

DISTRICT 721 NEWS

This publication is a response to community members' requests for more district news. Content suggestions are welcome!



Mission

To engage and support everyone in high levels of learning.

Vision

To be a premier school district that models excellence and embraces the challenges of the 21st century.

Values

- Allocate time and support to best practice research and implementation
- Respect diverse thinking
- Model appropriate, positive interactions
- Think globally
- Learn and apply supportive, interactive technologies

Priorities

- High Academic Achievement
- Maintaining Fiscal Integrity
- Effective, Engaging Communication

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Young Americans Workshop

On September 17, 2013, 253 students from around the district participated in the Young Americans National Outreach Tour Show. They learned the show in three days and performed in the NPMS gym for family and friends. During the three-day workshop, students took classes in voice, dance, and improv comedy. Along with singing and dancing, they forged new friendships, tried new things, and learned the importance of teamwork and respect.

The Young Americans are a non-profit organization based out of Southern California. They were founded in 1962 by Milton C. Anderson to shed a positive light on the youth of America. Since 1992, the Young Americans have traveled all over the globe, facilitating music workshops to highlight the importance of arts education.

The current tour had 46 Young Americans from all over the world, including the UK and Russia. Three New Prague alumni are currently traveling and teaching with the group: Kyle Hertaus (class of 2011), Michael Lunder (2012) and Molly Wick (2012). The tour will take them through Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Canada.

Students had a great time taking the workshop and learned more than just songs and dances. "I learned that if you made a mistake it didn't matter," said Elise Pahl, a 4th grader at Raven Stream Elementary. She also said "I like that you can show your personality through singing and dancing." Caleb Loney, an 8th grader, said, "The workshop is not just singing- you are able to express yourself."

The Young Americans tour this region every three years. Emma Deihl, a senior, has taken the workshop four times. When asked what keeps

her coming back, she said "It's a great experience, and there are new songs each time. It's a great confidence builder and gets you out of your comfort zone."

The Young Americans are currently running their "Turn up the Music" campaign, an attempt to raise one million dollars for the schools they work with over the next three years. As part of their campaign, New Prague received their highest award: a "Platinum Record" for having a "Distinguished Performing Arts Program."

Overall, the workshop was a success according to students, staff, and administration. With the help of the Young Americans, the students of New Prague Area Schools had the opportunity to gain valuable performing experience, work as a team and discover their potential. Look for the Young Americans to be back in New Prague in 2017!



FROM *the* SUPERINTENDENT

The Future of Technology

Technology Co-Directors Shaw Brandt and Greg Pint led two teams of educators through a year-long study of technology integration. The purpose of the teams' study was to make a recommendation to the School Board so they would be able to make an informed decision about the direction of educational technology at New Prague Area Schools. The study included survey information that was collected from nearly 1,000 students, teachers, and parents, collaborative research, event presentations, site visits to other school districts, consultations from vendors, sharing of personal experiences, and professional discussions.

In November, they presented their recommendation to the School Board. The team recommended that New Prague Area Schools move forward with a Digital Learning Environment. The New Prague School Board approved the team's recommendation at their board meeting on December 12, 2013.

A Digital Learning Environment is a student-centered framework where opportunities for learning and access to educational resources

are available anytime, anywhere. Components include 21st century skills (communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking), digital curriculum, mobile devices (wifi laptop or tablet), and personalized learning.

The transformation to a Digital Learning Environment will create opportunities for our students that are simply not possible without anytime, anywhere access to the internet. For example, it generates opportunities for: student collaboration, more timely feedback, differentiation, providing equal access to technology for all students, and engaging all students in high levels of learning where they can work at their own pace and ability.

Google Chromebooks were selected as the devices for students in grades 2-12, and touch tablets for grades PreK-1. The purchase plan will be a three year lease option. The implementation timeline will begin with a 1:1 initiative for all students in grades 9-12 in the high school for 2014-15. The 1:1 initiative will follow for middle school students in grades 6-8 in 2015-16. The elementary schools will implement classroom sets in 2016-17. Our plan is to re-direct and re-prioritize funds within

our existing budget to pay for this lease.

It is important to understand that a successful learning environment focuses on teaching and learning, not the technology. The device is a tool for learning but the teacher facilitates the process and guides each student down their path of personalized learning. Successful digital learning environments implement a number of different devices, use a variety of learning management systems, and collect data with a range of assessment applications; but all focus on student learning and applying best practices in teaching.

We are very excited about creating learning environments, at every grade level, that develop the potential of each learner for success in a changing world. The best way to accelerate learning is by embedding technology into student courses and classrooms. We believe by transforming to a Digital Learning Environment, we are truly aligned to our school district's mission – "To engage and support everyone in high levels of learning."

Tim Dittberner

Gifted and Talented Update

By Bethany Pearson, Gifted and Talented Coordinator

Over the past few months, Bethany Pearson, Gifted and Talented Coordinator for New Prague Area Schools, has had the opportunity to meet with all of the Gifted and Talented Cluster teachers in the district. Together, they looked over the students currently identified as GT, as well as the high achievers in each grade level. What has come to light is that New Prague Area Schools have a number of very high achieving students who are not identified as being Gifted and

Talented, and thus are not included in cluster classrooms.

Cluster classrooms are those in which a group of identified students with a specific need are housed together, so that a teacher can concentrate on meeting their specific needs. This is frequently done with Gifted and Talented students, but may also be of use with other special populations including English Language Learners or students with other special needs.

In response to this finding, the GT team will be looking at possible revisions to the identification process, so that as a district we can best serve all of our students. We will also be looking at the mission and vision for Gifted and Talented education, to make sure that programs are being designed to match, as well as identify and serve all of the students who best fit the program.



For news and info as it happens, follow District 721 on Twitter!

Food for Friends at Falcon Ridge

By Dave Giesen, Principal at Falcon Ridge Elementary

In the final months of last school year, an effort was made at Falcon Ridge Elementary to reach out to families in need within our community. With the help of Peace Center Director, Noreen Seurer, assistance was given to designated and willing families by sending a

backpack filled with food items home with the student on Friday afternoons. The goal was to directly impact Falcon Ridge families who, for a variety of reasons, are struggling to make ends meet. This Falcon Ridge project is modeled after the nationally recognized



KINDERGARTEN UPDATE *for* 2014

As many of you are likely aware, for the first time the Legislature for the State of Minnesota has agreed to fully fund, tuition free, all-day, every-day Kindergarten throughout the state beginning this coming Fall 2014. While the funding will be available for all-day, every-day Kindergarten, districts do have the option to provide other alternatives for programming. Recently, prospective parents of incoming Kindergartners were surveyed on their preference for their child next fall and nearly 90% of parents who completed the survey stated that they would opt for the every day, full day choice.

Recently, two parent question and answer forums were held at Eagle View (December 2) and Falcon Ridge (December 9). Over 60 parents, building and district level administration, school board members, and a representative group of Kindergarten teachers from each site attended. Julie Hull (Kindergarten teacher) and Terrye Wagner (district teacher/Kindergarten parent) presented to the group the rationale for everyday Kindergarten and what a typical schedule would like in New Prague Area Schools.

We received wonderful feedback from the parents in attendance, great questions and points were raised. A formal recommendation for Kindergarten programming for the 2014-2015 school year will be made to the school board on January 6. As always, the school board is looking to provide both equitable and practical programming for Kindergartners to ensure high levels of learning for all students in New Prague Area Schools.

“Blessings in a Backpack” program, which has a similar concept. Area districts such as Jordan and Shakopee have comparable programs in their communities.

One of the first steps taken last winter was to identify the families eligible for this program and who were interested in participating. Falcon Ridge Social Worker Amy Hennen worked directly with Mrs. Seurer, to ensure that proper foods and quantities for the size of each family would be allocated on a weekly basis. “We needed to be certain that this type of a program would have staying power,” stated Hennen. “After knowing the financial and moral support of Noreen Seurer would be there, we felt confident that this program would be successful for us.” This was the start of Food for Friends at Falcon Ridge.

Currently, each Wednesday a Peace Center employee delivers food to Falcon Ridge where it is stored overnight. On Thursdays, varying groups of staff members volunteer a small amount of their time to stuff the backpacks, which are kept until Friday when students are able to take a backpack home. Each pack is filled with food for the number of people in the family along with instructions to return the empty backpack on Monday.

We are hopeful that eligible Falcon Ridge families will take advantage of this opportunity. Cooperation of Falcon Ridge staff with Noreen Seurer and the Peace Center has helped to make this dream a reality; by working together Food for Friends can assist those with nutritional needs within the school community.

District 721 Staff Development Update

The November 1st staff development day was a great success. Teachers had the opportunity to select professional courses from a catalog of offerings tailored to best meet their needs. Presenters were brought in from outside of the district to provide more information on text series (Everyday Math) and other subjects. Many of our teachers also stepped up to present informative classes on technology, classroom management and instructional strategies. We have a wonderful resource in each other and a huge thank you goes out to those teachers that presented. Many staff members were also given an opportunity to work with the curriculum to help develop district wide “I can” statements that help to make the MN State Standards, more student-friendly.

A January Staff Development day is currently being planned. It too, is sure to bring many new insights and learning opportunities for all.

S.M.A.R.T. Pre-K



New Prague district preschools and the Early Childhood Family Education program have implemented a new curriculum this year that helps children's brains and bodies get ready to learn. Stimulating Maturity through Accelerated Readiness Training (S.M.A.R.T.) Pre-K provides the foundation for the basic readiness skills that are crucial for supporting students in becoming successful learners.



This program includes engaging physical activities for building large and fine motor skills, balance and coordination, visual efficiency, eye-hand coordination, attention and more. These readiness skills provide students with the tools necessary to attend and learn, enabling them to be "ready" for school.

Brain-based learning has gained a lot of attention in the education world and S.M.A.R.T. Pre-K is not only brain-

based, but it is also a brain stimulating program. It uses a developmental approach to reach all learners. Many preschool classes are multi-aged and developmental abilities are vast. With children ages 3-5 there are many students who are capable of learning, but developmentally they are just not able to take in and process information efficiently.

S.M.A.R.T. Pre-K provides stimulating activities to help bring children up to or beyond their age level and prepares them to learn prior to entering elementary school.

Research says...

- Hart and Risley (1995) found that while some children enter kindergarten with a vocabulary of 4,000 words, children from deprived environments in the same class may only know 2,000 words.
- Roughly half of children entering Minnesota kindergartens were not proficient in language/literacy and mathematical thinking (Minnesota School Readiness Business Advisory Council, Ready for School, 2004)

With these statistics in mind, licensed New Prague Area Schools' Early Childhood staff attended a two and half day training this past summer to learn how to implement the S.M.A.R.T. program into their classrooms. Kristen Palma, preschool teacher at Eagle View said, "This curriculum has been an exciting new addition to our classrooms! It engages all learners and provides students with the opportunity to experience whole body learning."

Our district preschool classrooms have implemented the S.M.A.R.T. circuit format, which is similar to the S.M.A.R.T. rooms located

in the district's elementary schools. Students engage in gross motor activities that develop coordination, balance, eye-hand coordination, eye-teaming, and fine motor skills. These activities are not only enabling the student's bodies to get ready to learn, but they are also reinforcing skills that have been previously taught in the classroom. Other components of the S.M.A.R.T. program are implemented throughout the class day to "ready" students for the next part of the day. These activities include helicopter spins, vision activities, and reflex activities. Katie O'Brien, preschool teacher at the Early Childhood Center and Eagle View says, "By incorporating some of these activities into crucial parts of the day students are able to stay focused and increase their attention spans."

S.M.A.R.T. activities can be implemented during preschool arrival time, circle times, center time or transition times. Bridget Barnett, Central Education Center preschool teacher, stated, "Implementing S.M.A.R.T. activities during transition times of the day eliminates any down time that may have existed previously and keeps students engaged in their learning." Some of the activities conducted during these transition times include; tactile trackers, near-far activities, and Rapid Automated Naming, which develop eye-hand coordination, focus, and fluency. The preschool classrooms also utilize S.M.A.R.T. workboxes. These workboxes contain various fine motor activities that are rotated bi-weekly and are important in the development





of the hand and wrist muscles in preparation for writing. Britt Anderson, PM Preschool teacher and ECFE Peek into Preschool and Preschool Plus teacher has also implemented S.M.A.R.T. activities into her weekly parent /child classes:

“We are excited to be adding this curriculum into our ECFE classes. Our children are participating in fun physical activities and parents are learning about the value of these activities in developing the skills necessary for readiness for school.”

S.M.A.R.T. Pre-K is a valuable tool for teachers of young children. We know that most of our brain development occurs during the early years of life. S.M.A.R.T. helps children’s brains and bodies get ready to learn. The activities help give children the readiness skills necessary for attending and learning when they enter Kindergarten. The biggest plus...the children are having fun!



What is Help Me Grow?

Help Me Grow is a state-wide program designed to reach out to families of young children who have concerns about their child. We provide information and connect at-risk children with the services they need. Children in this “at risk” group include infants and young children that are premature, have known syndromes, suspected autism spectrum disorder, motor delays, developmental delays or any other condition known to hinder development.

New Prague Help Me Grow is the first step for many families in getting their child the help needed before they start kindergarten. We offer free screening and assessment, and provide a variety of early intervention services to children that qualify. Our Help Me Grow Program recognizes that your family is the first and best teacher of your child and that children learn best through play. We work to enhance and support your family’s knowledge as you help your child learn and develop throughout daily activities and routines.

Early Intervention Program



Our Early Intervention Program, otherwise known in New Prague as our Birth to Three Year Old Program, offers home visits to assist children in their natural environments. When a child is in our Early Intervention Program, parents can expect that the service provider will work closely with them to give the information they need to help their child all through their day and in the routines that are hardest for the child and parent.



What Are Home Visits Like?

Our Early Intervention teacher takes the time to go over what has gone well and not well since the last visit. Based on the family needs and priorities, the school staff will help the family problem solve and give information and ideas of activities they can do to enhance play and daily routines. They also help connect families with community resources and supports as needed.

What Parents Are Saying About the Early Intervention Program...

“This is an outstanding program with incredible teachers using important tools to help my kids conquer the challenges that they were faced with as well as equip us as parents with the tools needed 24/7 to help continue the on the track to success. What a wonderful program that changed our lives forever.” - Jill

“Our whole family was significantly affected by the early intervention services that our youngest son received through the school district. Thanks to the help and support that was provided through home visits and the transition to preschool program, we all learned how to communicate and interact with him in a more positive way.” - Lori

Resources

For more information about Help Me Grow:

www.helpmegrowmn.org/

State-Wide Help Me Grow Referral Line:

1-866-693-4769

New Prague Help Me Grow:
952-758-1728

To Connect to our New Prague Early Intervention Website:

<http://teacherweb.com/MN/NewPragueFalconRidge/EarlyChildhoodSpecialEducation/>

Parent Aware - Redefining Quality Early Childhood Programs and Childcare



Finding quality child care and early learning programs starts by asking questions. The first question is simple. What is quality care and education? Safety, caring relationships, convenience, cost, and learning environment are all important concerns when making decisions about child care and preschool programs. Parent Aware wants all Minnesota children to be ready for kindergarten and wants to help answer those questions. Research tells us that children who enter kindergarten ready to learn are more likely to be successful in school and have a more positive attitude toward learning. Readiness for kindergarten means making the most of child care and early learning experiences as well as learning at home. Well-trained early care and education professionals, teaching and tracking key milestones in learning and development, are there to help.

Parent Aware is a Minnesota Child Care program that provides free tools and resources to help parents ask important questions and make informed choices about high quality early learning opportunities for their children. The program helps parents find early education providers in their communities that are focused on high quality early learning environments and curriculum. The program includes a star rating system that measures best practices, as identified by research, that help children succeed in school. Our district preschools at the Central Education Campus and Early Childhood Center in New Prague and Eagle View Elementary in Elko New Market were recently awarded a Four-Star Rating in the Parent Aware Program. A Four-Star rating indicates that a program has shown that their teachers or providers have completed a minimum of 8 hours of training in curriculum and 8 hours of training in assessment and are committed to continued professional development. Four-Star rated programs have adopted an approved kindergarten

readiness curriculum, use proven approaches in their daily routines and activities, regularly assess children on their skill development, adapt lessons and goals to meet individual needs, and communicate and conference with parents.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services leads Parent Aware in coordination with the Minnesota Office of Early Learning. They are working with communities to provide and share ratings of early care and education programs by 2015. Parents can go to www.parentawareratings.org to find programs, resources and scholarships for eligible families.

If you are looking for a child care program or preschool program, ask questions. The more you learn, the more your child will learn. If you would like more information about New Prague/Elko New Market preschool programs or daycare information please call the School Readiness Program at 952-758-1674.



New Prague Area Education Foundation

*Written by
Daniel R. Bishop
President of the
New Prague Area
Education Foundation*

The New Prague Area Education Foundation (NPAEF) is pleased to report that 2014 promises to be another great year for students in the New Prague Area School District. Many thanks go out to our local educators and staff for their devotion toward the youth in this community as they provide a consistent and continual passion for excellence in education.

NPAEF's role is to promote excellence for over 4,200 area students by enriching their education with tangible programs that go beyond the normal classroom experience. This is done by managing our community's generous contributions which provide the support and funding that allow our students the opportunity to receive truly exceptional opportunities.

Over the past year, the foundation funded 6 grant requests and awarded 41 scholarships, increasing the scholarship dollars given by 54% over the previous year. Established just three years ago, NPAEF has provided over \$27,000 in grants and \$70,000 in scholarships. Since its conception, this investment fund has been expanded to over \$75,000 for the sustainability of the foundation and the educational enrichment of our youth for generations to come.

With an eye toward the future, the NPAEF expanded the board and will continue to operate on a volunteer basis. This keeps expenses to a minimum and allows for additional investment in our students, making the most of the time and money donated by current supporters. Goals for this year include raising additional funds to enable approval of more grant requests from our teachers, completing the NPAEF display at New Prague High School, continuing Distinguished Speaker events with free admission, increasing the number of scholarships given, and growing

our investment fund. Furthermore, we are currently completing a strategic planning process to develop and track progress toward those long-term initiatives. Please visit the foundation website at therootstogrow.org, for more information, an events calendar, and ways to help this worthy cause. The numerous donors who have invested in the future of our students continually impress and inspire. We are blessed to live in an area that honors and supports the education of our students; with our community's continued generosity, we are preparing our youth for success.

The New Prague Area Education Foundation wishes to thank Shawn Brandt, Kristy Mach, Amy Trygestad, and Jerry Walerius for their contributions as past members of the board as well as to welcome new board members Cheryl Kotek, Marla Mayer, Cindy McNab, Kytyn Schoenbauer, Darlene Seurer, and Stef Tupy. These people and other dedicated board members deserve a big thank you for working hard to make our local educational experience superior.

BOARD HEARS 2012-13 FINANCIAL REPORT *and* AUDIT

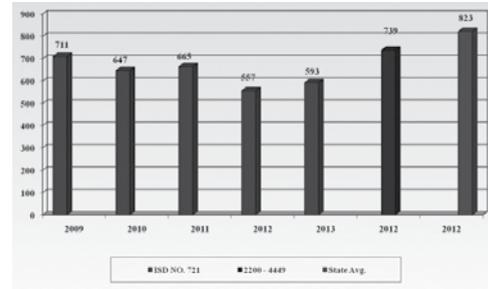
In September, Kim Hillberg from the district's auditing firm, CliftonLarsonAllen, presented the FY 2012-13 financial statements and audit report to the Board of Education. An audit of the district's finances is required by law, and is conducted in the months following the close of each fiscal year.

Financially, the district continues to be healthy. The total general fund balance increased from \$8.3M to \$9.3M including all restricted and unrestricted funds. The Food Service fund balance remained strong at \$213,000 and the Community Service fund balance ended the year at \$186,000. Student enrollment increased by 1.5% from the prior year and is expected to increase an average of slightly less than 1% per year over the next 5 years. The district was issued a clean audit opinion. Kim Hillberg stated "We are issuing a clean audit opinion again this year which means the financial statements are fairly stated."

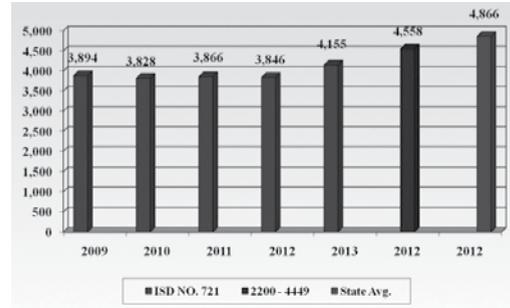
While there were a few minor issues that surfaced during the audit, Kim noted that "they were minor in the grand scheme of things and aren't problematic to resolve." She also indicated that "the business office did a very good job preparing information for the audit and we did not have to make any significant adjustments."

As part of the presentation to the board, the auditor presented information comparing New Prague Area Schools' expenditures per student to the statewide average and the average for districts the same size as New Prague in 2012. As you can see in the following charts, New Prague Area Schools compares very favorably.

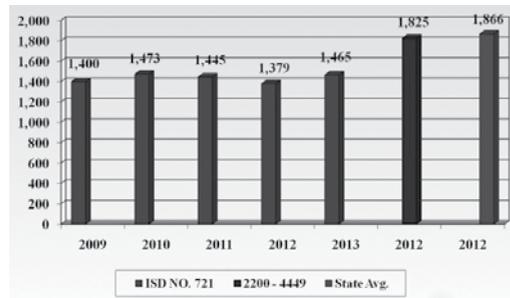
The district continues to maintain its long-standing commitment to academic excellence and educational opportunities for students within a framework of fiscal responsibility. Both the presentation to the board and the full audit report are available for viewing on the district's website.



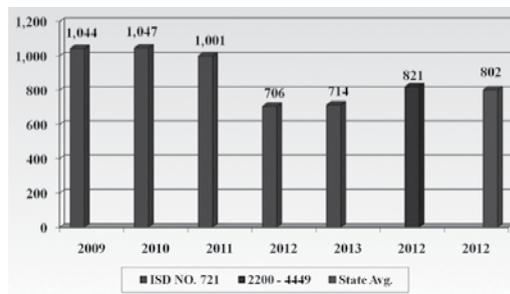
*District and School Administration:
Includes all school offices, the district office as well as the Board of Education.*



*Regular Instruction:
These expenditures represent classroom activities.*



*Special Education Instruction:
Represents all expenditures for special education programming in the district.*



*Sites, Buildings, Equipment and Other:
Includes expenditures for buildings, grounds and other expenses.*

Survey Finds Half of Parents Struggle with Their Children's Homework

By Karla Scoon Reid on September 18, 2013

A new survey finds nearly 50 percent of parents making an almost taboo admission: They struggle to help their children with their homework. And many parents - 46.5 percent - simply don't understand the subject matter.

The National Center for Family Literacy partnered with Google to survey parents with students in grades 1 through 12 about their ability to help with their children's homework. The online poll results include the responses of roughly 300 parents from two surveys.

Almost a third of parents said their homework frustrations were because "my child doesn't want my help." Another 21.9 percent admitted that they were "too busy" to spend time reviewing homework.

"The most alienating and scary moments in any parent's life

come when we feel powerless to give our kids what they need," Emily Kirkpatrick, vice president of the National Center for Family Literacy, said in a release. The Louisville, Kentucky-based group is offering parents some guidance to help mitigate their homework frustrations.

The center's website Wonderopolis.org offers information about the Common Core State Standards as well as science, technology, engineering, and math topics. Parents can find educational apps that students can use during downtime, like commuting. And lastly, the National Center for Family Literacy encourages parents to talk with teachers about how learning can be reinforced at home.

Why HALF of U.S. Parents Can't Help Their Kids with Homework

5 out of 10 parents say they have trouble helping their children with homework.



Why do so many parents fear they are falling short? Of those who have trouble...



Don't know where to start?

- **If you're feeling lost:** Find free teaching—and learning—resources online, many geared toward adults, from leading educational sites to build your own skills and confidence.
Start here: Content available in Verizon Foundation's Thinkfinity syncs up to K-12 curriculum standards across the country.
- **If she doesn't want help:** Tap into successful strategies and easy ways for families to learn together, beyond the textbook.
Start here: Find free resources online from the National Center for Family Literacy at www.family.org.
- **If you're short on time:** Make the most of learning opportunities hidden in everyday life, whether they come while you're making dinner, driving the carpool or waiting for the bus.
Start here: Visit Wonderopolis.org to start making the most of teaching moments throughout the day.

©National Center for Family Literacy

www.family.org



New Prague Middle School held its annual magazine fundraiser in September with an unexpected outcome. The primary purpose of the fundraiser was to raise money for student incentive prizes, transportation costs for field trips, foosball tables, and other extra items for students. The 7th and 8th grade students raised just over \$5,000 for their school.

During the sales, students were able to earn prizes depending on how many magazine subscriptions they sold. This year, Billy Klein of Great American Opportunities, who runs the fundraiser, asked the students if they were willing to forgo some of the prizes to help needy children. If a student sold at least three orders the fundraising company would donate a chicken to a Guatemalan family through a program

called "Save the Children." The chicken provides nutrient rich eggs for the family and also allows the family to sell the eggs at a market. Three chickens can help a family get above the poverty line. New Prague Middle school students sold enough magazine subscriptions and trash bags to send 108 chickens to Guatemalan families to help improve their lives!