



(SUN PHOTOS BY NATALIE TRIMBLE)

LEFT: Minnetonka Middle School West Assistant Principals Farhan Mohamoud, left, and Andrea Hoffmann, right, and Principal Freya Schirmacher participate in the Cool School Mobile Plunge at Minnetonka Middle School West May 7. **RIGHT:** Students participate in the Cool School Mobile Plunge at Minnetonka Middle School West.

Plunge/From page 1

sweatshirt at \$500. Those that raised \$1,000 or more received the full reward lineup.

One student at the middle school went above and beyond in her fundraising efforts, raising more than \$5,000 in support of school programs and Special Olympics Minnesota.

Eighth-grade student Wesley Dronen took a leap into the Plunger in a unicorn onesie, alongside his partner from the Best Buddies program. He has participated in both Plunge events hosted at Minnetonka Middle School West, expressing support

for the organization’s mission of promoting inclusion for students of all ability levels.

“I learned about this event last year, when we first did it, when I had to register for it, and I think it’s really cool to earn money so that Best Buddies can go on field trips and be included with everyone else,” eighth-grader Wesley Dronen said.

The Best Buddies program is an international nonprofit organization that promotes inclusion for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities by pairing students with and without learning challenges to

form friendships, according to bestbuddies.org. The chapter at Minnetonka Middle School West currently has 150 enrolled students and more than 200 students showing interest in participating in the 2026-27 school year.

The Unified program also promotes inclusion, acceptance and relationship building between students with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities; and currently has 45 enrolled

students at the middle school, according to Mary Schafer, a physical education teacher at Minnetonka Middle School West.

Schafer and Spilane both act as advisors to the school’s Best Buddies and Unified programs. When asked what their favorite things about the programs are, Schafer mentioned witnessing students’ kindness and respect toward one another and Spilane said letting students enjoy time with their friends

and having fun with one another.

“Definitely watching the interaction between kids with disabilities and kids without; and just seeing the inclusion and the hearts of these kids is just amazing. It just melts my heart,” Schafer said.

“My favorite part is the teachers getting to step back. I am in the thick of it everyday and being able to just let the kids be kids with their friends and getting to stand back and watch and facilitate, if

needed. But the kids do a really nice job together,” Spilane said.

The Best Buddies program is also offered to students at Minnetonka High School. Dronen said he intends on staying involved with the program as he transitions to the high school this fall, continuing the promotion of inclusivity for all students at all ability levels.

“It’s all about amazing support and making sure our kids feel included in everything,” Spilane said.



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