



# Opinion

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## Just a girl and her paddleboard

Hannah Davis  
News Editor

The sun had just dipped below the horizon, leaving a hue of oranges and pinks and purples. With my phone in a waterproof case in hand, I locked my car, attaching the key to my shorts with the keyring, and walked down to the dock.

Slipping off my sandals, I set my inflatable paddle board into the lake, gliding it nose forward and just under the dock so I could easily plant my feet in the middle of the board. The slushing of the water sounding each time I dipped the paddle in, then pulled it out, was met with silence only broken by a loon's call.

It's the sound of a typical Minnesota summer. But for a girl on a budget like me, that means no boat and rarely time on the water. That is until this summer, when I bought my inflatable paddle board. I have always loved the water. In any location I've lived, it's the place I find the most comfort. (Finding a place for water was much harder in the plains of Montana.) When I lived in California, I was the girl who buzzed to the beach for a lunchbreak when all the other natives stayed in.

There's a sense of quiet and peace that comes with spending time on the water.

I can breathe.

I swished my way around the island that evening, then paused to sit down, holding my mug of tea in both hands as I let my feet dangle in the water as the waves gently rocked me side to side. I had many thoughts in my head at that moment. I don't think it's possible for me to not think of something. But I felt

like I could take my time to untangle them, and to reflect on the summer thus far.

In the haste of the workweek, I find myself so laser-focused on my to-do list, making sure we get a newspaper out each week to our readers: Interview this person, write this story, edit these articles, take photos here. Then I get home and there's the endless cycle of to-dos there, as well: Fix the dishwasher, pay the bills, do the laundry. It's not that I don't enjoy my job, I do. And it's not like these things aren't important: they are.

But I often forget to breathe.

The pandemic reminded me of that, in a strange, ironic way. I worked harder than ever before, but I also found myself with a lot of time on my hands, with events canceled and nowhere to go due to restrictions in place. And for as lonely as I became at times, I also relished the opportunity to slow down.

Now that restrictions have lifted (crossing all my fingers the Delta variant doesn't change much), I am finding that the pace of life is picking back up to full speed ahead once more.

I don't mind being busy. I like having people to see, places to go, events to attend. But as I'm figuring out post-pandemic life, I'm trying to choose carefully about how I fill my time, and who I choose to fill my time with.

For now, I'm choosing one to two evenings a week out on the water.

I need to remember to make some space for the quiet, for those moments in life you can just sit down with a cup of tea on your paddle board and listen to the loons.



Davis

## Normalizing Mental Health Care

There are a lot of different kinds of stigma. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, stigma is defined as "a mark of shame or discredit". There is still a lot of stigma attached to mental health concerns, even though it is very common for people to experience mental health conditions. In fact, one in five Americans are affected by mental health conditions according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). If people do not discuss their mental health conditions, it can further perpetuate their struggles and can lead to isolation, blame and secrecy for the individual suffering with mental health conditions instead of hope and support. Right now, less than half of the adults in the United States get the services that they need which may be due to stigma. The good news is that mental health conditions are treatable and we can change or normalize the discussion on mental health to get more people the support they need and deserve.

My hope as a practicing therapist is that talking about mental health conditions including seeing a therapist, and taking medications for mental health conditions start to become as common as talking about needing to go to your dentist for your regular checkup. If we can have regular discussions about seeing a therapist as seeing a dentist, it will decrease the stigma with mental health conditions a little at a time. A simple way to get started on this is to talk or ask those around you about their mental health self-care practices and routines, including strategies we use to relieve stress and if we go to a therapist and/or psychiatrist. Just like how we might share with your friends and family about if you have a cavity that needs to be filled. This will slowly shift the narrative and begin to normalize treatment for mental health conditions.

Another important part of normalizing mental health care is by taking the time to educate ourselves about mental health conditions and rejecting stigmatizing stereotype like they are due to someone's personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing. We need to dispel these false ideas about mental health conditions as there are many factors that contribute to mental health conditions.

While it will take time to change this stigma, there seems to be a slow shift in today's culture when you look at social media outlets like Tik Tok, Instagram

## Thoughts of a Therapist

Lindsay Doten



and Twitter where people are opening up about their mental health conditions. This is important as reducing stigma can also help us better recognize when we or people we care about need more support. Allina Health's Change to Chill program suggests that there are ten signs below when someone may be struggling and needs professional help.

Here are 10 signs that suggest a person who is struggling needs professional help:

1. Feeling very sad, withdrawn or unmotivated for more than two weeks.
2. Making plans or trying to harm or kill oneself.
3. Out-of-control, risk-taking behaviors.
4. Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason, sometimes with a racing heart or fast breathing.
5. Not eating, throwing up or using laxatives to lose weight, significant weight loss or weight gain.
6. Severe mood swings causing problems in relationships.
7. Excess use of drugs or alcohol.
8. Drastic changes in behavior, personality or sleeping habits.
9. Extreme difficulty in concentrating or staying still.
10. Intense worries or fears getting in the way of daily activities like hanging out with friends or going to classes.

If you or someone you know is struggling, please consider getting professional support. In the case of an emergency, dial 9-1-1 or a crisis line like the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-8255). And if you have personal experience with mental illness or addiction, please consider sharing your story with others to reduce the stigma about mental illnesses. Together, we can change the narrative on mental illnesses and connect people with hope & support.

**Lindsay Doten is an individual and family therapist at Lakes Center for Youth and Families.**



## Financial assistance for the district brightens future amidst pandemic

### Around the District

Steve Massey



One year ago, most of the conversations in the school district were related to school shutdowns and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussions today are related to starting the school year with school fully open and with fewer restrictions. We continue to monitor developments with new variants and we remain committed to ensuring student and staff safety as students return for the new school year.

As we plan for the new school year, we celebrate an incredibly successful summer school program. We served over 450 elementary students and offered an intense literacy and math instructional program designed to help students strengthen their academic skills. We also focused on student social and emotional well-being by building resilience and interpersonal awareness.

Over 150 students at the secondary level recovered lost credits and advanced their status toward graduation.

When the pandemic began and the state financial picture turned dark, most school districts panicked. We wondered how we would cover the added costs of running schools with COVID-19 mitigation measures and shifting school models. We needed to lower class size and offer distance learning models, all of which required more educators and staff.

Fortunately, the state budget rebounded from a \$4.6 billion projected deficit to a \$1.8 billion surplus allowing Legislators to pass a two year education budget that provides a 2.45% increase in per pupil funding in the upcoming school year and a 2.0% increase in the following year. This represents one of the largest increases in education funding in recent memory and will allow the school district to honor the commitments made with the 2018 Operating Referendum.

Federal, state and local financial investment in schools during the pan-

demic is beyond measure. The three federal stimulus budgets came at the most crucial time as costs were taking a dramatic toll on the district's budget. Additionally, both Washington and Chisago Counties made a strategic and vital decision to allocate some of their Federal stimulus funds to school districts in their respective counties. The district is grateful for this insightful and visionary leadership.

There are many lessons that were learned this past school year, not the least of which were:

- When appropriate, technology can be a powerful learning tool.
- Students are adaptable and quick to learn new skills.
- Learning can and should take place beyond the four walls of a classroom.
- Relationships matter and the best way to develop connections is an in-person environment.
- Educators and staff are fiercely dedicated to their profession and craft.
- Extra-curricular activities, in-

cluding athletics, arts, and clubs are critical to student life.

- Schools play a crucial role in creating a level playing field for each student to succeed and to have equal access to opportunities.
- Strong partnership with and involvement from parents is instrumental to student growth and development.

It is mid-summer and we want our students and families to enjoy the best that Minnesota summers have to offer. The start of the school year is weeks away and we are busy planning for a dynamic and exciting year. We will be ready for our students and are forever grateful for the trust our district families have placed in our educators. The quality of education provided in Forest Lake Area Schools along with the many diverse academic and co-curricular opportunities creates an unmatched education.

**Steve Massey is the superintendent of Forest Lake Area Schools.**



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