



Eye of the Tiger

District 879 Newsletter January 2022

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Triple A winners

Dates to remember

January

10.....HS PIE meeting, 6 p.m.
17.....MLK Day, no school
21.....End of Semester 1,
early release for all grades
24...School board mtg., 5:45 p.m.

February

3.....9-12 band concert, 7 p.m.
7.....ES/IS conferences,
3:30 to 7:30 p.m.
7.....HS PIE meeting, 6 p.m.
8.....ES/IS conferences
3:30 to 7:30 p.m.
9.....History Day Competition
9.....DHS blood drive
(students and staff only)
16.....Two-hour late start
17.....9-12 choir concert, 7 p.m.
21.....President's Day, no school
28.....HS conferences, 4-7 p.m.
28...School board mtg., 5:45 p.m.

March

3.....DHS College Fair



Delano Elementary students took part in the annual holiday sing-along on Dec. 22, the day before Winter Break. Their school was named to U.S. News and World Report's inaugural 'Best Elementary Schools' list in December, and Delano Intermediate and Delano High School also were honored on the new 'Best Middle Schools' list.

Evidence of excellence

By Paul Downer
Communications Coordinator

Delano High School has been a regular on the annual list of Best High Schools compiled annually by U.S. News and World Report.

Now it has company.

In December the organization released its first-ever rankings of Best Elementary Schools and Best Middle Schools, and Delano Elementary

and Delano Intermediate fared well in the evaluations. DHS also earned a place on the Best Middle Schools list because it includes grades seven and eight.

Schools were ranked by their performance on state-required tests, graduation and how well they prepare their students for high school. The

See US News
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Delano High School seniors Marissa Huikko and John Lahlum have been named Triple A Award winners for the 2021-22 school year. See Page 4.

Top marks, levy next steps, and COVID

By Matthew Schoen
Superintendent

Welcome to the new year! Our hope is that the new year will be healthier and will allow a change of focus away from the pandemic and back on the importance of educational excellence.

In that area, I am pleased to announce that our schools are still

performing at a very high level, according to U.S. News and World Report. See the related article above for details.

I am proud to be working with such a talented staff that is able to maintain educational excellence in what has not been the most

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Four named educational leaders

By Paul Downer
Communications Coordinator

Each year teachers from around the region honor a select handful of their outstanding peers to receive Leadership in Educational Excellence Awards.

Four staff members from Delano Public Schools earned the award and were among those honored with a ceremony at the River's Edge Convention Center in St. Cloud earlier this school year. They were DES Dean of Students Paul Ludwig, sixth-grade math and life skills teacher Andrew Waldbillig, DHS math teacher Emilie Kalvig, and Delano Teacher of the Year Monica Kunkel.

In addition, Delano Superintendent Matt Schoen addressed the gathering as the Superintendent of Record for the evening.

"Tonight we honor the incredible courage that it takes to be an excellent educator in these most unusual and trying times," Schoen told the assembly. "The honorees this year deserve special recognition, as they have achieved excellence



Staff members earning Leadership in Educational Excellence Awards this year include, from left, Paul Ludwig, Monica Kunkel, Andrew Waldbillig and Emilie Kalvig.

in their field at a time when educational challenges have never been greater."

- Over his 25 years in education, including 23 in his native Delano, Ludwig has served as an elementary classroom teacher, then filled a technology support role before assuming his current position last school year. He received multiple anonymous nominations from DES staff members.

"His approach, demeanor and patience with the kids have been outstanding," said one nomination. "Paul comes to school every day with a positive attitude, goes above and beyond and has been a great support and go-to person for the staff."

- Waldbillig is in his 11th year of teaching, and his fourth year in Delano. During that time he has been active in

athletics and activities, as well as the classroom.

"Drew is a hard-working individual who is always willing to help where needed," the nomination said. "He has led our end of the year variety/talent show, and is currently working on getting a student council up and running for DIS."

- Now in her ninth year of teaching in Delano, and 12th overall, Kalvig said she aims to impart skills that can benefit students for a lifetime.

"She takes the time each morning to establish relationships with students in her classroom ... [and ensures] that each student has an understanding of the concept being taught," said the nomination.

- Kunkel is in her 14th year at Delano. She has served as the media center specialist at the high school, and is currently on special assignment overseeing curriculum, assessment and literacy. She earned an LEEA award in 2019, and was the district's Teacher of the Year for 2020-21. See more at <https://bit.ly/Kunkel21>.

Schoen

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optimum learning environment for our students. This is a testament to the dedication and tenacity of our staff, in every capacity, to provide a world-class educational experience for all our students.

It also is a testament to our parent community and the Delano Public Schools district community at large for their partnership and support in maintaining the tradition of educational excellence in our school system.

It may be difficult in these times, but it is necessary that we celebrate these great accomplishments at all levels within our school district. Delano schools is definitely doing things right with regard to the education of our students PreK-12.

Referendum update

As all of you know, the November operating levy referendum did not pass. As a result, the district will undertake two ma-

jor actions over the next several months. The first is to reduce our annual budget by \$500,000 in order to be fiscally responsible and in compliance with our budget parameters. This process will culminate when the school board adopts the fiscal year 2023 budget that includes the necessary reductions.

The second major step will include a post-election analysis of the referendum and development of a multiple-stage process to prepare for another levy referendum in the fall of 2022. This will be the last opportunity our community has to support the school district financially before the existing levy expires. More detailed information will be forthcoming in future newsletters.

COVID update

Throughout the first half of this school year we have been able to maintain in-person learning for all of our students safely. Our COVID plan and decision-making

matrix that were implemented at the beginning of the school year have been effective so far. We will continue to monitor the virus within our schools and make appropriate changes based on our numbers at the classroom level, grade level and school building level.

We hope that our weekly communication regarding COVID within our district has been informative and useful for all our parents. The only way we can continue to provide a safe learning environment for our students is to partner with our parents to make the best decisions for the health of our students.

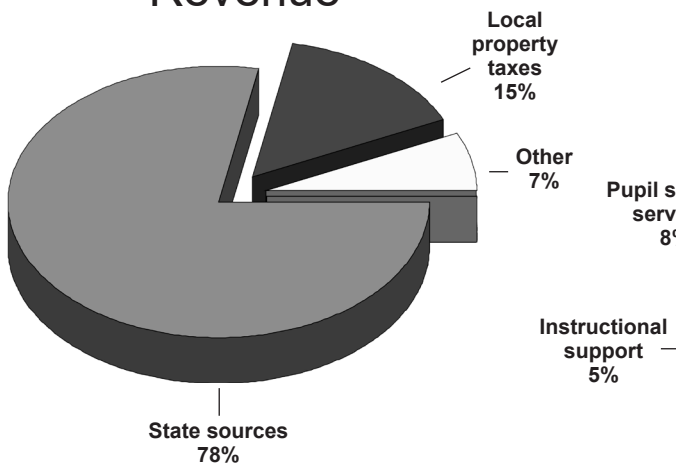
Important work ahead

I look forward to the second half of the school year and the continued growth of our students as they prepare to make a successful transition into the next phase of their educational career or post-secondary endeavors.

The district will reduce its annual budget by \$500,000 as a result of the failed referendum.

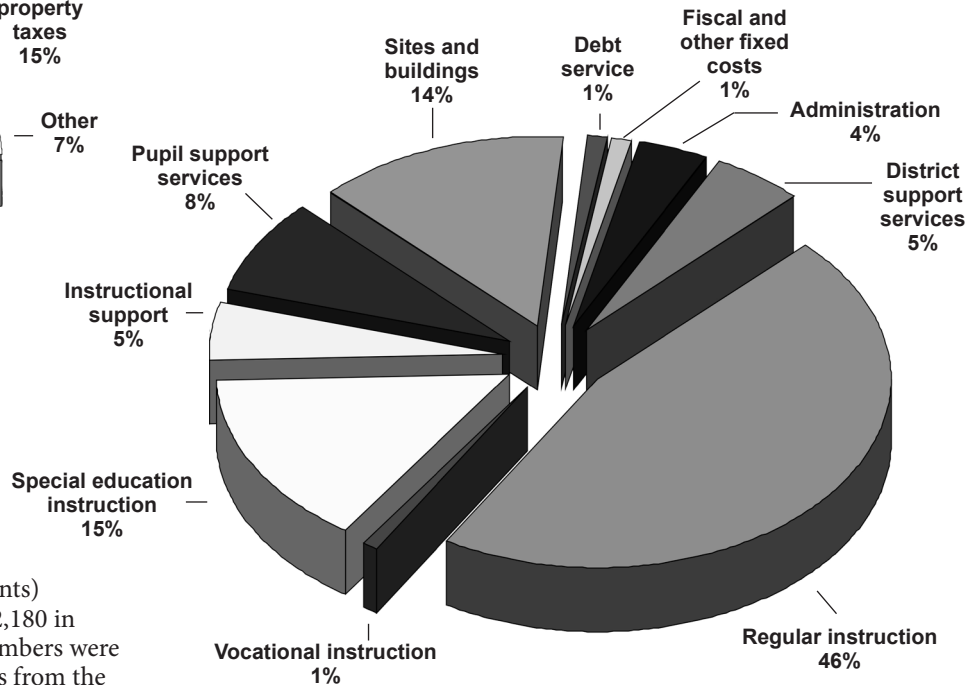
Sources of funding and uses

2021 General Fund
Revenue



In 2021 Delano Public Schools collected \$28.8 million in general fund revenue and expended \$29.6 million from the general fund. Revenue from property taxes per average daily membership (number of students) was \$1,810 compared to a state average of \$2,180 in 2020, the most recent year that statewide numbers were available for comparison. This information is from the district's annual audit presented in November of 2021.

2021 General Fund
Expenditures



US News

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top 30% of schools in the state were included on the list.

"This is again evidence that we are achieving educational excellence, and that our entire staff, in partnership with our parents, are truly dedicated to providing a world-class education for all our students at Delano Public Schools," said Delano Superintendent Matt Schoen.

Elementary rank

DES ranked No. 25 in the state overall, and No. 18 among traditional public elementary schools.

"When there are over 5,000 schools in Minnesota and Delano Elementary is ranked 25th, that is something to celebrate!" said DES Principal Rachel Schultz. "A long tradition of educational excellence has been fostered in this district for years. At Delano Elementary,

there is a culture of teamwork, grit and dedication that runs deep. This type of culture is what sets our school above others and allows us to set high expectations for our students."

Schultz added that schools depend on families and communities to bolster their efforts on behalf of students.

"Families want to be a part of this school because their children are cared for each day by outstanding staff that are knowledgeable, engaging and kind," she said. "I also believe that behind every successful school is a strong community. We are grateful for the partnerships and generosity within our community."

Intermediate rank

DIS ranked No. 13 among Minnesota middle schools overall, and No. 9 among traditional public middle schools. DIS Principal Katie Thompson said that rating can be attributed in part to skilled staff and families who value education.

"In reading about the other schools on this list, you'll notice that our building ranks very high, 92.5%, in the category of teachers with three years of experience or more," she said. "Our experienced and

'Our entire staff, in partnership with our parents, are truly dedicated to providing a world-class education for all our students.'

Matt Schoen

dedicated teaching staff, as well as a support staff with high standards for excellence, are a huge factor in our success. We also have hardworking students and supportive families. It makes DIS a great place to be."

High school rank

DHS ranked No. 21 among

Minnesota middle schools overall, and No. 16 among traditional public schools that include students up to grade eight.

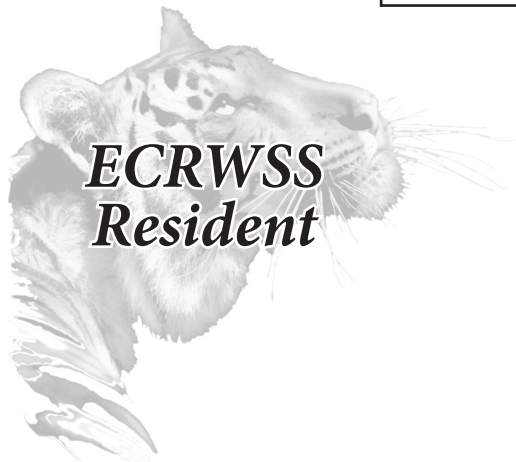
Of particular note was the school's overall math proficiency ranking, as its seventh- and eighth-graders ranked No. 3 among 441 schools on the list.

"This recognition speaks to the dedication of our students and the amazing talents of our staff," said DHS Principal Barry Voight. "What's really remarkable is that, despite these platitudes, we still have the desire to improve, to get better at delivering a comprehensive educational program that prepares our students for the future."

• For more information about the rankings, see <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/middle-schools/minnesota> or <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/elementary-schools/minnesota>.

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Delano Public Schools Vision

*Systemic growth toward educational
excellence for every learner*

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Huikko, Lahlum earn Triple A Award

By Paul Downer
Communications Coordinator

Amidst ongoing interference from COVID-19, students at Delano schools have continued to press on with their academic, artistic and athletic endeavors.

At the beginning of January two seniors, Marissa Huikko and John Lahlum, were recognized as Delano High School's 2021-22 Triple A Award winners for high performance in all three areas.

Marissa Huikko

Huikko has compiled a stratospheric weighted grade point average of 4.14 while taking some of the most challenging courses available to her, including numerous College in the Schools classes and an Advanced Placement course.

As for arts, Huikko has been a percussion section leader in band all four years, playing in concert band, wind ensemble, jazz band and pep band.

In terms of athletics, Huikko has been part of the basketball program throughout high school, and has played softball at the varsity level since her



DHS seniors John Lahlum and Marissa Huikko are this year's Triple A Award winners for high achievement in academics, arts and athletics.

freshman year. She will serve as a captain on the softball team this spring, and also enjoys coaching youth players on a regular basis.

In other activities, Huikko is the president of the Delano Best Buddies program, and volunteers with Special Olympics.

"Marissa Huikko's contributions are remarkable; she is one of the best role models we have at Delano and will represent the Triple A Award with dignity," said DHS language arts

teacher Jim VanCura.

Next fall Huikko plans to attend Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, with an intended major in biology. She is the daughter of Chad and Meredith Huikko of Delano.

John Lahlum

Any theater fan in Delano will recognize Lahlum's name, as he has been a leading actor onstage for the past several years. But Lahlum's resume includes much more than drama.

He carries a weighted grade point average of 4.07 despite a diverse and challenging course schedule. DHS language arts teacher Meghan Gibas said Lahlum stood out in her public speaking class because of his "strong work ethic, leadership skills, and gifted speaking abilities."

In the arts, Lahlum is a section leader in choir, and performed in the all-state choir as a sophomore. He is also a member of the select Sound Revolution vocal ensemble, and was a section leader in band as a freshman.

He continues to play piano for the jazz band, competes on the tennis team, and currently serves as one of two student representatives to the Delano School Board.

Next year Lahlum plans to attend Minnesota State University Moorhead to study entrepreneurship. He is the son of Steve and Rebecca Lahlum of Delano.

• This is an abridged version of a feature story available on the Delano Public Schools website. See www.delano.k12.mn.us for more information on Huikko and Lahlum.