

## CREATING A VISION FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



**BRIAN GERSICH**  
*Superintendent,  
Waconia Public Schools*

Back in 2018 when Waconia Public Schools asked staff and community members to participate in the District’s strategic planning process, there was a tremendous

response and willingness to engage.

Together, stakeholders identified strengths and needs, as well as a clear set of priorities to guide District leaders and help ensure that Waconia students, staff, and families have a positive experience in our schools.

Fast forward to 2023 and there is a belief that the current strategic plan is still relevant and captures the spirit of the ISD 110 community, but could be

improved by making a few updates. Earlier this fall, I asked a team of District leaders to engage in a discussion around the District’s current Mission, Vision, and Core Values. The team has been charged with updating language without losing the essence of the plan that stakeholders created together in 2018.

As we work to set our priorities and vision for the next five years, we will be strengthening the plan by adding several “Strategic Directions” that will include measurable goals. While specific strategic directions will be developed in the coming months, they will fall under one of three categories including Systems and Structures, Student Outcomes, and Student & Staff Experience.

One significant difference between this work and the process that took place in 2018, is the fact that we will complete revisions to the strategic plan internally, without outside facilitators or consultants. This is not only a financially

responsible decision for the District, but the right decision given that the 2018 process has provided a strong baseline from which to work from.

I plan to present this updated Strategic Plan to the School Board sometime in the late winter or early spring months, at which point we would also inform the wider ISD 110 community with relevant details.

Thank you for your continued support of Waconia Public Schools!

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## NICHE RANKS WACONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS AMONG MINNESOTA’S TOP 20 SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Waconia Public Schools has once again been named a top-20 public school district in the state of Minnesota by Niche, an online platform that annually ranks K-12 schools as well as colleges and universities. In Niche’s 2024 rankings, which were released on Friday, Sept. 22, Waconia Public Schools was ranked 16th on the platform’s list of Best School Districts in Minnesota.

The school district earned either an A-, A or A+ grade in seven major categories including Academics, Teachers, Clubs & Activities, Sports, Resources & Facilities, Administration, and Food.

ISD 110 also earned high placement on several of the platform’s other ranked lists. The school district is ranked 10th out of 362 on Niche’s list titled “Districts with the Best Teachers in Minnesota.” The school district was also ranked first on the platform’s list of “Best School Districts in Carver County.”

Niche’s methodology includes a number of data points including state assessment proficiency, graduation rates, student to teacher ratios, and Advanced Placement enrollment, as well as parent and student survey data.

Visit <https://bit.ly/WaconiaNiche> to view the school district’s Niche profile page and to learn more about the platform’s 2024 rankings.

## WHS NAMED NATIONAL BANNER UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOL BY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Waconia High School has recently been named a National Banner Unified Champion School by Special Olympics North America. WHS is one of five schools in the state of Minnesota to achieve this honor for 2023.

To achieve National Banner recognition, a school has to demonstrate that it has an inclusive school climate and that it exudes a sense of collaboration, engagement and respect for all members of the student body and staff.

To demonstrate a commitment to inclusion, a school must adhere to ten national standards of excellence. These standards encompass the provision of Unified Sports throughout the school year, regular participation with competition, trained adult coaches, official school recognition of Unified Sports, leadership opportunities within a Unified Club, regular club meetings, adult liaison, whole-school engagement activities, involvement of students with and without disabilities in planning and leading awareness activities, and a self-sustainable or planned future sustainability for these inclusive components.

Waconia High School’s Unified Program has been in existence for eight years and includes Unified Bowling, Unified Basketball, Unified Soccer, and Unified Track & Field. The program has expanded to the classroom this school year to offer Unified Art, Unified Culinary Foods, and Unified Industrial Technology classes. There is also Unified programming in all six of the District’s schools. The Unified Program in Waconia is led by Waconia High School Teacher Kari Klein and is supported

by numerous staff members across the District.



Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools is a program for schools Pre-K through university that intentionally promotes meaningful social inclusion by bringing together students with and without intellectual disabilities to create accepting school environments, utilizing three interconnected components: Special Olympics Unified Sports, inclusive youth leadership, and whole school engagement.



## WELCOMING OUR NEXT CLASS OF WILDCATS

Do you have a child who will be 5 years old on or before September 1, 2024 and is eligible to begin Kindergarten? We are so excited to welcome them to the Wildcat family in the Fall of 2024! When your child walks through the doors of our schools, it is the beginning of their personal journey in developing their lifelong learning skills. You can trust Waconia Public Schools with your most treasured gift - your child. Important dates for incoming Kindergarten families:

**November** — Watch for the ISD 110 Kindergarten Guide to be mailed to your place of residence

**December** — Online Kindergarten enrollment will open (look for exact date in the Kindergarten Guide)

**January** — Kindergarten Preview Night event at Bayview, Laketown and Southview Elementary Schools.



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HOMECOMING RECAP



2023 Homecoming Court members included River Aamold, Sophia Byers, Carben Dock, Kallyn Fahey, Mackena Forster, Sophia Kuntz, Wyatt Pauly, Katelyn Smith, and Jack Ulrich.



Jack Ulrich and Katelyn Smith were crowned this year's Homecoming King and Queen.




Students of various teams and clubs joined the Homecoming Parade on Community Drive.



The Homecoming football game was rescheduled due to rain and lightning. The Wildcats clinched a 35-7 win over Mankato East.

### SENIOR ABIGAIL VOELKER NAMED NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALIST




Waconia High School senior Abigail Voelker has been named a National Merit Semifinalist based on results of the Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), which is taken by more than 1.5 million 11th graders each year.

Voelker is one of approximately 16,000 students across the nation who took the PSAT/NMSQT to be named a National Merit Semifinalist for 2024. Voelker will now have the opportunity to fulfill several requirements to be named a finalist in February and potentially earn one of approximately 7,500 National Merit Scholarships that will be awarded next Spring.

The National Merit Scholarship Program is an annual academic competition among high school students for recognition and college scholarships that began in 1955.

### WACONIA HIGH SCHOOL NEWS & NOTES



Congratulations to the following Waconia High School students for taking part in the Metro West Conference Honor Band: Ghost Cooper (10), percussion; Addison Dorr (12), flute; Jayden Kisner (10), percussion; Oliver Lyons (10), french horn; Julia Palaia (11), flute; Sara Schoenfelder (11), trombone; Bennett Trapp (10), tenor saxophone; Quinn Villavaso (11), trombone; and Shane Zimmerman (11), clarinet.



It's been a busy Fall for the Waconia High School Conservation Club as club members have helped with clean-up efforts at both the Carver County Fair and Nickle Dickle Day, as well as their regular Adopt-a-Highway clean-up activities.



Students in Mr. Wayne Trapp's 10th Grade Cell Biology class look at bacteria that they had sampled from various places, incubated, and had Gram stained. The staining process they used in conjunction with our light microscopes allowed them to magnify the bacteria 1,000 times!



Seniors at Waconia High School have an opportunity to take a Senior Seminar course that is designed to help prepare students for life after high school. The course is divided into four subjects: health, finance, auto maintenance, and communication. During the health rotation, students have the opportunity to get CPR and First Aid Certified. The class will also spend time learning about the Heimlich Maneuver, EpiPens, tourniquets, splinting, environmental emergencies, and infant choking.



FALL THEATRE PRODUCTIONS ENTERTAIN AUDIENCES

The High School Theatre Program presented its fall musical, *Beauty and the Beast*, October 12-14 at the High School Performing Arts Center. The talented cast was led by seniors Tessa Paulson (Belle), Noah Van Leeuwen (Beast), and Jack Anderson (Lumiere). The Middle School Theatre Program (lower right photo) presented its fall play, *Charlotte's Web*, Oct. 26-28 in the Middle School Auditorium. Thank you to everyone who came out to support our talented students. Stay tuned for announcements regarding spring theater productions.



FALL ATHLETIC RECAP

Congratulations to all fall sport athletes and coaches for a successful season and for representing Waconia Public Schools in a positive way. Your hard work and determination led to the creation of lifelong memories, relationships and lessons.



BOYS SOCCER

The boys soccer team finished the season with a record of 7-7-3 and advanced to the section semifinals before falling to top-seeded Minnetonka. Senior goalkeeper Jackson Hayes and senior defender Owen Mielke were named All-Conference. Sophomore Elijah Lund (7 goals) and senior Jacob Krugerud (5 goals) were named All-Conference Honorable Mention. Notably, senior Tanner Conklin finished with three goals and four assists, while eighth grade midfielder Eli Seim tallied a team-high eight assists.

GIRLS SOCCER

The girls soccer team finished the season with a record of 4-11-2 and was eliminated from postseason play in the section quarterfinals by Minnetonka. All-Conference honorees included senior Bethany Langer (5 goals) and freshman Ada Meehan (5 goals). Seniors Hannah Beix (1 goal, 7 assists) and Jenna Myhre (2 goals, 4 assists) were both named All-Conference Honorable Mention.

BOYS CROSS COUNTRY

The boys cross country team placed 6th at the Metro West Conference championships and had two individuals earn All-Conference honors. Senior Jack Ulrich placed 7th and freshman Mitchell Moyer finished 15th at the conference meet to be named All-Conference. The team placed 6th at the Section 2AAA Meet where Ulrich placed 19th and Moyer placed 20th.

GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY

The girls cross country team captured the Metro West Conference championship for the second consecutive year, edging Chaska by six points in the team standings. The team placed five athletes on the All-Conference list including seniors Madeline Lage and Amelia Herold, freshman Jaidee Goehring, and eighth graders Avery Hess and Brekken Miller. The team placed fourth at the Section 2AAA Meet where Lage qualified for the State Meet by placing ninth in the individual standings. Lage was scheduled to compete at the State Meet on November 4, after this edition of the *CommuniCAT* went to press.

FOOTBALL

The football team finished its season with a record of 4-6 and was eliminated from postseason play by top-seeded Chanhassen in the section 2AAAAA semifinals. Statistically, the team was led on offense by senior quarterback Austin Randall, junior running back Wil Goldschmidt, senior wide receiver Mitchel Rieckhoff and junior wide receiver Owen Hiltner. Junior linebacker Cooper Jahnke led the defense in tackles.



VOLLEYBALL

The volleyball team had a season to remember as the Wildcats earned regular season victories over large schools such as Eden Prairie, Edina, Hopkins, Shakopee, and Prior Lake. The team earned the No. 1 seed in section 2AAAA and was scheduled to play Minnetonka in the section championship match at the time that this edition of the *CommuniCAT* went to press.

GIRLS TENNIS

The girls tennis team was eliminated in the first round of the Section 2AA Tournament by the eventual champions from Minnetonka. Ashley Bryfczynski earned All-Conference honors at season's end, while Brianna Bollig and Mackenna Forster were both named All-Conference Honorable Mention.

GIRLS SWIMMING & DIVING

The girls swimming and diving team was still in the midst of its season when this edition of the *CommuniCAT* went to press and is preparing to compete in the section meet on Nov. 8-10 at Edina's Southview Middle School. The team earned dual meet Metro West Conference victories over St. Louis Park, Chaska, Benilde-St. Margaret's, and Bloomington Jefferson during the regular season.

GO WILDCATS!



## ISD 110 CELEBRATES ESSENCE AWARD WINNERS

Back in 2009, ISD 110 started recognizing outstanding employees through the Essence Awards as a way to highlight the dedicated and skilled teachers and staff who are passionate about educating kids and helping them grow socially and emotionally. The Essence Awards were also created to celebrate those employees behind the scenes – people who may not otherwise receive much public recognition. These are the employees who work day after day to continue building the vibrant learning community we have here at Waconia Public Schools.

These individuals were recognized at the All-Staff Welcome Back Program on Thursday, Aug. 24 as the 2023 Essence Award recipients:

- Brenda Buesgens** | Administrative Assistant | Community Education
- Michelle Langer** | Educational Support Professional | Bayview Elementary School
- Jenny Steinhagen** | Educational Support Professional | Laketown Elementary School
- Sara Wolter** | Educational Support Professional | Southview Elementary School
- Carol Miller** | Educational Support Professional | Waconia Middle School
- Jamie Mackenthun** | Educational Support Professional | Waconia High School
- Congratulations to all of this year's recipients!



Pictured from L to R: Sara Wolter (Southview), Jenny Steinhagen (Laketown), Michelle Langer (Bayview), and Brenda Buesgens (Community Education). Not pictured are Carol Miller and Jamie Mackenthun.

UPCOMING KEY DATES AND EVENTS

NOVEMBER

17

End of First Trimester

20-24

No School E-12

27

School Board Regular Meeting, 7 p.m.

DECEMBER

5

WMS Choir Concerts

7-8

Yuletide Festival

11

School Board Work Session, 7 p.m.

18

Truth in Taxation Hearing, School Board Regular Meeting, 7 p.m.

19

WMS Band Concerts

21

Show Choir Premier Night

25-29

No School E-12

JANUARY

1-2

No School E-12

15

No School E-12, MLK Jr. Day

17

WMS/WHs Parent-Teacher Conferences

24

2-Hour Early Release

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