

The Little School District that Could

Many of us have either read *The Little Engine that Could* by Watty Piper ourselves, or read it to our children or grandchildren. This is the story of the *Little School District that Could*.

This **little school district** is a small rural school district located in Southeast Minnesota, a geographically large district with a somewhat small population. It encompasses the communities of Brownsdale, Hayfield, Oslo, Sargeant, and Waltham, as well as several townships across two counties.

This **little school district** believes whole heartedly in itself. The students, teachers, staff, administration, food service providers, bus drivers, and everyone else involved with this **little school district** believe they have what it takes to succeed in today's educational environment. In addition, the citizens, taxpayers, and the local business leaders also believe in this **little school district**.

In 2017 this aging **little school district** went to the taxpayers with a bold plan: The 65+ year-old building needed to be renovated, they explained. Major changes were needed to bring the educational facility into the 21st century.

So, the brand-new superintendent gathered his team and went to personally talk with voters to explain the current conditions and future plans. Meetings were held, tours were given, and questions were answered. In September of 2017, just 2 ½ months into the new superintendent's position, a special bonding referendum election was held. Thankfully, the voters of this special **little school district** agreed renovations were indeed necessary. And so began a multi-year plan to modernize this aging **little school district**.

One focus item of the renovation plan was a completely new Heating and Ventilation (HVAC) system. The unit would circulate fresh air multiple times per hour throughout the day, oxygenating and purifying classrooms, offices, gyms and hallways.

In just a few months, a novel virus would hit the country. The new system would become vitally important.

Equally important was the new investment in technology the **little school district** made just prior to the virus. In March of 2020, the Governor of Minnesota shuttered all schools in the state due to Covid-19. Students in the **little school district** did not lose instructional time; new technology meant the majority of students had devices they could use for Distance Learning.

As the **little school district** moved through the remainder of the 2020 school year and into the summer months, it quickly became clear that distance learning did not reflect the best the **little school district** had to offer. Students missed their peers; teachers missed their students; lessons and learning were not the same. The **little school district** students were struggling. It was time to prepare for another uphill journey: the superintendent knew face-to-face learning in the fall of 2020 would be of paramount importance. It was time to get back to work.

At that time, much was reported about the importance of updated HVAC systems in schools. A clean air exchange would go a long way in protecting students. Fortunately, the **little school district** was ahead of the game, with a state-of-the-art HVAC system.

Along with this was a wonderfully renovated facility, an enthusiastic staff and eager students. The **little school district** knew it could successfully resume face-to-face education, but would the virus thwart all plans? There was only one way to find out.

On the Tuesday after Labor Day, 2021, the **little school district** reopened for in-person, face-to-face learning. While many other districts struggled with remote learning challenges, this **little school district** brought its kids “home” to the classrooms! Pre-K through the 6th grades were able to spend the entire school year in face-to-face learning. Grades 7-12 were face-to-face except for a 6-week hybrid period. Throughout all of the challenges, the primary focus was to **“Keep the kids in school!”** Once again, the **little school district** proved it could.

Not only did this **little school district** keep the kids in school, they kept all of the programs going as well. For the first time in history, there were virtualized concerts, streamed events, and in-person sporting events with limited spectators. Creativity abounded as technology kept spectators in touch with district events.

Was that enough for the **little school district**? No! It would finish this spectacular year by sending athletes to compete at the state level. For the first time in school history, “I think I can” morphed into “I know we can.” In April, the boys basketball team brought home the **State Championship**. In June, the baseball team brought home a *second* **State Championship**!

This **little school district** surpassed all expectations, all year long. Not only does it believe in itself; it believes in its students. It will go the extra mile because it believes students deserve the very best educational, enriching experiences possible.

If you are looking for a **School District** for your children that believes in putting kids first, offers small class sizes for optimal learning, and enlists teachers, staff and an administration that care, this little gem of a school district in a state-of-the-art facility is for you.

Hayfield Community Schools in Hayfield, Minnesota, the **Little School District that Could!**