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2025 WINTER
A Community Collaboration by Marion Independent School District and Linn-Mar Community School District.

FROM CHALKBOARDS TO COMPUTERS:

A Century of Change in Iowa Public Education

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1925 was a markedly different time for students in Iowa compared to today. It was the post-World War I era, when jazz music first emerged, Ford's Model T cruised the roads and many Iowa farm families didn't have electricity in their homes. For many students—especially those in rural areas—formal education often ended after eighth grade.

One hundred years later, education in Marion, Iowa, reflects a dramatically different system and learning experience. While there's a certain charm in reflecting on simpler times, the opportunities and challenges faced by today's students are vastly different from those of the 1920s.

A century ago, students commonly recited facts and completed repetitive tasks. In 1925, they used chalkboards and wooden pencils to support their learning. Many learned together in one-room schoolhouses, where students of varying ages received the same instruction from a single teacher.

While we respect the traditions and values of the past, we know that today's students face a world that demands new skills, broader perspectives and greater adaptability.

Today's classrooms reflect a world that is more complex, interconnected and demanding than ever before. Teachers not only focus on educational targets to ensure consistency across Iowa school districts, but also tailor instruction to students' strengths and learning styles.

Students still use pens and pencils, but they also engage with online resources, virtual reality goggles, laptops and tablets. Instruction is individualized to help students understand the curriculum in ways that are personalized and aligned with real-world applications.

The rigor of today's curriculum reflects the evolving demands of society. Standards taught in classrooms help ensure students have a balanced foundation for lifelong learning. Students are required to complete courses in English, math, science and social studies to develop core skills in these key areas. They also engage in problem-solving, critical thinking and new learning that prepares them for whichever path they choose after high school. These are not just academic goals—they are life skills essential for success for students who might pursue education, enlistment or employment after graduation.

Even as recently as 1940, many Iowans did not pursue education beyond eighth or ninth grade, as higher-level skills were not in demand by employers. Today, Iowa students graduate from high school at much higher rates, with both Linn-Mar and Marion Independent regularly graduating 90 to 95 percent of students each year.

As educators, we may occasionally reminisce about the simplicity of earlier days. But we know the best way to honor those who taught Iowa students before us is by preparing today's students to lead, innovate and succeed in the years ahead.

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Building a Better Community Together

Young builders with big ambitions are transforming Marion–one home at a time.

Marion Community Build is a collaborative effort designed to reinvest in older neighborhoods by giving students hands-on experience in home rehabilitation. The program supports low- to moderate-income housing needs while preparing students for career pathways in the trades and beyond.

Over the course of several semesters, students from both public school districts worked on major home improvements at a Marion property purchased by Marion Economic Development Corporation (MEDCO). Under the supervision of teachers and industry experts, students serve as the contractors to rehabilitate the home. Current and past Community Build projects have allowed students to learn how to install new

appliances, construct a detached two-stall garage, install roofing and siding, replace windows, update bathrooms, install new flooring, build decking and create a laundry area. They also learned about making significant mechanical upgrades including improving or installing a new furnace and air conditioning units.

Once the remodel work is completed, the homes are listed for sale to support homeownership opportunities for local families. The students finished their first Community Build home in spring 2021.

"The Marion Community Build program is about more than construction—it's about building futures," said Mark Seckman, president of MEDCO. "Students develop real-world skills while making a meaningful investment in our neighborhoods. It's a win for our workforce, our community and our future."

A New Start on 30th Street

This school year, the students are collaborating on a new home located on 30th Street near Longfellow Elementary. Nineteen students from Marion Independent and Linn-Mar are participating in the renovation, which will result in another owner-occupied single-family home. MEDCO purchased the property, and students are leading the construction efforts alongside the generosity of local investors and partners:

- City crews shared hands-on demonstrations in tree removal, stump grinding and clearing overgrown landscaping.
- Skilled trades professionals are providing students with safety training and guidance in areas such as electrical work, HVAC installation and construction practices.
- Local architects contributed planning expertise by scanning the house and finalizing the new floor plan.

This collaborative initiative between Linn-Mar, Marion Independent, MEDCO and our local trade professionals continues to build a strong foundation for skilled careers and stronger neighborhoods in our community.

BACK TO SCHOOL EFFORTS

Support More Than 700 Local Students and Families

Many of our local students started their new school year with the support of the businesses and organizations in the Marion community.

Marion Independent's Start School Right program has been helping families prepare for the school year since 2015. The program ensures students receive school supplies, clothing, hygiene items, tennis shoes and breakfast food before classes begin. In addition, the program offers a resource fair with a wide range of community partners present to connect with and support individual family needs. Families received a meal provided by Hy-Vee, vision screenings by the Center Point Lions, dental screenings by Marion Dental and haircuts by Cost Cutters. Other community supporters include Marion Cares, Iowa Giving Crew, New Leader Manufacturing, Hills Bank, Community Savings Bank, Veridian Credit Union, Cotton Gallery, Great Clips, PepsiCo, local churches - and many more. A group of volunteers including many current and retired MISD staff organize the event. This year, the program—hosted in partnership by Marion Independent and the Marion School Foundation—served 234 families and 451 local students.

That effort was complemented by a Back to School Bash held at Linn-Mar's Linn Grove Elementary. This event was hosted by Marion Cares and supported by Green State Insurance, Hills Bank, Hy-Vee, Iowa Giving Crew, Shoes for Kids, and other local partners, along with staff and volunteers from both Linn-Mar and Marion school districts. Nearly 300 students and their families attended the event to receive a meal, vision and dental screenings, haircuts and shoes to start the year. Thanks to generous families, churches and businesses who anonymously adopted students and shopped for their supplies, each backpack was filled with essentials to help students start the year off right.

From backpacks and supplies to meals, haircuts and resource connections, the community's collaboration continues to set families up for success.

Safety First:

School Districts Invest in Security Upgrades

As part of a continued commitment to student safety, both the Marion Independent School District and Linn-Mar Community School District have made substantial progress in enhancing security infrastructure across their campuses.

Linn-Mar Community School District

Linn-Mar received $50,000 in grant funding per school building through a Homeland Security School Safety Improvement Fund to help implement recommended safety measure improvements. The funds were allocated based on the district's completion of a vulnerability assessment to ensure improvements were made based on the specific needs of each building. Through this funding the district made several improvements to aid in communication during emergencies including the installation of a standard intercom system in all buildings. The district also improved hardware to enhance lockdown capabilities in some buildings and upgraded cameras and locks in others.

Marion Independent School District

Marion Independent also received $50,000 in grant funding per building to advance its security efforts. Updates included upgraded camera and door access systems across all facilities, along with improvements specific to each building's needs. These included new interior door hardware and locking mechanisms in some locations and improved exterior lighting in others.

Building a Safer School Community

Both districts have also invested in CrisisGo, an app that allows building and district administrators to coordinate alerts, messages and notifications during emergency situations. The app is also accessible to local first responders and safety teams who may respond to emergencies at district buildings. Both districts are working to expand use of the app and are providing updated staff training to support not only the technology but also protocols for various emergency events.

Partnering with Marion Police Department

Additionally, Marion Police Officers Tom Daubs and Brian Davis serve as school resource officers at the districts. Officer Daubs has been paired with Linn-Mar since 2012, and Officer Davis with Marion Independent since 2018. These officers are a regular part of the school day, working alongside students and staff in school buildings to promote safety, build trust and support a positive school climate. In the event that law enforcement support is needed by one of the districts, the local police department has the benefit of these officers' familiarity with the buildings and the staff and students on the district campuses.

Marion Police Officers Brian Davis (left) and Tom Daubs (right) serve as School Resource Officers with Marion Independent and Linn-Mar Community School Districts.

These efforts reflect a shared commitment among both districts toward creating secure learning environments for our public school students. Through strategic investments in infrastructure, technology and training, the districts are not only enhancing physical security but also building a culture of preparedness and trust.

EXPANDING
Student Learning Through Curriculum

Today's high schools are evolving to meet the diverse needs and interests of their students by offering an increasingly wide range of classes. Both Linn-Mar and Marion Independent regularly assess the needs of their students and revisit their core curriculum to ensure student interests are matching the classes offered. Here are four innovative new courses available to students at these public schools:

What is AP Physics C: Mechanics?

AP Physics C: Mechanics is a calculus-based introductory college-level physics course available to Linn-Mar High School students. This challenging course allows students to build their understanding of kinematics, dynamics, work, energy, momentum, oscillations and rotational motion - through a calculus lens. They are able to build an understanding of physics through classroom study, in-class activity and hands-on, inquiry-based laboratory work.

"This class is especially significant because it gives students the opportunity to experience a true calculus-based physics course while still in high school," explained Linn-Mar High School Science teacher Brooke Berringer who is teaching the class this year. "It provides students, with an authentic preview of what they can expect in college-level physics and engineering courses. For many of our students interested in STEM fields, this is an exciting step that helps them strengthen both their problem-solving skills and their readiness for future studies.

"This course helps students see how math and science really come together," Mr. Berringer added. "It's challenging, but it builds the problem-solving skills they'll use in college and beyond."

What is Cybersecurity?

The new Cybersecurity course at Marion High School introduces high school students to the rapidly expanding and highly impactful field of cybersecurity. Using a problem-based learning approach, students take on the roles of cybersecurity professionals as they explore real-world challenges.

"Cybersecurity gives students broad exposure to the many aspects of digital and information security while encouraging socially responsible choices and ethical behavior. It inspires algorithmic, computational and especially 'outside-the-box' thinking," shared Chris Martin, who teaches the course.

Throughout the program, students investigate various educational and career pathways within cybersecurity and related information security fields. Guided activities allow students to apply industry-standard protocols and procedures to analyze security breaches—both on personal computers and small business systems. In addition, interactive online cybersecurity games provide opportunities for hands-on practice and skill development through play-based learning.

What is Super Sport?

Linn-Mar's Super Sport course is a dynamic and inclusive physical education course designed to meet the diverse needs of students with adapted PE goals as well as those with other individualized learning objectives. Rooted in the belief that movement is for everyone, Super Sport creates a supportive environment where students of all abilities can thrive physically, socially and emotionally.

Linn-Mar High School Physical Education teacher Erin Weis shared, "The course focuses on personal growth, teamwork and skill development. We pick activities that align with each student's unique goals. This class provides the structure and encouragement to help all students succeed."

With a focus on adaptability and inclusion, instructors collaborate closely with support staff and specialists to ensure that every student feels seen, supported and celebrated. Super Sport isn't just about physical fitness—it's about fostering a sense of belonging and achievement through movement.

By blending purposeful instruction with fun and engaging activities, Super Sport is redefining what physical education can look like for students with diverse needs.

What is Zombie Apocalypse?

Students at Marion Independent are asked, "What would you do if there was a zombie apocalypse?" in a new elective science course offered this year. Teacher Ryley Robinson shares, "This class is designed to pull back the curtain on science by making it intensely practical and engaging. I love seeing students who traditionally wouldn't choose an extra science elective not only sign up, but thrive as they learn crucial skills like first aid, shelter building and survival communication. We make complex scientific concepts relevant, fun and impossible to ignore."

In Zombie Apocalypse, students explore plant and animal identification, including the nutritional benefits and how to cook those items. Marion High School Senior Tyler Winterboer shared that his favorite activity in the class was, "the cookbook, because we had to research edible things in a certain region so we would know what is safe to eat and be able to still make some good nutritious meals."

During the course students learn to communicate through sign language, build simple circuit telegraph machines to send morse code messages and research and practice filtering water. Additionally, students explore viruses, bacteria and disease transmission; physical and mental health; how to design shelters; and general information about the various types of zombies. "At first you may think that a class about a zombie apocalypse sounds ridiculous, however, it's actually pretty interesting. This class really gets me thinking about all the things I take for granted in my daily life," stated Marion Independent Junior Starla Rubalcava.

From Chalkboards to Computers (cont. from page 1)

Changing Education Requirements Over 100 Years

	1925	2025
Requirements for Graduation	Localized testing with no high school requirements	Statewide graduation requirements
Subjects Emphasized	Grammar, arithmetic, agriculture and civics	English, math, science, social studies, physical education and financial literacy
Career and Vocational Learning	Many Iowa students farmed, but little school-based explorations were available	Extensive electives and career pathways available for students
Physical Education & Health	Not required	Mandatory PE classes and CPR certification
Technology	None	Classes like computer science and coding at beginner and advanced levels

History of Marion Independent and Linn-Mar Community School Districts

The first Marion Independent school opened in Marion Township in 1841 on the north side of Seventh Avenue. A four-room, two-story building called Union School opened in 1854 and became Marion's first public school, offering primary, elementary and secondary classes. In 1860, the Marion Independent School District was formed as the fourth school district in the state of Iowa.

The Linn-Mar Community School District wasn't established until decades later, when residents of Marion Township began organizing and centralizing education for its more rural population. In early 1948, 17 one-room rural schools joined together to form the student population of Marion Rural Independent Grade School. That population is known today as the Linn-Mar Community School District.

Burke, Sandra Charvat. Educational Attainment in Iowa: 1940–2021. Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Indicators Program.

Students Giving Back

Volunteerism Thrives at Linn-Mar and Marion Independent School Districts

Whether through school-sponsored clubs or community partnerships, students are making a difference in our Marion community while preparing for life beyond graduation.

Linn-Mar High School: Leading through Service

Many of the student-led organizations at Linn-Mar High School provide a lasting impact on the community through volunteerism including Accountability, Leadership and Opportunity (ALO) and National Honor Society (NHS).

ALO emphasizes leadership and integrity through volunteering by partnering with groups like Families Helping Families and Mission of Hope. Students are recognized for their service hours, and the group fosters a strong sense of community and personal growth through their community service activities.

Linn-Mar Student Assistance Specialist Joyce Booth-Baisten, who sponsors the ALO organization, said volunteering helps students gain more than hours. "It builds a sense of community within the organization," she said. "Not only are we volunteering, we're like a family. We invite them to things just to make them more comfortable, to build self-esteem, skill building. I think that's important for students."

"I began volunteering regularly once a month during my junior year and have been doing the same ever since. Now I am a regular volunteer for some organizations like Marion Cares, and help them twice a week during their after-school programs. It makes me proud to see all the help we can do for the community and the lives we can touch," Gavin Hatcher, Linn-Mar Senior and ALO district president.

NHS members serve at school events and in the broader community, choosing opportunities that match their interests—from blood drives to local festivals. Students gain practical life skills, build résumés and contribute to events that rely on volunteer support.

NHS students complete at least four hours of outside service per semester, in addition to hours within the school. Chelsi Snead, a Linn-Mar High School Health/PE teacher and one of NHS's sponsors, said many students choose opportunities that match their interests, from concession stands at sports events to helping at festivals and 5Ks. "Our younger generation has potential. They are responsible young adults. They are out here, giving back," she shared.

"I volunteered with the Feeding Lunches to Youth (FLY) organization the past two years and packaged and delivered meals to hundreds of kids during the summer months. It brightened my day to see their faces light up when I handed them a packaged meal, knowing they were guaranteed to eat a meal that day," said Addie Wegmann, Linn-Mar Senior.

Other meaningful volunteer opportunities for students at Linn-Mar allow them to give back to the community while developing leadership and service skills. Through the environmental club URenew, high school students actively engage in campus clean-ups, helped establish a prairie on school grounds and helped distribute nearly 650 trees to be planted throughout the community to promote environmental sustainability. Many Linn-Mar students also volunteer at St. Luke's and Mercy hospitals, dedicating time to support patients and staff in various roles. The high school's freshman talented and gifted class also completes quarterly service projects that emphasize learning through hands-on experience. Additionally, Linn-Mar has had several students earn recognition through the Herbert Hoover Uncommon Student Award, which honors those who design and carry out significant community service projects.

Marion Independent: The Marion Way in Action

Similarly, Marion Independent has several volunteer opportunities for its students through a variety of student organizations and activities. During the 2024-25 school year, 50 percent of Marion High School seniors went above and beyond in service to others, completing 160 or more service hours and earning their Silver Cord for volunteerism. In total, the senior class completed a total of 16,225 hours of service. This commitment reflects the heart of what the district calls the Marion Way: the mission to give back, strengthen our community and grow as individuals through meaningful acts of service.

"Each time our students serve, they not only make a positive impact on others, but also discover the values of empathy, responsibility, teamwork and connection—the hallmarks of lasting leadership," said Tom Kettmann, MHS school counselor.

Students engage in a wide range of service - from the Marion Girls soccer team supporting their fellow students by volunteering at Superstars Special Olympics to helping students with disabilities play baseball through the Miracle League. Junior Jemma Rubalcava said, "It becomes more than just inspiring our friends. Our spirit and joy are felt by every single person there; that is what true team spirit is."

Junior Leah Williams agreed. Leah volunteers with Miracle League, an organization that removes barriers that prevent children with disabilities from playing baseball, giving every child the chance to experience the joy of the game. "Helping teens with special needs play sports and seeing the joy on their faces is an amazing experience. I'm so thankful for the opportunity to be part of something that brings so much happiness to others," she said.

Other students find ways to apply their volunteering time and talents to support real-world needs. Marion Independent Junior Addy Showalter was part of the high school's Geometry in Construction (GIC) program that helped students build decks and handicap ramps for local residents in need, combining hands-on skills with community service. Addy shared, "The GIC program broadened my perspective and strengthened my problem-solving and teamwork skills. More importantly, it gave me the chance to use what I've learned to make a real difference for others."

Marion High School students also help to make FASTWORKS possible. FASTWORKS is a family-engagement program that builds a sense of community between families, schools and local resources through monthly, in-person sessions that include a meal and a variety of family activities. As a result of students' volunteerism, the FASTWORKS program is able to strengthen connections among families, with the school community and with the larger Marion community.

Another local teen took community service even further. Marion Independent Junior Haiden West serves as a volunteer firefighter, and shared, "In moments of crisis, it's the volunteers who show up—not for recognition, but because we care about our community. Anyone can show up on the good days, but it truly matters who shows up on the hardest ones. I want to be that person for my community.

"Joining as a high school student has been incredibly meaningful. To me, the department is more than a team—it's a family. Many of the members have known me since I was a kid, and now I have the privilege of standing beside them, serving the community that helped shape who I am.

"Even though I've only been part of the department for a short time, I've discovered more than a passion for helping others—I've found direction. Volunteering has shown me that my future is rooted in service, whether through emergency response, healthcare or any path where I can make a real difference."

The students at the Linn-Mar Community School District and Marion Independent School District show us that acts of service—both big and small— build a stronger community.