

Dialogue

Neenah Joint School District Community Newsletter

Spring 2021



FLEXIBLE LEARNING

Schools Shift from Virtual to In-Person



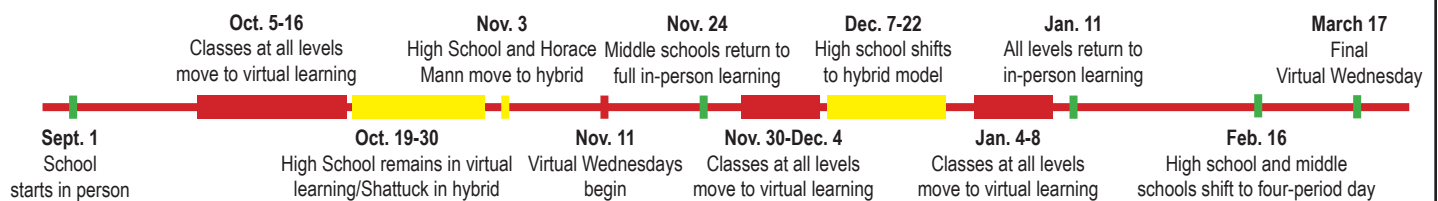
It's required lots of flexibility by families, students and District staff members, but students in the Neenah Joint School District have managed to stay in school in-person for the majority of the 2020-21 school year.

In July, the District offered students the opportunity to learn in a virtual or distance “real time” format. The real time format was expanded in January for grades 6-12 where students can log on and experience the class on their computer with their classmates who are in person.

Similar to most worldwide studies, Neenah schools have found few incidents of transmission of COVID-19 within the schools. Students and staff at all levels have worn masks all year. The middle and high schools held two class periods of three hours each until late February in order to reduce traffic in the hallways. Sanitizing and distancing as much as possible have been commonplace. School buildings have been closed to all outside groups and visitors all year long. Most fall sports were moved to the spring and music concerts were cancelled. Winter sports were held with athletes competing in masks and two spectators per athlete.

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Neenah Joint School District 2020-21 School Year Timeline



NJSD Staff Members Engaging in a Focus on Equity and Inclusion

All Neenah Joint School District staff members have been engaging in a focus on equity and inclusion throughout the second semester of the 2020-21 school year.

A group of staff members representing each school as well as Board of Education members and administrators began working with experts from the Equity Literacy Institute over the past year and are bringing conversations and emphasis to each of their schools over the next two years in the hopes of collectively working to remove some of the barriers our students face in our schools.

The kickoff event was held during a Professional Learning Day on January 29 during an all-staff convocation with a message from staff and students on the barriers they have faced and the support they have received to overcome them.

Staff members then broke into small groups at their buildings for further discussion and study. Since then, schools have dedicated some of their Professional Learning Day times to equity discussions through activities such as book reads and case studies. The Board of Education also approved the hire of an Equity

and Inclusion Coordinator and an Equity and Inclusion Instructional Coach through two-year grant-funded positions each designed to help close the gaps of achievement and experience for our minority students.

The focus challenges staff members to think about ways in which racism, sexism, homophobia, class inequities, language bias, religious-based oppression and other equity and diversity concerns affect students, teachers, families and other members of our school community.

From the Superintendent



Being a parent has always been rewarding, but challenging.

Getting kids off to school, keeping them fed, carting them around to different activities and tucking them into bed are tasks parents have been handling for generations.

Now add virtual learning from home, wearing masks, staying healthy, keeping active and a multitude of other challenges faced in a global pandemic.

It's amazing how much our families have endured over the past year. It's been far from easy and, whether you have kids or not, I know many of you have faced challenges even more extraordinary than those listed above.

Words can't express the gratitude and admiration we have for our families and our entire community in helping to navigate this pandemic. We've been able to have our students at school in person more than most districts of our size in the state. We also know there's been lots of starts and stops, plenty of quarantines and tons of missed events and interactions that make our children's school year memorable.

Our families' perseverance through everything we've experienced has been incredible. We've sacrificed family events and other social gatherings to keep everyone else healthy. We're also indebted to your continued support of our teachers and staff members. They have done so many things to ensure our students have continued their learning every day while also providing social and emotional support. So many of you have reached out offering gratitude and encouragement to our staff who have been heroic in how much they've given of themselves on behalf of our children.

We've made it three-quarters of the way through this unprecedented year. In one year, we completely overhauled what school has looked like for decades. We've learned a lot along the way and our continuous improvement efforts will pay off. We also realize we haven't done it alone. Thank you to everyone who has helped along the way to keep our kids in school and our community safe and healthy.

Neenah With Pride!

Dr. Mary Pfeiffer
Superintendent

Three Neenah Students Selected Among National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists



Three Neenah High School seniors have been named semifinalists for the prestigious National Merit Scholarship Program.

Rachel Strandberg (*left, above*), Alicia Zhang (*left, below*) and Daniel Zhao (*right*) were honored for their performance among more than 1.5 million students nationwide who entered the 2021 competition by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

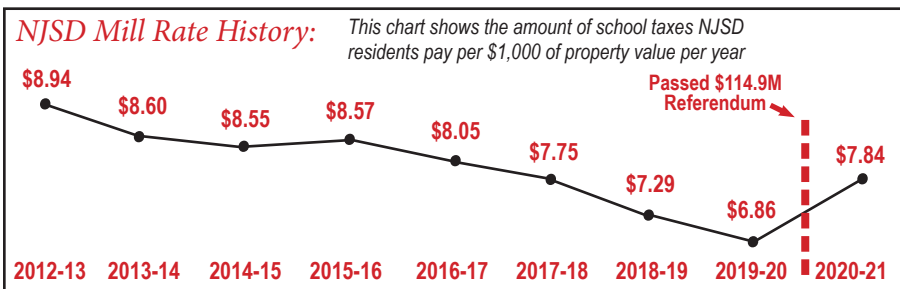


A total of 16,000 semifinalists were named nationwide, representing less than one percent of high school seniors. The three Neenah students are each vying for one of 7,600 National Merit Scholarships, which total more than \$30 million. Final scholarship awards will be announced next spring.

District Tax Levy Remains Low After Referendum

Neenah Joint School District residents will see a property tax increase of 98 cents per \$1,000 of property value in 2021, which is one cent lower than projected following the passage of a referendum in April 2020.

The total mill rate will be \$7.84 per \$1,000 of property value, which is still below the rate from 2017 when residents paid \$8.05. Included in the tax levy is over \$1.5 million toward private school student vouchers. Without including these vouchers and measuring only funds going directly to the Neenah Joint School District, the mill rate would be 33 cents lower at \$7.51. Despite the increase, District residents will still pay among the lowest school district taxes in the Fox Valley.



The overall increase follows a successful \$114.9 million referendum in April 2020 that will build a new high school, renovate the existing high school into intermediate and middle schools for grades 5-8, create more space for elementary students and enhance District-wide safety and security. Outside of referendum dollars, the District will also be updating all buildings with ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) enhancements. Construction on the new high school will begin in the spring of 2021 with the school scheduled to open in the fall of 2023.

Part of the reason the District was able to keep the tax increase lower for property owners was by fully spending last year's budget and receiving an increase in state aid.

In June, the District became one of the few school districts in the state to fully fund its post-retirement benefits liability. The payments over the past eight years toward the \$100 million liability opened up over \$5 million in the annual operating budget that will be used towards the facilities upgrade, reducing the size of the referendum amount. The District will also be providing 2.5 percent salary increases for all staff members. District staff members have received increases for over a decade, resulting in one of the highest staff retention rates in the Fox Valley.

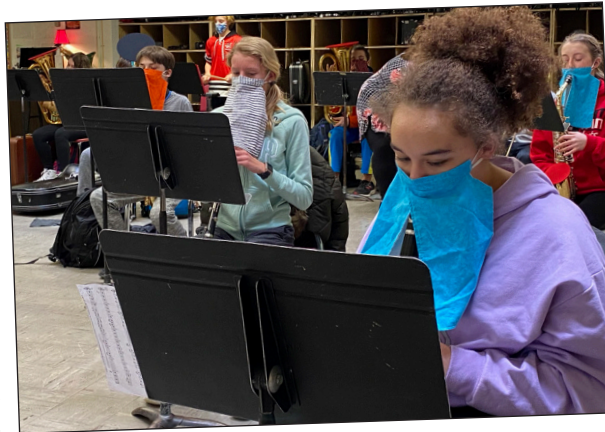
Singing A Different Tune

Music Classes Adapt to Numerous Changes in a Pandemic

Every aspect of school has changed during the 2020-21 school year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but music classes have likely seen the biggest changes. From taking long breaks in the middle of class to the cancellation of concerts and students recording their performance at home, music classes are more unusual this year than they've ever been.

Early on in the pandemic, health officials advised that singing and playing instruments indoors posed a significant health threat. This forced the music department staff into numerous summer meetings to figure out ways to still allow students to pursue passions and experience the fine arts in a safe manner.

One of the most significant challenges came from a Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendation that students sing or play for a maximum of 30 consecutive minutes and then break for 15 minutes to allow for air to transfer. When the middle and high schools decided on three-hour class periods to reduce students



taking place outside. In order to allow for distancing, the high school choir rooms that typically fit 80-90 students now hold about 27 chairs. Teachers have also had to manage some students learning at home and others in person during the same class. Those at home have a lag time in their internet connection, so they're forced to play with their computer muted and record their performances.

Keeping students motivated and finding ways to assess student performance has been another challenge. With all concerts cancelled, teachers have worked

to find ways to have students perform through recordings or in one-on-one environments. Many teachers are using more modern pop music songs that kids typically get more excited about.

Extracurricular activities have also been severely impacted. Vintage show choir performed for family members while wearing masks and recorded a performance for two virtual competitions. The show choirs still hope to hold their traditional "Finale" event in some format as well. The marching bands have missed out on football games and parades, but are still exploring some sort of outdoor performance in May.

Collectively, teachers worry most about students falling behind or losing interest. However, they continue to find ways to keep students engaged and pursuing their love of music in plenty of creative ways.



moving throughout the buildings, it created plenty of downtime in music classes. Teachers have gotten creative with lots of different activities. Many teachers went "back to basics" and instituted more music theory and basic rhythm activities. Choir classes critiqued episodes of the popular TV show "The Voice" and students created "FlipGrid" videos where they shared discussion on different topics.

Students have been wearing special masks to play their instruments that were created by or, in some cases, purchased by the Neenah Music Parents. Most of the classes have moved to new locations with many classes in Pickard Auditorium and some even



Top: Shattuck Middle School band students rehearse while wearing masks made by Neenah Music Parents. Left: Horace Mann band students practice in the parking lot with instrument covers. Bottom: teacher Amy Westcott leads the high school concert choir as students sit distanced in the Pickard Auditorium seats. Westcott is also teaching students virtually through the computer to her left.

Fall Sports in March? Only in 2021

Very few aspects of this school year have been traditional and that certainly applies to athletics and other extracurricular activities.

The WIAA allowed schools to move their fall sports to an “alternate spring” season. Neenah competed in the fall in girls golf and cross country, but opted to move football, boys soccer, girls swimming and diving, girls tennis and boys and girls volleyball to the alternate spring season.

Some fall sports began practice in February and all will conclude in late April or early May. Football is competing in a seven-week season in a 20-team Fox Valley Classic Conference with other area schools that are also playing in the spring. Crowds will be limited to family members for all sports, but most events will be livestreamed and may be accessed through a link on the District website.

Spring sports are expected to proceed as usual, starting in late April and ending in late June.



Neenah High School's fishing team placed fifth among 51 teams at the 2020-21 Wisconsin Interscholastic Fishing Association state championship meet. It marks Neenah's sixth top 10 finish at state in the past seven years. Pictured with a 34-inch northern pike are (L to R): Colton Tiedt, Logan Van Zummeren, Ryan Nelson and Riley Baumann. Teams fished across the state this year and uploaded photos of their catches through an app to calculate results.

Neenah Special Olympics Program Honored in ESPN Honor Roll

Neenah High School has been recognized as one of 36 Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools nationwide on the 2020 ESPN Honor Roll. The list includes elementary, middle, high schools and colleges across the country.

Neenah High School is the only Wisconsin school on the list and one of 22 high schools. The program's three main components are inclusive sports among students with and without disabilities, inclusive youth leadership and whole school engagement.

One of Neenah High School's most notable achievements has been a unified basketball game that typically takes place each November with the school's Special Olympics team taking on a team of faculty members. The past two years, the Special Olympics team included students without disabilities. The game also features a halftime performance with a unified dance team and a large student section.

Neenah High School has also had unified teams compete in track and field and several of the varsity athletic teams have held events in conjunction with the Special Olympics team. Neenah has taken its inclusion efforts across all levels in recent years as Shattuck Middle School also offers a unified program and events have been held at several elementary schools.



Neenah High School's boys basketball team finished the winter with a 23-3 record and tied for the Fox Valley Association title. Neenah was ranked No. 1 in the Division 1 state rankings for three weeks at mid-season. The Rockets ended the year at No. 2 in the rankings, losing to top-ranked and eventual state runner-up Kimberly in the regional final. Athletes competed while wearing masks the entire season and crowds were limited to two spectators per athlete. Senior Jake Dietz (pictured) was the team's lone first-team all-conference performer.

New Neenah High School Set for June Groundbreaking



Main Entrance

After months of engagement with staff, students, District leadership and the Board of Education, the plans for the new Neenah High School are continuing to develop. While there is still a lot of work to do to finalize all aspects of the new Neenah High School design, we hope you are as excited as we are with the progress made and the amazing spaces that will serve our students and our community for decades to come.
(Renderings provided by Bray Architects)



South Side from Football Stadium



Main Entrance Hallway



Atrium/Cafeteria



Flexible Learning Spaces

What's Next in 2021?

- ◆ Bids for summer 2021 safety/security and ADA improvements were received in late February and awarded in early March.
- ◆ The first bid package for the new Neenah High School (Site and Civil) will bid in April.
- ◆ Coolidge Elementary, Hoover Elementary, Roosevelt Elementary, Tullar Elementary, and Washington School of Early Learning will see safety/security and ADA updates in 2021.

Learn more and take a virtual high school tour at:
www.neenah.k12.wi.us/forward-together.cfm



Tullar Elementary fifth graders have been welcoming several national authors to their classroom via Zoom. Young adult fiction author Jennifer Nielsen recently joined the classes from her home in Utah and provided three autographed copies of her book "The False Prince," that appeared on the New York Times bestseller list.

O'Keefe Wins State Debate Top Speaker Award; Snyder Top Coach

Neenah High School senior Megan O'Keefe earned the top speaker award in the Lincoln-Douglas Division and was one of three state scholarship winners at the Wisconsin State Debate Tournament. Additionally, assistant coach Kaija Snyder was named the Wisconsin State Coach of the Year.

O'Keefe finished third overall in the Lincoln-Douglas Division and totaled 175 out of a possible 180 speaker points. She also won a scholarship from the Wisconsin Debate Coaches Association for her dedication and success in debate over the last four years.

Snyder is a 2015 Neenah High School graduate and has been an assistant coach with the program since 2017 as a student at UW-Oshkosh.

Parker DeDeker qualified for the National Speech and Debate Association Tournament of Champions in Congress Debate. The event will be held virtually in June. He is one of only two students to qualify from the district that spans from Madison to Sheboygan to Northern Wisconsin.

In forensics, six students qualified for the National Catholic Forensics League Tournament to be held virtually on Memorial Day weekend. DeDeker and Elrik Dunn qualified in Congress, Isabel Hoffman, Megan O'Keefe and Sarah Hoffman qualified in Lincoln-Douglas Debate and Natalie Frank advanced in Extemporaneous Speaking.

Joch Named Chief Financial Officer; Kachur Chosen as Curriculum Director

Two current Neenah administrators have received promotions to administrative positions at the District level.



Jon Joch has been named Chief Financial Officer, while Tim Kachur was chosen as the Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

Joch essentially fills the position previously held by Andrew Thorson, who was the District's Deputy Superintendent of Business Services before passing away in August. Dr. Jack Stoskopf filled the role in an interim basis during the fall to develop the 2020-21 District budget. Joch has worked in the business office for the past 10 years as the Director of Revenue Enhancements. His position will be filled by a Director of Business Services position.



Kachur, an Associate Principal at Neenah High School, will replace Susan Hull, who is retiring at the end of the school year.

Kachur has been at Neenah High School for the past seven years after spending three years as an English teacher at Shattuck Middle School.

Five Neenah Students Advance to International DECA Conference

Five Neenah High School DECA students qualified for the International Career Development Conference this spring, while six others earned awards at the recent Wisconsin Virtual State competition.

Senior Clara Padgham won the Apparel and Accessories category to qualify for the international meet, which will be held virtually April 19-23. Two Neenah teams qualified in the Travel and Tourism category as Emma Rundquist and Isabel Yoblonski placed second and Sophia Hodek and Kaitlyn Dietz placed sixth.

Carson Clark and Matt Whitmer added a ninth place finish in the Sports and Entertainment category and four other Neenah students earned medals for their efforts. Role play medals went to Annabelle Hodges in Principles of Hospitality, Sophia Paape in Food Marketing and Hannah Sabel in Principles of Marketing. Abi Wise won a test medal in Retail Marketing.



Families Residing in NJSB Boundaries Invited to Fill Out District Census

Families who live in the Neenah Joint School District whose children do not attend public schools or are not yet age-eligible are invited to fill out the District's census form to be included in potential enrollment communications from the District.

The census is especially intended for parents with children under the age of four who would like to be notified of upcoming enrollment dates for four-year-old or five-year-old kindergarten. We also welcome parents of home-schooled or private-school children who may someday consider enrolling in public schools to fill out the form and have their children included in our database.

A link to the census form may be found on the front page of each school's website.

First Five-Day Week of Classes Set for April 12-16

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Various classes and schools have moved in and out of virtual learning throughout the year, requiring immense flexibility from families. The entire District was in a virtual format for two weeks in October with the high school remaining online for two additional weeks. The District also went to a virtual format for the weeks following Thanksgiving and winter break, as well as every Wednesday from November 11 through March 17. Some schools also moved in and out of hybrid formats with half of the students attending in-person and the other half virtually on a rotating schedule.

When classes have had a majority of students or a teacher out with a positive COVID case or as a close contact, they have had to switch to a virtual format, usually on short notice. The District plans the week of April 12-16 to be its first five-day week of classes at all levels since September.

“We are proud of how we have been able to manage a difficult situation in keeping students and staff safe, but also realizing the importance of learning in person,” said Superintendent Dr. Mary Pfeiffer. “We are thankful to our families for their efforts in keeping each other safe and being flexible with so many changes. We also know this pandemic is not over, but we continue to look for safe ways to hold events and bring back many of the opportunities our students have missed.”

NJSD Hall of Fame Plans to Induct 2020 Class With No Additional Selections in October 2021

After having its 2020 banquet postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Neenah Joint School District Hall of Fame plans to induct the five already-selected individuals with no additional selections for 2021.

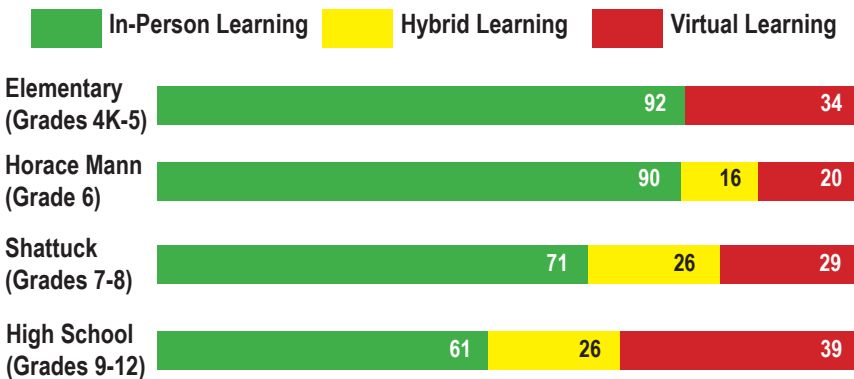
The 2021 event is scheduled for homecoming weekend on October 9 at Bridgewood Best Western Premier Resort and Conference Center. A decision on whether to proceed with the event and begin selling tickets will be made by August.

The five inductees from 2020 are Dr. Gary Losse, Todd Patterson, Vern Wollerman, Marti Wronski and Robert Yablon. The Hall of Fame selection committee intends for these five individuals to get their deserved recognition this fall while also acknowledging the uncertainty of whether it will be safe to proceed with the 2021 event.



Getting Back to School

Below is a look at the number of days schools have been virtual and in person during the 2020-21 school year through the end of the third quarter on March 19 (126 school days). In hybrid learning, half of the students are at school and half are virtual on a rotating basis.



Notes: Half days of school are counted as a full day in this chart. Elementary school data reflects the entire District - some schools and classrooms were virtual or hybrid for additional days due to positive cases or close contacts.

Free Summer Meals Offered Again in 2021

All children 18-and-under who reside in the Neenah Joint School District boundary will be eligible for free breakfast and lunch every weekday throughout the summer in 2021 for the third straight year. The meals are provided through a federally-funded program and have been free to children throughout the 2020-21 school year.

Families will likely be able to pick up breakfasts and lunches for an entire week on Mondays at locations to be determined.

Details will be announced in May through the District website, parent email communication and District social media channels.

Nominate Deserving Alums for the Hall of Fame

The NJSD Hall of Fame committee encourages community members to nominate deserving alums and former employees. Individuals may be nominated at any time through a form located on the District website or available at the Administration Building. The deadline is November 30 to be considered for the following year.

In order to be nominated, individuals must have graduated from Neenah High School at least 20 years ago or retired from District employment at least five years ago. Once nominated, an individual does not need to be re-nominated and will be considered each year. More information about the nomination process is available on the District website and questions may be directed to Jim Strick at jstrick@neenah.k12.wi.us or 920-751-6800 ext. 10136.



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POSTAL PATRON

We're Hiring

Plenty of Part-Time and Full-Time Positions Available Across the District

Individuals looking for part-time or full-time employment and the chance to work with the children in our community have plenty of opportunities in a number of different support areas.

Job openings are available as bus drivers, food service employees, crossing guards and elementary playground supervisors throughout the Neenah Joint School District. These positions all require a background check and offer rewarding experiences. Information about how to apply for any of these positions is listed to the right.



Who to Contact

Positions are available in each of the following areas:

- ◆ **Bus Drivers:** Kobussen Buses at 920-722-8572
- ◆ **Food Service:** Chartwells at 920-751-6800, ext. 10152
- ◆ **Crossing Guards:** Neenah Police Department at 920-886-6000
- ◆ **Elementary Playground Supervisors:** School District Office at 920-751-6800, ext. 10109



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@neenahschools



Board Meetings Held Online

All Neenah Joint School District Board of Education meetings will be held online via Zoom until further notice. The public is welcome to join the meetings through a link on the District website (www.neenah.k12.wi.us). Meetings are typically held the first and third Tuesday of each month.