

THE DUBUQUE DISPATCH

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STRONG SCHOOLS. STRONG COMMUNITIES.

Great teachers and well-supported public schools help students succeed — and help all of Dubuque County thrive.

Inside: Meet longtime Dubuque Senior teacher Paul Kilgore, understand Iowa's school-voucher debate, and see how neighbors are building stronger communities across the county.

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STRONG SCHOOLS. STRONG COMMUNITIES.

August brings a familiar energy to Dubuque County.

Teachers are preparing classrooms. Families are checking supply lists. Students are wondering who will be in their classes, what they will learn, and what the year ahead might hold.

Even for those of us who do not have children in school, the start of a new school year matters.

Strong public schools help young people develop the knowledge, confidence, and skills they need to build meaningful lives. They prepare future nurses, electricians, teachers, small-business owners, engineers, farmers, artists, caregivers, and community leaders.

They also help create communities where people want to live, work, raise families, and invest in the future.

Education affects far more than what happens inside a classroom. Research connects educational opportunities with long-term health, economic security, and overall well-being.

Studies consistently find that investments in school resources — particularly when those investments reach students with the greatest needs — can improve graduation rates, employment, and future earnings.

But statistics only tell part of the story.

Schools are places where students discover new interests, learn to work with people who are different from them, and begin to understand their role in a larger community.

That work is possible because educators and school employees show up every day with patience, knowledge, creativity, and care.

In this issue, we introduce you to **Paul Kilgore**, a longtime Dubuque Senior High School English teacher whose students continue to give him hope for the future. We also take a closer look at Iowa’s **school-voucher program** and why the way we fund education matters to every community in our state.

You will also meet neighbors building relationships through our **Neighbor-to-Neighbor** program, learn about a local organization helping students start the year prepared, and find several ways to connect with the Dubuque County Democrats in the weeks ahead.

Public education is not simply a service for families with school-age children. It is one of the commitments we make to one another.

When students are supported, teachers are respected, and schools have the resources they need, our entire community grows stronger.

Here’s to a safe, hopeful, and rewarding school year.



DUBUQUE COUNTY PUBLIC EDUCATION BY THE NUMBERS

10,000+

Public school students in Dubuque County

2,000

Approximate number of students in Dubuque County utilizing school vouchers

26

Public schools in Dubuque County



Scan to read more about St. Mark Youth Enrichment

ORGANIZATION SPOTLIGHT

St. Mark Youth Enrichment

St. Mark Youth Enrichment helps local students begin the school year prepared and ready to learn.

Through **Apples for Students: Fill the Bag**, the organization provides school supplies to more than **3,600 students at 30+ area schools**, working directly with schools to get supplies where they’re needed most.

St. Mark also supports young people through after-school and summer programs, with help from local donors, mentors, businesses, and volunteers.

PAUL KILGORE

A teacher who still believes in the future

After more than 25 years teaching English at Dubuque Senior, Paul Kilgore says his students still teach him something every year.



When Paul talks about teaching, he does not begin with lesson plans, grading, or books. He begins with his students.

“Being around young, optimistic people makes me feel okay about life.”

A Senior graduate himself, Paul teaches Advanced Placement Literature, public speaking, and concurrent-enrollment English courses that allow students to earn college credit.

He did not plan to become a teacher, but several educators changed his direction.

“I had teachers who inspired me, guided me, and encouraged me,” Paul says. “I wanted to do that for someone else.”

More than two decades later, learning still goes both ways.

His students introduce him to new technology, trends, and ways of looking at the world. More importantly, they remind him not to underestimate young people.

“They’re friendly, they can carry on conversations, and the students I teach today are much more accepting and tolerant than past generations,” he says. “It makes me think the world is in good hands.”

Paul spends long hours preparing lessons, grading papers, and helping students succeed. The rewards often come years later, when former students stop him around town or send a message about something they remember from his class.

By August, Paul is ready to return to the classroom.

“I have fun with my job every day. It’s a rewarding profession, and I’d encourage people to consider it.”

As another school year begins, we are grateful for Paul — and for every educator and school employee helping Dubuque County students learn, grow, and discover what is possible.

MEET PAUL AT A GLANCE

25+ YEARS

Teaching at Dubuque Senior High School

SUBJECTS

- AP Literature
- Public Speaking
- Concurrent Enrollment English

ALMA MATERS

- High School: Senior (Class of ‘93)
- BA: University of Dubuque
- MA: Loras College

EXTRACURRICULARS

- Former basketball player and coach at Senior
- Former track coach
- Running, cycling, rowing
- Hanging out with his wife (Michelle), daughter (Julia), and dogs (Mick and Honey)



Michelle, Julia, and Paul Kilgore



Mick and Honey Kilgore



“I know I’m making a difference. That’s what keeps me coming back.”



Scan to read more about Paul or visit dbqdems.org/blog/community-voices-paul-kilgore

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

What Changed and Why it Matters

PROGRAM CREATED

2023

Eligibility was restricted to families making up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (about \$90,000 for a family of four).



INCOME LIMIT REMOVED

2025-26

Now even **the wealthiest families** in Iowa receive state money to send their kids to private schools.

For generations, Iowa’s public schools have prepared students for college, careers, military service, and life in their communities.

That is one reason Iowa’s Education Savings Account program, often called the school-voucher program, has become such an important topic for debate.

An Education Savings Account is a state-funded account that eligible families can use for approved private-school expenses, including tuition.

The program was created by the Iowa Legislature in 2023 and has expanded in stages. The reason why so many people are talking about school vouchers now is a recent change in who qualifies for vouchers. Beginning with the 2025–26 school year, **eligibility is no longer limited by household income.**

When the program was introduced in 2023, only families earning up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level were eligible for vouchers. The following year, the ceiling was raised to 400% (about \$125,000 for a family of four). Today, there is no income limit, which means even the wealthiest families qualify.

Supporters say the program gives parents greater freedom to choose the educational setting they believe is best for their children. They also argue that state assistance makes private education available to more families.

Critics have several concerns.

Public schools are required to educate every student who comes through their doors. They provide special education, transportation, meals, extracurricular activities, school nursing, counseling, and many other services.

Private schools may have different admissions policies, additional tuition costs, or requirements that public schools do not have. In many rural communities, there are no private schools nearby at all.

Another concern is how state dollars are distributed. A large share of families using the program were already expected to enroll their children in private school. That has led some Iowans to question whether the program is primarily expanding access or helping cover tuition families were already paying. Exacerbating frustration is the fact that several private schools simply increased their tuition in response to the expansion of the voucher program.

The Dubuque County Democratic Party supports strong, fully funded public schools and opposes using public education funding for private-school vouchers.

Our 2026 county platform calls for education funds to be used for public education. It also supports timely and adequate school funding, competitive educator pay, strong Area Education Agencies, affordable public higher education, and full federal support for special education.

Whether or not you have children in school, these decisions matter.

Public schools educate the overwhelming majority of Iowa children. They prepare our future workforce, serve as gathering places, employ thousands of local residents, and help communities remain strong.

Understanding the program is the first step. Paying attention, asking questions, attending school-board meetings, and voting in state and local elections are how informed neighbors help shape the future of the school voucher program and our public schools.



To read more about our take on the school voucher program, scan or visit dbqdemocrats.org/blog/explainer-whats-the-deal-with-school-vouchers



NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR

Strong Communities Start with Neighbors



Dianne Gibson and Elaine Rockwell launched Neighbor to Neighbor in Dubuque County in 2025.

Some of the most important community conversations happen in ordinary places: on front porches, over backyard fences, at the mailbox, or while walking around the block.

Those small moments build trust

And trust is at the heart of the Dubuque County Democrats' **Neighbor to Neighbor (NTN)** community organizing program.

In today's busy world it can be tough to get to know your neighbors. NTN is a low key effort to build genuine, ongoing relationships

Helps volunteers build genuine, ongoing relationships with people who live nearby. It is not another short-term campaign program, and it is not about spending every weekend knocking on strangers' doors. It is about being a good neighbor and building community!

The program began last year after local Democrats learned about a neighborhood-based organizing model being used in Urbandale, IA. Elaine Rockwell and Dianne Gibson saw how naturally the idea fit Dubuque County.

"People are busy, but they still care deeply about their communities," Dianne says. "We wanted to create something that felt welcoming instead of overwhelming, but still gave people a way to make an impact locally."

Seventeen volunteers became Dubuque County's first NTN Neighborhood Contacts, serving several pilot precincts in the City of Dubuque.

Each Neighborhood Contact is matched with approximately 30 to 40 households close to where they already live. Contacts help neighbors stay informed about voter registration, early voting, absentee ballots, polling places, local events, and community issues.

Neighborhood Contacts do not need to be political experts or have all the answers to all questions that might come up. Training, materials, and ongoing support are provided at no cost.

This year, Dianne and Elaine hope to grow the program to 30-40 Neighborhood Contacts and expand into more communities across Dubuque County – including in the rural parts of the county.

The long-term vision is simple: at least one trusted Neighbor to Neighbor Contact in every county precinct.

Whether you live in Dubuque, Asbury, Peosta, Epworth, Cascade, Farley, Dyersville, Bernard, or somewhere in between, there's a place for you in the NTN program!



Interested in becoming a Neighborhood Contact?

We are looking for Neighborhood Contacts in ALL precincts across Dubuque County. If you're interested, we'd love to hear from you!

Scan the QR code to submit an interest form.



More than twenty community members attended the July 2026 NTN informational session. Many were Neighborhood Contacts in 2025.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Featured Event

Making Waves for Clean Water feat. Chris Jones

Sunday, August 16 • 2:00–6:00 p.m.
Swiss Valley Park — Sycamore Pavilion • 13606 Swiss Valley Road, Peosta

This event features Chris Jones, Democratic candidate for Iowa Secretary of Agriculture, along with live music by The Mississippi Duo, games and activities for all ages, face painting, food from the Hangry Hobo food truck, and conversations about protecting Iowa’s water. We will also be collecting school supplies to help area students begin the year prepared.

The event is free and family-friendly.

Rob Sand Town Hall

Monday, August 24 • 7:00 p.m.
Location provided after registration.

Join Rob Sand for a free town hall focused on the issues affecting Iowa communities, including good-paying jobs, strong schools, clean water, and responsible government.

Tom Townsend Golf Outing Fundraiser

Friday, August 28 • 1:00 p.m.
Bunker Hill Golf Course • 2200 Bunker Hill Road, Dubuque

Join Iowa State Senator Tom Townsend and supporters for an afternoon of golf and community.

Labor Day Parade and Picnic

Monday, September 7 • 9:30 a.m.
Bunker Hill Golf Course • 2200 Bunker Hill Road, Dubuque

Walk with the Dubuque County Democrats as we celebrate the workers, unions, and working families who built our community and continue moving it forward.



See More Events

Check out dbqdemocrats.org/events for more upcoming events.

HELP WANTED: SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER

Do you have experience creating social-media content, writing posts, making simple graphics, producing short videos, or planning digital campaigns?

The Dubuque County Democrats are looking for a volunteer who can help us share local stories, promote events, and connect more neighbors with opportunities to participate.

We are hoping to find someone with previous social-media, content, communications, or digital-marketing experience who can contribute reliably as part of a collaborative volunteer team.

Email marketing@dbqdemocrats.org with a brief introduction and a few details about your experience.

IMPORTANT DATES

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 3.

Aug. 25 - Oct. 19	Absentee ballot request window
Oct. 14 - Oct. 19	Elections Office mails absentee ballots out
Oct. 14 - Nov. 2	Early voting window
Oct. 19	Voter registration deadline; you may still register on Election Day
Nov. 3	Absentee ballot due; must be received by 8:00 pm to be counted. Postmarks do not count.
Nov. 3	Election Day; Polls are open 7:00 am to 8:00 pm

GET-OUT-THE-VOTE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Get Involved and Help Win Elections

Whether you enjoy meeting new people, organizing events, working with data, creating content, helping behind the scenes, or talking with neighbors, there is a way to use your time and talents.

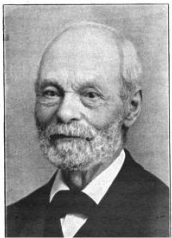
You don't need campaign experience. You don't need to know every issue or have all the right words.

You only need an interest in building a stronger, fairer Dubuque County alongside neighbors who care.



Fill out a volunteer interest form at dbqdemocrats.org/get-involved or call (563) 845-3115.

THIS TIME IN DUBUQUE



AUGUST 1, 1833

Alexander Levi arrived in Dubuque on August 1, 1833, becoming the first Jewish settler in what would become Iowa. He later opened a grocery store and, in 1837, became Iowa's first naturalized citizen.



AUGUST 3, 1971

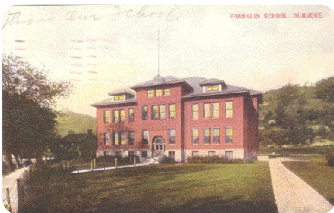
The Town Clock Plaza was formally dedicated on Friday, August 3, 1971, by Dubuque Mayor Dr. Gaylord Couchman and George Romney, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Concern about vibrations caused by loud music and hundreds of dancers led to a feature story in the Telegraph Herald in 1989. City officials stated their confidence in the structural soundness of the tower.



AUGUST 1855

By August 1855, Dubuque's school census counted **3,466 children**. That same year, the Iowa Legislature officially established the City of Dubuque as its own school district with a local Board of Education. Today there are over 10,000 children enrolled in Dubuque County public schools.



AUGUST 30, 1976

Franklin School reopened as a center serving children with disabilities, offering specialized education while helping students build the skills and confidence to succeed. It marked an important step toward expanding educational opportunities in Dubuque.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS



WHY I GOT INVOLVED

"When your friend asks you if they should run for office and you say yes, you also have to be prepared to support that decision. I'm here to support my friend and the best candidate for supervisor!"

Candace Eudaly-Loeback

Campaign Treasurer for Kristin Dietzel,
Candidate for Dubuque County Supervisor

WHY I'M VOTING

Every day we feel the consequences of every choice our elected officials make. We can call, or write to them, but, elections are the one time every few years that we the people can make a choice that has consequences for them.

We get to judge the work they have done for us and decide if we want them to continue or be replaced.

Tori Scott

Community Member (and Horse Lover)



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