

# 199 REPORTER

• • • INVER GROVE HEIGHTS SCHOOLS | SPRING 2024 • • •

## Semesters & Quarters to Further 199 Future Ready Work

The Inver Grove Heights School Board approved the 2024-2025 academic calendar at a special meeting on February 12. The new calendar will use a semester and quarter schedule instead of the current trimester school year schedule. The goal of transitioning to semesters and quarters aligns with our 199 Future Ready work. It is a cost-neutral way to provide more to our students.

The 2024-2025 school year will look very similar to the current school year schedule. However, semesters and quarters will help the district offer:

- **More Student Success.** Earlier and more frequent opportunities to monitor student progress, communicate with families, and put student supports in place
- **More Exploration.** More flexibility in middle and high school schedules for elective classes, and better alignment with Simley High School's college-level courses
- **More Engagement.** More professional learning for teachers to support more effective student learning in classrooms



Scan the QR code with your phone camera to see the 2024-2025 school calendar. More information about the new calendar and the semester/quarter school year schedule will be provided to families closer to the new school year.

We are excited to make this transition and take a step toward the 199 Future Ready goals of building belonging, relationships, and engagement!

Regards,

Dave Bernhardson, Superintendent

## COMMUNITY HELPS ISD 199 REFLECT ON REFERENDUM

After two Inver Grove Heights Schools (ISD 199) referendum questions failed this past November, the school district invited community members to share why they voted for or against the measures. The Post-referendum Survey was open for two weeks this January. It garnered 774 responses with helpful insights from the community.

A majority of those who responded to the survey were parents of current ISD 199 students (59%), followed by community members (19%). The survey also included responses from parents of former ISD 199 students (14%), district staff members (4%), alumni (2%), and parents of students who attend other districts (2%).

Respondents who reported voting "Yes" on the district's referendum questions showed strong support for maintaining class sizes (65%) and mental health supports for students (67%). About half (46%) of those who reported voting "No" cited the economy. Many talked about the hardships presented by fixed incomes and stagnant wages in the face of high inflation. Some respondents (43%) also shared that they were unclear on the plan for the referendum dollars, which led them to vote "No."

Thank you to everyone who completed the Post-referendum Survey. The insights gathered in the survey are invaluable. ISD 199 will use the results as it works on more ways to provide the community's students with the best education available.

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## Simley Teachers Earn Inclusive Educator Awards

### 199 REPORTER

#### Inver Grove Heights Schools

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Monday-Friday, 7:30 AM - 4:00 PM

The 199 Reporter is a quarterly publication that is mailed to every household in School District 199 to keep all of our community members informed about district news.

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### 199 REPLIES

#### Do you have a question about our district?

Part of our mission is to maintain an involved and invested community. To do so, we want to keep you informed. Visit [www.isd199.org/FAQ](http://www.isd199.org/FAQ) to browse answers to previously asked questions about our district or ask your own.



Two Inver Grove Heights Schools (ISD 199) staff members were selected to receive the 2023-2024 Inclusive Educator Award from Intermediate School District 917! Hilltop Elementary School First Grade Teacher Larisa Hein and Pine Bend Elementary School CARE/CID Primary Teacher Melissa Sorensen were nominated by District 917 colleagues and selected for their work to support the inclusion of unique learners. The person who nominated the teachers, District 917 Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher Mary Taylor, and District 917 Assistant Director of Special Education Taylor Lovin visited the elementary schools to present their awards.

District 917 created the Inclusive Educator Award as part of Inclusive Schools Week. Each December, the week highlights and celebrates the progress that schools have made in implementing inclusive practices to ensure a quality education for an increasingly diverse student population. The District 917 Inclusive Educator Award was created to acknowledge the incredible work of educators from District 917's nine member districts.



ISD 199 is one of those nine member districts. Students in member districts receive expanded special education services, alternative learning programming, and career and technical education that schools may not be able to support individually. Ms. Taylor nominated Ms. Hein and Ms. Sorensen because of their hard work identifying student needs and leveraging District 917's services to address them. Ms. Hein and Ms. Sorensen were also announced as award winners at the District 917 School Board meeting this January.

Thank you to Ms. Hein and Ms. Sorensen for their outstanding work to support all learners!

## Welcome, 2024 ISD 199 School Board!



During the November 2023 School Board Election, five candidates were chosen to serve on the Inver Grove Heights School Board. The four candidates elected in the four-year term race were incumbents Jake Klingner, Darcie Pierson, and Sherry Warrick as well as new member Liz Niemioja. Shana Dukes was elected in the two-year term race. At the district's January 8 special meeting, the newly elected school board members were sworn in.

The board also voted on officials for the new year. Carrie Lounsberry was voted in as the board chair, Jake Klingner was voted in as vice chair and treasurer, and Sarah Larsen was voted in as clerk. All three are Inver Grove Heights Schools alumni!

Congratulations to the board members elected last November, and thank you to everyone who voted.

## TriDistrict CAPS Business Students Pitch Ideas to Local Professionals



Simley High School students in the TriDistrict Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) Business and Entrepreneurship course had an opportunity to pitch their business ideas to local professionals. Students won “entrepreneur in residence” internships through event host Rêve Academy, a non-profit organization that helps students build marketable skills for the modern workplace.

Four TriDistrict CAPS students pitched their business ideas: two from Simley, one from South St. Paul High School, and one from Two Rivers High School. Simley’s Jiachelle Moulrier pitched a bakery business and Shaylee Olson pitched a headphone cover business. Each student had

15 minutes to present to the panel of six judges, which included:

- Nate Clayberg, Business and Industry Director, CAPS Network
- Philip Grey, Owner and Software Developer, Good Gravy
- Torrey Lau, Director of Academic Excellence, Rêve Academy
- Traci Leffner, President, Sovran Technology Solutions
- Casey Rutherford, Assistant Director of Learning, Inver Grove Heights Schools
- Ciara Venne, Career Development Specialist, Crescent Career Center

Judges asked the students questions and provided feedback after each presentation.

All four students walked away with the chance to continue their business with Rêve Academy. As part of their “entrepreneur in residence” internships, students will receive up to \$500 in seed money for their business. They will also be connected with an industry mentor, receive logistical support to grow their business, and earn three additional college credits. Students will be eligible to do multiple rounds of their residencies as they further develop their businesses. Great job, students!

The TriDistrict CAPS Program is for Simley, South St. Paul and Two Rivers juniors and seniors. The program aims to provide a wide range of opportunities to engage in authentic, real-world career exploration. The Business and Entrepreneurship course helps students gain a broader understanding of the world of business first-hand from business leaders in local communities. Along the way, students learn professional skills and practice these skills as they develop a professional resume, build a digital profile, and engage in practice interviews, site visits, and guest presentations.

Simley, South St. Paul, and Two Rivers juniors and seniors who are interested in enrolling in a TriDistrict CAPS course can talk to their counselor. Organizations that would like to learn more about TriDistrict CAPS or partner to train the next generation of business professionals can visit [careercollegeready.org/employers](http://careercollegeready.org/employers).

## GUEST READERS AT SALEM HILLS



Guest readers visited Salem Hills Elementary School and the Atheneum Gifted Magnet Program to celebrate World Read Aloud Day. Local officials, school community members, and classroom relatives and friends read

to students to celebrate the power of reading and sharing stories.

Each classroom had a special guest reader from the community and one from the school. Community guests included the Inver Grove Heights Mayor, IGH Police Chief, firefighters, and the children’s librarian from Inver Glen Library. Students asked them about their favorite things and their jobs in the city after they finished reading. Dakota County Commissioner Joe Atkins told

students stories about his career path and some history of the city before reading his chosen book to the class.

Staff from the school district also visited, like Inver Grove Heights Schools (ISD 199) Superintendent Dave Bernhardson, new ISD 199 School Board Member Shana Dukes, ISD 199 School Resource Officer Ericka Eid, and Interpreter Abbie Losinski. Teachers invited close friends and relatives to read as well. Students asked siblings, spouses, and long-time friends questions about themselves and about the teachers who invited them. In the afternoon, Salem Hills staff continued the read-alouds. The principal, school nurse, physical education teacher, and more visited classrooms to share their stories.

Thank you to all of the guest readers who took the time to read to and connect with Salem Hills and Atheneum students!

## Hilltop Teacher Nominated for Teacher of the Year



Hilltop Elementary School PLUS Program Teacher Tracy Zahn has been nominated for the Education Minnesota Teacher of the Year Award! This year, 159 nominees were chosen for demonstrating excellence in teaching. Public and private school teachers in preschool through 12th grade, Early Childhood Family Education, and Adult Basic Education were eligible. Over the next few months, Ms. Zahn will have a chance to become the 2024 Teacher of the Year.

Ms. Zahn has been a part of Inver Grove Heights Schools for nearly 30 years. Her work as a PLUS Teacher has made it possible for students with a range of special education needs to be successful in the general education classroom and beyond.

Her tireless work and care for students has given hundreds of children the foundation for a bright future.

In the months ahead, an independent panel of leaders in education, business, government, nonprofit, and philanthropy will read candidates' portfolios and narrow the list to a group of semifinalists and then finalists. The 2024 Teacher of the Year will be announced in May. The selected educator will become an advocate for education and a spokesperson for teachers during the following school year. They will be responsible for meeting with policymakers and stakeholders, presenting to key groups, and representing the best interests of students and staff to move education forward.

Congratulations to Ms. Zahn on her nomination, and good luck to her as she moves through the selection process!

## Simley Students Offer Perspectives to Boost Advanced Course Enrollment



Simley High School held an Advanced Course Fair to provide a student perspective on its college and career courses. Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors browsed more than 30 booths

in the gym, each dedicated to an advanced course. Student representatives at each booth shared their experiences in the class and answered questions from their peers. Some booths, like the booth for Simley's Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) class, also held demonstrations of the skills taught and practiced in the class.

Simley started holding the fair after students said they would be more likely to take advantage of a college or career class if they heard about it from another student. Student representatives talked about their experiences in on- and off-campus classes and the opportunities Simley students have to earn college credit, career experience, internships, and professional certifications before graduation. Students who attended the fair will use what they learned from peers to enroll in classes that best fit their goals during class registration.

Thank you to all of the students who shared their experiences with their peers so even more students benefit from Simley's ever-expanding catalog of college and career classes.

## Cultural Fashion Show at Simley



Students in Simley High School's International Club held their 3rd Annual Cultural Fashion Show. The show featured club members showcasing their cultures through regalia and performances.

The event hosts introduced each culture with facts before students walked a runway in the Simley Performing Arts Center.

Some students also performed dances that had the audience cheering and clapping along, including a rendition of Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean" and his signature dance moves. Simley teachers Ms. Droubie, Ms. Campos, and Ms. Armenta also walked the runway to represent Syria and Lebanon, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. Thank you to all of the students and staff who shared their cultures!

# Little Spartans

## Preschool

**Tuition scholarships available!**





**ISD 199**

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or scan the QR code

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## Student Advisory Council Gets Hands-on Look at Learning Framework



In November, students from grades 4, 7, and 11 were chosen to become members of this year's Inver Grove Heights Schools (ISD 199) Student Advisory Council. The council provides a student perspective on district initiatives and members learn leadership skills that they can bring back to their schools. At their second meeting, students learned about the school district's upcoming 199 Learning Framework.

ISD 199 Superintendent Dave Bernhardson introduced the council's 199 Learning Framework activity. The framework is an upcoming initiative aimed at helping students understand how they learn best and empowering them to use that knowledge to further engage in their learning. To

demonstrate the 199 Learning Framework, students did a mini-lesson, learning and showing what they learned, in three distinct ways.

**Traditional Learning:** ISD 199 Assistant Director of Special Education Kris Hillesheim used traditional teaching methods to teach her lesson. She gave a lecture, and students took a quiz at the end of her session to demonstrate what they learned.

**Self-paced Learning:** ISD 199 Assistant Director of Learning Casey Rutherford used an interactive presentation to teach students. They could read or listen through the presentation at their own pace, and the presentation provided links to supplemental information. Mr. Rutherford gave students the option to type a summary of the lesson, record their voice, or record a video to show what they learned.

**Differentiated Learning:** During ISD 199 Director of Instructional Technology Caroline Little's lesson, she presented information and gave students a digital book of the information. Students had the option to read or listen to each page. When it came time to assess what students learned, Ms. Little and the students discussed ideas for how they would like to demonstrate their learning.

Students provided feedback on their experiences during the activity. Many students said that they liked having options to demonstrate what they learned rather than always taking a test. ISD 199's goal is to implement the 199 Learning Framework in all classrooms over time to get students excited about learning and empower them to think critically and creatively.

## Pine Bend's "This Little Light of Mine" Builds Community



Shortly after Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Pine Bend Elementary School held a schoolwide assembly to celebrate making positive change in the world. They read a book by the youngest inaugural poet in U.S. history, Amanda Gorman, and sang their own version of Harry Dixon Loes' "This Little Light of Mine."

The schoolwide assembly started with a performance by fourth-grade students. Staff read "Change Sings" by Amanda Gorman, a story about how kids have the power to change the world, with musical interludes by students. Fourth graders played drums and xylophones and sang the book's repeating phrases: "I am the change that I want to be," "I am the change that

I want to see," and "Change sings."

Pine Bend Student Success Coach Theresa Bechay introduced the school song after fourth grade's performance. She talked about Amanda Gorman's work, Martin Luther King Jr.'s influence, and how everyone can make positive changes, including at Pine Bend. She then invited each grade to sing their verse of the Pine Bend lyrics for "This Little Light of Mine." The verses highlighted how students can shine at school and elsewhere. Students and staff sang:

Kindergarten and First Grade: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine."

Second and Third Grade: "With what I do and say, I'm gonna let it shine."

Fourth and Fifth Grade: "With my leadership, I'm gonna let it shine."

Staff: "Caring for Pine Bend, I'm gonna let it shine."



During their verse, students and staff stood and held glow sticks up to represent their light. The darkened gym glowed with hundreds of glow sticks as students and staff delivered the final verse together: "Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine."

Scan the QR code with your phone camera to see the whole performance. Great job, Pine Bend!

## Simley Student Wins Regional AAA Award



Simley High School senior Madeline Ngo has been named a winner of the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) AAA Award. Only 32 students in the state win the award each year, two

for each of the MSHSL regions. Madeline earned the Region 3AA award for excelling in academics, athletics, and the arts.

Madeline has challenged herself with college-level courses throughout her high school career. She has retained a nearly 4.0 GPA while taking multiple Advanced Placement (AP) courses and concurrent enrollment courses.

While maintaining her exceptional GPA, she is a three-sport athlete: Swimming, Nordic Ski, and Track and Field. She has competed on the Varsity Nordic Ski team since sophomore year, but she has been a dedicated swimmer since middle school. She has competed at the Varsity level on the Simley Swim and Dive team and earned All Conference every year since she began participating. During her freshman and junior year, she qualified for the State tournament in swimming, placing 11th at State last year. She also became the Swim and Dive team captain, which gave her a hands-on opportunity to learn about leadership.

“As a leader, I feel it is important that my teammates know the full potential they can reach,” she said. “It is my job to show

them that I believe they can do anything because having a good support system is crucial in accomplishing big goals.”

Madeline is also a noteworthy member of Simley’s band program. She has participated in Band throughout high school and has worked hard to excel in all areas of music. Last school year, she was selected for the highest honor a high school musician can achieve in Minnesota: the Minnesota Music Educators Association (MMEA) All State Band. Madeline became the first Simley student to be chosen for the honor in more than 20 years.

In addition to All State, she also earned All Conference during her junior and senior years and has been selected for multiple honor bands. She has participated in the MSHSL Large Group Band Contest and the MSHSL Solo/Ensemble Contest every year since she was a sophomore. She has performed in the Best of Site competition and earned the highest rating, Superior, each year that she has been in the Solo/Ensemble Contest.

“Whether it is in the pool, on the stage, or in the classroom, I have learned to be disciplined, and it has helped me strive to reach my full potential,” she said. “Even if things are not ideal, I know that I am doing everything that I can to be my very best student, athlete, and musician if I have a positive mindset and give all my effort.”

Madeline will attend the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities this fall, studying electrical engineering and continuing her participation in band. Congratulations, Madeline!

## SPARC Basketball Tournament Provides Positive Fun for Middle Schoolers



MOST Inver Grove Heights Middle School students say they DON’T want to drink alcohol when hanging out with friends.\* The Inver Grove Heights Spartan Prevention, Advocacy, and Resource Coalition (IGH SPARC) partnered with Inver Grove Heights Parks and Recreation to host a 3-on-3 Basketball Tournament. The tournament aimed to give students in grades 6-8 an opportunity to get together for a fun, healthy activity.

Six teams faced off at the Veterans Memorial Community Center. Each team played a half-court 3-on-3 game until only two teams remained. Families stayed to watch their kids play and cheer them on. Students also cheered each other on when they weren’t playing.

Congratulations to first-place winners Team Five and second-place winners Team Six! Thank you to everyone who signed up and came to make the event a positive one!

IGH SPARC’s goal is to reduce youth substance use in Inver Grove Heights. The coalition organizes events that provide fun, positive opportunities to get together with friends. The group also uses data from students to help the school community correctly perceive the norm for its students: MOST IGH Middle School and Simley High School students DON’T drink alcohol, vape, or use marijuana.\*\*

Inver Grove Heights parents, students, and community members and Inver Grove Heights Schools staff are invited to join IGH SPARC. Learn more about IGH SPARC and join the coalition at [www.ighsparc.org](http://www.ighsparc.org).

*\*Data based on the 2023 Positive Community Norms Student Survey of 621 IGH Middle School students in grades 6-8.*

*\*\*Data based on the 2023 Positive Community Norms Student Survey of 1,413 IGH Middle School and Simley High School students in grades 6-12.*

*Funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services - BHDH.*

## Simley Musicians Selected for Honor Bands



This winter, Simley High School band students were selected for honor bands hosted by the University of Northwestern in St. Paul and Augsburg University!

Four Simley seniors participated in the University of Northwestern 9-12 High School Honor Band. Chloe Heifort, Carter Kline, Collin Momper, and Madeline Ngo were selected from more than

100 nominees at several schools. As part of the honor band, students participated in group rehearsals, sectionals, and an informational session about what college life is like. They finished their day with an evening concert.

Ten Simley students were accepted into the Augsburg University Grade 9-10 Honor Band this year. Freshman Noah Pierson and sophomores Diego Ayala, Tommy Carroll Forsberg, Poppy Komatsu, Katelyn Museus, Ava Osland, Rafael Romero, Anna Steahl, Sophie Steahl, and Emma Turbett were selected from more than 200 nominees around Minnesota. They participated in rehearsals and master classes led by Augsburg University Concert Band Director Dr. Charles Weise.

"I'm continuously impressed by our Simley band students for their commitment to creating a legacy by participating in these events outside of the school day," Simley Band Director Kevin Robinson said. "Our Simley bands continue to excel because of participation in events such as these."

Congratulations to the student musicians on their selection to these honor bands!

## Simley eSports Team Earns Third at State



Two Simley High School students competed in the Minnesota Varsity League (MNVL) 2023 Fall State Finals for esports. Simley students Diego Gomez-Vargas and Elen Her earned third place in the Fortnite 2v2 category!

As part of an esports team, students work together and build their skills to play competitive online video games against other Minnesota students. This year's competition included matches in Rocket League, Super Smash Brothers Ultimate (SSBU), Fortnite, Minecraft, League of Legends, and Valorant. Congratulations, students!

## Simley Business Professionals of America



Three Simley High School students competed in their first Business Professionals of America (BPA) competition this year! The regional competition included seven high schools in Dakota County. Aaron Eischen, Shaylee Olson, and Gaukee Vang competed, and all three will move on to the State competition in downtown Minneapolis.

Aaron received 2nd Place and Gaukee received 3rd place in the Graphic Design Promotion competition. If students place at the State competition, they will qualify for the national competition in Chicago. Congratulations, students, and good luck in the State competition!

## Band All Conference



Fifteen Simley High School students have been selected for this year's Metro East All Conference Concert Band! Every year, the top band, choir, and jazz students from the Metro East Conference are selected for a two-day event and a performance at the Metro East All Conference Music Festival.

Congratulations to the following students on their selection:

### Juniors

- Cadence Dolphy
- Tabby Eschbach
- Tiffany Nguyen
- Matthew Ostebo
- Diego Rivas Rivera

### Seniors

- Kris Gurgel
- Spencer Hagel
- Chloe Heifort
- Alice Islam
- Christian Jack
- Carter Kline
- Lily Mattsen
- Collin Momper
- Madeline Ngo
- James Swearingen

Students participated in 10 hours of rigorous rehearsals and sectionals ahead of their concert. They rehearsed under the direction of Dr. Cassandra Bechard. Dr. Bechard serves as Director of Bands and Assistant Professor of Music at University of Northwestern - St. Paul and the artistic director and conductor of Seward Concert Band in Minneapolis. She will rejoin Simley musicians as a clinician later in February as they prepare for the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) Large Group Contest.

Congratulations to all of the student musicians who earned this honor!

Stay informed of the current issues , challenges, and changes facing the Inver Grove Heights School District.

## #1. BUDGET UPDATE

Inver Grove Heights Schools (ISD 199) is working on its 2024-2025 budget. The district’s current budget includes pandemic-related federal funds, which will be depleted at the end of the current school year. ISD 199 has been using a portion of these funds to offer additional support for students and families since the COVID-19 pandemic. The additional student supports were critical during the pandemic, but they are still necessary for propelling student growth as students continue to wrestle with the effects of the pandemic. Without these funds in 2024-2025, ISD 199 is projecting a deficit of \$1.6 million.

The district’s annual right-sizing process may help lower the deficit. Right-sizing is the district’s process of matching staffing to enrollment. Next school year’s enrollment is predicted to decline by 20 students because the incoming kindergarten class is predicted to be smaller than the outgoing senior class. However, this school year, ISD 199 had many students enrolling in the middle of the school year, more resident students returning to the district, and more open enrollments than the previous year. If those trends continue, they could impact staffing and, therefore, the 2024-2025 budget.

State funding is determined by enrollment. However, even if the

district were to gain more enrollments, it still might not erase the deficit. State funding has not kept pace with inflation for more than 20 years. If it had, ISD 199 would have 18.6% more in general revenue per pupil, which equates to about \$5 million more in the district budget.

Over the next few months, ISD 199 will continue to find ways to resolve the deficit.

## #2. REFUNDING

Inver Grove Heights Schools (ISD 199) administration works with the municipal advisors from Ehlers, Inc. to continually monitor bond interest rates for opportunities to save ISD 199 taxpayers money. Refunding is similar to refinancing a home mortgage.

In January 2024, the ISD 199 School Board approved a parameters resolution that allowed for a future bond refunding if the savings reached at least \$1.2 million. The resolution gave the school district the ability to take advantage of low bond interest rates this year. The bids that came in were even more favorable than expected. ISD 199’s work with Ehlers, Inc. resulted in a future savings of \$2.4 million for ISD 199 taxpayers. The \$2.4 million is a direct savings for taxpayers and will not benefit the district.

# • INVER GROVE HEIGHTS SCHOOLS WEATHER UPDATES: [WWW.ISD199.ORG](http://WWW.ISD199.ORG) •



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