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EDUCATION —
Electronic Edition

www.lcsc.org



by Chris Messer
Kindergarten Teacher, Barnesville Public Schools

What a difference a year makes. During this time in 2019, my students and I busily decorated our classroom walls, bulletin board, and large west-facing window with seasonal artwork. There was excitement in the air for our upcoming Holiday festivities. In December of 2019, I had never heard of the terms 'social distance' or 'distance learning', and to 'ZOOM' meant moving very quickly! As 2020 inched its way in, words like 'pandemic' and 'shutdown' became common vocabulary. Eventually, the idea of teaching remotely was no longer a question of if it would happen, but when.

I have a very large, west facing window in my classroom. The windows open, allowing fresh air in and sometimes the smell of craft paint, out. This window has been my looking glass into the outside world for over 20 years. It has allowed me to wave to children as they arrived at school in the morning, spy on who may be in the parking lot, and gave me a heads-up to the arrival of buses

at the end of the day. Each season, my students and I decorated our window with "tissue art" as it shines brightly in the afternoon sun. Last spring, the rainbows adorning my window - created by my students - were replaced with colorful hearts. Each heart had the name of a student in my classroom. Students I never really got to say "goodbye" to. Students who were schooled in distance learning and experiencing life during a pandemic right along with me.

Preparing for school this fall meant being prepared to teach in-person, from a distance, or in some form of hybrid at any given moment. It meant creating a safe learning environment for kindergartners while still meeting their social, emotional, and academic needs. This fall also brought a new view out my window.

You see, besides teaching during a pandemic, our school is in the midst of a major construction project. There are several areas of both the high school and

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elementary school being remodeled with significant new construction to both buildings. Being added to the elementary school is a whole new office area with a secure main entrance and a brand-new PreK, Kindergarten and Grade 1 wing.

Our elementary school is expanding west towards the high school, right out my window. Earlier this fall, as September became October, my window became darker and darker. The tissue paper pumpkins lost their sparkle. Even now, looking at my window on this beautiful, sunny, December day, all I see is darkness. The walls and roof for the expansion have been completed, the flooring has been poured and my classroom window is on its way to becoming an interior wall. An interior wall! No view of the outside world. This week I have been physically at the school - distance teaching, during a pandemic, via ZOOM - in a room with no natural light. Lonely and depressing are the only words to describe how I have been feeling.

Yesterday our Kindergarten Team reviewed furniture options for our new classrooms. We discussed table styles, colors, room arrangements and more. I began seeing some light shine through the darkness. I decided to take a closer look out my window. There is a difference between looking at and through a window. I think I had forgotten this. As my coworkers and I took time to look out at the new construction, I saw things that brought me some light. New classrooms. New hallways. Additional space we so desperately need. Next week we will even be allowed to walk through the new areas. I cannot wait!

Friends, 2020 has been a difficult time for many. Darkness has permeated our lives with very little light shining through. I challenge you, as I have challenged myself, to look not at your window, but through the glass. Find the hope, excitement and light that is out there. 2021 is a new year with new possibilities. Accept the past and look to the future. What a difference a year can make.

HISTORY IS MADE!

by Susan Ward

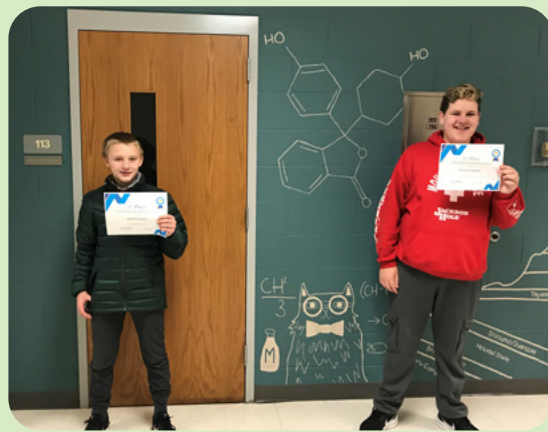
LCSC Academic Challenges Coordinator

When 14 teams competed in a virtual Junior High Knowledge Bowl meet on Tuesday, October 27th, history was made. This year, the competing teams did not physically gather to compete against each other. In fact, members of the same team weren't even in the same location. Students and coaches from Hawley, Rosholt, Brandon-Evansville, Ashby, Henning, New York Mills and Parkers Prairie did not drive to Fergus Falls for the competition. Instead, everyone connected and competed virtually. In the words of a Hawley seventh grader, "This is exciting."

It was evident that this year's Knowledge Bowl season would not be traditional, but because students had already been denied many opportunities, we wanted to do what we could to provide this great academic program. While adhering to safety protocols - we went to work - and the decision to utilize a virtual platform was made.

Instead of the typical in-person meet, students competed virtually from their schools, within their homes, or any place where they were distanced from their teammates. Fortunately, because of technology and technological assistance, students maintained the ability to connect virtually as teammates via discussions and debate. Technology Integration Specialist Monica Thompson seamlessly guided the students and coaches through the competition's new digital avenues.

Our teachers are faced with many challenges, yet they continue to go the extra mile for their students. We are very grateful for their creativity and willingness to, once again, show up for their students. We hope to be back to in-person meets soon, but this pandemic proves once again that our coaches and students are top shelf.



*Pictured: Te'o Lecoustre & Brogan McWethy
Both won 1st Place in the Knowledge Bowl Meet*

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

LCSC Executive Director, Jeremy Kovash



Professor and author Brene' Brown says,

"Leadership is not about titles or the corner office. It is about the willingness to step up, put yourself out there, and lean into courage. The world is desperate for braver leaders. It's time for all of us to step up."

We are humbled to serve the courageous leaders in our schools every day. We are humbled to witness your courage and bravery. This is never more evident than in times of difficulty. Our communities and schools continue to face adversity by "leaning into courage."

Nevermore has this been more evident than with our Regional Crisis Support Network. The Lakes Country Regional School Crisis Response Team was designed to offer immediate, compassionate, and practical resources for school districts impacted by trauma and serious loss. Members of the Crisis Response Team have specialized training

in school crisis response and are available to support school districts in times of need. When mobilized, the team acts as a support system for staff, students, and the community impacted by crisis. The Teams purpose is to be a trusted, respected, and valued resource that effectively mitigates the negative impact of trauma and serious loss in our region's schools.

Early on a Friday morning this December, I received a phone call from Superintendent Darren Kern of Battle Lake. While I hoped this call would be to discuss the upcoming Gopher football game - we share a passion for the Gophers - this call was not fun. Mr. Kern explained to me that they had lost a 9th grade student in a tragic accident. We chatted a bit and then he connected me with Battle Lake school counselor, Cassi Buchite who shared with me the needs of the Battle Lake school and community. On Friday afternoon, we activated the network, and over the weekend, we had plenty of daring, caring, and courageous leaders from across our region who volunteered their time to work with the grieving Battle Lake students, staff, and community following the tragic event.

The heartwarming care and concern of our schools and their staff is, to me, what the holiday season is about. We remain humbled to serve you and witness your courage and bravery. I hope you all have had a peaceful and blessed holiday season.

- Jeremy

Social Emotional Learning

by Staci Allmaras
Regional Center of Excellence

The return to school 20-21 has been like no other in history. In the first months, we have learned more than ever the importance of deepening our social and emotional competencies and creating equitable learning environments where all students and adults process, heal, and thrive. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), has created the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Roadmap recognizing the need for a different approach to the traditional 'show up and sit in your seat' model.

The recommendations are divided into four major sections, each with its own action steps and user-friendly tools to help operationalize the guidance. Within each activity, users are guided through Essential Questions, Actions to Prepare & Implement, and Tools to Support the Actions. You'll also find Guidance to Sustain the Work.

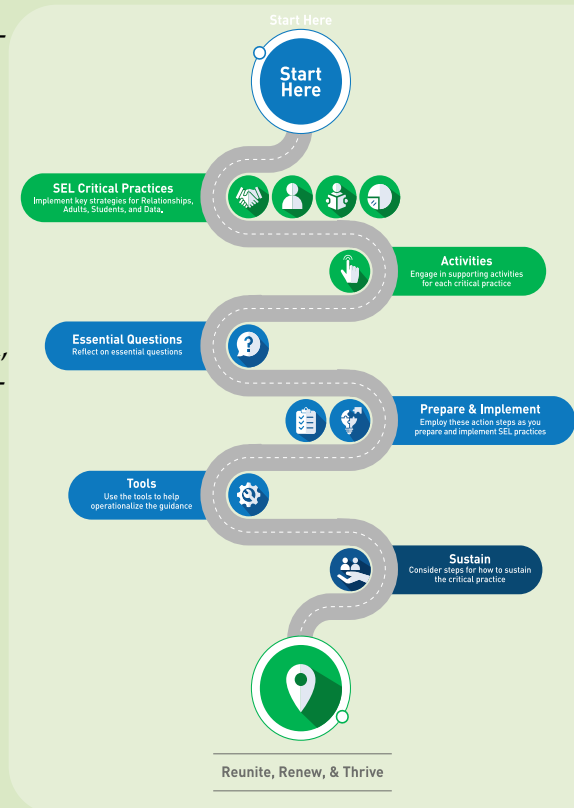
Critical Practices include:

1 Take time to cultivate and deepen relationships, build partnerships, and plan for SEL. Prioritize relationships that haven't been established, engage in two-way communication, and build coalitions to effectively plan for supportive and equitable learning environments that promote social, emotional, and academic learning for all students.

2 Design opportunities where adults can connect, heal, and build their capacity to support students. Help adults feel connected, empowered, supported, and valued by cultivating collective self-care and well-being, providing ongoing professional learning, and creating space for adults to process and learn from their experiences.

3 Create safe, supportive, and equitable learning environments that promote all students' social and emotional development. Ensure all students feel a sense of belonging; have consistent opportunities to learn about, reflect on, and practice SEL; examine the impact of the pandemic and systemic racism on their lives and communities; and access needed support through school or community partners.

4 Use data as an opportunity to share power, deepen relationships, and continuously improve support for students, families, and staff. Partner with students, families, staff, and community partners to learn about students and adults' ongoing needs and strengths, and continuously improve SEL and transition efforts.



Learn more about SEL and get the resources, support and guidance needed to reunite, renew, and thrive. Visit, <https://casel.org/reopening-with-sel/>.

Artist Residency Program At Ulen-Hitterdal School



Working with art teacher, Trudy Stubson, Fargo guest artist and printmaker Cameron Peterson recently conducted an artist residency program at Ulen-Hitterdal Public School. Peterson shared his knowledge and experiences in printmaking with kindergarten, first grade, fifth grade, sixth grade and 7-12 art students. Students spent two days learning from Peterson, working with this new media, and creating their own prints.

This residency program was supported by a project grant received from the Lake Region Arts Council, Fergus Falls, with additional financial assistance from the Ulen Area Lions.

*by Therese Vogel
Communications, Ulen-Hitterdal School*



Improvement for Participating Groups & Accountholders



The Minnesota Healthcare Consortium (MHC) is excited to announce that we recently facilitated a Medical Spending Account RFP for 2021, where six vendors were evaluated and considered. After extensive evaluations, vendor presentations and negotiations, the decision was made to renew with the incumbent administrator, Further (formally known as SelectAccount).

Meaningful improvements were achieved through the RFP process that will significantly benefit both participating groups and accountholders: Reduced account fees guaranteed for the next four years (2021-2024) that are well below retail rates, significant increase in VEBA returns with interest rates well above the market, and dedicated service model and improved member experience.

For more information:

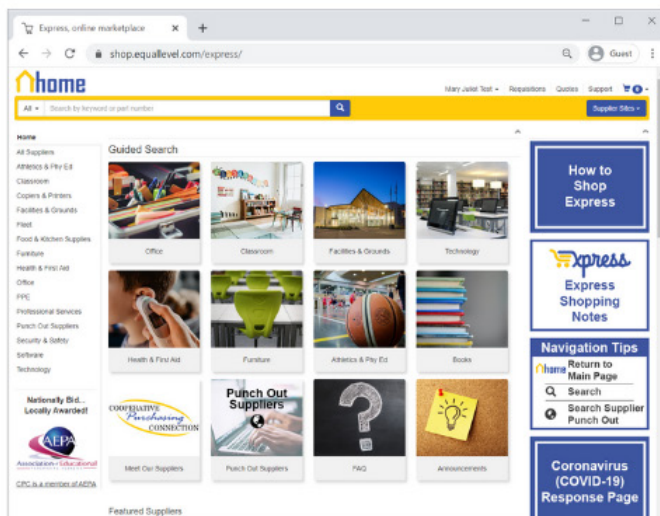
Please visit, <https://www.lcsc.org/Domain/45>, and contact either Melissa Walvatne or Dan Weir.

To view the Account Fee and VEBA Return improvements, visit, <https://www.lcsc.org/cms/lib/MN01001004/Centricity/Domain/45/2021%20MSA.pdf>

About Minnesota Healthcare Consortium

MHC is a joint powers group of seven of the state's regional service cooperatives in Minnesota. Service cooperatives are public, nonprofit cooperatives designed to provide a variety of services to their participating members, which include school districts, cities, counties, other governmental agencies, and nonprofits. Statewide, there are hundreds of organizations with thousands of members participating in the Minnesota Healthcare Consortium. MHC negotiates statewide stop-loss pricing, administrative discounts, and lower healthcare costs. We are dedicated to empowering and engaging our members in lifelong health and well-being.

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Visit www.purchasingconnection.org for more information

FAFSA Tips from LCSC Business Partner OnToCollege

Lakes Country Service Cooperative partners with OnToCollege to offer our member schools tools to graduate with minimal debt.



More than \$2.6 billion dollars in financial aid went unawarded in 2018. \$2.6 billion dollars! That's why it's so important for students and their families to complete the FAFSA application before graduation in order to qualify for need-based aid and even many merit-based programs. Not sure where to start? This guide answers your questions and more.

What is the FAFSA?

The FAFSA is the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. It's the application students and families must complete to be eligible for any kind of federal student aid, including grants, work-study, and loans. Many states, colleges, universities, and private foundations also use the FAFSA to determine qualifications for merit awards.

Every student planning to enroll in a post-secondary education program should complete the FAFSA. Even if your family income prevents your student from receiving need-based aid, many merit-based programs require completion of the FAFSA.

FAFSA applications open nationwide October 1 with closing dates (January 15-July 1) differing by state and by college or university. Students and parents must use their own individual Federal Student Aid (FSA) ID to log in, and each will need his or her own social security number to get started.

Apply for FAFSA Early and Every Year

Completing the FAFSA early helps you apply earlier to schools. And students who apply early may see more generous financial aid packages than those who apply later on. Historically, students who applied in the first three months received twice as much grant money as those who waited to apply until spring.

If you are a first-time FAFSA filer, students and parents must separately apply for an FSA ID prior to completing the FAFSA. It can take several business days to process your FSA ID. Make sure you have your social security number handy. Write down your FSA ID and password and keep them somewhere safe—you'll need them again next year! Beware of government holidays and/or unexpected maintenance. Don't wait to complete the FAFSA.

Tips for Your FAFSA Application

When selecting schools to receive your FAFSA info, (counselors recommend sending to the full ten allowed), search by state first, and then select the school. Some schools list every college under their name—be careful to select the main institution. If you want to send to more than ten schools, wait until you receive confirmation your FAFSA application has been processed or mailed to those schools, then log in again, delete the previous schools, add the new list, and re-submit.

- The FAFSA assesses 20% of student assets, while the rate is 5.64% for parents. Therefore, your parents shouldn't save college money in accounts belonging to you.
- A student who lives over 50% of time with the parent with lower income will have a lower Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The FAFSA does not collect income/home equity/assets from the noncustodial parent.
- Avoid income boosts during college years such as cashing out retirement plans and stock options.
- The FAFSA4caster is a tool to provide an early estimate of eligibility for aid. You still must file an actual FAFSA form to be eligible for federal student aid.
- The U.S. Department of Education offers several resources including a step-by-step timeline and a preview worksheet at this link: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/fafsa/filling-out>.
- You can also call the FAFSA Hotline at 800-4FEDAID (433-3243) or live chat with the Federal Student Aid Information Center.



TIS THE SEASON FOR

Gratitude

Looking back on this past year – a difficult one for many – we are humbled and grateful to continue serving you.

As a new year begins, we remain committed to show up for you- in ways new and old – as we work together to navigate all that may come in 2021.

Until then, our wish is that you had a **restful**, happy holiday season!

From all of us at Lakes Country Service Cooperative



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THE LCSC COMMUNICATOR IS A PUBLICATION OF
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Lakes Country Service Cooperative (LCSC) is a public, non-profit membership-based organization dedicated to providing services that help make our members successful. Originally created by legislation in 1976 as one of Minnesota's nine service cooperatives to provide services to pre-K through 12 education, we have grown and expanded to provide high quality, innovative programs to cities, counties, other governmental agencies, and non-profit entities. Together, we build relationships that help make all members and communities stronger.

Together...We Achieve.

STAY CONNECTED.



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