

well connected

AREA SCHOOLS | LOCAL GOVERNMENTS | NONPROFITS

PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE
Supporting educational equity

NONPROFIT SPARKS ENERGY EFFICIENCY
Providing power to the public

YOUNG AUTHORS CONFERENCE
Students have the 'write' stuff



Innovating
Public Safety



In the blink of an eye, another school year is coming to a close. Time certainly flies, doesn't it?

Summertime is always a wonderful time to live in Minnesota. We are surrounded by opportunities, punctuated with warmer weather and longer days. It truly is a season to be treasured. In addition to breathtaking scenery and a plethora of natural resources to be enjoyed, we are also a fortunate part of the country due in large part to the communities in which we live, work, and play.

This bi-annual publication is a testament to the work happening throughout the five counties that comprise Region 5 – Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena. Hardworking people like you are making this an ideal place to grow up, raise a family, and eventually retire.

In this Spring-Summer 2019 issue of Well Connected, these very pages are illustrated with poignant stories and captivating photographs of our friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors.

From our partners in education, we share accounts of equity in our schools and region through the SEED, or Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity, program offered at Sourcewell. We shed light on the implementation of solar energy at several of our schools with the help of a regional nonprofit that's teaching students the importance of harnessing the power of the sun. We also read about the impact a recently introduced writing conference has already had on local students and school staff.

In our cities and counties throughout Region 5, we discover how Innovation Funding and Small Project Partnership dollars through Sourcewell impact law enforcement as they, both, serve and protect. From bulletproof vests to mobile command units, members continue to dream of creative and collaborative solutions.

Finally, we have an opportunity to build up our Contract Purchasing program at Sourcewell and share how an awarded contract program helped one rural Minnesota school save thousands of dollars and months of time to better accommodate an influx of students over the 2018 summer break.

It's an exciting time to be in Region 5, not only because of the season but because our communities are brimming with possibilities and opportunity.

Thank you for allowing us to bring each of these stories to the pages of this magazine. We appreciate each of you and thank you for the contributions you make to the cities, counties, schools, and nonprofits you serve.

With warm regards,

Paul Drange
Sourcewell Director of Regional Programs

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SOURCEWELL REGION 5 PROGRAMS

Regional Programs Director
Paul Drange

City & County
Anna Gruber

Membership
Liz Wambeke

Education
Kassidy Rice

Technology
Dean Greising

Legal
Marcus Miller

Insurance & Employee Benefits
Ryan Donovan

WELL CONNECTED MAGAZINE STAFF

Director
Travis Bautz

Manager
Sarah Speer

Coordinator
Ali O'Day

Editors
Anita Meyer
Chelsea Ornelas

Graphic Designer
Becky Koep

Photographers
Mitchell McCallson
Jeremy Doyle

Writer
Jenny Holmes

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Email ali.oday@sourcewell-mn.gov

OUR MISSION:
To build valued relationships, deliver innovative solutions with integrity, and exceed the expectations of our members.



202 12th Street NE | P.O. Box 219
Staples, MN 56479
888-894-1930
www.sourcewell-mn.gov

Contents

Volume 9
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Cover story

04 Taking command

Innovation Funding

Morrison County command trailer provides safety asset for region.

EDUCATION

08 Planting SEEDs of change

Equity in education

Teacher applies training to make positive classroom change.

14 Embarking on an adventure

Young Authors Conference

Students participate in day-long writing conference.

18 Building for success

Cooperative Purchasing

District uses method to save time, money on school addition.

Features

CITIES & COUNTIES

12 Serving to protect

Small Project Partnerships

Funding allows purchase of vests for Crow Wing County agents.

22 Stepping up

Challenging childhood obesity

County determined to beat the odds, improve community health.

28 Getting 'RREAL'

Sparkling energy efficiency

Nonprofit changing the landscape with solar power.

Departments

32 Professional development

34 Sourcewell's conference schedule

COMMUNITY COMMAND

Taking

On a cold January morning, the outside temperature was nearly as bone chilling as the simulation playing out inside the Pierz Healy High School.

“The violent intruder training is a great example of how Region 5 emergency services can work collaboratively to develop unified command in the event of an emergency.”



Multiple agencies from Morrison County participated in a full-scale drill of a violent intruder scenario at Pierz Healy High School.



The command trailer provides an emergency communication center on wheels.

On a cold January morning, the outside temperature was nearly as bone chilling as the simulation playing out inside the Pierz Healy High School. Officials from multiple agencies in Morrison County, including the Pierz Police Department, the Morrison County Sheriff's Office, Pierz Fire Department, Pierz First Response, Gold Cross Ambulance, and Pierz Healy High School administration and staff conducted a full-scale drill of a violent intruder scenario at the school. A "lone shooter" entered the building that morning and began targeting students and staff, injuring several – some fatally. With the suspect still inside the building, law enforcement and first responders rushed to the school, and practiced working in collaboration to remove the threat. Parked out front of the school was the

front line for communication and keeping every participant informed: the Morrison County Sheriff's Office Mobile Command trailer. In the past, planning and logistics to address large-scale disasters or incidents were worked from a squad car. It was crowded and inconvenient, lacking helpful coordination tools like whiteboards and screens. It also left EMS exposed to weather elements. With the assistance of \$100,000 in Sourcewell Innovation Funding, the sheriff's department purchased the unit last year. The emergency and disaster communications center on wheels is a 34-foot, fifth-wheel trailer, featuring a 10-foot slide-out room with one side of the trailer dedicated as a communications center and the other as a command center. Technology fills the communications center portion of the trailer. A conference

table, white boards, and television monitors make up the command center side, allowing for multi-agency incident command. The monitors can connect to the school's camera system, as well as real-time drone footage from both inside and outside the building. The command center cost \$213,000, though Morrison County Sheriff Shawn Larsen said its value can't be measured. The new mobile unit provides a unified command post, allowing all participants to come to the table with resources right at their fingertips. While the trailer has yet to be called to an emergency, the sheriff's office has used it as a very visible approach to community outreach, including at the Morrison County Fair, National Night Out, parades, and other community events throughout the county. Additionally, the sheriff's office takes

full advantage of the trailer in providing training opportunities to other emergency agencies and schools. The active shooter scenario is the most recent example. "This trailer is an asset for our entire region and any other county that needs it," Larsen noted. In the case of the Pierz Healy High School training, Larsen says it's "outside the box" thinking and training that will best prepare responders for the what-ifs. "It's about establishing relationships before an incident takes place, and that's what we're doing," Larsen said. "Going to the schools, doing the pre-planning, working with the schools. Bringing in the right people in the planning process." Larsen said the goal of the Pierz school drill was to make the scenario as realistic as possible to fully prepare and train all partners. The event included a mock press conference, providing a

layer of reality for spokespeople in each jurisdiction. A chaplain met with role players and first responders during a post-event debriefing. "It was truly about the collaboration," Larsen said. "We need to deliver a message, but we must also be on the same page – not only with law enforcement, but also EMS providers, students, staff, parents, and school administration." Scott Saehr responded that day as a volunteer firefighter with the Pierz Fire Department; however, Saehr wore multiple hats, also serving as a representative of Sourcewell. "The violent intruder training is a great example of how Region 5 emergency services can work collaboratively to develop unified command in the event of an emergency," explained Saehr, a regional solutions specialist at

Sourcewell. "A vision we have is to offer this type of training to our members, giving them the opportunity to receive hands-on experience working side by side with multiple entities." Saehr said the experience exemplified the importance of having mobile units respond to large-scale emergency situations and provide one central location for direction. "Having access to the mobile command trailer gives our emergency leaders the ability to work efficiently and effectively in all types of events," Saehr said. "As a responder, it gives me confidence knowing that leaders are putting me in the best possible position at any given time when receiving one of their commands."



Planting SEEDs of change

You could say Sara Lenz has a green thumb. Sensitive to the diverse and growing needs of her students, as well as the backgrounds from which they each come, Lenz has begun to plant SEEDs of change in her classroom and school district.

SEED, or Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity, is a peer-led professional development program offered through Sourcewell to regional educators that promotes change through self-reflection and interpersonal dialogue. Participants challenge their own personal beliefs and practices, while connecting with other educators.

Topics explored in SEED sessions include poverty, gender, race, religion, language, immigration, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Lenz, a kindergarten and first grade special education teacher in the Wadena-Deer Creek School District, signed up to attend the SEED seminar last year.

"I was interested in them because I have always had a passion to be an advocate and stand up for

those who need a little extra help," she said. "I felt that these classes would give me the chance to open my mind, have courage, and the knowledge to fight, speak, and advocate for students and their families."

Lenz participated in all three SEED seminars and joined an Equity Leadership Advocacy group offered at Sourcewell to continue learning, growing, and sharing. The Equity Advocates group meets four full days each year, is facilitated by consultants from the Equity Literacy Institute, and leads educators who want to be an intentional voice advocating for systems change. While prior SEED experience is helpful, it's not required.

"Out of all the trainings and education that I've experienced in the last 12 years, SEED by far has been the most influential in how I teach, interact, and respond to those around me," Lenz said "My vision is to spread the knowledge I have gained to my co-workers and others that surround me so they, too, can change lives in a way that all students and families feel wanted, accepted, supported, and loved in our schools."



▲ Wadena-Deer Creek teacher Sara Lenz is implementing much of what she has learned in the SEED, or Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity, program to make students feel more welcomed and accepted.



▲ Supporting students on an emotional level was a critical takeaway from Lenz's SEED experience.

Food for Thought

An area where SEED has changed the status quo and made a positive impact came by way of simply changing the way Lenz words and promotes family events for her class, including the Muffins for Moms and Donuts for Dads events each spring.

"Learning what I did in SEED, I knew I needed to make the change for those students who may not have a mom or a dad that could make it for whatever reason, being death, divorce, work, transportation, or whatever it may be."

Lenz changed the name of the special events to 'Morning Muffins' and 'Donut Day.'

"I made sure that all children had the opportunity to invite whoever they wanted that loved them and wanted to be there for them," Lenz said. "I felt by offering this event that way it made the activity equitable for all students to obtain the same love and attention the activities were intended for without excluding anyone."

Sourcewell's equity vision:

"By honoring the unique gifts and opportunities each child and adult brings, our schools are learning communities where all individuals thrive intellectually, socially, and emotionally and are empowered to liberate themselves and others through connecting with and contributing to the world."

Creating Safe Spaces

Also stemming from information shared at SEED and equity training, Lenz has taken a closer look at ensuring all students are emotionally supported in the classroom.

Lenz created a special space in her classroom for Tristan, a student with special emotional needs. This space allows Tristan to remain in the classroom with his peers and absorb the experiences and information he would miss if he had to leave the room to regain control over his emotions.

"I truly feel that all kids deserve the opportunity to experience what their peers do," Lenz said. "And if that means creating a space for them that allows them to be able to self-regulate and feel safe, then I am all for it."

This space also helps other students and peers understand Tristan is wanting to participate; however, his emotions or out-of-control feelings require he take a few minutes to process what is going on in his environment and a chance to take a mental time out.

Growing SEED

Rachel Logan is an education consultant at Sourcewell and champion of the SEED program, among others.

"Sourcewell's work toward intentional equity work and training is absolutely gaining momentum in the region thanks to educators like Sara," Logan said. "Sara Lenz is influencing and empowering her students and colleagues to take a hard look at our schooling systems."

"What current practices close a door to some, what practices exclude or silence some students and families... While some practices may need to stop all together, some just need to be redressed, much like the 'morning muffins' and 'donut day' example. Sara didn't take that opportunity away from anyone; she just opened it up to include all of her students, no matter how they show up to school."

To learn more about education equity opportunities, visit sourcewell-mn.gov/education.



▲ Sourcewell offers SEED training to Region 5 educators on a semester basis.

During the 2016-17 school year,

five school leaders in Region 5 approached Sourcewell and asked: how can Sourcewell support schools in achieving educational equity?

This grassroots approach is the guiding thread throughout Sourcewell's intentional equity planning and work. Today, Sourcewell Education Consultant Rachel Logan and three teachers from Pequot Lakes are trained as SEED facilitators and offer regular trainings and education opportunities

In collaboration with regional schools, Sourcewell:



Partners with the Equity Literacy Institute working with Paul Gorski and Marceline Dubose to bring equity training to both regional educators and its Education Solutions team.



Facilitates an Equity Advocates Leadership team that meets quarterly to receive training and resources to advocate for equitable environments in their respective schools.



Supports a regional Equity Advisory Board comprised of volunteer partners to encourage this important work throughout the region.



Serving to protect, protecting to serve

In 2018, Crow Wing County Community Corrections agents had a cumulative caseload that equaled well over 2,000 contacts. Oftentimes, cases necessitate residential visits, leaving probation agents vulnerable as they approach unknown situations with questionable outcomes.

“Probation agents have many different roles when working with clients who have been placed on probation by the courts,” said Crow Wing County Community Corrections Manager Krista Jones. “Assessing risk to the community and identifying needs of clients is essential in order to accomplish our goal to promote positive change in clients and enhance public safety.”

While in the line of protecting others, Community Services officials knew it was also critical to protect their own. Kara Terry, director of Crow Wing County Community Services, said her team had explored ideas and options to increase safety measures and ultimately arrived at purchasing bullet-resistant vests for each agent to wear while out in the field.

In 2018, Community Services was awarded \$2,500 in Small Project Partnership funding through Sourcewell. With additional dollars contributed through the county, 11 vests were purchased.

“This had been an ongoing discussion for a while,” Terry noted. “We train on verbal de-escalation and other tactics; however, there may be times when this isn’t enough. We wanted to make sure the agents had additional tools to help with their safety in the field.”

Jones says the vests provide peace of mind.

“Having the necessary equipment in our roles is so important,” Jones added. “Agents need to feel safe, and these vests absolutely help our agents feel less vulnerable walking into a situation that might be dangerous. And by feeling safer, it often makes them more effective in their jobs.”

Both Jones and Terry said the agents appreciate the vests and the additional tools to help keep them safe on the job. And while they know the vests are not the be-all and end-all, they are certainly another tool in being effective out in the field.

“Our agency takes the safety of our agents very seriously and we are very grateful to be able to provide this to our staff with the help of the funds we received from Sourcewell,” Jones said. “Our agents have also commented that they feel fortunate to work for an agency that takes this seriously and has taken steps to help enhance their safety.”

► CWC Community Corrections agents including Eric Frey, Ashley Abear (inset, top), and Bobby Tautges (inset, bottom) feel safer in the field with the addition of bullet-resistant vests. These vests were purchased with the help of Small Project Partnership funds through Sourcewell.





Students have the ‘write’ stuff

Rounding the corner in concluding her elementary school experience, Sylvie Hochhalter is embarking on a new adventure: becoming a writer.

A fourth grader at Riverside Elementary School in Brainerd, this bright-eyed student was one of 180 children from the region who attended Sourcewell’s 2018 Young Authors Conference – Nov. 13, 2018 at the Central Lakes College campus in Staples. The day-long event provided an opportunity for young, aspiring writers to learn from experienced and esteemed writers, actors, illustrators, and others in a one-day, hands-on workshop.

Hochhalter said she enjoyed the conference so much that, in the weeks and months since, she has been inspired to write a short novel about presidents.

“They taught us there’s different ways and forms to write and you can write in your style and it won’t be wrong,” she said.

Hochhalter was one of 10 Riverside Elementary students participating in the conference accompanied by three of the building’s educators. Social Emotional Learning teacher Sue Carlson said you could tell how special each young writer felt from the minute the students stepped foot into the conference.

“They were treated like adults attending a conference,” Carlson said. “Like little professional writers. They signed in and got a name badge, a packet, their own notebooks and pencils. I think they just felt so confident. And based on the feedback, they all loved it. We could tell from the whole experience, they were amazed at what they saw, what we were doing, and how they were being treated.”

In his session, What Do You See, artist Wing Young Huie discussed the process of photographing thousands of strangers and showed students a sampling of his photos. He then asked participants to write and share their interpretation of what they saw in each photo, proving that through differing life experiences, people read photos differently.

“He demonstrated that what you see isn’t always the true story and the importance of not judging someone or something based on what you see,” Carlson said. “It was just so powerful. We loved it so much.”

The Riverside educators loved it so much, in fact, they collectively solidified a grant to bring both Huie and Minnesota author John Coy back to Brainerd for a two-day event in March for second-through fourth-grade students.

◀ 180 students from Region 5 participated in the 2018 Young Author’s Conference in Staples.

“His session completely crushed our assumptions,” Carlson said of Huie. “I was so excited to have him come in to work not only with our students, but also with the adults – and he didn’t disappoint. This whole conference really gave kids the permission and ideas to be creative, make characters, make it bigger, and keep going with it.”

Riverside Elementary Reading Interventionist Tyanne Rezac said when the Young Authors Conference broke for lunch, several students wanted to stay back and continue to write because they had so many ideas.

“They were really into it,” she said, adding praise to Sourcewell for providing the unique experience for Region 5. “It’s just so important to get out of your buildings, aside from regular classroom instruction, and utilize these experiences. Students had an opportunity to meet real writers and break down the process. We wanted them to learn, firsthand, about not getting caught up in conventions like spelling. Just get your ideas down on paper. Don’t stop. Keep writing.”

Katie Embree, student academics coordinator at Sourcewell, said

excitement is already building for the 2019 Young Authors Conference, to take place in the fall, and promises it will be even bigger.

“The overwhelming response from this year’s conference has allowed us to expand to a multiple-day offering for 2019,” she said. “It’s incredibly rewarding to hear such great feedback from an event like this. We’re honored to be in a position where we can provide top-notch workshops for all ages and to encourage tomorrow’s authors and artists.”

“They taught us there’s different ways and forms to write, and you can write in your style and it won’t be wrong.”

- Sylvie Hochhalter, Fourth Grader, Riverside Elementary School



▲ Minneapolis author John Coy enlightened and encouraged young writers at the conference.

▼ The day-long conference provided an opportunity for young, aspiring writers to learn from experienced writers, actors, illustrators, and others.





Crunching the numbers

Ada-Borup had a mere nine months to plan for the influx of 125 students, with only the summer months to complete a majority of the construction needed to add space to accommodate everyone.



▲ The Ada-Borup School District had a mere nine months to prepare for an influx of 125 students.

Ada-Borup High School Facility Manager Doug Slininger said using the eZIQ method got the project done “plain and simple.” ▲



9 MONTHS



125 STUDENTS



5,200 SQ. FT.



1 CONSTRUCTION SOLUTION

Norman County West High School called Halstad, Minn., home for 36 years. But, like other rural schools across the state, the school experienced a significant decline in enrollment in recent years.

After months of research and planning, on a chilly evening in January 2018, the Norman County West School Board reached an agreement with Ada-Borup School District to send their sixth- through 12th-grade students there beginning in the fall of the 2018-19 school year.

Ada-Borup had a mere nine months to plan for the influx of 125 students, with only the summer months to complete most of the construction needed to add space to accommodate everyone.

The district’s board and administration weighed their options, including whether to build a permanent addition to the school or erect temporary classrooms. Ultimately, they decided to build an addition using Gordian’s eZIQ® project delivery

method and construction services through Sourcewell.

According to Sourcewell Contract Administrator Zach Heidmann, eZIQ



For Ada-Borup schools, it came down to time and money.

establishes local, competitively solicited prices for repairs, renovations, upgrades, and new construction projects. Prices are upfront and eliminate the need to bid each

project separately, allowing schools and government entities to begin construction almost immediately because the required bid process has already been satisfied.

Between January 2015 and December 2018, 22 Minnesota school districts took advantage of the eZIQ solution, including four Region 5 districts: Brainerd, Crosby-Ironton, Pine River-Backus, and Upsala.

“Schools like the eZIQ solution because it provides construction contractors the ability to come in during summer or winter breaks and complete projects before school resumes,” Heidmann said.

For Ada-Borup schools, it came down to time and money.

“We reached out to another firm to obtain a cost estimate using the conventional route when we were first considering the building addition,” Ada-Borup High School Facility Manager Doug Slininger said. “It was nearly double the cost and came with a four-month extended construction time.

We like the ease of using a construction contract to streamline the process. Going with eZIQ got this project done, plain and simple.”

Ada-Borup administrators recognized Nor-Son Construction as an eZIQ option and chose them as the contractor in part because the company had previously worked with the school district on a bathroom renovation.

According to Gordian, the scope of work for the project was extensive, including installation of footings and foundation, below-ground plumbing and sprinkler installation, demolition of interior doors, and infill of windows in existing classrooms.

And that’s just what was to be finished by Aug. 1. After that, exterior concrete was poured for walkways and roofing, and more windows were installed.

To add pressure to an already tight timeline, after work began, Nor-Son discovered underground geothermal lines were not where the blueprints indicated and had to find a sub-contractor to relocate them before work could continue.

According to Gordian, if Ada-Borup had used traditional procurement, work would have stopped until a change order could be negotiated, potentially adding weeks to the timeline and thousands of dollars to the budget. With eZIQ, this large change was no trouble at all.

“Nor-Son never lost a beat in finishing the project on time,” Slininger said.

By fall break in October 2018, Ada-Borup High School students were in the new classrooms.

Using eZIQ instead of traditional construction procurement saved the school four months of work and cut costs almost in half. The newly arriving students integrated seamlessly and comfortably into their new school.



Exercising a commitment to a healthier community

Dissatisfied with its health and wellness scores, Morrison County developed strategies and enlisted community partners to make their county a healthier place to live, work, and play.

It was time to step up.

Sarah Pratt and Carmen Genske know the staggering statistics all too well. Morrison County continues to score poorly compared to the state averages of adult obesity, physical inactivity, and access to exercise opportunities.

Thirty-five percent of adults are obese in Morrison County compared to the state average of 27 percent. In relation to physical inactivity, 24 percent of the county's adult residents do not get the recommended level of regular physical activity compared to the state average of 20 percent. The statistics are not surprising, when access to exercise opportunities also scores low at 50 percent compared to 88 percent at the state level.

▲ Increasing fifth-graders' physical activity outside the school day by 30 minutes was one of three goals established by a Morrison County community health initiative.

However, with the help of community feedback, the Morrison County Public Health and Human Services supervisor and Community Health educator have developed strategies and goals to make their county a healthier place to live, work, and play. And just last year, the women proposed their project to Sourcewell by way of a Small Projects Partnership application, receiving \$2,000 to help put the plan in motion.

Every five years, public health departments throughout the country are required to conduct a community health needs assessment to identify and describe factors that affect the health of a population and determine the availability of resources to adequately address health concerns.

“The community health needs assessment assures that local resources are directed toward activities and interventions that address critical and timely public health needs,” explains Morrison County Public Health and Human Services Supervisor Sarah Pratt.

Morrison County’s community health assessment spanning from 2016 through December 2018 set an objective to develop help residents develop habits that are proven to reduce obesity rates.

Three goals emerged:

- 1 to increase fifth-graders’ physical activity outside of the school day by 30 minutes each week
- 2 to increase plant-based foods by one serving per week for those same fifth-grade students
- 3 to help those students consume one fewer sugary beverage per day



50%

Access to exercise opportunities scores low in Morrison County at 50 percent compared to 88 percent at the state level.

Genske explained fifth grade students were chosen as the target population for this project based on the fact they take a Minnesota State Student Survey every three years. Goals set as part of this project will match the subsequent questions on the survey to help determine the project’s effectiveness and impact.

“We wanted to look at physical activity as a whole in our community.”

With a deadline of December 2018 to meet or beat these goals, Morrison County Public Health sought out a variety of community partners for financial support and collaboration.

Getting Physical

“We wanted to look at physical activity as a whole in our community,” said Genske, community health educator. “When it came to access to exercise opportunities, we were lower than the state average. So, we asked ourselves, ‘what can we do to increase that?’”

Through a collaboration of several community partners, the idea of an exercise trail was identified and ultimately boiled down to a Fit Trail system.

The Fit Trail system consists of 10 exercise stations and is designed to encourage and motivate individuals of all ages to reach their fitness goals in a fun way. Participants move from one exercise station to the next and perform the exercise as illustrated at each stop.

The trail system, purchased and slated to be installed in spring 2019, will be located in Little Falls’ Pine Grove Park, nestled in a residential area, close to the city’s schools and adjacent to a local zoo with access to picnic tables and a playground.

“What we’re most excited about is the fact that this trail system is accessible and conducive to all ages, abilities, and fitness



35%

Adult obesity in Morrison County scores at 35 percent with a state average of 27.

levels,” Pratt says, adding the county eventually would like to explore the incorporation of sidewalks to help encourage walking and safe biking.

In February, the Pierz School District challenged its fourth- and fifth-grade students to engage in 30 minutes of physical activity outside of the school day. Little Falls schools will begin a similar challenge this spring.

“Kids always enjoy a little friendly competition,” Pratt said.

Encouraged by their teachers and physical education staff, students are charged with tracking their activity outside of the school day. Pratt said sports practice and games do not count; however, shoveling snow, cleaning the yard, following a workout video, and other activities do.

Students with the highest time tracked will win bragging rights and a fruit-infuser water bottle at the conclusion of the challenge.



▲ Snow shoveling proved to be an easily accessible way to get exercise for students participating in a wellness challenge this winter.



◀ Fruit-infused water jugs encourage students to drink more water and less sugary beverages.

▼ Students in the Swanville School District drink in the benefits of adding more water to their diets each day.



Healthy Habits at Home

As the county’s community health educator in Morrison County, Genske embraced the opportunity to educate students and adults in the importance of integrating more plant-based foods into their regular diet. In cooperation with the University of Minnesota Extension Office, cooking classes were offered to families. With a focus on fruits and vegetables, six families were given meal ideas and recipes to take the guesswork out of healthier eating, including a tour through the produce section of a local grocery store. Children from each family had an opportunity to come up with their own healthy recipe they could help make at home. And each family that participated in all six weeks of the program received a grocery store gift card.

tracking water consumption. Little Falls school district students were given the opportunity to try fruit-infused water during lunch, which included melons grown in their own school garden.

“We continue to receive really good feedback from both students and staff,” Genske said.

students and their families will begin a vegetable garden at home to promote both healthy eating and physical activity.

Both Pratt and Genske said they’ve been motivated by the success and excitement surrounding each of the community assessment-borne initiatives. In fact, county offices and St Gabriel’s

Hospital in Little Falls have started providing and promoting water consumption through fruit-infuser water bottles. And other regional communities have shared interest in installing Fit Trail systems in their cities.

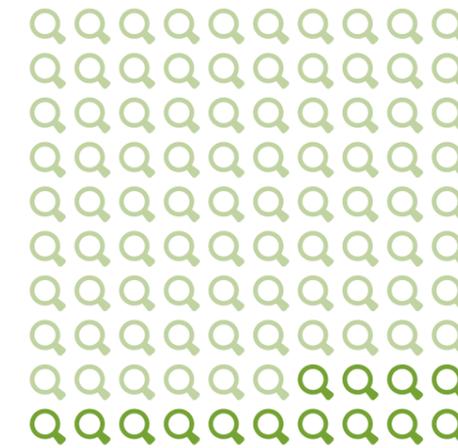
“We’re excited about it.

And now as the community is becoming more aware of it, we’re finding new and exciting ways to get more people engaged,” Pratt said, also acknowledging the efforts and involvement of school superintendents throughout Morrison County, Little Falls Mayor Greg Zylka, City Engineer Greg Kimman, and Morrison County commissioners.

“I think it is important to highlight our community partners around the table,” she says.

“The community health needs assessment is a requirement for public health agencies and hospitals, but it really is a community collaboration. Our project around obesity involved

many community partners. Morrison County as a community comes together to increase the health and livelihood of their neighbors. It’s fun to see that what started as a county project is now coming together as a community project.”



24%

In relation to physical activity, Morrison County comes in at 24 percent compared to the state average of 20 percent.

Sugar Shortage

During Summer 2018, three-gallon fruit-infuser water jugs were purchased and utilized by three Morrison County summer youth programs to introduce students to infused water as an alternative to sugary beverages. One jug was placed at the Boys and Girls Club, and the other two were at summer programs at Little Falls Kids Hideout and the Swanville Bulldog Club.

Soon, the initiative caught on throughout the county. Swanville Public Schools district was given an infuser jug through Public Health, then received a grant to purchase fruit. The Pierz and Little Falls districts began a friendly competition

Spurred from the momentum of the water initiative, Morrison County is now participating in the University of Minnesota Extension Office’s One Vegetable, One Community project. Packs of vegetable seeds are distributed to students throughout the county in hopes

Local nonprofit sparks energy efficiency

Twenty years ago, Jason Edens was struggling to make ends meet.

In the process of getting his master's degree, finances were tight, and, as colder temperatures encroached, he found himself and his family at a crossroads.

Heat or eat.

Having grown up in a low-income family, he knew all too well about the Energy Assistance Program offered at the state and national levels. And, while Edens knew this was an opportunity to provide necessary services for his family, he had an alternative idea.

With an interest in, and experience with, solar energy, Edens made a unique request to the powers-that-be behind the Energy Assistance Program: Would they help financially support a no- or low-interest loan to allow Edens to install a solar energy system at his home?

"They said 'no,'" Edens recalled, "and I said, 'oh!'"

The lack of interest in helping support a sustainable source of energy left Edens feeling down yet determined.

Shortly after, a family friend called. Knowing Edens' interest in solar power, the friend shared that his house had recently sold but the buyers wanted nothing to do with the solar panel system previously installed on the property, so it

was being thrown away.

"So, I drove down there and literally pulled it out of the dumpster," he said.

In doing so, he saved his family enough money in power bills that financial assistance was no longer needed.

"That's when I had an aha moment," he said. "If this technology could prevent a relatively low-income family from needing energy assistance, this could be a model we should consider more broadly for energy assistance across the country."

In the confines of a small garage in Backus, a nonprofit, the Rural Renewable Energy Alliance (RREAL), was born.

It wasn't long until this aha moment project outgrew Edens' garage space and moved to the Hunt Utilities campus in Pine River. In 2014, RREAL purchased property in Backus.

For nearly two decades, Edens and RREAL have dedicated time, talent, and treasure to making solar energy accessible to communities of all income levels through the Solar Assistance program, which provides solar energy systems to low-income families and communities as a sustainable solution to energy poverty.

While government-operated energy assistance programs provide much-needed help to those struggling with energy

poverty, Edens believes it is an expensive Band-Aid.

"It doesn't help lift people out of energy poverty, and it costs taxpayers a substantial amount of money," he said.

According to Edens, the state of Minnesota spends \$120 million a year to provide energy assistance for approximately 26 percent of residents. Nationally, the bill is closer to \$3.5 billion.

Edens believes through the implementation and integration of solar power, we have access to a sustainable and fiscally conservative option in sourcing energy.

"When we began here in the booming metropolis of Backus, we were the only organization in the country providing solar energy to low-income families," Edens noted. "Today, it's part of a national conversation."

Since 2000, RREAL has provided nearly 500 solar energy systems to low-income households at no cost to the homeowner, as well as provided design-build services on projects throughout 11 states. In 2014, RREAL began working with Sourcewell and the Region 5 Development Commission (R5DC) to bring the benefits of solar power to Region 5 school districts.

Sourcewell Government Relations Associate Dan Listug, serving as legal counsel to R5DC, first became involved with the Solar for Schools project in December 2015.

R5DC had been awarded a Renewable Development Fund Grant from Xcel Energy to develop 1.4 megawatts of solar power on education facilities in the region. Listug's role was to advise R5DC on the grant compliance and project development, and execute the necessary legal documents among Xcel, the schools, finance partner New Energy Equity, and eventually the contractor for the project.

"Sourcewell's involvement in the project was unique in that we were able to leverage my law license to support regional partners to complete a one-of-a-kind, multi-site, complex project to provide a direct benefit to the schools involved," Listug explained.

In February, RREAL completed an 808-kW solar array at the Pine River-Backus School District. The largest school solar project of its kind, the system is anticipated to produce roughly 1.14 million kWh annually, or 80 percent of the district's electricity load.

As a former high school teacher, Edens could attest – first hand – to the budgetary restrictions faced by schools.

"If you're a superintendent or a financial officer for a district, do you want to spend an already-limited budget on your electric bill or a better facility? An electric bill or better programming? An electric bill or more teachers?"

Building large solar assets for Region 5 school districts has created substantial savings in energy expenses, helping reduce overall operating costs.

By May 2019, RREAL hopes to have completed a 354-kW solar roof mount at Pequot Lakes High

School and a 333kW system at Central Lakes College's Brainerd and Staples campuses.

In addition to designing and building solar energy systems for and with regional schools, RREAL is also working with each district and school to help develop a Solar for Schools curriculum, bringing age-appropriate STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) opportunities to all grade levels.

"Today's youth are making tomorrow's energy choices," Edens said. "It's critical we educate them in the importance of harnessing solar energy and to demonstrate the possibilities that exist within the technology."

Edens and his board of directors at RREAL have become involved with the recently created nonprofit support arm of Sourcewell. Participating in succession-planning courses offered at Sourcewell, as well as tapping into funding and internship opportunities, Edens said he truly appreciates the fact that nonprofits are being acknowledged, valued, and supported.

"I'm excited about the fact that Sourcewell is filling the voids that have existed in nonprofit support systems," Edens said. "There

seems to be this perception that nonprofits aren't part of the economic development of our region. And I take issue with that. Nonprofits come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and functions. Some are very small with a specific footprint, and some have a municipal-based mission. But there are also nonprofits doing millions and millions of dollars' worth of business – hiring people, creating career opportunities in rural communities.

"By embracing nonprofits in its suite of services, Sourcewell is recognizing nonprofits as an essential part of the fabric of our community. And for that, I am grateful."

"When we began here in the booming metropolis of Backus, we were the only organization in the country providing solar energy to low-income families. Today, it's part of a national conversation."



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Professional development

For cities & counties

To learn more and to register, go to sourcewell-mn.gov

June 26, Oct. 30, 2019
Economic Development Series

Aug. 8, 2019
DHS/FEMA: Senior Officials Workshop

Aug. 20, 2019
Knowing the Nature of your Collaboration

Oct. 23, 2019
R5 Summit

For educators

To learn more and to register, go to sourcewell-mn.gov

June 5–6, 2019
Leading a High Reliability School – Two-day workshop

June 10, Aug. 20, 2019
Literacy Leaders Academy: COHORT II – Year 2, Session 1&2

June 11, Aug. 21, 2019
Literacy Leaders Academy: COHORT I – Year 3, Session 1&2

June 11, 2019
Code.org training

June 13, 2019
Trauma Informed School

June 14, 2019
World's Best Workforce (WBWF) Support Day

June 20, 2019
Small Group Reading Instruction

June 24–26, 2019
Leadership Retreat

July 24, 2019
Assessment to Support Teaching and Learning

Aug. 5, 2019
ENVoY I

Aug. 5, 2019
ENVoY Early Childhood - Part I

Aug. 5, 2019
ENVoY Environment

Aug. 5–6, 2019
ENVoY Small Group

Aug. 5 and 6, 2019 and Aug. 7 or Aug. 8, 2019
Carnegie Math Academy, Cohort 3

Aug. 5 and 19, 2019
Metier Wayfinders

Aug. 6, 2019
ENVoY II: Review, Refine, Refresh

Aug. 6, 2019
PRESS-Quality Core Instruction (1/2 day)

Aug. 6, 2019
PRESS: Classwide Interventions (1/2 day)

Aug. 7, 2019
Carnegie Math Academy, Proportional Reasoning

Aug. 7–9, 2019
Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)/
Response to Intervention (RTI)

Aug. 7 and 20, 2019
Metier Flowblazers

Aug. 8, 2019
Carnegie Math Academy, CRA Framework

Aug. 13-14, 2019
Minnesota Summit for Learning and Leading

Aug. 15, 2019
Acting and Leading for Equity... and Convincing Your
Colleagues to Join You

Aug 15, 2019
ENVoY Early Childhood - Part II

Aug. 15–16, 2019
ENVoY Cat in the Doghouse

Aug. 19, 2019
ENVoY Early Childhood - Part III

Aug. 19–20, 2019
Strategies for Cafeteria & Recess Success

Aug. 21, 2019
AVID Train the Trainer

Aug. 22, 2019
Unit Planning/Proficiency Scales Workday

Aug. 22, 2019
New Teachers Academy

Oct. 2019 – May 2020 (Pillager)
Oct. 2019 – May 2020 (Wadena)
ENVoY Live

Sourcewell conference schedule

Stop by our booth at these 2019 events

Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Sheriffs' Summer Conference
June 9-11, 2019 • Brainerd

Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Chief Deputy/Supervisor Conference
June 12-14, 2019 • Brainerd

League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) Annual Conference
June 26-28, 2019 • Duluth

Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities/Greater Minnesota Partnership (CGMC/GMNP) Summer Conference
July 24-26, 2019 • Bemidji

Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA) Fall Conference
October 7-8, 2019 • Duluth

Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA) Annual Conference
November 5-8, 2019

Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA) Annual Conference
November 17-19, 2019

Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Sheriffs' Winter Conference
December 8-10, 2019 • Alexandria

Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) Annual Conference
December 9-11, 2019

Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Chief Deputy/Supervisor Conference
December 11-12, 2019 • Alexandria

Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT) Annual Conference
Winter 2019



Sourcewell: we are driven to serve

Who is Sourcewell?

Formerly National Joint Powers Alliance (NJPA), Sourcewell is a self-supporting government organization, partnering with education, government, and nonprofits to boost student and community success. As one of Minnesota's nine service cooperatives, we offer training and shared services to our central Minnesota members. Throughout North America, we offer a cooperative purchasing program with over 325 awarded vendors on contract. We are driven by service and the ability to strategically reinvest in member communities.

Our core services

- Cooperative Purchasing
- City, County, Nonprofits, and other Government Associations
- Education
- Regional Low Incidence Project and Collaborative Service Workers
- Insurance and Employee Benefits
- Technology