

31 BACKPACKS COMMON GRANT APPLICATION

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Michigan Technological University

HU3694 Grant Writing

Jenni Nance

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NARRATIVE

1. Executive Summary

Michigan's Upper Peninsula, a part of the state more isolated from populated cities, requires extra support from within local communities to help under-served populations. The mission of 31 Backpacks is to break the cycle of poverty by tackling adolescent food insecurity. In cooperation with their schools, 31 Backpacks provides free necessities to at-risk students in the Copper Country (Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga counties). Nonprofits such as 31 Backpacks form connections with suppliers, making it easier to gain access to necessities such as easy-to-make food and personal hygiene items. This mission requires organized operation and community support which heavily rely on outside funding. Aside from small private donations, grants are an integral component in the fight against poverty and food insecurity. With these opportunities, 31 Backpacks will be able to supply food access to at-risk student populations in Keweenaw, Houghton, and Baraga counties, creating a system that places communities on the path to decreasing food insecurity for its members.

31 Backpacks works with vetted members of public schools to identify the number of food-insecure students. Volunteers pack the needed number of bags, taking great care to tailor the food to the student's capabilities and allergies, such as microwavable items for younger students. The packed bags are then taken to the schools and quietly placed in the lockers of students in an effort to preserve their dignity and minimize the chance of bullying. The organization takes its mission extremely seriously by also organizing 'big packs' for winter and spring breaks, and stocking a full pantry including personal hygiene items in the Horizons Alternative School in Mohawk and Washington Middle School in Calumet ("31 Backpacks Delivers"). 31 Backpacks also delivered door-to-door when schools were temporarily shut down during the pandemic, to ensure students were still able to receive necessary food and hygiene items. 31 Backpacks is constantly growing and expanding its outreach in the Western Upper Peninsula, with the goal of continuing to decrease the number of students who do not have access to daily meals.

2. Purpose of Grant

In the U.S. there is a correlation between poverty and food insecurity; Michigan's Upper Peninsula is no exception to this issue. The 2022 U.S. Census reported that 17.3% of people in Houghton County ("Reporter Profile page for Houghton"), 7.8% of people in Keweenaw County ("Reporter Profile page for Keweenaw"), and 12.2% of Baraga County fall under the poverty line ("Reporter Profile page for Baraga"). Of this population, 12% (Houghton), 12% (Keweenaw), and 15% (Baraga) of the students were in poverty. There was also a study conducted through Michigan Technological University's Social Science Department focused on qualifying the problem of food insecurity in rural areas. This study centered on a survey sent out to residents of

the Western UP, consisting of Keweenaw, Houghton, Baraga, Iron, Gogebic, and Ontonagon counties. “Reported food insecurity among WUP respondents was as high as 23.5%, with 20.1% of respondents eligible for SNAP” (Lu and Carter, “Social determinants”). Additionally, the Michigan Advance reported data from mid-May stating roughly 37% of households have incomes below \$35,000, with 17% of Michigan households with students reported either sometimes, or often, not having enough to eat in the past seven days (Jaehnig, “31 Backpacks provides”).

With the high number of students who go hungry in these areas, 31 Backpacks puts a large amount of time and money into their efforts. Being a non-profit, 31 Backpacks relies entirely on donations and grants from the local community to continue serving kids in the Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga counties. Since the organization is based in a rural area, the available funds from donors are limited, making it harder to compete with other organizations for donations and grant funds.

31 Backpacks respectfully requests \$140,150 from the Grace Foundation to support its annual operating budget. This funding would allow the organization to sustain its vital mission of combating childhood hunger in Michigan's rural Upper Peninsula, where food insecurity remains a significant challenge. With this grant, 31 Backpacks could not only ensure the continuation of its core programs but also explore and invest in additional initiatives aimed at strengthening the organization’s impact and reach. This support is critical to maintaining the fight against food insecurity in the Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga counties, where many families rely on 31 Backpacks for essential assistance.

The target population for 31 Backpacks includes K-12 students who participate in free or reduced-price meal programs at school and face challenges in accessing consistent food sources over the weekends. Through this service, students receive weekly food packs containing meals they can easily prepare themselves, ensuring they have enough nutritious food to sustain them when school meals are unavailable. “This year [2023] the non-profit filled 906 bags for students and their families” (“31 Backpack Delivers”). This support helps prevent hunger over the weekends, enabling students to return to school nourished and ready to learn.

a. Project Goals

31 Backpacks aims to reduce hunger experienced by students in Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga Counties by providing weekend and holiday food access to students who experience food insecurity, most of whom receive free or reduced lunch.

The success of the organization is measured by qualitative assessments by school officials and the personal testimonies of students. In addition to feeding students, the goals of this project include improving attendance at school, improving the ability of food-insecure

students to learn, improving students' health through nutrition, and reducing bullying by ensuring that food is delivered discreetly.

Future goals of the organization include increasing the bookkeeping compensation and owning a 31 Backpack facility with a parking lot that can serve as the headquarters of the organization.

Current action plans include organizing volunteer sessions to pack food for students for weekends and two big packs per year for breaks. 31 Backpacks is an ongoing project and requires continual funding to purchase food to pack and facilitate food transportation. The W.R. Grace Foundation grant will help with monthly expenses to operate as needed and roll into the yearly budget along with other funding packages.

b. Other Partners

31 Backpacks partners with local businesses and schools. 31 Backpacks operates out of Glad Tidings Church in Hancock, Michigan, and orders food from Feeding America for \$.20 per pound. The organization receives subsidies and recycling services from Tadych's marketplace, and Taldych's extends their employee discount to 31 Backpacks. Similarly, Louie's Fresh Market sells food to 31 Backpacks nearly at cost. School officials work with 31 Backpacks to identify students in need and distribute food. Some other companies who contribute to the needs of the organization are Costco, Breakwater Federal Credit Union, Louie's Fresh Markets, and Copper Country Intermediate School District. In addition to providing financial support and resources, several local companies pay their employees to volunteer to pack bags and provide assistance in distributing the packs.

c. Similar Projects or Agencies

One similar agency is the Baraga-Houghton-Keweenaw Community Action Agency. This agency has programs that include the Western Upper Peninsula Food Bank, Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), tax assistance, etc. While 31 Backpacks focuses on students in the community, the Community Action Agency is geared more toward adults/families who struggle with food insecurity. The Community Action Agency also disperses some food that needs to be cooked, cut up, and/or prepared, which are usually tasks students are not capable of. The Community Action Agency's food pantry runs for roughly two hours per month.

Another program dedicated to assisting low-income individuals is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is a program through the state government which is designed to help adults and families afford food. There are specific requirements applicants have to meet to qualify and the funding amount varies per family. These benefits come in the form of a monthly debit that can be applied to certain foods at checkout.

Assistance from 31 Backpacks expands food accessibility in Houghton, Keweenaw, and Baraga counties by supporting students who may not have adults at home, may not qualify for SNAP benefits, or whose families may not have transportation or time to pick up food. All the agencies share the common goal of assisting low-income individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. 31 Backpacks does not want to discourage families from applying for assistance programs in their areas but instead aims to offer additional support for families by intentionally helping students in schools.

d. Constituent Involvement

31 Backpacks seeks to solve the problem of child hunger by providing resources to reduce hunger in their operation area. School officials, in collaboration with 31 Backpacks, identify children in need. Several volunteers run the program in Baraga, and they coordinate with Ms. Maki for food deliveries.

e. Staff and Volunteer Qualifications

Co-founder Melissa Maki is trained in food handling through Feeding America. Drivers are trained to drive on their routes. Volunteers are trained on-site during food packing events. Most volunteers are friends and family of the Makis, but if needed, Melissa Maki has the ability to run background checks using participants' phone numbers. This ensures that volunteers are safe to work with children and do not pose a risk to the organization's reputation.

f. Long-Term Funding Strategies

31 Backpacks routinely collects donations and applies to several grants every year to continue funding the ongoing project. These include grants from the Keweenaw Health Foundation, Portage Health Auxiliary, and Keweenaw Community Foundation. 31 Backpacks also receives an annual donation from the Copper Shores Community Health Foundation for Giving Tuesday.

3. Evaluation

The success of 31 Backpacks is measured by the successful delivery of packed bags to as many students as possible. Ms. Maki also communicates with the school administration regarding the effectiveness of her program through their perspective, to which the administration sends letters of recommendation in return. 31 Backpacks receives anecdotal feedback from the schools where students are served. Dianne Goulette, the CLK Elementary School Counselor, said that 31 Backpacks serves families in an inoffensive way: "Families who may not qualify for state assistance can leverage 31 Backpacks as a support for their family in times of need without seeing it as a negative mark on their family's ability to provide" (Appendix A).

Similarly, Darren Kinnunen, the principal of Horizons Alternative High School, regards 31 Backpacks as an “integral” and “vital” program through their installation of a food pantry and imparting of valuable wellness supplies and techniques (Appendix B). 31 Backpacks is described as having provided the school population with an overall better life and educational experience for students suffering food insecurity, minimizing the extra stress they have to deal with.

Finally, 31 Backpacks was awarded the “Copper Country Leadership Award” by the superintendent of Lake Linden-Hubbell Public Schools, Brad Codere, on behalf of the Copper Country Association of School Boards (Appendix C). This award recognized exceptional “region-wide” assistance to K-12 Copper Country schools and awarded 31 Backpacks for their perpetual commitment to this mission.

These first-hand accounts from the partnered schools offer strong justification for the continued existence of 31 Backpacks. It offers immediate feedback on the impact the organization is having within the communities it serves.

4. Budget Narrative/Justification

31 Backpacks respectfully requests \$140,150 from the Grace Foundation to support its estimated annual operating budget. Securing this funding would enable the organization to cover its essential expenses while creating an opportunity to allocate additional resources toward new initiatives that strengthen its impact and sustainability. This grant would provide critical stability for current operations while fostering growth and innovation to further address food insecurity in the community.

The program is broken down into two financial categories: personnel services and other than personnel service (see Table 1). For personnel services, 31 Backpacks employs two paid individuals on an annual basis: an external accountant and co-founder Melissa Maki, who serves as the organization’s bookkeeper. The accountant is compensated \$300 annually for managing tax-related responsibilities. Ms. Maki, as the bookkeeper, plays a critical role in the organization, overseeing budgeting, coordinating and managing volunteers, drafting thank-you letters, and ensuring smooth day-to-day operations. For these services, she is paid \$550 per month. Additionally, Ms. Maki contributes an estimated \$3,000 annually for in-kind support, further bolstering the organization’s resources.

Each week, approximately 25 dedicated volunteers contribute their time to 31 Backpacks by shopping, packing, and delivering food bags to local partnered schools. Although unpaid, their combined in-kind contributions are valued at an estimated \$28,414.60 annually using Michigan’s minimum wage of \$10.33 per hour. Volunteers contribute in-kind fuel costs when transporting store-bought supplies to 31 Backpacks’ headquarters within Glad Tidings church

and delivering food packs to schools. Fuel cost was estimated assuming \$50 per month was spent per county per month on transportation during the nine months that school is in session. The in-kind contribution total also accounts for the in-kind “hourly” rates of volunteers during regular and large-scale packing events, the time spent purchasing food and supplies, and the time spent transporting these items.

Table 1. Budget Breakdown

	<i>Annual Cost</i>	<i>In-kind</i>
<i>Personnel Services</i>		
Accountant	\$300.00	
Bookkeeper	\$6,600.00	\$3,000.00
Volunteers		\$28,414.60
<i>Other than Personnel Services</i>		
<i>Food</i>		
Feeding America	\$110,000.00	
Local Grocery Stores	\$11,700.00	
Non-food items for pantry	\$6,750.00	
Rent including electricity, heating, and water	\$3,600.00	
Office supplies	\$1,200.00	
	\$140,150.00	\$31,414.60

Including Ms. Maki’s additional in-kind contributions, the organization realizes a total annual savings of approximately \$31,414.60, which significantly bolsters its capacity to serve the community effectively.

In the category of other than personnel services (OPTS), food purchases are categorized into two primary areas. First, food sourced from Feeding America is priced at approximately \$0.20 per pound, allowing the organization to maximize the volume of food distributed to students in need. This wholesale price allows 31 Backpacks to purchase around \$110,000 in

non-perishable food items annually. Second, for items not available through Feeding America, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, certain proteins like tuna, and sometimes dairy products, the organization spends roughly an additional \$11,700 per year at local grocery stores. This amount fluctuates based on inflation and seasonal availability. Currently 31 Backpacks is paying \$1.04 more per food item than last year due to an inflation rate of 3.5%.

In addition to food, 31 Backpacks allocates an average of \$6,750 annually toward personal hygiene products for students, particularly benefiting those at the Horizons High School where there is an established pantry to promote independence. These supplies are also sent home during the larger packs prepared for winter and spring breaks. These essential hygiene supplies support students who may lack consistent access to showers or laundry facilities, helping them feel clean and prepared in their educational environment.

These expenditures on food and hygiene products are critical for the program's success, ensuring that students have reliable meals during the weekends throughout the nine months of the school year and access to basic personal care items.

The remaining portion of the budget is allocated to securing essential workspace within Glad Tidings Church, which provides a functional and centralized area for the organization's activities. The monthly rental fee of \$300 grants access to vital utilities, including heating, water, and electricity, ensuring a stable environment for operations year-round. Additionally, an annual budget of \$1,200 covers necessary office and cleaning supplies that the church does not provide, such as paper, sanitation products, and other materials essential to maintaining an organized and hygienic workspace.

Having access to this dedicated space is crucial for 31 Backpacks, as it allows volunteers to assemble food packs in a controlled, accessible environment where resources are readily available. The investment in cleaning supplies not only supports basic upkeep but also fosters a sanitary setting, essential for safe food handling.

In summary, the total yearly budget equates to \$140,150.00. Additional in-kind contributions equate to an additional value of \$31,414.60. This funding enables 31 Backpacks to serve the students of Houghton, Baraga, and Keweenaw Counties.

5. Organization Information

31 Backpacks was started in 2012 by a mother-daughter team, Laurel and Melissa Maki, out of their home garage. Their goal was to serve kids: a completely helpless portion of society. The organization first served CLK (Calumet, Laurium, and Keweenaw) schools. The name comes from the initial estimate of packing for 31 students in a classroom. However, that number has now grown more than ten times— currently serving 351 students between Houghton,

Keweenaw, and Baraga counties. The organization began by asking the school systems to give them a list of how many students were experiencing food insecurity. Then, with help from donors, food was able to be provided to students by placing “packs” in the lockers of those students. As the program evolved, the organization was able to expand to cover school holidays and even went door-to-door during the pandemic. There have been 12 years of experience and consistent support from volunteers, donors, and grants.

a. Mission and Goals

31 Backpacks is constantly growing and expanding its outreach in the Western Upper Peninsula, with the goal of continuing to decrease the number of students who do not have easy access to daily meals.

The remote nature of the Western UP makes it difficult for families to travel to the store, with some people needing to travel an hour, or more, to get necessary groceries. For families who may not have reliable transportation, having the nearest store be further than a plausible walking distance can also make it extremely difficult, especially in the winter. The large distance between community members and grocery stores has led to results of previous studies finding that a lack of time to commute to the store is a major factor in food insecurity and an obstacle many families face (Lu and Carter, “Social determinants”). 31 Backpacks solves this issue by delivering food directly to the schools, making it more convenient for those who have limited time for grocery shopping or don’t have access to transportation to stores.

b. Description of Programs, Activities, and Accomplishments

31 Backpacks has two main programs: packing food bags for all partnered schools, and stocking the food pantry at Horizons Alternative School. The organization packs food every other Saturday and delivers food to schools weekly. The food pantry is self-regulated, with the room not being monitored by Horizons’ staff or 31 Backpacks volunteers. Students take what they need, ensuring there is enough left for other students as well (Sitkins, “Public Schools of Calumet”).

31 Backpacks has been recognized by local community organizations for their effort. In 2024, 31 Backpacks won the Community Partner of the Year Sparkplug Award, hosted by the Keweenaw Chamber of Commerce (Jackson, “Residents, organizations gather”). 31 Backpacks also received the Copper Country Education Leadership Award from the Copper Country Association of School Boards in 2015 and 2024 (“2015 CCASB Awards”; “CCASB honors students, employees”). Melissa Maki, Vice President of 31 Backpacks, received the Coldwell Banker Schmidt Realtors’ Humanitarian Award in 2023 for her work with 31 Backpacks, Hancock Rotary Club, and the City of Hancock (“Hancock community volunteer”). In 2013, 31 Backpacks was honored by the U.P. Volunteer Network and received the Volunteer of the Year award for their volunteer program (ohtadmin, “Baumin wins”).

c. Organization Chart

31 Backpacks is run primarily by Laurel and Melissa Maki. Ms. Maki and a tax accountant are the only paid employees of 31 Backpacks (see Figure 1). All other members are volunteers including those who pack meals every week as well as drivers who facilitate travel to and from the schools and church.

The Hancock location serves as the headquarters for Houghton and Keweenaw counties. The Baraga location serves Baraga County and has a separate team of volunteers in charge of day-to-day operations. The volunteers in charge of Baraga coordinate food delivery with Ms. Maki.

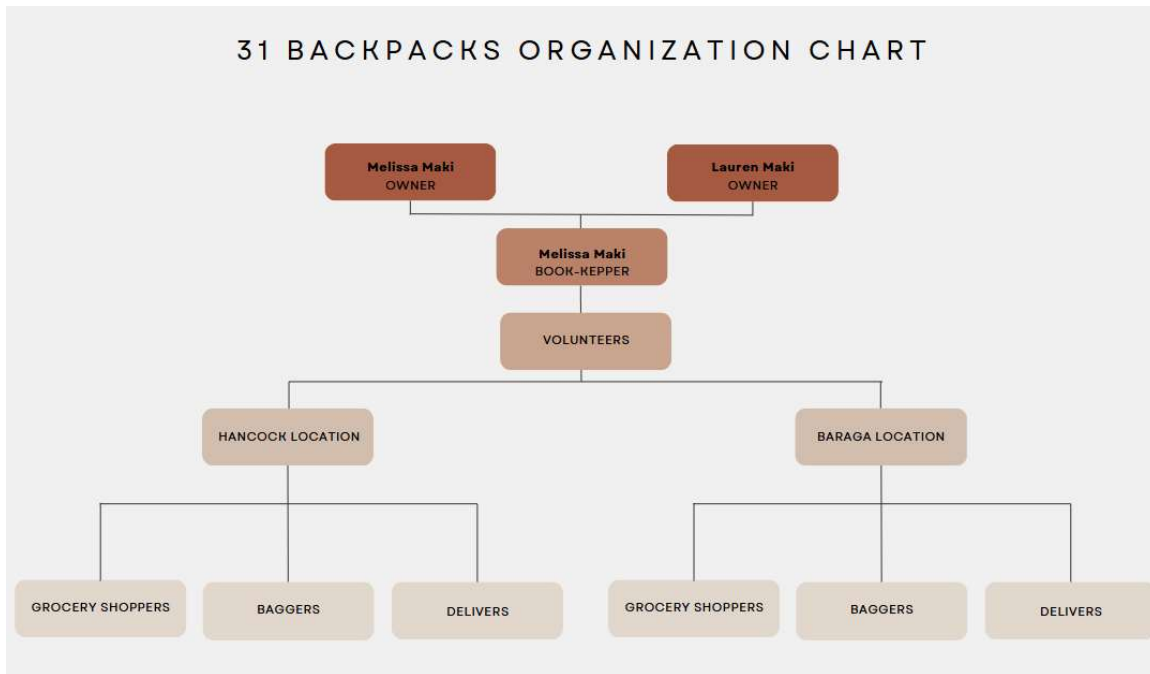


Figure 1. Organizational Chart for 31 Backpacks

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APPENDIX

Appendix A. Letter of Support from Dianne Goulette, the CLK Elementary School Counselor



June 13, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

Every day families struggle to provide their children with nutritious meals when school is not in session. At CLK Elementary at least half of our student body qualifies for FREE or reduced lunch. But what do these children do for food over the weekend when the school meals are often the only food they receive?

The 31 Backpacks program serving our area fills that need for our students during the school year. The program, in our building, this year supported 17 families (24 students) by meeting their food needs over the weekends and during breaks.

Our students' families are very appreciative of the program. This is evident when I deliver the bags of food items prior to both the winter and spring breaks. The families receiving the bags express their gratitude at not only receiving the items but also over the number of items they were receiving.

One of the most impactful things about the 31 Backpacks program is its availability to our students/families. There is already a fairly harsh stigma against taking "handouts" or accepting help in the culture of our area. We are strong, we are mighty, we should be able to do it ourselves. Not requiring proof of need means that even teachers can also request a student receive services from the program. And families who may not qualify for state assistance can leverage 31 Backpacks as a support for their family in times of need without seeing it as a negative mark on their family's ability to provide.

31 Backpacks is an integral part of our school being able to provide the best that we can to the students we serve.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dianne Goulette".

CLK Elementary School Counselor

Appendix B. Letter of Support from Darren Kinnunen, the principal of Horizons Alternative High School

**Calumet-Laurium-Keweenaw Schools
Horizons Alternative High School**

Located at: 110 Stanton Avenue, Mohawk, MI 49950

Address mail to: Horizons Alternative High School

c/o CLK Schools

57070 Mine Street

Calumet, MI 49913

Phone: 906-337-4611

FAX 906-337-4614

Email: dkinnunen@clkschools.org

June 6, 2024

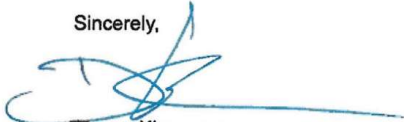
To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to convey the importance of 31 Backpacks and how this organization has supported our program. My name is Darren Kinnunen and I am the Principal at Horizons Alternative High School. 31 Backpacks have been an integral part of our program for many years. The students we serve here at Horizons come from schools within a two county area and often have faced hardships prior to their arrival at our program. Such hardships include poverty, trauma, exposure to substance use, family members with mental illness, etc. Food insecurity is a common issue our students face and 31 Backpacks has done a phenomenal job assisting us with supporting these students. This organization allows us to have a student pantry filled with snacks, meals for the kids to make while at school, meals for the students to take home for their families, personal hygiene products as well as cooking utensils for the kids to use and microwaves to assist them in making meals. I cannot stress enough how vital this organization is to our program. Hungry students are difficult to teach and 31 Backpacks alleviates this problem for us.

Please consider supporting 31 Backpacks with their endeavor to make sure no child is left hungry.

If you have any questions regarding 31 Backpacks or Horizons Alternative High School, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Darren Kinnunen
Principal
Horizons Alternative High School

Appendix C. Endowment Letter to L. Maki for the Copper Country Leadership Award from Brad Codere, Superintendent of Lake Linden-Hubbell Public Schools

LAKE LINDEN-HUBBELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS

601 CALUMET STREET
LAKE LINDEN, MICHIGAN 49945

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FAX (906) 296-0305

JACK KUMPULA
Athletic Director
Phone (906) 296-6681
FAX (906) 296-0219

Ms. Laurel Maki
31 Backpacks
601 Ingot St.
Hancock, MI 49930

Dear Laurel:

Congratulations! I am very pleased to inform you that the Copper Country Association of School Boards has selected 31 Backpacks to receive this year's **Copper Country Leadership Award**. This award is presented to a parent, educator, former administrator, volunteer, legislator, organization, media representative, philanthropist, or civic, business or government leader who has demonstrated outstanding leadership, commitment and effort in support of public K-12 education in the Copper Country. The effect of the recipient's effort must have a region-wide impact. The CCASB has recognized that you continue to make a real difference for Copper Country students and schools.

We will present your award at the CCASB's annual Education Awards Banquet on **Wednesday, March 20, 2024, at the Memorial Union Ballroom on the MTU campus in Houghton**. You may bring a guest and offer the same to any other member of your leadership team that you feel should also be included. The banquet begins at 5:30p.m. with a social and dinner at 6:00p.m. Students, educators and other community leaders will be recognized following the meal and the evening will culminate with the presentation of your award. You will have the option of addressing the audience if you wish.

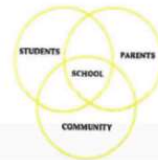
Please RSVP to Loret Roberts at the Copper Country ISD at 482-4250, opt. 1, by the end of the day on March 11th. Also, feel free to call her if you have any questions concerning the awards banquet.

Again, my sincere congratulations for receiving this well-deserved award, and thank you for your strong commitment to education and to kids in the Copper Country.

Sincerely,



Brad Codere
Superintendent/6-12 Principal
Lake Linden-Hubbell Public Schools
2023-2024 CCASB Host District



OUR MISSION: *Working together to ensure that all students achieve their maximum potential and contribute to society.*