

Tyler Honrud, Financial Advisor
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701.977.9500 4266 32nd Ave S, Suite H
 tyler@mymidwestwealth.com Fargo, ND 58104

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A Simple Act Of Feeding Kids Ran Into The System

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of the Meal Repack program. Administrators showed him the freezers and explained how the system worked. Within days of the media coverage and the visit, state officials began raising compliance concerns.

By November, the issue had reached the school board. On Nov. 17, 2025, the board voted to transfer up to \$1,000 from the general fund to the food service fund to keep the program running while the district explored other options. At the same time, the board discussed whether the food could be donated through the local food pantry instead.

In December, that option was officially taken off the table. After weeks of discussions involving the Great Plains Food Bank and the Minnesota Department of Education, the state ruled that leftover school food could not be distributed through Great Plains or through the Barnesville Area Food Pantry if it was intended only for students.

If donated to the pantry, the food would have to be made available to the general public. A school-based freezer for students only would not be allowed. That left only two allowable paths forward: private donations or transfers from the district's general fund.

At the December school board meeting, finance officer Jodi Samuelson presented the cost figures. In November alone, the district repackaged 269 meals, and at the required adult reimbursement rate of \$5.25 per meal, the total cost was \$1,412.25. For December, an additional \$412.25 invoice was due.

Board members began openly questioning whether the program was being used enough to justify the expense.

"I'm just wondering if we're funding something without there being a true need," board member Sarah Hough said during the December meeting.

School staff responded with firsthand observations.

Activities Director Aaron Schindler said he regularly sees students using the meals between school and extracurricular activities.

"Junior high and high school kids are taking stuff out of there and heating it in the microwave right in the hallway," he said. "I see our athletes using it a lot."

Roller said students often come directly to him.

"I've had students walk into my office asking when we would have



National publicity in October has left the Meal Repack program facing new funding challenges, leaving its future uncertain as the district looks for solutions.

more meals because they couldn't get home or go get food," he said. "They were in between school and activities and had no access to a vehicle."

Faced with both the financial reality and demonstrated need, the board chose not to end the program. Instead, members voted to pay the December invoice from the general fund and approved a hybrid funding model.

Beginning in December, up to \$50 from each concession event is directed to the Meal Repack program, with the amount reduced or waived if community donations cover the cost. District officials said any funds used to support Meal Repack are tracked, audited, and reviewed through the school board process to ensure transparency and financial responsibility.

Today, Meal Repack freezers remain in Barnesville's schools, but the program's future is uncertain. The Great Plains Food Bank has agreed to leave the equipment in place only as long as the district continues operating the program.

Ellerbusch said he plans to continue raising the issue with state legislators.

"It does not matter if you are Democrat or Republican," he said. "This is something good for families and kids. There should be a way to make this work."

Minnesota provides free breakfast and lunch to all students. Yet under current rules, food can be free at noon — but not at three in the afternoon.

And somewhere in Barnesville, a student is still opening a freezer door, hoping there will be something inside.

Community Ed Spring Class Lineup & Activities Are Open

By Chris Ellefson
 Barnesville Community Ed
 And Activities Secretary

The Barnesville Community Education program is offering a wide range of classes and activities this spring, with several options still open for registration. Residents can sign up through the Community Education office or register online through the district website.

Early-Morning Fitness Options

A Tabata exercise class continues to draw early risers to the high school gym. The high intensity interval training (HIIT) session meets Monday through Thursday from 5:00 to 5:40 a.m. for a monthly fee of \$35. Participants must register in advance to receive a building access FOB and are encouraged to bring a yoga mat and water bottle. The class will conclude for the school year on May 14 and will not meet during the summer.

Evening Recreation at School Facilities

Wednesday evenings remain active across district buildings, with Adult Volleyball and Men's Basketball held at the high school from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Adult Hockey meets at the elementary school from 8:00 to 9:30 p.m. Each activity costs \$1 per visit.

Open Pickleball is offered Thursdays from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the elementary gym through April 23 for \$3 per session. REFIT, a dance based fitness class, meets Tuesdays from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. in the high school's old gym on April 7, 14, 21, 28 and May 5, 12, and 19 for \$5 per class.

Martial Arts Training Available

Taekwondo classes continue on Mondays and Thursdays in the high school wrestling room. Beginners meet from 5:30 to 6:20 p.m., followed by advanced students from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. New students may join at any time after registering, and fees can be prorated for mid month starts. Uniforms are available for purchase from the instructor.



Tabata is one of the classes that is offered through the Barnesville Community Ed Program.

Taekwondo will also continue throughout the summer.

Driver Discount Program Returns

A refresher course for the state approved Driver Discount Program will be offered Tuesday, April 14, from 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. The four hour, in person class is taught by a Minnesota Highway Safety & Research Center certified instructor. Pre-registration and prepayment are required. Adults 55 and older who complete the course qualify for an approximate 10% reduction on auto insurance premiums for three years. Registration is available at www.driverdiscountprogram.com or by calling 1 888.234.1294.

High School Theatre Presents Spring Production

The high school theatre department will present Murder in the Knife Room, a comedic mystery by Jonathan Rand. The play follows an all knowing inspector unraveling a murder involving twenty eccentric suspects. Performances will be held April 30, May 1, and May 2 at 7:00 p.m., with a matinee on Sunday, May 3 at 2:00 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center.

Youth Sports Camps Begin This Spring

Several Summer Rec programs will begin early, including a Basketball Training Camp focused on shooting mechanics using the

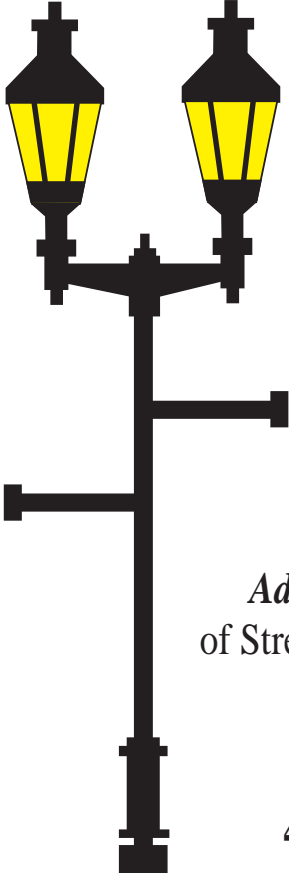
Noah training system, a tool used by most NBA teams. Two sessions are available: Tuesdays (April 7, 14, 21, 28) or Thursdays (April 9, 16, 23, 30) from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m. The camp is open to girls in grades 6 and 7, with a limit of four participants per session.

An Elementary Volleyball Skills Camp will run May 12, 14, 19, and 21, led by instructors Samantha Passa and Allie Aadland. Students in grades K-2 will meet from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., while grades 3-5 will meet from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. The camp emphasizes fundamentals, drills, and gameplay in a supportive environment.

A Track Camp is also planned, with details to be finalized and published in the Summer Rec brochure.

More Information

All class offerings can be found on the district website at www.barnesville.k12.mn.us (barnesville.k12.mn.us in Bing) under the Community Education tab. Community members with questions or class suggestions may contact the Community Education office at 354 2638. The department is also seeking individuals interested in teaching future classes.



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