

Mary Thomasson

Mary Thomasson spent 38 years serving the Northwest R-I School District—ten years as a teacher, two years as an assistant principal, ten years as a principal, ten years at the central office, and finally six years serving on the Board of Education. Thirty-eight years as a Lion—more than half of her life.

Mary's career in education began when she was just 10 years old, playing school in the family camper. Her mother, Thelma Thomasson, was a teacher in the Windsor School District, so "Camper School" was well stocked with educational materials. Not only was Thelma the supplier of materials, but she was also Mary's mentor, inspiration, and driving force behind her decision to pursue a career in education.

After attending Central Methodist College (now Central Methodist University), Mary applied for teaching positions and received only one interview request—Northwest. She will never forget interviewing with Ken Dillner, principal of Maple Grove Elementary. The interview took place at the central office, which at the time was a "house" in High Ridge. Mr. Dillner asked if she wanted to see the school. Mary assumed he meant High Ridge Elementary, located nearby. Instead, she found herself riding in his car down Highway 30 toward Maple Grove. For a moment, she thought she was being kidnapped.

Maple Grove, however, became her school home, where she enjoyed some of the best experiences of her life, primarily teaching fifth grade. To this day, she is amazed by how many former students she still interacts with, sees in the community, or has even worked alongside.

Becoming a principal in the Northwest R-I School District was never something Mary Thomasson envisioned for herself. It was not a career path she had planned, but when the opportunity arose, she reluctantly accepted. Serving as principal of House Springs Intermediate became one of the greatest highlights of her career. According to Mary, the staff at HSI was the best around—a true family that still gathers and enjoys each other's company to this day.

Leaving House Springs Intermediate to continue her career at the central office was one of the hardest decisions Mary ever made. She recalls interviewing with Dr. Paul Ziegler, Cindy Horn, and others, convinced she would not get the job—especially since technology was one of the

departments she would oversee, and she felt she knew very little about it. To this day, Mary is still unsure how she got the job.

During her tenure at the central office, Mary experienced several job and title changes, but one of her fondest memories will always be her time working in the trailer behind the central office. There, she worked with a group of women who became confidants, leaders, and lifelong friends.

In January of 2017, just five minutes before the deadline, Ms. Thomasson submitted her retirement paperwork to Dr. Paul Ziegler, with tears in her eyes. It was time—but it was bittersweet. Her career had been the highlight of her life, spent in a district that had truly become her home.

Although her journey was meant to end on June 30, 2017, two years later Ms. Thomasson was given the opportunity by the community to serve two terms on the Board of Education. While her tenure on the Board will soon come to an end, the experience only adds to her remarkable career at Northwest.

Mary Thomasson did not graduate from Northwest, but she will always feel—and proudly remain—a Lion. It is with great pleasure that we welcome Mary Thomasson into the Northwest Alumni Association 2026 Distinguished Educator Hall of Fame.