



## Mask Guidance Update

With the steady decline in positive COVID-19 cases, Fridley Public Schools—like many school districts across the state and country—is constantly reviewing its COVID-19 mitigation strategies. Anoka County is currently experiencing less than 10% of the number of cases we saw in late January. The shared commitment of our community to reduce the spread has brought us to a much healthier point.

On Monday, March 7, the district instated **Updated Mask Wearing Guidelines:**

- **Masks are recommended for:** All K-12 students, staff and visitors inside district buildings.
- **Masks are required for:** All students under the age of 5, and staff working with students in preschool and early childhood, including on school buses; and students and staff returning to school on days six through 10 following a positive test.

## FHS senior named National Merit Scholarship finalist

Congratulations to Fridley High School (FHS) senior Akshay Rai, who has been named a 2022 National Merit Scholarship finalist! This honorary distinction is earned by an academically elite group of 15,000 high school students across the United States, which places Rai in the top one percent of the nation's graduating seniors. Finalists are selected after completing a detailed scholarship application, which includes their academic record, extracurricular activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment, honors and awards. Rai now advances to the final phase of the competition, where 7,500 finalists are selected to earn Merit Scholarships.



Akshay Rai

## Fridley YIG student writes bill that continues to gain momentum

A breakaway star emerged from the 2022 Youth in Government (YIG) Legislative Session at the State Capitol held January 6 through January 9, 2022. Mike LeRoy, a sophomore at Fridley High School (FHS), had a bill he wrote unanimously passed by his colleagues from committee through the House and Senate floor, and signed into Minnesota YIG law by Lieutenant Governor Annette Adoga.

YIG delegate LeRoy's bill allows people with disabilities to get married without any financial or medical coverage penalties. There are a number of complicated laws that determine how people with disabilities receive social services once married. Currently in the United States, if people with disabilities marry, they may risk losing Social Security, medical coverage or other civil benefits.

LeRoy, who has cerebral palsy and epilepsy, utilizes a power chair and has a service dog, Maddox. He often shares his experiences to advocate for accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities and educate the uninformed.

Steve Holt, Fridley High School's advisor for YIG, was abundantly proud of LeRoy's presence at the assembly, and how it influenced others. "Mike is breaking ground; he is a great ambassador," Holt said. "It is very inspiring to see him teach other students about people with disabilities."

The bill states that "Every person should have the ability to get married without losing money or losing their health insurance." It continues to make a case that persons with high medical needs who marry and lose insurance coverage will end up financially broke. Continuing his momentum for the bill, LeRoy was invited to present at the virtual Minnesota Council on Disability (MCD) conference on January 15, 2022.

There, LeRoy and his mother, Kathie, explained the rationale behind the bill. "Mike would maybe like to have kids someday, and get married," Kathie shared with those in attendance. "I explained to him the way some of that works is really complicated. He might need to reconsider getting married or not, based on the way some of the programs are currently set up in the United States to make sure people have social services support."

Trevor Turner, Public Policy Director for the MCD, told LeRoy his presentation was going to be included in the council's agenda to continue dialogue and explore next steps. As an advocate who is leading the charge of educating others, LeRoy said improvements have only just begun. "Before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), there was no access to sidewalks and buses," he said. "We have more accessibility in the United States, but we need to keep working at it."

In an exciting coincidence, a similar bill was introduced the following week in Washington, D.C. California Representative Jimmy Panetta introduced the Marriage Equality for Disabled Adults Act in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"It's now a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives. And that is much better in the long run," added LeRoy. "It makes me excited for the future, that I could get married without losing my disability benefits or health insurance."

LeRoy is already making plans to attend the University of Minnesota to study astronomy, physics and astrophysics after graduation.



FHS sophomore Mike LeRoy presents his bill to the Youth in Government Legislature on Jan. 8, accompanied by paraeducator Sue Treichel.

"Mike is breaking ground; he is a great ambassador. It is very inspiring to see him teach other students about people with disabilities."

**Steve Holt**

YIG advisor, Fridley High School teacher

## Fridley Public Schools recognizes outgoing school board member Carol Thornton

Fridley Public Schools recognized school board member Carol Thornton at her final board meeting on December 21, 2021. Holding a historic leadership position within the district, Thornton was the first African American to serve on the Fridley school board. She was first appointed in September 2016 and re-elected by the Fridley community in 2017.

"Carol brought a valuable lens and understanding of the impact of mental health and social emotional wellness with her professional experience as a mental health therapist and case manager," said Superintendent Dr. Kim Hiel. "Her constant calmness and composed demeanor has benefited the board and has allowed her to help students in many different ways. She's been a great asset to the Board and will be truly missed."

According to Board Chair Donna Prewedo, Thornton has been a valuable advocate for students and offered important perspectives through her tenure. "She's been a tremendous asset to the board and entire community," said Prewedo. "She always has a positive attitude that came with a great lens. We wholeheartedly thank Carol for her years of service and unwavering support for the students, staff, families, and community at Fridley Public Schools."

"I welcomed the chance to be a voice for students and families. It's been a great honor to serve as a board member and to be a part of a community that deeply cares and supports its staff, students, and families."

Carol Thornton

As a former Stevenson Elementary parent, Thornton was a dedicated and frequent volunteer. The position on the board allowed Thornton to selflessly contribute to her passion for education while supporting the academic journeys of students and families served.

"I welcomed the chance to be a voice for students and families," said Thornton. "It's been a great honor to serve as a board member and to be a part of a community that deeply cares and supports its staff, students, and families."



School Board member Carol Thornton at her final Board meeting on Dec. 21.

During her tenure, Thornton was a board representative at SEE (Schools for Equity in Education) where she was elected and served as President of its Executive Board in 2019-2021. Thornton said that involvement in the SEE organization was a highlight, as she learned more and became immersed in the work of advocating for equity in school funding.

"I've enjoyed visiting the Minnesota State Capitol to meet legislators and discuss issues that are important in our community and schools," she said, adding that other highlights included seeing Fridley students prosper, grow, and succeed.

"I've loved learning from students - whether they presented to the board on projects at school, are giving back to the community through service, or sharing their backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. It's been wonderful to see the many smiling faces of students and celebrate their accomplishments with them as they progress through their academic journeys."

Looking back, Thornton is appreciative of the opportunity to have served the Fridley community in this capacity.

"The most rewarding part of being a board member has included the relationships I've built and the knowledge I have gained from serving," she said. "I thank the Fridley community who entrusted me to contribute my experience and knowledge to support Fridley Public Schools' core mission of preparing students both academically and emotionally for the future."

## SCHOOL BOARD NEWS

### Fridley School Board welcomes new member, Nikki Auna



The Fridley school board welcomed its new member, Nikki Auna, in January 2022. According to Auna, she decided to run for the Board because she wanted to become more involved in the Fridley community, while contributing to help its future.

Auna's involvement in Fridley Schools first began with the Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program at the Fridley Community Center, where she has served as a volunteer in classrooms and assisted with fundraising opportunities. She also previously worked as an ECFE teaching assistant.

Auna said open and transparent communication is important to her, and she greatly values the input of all students, staff, and community members. "I like to ensure that everyone has a voice, and all voices in the room are heard," said Auna.

Looking ahead, Auna is eager to listen and make a positive impact within the Fridley Schools community. "I'm looking forward to meeting more parents, students and staff, and I'm excited to engage with the community and contribute to student success," said Auna. "As a member of the Fridley School Board, I will go to work to continue the strong 'Friendly Fridley' tradition, striving to ensure that the area is attractive and inclusive to anyone who wants to make Fridley their home."

Auna and her husband, Riley, have lived in Fridley for eight years with their three children: a 5th grader at Fridley Middle School, 2nd grader at Stevenson Elementary, and a 3-year-old Fridley Preschool student.

### Fridley school board members take Oath of Office, welcome newcomer Auna

Fridley school board members Nikki Auna, Ross Meisner, and Avonna Starck took their Oath of Office at the board meeting held on January 18, 2022. Auna is a newcomer to the board, while Meisner and Starck were re-elected.

Board members also voted on organization roles, electing Meisner to serve as chair, Abdissalam Adam to serve as vice chair, Auna as treasurer, Jake Karnopp as clerk, Donna Prewedo as director, and Starck as director.



Pictured from left to right: Fridley School Board members Nikki Auna, Ross Meisner, and Avonna Starck.



## Devika Ramnarine



Devika Ramnarine says she enjoys the college-level challenges and advantages from the most rigorous course path offered at Fridley High School, maintaining a grade point average of 4.185 while pursuing the highly-regarded International Baccalaureate Diploma. Ramnarine also takes part in a number of arts and athletic opportunities to complement her education.

"These rigorous courses have allowed me to gain a global understanding and awareness of the many challenges facing humanity," said Ramnarine. "Being a full DP student has many challenges, but it has taught me to persevere and always put my best foot forward in any situation."

Growing up in the Fridley district, Ramnarine added that she's enjoyed the cultural diversity of the student body, as it's been key to an enriching IB experience. "At Fridley, I've been able to surround myself with a very diverse group of students from all different cultures and backgrounds," said Ramnarine. "That's had an impact on me and allows everyone to broaden understanding and open their minds to varying perspectives."

Ramnarine said she developed a love for the fine arts in elementary school, and greatly values the arts as a major part of her life. She currently plays the clarinet in Concert Band, having earned superior ratings and all conference during her high school band career. The arts have also allowed Ramnarine to serve in multiple leadership roles, gaining management, delegation and communication skills.

Balancing arts with athletic involvement, Ramnarine serves as a captain on the girls tennis team. According to Ramnarine, the sport has helped her to develop resiliency, commitment, and a consistent, positive attitude. "Although you won't win every match, it should never discourage you from practicing and trying your hardest to succeed in the next



**Left:** Devika Ramnarine (right) at the Key Club District Leadership Convention. **Center:** Ramnarine playing clarinet in Concert Band. **Right:** Ramnarine is a captain on the Fridley girls tennis team.

match," she said. Capitalizing on her organizational skills, Ramnarine also serves as manager for both the Fridley dance team and boys tennis team.

In addition, Ramnarine currently serves as the President of the Fridley High School Key Club, and is a member of the Minnesota Honor Society, link crew and speech team.

Ramnarine said her experiences in academics, arts, athletics and activities has been second-to-none, teaching her how to stay balanced and manage time effectively. "I've learned to never procrastinate and to always keep a detailed calendar to stay on top of everything," said Ramnarine. As she reflected on her high school years, Ramnarine added that it's important to take every moment as it comes. "There are so many fun moments in high school, and especially since COVID, I've learned to take advantage of every opportunity and appreciate and enjoy the little things."

Ramnarine said she is incredibly thankful to tennis coach Anthony Brannitski and band director Becca Shuman for their constant support and encouragement over the years. She plans to attend Hamline University in St. Paul this fall to pursue digital media and photography.

## Andrew Stevenson



Andrew Stevenson has excelled academically throughout his high school career while maintaining an impressive array of activity and athletic involvement. He ranks among the top of the senior class with a weighted grade point average of 4.2. During his junior year, Stevenson was enrolled in the highly rigorous International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP), completing several college-level courses and credits. In addition, he appreciates the global focus and varying perspectives that are incorporated into lessons. He's taken full advantage of the IB second language requirement, becoming conversationally fluent in Chinese Mandarin. Stevenson also earned the Harvard Book Award, given to the top-ranked member of the junior class.

According to Stevenson, his experience in the IB DP prepared him for college-level coursework; For his senior year, he shifted to the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program and is currently on track to earn 28 college credits at the University of Northwestern.

Highly involved in the fine arts, Stevenson plays saxophone in Concert Band and Jazz Band, having earned superior ratings and all conference honors. He participated in choir through his freshman to junior years, earning all conference, and has been involved in the one act play and speech team. According to Stevenson, his experiences in the fine arts have developed him into a multi-dimensional and dynamic person.

"Creating music and performing on stage have really taught me the importance of relying on others, and the rewarding feeling when people come together and work cooperatively to create something special and impressive," said Stevenson, adding that his experiences within fine arts have been instrumental in community building, as well as the further development of leadership skills.

Balancing his well-rounded interests, Stevenson serves as captain on



**Left:** Andrew Stevenson plays saxophone in Concert Band and Jazz Band. **Center:** Stevenson serves as captain on the Fridley boys tennis team. **Right:** Stevenson also serves as a captain on the Fridley cross country team.

the tennis and cross country teams. He first began playing tennis in 7th grade while at Fridley Middle School, and remains the only player who has competed on the varsity lineup in all six years since. Sports have allowed Stevenson to build upon his strong work ethic and tenacity. Stevenson added that he values the community team atmosphere, citing the many friendships and memories that he's built over the years.

Reflecting on his FHS career, Stevenson said he is grateful for all the experiences and opportunities that he's had. "I've grown so much from my peers' encouragement, coaches' challenges, and teachers' and directors' critiques," said Stevenson. "School is more than being a student, artist and athlete - It's about meaningful moments with people and life lessons you receive from those interactions. An immense part of who I am is because of my involvement in the arts, athletics and academics, and all the growth that this has given me."

Stevenson is grateful to his parents, Anne and Will Stevenson, for their constant support and unwavering encouragement throughout his life, as well as his older siblings, Dan, Katie and Ben.

Stevenson is in the process of choosing between Boyce College (Louisville, Ky.), University of Northwestern (Roseville, Minn.), and Gordon College (Wenham, Mass.) to pursue an accelerated masters program in biblical studies and pastoral ministry.

## Freezing for Inclusion: Fridley Middle School hosts Cool School Mobile Polar Plunge



Special Olympics  
Unified Champion  
Schools

Fridley Middle School (FMS) students and staff braved frigid waters to rally around acceptance and inclusion, as the school hosted its first Special Olympics Minnesota Cool School Mobile Polar Plunge on Wednesday, December 1, 2021. A total of 277 students took the leap into the mobile "plungester" in the school's front parking lot. In addition to FMS participants, students and staff of Fridley High School's special education program had the opportunity to take the plunge.

Through fundraising by students and staff prior to the event, the school raised \$5,509 to benefit both FMS Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Special Olympics Minnesota. The special event also included a pep fest hosted by Special Olympics Minnesota, which featured a guest speaker, games and prizes.

The unique and fun opportunity was provided to the school because of its Unified Champion School status. As a Unified Champion School, FMS offers many opportunities to all students that promote social inclusion. This includes unified homerooms, field trips, and leadership summit opportunities for students with disabilities. The school also participates in the annual Speak Kindness and Person First campaigns, which promote acceptance and use of language that is respectful and inclusive.

According to Special Education teacher Chelsea Clark, being a Unified Champion School sends a positive and educational message to students. "Through these intentional approaches, we promote a schoolwide climate of acceptance," said Clark. "Many students don't personally know someone with a disability outside of the school setting. Through opportunities and connections, students can gain a better understanding, develop empathy and treat everyone with kindness and respect, regardless of if a student has a disability or not."

Since 2018, the FMS special education program has brought groups of students to the Polar Plunge located at Lake Bde Maka Ska in Minneapolis. Jessica Mularie, also a Special Education teacher, said bringing the Polar Plunge to FMS was more feasible for this school year and elevated schoolwide participation in the event. "We were so blown away with the support, positive energy, and students' capacity for empathy at the event," said Mularie. "We are also thankful to our administration for supporting us and always championing inclusion and unified initiatives at our school!"



## District salutes outgoing Communications and Community Relations Director Jael McLemore

Fridley Public Schools salutes outgoing Communications and Community Relations Director Jael McLemore for her 10 years of service to the district. First hired as communications coordinator in 2011, McLemore has been instrumental in leading and building the district's communications department from a one-person unit to a national award-winning team.



Jael McLemore

McLemore's leadership and strategic approaches to communications work has advanced the impact, effectiveness, and presence of the department within the schools and district's external community. Fusing digital media, videography, social media, personal connections, engagement, and traditional print media, the department has developed a unique brand of communication products that suit the information preferences of all the various segments of its community.

"I had a vision to create a communications department with a multi-talented and innovative team that could adapt to any changing environment or needs of our stakeholders" she said. "Today, I am proud to say that we are an award-winning team that successfully changed gears during the difficult months of the pandemic shutdown, and brought our community together through our communications and engagement efforts."

Superintendent Dr. Kim Hiel said McLemore has been a tremendous asset to the Fridley school district and will be greatly missed. "From helping to pass many successful referendums, to creating award-winning publications and media, to providing timely and effective communication to all Fridley stakeholders. You've been a transformative leader and have created a valuable team where you work so seamlessly together to put out excellent communication," said Hiel. "Thank you, Jael, for your incredible ten years of service in Fridley."

## Fridley Public Schools welcomes Josh Collins as Director of Communications and Community Relations

Fridley Public Schools is pleased to introduce Josh Collins as the new director of communications and community relations. Collins comes to Fridley with extensive experience in communications and public relations, most recently serving as director of communications at Roseville Area Schools.

"We are excited to have Josh become part of our award-winning communications team," said Superintendent Dr. Kim Hiel. "From his communications work with Roseville Schools, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and public sector entities, he brings with him diverse perspectives and, along with his team, will continue to elevate the work of Fridley Public Schools."



Josh Collins

With Roseville Schools over the past two years, Collins led strategic work in the areas of marketing, crisis communications, and media relations.

Prior to his work in Roseville, Collins served as director of communications and media relations at MDE for six years. He served on its executive team, advising the education commissioner on strategic communications work, serving as media spokesperson for administration, executing proactive media relations, and highlighting the department's work in support of students and schools. He also spearheaded equity within communications work, including translations of documents in multiple languages and access to individuals with disabilities.

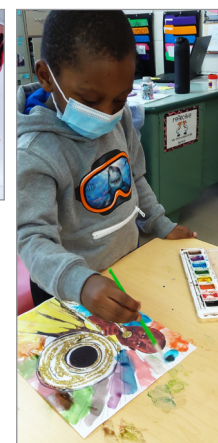
Collins said he is eager to begin his work within the Fridley Schools community. "I am excited to join a district with a great team of leaders and a strong focus on life-long learning with a global perspective," said Collins. "My experience working for the MDE and two other school districts has offered me the chance to communicate about education policy from both big-picture and close-to-the-work perspectives."



## Fridley Public Schools hosts Districtwide Black History Month Showcase

Fridley Public Schools' Equity and Inclusion team hosted a districtwide Black History Month Showcase on February 23, 2022. The event featured student performances of songs, skits, and poetry, as well as highlights of classroom Black History Month projects.

"The goal of this first-time showcase was to bring awareness and celebrate the effects that Black history has on our entire community and our scholars," said Equity and Inclusion Specialist Aloda Sims. "All year long, and specifically this month, it is important to recognize this history and allow our students to build upon the cultural and historic foundation. Watching our students embrace the past to build on the future is very inspiring."



**Pictured top & right:** Fridley preschoolers celebrated Black History Month with various activities - from exploring hair braiding and beading to learning more about Black historical figures. Students also enjoyed a "Trombone Shorty" art project after reading the book and learning more about the New Orleans-based musician, Troy Andrews.

## Fridley High School IB Diploma candidates recognized at Silver Platter Celebration



Fridley High School, an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, hosted its 12th annual Silver Platter Breakfast Celebration on December 21, 2021. Seniors who are enrolled in the full IB Diploma Programme (DP) presented their extended essays, a culminating research project for those pursuing the IB Diploma. This year, 13 seniors are participating in the highly rigorous college preparatory program.

To earn an IB Diploma, students must complete DP core classes, assessments and exams during their junior and/or senior years of high school. The challenging DP pathway is a course of study that is considered a prestigious distinction on college applications and offers students the opportunity to earn college credits. The extended essay is an externally assessed, in-depth study into a topic that teaches high-level research and writing skills, intellectual discovery and creativity. Each topic is independently selected by participating students, which allows Diploma candidates to engage in personal research while readily preparing for their next steps in higher education.



*Pictured above, l-r, back row: Ellie Hinnenkamp, Greta McCoy, Karina Daniels-Carlson, Ryken Farr. Front row: Michele Martinez-Rosales, Emily Hill, Priya Rana, Devika Ramnarine, Sophia Pehl, Andrew Hill, and Elizabeth Lor. Not Pictured: Eric Dean and Salma Hassan.*



## Presentation of the IB Diploma

In addition to the presentation of the extended essays, seven Class of 2021 graduates earned the IB Diploma. The internationally-recognized IB Diploma represents a highly advanced and rigorous high school education. Congratulations to the following alumni who accomplished this exceptional achievement: Abhinav Bijlwan (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Engineering); Grace Brant (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Nursing); Ellen Delp (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Journalism); Isabelle Dircks (Dance Instructor at More Than Dance); Louisa Schirmacher (Winona State University, English); Michael Ude (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Electrical Engineering); and Jason Vanderwerf (University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, Biomedical Engineering).

*Pictured above, l-r, Fridley High School alumni and IB Diploma recipients Grace Brant, Ellen Delp, Michael Ude and Louisa Schirmacher.*



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## Fridley Middle School 8th grade students present capstone History Day projects, students advance to regionals

Fridley Middle School (FMS) 8th grade students presented their capstone research and analysis History Day projects at the school's competition on February 17, 2022. This year's theme was *Debate & Diplomacy: Successes, Failures, Consequences*. Students explored historic events in which multiple perspectives resulted in clashes or diplomatic endings. Projects were presented via exhibit boards, websites, documentaries, process papers or performances. As an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, the annual History Day project allows students to put their Middle Years Programme (MYP) Approaches to Learning (ATL) skills to practice.

Congratulations and good luck to the 39 students whose projects were selected to advance to the virtual History Day regional competition in March.

Scan the QR code to read the full story!

Read the full story online!



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[www.fridleyschools.org](http://www.fridleyschools.org)



## UPCOMING DATES

**MARCH 21 - MARCH 25**  
**NO SCHOOL - SPRING BREAK**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 1**  
**FREE FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT: ENCANTO**  
Fridley District Auditorium, 7 pm

**APRIL 7-9**  
**FMS MUSICAL: WILLY WONKA JR.**  
Fridley District Auditorium, 7 pm on April 7-8, 2 pm on April 9

**FRIDAY, APRIL 8**  
**NO SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS**  
Evaluation and Planning Day (Tiger Club Open)

## FRIDLEY HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS NAMED MSHSL TRIPLE "A" AWARD RECIPIENTS

Congratulations to Fridley High School's (FHS) 2022 Minnesota State High School League Triple "A" (academics, arts, and athletics) Award winners, seniors Devika Ramnarine and Andrew Stevenson! Each year, the award honors two senior students - one male and one female - who have excelled in the classroom, athletics and fine arts. Both Ramnarine and Stevenson are standout, exemplary students who have challenged themselves academically at FHS with rigorous International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme classes while simultaneously maintaining extensive involvement in extracurricular activities.



Devika Ramnarine



Andrew Stevenson

### STEVENSON HONORED AS TRIPLE "A" STATE FINALIST

In addition, Stevenson has been named the Triple "A" Region 5AA winner, a recognition he earned against other male candidates from Maple Grove, Anoka, Centennial, Columbia Heights, Osseo, Blaine, Irondale, Mounds View, Rogers, Champlin Park, Mounds View, Park Center, St. Michael-Albertville, Coon Rapids, Spring Lake Park and Totino-Grace high schools.

Stevenson now advances with eight other regional finalists who are vying for the state title and scholarship opportunities. The state Triple "A" Award winners will be announced during a recognition ceremony on March 26 during the boys state basketball championship on KSTC-45.

[More about Triple "A" Award winners inside](#)

## Fridley Youth in Government student advocates for people with disabilities



FHS student Mike LeRoy's YIG bill allows people with disabilities to get married without any financial or medical coverage penalties. After signed into YIG law, LeRoy's bill is continuing to gain momentum and garner national attention.

[Read the full story inside](#)

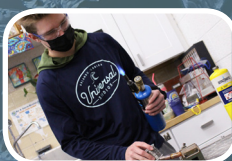
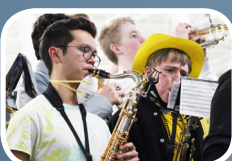


COMING MID-APRIL!

**FRIDLEY  
COMMUNITY ED  
CATALOG**

**SUMMER 2022**

**100+  
Youth Enrichment  
Opportunities**



IB CONTINUUM  
CONTINUUM DE L'IB  
CONTINUO DEL IB