

## EVERY KID, EVERY DAY



## Passion with a purpose: Introducing ISD 882's next superintendent

Eastview Education Center Principal Eric Olson to take the district reigns on July 1



Eric Olson, currently principal at Eastview Education Center, has proven (over and over again) that he will do anything to brighten a student's day. Whether it's sprinting through the school to deliver birthday pencils, or getting up at 3:30 a.m. to write a St. Patrick's day story that he'll later read over the morning announcements to elicit giggles across the school, he is constantly seen going above and beyond the administrative and academic call. And while the anecdotes may not be as catchy, his passion runs just as deeply for academics, and for bettering the lives of all children in the Monticello School District. He's done it at the middle school level, at the elementary level, and most recently at the unique EEC, where he started a completely new educational structure and took it from the ground floor to a very successful first year.

"Eric is an exceptional leader," said Assistant Supt. Joe Dockendorf, who worked as a principal at Little Mountain Elementary while Olson was a principal at Pinewood. "What has stuck out the most to me is his versatility. He's been successful at every level. And every step along the way he's formed deep relationships and accomplished many great things from an educational standpoint."

Now, he'll get to do it across the district.

On the evening of Wednesday, March 21, the Monticello School Board voted 6-0 to begin contract negotiations to make Olson the next Superintendent of the Monticello School District.

Olson said his mind has been racing 100 miles per hour ever since finding out he'd been tabbed as the next Monticello leader.

"There are so many exciting things we can do here," he said. "The possibilities are just going to be tremendous because of the people I get to work with every day."

Prior to his current position, Olson was a principal at Pinewood Elementary from 2008 - 2017. He has also worked as an assistant principal and activities director at Monticello Middle School, and taught in the Sauk Rapids-Rice School District prior to that. Olson's administrative license was earned through St. Cloud State University, where he also earned a master's degree. His elementary education degree was also awarded through SCSU.

Olson said it was just in the past couple of years that he became serious about his desire to pursue the superintendency position. The passion originated with wanting to bring relationships back to the forefront in the district and in the educational process.

Dockendorf said Olson is just the right person for that ideal.

"He's so respectful and cares about you as a person," said Dockendorf. "He's a strong listener and he cares about

people beyond their roles. He just makes people better."

That relationship building will be a year one focus.

"I really know that this first year is a year to rebuild the strength of our culture," said Olson. "I know we have the right people in this district. We just need to keep building connections."

Olson said he looks forward to bringing stakeholders from several different interest groups, including teachers, other employees, and even city leaders to the table to help formulate future goals for the district.

Together, they will research and work to find the best practices in education and put in progress a plan to implement them in this school district. Always at the forefront will be maintaining those relationships, and helping to keep kids in the right frame of mind to learn.

With that in mind, Olson also plans to work alongside social workers and counselors to make mental health a priority in ISD 882, and to create the best learning environment possible.

"You have to have the kids happy and wanting to come to school," he said. "Whole child education - that is the focus. Looking at the whole child, taking care of them, making sure they come to school wanting to learn."

Board members praised Olson's passion, commitment, and willingness to work together, to learn, and to improve, during the selection process on March 21. That passion, amongst other traits, is both transparent and authentic. It never wavers, let alone disappears, and over the years it seems to have taken a near-singular focus on bettering the lives of Monticello students through education. It's an opportunity Olson feels blessed to have. One that he equates to the accomplishment of his childhood dream that was fostered while growing up as a star hockey player in Grand Rapids, Minn.

"My dream when I was little was to raise the Stanley Cup," he said.

"I guess I kind of feel like coming here to Monticello has given me multiple opportunities to do the educational version of that. Not just this, but all the good days with kids, good days with staff, the presentations to the board. Now I get to take all of those moments and kind of flip and reverse my role. I get to be the person trying to direct all of those great moments, and put great people in front of our great kids. I'm just absolutely excited."

Olson will assume his position as Superintendent of the Monticello School District on July 1.

### Dear Community,

On behalf of the entire Monticello School Board, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Monticello community for their involvement in our recent superintendent search.

A wide array of people across this community aided in our search process. From filling out a survey, to serving on input committees, to being on a final interview team - community members played a key role in bringing us to our choice for the next leader of the Monticello School District.

We believe that the superintendent is not just a position of leadership in the district, but a position of leadership in the community as well. Therefore, it is our belief that community input carries great weight, and we appreciate the time and energy of all those that helped us gather that information.

I would also like to thank Dr. Michael Favor for his leadership and guidance during this transitional year. Dr. Favor has been an outstanding advocate for the children and employees of the Monticello School District, and we look forward to continuing to work with him this spring.

Last, but certainly not least, the board wishes to welcome Eric Olson to his new position as the Superintendent of the Monticello School District.

In Mr. Olson, the board sees a natural leader with unrivaled passion for this school district. Mr. Olson, like us, believes greatly and cares deeply for the talented and passionate staff and students we have throughout this district. Just as importantly, the board sees a person that has shown an ability to learn, grow, and improve during his time in the district, and a strong willingness to continue doing so.

We believe in Mr. Olson's vision for unifying the Monticello School community, and we look forward to working alongside him to help our district continue to achieve all-around excellence in education.

**Sincerely,  
Chair Jill Bartlett  
Monticello School Board**

Crosswalks at 3rd St. and Washington St. and School Blvd. and Fallon Ave. to receive improvements this year, Elm St. and 3rd St. improvements scheduled for 2019



At the last meeting in February, the Monticello City Council approved an item that will greatly benefit the Monticello School District and district families. The city voted to approve installing flashing pedestrian signs at three proposed locations during the next two years, helping to make walking to school safer for the students of Monticello. In 2018, the city will install flashing crossing signs at the School Blvd. and Fallon Ave. intersection as well as the Washington St. and 3rd St. intersection. The city plans to install pedestrian signs at the Elm St. and 3rd St. intersection in 2019.

The intersection improvements at Washington St. will include advance warning pedestrian crossing signs in both directions, and standard crosswalk markings on 3rd St., west of Washington St. Like the Washington St. improvements, the School Boulevard improvements will include a sign with "Pedestrian-activated flashing LEDs in the border." The future improvements at Elm St. will include a pedestrian pushbutton warning beacon system, as well as advance warning crossing signs.

The city used traffic rates and a bevy of other information to pinpoint the best locations for the new signage. The city's engineering firm, WSB & Associates, determined the type of signals that would work best for each location.

"They looked at a variety of options," said City of Monticello Community Development Director Angela Schumann. "Based on their expertise, they were able to choose what would work best at each location."

The idea to improve crosswalk safety was first sparked by a conversation between Little Mountain Elementary Principal Gabe Hackett and Wright County Commissioner Darek Vetsch, who is also a Monticello parent.

They, as well as others, had noticed that the increase in distracted driving that is plaguing this country had also been showing up in Monticello. They discussed what could be done to help keep walkers safe. To get the ball rolling, Vetsch helped put Hackett in touch with the city of Monticello.

That led to a big meeting with the city, members of Live Wright, of Wright County Health and Human Services, of CentraCare Health, and the Monticello School District. Several positives came out of that meeting, with one of the biggest ones being how invested the city was in helping out. "I think the city really felt like it was an immediate need," said Hackett. "They were on board from day one."

"If the school district tell us this is a concern for them ... as a city, we want to take that seriously," said Schumann.

The city was also ready to jump on this project because of how closely it aligned with their strategic goals. The city finalized a new strategic plan last year and the first two goals of that plan are "Create and Preserve Sustainable Livability" and "Build a Connected Community."

"To me, this project corresponds directly to our strategic plan as a city," said Schumann.

Plus, the city has long been interested in a safe routes to school initiative, which was another major development to come out of the large group meeting. With the help of the city and other partnerships, the district applied for a "Safe Routes to School" grant which would fund the district to work with a team of experts on improving walking and biking routes to school across the district. The district expects to find out the results of that application process in the next couple of months.

But regardless of how that turns out, with this step the city has already done major work to put wheels in motion on making walking routes safer near every district school building. Assistant Supt. Joe Dockendorf said it is invaluable to be in a city where leaders are willing to partner with the district to help make improvements that benefit all stakeholders.

"It's so important. I was amazed to see everyone working together," said Dockendorf. "I'm just so grateful to the city." Installation of the improvements and new signs is expected to begin this summer.

## Saluting excellence around the district



**Kim Nygaard, Dan Gruhlke, and Jason Thompson** - The trio represent the three most recently awarded Teachers of the Month in the Monticello School District, as selected by Education Minnesota Monticello. Nygaard teaches at Little Mountain Elementary, Gruhlke teaches at Eastview Education Center, and Thompson teaches at Monticello High School.

**The Monticello Moose Hockey Team** - For the second consecutive year, the Moose captured a section championship (this time via a 4-1 win over North Branch) and reached the Class A State Tournament. At state, Monticello fell behind No. 1 Hermantown 3-0 in the opening period before rallying to cut the deficit to 3-2 for the majority of the contest. A late Hawks insurance goal helped hold off the Moose, and gave the defending state champs a 4-2 win. The Moose finished the season with a record of 19-9-2.

**Jesse Midas** - The sophomore wrestler advanced to his first ever state tournament by virtue of capturing a section championship at 220 pounds. The sophomore wrestled impressively at state as well, finishing 2-2 and just missing out on placing in Class AA.

**Shea Anderson and Myah Hedlund** - The two gymnasts made their debut appearance at the Class A State Meet this spring and both made Monticello proud. Anderson finished 36th in floor exercise while Hedlund finished 37th on the beam. Anderson is a tenth-grader at MHS, while Hedlund is just an eighth-grader.

**Jack Whinnery, Logan Cordell, Cade Boraas, Jack Sampson, and Luis Barrientos** - The Magic boys swimming and diving team sent five representatives to the state meet in March, including three divers. Whinnery earned two 10th place finishes in swimming, while Cordell finished 16th and 15th in his two events. Boraas capped an impressive diving career at MHS by totaling 389.25

points to finish in second place in Class A. Team-mate Jack Sampson was right behind Boraas, with 386.1 points to finish in third. Barrientos scored 354.3 points to finish ninth, giving Monticello an amazing three divers in the Top-10.

**Matt Todd** - The MHS senior wrapped up one of the best basketball careers in Monticello High School history when the Magic fell to Delano in the section semifinal round in March. Todd finished his career as the school leader in points (2,599), assists (600+), and steals (380+). Todd was also named to the Star Tribune Third Team All-Metro squad.

**Grace Schillewaert** - The MHS senior earned finalist honors at DECA's state competition in March, thus earning a spot at the national competition in Atlanta in early April. Schillewaert helped start the DECA program at Monticello two years ago - read more in the story "Two years in, Monticello's DECA program is an all-around success" on Page 53

### Did You Know?

The Monticello School District website ([www.monticello.k12.mn.us](http://www.monticello.k12.mn.us)) features new headline stories each week from around the district! Make sure to bookmark the website and check in often so that you aren't missing stories about all of the great students in Monticello! In addition, Monticello School District is on Facebook as "Monticello Public Schools" and on Twitter at @ISD882. Please follow both to stay updated on recent headline stories, news updates, and more information from around the district.

12 students represent Monticello at state competition, with Grace Schillewaert moving on to international competition



Two years ago, then Monticello sophomore Grace Schillewaert was attending a conference and chatting with students from other school districts when the conversation turned to DECA - an organization that prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management in high schools and colleges around the globe. Schillewaert's friends were shocked to learn that the program didn't exist at Monticello High School.

DECA holds competitive conferences at the district, state, and international level. Those competitions challenge students to both take tests, and also to perform role play such as putting together a marketing plan and presenting it to business judges, or go through an interview process. The program is designed to build both specific skills and transferable skills, that will help make students successful in whatever future field they choose.

In 2016, less than a year after that conference conversation that piqued Schillewaert's interest, Monticello's DECA program was created. This year, Schillewaert's senior year, the program consists of 20 kids, 12 of which qualified to represent Monticello at the state competition in early March, and one, Schillewaert fittingly, who will be moving on to represent the school at the international competition in April.

Last year Monti had approximately 10 students qualify for state. This year, they qualified 12 out of the 18 that competed at districts.

The team put in plenty of work to get there. They start meeting once a week in September, and continue to meet through March, increasing the meetings to two or three times a week as they approach district and state competitions. They practice their role playing, interviewing skills, study for their DECA tests, and generally study business and marketing vocabulary and anything else that may help their performance. All of the work paid off, with a number of competitors receiving state recognition. Schillewaert earned her international qualification with a second place finish in Personal Financial Literacy. She also teamed with Kyle Schyma, Michael Stocker, and Alec Theros to finish first in a group project category (Product Area Group A for Marketing Plan) as well.

A number of DECA students said their involvement with the club has come with several benefits beyond just the

state accolades. "It builds confidence in everybody," said Myranda Turner, a finalist this year. "And not saying we weren't confident people before, but now it's in a different way. And it has helped to learn quick problem solving skills. Sometimes I can be indecisive, this helps you make quick decisions. I think it's just been overall enriching."

Another major benefit has been the bond that the students have built with each other, and DECA advisor Kari Grawburg, a teacher at MHS.

"Not only do you learn how to communicate in business terms, but I know I've grown closer to all of these other girls," said Amelia Warmka. "It's very nerve-wracking, the competing, but afterward you just feel so good. You feel more prepared to take on the rest of the world."

"And one of our favorite parts of DECA is Ms. Grawburg," added Turner. "She is the sweetest and most intelligent woman, one of the most amazing teachers that we have here. We come in here every day, even when we don't have DECA, and just chill. She makes us feel like we have a home here." For her part, Grawburg said the last two years have been the most she's ever enjoyed teaching, thanks to her involvement with DECA.

"Just seeing all of the members grow and learn, and to be able to see what they're learning in the classroom and take it outside of the classroom walls and really apply it is very rewarding for me as a teacher," she said.

And as for Schillewaert, she said her qualification for the international competition (April 21-24 in Atlanta) is very exciting, but more than anything, she's enjoyed watching the DECA program and participants blossom in front of her eyes. "Being able to start this and seeing these girls and the guys that are in it grow, and learn more about business and what they can do in the future, is really cool," said Schillewaert. "Just to see all of our members grow and learn more about something they're passionate about ... It's taught me about how to come up with an idea and bring it to fruition."

This story has been edited down for length. Please visit [www.monticello.k12.mn.us](http://www.monticello.k12.mn.us) to read the full story.

Serving at the highest level: 2002 Monti grad Chase Cushman reflects on eight years spent working in President Obama's White House, including four years as a director



*Below is a passage from a story on Monticello alum Chase Cushman, who worked as the Director of Scheduling and Advance in the White House under President Barack Obama. The full story can be found on the Monticello School District website.*

In 1999, Monticello High School sophomore Chase Cushman was a member of the first group of students to walk through the doors of the brand new Monticello High School. Fourteen years later, Cushman earned another, slightly more prestigious, first, when he became the first Monticello graduate to hold a Director position in the White House, serving as the Director of scheduling for President Barack Obama and eventually as the Director of Scheduling and Advance. It was a career and life path that started in Monticello, ventured through Collegeville, took a pit stop on a losing senate campaign in Minnesota, and then veered toward the campaign of a young senator in Illinois. That became a presidential campaign, which turned into a presidency. Cushman's position went from volunteer to campaign position to the low rungs of the White House to a director position that met daily with White House department heads and worked directly with President Obama.

"It was an interesting ride," said Cushman, with a laugh. The uniqueness and "cool factor" of Cushman's positions at the highest level of United States government are not lost on him.

"My job was really kind of interesting because I was one of the few people in the White House that had insight through all of the silos," said Cushman. "My job was to be the person that had a 30,000 foot view of all the things that the president was touching so that everyone knew how their stuff was going to affect somebody else's thing."

Cushman also noted that he firmly believed his local upbringing helped him both to become the person he is and to reach the positions he did.

"I think about my holistic upbringing a lot as part of the reason why I got to where I was. Look, you have to be able to work hard, be patient, and know when to speak your mind and when not to," said Cushman. "I think these are the kind of values we have in Monticello."

**For the full story on 2002 Monticello grad Chase Cushman's journey to the White House and time working for President Barack Obama, including anecdotes about the President, foreign trips, meeting the pope, and how his time at MHS helped prepare him, as well as a look at what his future may hold, please visit [www.monticello.k12.mn.us](http://www.monticello.k12.mn.us).**



Schools across the district have hosted Future Chef Culinary Showdowns, put on by Sodexo, during the past two months. Pictured is the showdown from Little Mountain Elementary, which featured eight contestants and six judges, including Monticello Mayor Brian Stumpf and Interim Superintendent Dr. Michael Favor.



Monticello Middle School hosted the annual District Wide Art Show in the media center on March 13th. The show featured hundreds of amazing works of art from students of all ages across the district. If you weren't able to make it, but are interested in checking out some of the highlights, visit [www.monticello.k12.mn.us](http://www.monticello.k12.mn.us) and look for Art Show Photo Gallery under district headlines!