EXPERIENCE EXCELLENCE

at Mahtomedi Public Schools

Learning by Leading

Real-world experience in child development and teaching

Turning Vision into Learning

Bringing the Portrait of a Graduate to Life



THE GLOBE

2025-26 | ISSUE 1

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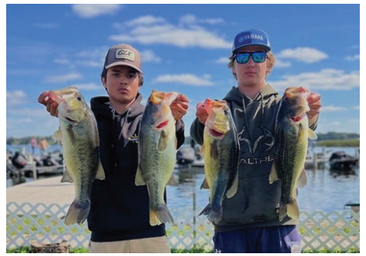
Experience Excellence



Theatre Production Earns Top State Honors

Mahtomedi's *Into the Woods* production earned top recognition from the Hennepin Arts Spotlight Education Program, including honors for Musical Theatre and Technical Production. The recognition places the Zephyrs among Minnesota's top 25 theatre programs, highlighting talent, collaboration, and excellence on and off stage.



Anglers Headed to Nationals

Mahtomedi anglers Landon Hogan and Blake Loida (Class of 2026) captured the 2025 State Junior Bass Fishing title, finishing first out of 78 teams. The pair has competed together for four years. Summer 2026 will mark their second appearance at Nationals.



National Merit Recognitions

Mahtomedi's Class of 2026 includes four National Merit Finalists — Taelin Richmond, Anna Cosby, Layla Befidi, and Amber Becker — and one Commended Student, Teagan McCloy. This prestigious accomplishment reflects exceptional academic achievement and the strength of Mahtomedi's commitment to rigorous, high-level learning.

Mahtomedi Teacher of the Year Inspires Student Growth and Leadership

Mr. Jim Lane, science teacher at Mahtomedi High School (MHS), is the 2025-26 Mahtomedi Teacher of the Year and a 2026 Minnesota Teacher of the Year Semifinalist. He is known for building strong relationships with students and creating learning experiences that support both academic and personal growth.

For more than 13 years, Mr. Lane has taught life science and engineering at MHS, including biology, field ecology, biomimicry, and engineering. Beyond the classroom, he serves as faculty advisor to the Mahtomedi Modeling A Protein Story (MAPS) team, the Eco Club, the Ethical Debate Club, and Power Walking Club, and previously served nine years as Student Leadership Council advisor.

Mr. Lane has been recognized as a Biology Teacher of the Year by the National Association of Biology Teachers and has presented and published widely on innovative teaching practices.



Hear Class of 2026 student Julian Cisek share the impact about Mr. Lane's teaching.

Portrait of a GRADUATE
MAHTOMEDI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Preparing Confident Leaders to Thrive Today and in Their Future

From creating camcorder videos at age 5 to earning statewide recognition, **Aidan Hastings**, Class of 2027, has always had a passion for filmmaking. Leveraging skills developed at MHS in English and AP Drawing, including scriptwriting, visual storytelling, and creative communication, he was selected for FilmNorth's Studio Thirteen Future Filmmakers Lab. The program provides hands-on learning and the opportunity to produce a film for submission to national student film festivals.



Class of 2028 student **Sam Coles** demonstrates integrity, trust, and accountability through service and leadership. As a member of the Superintendent's Student Cabinet, he is an advocate for positive change in the community. Last fall, he helped inform residents during referendum tours, and this spring he helped facilitate a Dessert & Dialogue conversation on a topic he is passionate about: artificial intelligence.



Superintendent's Message

Over the past year, our School Board and administrative team addressed district financial challenges through $2 million in budget reductions and a two-question referendum request. With the support of our community, both questions passed. We are deeply grateful to our voters for their continued investment in Mahtomedi Public Schools and our future.

As we build the budget for next school year, that support allows us to maintain class sizes, preserve academic excellence, and strengthen long-term financial stability. We have also launched facilities work groups to guide design criteria for voter-approved projects focused on enhancing safety, security, learning, and well-being across our schools. We will continue to keep our community informed as this work progresses.

In this issue, you will read about high school students making an impact in elementary classrooms through reciprocal learning and leadership. You will also learn more about academic strategies that we are using at the High School that support students now and in their future.

Looking ahead, we continue advancing the Portrait of a Graduate, a key component of our Strategic Plan. Recent engagement with staff and students is helping launch this work and strengthen clear and consistent experiences for student success.

Barb Duffrin
Superintendent





Psychology Field Experience is a hands-on course that advances Mahtomedi's Strategic Plan by giving students meaningful opportunities to support elementary learners while deepening their understanding of child development. Through observation, reflection, and real-world practice, students build Portrait of a Graduate skills in communication, collaboration, leadership, and self-awareness while exploring future pathways in education and service.

Learning by Leading

High School Students Build Skills and Confidence Working Alongside Younger Learners

Strong relationships across grade levels are a defining part of the Mahtomedi experience. As part of the district's Strategic Plan, building trust and partnership across the school community helps strengthen connections across our schools. This focus on belonging is reflected in the phrase, "We Are Zephyrs."

One example of this connection is the Psychology Field Experience course at Mahtomedi High School (MHS). In this course, students apply their learning in the district's elementary classrooms while developing the leadership, communication, and critical thinking skills identified in the district's Portrait of a Graduate.

Learning Through Experience

Walk into a classroom at Wildwood Elementary, and alongside the familiar sights of small tables, books, and hands-on learning materials, you may notice high school students working with younger learners. These MHS students are part of the Psychology Field Experience course, which blends academic study with real-world application.

Originally developed in 2015 by social studies teacher Ms. Emily Larson and now led by MHS teacher Ms. Angie Buckingham, the course engages approximately 50 students each year. Participants study educational psychology and spend three days each week in elementary classrooms. Some students are placed in preschool or middle school settings based on their interest.

continued on next page

Field Experience Shapes an Alum's Path to Teaching

Gustaf Magnusson, a Mahtomedi High School Class of 2020 graduate, recently served as a long-term substitute science teacher at O.H. Anderson Elementary (OHA). He credits his Psychology Field Experience course at MHS, along with time in his former first-grade placement classroom, with sparking his interest in teaching and preparing him for the role. "I have subbed in many school districts, and it's hard to find one better than Mahtomedi."





Students attend class at MHS with Ms. Buckingham on Mondays and Fridays, and attend their school placement classrooms Tuesday through Thursday. This structured cycle of learning and application allows students to explore key child development theories and then immediately put them into practice. In a recent unit on cognitive load theory, students designed age-appropriate mini-lessons to support how younger students process and retain information. They practiced delivering the lessons with their high school peers before applying them to the younger learners. This instructional approach helps students connect theory to practice in meaningful and relevant ways.

Building Confidence and Perspective

Reflection is an important part of the experience. MHS students regularly journal, participate in discussions, and analyze observations from their field experience classrooms. Over time, they begin to see growth in both their understanding of what they are learning as well as their confidence working with younger students.

Their final projects require them to take their observations and conduct research, with the hope of applying a theory or strategy to their placement classes and presenting their findings to their peers during finals week.

“I am continuously blown away by the work students do,” said Buckingham. “Their kindness and compassion for younger learners, along with their growing understanding of the role educators play, stands out every year.”

Impact Across Classrooms

The benefits of the program also extend to placement classrooms, where teachers frequently highlight the value of the additional support and the relationships that are developed.

Ms. Beth Johnson, a kindergarten teacher at Wildwood Elementary, has hosted several Field Experience students and can see the impact firsthand. “The program allows me flexibility as a teacher to do things differently and have more personalized instruction for my students,” she said. “High school students work one-on-one with learners, support those who need additional instruction, and provide additional challenges for students who are ready for more.”

These interactions create a reciprocal learning experience. Younger students benefit from individualized attention and mentorship, while high school students gain insight into teaching, leadership, and the impact they can have on others.

Preparing Future Leaders

For many of the high school students, the experience influences future goals. Some pursue careers working with children or in education, while others continue in the program or expand their experience through independent study. Graduates of the class often serve as mentors, helping to guide students as well as strengthen the overall program.

The Psychology Field Experience course reflects Mahtomedi’s commitment to meaningful, real-world learning. By connecting students across grade levels, the district is creating opportunities for students to lead, contribute, and grow through authentic experiences that extend beyond the classroom.



Additional Examples of Reciprocal Learning in Action



PATH Tutoring

Mahtomedi Class of 2027 students Delaney Dumermuth and Isabella Bixby are leading efforts through the Peer Assistance for Tutoring and Homework Help (PATH) club. By organizing peers to support younger students, they are strengthening connections across schools while building leadership skills and creating meaningful learning opportunities for all involved.

Scan to hear from PATH leaders and see the program in action



Wildwood Gaga Ball Pit

Gannon Hamen, Class of 2027, turned an idea into impact through his Eagle Scout project, bringing a Gaga Ball Pit to Wildwood Elementary. Through collaboration with peers and school leaders, he developed leadership skills while creating a space that will bring connection and joy to students for years to come.

Scan to watch a behind-the-scenes video about Gannon’s project



Homecoming Connections

Students from the Class of 2026 brought leadership and positive role modeling to elementary students during a Homecoming tradition. Senior athletes, performing arts students, and Homecoming Court members visited Wildwood and O.H. Anderson, creating connections across schools and giving younger students a memorable experience rooted in Zephyr pride.

Scan to watch a behind-the-scenes video of these joyful visits

Empowering Action

Fostering Confident Leaders and Community Impact



On Veterans Day, O.H. Anderson Elementary School held an all-school assembly to honor and recognize veterans. Students invited veteran family and community members to attend and be celebrated. During the assembly, students learned about the meaning of Veterans Day, sang the National Anthem, and introduced their honored guests. Vietnam veteran Tim Doble, a retired educator, author, and volunteer, served as keynote speaker, sharing the importance of recognizing the service and sacrifice of veterans and military families.

Scan to see photos from the event

The Zephyr Service Project is a district-wide service learning effort that supports Mahtomedi students in need. In 2025, students, staff, families, and community members came together for a record year of giving, providing holiday gift assistance for 140 students. Donations included more than 400 books, 300 toys, $8,500 for clothing and essentials, and $2,400 in gift cards for teens. Mahtomedi High School's Student Leadership Council wrapped gifts, while DECA supported marketing and outreach, demonstrating the impact of collective action.

Scan to see the project in action



LEADERSHIP

Ms. Ann Garry, Spanish teacher at Mahtomedi High School, was recognized by the Mahtomedi School Board for outstanding leadership in advancing the district's strategic plan. A 2019–20 Teacher of the Year, MHS alumna, and 20-year educator, Ms. Garry is known for rigorous, engaging instruction, strong relationships with her students, and meaningful learning experiences beyond the classroom. Colleagues and students describe her as inspiring, compassionate, and committed to helping every student grow in confidence and achieve excellence.

Scan to read more about Ms. Garry's impact





In the fall of 2025, Mahtomedi Public Schools welcomed families, staff, and community members to Community Referendum Learning Sessions. During these sessions, student leaders played a key role by guiding tours of proposed facilities projects. Students explained project details, shared how spaces are currently used, and helped visitors understand how improvements would support teaching and learning. Their leadership provided clear, first-hand perspectives that strengthened community understanding of the need for proposed projects.

Scan to see a behind-the-scenes look at the tours

At O.H. Anderson Elementary, students build confidence and leadership through a daily, school-wide Google Meet broadcast. Each week, a different homeroom leads by creating the slide deck and sharing announcements, celebrations, and updates. From lunch menus and weather to shout-outs and school news, students strengthen communication, collaboration, and presentation skills. This daily tradition fosters connection and strengthens a strong sense of community across the school.

Scan to watch a school-wide morning meeting



IMPACT



Turning Vision into Learning

Bringing the Portrait of a Graduate to Life

The Portrait of a Graduate is a key component of the Mahtomedi Strategic Plan. It is not a separate initiative, but an essential expression of the district's mission and a shared vision for the knowledge and skills students need to thrive after graduation.

Developed in collaboration with students, educators, military and business leaders, and postsecondary partners, the Portrait serves as a unifying framework that strengthens instruction, student support, and connections to the broader community.

Earlier this year, Superintendent Barb Duffrin engaged students in reflecting on the Portrait of a Graduate to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth. Students shared how these expectations show up in their daily experiences, both in and out of school. Their perspectives reinforced the importance of strong relationships, growing confidence, and preparing for what comes next.

Students also identified opportunities to expand how they apply these skills in more meaningful ways. They emphasized the value of real-world experiences, engagement with diverse perspectives and cultures, leadership opportunities, and learning environments that foster collaboration, problem-solving, and self-direction.

The feedback further highlighted the importance of career-connected learning, including internships, job experiences, interview preparation, and other real-world applications that help students build the skills and adaptability for life beyond graduation.

From Vision to Practice

At Mahtomedi High School, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is one way the district is bringing the Portrait of a Graduate to life. While AVID is an elective course, many of its strategies are used across classrooms, extending their impact to all students.

One example is Collaborative Study Groups, a peer-led, structured approach where students work together to solve academic challenges. Students bring questions to the study group connected to concepts they are still learning. Through focused discussion, peers ask questions to clarify thinking and help one another work toward solutions.

Recently, this approach was implemented in the science classrooms of Mr. Jim Lane and Ms. Kelly Shafer. With support from AVID elective students and teacher Ms. Carly Lewellen, the science students learned how to engage in the Collaborative Study Group process. The experience demonstrated how effective strategies can be shared across classrooms and content areas, and how students can take an active role in supporting one another's learning.



Building Skills for the Future

Collaborative Study Groups do more than support academic understanding. They create opportunities for students to listen, contribute, ask thoughtful questions, and build on one another's ideas. In the process, students strengthen their ability to communicate, collaborate, and approach challenges with confidence.

To support the advancements of the Portrait of a Graduate, the district has invested in leadership at the system level. In addition to teaching the AVID electives course, Ms. Lewellen was appointed in the spring of 2026 to serve as the district's Portrait of a Graduate Coordinator.

Superintendent Duffrin describes the role as "an investment in ensuring the district's aspirations for students are intentionally developed, embedded, and realized across the student experience."



Meet Carly Lewellen

AVID teacher Ms. Carly Lewellen also serves as the district's Portrait of a Graduate Coordinator. In this role, she is helping ensure that all students experience meaningful learning opportunities that prepare them for college, career, and life beyond high school.

"I am excited to implement a plan that ensures all students have access to college and career pathways as well as opportunities to connect with our broader community."

A Shared Commitment

The Portrait of a Graduate reflects Mahtomedi's commitment to preparing students not only for academic success, but for meaningful participation in their communities. By aligning instruction, student experiences, and community partnerships, the district is creating opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant and authentic ways.

Through strategies like Collaborative Study Groups and courses like AVID, students are gaining the experience, confidence, and perspective needed to succeed in future classrooms, workplaces, and communities.



Zephyr Pride

Helping Students Thrive On and Off the Track

At Mahtomedi High School, student well-being is a priority, and teachers and coaches play a key role in creating the environment for students to experience it. A strong example is Ms. Jodie Tester-Hastings, whose work in the classroom and on the track has made a lasting impact on students.

Ms. Tester is a special education teacher at Mahtomedi High School. She has also served as a behavior intervention specialist and transition teacher in the district's Passages Program for students ages 18–22. In addition to her work in the classroom, she is the head coach for both the boys and girls track teams.

Students describe Ms. Tester as someone who creates an environment where they feel supported and capable of success. One student shared, "Ms. Tester helps me thrive by creating a safe environment with opportunities to succeed in school and outside of school that I otherwise would not have."

Ms. Tester approaches her work by setting clear goals, consistent routines and expectations, and building on each person's strengths.

By combining these with a positive emotional climate, she helps students experience success and well-being in a safe and inclusive environment. "My goal is to build trust and ensure all of my students and athletes feel valued," she said.

She maintains these high expectations while providing the support needed for individuals to meet them. Her open-door approach encourages students to seek guidance, knowing they will be met with care and respect.

Her impact is evident in the paths her former students choose. One former track athlete, inspired by Ms. Tester's mentorship, is now pursuing a career in special education.

For Ms. Tester the most meaningful part of her work is seeing students achieve what they once thought was impossible.

"Every accomplishment and honor makes me proud," she shared. "It could be watching a student graduate who once did not think they would, or cheering for an athlete who comes in second even after breaking a 30-year school record. It is a privilege to work with each and every one of them."

Through her work as both an educator and a coach, Ms. Tester exemplifies the importance of well-being, high expectations, and strong relationships. Her impact extends beyond academics and athletics, helping students build confidence, resilience, and a sense of belonging that supports them long after they leave Mahtomedi High School.

Written by Xiaobao Liang, MHS Class of 2028 student and Mahtomedi Public Schools Communications Intern.



12x State Soccer Champions Honored by City Council

The Mahtomedi Girls Soccer team secured its 12th State Championship in 2025 and was honored by the Mahtomedi City Council.

Representing the team at the recognition were Class of 2026 student-athletes Harlow Berger, Jacque Worden, Ali Rippentrop, Kayla Poirier, Isabel Vipond, and Anneliese Ulschmid (2027). The students shared that, despite being a young team, they quickly came together, built strong connections, adapted to challenges, and persevered through setbacks by consistently working hard throughout the season.

Coach Dave Wald, who has led the program since 1995, reflected on the team's resilience. After graduating 11 athletes last year, including five All-State players and three Division I athletes, and losing the entire defensive line to graduation, the team still recorded 13 shutouts. Coach Wald thanked the community for its continued support of athletics, academics, and especially young women and their accomplishments.

Superintendent Barb Duffrin thanked the City Council for recognizing Mahtomedi students, noting the strong connection between the City of Mahtomedi and Mahtomedi Public Schools.

In its proclamation, the Council commended the team's hard work, sportsmanship, and continued tradition of excellence, along with the support of coaches, families, and staff.

Triple "A" Award honors seniors who excel in academics, arts, and athletics

Congratulations to Anna Cosby and Julian Cisek, Mahtomedi's 2026 award winners. Julian is involved in hockey, lacrosse, engineering activities, and music on both trumpet and piano. Anna participates in cross country, track and field, plays the flute, and is active in service organizations. Both have earned weighted GPAs above 4.1.

Mahtomedi Activities & Athletic Team Competitions

Fall 2025

Girls Soccer
State AA Champions

Girls Volleyball
State AAA Qualifiers

Girls Swimming & Diving
State A Qualifiers

Girls Tennis
State AA Third Place

Adapted Soccer
CI State Qualifiers

Mahtomedi Theatre
State honors from the Spotlight Education Program, including Achievement in Musical Theatre and Outstanding Technical Production.



Partnership in Action



Cooking Up Connections Across Schools

The Zephyr Cooking Club, offered through Mahtomedi Community Education, gives Mahtomedi Middle School students the chance to learn cooking skills while connecting with mentors from Mahtomedi High School (MHS). During club meetings, MHS volunteer mentors, guide younger students through recipes while encouraging teamwork and creativity in the kitchen.

For many of the high school mentors, the experience is an opportunity to give back to a program they once enjoyed themselves. Others participate through service-focused activities such as the National Honor Society and the Interact Club.

Students say the experience is about more than cooking. As one high school volunteer shared, “The club is not just about cooking. It is about the connections we build, the experiences we shared and the sense of community we create together.”

Learn more about Mahtomedi Community Education offerings



From Classroom to River: MAEF Grant Brings Learning to Life

Thanks to a classroom grant from the Mahtomedi Area Educational Foundation (MAEF), 225 fourth-grade students stepped out of their classrooms and onto the Padelford Riverboat to experience The Big River Journey, a 90-minute educational excursion on the Mississippi River.

Through hands-on learning in river ecology, geology, geography, and local history, students gained a deeper understanding of their local environment and the Mighty Mississippi. With guidance from experts at the National Park Service and Mississippi Park Connection, students used binoculars, maps, and geological samples to bring their lessons to life.

This immersive experience helped students connect their learning in science, social studies, and history to the world around them in lasting ways.

To learn more about our impact and how you can get involved, visit **maefgives.org**

Message from the Board

Staying Connected to Our Community

The Mahtomedi School Board is committed to listening to and learning from our community. What we hear informs our decisions, deepens our understanding of district needs, and guides the work ahead. We are grateful for the continued support of our families, staff, community members, and local partners. That partnership helped secure the passage of our referendum in November 2025 and continues to shape our next steps.

This connection is both within our schools and across the broader community. Through Board Walks we see student learning in action and stay grounded in district priorities. Visits to all four schools this year provided opportunities to engage directly with students and staff, and to better understand how initiatives are experienced day to day.

Across the community, we have created multiple ways to build awareness, listen, and learn. Coffee & Conversations offers informal opportunities to connect with families and community members, hear perspectives, and build relationships. The Zephyr Learning Showcases welcome the community to see the strategic plan in action. Dessert & Dialogue events created space for thoughtful discussions on key priorities, including the Portrait of a Graduate, and this year includes emerging topics such as artificial intelligence.

These efforts build shared understanding and ensure our decisions reflect the priorities of the Mahtomedi community. As we move forward, this engagement will continue to guide important work across the district, including the design of voter-approved facilities projects. We are grateful to serve a community that invests in our students, our schools, and the work of advancing excellence together.













MAHTOMEDI PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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We are Mahtomedi Public Schools

Mahtomedi Public Schools equips students with a world-class education through meaningful and rigorous learning experiences that support them to develop their leadership, ignite their passions, and impact their community. Through our holistic, community approach, we prepare confident learners to thrive today and in their future.



Stay Connected!

Follow us on social

@mahtomedipublicschools

@mahtomedi832

Alumni & Friends

Enrollment

Volunteer

Upcoming Events

Food Truck Friday
May 8, 5-7 p.m.
District Education Center

Zephyr Learning Showcase
May 11, 6:15-6:45 p.m.
District Education Center

Concert in the Park
June 10, 6-7 p.m.
District Education Center

Pet Extravaganza
June 17, 5:30 p.m.
MHS Fields 9 & 10

Community Garage Sale
July 30 & 31
Wildwood Elementary School