

# Educators *of* Excellence

*Celebrating positive  
impact and leadership*



April 30 & May 7, 2025 | 5:30 p.m.

# 2025 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 may select a TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE and a PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE who have had a positive impact on students and on their school environment.

## Agenda

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 5 p.m.    | Check-in, doors open  |
| 5:30 p.m. | Welcome:<br><i>Paul Drange, Sourcewell Chief Regional Solutions Officer</i><br><i>Kassidy Rice, Sourcewell Senior Director of Education Solutions</i> |
| 5:40 p.m. | Dinner:<br>Music provided by <i>Dave Lumley Acoustic</i>  |
| 6:45 p.m. | Group photo   |
| 7 p.m.    | Awards:<br><i>Paul Drange</i><br><i>Kassidy Rice</i>  |
| 8:15 p.m. | Closing remarks:<br><i>Paul Drange</i>  |

*Thanks to tonight's musicians!*

Dave Lumley & Lara Moline





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.

For more information, please contact:

Lindsey Riffle  
Innovative Schools Partner  
(218) 208-3435  
lindsey@ispmn.org

## INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR

Nicole Harmer

Brainerd High School



Nicole teaches chemistry, AP biology, and AP research at Brainerd High School. She strives to create an environment where students grow into independent, self-directed learners while developing the critical thinking, research, and communication skills needed to solve future problems. By building strong relationships with her students, Nicole witnesses their transformation into confident, capable individuals. Driven by the belief that every student has limitless potential when given the right resources and support, she continues to inspire and empower the next generation of thinkers and innovators.

Innovative Schools Project

## TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE

### Brooke Zastrow

Bertha-Hewitt School



Brooke is an outstanding math teacher who goes above and beyond to help others succeed. Her students are both challenged and supported every step of the way. She also leads beyond the classroom, serving on multiple committees to improve the school and as a dedicated volleyball coach. Brooke is the calm in the storm for her colleagues and students, always available to talk, listen, and laugh.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Sandy Johnson

Bertha-Hewitt School - Paraprofessional



Sandy's motto is "joy." Not only does she encourage others to spread joy, but she does so herself for students and staff on a daily basis. Her main focus is making sure every student she meets feels loved, safe, and happy. She puts an incredible amount of time into her lesson plans to make sure each student's academic needs are met.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Erin LePage

Lincoln Education Center - ATLAS



Erin has grown and developed her skills as an educator tenfold over her years at Lincoln Education Center. She supports some of the school's most unique and challenging learners with confidence, compassion, and consistency. Erin is a leader within the building and can always be relied upon for honest feedback. She is a problem solver and a breath of fresh air.

### Wendy Moddes

Brainerd High School



Wendy displays unwavering professionalism and genuine care for her students. She is dedicated to helping students recognize their worth and achieve their potential, both in and out of the classroom. Under her guidance, the Brainerd High School Key Club has gained national recognition. Wendy makes those around her better people and is a shining light in the school community.

### Jolene Parks

Brainerd Learning Center



Jolene creates opportunities for all students, particularly advocating for at-risk learners and special education students. She provides individualized support to ensure each learner's success, using innovative methods to spark critical thinking and active learning. With Jolene around, morale is high, everyone feels valued, and learning feels fun.

## Michelle Pfeiffer

Nisswa Elementary School



Michelle's passion, creativity, and unwavering dedication to her students make her an invaluable part of the Nisswa team. Walking into Michelle's classroom is like stepping into a hub of curiosity, energy, and joy. Her zest for learning and life is contagious, and she inspires her students to think critically, ask questions, and embrace challenges. Michelle doesn't just teach — she sparks discovery.

## Stacy Podoll-Erdal

Riverside Elementary School



Stacy's commitment to supporting not only her regular responsibilities but also extra activities truly demonstrates her leadership and passion. Her willingness to assist others makes a significant difference in the school environment. Stacy is a lifelong learner who invests time to learn about core content lessons so she can connect them to her music lessons.

## Ann Reed

Baxter Elementary School



Ann demonstrates quiet yet unwavering commitment to the academic and personal growth of every student. While she often works behind the scenes, her contributions are profound. Her steady and thoughtful approach ensures that every student receives the individualized attention they need to succeed.



## Brenda Sannes

Forestview Middle School



Brenda is a dynamic and passionate educator who fosters strong, meaningful, and positive connections with her students. She makes learning come alive in her classroom, creating an environment that students eagerly anticipate. It does not take long to see how deeply Brenda's students are connected to her and how invested she is in their lives and their learning.

## Kristin Smith

Garfield Elementary School



Kris is a passionate and compassionate educator who surrounds her learners with support and encouragement. She has evolved her own instructional skills while hosting student teachers and helping build supports needed to make other staff successful. No matter where she is, or what she does, Kris is a positive influence on everyone she meets and is truly the heart of the school.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Twila Ehrich-Belton

Brainerd Learning Center - Work Based Learning Coordinator



Twila has the exceptional ability to create innovative material that keeps students engaged and motivated. She goes beyond traditional teaching methods, incorporating real-life experiences to make learning relevant and impactful. Twila's insightful dedication to forging relationships has helped many students build trust and connect with others.

### Sarah Francis

Lincoln Education Center — ATLAS - Educational Assistant



Sarah's sense of humor is contagious: It's hard not to smile in her presence. Each student she works with, whether as an educational assistant or on daily transport routes, is cared for, challenged, and treated with dignity and respect. No matter a student's needs or challenges, her positive impact on them is plain to see. Sarah is reliable, positive, kind, and a joy to work with.

### Lois Gagne

Nisswa Elementary School - Paraprofessional



Lois is an absolute force of nature and an inspiration to everyone lucky enough to cross her path: She zips around the school like a whirlwind, ensuring that every student has the tools they need to succeed. Lois puts her heart and soul into making a difference every single day. Everyone at Nisswa Elementary has a "Lois story" to share. She is truly one of a kind.



## Megan Gates

Riverside Elementary School - Behavior Management Specialist



Megan embodies a positive, proactive attitude that positively impacts the entire school community. She approaches tasks with a smile, without hesitation or complaint, and plays a crucial role in students' success and well-being. Her approach to both teaching and assisting others makes a lasting impact on the entire school.

## Rick Jensen

Brainerd High School - Yearbook Adviser



As yearbook adviser, Rick is at almost every school event, which means he is busy day, night, and weekends too! Not only is the yearbook beautiful, but it is also inclusive, trendy, and positive. He lifts people up with his infectious smile and enthusiasm, and he creates opportunities for students to uncover their talents and make a difference in the world.

## Karol Kruse

Garfield Elementary School - Educational Assistant



Karol's commitment to building relationships and helping some of the hardest-to-reach learners is like no other. She understands the need for a clean slate and holds her students to the highest standard of achieving their best. Karol's secret skill is her ability to hold others accountable in a kind and subtle way: She is a great model of kind, compassionate support.

## Karen Rugloski

Baxter Elementary School - Educational Assistant



Karen is a truly remarkable educational assistant whose quiet yet unwavering dedication has made an enduring impact. She always demonstrates a calm demeanor and a deep understanding of student needs, adapting her approach to ensure each student has the support they need to succeed. Karen prefers to be behind the scenes, but she is an integral part of the school.

## Jie Westphal

Forestview Middle School - Educational Assistant



Jie's work with the Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCD) program is amazing. She truly sets the tone with her positivity and her student-centered approach. Jie is not one to be loud or boisterous in her work as she leads by quiet example, but DCD teachers frequently express how profoundly she impacts their lives and the lives of the students in the program.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Emily Alger

Cass Lake-Bena Elementary School



Emily is an inspiration to all. Her positive, selfless attitude toward students, colleagues, and families is truly infectious. She brings joy, professionalism, and expertise to the team in a way that urges others to be and do better. Most importantly, Emily's genuine empathy allows her to build strong bonds and a high level of trust with the students and colleagues she serves.

### Trisha Johnson

Cass Lake-Bena Middle School



Trisha is a dedicated employee of Cass Lake-Bena Middle School and an integral part of the leadership team. She has done an excellent job meeting the students where they are while also holding them to high standards. She is always willing to jump in and help wherever needed. Students love Trisha: She is always willing to have fun with the students as well as support them socially and emotionally.

Cass Lake-Bena School District



## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jeyshua Bush

Cass Lake-Bena Elementary School - ParaEducator



Jeyshua is his students' biggest champion, advocate, and care provider while at school. Time and time again, he can be observed giving students the space and attention they need to be calm, regulated, and ready to learn new skills and information. Jeyshua's very demeanor exudes calmness, joy, and safety to children and adults alike.

### Amanda Reiplinger

Cass Lake-Bena Middle School - Behavior Interventionist



Amanda knows how to do it all. She will step in and cover wherever she is needed to keep the school running, whether it is cleaning the cafeteria, answering phones, subbing, or transporting a student home. She is pivotal in building relationships with the toughest kids with compassion and empathy, while still holding them to high expectations.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jamie Duhn

Cuyuna Range Elementary School



Known for her kindness, compassion, and positivity, Jamie is deeply respected by colleagues, parents, and students alike. Her meticulous planning, unwavering dedication, and countless hours of effort make a profound difference in the lives of her kindergarteners. She is a true inspiration and a cornerstone of the school community.

### Molly Schenk

Crosby-Ironton High School



Throughout her time at Crosby-Ironton, Molly has taught both eighth and 12th grade social studies, coached various sports, and played a vital role in fostering a positive and supportive culture in the district. She takes excellent care of her students' academics and well-being. Her creativity in curriculum design and her thoughtful approach to teaching truly stand out.

Crosby-Ironton School District

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Kelly Schaefer

Cuyuna Range Elementary School - Administrative Assistant



Kelly plays a vital role in everything that happens within the building. With her positivity, kindness, and willingness to always lend a helping hand, she truly is the heart of the school community. No matter what is thrown her way, Kelly manages it all with a smile on her face. She has a gift for bringing joy and happiness to everyone who has the privilege of knowing her.

### Carol Yeager

Crosby-Ironton High School - Paraprofessional



Carol exemplifies what it means to be dedicated to students. It's plain to see how happy teachers are to have her in their classrooms, knowing that their students will receive not only support but also be held to high standards. Carol's flexibility and courtesy shine through as she is always ready to do what is needed to help students and teachers alike.



## TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE

### Joe Cutkay

Crosslake Community School



Joe is all about the entire school. He never hesitates to stop and ask if he can assist, and he is respected by all students thanks to his commitment to forging relationships with everyone at the school. He is continually seeking best practices and approaches to education to ensure that students are getting exactly what they need, in both lessons and real-life learning.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Bud Roberts

Crosslake Community School - Maintenance



Bud is the favorite person of everyone in the building -- students and staff. He always sees the big picture and will do whatever is needed to help -- from assisting with behavioral situations, to finding small jobs to help distract students, to dressing up as Santa and playing guitar at the holiday open house, to even obtaining his substitute teaching license to help cover staff shortages.

## TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE

### Corry Cook

Freshwater Education District



Corry's dedication to her craft and her students makes her a standout educator. Her expertise is matched only by her compassion, and her colleagues universally praise her as an exemplary team member with an ability to transform challenges into opportunities for growth and self-advocacy. She bridges gaps, not just for students but also for families, teachers, and teams.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Dawn Wegscheid

Freshwater Education District - Special Education Finance Specialist



Dawn exemplifies what it means to be a cornerstone of excellence in an organization. She consistently demonstrates exceptional expertise in her field, handling complex special education financial responsibilities with precision and competence while maintaining a kind and approachable demeanor. Her work ethic is unparalleled, and her commitment to quality and accuracy sets a standard for all to follow.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Lyn Gwost

Little Falls Community Middle School



Lyn is a well-rounded professional and a highly skilled educator. She is a leader in the building and is passionate about not only helping kids be successful, but helping her colleagues improve their practice. She has high expectations for her students while also connecting with them on a personal level. Lyn is always willing to learn and improve her teaching to meet the needs of her students.

### Kelley Kilanowski

Little Falls Continuing Education Center



Kelley has an outstanding work ethic, attitude, and ability to collaborate with others. She is eager to learn new things and create, develop, and finish bigger projects. She is on board with any initiative she is given, works as a team player, and always holds an open and honest line of communication. Kelley is a key component in her school's success.

### Elizabeth Oberton

Lindbergh Elementary School



Elizabeth consistently exemplifies the qualities of an outstanding teacher. She has created an environment that supports the growth of the whole child — fostering not only academic success but also nurturing students' social, emotional, and behavioral development. Whether academically, socially, or emotionally, Elizabeth meets each student where they are.



## Mara Roberts

Lincoln Elementary School



In Mara's classroom, exceptional management creates a safe and welcoming environment that supports academic success. She sets clear, specific expectations for her students and builds meaningful relationships with each one, fostering a sense of trust and connection. Mara is an exceptional teacher whose passion, expertise, and leadership have a lasting impact on her students and colleagues.

## Kara Schilling

Little Falls Community High School



Kara's judgment and patience in navigating the unique challenges of her role are matched only by her deep care for each student's journey. Kara's combination of professionalism, creativity, and compassion truly sets her apart as an educator. She is a leader in the broader school community, a role model for her colleagues, and a source of inspiration for her students.

## Elisa Sypnieski

Little Falls Early Childhood Center



As a compassionate advocate and resourceful problem solver, Elisa consistently demonstrates exceptional dedication to improving the school environment. Elisa is a great collaborator, working closely with teachers and staff to identify students in need of additional support and creating a safe space where students feel comfortable expressing themselves and seeking help.

## Whitney Thune

Dr. S.G. Knight Elementary School



Whitney's passion for supporting her students' success is always on full display. Her lessons are engaging, authentic, fun, and hands on. She cares for her colleagues and is willing to help out wherever she is needed. Whitney is a well-balanced educator, delivering high-quality instruction and high levels of emotional intellect with her students, staff, and families.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

## Mary Bartlett

Little Falls Community High School - LFCS Food Service Director



As the Food Service Director for Little Falls Community Schools, Mary sets a standard of excellence that inspires everyone around her. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and she ensures every interaction—whether with students, staff, or parents—is met with kindness and care. Mary is not only a talented and hardworking professional but also a genuinely kind and thoughtful person.

## Jenni Hanson

Lindbergh Elementary School - Library Paraprofessional



Jenni consistently demonstrates outstanding service to all students, fostering a love for reading and learning. Her dedication to creating an engaging library environment is best shown in her exciting book displays that capture the attention of students and spark their curiosity. Jenni's innovative contributions to the library have made it a welcoming and stimulating space for all learners.

## Stephanie Hubner

Dr. S.G. Knight Elementary School - School Nurse



Students adore Steph because she cares so much about them, not just medically, but as people. She is very resourceful and knowledgeable in the medical field and has a way of holding students to a high level regarding their own well-being. Steph goes above and beyond, filling in wherever she is needed, demonstrating strong skills as a trusted leader in the community.

## Dee Okerman

Lincoln Elementary School - Cook Manager



Dee is an exceptional and dedicated staff member who ensures the kitchen operates smoothly every day. Even in the midst of chaotic circumstances, she demonstrates remarkable adaptability, proactivity, and leadership. Her commitment to excellence and focus on student needs truly set Dee apart as she greets each day with a positive attitude and a smile.

## Sandy Rudek

Little Falls Community Middle School - Administrative Assistant



Sandy is always on top of things and incredibly organized. She knows anything and everything about the building and greets everyone who comes to the office with a smile and willingness to help. She is critical to ensuring every day goes smoothly, and she is respected and admired by staff, students, and families. Her patience and persistence solve problems every day.



## Jackie Yorek

Little Falls Early Childhood Center - Paraprofessional



Jackie's work with students demonstrates extraordinary patience and creativity. Her presence fosters a calm and structured atmosphere, as she excels in managing transitions, reinforcing positive behaviors, and encouraging respectful interactions among students. Jackie has withstood many changes within the program and continually shows up with determination and a sense of calm.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

## Chet Hudalla

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Secondary School



Chet has a gift of making connections with people. He finds ways to connect with anyone from young children to teenagers to adults. Chet often attends his students' evening activities or asks them about those activities the next day. His gift of connection leads to positive relationships and engaging classroom discussions for students and staff alike.

## Katie Lieser

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Elementary School



Katie is always positive. She knows how to motivate her students to do their best, teaches from the heart, and is always kind, compassionate, and empathetic. Katie brings out the best in every student she teaches and develops relationships with everyone in her classroom. Her commitment to high-quality teaching ensures engagement for every student.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Lisa Schurmann

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Elementary School - Library Aide



Lisa has a finger on the pulse of interests of students and continually seeks out books that will appeal to every child. Students always know when it is “Library Day” and their excitement is palpable. She has a calm and welcoming demeanor that makes the students feel comfortable asking questions or searching for a book, and she is always willing to step in to volunteer to make events a success.

### Sandra Terwey

Long Prairie-Grey Eagle Secondary School - Library Aide



Sandra works hard to get to know every student and staff member in the building. This sincere connection with the students leads to a high level of trust and respect. She always keeps the best interests of students at the forefront and works tirelessly to provide a bright spot for students. Sandra is a true servant leader and makes the school a better place for students to learn and staff to work.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Ashley Lynne

Menahga High School



Ashley's passion for teaching, dedication to her students, and leadership among her peers make her an exemplary educator. Ashley is an incredible math teacher who ensures that every learner, whether they need extra support or additional challenges, receives the attention and resources they need to succeed. Her ability to inspire, connect, and innovate makes her a role model for her students and colleagues.

### Cody Pulju

Menahga Elementary School



Cody exemplifies the qualities of an inspiring educator and mentor. He has cultivated an outstanding culture of learning where students are not only engaged but truly enjoy their educational experience. Cody's efforts benefit everyone in the school community. His commitment to improvement is evident in the success of his students, who thrive under his guidance and support.



## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Amanda Aho

Menahga Public Schools - District Accounts Payable, Data Coordinator



Amanda embodies the spirit of excellence as she supports and uplifts those around her in the school community. Her willingness to step in and help in all areas exemplifies her dedication to teamwork and collaboration. Every day, Amanda creates an engaging and encouraging atmosphere that enhances the school experience for both staff and students.

### Terry Kimball

Menahga High School - Head Custodian



Terry's exceptional work ethic, problem-solving skills, and positive attitude make him a true asset to Menahga Schools. He ensures the school is a clean, safe, and welcoming environment for all – no small task, but Terry and his team make it look effortless. His tireless efforts support student health and safety and set a standard of excellence for the entire community.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Erin Diedrich

Northland Elementary School



Erin demonstrates a commitment to continuous learning by actively seeking out new pedagogical approaches and staying updated on current research. She brings new ideas and resources to reading interventions to better support students. Erin cultivates a respectful and supportive classroom culture where students feel comfortable taking risks, asking questions, and collaborating with peers.

### Mark Gravelle

Northland High School



Mark's classroom is often bustling with students working diligently toward a beautiful end product that they and their family can be proud of. Mark is skilled in bringing people together for a cause and in writing grants and finding funding for new equipment, additional opportunities, and new classroom materials. His dedication has made a lasting impact on the entire learning community.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Julie Erpelding

Northland District Office - Accounts Payable/Payroll



Julie understands the importance of the behind-the-scenes jobs in schools, and she completes them with excellence and grace. Julie is easy to talk to and helps countless staff process questions and concerns. She consistently displays a very positive attitude and outlook within the school district, creating an uplifting and optimistic atmosphere for colleagues and students.

### Terri Julkowski

Northland Early Childhood - Bus Driver, Transportation Support and PreK Paraprofessional



Terri is an example of excellence in everything that she does, whether it is driving the bus, participating in professional development, or supporting struggling learners. Terri is professional, always positive, helpful, timely, accurate, knowledgeable, and kind. Terri has an infectious smile and is always ready to jump in with whatever task is needed.



## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Kristen Gabrielson

Pequot Lakes High School



Kristen exemplifies excellence through her unwavering dedication, adaptability, and passion for her subject. She is gracious and kind, consistently fostering strong relationships with her students, which creates a supportive and engaging classroom environment. Kristen's eternal optimism and caring nature make her a role model for both students and colleagues.

### Teri Kaminski Peterson

Pequot Lakes Middle School



Teri is an incredibly talented speech and language pathologist with a profound work ethic and degree of competency. Teri has impacted students throughout their developmental years: She has been an inflection point that has helped others find their voice and confidence through her ability to make connections with students and staff.

### Cory Kralovetz

Eagle View Elementary School



Cory stands out through his unwavering dedication to building meaningful relationships with even the most challenging students while holding them accountable for their actions and learning. He works to understand the unique needs of each student, particularly those who may struggle with behavior or engagement. All students, regardless of background or ability, feel valued and respected in his class.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Lynn Alberts

Eagle View Elementary School - Title I Paraprofessional



Students love working with Lynn. She has made a huge difference for third-grade readers through her flexibility and determination, as well as her supportive nature. Students consider Lynn a safe place to share their ideas, seek out help, or simply have a friendly conversation. Thanks to Lynn, students grow both academically and socially every day.

### Andrea Nelson

Pequot Lakes Middle School - Community Education Coordinator



Andrea is incredibly organized and thorough in her communication, with special attention to detail. She has created a culture where varsity athletes are a critical part of youth programming. She has profoundly impacted thousands of students and athletes throughout her years in the community, instilling in them values of character, fair play, and positivity.

### Shelly Reindl

Pequot Lakes High School - Paraprofessional



Whether supporting students or championing her fellow paraprofessionals, Shelly ensures that everyone has the resources and encouragement they need to thrive. She never raises a problem without presenting a thoughtful solution and is always willing to tackle unforeseen challenges head on. Shelly's reliability and helpfulness are an invaluable asset to the school community.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jessica LeBlanc

Pierz Healy High School



Jessica is an exceptional teacher whose natural talent for teaching shines in every aspect of her work. Her classroom is a welcoming, positive, and safe space where respect is mutual and students thrive. Former students often seek help from her because of the way she fosters relationships and confidence. Jessica's positive attitude and heartfelt commitment are evident in everything she does.

### Jodi Marshik

Pioneer Elementary School



Jodi stands out through her instructional skills, compassion for children, vision of learner outcomes today and in her children's future, and outgoing and positive demeanor. She skillfully balances the omnipresent pressure of academic performance with the compassion for meeting each preschool child exactly where they are.



## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Cheri Boser

Pierz Healy High School - Paraprofessional



Cheri exemplifies dedication and excellence in her role as a para, consistently going above and beyond her job responsibilities. She sets high standards for students while maintaining fairness, patience, and a supportive learning environment. Cheri's hands-on approach, adaptability, and ability to effectively reteach and guide students reflect her deep care for their success.

### Jessica Foss

Pioneer Elementary School - Paraprofessional



Jessica always has a smile and a great sense of humor while focusing her attention on a commitment to working on behalf of children. She has also taken on leadership roles that include mentoring new paraprofessionals and being co-president of the para union. Her colleagues look to her for guidance, and she provides it with her vision for the big picture.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Benjamin Horn

Pillager High School



Benjamin has built meaningful and lasting connections with students, staff, and the broader community at Pillager High School, earning respect and admiration from all. His innovation and dedication have helped him build the chemistry program and develop courses entirely from scratch, providing a robust and engaging curriculum. His impact as a teacher, mentor, and community leader is truly extraordinary.

### Kalyn Ivers

Pillager Elementary School



Kalyn stands out for her high expectations and ability to support students as they meet those expectations. She continually strives to find current and effective teaching strategies, and she is often a “go to” staff member when there is a question about how to best use a certain technology, create an eye-catching flyer, or build staff morale and positive school culture.

### Andrea Langhoff

Pillager Middle School



Andrea Langhoff exemplifies what it means to be an educator. Her unwavering compassion and care for her students are evident in everything she does. She works tirelessly with colleagues to ensure that each student has the resources and guidance they need to succeed. Andrea’s commitment to teamwork fosters a collaborative atmosphere that extends far beyond her classroom.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Susie Bettis

Pillager High School - Educational Assistant



Susie is an invaluable member of the Pillager High School team, known for her positive aura and genuine ability to connect with everyone she meets. As an Educational Assistant, she fosters meaningful relationships that help students feel seen, valued, and confident in their abilities. Susie's patience, empathy, and encouragement empower students to thrive both academically and socially.

### Rebecca Dobson

Pillager Middle School - Educational Assistant — ASD Programming



Rebecca is an exceptional individual who consistently demonstrates a willingness to learn and grow. Her commitment to her role is evident in the way she approaches her responsibilities with enthusiasm and dedication. Rebecca is a team player who is all about making an impact on staff and students, earning the respect of everyone in the building through her versatility and positivity.

### Dan Kruger

Pillager Elementary School - Educational Assistant



"Dan is the man!" Dan sets a stellar example of the impact educational assistants have on students and the crucial role they play within schools. He goes about his business in an often unassuming way but is willing to do just about anything that is needed to support programming for students, always leading by example and doing whatever is necessary to make learning successful.



## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Josh Hirschey

Pine River-Backus High School



Josh, a dedicated social studies teacher, embodies the essence of what it means to be a Pine River-Backus Tiger. He is a quiet yet impactful teacher-leader who leads by example, inspiring students and colleagues alike through his unwavering commitment to excellence. He puts in the hard work without seeking recognition, letting the success of his students and programs speak for itself.

### Rhonda Sawyer

Pine River-Backus Elementary School



Rhonda has been an exceptional early childhood special education teacher in Pine River-Backus for many years. Her quiet confidence, dedication to families, and efficient teaching methods make her a huge asset to the school community. Rhonda approaches each child and situation with patience, compassion, an individualized focus, and always ensures their needs are met with care.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Tim Tungseth

Pine River-Backus High School - Activities Director



Tim is a steadfast advocate for all school activities, showcasing their value and success. His unparalleled efforts highlight student achievements and foster a strong connection with the community. Whether organizing events or stepping in to assist wherever necessary, his actions consistently uplift PRB as a positive and effective learning environment.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jennifer Beaman

Royalton Elementary School



Jennifer is a wonderful teacher, through and through. Her effort, time, and dedication to the craft do not go unnoticed. She is on the leading edge of professional development, always stepping up for the sake of the team, and ready to help in the best interests of all. She is a tireless advocate for her colleagues, students, and school community.

### Heidi Noerenberg

Royalton Middle/High School



Students speak very highly of Heidi as their teacher. She has high expectations for students and will do whatever is needed to help them achieve their goals. She is a leader on staff as well, always having a potential solution to any problem she encounters and constantly helping out with logistical challenges. She is a positive and thoughtful member of the school community.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Shawna Puchalla

Royalton Middle/High School - Assistant Cook



Shawna has been a leader on the kitchen staff for helping develop positive relationships with students. Shawna has led multiple efforts to make meals feel special for students through memorable meals and holiday celebrations. She has been a tremendous contributor to students always seeing friendly and caring kitchen staff, creating a positive culture every day.

### June Brezinka

Royalton Elementary School - Bus Driver



June is willing to do what is necessary to get the job done and does it well. She creates very solid relationships with the students riding her bus as well as others around her. Students know her and are very receptive to her. Through multiple transition times, June stepped up as a leader and kept transportation running smoothly and getting students safely to and from school.



## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Nicolle Ament

Sebekas High School



Nicolle displays unwavering dedication to improving student outcomes through her versatility and her leadership within the school community. As the Q-Comp coordinator for several years, she has also played a vital role in supporting professional development and fostering growth among her colleagues. Nicolle's ability to adapt, lead, and inspire ensures that she leaves a lasting positive impact on everyone she works with.

### Jenny Lillquist

Sebekas Elementary School

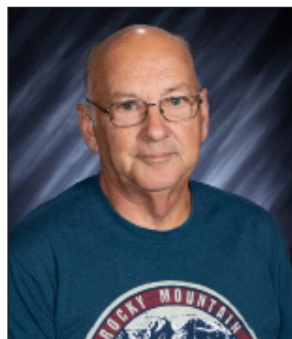


Jenny is renowned for exceptional student growth, innovative teaching practices, and outstanding classroom management. Her ability to inspire a love of learning in her students is unparalleled. It is truly remarkable to witness the transformation in her students' abilities and confidence from fall to spring. Jenny exemplifies what it means to be an excellent educator.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Alan McGraw

Sebekas Public School District - Bus Driver



For an incredible 50 years, Al has been a steadfast presence behind the wheel of a school bus, ensuring the safety and well-being of generations of Sebekas students. Al's commitment goes far beyond driving a bus: He has become a trusted figure in the lives of students, greeting each one with a smile and a sense of care that exemplifies the very best of what it means to serve a community.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Sarah Larson

Staples-Motley Elementary School



Sarah is an outstanding teacher! Students know what to expect and are constantly engaged in their learning. She has great relationships with her students and parents and is a champion for all of her students. In her classroom, the first thing that one notices is that all students are engaged in their learning. Her work ensures the success of all students, whether in her classroom or beyond.

### LaDeanna Simek

Staples-Motley Middle/High School



LaDeanna has been an educator in the Staples-Motley District for more than 30 years, displaying a passion for literature and teaching English that has inspired students to become stronger readers. Students enjoy LaDeanna's humor, flexibility, and understanding of their needs, but also her high expectations for work ethic and for positive attitudes in class.

Staples-Motley School District

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Lori Nienow

Staples-Motley School District - Activities and Community Education Administrative Assistant



Lori can always be counted on to go the extra mile. She is the driving force behind many school events, from football and basketball to the school musical and speech teams. She is a jack of all trades in many ways, offering information and support to all with a smile. Lori's "take care of it" attitude helps her tackle the endless details necessary to get projects and events rolling.

### Angie Yungbauer

Staples-Motley Elementary School - Paraprofessional



Angie is a wonderful person and a great staff member. She is kind, caring, always smiling, and humble, as she treats everyone with respect. She is a skilled communicator and team player, always able to pitch in with whatever needs arise. Angie is a positive person and her positivity is contagious, making the school a fantastic place for her students and colleagues.



## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Jack Peterson

Swanville Elementary School



Jack's work is summed up in one word: exemplary. Jack is passionate about teaching and cares deeply about the success of each and every child he works with. He is always smiling and has a kind word to say to all, both students and fellow staff. He encourages students to have the freedom to enjoy learning and is a resource to his colleagues when challenges arise. Jack lights up every room with his entry.

### Tara Ramsdell

Swanville High School



Tara has that can-do attitude that is so critical in teachers. She connects with each student, always making them feel welcome in her classroom. Tara takes the time to make lessons for her students customized to their unique needs. Students know that Tara is a safe space and that she will take the time to listen to them. She also has created a great environment for staff by spearheading exciting staff fun days.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Margaret Muhlenkamp

Swanville High School - Bus Driver



Margaret is the district's go-to person when any transportation issues arise. She is the main point for contacting the other drivers, sets the standard for bus expectations, and works closely with administration to ensure that busing runs smoothly for all students. Margaret greets each student with a smile and makes them feel welcome and valued.

### Danielle Schultz

Swanville Elementary School - Preschool Paraprofessional



Danielle's dedication and commitment to Swanville School is unparalleled. She is a calming presence and a kind-hearted person to students and staff, who all feel accepted and cared for by her warm words, smiles, and genuine friendliness. Danielle's work ethic and care keep class running smoothly and are an integral key to the success of students.

## TEACHER OF EXCELLENCE

### Kennedy Duclos

Upsala Elementary School



Kennedy creates a safe culture in her second-grade classroom for her students to learn, no matter their ability. She has a unique skill set when it comes to differentiation and making sure all her instruction is data driven. Kennedy's lessons are highly engaging, and she uses as many tools in her toolbox as she can to ensure all students grow in her classroom both academically and socially.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Joseph (Joe) Fuchs

Upsala School District - Bus Driver



Joe has been a bus driver for the Upsala School District for 48 years. In those years, students on his bus have always felt safe and welcome, whether for daily school routes or for sporting events and activities. Joe holds his riders to a high standard of respect, responsibility, and accountability that carries through to the rest of their day at school or in extracurricular events.



## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Alicia Jones

Verndale Elementary School



Alicia has shown extraordinary passion for fostering a love of learning in every student she teaches. She prioritizes creating an engaging classroom environment and works tirelessly to ensure her students receive the support they need. Alicia is a true pillar of the school community. She is always ready to lend a listening ear, offer advice, advocate for others, and support the needs of her colleagues.

### Daniel Stelck

Verndale High School



Daniel greets students every day with a smile, without fail. His easygoing nature and friendly attitude help even the quietest students feel comfortable and come out of their shells. If students struggle to grasp a concept, he never gives up and is always finding new ways to help them understand. Many students have shared how much they enjoy Daniel's class and appreciate him as a teacher.

## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Kimberly Kern

Verndale School District - Kitchen Staff/Summer Custodian



Kimberly is one of the most selfless and hardworking individuals around. She is always willing to lend a hand, no matter how busy she may be. Kind, courteous, and humble, Kimberly is a take-charge individual who contributes to every aspect of the school. Every student knows who Kimberly is and trusts that they can turn to her for anything they might need.

### Wade Kern

Verndale School District - Transportation Director



For over 20 years, Wade has been a cornerstone of the Verndale School community. He wears many hats and does a phenomenal job in every role. Always approachable, Wade keeps his door open for anyone who needs help and responds quickly with answers and solutions. Despite his busy schedule, he is always willing to help whenever needed, and he plays a crucial role in keeping things running smoothly.

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Kendra Schultz

Wadena-Deer Creek Middle School



Kendra Schultz is one of the most passionate and dedicated teachers around. She takes the time to get to know each student, find where they are, and build off their strengths. Her care for the students in her classroom is unmatched. Kendra's positive impact on kids each and every day is undeniable, and WDC is a better place to be because of her work.

### Shelley Steffens

Wadena-Deer Creek Elementary School



Shelley's work ethic and effort with all students is nothing short of extraordinary. Her kindergarteners come to know this through the extra care and concern she shows to each of them individually. She is the first one to arrive, the last one to leave, and always has time for parents, colleagues, and students. Shelley is a natural positive influence on her colleagues and the school's culture.



## PILLARS OF EXCELLENCE

### Dan Hahn

Wadena-Deer Creek Public Schools - Utility Mechanic/Bus Driver



Dan is a lead-by-example kind of guy. He is often the first one at the bus garage in the morning and the last one to leave. His work as a mechanic is top notch, and he always stays until the job is done and the vehicle is safe to drive. Dan is a great team player, never complaining about any challenges: He just rolls up his sleeves and does his part to make the situation better.

### Cindy Lemke

Wadena-Deer Creek High School - Paraprofessional



Cindy is an advocate for students every day, and their success is her No. 1 priority. Her ability to keep students on task while still challenging them is unmatched. Students have come to rely on Cindy as their No. 1 advocate. She will never pat herself on the back, but for those lucky enough to work with her, she is certainly worthy of celebration.

Wadena-Deer Creek School District

## TEACHERS OF EXCELLENCE

### Paige Fink

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley Elementary School



Paige is a compassionate, dedicated, and hardworking teacher who has a profound impact on her students and colleagues. She is energetic and caring, consistently putting her students first no matter the circumstances. She creates a welcoming and playful atmosphere that is centered on building strong connections, making every student feel valued and encouraged.

### Sheri Pickar

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley High School



Sheri's curriculum is challenging, and she has high expectations for her students, yet she is willing to tutor her students to ensure their success. She forms strong, trusting relationships with students, showing care and respect. Sheri empowers students by giving them opportunities to share their ideas and opinions, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement in their learning environment.

## PILLAR OF EXCELLENCE

### Debbie Osborn

Walker-Hackensack-Akeley School District - Kitchen



Each day, Debbie greets students with warmth and enthusiasm. She creates a welcoming atmosphere where every student feels seen and valued, setting a positive tone for the day, fostering a sense of community and belonging. She brings curiosity and joy to every interaction with students, no matter how small. Debbie consistently offers a friendly, approachable presence and is always willing to lend a helping hand.

*Exceptional educators can unlock  
the world for students.*

*Through their expertise and  
connection, they plant lifelong  
curiosity in everyone they meet.*

*– Dr. Chad Coquette, Sourcewell CEO*

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# Sourcewell: We are driven to serve

## Who is Sourcewell?

Sourcewell is the regional service cooperative for Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties. As a service cooperative, we're a self-funded government organization charged by Minnesota state statute to partner with education, government, and nonprofits to boost student and community success. Locally, we deliver training and contracted services. Statewide, we manage a self-funded group health insurance option for public agencies. Throughout the United States and parts of Canada, we offer a cooperative purchasing program and technology solutions for schools. We also provide procurement support upon request to authorized military installations across the U.S. Sourcewell staff aim to be force multipliers, empowering public employees as they fulfill their public service mission.

## 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