

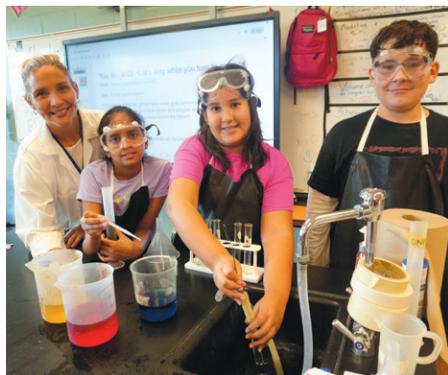
Community Update

FALL 2025 EDITION



ROCHESTER
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

PRIDE IN EXCELLENCE



Rochester Community Schools Strategic Plan, Year 1

Identifying priorities. Creating a unified sense of purpose. Driving action.

Rochester Community Schools continues to develop, support, enhance and drive forward educational excellence through five areas: learning, teaching, leadership, professional development and community engagement.

“Our strategic plan impacts every student, teacher, administrator and staff member within our district. Our teams make this work look very easy. But in reality, it is extremely complex, requiring a great deal of research and careful coordination and collaboration across schools and departments,” said Superintendent Nicholas Russo.

Through the strategic planning process, 23 plans were prioritized for the 2024-25 school year. Twenty-one of those plans were completed or transitioned to the second year for further action. Two plans were paused, awaiting state and federal guidance. Nineteen plans were identified for the 2025-26 school year.

The following are some highlights from the first year of implementation.

Literacy development. At the elementary level, RCS literacy plans follow a structured approach based on the science of reading. This method supports teachers’ daily instruction and helps all students build essential skills for lifelong learning.

“We continue to provide educators with high-quality resources to guide the complex work of literacy development for all RCS students. As part of this commitment, we have also piloted a systematic phonics program in grades K-2. This provides valuable data to inform future implementation,” said Kimberly Hempton, assistant superintendent of elementary and early childhood education.

Data support structure. Recognizing that students learn in different ways and at different paces, the RCS strategic plan ensures the district

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2025 Points of Pride, celebrating excellence

RCS students outperformed the state average by **26%** and the county average by **17%** in English language arts and math on the M-STEP



98%
graduation rate



14 National Merit Scholarship semifinalists;

46 Commended Scholars

Among 24,000 high schools across the country, U.S. News and World Report ranks RCS high schools in the top **5%** or better. Out of 1,136 Michigan high schools, Adams, Rochester and Stoney Creek ranked in the top **3%**



All elementary schools identified as having **high growth** and **high achievement** for math and reading using the i-Ready assessment tool



3,000+ students enrolled in **13 CTE** (career and technical education) programs

2,000+ students enrolled in **26 AP** courses; **86%** earned scores that can qualify for college credit

60%
graduating seniors earned 3.5 GPA or higher



33%
earned 3.9 GPA or higher with 4 or more AP courses

40% of middle school students enrolled in one or more high school credit courses

1,774 high school credits taken by RCS middle school students

Reading & writing proficiency increased to **88%** on the PSAT for 8th graders



Ranked **95%** or above for College Board **SAT** performance in Michigan

Increased SAT scores by **7%**
Exceeded SAT benchmark by **8%**

Strategic plan, year 1

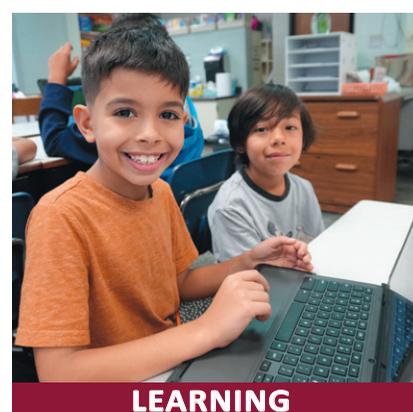
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establishes a professional learning and data support structure for educators to meet the needs of each individual student. By developing a handbook of tiered behavioral response procedures and processes, RCS is building a more responsive, data-informed culture that supports both remediation and advanced learning needs.

“At Rochester Community Schools, we believe students should not only be the focus of our work—they should be active participants in shaping it. Conversations around curriculum, instructional practices and school culture ensure every student feels heard and is capable of driving their own growth,” said Russo.



TEACHING



LEARNING

Innovative learning approaches. Innovation is transforming how RCS students and staff learn, lead and inspire. District committees are actively researching how artificial intelligence can be further integrated in K-12 schools to enhance both teaching and learning. Pilot programs during the 2025-26 school year will provide the foundation for system-wide

applications, so students and staff have the tools to be successful in an ever-changing world.

Safety and security. A safe, supportive environment remains the foundation for all teaching and learning. “Nothing is more important than the well-being of our school community. The implementation of the Centegix safety alert platform, as well as the revision of the district’s Emergency Operations Plan, strengthens our commitment



LEADERSHIP

to promoting a safe and secure environment across the district,” said Dr. Neil DeLuca, deputy superintendent. Every adult member of the RCS team

has been issued a breakaway lanyard that holds a crisis alert badge. Using the Centegix system, staff can call for help anywhere on school grounds, simply by pressing a button. Once activated, support teams will know exactly where the incident is taking place and can provide an immediate response.

Professional development. A high-capacity workforce that is dedicated to positive educational outcomes includes hiring, mentoring and retaining the top talent in the state. “By establishing purposeful and consistent feedback structures, we can continue to align practices that attract, develop and maintain a stable workforce,” said Dave Murphy, assistant superintendent for human resources.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To streamline processes, RCS is building a cohesive approach that ensures every initiative—whether it’s curriculum-focused or operational, like timecard systems or technology tickets—receives the structure and support it needs for districtwide success.

Communications. RCS remains committed to leveraging a variety of communication methods and tools to provide updates, celebrate excellence, build trust, and offer windows into life of school buildings. Through the strategic planning process, families now have the



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

opportunity to engage in two-way communication using ParentSquare and designate how they want to receive their information using a consistent platform.

“At Rochester Community Schools, students remain at the heart of our strategic plan. Each and every action we take defines the future direction to improve teaching and learning outcomes. We are truly grateful for the support of our community,” Russo said.

To learn more about the strategic planning process, community members are encouraged to visit the RCS website at www.rochester.k12.mi.us.

Continuing as leaders in music education

With a rich curriculum and outstanding instruction, Rochester Community Schools has been recognized as one of the 2025 Best Communities for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation. This is the 11th time the district has earned this designation for its commitment to music education as part of a well-rounded curriculum for all students. The district appreciates its teachers who provide this passion and foundation for learning.



Rochester Community Schools Strategic Plan, Year 2 2025-26 priorities

LEARNING

Plan 1 Implement evidence-based literacy practices in elementary schools and engage in a comprehensive literacy review.

Plan 2 Expand work-based learning opportunities in grades 9-12 for student success.

Plan 3 Explore academic opportunities for high-achieving and high-ability students districtwide.

Plan 4 Explore the feasibility of alternative scheduling.



TEACHING

Plan 5 Establish consistent data collection, analysis and response protocols.

Plan 6 Implement AI (artificial intelligence) literacy and best practices for staff and students.

Plan 7 Develop breakfast and lunch menus that include made-from-scratch and low-sugar options.

Plan 8 Develop and implement a cohesive, districtwide behavior framework.

Plan 9 Implement and roll out a visitor management system.

Plan 10 Expand K-5 access to STEAM and engineering principles.

Plan 11 Implement and assess responsive instructional practices.



Visit the RCS website for more information about our strategic plan.

LEADERSHIP

Plan 12 Develop a systemic process for policy and administrative regulation communication.

Plan 13 Strengthen the tool and process for non-teacher evaluations.

Plan 14 Develop additional training materials for business operations.

Plan 15 Conduct an audit of tuition-based programs to include recommendations for increased profit margins and community needs.

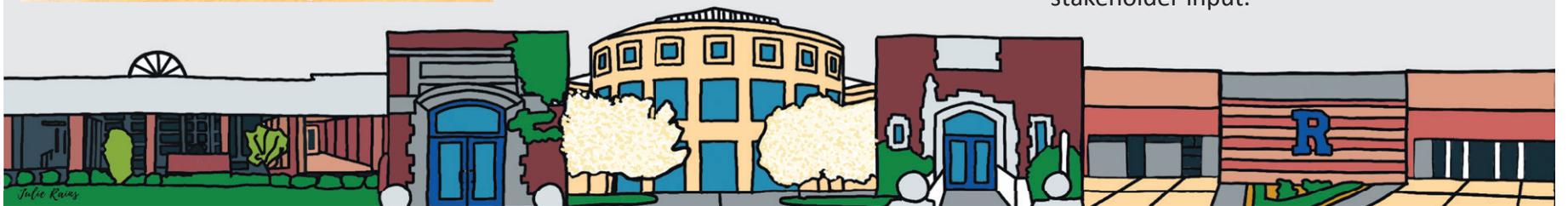
Plan 16 Develop a process to identify, communicate and check for understanding of district operations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Plan 17 - Standardize communication tools using ParentSquare.

Plan 18 - Explore opportunities to enhance digital content in alignment with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) best practices.

Plan 19 - Gather internal and external stakeholder input.



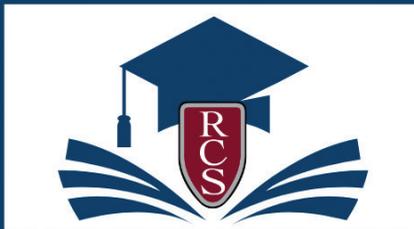
Rochester Community Schools is committed to safety and wellness

Preparedness for emergencies incorporates the following:

- Staff, including athletic coaches, are trained in CPR, first aid, automated external defibrillator (AED) support and EpiPen usage, concussion and Stop the Bleed protocols.
- AED devices and emergency supplies have been installed in prominent areas, districtwide. These locations are identified on digital, integrated building maps for quick access.
- The district has a cardiac emergency response plan that is regularly updated and shared with state officials.
- RCS buildings are stocked with EpiPens, auto-injectable devices used to treat severe allergic reactions, and Narcan nasal spray to reverse suspected opioid overdose.
- RCS team members have implemented Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM) tools and strategies to systematically identify, assess and manage potential threats in a supportive and collaborative manner.
- RCS counseling, psychology and social work professionals provide strategies and resources to support students who may be considering self-harm. A crisis flowchart walks staff through a determination process to provide immediate support and intervention for students, in collaboration with community partners, if necessary.
- Emergency operations plans have considerations to accommodate students and staff with access and functional needs that may include: limited English proficiency, autism spectrum disorder, nonverbal communicators, blindness or visual disabilities, cognitive or emotional disabilities, deafness or hearing loss, mobility or physical disabilities and medically fragile health.
- As a participant in the Handle with Care program, RCS partners with local law enforcement and Oakland Schools to make administrators aware of students who might be in need of emotional support, based on exposure to a potentially traumatic experience and contact with law enforcement.



National Merit Semifinalists



Congratulations, RCS scholars!

Congratulations to the 14 Rochester Community Schools seniors who are semifinalists for the 2026 National Merit Scholarship Program. These outstanding students qualified for this honor based on exceptional scores on the 2024 PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test). They now have the opportunity to advance to the finalist award level. We also congratulate the 46 RCS students who were named as commended scholars. We are proud to recognize the Class of 2026 for their outstanding achievements.

RCS National Merit Scholarship Program Semifinalists

Britta Anderson, AHS	Eda Nguyen, AHS
Aidan Arthurs, AHS	Ryan Ni, AHS
Mark Chernolutskiy, AHS	Elizabeth Phillips, RHS
Samuel Edwards, RHS	Siddh Sheth, SCHS
Choyeon Kim, AHS	Yueyang Wu, AHS
Ananya Kumar, RHS	Anthony Xie, AHS
Greta Lyons, RHS	Aiden Zhang, AHS

RCS National Merit Scholarship Commended Scholars

David Ahn, SCHS	Scarlett Locke, AHS
Leslie Bahk, SCHS	Saaheeba Mann, RHS
Kendall Barnes, AHS	Jacob Martincic, AHS
Arya Birje, RHS	Adam Maxwell, AHS
Elijah Chang, RHS	Peter Milne, AHS
Adit Chathakudath, AHS	Shivaen Myneni, RHS
Aidan Chen, AHS	William Newport, RHS
Johnson Chen, AHS	Brenden Niu, AHS
Judy Cheng, AHS	Aarush Phadke, AHS
Michael Cho, AHS	Caden Phan, RHS
Aarya Devali, RHS	Basaam Rathur, RHS
Mackenzie Doyle, AHS	Jacob Scott, RHS
Melvin Du, AHS	Eric Seo, SCHS
Santiago Escoto, AHS	Gaeun Shin, RHS
Joshua Fernandes, AHS	Chirag Shivakumara, AHS
Hailey Graunstadt, RHS	Anahita Sinha, AHS
Isaac Hacker, RHS	Victoria Sotomayor-Losoya, SCHS
Aden Hassan, AHS	Charlotte Stringer, SCHS
Anupama Iyer, AHS	Spencer Sun, SCHS
Ryan Jom, RHS	Anthony Trybus, AHS
Jayden Joseph, RHS	Yang Wang, AHS
William Kirkness, AHS	Alexander Weisenstein, SCHS
Katherine Lick, SCHS	Lagion Yang, AHS

Visitor management system enhances safety

For the 2025-26 school year, RCS has installed a comprehensive visitor management system in all 25 buildings. The system offers greater efficiency by providing a self-service kiosk for visitors, while eliminating the need for manual clipboards and check-



in sheets. It also alerts staff if an individual has a background that could jeopardize a safe learning environment and provides building administrators with the ability to see if visitors are entering restricted areas.

“A visitor management system improves security for our staff and students. Knowing who is in the building, along with their purpose, will also improve our ability to account for and assist our guests in the case of an emergency situation,” said Dr. Neil DeLuca, deputy superintendent.

“Keeping our school community safe is a team effort. New processes and procedures may not always be convenient, but they are essential in this day and age. We remain grateful for our community members who partner with us to support the safety and well-being of each and every student, staff, family member, visitor and guest on school grounds,” said Superintendent Nicholas Russo.

Improving filtration for healthy drinking water

To ensure healthy drinking water in our schools, RCS is participating in the state’s Filter First hydration program. All district water supply locations have been inventoried and improved filter installation is underway for drinking fountains and water bottle filling stations. A comprehensive water management plan ensures that children will be protected from exposure to contaminants in drinking water through proper filtration equipment and annual water sampling.

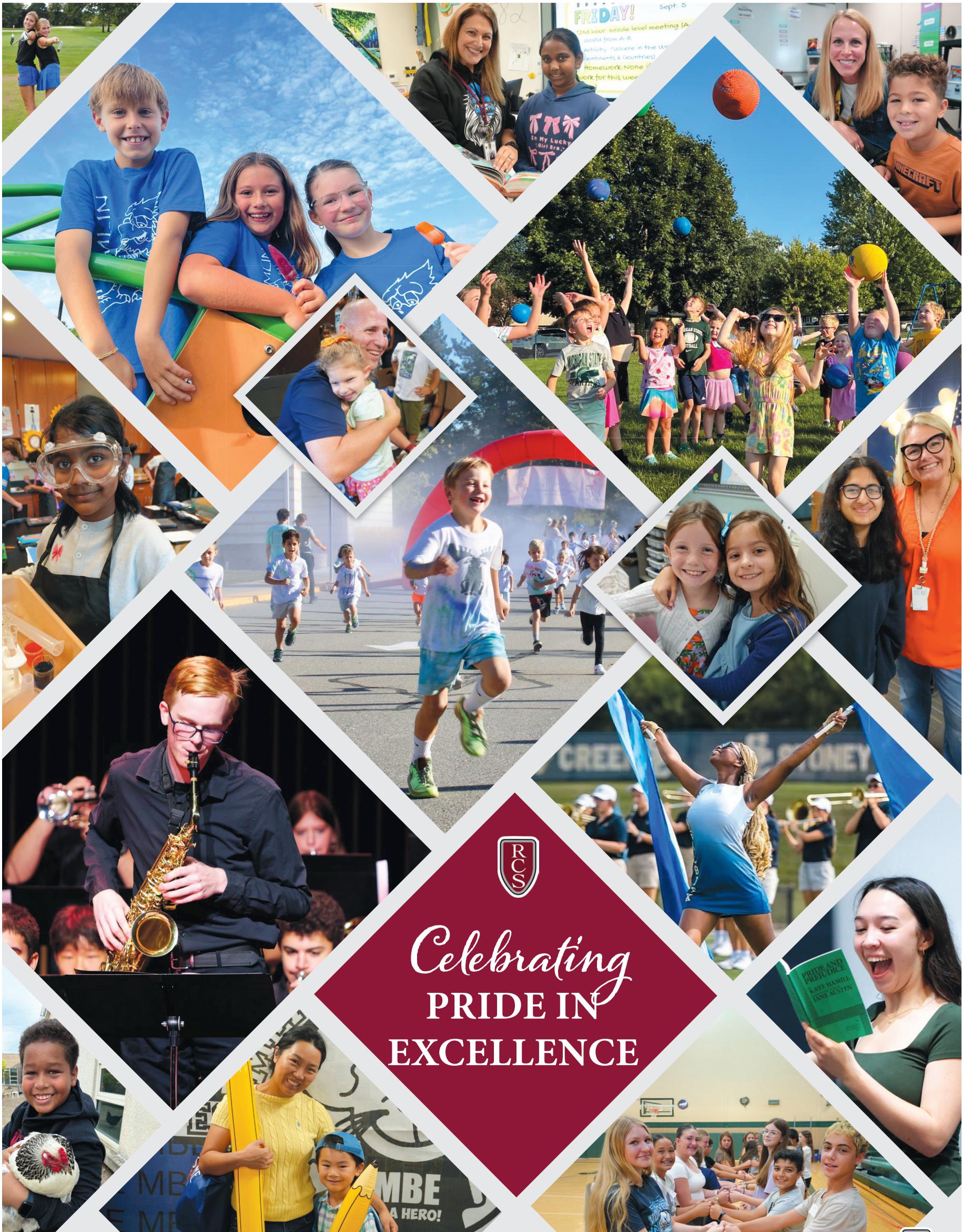
Special education supports all learners

RCS continues to grow its special education programs to support all learners. For the 2025-26 school year, the district is opening a new high school classroom for students with severe and multiple impairments. This program gives students important opportunities to learn and build friendships alongside their peers, while still receiving the personalized support they need.

RCS is also expanding its autism programming at the elementary level to better support students who benefit from more specialized academic, social and behavioral services within a highly structured learning environment.



As one of the largest districts in Oakland County offering a wide range of special education options, RCS is committed to helping students get the support they need in their home district.



Celebrating
**PRIDE IN
EXCELLENCE**



Continually improving reading success

Literacy development for all Rochester Community Schools learners is a top priority and the district remains firmly committed to providing intentional, effective and equitable early literacy practices for every child every day.

“RCS recognizes the critical role of literacy as the foundation for all academic disciplines and its impact on the lifelong success of students,” said Kimberly Hempton, assistant superintendent of early childhood and elementary education. “Over the past year, RCS elementary educators have spent significant focus on building strong foundational reading skills with our youngest learners, covering all the essential parts of learning to read and write.”

With a commitment to ongoing inquiry, data review, training and revision, RCS continually innovates its framework for literacy instruction, ensuring that it is aligned to research, incorporates state standards, provides training for educators and embraces positive relationships among teachers, children and families.



To best support students, RCS teachers in kindergarten through grade five have participated in specialized training in research-based reading methods through collaboration with Oakland Schools reading experts, Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading (LETRS) workshops and state-endorsed Literacy Essentials established by the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators.

“Teachers are building instructional strategies in phonics (letter-sound relationships), reading fluency and comprehension skills—the building blocks every child needs to become a successful reader and writer,” Hempton said.

Identified as a year two priority in the RCS strategic plan, professional development in literacy continues with additional training in three proven programs, including UFLI Foundations, Orton-Gillingham and American Reading Company (ARC).

The district’s comprehensive literacy review will continue to expand, as the Michigan Department of Education publishes the list of evidence-based, tier 1, class-wide reading curricula and materials required by state legislation.



“RCS educators are equipped with the latest research to help every student build strong reading skills step by step,” said Hempton. “As we complete our resource review later this school year, these evidence-based tools and approaches will advance our ultimate goal: helping students gain confidence in their literacy lives, feel supported in their learning and make meaningful contributions as readers, writers and thinkers.”

Chartwells honored as national leader

The Chartwells K-12 food service team at Rochester Community Schools has been honored as the Chartwells National Account of the Year!

During the 2024-25 school year, the Chartwells staff served 1,549,381 meals for RCS students, including 1,217,850 lunches and 331,531 breakfasts.

In addition, the team of 130 staff members provided 27 Discovery Kitchen learning events, four Global Eats celebrity chef visits, three farmers markets, one Discovery Kitchen cook-off and many other healthy eating learning opportunities across the district.

Special thanks to Marsha Dziewit and the RCS Chartwells team for providing outstanding service to our students.



RCS Foundation Hometown Hustle celebrates 20 years

The Rochester Community Schools Foundation enhances academics, arts and athletics for students in Rochester Community Schools.

On Sept. 20, the Hometown Hustle 5K celebrated its 20th anniversary and a longstanding commitment to education. With more than 1,400 participants, this year’s Hometown Hustle was a record-breaking event to support students.

Special thanks to Chief Financial Credit Union, longtime partner and premier sponsor of the Hometown Hustle, and the many volunteers, participants and business partners who had fun raising funds to enhance programs and services for RCS students.

To learn more about giving opportunities, please visit the RCS Foundation at: rcs-foundation.org.



RCS students personalize learning and elevate their voice using AI tools

When utilized properly, artificial intelligence (AI) tools have the power to personalize learning, build lifelong critical thinking skills and guide students to use their voices more effectively.

“We are better students because of AI,” said a group of Stoney Creek High School seniors. They explained how their experiences with AI have prompted them to improve their arguments with evidence, enhance their writing, prepare personalized review materials, identify content areas where they need more practice, and share their voice.



SchoolAI is one of the tools approved for use in Rochester Community Schools. After interacting with SchoolAI in several classes, students say they have learned to structure their study habits more effectively. “AI has taught me to write something and then evaluate it, add more detail, provide examples, consider other perspectives and think more deeply about my work. It helps me identify and refine my own ideas and voice,” one senior said.

As schools, businesses and people around the world adapt to AI, a team of 26 RCS educators spent the last year developing generative AI guidelines and approved tools for the district. “RCS recognizes the transformative potential of artificial intelligence and is committed to fostering a learning environment where innovation thrives alongside the purposeful and ethical use of AI,” said Pasquale Cusumano, assistant superintendent of secondary and adult education. “Our students and teachers are using AI as another tool to enhance teaching and learning.”

AI tools should primarily serve to enhance student learning experiences, promote personalized learning and empower students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Current RCS-approved tools for teachers include Gemini, NotebookLM, Canva Code and others.

AI Guiding Principles

- Student-centered learning
- Ethical use
- Promotion of AI literacy and critical thinking
- Academic integrity and responsible creation
- Continuous learning and adaptation

By adapting curriculum materials, AI can provide more student-centered, personalized learning strategies. At the middle school and high school levels, many early-adopter educators have uploaded the lesson plans they created over the years and applied AI to suggest creative new ways to present and review the content.

“Teachers can feel confident that students are getting the same, reliable foundation, but with additional ideas for interactive lessons, group activities, discussion prompts, review materials and visually appealing resources and guides,” said Bryan Lindstrom, Adams High School economics teacher. “AI tools help refresh and update my lessons, without compromising the integrity of the information. Additionally, AI can tailor the material for different learners and present content in a variety of meaningful ways.”

Teachers notice that students are becoming stronger writers as AI provides suggestions for clarity and improvement. “At RCS, we don’t allow students to use AI tools to generate content,” said Sarah Millard, Stoney Creek teacher. “Instead, the tools analyze the work a student submits, then AI can make suggestions and prompt the creator to refine it. The tools do not replace human interactions or judgment, so the personal learning process remains intact.”



Rachel Mainero, instructional technology specialist, agrees. “Our tools don’t allow students to simply find the answer and fill in the blank,” she said. “Instead, AI resources enhance the process of learning and meet

individual needs, so students can think deeply and understand how they arrived at the answer.”

Thanks to spell check, Siri, Google maps and other common tools, AI is already embedded in our daily lives, and many people don’t even realize it. This year, teachers are introducing AI to elementary students, so they understand what it is and how it works in the classroom.

Brooklands teachers Andrew Krupp and Jennifer McKay say their students benefit from AI tools to help make lessons more engaging. For example, each year, fourth graders write a biography on an interesting individual, using resources from the media center and online to conduct research. With new AI tools, students can activate a character chatbot to have a “conversation” with their subject and ask questions, like sharing Thomas Edison’s “voice,” speaking from the past.



In the same way, elementary teachers benefit from AI tools that help personalize information to meet diverse student needs. For example, teachers may level the text in a passage, use audio overviews and videos, or create visual planners for various instructional and learning preferences. “It remains student-centered. That’s what counts,” Krupp said.

As technology evolves, RCS will continue to provide professional development and adapt AI guidelines to help students and staff navigate a diverse, interdependent and changing world.

“Ultimately, the goal is to foster AI literacy and equip our school community with the skills to navigate AI while upholding academic integrity,” Cusumano said. “We are using innovative tools to deepen student learning and elevate student voice.”

Extracurricular activities enhance school communities

Students and families have the opportunity to participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities that appeal to diverse student interests and talents. From innovative STEM clubs to creative arts programs and competitive sports, these activities build community and provide enriching experiences beyond the classroom.

RCS was proud to host three communitywide fall tailgate events at our high schools. Families, friends and neighbors were able to enjoy some free fun activities and celebrate our schools through the Rochester High School Falcon Frenzy, Stoney Creek Celebration at the Creek and Adams Gold Rush.

The full district calendar, along with news and upcoming events, can be found on the RCS website.



Connect with RCS

Rochester Community Schools believes that effective communication is essential for maintaining healthy community partnerships.

The district website remains a valuable resource. Emergency information and school closings will be posted on the home page using a page pop.

ParentSquare is the district's primary communication system. RCS families will begin to receive messages once their student is enrolled. Community members may sign up to receive RCS community updates by joining RCS ParentSquare community groups.

RCS is always looking for ways to improve programs and services and community feedback is an important part of that process. To ask questions, share a concern, or make a comment, families are encouraged to contact their student's school directly, beginning with the staff member closest to the situation. All community members can use the Talk to RCS feature on the district website or send an email directly to the board of education.

Social media is an effective way to stay connected and learn about the exceptional programs, events and activities taking place in schools across the district. Official RCS sites include: RCS Facebook, X, LinkedIn and Instagram.



ParentSquare

Community groups can connect with RCS through ParentSquare

Rochester Community Schools recently launched ParentSquare as its official communication platform to share information with students, staff and families.

Community members may sign up for **RCS community groups** through the ParentSquare app. This self-sign-up feature is available for the following groups:

- districtwide general updates
- employment opportunities
- enrichment activities
- RCS Foundation
- retired employees
- high school alumni

Sign up here



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