



## Program summary: Anoka-Hennepin Schools - Academic Growth Recognition

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**Research:** The Anoka-Hennepin School Board has a tradition of recognizing the academic, athletic and artistic accomplishments of students. Over time, the School Board began having conversations on ways to celebrate additional “wins” for students to recognize focused and intentional work made by students and their support systems to improve. The intent was to recognize students making the highest academic growth in a full school year, which oftentimes includes students who may normally be struggling learners who do not receive regular recognition or may have had to overcome obstacles to make progress in reading or math.

**Planning/Analysis:** The Communication and Public Relations team consulted with the district’s Research, Evaluation and Testing (RET) department and the Superintendent and the Executive Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent and School Board to develop an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the achievements of these students.

The RET department found ways to gather data using the Measures of Academic Progress, Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment, CogAT and ACCESS tests to identify the top five percent of students that made significant growth over the past school year in the areas of math, reading, and language acquisition. Growth was measured by comparing performance on two of the same assessments in any of the three examined areas. These students are awarded certificates at the school level, and those with the highest growth at each school have previously been invited for School Board recognition at an Anoka-Hennepin School Board meeting.

Previously, this effort took over six School Board meetings to complete - each one running late into the evening and didn’t allow for families to enter the space due to meeting room capacity limits. In 2024, the team worked to consolidate efforts into two formal events. By shifting the logistics of the recognitions into formal events at high school auditoriums, it would allow for efficiency in time and space, and the ability for families to celebrate the accomplishment with their students.

**Implementation/Communication:** The communications team initiated several strategies to ensure a successful recognition event, and to instill a sense of pride in the district. To do so, the following communication tactics were used:

- *Certificates:* The Communication and Public Relations team coordinated the printing and presentation of over [2,900 certificates](#) for eligible students at 35 school sites.
- *Invitations:* Families of 423 eligible students received formal and email invitations for the Academic Growth Recognition event. Invitations and event RSVPs were coordinated by the event team. [Email invitation for Feb. 6, 2024 event.](#) | [Email invitation for Feb. 28, 2024 event.](#)
- *Event script:* Written to provide concise oral presentation for district leadership. [Feb. 6, 2024 script.](#) | [Feb. 28, 2024 script.](#)
- *Presentation slides:* Created to provide useful information for the audience while waiting for the event to start, and consistent branding among all participating schools and the district. [Pre-event slides.](#) running while families wait for the event to begin. RSVPs provided the list of names of students listed on event presentation slides. [Feb. 6, 2024 presentation.](#) | [Feb. 28, 2024 presentation.](#)
- *Live stream and video archive of both recognition ceremonies:* [First event held Feb. 6, 2024.](#) | [Second event held Feb. 28, 2024.](#) Royalty-free music and lower-thirds graphics coordinated by communications team in the control room of the auditorium.
- *Event photography available to all families:* [Feb. 6 event photography.](#) | [Feb. 28 event photography.](#)
- *News stories:* [Web](#) stories published on district and all participating school websites and in district e-newsletters, shared on social media channels for the district and all participating schools.

**Evaluation:** Feedback from district leaders after the Academic Growth Recognition events was overwhelmingly positive. School principals, district administration and School Board members appreciated the efficiency of meeting with a large group of students in under an hour, and hosting the event in an auditorium elevated the formality of the recognitions.

Recognition is a strategy of the School Board to instill a sense of pride in student achievement and make connections with families. Holding the event at district high schools created an opportunity for families to attend an event at what is potentially their student’s future high school. The livestream portion allowed for grandparents and family members who lived out of state to celebrate the accomplishments of their family members. The district received phone calls and emails both asking for the livestream link and messages of appreciation for the livestream portion. This aspect helps to strengthen and extend the support network for the honored students, encouraging them to keep improving in their academic progress. Overall, the event was low-cost and effective, supporting the growth of nearly 3,000 students at a cost of less than a dollar per student, an effective return on investment.