

well connected

AREA SCHOOLS | LOCAL GOVERNMENTS | NONPROFITS



One step
forward to
autonomy.

MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS ACADEMY

Providing a source of support to principals

RIVERFRONT RENEWAL

Maximizing the mighty Mississippi

VIRTUWELL

Taking the 'EW' out of the flu

wellconnected

Magazine

VOLUME 8 FALL | WINTER 2018

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
Kip Hines

Graphic Designer
Jill Kinsley

Photographers
Mitchell McCallson
Jeremy Doyle

Writers
Jenny Holmes
Chelsea Ornelas

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



Winter has certainly taken hold here in our beautiful area we call home. As we transition to a new season, it seems a good time to reflect on some of the wonderful things Sourcewell and its members are accomplishing right here in Region 5.

We are five months into the transition to our new name and brand, Sourcewell. As I've talked to people around the region, I am encouraged and excited about the feedback I've received about our new brand. We hope that when you think of us and the name Sourcewell, you have a sense of collaboration, rigor, and attentiveness.

Within the pages of this issue of Well Connected, you will find a variety of stories highlighting the services, programming, and people that make this such a wonderful place to live, work, and thrive.

Thirty-four principals from Region 5 are currently participating in the Minnesota Principal's Academy. This program, created in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association, the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, and the University of Minnesota, provides a professional development opportunity principals are not often afforded. On page 14, Brainerd Public Schools elementary principal Cathy Nault shares from her experience with the Academy and the impact it has had on not only her, but on her students and staff.

The city of Brainerd and a committee of community supporters are working to revitalize the Mississippi riverfront and bring economic growth and enhanced recreational opportunities to the area. Partnering with Sourcewell, the city has retained a part-time riverfront coordinator, as well as developed a comprehensive plan leading them confidently into the future. Read more about the Mississippi River Partnership Plan on page 8.

With flu season in full swing, families are often faced with long waits and crowded waiting rooms at local clinics. But with the help of telemedicine, an innovative online program makes wellness just a click away. VirtuWell offers a quick, convenient, and affordable health care option to anyone and everyone – with health insurance or without. On page 26, Sourcewell Insurance & Employee Benefits Manager Ryan Donovan explains how this program, and others like it, are positioned to reduce not only the anxiety that often accompanies seeking medical care, but also driving down health care costs nationwide.

There certainly isn't a shortage of good news in Region 5. This is just a sampling of what you'll find within the next pages of Well Connected. We are proud to provide this publication as a means of sharing the successes of our region and celebrating the hard work and efforts of the people who call this area home.

Thank you for your continued support. Alone, we can succeed, but together, we are empowered to lead our communities to a bright and successful future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Drange".

Paul Drange
Sourcewell Director of Regional Programs

Contents

Volume 8
FALL | WINTER 2018



04



08



14

Cover story

04 Finding their way

Regional Low Incidence

Teacher provides much more than instruction for visually impaired students.

Features

CITIES & COUNTIES

08 Riverfront renewal

City of Brainerd

Group works to revitalize the Mighty Mississippi near Brainerd.

18 Decriminalizing mental health

Pilot program

Keeping those with mental health issues out of jail and connected to resources.

22 Toward Zero Deaths

Innovation Funding

Raising the bar for safety education in the state of Minnesota.

EDUCATION

14 Leaders empowering leaders

Minnesota Principals Academy

A ripple effect felt after principals attend Academy.

30 A groundbreaking collaboration

Special education facilities

Two schools break ground for new facilities to serve Setting IV population.

INSURANCE & EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

26 Staying healthy without stepping into a doctor's office

Insurance & Employee Benefits

Skip the clinic this flu season with easy, online app.

LEGAL

36 A voice to be heard

Government Relations

Region 5 superintendents ensure schools are front and center at the Capitol.

Departments

40 Professional development

42 Sourcewell's trade show schedule



Five-year-old Kaylee Stewart was born with optic nerve hypoplasia, leaving her legally blind. Kevin Lund, certified orientation and mobility specialist, meets with the kindergartner twice a month—both at her home, as well as her school—to help her independently navigate her surroundings.



Finding their way

Helping visually impaired students
gain more than direction

Kaylee Stewart was born legally blind.

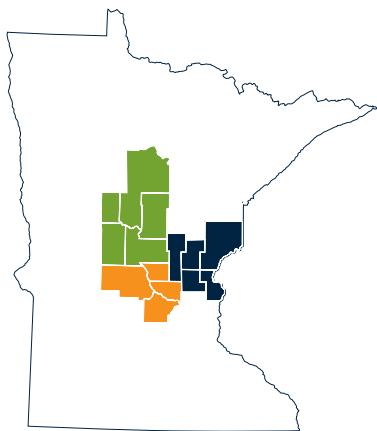
Diagnosed with optic nerve hypoplasia, Kaylee's vision – or lack thereof – leaves her in a world of shadows and tunnel vision.

At age 18 months, Kaylee was put into respite care by her biological family. Sue Stewart says her family immediately knew the challenges this little girl would face but embraced the opportunity to care for her and, eventually, adopt her less than a year later.

Now a thriving and energetic kindergartner at Riverside Elementary School in Brainerd, Kaylee relies on a cane to help navigate through her environment. And while this spunky little girl has no difficulty finding her way around her home, new environments can be tricky. And that's where Kevin Lund enters the picture.

What is the Regional Low Incidence Project?

Sourcewell sponsors Minnesota's Regional Low Incidence Project for the Economic Development Regions 5 and 7, which includes 14 counties: Benton, Cass, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pine, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright.



Regional Low Incidence Project provides free services to those with low incidence disabilities, such as:

- physically impairment
- deafness/hard of hearing
- blind/visually impairment
- autism
- deafness/blindness
- traumatic brain injury
- developmental cognitive disabilities
- other health disabilities

"We have seven adopted children," Sue Stewart noted, "but we had never dealt with blindness. And as a parent, you feel so responsible. But Kevin has so much patience, and he encourages us to allow time for processing. He has worked at our home and with our family to provide the resources to better help her."

Kevin [Lund] has become so much more than a coach and teacher. And, as Kaylee grows, so will her environment and need for exploration.

For over 20 years, Lund has worked as an orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist for visually impaired individuals from birth through 21 years. Last year, Lund joined Sourcewell and serves Region 5 and Region 7 schools (see 'What is the Regional Low Incidence Project?' to the left), helping provide students with the skills and confidence to safely navigate their surroundings and unfamiliar environments, including city streets, restaurants, and grocery stores.

A typical day for Lund isn't very typical.

"For a regular ed teacher," he says, "most of their students are fairly similar. Mine are all different."

Some students use canes, while others rely on a wheelchair. Some are completely blind, while others may have some vision but limited enough to be considered visually impaired. However, all benefit from having someone come alongside of them to find their way – both literally and figuratively.

In Kaylee's situation, Lund says he typically meets with her two times a month. Over the last year, they've worked together in her home environment, helping her distinguish boundaries around the yard and even maneuvering to and on the trampoline. At school, Lund helps Kaylee learn exact routes to certain areas and classrooms.

"I've been kind of amazed by her," Lund said. "Mobility wise, she has progressed quickly. She has a really good mental mapping system and has come a long way over the past year."

Facilitated through the Low Incidence program at Sourcewell, students are referred to Lund through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) created by special education staff, administration, and parents.

"There's no standard way since every student is different," Lund explained. "After initially qualifying for services through an assessment, we'll determine what we need to work on. For a student using a cane, we work on using it correctly and using it within their home, school, or community environment."

Lund said he enjoys working closely with families to get their input and integrate their wishes into the long-term goal.

"I don't feel it's appropriate for me to tell them, 'This is textbook and this is what you need to be doing.' Parents need to have a lot of input on where they want their child to go."

While working toward their IEP goal, Lund also works on the everyday life skills others take for granted.

"It can be as simple as going shopping at a store together. We lead up by determining how you get there – walking, public transportation. It's all based on individual students' needs. If we're fortunate enough that the school is close to town and we can walk, we plan a route and learn how to use the street address system to navigate and locate buildings."

Advances in technology are also an asset for those visually impaired. Lund said GPS tools on smart phones can greatly help an individual get from Point A to Point B, as well as online menus at a variety of restaurants.

"They're certainly not perfect, but they can be helpful tools," he said.

Currently, Lund works with approximately 35 visually impaired children, students, and young adults throughout Regions 5 and 7.

"Getting to know them and what makes them tick is a great part of my job. Working so closely with the students and their families – they become part of your own family. I've had cases where families have had multiple children with vision impairments, so I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with those families – getting to know them well."

For Kaylee and Sue Stewart, Lund has become so much more than a coach and teacher. And, as Kaylee grows, so will her environment and need for exploration. But Sue says she is confident Kaylee will rise to the occasion with the help of her friend and mentor.

"The biggest thing for us is that it's something you don't have to be afraid of. She's just a kid and is learning to take in everything around her. I so appreciate everything Kevin has provided over the last year. He's validating to both the child and the parent. Kaylee has high expectations for herself, and it's so nice to hear someone else say, 'I see her going far.'" □



While navigating the hallways between classrooms, Kevin allows Kaylee the opportunity stop in the gymnasium and empowers her to explore her surroundings with and without the use of her cane.



Riverfront renewal

Connecting the city and the Mississippi River to create a corridor for residents and visitors to more easily access and enjoy year-round natural scenery

THE VISION: To maximize our Mississippi Riverfront by creating recreational, economic, and cultural opportunities for Brainerd's residents and visitors



As a young boy, Don Gorham remembers the Mighty Mississippi with fondness.

Having grown up on the north side of Brainerd, Gorham recalls a childhood filled with days of exploring the woods along the river – building forts, catching snakes and, in times of low water, exploring the islands that emerged from the ol' Man River.

Those memories of yesterday and hopes for tomorrow drove Gorham and others to create and facilitate a committee designed to preserve the flowing treasure and capitalize on all it could offer to future generations.

In 2014, Gorham said he heard a committee was forming to explore ways

Brainerd could open itself to all the third-largest river in the United States could offer.

"I jumped at the opportunity to join the group," he said. "I became the co-chair and led the effort to produce the Mississippi River Partnership Plan (MRPP)."

In 2015, the MRPP was adopted by the city of Brainerd, and Gorham is now a member of the Brainerd Riverfront Committee, the group responsible for implementing the MRPP.

The Brainerd Riverfront Committee is comprised of a group of local representatives appointed to provide feedback and oversight of the riverfront efforts and a vision to "maximize our

Mississippi Riverfront by creating recreational, economic, and cultural opportunities for Brainerd's residents and visitors."

Brainerd's Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA), the city of Brainerd, the Brainerd Riverfront Committee, and the community's public and private sectors have embarked on a multiphased effort for implementing the Mississippi River Partnership Plan. The project presents an opportunity to connect the city and the Mississippi River, and create a corridor where residents and visitors can more easily access and enjoy year-round natural scenery.

Brainerd previously partnered with the University of Minnesota Center for



Partnering with Sourcewell, the city of Brainerd has retained a part-time Riverfront Coordinator in Ashley Kaisershot. Kaisershot, who has a background in planning and zoning, has also assisted the city in creating a comprehensive plan.

Rural Design (CRD) to develop a riverfront design plan for a two-mile section along the river from Washington Street to Little Buffalo Creek in Brainerd.

As a result of the Mississippi River Partnership Plan, the city of Brainerd applied for and was awarded a Difference Maker Grant from the Brainerd Lakes Area Community Foundation to begin the process of implementing some of the recommendations in the plan. The city was awarded a \$33,000 grant to retain a consulting firm or team for the first year, with the opportunity to renew the grant for two additional years. The Brainerd HRA managed this grant on the city's behalf for the first two years; then, management of the third-year grant transitioned back to Brainerd in early 2018.

Partnering with Sourcewell, the city was able to use the grant to retain a part-time Riverfront Coordinator, Ashley Kaisershot.

Through its Shared Services program, Sourcewell assists government agencies with planning and zoning services, as well as providing professionals like Kaisershot to aid in project and city planning, community engagement, comprehensive planning, and more.

Kaisershot, who has a background in planning and zoning, as well as extensive experience in landscape architecture and design, said the project was the perfect opportunity for her to lead the city and Riverfront Committee in the direction of their vision and goals.

“I have the ability to help teach the process, as well as the stages and evolution of design. Internally, I had the opportunity to determine the approach and how to best serve the city in this need.”

—Ashley Kaisershot, Riverfront Coordinator

“You can imagine how interested I was in this possibility,” Kaisershot said of the Riverfront Project. “I have the ability to help teach the process, as well as the stages and evolution of design. Internally, I had the opportunity to determine the approach and how to best serve the city in this need.”

In January 2018, Kaisershot jumped in as Riverfront Coordinator. Additionally, she was asked to assist the city in creating a Comprehensive Plan. This long-range plan for the city’s future encompasses a variety of topics including land use, utilities, infrastructure, and more.

“It’s a very diverse document,” Kaisershot said. “It lays the framework for the city’s vision. And the public provides input for the vision of the plan, so it’s not necessarily the vision of city staff. It’s an interesting process. While you might think people are really passionate about ‘x,’ you go in and find out they’re passionate about ‘x’ but they may put more priority on something else.”

With the Riverfront Project, both short- and long-term goals have been identified, beginning with solidifying stakeholders, community engagement, and identifying funding sources.

“Sometimes people don’t see the impact this is making. We continue to teach people the benefits behind environmental improvements along the riverfront. The amount of trail miles around Brainerd is incredible. To be right at the center of that monumental network is a great thing but capitalizing on that is very important. And we need to make incremental steps to build on that network.”

To Kaisershot and others behind the Riverfront Project, it’s about much more than creating trails along the riverbanks. According to the American Heart Association, for every \$1 spent on bike and walking trails, approximately

What is a comprehensive plan?

As cities and counties continue to grow and change, there also comes a need for a roadmap of sorts to help guide leaders successfully into the future.

A comprehensive plan is that map. With the help of professionals at Sourcewell, municipalities are able to take input from citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders and create a long-term vision along with setting goals to proceed confidently.

Sourcewell partners with the Region 5 Development Commission (R5DC) to provide these comprehensive planning services to communities through Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena counties. This partnership allows both organizations to combine unique strengths and resources in a way that benefits communities, communities’ long-range planning processes, and the comprehensive plans themselves.

For more information about the city of Brainerd’s comprehensive plan, visit imaginebrainerd.org. To learn how Sourcewell can help your organization plan for the future, email gov.solutions@sourcewell-mn.gov.

\$3 is saved in health care costs.

Within the Brainerd Riverfront Project, long-term goals include the addition of:

- Parking, trail, and riverside enhancements at Boom Lake and the Kiwanis Park area.
- A pedestrian and bike bridge across the Mississippi River south of town near the Buffalo Hills area.
- A Center for Arts and Culture along the heart of the riverfront.
- A scenic overlook on the west side of the river south of Laurel Street.
- Enhanced pedestrian and bike connections near East River Road.
- An elevated riverfront trail spanning the length of Washington Street/ Highway 210 down to College Drive. A portion of the Cuyuna Lakes Trail already exists in this area, but the committee seeks to bring pedestrians closer to the river.
- A public gathering space, including flexible spaces, outdoor learning areas and classroom, small amphitheater, canoe/kayak launch, and potential riverfront redevelopment district.
- A phased connection to the Brainerd Industrial Center.

“As an adult, the river has remained a favorite place to hike and get away from the world, right in the middle of the city. I was always struck by how invisible these places were to the rest of the town.”

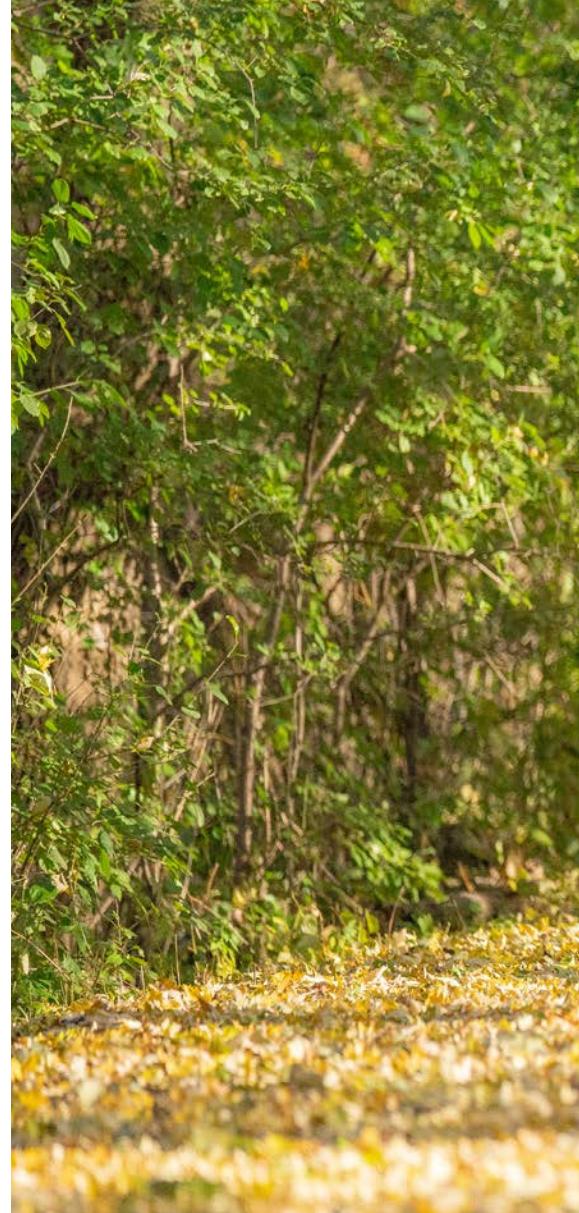
—Don Gorham, co-chair of the Brainerd Riverfront Committee

“We want to return a focus to the beauty of the riverfront,” Kaisershot said. “People have forgotten about it over the years, so we’re trying to share the story of its importance, it’s the Mississippi River.”

For Don Gorham, much has changed since his carefree days as a child; however, his fondness for the Mississippi has not.

“As an adult, the river has remained a favorite place to hike and get away from the world, right in the middle of the city. I was always struck by how invisible these places were to the rest of the town. But I believe this plan’s impact can go way beyond trails, canoe landings, and scenic overlooks. I truly see this as Brainerd’s chance for a total reset. Beyond the obvious economic benefits comes the chance for the town to raise both its self-esteem and perception not only in this region, but also throughout the state.”

For additional information about the Brainerd Riverfront Project, visit brainerdriverfront.org. □





The Kiwanis Park and Boom Lake area provide opportunities for year-round recreation on the shores of the Mississippi River in Brainerd.

Leaders empowering leaders



"The Principals Academy truly has opened up avenues between myself and my staff by providing outstanding resources and research."

—Cathy Nault, principal at Harrison Elementary School in Brainerd

The best gift Cathy Nault has received as an elementary principal was delivered just last year in an unexpected package.

In August 2017, Nault was invited to participate in the Minnesota Principals Academy—a rigorous program designed to create a statewide network of district and charter school leaders with the motivation and skills to create and sustain schools in which all students are on the path to college readiness by the end of high school.

After serving in the education field for nearly five decades and currently finishing her tenure as principal at Harrison Elementary School in Brainerd, Nault said she first learned about the Minnesota Principals Academy two years ago at the recommendation of Brainerd Public Schools Superintendent Laine Larson. Soon after, speaking to a colleague from Thief River Falls, Nault

said the principal raved about the difference the Academy made not only in his career, but also in the interactions with—and skillsets of—his staff.

"I've been through how many initiatives since I first entered the district in 1971," Nault noted, "and this is, by far, the most exciting, most relevant. The Principals Academy truly has opened up avenues between myself and my staff by providing outstanding resources and research."

The Minnesota Principals Academy was created in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association, the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, and the University of Minnesota. It is based on the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL), an initiative of the Washington, D.C.-based National Center on Education and the Economy.

Using the NISL program, the Minnesota Principals Academy enables cohorts of practicing principals to put leadership best practices from education, business, military, and other fields to work on behalf of their students and schools. Delivered in two- and three-day segments over the course of two years, the curriculum combines face-to-face instruction in workshops, seminars, and study groups.

Paul Drange, director of regional programs at Sourcewell, said his staff connected with the University of Minnesota, where the academies and cohorts had been offered in the past, including in the Twin Cities and Thief River Falls. When an application process to host another cohort in outstate Minnesota opened two years ago, Sourcewell and Brainerd Schools co-applied and were selected, as was the Lakes Country Service Co-op in Fergus Falls.

"This cohort model has a strong reputation," Drange said. "The content and rigor align with other services and training Sourcewell is providing to our schools. The trainers are highly respected and very talented. We believe this opportunity is bringing a high level of value to our region, as the training aligns with current efforts and empowers our instructional leaders—principals—to be the best leaders they can possibly be."

Through the program, principals across the state have an opportunity to receive a powerful and much-needed source of support as they play critical and challenging roles in improving schools and raising student achievement. The Academy includes content created and led by University of Minnesota faculty, in addition to facilitators who are principals, that is tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities in Minnesota.

Left: Cathy Nault, principal at Harrison Elementary School in Brainerd, said the most impactful training she has received during her tenure came just last year through the Minnesota Principals Academy. Sourcewell and Brainerd Public Schools were selected to co-host this cohort two years ago to provide principals across the state an opportunity to receive a powerful and much-needed source of support as they play a critical role in improving schools and raising student achievement.

Jackie Bruns, education consultant supervisor at Sourcewell, says the Academy has been well received by districts and current participants and has been very powerful as principals learn the “how-to’s” when putting their learning into practice.

“The most beneficial part of the Academy has been the opportunity for collaboration and learning from other principals in Region 5. Topics that have provoked meaningful discussion have included how fundamental changes in the international economy have raised the educational expectations for all students, the three findings of how people learn, what a standards-based instructional system looks like, the importance of teacher development, and how to effectively coach teachers for meaningful professional growth.”

Thirty-four Region 5 principals from Brainerd, Crosslake, Little Falls, Pequot Lakes, Pierz, Royalton, and Staples-Motley school districts are currently participating in the Academy. There are also two principals from Park Rapids Area Schools participating, as well as three from ROCORI Schools. The regional cohort kicked off Aug. 8, 2017, and is ongoing every other month until its culmination on June 13, 2019.

“This is intense professional development for our principals,” Bruns emphasized, “and the learning is relevant and robust, focused on the critical importance of principals being instructional leaders in order to make a difference in student achievement. All of the learning is research-based on what works in schools. The two-year Academy culminates in a day of each principal sharing an Action Learning Project with the participants. The Action Learning Project allows principals to choose an area of growth for their school and apply their learning in their day-to-day work within their buildings.”

Nault said she had no difficulty coming up with ideas for her Action Learning Project. The problem was narrowing it down to just one.

“My Action Learning Project is entitled, ‘High Poverty/High Expectations.’ I will be leading our staff through the research that informs us that, in order to reach our students, we need to build and sustain positive relationships with each and every student and we need to build social and emotional skills for and with our students.”



Nault says the Principals Academy has helped foster deeper relationships not only with staff, but also with her students.

Nault said building positive relationships, particularly in a high-poverty school, is critical, not just with students, but also staff, parents, and the community as a whole.

Harrison Elementary has implemented the Second Step program on a weekly basis for all students. As part of this program, a special education teacher visits classrooms and teaches the Zones of Regulation Skills. These skills help students have another, more acceptable way to express emotions when they’re happy, angry, or sad and a way for teaching staff to respond.

“It has already made us a much better school,” Nault said. “This project has helped me focus on providing weekly articles and quotes that address how and why relationships with all of our

students are so imperative to learning and memory. It has also helped me become a better leader, based on research as to why schools of poverty must build a school that has relationships at the heart of everything we do with students."

Nault referred to a quote by Bill Gates when reflecting on the power of the Principals Academy opportunity: "As we look ahead into the 21st century," Gates said, "leaders will be those who empower others."

And this opportunity is a gift Nault said she can continue to pass along to students, staff, colleagues, and generations of leaders to come.

"The Principals Academy is by far the best-designed program for any school leader who wants to improve not only their leadership skills, but those of their teaching team as well. I have three graduate degrees, and Principals Academy is by far the best-designed and delivered leadership program that I have ever attended. It truly addresses collaborative leadership in schools and the amazing results that can be achieved with collective efficacy." □



Nault (left) participated in a group activity at a recent gathering of Minnesota Principals Academy Participants. Nault is one of 39 principals enrolled in the cohort which meets once every other month until its culmination in June 2019.

Decriminalizing mental health

A regional intervention program aims to get individuals with mental health issues the help they need

For an unprecedented number of individuals booked into jails across the country, mental illness is a significant, yet undetected, culprit. Region 5 is not immune to that statistic.

According to the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, 10 times more people with mental health conditions are in correctional settings versus hospitals, and one in five people in jail has a serious mental illness.

A pilot program recently launched in Region 5 – and supported through Sourcewell Innovation Funding – is already making a difference in helping individuals with mental illness through diversion, early connections with resources, and services and developing discharge plans that truly meet their needs.

Tami Lueck, adult services division manager with Crow Wing County Community Services, is leading an endeavor coined the Region 5+ Comprehensive Re-Entry Project. This program's mission is to provide a comprehensive continuum of care to those who come into contact with the law enforcement community. The program will provide early assessment of any mental health or substance use needs for those who enter the jail.

"When a crime has been committed by someone who is mentally ill, they may end up going to jail rather than getting the help and resources they need," Lueck said. "And that's all over our

state, not just something we're facing here in our region. Jails are not the appropriate place for people with mental illness."

Based on data provided by Crow Wing County, 36.7 percent of those booked into jail could be eligible for diversion from detention due to mental illness. Additionally noted: discharge planning efforts in the county have shown a reduction in reoffenses. In 2017, 68 percent of those individuals with discharge plans did not return to jail. This is on track with a 68 percent national average for the first year following discharge.

For Lueck, it all boils down to improved care and timely identification of needs, as well as a streamlined approach throughout the region to access crisis mental health services, diversions, and care for those incarcerated.

After receiving \$287,000 in Innovation Funding, the Region 5+ Comprehensive Re-Entry Project was launched in June 2018. A collaboration among the counties of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, Wadena and neighboring Aitkin County, this endeavor was modeled after the Yellow Line Project in Blue Earth County. According to YellowLineProject.com, the program is designed to provide an early response to individuals with acute or chronic mental or chemical health problems who have become involved with law enforcement and are not a risk to the community.





Theresa Rardin, Crow Wing County Jail Comprehensive Re-Entry Coordinator, leads a meeting of several county stakeholders to address the Region 5+ Comprehensive Re-Entry Program. This initiative is funded in part by Innovation Funding from Sorcewell.

“Jails are not the appropriate place for people with mental illness.”

—Tami Lueck, Crow Wing County Community Services



The Region 5+ Comprehensive Re-Entry Project was spearheaded by Crow Wing County Community Services Adult Services Division Manager Tami Lueck. Lueck explains the program's mission is to provide a comprehensive continuum of care to those who come into contact with law enforcement and will provide early assessment of any mental health or substance use needs for those who enter the jail.

The Yellow Line Project enhances the resources and tools available to law enforcement so that residents get the right services at the right time and have strong incentives to participate in those services.

Lueck said this process was eagerly embraced by other counties around the area, from social and community services to law enforcement and mental health providers.

"Our jail staff came forward with their own concerns of not feeling equipped to manage and serve people with mental illness," Lueck explained. "The lack of inpatient mental health beds across the state also puts pressure on emergency departments. People act out behaviorally and end up in jail. And mental health stakeholders in our communities are concerned about this. It's really sad that

we've gotten to a place where that's how we serve people with mental health issues."

As part of the Region 5+ Comprehensive Re-Entry Program, social workers are placed in jails to conduct a 20- to 30-minute screening per individual to determine if mental health issues are present. If not done immediately after someone is brought to the jail, assessments are provided within the first 24 hours following incarceration.

If mental health issues are detected, social service workers are able to intervene and help connect the individual to a resource that can treat the root of the issue – whether it's a temporary residential crisis stabilization home, an inpatient facility, or other source of appropriately handling a mental health situation.

In some cases, there may not be a diversion but perhaps an early discharge or discharge with a mutually agreed upon plan.

"We had a case where we were able to assess an individual coming into the jail," Lueck said. "We agreed on a discharge plan. They went to stay at a trusted friend's home. The charging officer, the individual, and social services worker were all in agreement that this plan would work and that the individual wouldn't be a risk to the community. The charges were held by the officer, but the agreement stipulated that the charges would be forwarded if the individual didn't comply with the plan."

“Our hope is to connect those with mental illness to the resources and services they need.”

—Tami Lueck, Crow Wing County Community Services

Another aspect of the initiative is to equip law enforcement with the knowledge and resources they need to deal with mental illness issues on the front end.

“Sometimes, jail personnel or law enforcement just don’t know all of the resources available for people with mental health issues,” Lueck added. “Officers have felt like they only have three options: detox, which is limited; inpatient hospitalization, which also comes with limited bed resources; or incarceration. By providing this education, it allows officers to do their jobs and we can come in and do the pieces we’re good at. It focuses on partnerships and furthering the relationships between social services and law enforcement.”

Unfortunately, Lueck suggests, individuals with mental illness oftentimes

fall through the cracks.

“Whether it’s an intellectual disability, chemical or drug dependency, or a mental health issue – are they really getting the care they need when they have to ride in the back of a squad car during a crisis? What are the odds of asking for help when that happens? We need to work together to decriminalize mental illness.”

Baxter Police Chief Jim Exsted said his department was approached with the idea for a mental health initiative in 2017.

“For law enforcement, we saw this diversion program as an opportunity to provide help to individuals by offering resources instead of sending them to jail,” Exsted said. “This program has offered another tool for law enforcement in Crow Wing County when they find themselves dealing with an individual who is struggling with a mental health issue.”

And while the diversion side of the program hasn’t been as large in numbers as anticipated, the impact it has had on those affected has been significant.

“Initially, we estimated as many as 20 to 30 percent of individuals headed to jail could possibly be diverted,” Exsted added. “At this time, we are finding that the diversions are much less than that in Crow Wing County, but the diversions that do occur are extremely impactful. Additionally, the program has allowed the social worker embedded in the jail to meet with and offer services to most individuals who are booked into the facility.”

Through this process, Lueck said positive relationships have been forged – including between social services staff placed in the jail for assessments and the individuals they are able to serve.

“It’s been interesting to see how relationships are being created. That makes such a big difference with this population. And, on the flipside, employees at the jail appreciate having a social worker there to consult with and ask questions of. There are truly many benefits to this initiative.”

While Crow Wing County has served as the pilot for this program, neighboring counties are also putting plans in place to follow suit, with each incorporating a design team consisting of, but not limited to, the county attorney, sheriff’s office, social services, police chiefs representing the cities in each respective county, and mental health providers to discuss, support, and carry out the process.

“The communities throughout Region 5 have a lot of good mental health support systems,” Lueck noted. “Our hope is to connect those with mental illness to the resources and services they need. And, hopefully, through a variety of scenarios, we all learn how to better manage difficult situations. But, with the right strategies in place, we can all work together to improve the likelihood of individuals getting access to the services they need and the support they deserve. And that’s the bottom line.” □



Baxter Police Chief Jim Exsted visits with Theresa Rardin at the Crow Wing County Jail booking room. Exsted said this regional collaboration provides another tool for law enforcement, including jail staff, when dealing with individuals suffering from mental illness.

Toward Zero Deaths





Each day in Minnesota, approximately 215 traffic accidents occur – averaging one death, 81 injuries, and costing the state of Minnesota just shy of \$5 million daily.

In fact, according to the Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety, traffic crashes are the leading cause of death in Minnesota for ages 5-34.

The Toward Zero Deaths approach is based on the belief that even one traffic-related death on Minnesota roads is unacceptable. This “zero deaths” idea was first adopted in Sweden in 1997 as “Vision Zero” and has evolved to several state Departments of Transportation, including Minnesota, that have identified zero deaths as a core objective in their Strategic Highway Safety Plans.

The statewide TZD program was launched in 2003 by the Minnesota Departments of Public Safety, Transportation, and Health as a deliberate, interdisciplinary approach to traffic safety.

In January 2013, Tom Nixon began work with TZD and now serves as the East and West Central Region coordinator. However, it was a career in the emergency and fire service fields that drove Nixon to where he is today.

“Prior to TZD, I worked in EMS full time and was able to be a responder and educator for 12 years. I have been in a public office for 12 years, besides, and have had the opportunity to learn the regulatory and legislative side of response as well. Being in the fire service and responding to crashes, I have witnessed the aftermath of what decisions behind the wheel can do to the outcome, good and bad. I have worked to save friends and have been thankful for the times when people walk away unscathed. This roadway experience has helped the TZD program have a post-crash perspective. This includes responder safety, improved trauma care, and quick scene clearance.”

TZD was created with a vision to “reduce fatalities and serious injuries on Minnesota’s roads to zero” with a “Five E” approach – Enforcement, Engineering, Education and Outreach, Emergency Medical and Trauma Services, and Everyone Else (ie: legislators, judicial system, media).

The TZD program team works in partnership with community and corridor groups to improve the traffic safety of a designated area. The organization provides technical assistance, materials, and guidance to local groups that are committed to reducing crashes and the fatalities and severe injuries that result from them.

Last summer, Nixon – with the cooperation of the city of Brainerd – applied for Innovation Funding at Sourcewell to purchase equipment that would deliver educational impact throughout his service area, including the Region 5 counties of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena.

Sourcewell awarded Nixon, the city of Brainerd, and the TZD program over \$100,000 that was, in turn, used to purchase equipment and help implement additional outreach and programming.

“Without the funding from Sourcewell, we simply wouldn’t

have any of the equipment we’re going to be able to educate with,” Nixon said. “This offers local partners a way to draw people in and learn about traffic safety in an impactful way. The other equipment we are able to purchase because of this funding covers topic areas of distraction, inexperience, impairment, and pedestrian and bike use.”

The equipment teaches “experiential learning,” allowing the learner to not simply conceptualize what would happen, but experience situations in an as-close-to-real opportunity as is available for challenging conditions.

Included in the items purchased with Innovation Funding is the Seat Belt Convincer.

Unbelted occupants represent nearly half of the fatalities reported annually, yet people are buckling up with an 87.1 percent observed seat belt use rate in east central Minnesota, Nixon said. To help change the hard to reach, TZD officials look for ways to demonstrate the risks of unsafe behaviors.

“The Seat Belt Convincer should help do just that,” he said. “Targeting youth, teens, and young adults with a fun, yet safe, experiential learning tool will pay dividends in the years to come.”

The Convincer simulates a sudden stop where a seat belt could save an individual from injury or even death. Participants step aboard the platform, sit in the car seat, buckle up, and hold on. A five- to seven-mile per hour sudden stop is simulated, and impressive to all that ride it.

“The Convincer is the only one of its kind in surrounding states,” Nixon noted, “and is a unique opportunity for anyone to learn about the importance of buckling up.”

Nixon officially took his show on the road and began demonstrating the equipment in September 2018, visiting schools, fire departments, community events, and more – allowing individuals to not only hear, but feel, the implications of unsafe behaviors. Nixon says he believes this program and the equipment made possible through the Innovation Funding program will make a life or death difference to those who have an opportunity to experience it.

“When a crash happens, we look at what factors contributed to the crash and take a multi-discipline approach to prevent another crash from happening by using the resources provided through engineering, emergency response trauma services, enforcement, and education. Through Innovation Funding, Sourcewell has made the work I do and the people I support more effective and will contribute to our eventual goal of reaching zero deaths and serious injuries on our roads.” □

Toward Zero Deaths equipment and programs aimed to enhance driving safety:

- **The Seat Belt Convincer** simulates a low-impact 5-7 mph vehicle collision to stress the importance of wearing a seat belt.
- **Driving Simulators** are capable of demonstrating how distractions behind the wheel can have serious consequences. Additionally, these simulators will have other software to educate drivers on road conditions and monitor decision-making habits.
- **TZD Designated Driver App** will be available to local liquor-serving establishments to offer a designated driver (DD) something as an incentive for being the DD. Those who opt to be the DD can look up which locations are offering something they would appreciate. The app also advertises responsible liquor-serving establishments in the area.
- **Safety Town Props** is a large display of a mock town, set up to be explored by 4-10-year-olds to learn pedestrian and bicycle safety. The display comes in a trailer that, when set up, allows users to experience situations at intersections, railroad crossings, and when emergency vehicles are present.
- **Challenge Coins** are part of an effort to reward those engaging in the initiative to save lives on our roads in a way more than what their jobs already ask. Rewarding those who go above and beyond, gives a small token of appreciation to show they are part of something bigger.



The Seatbelt Convincer is an interactive tool intended to demonstrate the importance of seatbelt use in the event of a crash. TZD Coordinator Tom Nixon brought the Convincer to the Brainerd Fire Department open house in October.

HealthPartners' VirtuWell platform has saved Pierz Middle School teacher Rich Teske time and money on more than one occasion. This virtual clinic visit allows users, like Teske, to skip crowded waiting rooms and have immediate, and affordable, access to health care.

Staying healthy without stepping into a doctor's office

If you've ever been in a situation where you've been sick but would rather tough it out than expose yourself to even more germs in a crowded waiting room, this story is for you

Imagine being evaluated, diagnosed, and treated from the comfort of your living room, workplace, or virtually anywhere.

VirtuWell is a service provided by HealthPartners, offered to all members of the Sourcewell health insurance pool, and is a solution to rising health care costs and overcrowded waiting rooms at clinics and hospitals nationwide.

Ryan Donovan, insurance and employee benefits manager at Sourcewell, said the average visit to Urgent Care can run about \$200. A visit to the emergency room is often more than double that amount. But for less than \$50 and no waiting room exposure, VirtuWell users can immediately access health care professionals 24 hours a day and seven

days a week.

As its name suggests, VirtuWell provides virtual, or online, health care – also known as telemedicine. Through an easy to access and user-friendly website, a four-step process allows users to sign in, answer a series of questions – scored and triggered by a software algorithm – then sit back and wait for a response within 30 minutes. Data is reviewed, and a response is sent via email, phone call, or text by a nurse practitioner who is able to recommend and write prescriptions or suggest home remedies, including over-the-counter medication.

Donovan said the VirtuWell platform isn't limited to Sourcewell members and can be utilized by anyone with any insurance or no insurance at all. The





In less than one hour, Rich Teske says he is able to log in to VirtuWell, present his symptoms, receive a diagnosis, then run to Thrifty White Drug in Pierz to pick up his prescription. VirtuWell is available to anyone with or without insurance and is accessible 24/7.

maximum out-of-pocket fee to use the service is \$49 but could be less, depending on a particular insurance co-pay or deductible. Since being launched in 2010, VirtuWell has doubled the number of services offered and is licensed for use in 12 states.

"It's convenient for families with a student away at college," Donovan said. "If they're attending school in a participating state, they can simply log in, answer a series of questions similar to what they'd be asked by a physician if visiting a clinic, and receive a diagnosis and prescription if applicable."

Donovan said it's also a great option for families with young children, as well as working adults who don't want to – or can't – take time off from work for an in-person appointment.

"And, from an employer's perspective, employees can do it right from their desk," he said. "So, there's no lost time. A teacher can access VirtuWell during a break and pick up a prescription during lunch. Productivity is a big deal. Not only is it good for us, but it's good for everybody. Our health system is clogged, and this is a way to help unclog it."

In addition to a variety of benefits of using telemedicine, accessibility is one of the biggest.

"Access to care can be limited when you need to be seen right away, especially in rural Minnesota when the closest clinic can be at least 30 minutes away," Donovan said.

Rich Teske, a middle school science teacher in Pierz, said he suffers from sinus infections at least twice a year. VirtuWell is a welcome amenity when it comes to convenience from a time and geographic standpoint.

"I hate going to the doctor for upwards of \$200 when I know all I need are antibiotics," Teske said. "I use VirtuWell and, in about 30-45 minutes, I'm going up town in my little town of Pierz and picking up my antibiotics while saving time and money."

Teske said his family also took advantage of the service while at the lake over the summer. When their 3-year-old showed signs of a toe infection, rather than hunting down a clinic or hospital, they simply logged in.

"Again, we went through VirtuWell and they diagnosed it as a toe infection. So we went to a pharmacy and picked up his medication. It was great because we didn't have to go to some random hospital."

"VirtuWell truly enhances a patient's experience," Donovan said. "After someone initially uses VirtuWell, there's a high likelihood that they'll use it again. It's just a matter of convincing people of its safety, security, reliability, and ease of use."

As the chief deputy of the Brainerd Police Department, Mike Bestul doesn't have time to waste. Bestul said he and his family have been extremely pleased with the convenience and cost savings VirtuWell provides.

"Convenience is the biggest thing for us," he said. "We know what the limitations of it are, but 80 to 90 percent of the time, we've been able to log in and pick up a prescription within an hour. It's been pretty much flawless for us."

Bestul said his family typically uses VirtuWell for common issues that likely can be easily treated or something they've been diagnosed with in the past, including rashes, sinus infections, and urinary tract infections to name a few.

"I asked my wife the other day how much we've used it collectively as a family, and we figure about 10 times so far this year. For us, it's important that we're aware of where we're spending our HSA (Health Savings Account) money. It can also be a time issue, but most importantly for us is the cost and that it's saving us money."

Since its inception in 2010, VirtuWell has delivered over 300,000 treatment plans, has helped users save an average of \$105 for every treatment plan, and has saved over \$30 million in health care costs – truly making health care more accessible and affordable to all.

As both a health insurance representative and end user, Donovan said simple, effective, and low-cost health care is paramount now and will remain into the future as demand increases.

"Affordability needs to be grassroots. Telemedicine, whether it's VirtuWell or a different platform, reduces costs for health plans and members with every visit. It's decisions like this that we all need to start making in order to drive down the cost of health care."

To access VirtuWell, visit virtuwell.com. For additional information, contact Ryan Donovan at ryan.donovan@sourcewell-mn.gov. □

In addition to a diagnosis, VirtuWell provides a treatment plan that includes:



Step-by-step instructions, including a diagnosis, recommended medications—including prescriptions if needed—what to expect when following your plan, and future prevention tips.



Free 24/7 phone support – Nurse practitioners are available, day and night, to talk through any questions or concerns.



Free follow-up – A VirtuWell representative will check in to make sure everything is going as expected with your plan. If for some reason it's not working for you, follow-up care and any adjustments are included at no charge.



An electronic health record – Your VirtuWell medical records are always available in your account. You can share with anyone, including other doctors or caregivers.

Get immediate access to health care professionals 24 hours a day/seven days a week through VirtuWell

A ground-breaking collaboration

Community leaders gather for the Mid-State Education District groundbreaking event in Little Falls, Aug. 15. A similar scene played out earlier in the summer in Wadena as ground broke for a Setting IV facility in the Freshwater Education District.

Written by Chelsea Ornelas





Thanks to a combination of persistence, passion, and partnership, students with special education needs will be positively impacted when two new facilities are completed in 2019.

A fresh start for Freshwater

On July 16, several gathered for the official groundbreaking ceremony of the Freshwater Education School District's Setting IV special education facility in Wadena, estimated to open summer 2019.

The new 32,000-square-foot facility will serve approximately 50 students from 13 central Minnesota school districts, plus serve as the central office for Freshwater.

Jena Osberg, who's worked with Freshwater's Setting IV program since 2007 and has been the program's facilitator for the last two years, said a customized learning environment will have a significant impact.

"There's a number of things that have to happen for students to be successful in a school setting," Osberg said. "One is you have to have a quality staff. You have to have people who are willing to go above and beyond – Freshwater has that. You also have to have good programs and

curriculum that can change and adapt to students' needs; we've got that, too. But a third thing is the learning environment that students come to every day. I am thrilled to know that we're going to see our students' success based on the fact that this building was created just for them."

Federal policy requires schools to provide access to Setting IV programming in a separate school setting for students who struggle to succeed in the general education setting due to significant behavioral or mental health needs. Setting IV provides structured behavioral, academic, and mental health programming for students who spend the majority of the school day outside the regular classroom, have an individualized education plan, and often require intensive special education services.



Dave Fjeldheim, Superintendent at Sebeka (left) and Jerry Nesland, Executive Director at Freshwater (right), helped kick off the construction process for the Freshwater Education District's new Setting IV facility in Wadena.



Freshwater Education Setting IV Facilitator Jena Osberg says a customized learning environment will have a significant impact for students.



Freshwater Education District's Setting IV special education facility will serve approximately 50 students from 13 central Minnesota school districts, plus serve as the central office for Freshwater. Rendering courtesy of bh Partners.

Freshwater administrators and staff are looking forward to a building that fits the unique needs of its student population. Everything – including the layout, lighting, and color scheme – was designed with intention.

Osberg says all classrooms will be connected, offering better flow for easier transitions. Lockers will be located in the classrooms for enhanced safety and ease of supervision. The facility will also feature special windows above head height that offer natural lighting without the temptation of distractions from outside.

"We'll also have extra, smaller areas for kids to work," Osberg noted. "Sometimes we have a student who gets really overwhelmed with the noise, or just needs to step away. We'll have built-in areas to take a student so they can work. We've worked with our building designers on sensory-based details – colors that are calming and lights that can be dimmed. We're even building in sensory spaces and individual spaces within the classrooms, so I can be teaching my class and guide a student to a special workspace; they're still with us and not totally separated."

Freshwater has been dreaming of such a space for nearly 10 years. It started to become more of a reality in October 2016, when area special education leaders met with Sourcewell staff.

"We had a meeting about how we could work together in Region 5 to serve our special education students more intentionally," Sourcewell Director of Regional Programs Paul Drange said. "One item that came out of that meeting was this – what was needed for Setting IV facilities in our region. We allowed ourselves to dream a bit that day, and the discussions from that meeting set the wheels in motion that brought us here, to (this) groundbreaking."

Sourcewell has committed \$5 million to the building project as part of its strategic reinvestment in Region 5.

"This is a true collaborative effort among several entities – Freshwater, its member school districts, the city of Wadena, and Sourcewell," Drange said. "Our staff couldn't be more pleased with the work that's being done to support area students, families, and educators."

Freshwater's full-voting membership includes Menahga, Sebeka, Henning, Wadena-Deer Creek, Verndale, Staples-Motley, Bertha-Hewitt, Browerville, and Long Prairie-Grey Eagle, plus Frazee, New York Mills, Perham-Dent, and Pillager, which are considered associate members.



The roughly 35,000-square foot, state-of-the-art, Setting IV Mid-State Education District building, is slated to open in September 2019 in Little Falls. Sourcewell committed \$5 million to both the Mid-State and Freshwater projects. Rendering courtesy of Nor-Son Construction.

A Day of Celebration in Little Falls

A similar celebration of progress was Aug. 15 in Little Falls as educators, community members, business professionals, and others from throughout the area gathered to break ground for Mid-State Education District's new Setting IV facility.

The roughly 35,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art building is slated to open in September 2019 and will serve students from Mid-State Education District's member districts with unique needs requiring a specialized learning environment. Member districts include the Onamia, Pierz, Royalton, Swanville, and Upsala school districts, as well as a facility partnership with the Little Falls Community School.

Mid-State Executive Director Simoine Bolin said the cutting-edge facility will include student neighborhoods specific to elementary, middle school, high school, and students with multiple impairments.

With the help of a design team consisting of Mid-State representatives, as well as professionals from Nor-Son

Construction, the Gordian Group, and ORB Management, each "neighborhood" within the facility has been designed with age-and ability-appropriate areas for sensory and behavior regulation, a lunchroom, and spaces to meet recreation needs. Also included is an area for transition-age students between 17 and 21 years old who will participate in career exploration and job skills training and coaching. Bolin said Mid-State anticipates serving around 85 students in the new facility with approximately 45 program staff members, as well as additional child-specific staff.

"It is with patience and peaceful waiting that we look forward to the big equipment, the work to clear our site, the construction crews to begin their work, and the welcoming of students in the fall of 2019," Bolin told all in attendance at the mid-afternoon groundbreaking ceremony. "I want you all to clap for each other because it's you who made this possible."

Drange was on hand along with a handful of Sourcewell representatives and board members to help celebrate the reality

...each “neighborhood” within the facility has been designed with age- and disability-appropriate areas for sensory and behavior regulation, a lunchroom, and spaces to meet recreation needs.

of a longtime dream of Bolin and Mid-State staff. Sourcewell committed \$5 million to the project.

“I like to tell stories,” Drange began, “and I think what started our story here today, Simoine, going back to our meeting in October 2016, was about how we could work more intentionally together with facilities. And that’s the conversation that brought us down a winding road all the way to today. As part of that journey, Simoine was very intentional about saying to me, ‘you need to see these facilities that our staff works in and that our kids go to every day. I want to show you what we have, and I want to show you what is possible.’”

Drange said he had the opportunity to travel around the state with Bolin and others to visit similar facilities and take the best of each to help create one unique school where children can learn and thrive in a safe, and productive, environment.

“I’m especially excited for the staff at Mid-State for what you will have here in 12 to 13 months, or hopefully sooner than that, to serve these kids in this building,” Drange added. “It’s just as exciting as anything we do at Sourcewell – to see that come to fruition.”

Greg Zylka, Mayor of Little Falls and Sourcewell Board member, spoke before the crowd praising all parties involved for their dedication and perseverance in providing quality opportunities for students.

“Thank you for choosing this site and this community,” he said. “I think it’s a great addition to the community. I think it’s also a great addition for all children involved, not only in this school (district), but in every school (district) taking part in this.”

Recognizing Sourcewell for its contribution to the project, Zylka, a board member, said he’s often asked where Sourcewell expends its resources.

“When we’re at conferences, people say, ‘what do you do with the money you make?’ This is it. We reinvest in communities and children. What better way?”

Once complete, this facility will allow, for the first time since Mid-State Education District was formed in 1971, its programs to be located under one roof. Currently, students are taught in multiple



Mid-State Executive Director Simoine Bolin congratulated all in attendance at the August groundbreaking for helping to make this longtime dream become a reality for students and staff.

settings, including Little Falls, Onamia, and Upsala. Bolin said the new facility and location will lend to recruiting and retaining special education staff, as well as provide a centralized location to benefit time for student transportation and create efficiencies for the facility and member districts.

“Mid-State Education staff have shown the ultimate in flexibility over the years and have faithfully served our member districts across multiple settings,” Bolin noted. “This building gives us the chance to create spaces for professionalizing what our team does, with spaces to collaborate and train, to ensure each student receives the most personalized and supportive learning environment and experience we can provide.” □





A voice to be heard

A regional voice, telling our regional stories.

Every day decisions are made in St. Paul and Washington, D.C., that impact our communities. From our schools to our state, counties, and cities, every level of government is impacted by elected officials and the decisions they make.

Annually, Region 5 school administrators and city and county officials join their colleagues on a state and national level to advocate for their collective interests. Rural Minnesota's voice is often set aside in priority- and policy-setting agendas. But this collaboration, advocacy days at the capitol in St. Paul and the advocacy conferences and Capitol Hill visits in Washington, D.C., make this local team a voice for regional schools, cities, and counties on a statewide and national scene.

Crosby-Ironton School District Superintendent Jamie Skjleveland was one of a handful of Region 5 superintendents who recently spent a day on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., to meet with numerous congressional leaders and their staff to highlight critical issues facing public education.

Crosby-Ironton School District Superintendent Jamie Skjleveland is one of a handful of Region 5 superintendents recently spending a day on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., to meet with numerous congressional leaders and their staff to highlight critical issues facing public education.

"One of the major topics of conversation throughout the visit on the Hill was the fact that nothing will ever change with the ever-increasing special education cross subsidy unless we speak directly to our congressional representatives about the stories happening in our schools," Skjveland said. "The fact that school districts across the state of Minnesota, as well as the rest of the nation, have to use general fund dollars to cover the differential in costs of unfunded or underfunded federal mandates is a federal education policy that has had a negative impact on all of our students.

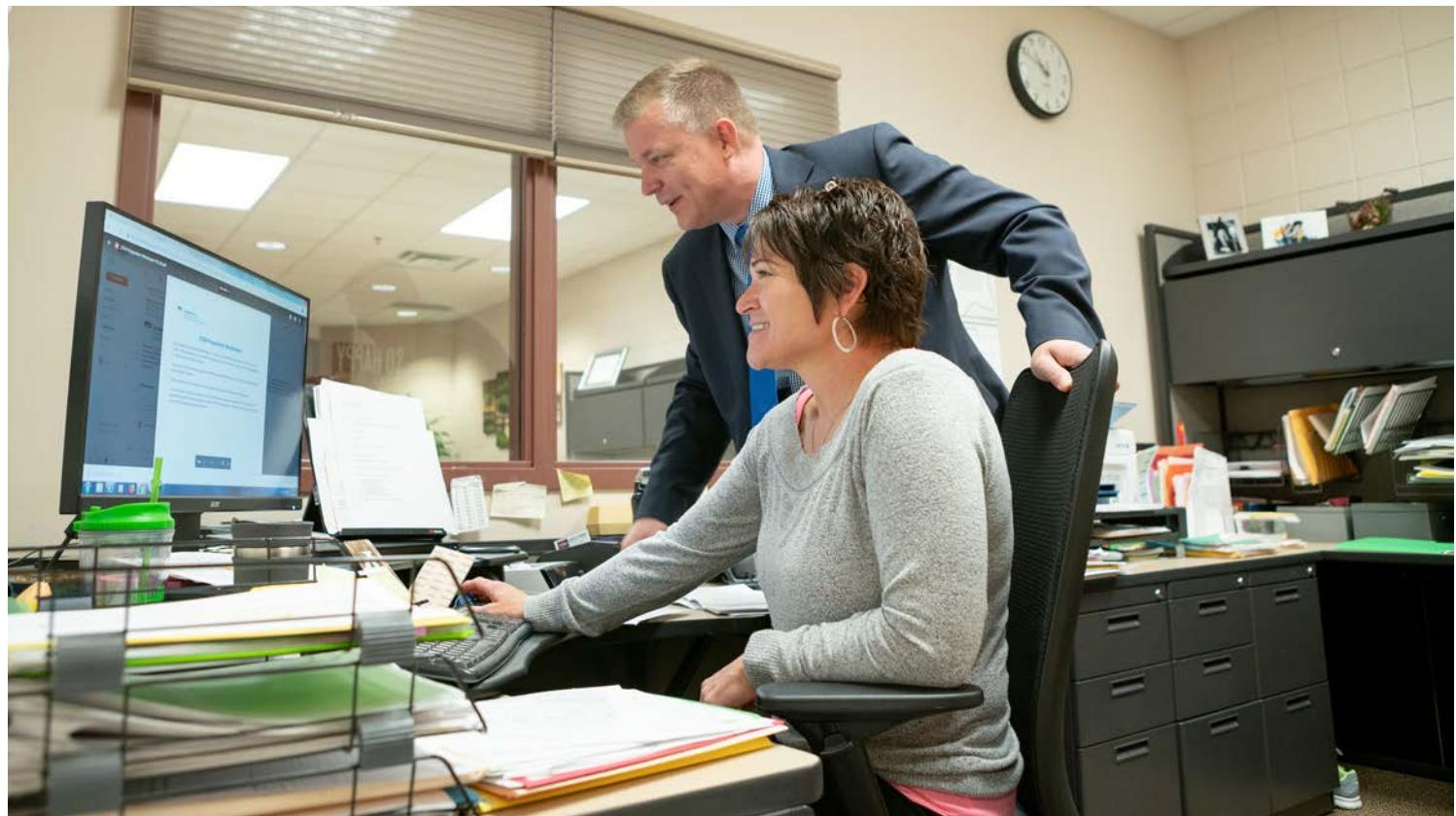
"In addition, the authors of the original legislation never envisioned a system of public education where

special education teachers are inundated with mounds of paperwork leading to burnout, teachers leaving the profession, and special education teaching positions having less of an appeal due to the stigma of paperwork. How the term 'least-restrictive environment' transformed to the stifling requirements that exist in special education today is a topic worthy of conversation. We need to overhaul the special education laws in an effort to get our special education teachers back to focusing their energies on working directly with children, rather than the hours of nervously completing paperwork to avoid punitive actions that are the result of inadvertent noncompliance mishaps."

In 2018, Sourcewell was proud to

"...nothing will ever change with the ever-increasing special education cross subsidy unless we speak directly to our congressional representatives about the stories happening in our schools."

—Jamie Skjveland,
Crosby-Ironton School District
Superintendent



Crosby-Ironton Superintendent Jamie Skjveland collaborates with Human Relations/Finance Coordinator Lea St. Ongé on an upcoming community engagement project. Skjveland emphasizes the importance of communication and connections.

partner in the School Administrators Region 5 Day at the Minnesota State Capitol, bringing over half of its regional school superintendents to advocate for school funding, school capital projects, per-pupil formula increases, mental health resources, professional development trainings, educators' retirement programs, and higher education opportunities for teachers.

On the national level, the School Administrators Advocacy Conference provided an opportunity to ensure the nation's school system leaders and school business officials are driving policy decisions. With more focus than ever on public education, students in Region 5 found strong advocates in their teachers and administrators.

Skjleveland said those in attendance also shared stories regarding the impact that a reduction in federal funding would have on Title I, career and technical education, and Head Start in our school districts.

"We need to create a sense of urgency in our nation with regard to preparing our young people for a global and digital world," he urged. "The conversation must focus on increasing an investment in our nation's public schools that will produce a highly skilled workforce, rather than graduates who are really good at taking standardized tests."

City and county staff, as well as elected officials, also weighed in on efforts at the nation's capital: advocating for the farm bill, federally funded infrastructure projects, flood insurance, the secure rural schools program funding, payment in lieu of taxes issues, and rural broadband.

Through meetings with Congress and administration officials, Region 5 leaders shared the best of the region, the best practices in their counties, cities, and schools, and showcased the prominence and importance of rural America to our elected officials, enlisting their support for our issues and funding for our projects. □



Several Region 5 leaders represented the area during a visit to Washington D.C. last spring and had an opportunity to meet with U.S. Senator Tina Smith. Pictured (left to right) Bill Otto, Eric Pingrey, Mary Klamm, Senator Tina Smith, Jamie Skjleveland, and Paul Brownlow.

Here are a few ways you can join Sourcewell in advocacy during 2019:

- National Counties Legislative Conference, March 2-6, 2019
- Congressional Cities Conference, March 10-13, 2019
- Region 5 Day at the Capitol, March, 2019
- School Administrators Advocacy Conference, July 8-10, 2019
- Educators Call to Action Conference, Sept. 19-21, 2019



Professional development

For child care providers

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

Jan. 7, 2019

Planning for the Future: Annual Budget and Cash Flow Projections

Feb. 11, 2019

Developing a Marketing Plan for Your Family Child Care Business

April 8, 2019

Injecting Quality into Your Family Child Care Business

For nonprofits

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

Jan. 22, 2019

Succession Training for Nonprofits – Session I

Feb. 26, 2019

Succession Training for Nonprofits – Session II

March 20, 2019

Nonprofit Boards as Systems: Creating the Conditions for Great Board Performance

March 21, 2019

Succession Training for Nonprofits – Session III

For cities & counties

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

Jan. 17, 2019 (two half-day sessions)

Preparing for the Census 2020 with Minnesota State Demographer Susan Brower

Feb. 11-12, 2019

Crisis Intervention Training for Law Enforcement

Feb. 28, 2019

GiANT Xcelerate

March 21, 2019

County Board Governance Roundtable

March 28, 2019

GiANT Xcelerate

April 10, 2019

Conflict Management & Mediation and Crisis Intervention & Mental Illness Awareness for Law Enforcement

April 11, 2019

Onboarding New Employees and Facilitating Knowledge Transfer

April 24, 2019

Human/Sex Trafficking Awareness Training

April 25, 2019

GiANT Xcelerate

May 2, 2019

Strengths-based Leadership

May 8, 2019

Bridging Divides: What to do when people disagree

May 23, 2019

Channeling Change

May 23, 2019

GiANT Xcelerate

For educators

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

Jan. 4, 7-8; Feb. 6-7; April 4-5; May 7-8, 2019

ENVoY Live – Wadena

Jan. 10-11, 14; Feb. 4-5; April 1-2; May 2-3, 2019

ENVoY Live – Pillager

Jan. 23, 2019

Webinar – Accommodation, Modification, and Adaptation of Curriculum, Materials, and Instruction

Jan. 24, Feb. 7, March 7, April 18, 2019

English Language Development Series

Jan. 30, 2019

Webinar – English Language Learners

Feb. 6, 2019

Webinar – Reading Preparation

Feb. 13, 2019

Webinar – Mental Health

Feb. 27, 2019

ENVoY I

Feb. 27, 2019

Webinar – Cultural Competency

March 6, 2019

Webinar – Technology

April 3, 2019

Region 5 Education Career Fair

April 11, 2019

Minnesota Department of Education Title I, II, and III Overview Training

Sourcewell trade show schedule

Stop by our booth at these 2019 events

**Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)
Leadership Conference**
Jan. 17-18, 2019 • Minneapolis

**Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP)
Winter Conference**
Jan. 30- Feb. 1, 2019 • St. Paul

**Minnesota Association of County Officers Annual
Conference (MACO)**
Feb. 12-15, 2019 • Bloomington

**Minnesota Association of School Administrators
(MASA) Spring Conference**
March 7-8, 2019 • Brooklyn Park

**Minnesota Clerks and Finance Officers Association
(MCFOA) Annual Conference**
March 19-22, 2019 • St Cloud

**Minnesota Chiefs of Police Association (MCPA)
Executive Training Institute**
April 14-17, 2019 • St. Cloud

**Minnesota Association of School Business Officials
(MASBO) Annual Conference**
May 8-10, 2019 • Duluth

**Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Sheriffs'
Summer Conference**
Summer 2019 • Brainerd

**Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Chief Deputy/
Supervisor Conference**
Summer 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 Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Sheriffs' Winter
Conference**
December 2019 • Alexandria

**Minnesota Sheriffs' Association (MSA) Chief Deputy/
Supervisor Conference**
December 2019 • Alexandria

**Minnesota Recreation and Park Association (MRPA)
Annual Conference**
Fall 2019

**Minnesota Rural Education Association (MREA)
Annual Conference**
Winter 2019

**Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT) Annual
Conference**
Winter 2019

**Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) Annual
Conference**
Winter 2019

Sourcewell



Formerly NJPA



Sourcewell core services.

Education and College and Career Readiness

Provides targeted training and consulting services for administrators, teachers, and staff as well as facilitates the regional Spelling Bee, Knowledge Bowl, and shared online courses.

Regional Low Incidence Project & Collaborative Service Workers

Provides accessible public education for students with disabilities as well as research-based interventions for youth (birth to 18) and families in central Minnesota.

City, County & Other Government Agencies

Provides services that help Region 5 cities, counties, and other government agencies meet their ever-growing needs, from professional development and emergency services to grant writing and financial reporting.

Technology

Offers high-end, affordable, and knowledgeable IT solutions and ongoing support in everything from day-to-day end user support to server and network setup.

Cooperative Purchasing

Awards cooperative purchasing contracts, which members may purchase from in order to streamline their procurement processes and create cost efficiencies.

Insurance and Employee Benefits

Serves government and educational entities with insurance-related products, focusing on overall employee wellness and national product offerings.