



PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
ROCHESTER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION

2025 SPARKLE BOOK

The PAC is an organization dedicated to empowering families of students receiving special education services through communication, education, and support with the purpose of obtaining the finest programs and services available within the Rochester community.



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**special recognition recipient*

Sparkle Award Introduction

A Note from Our PAC Chair

Dear Families, Friends, Staff and Community Members,

As this was my third and final year as Chair of the Parent Advisory Committee, I am so honored to have had this time to serve all of you.

My son began Special Education Services ten years ago when he was just two years old. Those early years can be especially challenging, but from the moment we started, we found incredible people already waiting to serve us. My family has never stopped learning, growing and being inspired by the educators, staff, students, and community members of this district. Your love, knowledge, patience and friendship knows no end. It is because of all of you that I know what Special Education should look and feel like, and because of this, I am driven to help other families like mine insist on the very same. My son made me a special ed mom, but all of you made me an advocate and I am so proud to spread your "Sparkle" as we continue on.

This year we are honored to be able to celebrate another record number of Nominations at 511. Congratulations to our special recognition award recipients: Daniel Rubino, Anna Picklo, Kaitlyn Barone, Gary Schwartz, Jean Lamberson, Anna Ruddy, Vivian Russell, Lonnie Spano, Zachary Mow, Laura Coleman, Amy Drehmer, Meghan Ivory, Evangelina Teknos, Amy Austin, and Peggy Dona. A special congratulations to our \$250 grant recipients, Katie Tash and Diana Badr who will get to choose classroom projects.

To our families: Having served the people of this community will always be one of the greatest opportunities of my life. Thank you for allowing me this incredible honor to be a small part of your lives and trusting me to represent the needs of all of our children.

To our nominators: Thank you for taking a moment to recognize those who make our community Sparkle. Sometimes on your hardest day, just having someone stop and say, "I see you," can mean the world. You have done a wonderful thing by taking a moment to recognize someone for all the good that they do.

To all of our nominees: You are stronger than you know. You have already gone further and done more than you ever thought you could. You made a choice to do something meaningful and now you mean the world to so many. Please keep going and always know that I am so proud of you.

Congratulations.

Melissa Hoffman

2022-2025 PAC Chair

Early On & Early Childhood Special Education

Early On

Jessica Delos Reyes, Speech Language Pathologist

I would like to nominate Ms. Jessie for the Sparkle Award. She has truly been a beacon of light for our daughter, Margot. Ms. Jessie created such a warm and welcoming environment for Margot. It's been incredible to see how her engaging activities and kind encouragement have helped Margot come out of her shell and express herself with newfound confidence. Margot has made such amazing progress in her speech and communication skills. She now tries new phrases and words constantly with self-assurance, and it's all thanks to Ms. Jessie's personalized approach and dedication. Margot looks forward to their sessions, which is a testament to how much she enjoys and benefits from them. After each session, Margot excitedly tells everyone about how Ms. Jessie came to see her and the puzzles that they did. It's heartwarming to see her so enthusiastic and proud. Ms. Jessie's kindness and genuine passion for helping kids have made a lasting difference in Margot's life, and for that, we are deeply grateful. Thank you for considering Ms. Jessie for this award.

—Anonymous

ECSE - Brewster

Jennifer Michalak, Speech Language Pathologist

From the start of the 2024-2025 school year, Jen was confident that our son would progress, at his own pace. She assured us that he would get the support and guidance needed, respective to his unique challenges. As the year progressed, we saw our son blossom, slowly but surely. We are grateful for Jen's patience and commitment. She, along with her peers are responsible for our son's speech progress. Excited about the future! Thank you!

—Younus & Sara



The whole Brewster ECSE team's exceptional dedication and genuine commitment to student development are worthy of recognition.

—Rio

Gamze Naglik, Paraprofessional

The whole Brewster ECSE team's exceptional dedication and genuine commitment to student development are worthy of recognition.

—Rio

Gina Ruffini, Teacher

Ms. Ruffini is amazing. Since the first time my wife and I met her and the staff at Brewster, we knew that our son was in good hands. She communicates regularly and effectively with parents, and spends time to curate the communications, includes photos. This means the world to us, because we can see our son interacting with her and the staff, in various activities and lessons.

Thanks for building up our son and helping him communicate with the world around him. Keep up the great work, we appreciate you!!

—Younus

The whole Brewster ECSE team's exceptional dedication and genuine commitment to student development are worthy of recognition.

—Rio

I want to nominate Mrs Ruffini for her patience, creativity, and unwavering support for students.

—Sai

Smitha Satheesh, Paraprofessional

The whole Brewster ECSE team's exceptional dedication and genuine commitment to student development are worthy of recognition.

—Rio

**Katie Tash, Teacher*

As soon as I saw the email about the nominations for these awards I knew I had to nominate my child's ECSE teacher Katie Tash! My child had a bit of a rough start into GSRP prek, they didn't want to go to school, they had a lot of difficulty adjusting and transitioning every day, I'd get calls halfway through the day to pick them up because it was so difficult for them. On top of that we received an early ADHD diagnosis and felt like the weight of world was on our shoulders. School started to feel like an enemy and I knew that we needed something to change. I initiated the IEP evaluation process and we anxiously awaited to see what would happen. We had a very wonderful IEP experience and are so grateful for that!

When they told me that my child qualified for an IEP and would be going into the early childhood special education program I cried tears of joy because I knew that my child was finally going to get the support that they needed. Immediately meeting Katie I already knew she was going to be amazing! She asked questions about our experiences so far, and really cared to get to know about my child before they ever stepped foot into the classroom, including making sure hand soaps and non food related items were safe for my child's food allergies! She thoroughly answered any questions I had and made me feel at ease and excited for my child to go back to school!

All of that qualifies her for a nomination just as it stands, but I can't just stop there because once my child started in her classroom I have seen a complete 180° turn from him all around! The structure and environment that Katie has created in her classroom has ensured that my child (and all the other children) can thrive! The change has even translated at home where I've seen SO much progress in all ways. Katie is also a wonderful communicator and always makes sure to relay any and all relevant information! I always feel a part of my child's day and their education even if I'm not there in the room!

In my experience when you have a neurodivergent child you have to become their biggest advocate and at times it feels lonely and isolating when you need additional supports and don't know where to turn. I truly thought we were doomed and that school would be something that we would just have to struggle through. Thanks to Katie Tash and her team of paras and other

staff my child is able to enjoy school, learn, and thrive! I as a parent no longer have to sit in anxiety everyday waiting for the inevitable "your child is having a bad day please come pick him up" call. I think Katie deserves at least a dozen sparkle awards for how absolutely phenomenally amazing she is! She's an asset to the district, and to the ECSE program! I firmly believe that she has rerouted the trajectory of my child's education from that of an uphill battle struggling with ADHD in a learning environment, to one where they have a solid foundation that we can build upon and a love for school to go with it. I could talk for days about my gratitude for Katie and how much she's helped my child, so I'll wrap it up now. Thank you Katie for being the reason my child loves to come to school.

—Anonymous

Ms. Katie has consistently provided exceptional support to her students, fostering a positive and encouraging learning environment from their initial years in school. Her dedication and compassion are commendable and warrant recognition.

—Jessica Louca

ECSE - Hampton

Laura Washer, Teacher

I am honored to nominate Laura Washer for her exceptional dedication and commitment to my child's education and well-being. She goes above and beyond to create a nurturing and inclusive environment, ensuring that my child feels comfortable, valued, and engaged every day. Her patience, creativity, and personalized approach have made a significant impact, helping my child grow both academically and socially. Whether through tailored lessons, encouragement, or extra time spent fostering confidence, Laura continually demonstrates her passion for her students' success. We are incredibly grateful for her unwavering support and kindness. She is not just a teacher but a true advocate and difference-maker in our child's life.

—Shruthi Rangan

She is so good, my kid learning a lot with her and he like to go school because of her. Her connection with parents so fantastic.

—Anjali Jain

ECSE - Musson

Jyothi Ippili, Paraprofessional

Miss Jo is always welcoming and has a warm smile all the time. She is my son's favorite teacher, even if we are running a few mins behind to pick up our son she is always understanding and never gets upset. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Miss Jo and the other staff (Miss Grillo) at Musson ECSE for their extraordinary efforts in taking care of our son Ronav.

— Rahul Suresh

ECSE - North Hill

Melissa Buffa, Teacher

She is so patient and my son loves her. She goes the extra mile.

— Elliott Cross

Natalie Johnston, Teacher

We are honored to nominate Mrs. Johnston for a Sparkle Award in recognition of her outstanding dedication, compassion, and the special role she has played in our daughter Hannah's life this school year. From the very beginning of the school year, Mrs. Johnston has been a shining example of what it means to be a caring and inspiring educator. She has not only helped foster Hannah's enthusiasm for learning, but also made school a place Hannah genuinely looks forward to every day. Her energy, warmth, and positive attitude are contagious, and she leads her classroom with both heart and purpose. One of the most meaningful things about Mrs. Johnston is how deeply she cares for her students, including Hannah. Whether it's gently cleaning her face and picking twigs from her hair after morning nature school, or offering a reassuring smile that brightens Hannah's day, these small acts of kindness speak volumes about her character and the care she has for her students. Mrs. Johnston has become a true role model for Hannah, who now loves playing school at home and pretending to be just like her. This past Christmas, Hannah asked Santa for a teacher's chair—just like Mrs. Johnston's—so she could “teach” at home. Most of all, Mrs. Johnston's calm presence and the way she shows up every day with joy and intention make her such a special teacher. Hannah is thriving in her classroom, and we know that's in large part because of the love, structure, and support Mrs. Johnston provides. The impact she has had on Hannah's confidence and sense of self this year is something we will always cherish. Mrs. Johnston embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award, and we are deeply grateful for the care, encouragement, and positivity she brings to our daughter's life each day. With gratitude,

— Ryan and Sheryl Good



ECSE - University Hills

Kate Merian, Teacher

She's very sweet, patient and brings joy to my son!

—Christina

Elementary School

Baldwin

Alaina Bos, Speech and Language Pathologist

Mrs. Bos puts a lot of thought into her lessons and makes things fun for her students. She is a strong advocate for her students, and her students love their time with her! She is always willing to jump in and help any of our team out with anything they need. She is proactive and

takes charge when things need to be done. She connects very well with the families she works with. We appreciate her so much!

—Anonymous

Mrs. Bos is an awesome SLP at Baldwin! She is always thinking of creative ways to meet kids need in the speech room, whether it is through a craft or book! She is very thoughtful about each child's need! Not only is she a wonderful SLP, but she is a great friend and colleague! We are so lucky to have her at Baldwin!

—Anonymous

Tiffany Bowen, Teacher

Mrs. Bowen is an outstanding teacher! This year she has assisted several students with some challenges. However, Ms. Bowen has not looked at these as challenges, but rather as an opportunity to connect with each child in a way to only see them reach their potential. Ms. Bowen is always one step ahead, trying to anticipate what support a child may need next. We are so lucky to have Mrs. Bowen!

— Anonymous

Sarah Forhan, Teacher

Mrs.Forhan is a wonderful and dedicated KG teacher. She has helped my son transition from ECSE program into KG so smoothly. I was nervous for my son to start school but she made it so easy for him due to her sweet and caring nature. My son has developed a love of learning thanks to her. She is very patient and caring and she truly deserves the sparkle award.

—Saamia Khan

Jenny Grimm, Teacher

Ms. Grimm has gone above and beyond this year! With several students requiring some significant support, Ms. Grimm has gone out of her way to be creative and thoughtful about how to approach these different learning styles. Ms. Grimm is committed to seeing all students succeed and ensures each individual student is being taught with love and respect!

— Anonymous

Tricia Grimminger, Teacher

Mrs. Grimminger has such a kind heart! She always communicates with teachers and parents thoughtfully about what each child needs. Mrs. Grimminger wants all her students to succeed and makes sure to include those that may need extra support. We are thankful for Mrs. Grimminger!

— Anonymous

Jessica Guoin, Paraprofessional

Ms. Jess's role in our building is hard to put in words. She comes to work each day with a positive attitude and can take on the most challenging of situations. She has such a calm, cool, collective air about her with quiet wit underneath. Ms. Jess wants what is best for all students and advocates to make sure their needs are being met! Without Ms. Jess, our Baldwin Family would be lost!

— Anonymous

Heather Guzik, School Psychologist

Ms. Guzik is such a helpful member to our Baldwin Team! Ms. Guzik is always looking at each child to creatively think of ways to meet their unique needs. She is dedicated and professional and always goes the extra mile! We are so lucky to work with her at Baldwin!

— Anonymous

Yvette Hooks, Teacher

Mrs. Hooks is an amazing teacher! She always goes above and beyond! Mrs. Hooks has a firm but loving style where each child knows they are valued! It's always so amazing to see the love that goes into watching each child grow throughout the year!

— Anonymous

Taylor Katona, Teacher

Mrs. Katona is an outstanding teacher! Our son, Leo, is lucky enough to have her for 2nd grade and she goes above and beyond to meet his specific needs. Mrs. Katona's deep commitment to her student's academic and personal growth is evident. She has truly taken the time to understand Leo's unique needs and has offered individualized support that has helped him grow tremendously this year. Mrs. Katona also collaborates with Leo's Special Education teachers in order to provide targeted instruction that will help him be successful. She creates a classroom environment that is built on trust and support and Leo loves going to school each day. We are so thankful for Mrs. Katona and all she does to help Leo succeed!

—Claire Agnello

Liz Kochajda, Teacher

Mrs. Kochajda has been an amazing teacher this year! I cannot express how awesome she has been for several of her students in her classroom. She sets expectations high and keeps a very consistent schedule. Thank you for all you do on a daily basis!

— Anonymous

Kathleen Lawson, Resource Room Teacher

Ms. Lawson is an outstanding Resource Room teacher! This is the second year our son, Leo, has had the opportunity to work with her. Ms. Lawson's dedication and compassion for her students is evident. She goes out of her way to meet our son's specific needs. Ms. Lawson also creates an atmosphere of trust, support, and inclusivity--an atmosphere in which our son can truly thrive. Leo has grown so much academically since he started working with Ms. Lawson. More importantly, his confidence has grown leaps and bounds! Ms. Lawson has certainly had a positive impact on our son and we are so thankful for her!

—Claire Agnello

Ms. Lawson has been an awesome addition to our Baldwin family! It's such an honor to share a space with someone who is always willing to go the extra mile for her students. Ms. Lawson exemplifies "team player" as she pitches in with no questions asked! I'm honored to call her a colleague and a friend!

— Anonymous

Heath Lemons, Teacher

Mr. Lemons has gone above and beyond this year! Mr. Lemons has taken on supporting an upper elementary student that has needed extra TLC. He comes in every Wednesday during his prep period to check on this student. He allows the student to earn extra gym time. What Mr. Lemons does not realize, is that this extra time has changed the trajectory for this child. This student looks forward to Mr. Lemon's check ins and the extra time he can spend with him. I am forever grateful for this gesture he has shown!

— Anonymous

Alaina Lyon, Special Education Teacher

Mrs. Lyon goes above and beyond to advocate for her students. She comes to school each day with a positive attitude and is always willing to help anyone who needs it. She is a fantastic teacher and deserves to be recognized for her dedication!

—Anonymous

Mrs. Lyon is the best teaching partner one can ask for! There are days when I don't know if I can go on, but Mrs. Lyon, (or Mac as I call her) always helps me find the positive. We can bounce ideas off of each other and know that the honest feedback will help each child in our classroom reach their potential. I honestly don't know how I could do my job without her! She is one person I can always count on, even when nothing seems to be going the way we planned!

— Anonymous

Nate Muncie, Teacher

Mr. Muncie deserves this award for his unwavering patience and commitment to students that require extra support in his classroom. He makes each child feel heard, all while keeping them at high standards. He is always in tune with what his students need, and goes the extra mile to make sure he is teaching to all. Mr. Muncie is definitely a gem!

— Anonymous

Lynn Nowicki, Paraprofessional

Ms. Nowicki is an outstanding part of our Baldwin team. Ms. Nowicki's calm and caring manner goes along way when it comes to helping out the students at Baldwin. Her quiet confidence helps the students reach their maximum potential in a supportive tone. We are so lucky to Ms. Nowicki at part of the Baldwin family!

— Anonymous

Sharon Parthum, Paraprofessional

Mrs. Parthum is nothing but extraordinary! Mrs. Parthum can pivot and help in any situation! She takes the time to get to know the student and their individual needs and meets them where they are at. She is always willing to go the extra mile and without her, Baldwin would be lost! Mrs. Parthum is a ray of sunshine that lights up our elementary community!

— Anonymous

Danielle Patsarikas, Speech Language Pathologist

Mrs. Patsarikas is truly an exceptional Speech & Language Pathologist. This is the second year our son, Leo, has worked with Mrs. P and we are constantly in awe of her dedication and kindness. She has worked tirelessly to find methods that will best help our son communicate and she goes above and beyond to meet his specific needs. Mrs. P also creates an atmosphere of trust and support and our son genuinely enjoys working with her. She is always finding special ways to incorporate our son's interests and some of his most fond memories at Baldwin are because of Mrs. P. It is rare to encounter someone as compassionate and special as Mrs. Patsarikas and we are so thankful for her!

—Claire Agnello

Danielle is amazing speech pathologist! She always has such a warm smile and kind demeanor about her when working with the students. She is always looking for ways to support each child's need!

— Anonymous

Shea Socrates, Teacher

Mr. S is ONE OF A KIND! While there are so many things we can say about how Mr. S supports the students at Baldwin, Mr. S has gone out of his way to help a student with sensory needs integrate into his classroom. He is always forward thinking on how he can assist this student to be successful, whether it is letting the child participate in the music class from his back office where the child is more comfortable, picking instruments that are enticing, or structuring the format of the class to maximize participation. Mr. S is an integral part of the Baldwin family!

— Anonymous

Kristi Sova, Teacher

Kristi Sova is an amazing teacher! Her smile, humor and dedication is unparalleled. Ms. Sova has such a calm demeanor and is able to support every type of learner that walks through her door. She is flexible and willing to go the extra mile when a student is in need of more help within her classroom!

— Anonymous

Jennifer Spencer, Teacher

Jen Spencer is a fantastic educator! She is positive and caring. Jen has high, but fair expectations of students in her classroom. She rolls with the flow of whatever the day brings and is willing to do whatever it takes to help a struggling learner.

— Anonymous

Amanda Starick, Social Worker

Ms. Starick is wonder woman! Without missing a beat, she answers every walkie call with confidence! The students LOVE to come by her room, and are always seeking her out. Ms. Starick provides a welcoming, safe space for all students to share their highs and lows throughout their day. Students know that Mrs. Starick always has an ear to lend and supportive advice to get them through their day. Baldwin is so lucky to have a social worker like Ms. Starick!

— Anonymous

Emaleigh Waters, Teacher

Mrs. Waters is a fabulous educator. She thinks ahead to mitigate potential challenges students in her class might face. Mrs. Waters builds relationships with all students in her classroom, but has taken a tremendous amount of time to learn the interests of one student. This student loves, trusts, and is an active participant in his classroom daily. She takes the time to write social stories, offer choices, rewards, etc. on a daily basis. We are all so lucky to have Mrs. Waters!

— Anonymous

Lauren Weisgerber, Teacher

Mrs. Weisgerber continues to elevate her teaching each year to meet the needs of her diverse learners. She communicates effectively with the students and creates a teaching environment that is consistent, visual, and supportive! She holds each child to their highest potential and they always rise to the occasion! We are so lucky to have her at Baldwin!

— Anonymous

Beth Winters, Special Education Teacher

Mrs. Winters is the glue that holds the special education team together at Baldwin. She is a team player and is always willing to guide or offer a hand. She is very knowledgeable of her field, and takes the initiative to improve her professional skills to better serve her students. She makes connections with families and helps guide that home-to-school relationship that is so important for these students. She is fantastic!!

— Anonymous

Jazmin Yasso, Teacher

Ms. Yasso has crushed her first year at Baldwin! She is not afraid to ask questions and seek support when she needs it. Her heart is so big and the love that she has for each of her students shows with the smile that spread across her face when she talk about them. While everyday can present a new adventure, Ms. Jasso has not let this stop her from striving for the best for each child in her classroom!

— Anonymous

Brewster

Gina Clark, Teacher

Gina consistently goes above and beyond to meet our students at their individual levels of understanding and need. Her commitment to fostering a nurturing and inclusive environment is evident in her collaborative approach with both students and colleagues. Gina's deep love for her students shines through in everything she does.

I have personally observed one of our students thriving due to Gina's exceptional support and guidance. Her ability to connect with each child, understand their unique challenges, and celebrate their successes is truly inspiring. Gina's dedication not only enhances the learning experience for our students but also contributes significantly to their overall growth and

development. Her impact is profound, and it is clear that she genuinely cares about each child's journey in education.

—Anonymous

Jennifer Hong, Teacher

Once again Brewster Elementary and the team that works with our daughter Renee Reinke hit it out of the park when placing her in her fourth-grade class with Mrs. Hong this school year. Mrs. Hong, a seasoned educator, has embraced, included, and shown the right amount of compassion perfectly balanced with the tough love that our daughter needs to succeed. From day one Mrs. Hong has remarked about Renee's loving and kind nature, often stating that she truly loves our daughter at her best and worst moments. Balancing a fourth-grade classroom in itself can be challenging. Adding any student with special needs into the mix can



be overwhelming and daunting to say the least. Mrs. Hong has accepted this challenge with Grace, and continues to show us, the parents of a special-needs child, that she is up for the challenge, and wants to do it in the best way possible. In all honesty, this has been one of the only years thus far in Renee's educational journey where she has been truly excited to attend every day. It was practically a miracle that towards the end of the holiday break she was positively thrilled to get back into the classroom. However, Renee is most excited to attend on Thursdays when Mrs. Hong's dog, a registered therapy dog named Maggie, often attends with her. Renee has been able to connect with Maggie on these days, and Mrs. Hong often sends pictures just to make us smile. We do not doubt our minds that

the zest and enthusiasm Renee shows towards this, her fourth-grade year at Brewster Elementary, is in large part due to Mrs. Hong and what she is able to provide our daughter. As Renee continues to navigate the rest of this year there is no doubt that she will encounter emotional, academic, and social bumps along the way. However, we are confident that Mrs. Hong's sparkle will lead her way.

—Laura Reinke

Brooklands

5th grade Safeties: Adam Afzaluddin, Victoria Besman, Caroline Broadbeck, William Cappelleri, Dean Carl, Kylee Carmichael, Maddie Cochill, Mihika Daphale, Vaidehi Dasari, Luke Davidson, Ethan Durnen, Abigail Espinoza, Kendall Evola, Sammi Hansel, Alex Kanasty, Jonah Legend, Max Lindstrom, Piper Mangold, Allison McCormack, Brendan Mullen, Grace Proimos, Trot Putnam, Carmela Reusch, Franco Soto, Mila Vasovski

I am writing to enthusiastically recommend the Brooklands 5th grade safeties for The Sparkle Awards. As the Administrator of Brooklands, I have had the pleasure of watching these students in action as they have built meaningful connections to the students in our SXI program. These students are remarkable individuals who have shown exceptional leadership qualities and a genuine commitment to fostering positive relationships within our school community. This group of 5th grade students who serve as safeties and buddies, have played a pivotal role in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for students with unique needs and talents at

Brooklands. These students have gone above and beyond to establish strong, supportive, and positive connections with their buddies. They approach their role with warmth, kindness, and compassion, making every effort to ensure that their buddies feel valued and included. I have witnessed firsthand how these 5th grade students embody the values of empathy, respect, and acceptance. Their consistent demonstration of these qualities not only enriches the experiences of their buddies but also sets a shining example for the entire school community. Their proactive approach to creating a sense of community and support among their peers is truly inspiring. I believe these students exemplify the spirit of positivity, connection, and friendship that the Sparkle Awards stand for.

—Sara Crowley

Hannah Allevato, Student

I would like to nominate Hannah Allevato for a Sparkle Award. Hannah is extremely kind and helpful with all of the special education students in her 3rd grade classroom. She is always willing to help out and include them in activities in the classroom and at recess. If she sees that they are struggling with something or sad she will offer support. I am thankful for her kindness and support for these students.

—Kim Novak

Lauren Begin, Speech Pathologist

Lauren is an incredible speech pathologist who demonstrates genuine love and compassion for all of her students and families. She is warm, supportive, and positive. She goes above and beyond to support her families and is an absolute shining star! We love Lauren!

—Sara Crowley

Monica Bell, Occupational Therapist

Monica is an incredible occupational therapist who is a tremendous support to our Brooklands team. She is passionate about supporting students and families, and is a phenomenal source of knowledge for her colleagues as well. She goes above and beyond to support our team and families at Brooklands. We are so lucky to have Monica as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Viktorija Burton, Special Education Paraprofessional

Viktorija is a wonderful special education paraprofessional who is enthusiastic and passionate about supporting students. She demonstrates patience, empathy, kindness and a genuine love for her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and team alike. We are so lucky to have Viktorija as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Felicity Carl, Student



Felicity is such a kind and caring second grade buddy to Wren, a second grader in the SXI categorical classroom. Last year, Felicity ate snack with Wren in her first grade classroom, and this year, she joins Wren for music class once a week. Felicity is patient with Wren and quietly encourages her to smile and interact even when she feels like being alone. Felicity has made Wren holiday cards and birthday cards and goes out of her way to make Wren feel special. Wren is so lucky to have a buddy like Felicity!

—Kristina Nichols

Kylee Carmichael, Student

Kylee is an amazing fifth grade friend to the fifth graders in the categorical classroom for students with severe multiple impairments. She plays with one or both of our fifth grade students almost every day at recess. She brings Max a ball to play with because she knows he loves to dribble and play catch. She pushes Olivia on the adaptive swing or swings next to her when Olivia uses a regular swing. She also takes Olivia on the play structure and goes down the slide with her.



Because of Kylee, Max and Olivia know what it is like to play with friends on the playground without an adult hovering over them. Kylee makes sure they stay safe and have a fun time.

—Kristina Nichols

Shobha Chhoker, Special Education Paraprofessional

Shobha is a wonderful special education paraprofessional who is enthusiastic and passionate about supporting students. She demonstrates patience, empathy, kindness and a genuine love for her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and team alike. We are so lucky to have Shobha as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Cari Dabrowski, Special Education Teacher SXI

Cari is an incredible educator, who creates a warm, supportive, and loving environment for all of her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and families and advocates for their needs. She shows up for them every day, in every way! We are all so lucky to have her at Brooklands!

—Sara Crowley

Erica Davis, Art Teacher

Erica Davis is an exceptional art teacher at Brooklands Elementary. She has worked collaboratively with our SXI teachers and paras to create an immersive and enriching art experience for the students with unique and exceptional abilities in our SXI program. Erica continues to seek new and innovative ways to connect to and engage her students, and has formed supportive and collaborative relationships with the SXI team and families. We are so lucky to have Ms. Davis as part of our Brooklands Team!

—Sara Crowley

Mrs. Duggan's 3rd Grade Class, Students

I would like to nominate Mrs. Duggan's Third Grade Class at Brooklands Elementary for a Sparkle Award. One of our Special Education students, Elliot, is a student in their classroom. Every student has embraced Elliott and understands that she learns differently than they do. They will help her in the classroom, they engage with her during morning choice, encourage her to participate in class discussions and make sure to include her and play with her at recess. She LOVES her friends and often announces to them when she's leaving the classroom for the day to go to her bus. I am overwhelmed with the amount of kindness and compassion these students show Elliott on a daily basis.

—Kim Novak

Vivienne Femminineo, Student

I would like to nominate Vivienne Femminineo for a Sparkle Award. Vivienne is extremely kind and helpful with all of the special education students in her 3rd grade classroom. She is always willing to help out and include them in activities in the classroom and at recess. If she sees that they are struggling with something or sad she will offer support. She will always ask if she can help out and is full of kind compliments. I am thankful for Vivienne's kindness and support for these students.

—Kim Novak

Elisabeth Green, Special Education Paraeducator SXI

Elisabeth is a wonderful special education paraprofessional who is enthusiastic and passionate about supporting students. She demonstrates patience, empathy, kindness and a genuine love for her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and team alike. We are so lucky to have Elisabeth as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Nardeen Harrington, Special Education Teacher

Nardeen is an incredible educator, who creates a warm, supportive, and loving environment for all of her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and families and advocates for their needs. She shows up for them every day, in every way! We are all so lucky to have her at Brooklands!

—Sara Crowley

Allison Hill, Speech Pathologist

Allison is an incredible speech pathologist who demonstrates genuine love and compassion for all of her students and families. She is warm, supportive, and positive. She goes above and beyond to support her families and is an absolute shining star! We thank Allison for all she does!

—Sara Crowley

Chad Hiller, Student



Chad is a great helper during the letter of the day and grooming routines in the SXI classroom. He follows adult directions, passes out student materials, and makes sure that the friend he is working with that day is engaged and participatory during the lessons. Chad has a positive attitude and helps the students in our room have fun while learning. We are so glad he wanted to be a helper in our room!

—Kristina Nichols

Cole Hiller, Student

Cole helps out in the SXI classroom twice a week during sensory room. First, he helps the students walk safely to the sensory room. Then, he has a list of jobs to do to make sure the sensory room is ready for play. Cole plugs in the various lights, sets up the sensory mats, cleans up any balls that are out of the ball pit, and turns on the floor piano. Then he is ready to play with the students! Cole is a great role model and helps the students have a fun time in the sensory room. We are so lucky to have him join us each week.



—Kristina Nichols

Sarab Kamoo, Social Worker

Sarab is an incredible social worker who demonstrates genuine love and compassion for all of her students and families. She is passionate about supporting students and families, and she is a tremendous team mate to all. She is a phenomenal source of knowledge for her colleagues as well. She goes above and beyond to support her families and is an absolute shining star! We are so lucky to have Sarab as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Melanie King, Special Education Teacher

Melanie is an incredible educator, who creates a warm, supportive, and loving environment for all of her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and families and advocates for their needs. She shows up for them every day, in every way! We are all so lucky to have her at Brooklands!

—Sara Crowley

Sue Markaity, Special Education Paraprofessional SXI

Sue is an incredible paraprofessional who is a tremendous support to our Brooklands team. She is so enthusiastic and passionate about supporting students. She comes to work each day ready to work to support her students and team, and demonstrates a genuine love for her students. We are so lucky to have Sue as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Sarah McGinnis, Resource Room Teacher

Sarah McGinnis is deserving of a Sparkle Award because she is always going above and beyond for her students. She is the resource room teacher for my daughter, Kylee. Ms. McGinnis does not simply see Kylee as a student that she is helping and supporting. Instead, she sees Kylee as the special person that she is. She makes Kylee feel important, accepted, seen, heard, and so many other things each and every day. Kylee strives to do better because she knows that she has Ms. McGinnis in her corner cheering her on. Recently, Kylee was in the hospital. Ms. McGinnis made a point to keep checking in to see how Kylee was doing. Beyond that, she even came to the hospital to visit Kylee. Of course, this brought the biggest smile to Kylee's face! School is not always easy for Kylee, but one of the main reasons she loves going to school is because of Ms. McGinnis. This just goes to show the strong impact that Ms. McGinnis has had on Kylee. The Sparkle Award is just a simple way to show Ms. McGinnis that she is that shining light for so many students.

—Lori Carmichael

Sarah is an incredible educator, who creates a warm, supportive, and loving environment for all of her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and families and advocates for their needs. She shows up for them every day, in every way! We are all so lucky to have her at Brooklands!

—Sara Crowley

Tim Nadeau, Music Teacher

Tim Nadeau is an exceptional music teacher at Brooklands Elementary. He has worked collaboratively with our SXI teachers and paras to create an immersive and enriching musical experience for the students with unique and exceptional abilities in our SXI program. Tim continues to seek new and innovative ways to connect to and engage his students, and has formed supportive and collaborative relationships with the SXI team and families. We are so lucky to have Mr. Nadeau as part of our Brooklands Team!

—Sara Crowley

Lyla Nguyen, Student

I would like to nominate Lyla Nguyen for a Sparkle Award. Lyla is extremely kind and helpful with all of the special education students in her 3rd grade classroom. She is always willing to help out and include them in activities in the classroom and at recess. If she sees that they are struggling with something or sad she will offer support. I am thankful for her kindness and support for these students.

—Kim Novak

Kristina Nichols, Special Education Teacher SXI

Kristina is an incredible educator, who creates a warm, supportive, and loving environment for all of her students. She goes above and beyond to support her students and families and advocates for their needs. She shows up for them every day, in every way! We are all so lucky to have her at Brooklands!

—Sara Crowley

Kim Novak, Special Education Paraprofessional

Kim is a wonderful special education paraprofessional who is enthusiastic and passionate about supporting students. She demonstrates patience, empathy, kindness and a genuine love for her students. She spends time outside of the school day connecting with and supporting her students and families. She is a tremendous resource for teachers and families alike, and she goes above and beyond every day! We are so lucky to have Kim as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Alex Panson, School Psychologist

Alex is an incredible school psychologist who is a tremendous support to our Brooklands team. Students LOVE working with Alex! She is passionate about supporting students and families, and she is an amazing team mate to all. She is a phenomenal source of knowledge for her colleagues as well. She goes above and beyond to support our team and families at Brooklands. We are so lucky to have Alex as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Allan Reynolds, Physical Education Teacher

Allan Reynolds is an exceptional physical education teacher at Brooklands Elementary. He has worked collaboratively with our SXI teachers and paras to create an immersive and enriching physical education experience for the students with unique and exceptional abilities in our SXI program. Allan continues to seek new and innovative ways to connect to and engage his students, and has formed supportive and collaborative relationships with the SXI team and families. We are so lucky to have Mr. Reynolds as part of our Brooklands Team!

—Sara Crowley

Adelina Romita, Student

I would like to nominate Adelina Romita for a Sparkle Award. Adelina is extremely kind and helpful with all of the special education students in her 3rd grade classroom. She is always willing to help out and include them in activities in the classroom and at recess. If she sees that they are struggling with something or sad she will offer support. Adelina has been helpful with these students since Kindergarten. She continues to show compassion and kindness to them and others on a daily basis. She always goes the extra mile and asks if she can help support them. I am thankful for her kindness and support for these students.

—Kim Novak

Allison Sikora, Special Education Paraprofessional SXI

Allison is an incredible paraprofessional who is a tremendous support to our Brooklands team. She is so enthusiastic and passionate about supporting students. She comes to work each day ready to work to support her students and team, and always has a smile for her colleagues. We are so lucky to have Allison as a part of the Brooklands team!

—Sara Crowley

Karin Vassilakos, Media ILS Teacher

Karin Vassilakos is an exceptional media teacher at Brooklands Elementary. She has worked collaboratively with our SXI teachers and paras to create an immersive and enriching media experience for the students with unique and exceptional abilities in our SXI program. Karin continues to seek new and innovative ways to connect to and engage her students, and has formed supportive and collaborative relationships with the SXI team and families. We are so lucky to have Mrs. Vassilakos as part of our Brooklands Team!

—Sara Crowley

Jane Walsh, School Secretary

Jane is the MOST welcoming, caring, and supportive member of our team! She goes the extra mile daily to ensure that students and families have what they need to be successful each day. She is particularly supportive and welcoming to our families and students with special needs. She models inclusion, empathy and kindness every day!

—Sara Crowley

[Delta Kelly](#)

5th Grade Peer Supports for CI Classroom: Avery Fales, Lawson Hall, Emerson Hermans, Roan Heskett, Eloise Kinzer, Solveig Kowal, Sohni Rana, Greyson Schornak, Eden Schwartz, Andrew Shi, Renan Silva Barbi, Alaina Skelton, Grant Smith

The 5th grade safeties show up each and every day to not only support their CI buddies with routines and school readiness, but to be their friends. I have watched these students play, laugh, and encourage the students in the CI program. Their patience, understanding, and willingness to learn has been amazing to watch this school year. We are all so grateful for their kind hearts and hope that this experience stays with them throughout their life. Never stop advocating for and including those around you!

—Kaylinda Bauer & Melissa Benham

Sadaf Abbas, Paraprofessional

Ms Abbas is a highly dedicated and caring para educator doing an amazing job every day. She is one of the reasons my son loves going to school

—Katja Hoefler

Elizabeth (Liz) Abbott, Teacher, 4th grade

The effort by the fourth-grade teachers—Liz Abbott, Colleen Monroe, Louise McCarty, and Maria Thomas—along with student teacher, Jasity Renner, to secure an inclusive swing for the upper elementary playground at Delta Kelly is an inspiring example of advocacy, teamwork, and dedication to creating a more accessible and equitable environment for all students.

Delta Kelly Elementary already provides a variety of inclusive play equipment on the lower elementary playground, such as inclusive swings, a spinner, sensory bongos, and chimes, which allow students of all abilities to participate in play. However, the upper elementary playground lacked similar inclusive features, and this was an area the educators along with their students identified as needing attention. One of the few accessible pieces of equipment in the upper playground was a CORE language board, which supports communication for students with

speech or language disabilities, but it was clear that additional support and play opportunities were necessary. Teachers heard their students and worked in partnership to bring their vision to life.

The teachers and student teacher recognized the need for advocacy to make these improvements and worked with their students to develop a plan. The team encouraged students to take ownership of the project, helping them craft presentations that they could share with various stakeholders including the PTA, families, and school administration. This hands-on learning experience not only gave students a voice in the process but also empowered them to engage in advocacy, communication, and problem-solving skills, all of which are important life skills.

To further strengthen their advocacy efforts, the educators partnered with a local bookstore for fundraising opportunities. This collaboration demonstrated their creativity and resourcefulness, tapping into community support to raise the necessary funds for the inclusive swing. The local bookstore likely held events, donated a portion of sales, or provided other ways to engage the community, helping to generate the financial resources required for the project. The partnership also allowed families and the broader community to get involved, further promoting the spirit of inclusion and support for all students.

The dedication, hard work, and passion of these educators and the student teacher are truly commendable.

Their advocacy for students of differing abilities shows a deep understanding of the importance of inclusive environments in schools. By advocating for the installation of the inclusive swing and fostering a sense of community involvement, they have helped create a playground that supports all students' ability to interact, socialize, and play together, regardless of their physical or developmental needs.

—Anonymous

Kayli Bauer, Teacher

I am excited to nominate Kayli Bauer for a Special Education Sparkle Award. As a teacher of students with cognitive impairments, Kayli consistently goes above and beyond to create a classroom environment where every student feels valued, seen, and included.

Kayli is a true champion for inclusion. She works tirelessly to ensure that all of her students not only have access to the education they deserve but also feel empowered and supported in their individual journeys. Whether it's through personalized lesson plans, creative adaptations, or fostering strong relationships with each student, Kayli has an exceptional ability to meet the unique needs of every child she works with.

Her dedication extends beyond the classroom. Kayli is a tireless advocate for her students, working collaboratively with families, staff, and the community to ensure that every child has the resources, encouragement, and opportunities they need to succeed. Her positive energy is contagious, and her unwavering belief in the potential of every student inspires everyone around her.

Kayli's classroom is a model of kindness, patience, and perseverance. She ensures that her students not only thrive academically but also socially and emotionally. She goes the extra mile to foster a sense of belonging. Her unwavering commitment to inclusion makes a world of difference in the lives of her students, and she is truly deserving of this recognition.

Kayli Bauer is an educator who exemplifies the qualities of empathy, dedication, and advocacy. She is making a profound difference in the lives of her students, and her work deserves to be celebrated.

—Anonymous

Pauline Bayrakdarian, Secretary

I am thrilled to nominate Pauline Bayrakdarian for a Sparkle Award, as she is the heart and soul of Delta Kelly Elementary School. As our dedicated secretary, Pauline truly embodies the values of kindness, positivity, and support, making a profound impact on our school community every single day.

Pauline radiates warmth and positivity, creating a welcoming environment for students, staff, and families alike. Her infectious smile and caring nature are a constant source of comfort, and she has an incredible ability to brighten the day of anyone who walks through the office door. Whether she is helping a student find their way, answering questions from parents, or assisting staff with a variety of tasks, Pauline does it all with grace and a genuine desire to help.

What truly sets Pauline apart is her unwavering support for all students, especially those with differing abilities. She goes above and beyond to ensure that every student feels seen, heard, and valued. Whether it's providing a listening ear, offering extra assistance, or advocating for their needs, Pauline shows an exceptional commitment to fostering an inclusive and nurturing environment.

—Anonymous

Melissa Benham, Teacher



Mrs. Benham has had the privilege of teaching my daughter for the past few years, and I could not be more appreciative of her dedication. She consistently goes above and beyond, creating a nurturing and enriching environment. Savannah has not only made significant academic progress but also developed a true love for learning, eagerly looking forward to each day at school with her second family. I am incredibly grateful for this wonderful community, the school, the staff, and especially for such an outstanding educator- thank you Mrs. Benham!

—Angela Sisovsky

I have worked with Melissa Benham for the past three school years. She helped me navigate being a new special education teacher, even sitting with me for hours after school to help write my first IEP. This school year, I have had the opportunity to share a classroom with Melissa and see first hand the time, effort, love, and dedication that she gives her students. I have seen the way her mind works to create opportunities for student growth. She has created materials and lessons that support even the most complex learners with the most significant needs. Her passion for her students and her ability to advocate for them inspires me each day. I have been lucky to learn from and collaborate with such an amazing educator!

—Kaylinda Bauer

Tahlia Campbell, PTA President

I am honored to nominate Tahlia Campbell for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional leadership and unwavering dedication as the PTA president for Delta Kelly Elementary School. Under her guidance, our school community has benefited from clear, timely communication about programs and events, ensuring parents and students stay informed and engaged. Tahlia consistently goes above and beyond expectations, embodying kindness, compassion, and a steadfast commitment to fostering inclusivity. Her dedication to supporting special education within Rochester Community Schools serves as an inspiring example to us all. Thank you, Tahlia, for making a lasting impact and enriching the lives of so many in our community.

—Abel Pech



Amanda Carpp, Resource Teacher

Amanda Carpp's contributions as a resource teacher at Delta Kelly Building go far beyond her classroom responsibilities. As a valued member of the Building Team, she plays an essential role in fostering a collaborative environment where both students and staff can thrive. Her leadership within the school is evident in her proactive approach to engaging with colleagues, students, and families, helping to create a cohesive and supportive school community.

As a teacher leader in the building Amanda is an advocate for best practices in education, ensuring that every student's individual needs are met. She works alongside other educators, offering guidance and insight into how to effectively support diverse learners, whether it be through differentiated instruction, social-emotional support, or additional academic interventions. Amanda's ability to build strong, positive relationships with students is a testament to her dedication and understanding of their unique needs, allowing her to create a safe and welcoming environment where every child feels valued.

Additionally, Amanda's engagement in the problem-solving process as part of the Building Team highlights her deep commitment to student success. She actively participates in collaborative discussions, offering her expertise and perspectives on how to address challenges and develop effective strategies that support all students, particularly those who require additional assistance. Her willingness to collaborate and innovate ensures that students receive the most appropriate and effective interventions, leading to better outcomes both academically and socially.

Her relationships with families are equally crucial, as Amanda recognizes the importance of involving parents and caregivers in the educational process. She communicates regularly with families, keeping them informed of their child's progress and working together to set goals that can be achieved at both school and home. This partnership helps build trust and ensures that students receive consistent support, further contributing to their overall development and success.

Amanda Carpp's contributions to Delta Kelly Building and Special Education are invaluable. Her leadership, collaborative spirit, and unwavering commitment to supporting both students and staff make her an essential part of the district's mission to create an inclusive, nurturing, and effective learning environment for all.

—Anonymous

Mae Colarossi, Student

She is always supporting and interacting with her CI friends. She goes above and beyond making sure they are included and having fun learning.

—Maria Thomas

Robin Cottone, Interventionist

Robin Cottone, the Academic Interventionist at Delta Kelly, showcases her deep commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all students. As a valued member of the Delta Kelly Building Team, she plays a pivotal role in ensuring that every student's unique needs are addressed through a collaborative approach. Her contributions go far beyond simply providing academic intervention; she brings a well-rounded perspective that enriches the school community.

Having previously worked as a general education teacher, Robin's insights into both general education and special education settings are particularly valuable. She is able to bridge the gap between these two important aspects of education, offering guidance and resources that help meet the needs of students across all learning spectrums. This dual perspective helps ensure that interventions are not one-size-fits-all but are tailored to address the specific challenges each student may face. Her ability to problem-solve and offer creative solutions ensures that students who need extra support do not just receive academic help, but are also encouraged and empowered to succeed in their educational journey.

Robin's role in supporting students extends beyond the traditional classroom. She works with students who may be struggling academically, socially, or emotionally, providing the necessary tools and strategies to help them thrive. Whether it's through differentiated instruction, providing extra support in small groups, or offering one-on-one interventions, Robin takes the time to ensure that every student is getting the help they need. Her focus on building strong, positive relationships with students, teachers, and other staff members contributes to a supportive school culture where everyone feels valued.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of Robin's approach is her long-standing involvement in placing students in the Cognitive Impairment (CI) program into their general education classrooms. Her dedication to inclusion is evident in this process, as she has worked tirelessly over the years to ensure that students in the CI program are not isolated but integrated into the broader school community. By advocating for inclusion, Robin fosters an environment where students of all abilities can learn from one another, form connections, and participate in the same classroom experiences. Her belief in inclusion is not just about placing students in the same classroom but creating meaningful opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and mutual respect among all students. Robin's efforts go beyond just academic support. Her focus on building positive relationships with all stakeholders—students, staff, parents, and the broader community—ensures that every individual involved in a student's education feels heard, valued, and supported. By working closely with parents and other staff members, she helps to ensure that students receive a holistic level of care, which ultimately helps them succeed both in and out of the classroom.

In essence, Robin Cottone's work reflects a deep passion for education, inclusion, and student success. Her ongoing commitment to going the "extra degree" to support all learners, particularly those with special educational needs, speaks to her exceptional dedication as an

educator. Her contributions help create a school environment where all students feel supported, included, and empowered to achieve their full potential.

—Anonymous

Emily Dumitrescu, Speech and Language Pathologist

I am excited to nominate Emily Dumitrescu, one of our exceptional Speech and Language Pathologists at Delta Kelly Elementary, for a Special Education Sparkle Award. Emily embodies the qualities of an outstanding educator, and her dedication to her students and the entire school community deserves to be recognized.

Emily is incredibly knowledgeable in her field and consistently goes above and beyond to support her students. Her deep understanding of speech and language development enables her to create personalized, effective goals and plans that help each child thrive. Whether working with individual students or in group settings, she ensures that her interventions are tailored to meet the unique needs of each child, fostering progress and confidence in their communication skills.

Not only is Emily highly skilled in her practice, but she is also a remarkable team player. She collaborates seamlessly with the Building Team, contributing to the problem-solving process and offering valuable insights into students' needs. Her input is always thoughtful and constructive, and she actively participates in team meetings to ensure that each student receives the support they need to succeed.

Her positive, solution-oriented approach makes her an indispensable member of our educational community. Emily's tireless dedication to her students, her collaborative spirit, and her passion for her work are just a few of the reasons she is so deserving of this recognition. Her contributions truly make a difference at Delta Kelly Elementary and for the Special Education Department, and her impact on the lives of students and colleagues is immeasurable.

—Anonymous

Jeffrey Gehm, Teacher

Mr. Gehm helped my son Milo and two other kids to get some extra support with their math study from Van Hoosen Middle school, which is very thoughtful and useful for their academic progress. We appreciate Mr. Gehm's effort to do this work for the kids.

—Ye

Kaela Harney, School Social Worker

I am excited to nominate Kaela Harney, Social Worker at Delta Kelly Elementary, for a Special Education Sparkle Award. Kaela exemplifies the qualities of dedication, collaboration, and exceptional service to special education that this award seeks to recognize.

From the moment Kaela joined Delta Kelly after completing her internship, she jumped into her role with a remarkable commitment to our students and school community. Her ability to collaborate with staff and provide valuable insights during team discussions has been a critical asset to our school's success in meeting the diverse needs of our students. Kaela is a natural team player, consistently offering her perspective, asking insightful questions, and contributing to effective solutions. Her dedication to both the students and her colleagues is evident in every interaction.

Kaela is a self-starter who approaches every challenge with positivity and determination. She actively seeks out opportunities for growth and is always looking for ways to improve the services we provide to our students. Her commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment at Delta Kelly is unwavering.

It is clear that Kaela's passion for social work and her dedication to our students make her more deserving of a Special Education Sparkle Award. She continues to shine brightly in her role, and her positive impact on our school community is truly appreciated.

—Anonymous

Nardeen Harrington, Resource Room Teacher

I am honored to nominate Nardeen Harrington for a Special Education Sparkle Award. As a first-year resource room teacher at Delta Kelly, Nardeen has shown incredible dedication, passion, and creativity in her work with students.

From the very beginning, Nardeen has demonstrated a natural gift for building relationships with her students. Her ability to create a safe, inclusive, and engaging environment in her classroom has allowed her students to thrive. She consistently goes above and beyond to understand each student's unique needs and tailor her teaching strategies to ensure every individual has the support and encouragement they need to succeed.

Her collaboration with her team and staff has been exemplary, as she works tirelessly to develop and implement individualized education plans (IEPs) that reflect her students' diverse strengths and challenges. Nardeen has an innate ability to make each student feel valued, supported, and capable of achieving their goals. She is also a fierce advocate for her students, ensuring they have the resources and accommodations they need to excel both academically and socially.

—Anonymous

Georgina Harvey, Teacher

Mrs. Harvey deserves a recognition of her incredible dedication, kindness, and positive impact on her students. From the moment she joined our school, Mrs. Harvey has elevated the level of positive teaching, bringing warmth, patience, and perseverance to her classroom. She genuinely cares about each and every child, not only as students but as individuals. She takes the time to participate in their lives, helping them grow in a nurturing and supportive way. Mrs. Harvey is more than just a teacher, she is a role model for the

Positivity Project, exemplifying collaboration, inclusion, and kindness in everything she does. She encourages students to solve problems thoughtfully and supports them in overcoming challenges, always leading with empathy and understanding. Her ability to inspire, guide, and uplift her students makes her truly one of a kind. For these reasons, I wholeheartedly believe that Mrs. Harvey deserves to be recognized with the Sparkle Award.

—Luciana



Hannah Hurst, Student-first grade

Hannah is a first grader with a very BIG heart! She is always looking out for others and is always ready and willing to help. She is a leader in helping students when they need assistance. Hannah uses words of encouragement to model leadership and show kindness. She shows responsibility by helping a student get to another classroom each morning. She is full of love! She helps students when needed by finding the area of the communication device to use when needed. She helps by making sure they find their special spot to sit in each day by offering her hand and encouraging words when they come into the classroom. She pairs up with students when we play class games and guides them encouragingly to the next step. We are proud of Hannah's leadership and love!

—Laura Kirklin and Allison Murphy

Lee Jensen-Muir, Resource Room Teacher

I am excited to nominate Lee Jensen-Muir, an amazing resource room teacher at Delta Kelly, for a Special Education Sparkle Award. Lee is an outstanding educator who consistently goes above and beyond to support the diverse needs of her students. Her dedication, hard work, and vast knowledge of special education make her an invaluable asset to our school community.

Lee is always willing to take the time to understand the individual needs of each student. She tailors her approach to ensure that every student in her care receives the personalized support they need to succeed. Whether it's working one-on-one with a student or collaborating with other educators, Lee's commitment to her students' success is unwavering.

Her ability to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment is truly exceptional. Lee's students not only make academic progress but also grow in confidence and self-esteem. She fosters a sense of belonging and creates a safe space where students feel valued, respected, and empowered.

Lee is an advocate for her students. She regularly communicates with families and staff to ensure that her students' needs are met both inside and outside of the classroom. Her collaborative approach helps create a team effort where everyone works together to provide the best possible outcomes for her students. In every aspect of her work, Lee exemplifies the qualities of a dedicated, compassionate, and skilled educator. Her passion for special education shines through in everything she does.

—Anonymous

Laura Kirklin, Teacher

I am honored to nominate Laura Kirklin, a first-grade teacher at Delta Kelly, for a Special Education Sparkle Award. As our staff PAC (Parent Advisory Council) representative, Laura has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to fostering an inclusive environment for all students. Her dedication to special education and her advocacy for every child's success have made a profound impact on our school community.

Laura is an absolute champion for inclusion. She tirelessly works to ensure that every student, regardless of their abilities, has the tools and support they need to succeed. Laura has worked to add to inclusive playground equipment, planned school-wide creativity challenges for all, and much more! She approaches each child with kindness, patience, and understanding, creating a learning environment where differences are celebrated and embraced. Laura goes above and

beyond to make sure that her classroom is a place where all students feel seen, heard, and valued.

Through her involvement with PAC, Laura has been instrumental in bringing together parents, teachers, and staff to create a more inclusive and supportive school environment. Laura consistently advocates for the needs of students with differing abilities. Her ability to build relationships with families, collaborate with colleagues, and promote inclusion on a larger scale makes her an invaluable asset to our school.

Laura's passion, dedication, and heart for special education are evident in everything she does. She continuously inspires those around her and is a true advocate for students with special needs.

—Anonymous

Olivia Kirtley, Nurse Paraprofessional

Miss Olivia is a ray of sunshine to all! She is full of smiles, encouragement, and positivity! Each day Olivia encourages students, gives space and time for students to try skills independently, and cheers everyone on. She is full of patience and kindness. Olivia is very developmentally appropriate in teaching students in the first grade. She models to the class how students use their communication device, and students learn quickly to let students try it on their own first. Miss Olivia does a great job giving cues to the students to show what they know on their communication device. Olivia is full of fun and love! Thank you, Miss Olivia, for spreading love and kindness each and every day!

—Laura Kirklin and Allison Murphy

As a nurse, Olivia exemplifies outstanding care, professionalism, commitment, and dedication. As a nurse within our classroom, Olivia is vital part of our lives. Not only does she take amazing care of her designated student, she cares for all students. She is willing to jump in, support, and help in any way possible. Olivia is a team player that helps to problem solve and find solutions without judgement or hesitation. She is a leader both in her profession and within the school environment. We are lucky she found us and continues to be committed to the success of all students and teachers.

—Melissa Benham

Jillian Knapp, School Psychologist

I am honored to nominate Jillian Knapp for a Special Education Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional contributions as a school psychologist and a valued member of the Building Team. Jillian's unwavering dedication to supporting students with diverse needs is truly inspiring, and she consistently demonstrates an extraordinary level of professionalism, expertise, and compassion in her work.

As a school psychologist, Jillian plays a pivotal role in the problem-solving process, working collaboratively with teachers, staff, and families to ensure that every student receives the support they need to thrive. Her thoughtful approach to assessment and intervention is marked by a deep understanding of individual student needs, and she always goes above and beyond to identify strategies that promote both academic and social-emotional growth.

Jillian's ability to bring people together to develop and implement effective, student-centered plans is a testament to her outstanding teamwork and leadership. She listens actively to all

perspectives, provides valuable insights, and remains calm and solutions-focused even in challenging situations. Her collaborative spirit fosters a positive and inclusive environment where everyone feels heard and empowered to make a difference in the lives of students. Moreover, Jillian’s genuine care for the well-being of each student is evident in every interaction. She approaches each case with empathy and a commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment where students feel valued, respected, and understood. Her ability to build trust with students, families, and staff alike is a remarkable quality that makes her an indispensable part of our school community.

Jillian Knapp is an outstanding school psychologist who exemplifies the very best of what we strive for in RCS. Her exceptional skills, commitment, and positive impact on students make her more than deserving of the Special Education Sparkle Award.

—Anonymous

Louise McCarty, Teacher, 4th Grade

The effort by the fourth-grade teachers—Liz Abbott, Colleen Monroe, Louise McCarty, and Maria Thomas—along with student teacher, Jasity Renner, to secure an inclusive swing for the upper elementary playground at Delta Kelly is an inspiring example of advocacy, teamwork, and dedication to creating a more accessible and equitable environment for all students.

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The teachers and student teacher recognized the need for advocacy to make these improvements and worked with their students to develop a plan. The team encouraged students to take ownership of the project, helping them craft presentations that they could share with various stakeholders including the PTA, families, and school administration. This hands-on learning experience not only gave students a voice in the process but also empowered them to engage in advocacy, communication, and problem-solving skills, all of which are important life skills.

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and fostering a sense of community involvement, they have helped create a playground that supports all students' ability to interact, socialize, and play together, regardless of their physical or developmental needs.

—Anonymous

Jenifer McPherson, Teacher



Our family would like with great gratitude to nominate Mrs. McPherson for the Sparkle Awards this year! Mrs. McPherson is truly one of those special teachers who make a difference in student life! For the past two years, she has not only been my son Sami's 2nd\3rd grade teacher, but also his biggest cheerleader, supporter, and advocate. As a mom of a child with an IEP, I know how important it is for a teacher to make a child feel included, safe, and valued. Mrs. McPherson does that every single day, and I cannot thank her enough.

From the moment Sami stepped into her classroom, she made sure he knew he was loved and accepted just as he is. She has helped him understand that it's okay to learn differently from his friends, that

mistakes are just part of the learning process (as she always says, "A mistake is an opportunity to learn!"). After the first few months of Sami's attending her 2nd grade classroom, Sami stopped asking for breaks, that big basket of fidgets beside his chair disappeared, and transitioning to specials and lunch became effortless and exciting! I truly believe because of her and his caring Delta Kelly team, Sami walks into school with confidence, knowing he is in a place where he is supported and appreciated.

I must point out that Mrs. McPherson classroom is a model of universal accommodation, where every student—regardless of ability—feels welcome, supported, and empowered to succeed.

The love and patience she pours into her students are evident in the way Sami speaks about his day at school and excitement in his eyes that he finished his morning work all by himself.

Beyond her support for her students, Mrs. McPherson has also been an incredible ally for parents. I will always remember the drop-in parents support group zoom calls she set up during Covid. During that time my older son, Ryan, was one of her students, and she wanted to make sure parents had the support they needed during that weird time, even if it means just talking to familiar people during lockdown.

Jen's dedication, compassion, and commitment to inclusive education make her more than deserving of this recognition. She is shaping young lives in the most profound way. She has made an incredible difference in Sami's live, and I know she has done the same for so many other students and families.

Thank you so much Jen and thanks to the committee for considering her for this award!

—Heba

Colleen Monroe, Teacher, 4th Grade

The effort by the fourth-grade teachers—Liz Abbott, Colleen Monroe, Louise McCarty, and Maria Thomas—along with student teacher, Jasity Renner, to secure an inclusive swing for the upper elementary playground at Delta Kelly is an inspiring example of advocacy, teamwork, and dedication to creating a more accessible and equitable environment for all students.

Delta Kelly Elementary already provides a variety of inclusive play equipment on the lower elementary playground, such as inclusive swings, a spinner, sensory bongos, and chimes, which allow students of all abilities to participate in play. However, the upper elementary playground lacked similar inclusive features, and this was an area the educators along with their students identified as needing attention. One of the few accessible pieces of equipment in the upper playground was a CORE language board, which supports communication for students with speech or language disabilities, but it was clear that additional support and play opportunities were necessary. Teachers heard their students and worked in partnership to bring their vision to life.

The teachers and student teacher recognized the need for advocacy to make these improvements and worked with their students to develop a plan. The team encouraged students to take ownership of the project, helping them craft presentations that they could share with various stakeholders including the PTA, families, and school administration. This hands-on learning experience not only gave students a voice in the process but also empowered them to engage in advocacy, communication, and problem-solving skills, all of which are important life skills.

To further strengthen their advocacy efforts, the educators partnered with a local bookstore for fundraising opportunities. This collaboration demonstrated their creativity and resourcefulness, tapping into community support to raise the necessary funds for the inclusive swing. The local bookstore likely held events, donated a portion of sales, or provided other ways to engage the community, helping to generate the financial resources required for the project. The partnership also allowed families and the broader community to get involved, further promoting the spirit of inclusion and support for all students.

The dedication, hard work, and passion of these educators and the student teacher are truly commendable.

Their advocacy for students of differing abilities shows a deep understanding of the importance of inclusive environments in schools. By advocating for the installation of the inclusive swing and fostering a sense of community involvement, they have helped create a playground that supports all students' ability to interact, socialize, and play together, regardless of their physical or developmental needs.

—Anonymous

Satvika Neeloshan, Student

Satvika has a special CI friend Stevie. He looks forward to seeing her everyday. She is always supporting and interacting with her CI friends. She is first to raise her hand to read and play with them. She goes above and beyond making sure they are included and having fun learning.

—Maria Thomas

Jasity Renner, Student Teacher, 4th Grade

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—Anonymous

Molly Schuette, Student

She is always supporting and interacting with her CI friends. She is first to raise her hand to read and play with them. She goes above and beyond making sure they are included and having fun learning.

—Maria Thomas

Michelle Slater, English Language Development Teacher

I nominate Michelle Slater, an exceptional English Language Development (ELD) teacher at Delta Kelly, for a Special Education Sparkle Award. Michelle is a dedicated and compassionate educator who consistently goes above and beyond to support all students requiring English language assistance, including those with special needs.

Michelle's work with students who have diverse learning needs is truly inspiring. She demonstrates an unwavering commitment to ensuring that every student, regardless of their individual challenges, has the opportunity to succeed and thrive in the classroom. Her ability to

adapt her teaching methods to meet the unique needs of each student is a testament to her skill and dedication as an educator.

In addition to her teaching, Michelle plays a vital role in our collaborative team environment. She actively participates in the problem-solving process, contributing valuable insights and strategies to support the academic growth and emotional well-being of all students. Her collaborative spirit and willingness to work with her colleagues make her an indispensable part of the Delta Kelly team.

Michelle's genuine care for her students, her commitment to their success, and her ability to navigate complex challenges with grace make her very deserving of a Special Education Sparkle Award. She not only illuminates the classroom with her expertise and passion but also creates an environment where every student feels valued, supported, and capable of achieving their best.

—Anonymous

Kim Smith, Office Assistant

I am excited to nominate Kim Smith, Office Assistant Secretary at Delta Kelly Elementary School, for a Sparkle Award due to her unwavering dedication and outstanding support to all students, particularly those with differing abilities. Kim is the first face you see when entering the school, and she creates an immediate sense of welcome and comfort.

Kim goes above and beyond to ensure that every child feels valued, respected, and supported. She takes the time to learn about the individual needs of students, offering them a kind word, a helping hand, or a smile that can brighten anyone's day. Whether it's providing additional assistance to a student with special needs or helping a nervous child feel at ease, Kim's presence is a vital source of reassurance for both students and staff.

In addition to her work in the front office, Kim frequently collaborates with teachers, support staff, and parents to ensure that students' diverse needs are being met. She proactively finds creative ways to assist with everything from physical accommodations to emotional support, and she consistently works to make every child's experience at Delta Kelly a positive one.

—Anonymous

Corine Terry, Learning Consultant

Corine Terry, the Learning Consultant at Delta Kelly, is an exceptional educator who consistently goes above and beyond to support all students, with particular attention to those with differing abilities. With a strong background as a former resource room teacher, she possesses a deep understanding of the unique challenges that students with special needs may face, and she is committed to providing the tailored support necessary for their success.

As an integral member of the Building Team, Corine plays an active role in the collaborative problem-solving process. She works closely with fellow educators to identify and address the diverse needs of students. Her expertise in identifying learning barriers, developing individualized strategies, and implementing interventions is invaluable in ensuring that every student has access to the resources they need to thrive academically and socially. Corine's ability to work collaboratively and problem-solve in these team settings fosters a supportive environment that benefits all students, regardless of their abilities.

Corine's enthusiasm for her work is evident in the energy and dedication she brings to her role. Her wealth of knowledge about special education, combined with her genuine passion for

helping students succeed, makes her a trusted resource for both staff and families. Whether providing guidance on best practices for differentiation, offering strategies to address behavioral challenges, or advocating for specific accommodations or modifications, Corine's support is always thoughtful and targeted to meet the needs of the student.

In addition to her direct work with students and staff, Corine plays an essential role in strengthening the Special Education Department within the RCS district. Her contributions to district-wide initiatives, professional development, and support systems have had a positive impact on both Delta Kelly and the broader community of educators. Corine's ability to connect with students, families, and colleagues creates a sense of unity and shared purpose, ensuring that every student receives the attention and care they deserve.

Corine Terry is not only an asset to the Delta Kelly community but also a vital leader in fostering an inclusive, supportive, and effective learning environment for all students. Her dedication to her work, her unwavering commitment to student success, and her collaborative spirit make her a standout figure for supporting Special Education in RCS.

—Anonymous

Maria Thomas, Teacher

Mrs. Thomas has gone above and beyond for inclusion this year of the students in the CI program. She has asked for more opportunities to include my students in her classroom and has adjusted her schedule to provide meaningful participation times for them. Maria and the fourth grade class have made my students feel not only welcomed, but needed as a part of the class. Maria and her students were even working on writing letters to advocate for adapted equipment for our playground to make it more accessible with our friends in mind. Thanks for all you do, Maria! Your inclusion means more than you'll ever know!

—Kaylinda

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—Anonymous

Hamlin

Najah Abdullah, Paraprofessional

Ms. Naja, we just wanted to take a moment to say thank you for your amazing work with our students. The patience and flexibility you show each day ensure that our students with autism feel seen, heard, and understood. You are making a profound impact on their lives, and for that, we are incredibly grateful. Keep up the great work—you are truly appreciated!

—Sonali Arora-Mata, Morgan Wrubel, Madelyn Perkins

I am nominating the 6 ASD para educators that go above and beyond in supporting our shared students in my 2nd grade general education classroom at Hamlin Elementary School. As a teacher, I admire all of the creative and flexible practices that they use daily to ensure our students are not just included, but also recognized for their incredible and unique gifts. These adults intentionally blend into the classroom walls while our students shine among their peers. These exceptional individuals have enabled the growth of our students and my professional development, as a teacher. As a parent myself, I also view them through the eyes of a mother. It is so beautiful to see the mutual and authentic love that they share with our students. I would like to thank them for the love, dedication, and leadership that they bring to Hamlin every day. Our world is a brighter and more inclusive one because of these amazing educators!

—Lila Scheckelhoff

Sonali Arora-Mata, ASD Categorical Teacher

Mrs. Mata is truly deserving of a Sparkle Award for countless reasons. She embodies kindness in every way, showing unmatched care and a deep love for both teaching and every single one of her students. Her dedication to Hamlin is evident in her involvement with everything from the talent show to the social committee and COW, to name a few. And on top of that, she excels as

a devoted mom, fully engaged in her family's life. Mrs. Mata brings an atmosphere of inclusion, warmth, and joy to our school, radiating positivity and compassion. The strong, meaningful relationships she builds with both staff and students are nothing short of inspiring. I strive to mirror her kindness and dedication every day. Mrs. Mata, you are an absolute rock star!

—Sabrina Olson

Ashwini Bagewadi, Paraprofessional

Mrs. Ash, your dedication and patience in working with our students are truly invaluable. You approach each day with a heart full of compassion and a spirit of support, making such a difference in the lives of these kids. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to helping them grow, learn, and thrive. You are an essential part of their journey, and your efforts are deeply appreciated!

—Madelyn Perkins, Morgan Wrubel, and Sonali Arora-Mata

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—Lila Scheckelhoff

Harminder Bedi, ASD Paraprofessional

Mrs. Bedi, thank you for the incredible care and understanding you bring to our students each day. Your ability to create a safe, supportive, and engaging environment allows them to flourish in their own unique ways. Your hard work and genuine dedication make a lasting impact, and we are so grateful for all that you do!

—Morgan, Maddie, and Sonali

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—Lila Scheckelhoff

Susan Brown, Paraprofessional

Susan Brown has been a staple support for the children in my family, starting in September 2017, when my oldest son was in Kindergarten, my daughter who attended at the same time as my oldest son, and continues to support my youngest son, currently in Second Grade. That is 8 years of superb support! To add, she is a morning crossing guard at the school, rain, snow, wind or sun! She greets the children with a smile every morning! She has always been kind, and firm. Her approach is gentle, yet her rules are clear, and she always adhered to their IEPs. My children were intrigued by her English accent, and she was open in sharing about her English heritage. Due to her open, calm, firm, and kind nature, in terms of paras, or even teachers, she has a clear understanding of how to manage children with IEPs, sticking to BIPs and schedules, guiding them through their days. I especially appreciate that she can intervene before an antecedent to prevent problems for children with special needs. She is a model para. We are so



lucky that she was able to support all of our children- eight continuous years helping our family! And I am sure she has helped countless others!

—Gina

I am nominating Susan Brown and Ashely Rea for their incredible work as resource paraprofessionals that support students in my 2nd grade general education classroom at Hamlin Elementary School. They have built intentional and long-term relationships with their students as they've moved up through various grade levels at Hamlin. These long-term relationships are built on a foundation of mutual trust, respect, love, and understanding. This continuity has been such a powerful catalyst that allows our students to achieve their personal best, especially when transitioning between grade levels and teachers. As a new teacher to Hamlin, these educators also proactively offered their collaboration to build a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students in my classroom. On any given day, you will find them going far above expectations. They are driven by a deeper purpose as they work tirelessly to advocate for all students at Hamlin. I am so thankful for their leadership and love!

—Lila Scheckelhoff

Ebony Dixon, Behavior Technician

Ebony is a true ray of sunshine to the students she works with and fosters a sense of belonging and support for everyone. She works with students that have the some of the highest behavioral needs and wraps each of them with compassion and understanding. Ebony has an incredible ability to meet students exactly where they are, providing the right level of support for their emotional and behavioral needs at any given moment. Her compassionate approach allows her to connect with each student on a deep level, building trust and fostering a safe and supportive environment. Ebony is always thinking outside the box, using her previous experiences and creativity to help design individualized behavior reduction strategies that respect each student and utilize strength-based approaches. She creates unique learning

opportunities tailored to the needs of each student, ensuring they have the chance to thrive academically, socially, emotionally, and behaviorally. In her collaboration with teachers and ancillary staff, Ebony is a creative force, always ensuring her students' needs remain the top priority. She's a tireless advocate for her students and uses her ingenuity to find solutions that work for each child in a neuro-affirming way.

—Anonymous

Ryan Fila, School Psychologist

Hamlin is lucky to have a school psychologist like Ryan Fila. She is an exceptionally educated and efficient school psychologist. She cares deeply for her students and families alike. She is dedicated and compassionate. Over the course of her time at Hamlin, she has proven to be an indispensable asset to our school community, offering unwavering support to both students and staff. She possesses an exceptional ability to connect with students from all walks of life, fostering a safe and supportive environment in which they feel safe and understood. She has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for problem solving, emotional, social, and behavioral challenges. Hamlin is better because of Ryan!

—Sonali Arora-Mata

Laxmi Prassana Kommula, ASD Paraprofessional

Mrs. K, we wanted to take a moment to thank you for being such an amazing support to our students. Your dedication and understanding make a real difference in their ability to reach their potential. Your kindness and commitment to their growth do not go unnoticed, and we truly appreciate the love and care you bring to their lives.

—Morgan, Maddie, and Sonali

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—Lila Scheckelhoff

Dhanya Krishnan, Paraprofessional

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It is so beautiful to see the mutual and authentic love that they share with our students. I would like to thank them for the love, dedication, and leadership that they bring to Hamlin every day. Our world is a brighter and more inclusive one because of these amazing educators!
—Lila Scheckelhoff

Mrs. Kris, we wanted to send a special note of appreciation for everything you do for our students. Your consistent encouragement, creative problem-solving, and gentle approach are exactly what these kids need to succeed. Your positive influence extends beyond the classroom, and I can't thank you enough for your efforts!
—Sonali Arora-Mata, Morgan Wrubel, Madelyn Perkins

Courtney Morgan, Speech Language Pathologist

Courtney is the definition of a team player. She is an important part of our ASD team at Hamlin and we all learn so much from her on a daily basis. Courtney's expertise in speech and language development is exemplary. She is not only highly knowledgeable about speech and language but also has a remarkable ability to adapt her strategies to meet the unique needs of each student. Courtney is a natural leader within our school community. She is a valued member of our team!
—Sonali Arora-Mata

Sabrina Olson, Social Worker

As an elementary school social worker, Sabrina has consistently demonstrated an exceptional commitment to the well-being of our students, creating a positive and supportive environment for all. New to elementary social work, she has gone above and beyond in fostering emotional resilience and social development in students. She is always ready to listen, provide guidance, and offer support, no matter the challenge. Sabrina has worked hard to address the unique needs of each child, from helping students navigate personal difficulties to facilitating programs that promote empathy, inclusivity, and conflict resolution. She collaborates with teachers, parents, and staff to ensure all students receive the support they need to succeed.
—Sonali Arora-Mata

Teresa Pass, Teacher

Teresa displays exemplary service and support to all students in her Kindergarten classroom, including our students who require special education services. Teresa provides exceptional teaching, individualized instruction, behavior support and is an advocate for her students' needs.

Teresa provides exceptional instruction for all students in her classroom, including the students with special education. She works to understand each student's abilities and where they need support. Teresa shows ownership over all students and provides them with what they need to succeed. She is a highly skilled instructor and uses those skills to help her students make progress.

Teresa has an immense understanding of her students. She is able to recognize that many students come into her classroom with differing experiences and backgrounds and adapts her engagement accordingly. Teresa realizes that in order to help students have success they do need different things- especially around the areas of behavior and social/emotional support.

She puts in the extra work to create supports and put them into place in her classroom for the benefit of her students. Teresa also provides the much needed flexibility to work with students with significant behavior needs. She understands when to hold the line and when to allow choice. She provides choice so the students feel success in the school environment.

Teresa is an amazing advocate for her students. She recognizes when students require more support and will seek out support. She is an excellent communicator and can effectively share with special education staff what would benefit her students. Teresa advocates to parents and school staff alike with what would be beneficial for her students. She is an amazing partner and leader for her students to make progress and excel in the school environment.

Teresa is an exemplary teacher to our special education students and support their families and our staff. She is a gift to our students, families and community. Thank you for all that you do!!

—Tracy Marshall

Madelyn Perkins, Teacher



I am delighted to nominate Madelyn Perkins for a 2025 Sparkle Award. As her stepmom, I've had the privilege of witnessing Madelyn blossom into a kind, compassionate, and dedicated educator. Every day, she brings energy, positivity, and a sense of fun to her classroom, creating an environment where her students feel valued and supported. Her students and their families adore her, and in her short time as a teacher, she has built meaningful relationships with each of them. Madelyn's youthful energy and enthusiasm help her create a classroom where students can truly be themselves while learning essential skills and life lessons. Many of her students experience their first classroom setting with her, and their families trust her wholeheartedly to care for and guide their little ones. It

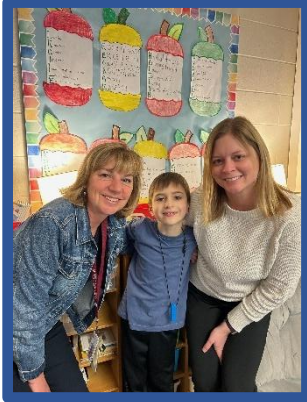
has been such a joy to watch Madelyn's journey—from her time as a peer mentor during high school to choosing her career path in college, and now thriving in her own classroom. Following in my footsteps by working with students with special needs, Madelyn treats teaching as a true calling, pouring her heart into every aspect of her work. Madelyn, I am so proud of you and the incredible impact you've already made. While you've touched the lives of many, I know your hard work and dedication will continue to inspire and uplift countless others. You are truly deserving of this award, and I can't wait to see where your career takes you next. Thank you for the love and care you show your students every day!

—Melissa Perkins

Maddie is a compassionate and present educator. She is a safe space for all her students; she goes out of her way to ensure their basic needs of safety are met. She has shown dedication to ensuring that her students are provided with an inclusive, supportive, and nurturing learning environment where they can thrive. Maddie is able to tailor her lessons to meet the individual needs of her students, making learning engaging and fun!

—Sonali Arora-Mata

Ashley Rea, Paraprofessional



I am nominating Susan Brown and Ashley Rea for their incredible work as resource paraprofessionals that support students in my 2nd grade general education classroom at Hamlin Elementary School. They have built intentional and long-term relationships with their students as they've moved up through various grade levels at Hamlin. These long-term relationships are built on a foundation of mutual trust, respect, love, and understanding. This continuity has been such a powerful catalyst that allows our students to achieve their personal best, especially when transitioning between grade levels and teachers. As a new teacher to Hamlin, these educators also proactively offered their collaboration to build a welcoming and inclusive environment for all

students in my classroom. On any given day, you will find them going far above expectations. They are driven by a deeper purpose as they work tirelessly to advocate for all students at Hamlin. I am so thankful for their leadership and love!

—Lila Scheckelhoff

Lila Scheckelhoff, Teacher

George has been struggling in his public education from the start, and in fact, did not like going to school. He is a high-functioning child with ASD and ADHD impulsive/ inattentive. Knowing this, we entered 2nd grade with trepidation, due to his prior years of difficulty and negative



classroom experiences. Our worries abated after meeting with Lila Scheckelhoff to go over George's IEP and create a Behavior Intervention Plan.

She was a smiling, gracious angel, that not only adhered to his behavior plan, but adjusted her lesson plans with George in mind, integrating some of the supports in his IEP to the whole class. Some examples- the ability to draw with certain assignments, and flexibility for George to take movement breaks away from the group; he was still listening and contributing. She also encouraged me to join the PAC, which has been a blessing, connecting me to other parents who have children with IEPs, and keeps me abreast with everything that

special education is doing in our district. As a parent, it has expanded my access to resources, and gives me a platform to share experiences related to the discussions, and share potential ideas to improve special education.

George would come home with pride from her specific positive praise. Specifically, being the first to earn a reward with a class monetary system attached to positive behavior. On his most challenging days, where I had to come to school to pick him up, Lila still focused on the positive and let him know that he was still loved and will be missed in the classroom; he was so important to the classroom community because he had a lot of great learning perspectives to share with his peers. This allowed me to piggyback on her constructive comments so that she and I aligned to encourage positive classroom behavior. This approach made him feel valuable, and intrinsic motivation to try harder to control his impulses! She has gone above and beyond in her duties, adhering to the IEP, and doing even more! For this reason, I feel she is very

deserving of this award. If only she could replicate this part of herself in all teachers! We are so lucky to have her as a teacher in this district!

—Gina

I would like to nominate Lila Scheckelhoff, second grade teacher at Hamlin Elementary for a Sparkle Award. She is a caring and compassionate individual who loves her students. Lila is dedicated to making meaningful relationships and going the extra mile to create an environment that is welcoming to all. She has great communication skills with students, parents, and staff members alike. Her positive attitude, warmth, and patience are always on display, even in challenging situations. Lila recognizes the strengths in her students and promotes their continuous growth academically, as well as socially. We are so lucky to have Lila as part of our Hamlin team!

—Britney McDonald

Jami Schuermann, Teacher

Jami continues to display exemplary service and support to all students in her Kindergarten classroom, including our students who require special education services. Jami loves all her students, provides a supportive environment and is a partner with parents and staff.

Being a kindergarten teacher, Jami's room is filled with students new to Hamlin and many new to the school experience. Jami makes the most amazing connections with her students and builds rapport even within the most difficult situations. She is able to see the child for their possibilities and not define them by their behaviors. Jami is an advocate for students to ensure that they are receiving the appropriate support, including special education or alternate placements. She has a gift of providing love to all students and focusing on their strengths, no matter how difficult the behaviors and needs may be. She has the amazing ability to start each day fresh with students, always see the positive and help each student feel successful, no matter the setbacks.

Students want to be in Jami's classroom. She creates the most loving and caring environment for students. Jami advocates for individual student needs, while simultaneously supporting the safety of all students. She comes up with innovative and interactive behavior plans and activities. Jami also provides calming areas, alternative activities, supports movement and alternative needs. This all while teaching the kindergarten curriculum and fostering participation

and progress for all students.

Jami supports students with special education services, but also their parents as well. She shows compassion to parents during crisis moments with their children and assists them as we identify appropriate supports for their child at school. Kindergarten is often the first school experience for students, but also the first special education experience for parents. She is honest, but so incredibly kind and supportive as we work together through the process. Jami builds trusting relationships with parents, which carries over with the special education team. Jami is an exemplary teacher to our special education students and a support their families and our staff. We are so lucky to have her at Hamlin to share her gifts with our community.

—Tracy Marshall

Dipti Shah, Paraprofessional

Mrs. Shah, we are so grateful for the care and dedication you bring to our classroom each day. Your hard work and patience help our students build confidence, learn new skills, and feel safe in an environment that supports their growth. You're an incredible asset to our team, and we are lucky to have you. Thank you for everything!

—Madelyn Perkins, Morgan Wrubel, and Sonali Arora-Mata

I am nominating the 6 ASD para educators that go above and beyond in supporting our shared students in my 2nd grade general education classroom at Hamlin Elementary School. As a teacher, I admire all of the creative and flexible practices that they use daily to ensure our students are not just included, but also recognized for their incredible and unique gifts. These adults intentionally blend into the classroom walls while our students shine among their peers. These exceptional individuals have enabled the growth of our students and my professional development, as a teacher. As a parent myself, I also view them through the eyes of a mother. It is so beautiful to see the mutual and authentic love that they share with our students. I would like to thank them for the love, dedication, and leadership that they bring to Hamlin every day. Our world is a brighter and more inclusive one because of these amazing educators!

—Lila Scheckelhoff

Morgan Wrubel, ASD Teacher

Morgan is a fantastic educator whose teaching has been nothing short of exemplary. Morgan has consistently demonstrated a deep commitment to growth, successes, and well-being of each students. One of the most remarkable qualities that sets Morgan is her ability to connect with students on an individual level. She's not only a talented educator but also is an advocate for the needs of her students. She actively collaborates with her team, parents, and support staff to create a supportive and inclusive environment. She creates a classroom atmosphere where students feel valued and respected. She is an integral part of our Hamlin ASD team. I learn daily from Morgan!

—Sonali Arora-Mata

Rebecca Zaleski, Teacher

She is a Dedicated, Planned, Supportive one. We are seeing lot of good qualities and improvement in our child because my daughter is in her class. Of course, she is very helpful.

—Manikandan

Hampton

Taylor Coy, Teacher

Mrs. Coy is extremely patient and kind teacher. She has helped my son in numerous ways. She is great communicator. She is the reason my son loves to go to school!

—Kanchan Patil

Sivaranjani Palaniselvan, Paraprofessional

— Anonymous

Sydney VanCoppennolle, Teacher

Mrs. Van being a new Teacher has definitely made a remark on Kids mind with her enthusiastic and sparkling Teaching method. She always has a Smile on her face which will definitely help our Kids to be the same in every hard or easy situations that they face. I see a great and positive impact of her teaching on my little one. She deserves to be recognized.

—Neelam Mane

Hugger

Amy Baisley, 4th grade Teacher

Amy Baisley is an exceptionally experienced teacher who strives to support her students in every possible way. I am truly impressed and inspired by her immense talent and dedication.

—Eugenia Park

Kateri Banghart, Teacher

Kateri loves what she does and that is key to her success in the classroom. She meets every student where they are at. She is always finding new ways to help engage and support her students. She cares deeply and is passionate about what she does.

—Anonymous

Marnie Barker, Principal

Mrs. Barker, I don't know where to start but THANK YOU! Thank you for giving Arianna a chance and working with our family and your staff to make Ari's elementary years at Hugger a success. Your hard work and dedication don't go unnoticed. Thank you for embracing Ari and she will always have her memories of special lunches with you. You're an amazing principal and appreciate all your hard work.

—Karin Ferrari

Jackie Brandenburg, Teacher

Mrs. Brandenburg has gone above and beyond the call of duty. She has identified my child as needing extra supports in reading and has gotten him services to address these issues. She provides DAILY reports as to my child's behavior so we can track trends and try to address triggers. She has worked beautifully with the TEAM to provide countless supports to meet my son where he is while still supporting him to achieve goals. She encourages his special interests and uses them to support and encourages his learning. Mrs. Brandenburg truly SPARKLES!

— Anonymous





I am honored to wholeheartedly recommend Jackie Brandenburg for the Sparkle Awards. As my son Jaxon’s general education teacher, Jackie has not only embraced him but has truly seen him—his strengths, his potential, and his limitless possibilities.

From the very start, Jackie created a classroom where Jaxon feels safe, valued, and capable. Her unwavering support, encouragement, and advocacy have not only helped him grow academically but have also nurtured his confidence and independence.

This past year, Jaxon has reached milestones I once only hoped for. His love for learning has deepened, his self-assurance has blossomed, and

he has built meaningful friendships—all because Jackie believed in him. She didn’t just teach him; she empowered him. She celebrated his victories, big and small, and helped him navigate challenges with patience, kindness, and an open heart.

Jackie’s impact on Jaxon’s life is immeasurable, and our family will always be grateful for the difference she has made. She embodies everything the Sparkle Awards stand for.

—Jazmin McKeon

Tamera Conner, Paraprofessional

Tamer Conner has been an amazing Para Educator to my daughter Arianna Ferrari. Ari loves to speak about all the fun things they do and how much she helps her. Your patience and kindness with Ari is greatly appreciated by our family.

—Karin Ferrari

Lauren Daley, Speech Therapist

Lauren Daley has been so kind and hard working with Arianna on her speech skills. She has helped her grow and found ways to work with Ari to motivate her to always do better!

—Karin Ferrari

Shelby Desjardins, Teacher

She’s an amazing teacher who truly connects with her students. Her dedication, energy, and passion for helping kids shine through in everything she does!

—Bella Nguyen

Rachel Dolecki, Para Educator/Building Sub

Mrs. Dolecki has shown my son compassion and love from day 1. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty by engaging my son using his special interests. She has created resources for him and shown incredible patience in the face of challenging situations. She SPARKLES! You can tell that she without a doubt loves her job and truly, deeply cares for all her students, especially my son. There are very few people that my son trusts, and because of the care and love that Mrs. Dolecki has shown my son, he trusts and loves her. She has helped him do things that wouldn't be possible without her.

— Anonymous

Tiffany Dupras, First Grade Teacher

I am honored to nominate Mrs. Dupras of Hugger Elementary for the RCS PAC Sparkle Award. As the first-grade teacher for my son, Dominic, Mrs. Dupras has demonstrated exceptional dedication, compassion, and professionalism, going above and beyond to ensure his success and well-being. Transitioning to Hugger Elementary could have been a daunting experience for Dominic, but Mrs. Dupras made it seamless. From the very beginning, she prioritized building a genuine connection with him and poured her heart into understanding his unique needs and strengths. Her ability to create a warm, inclusive, and affirming environment has not only helped Dominic feel safe and valued but has also made him thrive. He knows he is loved by her, and that feeling has been transformative for his learning experience.

Mrs. Dupras exemplifies what it means to be a collaborative partner. She has worked tirelessly alongside us, embracing neurodiversity-affirming practices and continuously learning to better support Dominic. Her thoughtful planning and problem-solving reflect her unwavering commitment to ensure that Dominic is not just a part of her general education classroom but is fully seen, supported, and celebrated as one of her own students.

The care and intention Mrs. Dupras brings to her classroom extends beyond academics. She genuinely cares about Dominic's overall well-being, demonstrating a holistic approach to teaching that prioritizes relationships and joy. Her efforts have deeply impacted our family, and we are incredibly grateful for the love and dedication she shows every day.

Mrs. Dupras is truly a spark in the RCS community—an educator who embodies the values of inclusion, kindness, and excellence. She has made a profound difference in Dominic's life and has set a high standard for what it means to be an exceptional teacher. It is with heartfelt appreciation that the Maiuri family nominates her for recognition.

—Stefanie Maiuri



Kristi Kaye, Resource Teacher

Mrs. Kaye has been such a kind, understanding and amazing resource teacher for all the years Arianna has been at Hugger. She has always been willing to push Ari to reach her potential. She works very hard and is so passionate about her work helping Ari and all her students. Thank you so much!

—Karin Ferrari

Hafsah Khan, Paraprofessional

Thank you for your kindness and hard work as a para for Arianna Ferrari.

—Karin Ferrari

Kaitlen Kinney, Occupational Therapist

Mrs. Kinney has been such a kind, patient and attentive OT with Arianna. She has learned what works for Arianna and we are so thankful for your hard work with Ari!

—Karin Ferrari

Christina Nardone, Social Worker

Mrs. Nardone SPARKLES! She has been a critical part in shaping my son's elementary experience. She has provided tools for teachers to use in school and parents tools to use at home. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty connecting with our services outside of school to unify the language and tools we are using at home, at school, and at the offices. She is an incredible social worker who has helped tremendously in my son's progress!

— Anonymous

Ms. Nardone has been a wonderful part of our son's team. She is always coming up with new ideas and supports to best help the kids. My son is apprehensive of the large lunch room, so she implemented a "Lunch Bunch" where he gets to have lunch with several friends from his class in a quieter area to practice social skills and interact with peers. We are so thankful for your work to promote opportunity and inclusivity.

—Kerry

Ghania Ourlissene, Paraprofessional

Thank you for your hard work and dedication with Arianna Ferrari! We appreciate your work being her para.

—Karin Ferrari

Jennifer Pankau, Paraprofessional

I am honored to nominate Jennifer Pankau for a Sparkle Award recognition as an exceptional paraeducator. Since last year, Jen has been more than just a support staff member, she has been a trusted mentor, advocate, and unwavering source of encouragement for a student. Their bond is truly special, built on patience, understanding, and genuine care. The student has faced significant trauma in his short life, and having a consistent and compassionate presence like Jen's has made a profound difference. She has been his sounding board, his safe space, and the person he turns to when needs reassurance and support. Her ability to recognize his needs, provide stability and help him navigate challenges- both academically and emotionally – is truly remarkable! The student sees Jen as his trusted adult, and he turns to her often. Their bond is wonderful and has made a significant difference in his life!

Jennifer consistently goes above and beyond, not just in her daily responsibilities, but in the meaningful connections she builds with students. Her unwavering dedication has helped this student gain confidence, resilience and a sense of belonging. Our Hugger School community is incredibly fortunate to have someone as compassionate and committed as Jen. She exemplifies what it means to be an extraordinary paraeducator, and I wholeheartedly recommend her for this well-deserved recognition.

—Jacqueline Brandenburg

Autumn Pyne, Paraprofessional

Autumn has gone above and beyond in helping the students in room 9 find their independence, and grow academically! She has a unique way of connecting with the students, and supporting them on the days their needing extra support. Her hard work and dedication makes Room 9 one of our happy places at Hugger!

—Anonymous

Kimberley Rodriguez, Resource Teacher

Mrs. Rodriguez has been an amazing resource teacher and asset to Arianna's team. She has taken the time and effort to get to know Ari and what works for her as a learner. We appreciate all that you do and are thankful for you!

—Karin Ferrari

Mrs. Rodriguez has used her expertise in special education to help my son grow and learn so much these last two years. She has provided not only knowledge, but a safe space for my child to learn and grow. She has used his special interests to help regulate him and keep him focused and engaged when he otherwise wouldn't be. She SPARKLES! Mrs. Rodriguez has played an integral role in identifying and providing the services my child needs. She has provided solutions at times when we felt overwhelmed and helpless. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty!

— Anonymous

Dana Santilli, Resource Teacher

Ms. Dana Santilli is so deserving of the RCS Sparkle Award. Ms. Santilli is a resource teacher who, in her 1st year with RCS, embodies the essence of a teacher who not only is loving, caring and passionate about her student's success, but also is a staff member who is a team player. Ms. Santilli's classroom is a place where all students are able to access learning while feeling safe, secure and a strong sense of belonging. Ms. Santilli's ability to ensure that her student's experiences at Hugger are focused on their strengths while supporting continual growth. Hugger is so fortunate to have Ms. Santilli at our school and in our student's lives!

—Marnie Barker

It is with great admiration and gratitude that I nominate Ms. Santilli of Hugger Elementary for an RCS PAC Sparkle Award. She is a true shining star, and we are incredibly grateful for everything she has poured into our son, Dominic. Ms. Santilli joined RCS and Hugger Elementary this school year, and we were fortunate that she became Dominic's resource classroom teacher. As a new family navigating public school and the IEP process, we could not have asked



for a more dedicated, compassionate, and supportive educator. From the very start of the school year, Ms. Santilli served as an invaluable liaison, ensuring a smooth transition for Dominic. She worked tirelessly to build a strong connection with him, recognizing and nurturing his strengths. Because of her warmth and dedication, Dominic quickly bonded with her and developed a love for school. This school year has been filled with incredible firsts—so much learning and growth that it has been almost hard to keep up. Throughout it all, Ms. Santilli has maintained an open and ongoing stream of communication between home and school. I have been incredibly fortunate to know that Dominic's needs have always been at the

forefront. She has been receptive, eager to collaborate, and proactive in problem-solving alongside us. What makes Ms. Santilli truly exceptional is how she meets Dominic where he is, always presuming competence and ensuring that he feels seen, valued, and understood. She has incorporated his interests—whether it's farm kitty, Moana, or Frozen—into his learning,

making school a place of joy and connection. Beyond her direct work with Dominic, she has dedicated countless hours to building the capacity of others, ensuring that he can be successful across different environments. She has supported him through co-regulation, responded to his emotional and developmental needs with deep care, and, most importantly, has always believed in him. Ms. Santilli's impact on our family and the Hugger community is immeasurable, and we are forever grateful for her dedication. It is with heartfelt appreciation that we nominate her for this well-deserved recognition.

—Stefanie Maiuri

Ms. Santilli has been amazing this year. She always has a huge smile and positive attitude. We had a challenging beginning to the year and she worked tirelessly to keep trying new things until we found what worked. We now have a regulated boy who loves to go to school every day. She is always willing to be flexible and adapt what her role looks like in order to put the children's needs first. We are very thankful to have her!

—Kerry

I am writing to nominate Ms. Santilli for her exceptional support and dedication as a resource teacher. She has made a profound impact on my child's academic and personal growth. Ms. Santilli's commitment to helping children not only meet their academic goals but support in their GE classroom. From the very beginning, Ms. Santilli has shown immense patience, understanding and support. She takes the time to recognize each student's individual needs and consistently works to meet them in a compassionate, thoughtful manner. Through her guidance, my child has grown more confident, not only in his abilities but also knowing how he learns. She has created a safe, encouraging environment where they feel supported, heard, and motivated to succeed. Her dedication to their well-being and progress has made a significant difference, and I truly appreciate all the care and effort she has invested in my child's development. Ms. Santilli is a wonderful teacher who brings out the best in every student. Her contributions to my child's growth and success have been truly remarkable, and I believe she deserves to be recognized for her tireless work, compassion, and belief in the potential of every child.

—Maria Kinaia

Shubh Sushmita, Paraprofessional

Thank you for being Arianna Ferrari's para! Appreciate all your hard work.

—Karin Ferrari

Meghan Timko, Fourth Grade Teacher

Meghan goes out of her way to provide accommodations for students with disabilities. She thinks outside of the box and goes above and beyond. Your students are so lucky to have you! Your hard work does not go unnoticed.

-Anonymous

Kathy Vitale, Paraprofessional

It is with great admiration and gratitude that I nominate Ms. Vitale of Hugger Elementary for an RCS PAC Sparkle Award. Ms. Vitale has gone above and beyond in her role as a paraeducator to

build a beautiful, reciprocal relationship with my son, Dominic. She has developed an authentic connection, rooted in truly getting to know him, his interests, what is meaningful to him, and his needs. Her kindness, patience, and care has been at the center of every interaction. Transitioning out of an early childhood setting to Hugger could have been a daunting experience for Dominic, but Ms. Vitale served as a bridge. Through their deep connection, Ms. Vitale recognized and nurtured Dominic's many strengths, fostering remarkable growth and confidence over the school year. Ms. Vitale is a dedicated paraeducator who exudes kindness, compassion, and caring. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure my son's success and emotional well-being. Her genuine pride in Dominic's growth over the school year has been incredibly meaningful to me as a mother. Ms. Vitale is an absolute gem in the RCS community and we are forever grateful for the impact that she's made in Dominic's life. She has set a high standard for what it means to be an exceptional paraeducator. With heartfelt appreciation, the Maiuri family proudly nominates Ms. Vitale for this well-deserved recognition, in gratitude for the profound difference she has made in Dominic's life.

—Stefanie Maiuri

Erika Wattles-Cooke, Teacher

Mrs. Wattles-Cooke, thank you so much for being such an amazing, kind and welcoming teacher to Ari for her 5th grade year! She loves going to school everyday and always talks about all the fun things you do in class. I appreciate all your communication and hard work with Arianna.

—Karin Ferrari



Long Meadow

Stephanie Baker, Speech Language Pathologist

I have had the wonderful pleasure of working with Stephanie for three years. Through those three years, I have seen what a remarkable person she is. She is so selfless and is always checking in on our team. While Stephanie has a large caseload, she still manages to find time to support around the building and to ensure her students, team, and other staff needs are met. I feel ancillary staff is sometimes overlook and I want people to know how much Stephanie means to me and our entire Long Meadow team. She is such an asset to our team and we are so thankful that we get to have her along side us. Stephanie is long overdue for a Sparkle award and I couldn't see another year go by without her receiving one for all the amazing work she does.

Steph, thank you for being such a light in our sometimes very challenging job. Thank you for offering to fill in for me so I can get a lunch or even a prep. Thank you for never second guessing and always being there to support our team. Thank you for working so hard for our students and providing them a safe person and safe place for them to learn. Thank you for being YOU!

—Kira Duncan

Stephanie Baker is an absolutely AMAZING individual. She goes above and beyond for her students and families, and puts her heart into everything she does. Our son, Callan Lewis, had received speech & language services from his former school, so Stephanie was one of the first people we met at Long Meadow Elementary when we came there in fall of 2023 when he had to have a new evaluation. Stephanie noticed Callan could use additional support, and she went out of her way to help us secure free, grant-funded tutoring for Callan - bumping him to the top of the list when we otherwise never would have got in. She also attends many of the school's events, despite that being of her personal time, making it so fun for Callan and other students to get to see her after-school hours. Stephanie is a gem of a human being and we are so very lucky to have her in our corner. Thank you for all you have done to help Callan grow in his confidence and make our time at Long Meadow so wonderful!

—Andrea Guy

Julie Sandrock, Academic Interventionist



Our son Shepard was struggling to sound out words and letter sounds correctly. Shep has a speech IEP, and always was hard on himself about not being able to make the right sounds. Since working with Mrs. Sandrock, Shep has grown so much in his confidence of reading. He is reading at grade level now and continues to show growth everyday. In the past every night was a struggle to get him to read. He now loves to show off to us about what level book he is on and is able to work through every word he tries. It really is a testament to the work Mrs. Sandrock has done with him. He is so excited about his "work" every night she gives him. She taught him to read, and we are so grateful for all her love and support of Shep to get him where he is today.

—Sarah Smith

Jonathan Ziaja, Principal

I have nothing but the utmost gratitude for all the support and dedication Mr. Ziaja has shown toward our EI classrooms. His unwavering commitment to our students and staff has made a world of difference, and our job would not be possible without him. His leadership and compassion create an environment where both students and educators can thrive. Whether it's through the encouragement he gives, the support he provides, or the time he invests in ensuring our classrooms run smoothly, his efforts never go unnoticed. Mr. Ziaja truly understand the challenges we face and he goes above and beyond to make sure we have everything we need to succeed.

It is because of his kindness, hard work, and dedication that I wholeheartedly believe he is more than deserving of the Sparkle Award. The impact he has on our school community is immeasurable, and this recognition is just a small token of appreciation for all that he does. Thank you, Mr. Z for being such an incredible leader and advocate for our students. Your support means the world to us, and we are truly fortunate to have you as our principal.

—Kira Duncan



McGregor

Dominik Barge, Student

Dom is a responsible, motivated, and passionate learner who consistently sets a positive example in our Level 4 classroom. He is a model student who sets a positive example for our ASD students. He also occasionally helps with academic tasks and works with his friends 1:1. Dom joins us every afternoon towards the end of the day and actively participates in our class activities. He often helps with academic tasks and works one-on-one with his friends with ASD. His support for ASD students plays a crucial role in fostering an inclusive community. We are incredibly proud of you, Dom! We LOVE you, Dom!

—Eleonora Richardson

Elyssa Chemlal, Student

She is an accountable, compassionate and thoughtful student who brings positivity and enthusiasm to our Level 4 classroom every afternoon. Elyssa arrives with a smile, excited to help. She is a model student who sets a positive example for her friends with ASD. When needed, she works with her friends on academic tasks and independent assignments within the classroom. Elyssa helps daily, making a tangible impact in building our inclusive community. We are so PROUD of you, Elyssa!! We LOVE you Elyssa!

—Eleonora Richardson

Erica Johnson-Veggian, Resource Teacher

I am writing to enthusiastically nominate Mrs. Johnson-Veggian for recognition of her outstanding work as a Special Education teacher at McGregor elementary school. As the parent of Mariana Gomez, I have witnessed firsthand her exceptional dedication and skill in supporting students with special needs. Mrs. Johnson-Veggian has been instrumental in my daughter's educational journey through her thoughtful implementation and management of her Individualized Education Program (IEP). What sets her apart is her remarkable ability to:

- Demonstrate exceptional flexibility by consistently adjusting the IEP to meet my daughter's evolving needs, ensuring the educational plan remains effective and relevant
- Maintain clear and proactive communication with our family, keeping us informed of progress and challenges while always being receptive to our input and concerns
- Show genuine dedication to her students' success, going above and beyond to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment
- Display deep understanding of special education principles and practices, implementing evidence-based strategies that have directly contributed to my daughter's academic and personal growth
- Foster independence while providing appropriate support, helping my daughter build confidence in her abilities

The positive impact of Mrs. Johnson-Veggian's work extends beyond academic achievement. Through her patient and comprehensive approach, she has helped my daughter develop essential life skills and self-advocacy abilities that will serve her well throughout her educational journey and beyond.

Mrs. Johnson-Veggian exemplifies the qualities of an outstanding special education professional: expertise, compassion, dedication, and the ability to create individualized

solutions for each student's unique needs. Her commitment to excellence in special education makes her highly deserving of recognition.

—Brenda Zendejas Gonzalez

Mila Lieber-LaFata, Student

She is sweet, motivated and always brings positive attitude. She comes to our Level 4 classroom every day with a smile, ready to contribute during our morning work and end-of-day activities. Mila is always eager to assist her friends with ASD with their academic tasks. She regularly helps her friends with ASD, supporting them in developing social skills and meaningful friendships. I am incredibly proud of Mila and all the work she puts in every day. We love you, Mila!

—Eleonora Richardson

Leela Nagarajan, Paraprofessional (ESL)

Leela and Donna are the embodiment of education. Every Wednesday they spend an hour with the children of the Rochester Estates as a part of a program called 'Homework help'. They spend this one hour helping with homework, working on ELA, math and in some cases, just coloring and talking to the kids. This program is a safe space that some of our McG kids come to so they can continue learning. The fact that they have done this for years, as a volunteer is incredible and is very inspiring. This program is the baby of one of our retired para educators, Kathy Caputo.

—Megha

Morgan O'Callaghan, Teacher

Ms. O'Callaghan welcomed Isadora with great care and affection. The teacher knew how to respond and deal with the language challenges (since Isa did not speak English yet). I am very grateful for all the work she did at the beginning of elementary school, leaving us parents relieved and confident. Thank you Ms. O'Callaghan, may your path in teaching always be enlightened.

—Katia Oliveira

**Anna Picklo, Music Teacher*

As a special education teacher at McGregor Elementary, I appreciate how Mrs. Picklo makes every effort to get to know all of our students, their interests, strengths, and needs, exemplifying the theme of "All means all" in every aspect. She reaches out to our special education team when needed; she collaborates on how best to meet students' needs; and treats every student with kindness and respect.

This school year, McGregor is putting on the musical "Finding Nemo." Mrs. Picklo has had big shoes to fill, when our previous music teacher, Mrs. Plotzke, retired mid-year last school year. While Mrs. Plotzke certainly cannot be replaced, Mrs. Picklo has forged her own path! She has included so many students in this musical, cast and crew. I had the privilege of watching one of their rehearsals and saw the extreme joy of watching ALL of the students having so much fun and feeling that they are part of something bigger than themselves. Mrs. Picklo has coordinated with other teachers and parents to ensure that our students with disabilities, those learning

multiple languages, and any other student who wanted to participate is doing so meaningfully. Thank you does not seem to be enough but, Mrs. Picklo, thank you. You are seen and you are appreciated!
—Erica Johnson-Veggian

Donna Putnam, Paraprofessional

Donna and Leela are the embodiment of education. Every Wednesday they spend an hour with the children of the Rochester Estates as a part of a program called 'Homework help'. They spend this one hour helping with homework, working on ELA, math and in some cases, just coloring and talking to the kids. This program is a safe space that some of our McG kids come to so they can continue learning. The fact that they have done this for years, as a volunteer is incredible and is very inspiring. This program is the baby of one of our retired para educators, Kathy Caputo.
—Megha

Marissa Russo, Behavior Technician

There is beauty in the quiet connections and soft-spoken bonds that come with Ms. Marissa. She lets her work with students do the talking and judging by the number of children that flock to her and the beaming smiles on their faces, the message is loud and clear, she "Sparkles". The connections she makes with her students is special to witness and there is an unspoken bond that needs no words. Her empathetic approach enables her to build deep, trusting connections with each student, fostering a safe and nurturing environment. Marissa supports students that have some of the highest behavioral needs in the district, however she does it with grace and compassion. Marissa has an exceptional ability to meet students exactly where they are, offering the appropriate support to meet their emotional and behavioral needs in any given moment. She creates a strong sense of belonging for her students and fosters great interactions with all students in the classroom. Additionally, Marissa a fierce advocate for students. Her commitment to ensuring their needs are met is unwavering, even if it means standing alone. She keeps them at the forefront of every decision that is made and collaborates with educators across the district, always keeping decisions student centered. Ms. Marissa is a constant reminder that true leadership and change comes not from being loud, but from making a lasting impact in the lives of those she serves.
—Anonymous

Kaya Salvaggio, Student

She is a kind, engaged and dependable student. Every day, Kaya arrives in our Level 4 classroom with a smile and enthusiasm, ready to assist her friends with ASD during their morning work. She also returns later in the day to help with afternoon academic activities. Kaya is a model student who consistently sets a positive example for her friends with ASD. Her daily involvement plays a key role in strengthening and building our inclusive community. I am so proud of Kaya!! We love you, Kaya!
—Eleonora Richardson

Brooklyn Waterman, Student

She is an enthusiastic, cheerful and warmhearted student who brings joy to our Level 4 classroom. Brooke is always the first to arrive each afternoon towards the end of the day. She consistently shows kindness, respect, and courtesy to her friends with ASD. Brooke is always eager to help, learn, and contribute to the classroom. She willingly assists with various tasks and actively participates in making our environment more inclusive. Brooke helps raise awareness about the importance of inclusion for children with disabilities. We are so PROUD of you, Brooke!! We LOVE you Brooke!

—Eleonora Richardson

Jadien Young, Student

She is responsible, kind, and warmhearted. Every day, she arrives in our Level 4 classroom with a smile and genuine excitement to help. Jadien is a role model who sets a positive example for her friends with ASD. She consistently assists with morning work, as well as reading and math assignments, and also helps daily with dismissal. Her daily efforts contribute significantly to building a more inclusive classroom community. I am incredibly proud of Jadien, and we all truly appreciate her! We LOVE you, Jadien!

—Eleonora Richardson

Meadow Brook

5th Grade ASD Safeties: Oliver Moser, Charlie Muccino, Michael Nafso, Aiden Pokowski, Drew Wellington

These five friendly 5th graders have consistently ensured that our ASD students arrive at their buses safely, on time, and with everything they need. However, their contributions extend beyond simply walking students to their destinations—they have formed genuine connections that bring comfort, encouragement, and joy to the students they assist.

Drew, Oliver, Aiden, Charlie and Michael have embraced their roles with a level of compassion and responsibility. They take the time to engage with the students in meaningful ways, asking thoughtful questions, holding hands for reassurance, and assisting with carrying items when needed. Their patience and kindness help create a sense of security, making the transition to the buses a positive and enjoyable part of the day.

Their efforts do not go unnoticed, and we truly appreciate their willingness to help, show empathy, and be a part of our school's inclusive community.

Thank you, Drew, Oliver, Aiden, Michael and Charlie! Your kindness and leadership are inspiring!

—Jamie Blake, Candace Cohen, Megan VanderVoord

Julie Amore, Teacher

Each year, I look forward to working with Mrs. Amore. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure our ASD students thrive in her classroom. She makes it a priority for them to be included in every activity, no matter how big or small. Our students find success in her classroom thanks to her positive attitude and her ability to make all students feel welcome and valued. Even before the school year begins, she's already asking how she can assist and

ensuring she knows how to properly spell our students' names. Mrs. Amore is truly a gem at Meadow Brook, and we're so lucky to have her as part of our ASD team.

—Megan VanderVoord

Lake Angle, School Cafeteria Worker

Miss Lake, we sincerely appreciate your dedication to supporting our students in the lunchroom. Your behind-the-scenes efforts in preparing their meals play an important role in helping them develop essential life skills for the future. You are an essential member of the Food Service Team, ensuring that our students with special needs have a positive and enjoyable experience each day. We are incredibly grateful for you and your team!

—Megan VanderVoord, Candace Cohen and Jamie Blake

Alysia Beier, Teacher

Mrs. Beier consistently goes above and beyond to ensure the needs of our ASD students are met. She finds creative ways to include them in every aspect of her classroom and works hard to make them feel welcomed and valued. Her openness to having parents participate in class events, like parties, is always appreciated, and her positive, can-do attitude shines through in everything she does. We are truly fortunate to have her as part of the Meadow Brook family.

—Megan VanderVoord

Seth Berg, Principal

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—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Jordan Berkley, Student



This is our first year at Meadow Brook and we didn't know anyone. My son, Rylan, has autism and he is a non-speaker. He is in an ASD class, however, he also goes to Mrs. Kubik's general education class. Jordan is in Mrs. Kubik's class and he has welcomed Rylan since day one. Jordan always asks if Rylan can be in his group and gives him a hug or says "Hi, Rylan" when he joins the class. Rylan can't say hi back, he doesn't know how to socialize or play with other kids, but none of those things seem to matter to Jordan, Rylan is just his friend. I've seen what a great friend Jordan is when I've gone into the class to volunteer. For MLK day, Mrs. Kubik's class did a project, where they each made a leaf to put on a tree. Jordan wrote "Me and Rylan" with two little kids with their arms around each other. Thank you to Jordan and his parents for being such a great example of welcoming Rylan into the class. I cannot express how much it means to me.

—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Anna Beylerian, Paraprofessional

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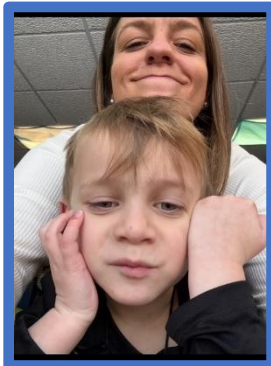
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—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Anna is truly appreciated in our classroom for her kindness, thoughtfulness, and unwavering hard work. She consistently goes out of her way to help others, always lending a hand or offering a kind word when needed. Her ability to stay focused and give her best effort in everything she does inspires her classmates and creates a positive environment where everyone feels valued. Anna’s thoughtful nature extends beyond just academics, as she is always considerate of others’ feelings and needs, making her an essential part of our classroom community.

—Jamie Blake

Jamie Blake, Teacher



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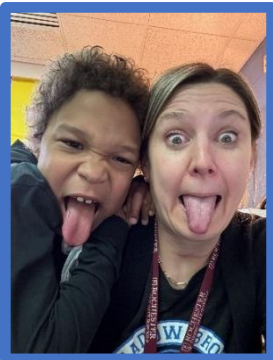
—Meghan Madigan Wagner

We are so lucky to have Jamie as one of my sons teachers. She shows so much kindness and love to my children. Her heart has shown through so many times with her devotion to the children with special needs. I have seen my son grow in so many ways this year and exceed so many expectations. I know this is because of the love and support he feels in the classroom. Thank you Jamie for being you and sharing your love with so many.

— Anonymous



Candace Cohen, Teacher



Candace has been my sons teacher the last year and half. She has given him the most incredible space and love to grow. He has blossomed under her love. She always sees the positive in him and I look forward to the daily notes she sends home filled with funny moments during his day. Thank you Candace for being you and caring so deeply.

— Anonymous

Vijaya Dharmavarapu, Paraprofessional

Just before the school year started, we had planned to go to North Hill, where our family had been attending for the past 9 years. I got a call from staff in Special Education Administration who stated Rylan, my son who has autism and will be starting kindergarten, will be moved to Meadow Brook. I was sad to say the least. Before we even started, so many of the staff members reached out to welcome us to Meadow Brook. Seth Berg, the principal, was so welcoming and invited us to come to the school and check out Rylan’s class and meet his teacher. We met Mrs. Blake, Mrs. Nazione and paraeducators, Anna Beylerian and Vijaya Dharmavarapu. We also met Mrs. Kubik, Rylan’s general education teacher, who was also welcoming and quickly shared her own personal experience with autism that made me so comfortable as a parent sending my non-speaking son to a new school. Later in the year, Leticia Fonseca also joined as a paraeducator and Rylan quickly grew a bond with her. I cannot say enough amazing words or thank these RCS employees enough for how they welcomed our family to a new school and how much they have helped Rylan adjust to kindergarten. They help him to regulate himself so he is ready to learn. They give him sensory an calming time when he

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—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Vijaya, you are such an important part of our classroom community and ASD team! I admire your patience and calm demeanor. I am so grateful to work along side you! Thank you for everything that you do!!

—Jamie Blake

Leticia Fonseca, Paraprofessional

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—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Leticia has seamlessly fit into our classroom, and her presence is exactly what the kids need. With her warm and approachable demeanor, she creates a welcoming atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable. Leticia is always present, engaged, and ready to lend a hand whenever needed, whether it's offering assistance with projects or providing support to her students. Her willingness to help and her positive attitude make her an invaluable member of our classroom, and her energy contributes to the collaborative and caring environment that we all enjoy.

—Jamie Blake

Fran Haynes, School Cafeteria Worker

Miss Fran, thank you for consistently supporting our students who pick up their school lunch. Your patience and understanding mean the world to our ASD students and staff. Fran has developed an effective system that empowers our students to succeed while teaching them essential life skills, including responsibility, decision-making, and independence. Fran, we are incredibly grateful for all that you do!

—Candace Cohen, Jamie Blake, Megan VanderVoord

Tracie Hickner, ASD Paraprofessional

There are few para educators who can partner with their teacher so seamlessly to problem-solve, create impactful visuals, and serve as a right-hand support in leading a classroom toward success. This year, Tracie has been instrumental in helping our new students in the ASD classroom thrive, not only within our classroom but across all areas of their learning. Each day, Tracie works tirelessly to ensure that our students feel successful and validated, making a profound difference in their lives and learning experiences. She takes lamination and prep work home each week to ensure our classroom is set up for success. Also, her 'the laminator is unplugged' texts before she leaves for the day always make me smile and help me sleep peacefully at night. Thank you for everything you do, day in and day out.

—Megan VanderVoord

Atticus Hoag, Student

Atticus truly embodies the essence of friendship and what it means to be a Meadow Brook Hero. His heartfelt commitment to connecting with our ASD students is evident in the genuine, meaningful relationships he cultivates with them each day. Atticus goes beyond simply engaging with his peers; he takes the time to understand their interests, helping them flourish both in the classroom and beyond. As a natural leader, he strives to ensure their success at Meadow Brook, offering his support not only in the ASD classroom but throughout the entire school. Whether he's guiding peers in general education classrooms, interacting with students in the lunchroom, spending time with them during field trips, or simply being present with them in the hallways, Atticus leaves a lasting, positive impact. Our students eagerly anticipate seeing him each day, and it's clear that he cares deeply for each and every one of them. Even the parents of our students have expressed how much of a difference Atticus has made in their child's life—and in their own lives as well. One of our ASD parents even has a note Atticus wrote to their son in 2nd grade pinned up in their office! Thank you, Atticus, for everything you do, and we know you will continue to make a difference with our ASD students for years to come.

—Megan VanderVoord

Melissa Hoffman, PAC Chair

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—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Kelly Kubik, Teacher

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—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Amy Larson, School Cafeteria Worker

Miss Amy, thank you for all that you do to help our students succeed both in and out of the lunchroom. You have empowered our students by helping them gain life skills and make decisions about what they want to eat during the school day. The systems you've put in place have greatly contributed to their success, and we are fortunate to have people like you in our school!

—Candace Cohen, Jamie Blake and Megan VanderVoord

Erin Moser, Paraprofessional

Erin's flexibility and willingness to jump in whenever needed are truly admirable. She approaches every situation with a smile and an open heart, always ready to lend a hand, whether it's assisting with a lesson or supporting a student in need. Erin cares for our students as if they were her own, and her genuine love for them shines through in everything she does. Her positive attitude and eagerness to help create a nurturing environment where students feel safe and supported, and she's always there, without hesitation, to make sure they succeed.

—Jamie Blake

We are honored to nominate Erin Moser for her unwavering dedication to our students with Autism. This year, Erin has been an incredible asset to all of our ASD classrooms. Always ready to step in at a moment's notice, she provides invaluable support wherever it is needed. She takes the time to truly understand each student—their interests, calming strategies, and schedules—ensuring they feel seen, supported, and valued.

Erin's positive attitude and warm smile brighten every classroom she enters. Her calm, compassionate nature creates a welcoming environment where students thrive. Despite having her own para schedule, she frequently adjusts it to offer additional support, demonstrating her deep commitment to our students. Her natural ability to connect with them and her effortless approach to helping make a lasting impact.

We are beyond grateful for Erin and the time, care, and dedication she brings to our classrooms. Thank you, Mrs. Moser!

—Jamie Blake, Candace Cohen, Megan VanderVoord

Laura Nazione, Speech Language Pathologist

Laura is an invaluable asset to our Meadow Brook ASD team. She is someone we can always rely on, and the lessons she creates are incredibly creative. We've witnessed significant growth in our students' communication skills and their use of AAC devices, thanks to her engaging lessons. Laura is always open to trying new ideas and never hesitates to embrace new approaches. One of our class's favorite memories was making a miniature snowman, using words like "put" and "on" to place the snowman's accessories. The students absolutely loved it. Thank you for always going the extra mile to support and inspire our students!

—Megan VanderVoord

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—Meghan Madigan Wagner

It is with great honor that I nominate Laura Nazione for a Sparkle Award.

Mrs. Nazione goes above and beyond every day in our ASD programs, making an incredible impact on both students and staff. She is deeply committed to fostering communication skills—not just within the classroom, but across all social and academic settings. Through her dedication, students are learning to express themselves more effectively, building confidence and independence in their interactions.

One of Mrs. Nazione's many contributions is creating a specialized speech group that focuses on core words, ensuring that students develop essential communication skills in meaningful ways. She also provides speech services in natural settings, seamlessly integrating support into students' daily routines. Beyond working directly with students, Laura actively supports teachers and staff, always promoting communication as a vital part of the learning environment. Mrs. Nazione is the first to respond whenever extra support is needed, whether it's answering a call for assistance or lending a helping hand in a challenging situation. Her expertise extends beyond speech and language—she has an incredible ability to navigate and manage challenging behaviors with patience and skill.

Her impact is not limited to the ASD community; she is a valuable resource for all students, both in special and general education, at MeadowBrook Elementary. Despite wearing multiple hats and serving so many students, Laura carries out her work with unwavering calmness, grace, and professionalism.

Mrs. Nazione is someone we can always count on, and I am truly grateful for her dedication, kindness, and support. She is an invaluable member of our school community, and her contributions make a lasting difference every single day. Thank you, Mrs. Nazione!

—Candace Cohen

Elle Nichols, Teacher

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Elle Nichols for her constant dedication and kindness toward our students with special needs. Ms. Nichols is an exceptionally talented 3rd-grade teacher who fosters a fun, warm, and inclusive classroom environment. She has created a safe and welcoming space where our ASD students can learn and grow alongside their peers. Every time we enter her classroom, she goes out of her way to engage with our students—both socially and academically—while supporting their individual goals.

Through her leadership, Ms. Nichols has set a powerful standard: every student belongs, and every student is valued. She has graciously opened her doors for morning meetings, snack time, weather reports, and reading buddies, ensuring that our students with Autism feel comfortable, included, and empowered to learn from their friends in a nurturing space.

I am incredibly grateful for your compassion, dedication, and partnership in helping our students thrive both academically and socially. Thank you, Ms. Nichols!

—Candace Cohen

Christopher Noronha, Teacher

Each year, our team writes a Sparkle for Mr. Noronha to recognize the incredible dedication he shows to our students. Year after year, I continue to be amazed by everything he does. He is constantly working to ensure our students are included and that their needs are met, whether it's organizing 5th-grade safeties to assist with lunch carts or making sure we have safeties to help us get to the bus at the end of the day.

One of my favorite memories of Mr. Noronha this year was when he came into my classroom to deliver something. One of our students, who attends Mr. Noronha's class for General Education, approached him using his AAC device to ask for goldfish. Without hesitation, Mr. Noronha responded, "How could we deprive this student of goldfish?" He immediately took the student by the hand and walked with him down the hall to get the goldfish in his classroom! In my 11 years of knowing Mr. Noronha, I'm always surprised by all the ways he goes the extra mile for a student in such a personal and thoughtful way. It was a moment that created a lasting memory for both the student and Mr. Noronha. This simple act of kindness truly shows the depth of his care for our students. We are so fortunate to have him on our team.

—Megan VanderVoord

Karen Palmieri, Paraprofessional

I would like to nominate Karen Palmieri for a Sparkle Award. Recently, Karen has taken on a new role in addition to her para responsibilities, and she has accepted with dedication and a true willingness to learn. She is now supporting a student in communicating through sign language and has committed herself to helping this student find their voice through signing. Karen's eagerness to learn is a wonderful quality—she is always asking thoughtful questions, seeking guidance, and striving to enhance her skills to better support her student. Her patience, determination, and open-mindedness in navigating this new challenge reflect her dedication to her work. Karen's ability to adapt and stay flexible during this transition has not gone unnoticed, and her team truly appreciates her positive attitude and support! Thank you, Karen!

—Candace Cohen

Patricia Peck, Paraprofessional

We are proud to nominate Patricia Peck for her special dedication to Meadow Brook's Autism community. With extensive experience working with children with special needs, Ms. Peck has made a large impact this year by supporting ASD students across two classrooms. She adapts to the diverse needs of her students, providing essential support that helps both teachers and students navigate throughout the day. Her flexibility, efficiency, and willingness to take on new challenges have been a tremendous help. From assisting with projects to enhancing academic lessons, Ms. Peck's involvement has greatly contributed to student growth. We are incredibly grateful for the dedication and compassion she brings to the classroom every day! Thank you, Ms. Peck!

—Candace Cohen and Megan VanderVoord

Sara Quiring, Car Line Leader



Ms Quiring has been serving as the car line leader for 4 years at Meadow Brook elementary. She welcomes our students every day with a bright smiling face and happy demeanor. She is there - rain, shine, sleet or snow. She helps us with car doors, tears, dropped water bottles, tricky back packs and endless snow bags. Ms. Quiring deserves recognition as a huge contributor to Meadow Brook. She also leads our popcorn Fridays which should pop her to the top of your list!

—Ashley Udy

Niki Rose, Music Teacher

Mrs. Rose consistently goes above and beyond each year, and this year was no exception. During our winter music performances, she made the experience truly special for three of our ASD students. She was dedicated to finding creative ways to ensure they were fully included and successful in the performance. The smiles on our students' faces said it all, and our parents were overjoyed to see their children participating alongside their general education peers. It was a memorable experience for everyone involved. Thank you for always taking the time and energy to ensure our students are included.

—Megan VanderVoord

Lana Sweney, Paraprofessional

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Lana Sweney for a well-deserved Sparkle Award. Lana has made a profound difference in the lives of the students she works with in the ASD community. She is incredibly caring and compassionate, always approaching her students with patience, warmth, and an unwavering commitment to their success. Her gentle presence provides students with a deep sense of safety and reassurance, creating an environment where they feel truly supported and valued. One of the things I appreciate most about Mrs. Sweney is her collaborative spirit. She is always eager to exchange ideas, problem-solve as a team, and embrace new strategies with enthusiasm. Her "Let's try it!" attitude reflects her dedication to innovation and growth, always putting students' needs first. Additionally, Lana is quick to step in wherever help is needed, whether responding to support calls or assisting colleagues

throughout the building. Lana has also formed a particularly special bond with a student, taking the lead in ensuring his success in the general education classroom. Her flexibility, calm demeanor, and unwavering support have made a tremendous impact, not only on this student but on the entire Autism community at MeadowBrook Elementary. Lana's kindness, dedication, and willingness to go above and beyond make her an invaluable part of our school. We are so grateful for her! Thank you, Mrs. Sweney!

—Candace Cohen

Lynnette Teller, Information Literacy Specialist

Mrs. Teller is all about inclusion! She has done so much for our students over the years, and this year was no different. This year, she included our Adult Transition Program in helping check in library books. One of the students who works in the library uses AAC. She also recognized what a great opportunity this was for another student at Meadow Brook who uses AAC to communicate, allowing them to join during that time, build a meaningful relationship, and learn valuable job skills along the way.

—Megan VanderVoord

Megan VanderVoord, Teacher

Mrs. VanderVoord is an incredibly dedicated educator that goes above and beyond always willing to help and very supportive.

—Seada

Kelly Vires, Occupational Therapist

Each year, I grow more appreciative of Mrs. Vires for the knowledge and innovative ideas she brings to our ASD team. She consistently develops new strategies to address our students' sensory needs, always with creativity and thoughtfulness. This year, she played a key role in enhancing our sensory room by introducing interactive visuals and engaging ideas that have made a meaningful impact. We are truly grateful for all the hard work and dedication she puts into supporting our students at Meadow Brook.

—Megan VanderVoord

It is my absolute honor to nominate Kelly Vires for a well-deserved Sparkle Award.

Kelly's expertise in Occupational Therapy is truly exceptional. She consistently shares creative and effective strategies to help our students grow and achieve their goals. Her dedication to thinking outside the box, developing innovative lessons, and tailoring support to each student's needs is very inspiring!

With her calm, motivating presence, Kelly creates an environment where students feel encouraged to learn. She not only builds meaningful connections with them but also collaborates so well with our team, offering valuable insights to enhance our ASD classrooms. I am always amazed when I watch Kelly work with our students—I learn something new every time she steps into our classroom.

Thank you, Mrs. Vires, for your passion, dedication, and the incredible impact you make every day!

—Candace Cohen

Musson

**Kaitlyn Barone, Teacher*

Ms. Barone has been the Kindergarten teacher of our dreams. Even though we came in to Kindergarten well prepared with an individualized education plan (IEP), positive experiences with the Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) program, and both hard-earned and miraculous progress, I was very anxious. The years we spent in COVID, intensive therapies, and developmental programs had been incredibly isolating. We're so grateful for all of the assistance and expertise we received through those programs, but honestly, also felt othered and excluded.

After years of separate programming, Ms. Barone's Kindergarten classroom has been the best equalizer. Early on, Ms. Barone advocated for our son to be fully in her classroom and to have needed supports pushed in. She has checked in with me at just the right times to align and esuage any anxieties. Within the first two weeks of school, she initiated an email thread to share how our son was doing. It was wonderful to have the personal communication. But from what she shared, it was also obvious that our son was seen, loved, and included. She focused on his strengths. And his favorite things that others label as "special interests" or as a deficit, she framed as normal as well as engaging for many of his classmates. She shared: "So far Junior loves listening to the Tonies box, building during choice time (Legos, making pipes, playing store and vet hospital with friends), listening to stories, brain break, snack time, and math games. Junior has been sharing connections to stories during whole group lessons, he also loves to explore our classroom and check out drains and wires around our room. His curiosity truly shines, last week he even had the idea to build a giant pipe across our classroom out of Unifix cubes from the front wall all the way to the sink. Many classmates joined in and helped him build the pipe, they are all so excited when they completed their mission to make "the biggest pipe". I just wanted to connect with you and share some happy kindergarten moments with you!" It was such a positive and inclusive message that warmed this mama's heart.

Ms. Barone has always been positive and communicative, emailing us at least once a month to share in the joy and happy tears as Jr took his first turn at the white board, read his first book, signed off on all of his upper case letters, wrote his first story with a beginning, middle, and end, and drew his first person with a head, face, body, and limbs. I am so grateful for his progress and accomplishments, but my favorite is sharing in the effort, joy, and happy tears. It's healed some of the isolation and exclusion I've felt these last couple of years too. Throughout the school year, I've appreciated time and time again how Ms. Barone's view and interactions with our son align with mine—full of love, strengths-focused, normalizing and accepting, and with unwavering belief in him.

At the beginning of the school year, I shared my main concern for our son with Ms. Barone. I told her how I had the impression from his mainstream pre-school that he was known but not seen, and present but not fully included. Specifically, I shared a picture of him and his mainstream preschool classmates playing Bingo. He's there and at the table with a card in front of him. But while everyone else's Bingo cards have tokens on them, our son's was empty. My point was that he needed a little more visibility and help to fully participate. Ms. Barone immediately expressed understanding the assignment. She looked at the picture and replied, "This will not happen in my classroom." And she was right. She has been mindful and aware of Jr in her classroom, often helping him herself. She has also collaborated wonderfully with the

speech therapist, occupational therapist, social worker, and paraprofessionals on our son's educational team so that our son can benefit from what everyone can bring. Together, they have had a profound impact on his attention, speech and language, play and social skills, academics, and art. Together they have had a profound impact on his neurology. They've encouraged, praised, and cheered for him. They've also lovingly talked and learned more about pipes and plumbing than they likely ever imagined.

Although sometimes tired too, our son comes home happy and confident from school every day. He talks about all of his friends, which to be clear, is the whole class. And he even talks about his plans for them all to live together when they grow up, with him building the house and, of course, taking care of all the plumbing. Every day, he's also generally happy to work on worksheets and reading with me. It takes a special teacher and team to create such an inclusive and positive learning environment, and such a confident, ready-to-learn kid. Thank you and we love you Ms. Barone.

—Lindsay Abdulahad

Tina Eleczko, Kindergarten Teacher



Mrs. Eleczko is an exceptional kindergarten teacher. She has many years of experience which she applies to her job where she goes above and beyond in the classroom. She puts her attention into clever systems which motivate children such as the Desk Pet reward system. She also regularly invites parents into the classroom for field trips and themed classroom events. Mrs. Eleczko sets the tone in kindergarten that school is a positive place to grow and learn. Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication to your students.

—Rebecca Vannest

Heather Guzik, School Psychologist

Ms. Guzik is amazing! She is always willing to jump in and support the staff and students at Musson in any way needed, even though she has multiple buildings to service, many students to see, and many, many meetings to attend. Heather keeps our team on track with her organizational skills, special education expertise, and excellent communication skills. She spends many hours at home, outside the school day on nights and weekends, completing reports and documentation the team needs to best serve our students and collaborate/communicate with parents. We look to her as a leader, and someone who probably knows the answer to any question we have! We respect and appreciate her dedication to RCS and it's families, as well as our staff! We love you Ms. Guzik!!!

—The Musson Special Education Team

Jennifer Juengel, Musson 5th grade Teacher

Jen Juengel is an amazing 5th grade teacher at Musson Elementary. So when the ASD Team approached her about increasing the inclusion time in her classroom for a student in the ASD program, Jen's response was no surprise at all. Without hesitation, Jen was positive and welcoming of the idea, and she ran with it! Jen continuously modifies tasks and projects to assure the success of the student. She includes the student in discussions, and works

individually with him to re-teach and reinforce appropriate behavior in the classroom. Jen has high expectations from her students, and is always kind and respectful. She fosters a positive learning environment and compels students to be the best version of themselves. Jen models how to show respect, patience, and understanding of students with diverse needs, and her students follow her lead. She includes the other 5th graders and helps them learn about their friend, and they, in turn, have embraced their classmate and have become student teachers themselves to help support him. The ASD team has seen incredible improvement in our 5th grade friend this year, and we know his experiences and the inclusion with his 5th grade peers, led by Jen Juengel, have had a little something to do with that.

—The Musson ASD Team

Lisa Leonard, Resource Paraprofessional

Mrs. Lisa Leonard is the heart of Musson, bringing warmth, joy, and inclusivity to our school every single day. She makes sure every student feels welcome, included, and truly knows they belong. Her radiant energy and kindness uplift everyone around her, creating a school community filled with positivity and connection.

We are beyond lucky to have Mrs. Leonard in our lives. She is a shining example of what it means to lead with love and compassion, and her impact is felt by all who cross her path. Mrs. Leonard is one of a kind, and she spreads a little sparkle everywhere she goes!

—Josie Cestari & Family

Andrew Lewis, English Language Development Teacher

Mr. Lewis brought to Musson all his teaching experience to support our bilingual kids to improve academically and socially, creating a sense of belonging, recognizing and nurturing the respect of their cultures and heritages. His support is an invaluable asset for our community and the growing of its cultural diversity. As a staff member at the building, we as parents can see how he is bringing collaboration and bright ideas to improve the experience of learning having kids, teachers and families with different cultural backgrounds and history. We are thankful for having at Musson our first full time EDL teacher to support our kids in a very unique way.

—Andrea Camacho

Laura Matthews, Interim Principal

We would like to recognize Mrs. Matthews for not only stepping in as interim principal this year, but also supporting & contributing so thoroughly to the special education team and students. Mrs. Matthews joined us mid-year and has quickly gained the respect and appreciation of the team. Whether it's problem solving, guiding difficult conversations, or contributing to input and planning in an IEP, the staff and students learned quickly that Mrs. Matthews is there for all of us, whatever we may need!

—The Musson Special Education Staff

We are excited to nominate Mrs. Matthews for her exceptional leadership and dedication as interim principal. Even though she joined us midway through the year, she wasted no time learning the ins and outs of Musson, quickly becoming an integral part of our special education

community. Mrs. Matthews opened her arms and the school to help me host a PAC meeting and has invested into her role on my daughter's Team. She has created a space of empowerment, support, and safety for all students, and her positive impact is already felt throughout the school. We are so grateful for her leadership and the energy she brings to Musson!

—Josie Cestari & Family

Ray McCaffery, Student

Ray is an outstanding 5th-grade student who consistently goes above and beyond to be inclusive, supportive, and a great friend. He has a special way of making everyone feel welcome and appreciated, always ready to lend a helping hand. His incredible nature has been particularly evident in the way he supports a student with special needs in his classroom. Walking him to and from class, engaging him in conversation and listening to whatever is on his mind. Ray is always there for others, offering encouragement and support without ever expecting recognition. His kindness has a lasting impact on those around him, making him not only an amazing friend but also a shining positive presence in our Musson community.

—Abby Watson

Jacey Miller, Student

Jacey is an outstanding 5th-grade student who consistently goes above and beyond to be inclusive, supportive, and a great friend. She has a special way of making everyone feel welcome and appreciated, always ready to lend a helping hand. Her incredible nature has been particularly evident in the way she supports a student with special needs in her classroom. Jacey is always there for others, offering encouragement and support without ever expecting recognition. Her kindness has a lasting impact on those around her, making her not only an amazing friend but also a shining positive presence in our Musson community.

—Abby Watson

Brian Muir, Social Worker

Brian started his role as a social worker at Musson back in November. He instantly made his students feel comfortable with the mountain of Squishmallows in his office. Brian has a kind and gentle presence, and fiercely advocates for the needs of his students. He pours so much love into the work he does and deserves this recognition as a first year social worker.

Congratulations, Brian!

—Anonymous

Maryanne Munroe, Resource Teacher

Maryanne is an AMAZING colleague. She is always willing to jump into action to help support our ASD program even though she doesn't service any of the students on her caseload. She is supportive of the staff offering suggestions for problem solving from her wealth of special education and administrative knowledge. We love and appreciate you Maryanne!

—The Musson ASD Team

We are thrilled to nominate Mrs. Munroe for her exceptional dedication and the positive environment she creates for Musson students. She ensures every child feels safe, supported, and encouraged to succeed.

Beyond her work at the school, Mrs. Munroe is a respected community figure, owning the Spice and Tea Exchange in downtown Rochester and contributing charitably. Her impact reaches far beyond the classroom, and we are so grateful for all she does!

—Musson PTA

Leslie Palumbo, Secretary to the Principal

We are delighted to nominate Mrs. Palumbo for her exceptional care and attention to detail. She is methodical in her approach and truly sees the unique needs of each student, which is what makes our school thrive. Mrs. Palumbo's trustworthy nature and thoughtful way of working with each child make it easy to feel comfortable sending our kids to school, knowing they'll be cared for and seen for who they truly are every day.

Her dedication to creating an inclusive space of belonging and kindness make her a shining star in our school community!

—Josie Cestari & Family

Stacy Parsons, Speech and Language Pathologist

Mrs. Parsons has continually gone above and beyond for our son the past few years. First, she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the job and her ability to help the many different students with speech and language needs on her caseload, including our son, is amazing. She also communicates frequently with parents. We've gotten notes from her explaining skills they are working on at school that we can help reinforce at home. This kind of home-school partnership is so important and she prioritizes keeping us in the loop!

Additionally, I know that Mrs. Parsons works closely with the general education teacher so they are working on the same skills. We are so grateful for Mrs. Parsons!

—Sarah

We are thrilled to nominate Mrs. Parsons for a Sparkle Award! She sees the unique strengths in our child and helps her shine. With her support, our daughter has gained confidence and learned to advocate for herself—lessons that extend far beyond their weekly sessions! Mrs. Parsons also provides us with guidance and encouragement at home, helping us continue building on that success. Her kindness, dedication, and partnership mean the world to our family. We are so grateful to have her on our Team!

—Josie Cestari & Family

Angela Poppe, Resource Teacher

Angela is an awesome colleague/teammate. Her energy is contagious, and her patience is inspiring. Angela is always looking to support our team members to ease their workload. She is loved and appreciated at Musson! We love you Angela!

—The Musson ASD Team

We are incredibly grateful for the amazing resource room teachers at Musson Elementary, especially Mrs. Poppe. This year, we had the pleasure of getting to know her, and she has been

such a wonderful addition to the school. Her dedication, kindness, and support have made a meaningful impact on Kyle's growth, and we truly appreciate all the care and effort she puts into her work. Thank you, Mrs. Poppe, for all that you do!

—Kristy White

We are honored to nominate Mrs. Poppe for her dedication, patience, and the kindness she brings to her students each day. She creates a supportive and inclusive space where every child feels valued and empowered to succeed. Her commitment to providing exceptional learning opportunities ensures that students receive the guidance and encouragement they need to grow. Mrs. Poppe's positive impact extends far beyond a classroom, and we are so grateful for all she does. She is truly a gift to our school community!

—Musson PTA

Nolan's two favorite things about his school day are recess and his time with Mrs. Poppe. I think that says it all.

—Lindsay Hurst

Laura Pycz, Paraprofessional

Mrs. Pycz has been an absolute treasure in the classroom, bringing warmth, dedication, and a nurturing spirit to her role as a Paraeducator. In the dynamic world of Transitional Kindergarten, where play-based learning fosters social and emotional growth, she goes above and beyond, seamlessly integrating academic support with care and encouragement. Our child's love for writing has blossomed under Mrs. Pycz's guidance. Even at the TK level, she eagerly brings home handwritten stories and notes, a testament to the joy she finds in expressing herself. Mrs. Pycz has been right there beside her, patiently helping her spell out words, put thoughts to paper, and build confidence in her abilities. Her presence in the classroom, alongside Mrs. Buchanan, creates a learning environment filled with patience, enthusiasm, and a deep understanding of how to support young learners.

What sets Mrs. Pycz apart is not just her skill but the kindness and attention to detail she brings to every interaction. One moment that stands out in our hearts is when our child, believing she had submitted a "shout-out" for Mrs. Pycz to be read over the intercom, was heartbroken when it was only posted on a bulletin board. She insisted, "But the whole school needs to hear the shout-out about Mrs. Pycz! She is the very best!" That pure and heartfelt sentiment perfectly captures the impact she has on her students.

Whether in the classroom, at lunch, during recess, or at special events, Mrs. Pycz's kindness shines in everything she does. Her patience, warmth, and unwavering support have made a lasting impression on our children, and we are deeply grateful for all that she brings to their lives. She is truly a gift to the students and families she serves, and her work does not go unnoticed.

—Anonymous

Sarah Roth, Kindergarten Teacher



Mrs. Roth is an exceptional kindergarten teacher. With a wealth of experience she goes above and beyond to make her classroom educational and full of fun surprises. Her desk pets reward system was delightful and motivating to my son. In addition to the creative and intriguing learning opportunities parents were invited into the classroom for volunteer experiences and class parties. Mrs. Roth creates the dream kindergarten experience for Musson Students. Kindergarten with Mrs. Roth was a positive introduction to school. Thank you for all you do to make school a positive experience.

—Rebecca Vannest

Melissa Sera, Behavioral Therapist

Another year has passed, and our appreciation for Mrs. Sera has only deepened. Her ongoing dedication and expertise have played a crucial role in my son's continued progress, and we are beyond grateful for the lasting impact she has made. With each session, we've seen him grow more comfortable with her, allowing him to open up, trust the process, and truly embrace the strategies she introduces. Her patience and thoughtful approach have not only helped him navigate challenges with greater confidence but have also strengthened his ability to self-regulate and communicate his needs more effectively. Mrs. Sera's influence extends far beyond their time together, shaping his growth in ways we couldn't have imagined. We are incredibly thankful for her unwavering support and the difference she continues to make in our son's journey.

—Kristy White

Sheila Thomason, 2nd Grade Teacher

Mrs. Thomason has turned Nolan from frowns to smiles when it comes to school. She has been a fundamental part in helping us discover how Nolan learns best and she has been his constant cheerleader as he becomes a happy leader in her classroom.

—Lindsay Hurst

Kimberly Travis, 2nd Grade Teacher

We are so grateful for Mrs. Travis and the care she puts into supporting our daughter's learning and growth. She creates a safe, nurturing classroom where our child feels comfortable taking risks, knowing that failure is just another step toward success. Her thoughtful communication—reaching out right away and often—has been invaluable, ensuring early intervention and meaningful progress. Mrs. Travis's dedication has made a lasting impact on our child's confidence and love for learning. We truly appreciate all she does to create such a supportive and encouraging space!

—Josie Cestari & Family

Kelly Ureel, First Grade Teacher

It is with great appreciation that I nominate Mrs. Ureel for this well-deserved recognition. From the moment my son, Kyle, entered her first-grade classroom, he has experienced incredible



growth—not just academically, but in confidence as well. Mrs. Ureel has a gift for making every child feel seen, valued, and capable, meeting them exactly where they are and helping them flourish. Her ability to adapt and improvise in the classroom is nothing short of remarkable. She truly understands that each child learns differently and finds creative ways to engage them, ensuring no student is left behind. Her patience, warmth, and unwavering commitment to her students make her more than just a teacher—she is a mentor, a cheerleader, and a source of stability in their young lives. Our family is beyond grateful for the impact she has had on Kyle in such a short time. It is clear that she treats every child as if they were her own, and that level of care and dedication is what makes her exceptional. Mrs. Ureel is shaping not only bright students but also confident and kind individuals.

—Kristy White

Abigail Watson, ASD Categorical Teacher

I want to honor Mrs. Watson for her selfless dedication to the students in her class and their families. Mrs. Watson sees the potential in every student in her class and strives to help every student reach their potential. She reaches out for extra supports for families, offers guidance through the difficult world of special education, and makes sure every student knows they are valued, loved and respected. The students and staff that work with Mrs. Watson love and appreciate her deeply! Thank you Mrs. Watson!!!

—Stacy Parsons

I truly feel like we hit the jackpot when getting Mrs. Watson as a teacher. Her unwavering support and continued education on ways to best help my daughter does not go unnoticed. It is also not at all surprising how much Harper has grown this year and Mrs Watson has had such a heavy hand in that growth. She is always finding new and fun ways to educate the kids and you can tell that she puts so much thought into her lesson plans and activities. Mrs. Watson is always adapting her teacher styles to best fit how Harper learns. She is organized, has systems in place and has been nothing short of amazing when it comes to collaborating with. Above all these wonderful qualities that Mrs Watson possesses, I would say most importantly, she sees that my daughter is a very smart and capable little girl. I know and trust that Mrs Watson will continue to push and hold Harper to a high standard through her elementary education. Thank you Mrs. Watson for loving the kids like you do! We love you and are forever grateful for you!

—Jillian Singh & Family

I don't even know where to start to describe the level of love, respect and appreciation we have for Abby. My son Noah is lucky enough to have her for two years, and she has always been available to answer any questions we have, she always goes above and beyond, and she has consistently believed in him, pushed and motivated him, and her hard work has yielded great results for my son. She is like a second mother at school for him, and his biggest cheerleader and advocate. I have been in her classroom and she is the same way with all of her students. People like her are just hard to find, she just gets it. Every morning when I say goodbye to my son, I feel so incredibly lucky that he's going to be in her class. We are forever thankful for everything she has provided for my son Noah, she truly has made a huge difference and I know that she will continue to every day. Honestly nothing I can fit in this paragraph is enough.

—Zahra

We are honored to nominate Mrs. Watson for her positive attitude and dedication to her students. She creates a safe, supportive space where all learners feel valued and empowered. Her commitment to exceptional teaching ensures that each child has the tools and encouragement they need to grow and succeed.

Mrs. Watson's kindness, patience, and passion make a lasting impact, and we are so grateful for all she does. She is truly a gift to our school community!

—Musson PTA

Dakota Watterson, Graduate Student Clinician

We are so grateful for the dedication and support Ms. Dakota has provided our child this year. She has built a wonderful rapport, creating a positive and encouraging space where our daughter feels confident to grow. With her keen insight, she has identified new opportunities for progress and helped us establish meaningful goals to keep our child moving forward.

Ms. Dakota's thoughtful approach and commitment have made a lasting impact, and we truly appreciate all she does to support our daughter's success!

—Josie Cestari & Family

North Hill

Heidi Cattanach, Paraprofessional

I nominate Heidi Cattanach. My daughter is in 5th grade and the love and support that she has for my daughter Gwen, along with the rest of the classroom, is true art. Heidi has a special bond



with my daughter. They have been in the same classroom for years. I contribute much of my daughter's growth due to her relationship with Heidi. The thing is, especially when you have a child that is non-verbal, you don't really get a true sense of what is happening in the classroom. Sure, they have daily reports they fill in, but the detail that she shares daily is unbelievable. The notes I receive in the margins, like, "She rode a tricycle today in gym", what? I didn't know she could ride a tricycle! Or "did a presentation in the GE classroom and everyone encouraged her", what? My nonverbal daughter doing a presentation? Also, if I pick up Gwen early, she will come out and tell me what exciting things happened, the girls in the Gen Ed

classroom all wanted to sit next to her, or that she was playing with them on the playground. She tells the stories, and I feel like I am there watching Gwen do these amazing things that I was never sure was going to happen. The things you always hope and wish for are happening at school because of the inclusion that Heidi has made possible in her example.

My daughter is nonverbal and elopes. There have been situations where Heidi anticipates her behavior and shuts it down with just a look at my daughter. I know when Heidi is not at school as my daughter is not as happy when she gets home. For years she has asked for her by name every morning. Going into 5th grade this year Heidi was on maternity leave the first few months. Gwen still had the same teacher, so that helped, but Gwen was not as excited to go to school as she was in 4th grade. We weren't sure if it was a new kid in the classroom that irritated her, or the demands of 5th grade after the summer. However, once Heidi returned,

she was the happiest girl in the world. It takes a very special person to touch a little girl's heart, and Heidi has done that in spades. We will miss her so much next year. I am so grateful she is part of our village.

—Tania Glime

Clark Crews, Teacher

My son who has autism is thriving in his first-grade classroom thanks to the immense support and encouragement provided by his outstanding teacher, Mr. Clark Crews. Mr. Crews has an uncanny ability to look at each student and know exactly what supports they need to be successful. For example, he recognized that my son had a difficult time calming his body during carpet time, so he provided him with a special chair to sit on. He observed that my son was having difficulty positively engaging with his peers, so he worked with my son's social worker to design language and social stories to help him. He consistently provides my son with positive reinforcement and celebrates all achievements, no matter how small. Mr. Crews regularly provides us with updates on my son's progress and comes up with creative solutions to promptly address any concerns identified. Thanks to his extraordinary efforts, my son truly feels included and accepted in his class. We are so grateful for Mr. Crews!

—Jacki Markert

**The Pretzel Girls: Anna Ruddy, Vivian Russell, Lonnie Spano*

I would like to nominate the Pretzel girls for a group nomination.

These girls have shown an exemplary model for inclusion at North Hill. My daughter Gwen is non-verbal and they accept her for who she is. They are so excited to see her when she comes into the classroom. They fight over who gets to grab her bouncy chair, and everyone wants to sit next to her. They are called the pretzel girls because Gwen would always bring in her pretzels for her snack. At one point last year the girls asked their parents if they could bring in pretzels like Gwen. They were doing a science experiment one day and it involved ingredients for s'mores, everyone could eat afterwards. The girls said, "Gwen is not going to like this, it doesn't have pretzels in it". Last month Gwen was sick for a few days, when she came back they said "our days are just so much better when Gwen's here." One day there were extra bagels that the girls could get. They came to Gwen's room to ask if they could get one for Gwen. I could go on for paragraphs on the kindness they show my daughter. They get so excited when Gwen has the same recess as they do, they often ask if she will be out there with them. I am so grateful for these girls and the love they have shown my daughter throughout the years. We will miss them so much. Thank you for being part of our village.

They also had an assignment recently to write about someone you are appreciative of and one of the girls wrote this to Gwen.

Dear Gwen, Everyday I see you, you put a big happy smile on my face and light up my heart. When we do morning work, you do amazing at it. When I see you walking into our room you make me jump with joy. Because when you come to our room I know we are going to have a great time.

I just also want to say what amazing parents these girls must have for them to be such thoughtful and kind kids.

—Tania Glime

Katie Sites, ASD Teacher



My son, Tremaine Rodgers, has thrived at Rochester Schools because of Mrs. Sites and the other teachers and paras who have worked with him over the years. This is Trey's third year in Mrs. Sites' ASD room and he loves going to school every day. She gets him excited about learning - in fact, when asked to choose a word for the 2025 year, he picked "learn"! He went from saying a handful of words to speaking in full sentences since we moved to Rochester in 2021. But Mrs. Sites has helped us with resources outside of the classroom as well. She has made Trey laugh and listened to me cry. Her strength knows no limits and we will always be grateful for her support and care. She deserves so much more than this award.

—Stephanie Shar

Mrs. Sites is an extraordinary teacher who gives so much to her students every day! She is a dedicated and caring educator with experience, which has been instrumental in helping my son grow both academically and socially. Over the course of his time in her classroom he has gained confidence and is more comfortable in different environments. I appreciate her communication about his days at school and the relationship we have, which encourages my son to do his best! Mrs. Sites is able to assess a situation and determine the best way forward so my son has what he needs to be successful. With her calm and patient approach I have seen my son develop new skills for the classroom and beyond! He always feels important and supported in Mrs. Sites' classroom and throughout his days at North Hill. We are so thankful she continues to be his teacher and appreciate everything she does to contribute to his progress!

—Lynn Nowicki

I nominate Katie Sites. She is such an incredible teacher. When Gwen started in her classroom a few years ago, she couldn't go into the GE classroom very often due to sensory needs. Katie



worked with Gwen and now she is in the GE classroom several times a week and thrives with the Gen Ed kids. It is so amazing how one person can get the best out of your child. Not only has Gwen started comprehending more when she reads, but her math skills floor me every day. We went to the Friendship Circle on a school field trip recently. They give you money and a wallet to pay for things in the village such as tickets for a movie or getting your nails done at the salon.

The women at the movie theater said "that will be \$2.00", Gwen reached into her wallet and counted two dollars and handed it to the women. I thought maybe it was a fluke. We went to the salon, "that will be \$4.00", she again counted out four dollars and handed it to the lady. I have never asked Gwen to pay for anything, so I had never experienced this with her. I have to say, I was so excited to see that life skill at work already. The thing is with a non-verbal child, you never know what is going on in their heads as they can't tell you what they are thinking, I have heard people talk about "let's assume competence" with our non-verbal community. This is what Katie does. She assumes that Gwen can do it, and

therefore Gwen can. It takes a very special person to teach in an ASD classroom, to assume competence of the kids in their classroom and bring the best out of them every day. We will miss her so much next year. She has made school exciting for Gwen. I am so grateful she is part of our village.

—Tania Glime

University Hills

Nicole Plumer, Teacher

Ms Plumer goes above and beyond in everything. She teaches with love and enthusiasm, we can see she really loves what she does. She is fast in informing and answering questions.

—Janice

Consultants

Lauren Stanton, Oakland Schools Teacher Consultant, Visually Impaired/Orientation & Mobility

Lauren Stanton is a dedicated Visually Impaired/Orientation & Mobility Teacher Consultant with Oakland Schools who has consistently gone above and beyond to support one of our students in the ASD Categorical Classroom at Meadow Brook. Her innovative strategies and creative solutions have played a crucial role in the student's remarkable success, achieving outcomes once thought difficult to reach. Through her expert guidance and proactive interventions, she has empowered our team to provide tailored, effective support, transforming the learning experience for both the student and our classroom as a whole. Thank you for all that you have done to make this year such a special one for us.

—Megan VanderVoord

Middle School

Hart

Bradley Crighton, Teacher

Mr. Crighton, teacher of Algebra I in Hart Middle school, has been an exceptional resource for students, demonstrating a profound commitment to their academic growth and personal development. By providing individualized support, the teacher has helped students build essential foundational skills that are critical not only for success in Algebra but also for their future studies in Geometry as they transition into high school. Moreover, the teacher has been proactive in offering guidance on high school readiness, equipping students with the tools and confidence needed to tackle more complex mathematical concepts. This supportive and nurturing approach fosters a positive learning environment, encouraging students to engage deeply with the material and develop a lasting appreciation for mathematics.

—Esquivel Family

Lindsey Daines, Paraprofessional

Lindsey is a para educator with the EI classroom at Hart. I have the privilege of having her with me during the Unified PE class. Lindsey has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to providing exceptional support to students. Her dedication, compassion, patience and kindness have made a significant impact on the students she works with. Her ability to connect and provide individualized assistance and foster an environment of inclusivity is truly commendable. What sets Lindsey apart is her ability to anticipate the needs of both the students and teacher, creating a seamless learning environment. I love working with her and I can think of no one more deserving of this award than Lindsey Daines.

—Chrissy Bays

Lisa Dimefski, Literary Consultant

Lisa Dimefski has proven herself year after year. She is here for students, the entire student body of Hart Middle School, and specifically present and accommodating for those who need presence and accommodations the most. Until last year, Lisa balanced the entire 504 student population at Hart Middle School. The amount of which totals over 60. Well, she still navigates the student's 504 documents, and accommodations independently, thankfully the district has provided support in the form of an interventionist to assist her in meeting the student's day-to-day needs. This support has only increased and expanded Lisa's ability to reach and meet students' needs at Hart. It is laughable when Lisa's schedule is made yearly, indicating she has one hour allotted for 504 coordination and prep. Within a few weeks, she has agreed to students popping in from their other classes where they're struggling, completing check-ins, proctoring assessments, or providing extra intervention during these non-teaching hours and even often during her scheduled lunch. It's no surprise, and extremely appreciated, that she regularly has to work late into the evening to get what she isn't able to accomplish during those times completed. Lisa also creates, plans, and masterfully executes all of our building professional development for staff.

To say Lisa is busy is an understatement. However, even with all she has on her plate. She still makes time to have meaningful conversations, provide support (emotionally and academically), and make sure her students are living up to the potential she knows each one of them possesses. Lisa shines in the Hart community, and we truly believe that none of the staff knows just how much of her heart and soul she pours into our student's daily lives. It is truly amazing to see how many students find solace in her classroom and presence often begging to eat lunch with her, which she will always say yes to. Thank you Lisa for your tireless efforts with the students, their 504 needs, and their emotional well-being. Lisa, we recognize you today for all that you provide the Hart community.

—Laura Reinke, Mike Bennion, Herb Goliday

Officer Amy Drehmer, School Resource Officer



We'd like to nominate Amy Drehmer, Hart Middle School's police liaison, for a Sparkle Award. Officer Drehmer deserves this award for her continuous support, dedication, and unwavering commitment to helping all Hart and Stoney Creek students, especially those who have IEPs and unique abilities. Officer Drehmer has provided students with disabilities at Hart support in times when no one else would. On many occasions, she

and the Hart community partnered to provide families of students who have a disability with boxes of food and/or meals during the holidays. While it is always protocol for families to come collect these donations from the school, she has volunteered to hand-deliver when they're unable to come up to the school. One time she coordinated a collection for a Hart/Stoney family in which two of the three children had an IEP, that had been removed from their home and moved to be with their Grandmother an hour away. Her ability to care fiercely for those who need it most is her superpower.

Furthermore, Officer Drehmer makes a point to spend time with students in our self-contained emotional impairment classroom for fun times to build the much-needed rapport she needs to communicate with them during times of dysregulation. Every Wednesday morning that she's able to, she can be found playing What Do You Meme, Uno, or whatever the game of the day is. The dedication and respect shown towards the students during this time do not go unnoticed and are appreciated by all.

Officer Drehmer is extremely dedicated to helping those around her, especially those with special needs, feel safe, and loved, and she will go to great lengths to make sure they have what they need.

A few weeks ago, Officer Drehmer even set her alarm an hour before the normal time to go on a bus mission with a Hart Administrator to help a few students who were having difficulty feeling safe at the bus stop and during the ride. She wanted to help make the situation better for all involved, so showing up at the bus stop at 6:30am was just what she did. This dedication sets her apart from most, and she deserves to be recognized for her drive to help those who need help the most.

Amy is also committed to doing anything within her power to get students with disabilities into the school setting. We've lost count of how many times she's provided rides for individuals who missed the bus or done home visits to make sure everyone is safe and okay while encouraging them to return when able. When dealing with the discipline of students with disabilities at Hart, Officer Drehmer will often make sure we're providing some kind of wrap-around service for these students to receive services in the home. She's an advocate for students with disabilities, always wanting the best for them even in times of crisis.

In conclusion, Officer Drehmer deserves to be recognized for the above-and-beyond support, dedication, and commitment of the students with disabilities at Hart Middle School. Often, there can be a negative stigma attached to police officers and their interactions with students with disabilities. Officer Drehmer is a shining example of the relationship that should and could be between law enforcement and special education.

We hope Officer Drehmer knows how cherished she is in the RCS community as a whole, but especially at Hart. When stopping by multiple times a week to take the produce the self-contained emotional impairment students collect each morning for their community job from the cafeteria to bring to the Rochester Community Freedge, she makes a point to stop into the EI room, check in with some of our friends with disabilities who have been having trouble, and always pay a compliment to one student or another with special needs who needs it. She's thoughtful, kind, and compassionate in her approach when speaking and interacting with these students. Officer Drehmer not only wears a gold star on her uniform but shines like a star on the inside as well.

—Laura Reinke, Mike Bennion, Herb Goliday

Ryan Johnston, Teacher



We would like to nominate Mr. Ryan Johnston for a 2025 Sparkle Award. To be an individual who merits this award, one must be dynamic, compassionate, and humorous. Ryan exemplifies these qualities and many more in his position as the emotionally impaired classroom teacher at Hart Middle School. When we think of Ryan's ability to be a dynamic individual, Teacher, and leader, we think of January 2024. At that time, Ryan was content teaching students primarily with learning disabilities and those with deficits in executive

functioning. His jam-packed schedule included five study skills courses which span three grade levels and approximately 50 children.

When the district found themselves in a last resort type of situation and needed to pull Ryan from his current schedule and not only remove him from Hart and place him at West Middle School but also utilize a certification he had in all honesty never pursued. Ryan took the news with Grace, poise, and a sense of humor. He packed what he could and moved over into this new setting where he knew very little of the students and the interventions they required daily. Ryan showed his true ability to be a dynamic teacher when he not only excelled as the emotionally impaired classroom teacher but also was able to shine. His dynamic skills continued throughout the year and students in his classroom showed growth in many ways. He adjusted to teaching a new curriculum, implementing new behaviors, and plans, and working with an entirely new to him set of staff members.

Fast-forward to this year when Ryan transitioned over to Hart with the entire program and hit the ground, running with the zest and enthusiasm, that only truly talented and amazing individuals could do. The compassion Ryan shows on a daily, hourly, and often minute-by-minute basis is truly remarkable. His students truly enjoy and choose to surround themselves with Ryan in a way we've never seen before. Ryan knows his students in the most caring and compassionate way and tasks himself with making sure they are safe, valued, respected, and included in not only Hart Middle School's daily routines but are stakeholders within his classroom as well. Individuals who work with Ryan remark on his ability to perfectly not sweat the small stuff while balancing the tricky, journey of growth and learning for individuals who have an emotional impairment.

Furthermore, Ryan has hands-down, the best sense of humor around. Each day is filled with small moments, surrounded by large learning opportunities in which everyone in his classroom

and the staff members he works with are engaged and are provided much-needed laughter. It is not an easy position to be in, one that is often filled with heartbreaking moments of dysregulation, but Ryan always finds a way to make those who are impacted smile, if only for a brief moment. It's this witty nature that makes Ryan an amazing educator within his emotionally impaired classroom setting.

When we asked each of his students, what their favorite quality and or thing about Mr. Johnson was they responded with the following;

“Mr. Johnston does Uno with me”, “Mr. Johnston has great confidence”, “He makes really funny faces to make me feel better”, and “He has a great sense of humor”. As you can see, Ryan deserves to feel all the appreciation that is felt by those he educates, works with, and is surrounded by daily.

—Laura Reinke, Mike Bennion, Herb Goliday

Madison McMillan, Teacher

Amazing teacher, so nice and she is very clear when she explains.

—Katia Oliveira

Nick Perkaj, Student

Nick and Clay are students in our Unified Physical Education class. They consistently bring a positive attitude and encouragement to make the class fun and engaging. During our units and games, they work great as a team to always encourage and help build confidence. They are patient, flexible and open minded to help ensure a supportive and positive atmosphere.

—Chrissy Bays



Sarah Roberts, Interventionist



Sarah truly is a star, a fixed luminous point. She is steadfast, reliable, and consistent in her servitude of Hart students and staff. When Sarah was hired as Hart's interventionist we were not sure she or anyone else knew exactly what her position would entail. However, Sarah has exceeded all expectations of whatever an interventionist is supposed to or not supposed to do. Working with some of Hart's most challenging population, students emerging from unfortunate home circumstances, struggling to pass classes, and having difficulty making connections with students and staff alike, was and isn't an easy undertaking but Sarah does it effortlessly. We've witnessed firsthand how many of Sarah's students and Hart's most challenging seek her

out weekly, daily, and hourly just to spend even a few minutes with her. She tirelessly communicates with parents whose children are struggling and works hours on end to help their children get assignments turned in, understand concepts, and fill the gaps in instruction they have. Sarah's magnetic personality not only draws students to her presence but also staff members as well. Sarah is extremely active in the Hart community. Her amazing ideas have transformed Hart's professional development and increased engagement twofold.

Furthermore, Sarah does every one of these things with her tiny but mighty stature. In truth, she most likely has overcome obstacles, just like the students she serves daily. This only makes

her a better educator and one to be recognized. Sarah, you are truly a Hart star. Meeting student's daily needs with a smile, kindness, and an unprecedented spark. We all know that a certain J student wouldn't show up every day to school if he couldn't come to have a conversation with you first thing in the morning. Thank you for those conversations, thank you for your dedication, and thank you for your inspiration. Shine on little Sarah, you are luminous!
—Laura Reinke, Mike Bennion, Herb Goliday

Clay Ward, Student

Nick and Clay are students in our Unified Physical Education class. They consistently bring a positive attitude and encouragement to make the class fun and engaging. During our units and games, they work great as a team to always encourage and help build confidence. They are patient, flexible and open minded to help ensure a supportive and positive atmosphere.

—Chrissy Bays



Reuther

Tiziana Biffi, Paraprofessional

I would like to nominate Tiziana Biffi for a Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional work as a paraeducator at Reuther Middle School with Rochester Community Schools. Tiziana works with our ELL and special education students in my ELA classroom, specifically supporting students in reading and writing. She is a true asset to our classroom, not only because of her professional skills but also because of the incredible kindness and empathy she brings to her work each day.

Tiziana has a unique ability to connect with students, giving them the confidence they need to thrive in a challenging environment. Her positive, patient, kind demeanor helps create a safe and encouraging space where students feel supported and motivated to improve their reading and writing skills. Whether she is working one-on-one with students or assisting in group activities, her dedication is evident in everything she does.

Her attention to each student's individual needs and her ability to provide tailored support has made a lasting impact on their academic progress and self-esteem. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure every student feels valued and empowered, and her support truly makes a difference in their learning experience.

Tiziana's unwavering commitment to the success of our students is a perfect example of what a Sparkle Award represents. Her kindness, patience, and dedication are truly deserving of this recognition.

—Kati Cottone

Ariel Blizzard, Teacher



Ms. Blizzard has truly exceeded our expectations as our daughter's middle school teacher. Ms. Blizzard always goes above and beyond to help our daughter be her very best, not just in the classroom but also at home. When I drop Whitney off at school every morning I am confident that she is loved, safe, taken care of and intentionally challenged so that she can excel both academically and developmentally in every area of her life. Ms. Blizzard reaches out to us after school hours to see how she can help support our needs and goals for Whitney at home. She is very detailed oriented and always accessible. She invests her time, skills, training, and advanced education to be the best teacher for her students.

Above all, I know she loves Whitney as a person and the relationship they have cultivated over the last three years is beautiful. To say that we will miss her next year is a total understatement.

—Jenn & Tim Batey

I am pleased to nominate Ariel Blizzard for the Sparkle Award for her exceptional work with my daughter, Ada, who has Down syndrome. As Ada's CI teacher, Ms. Blizzard consistently goes above and beyond to make sure Ada's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is not just a formality, but a dynamic and personalized guide to her growth. Ms. Blizzard's commitment to tailoring her teaching methods to Ada's needs is a true example of what it means to put the "I" in IEP. She is always thoughtful in her approach, ensuring that Ada is challenged, yet supported, in a way that helps her thrive academically and personally. Beyond the classroom, she is deeply invested in Ada's long-term success, working to ensure she thrives in all environments—academic, social, and beyond. She continues to help plan for Ada's future, always keeping her best interests in mind and advocating for opportunities that will help her reach her full potential. What makes Ms. Blizzard truly special is the joy she finds in working with Ada. She embraces Ada's humor and even her little mishaps, seeing them as part of what makes Ada unique. Her ability to celebrate Ada's personality while guiding her growth is a testament to her dedication and compassion. For these reasons, I believe Ms. Blizzard is highly deserving of the Sparkle Award for her outstanding commitment to Ada's educational journey and the meaningful impact she has had on her progress.



—Ann Ehlert

Colton Bowers, Student

I am honored to nominate Colton for the Sparkle Award in recognition of his unwavering kindness, leadership, and dedication to making our classroom an inclusive and welcoming space for all students. Colton consistently goes out of his way to support students with cognitive impairments, ensuring they feel comfortable, included, and valued. He welcomes them into group activities, encourages their participation, and always makes sure they are part of the conversation. His ability to connect with others and make everyone feel important is a testament to his character. Beyond his kindness, Colton leads by example in fostering a culture

of respect and inclusion. Whether he's collaborating on multimedia projects, helping with technology, or simply offering a friendly smile, Colton demonstrates patience and understanding in every interaction. He actively seeks ways to make learning accessible for everyone, often taking the initiative to assist peers who may need extra guidance. His compassion extends beyond the classroom as well—he is the first to offer a helping hand in welcoming students to the classroom and help students with cognitive impairments get on the bus, ensuring no one feels left out and has a warm send off from school. His positivity and leadership inspire his classmates to be more accepting and supportive of one another. Through his actions, he reminds us all of the power of kindness and the importance of making sure every student feels valued and included. Colton truly embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award, and I cannot think of a more deserving recipient. His dedication to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment has made a lasting impact on our class and school community, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to recognize his outstanding contributions.

—Kati Cottone

William Bradley, Student

I am proud to nominate William for the Sparkle Award because of his kindness, inclusivity, and dedication to making our classroom a welcoming place for students with cognitive impairments. William is the kind of student who always looks out for others and makes sure everyone feels like they belong. Every day, William goes out of his way to include students with cognitive impairments and make them feel important. He invites them to join group activities, encourages them to share their ideas, and makes sure they are part of the conversation. He never lets them feel left out. William listens with kindness, speaks with respect, and treats them as a valued friend. His thoughtful and caring nature makes our classroom a happier and more supportive place. William is always ready to help. Whether he's working on multimedia projects, teaching classmates how to use technology, or simply lending a hand, he shows patience and leadership. He takes the time to explain things clearly, making sure students with cognitive impairments understand and feel confident. He encourages his classmates and helps them believe in themselves. He makes an effort to check in on his classmates, offer a helping hand, and spread positivity to these new friends. His quiet but powerful actions make a big difference in the lives of others. William truly represents the spirit of the Sparkle Award. His kindness, patience, and dedication to including others make him an important part of our classroom and school community. I am honored to recognize him for his hard work in making sure everyone feels welcome, valued, and supported.

—Kati Cottone

Harjeet Chauhan, Paraprofessional

I am pleased to nominate Harjeet Chauhan for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional support of my daughter, Ada. Ms. Chauhan has played a key role in helping Ada manage behaviors within the classroom and beyond, creating a positive and productive environment for her to thrive in. Ms. Chauhan's approach is both patient and proactive. She has worked closely with Ada to understand her needs and help her develop strategies to manage behaviors in various settings. Whether in the classroom or outside of it, Ms. Chauhan has been a



constant support, ensuring that Ada feels safe and understood. We are also excited that Ms. Chauhan has been studying to become a teacher and will soon be able to help even more children. Her dedication, hard work, and commitment to supporting students make her a truly deserving nominee for this award.

—Ann Ehlert

Faith Dye-Cook, Student

I am honored to nominate Faith Dye-Cook for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional support and dedication to students with special needs at Reuther Middle School in Rochester Community Schools. Faith has consistently gone above and beyond in helping ensure that students with cognitive impairments are able to safely and comfortably attend their drama class.

Every day, Faith takes the time to pick up students from their classrooms and accompany them to the drama class, ensuring they arrive safely and on time. She offers both physical assistance and emotional support, always providing a kind, welcoming presence. Her caring attitude and attention to detail make a significant difference, as she is often the first warm face these students encounter as they transition into a new environment.

Faith's commitment goes beyond simply ensuring that students arrive at drama class—she consistently provides a positive and reassuring presence, helping to make the experience a smooth and enjoyable one for the students. Her efforts create a safe and inclusive atmosphere, making a lasting impact on their school day.

It is with great pride that I nominate Faith Dye-Cook for the Sparkle Award. Her dedication to the well-being of her classmates and her role in making the transition to drama class a positive and supportive experience for students with special needs is truly remarkable. Faith is more than deserving of recognition for the difference she makes EVERY day.

—Kati Cottone

Emily Lumetta, Student Teacher

I am honored to write this Sparkle award for Emily Lumetta, an up-and-coming exceptional special education teacher whose dedication, compassion, and unwavering commitment to student success set them apart. I have had the privilege of working alongside Emily in my classroom as a student teacher.

Emily embodies the qualities of an outstanding educator: patience, empathy, and adaptability. They create a warm and inclusive learning environment that fosters growth for all students, regardless of their unique challenges or learning styles.

One of Emily's greatest strengths is her ability to build strong relationships with students. She takes the time to understand each child's individual needs, strengths, and aspirations, providing academic support and emotional encouragement. Their classroom is a safe space where students feel valued, respected, and empowered to take risks in their learning.

Her dedication, compassion, and expertise make them an outstanding educator who will undoubtedly continue to change lives.

—Ariel Blizzard

Heidi Madill, Teacher Consultant

I would like to nominate Heidi Madill for the Sparkle Award for her outstanding collaboration with Ada's CI teacher, Ariel Blizzard, in supporting Ada's growth and development in her education. As a teacher consultant, Ms. Madill has been creative in ensuring that Ada is appropriately challenged and provided with opportunities to grow.

Ms. Madill works closely with Ms. Blizzard to tailor strategies and resources that meet Ada's individual learning needs, always keeping Ada's best interests in mind. Her collaborative approach has been instrumental in helping Ada progress in her academic journey while feeling supported and encouraged. The thought and effort Ms. Madill puts into her work with Ada are truly appreciated.

For these reasons, I believe Ms. Madill deserves recognition for her dedication and creativity in ensuring Ada's continued growth and success.

—Ann Ehlert

**Zachary Mow, Student*



I am honored to nominate Zachary Mow for the Sparkle Award in recognition of his kindness, leadership, and unwavering commitment to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment in our multimedia class. His daily actions demonstrate the true meaning of empathy and support, as he continuously strives to make every student feel valued and included.

Each day, Zach goes above and beyond to ensure that students with cognitive impairments feel welcomed, comfortable, and ready to participate. From the moment class begins, he takes it upon himself to greet and guide his peers, ensuring they feel at ease and included in both classroom discussions and hands-on activities. His natural ability

to connect with students with cognitive impairments allows students who may struggle socially or academically to feel a sense of belonging. He never hesitates to offer encouragement, assistance, or simply a reassuring presence that makes all the difference in their day.

Zach's leadership comes from a place of genuine kindness and a desire to see others succeed.

He is always the first to volunteer to work alongside students with cognitive impairments, taking the time to patiently explain concepts, troubleshoot technology, or provide guidance on multimedia projects. He understands that inclusion is more than just inviting someone to join; it's making sure they feel valued and heard. His selfless actions inspire those around him to be more compassionate and inclusive as well.

Zach doesn't just include others in my classroom—he elevates them. He sees the strengths in his fellow classmates and helps them shine. His patience, humor, empathy, and unwavering commitment to making our school a more inclusive place set him apart as a true leader.

For these reasons and so many more, Zach embodies the true spirit of the Sparkle Award. His kindness and dedication leave a lasting impact on our class and school community, and I wholeheartedly believe he is more than deserving of this recognition.

—Kati Cottone

Multimedia Students: *Viviana Biotti, Brynne Czechowski, Hannah Feghali, Elizabeth Hermans, Kaitlyn MacDonald, Jane Olejniczak, Avery Pikos*

I am honored to nominate Kaitlyn MacDonald, Avery Pikos, Brynne Czechowski, Viviana Biotti, Elizabeth Hermans, Jane Olejniczak, and Hannah Feghali for the Sparkle Award in recognition of their exceptional inclusion and support of students with Cognitive Impairments at Reuther Middle Schools in Rochester Community Schools. These seven remarkable students have consistently demonstrated kindness, empathy, and dedication in their interactions with their peers with cognitive impairments.



Throughout the school year, they have gone above and beyond to include students with Cognitive Impairments in a variety of group projects. Whether working together on creative endeavors like creating dances, reenacting movies, writing plays, or even playing games, they always ensure that every student is actively involved and feels valued as a full participant in the activities. Their efforts foster a positive and inclusive atmosphere where all students can thrive and build lasting connections with each other.

Beyond the classroom, I've witnessed these students extend their kindness and create meaningful relationships with their peers with cognitive impairments outside of the classroom, at lunch, and after school hours as well. They make a conscious effort to include their peers in social settings, nurturing friendships that extend beyond academics and into everyday life. This commitment to inclusivity and support is a testament to their character and their dedication to making everyone feel welcomed and valued.



Kaitlyn, Avery, Brynne, Viviana, Elizabeth, Jane, and Hannah have set a powerful example of what it means to be inclusive leaders and compassionate peers. Their dedication to making sure all students feel welcomed, respected, and included is truly inspiring and reflects the spirit of the Sparkle Award.

It is with great pride that I nominate these outstanding students for their unwavering commitment to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all their classmates.

They have truly made a difference in the lives of their peers with cognitive impairments, and they are more than deserving of recognition.

—Kati Cottone

Multimedia Students: *Emma lafrate, Arie Krebs, Abigail Richards, Pamella Swenson*

I am honored to nominate Pamella Swenson, Emma lafrate, Arie Krebs, and Abigail Richards for the Sparkle Award in recognition of their kindness, inclusivity, and dedication to making our classroom a welcoming space for all students. Every day, these young leaders go out of their way to ensure that students with cognitive impairments feel valued and included. They warmly welcome them into their groups, encouraging participation in activities and making sure that no one is left out. Their natural ability to foster a sense of belonging speaks volumes about their character and compassion. Whether working on multimedia projects, collaborating on creative ideas, or simply sharing a friendly conversation, Pamella, Arie, Abigail, and Emma create an environment where everyone feels accepted. Their consistent efforts to build a supportive and inclusive classroom culture make a lasting impact on their peers and the school community.

Their kindness and leadership truly embody the spirit of the Sparkle Award. I cannot think of a more deserving group of students for this recognition.

—Kati Cottone

Multimedia Students: Trent Cabalum, Ahmed Ebrahim, Faizaan Mohammad, Daniel Nreaj

I am proud to nominate Trent Cabalum, Ahmed Ebrahim, Daniel Nreaj, and Faizaan Mohammad for the Sparkle Award in recognition of their kindness, inclusivity, and dedication to creating a welcoming environment for all students. Every day, these four students go out of their way to ensure that students with cognitive impairments feel included and valued. They make a conscious effort to welcome them into their groups, encourage their participation, and ensure that no one is left out. Their natural ability to make others feel comfortable and accepted demonstrates their strong character and compassion. Whether they are working on multimedia projects, collaborating on technology, or simply engaging in conversation, Trent, Faizaan, Ahmed, and Daniel lead by example—showing patience, understanding, and genuine kindness. Their actions make a meaningful impact on their peers and contribute to a culture of inclusivity in our classroom and beyond. Their efforts truly embody the spirit of the Sparkle Award, and I can think of no students more deserving of this recognition.

—Kati Cottone

Rajalakshmy Padmavathy, Paraprofessional

Rajalakshmy (Priya) demonstrates exceptional care and dedication when working with children with special needs. Her enthusiasm when discussing her students and the ways she has supported them is truly unmatched. She treats each child as her own, ensuring they receive the necessary support to become independent. What sets her apart is her unwavering commitment to their success—she consistently goes above and beyond in the classroom, ensuring they have access to lesson notes and assisting them in building meaningful relationships with their peers.

—Anonymous

Rajalakshmy is so dedicated and working closely with students. She is one of kids favorite para. She understands the requirements of each student from each different grades and help them with everything.

—Kannan Marimuthu

Karen Saddington, Teacher

I would like to nominate Karen Saddington for the Sparkle Award for her support of my daughter, Ada, who has Down syndrome, in the 6th grade ELA class. Ms. Saddington has worked to include Ada in the class by finding creative ways to keep her engaged and focused during lessons. Ada's participation in class has improved, and Ms. Saddington has been attentive to her needs, ensuring she feels comfortable and supported in the classroom environment and her efforts have made a noticeable difference in Ada's learning experience. For these reasons, I believe Ms. Saddington deserves recognition for her thoughtful approach and dedication to including Ada in her classroom.

—Ann Ehlert

Michael Samoila, Student



I am honored to nominate Michael Samoila for the Sparkle Award in recognition of his unwavering kindness, patience, and dedication to supporting students with cognitive impairments in our multimedia class. His actions each day demonstrate a deep commitment to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment where every student feels valued and supported. Michael consistently goes above and beyond to ensure his peers feel confident and engaged in the classroom. Not only does he assist with filming projects, but he also takes the time to teach his new friend essential skills, such as 3D printing, using computer software, and navigating the filming process. His generosity in sharing his knowledge is truly remarkable—he doesn't just complete tasks for others; he empowers them to learn and grow. His patience and encouragement create opportunities for students to build independence and develop skills they may not have explored otherwise. Beyond the classroom, Michael's kindness and leadership continue to shine. Each day, he makes it a priority to escort students to the bus, ensuring they receive a warm and friendly send-off. This simple yet meaningful act reflects his genuine care for others, making a significant impact on those around him. His presence provides a sense of comfort and consistency, reinforcing the idea that every student is important and valued. Michael's compassion is not just seen—it is felt by everyone who has the privilege of working with him. He leads by example, showing his peers what it truly means to be inclusive, supportive, and kind. His selfless actions inspire others to be more compassionate and aware of the ways they, too, can contribute to a welcoming and accepting school community. Michael truly embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award through his compassion, leadership, and willingness to help others. His dedication to uplifting those around him makes a lasting impact on our classroom and school, and I cannot think of a more deserving recipient.

—Kati Cottone

Swati Sareen, Paraprofessional

Swati has been a great addition to the middle school CI program. Swati joined the team this year and has gone above and beyond to support students and me. She steps up and leads activities daily to support student growth in learning, and her passion for teaching shines in this role. The classroom could not run without her, and I am grateful to have her part of our team.

—Ariel Blizzard

Nicholas Savaya, Student

I am proud to nominate Nick Savaya for the Sparkle Award for his kindness and dedication to inclusion. He goes out of his way to support students with cognitive impairments, making sure students feel included. His patience make a lasting impact. Nick truly embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award, and I am honored to recognize him. Nick, when you try your best, I believe that you have the potential to thrive, shine, and sparkle.

—Kati Cottone

Rachelle Stephens, Paraprofessional

I am honored to nominate Rachelle Stephens for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her outstanding support of my daughter, Ada. Ms. Stephens brings warmth, energy, and dedication to her work, making a meaningful difference in Ada’s daily experience at school.

Ms. Stephens is fun, loving, and caring, creating an environment where Ada feels supported and encouraged. She connects with Ada in a way that makes learning and daily activities enjoyable while ensuring she has the assistance she needs. Her kindness and enthusiasm have helped Ada feel more comfortable and confident in the classroom.

Ms. Stephens’ commitment to her students is evident in the way she approaches her work with joy and compassion. Her ability to provide both support and encouragement makes her truly deserving of this recognition.

—Ann Ehlert

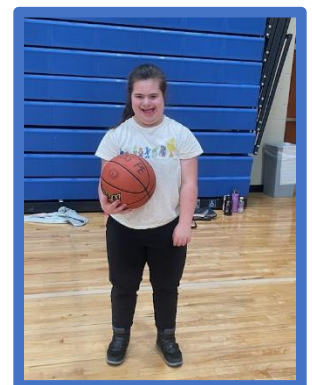
Shilpa Wari, Paraprofessional

Shilpa has been a great addition to the middle school CI and SXI program. Shilpa joined the team this year and has been a great support to both classrooms. . She steps up and leads activities daily to support student growth in learning. The classroom could not run without her, and I am grateful to have her as part of our team.

—Ariel Blizzard

Unified PE Class: Liliana Bastos, Gwyneth Campbell, Annabel Clark, Gianna Darling, Grant Dorris, Aryana Givans, Jacob Goergen, Ava lafrate, Kennedy Jones, Aadya Reddy Kommula, Averie Lanzon, Norah Leitz, William Little, Peyton Magrath, Karrie Mitchell, Zachary Mow, Kathryn Nagel, Lilliana Nicholas, Ella Schnelbach, Lilliana Stewart, Kloie Teeples, Chloe Thompson, Tyler Vandermoere, June Whybrew

We are honored to nominate Reuther Middle School’s Unified PE class for the Sparkle Award in recognition of their exceptional kindness, patience, understanding, and inclusion. This group of students, some of whom have been part of the class for the past three years and others who have enthusiastically joined for the first time, exemplifies the spirit of unity and support.



Over the years, the Unified PE class has continued to grow, fostering meaningful relationships across all grade levels and ability levels. It is truly heartwarming to witness the bonds formed between students. The Unified PE students consistently support and encourage their peers with cognitive and physical impairments to try new activities,



participate in group games, stay active, and always give their best. Through this, they not only help their peers grow but also develop invaluable skills themselves. Their dedication to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all students in the class makes them highly deserving of the Sparkle Award.

—Ms. Karen Saddington, Ms. Hannah Schneider & Mrs. Jillian Schaibly



Van Hoosen

Gina Belcastro, Teacher

I would like to nominate Ms. Belcastro for the sparkle award. She's made a difference in my school days when I first started 8th grade. She made me feel happy and that is important to me because I didn't just have my friends help, I also had her's. Ms. Belcastro is a special person because she helped me when I'm confused on a math problem. Thank you fo making my life sparkle.

—Kaleb Jonutz

Ms. Belcastro is a very kind very hardworking teacher.

— Anonymous

I would like to Nominate Ms Belcastro For the sparkle award.They have made a difference in my school days when I needed help with all my classes when it was hard. This made me happy and

that is important to me because It made me learn more when I needed help. Ms Belcastro is a special person because they always help me when i need help with my homework. Thank you for making my life sparkle!
—Mariah Ostrander

I would like to nominate Mrs. Belcastro for the sparkle award. She has Made a difference in my school days when she is helpful in school. This made me feel happy and that's important to me because school can be tough sometimes. Mrs. Belcastro Is a special person because they always makes me smile. Thank you for making my life sparkle! Sincerely, Lily Lafleur
—Lily Lafleur

Lauren Boruta, Teacher

Ms. Boruta is an exceptional teacher, as she exemplifies what it means to go above and beyond in every aspect of her teaching. Her ability to build genuine connections with her students is incredible, as she takes the time to understand their individual interests, passions, and learning styles. She motivates and supports each student, encouraging them to reach their personal best while fostering a positive and inclusive environment.

Her dedication extends beyond the classroom, as she actively collaborates with parents to ensure the success and well-being of her students. Whether it's through regular communication or providing extra support, she is always there for both students and families. Ms. Boruta is an invaluable member of our school community, and her commitment to nurturing and inspiring her students truly sets her apart.

—Abby Watson

Cathy Brennan-Stover, Teacher

Mrs. Brennan Stover,

Thank you for bringing in Zoey and Ivy in class, it is very stress-relieving for me and my friends. When I move to Adams, I will remember your class for being more comfortable and easy to learn in. I hope this award reminds you that you are an amazing teacher.

—Noah Kornacki

**Laura Coleman, Teacher*

I'd like to nominate Laura Coleman for a Sparkle Award. She has been nothing but a steady force for us this year. And let me tell you, it's been a year that has involved a revolving door of teachers for my son. As we all know, many of our kiddos don't handle change well. But when your kid is on his 5th teacher in one specific class and then loses his resource teacher as well less than halfway through the year, you can only imagine the anxiety this causes. Thankfully, my son has handled most of this like a champ! I attribute it all to Laura's calm and steady presence. Me, on the other hand, I may have been guilty of lighting up her email with many concerns. Laura has been wonderful and reached out by phone or email to follow up on all of my concerns. She has been reassuring, calm and honest, and has talked me down off of my "anxiety high" a few times. I will never forget one conversation we had about my son and the so called promises he made about having his work completed. We giggled and laughed freely over her "prove it" method. I'm sure she has caught him sugar coating his work's completeness a few times using this method. Most recently, I was cc'd on an email Laura sent to my son. He

had told her he was having a rough week and she took it upon herself to send him the most kind and uplifting message. Mind you, this email was sent long after her work day had ended. And if you ask, it completely brought me to tears. I could truly tell that she SAW my son for who he is and not the struggles he faces or the disabilities he has. Sadly, this looks like it might be the last year we have Laura as a specialized teacher for my son. He's made such tremendous progress in her class and based upon my recent inquiry (remember how I said she was honest!), she indicated that he appears ready to fly the nest. While we (ok me!) might not be ready to let go just yet, I know my son will thrive based on all of her help and guidance. Being in her class has been such a positive growth experience for my son. Thank you again Laura for all that you do! We are looking forward to ending this year on a high note!

—Christine Bennett

I would like to nominate Miss. Coleman for the sparkle award . She has made a difference in my school days because she was a fun teacher that made ELA fun and easier for me .this made me feel happy and that is important to me because it made me like ELA .Miss Coleman is a special person because she is always happy and positive .Thank you for making my life sparkle.

— Anonymous

She is the teacher that will always help me with my homework and answer my questions about my homework

—Eli

I would like to Nominate Mrs. Coleman For The Sparkle Award. They Have Made a Difference In my school Days when I need help with reading and writing. This Made Me Feel Happy And That is Important To me Because Reading and writing was not easy for me. Mrs Coleman Is A special person Because Shes Always Helps me when I need help from her.

Thank You For making My life Sparkle

—Mariah Ostrannder

I would like to nominate Miss Coleman for the sparkle award. She has made a difference in my school days when she makes me smile with her positive energy. This made me feel happy and that is important to me because school can be tough sometimes. Miss Coleman is a special person because she always makes me laugh and smile. Thank you for making my life sparkle!

sincerely, Lily Lafleur.

—Lily Lafleur

I would like to nominate Mrs Coleman for the sparkle reward she has made a difference in my School days when she makes jokes and helps me get to school on time this made me feel valued and that is important to me because that makes me feel comfortable in her class Mrs Coleman is a special person because she always cares for me thank you for making my life Sparkle

—Jacob Rice

Keaton Cottone, Student

I am honored to nominate Keaton Cottone for the Sparkle Award in recognition of his unwavering dedication to supporting students receiving special education services. Keaton's kindness, leadership, and commitment to inclusivity have had a profound impact on his school community.

For the past three years, Keaton has been an active participant in the Anchors program, consistently showing up every Thursday to build meaningful connections with his peers. He has also attended the optional Anchors bowling event each January, demonstrating his enthusiasm and dedication beyond the school day. This semester, Keaton is enrolled in Unified PE, where he is not only excelling but truly loving the experience—further proof of his passion for fostering an inclusive environment.

Keaton's leadership extends beyond these programs. As a three-year member of Student Council and an Eboard member this year, he continues to serve as a role model for his peers. His ability to lead with compassion is also evident in his role as a wrestling team captain, where he encourages and uplifts his teammates both on and off the mat. Additionally, Keaton has showcased his creativity and commitment to self-expression by participating in the PTA Reflections program throughout his time at VH.

What truly sets Keaton apart is his natural ability to make others feel valued and supported. Whether caring for his younger cousins or demonstrating empathy toward his peers, he consistently goes above and beyond to brighten the lives of those around him. His kindness is not just an occasional act but a defining characteristic of who he is. Keaton embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award, making a lasting difference in the lives of students with special needs. His dedication, compassion, and leadership make him truly deserving of this recognition.

—Matthew Cottone

Kelsey Folmar, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mrs. Folmar for the sparkle award. She has made a difference in my school days when I first started 6th grade. She made me feel happy and that is important to me because it was my first time playing a instrument. Mrs Folmar is a special person because she always helped when I'm stuck. Thank you for making my life sparkle.

—Kaleb Jonutz

Amy Granger, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mrs. Granger for the sparkle award. She has made a difference in my school days when she walks into class optimistic and hopeful. This made me feel very relaxed and ready to work and that's important to me because it allows me to learn and focus better on homework and finish it. Mrs. Granger is a special person because they always make the class fun and exciting. Thank you for making my life sparkle!

—Cameron Poirier

I would like to nominate Mrs Granger for the sparkle award. She has made a difference in my school days when she did the gritty dance with me in 6th grade. This made me feel awesome and that is important to me because it showed that she cared. Mrs Granger is a special person because she always finds a way to make me laugh. Thank you for making my life sparkle!

—Jacob Rice

Carri Griffin, Social Worker

— Anonymous

Susie Kautz, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mrs Kautz for the Sparkle Award they made a difference in my school days when they taught a new lesson this made me feel good and that is important to me because I love to learn Mrs Kautz is a special person because they always are nice to me and always make it fun to learn thank you for making my life Sparkle.

—Ethan

Jennifer Kreep, Teacher

I would like to nominate Miss Krepp for the Sparkle Award. She made a difference in my school life by being helpful and supportive all year. She is important to me because she was always nice and supportive. Miss Krepp is a special person and I'm happy that she was my Teacher. Thank you for making my life Sparkle Miss Krepp.

— Anonymous

John LeClair, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mr. Leclair for the Sparkle Award they made a difference in my school days when you played fun games this made me feel good and that is important to me because the games are fun and active Mr Leclair is a special person because they always make my day thank you for making my life Sparkle sincerely Ethan McEvoy.

—Ethan

Ty Myre, Paraprofessional

Ty is a wonderful assistant! The kids adore him and he supports the classroom community with enthusiasm and a calm, positive manner. He is so friendly and helpful, and the students really respond to him. We are lucky to have him and he deserves to be recognized!

—Amy Granger

Donley Norris, Teacher

Mr. Norris,

I want to thank you for making my 7th-grade science experience a much easier time. You made my learning process a lot more enjoyable and I really appreciate that. As I move to Adams, I will always remember your class. Thank you for being an amazing teacher.

—Noah Kornacki

Angela Snitgen, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mrs Snitgen for the Sparkle Awards. She has made a difference in my school days when I was in 8th grade at VHMS. This made me feel happy and that is important to me because I can bring that joy to high school singing. She is a special person because she always helps me with my tasks. Thank you for making my life Sparkle

—Scott Bailey

Stephanie Zsigo, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mrs Zsigo for the sparkle award. SHE has made a difference in my school days at VHMS during my science class because she taught me about plate tectonics. This made me feel special and that is important to me because it helps me feel noticed. My teacher is a special person because she always helps me learn. Thank you for making my life Sparkle, Mrs. Zsigo!

—Scott Balley

West

Eloise Herrick, Student



Eloise is an outstanding anchor at West Middle School, known for her flexible communication methods and her ability to adapt to the needs of each student. When working with a student who benefited from visual prompts, Eloise effectively communicated through writing, ensuring the student felt supported and understood. Her kind and compassionate nature shines through as she interacts with students, especially those with ASD, creating an inclusive and welcoming environment. Eloise is always ready to help, offering great ideas and a willingness to problem-solve, making her a valuable asset to the school community. Her positive demeanor, even when she isn't feeling her best, demonstrates her dedication and commitment to always putting her best foot forward, inspiring those

around her with her resilience and caring attitude.

—Anna Ketzler, Kayla Istifu, Beth Shannahan

Lindsay Impemba, Behavior Technician

Lindsay is the sunshine and rainbow in her students day. She brings an immeasurable sense of joy, belonging, and affirming care to the students she works with. Lindsay supports students that have the highest behavioral needs throughout the district and she approaches each day as if she is working at Disney World...the happiest place on earth. Lindsay makes her students feel as if they are the Prince or Princess of the school and goes above and beyond to show how valued, important, and special each of them are. She makes learning an adventure. You never know what surprise is going to come out of her bag next but I guarantee you it is one that the students love. Lindsay thinks about every detail of their day and implements strategies and supports that enable them to show their full potential. Behavior is communication and Lindsay must know 100 languages because she just gets it. She meets each student where they are at each day and always see potential, possibilities, and “what if we try...” in every situation. Spoiler alert... her stories always have a happy ending because of the love, trust, and relationship she builds with each of her students. Lindsay’s sparkle shines bright so make sure you wear your sunglasses when you are around her.

— Anonymous

Kayla Istifu, Social Worker



We are pleased to nominate Kayla Istifu, Social Worker, and Anna Ketzler, Speech Pathologist, for their outstanding contributions to our school community. Both Kayla and Anna consistently go above and beyond to create meaningful opportunities for peer-to-peer connections for students in our ASD program. Their dedication to fostering an inclusive environment has made a profound impact on our students and staff alike. Kayla and Anna have introduced several new initiatives this year that have brought our students together, including the new weekly jobs program. This program has partnered peers to engage in important tasks such as delivering mail and packages, stocking paper, and sorting materials in the media center. These activities not only provide valuable

skills to all of the students but also promote collaboration and interaction with peers across the school. Additionally, Anna and Kayla have initiated weekly cooking activities with peers in our Life Skills class. This hands-on experience provides students with the opportunity to develop cooking skills while fostering meaningful social interactions. They also created opportunities for students to engage at rec time and lunch time with peer partners as well as after school activities. These activities have significantly expanded friendships among students, cause other students in the building to approach Mrs. Ketzler and Mrs. Istifu to inquire how they can become involved in these job programs and cooking classes. The success of these initiatives has been inspiring. The bonds of friendship between students in our ASD program and their peers have grown stronger, creating an inclusive and supportive school environment. Thanks to Kayla and Anna's hard work, compassion, and creativity, we are excited to see the continued growth of our peer-to-peer program, and we are confident that it will continue to flourish. In recognition of their dedication and the positive impact they have made, we wholeheartedly recommend Kayla Istifu and Anna Ketzler for a Sparkle Award.

—Lisa Fosnaugh & Bill Staugaard

Anna Ketzler, Speech Language Pathologist

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—Lisa Fosnaugh & Bill Staugaard

Broden Masson, Student

Brody is an exceptional Anchor at West Middle School, embodying a positive attitude and a kind, patient demeanor that makes him a standout leader among his peers. He is always approachable and interacts with others in a way that fosters a welcoming environment for everyone. His leadership shines through both in and out of the classroom, especially in the Unified Gym class when the teacher was out on leave. During this time, Brody took charge, structuring the class and leading exercises with confidence. He ran the games, ensuring they were organized and fun for everyone, and was always willing to help his peers. His dedication to helping others and his ability to lead with enthusiasm make him an invaluable member of the school community.

—Anna Ketzler, Kayla Istifu, Beth Shannahan



Matthew Meyers, Student

Matthew is an invaluable anchor in the ASD program, always going above and beyond to build meaningful relationships with the students. His helpfulness and genuine care make him a trusted figure, with the ASD students consistently seeking him out for support and guidance. With a positive attitude and a deep commitment to their success, Matthew asks insightful questions to continually expand his understanding of how to best support the students. He is always willing to collaborate and brainstorm creative ideas for planning activities that cater to their individual needs. Matthew's presence in the program fosters a sense of stability and trust, making him an essential part of the students' educational experience.

—Anna Ketzler, Beth Shannahan, Kayla Istifu

Beth Shannahan, Counselor

We would like to nominate Beth Shannahan, School Counselor, for the Sparkle Awards in recognition of her exceptional dedication and commitment to our students. Beth has consistently gone above and beyond in her role, she creates meaningful opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement in our Anchors program fostering a sense of community within our school. Beth works closely with our Peer Anchors, designing and organizing activities that promote connection, growth, and development for all students. She has introduced career exploration activities, creativity kits, special holiday kits, and other initiatives, all aimed at encouraging students to explore their interests, develop new skills, and build lasting friendships. Whether it's creating opportunities for students to engage in thoughtful conversations or facilitating events that foster teamwork and collaboration, Beth's efforts have made an impact. For all of these reasons, we recommend Beth Shannahan for a Sparkle Award. Her dedication to fostering peer-to-peer connections, and always striving to find creative ways to make a positive impact is something that deserves to be recognized and celebrated.

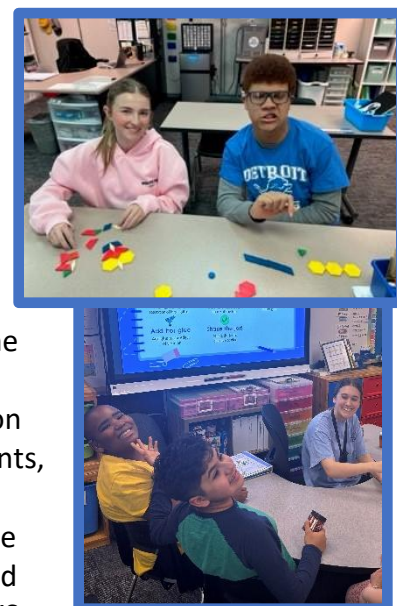
—Lisa Fosnaugh & Bill Staugaard

High School

Adams

Adams Peer Mentors: Alyssa Assaf, Sark Bayrakdarian, Eva Beebe, Kaitlyn Bothe, Isabel Brett, Lucas Carpenter, Abigail Chamberlin, Taryn Dalton, Emily Edwards, Kate Estereicher, Hannah Fahy, Chloe Hitt, Sienna Hunt, Samuel Hollenback, Ailey Kenny, Joseph Klott, Sarah Leavitt, Sadie McCutcheon, Meredith Murray, Jessica Oliver, Brandon Pfaff, Audrey Pietras, Emily Powals, Anabel Rase, Makayla Rife, Emma Romin, Molly Snook, Drew Stitzel, Sophia Torres, Ava Tragle, Camden Wornson, Marissa Wills, Julianna Zobrist

We are honored to nominate this outstanding group of high school students who exemplify the true meaning of "Exemplary." These students have not only embraced our population as mentees, but have also formed genuine friendships with them. Each day, our peer mentors bring enthusiasm and dedication to their role, supporting our students while growing as compassionate and empathetic young individuals. Our students eagerly anticipate the presence and encouragement of their peer mentors, whose daily greetings and conversations reflect authentic friendships. Throughout the school year, these mentors go above and beyond to ensure our students feel valued and appreciated. Their leadership extends beyond the special education classroom to general education electives, the lunchroom, school sporting events, clubs, and the broader community. Time and again, these peer mentors have stepped outside their comfort zones to embrace diversity and advocate for the independence, safety, and dignity of our students. Many have even committed to second and third semesters of peer mentoring, actively promoting the LINKS program to their classmates. Our students, their families, and our staff are delighted to nominate these extraordinary AHS Peer Mentors for the 2025 Sparkle Award. Thank you for



your remarkable impact on our students' lives and for serving as positive role models for the entire high school community!

—Nicole Burch, Sarah Kowal & Melissa Perkins



Nicole Burch, ASD Teacher

I am thrilled to nominate Nicole Burch for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Nicole is an extraordinary educator in one of our ASD categorical classrooms, and it has been a joy to be her teaching partner. Over the past seven years, I have had the privilege of working alongside Nicole and witnessing her incredible growth as an educator. Her compassion, dedication, and kindness have profoundly impacted countless students and their families. From the beginning of her career, Nicole displayed an eagerness to learn from her colleagues and a drive to continually



improve. She approached her work with an open heart and a willingness to grow. Over time, she has blossomed into a confident leader and an expert in her field. Nicole generously shares her expertise, developing curriculum and best practices for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and volunteering her time to support school events. Nicole's wealth of knowledge is matched only by her commitment to collaboration and her passion for student success. She presumes competence in every student, setting high expectations while supporting them with compassion and

proven strategies. Nicole creates a learning environment where all students feel not only supported but deeply valued. Her ability to make students feel loved and appreciated is truly remarkable. Nicole is a tireless advocate for her students' independence, safety, dignity, and sense of belonging. She genuinely cares for each student as a whole person, dedicating herself to their individual growth and well-being. Her impact extends far beyond the classroom, touching the lives of many students and their families in profound ways. Nicole, thank you for your unwavering commitment to our students and their families. Your dedication and heart make a difference every single day. You are truly deserving of this award, and I am honored to celebrate your incredible contributions.

—Melissa Perkins

I am proud to nominate Nicole Burch for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Nicole always puts her students first, advocating for their needs and rights while ensuring they receive the education they deserve. She works tirelessly to promote inclusivity at Adams High School, creating a supportive environment for all students. Nicole is an incredible team player, and I couldn't do my job

without her. Thank you, Nicole, for being yourself and making our workplace meaningful and fun. I truly appreciate you!

—Sarah Kowal

Matt Call, Teacher Consultant

We are pleased to nominate Matt Call for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Matt is new to our Adams High School ASD team this year. He comes to school each and every day with a positive attitude towards students and staff. He continuously advocates for staff, students, and their families needs. We're fortunate to have him on our team. Thank you for making a positive impact in the lives of our students and families. We appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Joey Ciluffo, Paraprofessional

We are pleased to nominate Joey Ciluffo for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Joey is new to our team this year and has been a wonderful addition. He comes to school each day with an optimistic and "all in" attitude towards staff and students. He takes initiative to help support students across all settings. Joey sees students' abilities and potential. He encourages independence and growth, allowing our students to achieve to the best of their ability. Joey advocates for them on a daily basis across settings. Thank you for making such a positive impact in the lives of our students. We appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Karen Davies, Teacher

Mrs Davies is an incredible math teacher and has been a wonderful support for my daughter Catherine this year. In so many ways, Mrs Davies goes above and beyond for Catherine - staying after school for quiz retakes, ensuring Catherine has practice worksheets for tests and keeping me in the loop when there's a concern or Catherine has done exceptionally well. It was very clear the moment I met Mrs Davies that she was extremely invested in Catherine's success. And, consequently, Catherine loves math and Mrs Davies' class.

—Molly Corombos

Susan Demeniuk, Assistant Principal

We are delighted to nominate Susan Demeniuk, Assistant Principal at Adams High School, for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Susan is an invaluable member of our Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) program, consistently exceeding expectations in her administrative role. She has dedicated significant time to building meaningful relationships with our students and their families, advocating strongly for their independence, safety, and dignity. Beyond addressing crises, Susan collaborates regularly with our entire team to foster student growth. Her unwavering commitment has profoundly impacted the lives of our students and their families. We deeply appreciate all that she does.

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Matt Harris, Teacher

We are proud to nominate Matt Harris for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Matt goes above and beyond to foster an inclusive community at Adams High School. He warmly welcomes students into his class, ensuring they feel valued and included. In the hallways, he takes the time to connect with

students through a high five or handshake, creating moments of joy and connection. Our students eagerly look forward to being part of his class. Thank you, Matt, for your positive impact and dedication — we truly appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Vera Horo, Paraprofessional

We are pleased to nominate Vera Horo for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Vera has been a member of our team for several years. She comes to school each day with a positive attitude towards staff and students. She helps support students across all settings, encouraging independence and growth. Vera encourages our students to achieve to the best of their ability and advocates for them on a daily basis. Thank you for making a positive impact in the lives of our students. We appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Katerina Hrisopoulos, Head JV Cheer Coach

Coach Kat, Coach Emily and Coach Taylor are amazing women. All three are so deserving of a Sparkle Award - not because of what they did during this year's sideline cheer season. They deserve it because of what they didn't do. My daughter Catherine is a freshman at Adams with Down syndrome and type 1 diabetes. She's also spent years cheering and wanted desperately to be able to cheer in high school. Kat, Emily and Taylor said of course. But they didn't make any exceptions for Catherine. She was required to practice with the same intensity and frequency as the rest of the team. She was required to be on time, listen, try and work hard. And if she didn't, she had the same consequences as any other cheerleader. During one particular poignant moment at practice that I just happened to be there to witness, Catherine was scared to try a handstand. Instead of giving her a pass, Kat took her firmly and gently and told her she was required to try because "I know you can do it Cat if you just try." And try she did. And watching that moment made me tear up because that moment capsulated how I raise Catherine. Because these three amazing ladies expected so much from Catherine, Catherine folded into the cheer team easily. And while inclusion is a beautiful thing to watch, belonging is even more beautiful. And I got to witness Catherine belonging at practice, at camp and at games. She was just simply another freshman cheerleader who worked hard to get to each practice and game and balance her other high school responsibilities at the same time. And for a mother like me who was told when Catherine was born that nothing like this would ever be possible, I relished every moment and said prayers of thanks for cheer coaches who aren't required to practice inclusion but did as easily as if they were breathing.

—Molly Corombos

Sarah Kowal, ASD Teacher

I am delighted to nominate Sarah Kowal for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Sarah has grown into an exceptional educator, and I've had the privilege of witnessing her journey firsthand as one of my student teachers. Over the years, it has been inspiring to watch her enthusiasm, dedication, and passion transform her classroom into a space filled with energy, positivity, and growth every single day. Sarah approaches each challenge with a positive attitude and a deep



commitment to the ASD categorical program. She consistently demonstrates genuine compassion, respect, and empathy for her students, making their well-being her top priority. A true team player, Sarah communicates effectively with colleagues and takes the initiative to ensure the success of her students in all settings. She is a strong advocate for fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion for every child she works with. When faced with difficult behaviors or challenges, Sarah tackles obstacles head-on, developing thoughtful and creative solutions to support her students. Her ability to think outside the box has opened up countless opportunities for students to grow socially and build independence. She sets high expectations and encourages her students to reach their full potential, advocating for their needs across all environments. In addition to her remarkable work with students, Sarah excels at collaborating with colleagues and fostering a strong sense of teamwork. Her problem-solving skills and innovative mindset have a lasting impact on her classroom and beyond. Sarah's dedication to her students and their families is unwavering, and she is deeply committed to their success and overall well-being. Sarah, thank you for your incredible contributions to the lives of our students and their families. Your hard work, compassion, and creativity do not go unnoticed. You are truly deserving of this award, and we deeply appreciate all that you do!

—Melissa Perkins

Christie Larson, Speech Language Pathologist

I will like to nominate Christie Larson for a Sparkle Award because she has been our main source of communication during our daughter's high school years. Ms. Larson meets with our student once a week for speech but she has also invested in her building positive peer and staff relationships. She advocates for services our daughter needs and shows an interest in helping guide her career path after grade 12. Most importantly she respects our daughter and treats her like the mature student she is. It is so reassuring to know that Ms. Larson always has our daughter's best interest in mind. Thank you!

—Anonymous

We are proud to nominate Christie Larson for a 2025 Sparkle Award. As a valued member of our team at Adams High School, Christie brings a positive attitude to school each day, uplifting both students and staff. She goes above and beyond to discover students' strengths and interests, thoughtfully selecting activities that meet their needs. Christie is always seeking opportunities to support students and their families, addressing individual needs with care and dedication. We are truly fortunate to have her on our team. Thank you, Christie, for making such a meaningful impact — we deeply appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Robert Mele, Special Education Teacher

Rob Mele transforms the educational experience of special education students through his extraordinary dedication and comprehensive support. He creates a safe haven for students during challenging moments and uses every available minute, including his prep periods, to provide one-on-one academic and behavioral assistance. His impact is beautifully illustrated through students like one who, with his unwavering support, successfully transitioned from Language Live to a general education English class. Even after this transition, Mr. Mele continues working with her daily, adjusting assignments and coordinating with specialists to

ensure her ongoing success.

What sets Mr. Mele apart is his proactive approach - he takes the initiative to learn all curriculum thoroughly, coordinates with speech pathologists and specialists without being asked, and deeply understands each student's unique needs. He has become the most trusted adult for many students, creating a foundation of support that enables them to achieve goals they once thought impossible. Through his guidance, students show remarkable growth in confidence, academic performance, and emotional regulation. Rob Mele truly embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award through his lasting positive impact on students' lives, proving that with the right support, every student can thrive.

—Stephanie Knapp

Taylor Mickens, Adams JV Cheer Coach

Coach Kat, Coach Emily and Coach Taylor are amazing women. All three are so deserving of a Sparkle Award - not because of what they did during this year's sideline cheer season. They deserve it because of what they didn't do. My daughter Catherine is a freshman at Adams with Down syndrome and type 1 diabetes. She's also spent years cheering and wanted desperately to be able to cheer in high school. Kat, Emily and Taylor said of course. But they didn't make any exceptions for Catherine. She was required to practice with the same intensity and frequency as the rest of the team. She was required to be on time, listen, try and work hard. And if she didn't, she had the same consequences as any other cheerleader. During one particular poignant moment at practice that I just happened to be there to witness, Catherine was scared to try a handstand. Instead of giving her a pass, Kat took her firmly and gently and told her she was required to try because "I know you can do it Cat if you just try." And try she did. And watching that moment made me tear up because that moment capsulated how I raise Catherine. Because these three amazing ladies expected so much from Catherine, Catherine folded into the cheer team easily. And while inclusion is a beautiful thing to watch, belonging is even more beautiful. And I got to witness Catherine belonging at practice, at camp and at games. She was just simply another freshman cheerleader who worked hard to get to each practice and game and balance her other high school responsibilities at the same time. And for a mother like me who was told when Catherine was born that nothing like this would ever be possible, I relished every moment and said prayers of thanks for cheer coaches who aren't required to practice inclusion but did as easily as if they were breathing.

—Molly Corombos

Ryan Mulrenin, Paraprofessional

Ryan has come into the guitar class at Adams since the start of this semester. He has done an amazing job helping teach in the class. Every day he works on making the students do better and learn more. He is patient and kind and wonderful. He has done such a great job helping the students learn to play the guitar. The students he works with in the class have been able to play music each day and also enjoy themselves. It's truly amazing how much work he has put into this.

—Matthew Harris

We are proud to nominate Ryan Mulrenin for a 2025 Sparkle Award. As a new member of our team this year, Ryan has been an outstanding addition. He arrives each day with an optimistic,

'all-in' attitude, uplifting both staff and students. Ryan consistently takes initiative to support students across all settings, recognizing their abilities and potential while fostering independence and growth. He encourages students to reach their full potential and advocates for them daily. Beyond his dedication, Ryan shares his musical talent, playing guitar songs that bring joy to our students. Thank you, Ryan, for your positive impact and unwavering commitment — we truly appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Andrea Noel, Assistant Principal

We are pleased to nominate Andrea Noel for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Andrea is a valued part of our ASD program at Adams High School. Our administrative team has invested their time into developing relationships with our students and their families. She is a strong advocate for our students' independence, safety, and dignity. As one of our administrators, she has not only stepped in during times of crisis, but she routinely collaborates with our entire team to support student growth. Thank you Andrea for making such a positive impact in the lives of our students and families. We appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Melissa Perkins, ASD Teacher

We are proud to nominate Melissa Perkins for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Melissa goes above and beyond to create an inclusive community at Adams High School. She works tirelessly each day to ensure her students' needs are met, recognizing their potential and supporting them in achieving their goals. Most of all, Melissa is a true team player whose kindness shines through everything she does. Adams wouldn't be the same without her, and neither would our team. Melissa, you not only enhance the lives of your students but enrich ours as well. We truly appreciate you!

—Sarah Kowal and Nicole Burch

Emily Quaine, Adams JV Cheer Coach

Coach Kat, Coach Emily and Coach Taylor are amazing women. All three are so deserving of a Sparkle Award - not because of what they did during this year's sideline cheer season. They deserve it because of what they didn't do. My daughter Catherine is a freshman at Adams with Down syndrome and type 1 diabetes. She's also spent years cheering and wanted desperately to be able to cheer in high school. Kat, Emily and Taylor said of course. But they didn't make any exceptions for Catherine. She was required to practice with the same intensity and frequency as the rest of the team. She was required to be on time, listen, try and work hard. And if she didn't, she had the same consequences as any other cheerleader. During one particular poignant moment at practice that I just happened to be there to witness, Catherine was scared to try a handstand. Instead of giving her a pass, Kat took her firmly and gently and told her she was required to try because "I know you can do it Cat if you just try." And try she did. And watching that moment made me tear up because that moment capsulated how I raise Catherine. Because these three amazing ladies expected so much from Catherine, Catherine folded into the cheer team easily. And while inclusion is a beautiful thing to watch, belonging is even more beautiful. And I got to witness Catherine belonging at practice, at camp and at

games. She was just simply another freshman cheerleader who worked hard to get to each practice and game and balance her other high school responsibilities at the same time. And for a mother like me who was told when Catherine was born that nothing like this would ever be possible, I relished every moment and said prayers of thanks for cheer coaches who aren't required to practice inclusion but did as easily as if they were breathing.

—Molly Corombos

Stephanie Stein, Teacher

We are pleased to nominate Stephanie Stein for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Stephanie goes above and beyond to create an inclusive community at Adams High School. She goes out of her way to stop by our classrooms and say good morning to our students on a daily basis. She has taken the initiative to get to know students in the ASD program even though they're not currently in her German classes. Thank you Stephanie. Your kindness, positivity, and inclusive attitude make a positive impact on our students and school community. We appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Luke Swanson, Principal

We are proud to nominate Luke Swanson for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Luke is an invaluable member of our ASD program at Adams High School. As a high school administrator, he consistently goes above and beyond his role, dedicating time to build meaningful relationships with students and their families. Luke is a strong advocate for students' independence, safety, and dignity. In times of crisis, he steps in with care and compassion, and he routinely collaborates with the entire team to support student growth. Thank you, Luke, for your unwavering commitment and the positive impact you make in the lives of our students and families — we truly appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Adrienne Walker, General Education Teacher

It is with great pleasure that we nominate Adrienne Walker for the 2025 Sparkle Award. She consistently embodies a positive, patient, and joyful demeanor, enriching our community with her unwavering commitment. Mrs. Walker goes above and beyond to ensure every student feels included and engaged in her foods/nutrition classes, crafting creative ideas and accommodations that empower students to express their authentic selves. She consistently highlights each student's abilities, building upon their strengths with genuine enthusiasm. Her dedication has made a profound positive impact on our students and their families. We deeply appreciate all that she does.

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Alyssia Wiczorkowski, Paraprofessional

We are thrilled to nominate Alyssia Wiczorkowski for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Alyssia joined our team this year and has quickly become an invaluable member. She approaches each day with a positive attitude, fostering a supportive and encouraging environment for both staff and students. Alyssia consistently takes the initiative to assist students across various settings, promoting their independence and growth. She inspires our students to reach their full potential and serves as a tireless advocate for them in every setting. Thank you, Alyssia, for

your unwavering dedication and the positive impact you've made in the lives of our students. Your efforts are truly appreciated!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Michelle Wilcox, School Social Worker

We are delighted to nominate Michelle Wilcox for a 2025 Sparkle Award. As a valuable member of our team at Adams High School, Michelle stands out for her exceptional problem-solving skills and innovative approaches to supporting our students. Each day, Michelle arrives with a positive attitude and a genuine commitment to both students and staff. Her unwavering dedication and willingness to help ensure she is always there when needed. Michelle consistently seeks opportunities to meet the unique needs of our students and their families, making a meaningful difference in their lives. We are truly fortunate to have Michelle on our team. Thank you for your remarkable contributions and the positive impact you have made. Your efforts are deeply appreciated!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Angie Wornson, School Psychologist

We are pleased to nominate Angie Wornson for a 2025 Sparkle Award. Angie comes to school each and every day with a positive attitude. She continuously goes above and beyond to support students and staff. Angie seeks out opportunities to support students' and their families' individual needs. She is a vital member of our team at Adams High School. We're fortunate to have her as part of our school community. Thank you for making a positive impact in the lives of our students and families. We appreciate you!

—Melissa Perkins, Nicole Burch, & Sarah Kowal

Rochester

Amy Cosentino, Teacher

I would like to nominate Amy Cosentino (Mrs. Cos) for a Sparkle Award. She is my 6th hour Careers Class teacher. She is a fun and kind teacher. In her class we make deliveries and learn about jobs around the school. She was my math and reading teacher a few years ago and was fun. This is why I want to give Mrs. Cosentino a Sparkle Award.

—Victoria

Nancy Cox, School Social Worker

I would like to nominate Mrs. Nancy Cox for a Sparkle Award. She is the Social Worker at Rochester High School. She comes into my classroom and does lessons on Zones. It helps me learn about myself and about anxiety. She goes on Friday Field Trips and makes them fun. She makes me laugh and smile when she is talking with me. These are the reasons why I want to nominate Nancy Cox for a Sparkle Award!!!!

—Linnea

Tarra Dodge, Teacher

I want to nominate Mrs. Dodge for a Sparkle Award. She has helped me study for tests and she gets me focused when im distracted. She makes me feel Happy. She is one of my favorite teachers because she is very caring.

—Mariah Becerra

I would like to nominate Ms. Dodge for a Sparkle Award because she is an amazing teacher who helps me so much! When I was having trouble with my school work, Ms. Dodge took the time to help me understand things better. She also helped me transition from my old school to this one, making the change a lot easier for me. I really appreciate how patient and kind she is throughout the process.

Ms. Dodge makes me feel supported and understood, which is important for me. She is always there to answer my questions and explain things in a way that makes sense. That's why she is one of my favorite teachers! Ms. Dodge helps me learn and feel confident in my abilities, making school a better place for me. I think she deserves this award because she truly sparkles in everything she does!

—Addie Wiemels

Mike Dziadzio, Teacher

Mr. Dziadzio deserves this 2025 Sparkle Award. He is my Algebra teacher at RHS. First, he helps others when needed. Second, he makes everyone smile when people see him. Third, he is always there for us and continues to always be the best. These are just some of the reasons why Mr. Dziadzio is deserving of the 2025 Sparkle Award.

—Christopher

Steve Fox, PE Teacher

—Anonymous

Kris Kehren, Paraprofessional

I am honored to nominate Mrs. Kris Kehren for a Sparkle Award. As a Paraprofessional at Rochester High School, Mrs. Kehren has made a big impact on my learning. Mrs. Kehren assists me in my computer class, where her enthusiasm shines through in every session. She has the ability to make complex concepts approachable and engaging Her patience and encouragement and her positive attitude makes every class enjoyable. At school she helps me to feel happy and safe to express myself. She cares about me and is very kind. Her smile and kind words brighten my day. For these reasons I nominate Mrs. Kris Kehren for the Sparkle Award Award. Her dedication, warmth, and support make her deserving.

—Christina Guerra

For helping me with my work or catching up in class supporting during tests and overall worries

—Aidan

Jenell Kelly, Teacher

I would like to nominate Ms.Kelly for a 2025 Sparkle Award. She is deserving of this award for so many reasons. First is that she helps me with my work. Second is that she gave me an extra

day on an assignment. These are some of the many reasons why Ms. Kelly is deserving of a 2025 Sparkle Award.

—Quinn Davison

I would like to nominate Dr. Kelly for the Sparkle Award because she is an amazing teacher who truly cares about her students. Whenever I have trouble understanding an assignment, she is always there to help me. She takes the time to explain things in a way that makes it easy to grasp, and she patiently answers all my questions. Not only does she help me with my schoolwork, but she also checks my spelling mistakes, which has made a big difference in my writing. Dr. Kelly's support has made school feel much less stressful for me.

What I love most about Dr. Kelly is how sweet and kind she is. She always greets us with a smile and creates a positive classroom environment where everyone feels welcome. Her excitement for learning makes the lessons fun and engaging, and I always leave her class feeling happy. Dr. Kelly doesn't just teach; she inspires us to do our best and be our best selves. I believe she deserves the Sparkle Award because she truly shines in everything she does as a teacher.

—Samiksha

Kylie Kimble, Secretary

I am nominating Mrs. Kimble for a Sparkle Award. She works at Rochester High School at the front desk. I am nominating because she is nice, kind, funny and is a fellow Swiftie. She talks to me about Taylor Swift and she makes me feel welcomed in the front office. She is always very busy, but makes time to talk to me. She also has a lot of clothes with Taylor Swift and we talk about it. Her favorite number is 13 and so is mine.

This is why Mrs. Kimble deserves a Sparkle Award.

—Evan

I would like to nominate Mrs. Kimble for the Sparkle Award because she has been an incredible support for me this year. She is always willing to listen and talk to me about anything and everything that's on my mind. Mrs. Kimble makes me feel good about myself because she doesn't judge anyone based on their mistakes. She reminds me that everyone has challenges and that it's okay to ask for help. I see her as my "school mom." She is always there for me, supporting me and encouraging me when I need it most. Her kindness and understanding have created a safe space for me in school, and I am grateful to have her in my life.

—Kayleigh Noell

Katie Lafata, Teacher

I want to nominate Mrs. Lafata for a Sparkle Award. She has helped me with math problems and she writes notes for me when we do tests. She makes me feel happy to be in her classroom. She is one of my favorite teachers because she is kind and caring.

—Mariah Becerra

I would like to nominate Mrs. Lafata for a 2025 Sparkle Award. She is my math teacher. She is deserving of this award for so many reasons. First she is kind. Second she helps me understand my math. Lastly, she is kind to me.

—Freddy Ndoja

Mrs. Lafata is the embodiment of kindness and dedication in our school, making her a deserving candidate for the Sparkle Award. As a math teacher, she not only simplifies complex concepts but also fosters a warm and supportive learning environment, where every student feels valued. Whether it's staying after school to provide extra help or taking the time to understand and address individual challenges, Mrs. Lafata is always there, ready to lend her support. Her infectious enthusiasm for math inspires her students to engage and strive for their best, and her genuine compassion creates a safe space for everyone. Recognizing Mrs. Lafata with the Sparkle Award would not only honor her contributions but also highlight the profound impact one caring teacher can have on their community.

—Giovani

Catherine Lykins, Choir Teacher

I am honored to nominate Mrs. Lykins for a Sparkle Award. As a Choir Teacher at Rochester High School, Mrs. Lykins has made an impact not only on my musical abilities but also on my confidence and love for singing. From the very first day in her class, Mrs. Lykins has shown a dedication to me and had made me feel talented and valued as a singer. At our choir performances, I feel proud of myself. Mrs. Lykins has brought me a lot of joy at our concerts and field trips. In conclusion, Mrs. Lykins is an amazing choir teacher. She deserves this award for her dedication to her students and to music.

—Evan

Laura Martin, School Social Worker

She has helped me throughout so much and i mean mental health and my schoolwork wise. She has been so nice to me and is very nice, kind, and a very nice person!!!! ^_^ shes just honestly the best person i've meet (that isn't one of my family members 🙏)

—Anonymous

I would like to nominate Mrs. Martin for the Sparkle Award because she has been an incredible support throughout this school year. Whenever I feel overwhelmed with homework, Mrs. Martin is always there to help me understand the material better. She has a way of explaining things that makes them easy to grasp, and her patience really shines through in how she encourages us to ask questions. Thanks to her guidance, I feel more confident in my studies, and that means a lot to me. Not only does Mrs. Martin help with schoolwork, but she also creates a calm and welcoming environment in the classroom. Her kindness and positive attitude make it easy to relax and enjoy learning. I appreciate how she listens to our concerns and always has a friendly smile, which brightens my day. For all these reasons and more, Mrs. Martin deserves the Sparkle Award because she truly makes a difference in her students' lives and inspires us to do our best!

—Shawn

Kathryn Michalski, Paraprofessional

I would like to nominate Ms. Michalski for the Sparkle Award because she has made a huge difference in my life. She always takes the time to help me study, no matter how busy she is. Whenever I feel unsure about my work, she encourages me and helps me believe in myself. Her

patience and support have made it much easier for me to learn and improve. It feels great to know that she genuinely cares about my success. What makes Ms. Michalski stand out even more is her kindness. She always greets us with a smile, and her positive attitude makes our classroom feel like a happy place to be. I love going to her class because it's full of joy and laughter. Ms. Michalski truly inspires her students, and I think she deserves this award for all the hard work and dedication she puts into teaching us. She is not just a teacher; she is a mentor and a friend, and I am really grateful to have her in my life.

—Anonymous

Monica Pouncy, Teacher

I would like to nominate Miss Monica for the Sparkle Award because she goes above and beyond to help me every day. She always makes sure I get on the bus safely and double-checks that I have all my belongings before I leave. Her thoughtfulness shows that she cares about us, and I truly appreciate her attention to detail. Miss Monica is one of my favorite teachers because she is incredibly sweet and always makes me feel seen. Her kindness and support create a positive environment where I feel comfortable and valued. She makes a big difference in my day, and I'm grateful for everything she does to help and encourage me.

—Ra'Yanah Bluestein

Nicholas Reed, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mr. Reed for the Sparkle Award because of the incredible support he provides to his students. He has been a great help in keeping me on track with my work, always encouraging me to do my best. No matter how busy he is, he makes time to talk with us about anything that is on our minds. This openness makes a huge difference, as it creates a comfortable environment where I, and many others, feel safe to express ourselves without fear of judgment. Mr. Reed stands out as one of my favorite teachers because he genuinely cares about his students and their success. He goes above and beyond to ensure we understand the material and are not overwhelmed by our responsibilities. His dedication and kindness truly make a positive impact on our learning experience. I believe that Mr. Reed embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award, and he deserves to be recognized for the difference he makes in our lives every day.

—Harmony

Kiely Robinson, Peer Mentor

I am nominating Kiely Robinson for the Sparkle Award because of her outstanding dedication. She was a Peer Mentor in our 6th Hour Careers Class at Rochester High School. Each day she would help my students with their daily tasks around the school. Whether it's delivering packages, hanging up posters, or refilling the copy machines, Kiely consistently went above and beyond to lend a hand. She would show great responsibility and compassion in assisting with these jobs, ensuring that everything ran smoothly. Her willingness to help, even with tasks that often go unnoticed, made a significant impact on the school community and demonstrates her strong work ethic and care for others. Despite her busy schedule as a student-athlete, playing both basketball and soccer, Kiely always makes time to contribute to the school. She attended the Friendship Basketball Game, demonstrating her commitment to fostering inclusivity and school spirit. In addition to her athletic pursuits, Kiely is a member of the National Honor

Society, reflecting her dedication to academic excellence and leadership. Her ability to balance academics, sports, and meaningful service to others is a testament to her character, making her a deserving candidate for the Sparkle Award. These are the reasons that Kiely is deserving of a Sparkle Award.

—Amy Cosentino

Pam Salkowski, Paraprofessional

Pam does an amazing job at supporting various students in our science curriculum. She not only aids students on her caseload, but also leaves a positive impact on every student in the classroom. This is my first semester without her in my class and I feel like a piece of me is missing! I have never met someone more deserving for their hard-work, dedicate, and confidence in my students (para needed or not!)

—Lauren Hope

I am honored to nominate Pam Salkowski for a Sparkle Award. Pam is an invaluable asset to RHS, and her impact on both staff and students is immeasurable. She brings an energy and positivity to the school that makes her a beloved figure in the building. Pam's vast knowledge of Biology is truly remarkable. She goes above and beyond to ensure her students not only understand the material but also feel confident in their learning. Her ability to break down complex science terminology into easily digestible explanations is one of the many reasons her students thrive. Pam's commitment to helping students succeed is evident in the way she organizes their notes, making sure they have the tools they need to excel in their studies. Beyond her teaching skills, Pam's kind and supportive nature creates an atmosphere where both students and staff feel welcome and valued. She genuinely cares about the success of those around her and is always willing to offer guidance and support when needed. Pam is, without a doubt, one of the best educators and colleagues at RHS. Her dedication, warmth, and expertise make her a standout member of our community, and she is most deserving of a Sparkle Award.

—Tarra Dodge

I am pleased to nominate Ms. Salkowski for this Sparkle Award, as she has made a significant impact on my educational journey in both Consumer Math and Interior Design. Throughout my time in these classes, Ms. Salkowski has been an invaluable support system, guiding me through challenging concepts and helping me complete my assignments with confidence.

Ms. Salkowski stands out as one of my favorite paraprofessionals due to her dedication, patience, and genuine passion for helping students succeed. She possesses a unique ability to break down complex topics in a way that is easy to understand, ensuring that I grasp the essential principles of Consumer Math. Her encouragement inspires me to tackle even the most difficult problems. In Interior Design, Ms. Salkowski's creative approach shines. She not only assists me with the technical aspects of the assignments but also encourages me to express my creativity and develop my own design ideas. Her insightful feedback has helped me to think critically and expand my understanding of the subject matter. What truly sets Ms. Salkowski apart is her unwavering support and kindness. She invests her time and energy into helping me, often going above and beyond to ensure I have the resources and knowledge I need to succeed. Her belief in my potential boosts my confidence and motivates me to strive for excellence in my

studies. I believe that Ms. Salkowski deserves this award for her outstanding commitment to her students and her phenomenal ability to nurture academic growth. Her impact on my life has been profound, and I am incredibly grateful for her guidance. Thank you for considering this nomination for Ms. Salkowski.

—Samiksha

Swathi Shibu, Paraprofessional

I am thrilled to nominate Swathi Shibu for a Sparkle Award! She is truly an outstanding asset to RHS, and her dedication to both students and the school community deserves recognition. Swathi consistently demonstrates the highest level of professionalism in everything she does. She treats students with kindness and respect, and in return, she has earned their trust and respect as well. She is always approachable, making sure students feel comfortable reaching out to her for help, whether it's for note-taking, test preparation, or staying organized. Her expertise in math is exceptional. Students know they can rely on her for guidance in tackling challenging concepts and finding solutions to tough problems. Her ability to break down complex material in a clear, understandable way has made a huge impact on their learning. Swathi goes above and beyond to support her students, and for that, she is truly deserving of a Sparkle Award. She is simply the best!

—Tarra Dodge

I would like to nominate Mrs. Swathi Shibu for a Sparkle Award. She is deserving of this award for 2 reason. First, she helps me on all my tests. She reads them out loud and helps me to understand the information. Second, she is very kind and friendly. This is why I want her to get a Sparkle Award.

—Kellan Wilamowski

Emma Smith, Teacher

i would like to nominate miss smith beacouse she is very nice and is very kind. she helps me with my work when i need it.

—Brandon Jin Logan

**Evangalina Teknos, Peer Mentor*

I am nominating Eva for the Sparkle Award because of her exceptional dedication as a Peer Mentor for the past two years at Rochester High School. Throughout her time in this role, she has gone above and beyond to support her peers, always willing to lend a hand and provide guidance. Eva's ability to connect with others and to be a role model has had a significant positive impact on the students in my class. She fosters a sense of community and inclusivity in our school, making everyone feel welcome and supported. A stand out moment was on the first day of the 2nd Semester. Eva saw a freshman student crying in the hallway at passing time. It was a busy time in the halls (RHS has 1700 students) and many students just walked right past this student. BUT NOT EVA!!! She did not hesitate and walked up to her and asked her if she needed help. It turns out that this student has Autism and was having a rough day with a new schedule, classes and teachers. Eva did not know anyone even saw her do this... she just did it because she is wonderful and caring person.

In addition to her role as a Peer Mentor, Eva consistently contributes to the classroom environment in creative ways. One of her standout contributions is her work designing and creating bulletin boards that enhance the learning space. Her artistic flair and attention to detail make these boards not only visually appealing but also educational, often tying into the lessons and themes of the class. Eva's creativity transforms the classroom, making it a more engaging and inviting place for all students.

Despite her busy schedule, which includes being an active member of the dance team, Eva always makes time to interact with our special needs students in the 6th Hour Careers Class. Her genuine care and patience as she helps these students thrive is truly inspiring. Eva's ability to balance her extracurricular commitments while making a meaningful difference in the lives of others exemplifies the qualities of a Sparkle Award recipient. Her compassion, leadership, and creativity make her an outstanding nominee for this prestigious recognition.

These are the reasons that Eva should receive a Sparkle Award.

—Amy Cosentino

Sarah Thomas, Teacher

I am excited to nominate Mrs. Thomas for her incredible qualities and the positive impact she has on those around her. She is incredibly flexible and adaptable, always ready to meet our needs and create a supportive environment. Her caring nature, vibrant energy, and great sense of humor make every interaction enjoyable. I find that I can connect with her on many levels, and her amazing personality truly shines through in everything she does. Whenever I am around Mrs. Thomas, I feel happy, motivated, and comfortable. She inspires me to be my best self, and I believe she truly deserves this nomination.

—Madison

I would like to nominate Mrs. Thomas for the Sparkle Award because she has truly made a difference in my life. From the moment I stepped into her classroom, I felt her passion for teaching and her commitment to her students. Mrs. Thomas has a unique ability to motivate me and help me become smarter in my studies. She encourages us to push through difficult subjects and never gives up on us, which makes all the difference. Her support helps me believe in myself and my abilities.

What I appreciate most about Mrs. Thomas is how she makes me feel heard and understood. Whenever I face challenges, she is always there to listen and provide guidance. She takes the time to connect with each student, making us feel valued and important. Mrs. Thomas is one of my favorite teachers because she not only teaches us the subject matter, but she also helps us overcome hard challenges and grow as individuals. I believe she deserves the Sparkle Award for all the amazing things she does for her students!

—Madelynn

Keith Torok, Teacher

i would like to nominate Mr Torok because he helped me with studying for a biology quiz

—Greyson Miesch

I would like to nominate Mr. Torok for the Sparkle Award because he has made a significant impact on my experience in school. He has always been there to help me with my work,

providing guidance and support whenever I needed it. Mr. Torok also takes the time to help other students stay on task, creating a focused and positive learning environment for everyone. His dedication to our success truly motivates us to do our best.

Mr. Torok makes me feel good about myself and my abilities. He encourages us to ask questions and seek help when needed, which makes learning much more enjoyable. He is one of my favorite teachers because he popped into my mind as someone who really cares about his students. Mr. Torok goes above and beyond to make sure we succeed, and I believe he deserves this recognition for all the hard work he puts into being an amazing teacher.

—Anonymous

David Uhrig, Teacher

I would like to nominate Mr. Uhrig for the Sparkle Award because he has been an incredible source of motivation and passion for me this school year. His enthusiasm for music and marching band is contagious, making every rehearsal feel exciting and fun. Whenever I'm in the band room, Mr. Uhrig's positive energy makes me want to do my best. He has a way of encouraging us that not only boosts our confidence but also helps us connect with the music we play.

What makes Mr. Uhrig stand out even more is his great sense of humor. He knows how to make us laugh, even during long practice sessions, and his jokes help lighten the mood when things get tough. Because of his support and guidance, I always look forward to our performances, knowing that he believes in us. Mr. Uhrig truly makes a difference in our lives as students, and I believe he deserves the Sparkle Award for all the joy and inspiration he brings to our band program.

—Anonymous

Kayla Walega, Peer Mentor

Kayla Walega is truly deserving of the Sparkle Award because of her unwavering dedication to fostering a positive environment for the students in my classroom. Every day, she is the first to arrive to my classroom at Rochester High School. On her arrival she sets a warm and welcoming tone for the afternoon. She immediately puts her backpack down goes to pick up our special needs students, as they are returning from their PE class. They are always so happy to see her, as she always gives them friendly hello with kindness and respect. What makes Kayla special is that she ensures the students feel seen and valued from the moment they arrive in our classroom.

In addition to her punctuality and kindness, Kayla continuously goes above and beyond in helping to create a nurturing school environment. She leads our daily warm-ups, taking initiative to get everyone engaged and ready to complete the worksheet. Kayla is also an integral part of maintaining the smooth running of the classroom, assisting with "in-house" school jobs and ensuring that students stay on track with their responsibilities. Her role in walking students to the bus further exemplifies her caring and thoughtful nature. Kayla's consistent positivity, support, and leadership make her a perfect candidate for the Sparkle Award.

These are the reasons that Kayla is deserving of a Sparkle Award.

—Amy Cosentino

Kim Williamson, Speech Language Pathologist

I would like to nominate Mrs. Kim Williamson for a Sparkle Award. She is the BEST Speech Teacher at Rochester High School. She does so many story champs with me and is amazing. She helps me with my feelings. Sometime she goes on Field Trips with my class. She is very nice a fun. I like to go to her office and talk with her, she makes me feel better if I am sad. This is why I want to nominate Mrs. Williamson for a Sparkle Award.

—Victoria

I would like to nominate Mrs. Williamson because she is a great person. She is a amazing because I can go to her when I'm worried about not doing so well in class. She is very kind, considerate, and pleasant to be around. Ms. Williamson is the smartest and inspiring speech teacher I know. I am so lucky to have a great speech, she improves my learning each and every day. I like when she comes into my 1st Learning Strategies Class. I appreciate all the help and support that she gives me. We work on my assignments together and she helps me to understand the work in "IN A FUN WAY"!!!

These are the reasons that Mrs. Williamson is deserving of a 2025 Sparkle Award!!

—Victoria Lulgjuraj

Stoney Creek

Carleen Allen, Special Education Teacher

It is with great admiration that I nominate Carleen Allen for a Sparkle Award for her exceptional contributions to her students' success. As a Special Education teacher, Carleen brings a unique combination of passion, skill, and personal connection to her teaching, ensuring that every student she works with has the tools they need to succeed. Whether in language arts, learning strategies, or science classes, Carleen's dedication to her students shines through as she creates a supportive and engaging learning environment that fosters both academic and personal growth. Carleen's ability to connect with her students on an individual level allows her to tailor her approach to their specific needs, empowering them to reach their full potential. Her collaborative nature, working closely with colleagues and other professionals, strengthens the overall support system for her students, ensuring they receive the best possible care and instruction. Carleen's excellence in all that she does—both in the classroom and in her ongoing commitment to student success—makes a lasting and meaningful impact, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her as part of our team.

—Tracy Bullock

**Diana Badr, Teacher*

I am pleased to nominate Diana for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her dedication and support for students with special needs and unique challenges. While Diana was responsible for running credit recovery classes this semester, she also took it upon herself to assist students with IEPs and 504 plans who were taking Edgenuity courses.

Diana made sure that students received their accommodations, provided tutoring for those in unusual circumstances, and was consistently available to address technical issues. She also stepped in to oversee the progress of a student who had recently arrived from another country,

collaborating with team members to ensure that this students stayed on track with their coursework.

In addition to her work with students, Diana attended IEP meetings and helped parents understand how to navigate the Edgenuity platform, enabling them to better support their children. Her clear and reliable communication was a valuable resource for both families and case managers, providing much-needed support throughout the semester.

Diana served as a key advocate for students with 504s and IEPs, ensuring their needs were met and their progress monitored closely. Her commitment and willingness to go beyond her assigned role made a significant difference for many students. She is truly deserving of this recognition.

—Alison Howard and Rebecca Riggs

Abby Barbuto, Special Education Teacher

It is with great honor that I nominate Abby Barbuto for a Sparkle Award for her outstanding dedication and impact on the lives of her students. As a Special Education teacher, Abby exemplifies grit, compassion, and unwavering dedication to ensuring the success of her students.

Through her learning strategies class, she provides her students with the essential tools and strategies they need to thrive academically, while also equipping them with valuable executive function skills that are critical for long-term success.

Abby goes beyond the academic realm, offering vital mental health support and creating a safe, nurturing environment where students feel valued and understood. Her ability to address the holistic needs of her students, both in their education and emotional well-being, sets her apart as a true advocate for their success. Abby's collaborative spirit fosters a sense of teamwork and shared purpose, and her excellence in every aspect of her work ensures that each student she supports is given the best possible chance to grow and succeed. We are incredibly fortunate to have Abby as part of our team, and her influence truly makes a lasting difference in the lives of her students. Thank you Abby for all you do. I am honored to work along side you.

—Tracy Bullock

Jessica Book, Teacher

I am proud to nominate Jess Book for the Sparkle Award in recognition of the exemplary support they have provided to my child, Cat. Ms Book is a deeply supportive and compassionate educator who goes above and beyond to ensure Cat feels valued, understood, and empowered.

Ms Book excels in creating an environment where Cat feels safe to express themselves and explore new learning opportunities. She is a great listener, taking the time to understand Cat's unique needs and preferences. Ms Book's patience and dedication have made a significant difference in Cat's educational experience.

In addition to providing individualized support, Ms Book encourages Cat to take pride in their progress, fostering both their academic and personal growth. Her approach to teaching is not only inclusive but also nurturing, building Cat's confidence while ensuring they are engaged in their learning journey.

Ms Book is truly deserving of recognition for her outstanding dedication to supporting students in special education. I am incredibly grateful for the positive impact they have had on Cat's development.

—Ann Ehlert

Steve Book, Teacher

I am excited to nominate Steve Book for the Sparkle Award in recognition of his lasting and meaningful impact on my child, Cat. Mr. Book has been Cat's teacher for various subjects throughout their time at Stoney Creek High School, but his influence extends far beyond the classroom.

Even during semesters when Cat was not in Mr. Book's class, he continued to be a constant source of support, engaging in insightful and helpful conversations that encouraged Cat to grow academically, emotionally, and personally. His ability to listen, guide, and challenge Cat has made him a trusted and respected presence in their life.

Now, as a senior, Cat often reflects on the support and encouragement they've received from Mr. Book and believes he will continue to be a mentor well beyond high school. Cat is choosing to attend James Madison College at Michigan State University, just like Mr. Book.

His dedication, compassion, and genuine investment in Cat's success make him truly deserving of this recognition. It is with heartfelt gratitude that I nominate Steve Book for the Sparkle Award, celebrating the lasting impact he has made on Cat's journey.

—Ann Ehlert

Emily Braun, Student Peer Mentor

I am writing to wholeheartedly recommend Emily Braun for the Sparkle Awards. As her Supervising Peer Mentor Teacher, I have had the pleasure of knowing Emily for the past two years, during which she has served as an exemplary peer mentor in our math resource class and PAES Lab.

Emily is a wonderful peer mentor who inspires her mentee students with special needs to tackle challenging math concepts. Many students often find it difficult to engage with a teacher when it comes to practicing math; however, Emily possesses a unique ability to connect with other underclassmen who have struggled in math for years. Throughout her time as a mentor, Emily has demonstrated patience and consistently encouraged students to feel supported in their learning journeys. I have witnessed her ability to work through the problem-solving math process alongside her mentees, fostering an environment where they can explore math in a safe and collaborative setting with her.

Emily's impact as a peer mentor has been profound. She has not only helped resource students improve their math skills but also supported them in becoming independent, lifelong learners. The skills and confidence she has imparted will undoubtedly resonate with them for years to come.

I appreciate all that Emily has done to support my resource math students and I strongly nominate her for the Sparkle Awards, as I believe she embodies the spirit of mentorship and excellence that has been a crucial part of my resource student's success.

—Mr. Lacy

Tracy Bullock, School Social Worker



I have had the privilege of working directly and indirectly with Tracy Bullock for 23 years. She has been an integral part of our Social Work department, even serving as department chair several years ago. Tracy is a wealth of knowledge, offering invaluable support to students, parents, and colleagues both across the district and within Stoney Creek High School. Her innovative, proactive, and compassionate approach to student care has always been evident, but this year, working directly with her, I have seen it shine more than ever. Tracy has an exceptional ability to build trust and meaningful relationships with students, always going above and beyond for Stoney Creek. Following the 2020 shutdown, she identified critical needs specific to our school and took the initiative to coordinate donations and financial support for families requiring assistance with basic necessities. Beyond Stoney Creek, Tracy has made a significant impact at the county and district levels. She has served on the Oakland Schools Problem-Solving Committee, is an active member of the Rochester Community Schools Crisis Team, and consistently demonstrates professionalism and collaboration. She is a trusted resource for all social workers, generously sharing her unique ideas, strategies, and lessons. More than just a colleague, Tracy is a dear friend. As she embarks on her well-earned retirement at the end of this year, I know her influence will endure in the lives of the countless individuals she has touched. Tracy, you truly sparkle.

—Brandee L Lamontagne

Tracy Bullock exemplifies dedication and support in her role as a social worker, consistently going above and beyond to assist every student in our building, regardless of whether they are on her caseload or not. Her unwavering commitment to advocacy for those in need is evident in her tireless efforts to ensure that each student feels seen, heard, and valued. Tracy's compassionate approach and proactive involvement have made a profound impact on countless students, guiding them toward positive choices and helping to set them on the right path to success. Her selflessness and determination to uplift others truly make her a cornerstone of our school community. Tracy not only gives to students but has also initiated and implemented several impactful programs in our school district. At Stoney Creek she started the Cougar Closet, Cougar Chow, and the Holiday Feast program. These programs have had a significant positive impact on our students and their families.

It should also be noted that Tracy has co-authored a book on helping students manage trauma and crisis, demonstrating her expertise in the field. She has also led and co-led several presentations at various workshops, conferences, and in-services, covering topics such as the impact of THC on the adolescent brain and strategies for addressing adverse behaviors and academic struggles.

Tracy Bullock is an outstanding social worker and we are honored to be working alongside of her. Thank you, Tracy, for your professionalism and the support you bring to the special education department and Stoney Creek high school.

—Amy Sartor

We are so grateful for Mrs. Bullock. My son has been in a virtual learning environment for the past five years. This was a huge transition year for him moving back into in-person learning and a new, and very large, school. It was scary, but Mrs. Bullock provided constant reassurance and gave us confidence. There were several times this year that our son felt overwhelmed and Mrs. Bullock was always there to de-escalate the situation and bring him back to calm. I was so impressed and comforted with her knowledge and acceptance of his neurodivergence. This is one of the first times in his ten years of schooling, that I believe someone understands him and knows how to meet his needs. She doesn't focus on his faults, but praises his strengths. She doesn't jump to discipline, but makes tough situations into learning opportunities. Focusing on his positive qualities has helped rebuild his very low esteem and slowly building back confidence.

—Erin Handzo

Shelby Carpenter, ASL Teacher



I am pleased to nominate Ms. Carpenter for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her outstanding support of my daughter, June. Ms. Carpenter has been a constant source of encouragement, creating an inclusive and welcoming environment where June feels comfortable and valued. Ms. Carpenter consistently checks in with June, ensuring she feels supported and heard. Her kindness and approachability make it easy for June to seek help whenever she needs it. Ms. Carpenter's inclusive approach fosters a sense of belonging for all students, and she makes sure June is an active participant in the classroom.

I truly appreciate the care and attention Ms. Carpenter provides, making her an ideal nominee for the Sparkle Award.

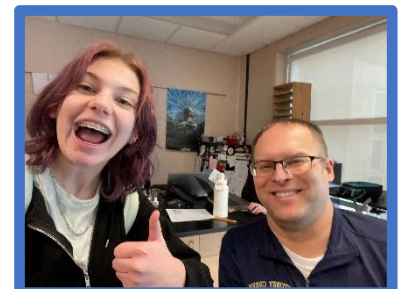
—Ann Ehlert

Ms. Carpenter is a fantastic teacher. My son has been in a virtual school setting for the past five years. This year was a big transition to come back to in person and to a new school. Ms. Carpenter went above and beyond to meet my son's needs. She took time to get to know him. She discovered several things she had in common with my son and this built a connection. My son describes her as the person he feels most comfortable talking to at school and knows that she will always be there for him. He also describes her as kind, patient, and a good teacher. As a mom, this is a huge comfort for me to know she is there for him I also really appreciate the way she keeps in touch with me to share any concerns and joys.

—Erin Handzo

Jeff Castonia, Teacher

I am happy to nominate Jeff Castonia for the Sparkle Award in recognition of his support of my daughter, June. Mr. Castonia has created a safe and supportive environment for June, where she feels comfortable and understood. June especially enjoys his sense of humor, which makes the classroom an enjoyable place for her to learn. On days when she's struggling, Mr. Castonia is quick to offer support, helping her navigate through tough



**Officer Amy Drehmer, Resource Officer*

I am privileged to nominate Officer Amy Drehmer for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional dedication, compassion, and expertise in supporting students with special needs at Stoney Creek High School, Hart Middle School, and ACE High School. Officer Drehmer has made an incredible impact on our school community, particularly in her work with students who face unique mental, emotional, and social challenges. Her unwavering commitment to their well-being and success exemplifies the qualities of leadership and care that the Sparkle Award celebrates.

Officer Drehmer is not only a law enforcement officer but also an educator in her own right. Her proactive and positive presence throughout the district has made her an invaluable resource for all students. In regards to our special needs population, she takes the time to connect with each student individually, using her unique position to teach life skills, conflict resolution, and personal safety. Her approach is grounded in respect, fostering an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions, learning, and growing. Officer Drehmer integrates real-world lessons into her interactions, helping students understand and navigate the complexities of both their school and personal lives.

Officer Drehmer's compassion shines through in everything she does. She has a deep understanding of the diverse needs of students with special needs and approaches each student with patience, kindness, and empathy. She listens attentively and offers emotional support whenever needed. Whether it's providing reassurance during moments of anxiety, mediating social conflicts, or offering a safe space for students to talk, Officer Drehmer's devoted compassion helps create an environment of trust where students feel genuinely cared for and supported.

One of Officer Drehmer's most valuable qualities is her expertise in mental and social well-being. She understands the importance of emotional health and is skilled at identifying and addressing the unique challenges that students with special needs often face. Whether supporting students through moments of stress, anxiety, or behavioral difficulties, Officer Drehmer is always equipped with the tools and strategies needed to guide them. She works closely with school social workers, school counselors and staff to ensure that students receive the support they need, making her an integral part of the team that promotes mental and emotional well-being across the school.

Officer Drehmer has made an extraordinary impact on our school community, especially with students who require extra care and attention. Her ability to educate, her immense compassion, and her commitment to the mental and social well-being of our students are qualities that make her truly deserving of the Sparkle Award. She has touched the lives of many students in profound ways, and her dedication continues to inspire all who work alongside her. Thank you for considering Officer Amy Drehmer for this well-deserved recognition. Her work truly embodies the spirit of the Sparkle Award.

—Tracy Bullock

Emily Dybowski, Social Worker

I am honored to nominate Emily Dybowski for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional support of my daughter, June. Emily has a unique ability to connect with June, making her feel comfortable and understood.

Emily's approach to working with June is one of ease and empathy. She is funny and approachable, always finding ways to make June feel at ease. Rather than sitting face-to-face, Emily often walks with June, which creates a more relaxed atmosphere and allows June to open up more freely.

What truly stands out is Emily's attention to detail. She remembers important things about June, making their conversations feel personal and genuine. This thoughtful approach to building a relationship has made a significant difference in June's experience.

For her dedication, kindness, and thoughtful support, Emily Dybowski is truly deserving of the Sparkle Award.

—Ann Ehlert

Kim Filips, Special Education Teacher

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Kim Filips for a Sparkle Award for her exceptional dedication and commitment to the success and well-being of her students. As a Special Education teacher, Kim consistently goes above and beyond, using creativity and motivation to ensure that her students not only succeed but thrive. She engages her students in language arts and beyond, always striving to make learning accessible, enjoyable, and meaningful for each individual.

Kim is deeply invested in her students' overall well-being, taking an all-inclusive approach that addresses their academic, emotional, and social needs. Her ability to connect with her students and make a positive, lasting impact is truly remarkable. Additionally, Kim is a collaborative individual who works seamlessly with colleagues, sharing her expertise and insights to create an inclusive, supportive learning environment. Her unwavering excellence in everything she does shines through in her efforts to better the lives of her students, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her as part of our team. Thank you, Kim, for all you do. I am honored to work alongside you.

—Tracy Bullock

Nina Gambino, Teacher

I am proud to nominate Nina for the Sparkle Award for her exceptional support of students facing extraordinary medical challenges. Nina's dedication and compassion played a key role in helping two students, who might not have otherwise graduated, successfully complete their education and earn their diplomas.

Nina consistently went above and beyond to ensure her students' success. She tutored students while they were homebound, providing encouragement and the flexibility they needed to keep going. Nina made herself available over holiday breaks and weekends, adjusting assignments to ensure they were manageable given the students' unique circumstances.

In addition to her work with students, Nina maintained clear and consistent communication with team members to ensure everyone was aligned in meeting the students' needs. She also provided invaluable support to families, always approaching them with warmth and understanding. Nina's willingness to volunteer her time and expertise, often without hesitation, exemplifies her selflessness and commitment.

Thanks to Nina's hard work and caring approach, these students were able to graduate under extraordinary circumstances. Her efforts have made a lasting difference in their lives and reflect the true spirit of the Sparkle Award.

—Alison Howard and Rebecca Riggs

Ms. Gambino goes above and beyond to make sure that all students in her classroom feel safe and welcome. She genuinely wants all students to succeed and cares about who they are both in and out of the classroom. For several students with unique learning circumstances this year, she has supported them in ways that allowed them to still access the curriculum.

—Anonymous

Hogan Glenn, Student

We are honored to nominate Hogan Glenn for the Sparkle Award for his outstanding support of students receiving special education services at Stoney Creek High School. Hogan is a dedicated sophomore who has made a remarkable impact on the lives of many of our students with special needs.

In his Biology class, Hogan consistently goes above and beyond to assist his peers with special needs. Whether it's offering extra help during lessons, providing support in group activities, or being a compassionate and patient mentor, Hogan has become an invaluable resource to his classmates. His independent willingness to lend a hand, explain complex concepts, and ensure that every student feels included demonstrates his genuine care and commitment to their success. His kindness extends beyond the classroom support and is observable in his social interactions beyond the classwork. He greets all students with kindness and enthusiasm to make genuine connections.

Hogan's positive attitude and work ethic make him a role model within the school community. He shows exceptional empathy and understanding, fostering an environment where students with special needs feel respected and supported. His contributions are truly exemplary, and he deserves to be recognized for his unwavering dedication to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all students.

For these reasons, we wholeheartedly recommend Hogan Glenn for the Sparkle Award.

—Jeff Castonia & Pamela Steen

Brooke Govern, School Counselor

I am pleased to nominate Brooke Govern for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional support of both of my children, June and Cat. Ms. Govern has been a source of emotional support for both of them, offering a safe space where they can talk through their challenges.

Both June and Cat have sought out Ms. Govern when they needed guidance or comfort, and she has always been there to help them navigate difficult moments with empathy and understanding. Her ability to connect with them on a personal level has made a significant impact on their emotional well-being.

Ms. Govern's dedication to her students and her ability to provide meaningful, compassionate support makes her a truly deserving nominee for the Sparkle Award.

—Ann Ehlert

Alison Howard, Teacher Consultant

It is with great pleasure that I nominate Alison Howard for a Sparkle Award for her outstanding dedication to advocating and supporting our special education students and team. As a Teacher Consultant, Alison consistently demonstrates integrity, compassion, and a deep commitment to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed. Her advocacy extends beyond just the classroom/office; she is a tireless leader at both the building and district level, always working to improve systems, policies, and resources that benefit our students and staff alike. Alison's collaborative spirit is truly exceptional, as she consistently goes above and beyond her daily duties to offer guidance and support to anyone in need. Whether it's providing resources, offering advice, or simply lending a helping hand, Alison is always there to support her colleagues and students, making a lasting impact on the entire school community. Her unwavering dedication to excellence in all that she does is evident in the way she elevates others, fosters an optimistic learning environment, and ensures that every individual is equipped to succeed. We are incredibly fortunate to have Alison as a part of our team, and her leadership and advocacy continue to make a profound difference in the lives of students and staff every day.

Thank you, Alison, for everything you do. I am honored to work along side you.

—Tracy Bullock

I am honored to nominate Alison Howard for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her outstanding support for my daughter, June. Ms. Howard went above and beyond to ensure June's transition into Stoney Creek High School was seamless.

Before June even arrived at Stoney, Ms. Howard met with her a couple of times to understand her needs and prepare for her transition from a private school. On June's first day, all of her accommodations were already set up, even though her IEP was not yet in place. This proactive approach allowed June to feel supported and comfortable from the very beginning of her time at Stoney.

Ms. Howard's dedication to ensuring that June had everything she needed to succeed is truly appreciated. Her commitment to providing excellent support makes her a deserving nominee for the Sparkle Award.

—Ann Ehlert

Jackie Hubar, Paraprofessional

Jackie has helped to run our Academic Center for over 20 years. She works with students of all abilities and treats them with kindness and respect. She truly wants to see all students succeed and works hard to make that happen!

—Anonymous

Mary Hunter, Special Education – Math Teacher

It is a pleasure to recognize Mary Hunter with a Sparkle Award nomination for her exceptional contributions to the success of her students. As a Special Education teacher, Mary consistently demonstrates an unwavering commitment to excellence, combining her deep desire to learn with creativity and dedication to provide outstanding instruction. Her ability to connect with students who face math struggles is nothing short of remarkable, as she tailors her approach to meet their unique needs, ensuring they receive the support and guidance they deserve.

Mary's collaborative spirit is evident in her work with colleagues, as she actively seeks out opportunities to share insights and strategies to benefit her students. Her passion for education and her commitment to helping students overcome challenges shines through in everything she does. Mary's outstanding level of instruction not only empowers her students to succeed academically, but also instills in them the confidence and skills they need to face future challenges with resilience. We are incredibly fortunate to have Mary as part of our team, and her excellence truly makes a lasting impact on the lives of the students she serves. Thank you Mary for caring about education, students who need specialized instruction, and for being such an advocate for your students.

—Tracy Bullock

**Meghan Ivory, Teacher*

I am honored to nominate Meghan for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her exceptional dedication and compassion in supporting students with special needs at Stoney Creek. Megan has gone above and beyond to ensure inclusivity and foster a sense of belonging for all students, especially those in special education.

One notable example of Meghan's commitment is her work with a student in the school store. Megan created meaningful opportunities for this student to work alongside peers, providing guidance and encouragement every step of the way. When the student made mistakes, Megan patiently taught him how his actions might be perceived, using the moment as a teachable opportunity.

Meghan also demonstrated extraordinary empathy when this student was accused of stealing. She worked diligently to uncover the truth, addressing not only the situation but also the potential bullying dynamics in the class. Furthermore, when students in the class encouraged the student to ask someone to homecoming—only for him to be turned down—Meghan stepped in with care and understanding to ensure the student's feelings were supported and his confidence remained intact.

Meghan's advocacy extends far beyond individual moments. She consistently adapts her teaching strategies to ensure every student feels included and valued. Her creative approach highlights students' strengths, helping them recognize their own potential. Meghan's participation in IEP meetings is marked by her positivity and proactive mindset, making her a champion for her students' success.

Meghan's creativity, compassion, and unwavering commitment to inclusivity make her a bright light at Stoney Creek. Her efforts inspire those around her and leave a lasting impact on the students she serves. She is truly deserving of this recognition.

—Alison Howard

Mrs. Ivory is the best teacher I have. I'm so proud that I got have her class. She is so nice. She helps with any reason I have, she helped me with working so I could get a job, she helped send emails to places where I could get a job, she helped me practice for interviews. She is really funny and if I'm not having a good day she makes me laugh, she tries to make anyone happy. She was the teacher in the school store and she helped me with the cash register, she helps me if something happens with other kids that is hard. In conclusion Mrs. Ivory is the kindest teacher I have ever had. Thank You Mrs. Ivory.

—Pedro Maximiano Ferreira

Jason Kluzak, Assistant Principal

It is with great admiration that I nominate Jason Kluzak for a Sparkle Award for his exceptional dedication to supporting the students of our school community. As an Assistant Principal, Jason exemplifies compassion and leadership in all that he does. He goes above and beyond to support students facing mental health struggles, academic challenges, and special education needs, ensuring that they have access to the resources and guidance they need to thrive both academically and personally. One of Jason's amazing contributions to the special education department is with regards to scheduling. Jason is instrumental in developing a unique daily schedule that best supports our students with IEP's and 504 plans. Thank you for all you do for our students with special needs. It is an honor to work along side you.

—Tracy Bullock

Rinka Kneko, Student

Rinka has been a Peer Mentor in the Academic Center this year and last year. She always has a positive attitude, is extremely polite, and is so great at working with the students who are scheduled into the AC.

—Jess Book and Rebecca Riggs

Jason Lacy, Special Education Teacher

It is with great pleasure that I recognize Jason Lacy for a Sparkle Award. Jason is a truly exceptional Special Education teacher whose creativity, drive, and unwavering dedication have made a profound impact on his students. He continuously goes above and beyond, not just in teaching math and essential life and career skills, but in inspiring and empowering students to reach their full potential.

Jason's collaborative spirit shines through in every aspect of his work, as he works seamlessly with colleagues to create an inclusive and supportive environment. His ability to connect with his students, coupled with his commitment to excellence, ensures that every student he works with is provided with the highest level of instruction. His passion for their success is evident in all that he does, and his influence extends far beyond the classroom, shaping the futures of those he teaches. Jason Lacy is truly a beacon of excellence, and we are fortunate to have him making a difference in the lives of his students every day. Thank you, Jason. It is an honor working along side you.

—Tracy Bullock

Mr. Lacy has helped make my son's transition into High School smooth and successful. It's obvious that he cares deeply for his students. I am very impressed by how quickly he got to know my son so well. He really understands his strengths and his struggles. Therefore, he offers guidance and advice that is just right for my son's needs. He is passionate about helping kids navigate the right path towards their future. This is also helpful for Special Ed parents who aren't sure what a unique path might look like. He explains all the options well and he gave my son such hope for the future. Mr. Lacy teaches students to how to make wise decisions, how to weigh the Pros and Cons, and this is empowering. As a mom, nothing makes me happier than seeing my child excited about their future because their teacher inspired them. Thank you Jason Lacy

—Kimberly Lopez

Brandee Lamontagne, School Social Worker

It is with respect and admiration that I nominate Brandee Lamontagne with the Sparkle Award for her outstanding contributions to the well-being and success of both students and staff. As a School Social Worker, Brandee is a true wealth of knowledge, providing invaluable support on both a building and district level. Her compassion, creativity, and expertise enable her to offer guidance, resources, and unwavering support to students facing mental health struggles and life stressors, as well as to the staff who serve them. Brandee's ability to connect with others and offer practical solutions makes her an essential resource in our school community. She goes above and beyond to ensure that students not only receive the mental health support they need but are also equipped with life skills that empower them to overcome challenges and thrive. Her collaborative approach, working closely with colleagues, families, and external partners, strengthens the support system for all students. Brandee's commitment to excellence in every aspect of her work profoundly impacts the lives of those she serves, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her making a positive difference each and every day. Thank you Brandee for your dedication to our students, families and RCS community. I am honored to work along side you.

—Tracy Bullock

Kimberly Lopez, Paraprofessional

Kim brings an attitude of joy and optimism to work each day and strives to make authentic connections with both students and staff. She is passionate about learning new things and encourages students to love learning as well.

—Anonymous

Maddox Lundsten, Student Peer Mentor

I am pleased to nominate Maddox Lundsten for a Sparkle Award, who has served as a Peer Mentor under my supervision for the past two semesters. In my role as her supervising teacher, I have had the privilege of observing the profound impact she has made on our students with special needs. Maddox is an exceptionally caring and compassionate young lady. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure that her mentees feel supported and included. Her dedication to fostering loving friendships with her peers is evident in her daily interactions, where she demonstrates a genuine commitment to the well-being of others. One of the most remarkable aspects of Maddox's character is her attentiveness to the needs and feelings of those around her. She possesses an innate ability to listen and respond with empathy, making her mentees feel valued and understood. This has not only strengthened her relationships with them but has also created an environment where they feel safe to express themselves. Moreover, Maddox has forged strong friendships and connections with her mentees, which significantly enhances their experience in our classroom. Her supportive nature encourages them to engage more fully in their learning and personal growth. I have witnessed firsthand how her presence can uplift and inspire others, creating a ripple effect of positivity among her mentees. In conclusion, I wholeheartedly nominate Maddox for a Sparkle Award. Her caring demeanor, dedication, and ability to include others make her an ideal candidate for this recognition. I am confident that she will continue to excel and make a meaningful difference in the lives of those she encounters after graduation and throughout her life.

—Mr. Lacy

Maddox is special to me because she took time to get to know me. And she became a great mentor for me to look up to.
—Caitlin Wagner-Deluna

Aaron Mize, Teacher

Mr. Mize does a fantastic job of understand student accommodations and helping to implement them in his class. He holds his students to a high standard but works with them individually to set them up for success in his class.

—Anonymous

Susana Morales, Paraprofessional

Susana has been an amazing addition to the Academic Center staff at Stoney Creek! She is friendly with students and works hard to help students feel comfortable and welcome. She is energetic and always willing to help in any way.

—Anonymous

Traci Naylis, History Teacher

Ms. Naylis works hard to connect with all students and inspire them to love History. She recognizes each students unique learning style and strives to match them with her teaching.

—Anonymous

Rebecca Riggs, SCHS Learning Consultant and 504 Coordinator

Ms. Riggs has shown unending patience, compassion, and proactiveness since my child started high school. She's always gone above and beyond to make herself available with guidance and support throughout my child's time at Stoney Creek. She is an exceptional person and professional, and our family's experience at SCHS has been greatly enhanced because of Ms. Riggs. We're grateful for her.

—Anonymous

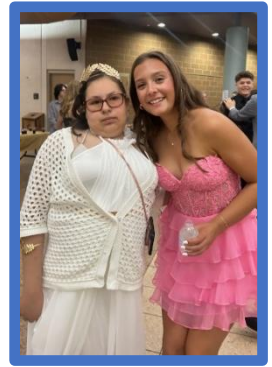
I am honored to nominate Rebecca Riggs for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her unwavering support and encouragement of my child, Cat. Ms. Riggs has consistently pushed Cat to reach their full potential, believing in their abilities and encouraging them every step of the way.

What makes Ms. Riggs truly special is her creativity and dedication in ensuring that Cat has the accommodations they need to succeed. She has helped Cat find innovative ways to complete tasks, always focusing on what Cat can do rather than what they can't. Her belief in Cat's capabilities has fostered a sense of independence and confidence that has been invaluable.

Ms. Riggs's commitment to inclusion, creativity, and student success has made a meaningful difference in Cat's educational journey. She is a true advocate for her students and an inspiration to all who have the privilege of working with her.

It is with heartfelt gratitude that I nominate Rebecca Riggs for this well-deserved recognition.

—Ann Ehlert



Meagan Rigney, Special Education Teacher/Link Crew Leader

It is with great pleasure that I want to nominate Meagan Rigney for a Sparkle Award and for her outstanding contributions to the Stoney Creek High School community. As a Special Education teacher, Meagan combines personal connection, compassion, and dedication to support her students with special needs. She goes above and beyond to help them develop learning strategies that empower them to succeed, particularly in subjects like economics and government. Her ability to connect with her students on a personal level ensures that they feel supported and motivated to overcome challenges and reach their full potential.

In addition to her work in the classroom, Meagan plays a vital role as one of the leaders of the LINK crew, where she helps welcome and connect incoming freshmen to the Stoney Creek High School community. Through her leadership, she fosters an inclusive and supportive environment, ensuring that every freshman feels seen, heard, and integrated into the school culture. Meagan's collaborative nature and commitment to excellence shine through in everything she does. She truly impacts the lives of her students, both academically and socially, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her in our school community. Thank you, Meagan. I am truly blessed to work along side you over the years.

—Tracy Bullock

Amy Sartor, Speech Language Pathologist

It is with great admiration that I recognize Amy Sartor with the Sparkle Award nomination for her extraordinary contributions to the lives of her students. As a Speech Pathologist, Amy combines compassion, creativity, and expert knowledge to support students with language impairments, mental health struggles, and life stressors. Her ability to connect with students and create individualized, impactful solutions ensures they are given the tools and encouragement to overcome challenges and thrive.

Amy's dedication goes beyond just improving communication skills; she is deeply invested in her students' overall well-being, helping them navigate the complexities of both education and life. Her collaborative approach, working closely with teachers, families, and other professionals, ensures that each student receives holistic support tailored to their needs. Amy's commitment to excellence in every aspect of her work is evident in the positive impact she has on her students' lives, not only enhancing their academic skills but also empowering them to grow emotionally and socially. She is truly a shining example of how one individual can make a profound difference, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her as a part of our team. Amy I am honored to have worked with you for over 25 years at RCS. Thank you for all you do and what you bring to the profession and to the lives of the students.

—Tracy Bullock

Brian Shelson, SCHS Principal

I am thrilled to nominate Brian Shelson, SCHS Principal, for the Sparkle Award in recognition of his outstanding leadership, compassion, and creativity in supporting students with special needs at Stoney Creek High School. Brian has demonstrated time and again that he is a true advocate for our students, going above and beyond to ensure they have the best opportunities to succeed and thrive in the school environment. One of Brian's most admirable qualities is his deep sense of compassion for the students in his building. He genuinely cares about each student's individual journey and goes to great lengths to build trusting relationships with them.

He listens attentively to their needs, celebrates their victories, no matter how small, and provides encouragement during their challenges. His understanding and empathy help create an environment where students feel safe, valued, and motivated to do their best. In all his work, Brian has proven himself to be an invaluable asset to Stoney Creek High School. His leadership, compassion, and creativity are truly deserving of the Sparkle Award. I can think of no one more fitting for this honor than Brian Shelson, whose dedication has touched the lives of so many students and colleagues alike.

—Tracy Bullock

Thalen Tansel, Student

We are pleased to nominate Thalen Tansel for the Sparkle Award for his outstanding support of students receiving special education services at Stoney Creek High School. Thalen is a thoughtful sophomore who has made a noticeable impact on the lives of many of our students with special needs. Thalen exceeds expectations to assist his peers with special needs in his Biology class. He has become an invaluable support to his classmates, whether it's offering extra help during lessons, providing support in group activities, or being a generous and patient mentor. His readiness to assist, clarify difficult concepts, and make sure his classmate feels welcomed highlights his dedication for their success.

Thalen's empathy and understanding creates an environment where students with special needs feel valued and supported. A strong work ethic and positive approach makes him a role model among his peers. His efforts are notable and he deserves recognition for fostering an inclusive and supportive space for all students.

For these reasons, we wholeheartedly recommend Thalen Tansel for the Sparkle Award.

—Jeff Castonia & Pamela Steen

Megan Terbrack, Math/Team Math Teacher

I am pleased to nominate Megan Terbrack for the Sparkle Award, recognizing her outstanding work in educating and advocating for students with special needs at Stoney Creek High School. As a team math teacher Megan's steadfast dedication, compassion, and tireless advocacy make her an invaluable member of our school community and a true asset to our students. Megan is an exceptional educator who consistently goes above and beyond to meet the unique needs of her students. She is not only skilled at tailoring lesson plans to accommodate diverse learning styles but also deeply committed to ensuring that every student has access to an education that is both meaningful and engaging. Megan takes great care in creating individualized strategies and resources that allow her students to thrive in the classroom. Whether it's adapting materials for different abilities or offering one-on-one support, she ensures that each student feels capable and empowered to succeed.

Megan is a powerful advocate for students with special needs. She is always at the forefront, ensuring that the voices of her students are heard and their needs are met. She works closely with families, school staff, and external resources to develop strategies that best support each student's educational journey. Megan goes above and beyond in ensuring that students have the accommodations and services they need, often stepping in to fight for their rights and opportunities. Her advocacy is instrumental in helping students overcome barriers, and her commitment to equity and inclusion inspires everyone around her.

—Tracy Bullock

Heather Thomas, Teacher

I am pleased to nominate Heather Thomas for the Sparkle Award in recognition of her support of my child, Cat. Since Cat's sophomore year, Ms. Thomas has been a consistent source of guidance and encouragement. Ms. Thomas has supported Cat through the challenges of living with a disability while encouraging them to focus on their strengths and abilities. She has helped Cat see that their disability does not limit what they can achieve. We are so grateful to have Ms. Thomas as part of Cat's village. Now, as a senior, Cat values the support Ms. Thomas has provided and the confidence she has helped build. Her dedication to Cat's growth and success makes her a deserving nominee for this award.

—Ann Ehlert

Liz Tigue, Teacher

Mx. Tigue has been teaming bio this year and done a fantastic job of working with our students with IEPs/504s. Mx. Tigue truly cares for their students and also is a strong advocate for them if they notice they are struggling.

—Anonymous

Beth Tocco, Assistant Principal

It is a privilege to recognize Beth Tocco for the Sparkle Award for her exceptional dedication to the well-being and success of our students at Stoney Creek High School. As an Assistant Principal, Beth exemplifies compassion, drive, and unwavering commitment to supporting students who face mental health struggles, financial challenges, and special education needs. Her passion for making a difference in their lives goes far beyond the classroom, an office or a building. Beth works tirelessly to collaborate with both internal and external professionals, ensuring that students have access to the resources they need to thrive. Her proactive approach to problem-solving allows her to find innovative ways to not only educate students but also to provide them with support that helps them overcome life's obstacles. Whether it's linking students to essential resources or creating opportunities for them to build life skills, Beth's efforts help shape a brighter, more supportive future for every student she touches. Her ability to balance empathy with leadership makes her an invaluable asset to our community, and we are fortunate to have her advocating for the holistic success of our students. Beth it is an honor to call you our leader and work along side you. Our students, staff and community are blessed to have you in their corner.

—Tracy Bullock

Special Education Administration

Amanda Sawka, Categorical Supervisor

I want to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude for Amanda and the support she has provided me this school year. She has been incredibly understanding, a thoughtful listener, and deeply compassionate, always demonstrating a strong commitment to helping me navigate challenges and times of celebration.

Her kindness and reassuring words have been invaluable in moments of uncertainty and difficulty. She consistently makes herself available—whether through a quick call or text, even on her days off—to offer guidance, answer questions, or help process ideas.

I am truly grateful that Amanda has joined the Rochester team and am impressed by the meaningful, positive changes she has already made in her first year as part of the special education administrative team.

—Ariel Blizzard

Adult Transition Program Services (ATPS)

**Amy Austin, Teacher*



Our son, Patrick Omahen, has utilized his communication device (AAC) to nominate Amy Austin, his teacher at ATPS, for 2025 Sparkle Awards. We assisted Patrick in the process. Patrick communicated this: Amy is awesome teacher. She help me learn. She make school fun. She make me feel good clam safe happy. Amy thank you for all you do.

We are providing additional information: Amy Austin is an amazing teacher. She is kind, compassionate and very dedicated to her students. Patrick has made significant growth over the last three years and blossomed under her guidance. Amy goes above and beyond to support her students. She took time to visit Patrick, when he was hospitalized due to complications following surgery, in November. Amy's positivity and kindness make her students, families, and staff feel valued and appreciated. She brings everyone together to work on behalf of her students in the spirit of unity. Amy is an exemplary teacher and a passionate advocate for her students. She helps them feel valued, appreciated and loved. Amy supports every student's voice by utilizing all forms of communication in her instruction and interactions. She is a lifelong learner, who continues to add valuable tools to her professional toolbox. Patrick cannot wait to get on the bus and go to school. He comes home happy and smiling, letting us know how much he loves ATPS, Ms. Amy, and his amazing team.

—Patrick Omahen

Wendy Brown, Para Educator

I would like to recognize Wendy for her outstanding dedication and contributions to our classroom and program. Her knowledge and experience in working with individuals with autism have been an invaluable asset; enriching the environment for both students and staff. Wendy consistently demonstrates a willingness to embrace new strategies and approaches. She is always striving to support our students in gaining independence and achieving success. Wendy's passion and commitment to our students across the ATPS program makes a meaningful difference. I appreciate her efforts and the positive impact she has made.

—Amy Austin

Laura Cazabon, Shield Security

I haven't been in the building long, but I have been here long enough to see that Laura Cazabon --who works for Shield Security--is someone who goes out of her way to greet (and say goodbye) to the ATPS students and staff who are leaving and getting on the busses when she arrives to her 3pm shift here at the ATPS, ESL, RACE and ACE building! Laura frequently goes out of her way to learn people's names, ask about their lives, and to offer a friendly word. In fact, I believe the ATPS students are her favorites! It is clear that she is interested in taking the time to invest in relationships, something not seen as often as we would like. I wanted to nominate Laura, because she adds to the climate and culture of the building with her outgoing and friendly nature:)

—Jenn

Katie Cloos, Work Based learning coordinator

It was my honor to nominate Katie Cloos because she checks on me at my jobsite.

—Arianna Donnelly

Kellie Conner, Para - Job Coach

Mrs Kellie is Funny And a kind Person. She was My job Coach at Jitterz. Kellie is Funny at Work And in the Classroom. She Helps me on the Cash register. She also Helped me make coffee's for Jitterz. She is the best. Thank you Mrs. Kellie for All you Do.

—Timothy MacLean

Because She is the best. She always helps me at the library when I go there to work. She lets me be independent when I put the books on the conveyor belt. She also holds my medical bag while I'm at work because it is hard for me to reach in the bin with my with it on. I also like when she goes bowling or in the community with me. Whenever I'm having a bad day, she always gives me a hug and that makes me feel good and safe.

—Catie

Kellie- you are very funny and nice to talk to.You are so friendly. You are so helpful. You always help me remember to use my adult actions when I am upset.

—Griffin Balter

I'd like to nominate Kellie, Because she helps me handle my job in a lot of ways. For example, She helps me at the register at JitterZ when I greet people and manage the money. She also helps me do other things like sorting certain stuff such as m&ms etc. When I was at Chartwells, She helped me follow the schedule. She also helped me increase my pace when I was doing certain stuff at Chartwells like filling up fruit in cups, stocking silverwares & straws, stocking condiments, etc. Kellie also helped me greet Eric at Chartwells. For example, when Eric said hi, I say hi back to him. Kellie also reminds me to say bye to him at Chartwells too. Now at JitterZ, Kellie sometimes also reminds me to wear the nametag if necessary. Sometimes she reminds me some other stuff if necessary. This is why Kellie is whom to nominate.

—Rashdan

Bridget Diener, Para Educator

Bridget has been a fantastic addition to our ATPS team! Her unwavering positivity and willingness to step in wherever needed make a meaningful impact. She consistently demonstrates incredible flexibility and patience with our students, ensuring they feel supported and valued. Bridget's dedication, enthusiasm, and teamwork create a welcoming and encouraging environment for both students and staff. She goes above and beyond to help, always approaching challenges with a can-do attitude. Her contributions have truly made a difference, and we are so grateful to have her as part of our team!

—Amy Austin

Sue DiPanni, Job Coach

Sue DiPanni is My job coach. She helps me play with the kids outside at my jobsite at Hampton. She is funny and makes me laugh. I really like working with her.

—Lindsey Kesler

**Peggy Dona, Teacher*

I would like to nominate Peggy because she cares about me. She is the only teacher who has ever cared about me enough to push me to do hard things even if I don't like it and get mad at her. She immediately notices when I'm upset or struggling and she takes time to talk to me about it. Peggy is not giving up on me even when I'm very difficult. She is such a great, funny and sweet person and she made the transition from high school to ATPS so much easier for me.

—Lorelei

she helps me to face my fears. She is the sweetest and kind and she loves coke and dancing to rock bands. She helps me to be independent in the community and the classroom and she is the best person for this award and she is fearless.

—Ava Gilleland

I like her because she is smart. Miss Peggy is also nice. Miss Peggy helps me alot in the classroom with my math, my money skills and my communication skills. Miss Peggy teaches me life skills that are important to me to find a job in the community. Miss Peggy is a sweet person who always helping our class to be better students inside the classroom and outside in the community.

—Griffin Beloungea

Peggy- you are the best teacher you are silly. You are kind. You always help me remember to try new things. You class is fun.

—Griffin Balter

Dear Ms. Peggy Thank you so much for helping me. You really mean a lot to me. You are brave, amazing, accomplished and hilarious. And "yeah, no!" it's true!

—Catie



Mrs. Peggy Dona is an excellent teacher for my son Rashdan. She is kind, friendly, understanding, and supportive. She teaches in a way that Rashdan can understand. We are both grateful for having her this past year.

—Anonymous

Diane Eckstein, Paraprofessional

I would like to nominate Diane because she is so nice. She always has my back if I am upset about something I know I can always go talk to her and see if we can find a way to make things better I am glad to have you in my school.

—Griffin Balter

Claire Gawel, Speech Therapist

I want to nominate Claire Gawel because she asks me different questions about my job site.

—Arianna Donnelly

Ava Gilleland, Student/Friend

Because she is my good friend. She makes me laugh and gives me diet coke. Ava spends time with me, and makes me feel happy. Ava always plays a game with me. She always talks to me, and we always go out Together. We always go to rochester high school Together. We always go to a restaurant Together. We always go to 2nd and charles Together. I think Ava should get the Sparkle award this year.

—Hamza Syed

Genet Haise, RCS SE Supervisor

I am deeply honored and humbled to nominate Genet Haise for the 2025 Sparkle Award. I have had the privilege of knowing Genet for over 15 years, as we were hired at the same time to fill ASD categorical classroom positions. From the very beginning, we became fast friends.

Although we didn't have the opportunity to work in the same school or program until over eight years later, we consistently brainstormed, problem-solved, and shared stories from our days with one another. I have had the joy of witnessing Genet's incredible professional growth over the years. She began as an elementary ASD categorical classroom teacher, transitioned to a high school ASD categorical classroom teacher, became an ASD Teacher Consultant, and now serves as an RCS Supervisor and the head administrator at the ATPS Schultz Campus. In each role, Genet has been a fierce advocate for the rights of students with disabilities across all grade levels. She is the person you turn to for guidance with challenging behaviors or when you want feedback on an idea. Her ability to think creatively and empower students to reach their fullest potential is truly remarkable. Genet is a treasure trove of knowledge and a lifelong learner, always striving for excellence. She is a tireless worker, a dedicated colleague, and an unwavering source of support. Personally, she has been one of my greatest heroes and supporters, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have her in my life as we continue our shared mission of serving students with disabilities. Genet's impact on the lives of countless students and families is immeasurable. Her dedication and passion for her profession inspire me to grow and do better every day. She is one of the strongest, most compassionate individuals I know, and it has been a true blessing to walk alongside her all these years. Thank you, Genet, for your unwavering love and compassion for the students, families, and colleagues you support. You

are so deserving of this recognition, and I cannot thank you enough for the countless ways you pour into the betterment of others. It is an honor to nominate you for this well-deserved award.

—Melissa Perkins

Skye Hill, RBT

Skye is an invaluable member of our classroom and ATPS team. Her knowledge, expertise and dedication make such a positive impact every day. Not only is she supportive and flexible, Skye also has a positive attitude and a calm demeanor. We are incredibly lucky to have her! I truly appreciate all that Skye does to support our students!

—Amy Austin

Sabrina Krolicki, Social Worker

She is always there for me, when I need to talk or need support. She is helping me come up with strategies to help with my emotions. She makes me feel comfortable and safe. I can trust her. She's helped me transition from Stoney Creek high school to ATPS. She is a really caring person, she makes me feel understood.

—Lorelei

Melissa Martin, Teacher

I would like to recognize Melissa and recommend for her a Sparkle Award. Melissa is not just an incredible teacher; she is a rock star in every sense of the word. As my partner teacher, Melissa has been a constant source of support, wisdom, encouragement and humor. Whenever I need advice, I know I can count on her guidance. Her partnership has been invaluable, and I am so grateful to work alongside her. Thank you for everything you do, Melissa. You make a difference every single day.

—Amy Austin

We appreciate Melissa's patience, kindness and her efforts in working through moments. Her positive outlook and general happy demeanor and smiles really help comfort us as parents but especially my son when he is having a bad moment.

We appreciate her updates and photos of his day to day, whether it's a great day or not so great day and we are worrying how things are going. Thank you

—Josephine Falzetta

Angelika Morhard, Paraeducator

Dear Ms. Angelika You always make me smile and laugh! I love making sugar scrubs with you. You are an amazing person and I'm happy to know you.

—Catie

I would like to nominate Angelika for the Sparkle Award. Angelika is a great paraprofessional. She helps me every day. She takes me to Paint A Miracle and I have made some amazing paintings with the help of Angelika.

She has even framed some of my paintings so that I could give them to my family as a gift. I



really think Angelika should get this award because she goes above and beyond each day. Thanks for all you do for us, Angelika.
—Noah

I want to nominate Mrs. Angelika for the Sparkle Award. I want to nominate her because she is funny and she helps me a lot at ATPS. She helps me have good behavior so that I can earn my blazer bucks so that I can go out in the community with Mrs. Stephanie at the end of each month. Mrs. Angelika also laughs at my jokes when i tell her them. Sometimes she says "Hamza, you are silly." Mrs. Angelika does a lot of things for our class and I really think she should get this award for all that she does.
—Hamza

Angela Petkoff, Teacher

Angie has been phenomenal in taking care of my daughter (trust she has been doing the same for other students as well), including encouraging her to speak up, taking care of her inspite of the language barriers. She also encouraged me to send in weekend photos of my daughter with the purpose of training her on language and expressions. Angie also sends in weekly plans to all parents on weekends , which is a real manifestation of her hard work and commitment. In her weekly plans, she always manages to take care different needs of the class with a good combination of work and fun activities. Angie has been showcasing a very positive and professional attitude toward her job and I as a parent can really Feel her passion love toward her students. My appreciation is beyond words.
—Marlene Ye

Karey Rinnan, Para Educator

Karey is such an asset to our classroom and school community. Even though she has only been with us since 2024, her knowledge, professionalism and patience make it seem as if she has been working in education for years! Karey consistently demonstrates a willingness to learn and embrace new strategies to support student success. Her caring and empathetic nature make a meaningful difference in the lives of those she works with. Karey’s commitment to fostering a positive learning environment and her collaborative spirit make her an invaluable colleague. Her hard work and dedication do not go unnoticed and I truly appreciate all she does for our students and team.
—Amy Austin

Brenden Ross, Psychologist

I would like to nominate Brenden Ross. He is good at his job and when I worked with him he was nice. He wasn’t in a hurry and he let me take my time when I was figuring things out. Even though I don’t see him everyday, it was nice to work with him.
—Dominic Ciaramitaro

Cayla Scharoll, Teacher

It is my privilege to nominate Cayla Scharoll, an SXI teacher at ATPS, for a Sparkle award. Cayla shows remarkable dedication and compassion towards her students. She consistently goes above and beyond to ensure that the students' needs are met, especially their safety. Her

attention to detail and ability to focus on all aspects of each student, no matter how small, ensures that each student receives the utmost care. She keeps the parents updated daily on their progress with any concerns or questions she may have. We all feel fortunate to have such a devoted and caring teacher in our classroom and our community.

—Anonymous

Pete Sexton, Paraeducator

I like to nominate Mr. Pete because he is awesome. Mr. Pete helps me when I'm in the community to fill out worksheets. He is teaching me (men) manners, like holding the door for women and that men should not pass gas in the classroom. Mr. Pete is always nice to me and funny.

—Griffin Beloungea

I would like to nominate Pete. He takes care of me when I'm at school. During break time he gives me my water. Pete brings me to the bus when school is over and he always makes me laugh by making jokes. He is just a great person and I think he should be recognized this year.

—Noah

Dear Mr. Pete I really appreciate YOU. Thanks for keeping me safe and making it fun always!

—Catie

Stephanie Smith, Teacher

i would love to nominated Stephanie Smith because she always helps me out when i'm strong and sometimes whenever I'm having trouble with my love life also makes me laugh whenever Stephanie Smith calls me Troublemaker i love you Stephanie Smith

—Grace Burtka

Because she is the best and kindest person and encourages me to be independent in her class. She is funny and she makes me laugh and she helps me to advocate for myself to go out in the community. She is the best for this award. She encourages me to be independent by walking with my friends in the community and she is amazing and encourages the students. Stephanie should win this Sparkle Award.

—Ava Gilleland

She is so nice to talk to. You are friendly, kind, funny and helpful. You are always there if I feel like talking to someone. I love talking to you in the hallway.

—Griffin Balter

It is an honor to nominate Stephanie Smith. She is an amazing teacher, she is incredible and respectfule to me and the other students. It's my last year in ATPS and I hope to keep in touch with Stephanie after I am done at ATPS. I love Stephanie and her daughter, Raya. Thank you for the Sparkle Awards Nominations, I will miss you guys. Go Trailblazers!

—Lydia Gorecki



Durham Bus Services

Leonardo (Dina) Bianchini, Bus Driver

Dena makes sure that I'm safe on the bus. She is kind enough to help me when I need support. Dena is always happy and cheerful. She is an awesome bus driver.

—Noah

Deborah Bobek, Bus Driver

Because she is nice and kind to me. Miss Debbie keeps me safe on the bus and she is fun to be with while riding to school and going home. Miss Debbie is a very thoughtful and considerate person and I look forward to going to school on Miss Debbie's bus. And i hope you will be here next year because you are the best and my favorite bus driver.

— Antonio Fisher

LaDonna Branner, Bus Driver

I would love to nominate Ladonna Branner because she offered to take me home when Mrs. Amy couldn't. I feel she is a great choice because she has a heartwarming personality. Shes also someone i really trust. One of my favorite things about her is when she makes me laugh.

— Daniel Ammon

Marcia Cushman, Bus Driver

Marcia has been a bus driver for my children for 5 years. She has always communicated any issues with me, and sometimes we were able to problem solve with simple solutions. She is very committed to all of her students, and even gets free ice cream vouchers for all of her bus drivers at the end of the year, among other fun party toys throughout the year. She is very aware of the children and goes above and beyond. She can see through a special needs lens and accommodate. I am so glad that my children had her as a bus driver, and my youngest gets her support now.

—Gina



Robert Dailey, Bus Driver

Bob is a fantastic trustworthy bus driver. Always on time and Safe bus driver.

— Prathiksha

He is so helpful, patient and very careful with our children.

—Anonymous

Lyne Gamache, Bus Driver

Lynn- you are the best bus driver. You are friendly. You always make sure I get home in time and home safe. T like going on your bus. You have a fun bus.

—Griffin Balter

Andrew Hartness, Bus Driver

Andrew, our morning Bus Driver, has been an awesome support to our family. He is warm and welcoming to our son and always caring and respectful. He always acknowledges my son and me, every morning, and I know my son is in good hands. THANK YOU!!!

—Younus

**Jean Lamberson, Bus Aide*

Mr. Gary and Miss Jean to the rescue! They are always ready to lend a helping hand, and December 18th was no different. On that bitterly cold day, after the fire alarms rang through the school, we all rushed outside—without our coats—leaving us all shivering as we tried to keep our students warm while singing and dancing in the freezing weather. Thankfully, Mr. Gary and Miss Jean, who are always the first to arrive at Meadow Brook, noticed our three ASD classrooms standing outside in the frigid weather. Without hesitation, they pulled over as soon as they saw us and immediately offered assistance. When we asked if we could come on the bus, they didn't think twice before opening the doors to provide warmth and shelter. They ensured our students were safe, comfortable, and cared for, going above and beyond to keep us all warm and secure. Mr. Gary and Miss Jean truly make a difference each and every day, showing how much they care for our student's safety and well-being.

—Megan VanderVoord, Jamie Blake and Candace Cohen

Mr. Gary and Ms. Jean have been a constant for Rylan this year! This is the first time he rides the bus to and from school and he absolutely loves it and I know it is because he has the BEST driver, Mr. Gary, and an AMAZING aide, Ms. Jean. Rylan loves to watch for them every morning and he enjoys sitting with Ms. Jean on the way to and from school. It's not easy entrusting other adults with your special needs child, but Mr. Gary and Ms. Jean have been so wonderful and helpful in Rylan's transportation needs. Rylan and I love to see their smiling faces every morning – thank YOU, Mr. Gary and Ms. Jean for all you do for your special education students, you two truly make a difference!

—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Karen Lewis, Bus Aide

I am pleased to nominate Miss Karen for her outstanding dedication as a bus support staff member. Her focus on safety ensures every child feels secure during their ride, from helping them find seats to reinforcing safety procedures. Beyond safety, Miss Karen's warmth and patience create a welcoming environment, making each trip a positive experience. Her care and attentiveness provide parents with peace of mind, knowing their children are in good hands. For her commitment and kindness, I wholeheartedly support Miss Karen's nomination—she is truly an invaluable part of our school community.

—Shruthi

Daniela Lockard, Bus Driver

Daniela has been an absolute joy to work with this year. Her calm demeanor and exceptional problem-solving skills have made a significant impact on one of our students' success. From the start, she proactively collaborated with our team to ensure that she was providing the highest level of support possible. Her patience and willingness to lend a helping hand have been

invaluable, and her dedication to our student success shines through in everything she does. We love that Daniela always wants to participate in our Meadow Brook Spirit Days too!
—Megan VanderVoord

Crystal Miller, Bus Aide

Crystal, our morning Bus Aide, has been an awesome support to our family. She is cheery and welcoming to our son and always caring and respectful. She always acknowledges my son and me, every morning, and I know my son is in good hands. I feel like I am leaving my son with family, and that feeling is priceless. Especially on days when my son is having a rough morning, she is consistently patient and understanding. THANK YOU!!!

—Younus

David Noah, Bus Driver

We've been lucky enough to have David as our bus driver going on our second year. He always comes with a smile, he's patient, kind, and his love for our boys is always apparent. He has concern for them when they aren't on the bus. He is patient with them while getting on and off the bus with all their treasures they take to and from school. He is a true pleasure and light in this world.

—Anonymous

David has been a steady, calming presence for our ASD students, consistently bringing a smile and a positive attitude to each interaction. He greets the children with enthusiasm, always creating a welcoming atmosphere. We are incredibly grateful for his patience and dedication to our students. When transitions on the bus are difficult, David remains calm and reassuring, offering gentle encouragement and reminding them that it's okay. This year, when we introduced a new schedule to guide the order in which students board the bus, David eagerly embraced it, further demonstrating his commitment to supporting our students. Over the past two years, David has become an invaluable part of our student's lives.

—Megan VanderVoord, Candace Cohen, Jamie Blake

Kurt Ozinga, Bus Driver

He has been a school bus driver for our neighborhood since 2020. He memorized all kids' names in the bus and gave kids right directions. Has kept eyes on young kids and confirmed they had a right person. He works as a guardian for our kids and make parents feel comfortable all the time.

—Yoon Family

**Daniel Rubino, Bus Driver*

As you might imagine, riding a bus to school could be a very scary experience for a 3 or 4 year old ECSE student. But that's not the case when Daniel is their driver. Daniel takes great care getting students to school safely and on time for class. But more importantly, Daniel shows such compassion for and kindness to our youngest learners. At the beginning of the school year, Daniel learned sign language to better communicate with a student. He always makes sure that

every student leaves their ride to school feeling safe, happy, and seen. We are so grateful to Daniel for starting their day in such a positive way!

— Karen Revenaugh

Diane Saad-Walters, Bus Driver

Diane Saad-Walters is the best transportation specialist RCS has on their fleet of drivers in my opinion! There is a plethora of reasons she deserves a SPARKLE AWARD and here are just a few:

1. She is the driver epitomizes “servant leadership” as she sees her profession as a privilege to transport each child
2. Her smile brightens each child’s day as she is fast to share one each morning
3. She is always on time as I hear the vroom of her bus as it drives by at 0642 each morning
4. She makes the effort to individually greet each child with a smile and a good morning keeping close eyes on any situation that might require her intervention and does not allow any bullying or the like
5. She navigates the road and each stop with such care and expertise which is truly commendable.
6. It may seem ordinary to some and, but she takes utmost attention to the details of her route and doesn’t take any part of her job for granted
7. Diane does a fantastic job carrying out her duties and responsibilities without fail.
8. My son always looked forward to her kindness and positivity for her riders each day.
9. She made him feel appreciated and valued.
10. He recently had a field trip with her and came home saying how nice she was, and he always feels safe with her at the wheel.



There are a great number of transportation specialists that just “drive the bus”, but Diane Saad-Walters stands out among all others with her professionalism, punctuality, friendliness, connection and care of the children on her route, the dog treats for the pups who love the sound of the bus and anxiously sit to receive the treat she has for them. The respect and kindness she so freely gives to each parent whose greatest treasure is being released into her care is so comforting. The coolest thing is she does as that because that’s who Diane is, and she doesn’t take that trust for granted. I submit Diane Saad-Walters for this award as she truly sparkles in all she does and is so very deserving!

God Bless you Diane in all you do!

—Heather MacKenzie

Kristin Schwark, Bus Driver

Dear Ms. Kristen Thank you for riding me on the funshine bus around the world LOL. You help me start and finish my day in a great way, thank you!

—Catie

**Gary Schwartz, Bus Driver*

Mr. Gary and Miss Jean to the rescue! They are always ready to lend a helping hand, and December 18th was no different. On that bitterly cold day, after the fire alarms rang through

the school, we all rushed outside—without our coats—leaving us all shivering as we tried to keep our students warm while singing and dancing in the freezing weather. Thankfully, Mr. Gary and Miss Jean, who are always the first to arrive at Meadow Brook, noticed our three ASD classrooms standing outside in the frigid weather. Without hesitation, they pulled over as soon as they saw us and immediately offered assistance. When we asked if we could come on the bus, they didn't think twice before opening the doors to provide warmth and shelter. They ensured our students were safe, comfortable, and cared for, going above and beyond to keep us all warm and secure. Mr. Gary and Miss Jean truly make a difference each and every day, showing how much they care for our student's safety and well-being.

—Megan VanderVoord, Jamie Blake and Candace Cohen

Mr. Gary and Ms. Jean have been a constant for Rylan this year! This is the first time he rides the bus to and from school and he absolutely loves it and I know it is because he has the BEST driver, Mr. Gary, and an AMAZING aide, Ms. Jean. Rylan loves to watch for them every morning and he enjoys sitting with Ms. Jean on the way to and from school. It's not easy entrusting other adults with your special needs child, but Mr. Gary and Ms. Jean have been so wonderful and helpful in Rylan's transportation needs. Rylan and I love to see their smiling faces every morning – thank YOU, Mr. Gary and Ms. Jean for all you do for your special education students, you two truly make a difference!

—Meghan Madigan Wagner

Jarith Walker, Bus Driver

Mr. Jarith drives for our ECSE students at North Hill Elementary and makes their ride so fun. He has made an impact on the lives of our littles ones and they look forward to riding on his bus daily. One student sees his bus pulling up and refers to him as "her Jarith" is here, as she cheers and screams in excitement. Another student completed his all about me project for school and when he grows up, he wants to be "a bus driver like Mr. Jarith". The students are all smiles as they see him pull up and he surely has a special place in their little hearts here in ECSE! Mr. Jarith sings songs with the kids on the bus and has captured their hearts and made the bus a safe and special place for them.

—Natalie Johnston

Therapy Animals

Finnigan Bednard, Therapy Dog, Rochester High

I would like to nominate Finnigan Bednard for the Sparkle Award! Finnigan is the best dog ever! He always lets me pet him and play with him, which makes me so happy. When I am with him, I feel calm and relaxed. Finnigan is so adorable with his fluffy fur and wagging tail. I love how he plays and always seems to know when I need a friend. He makes every day brighter just by being himself! Please give Finnigan the Sparkle Award because he truly deserves it! He is my favorite dog, and I am so grateful to have him in my life.

—Michael Krolicki



Bailey Zanchetta, Therapy Dog, West Middle

Bailey the Therapy dog comes to West with Mrs Zanchetta on Fridays and his presence has created such a sweet motivation for my son Andrew. He works so hard everyday to earn the reward of getting to see Bailey on Fridays. Andrew has had previously challenging experiences with dogs, even with therapy dogs, but Bailey has a special place in Andrew's heart. He asks



about Bailey and it is something that he really looks forward to. Bailey dog should be recognized for all the dependable joy he brings to Fridays at West. And his mom for her hard work to help Bailey too!
— Kathleen Dobrovic