

# pride & pack

2024 FALL



## Friends:

As superintendents of our city's two public school districts, we are proud to introduce "Pride and Pack," a joint effort designed to help share news and information about our school districts with the residents in Marion.

While our organizations are very different in many ways, we share a common interest in helping our public understand and appreciate the dedication, creativity, and hard work of our students, teachers, and staff. Twice a year our districts will use this "Pride and Pack" insert in the Marion Messenger to showcase the activities, achievements, and provide other updates from both of our public school systems. Our City has done a wonderful job of helping to foster a greater sense of unity and pride within our community, and we believe its willingness to partner with the public school systems with this initiative continues to support our common interests in moving our community forward together.

Partnerships between our schools, local government, Marion businesses, and organizations in our community play a pivotal role in addressing the diverse needs of our students, and those partnerships in the Marion community are strong. We look forward to sharing

more about these connections and how they are benefitting our students and local families.

In this edition of "Pride and Pack" we'll take a tour of our campuses and highlight several facility improvements at each of our districts. While these facility improvements meet the discrete needs of our individual districts, the improvements are supported by common funding streams available to all public schools. We'll introduce these funding streams in this publication, and use space in upcoming editions to help better explain how funds are made available to districts.

As proud partners with "Team Marion," both Linn-Mar Community and Marion Independent School Districts are committed to working together to support and celebrate our community. We know that collaborations like this strengthen our greater community and demonstrate the collaborative spirit that Marion is known for. We can't wait to share more.

### Amy Kortemeyer

Linn-Mar Community School District  
Superintendent

### Janelle Brouwer

Marion Independent School District  
Superintendent



# EXPANDING

Computer science instruction across the city of Marion is preparing students for the next generation of career opportunities.

## Increasing Student Access to Computer Science

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, 34 percent of Iowa's college age graduates leave the state. Only eight other states in the United States have a larger number of college graduates leaving their states compared to Iowa. "At a district level, we know that the more we can provide access to computer science and access to our community's organizations and resources, we know we can build our future workforce and our future community," shared Director of Technology for Marion Independent School District (MISD) Peggy Murphy.

"Computer science lets students hone their problem solving skills, and it also taps their creativity, because there's no single way to tackle a programming challenge or to create a work of art by writing code," says Dan Niemitato, Linn-Mar High School's lead computer science teacher. "At one level, programming involves logical and mathematical thinking, but it also requires grit, creativity, planning, and evaluating different strategies for solving a difficult problem or creating something cool."

## Grade-Appropriate Computer Science Exploration

Both Linn-Mar and MISD have made significant efforts to increase student access to computer science learning.

At the elementary level, both school districts are introducing foundational coding concepts through interactive platforms that allow students hands-on access to personalize their learning.

These efforts are often embedded with day-to-day learning in traditional classrooms. For example, MISD's kindergarten, first and second grade classrooms are using literature that is matched with computer science and STEM activities, and their third and fourth grade classrooms are embedding computer science lessons within their science curriculum.



Linn-Mar's elementary buildings often combine computer science education with learning in their libraries. These efforts start by helping students learn computer science vocabulary, then include hands-on learning with that lesson. "For example, students at our building learned the term 'algorithm,' and then were able to create their own algorithm to lead their partners through the library," explained Echo Hill Teacher Librarian Katie Merulla. Merulla explained that lessons look a little different from building to building, allowing librarians to customize their students' learning based on their own space, resources, and the developmental needs of their students.

By the time students reach middle school, they have opportunities to engage in more structured courses that cover topics such as programming basics, robotics, and digital citizenship. During these classes students are able to build on their knowledge of coding and troubleshooting with tools as they grow in skill and knowledge, all through a hands-on approach.



Students in a computer science course in 7th grade at MISD study computing systems where they learn about devices, their hardware, and trouble-shooting components. In this photo, Aria Determann and Carly Norton are completing the assembly of the seven key computer components.

At MISD, students are using block-based coding with a Finch robot, and then advancing their learning by adjusting their programming and using text-based coding. Students also have access to another robot called the Hummingbird which allows them to learn coding by programming LEDs and a variety of sensors.

Linn-Mar middle school science classes also engage with computer science hands-on projects that combine design and real-world problem solving. In some of the eighth grade classrooms students are not only learning how to conceptualize and create applications but also working on practical projects, such as designing toys for children with disabilities. This winter students also will learn how to use tools in a design program to recreate a birdhouse based on specific measurements, and then printed a 3D replica of the birdhouse.

At the high school level, both MISD and Linn-Mar offer more extensive computer science curriculum for their students. Beginning their freshman year, students can choose from introductory classes that embed computer science to those that offer more advanced programming languages, data structures, and learning about computer systems and networks.

Students in both high schools can earn college credit for some of these courses, but the primary focus is on providing hands-on experience and introducing computer science as a potential career pathway.

"It's really fun to see the students' progress after a semester of striving for mastery in the various skills involved in programming," commented Niemitato. "They work very hard at it, but a lot of them have a lot of fun, too. It's a joy to teach students who love to program, and those kids will probably be the best programmers when they become professionals."





# HORIZONS

## with Computer Science Learning

### Extending Computer Science Learning Opportunities

Each district also has grown its learning opportunities beyond the courses available in the traditional classroom as well.

MISD was awarded a STEM BEST grant that funded the development of two new courses called AMPED (Algebra, Manufacturing, Production, Entrepreneurship, and Design) and GIC (Geometry in Construction) courses. The monetary support has allowed for increasing district tools and methods for collaboration on projects, connecting students with career fields as well as building their capacity to identify and solve real-world problems computationally (all of which are computer science standards).

Additionally, students attending both Linn-Mar and MISD have access to after-school programs like First Lego League, First Tech Challenge, and Robotics Teams that allow them to apply their computer science knowledge and explore advanced concepts in practical settings.

Both districts point to the valuable partnership between their teachers and students and the Marion Economic Development Corporation as an important aspect of expanding student awareness in computer-



science related needs and careers. "MEDCO has allowed students access to business and industry leaders, guest speakers, career fairs, and attendance at STEM institutes," commented Mark Hutcheson, Linn-Mar Director of High School Teaching and Learning, Director of Venture Academics. "These community partnerships are critical in helping to prepare current learners for post secondary opportunities."



### Computer Science Showcase

Linn-Mar sophomore Pierson Baker is taking Computer Science Principles at the high school this year. His beginning project for this semester included creating a stock market simulation game. The game allows players opportunities to buy, sell or hold individual stocks as the game mimics the ebbs and flow of the daily stock market. "I first created a game like this as a freshman," Pierson said, "but since then I've changed the code to make it a more realistic experience with price changes." Pierson says computer science is one of his favorite classes, and he hopes to work in avionics programming as a future career.





# Meet the ADMINISTRATION



The administrative teams at both of Marion's public schools are responsible for implementing the policies established by their elected Boards of Directors. Administrators help recruit and hire staff, manage the district's budget, maintain secure and safe learning environments, ensure technology and resources are available in buildings and classrooms, provide professional learning opportunities for teaching staff, and confirm that federal and state requirements related to curriculum learning and student support services are met.

## Linn-Mar Community School District's Administrative Team

### **Mrs. Amy Kortemeyer, Superintendent**

Amy joined the Linn-Mar Community School District as superintendent of schools in 2023. Before returning to Linn-Mar, she served as the deputy superintendent for the Iowa City Community School District. Amy also served as part-time superintendent for Springville schools during the 2014-15 and as director of elementary teaching and learning at Linn-Mar from 2008 to 2015. Prior to that she served as an elementary principal in the Cedar Rapids Community School District.

### **Mr. Nathan Wear, Associate Superintendent**

Nathan was an elementary principal at Fairfield Community School District before joining Solon Community School District

as their high school principal. Nathan joined Linn-Mar in 2018 and is the district's chief academic officer along with other associate superintendent duties.

### **Ms. Melissa Frick, Executive Director of Student Services**

Melissa joined the Linn-Mar Community School District Student Services team in 2021 and became the executive director of student services in 2023. She previously worked in administrative level positions with Grant Wood Area Education Agency, Central Rivers Area Education Agency, the Iowa Department of Education, and the statewide Iowa AEA system.

### **Mrs. Karla Christian, Chief Human Resources Officer**

Karla has served as the leader of human resources at Linn-Mar Community School District for 20 years. Prior to coming to Linn-Mar, she was a human resources manager at Archer Daniels Midland in Cedar Rapids and at Methode Electronics in Illinois.

### **Mr. Jon Galbraith, Chief Financial and Operating Officer**

Jon joined Linn-Mar in 2023 after serving as the operations director for the Cedar Rapids Community School District. His background includes progressive work experiences in construction, operations management and school finance.

### **Mrs. Jeri Ramos, Executive Director of Technology**

Jeri Ramos has been the chief technology officer at Linn-Mar Community School District since 2012. Her professional history spans several years and many positions including technical writer, corporate trainer, network specialist, and infrastructure director in a variety of corporate and education settings including AMD, Intel, PG&E and CRST.

### **Mrs. Renee Nelson, Executive Director of Communications**

Renee joined the Linn-Mar district in spring of 2024 and leads internal and external communications for the district. Renee previously headed communications and creative services at Grant Wood Area Education Agency and held other communications leadership roles with local organizations including NextEra Energy Duane Arnold Energy Center.



## Linn-Mar Community School District's Board of Directors

### **Barry Buchholz, President**

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### **Melissa Walker, Vice President**

Term Expires Nov. 2025

### **Justin Foss, Board Member**

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### **Katie Lowe Lancaster, Board Member**

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### **Midhat Mansoor, Board Member**

Term Expires Nov. 2025

### **Brittania Morey, Board Member**

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### **Laura Thomas, Board Member**

Term Expires Nov. 2025





# Meet the ADMINISTRATION



## Marion Independent School District's Administrative Team

### Dr. Janelle Brouwer, Superintendent

Janelle began her role as the MISD superintendent in the fall of 2019. She held a prior role in the district as the assistant superintendent, as well as administrative roles as a building principal with the Western Dubuque Community School District from 2005 to 2012 and as an Area Education Agency administrator from 2012 to 2015.

### Mrs. Gretchen Kriegel, Assistant Superintendent

Gretchen returned to MISD as the assistant superintendent in 2019, having taught special education in the district prior to moving into administrative roles. Gretchen

has worked as a district leader with Monticello School District and previously held an administrative role in Keystone Area Education Agency.

### Mrs. Christie VanWey, Business Manager

Christie is an MISD graduate who returned to her alma mater in 2019 as the business manager. She previously worked as the business manager at Alburnett and Center Point Urbana school districts.

### Mrs. Peggy Murphy, Director of Technology

Peggy began her role as the director of technology in 2019. Prior to her current role, she served the district as a technology coach and as a teacher for MISD.

### Mr. Bob Scott, Director of Operations

Bob joined MISD in 2018, starting as the transportation director. He now oversees operations which includes transportation, facilities, custodial, and maintenance.



## Marion Independent School District's Board of Directors

### Shari Funck, President

Term Expires Nov. 2025

### Carl Lantermans, Vice President

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### Denise Allison, Board Member

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### Bryan Fentress, Board Member

Term Expires Nov. 2025

### Jon Fitch, Board Member

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### Michelle Henry, Board Member

Term Expires Nov. 2027

### Diana Zrudsky, Board Member

Term Expires Nov. 2025

## Meet Our Public School Board of Directors for Marion Independent and Linn-Mar Community School Districts

Iowa school board members are elected to four-year terms and give direction to the school district superintendent as to its priorities and goals. In addition to attending school board meetings, board members serve on a variety of district committees and represent the district's interests at the local, state, and national level.

Locally, school board members and the school district work cooperatively with Linn County and the cities of Marion, Robins and Cedar Rapids on various initiatives. School board members and district staff are also actively engaged with community organizations such as MEDCO and the Marion Chamber of Commerce, as well as engaged in partnerships with neighboring school districts on a wide range of issues that impact our schools and our community.

School board elections are held every other year on the first Tuesday in November, and new members begin their term at the following board meeting. The school board then elects a president and vice president from among its members to serve one-year terms.

# FACILITY ADDITIONS EXTEND OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT

## Learning and Growth

### Funding Streams Available for Capital Improvements

School districts have several separate funding streams available to help support facility needs and capital improvements. Knowing more about these resources can be helpful in understanding the opportunities and limitations that surround district investments.



#### Secure an Advanced Vision for Education (SAVE) Fund - Thanks to

Iowa's one cent sales tax, often called the 'penny tax', this fund helps districts pay for important projects like new construction, building renovations, and technology upgrades, creating safe and modern environments where our children can learn and grow.



#### Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL) - Marion residents supported both

districts in 2024 by passing PPEL, a local funding mechanism that allows school districts to raise money specifically for physical improvements and equipment needs. This levy must be renewed every 10 years by voters, and as of this year, 276 out of 325 districts in Iowa have a voted PPEL in place to support district improvement needs.



#### General Obligation Bonds - School districts sometimes ask for voter approval for a general obligation bond, which allows the

district to borrow dollars needed to fund larger facility projects.



#### PERL - The Public Education and Recreation Levy (PERL) is also known as the Playground

Levy because it is a source of revenue based on property taxes that can be used for playgrounds and recreation areas in school districts. The PERL fund can also be used for community education.

Districts also access several other funding streams to enhance our children's educational experiences. For example, both districts access energy rebates and grant funds, and one-time Federal funds to help with infrastructure upgrades like HVAC and technology needs in these new facilities.

Both Linn-Mar and Marion Independent School Districts opened new space to support student learning this academic year, with additional plans on the horizon.

MISD's facilities committee, as part of the 2021 bond referendum, recommended a long-range facility plan based on community surveys, feedback from open houses, and input from students and staff. The plan included recommendations for:

- A new auditorium and a new stadium at the high school,
- Renovations to the high school,
- Renovations and an addition at Francis Marion Intermediate, and
- A new elementary school.

Linn-Mar also collected feedback from the larger Marion community as it created a 10 year capital improvement plan. This plan included recommendations to build Hazel Point and Boulder Peak, two new intermediate buildings to house the district's 5th and 6th grades, to alleviate crowding in elementary and middle school buildings. The plan also recommended updates to parking lots at the middle and high school levels and:

- A new district tennis complex,
- A larger performance venue at the high school,
- Renovations to existing administrative space near the high school,
- A new activities center, and
- A new administrative building.

### Parkview Elementary, MISD



MISD's newest school building, Parkview Elementary, opened this fall and houses students from pre-K through 2nd grade.

Located at 125 3rd Ave. near Thomas Park, Parkview Elementary School replaced the aging Starry Elementary School. Parkview includes safety features such as a storm shelter and secure entrance, boasts lots of natural lights, brings the outdoors to life inside with natural colors and playful murals, and offers collaboration spaces to support learning engagement across classrooms and curricular areas.

### Renovations to Support High School Students



Linn-Mar's Learning Resource Center (LRC) was the first building constructed as part of the Marion Rural Independent School, the area now known as the Linn-Mar Community School District. Located on the corner of 29th Ave. and 10th St. in Marion, the building's proximity to Linn-Mar's high school





campus made it an ideal location to support the continued growing needs at the district's high school level.

This fall the building was updated to again support the learning needs of Linn-Mar High School students. The renovated space supports three high school programs:

- Venture Academics was started in 2021 as a new way of teaching traditional coursework to Linn-Mar high school students. In Venture, students interact with and work on projects alongside local businesses and professionals to enrich their learning through learning pathways like advanced business, earth science, digital design, exploring education, biomedical science, life science, behavioral science, civics, marketing essentials, and creative writing. In its first year the program supported about 150 high schoolers, but during the 2024-25 year the high school has more than 345 students registered for Venture Academics.
- ATLAS (Achieving Transition through Learning, Advancement and Success) is a Linn-Mar program that supports children living at the Four Oaks residential facility in Marion. The district previously supported nine students in the ATLAS program and has seen that number double.
- Compass is an alternative high school program that also supports students from both Linn-Mar and MISD through a sharing agreement. Compass provides a smaller high school environment, schedule flexibility, and other accommodations to support students who benefit from an alternative high school program. The district expanded Compass to support 10th graders in addition to 11th and 12th grades. Together, the two districts have 110 students attending the program.

## Administrative Staff Shift to Make Room for Student Learning

**SAVE** This fall Linn-Mar opened a new administrative building to house district leadership and administrative functions like curriculum, student services, communications, finance/payroll, human resources, technology and others. These administrators were located at the building formerly known as the LRC, and their move to a new building allows additional student access to the former LRC, which is located on the high school campus. This new building is designed to host internal learning sessions for teachers, and a new meeting



space to help improve the district's ability to live stream board meetings.



## Kicking Off A New Season at Marion Stadium

**BOND** The Marion Stadium, the first project that MISD completed as a part of the successful 2021 bond election, opened in the spring of 2023. This facility provides a turf field for soccer, football, marching band, dance, and cheer, as well as an 8-lane track. Fans are able to enjoy events in the accessible grandstands, which includes an elevator and upper viewing platform near the pressbox. During the school day, the venue is in use for a variety of activities including elementary school walk-a-thons, marching band rehearsals, and the all-staff kick off meeting for the 2024-25 school year.



## Expanding Auditorium Space at Both Linn-Mar and Marion Independent School Districts

Both of Marion's public schools are building new performance spaces to help support the growing student and community interests in fine arts.

**BOND** **SAVE**

This winter, MISD will open a 750+ seat performing arts venue at its high school. The space will provide a much larger, professional environment for student and local performances. Designed with modern acoustics and technology, the new auditorium will provide a dedicated space for music, theater and dance performances. Additionally, the venue is equipped with a storm shelter and a secure entrance for Marion High School for increased safety and security. The space is targeted to open this winter to student performances.



**SAVE**

Linn-Mar Community School District also has broken ground on a 1,200 seat performance venue to better support its growing need for a performance venue. The district's current space is often crowded for district events and is unavailable when the time comes to schedule it for the district's younger students.

Each of these new facilities will include modern sound and lighting systems, enabling students to learn and perform in environments that match those in other large public performance venues.

## Refreshed Linn-Mar and MISD Recreational Spaces

**SAVE** **BOND**

Parkview Elementary offers MISD preschool and K-2 playgrounds equipped with a safe and accessible surface. Similarly, recent renovations at Francis Marion Intermediate included a new playground surface. These outdoor spaces serve students during the school day, while also offering safe, accessible, and welcoming spaces for youth in the community outside of the school hours.

**PP EL** **PP EL**

Linn-Mar relocated its high school tennis courts by creating an eight-court complex, located adjacent to the existing baseball/softball facilities at Oak Ridge Middle School. This complex allows student-athletes access to top-quality, lighted facilities and is available to Marion residents when not in use for school events. The district also opened a new playground for students at Westfield Elementary this fall after replacing the playground equipment that had been at the elementary school since it opened in 1999.

## Francis Marion Intermediate Safety, Security, and Classroom Improvements

**BOND** **PP EL** **SAVE**

In addition to the playground upgrades, recent renovations to Francis Marion Intermediate (FMI) improve safety and security. Renovations include a secure entrance with



the office spaces and a conference room all near the front entry, rather than the prior access which required visitors to walk past classrooms and down a hallway to access the main office. A new wing is complete with spaces for art, music, and classrooms that also serve as a storm shelter, improving safety for students and staff in the event of severe weather. The project also included updates to existing classrooms with storage cabinetry, carpeting, furniture, and technology improvements, modernizing spaces for learning throughout the building.

## Renovations at the Marion High School campus

**BOND** **PP EL** **SAVE**

Marion High School renovations, in addition to the Marion Stadium and the new auditorium, also include upgrades to the HVAC system, indoor and exterior lighting upgrades, carpeting, paint, renovations to an art room, furniture in the library and lunch room, and recladding of some exterior walls.



## Future Initiatives

MISD is currently working with OPN Architects and the City of Marion to study the Starry Elementary site. Final decisions have not yet been made regarding Starry, but the location will continue to be owned and operated by MISD. At this time while long range planning continues, the site currently provides storage for a variety of district needs including school supplies and clothing to support families in need, as well as gym space for district and youth programming. The district recognizes the importance of maintaining facilities to best serve the needs of students in their educational and extracurricular pursuits, while also remaining dedicated to fiscal responsibility.

Linn-Mar also embarked this year on a study and design effort for a new district indoor activity space. The district has plans to build a multi-use space to better accommodate demand for additional indoor recreational space. This center would support athletic team practices and other indoor activities and events. Conversations continue as this project is still in the design phase.