

# Prowler Proud: **It's the start of an exciting school year in TRF**

*Our most pressing challenge is our financial instability*



**Christopher Mills**

As we approach the start of an exciting 2023-2024 school year at Thief River Falls Public Schools, I'd like to formally introduce, or re-introduce, myself to the community. My name is Christopher Mills. Originally from northwestern Minnesota, I started my education journey many years ago here as a student teacher in Thief River Falls Public Schools. After working as a middle school principal at Franklin Middle School and then superintendent of Stephen-Argyle Schools for 23 years, I am excited to return to Thief River Falls, this time as superintendent.

I could not be more excited to return to the Thief River Falls community.

Since my start in July, I have already seen the amazing commitment of our teachers and staff to our students and the wider community. Our schools are truly a special place: The diversity of programs available to our students demonstrates our commitment to excellence for every child and the focus on meeting individual interests and needs.

Looking to the future, I hope to provide leadership, support, and positive communication on behalf of our schools and the community. I am looking forward to tackling some of our district's biggest challenges and charting a brighter future for our students.

I believe this effort starts

by addressing the most pressing challenge facing our district: Our financial instability. Our district has cut its budget by nearly \$2.7 million over the last six years in response to inadequate state funding and rising costs of education. Despite these cuts, our district still faces a \$2.4 million deficit by the 2026-2027 school year. If these issues are left unaddressed, our district will have no choice but to make further cuts to our budget, impacting staff, class sizes and student programming.

Our district's Long-Term Planning Advisory Committee (LTPAC) has done excellent work over the past year with staff and community members to develop a plan

to stabilize our budget and protect staffing and student programming for our schools. In July, the school board considered the committee's recommendations and agreed to present the plan to our communities during a referendum on Tuesday, Nov. 7.

The proposed plan will ask district residents to consider three ballot questions. If approved, the referendum would authorize new levies to help stabilize the district's budget, recruit and retain quality staff, invest in learning technology and protect current class sizes. These levies would also support additional investments in security, mental health services and career and technical education training - all serv-

ices that our students deserve.

To learn more about these three ballot questions, the tax impact of the proposed plan and how you can vote in November, I encourage you to visit the referendum website: [PlanForOurProwlers.org](http://PlanForOurProwlers.org).

I look forward to engaging with students, parents, and community members over the coming months to discuss the future of our schools. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me by email at [chris.mills@myprowler.org](mailto:chris.mills@myprowler.org).

I am looking forward to the start of a great school year. Go Prowlers!