it is counted as a "No" vote.

STUDENTS FIRST.
IMPROVE THE TRUST.

msba

www.minnesotaPSFamendment.org



SPHS students making up Liz Liefried's Saints Brew crew this year for the cart are (l to r) Abby Voeltz, Autumn Squires, Logan Gessner, Abby Schily, Kallie Brovold, and Judd Wartman.

SPHS's Saints Brew crew eager for the 2026-27 school year!

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

The much-anticipated debut of Saint Peter High School's Saints Coffee Cart crew from Liz Leibfried's classroom took place Tuesday morning, with the students delivering their always-popular snacks and beverages to SPHS staff.

Each week, the Saints Coffee Cart crew offers a variety of baked goods such as cookies, bars, and muffins, and a fruit or veggie snack option is often included. The beverage choices include water, lemonade, coffee, or hot chocolate. Leibfried's special education teaching colleague, Joey Brown, will have his class help prepare the baked treats again this year.

This year's Saints Brew crew consists of Kallie Brovold, Judd Wartman, Abby Voeltz, Logan Gessner, Abby Schily, and Autumn Squires. "We will have two carts going like we did last year," Leibfried said. "Some of the students have done it before, and there are two students that are new to the coffee cart, which is always great to see.

"The students will be working on various skills such as employment, communication, and social skills. The SPHS Staff Council has agreed to fund the supplies for the coffee cart again, so we're extremely grateful for that. If we do get donations, they will be used towards classroom field trips."







SPHS outdoor education students take part in a kayaking activity

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

Saint Peter High School's outdoor education classes, taught by Keith Hanson and Kris Sandborg, provide students with unique learning activities both in school and at other locations throughout the St. Peter area.

One such activity they had the chance to participate in is kayaking, with Hanson's third-block class and Sandborg's fourth-block class making their way to Hallet's Pond earlier this week for some water fun. Second semester outdoor education students will participate in a kayaking unit later in the school year.

"This was an exceptional experience to provide our students with a chance to participate in an activity they may otherwise not be exposed to," Koehler Sandborg said. "It's so fun to see the students breaking down fears of participating in water activities. Because this is a tandem kayak, it was great to see groups problem solving and working together to learn a new skill set."

One precaution for an activity like this is having a lifeguard on duty when students are in the water, and SPHS seniors Vivian Hendrickson (a member of Hanson's class) and Lily Prunty, who are certified lifeguards, provided that service for these kayaking activities.

Here are some photo highlights from the kayaking activities at Hallet's Pond.



SPHS ninth graders test Minnesota River's waters from Hwy. 99 bridge

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

Freshmen science students in Mr. Borslien's class at Saint Peter High School visited the Highway 99 bridge walking path at various times on Tuesday to participate in the annual testing of the Minnesota River.

Patti Braulick from the Friends of the Minnesota River's Riverwatch program was on hand to assist with the river water testing. The program is funded through the MPCA (MN Pollution Control Agency).

Students collected water samples from the Highway 99 bridge walkway and tested for dissolved oxygen, nitrates, pH, temperature, turbidity (cloudiness), conductivity, and the height of the river. They also described the riverbed and water quality in more general terms for usability, water color, and bank descriptions.

According to Borslien, the data will eventually be added to MPCA's database, which monitors river health in Minnesota. This hands-on experience provides students with a chance to do a little fieldwork and see some science data collection in action.

Here are some photo highlights from the students' work at the Minnesota River.

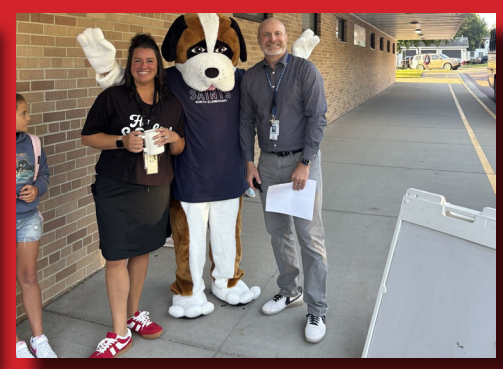
SOUTH






NORTH

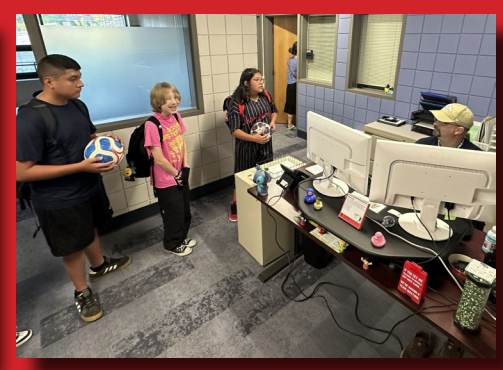


MIDDLE SCHOOL

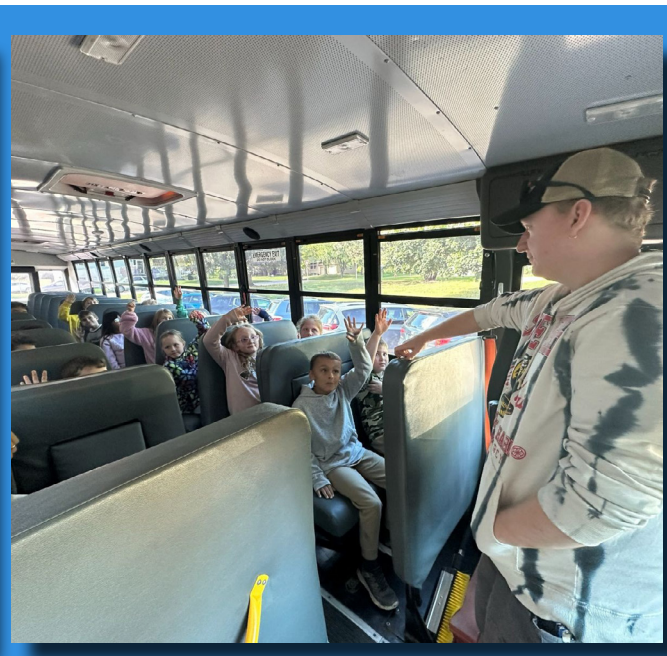






WELCOME BACK TO SPMS, NORTH & SOUTH STUDENTS! The new school year officially began the morning of September 10th for students at South Elementary (gr. K-1), North Elementary (gr. 2-4), and Saint Peter Middle School (gr. 5-8). Here are some photo highlights from the start-of-the-school-day activities!






SPPS students take part in annual bus safety training

Bus safety training at the start of the school year is a yearly event for students at Saint Peter Public Schools. Students at South Elementary, North Elementary, Saint Peter Middle School, and Saint Peter High School take part in the training early on to prepare them for the new school year. Here are a few highlights from some of the training activities!







SPMS STUDENTS KICK OFF DAY WITH ASSEMBLY

The energy level inside the Saint Peter Middle School gym was high on the morning of Sept. 18, as students and staff took part in the Kick-Off Assembly to start the day. The SPMS PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) team hosted the event, which featured information on the Saints' ticket program, including a few prize giveaways, and wrapped up with staff and students taking part in a rousing game of Balloon Hooping! Here are some photo highlights from the festivities!

Mrs. Nyhammer's
Watercolor Painting
5th-12th Grade

Capture the beauty of nature through color, flow, and expression! This class invites middle and high school students to master the art of painting skies, mountains, and scenery. In this focused single session, older students will learn to capture depth, light, and natural textures to create a sophisticated outdoor masterpiece.

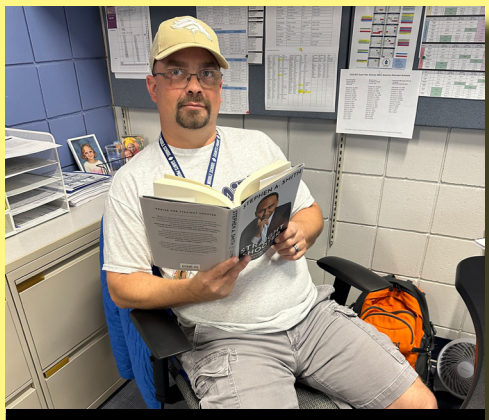
MON., NOV. 9TH, 3:30-5:00 PM
REGISTER BY NOV. 2, $15

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



Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

This month's Get Caught Reading featured guest is Jonathan Smith, Saint Peter Middle School's principal's secretary/ adminstrative assistant. "My wife, Rene, and I have two children ages 7 and 11 months old. I have two other children that live in Ohio with their mother and visit in the summer," Smith said. "We have a Siberian Husky and two miniature cats, so our house is very noisy." Smith was born in Asheville, NC, as his father was in the Navy, " I have lived in Millington, TN, and Bremerton, WA, but spent most of my formative years in Swansboro, NC." He also served in the Navy for nine years and has just entered his fourth year with SPPS, having originally worked as a paraprofessional for the district before moving to Saint Peter Middle School in early 2026. The following is a Get Caught Reading profile with Jonathan Smith:



Jonathan Smith, SPMS principal's secretary, enjoys reading as a way to relax and is particularly fond of autobiographies of many kinds.

What did you read when you were a kid? Growing up a lot of sports books, but my favorite series was The Hardy Boys.

What do you like to read now? Mostly enjoy reading autobiographies - can be sports, history, or military related.

What do you enjoy most about reading? Being able to relax and feel like you are there or living vicariously through the book.

NORTH RECEIVES DONATIONS FOR STUDENTS

North Elementary has been fortunate to receive numerous donations from area businesses at the start of the 2026-27 school year. Here is the list of donors and items donated to date, per North's Dean of Students, Mandy Kennedy:

- Friends For Learning
- Edward Jones - Backpacks
- The Drawer - Socks and Underwear
- Jaraff - school supplies
- Greater Mankato Area United Way - school supplies
- Erberts & Gerberts - school supplies
- Pioneer Bank - school supplies

Here are some photo highlights of some of those donations being received by North staff!











NORTH ELEMENTARY HOSTS KICK-OFF ASSEMBLY

North Elementary students and staff gathered in the school gym at the end of the day on Friday, Sept. 11, for the annual kick-off assembly. Principal Darin Doherty welcomed everyone to the gym and gave a presentation on the theme of "Kindness". Here are some photo highlights! New North Dean of Students Mandy Kennedy also addressed students and staff about the upcoming year, and several students shared experiences of kindness they witnessed in school. The assembly wrapped up with the first public showing of the annual North staff video, which can be found at https://youtu.be/uxgf62qJhIM

St. Peter Children's Weekend Food Program

CHILDREN'S WEEKEND FOOD PROGRAM APPLICATION INFO

Families of students at South Elementary (gr. K-1), North Elementary (gr. 2-4), and St. Peter Middle School (gr. 5-8) can enroll in the Children's Weekend Food Program at any time during the school year if they need nutritional support for their children on the weekends. Bags of two nutritional breakfasts, dinners, and snacks are sent home each week of the school year. To enroll, please click HERE









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.arux.app

CHILDREN & YOUTH CLASSES

Activity	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7 & up	Date of activity	Day(s)
3-D Printing: Jewelry Fabrication & Arts *Tech Academy*			X	X	X	X	X		Oct 17 & 24 9-10:30 AM	Sat
Ghosts and Goblins *Kids' cooking class with Jackie M.*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Oct 20 4-5 PM	Tue
Mini Art Club *Art with Mrs. Nyhammer*	X	X							Oct 19 & 26 3-4:30 PM	Mon
MP Minecraft: Poke Mods & Games *Tech Academy*		X	X	X	X	X	X		Oct 15 9 AM-12 PM	Thu
Watercolor Painting *Art with Mrs. Nyhammer*						X	X	X	Nov 9 3:30-5 PM	Mon
Intro to 3D Printing & CAD *Tech Academy*			X	X	X	X	X		Nov 7 & 14 9-10:30 AM	Sat

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! This class 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.

Wed., Oct. 21, 7–9 p.m., SPHS Commons Area
Register with Community Ed by Oct. 12
$15 per person, $45 per Household

Heart Nebula photo by Mike Lynch

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Shea Roehrkasse

Alternative Schools & Programs Administrator
South Elementary Principal
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Middle School Principal
Jessica Buttell

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

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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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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!