



# Opinion

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## Celebrating 2021

### Around the District

Steve Massey



Most of us would like to forget much of the COVID-dominated year 2021, myself included. In some ways, this was the hardest year many of us in education have ever faced. We continue to endure the uncertainty of the pandemic, divided opinions regarding vaccinations and mask requirements, staff shortages and fears of getting sick. Yet, through it all, we see amazing stories of resilience in our staff, students and their families. This article focuses on the countless achievements and accomplishments from 2021 that remind us that great things are happening behind the COVID headlines.

In spite of fluctuating learning models, student academic accomplishments are impressive. We know that some students suffered a loss of learning time and that will have a lasting impact for years to come without direct and intensive interventions. Hours of learning were added to summer school to provide time for students to recapture learning time. Additionally, we have implemented targeted interventions along with progress monitoring to chart student learning growth.

Proudly, we offered as much if not more in-person learning this past year than many other districts. For most students, in-person learning is far superior to distance learning and we will continue to do all we can to ensure that our students learn in the classroom with their teacher and their classmates.

The challenges and uncertainty of the pandemic did not overshadow the many significant successes and accomplishments.

- High school seniors outperformed the National average ACT Score 21.4 to 20.3.
- High school students dedicated over 3,000 hours of community service.
- Over \$2 Million in scholarships

were invested by the community to our graduates who are now studying at colleges across Minnesota and the United States.

- Music groups throughout the district performed, sometimes virtually, for families and friends.
- Theater productions performed to live audiences giving students an important form of creative expression.
- Athletically, our students continue to shine with 5 conference titles, 8 team section titles, 8 team state appearances, 55 individual state tournament appearances, 2 team state runner ups and 1 team state championship.

Just prior to the pandemic, the Athletic Field Task Force provided a bold and dynamic vision to the school board to upgrade the High School Athletic Complex. Construction began at the height of the pandemic and concluded this summer. This spring, we will hold the first home track meet in over twenty-five years. Without a rise in property taxes, this facility is both a district and community asset that deepens the pride in Ranger Territory.

The district's financial condition is very solid. With a small increase in the district's fund balance and exceptional financial management, most Forest Lake Area School District residents will see a reduction in their 2022 School District tax rate. This is largely due to increased property values, residential development and expanded industry development.

"Excellence for Every Student Every Day" is our vision. In spite of a pandemic we remain focused and committed to the 6,000 students and families we serve.

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

## How to parent more intentionally

### Thoughts of a Therapist

Lindsay Doten



As a therapist and mother, I believe that all parents long to feel more deeply connected to their child and that can seem so difficult at times. Parenting is the only job in the world that is unpaid, amazing, rewarding and challenging all at the same. In fact, a lot of times it tends to be the most challenging for me when I am exhausted or stressed myself and cannot be mentally present for my daughter. That is why I believe whole heartedly in the idea of working on being more intentional in my parenting or what some parenting experts call conscious parenting. According to an article on BetterUp by Allaya Cooks-Campbell (tinyurl.com/2p82ewac): "Conscious parenting is a child-rearing philosophy that encourages parents to make mindful, emotionally intelligent decisions in raising their children... parents are taught to manage their own behavior, thoughts, and feelings first and foremost."

The whole idea behind conscious parenting is first recognizing how we as parents are showing up in our interactions with our children and being curious about what is causing that in ourselves. Whether we initially realize it or not, our life experiences shape how we respond to things, either consciously or unconsciously. If we are not aware of our own responses and do not work on ourselves first, we can repeat patterns

that were taught to us or even our own childhood traumatic experiences. This is not to say that this always happens and that is necessarily anyone's fault, however, recognizing where we are mentally and how that may be influenced by our own upbringing is so important. The more in tune we are with our own emotions and experiences, the more intentional we can be with our children.

In order to parent more intentionally with my daughter, I have learned that I must work on being present in the moment with my child and make sure that I am trying to first regulate my own emotions. This awareness continually takes lot of practice and it can be helpful to do your own therapy work in this as well to look into what is bringing up these emotions. Then once you learn more of your own triggers for your children (crying, whining, talking back, etc.) & what is going on with you (like a history of being told not to show emotions for example) you can be more effective as a parent. While this is ultimately a longer process than some traditional parenting techniques (like time outs or authoritarian parenting), there are a lot of benefits from con-

scious parenting. Some of the research on conscious parenting found that there is ultimately better communication between the parent and their child as well as improved mindfulness and emotional intelligence in children. Most importantly, this should ultimately lead to a better connection between a parent and their child. Below is a list of key elements of conscious parenting or guidelines on how to become a conscious parent from the BetterUp article including:

### 3. Set clear boundaries

Don't think that conscious parents just let their kids do whatever they want. Part of this parenting style is communicating what is acceptable and why. When your children violate a boundary, reinforce it. Remind them that what they did isn't okay and why.

### 4. Accept how things are

New parents — especially type-A parents — often have a hard time accepting the messiness and unpredictability of parenting. Your kids are individuals, whether you love it or not — but you can love them no matter what. Accept that while things may not be perfect, they are what they are, and move forward without making the situation, your kids, or yourself wrong for it.

### 1. Talk to your kids

The next time your kids do something "wrong," take a moment before you hand out the punishment. Ask them to explain what happened. It may not change the consequences, but it will make them feel more heard.

### 2. Do the Inner Work

Conscious parenting means being aware of your own emotional hurts and parenting yourself, first and foremost. In taking time for reflection, you'll become aware of your patterns and how they impact your parenting style. Working with a coach (or therapist) — especially one that specializes in working

While the whole idea of conscious parenting may be new to you, I would encourage you that you can take steps toward it today by recognizing your own emotions and how you are showing up as a parent. I think you'll be amazed as you reflect and learn more about yourself and notice how small changes can affect you and your whole family dynamics. I hope that you have an intentional year of parenting!

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



A partnership of Adams Publishing Group and MN ADOPT to find homes for kids seeking adoption or foster families.

Michael 17, can be a very outgoing, talkative teen. Once he gets to know

He can be sarcastic at times and has a great sense of humor - there is never a dull moment with Michael!

He is bright, creative, inquisitive and loves to ask questions. Michael likes to have fun, try new things, and is fun to be around.

Some of Michael's interests include tinkering/taking things apart and putting them back together,

playing on the computer or watching videos/playing video games, being outdoors, fishing, being on the water and being creative!

Michael loves his independence and social time with friends via gaming systems. A family who could find balance between being active and enjoying days at home would be ideal. Michael would benefit from

parents who can provide structure, patience, understanding, flexibility and fun.

Following adoption, Michael would need to maintain contact with his siblings.

**If you would like more information on adopting or fostering a Minnesota waiting child, please e-mail info@mnadopt.org or call**

612-861-7115.



Michael



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