

# Educators of Excellence

Celebrating positive impact and leadership

April 24 & May 1, 2024 | 5:30 p.m.

2023

Teacher of  
Excellence Award

Sourcewell

Is Honored to Recognize

Joseph Wood

With This Award for  
Exemplifying Innovative  
Practices in Education

# 2024 Educators of Excellence

## Celebrating excellence

Educators of Excellence Awards celebrate the dedication, hard work, and leadership of innovative teachers and school staff throughout Sourcewell's five-county service area of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties.

## How it works

Each school selects a TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE who has demonstrated a commitment to excellence that has led to increased student success.

New this year! Each school had the opportunity to select a PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE, or a school staff member, whose leadership has had a positive impact on students and on the school environment.

## Agenda

Welcome: Paul Drange

*Sourcewell Chief Regional Solutions Officer*

Kassidy Rice

*Sourcewell Senior Director of Education Solutions*

Dinner

Music by: Dos Guys

Group photo

Awards presented by: Paul Drange

Kassidy Rice

Closing remarks: Paul Drange

## TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE

### Troy Anderson

Bertha-Hewitt Elementary School



Social studies can be a tough subject to bring to life, but Troy's class is a favorite for many of his students. Troy sets high academic and character standards for his students, and he follows through with an engagement strategy that meets students where they are. Troy's commitment to respect, development, and responsibility shines through in every facet of his teaching.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Devin Perish

Bertha-Hewitt High School



Devin is always the first to help wherever he can. Although he juggles multiple duties as custodian, Devin always makes time to check in with students and staff, greeting them warmly and making sure they're doing well. He is known for his smile, his thoroughness, and his willingness to do whatever is necessary to help students succeed.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Sarah Armstrong

Harrison Elementary School



Sarah is all about the student. She works diligently to research and implement teaching improvements, ensuring that her students have the accommodations they need. Sarah goes out of her way to build rapport with everyone and truly get to know them, and she is a steadfast advocate for the students she teaches.

### Sally Bisted

Forestview Middle School



Sally embodies the concept of lifelong learning. She fearlessly ventures outside her comfort zone to enhance her instruction and improve her students' achievements. Sally takes time to connect with colleagues to provide resources and encouragement, and many staff lean on her for support. In everything she does, big or small, Sally's dynamic personality creates a positive school culture.

### Teresa Christiansen

Lincoln Education Center



Teresa embodies the phrase "every student can learn." She works to find a solution for any challenge, ensuring that it fits the student's unique needs. If no tool or resource fits the need, Teresa develops one. She is always the first to step up when others need support, and her genuine compassion has improved the lives of her students and her colleagues.

## Susan Headlee

Nisswa Elementary School



Susan is a beacon of leadership and inspiration to students and staff alike. Her classroom is a place of tranquility, learning, and enjoyment, as she effortlessly connects with students regardless of learning or social challenges. Her steadfast support for Nisswa Elementary's mission has shaped generations of students and left an enduring impression on her community.

## Renee LaFlamme

Riverside Elementary School



Renee is a diligent supporter of the entire school. As a part of the continuous improvement team, Renee engages in tough conversations with thoughtfulness and perseverance. She shines as a mentor and teacher, always bringing an insightful perspective to challenges. Renee comes to every meeting prepared with specific feedback, and she works collaboratively to make sure both teacher and student succeed.

## Nathan Macejkovic

Baxter Elementary School



Nate's gentle and passionate demeanor creates an inclusive school culture where everyone feels valued and supported. Nate knows practically every book a student could want to read, and his recommendations hook students and get them excited about literature. Nate's intelligence helps him innovate in the classroom – not only imparting knowledge but also fostering a love for learning.

## Suzanne 'Sue' Miller

Brainerd High School



Across many different teaching assignments, Sue's commitment and flexibility have helped numerous students with disabilities achieve success. Sue gives every challenge her best effort, always seeking solutions over excuses, and she instills this sense of high expectations in her students as well. Sue is also a mentor whose collaborative approach to teaching has helped numerous colleagues.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

## Tom Adkins

Riverside Elementary School



Tom's positivity is clear in his words and actions. He nurtures a safe environment as both a bus driver and custodian, connecting with students and always making them feel welcomed. Tom even gave his own personal time to work with students who had vandalized the school, holding them accountable for their actions and supporting them as they put in work to make things right.

## Deborah Bell

Forestview Middle School



Teachers who work with Deb praise her commitment to excellence. Her work as an educational assistant is essential to the success of the classes she serves. Deb takes time to understand each student, forging deep relationships and anticipating their needs. She is a positive influence on all staff as well, modeling professionalism and facing all challenges with a solution and a smile.

## Laura Boeckermann

Baxter Elementary School



Laura is confident and capable in any role. She is very flexible as an educational assistant, following the needs of students wherever needed, whether that's covering homeroom or helping with recess and end-of-day pick up. Laura's energetic, positive personality makes everyone feel welcomed, and she makes relationship building a top priority.

## Marilyn Fanjoy

Lincoln Education Center



Marilyn's work as an educational assistant and Type III driver is not easy, but she is always flexible and friendly with everyone she meets. She always wears a smile and always seeks new ways to help others. Marilyn is an irreplaceable member of the team, and her knack for remembering the little things that others forget makes Lincoln Education Center a better place for all.

## Jesse Hawk

Harrison Elementary School



Jesse is usually in the building long before most other staff, analyzing data for use in meetings and with staff. He doesn't just succeed in each task: he always seeks ways to improve the experience for everyone involved. Jesse has a way of finding small changes that can have a big impact on students, making them more relaxed and engaged throughout the day.



## Orlyn “OJ” Steffen

Nisswa Elementary School



OJ's selfless nature and commitment to excellence set him apart as Nisswa Elementary's head engineer. He not only keeps the facility operating at full capacity with his troubleshooting abilities, he also fosters a positive atmosphere by frequently engaging with students and staff. OJ's humor and warmth brighten everyone's day, and he is always approachable and attentive to others' needs.

## Pat Wilson

Brainerd High School



Pat takes great pride in his work as custodian. He leads with a helpful attitude and a willingness to take on new and challenging tasks. Pat also acts as a mentor for a student custodian, coaching them through mistakes with patience and kindness. The student has developed into a more responsible employee and person thanks to Pat's guidance as a role model.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Nichole Powers

Cass Lake-Bena Middle School



Nichole is an accomplished teacher, colleague, and advocate for equity. Through clear communication and diligent planning, she produces high growth in her students. In her first year as teacher for the fifth-grade students with the most significant absenteeism, Nichole improved student attendance by nearly 40%. She is a stellar mentor, role model, and voice for Native American concerns, confronting issues that are often overlooked in other districts.

### Brian Voge

Cass Lake-Bena Elementary School



Students often remember Brian, and what he meant to them, long after graduation. He builds strong relationships with students, pushing them to persevere and achieve success. Brian has had a profound ripple effect on curriculum development and setting standards for physical education. His sense of calm in stressful situations creates a space where everyone feels safe and encouraged.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Missy Freeman

Cass Lake-Bena Middle School



Missy is a beacon of optimism and a true child advocate. Her amazing rapport with students, families, and colleagues is the embodiment of excellence in school administration. Missy is a leader on implementation teams and the school's Climate Committee. She ensures equitable, positive, and restorative practices across the district. Missy's authenticity and consistency enrich her school each day.

### Allysa Schleif

Cass Lake-Bena Elementary School



Allysa is reliable and empathetic to everyone who interacts with her. An expert in academic interventions, she has been highly influential in meeting students' math and reading needs. Allysa is constantly thinking of new ways to connect with students, leading with a compassion that speaks to their hearts as well as their minds.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Melissa Fischer

Crosby-Ironton Secondary School



Melissa is a favorite of students and families alike. She is welcoming and accommodating to all while setting high standards to help her students reach their fullest potential. Melissa is also a mentor and supporter for her colleagues, who often visit her classroom seeking advice. Throughout her many roles, her work improves the lives of everyone in the district.

### Clayton Lang

Cuyuna Range Elementary School



Clayton has transformed the physical education curriculum in his district. His students experience activities and training that will remain relevant well into adulthood. Clayton goes beyond physical skill training to also instill social skills such as fair play and goal setting in his students. His flexibility and willingness to learn new tactics and subjects rub off on his colleagues, creating a “student-first” mentality throughout the school.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Christine Elliott

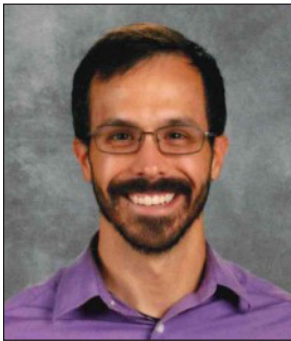
Crosby-Ironton Secondary School



Christie is a tireless advocate for students and staff members. She can often be found helping students work through assignments or online classes, and she excels at helping students realize their full potential. Christie's calm and encouraging nature is present in every interaction, and she has bettered the lives of students across all levels of coursework.

### Trevor Rohloff

Cuyuna Range Elementary School



Trevor is the glue that has held his school together through some very challenging times. Students and staff alike lean on his professionalism and positivity. An expert in his field, Trevor has helped hundreds of students in crisis build the skills necessary to regulate their emotions. He is also a leader among colleagues, helping them implement interventions and constantly exceeding expectations.

## TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE

### Paula Peterson

Freshwater Education District



Paula is renowned for her out-of-the-box problem-solving skills. Her innovative approach fosters a love for learning and discovery in her students, and her positive attitude is a beacon of inspiration for her students and colleagues. Throughout Paula's tenure as occupational therapist, she has shown an enduring commitment to excellence. She is an exceptional educator, mentor, and leader.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Tammy Miller

Freshwater Education District



Tammy has shaped Freshwater with her strong work ethic and outstanding communication skills. She is meticulous in every task she undertakes, and she has a knack for conveying complex ideas with clarity and precision. Tammy is always attentive and receptive with everyone she meets, creating a collaborative and respectful atmosphere for everyone involved.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Julie Alholm

Lincoln Elementary School



Students look forward to the time they spend with Julie, thanks to the outstanding connections she forges with each one. As interventionist teacher for grades K-2, she bolsters students' confidence in their academic abilities and makes them feel personally nurtured. Julie also plays an integral role on the student assistance team, giving colleagues unique insights on supporting their classes.

### Dylan Curto

Dr. Knight Elementary School



Dylan plays a vital role as school psychologist, programming to meet student needs in behavioral and academic support. The school relies heavily on his expertise as a key member of the Student Assistance and Child Study teams. Dylan goes above and beyond in his role, providing insightful recommendations to staff on how best to meet the needs of each student.

### Shae Edgerton

Little Falls Community High School



Shae's incredible organizational skills and attention to detail serve her well in a demanding educational environment. She shines when working with students facing anxiety, depression, and mental health disorders, where her ability to connect on a personal level makes a massive impact. Shae goes above and beyond in leading academic interventions and bringing support to struggling students.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Allison Hendrickson

Little Falls Early Childhood Center



Allison shines as a leader in early childhood education. She is constantly innovating, finding creative ways to engage young learners and creating home learning materials to involve families in their children's education. Allison fosters connections so strong that her students still visit years later. Her energy and positivity have been integral to the growth of her Early Childhood program.

### Chad Kaddatz

Little Falls Community Middle School



Chad's passion for science is clear as he constantly innovates and experiments with new teaching techniques, embracing change to give his students the best possible experience. Chad's classroom is always buzzing with activity, thinking, and discussion. As a coach, Chad has built a fantastic program of student-athletes who uphold the pillars of Flyer Pride.

### Lisa Salber

Lindbergh Elementary School



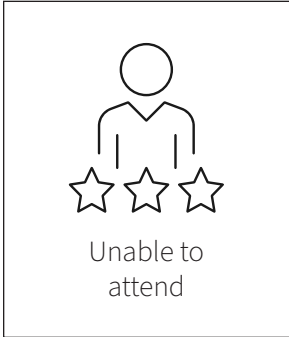
Lisa is a valuable resource to everyone around her. She diligently analyzes school data to help develop the best academic plan possible. Lisa is also highly involved with students' families, coordinating multiple engagement evenings each year to bridge learning from school to home. Lisa is already a wealth of knowledge, but she continues to learn and innovate, and her commitment to growth improves the entire district.



## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jackie Kroll

Little Falls Community High School



Jackie is a dedicated paraprofessional who serves as a supportive presence for both students and fellow staff members. She actively engages with students, offering encouragement wherever needed, and her collaborations with teachers enhance the learning experience at every level. Jackie shines not only in her individual efforts but in the way her contributions inspire others in the community.

### Troy Murphy

Lindbergh Elementary School



Troy is one of the most dynamic people at Lindbergh Elementary School. He makes everyone feel special with his excellent custodial leadership and his willingness to have fun. The extra flare Troy adds to his work and the relationships he builds with students and colleagues clearly demonstrate the love he has for the school and everyone in it.

### Jeanine Pantzke

Dr. Knight Elementary School



Jeanine is the heart and soul of Dr. Knight. The school day would not run nearly as smoothly without her presence as secretary, where she demonstrates excellence each day with a warm smile. No matter the need, Jeanine makes time to help and can be counted on to accomplish any task. Jeanine always makes students and families feel welcomed and understood.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Carole Walkoviak

Dr. Knight Elementary School, Early Childhood



Carole works tirelessly as a paraprofessional to ensure a rewarding day for her team. She takes initiative, is endlessly flexible, and can always work with any plan. Carole's kindness makes the learning environment inviting and safe for all students, and her ability to find a silver lining improves even the most challenging situations.

### Karen Winscher

Little Falls Community Middle School



Karen's warmth and leadership have a massive impact on food service staff, students, and the greater community. Karen manages the school kitchen with exceptional positivity and responsibility, serving as a model for others and ensuring the kitchen is prepared for whatever the day may bring. Thanks to Karen, mealtimes are a positive part of the day for every student.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Kendra Berg

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Secondary School



Kendra's name constantly appears on student lists of teachers who have made an impact. She makes a personal connection with her students, meeting each one where they are, and she leads her colleagues to do the same. Kendra is a leader both in and out of the classroom, as she shares her knowledge and experience to always put students first.

### Kyle Lamb

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle School District



Kyle's high energy and creative approach have revitalized his school's vocal music and theater programs. He connects with students and helps them feel capable in any environment. Kyle is also an adviser for an LGBTQ+ after-school support group, speaking up for students and making them feel supported and accepted. He advocates for important changes and is always willing to jump in and make them happen.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Cindy Dalton

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle School District



Cindy has a can-do attitude that has served her well in an intricate and dynamic environment. She has been a positive influence during an admin restructure and a new finance system launch, always willing to jump in wherever needed. Cindy's affirmations and confidence have encouraged many of her colleagues, helping them see their way through challenging circumstances to improve education for the entire district.

### Audrey Morrill

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Secondary School



Audrey is the heartbeat of her school. She is always willing to put in extra time to help out, and her presence is invaluable for students, staff, and families. Audrey manages numerous tasks easily, from planning sessions and development initiatives to lighthearted school events. Through it all, she helps everyone know where to go, what's happening, and how to access whatever they need to succeed.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Brian Carlson

Menahga High School



Students in Brian's science classroom are always ready to ask and answer questions, thanks to his safe and respectful presence as a teacher. He sets clear expectations and projects a sense of calm, and he cultivates a positive learning environment that primes students to absorb lessons easily. Brian is always open to unconventional solutions, stepping outside of his comfort zone to help students and staff alike.

### Ashley Walvatne

Menahga Elementary School



Ashley's positive impact on Menahga Elementary is palpable. Her classroom is a haven of warmth and welcome, sustained by her positivity and energy as a teacher. She has taken leadership roles on multiple crucial committees, investing her time and expertise to push the entire school forward. Ashley's dedication and expertise enrich the lives of everyone she meets.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Colleen Taylor

Menahga High School



Colleen is always ready to help with technology or lend a listening ear. She steps up to every challenge with flexibility and a “bigger picture” mindset that promotes the future of every student. Colleen has an ability to positively motivate learners in any environment, always communicating clearly and serving as a wealth of resources to help every student achieve success.

### Kim Ylitalo

Menahga Elementary School



Mrs. Kim possesses a remarkable “go-get-it” attitude and an unwavering commitment to her work. Kim has been the first to step up to address increased mental health needs among students, working to serve students beyond just their academic performance. Kim is courageous in difficult conversations, and her proactive problem-solving approach creates a positive and collaborative environment.

## TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE

### Terri Shepard

Remer Elementary School



Terri is a cornerstone of Northland Community Schools. She acts as a lead or co-adviser on numerous initiatives, constantly advocating for students and organizational improvement. Terri is always learning: She pursues new courses and initiatives and helps to redefine practices and protocols wherever possible. Terri is a frequent source of advice for colleagues, and she makes everyone in the building feel more positive and welcomed.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Jamie Kendall

Northland Elementary School



Nothing seems to rattle Jamie. Her calm demeanor makes students feel heard and supported, even as she works with them to process their disruptive behavior and get back into a learning mindset. Jamie is a cornerstone of helping her school run smoothly: No matter what happened yesterday, she makes students feel welcomed into a fresh start every morning.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### David Christensen

Pequot Lakes High School



David's classroom is an inviting space for all students. His enthusiasm for literature is clear, but his teaching style focuses on helping students find their own voices while maintaining – and achieving – high expectations for learning. David is always willing to tackle the new or difficult if students will benefit, and he has been essential on multiple teams and initiatives in his time at Pequot Lakes.

### Bob Fischer

Pequot Lakes Middle School



After decades of serving as a K-6 social studies teacher, Bob is now elevating the district's career and technical education department to a new level. Bob constantly innovates: He has harnessed the limitless energy of middle-school learners with new experiences in engineering, including Battle Bots and coding opportunities. Bob's passion for the student experience is clear in every lesson.

### April Kinney

Eagle View Elementary School



Kindergarten teachers notice when a student has spent time in April's Early Childhood classroom. Her expertise helps weave education and play seamlessly to prepare her students for future learning. April shines through meticulous preparation work, leadership on multiple teams, and the supportive relationships she fosters with staff, students, and families.



## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Robert Engholm

Pequot Lakes Middle School



Robert exemplifies servant leadership in all he does for students and staff. He serves as a multitasking resource, both as lead custodian and as volunteer in sports programs and snowmobile safety courses. Robert has had an undeniable impact on campus appearance and operations, community involvement, and student experience.

### Nancy Lazerine

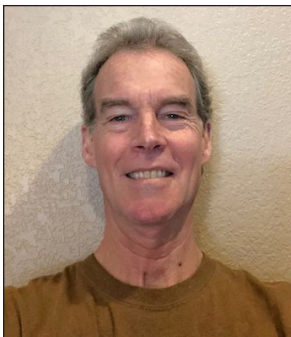
Pequot Lakes High School



Nancy is universally adored by students and families for her support with the challenging concepts and strategies of math. She helps identify common student struggles, and she finds creative solutions to support both educators and learners. A natural leader, Nancy has a knack for kindly stated suggestions that display keen insight. She is invaluable in creating a warm, caring, and productive space.

### Jon Stachour

Eagle View Elementary School



Jon is the driving force keeping Eagle View Elementary running. He always strives for excellence in his work, and his speed, dependability, and initiative are unmatched. Jon is a man of many talents, and he can be seen working all around the grounds each day. In fact, many students watch for him, hoping to catch a high five or a friendly smile.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Kelly Sauer

Pierz Healy High School



Whether Kelly is staying late after class to explain a topic or coming in early to prepare for a new and unique lesson approach, she always puts student learning first. Kelly's emphasis on real-world application helps students connect with the material in a practical way, and her "embrace challenges" mindset helps them learn from mistakes and build resiliency.

### Jackie Tautges

Pioneer Elementary School

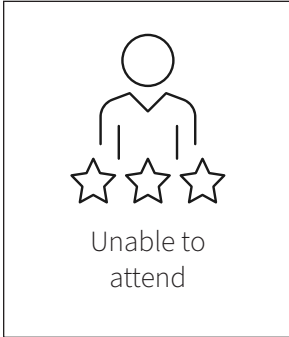


Jackie radiates a positivity that brightens the school. She works tirelessly to provide a supportive environment to students, coaching them on productive solutions and holding them to high expectations. Jackie is dependable during the most stressful situations, and she is quick to mentor new teachers or fill in for a sick colleague. In all she does, Jackie demonstrates genuine care for those around her.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Emmy Keehr

Pierz Healy High School



Emmy is never seen without a glowing smile. Her interactions with students and staff always exude a genuine interest in others that sets her apart. Emmy's outstanding work as both custodian and lead cook demonstrate her dynamic skillset, and her compassion for others improves the lives of everyone wherever she goes.

### Kari Mitchell

Pioneer Elementary School



Students are drawn to Kari by her kind heart and dedication to meeting their needs. Kari has been critical to the success of many students, curating a supportive environment where students can work through challenging situations and lessons. When she sees a need, she addresses it without being asked, approaching every task with flexibility and positivity.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Alissa Anderson

Pillager Elementary School



Alissa is a calming voice in a chaotic world. Her depth of knowledge in early childhood special education creates an inclusive and supportive environment for all students. Alissa is a proven mentor to colleagues and frequently helps them develop skills in working with unique needs. Alissa's determination helps her control any unusual situation and refocus on the student's best interests.

### Sara Kimman

Pillager Middle School



Middle school is a critical time in development, where exceptional teachers like Sara have an extraordinarily positive impact. Sara's classroom is defined by empathy and patience, and she offers a personalized style of instruction that connects with students across many academic and personal situations. Sara shines in her relationships with students and families and also as a team member and leader in the building.

### Ryan Saulsbury

Pillager High School



Like other excellent teachers, Ryan doesn't just teach a subject: He passes his passion for the subject along to his students as well. As a talented and upbeat instructor, he brings joy to those around him and hope to students who are at risk academically. His laugh is infectious, and his approach to teaching improves the experience of both his biology and Area Learning Center students.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jackie Dickinson

Pillager High School



Jackie forges powerful, lasting relationships with students, especially those struggling to interact with others. Her unique approach blends empathy, grace, compassion, and a twist of humor, drawing students into a genuine connection that makes them feel supported and encouraged. Jackie's dedication is clear in her many contributions around the school and her positive impact on those she serves.

### Alexis Headlee

Pillager Elementary School



Alexis shows a commitment to every student, treating each with the dignity and respect they deserve. Despite challenging and sometimes discouraging circumstances, Alexis returns each day with a fresh outlook and a positive energy. Even on the hardest days, she excels at serving students at every behavior level and providing an uplifting learning environment.

### Barb Snow

Pillager Middle School



Barb has held many roles in her school district, and she has excelled at them all. The support and guidance she provides impact students and colleagues alike. Barb's skill at making connections while setting a high bar motivates everyone she works with. She is always the first to lend support for personal challenges.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Ariana Schendel

Pine River-Backus High School



Ariana distinguishes herself with a keen ability to balance support and challenge in her classroom, motivating her students to achieve their full academic and personal potential. Ariana fosters a sense of belonging and collaboration in her classroom, and her meticulous approach to learning and interventions significantly boosts her students' success.

### Becky Shackle

Pine River-Backus Elementary School



Becky's unwavering commitment to excellence sets a standard for her colleagues. She has an innate ability to interpret student data and use the results to tailor her instruction and interventions. Becky has greatly improved student outcomes with this evidence-based approach. She also continuously seeks opportunities to learn and grow as an educator, and she serves on the elementary leadership team as an energetic and positive influence.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Jim Niskanen

Pine River-Backus High School



Jim's impact as custodian is nothing short of remarkable. His communication and follow-through, along with his attention to detail, ensure that every task is completed with precision. This thoroughness keeps the school operating smoothly no matter the challenge. Jim's kindness and service-based leadership motivate others to do their best, improving the community as a whole.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Alyssa Gerads

Royalton High School



Alyssa's work with curriculum and assessment serves as an example for her colleagues. She is highly organized, with a clear vision for her science students' classroom experience. Alyssa is committed to professional development and innovation, constantly monitoring student progress and evolving her approach. She constantly strives to make her classroom a better place to learn.

### Hannah Thoma

Royalton Elementary School



Hannah fosters a well-rounded learning environment for her students with an approach that blends creativity and structure. She sets clear expectations with students while allowing them to be themselves and engage with the learning process. Because Hannah builds strong relationships with her students, they respect her as an educator and feel safe to participate and learn.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### David Lemm

Royalton High School



David has managed the Royalton School District technology department with efficiency and reliability for a long time. Technology requires multiple skillsets, and David's ability to juggle development, implementation, and maintenance keeps everything moving smoothly. Much of David's work is behind the scenes, but his impact is felt every day by every student.

### Lisa Tasto

Royalton Elementary School



Lisa is an instrumental leader of the paraprofessional group, creating a reliable and consistent learning environment. Many students love working with her, thanks to her consistent support and awareness of student needs. Lisa often is the first to recognize potential trouble areas, and tasks are always safer, smoother, and more efficient under her leadership.



## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Melissa Koch

Sebekka Secondary School



Melissa has built an incredible vocal music program over the last 16 years. Her knowledge and performance skills are matched only by her ability to instill a sense of creativity and passion in her students. Melissa continues to pursue development, recently completing a master's degree in music education. Melissa's tremendous investment of time and effort has inspired hundreds of vocal music students.

### Nicole Oyster

Sebekka Elementary School



Nicole's classroom embodies the wonder of learning. Her students are always eager to demonstrate what they have learned or share their work with others. Nicole designs her lessons to encourage participation, activate creativity, and engage with student interests. Nicole is always willing to incorporate new ideas when others are hesitant, and everything she does is done with purpose.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Becky Pierson

Sebekka Elementary School



Becky has been a force of stability and support at Sebekka Public Schools for 40 years. She is unselfish, kind, and supportive to everyone she meets while maintaining a consistent environment conducive to learning and growth. Becky's professional and collaborative demeanor with colleagues, plus her approachable and caring attitude, have had a positive impact on countless Sebekka students.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jill Kneisl

Staples-Motley Middle/High School



As a visual arts teacher, Jill excels at helping students build on their own strengths and interests. Her approach to all aspects of art allows students to flex their creativity and try something unique. Jill's calming rapport and creative approach make her classroom a school favorite: Many students ask to spend free time there whenever possible.

### Dawn Weite

Staples-Motley Elementary School



Dawn is a driving force at her school for effective learning. She frequently shares new education strategies from a wide range of sources, from podcasts to graduate courses. Dawn has been adaptable in the face of significant changes and challenges, and her great attitude and rapport with students are a testament to the consideration she puts into every choice she makes.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Angela Jares

Staples-Motley Middle/High School



Angie tackles hard work with some of the district's most challenging student situations. Her consistency and strategic sense of calm have a big impact on student growth and success, and she steps in wherever necessary with an eagerness to grow and improve her work. Angie works closely with the special education teacher to build positive relationships and maintain high-quality education.

### Yolanda Koppes

Staples-Motley Elementary School



Yolanda's kindness and effectiveness as a paraprofessional are legendary. All students look forward to interacting with her, and her positivity throughout every task in a typical day sets a solid foundation for learning throughout the building. Yolanda is always two steps ahead, ready to step up or anticipate a colleague's needs before they say anything.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Samantha Roden

Swanville High School



Samantha engages her students with a creative and forward-thinking approach to art education. She is approachable as a teacher, making students feel comfortable participating in class. Her exceptional organizational skills further enhance the learning environment. Samantha frequently connects with other art educators in conferences and online communities, ensuring that her students are exposed to contemporary methods and relevant curriculum.

### Tamie Wimmer

Swanville Elementary School



Tamie infuses excitement into the learning experience across every subject. Students in her class engage deeply, thanks to an immersive approach that turns every lesson into an adventure. Tamie adapts swiftly as well, tailoring lessons to address individual learner strengths and weaknesses. She is a strong advocate for all students, and she contributes frequently on various committees to foster continual schoolwide improvement.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Kimberly Lindemann

Swanville School District



Kim is an invaluable resource, standing out as a highly skilled individual committed to the best interests of students. Her unwavering integrity and supportive nature have earned the respect of her colleagues and made her a role model for others. Kim's proactive approach in identifying tasks and her initiative to see them through make a positive impact on the district every day.

### Lizz Schafer

Swanville School District



Lizz exemplifies professionalism in all aspects of her role. Her proactive approach as school nurse ensures a safe and healthy learning environment for both staff and students. She promotes a culture of respect, integrity, and accountability through her actions. Lizz sets clear boundaries and expectations but communicates them with warmth and compassion.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jacob Drimel

Upsala High School



Jacob is well respected by students and staff, thanks to his dedication and his ability to connect with people of all ages. Jacob's social studies lessons help students find their potential both inside and outside of the classroom, as he takes time to relate his material to practical life lessons as well. Jacob's high expectations and positive outlook motivate his students to achieve success.

### Grace Rahn

Upsala Elementary School



Grace works as a special education teacher under challenging circumstances, and she always rises to meet each challenge. Grace's students show tremendous academic and social growth, thanks to her dedication and willingness to try out new approaches to learning. Grace is a calm presence during even the most difficult situations, and a model of perseverance for students and colleagues alike.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jayne Glaser

Upsala High School



Jayne works diligently to ensure every student feels prepared for life after high school. She helps students prepare for scholarships, college applications, and career planning, understanding their goals and skillsets and helping them explore opportunities where they can thrive. Jayne takes the time to make positive connections with each student, doing everything she can to give them what they need to be successful.

### Gina Gross

Upsala Elementary School



Gina is a steadfast and positive presence at Upsala Schools, where she greets everyone each morning with a smile. Gina's polite and pleasant demeanor is contagious, and she excels at making visitors or callers feel welcomed. Like many administrative staff members, Gina wears many hats, but she handles stressful situations with ease and always leads with eagerness and dedication.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Deb Hutson

Verndale Elementary School



Deb is an incredible music educator, mentor, and colleague. She places a focus on empathy and relationship building, and she always conveys concepts in a clear and engaging manner that caters to the diverse learning styles of her students. Deb is always available for support, encouragement, and positivity, and she will set aside anything to help someone else in need.

### Katie Tackmann

Verndale High School



As a school counselor, Katie has gone above and beyond to build a transparent, collaborative network of students, parents, and educators. Her unwavering dedication to student success creates a supportive and inclusive atmosphere throughout the school. Katie has also led several college and career readiness initiatives, simplifying work for her colleagues while greatly increasing opportunities for students.



## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Mary Gronlund

Verndale Elementary School



Verndale Elementary thrives thanks to Mary's dependable and positive presence. Mary's efforts to keep up with data and administrative deadlines demonstrate deep resiliency. Her flexibility in the face of numerous challenges and changes is an inspiration to all. Mary is dependable and calm under pressure, a quiet leader and example of excellence.

### Ed Pudwill

Verndale High School



Ed's "can-do" attitude and approachability create a safe and secure environment every day. He always knows what to do, and if he doesn't, he'll teach himself how. Ed's unwavering patience with student workers and terrific sense of humor improve everyone's mood. On the very rare days when Ed is absent, students always ask when he's returning.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Michael Brunsberg

Wadena-Deer Creek Middle & High School



Mike's ability to make everyone feel valued and part of a community is unmatched. Whether in his English classroom or on his cross country or baseball teams, Mike celebrates each student's uniqueness and encourages their creativity. Athletes of all skill levels love being coached by Mike because he makes them feel their presence is important. To him, it's never about winning or losing: It's always about improvement.

### Lindy Thompson

Wadena-Deer Creek Elementary School



Lindy is a natural-born teacher, coach, and leader. Her positivity lifts the spirits of everyone she meets, and her willingness to try new approaches in class emboldens her students to attempt difficult tasks themselves. Lindy continues growing through ongoing certifications and technology education, and she also demonstrates a commitment to high-quality athletic development as a coach for girls' tennis and girls' track and field.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Lisa Schmidt

Wadena-Deer Creek Elementary School



Lisa is the epitome of positivity and efficiency. Her expertise extends to all areas of building operation, bringing support to everyone wherever it's needed. Lisa's consistent and excellent communication helps colleagues ask informed questions and make the best decisions possible for their students. Her kindness and compassion are evident in every interaction.

### Mary Wynn

Wadena-Deer Creek High School



There is no one more caring and energetic than Mary. She brings a positive attitude to everything she does, and her infectious laugh lifts up everyone around her. Mary has high expectations for students and is not afraid to challenge them, but her approach is so genuine that students respect and listen to her. Mary's attitude has seen her through many challenging supervision positions.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Cheri Lemberg

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley Elementary School



Cheri fosters self-awareness, self-management, and relationship-building skills in her students like no other educator can. Thanks to her approach, her students are equipped with the tools to succeed both academically and personally. Cheri also serves as a wealth of knowledge for colleagues, helping them think through effective interventions and how to implement them efficiently.

### Lindsey Slavin

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley Secondary School



Lindsey's creativity in the classroom brings out the best in even the most reluctant learners. Her approach to special education ensures that students are simultaneously challenged and supported. Lindsey is always seeking new ways to engage students, and her passion for their success is unmatched. She arrives with a smile each day, and her positivity inspires everyone she meets.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Laurie Haraldson

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley Elementary School



Laurie is a calm, consistent source of support for all. She builds a firm but gentle rapport with students, and she knows how to motivate them to work and when to accommodate their needs. Laurie's kindness assures every student that she cares about them, and her positive attitude brings a steadying sense to every room she is in.



Innovative Schools Project (ISP) is a nonprofit organization funded by Sourcewell that provides matching grants to Region 5 public school districts to support teachers' innovative classroom ideas.

ISP recognizes innovative teachers to highlight creative problem-solving strategies and connect educators. By providing resources to local school groups, ISP helps promote community collaboration and sustainable support networks within each district.

## Lake Mathison

Royalton High School, Spanish I-IV



Dr. Lake Mathison teaches high school Spanish in Royalton, where she loves watching her students grow in their language and cultural knowledge. Her most recent academic endeavor is helping students focus on their learning instead of just their grades. Students in her classes receive feedback on their progress in learning objectives, rather than number scores, part of a revolutionary philosophy called Ungrading.

## Jon Koenig

Royalton High School, 10-12 English



Jon believes first and foremost in challenging every student to reach their full potential. To do this, he spends most of class time in small groups and one-on-one settings as part of a new teaching strategy called Modern Classrooms Project. His favorite part of teaching is forming relationships with students and celebrating their successes.

## *A special thanks*

Tonight's trophies are Ranger Made, crafted with care by Crosby-Ironton High School students. Ranger Made is a state-of-the-art, student-managed manufacturing company inside Crosby-Ironton High School. In Ranger Made, students design, create, manufacture, and sell various products. The facility includes wood and metal fabrication manufacturing spaces, automotive care and small engines facility, computer-automated drafting and design room, a technology and innovation lab that houses the robotics program, a flexible learning classroom, and a retail store.

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*“Ensuring a bright future starts with exceptional educators — those who light the way by igniting curiosity, fueling creativity, and sparking a love of learning.”*

– Dr. Chad Coauette, Sourcewell executive director/CEO



# Sourcewell: We are driven to serve

## Who is Sourcewell?

Sourcewell is a local unit of government and the regional service cooperative for Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties. We are one of nine service cooperatives in the state. We partner with education, government, and nonprofits to boost student and community success. We offer training, student academic programming, and contracted services to our central-Minnesota members. Statewide, we provide a self-funded group health insurance option for public entities. Throughout North America, we offer technology solutions for schools and a cooperative purchasing program for all public entities. Sourcewell staff aim to be force multipliers, empowering you to fulfill your public service mission to help your students, school, and community.

## Our core services

- Cooperative Purchasing
- Community Solutions
- Education and Career and College Readiness
- Regional Low Incidence Project and Collaborative Service Workers
- Insurance and Employee Benefits
- Technology Solutions for Schools