



## From the District

Greetings from Albany Area Schools,

It has been an absolute pleasure to attempt to fill the large shoes of former Superintendent Greg Johnson. As your new superintendent, I have spent the greatest portion of my time over the past three months focused on meeting people, building relationships and learning all I can about who we are and how we do things. So far I have been able to gather a lot of information and am enjoying working with our administrative team to better understand where we might be able to focus our efforts for growth.

Albany Area Schools has a reputation that is well known outside our borders. Now, I have been able to experience the district and our community firsthand. This summer I was able to regularly attend meetings for both the Avon and Albany Chambers of Commerce. I was also able to meet local business leaders, attend Spunktacular Days and Heritage Days and even got a personal tour of Pioneer Days this fall. Attending sporting events has allowed me to connect with families, students and community members. During other events like Albany Area Education Foundation meetings and the Huskie Athletic Hall of Fame ceremony, I have been able to see how previous school leaders have developed structures for collaboration. And, in the past month, I have had the opportunity to be in classrooms, eat lunch with students and meet with staff members. So far I have been left with some pretty strong positive impressions about the well-developed collaboration between the school and the community, our high level of student participation in activities beyond the classroom and the degree to which our organization has worked to cultivate and grow a healthy and supportive culture for learning.

One of the best parts of starting this school year has been the ability to return to many of the routines that have been part of school culture in our district and across our state and country. While we are still monitoring COVID and reporting as required to the State, the vast majority of our planning and preparation this summer was focused on student academic growth. This has been a very welcome change for our staff, who can once again focus their attention on their areas of expertise.

Another major development this summer was the referendum that voters approved on August 9. With 59% of our voters approving the \$16.9 million dollar project, we are now hard at work in the design phase of the project. We are very thankful to have such strong support for our school from our community and I am excited to be a part of this process. We look forward to bringing you regular updates as the project progresses.

It has been a wonderful start to the school year and I am looking forward to experiencing more Purple Pride throughout the year. Thank you for the opportunity to serve Albany Area Schools and thank you for your support of our district.

Travis Okerlund, Superintendent  
[tokerlund@district745.org](mailto:tokerlund@district745.org) | 320-845-5050

# Huskie Howl

Fall 2022

Community Newsletter

Albany Area Schools





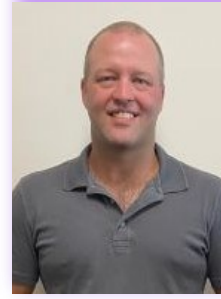
**Mike Ellingson**  
Middle School  
Math



**Brittany Brinkman**  
Middle School  
Reading



**Erin Giosta**  
Middle School  
Math



**Ron Reszel**  
Middle School  
Social Studies



**Carmen Peterson**  
Middle School  
Special Education



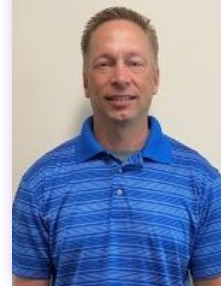
**Taylor Gerads**  
High School  
Special Education



**Krista Kujala**  
Secondary Speech  
Long Term Sub



**Emily Nienaber**  
Albany Elementary  
Grade 3



**Chris Grove**  
Albany Elementary  
Grade 4



**Rachel Koenig**  
Albany Elementary  
Grade 5



**Emily Pratt**  
Albany Elementary  
Kindergarten



**Bayley Engler  
Pooler**  
Avon Elementary  
Early Childhood  
Special Education



**Rose Pavel**  
Avon Elementary  
Early Childhood  
Special Education



**Bethany Bierscheid**  
Avon Elementary  
Grade 4



**Melissa O'Connell**  
Avon Elementary  
Kindergarten

## District Wide

Joe Dingmann - Van Driver  
Melissa Kurkosky - Food Service Director

### Albany Elementary

Laurie Brutger - Paraprofessional  
Rose Davis - Food Service Aide  
Alyson Dirkes - Paraprofessional  
Shannon Dustin - Paraprofessional  
Alissa Dunn - Paraprofessional  
Amy Engelmeyer - Food Service Aide  
Barb Palzewicz - Food Service Aide  
Rose Pundsack - Paraprofessional

## Middle & High School

Sandy Wielenberg - Paraprofessional  
Emily Rademacher - Food Service Aide  
Robin Garding - Paraprofessional  
Lindsay Herdering - Paraprofessional

### Avon Elementary

Loni Price - Paraprofessional  
Kayla Furnstahl - Paraprofessional  
Linnea Ingold - PreK Paraprofessional  
Audrey Dingmann - PreK Paraprofessional  
Kendra Plautz - Kids Company Assistant



**Travis Okerlund**  
Superintendent

On July 1, Travis Okerlund began in the position of Superintendent of Albany Area Schools. Okerlund, who grew up in Little Falls, comes to Albany Area Schools from the role of Executive Director at Kaleidoscope Charter School in Otsego.

Okerlund made the decision to apply for the position in our district based on the strong reputation of putting students, education and people first.

When asked his initial impression of Albany Area Schools, Okerlund replies, "I have enjoyed learning about the traditions, our connections to our community and understanding our processes. The best part of my job has been meeting and getting to know the people, especially the students and staff. I regularly have to remind myself that this is real and I have been given an amazing opportunity to lead such an excellent group of people on a clearly focused mission of providing opportunities for our students."



**Jason Mielke**  
Principal, Avon Elementary

Jason Mielke has been enjoying his new role as Principal at Avon Elementary. Mielke, who grew up in Annandale, was previously an Elementary Principal in the Sartell-St. Stephen School District. Mielke made the decision to apply for the position at Avon Elementary due to the district having great community support for education and the strong history of academic and extra-curricular success.

When asked his initial impression of Albany Area Schools, Mielke replies, "The Albany Area School District has a collaborative group of compassionate educators and families truly care about their students' success. There is an immense amount of Purple Pride, not only in the schools but across the area. I look forward to continuing to be a part of this supportive school system for years to come."

### In the News

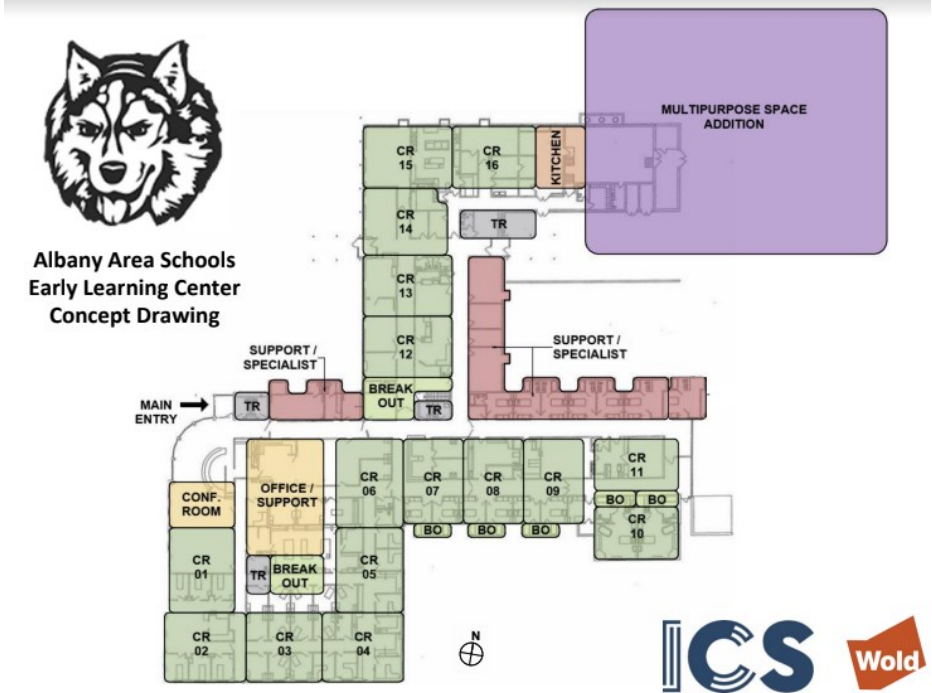
- On June 10, Albany Area Schools student Olivia Goebel, was named the Class AA State Champion in the 3200 meter run at the Minnesota State High School League Track and Field State Meet.
- Albany Area Schools students Kaitlyn Lahr, Abby Thelen, Blake Silbernack and Zac Kreuzer competed at the Minnesota State High School League State Golf Tournaments this past June.
- This fall, Junior Varsity Girls Soccer was added as an extra-curricular activity offered by Albany Area Schools. This winter, Junior Varsity Gymnastics will also have its inaugural season.



# Referendum Update – Early Learning Center

Thanks to the voters of the Albany Area School District and a successful referendum on August 9, the vision for the Albany Area Schools Early Learning Center is now becoming a reality!

An interesting aspect of a major public project like our Early Learning Center is the amount of time that each step takes. However, we have still made some big strides since August 9. We have been working with ICS, our lead project consultant, to coordinate and manage the numerous aspects of the project. The Board of Education officially purchased the former Albany Hospital on September 13. We then updated our bond rating and collected bids for the bond sale, and the Board of Education officially awarded the sale of bonds on October 12. We also established a Design Committee and Project Oversight Committee to develop the plan and implement the vision for the building. We officially close on the sale of the bonds on November 3 and will then have the funds to finance work on the project.



Design of the new Early Learning Center is expected to go on throughout the school year, but the goal is to complete the major design aspects by spring, when the project is tentatively scheduled to go out for competitive bid for all construction trades. Abatement and interior demolition will most likely take place during the design phase of the project, and major construction will begin sometime late next summer. Although supply chain issues and labor shortages have become a regular occurrence lately, we are still pushing for the building to be ready for students by the fall of 2024.

The new Albany Area Schools Early Learning Center will house all students who would normally attend preschool and kindergarten at Albany Elementary School. The new facility will free up 4 to 5 classrooms at both Avon and Albany Elementary Schools and will enable us to better accommodate some of our current program needs. It will also provide room for future growth of our district and significantly improve our ability to provide high quality education to our learners and the districtwide community.



As the design and construction process continues, we are committed to sharing regular updates with our staff and community, and we are currently developing a plan for community engagement at all major milestones. We can't wait to share all the exciting developments as they happen.

Thank you to our entire community for helping to support the new Albany Area Schools Early Learning Center.



# Get to Know Your School Resource Officer



**Name:** Sergeant Matthew Gannon

**Agency:** Albany Police Department

**Current Assignment:** School Resource Officer for District 745

**Years in Current Assignment:** 7.5 years

**Primary Responsibility:** Provide a safe learning environment for our students and staff.

**Favorite Part of Current Assignment:** Having the opportunity to interact daily with students.

**Past Experience:** 17.5 years as an officer (7.5 years with Albany PD and 10 years with St. Cloud PD).

**Past Specialty Assignments:** Field Training Officer, Defensive Tactics Instructor, K9 Handler, Firearms Instructor and Crime Scene Technician.

**Contact Information:**

Email: [mgannon@district745.org](mailto:mgannon@district745.org) | Office: 320-845-5066

## News from the SRO

Happy Fall! I hope you have had a great start to the school year. This year, you will see updates from me in each edition of the Huskie Howl. I will share more about what we do at Albany Area Schools to ensure our students and staff have a safe learning environment and I will also share ways you can help support your student in safety-related topics at home.

At the beginning of the school year I received several calls and emails asking about our school safety measures. The heartbreaking events at Uvalde at the end of last school year brought forth many concerns for parents. School safety is always one of the top priorities for our district. Here are a just a few of the things we have in place to ensure student and staff safety throughout the day:

- Secured entrances and all doors locked during the school day
- Raptor visitor management system for all visitors and staff ID badges
- Lockdown/emergency drills
- ALICE training for staff and students
- CrisisGo App for staff during emergency situations
- Daily SRO safety walkthroughs

If you ever have questions or concerns, the best way to contact me is by email at [mgannon@district745.org](mailto:mgannon@district745.org).

## PAWS-ITIVE PRIDE

If you're a parent of a student at Albany or Avon Elementary, it's likely you've heard the term "Paws-itive Pride". Both elementary schools use PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) as a positive and proactive approach to student behaviors. Each school has pillars that guide student behaviors including: Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe and Be a Learner. In all areas of the school day, students are taught what it looks like to show Paws-itive Pride for each of these pillars. Students and classrooms are also celebrated when they are caught showing one of these positive behaviors. Throughout the year a variety of celebrations are held as the school works together to meet a goal. A few of these rewards are filling the Huskie House at Albany Elementary and the Tower of Pride at Avon Elementary.



# Student Representatives to the School Board

Mason Bierbaum



Maggie Seiler



Cecilia Hudock



**Q: What made you interested in serving as a student representative to the school board?**

**A:** I have always been interested in learning about all levels of government and helping people, so when I saw this position on the school board open I thought it would be a great opportunity to do both.

**Q: What are your plans after high school?**

**A:** I plan on attending the University of Minnesota and majoring in Political Science.

**Q: What made you interested in serving as a student representative to the school board?**

**A:** I was interested in becoming a representative to make everyone's voice heard in school.

**Q: What are your plans after high school?**

**A:** I plan on attending Gustavus Adolphus College to major in Pre-Med.

**Q: What made you interested in serving as a student representative to the school board?**

**A:** I was interested in being a student rep because I wanted to make sure the students in our school had a voice.

**Q: What are your plans after high school?**

**A:** My plans after high school are to go to a four year college and get a degree in Genetics.

## 2022 - 2023

# Students Inducted into National Honor Society



On September 26, the Albany Chapter of the National Honor Society (NHS) inducted 11 new members. The new inductees joined 16 current NHS members. Membership in this group is based on the four pillars of NHS: Scholarship (GPA of 3.5 or higher), Service, Leadership and Character. NHS members support our community through service projects, serve as leaders in our school community, and hold themselves to high standards. Induction into NHS is an elite honor.



# Athletic Hall of Fame Induction Celebrated



Albany Area Schools celebrated the induction of four new members into the Huskie Athletic Hall of Fame on Friday, September 16 and Saturday, September 17. Rachel Bruns, Jennie Noreen Helget, Maury Meyer and Kurt Schlangen were the 2022 Athletic Hall of Fame Inductees.

The honorees attended the revealing of their likeness on the granite Huskie Athletic Hall of Fame wall located in the secondary school commons (pictured at the left), enjoyed a pep fest with the student body, a home Huskie football game, and a public reception at the Albany Golf Course. More information on the inductees can be found on the district website. Congratulations to the honorees!



Inductees include (L to R) Maury Meyer, Kurt Schlangen, Rachel Bruns and Jennie Noreen Helget



## Johnson Named Assistant Coach of the Year

On October 8, Grant Johnson was recognized by the Minnesota State High School Coaches Association as Class AA Assistant Baseball Coach of the Year. Johnson was named Head Coach of the Albany Huskies Baseball program earlier this year.



## Amdahl Inducted into Hall of Fame

On September 25, the Minnesota State High School Baseball Coaches Association inducted Al Amdahl into the MSHSBCA Hall of Fame. Amdahl served as the Albany Huskies Baseball Head Coach from 1992-2022.



## Neu Receives Community Education Award

On October 6, Kelly Neu, Albany Area Schools Community Education Coordinator, received the Region 9 Community Educator of Excellence Award. Region 9 represents 53 districts in Central Minnesota.



# Huskie HOMECOMING



Albany Area Schools celebrated Homecoming Week October 10-14. On October 10, Carmen Eiyneck and Mason Bierbaum were crowned Homecoming Royalty.



## Homecoming Button Tradition Continues

The 2022 Homecoming button (left) was designed by Ava Hines. These buttons are a long standing Huskie tradition dating back to 1957 or before. Each year students in grades 6-12 can submit button design ideas and the winning design is made into buttons and sold by Albany Huskie Letter Club members. Thank you to Ludwig Photography for donating the supplies and equipment used to make Homecoming buttons each year!



Community Education  
Albany Area Schools  
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EDDM\*\*\*\*\*  
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