



Minnetonka School District, ISD #276
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SUMMER 2021

AROUND MINNETONKA

NEWS FROM MINNETONKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS



scientific process, and they need to clearly articulate the importance and significance of their work," said Hoehne.

High schoolers looking to connect their interest in science to future careers are able to do so through two other signature programs, as well: VANTAGE, the MHS advanced professional studies program; and MOMENTUM, the school's program focused on design and skilled trades.

"The science programs across the District have established a firm foundation for our students," reflected Hoehne. "Students receive a robust curriculum with opportunities to learn through inquiry, creative problem-solving, and collaboration. These components allow students to build on previous courses and apply their knowledge in new contexts, seeking answers to their own curiosities."

At Minnetonka Public Schools, innovative science programs inspire curiosity and empower students to excel. "Engaging students in science begins with an early introduction to the power of hands-on learning, and it grows by offering inquiry-based opportunities for students to pursue what interests them," said Dr. Dennis Peterson, Superintendent of Schools.

Classes and extracurricular options offered throughout the District provide opportunities for students to explore science and the ways it connects to other aspects of their daily lives. The programs provide a strong foundation for students to continue to pursue excellence in the field after graduation.

ENGAGING IN A SCHOOL OF OPPORTUNITIES

Minnetonka High School (MHS) is often referred to as a 'school of opportunities,' able to support and challenge students to discover and pursue their passions while achieving personal excellence. MHS offers a robust slate of AP and IB science courses, including AP courses in biology, chemistry and environmental science; IB sports, exercise and health science; and several options for both AP and IB physics. More than 80% of MHS students take at least one AP or IB course during their four years at the High School. In addition to these opportunities, MHS's signature programs provide pathways for students to engage in rigorous scientific endeavors.

In Minnetonka Research, students pursue authentic, collaborative research, driven by their own interests. In the program, students propose, execute and present original projects while engaging with academic professionals and industry leaders. "Students participate in a wide array of projects, from biochemistry and astronomy to computer sciences, exercise science and psychology," said Kim Hoehne, Minnetonka Research program director. "There are so many ways for students to explore their curiosities here."

Last year, four Minnetonka students qualified for the Society for Science's 2021 International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), the premiere international event for high school science. At the fair, students share their research with professionals and scientists from around the world and compete for prestigious awards and scholarships. "To be named an ISEF Finalist, students must have a robust research project that follows the

MAKING THE MOST OF THE MIDDLE

At Minnetonka's two middle schools, in addition to studying physical science in sixth grade, life science in seventh grade and earth science in eighth grade, students may also choose to propel their academic study through accelerated science courses. In these classes, physical, life and earth sciences are covered in two years rather than three.

Extracurricular science offerings enhance middle schoolers' experiences in the classroom. Students have competed in Science Bowl challenges at the national level, and in past years, educational summer trips for seventh and eighth graders provided chances to learn about topics such as life sciences in Costa Rica and earth science in the southwest United States. "The opportunity to experience science outside of the traditional school setting is really amazing," said Fred Stock, science department chair at Minnetonka Middle School West.

BEGINNING WITH HANDS-ON CURIOSITY

Elementary students are engaged in standards-based content with an emphasis on cultivating 21st Century skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking and innovation across all subject areas. In science classes, collaboration and critical thinking often take the form of lab activities. Science units are enriched with hands-on labs supported by the district's Science Center. The Center provides materials for the K-5 science lessons at all six elementary schools. From preparing kits for Kindergarteners learning about mealworms to procuring Lego kits for upper elementary students to build simple machines, the Science Center is a hub of resources for projects and activities.

"Minnetonka's science programs provide students with hands-on opportunities to explore and innovate at every level," shared Dr. Amy LaDue, the District's Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. "Students learn deeply, and they build confidence in their knowledge and skills along the way, preparing them to succeed and excel in their endeavors both within the science classroom and beyond it."

Want to learn more? Read the full science department profile at minnetonkaschools.org/science



MOMENTUM construction at Minnetonka High School. Image courtesy of ATS&R

MESSAGE from the Superintendent

As the summer winds down, the District is busily preparing for another school year in which COVID-19 will play a role.

We have built a great plan for educating our students for the year ahead. We have expanded opportunities for students, as you will read about in this newsletter. We have also added some outstanding new staff members to our great team. The ingredients for strong student performance and for supporting our students' needs are in place.

Enrollment remains strong, as families appreciate the success we had last year on top of a long run of excellent years. That said, it is a challenging time to be in school leadership. We know that nationally—and locally—there are polarized positions on many topics. People are back and forth with each other and with the organizations in their communities about how to approach issues such as COVID-19 protocols or how to best approach the ways in which student belonging is supported.

One of the incredible strengths of this district has always been the rich engagement and participation that parents and community members have had in connecting with and supporting each other. We see it in our schools, and we see it broadly throughout Minnetonka.

As contentious issues emerge here, as they have been in districts throughout the nation, I promise you all that District leadership will listen. We will earnestly hear what you share with us, and we will work hard to make the decisions that are in the best interests of students. We will equip them with the programs, opportunities and supports they need to be successful. We have done this with great results for decades. Our district has thrived because we provide opportunities that other districts do not, and we treat students with personal care. We commit to building on these strengths and to delivering a school experience that is exceptional.

It is a school board election year, which often increases engagement from constituents on what they feel is happening in schools that is outstanding and what they feel may be improved. We welcome this engagement. There are three School Board seats up for election this November. I encourage you to please take the time to get to know the eight candidates that will be on the ballot and their platforms. Their names are listed on the School Board section of our website.

It is a time for all to engage in the discussion. Your voice matters. This is a great community, and we look to you to help shape the School Board that will represent Minnetonka Schools for years to come.

Thank you to each of you for all you do to make this a thriving, robust community in which to live, work and raise your children.

Dr. Dennis Peterson, Superintendent



MOMENTUM PROGRAM UPDATE

MINNETONKA DESIGN AND SKILLED TRADES

Construction for the MOMENTUM addition to the Pagel Center is underway on the Minnetonka High School campus (pictured above). Upon completion, more than 150 MOMENTUM students will engage in design and skilled trades coursework there during the second semester of the 2021-22 school year. "MHS is a school of opportunities where we work to help each student find their passion and place," shared Principal Jeff Erickson. "MOMENTUM, in particular, is a way for students to broaden their horizons and apply their learning to real life scenarios."

Staff are incredibly excited to further the connections and opportunities for students in MOMENTUM. The launch of the new automotive track will include multiple sections of Automotive I this spring, which demonstrates students' excitement for the experiences the program offers. Learn more at minnetonkaschools.org/momentum



Students Achieving Independent Life PROGRAM UPDATE

This fall, Minnetonka Schools will welcome more than 30 students with special needs to its new S.A.I.L. (Students Achieving Independent Life) Transition Program. "The S.A.I.L. program will afford Minnetonka students the ability to continue their 18-21 year old programming in the community in which they live," said Christine Breen, Executive Director of Special Education. Coursework will focus on developing skills and connections for life after high school. Classes will take place in the newly-renovated building in Shorewood, which includes a greenhouse, kitchen space, a video production studio and other learning labs for skill development, as well as a complete model apartment.

"Students will engage in classroom and community activities that will benefit both S.A.I.L. students and the community," shared Breen. "The focus for learners will be on growth in independence in living, working and acquiring new skills." The new S.A.I.L. building will open for classes this September.

STAY CONNECTED WITH MINNETONKA SCHOOLS

For more stories, follow us on social media and read featured news updates on the District website at minnetonkaschools.org.



MINNETONKA SCHOOLS IMPORTANT DATES

As the start of the 2021-22 school year approaches, District leaders and staff are working hard to ensure a safe return to school this fall. Specific back-to-school information will be available in late August at minnetonkaschools.org

AUGUST 2021

- 15-26.....New Teacher Workshops
- 19.....School Board Study Session, 6pm
- 30-1.....Teacher Workshops & Planning

SEPTEMBER 2021

- 2.....School Board Regular Meeting, 7 pm
- 8.....First Day of School, Gr 1-12
- 10.....First Day of School, Kindergarten
- 23.....School Board Study Session, 6pm