

# **Staff Commendations**

## **February 2026**

*Thank you to Allison Kupka and the Kupka Real Estate Team for their generous donation to the Angel Fund and towards other educational endeavors at DCG. We truly appreciate their support.*

*-DCG Administration*

*I would like to recommend Maxim Novak for a commendation award. He is a night custodian here at Oak View and he is very willing to help and go above and beyond for DCG. He once found a teacher's debit card on the hallway floor here at the school and went out of his way to try and find her name and email address so he could return the card to her. He is relatively new here at DCG and when we find good custodians, I believe we should acknowledge them. Max comes to work each day and does what is expected of him and more.*

*-Becky Keeling*

*I'd like to give a big shout-out to the ELL team—Leah Mertz, Danielle Heintz, Christine Kane-Finn, and LaRee Hawks—for their hard work as we begin practicing and administering the ELPA21 Summative Assessment. The process can be daunting, but you handle it with such grace and dedication. Thank you for all you do and for being such incredible teammates!*

*-Kayla Holland*

*I would like to nominate Stephanie Madsen to be recognized for everything she does for DCE. Steph is the go to person when you need something. She loves the kids and is so very helpful to the teachers of the associates*

*-Beth Wright*

*I would like to recognize Kendra Foster (associate at Oak View) for being a team player and volunteering to take bus duty. This was a huge help for the team and we are very grateful for your willingness and flexibility! Thank you!*

*-Cindy Nelson*

*I would like to recognize someone who is almost staff - Stacy Frett (Anne's husband). Stacy is in charge of all of our set pieces and items that we need for Large Group Speech Contest. He takes care of the trailer and loading and unloading and fixes things that need to be fixed. Even in below zero temperatures, he takes care of us all. Thanks!*

*-Sarah Schaefer*

*Ed Carter and Kim Merryfield have been holding down the DCE cafeteria alone as they have been working with some absences lately. It's a lot of work for them, but they've done an amazing job making sure our kiddos are fed and through the line quick enough to have time to eat. Thank-you to them for all they do and the patience they do it with*

*-Tracey Smith*

*I would like to recognize my General Education associate, Cathy Scholl. Cathy comes to work every day so excited for whatever lies ahead. She is so kind and caring to staff and students. Her ability to be flexible is admired. I can depend on her to support our multi-age learners in any way that is needed to help our students be the most successful they can. She takes initiative because she has a natural ability to support learning in our classroom. We are thankful for her collaboration and excellent attitude every day!*

*-Shea Jorgensen*

*I am honored to commend my partner teacher, Maddy Wardlow, for her outstanding work with our shared students. This may be her first year teaching, but Maddy demonstrates the skill, professionalism, and dedication of a veteran educator. Her ability to connect with students—both academically and personally—is remarkable and has had a noticeable impact on our learning community. Miss Wardlow approaches each day with a passion for math and science that inspires her students to engage, question, and persevere. Her commitment to building relationships, fostering a positive classroom environment, and continuously seeking ways to improve her teaching practice sets her apart. I am grateful to collaborate with Maddy Wardlow and witness firsthand the difference she makes every day. She is a tremendous asset to our team and to our students.*

*-Sara Cockrum*

*A big thank you to Megan Seifert for finding and coordinating special presenters to enrich the topics our preschoolers are learning about this year! Your efforts truly make our preschool program even better.*

*-Jennifer Haack*

*I would like to recognize Kim Brauckman (associate at Oak View). Kim is always willing to fill in wherever needed. She has been such a huge help covering schedules and I appreciate her teamwork and flexibility. Thank you Kim!*

*-Cindy Nelson*

*I would like to recognize Kassie Jordan (associate at Oak View). Kassie has been such a huge asset to our team. She is patient, kind, caring and works so well with our kids. She brings joy to our team! We appreciate you Kassie! Thank you for all that you do.*

*-Cindy Nelson*

*I would like to personally recognize Sara Sonius for the impact she makes on our team and our students every day. Having the opportunity to work alongside her, I have consistently seen the level of patience, professionalism, and genuine respect she brings into every interaction. Sara meets students where they are, treats them with dignity, and takes the time to ensure they feel heard and understood. Her work ethic is evident in the way she is always willing to step in, help wherever needed, and follow through on what she says she will do. What truly makes her stand out as a role model is the consistency of her character. She treats every staff member and student with the same level of kindness and professionalism, regardless of the situation. That consistency creates a safe and positive environment for students and staff. I have personally appreciated how reliable and respectful she is—she sets a tone that makes it easier for everyone around her to do their best work. I am grateful to work alongside someone who models such professionalism and care on a daily basis. Thank you!*

-Caelyn Briley

*I would like to recognize Taylor Cook for being so supportive with the student that we share. She has been amazing to collaborate with and has shown a great deal of commitment. I have really enjoyed working with her so far this year and am looking forward to working with her more in the future.*

-Kristina Miller

*I would like to recognize Kelcie Stratton. She consistently goes above and beyond in service to students, demonstrating kindness, compassion, and a genuine love for the work she does each day. Her positive attitude and caring nature creates a supportive environment where students feel valued, safe, and encouraged to succeed. In addition to her work with students, Kelcie is always willing to lend a helping hand, stepping in wherever needed and contributing to a strong sense of teamwork within the building. Her willingness to support others exemplifies the very best of our district's values.*

-Stephanie Madsen

*I'd like to recognize Jessica Soukup. She does an amazing job of listening to and working with the visual arts team to support us!*

-Maddison Maddock

*I would like to commend Nejra Vatres, our exceptional special education teacher, who consistently goes above and beyond. She is always present and ready to help wherever needed. Nejra is deeply dedicated to her students and has a genuine passion for helping them succeed! I am truly grateful for the opportunity to work with her, as she is an incredible and reliable colleague!*

-Brittany Halsrud

*I would like to commend Cara Piepho, the school nurse for both the middle school and DCE. She balances both buildings with incredible reliability, optimism, and professionalism. Cara is a happy, steady presence and a true wealth of knowledge. She has personally taught me so much and is a wonderful leader with a warm, positive spirit! So happy to know her!*

*-Brittany Halsrud*

*A huge thank you goes out to Sydney Wessling, Asia Olson, Allison Prohaska, and Leanna Houston for opening up your classrooms and welcoming a group of visiting teachers from another district to see your amazing MyView Literacy lessons in action! We were all impressed to see creative student engagement ideas, evidence-based teaching strategies, and how you all are implementing MyView so well! The students were achieving at high levels, and that was exciting to see! Your vulnerability, courage, creativity, and flexibility is much appreciated!!*

*-Tyra Behnkendorf & Shana Olson*

*Lexi Willie, thank you very much for opening up your classroom for multiple days and sharing the intuitive ways you and your team have adapted the MyView writing resource with integrity! It was exciting to see the students so highly engaged with the genre, and the scaffolds you put into place to meet them right where they are was impressive! Thank you for your willingness to share your experiences, it's much appreciated!!*

*-Tyra Behnkendorf*

*A big thanks to Kari Traver for always knowing what our students need and then doing it. She makes such amazing connections with some of our students that really need that positive adult interaction. Thanks for all that you do every day!*

*-Jenny Rants*

*Thank you to Bobbie Bruns for approaching each day as an opportunity for growth for her student. She adores her Kindergarten friend and wants him to be the best he can be every day. We appreciate you!*

*-Jenny Rants*

*A huge shout out to Kari Traver and Maddie Stites for literally running to make sure one of our friends was safe. It was an unexpected workout at 7:50 in the morning, but your efforts were appreciated.*

*-Jenny Rants*

*I would like to recognize Tyra Behnkendorf and Rebecca Skow for their willingness to jump in and tag team library coverage for me! One of the many things that I love about DCG is that our staff supports one another, and this is a perfect example of that. Thank you so much, Tyra and Rebecca!!*

*-Betsy Bejarno*

*Shoutout to Abie Wych, Joan Werner, and Kari Traver. We were short associates and these three stepped up to help during the busiest time of the day. I cannot explain how helpful this is....for the teacher and the other students. Thank you!*

-Jenny Rants

*Renae Conway: She's at it again. Always stepping up to fill any needs the district needs and to inform all of the staff of helpful ways to encourage and challenge our students. She goes the extra mile to make learning fun and engaging.*

-Gena Pierce

*Rebecca Skow: Rebecca is always looking for engaging ways to teach students. She makes connections quickly with the students. She is interested in what they are doing outside of school as well as when they are here at Northridge. Rebecca also works closely with the staff to ensure that she is collaborating in a way that will support the staff as well as the student.*

-Gena Pierce

*Mallory DeLacy: I appreciate all the support you provide for not only our students but also staff! You go above and beyond to make sure everyone's needs are met. If I have something difficult to talk through, I feel blessed that you take the time to listen, support, and offer ideas. Thanks for all you do!*

-Klaire Jungling

*Brittany Halsrud: Thank you for being a light here at DCE! My students feel so safe, supported, and loved around you which is such a great gift. I appreciate your collaboration and willingness to problem solve situations with me, and I admire your patience and empathy. Thanks for all you do!*

-Klaire Jungling

*Steph Madsen: Thank you for being the glue that holds our school together! My students admire you, and we appreciate all the work you do behind the scenes to make sure the school day runs smoothly. You're the perfect person to greet students, families, and visitors, and you do a great job giving them a glimpse at how great DCE really is. Thanks for all you do!*

-Klaire Jungling

*Megan Klein: You have been such a great support to me as a new teacher in the field! Your positivity inspires me, and I love brainstorming/problem solving together. Your students are beyond lucky to have a teacher with such kindness, patience, and passion. Thanks for being such a great role model, not only to your students but also to me!*

-Klaire Jungling

North Ridge ❤️

You won't find a better team of people dedicated to their students' growth and to building healthy relationships with their students and the people they work with every day. It's truly remarkable and impressive! All the fine details involved in implementing a plan for a student or classroom can be overwhelming and difficult at times. But if you want to know what it looks like to truly show up for your people, come spend a day walking in the shoes of any staff member at North Ridge. The leadership Mrs. Heitland displays is a blessing to all the families we serve at North Ridge. Every person who works or volunteers at North Ridge leaves a lasting impact on the lives of every student and for generations to come!

-Erika Borcherding

Girls DCG Wrestling Team - Coach Rex Gray, Nicole Merical, and Riley Kovaleski, A huge shoutout to these three coaches who led four girl wrestlers to STATE this season. These coaches displayed compassion for every single girl wrestler while balancing coverage for each match. As this sport continues to grow in numbers for these girls, the foundational values it teaches will positively impact DCG and our community for generations to come. There are also a handful of wrestling coaches from the boys' side who have shown up for these girls, and their time has not gone unnoticed. Being called "Coach" is a sign of respect, and these girls have nothing but respect and pride for all their coaches who have played a major role in growing girls wrestling at DCG.

-Erica Borcherding

Boys DCG Wrestling Team:

Coach Stratton leads by example by including athletes of different abilities. The inclusion that Coach Stratton promotes sets an example that all coaches, directors, and teachers at DCG should uphold. Coach Stratton and Coach Rex have led the DCG wrestling program in a direction where anyone who wants to wrestle can. The character these athletes build on and off the mat is a true testament to what DCG stands for and what inclusion looks like under state laws and regulations.

-Erica Borcherding

Madison Melchert,

Thank you for showing up to all the home tournaments and duals. Your support means a lot to the community and the wrestling families!

-Erica Borcherding

Thank you to Gena Pierce and Shana Olson for their work on Transitional Kindergarten report card statements. Their work has been meaningful and allows us to continue the progression throughout the grades.

-April Heitland

*Thank you to Stacie Walker, Michelle Mickle, and Sarah Irlmeier for their continued work with our kindergarten students that foster positive peer relationships and always meeting the needs of the students in their classrooms.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you to Sarah Hinrichs for her leadership throughout our district. Her active leadership role with our safety committee has been instrumental in providing us with the training that we need. She also leads at the building level as someone that staff members see as a colleague that is a servant leader. She is always willing to step in and collaborate and support all students.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you to Renae Conway for her leadership with the acceleration process for students at North Ridge. She is thorough, an excellent communicator, and data driven.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you Chloe Nixon for the opportunities she provides the students in her classroom for enrichment. Her differentiated approach allows students to receive just what they need.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you to Emma Hartman and Joanna Hammond for the collaborative approach. They work closely as a team to provide the most successful environment for our students.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you to Courtney Hixenbaugh, Brittany Mendlik, Deanna Weber, and Alyria Morshead for their collaboration and teamwork to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for students.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you to Erin Bryant for her continuous support, positive attitude and solutions focused approach. Erin is a bright spot for all staff, students, and families at North Ridge.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you to Mary Deahr for her contagious positive attitude and ability to support students and staff.*

*-April Heitland*

*Thank you to Traci Gafford and her ability to build strong and lasting relationships with the students at North Ridge. She is kind, caring, and compassionate.*

*-April Heitland*