SAINT PETER PUBLIC SCHOOLS
LEARNING MATTERS

School Highlights

Saint Peter Public Schools

May 2026

"Make each day your masterpiece."
— John Wooden

SPPS hosts Staff Recognition event; Maripsa Romero receives Distinguished Service Award

On Wednesday, April 29, St. Peter Public Schools hosted its annual Staff Recognition reception in the SPHS Commons. The event, opened by Superintendent Jon Graff, honored this year's retirees and those marking 25 years of service to the district. A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the 2025-26 Distinguished Service Award to long-time Cultural Liaison Maripsa Romero by SPHS Principal Annette Engeldinger.

"It's not often that one person can change the experience of an entire community, but this year's Distinguished Service award honors someone who has done exactly that," Engeldinger said in her introduction of Romero. "When our district first sought to better serve our Spanish-speaking families, we didn't just need a program—we needed a person. And in Maripsa, we found exactly the right one. From day one, she worked to ensure that every family felt seen, heard, and valued. She made what can be a complicated system feel human.



SPPS staff members recognized at the Staff Recognition reception included: front row (l to r), Anita Tuomala (25 years), Maripsa Romero (Distinguished Service Award), Cheryl Weisgerber (retiree); back row, Paulette Topel (25 years), Joyce Harvey (25 years), Candi Moelter (25 years), and Erin Hinton (25 years).

"Maripsa has a rare gift—the ability to balance deep professionalism with genuine love for the people she serves. She can move seamlessly from translating important information… to somehow knowing exactly what a family needs before they even ask."

To emphasize the importance of "excellence" in our school district, a "Distinguished Service Award" was established during the 2010-2011 school year. Candidates are nominated by peers for exemplifying "excellence" in their job and for their commitment to the students and staff at SPPS.

This year's retiree is Cheryl Weisgerber (District Office). Those who retired last summer were also honored, including Erin Domras (North), Stella Meixner (North), Carol Glass (South), and Nikki McClintock (SPHS). Ceremonial school bells were given to each retiree.

This year's staff members receiving the 25-Years of Service ceremonial clock were Joyce Harvey (South), Erin Hinton (North), Candi Moelter (North), Paulette Topel (SPHS), and Anita Tuomala (SPMS).

Saint Peter Public Schools Summer Programming

Dr. Jon Graff, Superintendent of Saint Peter Public Schools



Most people think of "school" as the activities and programming that occur between the months of August and June. Within Saint Peter Public Schools, however, "school" is a year-round endeavor with vital programming occurring throughout the summer months. As we approach the end of the regular school year, our teams are simultaneously planning for these important programs.

Early Childhood summer programming will be hosted at South Elementary and will include Special Education Extended School Year (ESY) services. These services address specific individual education needs and are determined by a student's Individual Education Program team to ensure continuous developmental progress during the break.

For our **Kindergarten through 8th Grade** students, North Elementary will again serve as the central hub for academic programming. These programs include ESY and Targeted Services, which provide essential math and reading support for students based on standardized assessment scores, grades, and teacher recommendations. Additionally, English Language Learner (ELL) services will be provided to students learning English as a second language. This program is designed to ensure progress toward language proficiency and academic goals continue throughout the summer months.

At the **High School (9-12)** level, summer programming includes both Special Education Extended School Year and Credit Recovery. The Credit Recovery program is specifically designed to support students who need to make up credits missed during the regular school year.

Beyond traditional academics, North Elementary will once again host **Read and Feed**. This state-funded program offers free meals and engaging reading activities to all students up to 18 years of age

Finally, a wide array of summer enrichment opportunities is available through **Community Education**. These programs offer students a chance to explore new interests and stay active. To learn more about these exciting options, please visit stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com.







SPHS culinary arts students compete at CRAVE event

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

Several Saint Peter High School culinary arts students, under the direction of FACS (family and consumer science) teachers Courtney Shoemaker and Michelle Javens, competed in the annual CRAVE event at the Mayo Clinic Health System Event in downtown Mankato. Here are some photo highlights from SPHS students competing.

CRAVE (Culinary Arts Regional Venue in Education) is a regional event for high school students in culinary arts classes that showcases the food and hospitality industry. Students have an opportunity to explore culinary arts careers and skills with industry professionals through competition and/or interactive learning sessions.

The competition areas the SPHS students participated in at CRAVE included Cake Decorating and Culinary. SPHS junior Amelya Weston placed first overall in the Cake Decorating category and received a plaque for her efforts. SPHS CRAVE competitors included the following:

Amelya Weston - Cake Decorating (First place)
Luz Torres - Cake Decorating
Vivian Christenson - Cake Decorating
Aubrey Haynes - Cake Decorating
Ashlyn Loula - Cake Decorating
Alia Muhidin - Cake Decorating
Melody Gonzalez - Cake Decorating
Ceejae Marroquin - Cake Decorating
Lilly Marquart - Cake Decorating
Maliah Johnson - Cake Decorating
Makayla Guth, Jocelyn Gutierrez, and Paloma Romero - Culinary
Addison Sanchez, Alexander Juarez, and Maya Sanchez - Culinary
Parker Brown and Dylan Hutchins - Culinary
Izzy Torgerson, Rylee Wilking, and Khloe Mann - Culinary
Esme Garcia-Sanchez, Santi O'Malley, and Kaylee Dimmel - Culinary
Danely Bocanegra and Julie Weber - Culinary
Shayla Wills and Shelby Hall - Culinary













SPHS hosts World Culture Joy Day activities

Saint Peter High School students took part in the first-ever World Culture Joy Day festivities for part of their school day on Friday. The event, put on by the SPHS Social Justice Club, had activities and displays put on by students from our Asian/South Pacific, Hispanic/Latino, Indigenous, and Somali/ East African communities. Here are some photo highlights!





SPHS BAND TRIP TO GREECE HIGHLIGHTS

Saint Peter High School's band members recently returned from their trip to Greece along with director Dave Haugh and several adult chaperones. Here are a few photo highlights from their trip, and more photos and video clips from the trip to Greece can be found on the St. Peter Saints Pep Band/Marching Band's Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/groups/170356179716410.

Mock interviews give SPHS adulting students job-seeking experience

Chelsea Klaphake,
SPPS Communications Coordinator







Members of Michelle Javen's Adulting 101 class at SPHS recently partook in mock interviews with various staff volunteers and special guest Mariah Jones, an HR Manager from Hewitt Docks. Jones spoke with students about what she looks for when hiring, common red flags in interviews and applications, and shared job opportunities available to students. Her insight helped students better understand real employer expectations and how to present themselves professionally. This experience gave students practical, real-world feedback and encouraged many of them to take the next steps in applying for jobs.

Adulting 101 is a class offered to all students at SPHS, but is specifically geared towards juniors and seniors as they begin preparing more directly for life after high school. Students in Adulting 101 build practical, real-world skills that prepare them for life after high school, with a focus on developing confidence and independence as they transition into adulthood. The course covers career planning, job readiness, and financial literacy, as well as hands-on skills such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and sewing. Students are currently completing a service project by hand-sewing items to donate to Enchanted Makeovers. The class also explores relationships, communication, and health and wellness to support well-rounded decision-making.

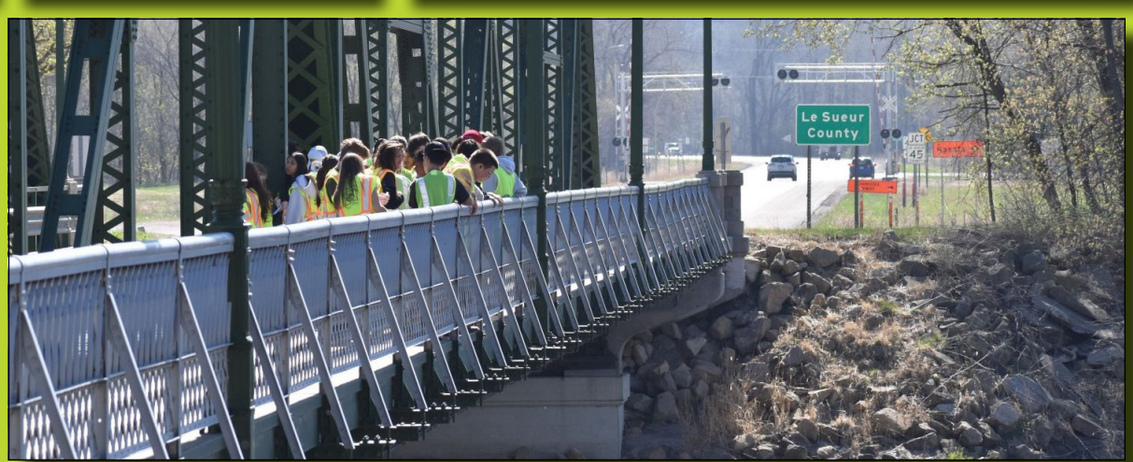
"My favorite part of teaching this class has been watching students gain confidence as they try new skills and step outside of their comfort zones. Whether it's practicing interviews, cooking for the first time, or learning to sew, it's rewarding to see them realize they are capable and take pride in their work, especially when they know their projects can positively impact others." Michelle Javens commented. Javens also talked about how valuable the interviewing experience was for her students. Many of them felt nervous, but through their hard work, preparation, and professionalism, they presented themselves well and practiced their communication skills effectively.

SPHS freshmen conduct water testing of the Minnesota River









Ninth-grade science students in Mr. Borslien's class at Saint Peter High School paid a visit to the Highway 99 bridge walking path on April 25th to take part in their annual Minnesota River water testing unit.

The activity takes place with the help of the Friends of the Minnesota River, which runs the Riverwatch program, and Patti Braulick from that program. The program is funded through the MPCA (MN Pollution Control Agency).

Students worked with Patti Braulick and Mr. Borslien to collect 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, including usability, water color, and bank descriptions.

According to Borslien, the data will eventually be added to MPCA's database monitoring river health in Minnesota. It provides students with a chance to do a little fieldwork and see science data collection in action.







SPHS 10th graders attend annual SCSC Career Expo

Saint Peter High School sophomores had the chance to explore future career and educational opportunities during the annual Career Expo at the Mayo Clinic Health Systems Center in Mankato on Wednesday. The event is sponsored each year by the South Central Service Cooperative.

Tenth graders from throughout South Central Minnesota attend this event annual with more than 1,500 students on hand each year for the Career Expo. Students participate in career exploration activities that are provided through:

1. Interactive Exhibits, where students may ask questions of company representatives and find out more about specific careers
2. My Story, where storytellers from area businesses share their career journey
3. Game Show, where teams of students are quizzed on career trivia and statistics to win fabulous prizes!

SPMS kicks off fourth quarter with assembly

Saint Peter Middle School students and staff started off the fourth quarter with an energetic style kickoff assembly at the school's gym. The event included numerous raffle drawings and giveaways, and concluded with the finals of the annual Rock, Paper, Scissors tournament. The overall champion was Martin Ortega Caceres (5th grade), who defeated staff member Jonathan Smith for the title. Other grade winners included Elise Carter (8th grade), Maddox Mercado (7th grade), and Kayden Ramirez (6th grade).









SPMS 7TH GRADERS FARE WELL AT MN STATE HISTORY DAY CONTEST

Congratulations to Saint Peter Middle School seventh graders (l to r) Cecilia Waller, Mallory Nelson, Brooklynn Francis, Ella Evans, and Sylvie Kuhlmanm for earning honorable mention at the Minnesota State History Day competition on Saturday, April 19th, at the Minneapolis Convention Center. There were 19,000 projects statewide, and these students finished in the top .05% of the whole state.



North Elementary awarded DNR No Child Left Inside grant

Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

North Elementary staff member, Morgan Lenhoff, recently learned she was awarded a grant from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) No Child Left Inside grant program. The grant proposal entitled "Winter Wings and Trails" was awarded $20,250 to carry out nature-based activities centered around snowshoeing and the local bird population at North and other nearby outdoor spaces.

"I am very excited about the new opportunities this grant is going to bring to North Elementary students," Lenhoff said. "The grant funds will be used to obtain snowshoes and related equipment, as well as birding supplies such as binoculars to engage in outdoor activities and learning opportunities."

By utilizing the snowshoes in multiple programs, including a snowshoeing unit in physical education classes, winter ecology and birding excursions related to science standards, teacher-led small group explorations on Passion Project enrichment days, and an after-school nature club led by Mrs. Lenhoff, North will be able to offer many entry points for students to engage.

Among the items to be purchased for North with the grant funds are 60 pairs of children's snowshoes, six adult-sized snowshoes for staff, 45 pairs of poles, 20 pairs of lined boots, racks to hold the snowshoes, 30 pairs of binoculars, 30 digital cameras, 30 gear bags, 60 outdoor journals, and 20 bird feeders with stands.

"My biggest goals in applying for this grant were to expand hands-on environmental learning with elementary age students and cultivate lifelong nature stewardship by engaging students in meaningful winter outdoor experiences that build respect for local ecosystems," she said. "With these funds, we should be able to go a long way to accomplish that."

The equipment will be used for activities in and around North Elementary, including the nearby North Woods (McGill Park) and at some point there is hope to visit The Arboretum at Gustavus Adolphus College and also put the new equipment to good use there.

About the DNR's No Child Left Outside grant program

North was one of 19 projects to receive grant funding through the Minnesota DNR's No Child Left Outside program out of 133 applicants. Recent and emerging research indicates that students are increasingly disconnected from nature. Getting more youth outdoors is crucial for the future stewardship of Minnesota's natural resources.

The program aims to support and increase efforts to expand programming that connects youth to the outdoors. Originally funded by the 2019 Minnesota Legislature with continued funding from the 2021, 2023 and 2025 legislative sessions, these grants are provided for outdoor environmental, ecological, and other natural-resource-based education and recreation programs serving youth.

For more information on the program, please click HERE!



GET CAUGHT READING

with RACHEL DAUK



Kurt Hildebrandt,
School Information Coordinator

This month's Get Caught Reading featured guest is Rachel Dauk, North Elementary's Principal's Secretary, who began working in the district in January. She is a native of Cleveland, MN, and has five children (and their spouses) – Carly (Cole), Jake (Maggie), Olivia (Ryan), Allison, and Jackson. She also has two grandchildren, Cash and Zoe, along with two mini golden doodles, Remy & Lucy. The following is a Get Caught Reading profile with Rachel Dauk:

What did you read when you were a kid? Little House on the Prairie & Baby Sitters Club.

What do you like to read now? Brene' Brown, Colleen Hoover & Ann Rule books.

What do you enjoy most about reading? It's a great escape from everyday stressors.





PASSION PROJECT EVENTS A BIG HIT WITH NORTH KIDS

North Elementary students wrapped up their day on Friday and celebrated the completion of the third quarter with the school's third Passion Project Day activity of the 2025-26 school year. The event is put on at the end of each quarter by North's PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports) group.During the last hour of that day, students could sign up for an activity they were interested in that was taught by North staff. Students selected their top three activities, and the PBIS team created groups. Members of Saint Peter High School Project 4 Teens helped out with many of the activities. Pictured here are some photo highlights from the fun day of activities. Photos by Chelsea Klaphake, SPPS communications intern.

South first graders host book release party

Chelsea Klaphake,
SPPS Communications Coordinator

Students in Mrs. Wenner's first grade class at South Elementary had the opportunity to take part in a book release party on Friday (April 10) with family and friends on hand for the big event.

"Every year, I have my class create and publish a book through Studentreasures Publishing," Mrs. Wenner said. "For the last five years, I have done the theme 'My First Grade Me.' Each student writes a little about themselves, and then to celebrate all our hard work, we have a publishing party where we walk down the red carpet, and the students each take a turn reading their page to the audience, and then we celebrate with cookies and coloring some bookmarks!"











Drama Kids Take 2 presents Cinderella

Ages 7–14. Step into a magical world where a hardworking girl with a heart of gold dreams of a life beyond her dusty fireplace. With the help of a little bit of magic and a pair of very special slippers, she finds herself dancing the night away at a grand royal ball. With a full cast of characters, this classic tale of kindness and courage proves that even the smallest feet can leave a giant footprint on the world! This is a full-day camp. Auditions will be held on Monday. Friday performance day will start at 1 p.m. Students will need to bring their own lunch, snacks, and a water bottle each day.

Drama Kids staff

Mon.-Thu., Jul. 13-16, 9 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
Fri., Jul. 17 rehearsal 1-4:30 p.m.
SPHS Performing Arts Center
Register at https://dramakids.com/mankato-st-peter-new-ulm-mn/camps-events/
Performances Fri., Jul. 17, 5 & 7:30 p.m.



Water Safety Instruction

For ages 16 years old and up, 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. Min. 6, max. 14.

Mon., Tue. & Thu., June 8, 9, 11 & 15, at 8:00 a.m. - Noon
$145 | Register with Community Ed by May 26



2026 Summer Beginning Band Lessons

Incoming 6th and 7th graders can jumpstart their band journey with three fun, 45-minute lessons! Learn to produce a great sound, play your first notes, and practice effectively before the school year begins. Most students will have chosen an instrument by 5th grade, but if you haven't, no worries—it's not too late! Attend all three sessions if you can, but missing one isn't a dealbreaker. (Summer lessons are optional for joining the band.) Each lesson will be in a small group of like-instrument players in the St. Peter High School Band Room.

Mon. July 6
9:00-9:45 am Flutes
10:00-10:45 am Clarinet
11:00-11:45 am Saxophones

Tues. July 7
9:00-9:45 am Trumpets
10:00-10:45 am Trombones/Baritones
11:00-11:45 Percussion

Mon. July 13
9:00-9:45am Flutes
10:00-10:45 Clarinet
11:00-11:45 Saxophones

Tues. July 14
9:00-9:45 Trumpets
10:00-10:45 Trombones/Baritones
11:00-11:45 Percussion

Mon. July 20
9:00-9:45am Flutes
10:00-10:45 Clarinet
11:00-11:45 Saxophones

Tues. July 21
9:00-9:45 Trumpets
10:00-10:45 Trombones/Baritones
11:00-11:45 Percussion

Prior to lessons, students should have an instrument and a Yamaha Advantage book 1 for their instrument. If you require help securing an instrument for financial reasons, please contact Mr. Haugh (dhaugh@stpeterschools.org) at least two weeks before the start date. **Register with Saint Peter Community Ed by June 29, $50. (507-934-3048 ext. 7002, or stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com)**

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	Gr. K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7 & up	Date of activity	Day(s)
Mad Scientist Eats *Kids' cooking with Jackie M.*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		May 28	Th
Summer Art Camp *with Mrs. Nyhammer*	X	X	X	X	X				Jun 8-10, AM	M-W
Red, White & Blue-tiful *Kids' crafting with Laura Maki*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Jun 10, PM	W
Private Percussion with Justin T. *Call Community Ed for available lesson times*					X	X	X	X	starts Jun 11	Th
Fruitopia *Kids' cooking with Jackie M.*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		Jun 24	W
Sun-Catching Fun: Window Clings *Kids' crafting with Laura Maki*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Jul 1	W

MAD SCIENTIST EATS

Get ready for a
total sugar rush in the kitchen
as we turn candy into chemistry!
We're going to whip up wild, fizzy recipes
that snap, crackle, and literally erupt
using the power of PopRocks.
It's going to be a noisy, bubbling blast, as
we make Firecracker Brownie Bites and
Poppin' Sugar Cookies!

THURSDAY
MAY 28, 4-5 PM
SPCC RM. 219
REGISTER BY MAY 18, $32

stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com

Fruitopia

Welcome to Fruitopia, where we turn yummy summer snacks into edible art! You finally have permission to play with your food as we turn juicy fruit into a deep-sea world. You'll learn how to build wiggly octopuses, tiny turtles, and colorful fish that are just as fun to look at as they are to eat.

Wednesday, June 24, 3-4 PM
SPCC Rm. 219
Register by June 15, $32

stpeterschools.reg.eleyo.com

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Darin Doherty

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Community & Family Education Director
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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!