



**WEST FARGO AREA  
EDUCATION FOUNDATION**

**“Focused on Futures”**

# 20 24 Annual Newsletter





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## **INTRO**

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The West Fargo Area Education Foundation's mission is to inspire and celebrate excellence in West Fargo Public Schools. This newsletter reflects that mission by celebrating the past through testimonials from our most recent Hall of Fame inductees. It also highlights our support for creative initiatives, such as the Family Fair and Education Pathways.

Beyond that, we assist the district in shaping future leaders and entrepreneurs through the Mini Grant Program. We also serve as both a catalyst and collaborator for innovation with the Para to Teacher Initiative.

If our work inspires you, please consider donating to the foundation. And if you feel called to be part of this impact, we'd love to hear from you-there's always room for more visionaries.

## New Executive Director

We are pleased to announce our new part-time Executive Director.

As of September 1, 2024, we have a new part-time Executive Director, Dr. Tim O. Peterson. He has served on the West Fargo Area Education Board since 2015. He recently retired from North Dakota State University, bringing 34 years of academic experience as a faculty member at the University of Tulsa, Texas A&M University, Oklahoma State University in Tulsa, and North Dakota State University. Tim retired from the U.S. Air Force in 1991 as a Lieutenant Colonel with 25 years of active-duty service.

Tim currently serves as Vice-Chair on the board of directors of Theatre B. The love of his life is Dr. Claudette Peterson, who is a Certified End of Life Doula. They have one daughter, Zoey Peterson, who lives in Vancouver, Canada. Zoey is a published writer, an award-winning filmmaker, and the Director of Digital Holdings for the Vancouver Public Library.



## Para to Teacher Initiative

West Fargo Public Schools, the fastest-growing district in North Dakota, faces the dual challenge of attracting quality educators to fill vacancies created by rapid growth and retirements. This challenge is further compounded by the diverse backgrounds of our student population, which includes many new Americans. In the spirit of Emily Style's philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of providing both "windows and mirrors" in education, our schools strive to ensure that all learners can see themselves reflected in the curriculum and among the staff.

To address this need, the Para to Teacher Initiative partners with local teacher preparation colleges to support paraprofessionals already working in the district, helping them become certified teachers. Through the West Fargo Area Education Foundation, this initiative provides tuition assistance, aids in selecting candidates from diverse backgrounds,

and facilitates enrollment in teacher preparation programs. By fostering this pathway, we tackle the teacher shortage while enriching our educational environment for all students.

We are proud to announce the first recipient of the Para to Teacher scholarship, Rashid Ibrahim, who completed his student teaching at Cheney Middle School in the fall of 2024. Congratulations, Rashid! If you would like to support this vital initiative, please consider donating through the [\*\*West Fargo Area Education Foundation website.\*\*](#)





## Hall of Fame Ceremony

The West Fargo Area Education Foundation is proud to honor the achievements of our community and alumni through this Hall of Fame ceremony. This special event celebrates the remarkable accomplishments of individuals and teams who have made significant contributions to the legacy of West Fargo High School. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Bell Bank and Bottom Line Tax LLC for their generous sponsorship of this event.



### Jamie Parsley Outstanding Alumni

Born in Fargo, ND, Jamie Parsley graduated from West Fargo High School in 1988 and developed a passion for poetry during his studies. An accomplished poet and writer, he has published numerous books, including *Fargo, 1957*, an elegiac chronicle of the 1957 tornado in Fargo. In 2006, he received an Individual Artists Fellowship from the North Dakota Council on the Arts and

has taught at various institutions, including Concordia College and the University of Jamestown. As an ordained Episcopal priest, he advocates for inclusion in the arts and community involvement.

### Greg Warren Outstanding Community

Greg Warren, a West Fargo native, has dedicated his career to serving the community through law enforcement. After joining the Cass County Sheriff's Department in 1974, he became a patrol officer with the City of West Fargo. Known for his commitment to youth, he implemented drug intervention programs and coached football for 17 years. As Lieutenant of Investigations, he supervised various law enforcement initiatives and received the North Dakota Special Olympics State Recognition Award. Greg retired in January 2023, leaving behind a legacy of service and community.

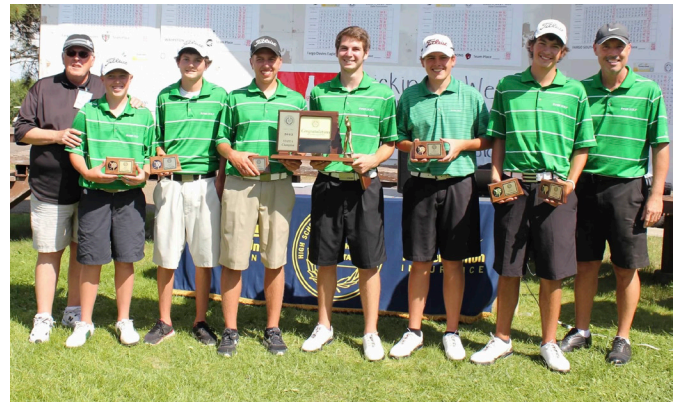


### 2012 Boys Baseball Team - Outstanding Team

The 2012 Boys Baseball Team achieved a remarkable 29-4 record, winning both the Eastern Dakota Conference Championship and the State Class A Championship against Fargo Shanley High School. This team was the first to bring a state championship title to West Fargo High School. Andrew Young was named the North Dakota High School Coaches Association Class A Senior Player of the Year and the ND Gatorade Player of the Year, while Brett Peterson received the North Dakota State Coach of the Year award. Their success established a winning tradition for the West Fargo Packers Baseball program.

### 2012 Boys Golf Team - Outstanding Team

Finishing 2nd in the Eastern Dakota Conference Golf Tournament and winning the State Class A Championship at Heart River Golf Course, the 2012 Boys Golf Team also marked a historic first for West Fargo High School. Key players included Riley Johnson, who became the Individual State Champion, and Connor Holland, named Class A Boys Golf Outstanding Athlete of the Year. Their achievements helped set a foundation for future success in the West Fargo Packers Golf program.



# Giving Hearts Day 2025

## Give Your Way: Focused on Futures

As the West Fargo community grows and becomes more enriched by each neighbor's unique and diverse experiences, our schools evolve to reflect those changes. The West Fargo Area Education Foundation strives to create exemplary futures for our students through innovative, safe, inspired, and inclusive opportunities where each member of our diverse student body can learn and grow, while seeing their own lived experiences valued and validated in our schools, curriculum, and educators.

### Our Goals This Year:

- **Meet Student Needs:**  
Allocate \$15,000 to provide hygiene products, staple foods, classroom supplies, technology upgrades, and emergency student assistance.
- **Support the Para to Teacher Program**  
Help two paraprofessionals in West Fargo Public Schools become certified teachers.
- **Fund Mini Grants**  
Provide \$10,000 to equip educators with tools and resources to create dynamic and engaging learning environments.

By Giving Your Way, we raised over **\$18,000** on Giving Hearts Day! Because of your kindness and generosity, we will be able to fund mini grants for teachers and staff, provide financial support for our para to teacher program, assist students through our immediate needs initiative, and continue creating new and exciting opportunities for our students, teachers, and schools.

**Thank you  
for being a  
GIVING HEART!**



**GIVING HEARTS DAY**

**EARLY GIVING IS OPEN!**



Fund Mini Grants

Meet Student Needs

Para To Teacher

**Give Your Way: Focused on Futures**




**GIVE YOUR WAY: FOCUSED ON FUTURES**

YOUR DONATIONS SUPPORT:  
Para To Teacher  
Fund Mini Grants  
Meet Student Needs



**GIVING HEARTS DAY**

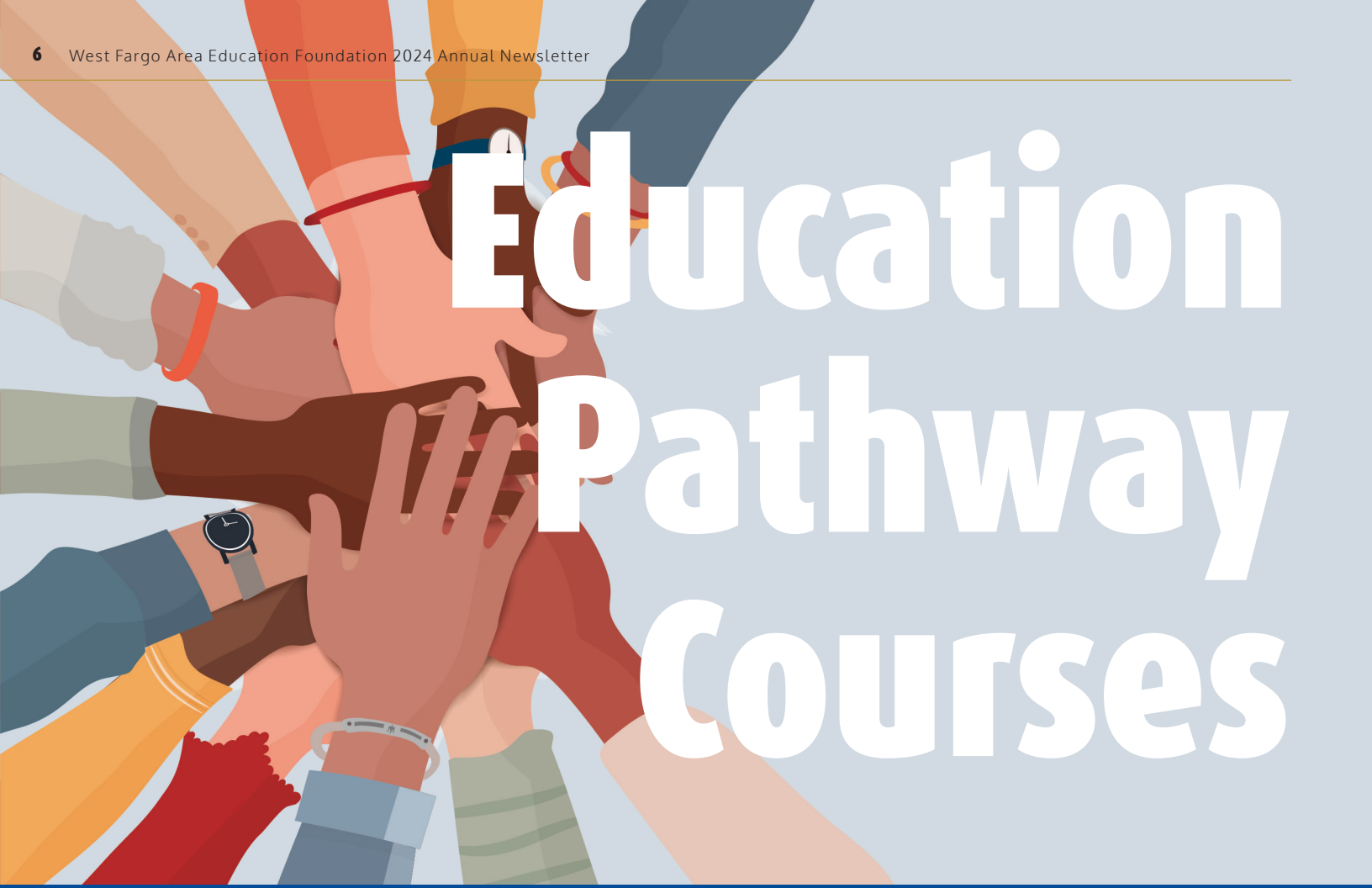
**EARLY GIVING IS OPEN!**



**GIVE YOUR WAY:  
Focused on Futures**

Your Donations Support...





# Education Pathway Courses

During the global pandemic, teaching and learning underwent a significant shift, ushering education into a new era. Educators were leaving the profession at an unprecedented rate, with departures exceeding new hires. In what seemed like a well-timed coincidence, West Fargo Public Schools launched the Education Pathway courses during the 2019-2020 school year.

## What is the Education Pathway?

The Education Pathway offers a sequence of courses for juniors and seniors interested in pursuing careers in education. These courses are available for dual credit through a partnership with Valley City State University (VCSU). While the immediate impact may not be visible, the long-term benefits have the potential to influence future generations.

Sheyenne and West Fargo High Schools were the first to introduce the Introduction to the Teaching Profession courses, with Horace following in 2023. This course provides students with opportunities to explore the foundational principles of teaching and learning. Being an educator requires wearing many hats, and this course helps students develop essential skills in classroom management, instructional strategies, understanding diverse learning styles, interpersonal relationships, and student progress tracking.

Upon completing this course, students can enroll in the Field Experience course. In this course, students gain hands-

on experience by working alongside a teacher in their chosen area of interest. Over the semester, they accumulate 40 hours of classroom experience through observation, guided interactions, and task completion. For many students, this experience serves as a pivotal moment in deciding whether teaching is the right career path for them.

## The Lasting Impact

These courses provide invaluable benefits. Students can earn up to four college credits while gaining a clearer understanding of whether a career in education aligns with their interests.

Elizabeth Krogen, a West Fargo High School alumna, was part of the first Introduction to Teaching class that year. Today, she teaches math at Heritage Middle School. Reflecting on her experience, she shares:

“The impact of the intro to education courses was vital for me. It provided knowledge, exposure, and opportunities for meaningful conversations. Having the NDSU/VCSU Dual Degree Program representatives speak to us about future career options in education was incredibly helpful.”

## Expanding the Pathway: Peer to Peer and Educating the Exceptional Child

The Education Pathway extends beyond traditional teaching courses. Peer to Peer and Educating the Exceptional Child focus on understanding and supporting exceptional learners. While Peer to Peer takes different forms at each high school, the core emphasis is on developing skills as peer mentors, advocating for individuals with disabilities, and fostering inclusive educational environments.

Horace High School's Peer to Peer instructor, Kennedy Blair, explains:

"This course develops and practices peer mentoring skills, raises awareness about disabilities, and emphasizes the importance of inclusion. Whether in classrooms, middle schools, PAES labs, or coffee shops, students engage in real-world experiences that promote meaningful inclusion for all."

After completing Peer to Peer, students can take Educating the Exceptional Child, a VCSU dual credit course with a second 40-hour field experience focusing on special education. Jenn Thielges, Sheyenne HS instructor, describes it:

"This course explores the exceptional students present in every classroom. We cover key topics that prepare general education teachers to effectively instruct all students."

An additional feature of this course includes paraprofessional training modules. By completing these modules, students can take the certification exam to earn their North Dakota Para-Certificate valuable credential that has already benefited many students. Currently, two former WFHS students are transitioning from paraprofessionals to educators through this program.

West Fargo High School 2024 graduate Ruby Chitty shares her experience:

"At first, these classes were just a credit requirement, but they quickly became a passion. Helping children and making an impact in their daily lives became something I truly cared about. Being a para at elementary and middle schools helped me connect with students and showed me how much teachers genuinely care about their students' well-being."



**KFGO Radio Interview**

## The Growing Influence

Since 2020, approximately 50 students across the district have earned their Para-Certificates. Holly Friedrich, a West Fargo High School instructor, highlights the program's impact:

"West Fargo High School is a Unified Champion Banner School, and these courses contribute to creating more inclusive environments. We've observed decreased negative behaviors among students with intellectual disabilities when paired with peer mentors instead of adults. This program has increased awareness of educational and related careers while addressing the para shortage by providing students with access to paid, entry-level education jobs."

## Looking Ahead

The Education Pathway is more than just a set of courses, it's an opportunity to invest in ourselves and the future of education with the rewards reaching far beyond our individual capacity. Through partnerships with VCSU, the Para-To-Teacher Scholarship Program, and the NDSU Dual Degree Program, West Fargo Public Schools are actively recruiting and retaining the next generation of teachers. The work accomplished so far is something to be proud of, and we look forward to expanding the program and finding even more ways to positively impact students, schools, and the community.

### **Hear directly from past and present students**



**Cass County Education Pathway Promo Video**



# Family Fall Event



Robin Nein is the school counselor for Eastwood Elementary School in the West Fargo Public Schools system. Three years ago, she started a free basic needs garage sale for Eastwood families. She wanted to expand the event to include more students and families within the West Fargo Schools District, so she conducted a pilot event called the Family Fall Event, with a large focus on Eastwood, L.E. Berger, and West Fargo High School. That pilot event then expanded to include all West Fargo Schools in the fall of 2024.

The Family Fall Event aims to provide basic resources such as food items, including fresh produce, clothing, and shoes, as well as to help families get immunization support, eye care support, and other basic needs from community members. Robin received support from the Lions Club in Horace for eye vision screenings, Family Health Care for immunizations, Scheels for shoes, and many community members donated used clothing and household items. The desire is to keep expanding resources and community



connections to offer support for families and students in the West Fargo Public Schools. As Robin reports,

**“We rely on donations for the bulk of our event.”**

One of the most critical needs for some families is immunizations. If a family does not have insurance, they can apply for a free shot; however, some immunizations require a \$20 administrative fee per shot. The West Fargo Area Education Foundation heard about this need and has established a Family Fair Fund, receiving a \$400 donation for this effort. If you would like to contribute to this effort, you can donate at the [WFAEF website](#).



# Mini Grant Stories

**We serve over 13,000 students in West Fargo. Second largest student enrollment in the state.**

One of the most exciting programs offered by the West Fargo Area Education Foundation (WFAEF) is the Mini Grants initiative! Each year, all West Fargo Public School staff have the incredible opportunity to apply for a mini grant designed to bring their innovative classroom ideas to life. Whether it's a new project, an enhancement to an existing program, or a collaborative effort among staff, these grants are here to support and inspire.

Submitted proposals are reviewed by a dedicated committee that evaluates each application based on its merit and alignment with the district's goals. The Foundation seeks grants that enhance current programming or ignite new academic and extracurricular initiatives. To ensure accountability and effectiveness, we've refined the application process, making it easier for applicants to align their proposals with our shared objectives.

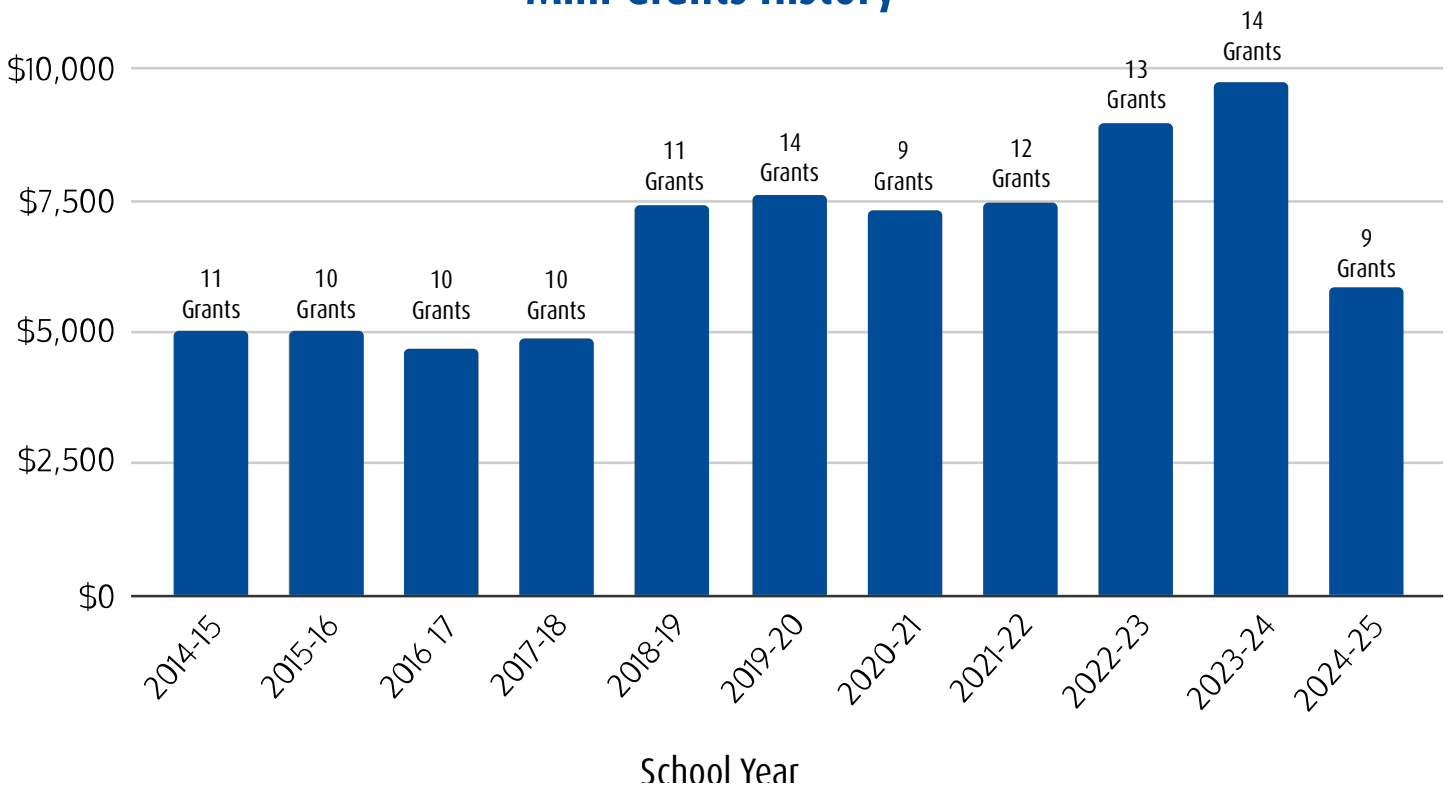
Since the program's inception, we've awarded an impressive 122 grants totaling over \$73,000 across all grade levels and schools in the district. These funds have empowered educators to implement creative and impactful projects that benefit our students and community.

If you're interested in applying for a grant, be sure to visit the Foundation's website for all the details, including application guidelines and examples of successful proposals. Keep an eye out for an email from Ms. Heather Leis, who will share the exciting opportunity to apply for a grant for the upcoming 2025-26 school year.

Together, let's invest in the future of our education system and make a difference in the lives of our students! You can contribute to this inspiring initiative right here on the [WFAEF website](#).



## Mini Grants History





## NEW BOARD MEMBERS

### CharRae Chwialkowski

CharRae Chwialkowski, NCIDQ certified with over 30 years of interior design and commercial furniture sales experience, she leads Connect Interiors as President. After graduating from NDSU with a degree in Interior Design, CharRae started her career with Steelcase, the leading commercial furniture manufacturing company in the world. In 2007, she moved back to the Fargo area with her family and joined Hannaher's Inc. where she held various design, sales, and leadership roles. In 2020, CharRae and four other women leaders purchased Hannaher's and the company became Connect Interiors.

CharRae is focused on building relationships, helping her clients achieve their goals, and positively impacting her team members and communities. Fostering diversity and growth, she is extremely proud to lead the organization with national certification as a Women's Business Enterprise, Women Owned Small Business and North Dakota Women Owned Business. CharRae is involved with the North Dakota Interior Designers organization and a member of Lutheran Church of the Cross. She resides in West Fargo with her husband, Jay, and they have four children. They have a current Junior at West Fargo High School and the other three have graduated from West Fargo High School in recent years. All have been involved in different athletic and school activities in the district.

**"I am excited to join the WFAEF board to learn more about different ways that we can make an impact in our schools and our community."**

### Dave Samson

Dave Samson is a lifelong resident of the area, having grown up on a horse farm north of West Fargo. A graduate of West Fargo High School, Moorhead Tech, and Moorhead State University, he began his 44-year journalism career at the West Fargo Pioneer in 1981. Now semi-retired from The Forum, he continues to cover sports on a weekly basis. In 2015, Samson was inducted into the West Fargo High School Hall of Fame. He lives in West Fargo with his wife, Andrea, who retired from teaching math in 2024 and now works in the school library at West Fargo High.







## Q: Why do you serve on the WFAEF Board?

### **Alison Ottesen | President**

Serving on the West Fargo Area Education Board is deeply meaningful to me, as I grew up in West Fargo and attended West Fargo High School. It allows me to give back to the schools that helped create the person I am. I have a passion to ensure that current and future students have access to the same, if not better, opportunities and resources that I had.

This role enables me to advocate for educational excellence and support initiatives that enhance the learning environment. I am committed to fostering a supportive and inclusive atmosphere where every student can thrive. It's this sense of purpose and connection to my community that makes serving on the West Fargo Area Education Board so fulfilling for me.

### **Angela Ottesen | First Vice President**

I choose to be on the WFAEF board because I believe every student deserves a fact-based education where diversity, safety, equity and inclusion are not only respected but practiced. I know every student has unique talents and gifts, and I want to ensure the barriers students face on a daily basis do not undermine their ability to reach their full potential!

### **Gary Clark | Second Vice President**

It has been my honor and privilege to serve on the board of the West Fargo Area Education Foundation. After serving for 41 years as a teacher, assistant principal and principal of West Fargo High School, I know the value of supporting our students, staff and community in extra ways that enhance their educational opportunities. In some small way I hope to give back to the West Fargo Public School district that meant so much to me!

### **Nancy Peterson | Treasurer**

I joined the West Fargo Area Education Foundation because I believe in giving back to an organization that helps support the future, our children.

### **Dr. David Flowers | Board Member**

As a retired superintendent for West Fargo Public Schools, serving on the Board for the West Fargo Area Education Foundation allows me to continue supporting the district in meaningful ways. The Foundation plays a critical role in addressing gaps that fall outside the district's budget, funding significant needs that might otherwise go unmet.

One initiative particularly close to my heart was ensuring children-especially those from financially disadvantaged families-had access to books during the summer. I was able to contribute funds to the Foundation, which helped purchase and repurpose a used school bus into the "Little Red Reading Bus." With the help of volunteers, the bus served children for several summers, bringing books and activities to neighborhood parks. Eventually, oversight of the program was transferred to the West Fargo Public Library, which has since retired the original bus and invested in a new, fully equipped mobile library. This is a perfect example of how the Foundation serves as a catalyst for lasting solutions, turning an initial vision into a sustainable program.

### **Mark Berntson | Board Member**

I serve on the WFAEF Board because I want our learners to have the best education they possibly can, and often a school district can't provide that alone. If we can plug some holes or provide some opportunities I'm all in!

### **Tim O. Peterson | Executive Director**

I serve on the West Fargo Area Education Foundation because the output from the West Fargo School system will be my plumber, my doctor, my auto mechanic, my accountant, my... I want that output to be professionally competent organizational citizens. This will only happen if I am engaged in the system.

Thank you for your continued support of the West Fargo Area Education Foundation (WFAEF). Your commitment to our mission and involvement in our initiatives make a significant impact on the lives of students and educators in our community. Together, we are creating opportunities that empower our future leaders and inspire a love for learning.

At WFAEF, we believe in being **Focused on Futures**-and with your generosity, we can continue to enhance educational experiences and foster growth within our schools. We appreciate your partnership and look forward to the incredible achievements we can accomplish together.

## **THANK YOU FOR INVESTING IN THE FUTURE!**

[www.wfaed.foundation](http://www.wfaed.foundation)

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**Nancy Peterson** - Treasurer - [nap70@live.com](mailto:nap70@live.com)

