In this issue:

**OUR PUBLIC EDUCATION, OUR GREATEST INVESTMENT**

**AMPLIFYING THE FUTURE**

**A STRONG COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**

Public Education is the catalyst for innovation and community advancement. It is the common thread from which our children grow into the leaders who will shape the future of our world.
From the Publisher

Dear St. Vrain Valley Community,

Welcome to ST. VRAINNOVATION, a publication celebrating the impact of education in our community. Public education plays one of the most significant roles in the advancement of our nation. To ensure the success of our children, economy, and our future, it is essential that we prepare students to meet the challenges they will face.

Please join us in celebrating the incredible achievements of our students, staff, and community. Together, we are advancing our children, our economy, our national security, and our future.

Sincerely,

Don Haddad, Ed.D.
Superintendent
@SVVSDSupt

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Table of Contents

1 Public Education, Our Greatest Investment
A high-quality public education system is a catalyst to a stronger future.

5 Education is Life Itself
It is through our public schools that the next chapter is being written and the future begins to unfold.

7 Sparking Those ‘Aha’ Moments
The key to sparking students’ ‘aha’ moments is ensuring all have access to a variety of extraordinary opportunities.

9 A Strong Competitive Advantage
The lessons in perseverance, sportsmanship, teamwork, and competitiveness drive our students to excel in sports and beyond.

13 Painting Our Path
The arts have a significant impact on students’ lives and learning.
The next generation of media makers are getting their start and finding their voice in our public schools.

ST. VRAINNOVATION and other district initiatives are generously supported by these and many other community sponsors.

Amplifying the Future

Safe & Sound
Bond and Finance Update

Class Acts
Our schools are full of outstanding educators.
Let’s meet four of St. Vrain’s finest...

Engineering Healthier Communities
Students use their passions for STEM to make advancements in the health and science fields.

The Pathway to Career Readiness
Transitioning foundational skills into real-world application

Homegrown Brilliance
These five people are doing amazing things with their lives, and they have one thing in common: they are all products of St. Vrain Valley Schools.

All In
St. Vrain is giving every student the opportunity to succeed.

How Might We...
How might we leverage innovative technologies to better serve our students with diverse learning needs?

Building Readers for Life
St. Vrain is leading the way to support reading in the early grades.

How Might We...

Safe & Sound
The safety and well-being of our students is paramount.

Make a Difference. Join the #StVrainStorm

Bond and Finance Update
In the 20 years that I have been a part of St. Vrain Valley Schools, I have seen the world completely transform at a rapid pace. From my first year as a Principal at Niwot High School, watching 9/11 unfold alongside our students and staff, to assuming the superintendency at the start of the 2008 recession, to managing significant disruption during the 100-year flood in 2013, and now leading a public education system in a global pandemic, our system has been faced with many Rubicon moments, and together, we have bravely crossed over those challenges and emerged stronger.

Education today is incredibly complex for our children and society, and much more significant than anything we have ever experienced. Today’s high school students were coming into the world at the same time Apple introduced the iPhone, Facebook and Twitter launched, Hadoop opened the world’s largest open-source software platforms, Amazon launched the Kindle which could hold a library of books on a single device, and Github opened and gave everyone access to one of the world’s largest repositories of software development. The power and speed of microchips doubled every 18 months, and with IBM’s launch of Watson, artificial intelligence signaled a new era of infinite possibilities.

Public Education, Our Greatest Investment

BY DON HADDAD, ED.D., SUPERINTENDENT
PHOTOS BY AARON FORD AND KERRI MCDERMID
“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.”

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Around that same time, 13 years ago when I assumed the superintendency, our district also began a process of critical change. As the world around us was moving at an incredible pace, our leadership team – together with our teachers and staff, students, families, and community – took stock of our purpose to determine whether we were on the right trajectory to ensure the advancement of our students, community and society. Our community recognized that we needed to ensure that our system was not only providing students with a high-quality, rigorous education, but that it was effectively preparing students to compete on a global scale for jobs that didn’t yet exist.

Toward this end, we began a process of momentous transformation bolstered by significant support from our community. Since 2008, through the passage of two bond measures and two mill levy overrides, our community has invested $976,744,501 in our schools, and today, we are beginning to recognize significant returns on our greatest investment – advancing the future of our children, nation, and world.

A high-quality public education system is a catalyst for powerful economic development that attracts industry and jobs to our area. The quality of a neighborhood school has an enormous influence on property values, and is one of the most important factors in a home buyer’s decision regarding where to purchase a home. Our local median home sale price in 2021 is $530,000, an increase of almost 50 percent over the past five years.

High-quality public schools also have other significant economic and social impacts. Over the course of a lifetime, a high school graduate earns $331,000 more than a student without a high school diploma, and $754,000 more if they have an associate degree. If Colorado had reduced its dropout rate by 50 percent last year, the long term benefit for those students would have been over $1.4 billion in increased earnings and economic gains.

As the quality of a community’s public education system increases, their productivity, income, social stability, and economic development also rise, while crime rates, healthcare dependence, and public service costs decrease. For every $1 invested in early childhood programs, taxpayers see an average return of $13 through increased workforce productivity and reduced future costs of crime and government assistance, and for every high school graduate, the net economic benefit to the public is $127,000. Accordingly, in the past four years, the 8,654 students who have graduated from a St. Vrain high school will contribute $11 billion back to the economy.

Our transformational shift over the past 13 years has been focused on maximizing the returns on our community’s investments into our schools, while also giving our students a strong competitive advantage for future success. To achieve the greatest impact, we instituted a number of strategies as we looked forward to long term gains. We aligned the curriculum, instruction, assessment, and technology across our system to capitalize on economies of scale, while also fostering more effective and higher-quality learning.
environments for our students in accordance with Colorado’s Academic Standards. We added high-quality preschool and full-day kindergarten to every school community. We redefined our view of rigor and high-quality opportunities for all students by adding a full slate of Advanced Placement (AP) classes at every high school, strengthened our International Baccalaureate Programme, and introduced honors courses, Algebra and Geometry at the middle school level.

In 2010, St. Vrain Valley Schools was awarded a $3.6 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant with the top score in the nation, scoring higher than Harvard and other nationally recognized institutions, and in 2012, St. Vrain was selected as one of only 16 school districts in the United States to receive the highly-prestigious $16.6 million Race-to-the-Top grant. We invested this $20.2 million into transforming the Skyline Feeder and launching our build-out of STEM programming and a portfolio of 70 instructional focus programs across the district, including academies in aerospace and engineering, biomedical sciences, business, energy, medical and biosciences, leadership, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and visual and performing arts.

These investments also led to the opening of our Innovation Center, first as a 6,000 square foot garage serving students in the Skyline Feeder, to the 2018 opening of our new 50,000 square foot cutting-edge facility that provides thousands of students across the district with the opportunity to engage in real-world learning and work experiences in some of our economy’s fastest growing industries including aerospace, computer science, artificial intelligence, robotics, design, cybersecurity, and entrepreneurship.

The Class of 2021 was beginning kindergarten at the start of this time of extensive growth and transformation. They are the first cohort of students to go through their entire educational journey benefiting from these strategic investments, and we are seeing strong returns on advancing success for all.

As we have increased rigor, we have seen significant gains in student achievement. Over the past ten years, St. Vrain’s overall on-time graduation rate has increased 14 percent while the on-time Hispanic graduation rate has increased 31 percent. Fifth grade reading and math achievement continues to increase, outpacing the state, with even larger gains in our Hispanic student population. St. Vrain Valley Schools was one of four Colorado school districts, and one of 373 nationwide out of approximately 14,000 school districts, to make the College Board’s Annual Advanced Placement (AP) District Honor Roll for increasing access to AP courses for all students, and in the past five years, our number of AP exams taken has increased 62 percent with scores also increasing greatly. We have also experienced a 201 percent increase in the number of concurrent enrollment college classes taken by our students in the past seven years, and added new opportunities for students to receive college credit through our CU Succeed programs. Accordingly, the Class of 2021 had the opportunity to start their postsecondary education with approximately 32,000 college credits on their transcripts, potentially saving their families over $8.1 million in tuition costs.

We have built over 100 industry and corporate partnerships that provide resources, knowledge, and learning opportunities for students, teachers, and staff. This has been pivotal to the successful launch of our three P-TECH programs in computer information systems, biochemistry, and cybersecurity. P-TECH, or Pathways Through Technology Early College High School, brings together the best elements of high school, college and the professional world, allowing students to earn a high school diploma as well an associate degree at no cost to the student. St. Vrain was the first school district west of the Mississippi to open a P-TECH school in 2016 at Skyline High School which was recently featured in the book Break Barriers by Stan Litow, former Vice President of Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs at IBM, and current Innovator in Residence at Duke University.

St. Vrain Valley Schools has also become a destination district and sought-after community, contributing to the large amount of growth and economic development in our region. Student enrollment has grown 24 percent from approximately 25,000 students in 2008 to 32,000 in 2021, while enrollment in private schools has decreased over 50 percent since 2008. Over the past 10 years, the number of students from outside districts opting into St. Vrain Valley Schools has increased 112 percent, for a net increase of approximately $2.7 million. The full build-out plan for St. Vrain Valley Schools includes 76,550 students, and since 2008, 18,268 new housing units have been added in our geographic footprint.

As the largest employer in the region with over 5,000 employees, St. Vrain has created almost 1,000 new full-time jobs in the past 13 years, while also greatly increasing teacher and staff pay and benefits.

“Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.”

JOHN F. KENNEDY
We have also opened 12 new schools, completed large expansions on 17 additional schools, and added 1,342,634 square feet of learning space across all of our communities, alongside other essential upgrades to our facilities.

Over the past two decades, we have also significantly restructured our finances and the manner in which we invest our resources. By strategically aligning our budget to our values and operating from a conservative and targeted approach to resource investment, St. Vrain Valley Schools went from bankruptcy to one of the strongest financial positions of any school district in the state and nation. Over the past several years the district’s bond rating has increased to AA+ and refinancing of the 2016 bond saved taxpayers approximately $30 million. Additionally, in the past four years, we have been awarded almost $24 million in grant dollars, furthering advancement opportunities for our teachers, students, and staff.

The well known Chinese proverb, “the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, the next best time is now,” speaks to the significance of intent and time to advance positive outcomes that enhance and advance our world. When we choose to plant a seed, we are looking to the future with hopeful optimism that our efforts will provide a future benefit that will improve our lives. We invest in the things that matter to us, but also in what we believe will provide the strongest returns.

Public education is America’s most significant investment and second only to parenting – is the greatest contributor to the future of our world. The quality of our schools impacts and strengthens our economy, public health and safety, national security, the quality of our service industry, residential and business property values, public health, our democracy, and so much more. While the full return on investment and its benefits are often not seen until decades in the future, we will continue to invest our resources to advance the future of not only today’s generation but also tomorrow’s.

As we look to the future and prepare for our next Rubicon moment, I know that our system will be well positioned to meet the demands of any challenge, and continue to advance academic excellence by design.

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“Education is Life Itself”

BY KERRI MCDERMID

The moment we are born into the world, our story begins. Our blank pages fill as we experience the world, learn, explore, and create memories with every action. The power of the human brain is humanity’s greatest asset, with a capacity so vast and limitless that at birth, it contains as many neurons as stars in the Milky Way.

It is within our minds and memories that we shape ourselves and the future direction of our society. We develop empathy and compassion, build on past knowledge, and foster the indomitable human spirit for innovation and advancement.

As we learn and grow, each new chapter of our story takes shape, driven by our continued learning and access to new opportunities. To this end, our public schools have one of the greatest impacts on the growth and advancement of the human experience. Over 90 percent of all children in the U.S., ages kindergarten through twelfth grade, attend a public school. Outside of parenting, the quality of our public education system has the greatest impact on our future. It is in our classrooms that students not only gain a strong academic foundation and workforce readiness skills, but they come of age through the myriad of experiences and opportunities available to them. In our hallways – and on our stages, courts, and fields – students learn and practice intellectual curiosity, cooperation, perseverance, trust, friendship, adversity, love, and joy.

WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE?

In March 2020, the week before we were required to close our schools to in-person learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Vrain Valley Schools hosted a series of focus groups to engage our families, students, teachers, staff, and other community members in the question, ‘What is the purpose of public education?’ Through these conversations, many clear priorities and values for our system came forward.

- We believe that students are not a statistic or a test score, but their full potential should be recognized and passions cultivated.
- Schools are a place where students can discover who they are and what they value in a safe environment that encourages movement beyond their comfort zone.
- St. Vrain Valley Schools provides access to new resources and opportunities, and engages students in conversations that foster advanced thinking and discovery.
- Our schools serve as much more than a place to learn academic content, they are pivotal in supporting student well-being, including counseling and health services, access to food and other basic needs, and so much more.
In reflecting on the roles of school in society, the late American philosopher, John Dewey, shared that, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” The power of our learning is so intertwined with who we are, that to understand its value is to acknowledge and measure the whole of human achievement. Through the minds of public school graduates, we’ve walked on the moon, cured diseases, invented vaccines, and almost eradicated extreme poverty.

Because of public school graduates, approximately 90 percent of the world’s population has a device in their pocket more powerful than the super computers of the late 20th century. From those devices, anyone in the world has access to resources of information exponentially greater than any library or prior repository of knowledge, and with the touch of a button we can engage in a face-to-face conversation with a loved one on the other side of the world.

In this time of significant global challenge, St. Vrain students engaged in advanced biomedical research, designed the hospital room of the future, raised and reintroduced an endangered fish species, won numerous state athletic championships, learned new languages, created incredible music and art, demonstrated community engagement and leadership, engineered innovations in artificial intelligence, demonstrated patience and grace, found new ways to communicate and connect, and most importantly, they learned to keep moving forward.

“Education is life itself.” It is through our public schools that the next chapter is being written and the future begins to unfold and take hold – a future brighter than all of the stars in the Milky Way.
LEARNING THROUGH EXPLORATION

At Frederick High School, the Biomedical Science Academy offers a new virtual reality partnership program with Colorado State University (CSU) that has students wearing VR goggles to learn and study anatomy, working with CSU undergraduate students, and exploring real imaging of the human body to diagnose the medical issues they are seeing.

“The VR experience was the first time in a long time that I had a deep-seated spark and childlike excitement for something that was new. The medium was so correct for what we were learning about – it was easy to get engrossed in the subject,” shares Levi Friss, a senior at Frederick High who wants to pursue a career in veterinary medicine with a focus on wildlife.

“The VR experience was the first time in a long time that I had a deep-seated spark and childlike excitement for something that was new. The medium was so correct for what we were learning about – it was easy to get engrossed in the subject,” shares Levi Friss, a senior at Frederick High who wants to pursue a career in veterinary medicine with a focus on wildlife.

“Breaking down the differences between the cranial nerve and spinal nerve and how that impacts the body is one small piece to piquing students’ interest. The more they learn, the more clarity they gain with what they might like to pursue after high school.

For fellow senior, Tanya Alvarado, her favorite aspect of the program was working with the CSU mentors. Ahead of the first class, Tanya felt nervous that the undergraduate students were a few years older and would have more experience. But, she quickly felt at ease working with her mentors and realized that this is a path she can, and will pursue. “I always thought I wanted to pursue a career in medicine and this experience really solidified that for me. The partnership gave me a sense of what future college classes would look like – especially because this is a college class,” shares Tanya.

MAKING REAL-WORLD CONNECTIONS

In St. Vrain, students make connections between what they are learning in class and the career opportunities that exist. Over the course of two years, students at Lyons Middle Senior High and the Innovation Center of St. Vrain Valley Schools have engaged in a nationally recognized conservation partnership project to raise and release the Colorado native, endangered northern redbelly dace minnow into
the local ecosystem. Through the experience, students work directly with local leaders in conservation efforts including the Ocean First Institute, Boulder County Parks and Open Space, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, and the Denver Zoo.

Niwot sophomore, Taryn McDermid, joined the project because it combined her passions for the environment and robotics. “This project really matters to me because of how important these fish are to our community and to ensuring a healthy environment.” Taryn and her peers are raising fish with the ultimate goal to reintroduce them into the St. Vrain River.

Post-reintroduction, students will continue to study the success of the project by monitoring the fish with underwater robotics and conducting tests on water quality through various means, such as eDNA testing.

The project brought with it many challenges, which has fostered resiliency and adaptability in the students. The team had to work around COVID-19 related restrictions and delays. The first batch of fish raised was intended to be released at Webster Pond in unincorporated Boulder County, but post-flood restoration work to the pond was delayed and the group found a different location in Lyons for the first release in September 2020.

On a sunny day in August 2021, community members were finally able to celebrate the release of the dace into Webster Pond. “After beginning this project at the start of the pandemic, we have worked tirelessly to create an environment for these fish to not only survive, but thrive at our school,” reflects Lyons senior Cassidy Batts. “The fish lost their environment just like we did in the 2013 flood. We faced COVID obstacles while raising them, but persevered because the conservation of this native species matters.”

**PLANNING FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND**

Planning for future success requires starting during the early years and building on students’ unique abilities. At Timberline PK-8, school leadership recently developed a pathway for students to successfully enroll in the Seal of Biliteracy program once they enter high school. The Seal of Biliteracy recognizes students who have studied and attained proficiency or higher in English and at least one other language, providing students with a competitive advantage in the employment market as well as increased opportunities for higher education.

Timberline PK-8 has always offered a biliteracy program for students in kindergarten through third grade, and Spanish as an elective for students in sixth through eighth grade. Realizing there was a break in their Spanish offerings when there was a high interest in continuing the coursework, the team developed the Pathway to the Seal of Biliteracy program, where Timberline now offers Spanish as an additional specials class, like music or gym, for students in fourth and fifth grade.

“We look at the advantages that Timberline already has here. We are lucky that we have a lot of bilingual students that can be a part of supporting a pathways program,” shares Literacy Teacher Dianne Portilla. “Being bilingual is an asset. Now we can extend the opportunity to families who do not have two languages at home.”

For students with a strong foundation in Spanish, the Pathway to the Seal of Biliteracy focuses on connecting language, vocabulary, and grammar across learning environments to develop stronger academic language. For students in the developing and advanced stages of learning Spanish, the program focuses on connecting learning environments and language learning with authentic texts, vocabulary development, and writing.

Fourth Grade Teacher Ruth Hanna explains that the students who take language classes in elementary and middle school have their interests piqued to either continue to study that same language in high school, or choose to pursue a new language. “They are ready for the very rigorous Seal of Biliteracy program when they enter high school.”

One of the many ways Hanna and Portilla build a bridge between English and Spanish is through their focus on the use of cognates, or words with similar sounds and meanings, to encourage students to master academic vocabulary, which leads to true biliteracy and opens new doors for students in career options and community building.

The students also see their growing translanguaging abilities as an asset. “Being able to speak two languages helps me understand people and think in different ways,” shared fourth grader, Juno Flores. “It helps me have a better mindset.”

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**By the Numbers**

**EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITIES**

$8.1 million in potential college tuition savings from college credits earned by the Class of 2021

84 Career and Technical Education course offerings

70+ high-quality instructional focus programs

92 Seal of Biliteracy Graduates in the Class of 2021
A STRONG COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

BY TREY HILL
PHOTOS BY CARRIE ADAMS, AARON FORD, AND MATTHEW WIGGINS

There are few athletic accomplishments that carry the prestige of being an Olympian. The time we spend watching these athletes perform is often brief. Whether it’s the ten seconds it takes to sprint the 100 meters, or the grueling two days and ten events of the decathlon, what the audience sees pales in comparison to the thousands of hours of work these athletes put in behind the scenes in the four (or five) year build up to the games themselves.

Photo: Olympian Elise Cranny is honored at Niwot High School’s 2021 Homecoming game.
St. Vrain Valley Schools can proudly boast not one, but two 2020 Olympians in Stanford graduates Valarie Allman and Elise Cranny. Cranny, a Niwot High School alum, qualified for the 2020 Tokyo Games after winning the 5,000 meters at the U.S. Olympic Trials. She placed 13th in the final of that event in Tokyo. Sandy Cranny, Elise’s mother, said, “taking AP classes, being a part of a good athletics program, having good mentors, and learning to balance school and athletics” helped prepare Elise for postsecondary academics and athletics. Sandy said that the challenging courses led to more discipline and organization, and that the course load was enough to build habits that carried into college. “If you have a passion for both, you can do it. There is no reason you can’t combine sports and academics, and it is better to be balanced. Never sell yourself short,” Sandy remarked.

Allman, a Silver Creek High School graduate, won gold in women’s discus at this summer’s Olympic games, breaking an American record with her 71.16m throw in the process. She is only the third American woman to win gold at the Olympics in discus. Allman also holds the Colorado state high school record in the event, a record she broke in 2013 while still at Silver Creek. In an August interview with a local news station, Allman said, “I had never felt the weight of the pressure and the weight of expectation like I had in those days leading up to it. Now, looking back, it honestly kind of feels like a dream. You know, so much work went into preparing for that moment.”
The lessons in perseverance, sportsmanship, teamwork, and competitiveness drive St. Vrain Valley Schools students to excel in sports and beyond.

These two outstanding competitors are keeping the district’s longstanding tradition of Olympic success going. In fact, the only person to win a gold medal in different events at both the summer and winter Olympics, Eddie Eagan, attended Longmont High School. Eagan won gold in boxing at the 1920 Summer Olympics in Antwerp, competing in the light-heavyweight division. Eagan completed his remarkable achievement 12 years later at the 1932 Lake Placid Olympics, winning gold as part of a four man bobsled team.

Eagan is just one of a number of Longmont High School alums that have garnered attention on the national stage for their athletic accomplishments. Greg Biekert, a Longs Peak Middle and Longmont High School alum, played ten seasons as a linebacker in the NFL for the Oakland and Los Angeles Raiders, and the Minnesota Vikings. Another Longmont High graduate, David Pauley, pitched for the Boston Red Sox, Seattle Mariners, Detroit Tigers, Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, and Toronto Blue Jays across parts of six MLB seasons from 2006 to 2012. Longtime award winning ESPN reporter Ed Werder has contributed to SportsCenter, Sunday NFL Countdown, Monday Night Countdown, and NFL Live during his career. He graduated from Longmont High in 1978.

Longmont High can now count an NBA draft pick among its already robust collection of sports professionals. Justinian Jessup was drafted 51st overall by the Golden State Warriors in the 2020 NBA Draft, and has been playing professionally for the Illawarra Hawks in Australia’s NBL while awaiting his call up to the Warriors.


Lyons Middle Senior High School has also seen its fair share of athletes shine on the national stage. Leister Bowling won three state championships competing in wrestling for Lyons, finishing his high school career with a record of 154-2. He then competed for Dana College, being named an NAIA All American three times and finishing as the NAIA runner up once. Bowling now coaches wrestling and has worked with a number of professional mixed martial artists, including former UFC bantamweight champion TJ Dillashaw.

Paul Roberts was a Division II All American at Colorado State University Pueblo before capping off a stellar collegiate career at the University of Wyoming, where he was a Cross Country All American and the Mountain West Cross Country Athlete of the Year. His older sister, Miriam Roberts had an outstanding career at Colorado State University Pueblo as well, garnering DII All American honors.

St. Vrain Valley Schools alumni have excelled outside the realm of traditional athletics, too. Trent Nitta, a 2021 graduate of St. Vrain Virtual High School, has competed for the U.S. National paintballing team and is playing semi-professionally for the New England Hurricanes. Nitta gave advice to younger players in an online interview, saying, “It is also important to surround yourself with a support system. I have been lucky to have the support of so many people – family, people I met in the sport and now call close friends, pro players, coaches, and scouts. Having these relationships is priceless.”

This trend of St. Vrain Valley Schools alumni shining in less traditional sports continues with Lyons Middle Senior High alum Katie Fankhouser, a freestyle kayaker who has represented the USA in under-18 competitions. After becoming the national junior freestyle white water kayaking champion, she placed third at the 2019 World Championships in Spain.

Trevor Smith, a Niwot High School alum now studying mechanical engineering at University of Colorado Boulder, placed third in the U.S. Paraclimbing team in 2018, qualifying for World Championships. He then won a silver medal at the 2018 IFSC Paraclimbing World Championships in Innsbruck, Austria.

These St. Vrain Valley Schools alumni and many more serve as inspiration for the current crop of superb students representing the district with academic and athletic excellence. The lessons in perseverance, sportsmanship, teamwork, and competitiveness drive St. Vrain Valley Schools students to excel in sports and beyond.

Lyons Middle Senior High Principal Andrea Smith said, “In St. Vrain, we value student engagement and participation in athletics as a part of overall academic achievement. Students who are engaged in athletics and activities learn invaluable skills around time management, organization, and commitment to excellence. By valuing student engagement and participation, we have created opportunities for our students to excel both inside and outside the classroom and have shown that we are a system that truly supports these students in taking on these amazing opportunities.”

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### By the Numbers

**St. Vrain students have won 21 team state championships over the last five years.**

**St. Vrain offers 21 different boys, girls, and Unified sport offerings.**

**St. Vrain high school students are sanctioned to compete in 1,754 athletic events each year.**
WITH OUR IMAGINATION, we are able to use a piece of clay, or a piece of paper and some paint, to create something amazing. Visual arts have been used to capture and express a wide range of ideas embraced by others and can educate, persuade, and problem solve. They teach students about perspective, color, and layout. “Students can do more critical thinking because they’re making choices, they’re the ones in the driver seat – they are creating, problem finding, and then problem solving,” shared Tambrie Valdez, Art Teacher at Centennial Elementary School.

At Centennial Elementary School, Valdez uses Choice Based Art. “There are different centers set up in the classroom: drawing, collage, clay, or painting. I give them a demonstration at the beginning of class, then they choose their work center for the day. It brings me joy when I see my students enjoying art because they are learning how to express what is inside of them.”

Just like many of the other specials, the art room is a place where students can come in and be allowed to be themselves. “Teaching students in grades K-5, I get to see them develop their skills as they go through my class – I see their creativity. Their preferences might be one thing when they first start, and as they get older, I watch them develop those preferences and skills,” said Valdez. Art is important for student’s programming, it brings them joy and a natural process of critical thinking.

Research shows that when students participate in the arts, it can improve their academic and socioeconomic status, providing them with opportunities to learn critical thinking skills, building capacity for expression, and developing the skills they need to become successful in the 21st century. It is important for students to have a creative outlet while in school. “Creativity is so important in all aspects of life. In order to enter any job, you need to have the ability to be creative and school is a place to foster creativity,” shared Elizabeth Nicholson, Art Teacher at Westview Middle School.

For Nicholson, she knows first hand what it meant to have an art class available in school, “I knew I needed art when I was in school, it was the one class period where I was able to unwind and feel myself.” Art is a great way for students to do something they really enjoy while expressing their feelings.

Below: Centennial Elementary kindergarteners, Jordan Stewart and Victoria Ribovich, express themselves creatively through painting.
One of the best parts about being an art teacher for Nicholson, “is seeing the ideas students come up with and watching them produce their final product. I love walking around my room and seeing how different each project is based on my students interests and backgrounds. Middle school students have fantastic ideas that come out in their pieces.”

Students learn what their strengths and weaknesses are and how to develop them. “One of the greatest things about our program is that we get to watch students grow – by the time they’re seniors, they are so much more confident, not only about their work but about themselves,” said Jennifer McClees, Visual Arts Teacher at Skyline High School.

The arts have a very positive impact on students’ lives and learning in different ways. “The arts have allowed me to share my ideas, thoughts, and feelings in a unique and special way,” shared Kinsey Kaczmarek, senior at Skyline High School.

For McLees, it’s a joy “seeing students blossom through their study of the arts by becoming more creative problem solvers, comfortable in taking risks, and generally finding an appreciation for mindful moments that help to create a balance in life. For those who are members of our Visual Performing Arts (VPA) program, I see students finding comfort and support within a like-minded community and also rising to the challenge of leadership within this community.”

“Visual Arts is unique compared to other programs in the district, students have the opportunity to work with different tools – we revamped our program with the focus to target our student’s interests more. We learned students had interest in jewelry and metals, so we made sure to add that choice for them,” said Amanda Giulini, STEM and VPA Coordinator at Skyline High School. “Teachers are constantly working together to propose new art classes to keep that student interest alive.”

Through the lens of the state’s standards, Skyline’s Visual Arts Department focuses student learning on developing the 8 Studio Habits of Mind that an artist would naturally develop on their own and in other community settings. “Many of the skills in developing these habits (Developing Craft, Envision, Expressing, Stretching and Exploring, Observing, Engaging and Persisting, Understanding Art Words, and Reflection) can easily be applied outside of the art making practices, and more specifically to the workforce,” shared McLees. “Learning to envision, for example, relates to developing one’s ability to come up with creative solutions (beyond the first thing that comes to mind) and can be applied to any sort of problem solving.”

In art making, students learn attention to detail through closely observing the world around them and how they respond to it, “this relates to things one might pay closer attention to in making or interpreting a piece of artwork or pulling in what one observes in life into their work,” shared McLees. “The practice of reflecting on one’s work is a set of skills that can be applied to any learning situation, whether it be in the workforce or general life experience.”

“Some students choose to take one class, while for others, art is what they really want to pursue with their lives. Teachers balance that and are able to use those high achieving students to motivate others – that is why it’s important that we have many options available for them, so they can have the opportunity to explore the many different forms of art – we want all students to benefit from the program,” shared Giulini.

For Skyline High School senior, Grace Bush, the arts “helped me throughout my time in high school by introducing me to the specific path I want to take later in life. Thanks to the incredibly supportive teachers and diverse art classes, I’ve found a major and minor for college I really feel reflects me and what I want to do with my life.”

Students are encouraged to enter contests and competitions, participate in special shows, attend digital and live workshops, interact with practicing artists and attend special off-campus opportunities, and field trips. At Westview Middle School, students have the opportunity to explore anything from Art, Ceramics, iPad Art, Digital Photography, and Graphic Art. “We have an Environmental Art STEM class that combines art and science,” shared Nicholson. “That’s the great thing about middle school is they have many opportunities to try different mediums, they are able to express themselves through visuals instead of talking.”

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ST. VRAIN VALLEY SCHOOLS
On a cold January morning in 2012, Jose Quiroz Yanez was apprehensive as he entered his third grade classroom in Longmont for the first time. Just a few weeks prior, Jose had immigrated to the U.S. from Guanajuato Mexico, with the dream of someday having the opportunity to attend college.

“It felt daunting to start school without knowing anybody, and in a completely new country and environment,” shared Jose.

Little did he know, those first few steps down the hallway of Spangler Elementary School would eventually lead him all the way to one of the world’s most prestigious universities.

SUCCESS FOR EVERY STUDENT

Jose’s academic journey began the same as many students across the world – first day butterflies and unease as he navigated an unfamiliar space with unknown faces. But for Jose and many other students, those new-kid nerves are magnified when the classroom posters and teacher’s lessons are in a language they do not understand.

“I got here and I just envisioned myself walking into a classroom full of people who didn’t know how to speak any Spanish,” shared Jose. “I thought I was going to be alone.”

Everything changed the day that Jose’s teacher called on him to read in front of the class.

“My teacher handed me a book and asked me to read a few pages to the whole class out loud. I was shocked that she asked me because I didn’t know how to speak English or the correct pronunciation, but she insisted that I could do it,” shared Jose. “I stood in front of the class and tried to read from the book as best as I could. When I was done reading, I was nervous that they were going to think ‘he doesn’t know how to do it,’ but my classmates and teacher all clapped for me and cheered me on. That really encouraged me to continue to learn the language and to not give up, to see that it was possible and I was not alone.”

Through the support of his teacher and classmates, Jose went on to become one of the top readers in his class and demonstrated full English proficiency by fifth grade.
EXCELLENCE BY DESIGN

Jose’s story exemplifies the power of public education to change lives through opportunity, access, and community. Every child has unique strengths, challenges, and experiences that they bring with them into the learning environment. For some, it is learning English while experiencing significant life changes. For others, it may be neurodiversity or a special learning ability. A school community represents the spectrum of differences and identities in our society – race, ethnicity, language, religion, ability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or economic status. Success is achieved when all students have access to the resources and opportunities that will advance their future in our globalized, competitive world.

“There is definitely help out there and I’ve seen that throughout all my years in St. Vrain,” added Jose. “If you set your mind to something, there is nothing that you can’t do.”

St. Vrain Valley Schools has long prioritized resource investment in programs, environments, and people that would provide the highest quality education for all students. Some of the most important factors impacting student achievement are access to high-quality early childhood educational experiences, a strong and diverse teaching staff, and the implementation of rigorous focus programs and engaging co-curricular activities that create a sense of belonging and community.

For more than a decade, St. Vrain has offered high-quality preschool programs and full-day kindergarten in every school community. Research has shown that robust early childhood education programs are pivotal to giving students a strong foundation for academic growth, and full-day kindergarten programs substantially improve reading and mathematics achievement – determinants of long-term academic success.

Second only to a student’s family, teachers have one of the greatest impacts on a child’s educational outcomes and experience in school. St. Vrain has a nationally-recognized professional development program, focused on continuing to build teacher capacity to support outstanding instructional practices, while also recognizing and supporting the needs of a diverse student community. Additionally, to strengthen and expand the teaching workforce by recruiting future teachers within the community, St. Vrain launched a Pathways to Teaching (P-TEACH) program that gives high school students a head-start on their career as an educator through concurrent enrollment credit at the University of Colorado Denver, and unique experiential learning and mentorship opportunities.

EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITIES

Jose also experienced many other changes and resource investments first-hand. In 2015, St. Vrain closed Spangler Elementary, and Jose and his classmates transitioned to Timberline PK-8 to begin fifth grade. The district invested millions of dollars into the renovation of Jose’s new school, turning it into an exceptional environment for student learning. These changes were part of a larger initiative to transform the Skyline Feeder system, with significant upgrades to school buildings and classrooms, implementation of STEM-focus programming, and the opening of the district’s extracurricular programs.

By the Numbers

ADVANCING ACHIEVEMENT

- **95%**
  - Preschool instruction across St. Vrain produces reading scores of 95% in Literacy and 87% in mathematics with mathematics growth outpacing all areas.

- **11%**
  - St. Vrain’s Hispanic students increased the percentage of students meeting or exceeding fifth grade reading achievement expectations by 11% and in math achievement by over 10% in the past 5 years.

- **92%**
  - St. Vrain saw a 92% increase of Hispanic students and 50% increase in Black students taking AP Exams over the past 5 years while increasing the percentage of students scoring 3 or higher.

- **0.8%**
  - St. Vrain’s dropout rate has fallen to 0.8% in 2020.

- **86.3%**
  - St. Vrain’s four-year Hispanic student graduation rate has increased from 55.9% in 2010 to 86.3% in 2020, while graduation requirements have also increased during that time period.

- **100%**
  - Hispanic and Black students have a 100% pass rate in Algebra 1 taken in 8th grade.

- **81%**
  - 81% of students are engaged in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities beyond the school day, an increase of 25% in the past four years.
success to his family, including the strength of his mother, and the unwavering love of his grandparents. It had long been Jose’s dream to attend college, and with one diploma already in hand, Jose set his sights on Harvard. However, when it became time to submit his application, his grandfather had been hospitalized with COVID-19.

“All I wanted to do was be with my family. I didn’t want to do schoolwork or be in my room writing college essays, so I almost didn’t apply,” shared Jose. “But then I remembered something my mother told me. My grandfather would always speak very proudly of me to anyone who would listen, how great of a grandson I am, and how great of a student I was. My mother told me that ‘he would want you to do it, not for him, not for me, but for yourself, because this has been a dream of yours for a very long time.’”

In the weeks after he submitted his application, Jose mourned the passing of his grandfather, while continuing to focus on finishing his associate degree, and completing his final semester of high school. On April 7, he got an alert that would change his life and mark the beginning of a new academic journey.

“There is a big red button that says view application update. I stared at the button for a little while, just waiting to click it,” shared Jose. “When I did, there was this big congratulations and a giant red box saying ‘Welcome to Harvard.’”

Almost a decade after Jose first walked into Spangler Elementary School, the butterflies and nerves that come with starting your first day of school would return, only this time he would be walking the halls of Harvard University on a full scholarship.

Innovation Center through the $16.6 million Race-to-the-Top grant, and the $3.6 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant.

St. Vrain Valley Schools also opened the first Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH) program west of the Mississippi at Skyline High School in 2016 (in computer information systems), and has since added a program at Frederick High School (in biochemistry) and Silver Creek High School (in cybersecurity). P-TECH is a new type of school that brings together the best elements of high school, college, and the professional world, allowing students to earn a high school diploma, as well as an associate degree, at no cost to the student. The program includes significant internship and mentorship opportunities alongside industry partners, giving students a head start in their career after completing the program.

Jose’s educational journey in St. Vrain continued when he was accepted into the second P-TECH cohort at Skyline High School, and would become the first in his family to enroll in a college course. When reflecting on his first day of ninth grade, Jose shared, “I was scared all over again. It would be my first day of high school, but it would also be my first day of college.”

Throughout his four years of high school, Jose excelled in the P-TECH program and this past spring, received his Associate of Applied Science in Computer Information Systems from Front Range Community College two weeks before his high school graduation.

**WELCOME TO HARVARD**

In addition to the support from his teachers and classmates, Jose also credits his success to his family, including the strength of his mother, and the unwavering love of his grandparents. It had long been Jose’s dream to attend college, and with one
Advancing the Success of All Students

Equity is achieved when each and every student has access to a wide variety of support, resources, spaces, models, programs, strategies, and highly-skilled staff in order to graduate prepared for success regardless of race, ethnicity, language, religion, ability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or economic status.

St. Vrain’s commitment to the success of all students is exemplified in the many resources and opportunities available to every student.

Focus Programs and Academies

The district has developed over 70 instructional focus programs that provide focused content delivery on top of the already rigorous academic foundation available at every school. At the high school level, the district offers focus academies in aerospace and engineering, biomedical sciences, business, energy, medical and biosciences, leadership, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and visual and performing arts.

High-Quality Early Childhood Education Opportunities

For over a decade, St. Vrain has offered high-quality preschool programs and full-day kindergarten in every school community. Research has shown that robust and high-quality early childhood education programs are pivotal to ensuring equity and giving students a strong foundation for academic growth and success.

Rigorous Graduation Requirements

St. Vrain Valley Schools has some of the most rigorous graduation requirements in the state, ensuring that all students graduate with the number of credits required to apply to any postsecondary program in Colorado. As we have increased rigor, we have seen significant gains in student achievement, and significant gains in closing the achievement gap.

High-Quality Learning Environments

St. Vrain Valley Schools has invested millions of dollars in our schools. This has included the $16.6 million Race-to-the-Top grant, and the $3.6 million Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. These investments included significant upgrades to school buildings and classrooms, in addition to the wide implementation of STEM focus programming and the opening of the district’s Innovation Center.

1:1 Technology Access and Internet Connectivity

To ensure all students have access to high-quality learning devices, St. Vrain Valley Schools has implemented a 1:1 iPad program. Starting with middle school students in 2012 the program has now expanded to include students at all grade levels. Additionally, the district supports many initiatives to ensure that families have internet access at home, and is a national model for technology and digital access.

Outstanding Teachers and Staff

Our human resources team continues to prioritize recruitment, hiring, and retention of a workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities we serve.

Open Enrollment

St. Vrain believes strongly that school attendance should not be limited by zip code. To this end, students and families can enroll in any school or program that best fits their needs and interests.

Pathways to Teaching

Program introduces St. Vrain high to a career as an educator by concurrent enrollment courses. Critical strategy that St. Vrain is diversify our teaching ranks and career pathways that will keep community beyond graduation.

Increasing Diversity of Leadership, Administrators, Teachers, and Staff

St. Vrain Valley Schools has a robust professional development program that includes equity training and other opportunities for teachers and staff to engage in learning on topics that will support the advancement of all students.

ST. VRAIN VALLEY SCHOOLS  18
ENGINEERING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

ST. VRAIN STUDENTS USE THEIR PASSIONS FOR STEM TO SERVE AND MAKE ADVANCEMENTS IN THE HEALTH AND SCIENCES FIELDS – NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE

BY CAROLINE CHUTKOW
PHOTOS BY CAROLINE CHUTKOW AND AARON FORD

Photo: Mia Novick and Baily Klusack visit UCHealth to design the hospital room of the future.
T'S A DARK, RAINY AUTUMN NIGHT as 15 Longmont High School students meet for their weekly SMART (Students Modeling a Research Topic) Team meeting. The after-school program creates a space where students can socialize with peers who have similar interests, and engage in rigorous medical studies and research. Through SMART Teams, students study different proteins over the course of the school year. They conduct advanced work including creating 3D models, writing scientific abstracts, and presenting summaries of their research. This evening, the students are learning to write a scientific abstract about myoglobin and its function in the human body.

When asked why they return to school during their sparse free time, the students’ first responses include the standard high schooler jokes about how great participation looks on college applications, but as they continue chatting about their interests, their passion for science is clear. “Learning about proteins is interesting. We never go this deep into research during our science classes. It’s a lot different than anything we’ve done before,” shares senior Charlie Bastunskiy.

“There is a social aspect to SMART Teams. You are around others who are equally as interested in the topics and it’s very motivating to be around other people and go deeper into the content,” explains fellow senior, Annette Perez Ayala.

There is a lot of crossover between students who participate in the school’s Medical and BioScience Academy and SMART Teams, but it’s open for any student who wants to explore science more. The program also includes mentorship visits from professors, research scientists, and PhD graduate students from the University of Colorado Boulder to deepen students’ connections between their current research and their potential next steps at the collegiate level and beyond.

Many of the students pursue research opportunities as undergraduates, and go on to study biomolecular chemistry or pre-med related undergraduate studies. Participation in SMART Teams opens up new career interests for them. “They are understanding high-level scientific concepts. The projects they create are similar to the work of graduate students,” says advisor Kelly Lubkeman.

SMART Team students have conducted research on topics such as: ras proteins, regulators of cell growth; opioid receptors, receptors in the nervous system; and histidine kinase CheA, chemical detectors that trigger bacterial movement. Past participants have gone on to present their professional posters at the Experimental Biology Annual Conference.

“The students that we get are the ones who are curious. They enjoy the process of learning. For me as an advisor, it’s fulfilling because participating in SMART Teams is not about extrinsic factors – there is no competition or award. They are motivated intrinsically because they love to learn and we as educators are excited to foster that desire to learn,” shares advisor Chris Chou.
“My students go out and serve the community,” shares Karen Carr, who has been a paramedic for 24 years and now finds herself assigned to work alongside former St. Vrain students during her weekly ambulance shift. “It’s such a great feeling.” This is her fourth year teaching at the Career Elevation and Technology Center (CETC) where she leads the Emergency Medical System and Health Sciences pathway courses and regularly witnesses current students and graduates working in the health community and impacting lives.

Through the Health Sciences program, students across St. Vrain can explore certification pathways in the following health careers: Emergency Medical Technician, Nursing Assistant, Dental Assistant, Medical Assistant, and Sports Medicine. “I love the energy we get from students trying something that they didn’t think was possible,” continues Carr. She structures her classes to be as hands-on and experiential as possible for her students. Throughout her classroom are mannequins, cots, oxygen tanks, first aid kits, and CPR equipment. Outside her classroom is an ambulance that she worked to acquire as a donation for students to understand how to work with patients in tight-knit quarters.

Carr’s goal is for her students to be prepared to master their certification test, whichever pathway it may be, and be successful in their desired field. “When students leave my class, they are ready to take their national certification and go to work. There is nothing they are going to encounter on the job that they have not seen in class,” declares Carr. Many of her students within the EMT Program are college bound and interested in pre-med. After they complete their classroom training and take the national exam, they can work as EMTs, which gives them real experience working with patients, and positively impacts their community.

“It’s really about preparing you for the future,” shares Frederick senior, Morgan Boisen. It’s great to learn new things about a topic I am passionate about and that is applicable in real life. Now in an emergency, I know how to step in and help.”

While the students are enrolled in CETC coursework, they volunteer at local health fairs and community events, and they receive clinical training at emergency rooms, assisted living homes, and special events as medical standby staff. Students come back from clinicals with real-world experiences such as performing CPR and providing care to patients with significant needs. These experiences are what guide students to knowing if they are on their right career path or whether they want to explore a different field within medicine.
DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF HEALTHCARE

St. Vrain Valley Schools’ students are engaging with health industry professionals now to serve as thought partners to improve systems. Through a partnership program with UCHealth, high school students at the Innovation Center of St. Vrain Valley Schools were tasked with improving the overall hospital room experience by competing in a design challenge referred to as the Hospital Room of the Future.

Working in teams, students representing different high schools across the district worked with UCHealth to empathize with patients and medical staff, and ideate solutions for improvement within the hospital environment.

Recent Niwot High School graduate, Jocelyn Gunn, has always been passionate about science and medicine and wanted to combine her interests with the more technical aspects of healthcare. She chose to collaborate with peers interested in robotics to develop a greater understanding of how various industries come together.

“This experience opened my eyes to how things function in a practical, real-world situation. We can learn about engineering and biology in the classroom, but it is totally different to see how concepts function in a real-world situation,” explains Jocelyn.

Her team won the challenge with their proposed design for a food delivery robot. The use of the robot alleviates the workload of nurses while improving the food delivery experience for patients in terms of speed and temperature of the food.

“It’s really important for students to see their learning goes beyond the classroom and for them to make connections between what they’re learning in their biology classes or math classes and see how that can lead to an actual impact,” shares educator Michelle Kennedy, who coordinated the project with UCHealth.

Kennedy’s hope for her students is to understand the complexities of healthcare, think about things from different perspectives, and develop empathy for patients, family members, hospital staff, nurses, and doctors. “The project connects students with the resources available to them within their community and has them thinking critically about how they can improve these things in the future and make them better for everyone involved.”

By the Numbers

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

- **869** total secondary students participating in health focus programs during the 2020-2021 school year
- **130** SMART Team participants at Longmont High since 2012
- **131,978** square feet of career and technical education facility space
- **32** AP course subject offerings across our eight comprehensive high schools

Photo: Students visit UCHealth to hear firsthand from medical staff.
It’s Thursday afternoon and Sienna Arellano, a sophomore at Niwot High School, pulls her chair up to the table alongside other Education Committee members from the Longmont Area Chamber of Commerce (LACC). Around the table are educators, business owners, and local leaders. Sienna is currently serving as the committee’s full-time intern, gaining real-world experience in the management of marketing newsletters, social media campaigns, and overall project management. This opportunity strongly aligns with her current coursework and ‘primes the pump’ for future professional work.

Committee members are able to provide Sienna with strong guidance and mentorship. When she completes the internship, she will have roughly 120 hours of real-world experience translating into roughly two credits to apply toward graduation, if she so chooses.

This is one of the many work-based learning opportunities created by St. Vrain and its community partners. “Being an intern at the LACC, I have had the opportunity to meet the outstanding leaders in our community and create connections that I never would have imagined,” said Sienna. “I have learned how to use my communication, organization, and social skills to create short stories about Longmont. These skills are preparing me for my future. With every meeting, I learn something new about my community and I cherish this connection.”

What is career technical education? What is work-based learning?

Work-based learning refers to activities that take place completely - or in part - in the workplace. It is a large component of Career Technical Education (CTE). Colorado defines CTE as programming that leverages workforce and education systems to provide learners with quality work-related experiences leading to lifelong career success.

Examples of work-based learning include internships, apprenticeships, industry-sponsored projects, and clinicals to name a few. These experiences combine skill development with training opportunities and are a key strategy in Colorado for developing talent and preparing our workforce for the future labor market.

St. Vrain Valley Schools boasts some of the strongest CTE programs in the state, including its three P-TECH programs focusing on biochemistry, cybersecurity, and computer information systems. Unlike traditional classrooms, CTE courses are required to connect with designated career cluster models and be taught by individuals with relevant industry experience. These programs cater to high school students and are most prevalent at the Innovation Center and the Career Elevation and Technology Center. Programming also extends to individual high schools via P-TECH or other relevant pathways.
FOUNDATIONS IN INNOVATION

CTE and work-based learning are valuable resources for students, but this work does not simply begin in high school. In St. Vrain, these skills are nurtured as early as preschool via STEM activities, design thinking, and other academic support.

Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that integrates the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and requirements for overall success. This process involves empathizing with an audience, defining goals, preparing potential solutions, and finally developing prototypes to test with the original audience. During this process students develop various skills in communication, teamwork, professionalism, and project management – all highly sought after skills by today’s hiring managers. St. Vrain has fused these skills into its foundational curriculum and continues to support its students and staff with cutting-edge technology and state-of-the-art facilities.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR CAREER-READINESS

When students progress to middle school, students and counselors work together to construct an Individualized Career Action Plan or ICAP – a multi-year process that intentionally guides students and families in the exploration of career, academic, and postsecondary opportunities. Early stages of this process involve specialized assessments that focus a student’s academic goals toward identified career clusters. Students build their career knowledge-base by participating in site visits, webinars, classroom speakers, job shadows, and summer camps. Examples of these activities include Northrop Grumman’s Cybersecurity Camp and Xilinx’s PYNQ Bootcamp.

Summer camps and job shadows are non-credit bearing activities that allow students to work with professionals in supervised situations to gain a deeper understanding of work. They are often used to transition middle school students and/or freshmen into more rigorous work-based learning, such as internships. These activities require higher levels of support from industry and district staff.

PARTNERING WITH INDUSTRY

As we’ve discussed, CTE coursework must be taught by individuals with relevant work experience, but program leaders are also required to engage industry leaders twice a year to ensure alignment with current industry standards. It’s during these gatherings that relationships are forged and more engaging work is created.

One such relationship is maintained by the Innovation Center and Anark Corporation. Over the past three years, this collaboration has produced over 20 paid interns, tasked with the quality assurance of cloud-hosting software developed by the company. In twelve months, interns were able to identify 562 software bugs. Another 115 bugs were identified by former St. Vrain interns, now employees of Anark. This amounts to 37 percent of all software bugs fixed within the year.

“An internship that involves performing meaningful work in an area of personal interest can be profoundly illuminating to students.”

SCOTT COLLINS, CTO AND COFOUNDER, ANARK CORPORATION

“An internship that involves performing meaningful work in an area of personal interest can be profoundly illuminating to students.”

tends to feel more applied, with new and exciting ways to experience success.”

Colorado and national performance metrics now include work-based learning as a key metric for which school districts are held accountable. For the 2019-2020 school year, St. Vrain had 5,220 students engaged in CTE. Of that cohort, 38 percent participated in work-based learning, outperforming its state goal of 5 percent.

Early indicators point to an increase in participation for the 2020-2021 school year. To support this work, St. Vrain will do what it always does – increase support for students and staff, build strong channels of communication to share opportunities, and continue to innovate with community and industry partners.

If you are a local community or industry partner seeking to connect with our local schools and programs, we would love to engage. Please reach out to our Community Strong Team. 

Learn more at communitystrong.svvsd.org
These five people are doing amazing things with their lives, and they have one thing in common — they are all products of St. Vrain Valley Schools.
Do you ever wonder what happened to that classmate that stood out to you the most? The one you would ride the bus with, or the athlete you looked up to in high school? How about the one that you just knew would one day change the world?

These five alumni have made a name for themselves – each with their own journey through the St. Vrain community.

Sam Zilli
Olde Columbine High School
Class of 2012

“I am incredibly thankful for everyone that I met, and had the opportunity to learn from at Olde Columbine High School. It absolutely changed my life,” shared Sam Zilli, who graduated in 2012. As Sam reflects on their time in high school, they recall how the community at Olde Columbine helped change “how I viewed myself and what I felt capable of – I felt supported, listened to, affirmed, and welcomed; I was excited to go to school and see these teachers and peers that I connected with, and for me that made all the difference.”

Sam received the prestigious honor of being named a 2020 Truman Scholar by former Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright, President of the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation. They were one of 62 recipients from 55 colleges and universities across the country. Sam also served in the U.S. Navy for four years as a helicopter mechanic while working to improve reporting, response, and support for survivors of sexual violence in the military.

Recently, they completed their undergraduate degree at Berklee College of Music in Boston and are now applying to law schools. “I hope to complete my Juris

Miles Rivera
Longmont High School
Class of 2014

Miles Rivera always dreamed of playing Division I sports. “I was offered to play football for the Air Force Academy – I knew I would be getting the best of both worlds,” shared Miles. “I would be attending an incredible school with an incredible opportunity to serve and to do things I most likely would not be able to experience in a different institution.”

Although he stopped playing football his freshman year, Miles said “What kept me in the Academy was the people I met and knowing the future impact I was going to have if I stayed in the Air Force.” Miles graduated from the Air Force Academy in 2018 and is now serving as a First Lieutenant, and will be promoted to Captain in May. His assignments include the 89th Airlift Wing, where the mission was to provide global Special Air Mission airlift, logistics, aerial port and communications for the President and Vice President of the United States, cabinet members, combatant commanders and other senior military and elected leaders as tasked by the White House, Air Force Chief of Staff, and Air Mobility Command.

Looking back at his time in high school, Miles remembers two teachers and a coach that had an impact on him. “Mr. Kenny and Ms. Gaddis were both my English teachers. They helped shape the way I write and communicate, and offered me awesome perspectives in life,” shared Miles. “My football coach, Coach Johnson mentored me and put me into positions to help me succeed.”

Reflecting on his time attending St. Vrain Valley Schools, Miles admits there is one thing he overlooked during his time in school, “it wasn’t until I was in the Academy when I really began to appreciate how hard teachers work, how much educators care about their students and how much they do for them – they want them to succeed and have a good life,” shared Miles. “Teachers are willing to innovate, to listen and mentor you, and not only teach you but they also give you life lessons.”

His advice to current students as they look at their future is to, “always maintain perspective and know that you will eventually have to be on your own – you will be your self-starter, your self-motivator, but always listen to your parents,” shared Miles. “Listen to your teacher’s advice instead of blowing it off, always take it for what it is but listen to it and maintain perspective.”

For Miles, his education in St. Vrain Valley Schools was a phenomenal experience, “I look back on it a lot, there were so many positive experiences, St. Vrain Valley Schools holds a special place in my heart and I always enjoy coming back and visiting.”

“I am incredibly thankful for everyone that I met, and had the opportunity to learn from at Olde Columbine High School. It absolutely changed my life,” shared Sam Zilli, who graduated in 2012. As Sam reflects on their time in high school, they recall how the community at Olde Columbine helped change “how I viewed myself and what I felt capable of – I felt supported, listened to, affirmed, and welcomed; I was excited to go to school and see these teachers and peers that I connected with, and for me that made all the difference.”
Doctor and become an attorney for survivors of gender-based violence – I found that being a lawyer would be a career where my intellectual interests, my personal passion, and my mission statement would coalesce. Knowing that everyday I will get to wake up and do something that I enjoy and that helps people is a dream come true.”

Sam reflects on their time at Olde Columbine High School, and acknowledges that the single greatest thing Olde Columbine did for them was provide mentorship and a sense of community. “There were times when I was unsure of what I wanted to do, or how to handle things in my life, but knowing that there were mentors, peers, and resources available to help guide me, was very powerful.” Sam was an honor student, and was chosen to give a speech at graduation. “I’m thankful that my peers trusted me to be a representative for our graduating class, and I still think about graduation day as one of the most meaningful days of my life.”

There were so many teachers that had a great impact on Sam’s high school success. One specific teacher they remember greatly is their creative writing teacher, Donna Salemink. “I was making a documentary about Olde Columbine, and she mentored me through the largest artistic and academic endeavor I’d ever taken on. The fact that she went above and beyond to craft an assignment that was challenging, but aligned with my interests and that I was excited to do, was really incredible. I learned so much from that project, and her mentorship and investment in my learning meant the world to me.”

Sam’s advice to students is that they keep their minds, and options open. “Your path can be really non-linear, and it can take time to figure out what you want, and there’s a good chance that what you want will change over time. Ultimately if you try your best in every situation that you’re in then, you keep your options open for later, and your future self will thank you.”

“**EDUCATION IS SOMETHING THAT I REALLY VALUE,**” shared St. Vrain Valley Schools alum, Trenton Hoshiko. He has had the opportunity to collaborate on numerous projects with schools throughout the district. “It’s my way of giving back to the community and supporting the next generation of students, our future leaders,” said Trenton.

After graduating from Emerson College in Boston with degrees in Film Production and Cinematography, Trenton moved back to Longmont and founded Modern Icon Media in 2014. It focuses on commercial and creative video production and designing media in the Longmont, Boulder, and Denver areas. This year, Trenton added ad agency work to his company’s offerings for small businesses, which helps them build connections within the community. Modern Icon Media recently added CiniStream, an online art gallery for short, independent films around the world. “I learned from Silver Creek Leadership Academy that having a local and global mindset at the same time, reflects in my current life.”

Trenton was part of the first Silver Creek Leadership Academy class. “We helped them figure out what they could teach us and they were learning what we could do. Watching the curriculum change, and watching the program grow as the years went by – it was a wonderful experience to be part of that.” There are many teachers that Trenton is grateful for and contributed to his success, and today, he continues to have close relationships with them. “I’m thankful for the support I was able to get early on, their support was instrumental in my growth and having that framework to grow from within.”

The resources and the guidance he received from his teachers played a big role in him being able to attend a college that supported “what I wanted to do and gave me the confidence to do it. These teachers are not limiting themselves in helping people, they are still helping years later and that’s something very special to me.”

Being able to come back and work with schools, supporting these students, and being an SCLA mentor, has been incredibly fulfilling. “I hope to continue supporting these kids in every educational way possible, I want to be able to support education for future generations – these teachers helped me get to where I am today, and if I can be one percent as helpful to someone in the same ways, I know have made significant difference in their lives.”

“My advice for students now is to set yourself big long term goals, seek mentorship to help create a road map, start now – have tons of fun, spend more time with your family. Don’t take any time now for granted.”

**TRENTON HOSHIKO**
Silver Creek High School
CLASS OF 2013

**REED CALDWELL**
Longmont High School
CLASS OF 2000
For as long as she can remember, Brittany can recall many positive experiences she has had with her teachers. “I remember always having amazing teachers ever since elementary school and through high school. They provided me with the support that I needed and were there to help guide me. I can honestly say that because of them, I am a teacher today,” shares Brittany.

After getting her math degree, Brittany realized she was missing something. “I have always worked with kids, and I realized that was what I truly wanted to do. I wanted to have an impact on students just like my teachers had on me.” Brittany decided to go back to school and get her Masters Degree in Education and her teaching license. Today, Brittany teaches Geometry and AP Statistics at Mead High School.

“When I was thinking about where to teach, St. Vrain immediately came to mind, it’s such a great school district, and I felt it was important for me to give back to the community that helped and supported me to get to where I am today.” It is very rewarding for her when she’s giving a lesson, and all of a sudden “you see the light turn on for students when they learn something new. It’s important for me to help those that have gone through other things and give them the extra push. The extra love and support that school can provide, at the end of the day, that’s what I want for my students.”

Brittany says that being back in the school teaching with the same teachers that taught her, has been a great experience. “They have been so warm and welcoming. It wasn’t a hard transition from being one of their students to becoming their colleague.” Looking back, “I would still choose this career path.” One of her greatest mentors was her high school principal. “She always made sure that we’d become the best students that we could be, not only in the classroom but outside the classroom.”

At the end of the day, “I want my students to know that I care about them and I want them to succeed. I want my seniors to be resilient – if you fall down, get back up.” As far as students pursuing a teaching career, “make those connections early on with your current teachers, visit with them, and take the opportunity to shadow them – because becoming a teacher has been one of my greatest accomplishments.”

Specifically remember how my French Teacher, Robin Zimperman, always made learning fun. She taught us a lot more about being good people and being kind to one another, and to this day, we still keep in touch,” shared Reed.

A product of St. Vrain Valley Schools, Reed recalls how his time in high school prepared him for his future. “I started to learn how to balance priorities. Academic achievement is a must, but I also began to learn that having fun, exercise, and family are important too.” He currently serves as the Chief of Service and EMS Medical Director in the Emergency Department at NYU.

For Reed, it was important to pick a service-oriented career where he would be able to make a tangible difference in the lives of others. Emergency medicine combines a number of different elements that are important to him, and that he enjoys. “Servant leadership, human connections, solving problems, science, and discovery – being able to positively impact the lives of others while fulfilling my own interests – has proved to be an awesome career choice.”

When he thinks about his time in high school, one word comes to mind, “growth.” With the many opportunities available in St. Vrain, he was able to fully prepare for his future and continue being successful even after graduation. “If I had a do-over and could repeat my experience at Longmont High School, I would graduate with more friends that are different from me. We all tend to gravitate toward people who live like us, speak like us, look like us, and think like us. By seeking and developing real relationships with people that are different, it not only strengthens individuals, but also it strengthens the community.”

His advice to students as they prepare for their future is to “dream big and work really hard. Set yourself long term goals, seek mentorship to help create a road map, start now – have tons of fun, and spend more time with your family.”
HERE IS SOMETHING INNATELY HUMAN about the desire to share thoughts, reflections, and opinions with others. In education speak, this is called “student voice.” While the drive to find your voice remains constant — the avenues to express it are continually evolving, Budding journalists, directors, podcaster, videographers, and creative communicators of all stripes are getting their start in our public schools. Educators across St. Vrain schools are equipping these future storytellers with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to find — and successfully communicate — their voices in any medium.

In a media landscape where video is consumed at greater and faster rates, students across the district are also gaining experience in front of and behind the camera. At Westview Middle School, a student-produced video news broadcast, Westview TV (WTV), introduces students to video production. “The goal of WTV is simple,” shared David Kline, a Math Teacher who has facilitated this student-run broadcast for seven years, “to create a place for students to tell their stories.”

It would be natural to assume that the pause button had to be pushed on WTV when schools across the country went virtual last spring, but, “we actually increased the frequency of our episodes during the remote time,” Kline says. “WTV became a critical tool for keeping our school community connected.” Using iPads in their backyards and living rooms, students were able to offer critical opportunities for connection to the rest of the student body throughout virtual learning.

High school students across the district can access industry-level media production equipment at both the Innovation Center and the Career Elevation and Technology Center, where they hone their technical, storytelling, and entrepreneurial skills simultaneously. Through studio courses and client-based projects, students gain real-world experiences in telling compelling stories from start to finish.
“They learn the whole gamut,” said Instructional Technologist, Jeffrey Lund. “They learn how to storyboard, light a scene, sit with a client, get audio, and edit it all together for the right platforms.”

Lund leads a course focused on studio production, where students learn to completely run a live broadcast using professional equipment. “It means that after graduation, these students can walk into a client meeting, or onto a set, and already know how things work,” says Lund.

Colton Stedman, a senior at St. Vrain Virtual High School, is also a member of one of the student media production teams. “It can be nerve-wracking, knowing your work will actually be seen by so many people,” they acknowledged, “but that’s also what makes it so rewarding to be trusted with real-world projects as a student.”

The student newspaper is a hallmark of the high school experience and one of the classic avenues of student expression. But gone are the days of reading about a school dance that transpired weeks ago and getting ink smudged all over your clothes in the process. School newspapers like “The Mav” at Mead High School and the “Talon Tribune” at Silver Creek High School, contain dynamic, thought-provoking articles from students that are published immediately to the web.

The Mav’s staff covers not only school news, but national and state issues, in addition to hosting podcasts, photojournalism, and columns on wide-ranging topics. “We are entirely student-run,” shared The Mav’s Editor-in-Chief, Arizona Lee, “which allows for our reporters to work closely with their peer editors on staff to produce anything they feel passionately about. I love watching new reporters grow to understand that their voice matters and that The Mav will help their voice be heard — it is such an empowering feeling.”

The virtual format allows students to not only cover stories in a timely manner, but to distribute them far beyond the school halls, with access to real-time data about readership and reach. Mav Student News advisor Jamie Hedlum added, “our students are writing things that matter to them and it emboldens their agency and excitement! Every time a student bursts into my room to tell me their article reached so many engagements or had so many views on our website, I share their excitement and pride.”

“I can completely attribute being able to develop confidence in the impact of my voice as a student to working on The Mav as a reporter, content editor, and now editor-in-chief over the last three years,” shared Lee. “Knowing that my voice, and, truly, the voice of the student body which I work to represent as a student journalist, can create change has helped myself and my peers find and express our voices.”

While the spoken word has long been a powerful way to communicate ideas, podcasting has been a rapidly growing format for it. Many teachers across the district offer podcast creation as an alternative to the typical five-paragraph essay. Recent Silver Creek graduate, Peter Fredo, created a podcast, “Grow Through It,” for his capstone project at the Silver Creek Leadership Academy. Aimed at helping students learn about growth mindset, this podcast has enabled Fredo to interview and learn from CEO’s, authors, and superintendents. If Fredo were to take the 13+ episodes of his podcast and transcribe them, his thoughts would fill a 72-page book.

Schools in St. Vrain teach students in advanced thinking and to form ideas worth communicating. Students are learning which medium is best suited for their unique voice, audience, and purpose. Regardless of the medium: video, written word, or spoken word, St. Vrain Valley Schools is creating innovative and inspiring ways to give students a voice.
Cross St. Vrain Valley Schools, we are all lifelong learners. Students and educators alike work to advance our schools using the design process—a method to break down a seemingly large, real-world problem into an actionable step framework. Through the design process, learners empathize with an audience, define a problem, ideate possible solutions, create a prototype, and test their ideas.

In an effort to explore new tools for students with unique learning needs, St. Vrain’s Special Education Department and the Innovation Center’s Robotics Team collaborated through an initiative called Innovate to Elevate, in which they explored a design process challenge to incorporate the use of socially assistive robots into specialized classrooms across the district.

“The design process framework provides a roadmap for where to go next in our work. It gives educators and students a way to locate ourselves in the story of a project and acts like a bookmark to help us orientate ourselves,” said Chris Schmitz, Computer Technology Teacher at Soaring Heights PK-8, Robotics Teacher at Erie High, and participant in Innovate to Elevate.

To explore the design challenge, five St. Vrain schools engaged in the pilot phase of the socially assistive robotics implementation throughout the spring 2021 semester. Technology and special education teachers attended early evening training sessions to learn how to integrate the robots to support students in specialized classrooms with self-regulation, self-determination, communication, and socialization. The Innovation Center’s student designers supported the site teachers with the programming of the socially assistive robot, Misty, produced by Misty Robotics. After some initial training, the teachers met with their classroom students weekly to incorporate Misty into lessons and collected data on student progress.

Misty was programmed to engage students in affective needs and autism-based classrooms during their daily check-ins, to read stories with English language learners, and to encourage social interactions for all students by asking questions, telling jokes, and playing ice-breaker games.

Teachers observed during the initiative’s pilot phase that student engagement and academic success increased by incorporating the robot in their daily check-in or lesson. The data collected showed a decrease in student anxiety during learning, an increase in reading comprehension, and an increase in social communication. “More than 55 percent of my students are either nonverbal or very limited verbal and since working with the robot, one student who was completely nonverbal has not only begun to mimic humans, but to speak in complete sentences unprompted,” said Krystyna Farquhar, Special Education Teacher at Longmont Estates Elementary.

The consistent tone used by socially assistive robots supports English language learners with understanding and building vocabulary. Engaging with a robot removes some of the hesitation and fear for students while they are practicing a second language. “Misty has provided the opportunity for meaningful conversation within a safe and non-judgemental environment,” said Longs Peak Middle School STEM and Technology Teacher, Monica Moreno-Martinez.

There are also benefits to being able to program a socially assistive robot in multiple languages. “Together we have had the opportunity to develop and co-create cultural and authentic content for Misty in both English and Spanish.”

Photo: Soaring Heights 5th grader, Robert Tussey, works with a socially assistive Misty robot.
Longmont student Mia Ortega, was an eighth grade student at Longs Peak Middle during the pilot and attributes her improving English with her sessions with the socially assistive robot. “Misty is helping me learn to carry a conversation and learn new vocabulary. The more sessions with Misty I go to, the more comfortable I feel speaking English.”

Due to the pilot’s success, St. Vrain Valley Schools is in the midst of its second cohort of professional study teams integrating the socially assistive robots into their specialized classrooms. “St. Vrain Valley Schools’ successes are due in large part to the fact that we work cohesively as a system,” said Axel Reitzig, Coordinator of Innovation for the Innovation Center of St. Vrain Valley Schools. “Successful implementation of innovative technologies requires careful coordination and collaboration between different district stakeholders and an alignment to our district’s overall strategic priorities.”

CYBERSECURITY PATHWAYS

In addition to implementing new technologies, St. Vrain Valley Schools is taking a deep dive behind the scenes of technology through computer science, programming, and cybersecurity curriculum.

Student interest in cybersecurity has grown exponentially over the past several years with introductory courses available at high schools and middle schools across the district. The Innovation Center now offers a cybersecurity pathway option and Silver Creek High School launched its own P-TECH program in fall 2021, making it the third P-TECH program offered within the district. Named RaptorTECH, students enrolled in the program earn a no-cost associate degree focusing on cybersecurity from Front Range Community College, while receiving significant mentorship and internship opportunities with industry partners including Cisco, Comcast, Peak Resources, and Seagate Technologies, giving students a head start on their careers after completing the program.

The first cohort of RaptorTECH consists of 35 ninth grade students. “The program is very timely,” said RaptorTECH Counselor, Aaron Baskin. “It’s exciting for students to be learning to tackle problems that we hear about all the time in the news.” Next semester, the group of freshmen will begin their first college coursework through Front Range Community College. The underclassmen are very eager to get started with their elevated coursework and he often jokes with them, “let’s see how high school goes first.” The course sequence is designed so that students can successfully transition from middle school to high school ahead of enrolling in their first college course.

“My favorite aspect of RaptorTECH is the mentorship opportunity,” shared freshman Digby Goodchild. Digby enjoys learning about the growing technology field and how to defend against potential threats to online safety.

Fellow RaptorTECH student, Camila Rivera, feels fortunate to be a part of the first cohort of a program that fosters her love of STEM and will see her graduate high school with an associate degree as well. Camila hopes to pursue a career in cybersecurity one day. “I’m excited to see what’s to come, and for future students to experience this unique opportunity as well.”

Through the cybersecurity pathway program at the Innovation Center, students can enroll in courses including: Ethical Hacking, Python in Cybersecurity, Forensics, Linux, and Cisco CyberOps.

Many St. Vrain students enrolled in cybersecurity courses also compete among thousands across the country in CyberPatriot, a national competition created by the Air Force Association where students vie to secure virtual networks.

Beth Cerrone, Instructional Cybersecurity and Technology Manager, coordinates district participation in CyberPatriot tournaments and leads the cybersecurity pathway program at the Innovation Center. “One of our main goals is to provide students with real-life authentic learning experiences.”

CyberPatriots has students decoding authentic cybersecurity challenges. “My favorite part of CyberPatriot tournaments is solving really difficult puzzles. It gets frustrating not being able to figure out a forensics question or find any more security flaws, but when you do it feels so rewarding,” said junior at Erie High School, Kenzie Campbell. “Every time someone on my team solves a really difficult question or finds another security flaw, the room fills with excitement and encouragement.”

Cerrone emphasizes the large number of industry openings within the field of cybersecurity.

Students who choose to enter the field will have a career with competitive pay and the opportunity to help people protect their personal online data.

“When I teach cybersecurity, nobody ever asks me, ‘When am I going to use this?’”

By the Numbers

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

49,500

computing devices are supported by District Technology Services.

1,116%

increase in the number of students participating in competitive robotics over the past five years.

Watch and learn more about socially assistive robotics across our schools.
OUR SCHOOLS ARE FULL OF OUTSTANDING EDUCATORS. LET’S MEET FOUR OF ST. VRAIN’S FINEST...

STORY AND PHOTOS BY EUNICE PEINADO

CLASS ACTS

Erie High Choir Director, Thalia Burd
WHAT DISTINGUISHES AN OUTSTANDING TEACHER?

Is it their love for learning, their diligence or knowledge, creativity or charisma? Or all of the above? These four outstanding teachers demonstrate hard work, dedication, encouragement, and compassion. Through their love of teaching, they encourage their students to pursue their passions and guide them along the path to build a strong future.

THALIA BURD, CHOIR DIRECTOR, ERIE HIGH SCHOOL

I teach because... “I want to make a positive difference in the lives of young humans, to enable them to be lifelong musicians, and to be more empathetic, contributing members of society.”

“I was inspired by my own experience, I truly wanted to become a performer,” recalls Thalia. But the more she performed, the more she realized that the “teaching aspect of it was much more energizing—that’s what I wanted to spend my energy and time on.” Before becoming a teacher, Thalia always had a passion for music and working with kids. Throughout her young adult life, she always found ways to put the two together. “I worked in children’s theater, and I taught private voice and piano lessons throughout college.” But it wasn’t until her senior year in college that Thalia figured out what her true passion would be – to become a music teacher.

When you speak to Thalia about music, her genuine love for music comes to life. You see her face light up, and you can’t help but to feel her joy. For Thalia, it is hard for her not to love her job. “Choir has always had a special place in my heart,” she recalls, “I participated in the Colorado All State Choir when I was in high school, and seeing the passion that exists amongst other choir students – that was inspiring.”

If you ask her today what her favorite part of her job is, there is no hesitation from her, “it’s when I see the final product come together, the concerts our choir puts together, the little day to day moments, when a student gets their solfège on sight singing, or when they nail that one tricky part of the song, those are my ‘aha’ moments – those are the moments that truly bring joy to me.”

Thalia’s hope for her students is that they continue to become lifelong musicians, whether some may go on and study music, “I just want them to continue to experience that art form throughout their lives – my hope is that I was able to touch someone’s life, knowing that I had an impact on them for the better makes it worthwhile, even on those tough days.”
CLAYTON WITTROCK, 8TH GRADE LANGUAGE ARTS, TRAIL RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

I teach because... “It’s where I have the opportunity every day to impact someone in a way that can help them the rest of their lives, even if it’s one nugget.”

“I knew at some point in my life I would become a teacher, I always liked working with kids, being there to help guide them,” recalls Clay. Not long after this realization, he had the opportunity to become a high school teacher. “Something has always drawn me to the leadership role, and the confidence and willingness to guide others to learn more and see new things.”

With over 10 years of teaching, Clay continues to have the same mindset as to why he became a teacher. “Those moments when I can share my true honest passion with my students, the love I have for reading and writing – I would say that’s my favorite part of being a teacher.” When you have a moment to spend time with Clay in his classroom, getting to know him, you can clearly see that his passion for teaching continues to grow as the years go by. The most rewarding part of being a middle school teacher for Clay is when his past students come back and visit. “They tell me stories of what they learned when they were in my class. You may not realize at that moment that you’re doing something for them that will pay off later – you contribute in making them successful – that to me is truly amazing.”

If you ask Clay what gets him excited about his work, with no hesitation, he will say it’s when he is around his students. “I feel very at home with them, their energy, their curiosity, that is something that we as adults can lose track of. We can lose a little bit of that fire, but when we are around students, we get those little sparks back – it’s being able to create those relationships with them.”

Clay hopes that his students realize that part of being successful is having the energy to be successful. “I try to bring that energy to them every day, I want my students to be proud and confident in themselves. I want them to have a mind of their own, for them to walk away being thinkers, paying attention to the little things and enjoying the little things – if anybody is going to show them something that is going to help them in their life, I want to be that person.”

LISA MERCIER, 1ST GRADE TEACHER, BLACK ROCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

I teach because... “I get to be part of something that is really important. Kids are amazing, smart, resilient, and kind and I love being part of that. I can’t imagine anything else that would bring me this much joy.”

“I went to college to study law, but I wasn’t enjoying it, and I couldn’t figure out why I wasn’t happy,” recalls Lisa. “One day when I was out jogging, I passed by a park where kids were playing; at that moment I realized how much I missed kids – everything I had previously done involved kids. I wanted to become a teacher,” she recalls. Soon after that, Lisa moved back to Wyoming, enrolled herself in the education program and the rest was history. Now with over 20 years as an educator, Lisa is more convinced than ever that this was and is what she was meant to do.
When you spend time with Lisa, you can feel the compassion she has for her students, her love for teaching, and the joy that comes from her doing what she loves to do most. “Watching kids collaborate with each other, seeing the energy they have, that really keeps me excited in what I do.” Lisa always finds different ways to be creative in her teaching and tries to do things that show her students what they know. “It’s easy for us as teachers to sometimes feel bogged down, but the second I see my students’ faces, they really put things into perspective. That’s what I love about my job.”

The most rewarding part for Lisa is when she is part of the special moments when something clicks for her students, “it’s almost like I can actually see a true lightbulb going off, or the little things – for example, a student that held up a handmade heart that read ‘I love you Mrs. Mercier’, that’s rewarding, knowing that someone took the time to create something for you – that you matter and that you’re making a difference.”

For Lisa, being a teacher is a really admirable profession. “I love watching first year teachers, the passion and energy that they bring.” Her advice to new teachers is that “I want them to hold on to that initial feeling that you can make a difference because you can and you are, and when you feel that you’re not, step back and try to remember some of that feeling.” Her hope for her students is that she can have a positive impact on them. “I want them to know that they are cared about and that they matter – I hope that I have been able to make kids feel good and important more than anything else.”

**NATE WILCOX, ROBOTICS AND TECHNOLOGY TEACHER, INNOVATION CENTER OF ST. VRAIN VALLEY SCHOOLS**

“I teach because… ‘I want students to have a teacher tell them the ‘why’, that will listen to their ‘why’, not judge them for their ‘why’, but will try to teach that ‘why’ and help them make the connection to what they are learning and give them hope for the future.’”

“I knew I wanted to work with people. I wanted to do something that had a deeper impact in the community, and teaching was always a top idea about what I wanted to do,” recalls Nate. This school year marks Nate’s eighth year as an educator.

“I came into education with a really backwards approach,” recalls Nate. “I remember my high school teacher telling me that I was just like him in the aspect that I loved to learn but I didn’t like to work hard. He assured me that would change.” When you speak with Nate, you feel his energy, the enthusiasm he has for teaching.

He has always had that deep curiosity, a fascination on how things work, and being a teacher has given him that opportunity to keep learning, and to keep growing. “I fell in naturally with STEM, there are always new problems to solve every day – there is no monotony in STEM, that’s what makes it so interesting.” As a Robotics and Technology Teacher, Nate has the opportunity to work with high school students, “seeing students grow as people is definitely the most rewarding part of my job, to be able to be part of that growth, that is really fun.”

Nate firmly believes that every student has their own story; “I always want to treat them for who they are, where they’ve been, what they’ve been through, what knowledge and skills they have acquired so far, where their character is so far, and treat each individual specifically to lead and guide them towards growth.”

He hopes that his students will know how much he cares for them, and that they leave his classes encouraged and continue to grow. “I want my students to have an exposure in every content area that I teach, with the hope that they find passion in these areas, hoping they make connections – I want to help them see what’s possible.”
Building Readers for LIFE

ST. VRAIN IS LEADING THE WAY TO SUPPORT READING IN THE EARLY GRADES

BY EUNICE PEINADO
PHOTOS BY AARON FORD AND EUNICE PEINADO

TO READ IS TO ACCESS THE WORLD by allowing individuals to identify, understand, create, and communicate. For young students, literacy is a vital foundation because it allows them to respond to what they are learning, supports their understanding to communicate, and helps them express and understand feelings. Literacy nurtures growth and contributes to students’ development, all while stimulating their imagination and expanding their understanding of the world.

“We can get them excited about it early on – for me personally, it’s letting kids know that they can express themselves, with reading, writing, and drawing,” shared Emma Cruise, Kindergarten Teacher at Prairie Ridge Elementary School.

Literacy is the building block for one’s future success. The sooner younger students are exposed to different types of literacy like communication, reading signs, and telling stories, the more immersed in their own environment they become. This will contribute to making students successful in both school and their daily lives. “As a school, we focus on the standards and curriculum and what our students need to be learning – we address reading, writing, and speaking in every lesson and in every content area,” shared Melissa Parson, Fifth Grade Teacher at Prairie Ridge Elementary School.

“Literacy is a way for students to communicate, understand, to be independent, and feel that empowerment that they know how to communicate with others,” shared Sherry Zamudio, First Grade Teacher at Prairie Ridge Elementary School. The primary years are very important for young children to be immersed in literacy everywhere – it builds their foundation. The earlier they become engaged, the more successful they will be.

There are many moving pieces when it comes to literacy. When students are taught writing at the beginning of kindergarten, they learn the five components of literacy – phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. If they have an understanding of these five components, it makes it easier for them to connect letters, but if students do not have any sound awareness, it will be hard for the child to read. “What we are now understanding is not just words on the paper, but it has a lot to do with the sounds we hear,” shared Stefany Morgan, Literacy Teacher at Blue Mountain Elementary School. “We are putting those sounds with what we see in front of us together on paper. If one of those things is off, it makes it hard for the child to read.”

When students understand sounds it makes it easier for them to connect it to a letter and makes them strong readers. Early intervention for students is very important, and if teachers can get students reading before third grade, their trajectory and their ability to succeed soars.

“We are all extremely lucky to be part of a district that is doing really great things – it is great to see that we are all focused on the same goal, so students can receive similar instruction, and share good practices wherever they go,” said Morgan.
A NEW LEARNING STYLE

It is an exciting time to be an educator who is passionate about teaching students to read. Over the last 10 years, “we have seen a dramatic increase in the research around how people learn to read. This research has really ignited our teachers in the district to enhance how we teach our students,” shared Diane Lauer, Assistant Superintendent of Priority Programs and Academic Support.

When the district’s Dyslexia Task Force was formed in 2016, one of the main objectives was to figure out how teachers and administrators were going to work together to identify dyslexic students, and what practices would be best in supporting each individual student.

Research shows that for the 10-15 percent of students who may have dyslexia characteristics, learning to read requires explicit, systematic, sequential, and diagnostic instruction with many repetitions. However, new research suggests that 50 percent of students actually require an explicit, systematic, and sequential instruction. This is one reason why St. Vrain Valley Schools has added two specific programs to their instruction: Fundations and Orton-Gillingham. Both programs are explicit, systematic, sequential, and multi-sensory.

Not only were these two programs approved by the READ Act, but they were also piloted in St. Vrain. “It was really important for us to find a tool that would help us help our students,” shared Kathy McCall, Dyslexia Instructional Coach. Teachers saw strong student gains using one program, but noticed that when both were used together, the gains were even stronger. Fundations is a curriculum that uses the Orton-Gillingham strategies, but when they are used together, they complement each other. “We began building a very robust program to respond explicitly with literacy instruction for all of our learners,” shared McCall. Teachers are able to use Fundations but for students that may need more support than others, Orton-Gillingham is also available.

The research indicates that these two programs are proven to increase student literacy, and after being piloted in several schools, “we are seeing for ourselves that they were making a difference, that’s when we expanded the implementation across the district,” shared Lauer.

By the time the READ Act was revised in the 2019 Legislative Session, St. Vrain had been fully implementing this new research for three years, and had the advantage of leading the state. The district’s initial focus was on kindergarten through third grade, but because teachers began to see how powerful these strategies are, it expanded across the board from all elementary grades, and all the way to middle school and high school. The READ Act now requires anyone teaching reading to students in kindergarten through third grade to use scientifically-based strategies like those found in Fundations and Orton-Gillingham.

St. Vrain is the only district out of 178 in Colorado that has a state-approved training program, which allows the district to use its own in-district expertise to train their teachers; the other 177 districts have to outsource their training.

When students have access to the same teaching, they accelerate and learn how to read at an even faster pace. “This is some of the research that has really ignited our teachers. What has shifted is that previously we provided instruction to only students that we thought needed intervention, but because the benefit is so great and supportive, it’s advantageous for all students,” shared Lauer.

Photo (Above): At Prairie Ridge Elementary, Jackson Lemon works on sounding letters.
Photo (Below): Literacy teacher Jannie Crosby works with students at Erie Elementary.
**Safe & Sound**

*By Trey Hill*

*Photos by Aaron Ford and Trey Hill*

**THE SAFETY, EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING, AND MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS** are crucial factors in providing the strongest learning environment possible. St. Vrain Valley Schools strives to give students access to dedicated school counselors, psychologists, interventionists and social workers, supportive campus supervisors, dedicated and caring School Resource Officers (SROs), and a thoughtful curriculum that is inclusive of social-emotional learning to advance student well-being and safety.

Beth Colvin, a parent of two students at Frederick High School, sees the benefits of having SROs at schools. She says it adds to the safety and security of kids. “Having that presence there creates a sense of security and prevents things from happening that might if there wasn’t one there.”

However, SROs do much more than just protect the physical safety of our schools, they also build relationships with students so that they are an approachable and relatable resource. Officer Andy Fairbanks, an SRO at Frederick High, acknowledges that it is important for students to see the human side of law enforcement. Fairbanks says, “my job is not to get students in trouble, it’s to encourage them to learn from mistakes before they enter the real world as adults.”

Fairbanks spends a lot of time beyond the routine school day connecting with students. He shows up to cross country and track workouts to run with students, supports them at different athletic events, and volunteers at events such as canned food drives and Veterans Day breakfasts. “He shows that he is interested and involved, remembering the names of students and what their likes and dislikes are to build trust,” added Colvin, who is also a librarian at Centennial Elementary School.
St. Vrain empowers students with a focused curriculum that teaches mindfulness and fosters social-emotional well-being. Social-emotional learning, the process of developing self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills, is ingrained at all levels of education through InFocus for elementary school, 7 Mindsets for middle school, and Sources of Strength for high school students. These skills are vital for school, work, and life success.

At Soaring Heights PK-8, the neuroscience focus program supplements these already robust social-emotional learning curricula. Alex Shores, an eighth grader at Soaring Heights PK-8, says, “having neuroscience so readily available and everywhere in this school is helpful for my learning process because I’m a lot more engaged in learning about my mind.”

Students at Soaring Heights PK-8 are taught about mindfulness, and how emotions are connected within the brain. These lessons also prepare students to solve complex, global problems such as clearing the ocean of pollution. “You can use neuroscience to connect with anything,” says Shores. “The neuroscience focus is making me think more and making me more self-aware. It has helped me be more engaged and focused.”

Parents also play a critical role in keeping students safe at school. Knowing the role of teachers, school counselors, psychologists, interventionists, social workers, SROs, and campus supervisors helps establish and maintain healthy relationships between them, parents, and students.

Photo (Top): Student Resource Officer Andy Fairbanks talks with students at Frederick High School.

Photo (Bottom): Soaring Heights student Alex Shores works in one of the school’s makerspaces.
WE ARE ALL HERE WORKING TOGETHER FOR THE SAME PURPOSE. There is a place for everyone in St. Vrain,” shares Head Custodian Chris Ulmer as he waves and chats to students as they pass by him in the hallways at Alpine Elementary School.

St. Vrain Valley Schools has over 5,000 staff members who serve in diverse ways and are united in that they consist of a positive group of passionate and caring professionals who are all working to support student success. The sum of each staff member’s unique contributions is what makes advancing students’ well-being and academic achievement across the district possible.

Chris has worked in other industries previously and enjoys serving in a school environment where he sees himself as the caretaker of the building and has built strong relationships with colleagues and students.

“The people I work with are amazing,” remarks Chris. “My school community is a family. When it’s my birthday, I hear ‘happy birthday’ from everyone in the school – twice.”

St. Vrain team members are an integral part of their school and building community and act as role models for students. Employees have a significant impact on the lives of families in the community. Their contributions create secure and clean school buildings, safe routes for students on their way to-and-from school, healthy meals to fuel student learning, and a nurturing and fun environment for children who arrive early and stay after the last bell rings each day.
“I love my job. I have a whole lot of friends here,” says Melodie Erdmann as she sits and laughs with elementary-aged children observing clouds outside at Eagle Crest Elementary. Melodie has worked with Community Schools before- and after-school childcare programming for over 10 years and also serves as a paraprofessional in the district.

Along with the positive culture, she enjoys the flexibility of working in St. Vrain Valley Schools. When her own children were younger, she was able to work in the mornings while they were at school and have free time during the day to take care of other responsibilities. “St. Vrain works with you for a schedule that fits your needs,” continues Melodie.

Many of St. Vrain’s essential positions offer employees flexibility in their schedules, allowing them to have time during the day or a shift that works for their personal schedule. Schedule options vary by position and can offer mornings, afternoons, and/or summers off. Work schedules follow the school calendar, and offer consistent schedules where employees enjoy weekends and holidays off so they can spend more time with their families.

Johannes van Ek was a retired physicist when he decided to join the team at Main Street School as a Special Education Paraprofessional. He enjoys being a part of a community. “I came out of retirement because I wanted to make an impact. My job is fulfilling and St. Vrain offers great benefits packages,” shares Johannes.

When community members join St. Vrain Valley Schools, they are joining a mission-driven family with a shared goal to serve students, family, and staff. Employees receive all training from St. Vrain, so new staff feel prepared on day one of their new role.

“St. Vrain Valley Schools teaches you everything you need to know before you start your first route,” says Annette who serves as Bus Driver for Transportation Services. “I love the interaction with the kids and my bus assistant. I love that we work as a team. It’s a great environment.”

Natalya Varela works with a student during Community Schools before- and after-school care.

COMPREHENSIVE BENEFITS PACKAGE

St. Vrain Valley Schools offers a wide range of benefits, programs, and resources that are competitive, diverse, and flexible to meet your needs. Employees can customize a selection of benefits including medical, dental, and vision.

LEARN MORE AND APPLY AT JOBS.SVVSD.ORG OR CALL 303-682-7435
In November 2016, the St. Vrain Valley community approved a $260 million bond to address rapid continued growth, enhance school safety, and ensure that St. Vrain Valley Schools can continue our commitment to excellence in serving our community. This vote recognized that our community values public education, champions the success of our students, and has strong trust and confidence in the future of our district. Bond projects are on schedule – or in many cases, ahead of schedule – as the district operations and finance departments work diligently to stay ahead of inflation and rising construction costs to ensure that we are receiving the highest value and return on our community’s investment in our schools.

**LEARN MORE AT HTTP://STVRA.IN/BOND**

**Timeline of Major Bond Projects**  
*Note: this is not a comprehensive list of bond projects.*

**2017**  
- **Groundbreaking:** Soaring Heights PK-8, Grand View Elementary, the Innovation Center, Mead and Erie High additions  
- **Construction of building additions complete at Eagle Crest and Blue Mountain Elementaries**

**2018**  
- **Design work for construction projects at:** Erie High, Silver Creek High, Coal Ridge Middle, Fall River Elementary, Alpine Elementary, Legacy Elementary, St. Vrain Community Montessori, and others  
- **Completion of various facility improvements to charter schools:** Carbon Valley Academy, Aspen Ridge Preparatory Academy, Imagine Charter School, and Twin Peaks Charter Academy

**2019**  
- **Design work for construction projects at:** Highlands Elementary, Frederick High, Lyons Middle/ Senior, Altona Middle, Burlington Elementary, Coal Ridge Middle, Erie Middle, Spark! PK, Trail Ridge Middle, and the Aquatic Center housed at Silver Creek High School

**2020**  
- **Construction projects completed at:** Mountain View Elementary, Longs Peak Middle, Sanborn Elementary, Black Rock Elementary, Niwot High, and previously mentioned projects

**2021**  
- **Design work for construction projects at:** Centennial Elementary, Everly-Montgomery Field House, Columbine Elementary, Westview Middle, Longmont Estates Elementary, Mountain View Elementary, Erie Elementary, Central Elementary, Indian Peaks Elementary, and Rocky Mountain Elementary

**2022**  
- **Construction projects scheduled for completion at:** Central Elementary, Red Hawk Elementary, Sunset Middle, Hygiene Elementary, Northridge Elementary, Thunder Valley K-8, and Timberline PK-8

**ALL 2016 BOND PROJECTS ARE SCHEDULED FOR COMPLETION IN 2022.**
FINANCIAL ACCOLADES
- S&P bond rating of AA+, Moody’s bond issuer rating of Aa2, and Moody’s series issuance rating of Aa1
- Enrollment has grown by 4,588 since October 2010
- Fortune 500-level corporate sponsors and community partnerships
- National financial awards – annual reporting, consecutively since 2004

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY
Since 2010, the district has called or refinanced bonds to lower interest rates, saving taxpayers more than $38 million over the life of the bonds. In October of 2018, the remaining $60.3 million in bonds of the $260.3 million 2016-approved authorization were sold. Savings on combined principal and interest payments over the life of both 2016 issuances amounted to more than $21 million compared to what was originally approved by taxpayers per ballot language. Bond spending is overseen by an accountability committee of community members and the district.

General Fund Sources and Use

- 38.70% State Equalization
- 29.83% Property Taxes
- 2.68% Specific Ownership Taxes
- 2.82% Other Local Revenues
- 5.42% Other State Revenues
- 15.05% Mill Levy Override
- 5.50% Federal Revenues*

*higher due to one-time federal Coronavirus Relief Funds

How Funds are Used

- 2.99% Central Support and Admin
- 97.01% Direct Classroom Instruction and School Building and Classroom Support
#StVrainStorm   jobs.svvsd.org   stvra.in/linkedin   @svvsd

Join the #StVrainStorm
Now hiring essential positions

Make a difference.

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