

Students of Character

Celebrating quiet leaders in our region

April 15, 2026 | 5 p.m.





Cooper Genz

AITKIN HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Meredith Sander

Cooper's excellent work ethic and maturity have set him up for success in both school and life. He is one of the most dependable seniors in his class and he sets an example for everyone around him. Whether in school, at work, or on the baseball team, Cooper always has something positive to contribute. Cooper plans to attend M State – Wadena after graduation.

Addison Weimer

AITKIN HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Meredith Sander

Addison's positive attitude and natural curiosity make her an exceptional student and an excellent support for her fellow students. She has risen to meet many challenges, learning how to cope with mental and physical health obstacles while excelling in college-level courses and juggling multiple jobs. Addison plans to pursue nursing at Crown College.



Brady Bowman

BERTHA-HEWITT PUBLIC SCHOOL — Nominated by: Craig Vogl

Brady is as kind and decent a human as you will ever find. He quietly encourages others around him, helps where needed, and expects nothing in return. He is always ready to try something new or work with anyone: He recently jumped into the world of theater with a huge role in the fall play that people can't stop talking about! Brady plans to study mechanical engineering after graduation.

Mckayla Kapphahn

BERTHA-HEWITT PUBLIC SCHOOL — Nominated by: Paula Wojick

Mckayla is a quiet, steady, positive influence throughout the school. Her artistic skills and responsibility in programs like Bear Blooms and NextGen make the community a more beautiful place. She can be found in the background helping wherever needed, always with a smile. Mckayla plans to attend Alexandria Technical and Community College to be a medical lab tech.



Collin Pederson

BRAINERD AREA LEARNING CENTER — Nominated by: JoDee Moen

Collin is a kind and respectful young man who truly wants to make a difference in the world. He never looks for the spotlight, but his academic accomplishments are definitely worthy of recognition! He has persevered through severe medical challenges to maintain his schoolwork, becoming an exemplary student and a model for others. Collin is considering becoming an electrician after graduation.

Students of Character



Grace Enge

BRAINERD HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Allan Balsley

Grace's empathy and kindness shine in every interaction. She is a tremendous student who leads by example, balancing a rigorous school schedule with work and her social life. She creates a warm and welcoming environment throughout her neighborhood, always willing to help out. After graduation, Grace plans to study biology on the pre-med track.

Caleb Rademacher

BRAINERD HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Allison Bullard

Caleb has created opportunities for connection and service throughout his school. As student council president, he manages endless logistics and community projects. He challenges himself to build confidence and overcome social anxiety, and his willingness to lean into discomfort is an encouragement to his peers. Caleb plans to attend the University of Wisconsin–Madison for biochemistry.



Simon Carter

BRAINERD LINCOLN EDUCATION CENTER — Nominated by: Amy Jordan

Simon is a role model for others: Whether encouraging his peers, being patient with elementary students, or simply making everyone he meets feel seen, Simon always creates a positive space. He has worked hard to meet his academic goals, overcoming many obstacles along the way. Simon plans to be employed full-time and consider his post-secondary options after graduation.

Ben Biegler

BROWERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Charlie Stier

Ben always makes sure he is where he needs to be, whether to support the golf team, the school, or his younger siblings. He's taken a big role in improving the golf team, and is always there to help with events and activities even when it's inconvenient. He also isn't afraid to speak up about what's right. Ben plans to attend St. Cloud Technical College for instrumentation and process control.



Liliahna McDaniel

BROWERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Denise Olander

Liliahna is always looking for ways to get involved and help out, whether in school or in her community. She is very friendly and cheerful with both students and staff, and thanks to her hardworking mindset she plans to have her AA degree by graduation. Liliahna plans to attend St. Scholastica for a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's in social work.



Keonna Allen-Cooper

CASS LAKE-BENA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Jen Voge

Keonna is a top student leader who can often be found mentoring others and helping with local events, especially moccasin games, which are very challenging to master and teach. She has worked hard to overcome shyness, putting herself out there and participating in many school activities. Keonna plans to attend Bemidji State University to study Ojibwe language and culture.

Christopher Drouillard

CASS LAKE-BENA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Henry Ruud

Chris always notices when someone needs cheering up and does his best to help them. He is not used to attention, but he embraced the chance to step up and share school spirit with his peers as a homecoming king candidate this year. His strong connections with classmates have helped him through the loss of several family members in the past year. After graduation, Chris plans to join the Marine Corps.



Bryan Wakonabo Jr.

CASS LAKE AREA LEARNING CENTER — Nominated by: Mary Aery

Bryan is a calm and positive student who keeps a smile on his face even amid stress and chaos. He has gone above and beyond in his schoolwork, getting perfect scores on the vast majority of his assignments. He also works hard to lead others both in school and at his job, even while managing a heavy schedule. Bryan plans to attend college after graduation.

Colton Armbrust

CROSBY-IRONTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Chelsea Lipski

Colton is not afraid to speak out for what is right or amplify others' voices. He leads by example and truly cares about the well-being of others and the world at large. Whether he's bringing awareness to environmental issues or helping promote student mental health, Colton is a positive change-maker in everything he does. Colton plans to attend Macalester College to study music and sociology.



Eldon McLean

CROSBY-IRONTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Michael Gindorff

Eldon is always quick to smile or lend a helping hand. He works well with special-needs students and participates as a unified partner in Special Olympics, and he is also a referee for junior high basketball games. Eldon has overcome injuries in sports to find success, and is happy to help others overcome their challenges. Eldon plans to study business at Valley City State University.

Students of Character



Serenity Gaskin

FRESHWATER EDUCATION DISTRICT - STAPLES AREA LEARNING CENTER —

Nominated by: Leah Bloemendaal

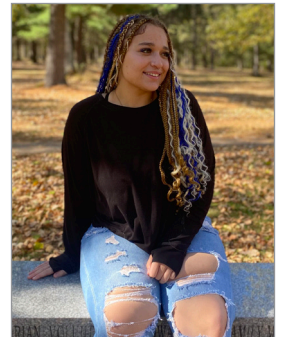
Serenity constantly works behind the scenes to uplift others in small but meaningful ways. Her humor and positivity create a welcoming atmosphere where students feel seen and supported. She has become an excellent advocate for herself, both academically and emotionally. After graduation, Serenity plans to attend community college in Duluth and eventually pursue environmental sciences.

Passion Higgins

FRESHWATER EDUCATION DISTRICT - WADENA AREA LEARNING CENTER —

Nominated by: Heidi Heino

Passion has a heart for people! She's always kind and patient, volunteering at the humane society, elementary school, and working with disabled adults. She loves helping people prepare for life. Passion has overcome racism, bullying, and hardship to arrive in her senior year, ready for what's next. After graduation, Passion plans to pursue a career in neonatal nursing.



Zoe Dreher

LITTLE FALLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Julie Slettom

Zoe constantly strives for success in her classes, and maintains a positive attitude no matter the challenges before her. She has blossomed into a gifted quilter, working daily with students as a TA and peer mentor and helping them succeed as she shares her passion and expertise with them. Zoe plans to enter the workforce after graduation.

Cayden Olsen

LITTLE FALLS COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Megan Siemieniak

Cayden is one of the most positive and friendly students in the school: He's very involved in band and has grown into a leadership role among his fellow musicians, always giving his best effort. After losing his dad, Cayden stepped up to help his family, showing incredible resolve and resilience. Cayden plans to attend North Central University after graduation.



Benjamin Kasper

LONG PRAIRIE-GREY EAGLE SECONDARY SCHOOL — Nominated by: Stacey Custer

Ben's dedication to school is amazing. He works diligently even when something challenges him, and has even taken on the role of peer tutor for other students. He always knows how to help them through a bad day or tough activity. His gentleness and genuine nature brighten everyone's day. Ben plans to work as a special education paraprofessional after graduation.



Madelyn Wehrspann

LONG PRAIRIE-GREY EAGLE SECONDARY SCHOOL — Nominated by: Kelsey Paurus

Maddie is a steady source of positivity and leadership for her team. She has persevered through a severe concussion that caused athletic and school obstacles, staying committed to her work and pushing through frustration. She has adjusted and developed new strategies to find success through challenges. After graduation, Maddie plans to pursue her degree as a dental assistant.

Melodie Dillon

MENAHGA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Tiffany Besonen

Melodie's consistent follow-through and strong attention to detail are just two of the many, many ways she leads by example. She is always a positive presence in class, demonstrating commitment and creativity even as she steps outside her comfort zone. Melodie's genuine concern for others is clear in all she does. Melodie plans to attend Bemidji State University and pursue a law degree.



Alan Skare Jr.

MENAHGA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Logan Gerdes

Alan is a hardworking, dedicated student who always makes the best of every situation. Rather than allowing difficulties to limit him, he uses them as motivation to work harder and push himself creatively. He is a positive voice on the Menahga student council, always working to benefit other students. Alan plans to study music education and theater at the University of Jamestown.

Casey Jones

NORTHLAND HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Scott Peterson

Casey is an active leader in her high school and on each of her three sports teams. She has never let any challenges get in the way of her vibrant, fast-paced lifestyle. Casey also isn't afraid to stand up for herself and others: Beyond her cheerful demeanor, she possesses a commendable inner strength. Casey plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in human services, starting at Central Lakes College. **Will receive a \$750 scholarship from Central Lakes College.*



Madison King

NORTHLAND HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Scott Peterson

Madison is a role model for her peers. She balances many commitments, including basketball, manager for volleyball, student leadership, and PSEO, always supporting those around her and encouraging them to participate. She has also run fundraisers and other events to improve her community. Madison is considering many options for when she graduates next spring with her AA degree.

Students of Character



Madeline Baumann

PEQUOT LAKES HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Daniel Moddes

Madeline brings a contagious positivity and warmth to everyone in her orbit. She is a role model for determination, having faced multiple health challenges with a zest for life that carries her through the tough days. Her smile, laugh, and funny tangents can uplift almost anyone on a difficult day. After graduation, Madeline plans to pursue animation, graphic design, and theater.

Kodi Raiche

PEQUOT LAKES HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Erin Linehan

Kodi holds herself to a higher standard than even her teachers do. She is driven to succeed, both in school and in the Army Reserve. She is eternally positive and works well in a team with anyone: In Art Club especially, she cultivates a creative safe space to open up with others. Kodi plans to join the Army National Guard and attend Mankato State University after graduation.



David Brown

PIERZ HEALY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Joel Pohland

David has grown into a respectful and considerate leader in his school. He gives countless hours to help with the music and theater departments to help make the best productions possible. David always goes out of his way to help out, share joy, and make others laugh wherever he goes. David plans to pursue a degree in biology to become a doctor.

Lucy Caughey

PIERZ HEALY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Joel Pohland

Lucy's work ethic and willingness to contribute make her stand out. She always goes out of her way to help those in need – whether teachers or students – and always does so with confidence and a smile. She has worked hard to step out of her comfort zone, speaking at Veterans Day and joining student council to help others. Lucy plans to attend Central Lakes College for a degree in natural resources. **Will receive a \$750 scholarship from Central Lakes College.*



Isaiah Andrews

PILLAGER HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Kim Lund

Isaiah brings a kind, gentle spirit to everything he does, whether it's athletics, One Act, or the ProStart cooking team. He has shown incredible growth in the face of challenges and is always working to improve himself. He is a model team member and always encourages younger students to do their best. After graduation, Isaiah plans to attend culinary school.



Nathanel Hollenbeck

PILLAGER HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Sue Turner

Peers naturally seek out Nate for advice: His positive attitude and love of school create a welcoming environment that makes others feel supported, valued, heard, and safe. Nate doesn't seek recognition, but his steady presence, willingness to help, and positive influence make a recognizable difference every day. Nate plans to attend Central Lakes College for computer science.

Araiya Herbote

PINE RIVER-BACKUS HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Greg Gentry

Raiya is an important part of the yearbook team, and always does a wonderful job working with her teammates to help put their best possible work forward. Having lost her mother, she has had to adapt and work hard, balancing jobs with school and social life. Even still, she is always happy to help others with whatever they need. After graduation, Raiya plans to get her CNA/RN, then go to college for cosmetology.



Morgan King

PINE RIVER-BACKUS HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Greg Gentry

Morgan leads by example, both in the classroom and in Speech and Knowledge Bowl. She is endlessly curious and an inspiration to other students. Morgan is someone that classmates can go to when they need help, and she's not afraid to help them speak up for what they need. Morgan plans to attend Northern Michigan University to study forensics.

Cody Bieniek

ROYALTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Monica Flakus

Cody keeps busy by giving back. He has strengthened his communication skills by stepping outside of his comfort zone, and he now helps mentor younger teammates by sharing insights from his own challenges with shyness. He is consistently positive, dependable, and happy to help. After graduation, Cody plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in business or finance.



Brynn Gramentz

ROYALTON HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Monica Flakus

Brynn is an awesome blend of service and leadership. Brynn's approach to life is simple yet powerful: She maintains an open mind and a positive attitude because she genuinely understands that everyone faces unseen battles. She has shown dedication and resilience in her academics as well. Brynn plans to attend Mitchell Technical College to pursue a career as a lineman.

Students of Character



Hana Eitel

SEBEKA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Rachel Kern

Hana's laughter helped ease tough cross country workouts and helped make the team feel connected. She is quick to offer encouragement and a smile to others. She works hard and doesn't give up, even when a task is challenging or unfamiliar. Her drive and demeanor set a great example for younger runners. Hana plans to attend Alexandria Technical and Community College for early childhood education.

Jayden Soule

SEBEKA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Melissa Koch

Jayden has been a positive and kind member of the Sebeka choir program for her entire high school career. She is a calming influence and role model for her peers: She consistently does the right thing with patience and empathy. She always faces hard work with cheerfulness and curiosity. Jayden plans to attend the University of Minnesota to become a psychologist.



Katriane Beach

STAPLES-MOTLEY MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Maggie Borg

Kat's behind-the-scenes efforts are driven by genuine care for others and a strong sense of responsibility. She is a reliable and impactful contributor to both her school and community. She is also an incredible mentor to younger students, always willing to spend her own time to mentor others. Kat plans to attend college to study graphic design, marketing, and photography.

Henry Dorothy

STAPLES-MOTLEY MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Val Turner

Henry is a quiet leader who shows genuine care for others, treats peers and adults with kindness, and willingly helps without being asked. He has taken ownership of his education by putting in extra work: His perseverance, accountability, and determination to grow are truly inspiring and will serve him well. After graduation, Henry plans to attend trade school.



Lara Baggenstoss

SWANVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Chantelle Frie

Lara shows up: For her friends, for rehearsals, for early morning meetings. She shows up even when others don't. She has been a driving force in theater casts for several years. After moving to Swanville in middle school, she quickly found a home with her classmates and has not stopped shining her light since. After graduation, Lara plans to attend Alexandria Technical College for law enforcement.



Christopher Harrison

SWANVILLE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Sheryl Johnson

Chris is a quiet but impactful leader who consistently improves the school through his creativity and hands-on work. He continues to grow in self-expression and speaking up for himself and others, doing so with kindness and humility. He plays an important behind-the-scenes role across the school community. After graduation, Chris plans to join the military as an avionics mechanic.

Dominic Blais

UPSALA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nick Klug

Dominic comes to school every day with a smile on his face, ready to work and do his best.

He is a friend to all and is always willing to step up and help in any way he can. He has overcome challenges by balancing work and school and putting in hard work on everything he does. He is a truly outstanding person who will be missed when he graduates. Dominic plans to attend college to study nursing.



Hannah Heesen

UPSALA HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Nick Klug

Hannah's classmates describe her as the nicest student in the school. She is a wonderful role model who approaches everything she does with determination and care. She has overcome lifelong medical challenges to become a three-sport athlete and team leader, playing at the varsity level in all three her entire high school career. Hannah plans to attend Central Lakes College in Brainerd for dental hygiene. **Will receive a \$750 scholarship from Central Lakes College.*

Ashley Kovar

VERNDALE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Heather Lehmkuhl

Ashley never seeks recognition but is often the first to volunteer. Teachers frequently note her willingness to step up and do extra work without hesitation. Through perseverance and hard work, she made tremendous growth in both skill and confidence. Ashley plans to attend Minnesota State University Moorhead for speech-language pathology.



Micah Stanley

VERNDALE HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Kody Van Den Eykel

Micah consistently contributes behind the scenes through reliability, effort, and a positive presence. He balances a demanding schedule while supporting teammates, staff, and peers. Despite a season-ending wrestling injury, Micah stayed committed to the team by finding other ways to engage and help out, while working on his own rehabilitation. Micah plans to attend M State in Wadena for HVAC training.

Students of Character



Blake Haverkamp

WADENA-DEER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Cindy Lemke

Blake is an excellent student who always does the right thing. He is quiet, focused, and respectful, and he is happy to help other students in class or stick up for them when they need an advocate or a friend. Whether in his three sports, in class, or at his job, he always makes the most of his time. Blake plans to attend M State in Wadena to be an electrician.

Raelle McIntosh

WADENA-DEER CREEK HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Michelle Peterson

Raelle's creativity, dedication, and willingness to help make her an invaluable part of any team she joins. She has been an exceptional presence in the media center, decorating and preparing for many events. Raelle doesn't just help others: She gives her own time to make sure they have exactly what they need. After graduation, Raelle plans to work for a year before attending Minnesota State College.



Kaleah Morrow

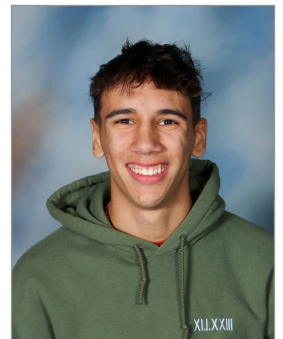
WALKER-HACKENSACK-AKELEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Thomas McIver

Students go to Kaleah when they aren't sure what to do. She is well respected by her classmates and can regularly be seen volunteering her time at school and in the community. Despite losing several close family members, she has been persistent in achieving her goals and caring for others. Kaleah plans to attend Leech Lake Tribal College and Bemidji State University to study business management.

VINCENT PERUCHO

WALKER-HACKENSACK-AKELEY HIGH SCHOOL — Nominated by: Sarah Johnson

Vinny is a leader that many younger students look up to. He has excelled in activities from wrestling to track and field, all while remaining humble. He is possibly one of the most positive students in his class, and he is always willing to step up and help others, encouraging younger athletes to excel. Vinny plans to study kinesiology at Minnesota State University Mankato to help fellow athletes.



About Sourcewell

Sourcewell is the regional service cooperative serving Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties. As a self-funded government organization established by Minnesota statute, we partner with education, government and nonprofit organizations to support student and community success. Locally, we provide training and contracted services. Statewide, we manage a group health insurance program for public agencies. Across the United States and parts of Canada, we serve thousands of public agencies through cooperative contracts and related solutions that drive efficiency and impact. We also provide procurement support, upon request, to authorized military installations across the U.S.

Thank you!

Sourcewell partners with local businesses, organizations, and individuals to hold this annual celebration. Thank you for your donation of scholarship money.*

Platinum Level Donors

Katie & Jose
Alba



Ives Family
(Mary F. Ives,
Michelle Ives Carlson,
and Kris Ives)

Jed & Angie
Klein



Gold Level Donors

Adam M. Sisneros
Allegra - Brainerd
Breezy Point Resort
Chad & Dawn Coauette
Craig & Jennifer Roelke

First International Bank & Trust
Jeremy & Joni Schwartz
Kary Graser
Mid Minnesota Federal Credit Union
Nor-Son Construction

Paul & Stephanie Drange
Public Works CP
SchoolLinks
Sourcewell Board Members,
Past & Present

Silver Level Donors

CTC
Heidi Murray
Jacob & Alison Zetah
Lane & Donna Waldahl
Mike & Sara Carlson

NIGP
Rodney & Monica Klimek
Sam & Moriya Rufer
Shannon P. Huneke

Sharpe Wiebusch Real
Estate Team - RE/MAX Results
Staples Lions Club
Tom & Jenny Hoppe
Tower Pizza