

COMMUNITY CONNECTOR

FALL 2025



GRAND RAPIDS — AREA SCHOOLS —

Resilience ♦ Readiness ♦ Excellence

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ISD318.ORG



A Message From Our Superintendent

Resilience. Readiness. Excellence.

As a new school year begins, these three words capture who we are and what we stand for. This fall, our students returned eager to learn and our staff and schools were ready for them. That preparation is paying off. Despite national and state narratives about how students are performing, our 2025 MCA state reading and math scores reached their highest levels in five years and once again outpaced the state average.

But resilience isn't just about test scores. It's about showing up, adapting, and moving forward even when faced with challenges. Like many districts, we continue to face funding levels below the state average, making it harder to provide the opportunities our students deserve. While providing above average results and opportunities with below average funding is something we can be proud of, I'll continue to advocate for doing more and better, and to accomplish that, more will be asked of our community.

Public schools have stood strong for our country and our community through uncertain times before, and we will continue to do so now. By supporting our children, we support the future of this community. Together, with resilience, readiness, and excellence, we can move forward towards better.

Matt Grose
Superintendent-GRAS

Schools

Grand Rapids Area Schools

Our mission is to cultivate a responsive and inclusive learning environment where every student, supported by faculty and the community, develops the resilience, readiness, and excellence to embrace their potential and achieve future success. Our commitment to excellence is evident in the 2025 Minnesota MCA scores, with reading scores 6.3% higher and math scores 2% higher than state averages.

Scan to learn more about
our schools.



West Rapids Elementary

West Rapids is implementing the UFLI Foundations (University of Florida Literacy Institute) reading program in all K-2 classrooms this year.

This is a change to more structured, research-based reading instruction. Families will get more consistent information about what their children are learning in reading, including letter sounds, spelling, and decoding.

The overall goal is for all students to be confident, successful readers by third grade.

East Rapids Elementary

This year, East Rapids is changing how classes are taught to maximize instructional quality. Students have one teacher for math and another for reading. This helps teachers focus on one subject so they can teach it really well. Beyond the classroom, this new structure has successfully built stronger collaboration among our teaching staff, allowing them to work together more effectively to support all students.

In addition, we are clustering our gifted and talented students so they can be challenged at their level, while still benefiting from collaboration with their peers. These shifts allow us to better meet the diverse needs of all learners and ensure student academic success.



Cohasset Elementary

Cohasset Elementary earned the PBIS Sustaining Exemplar Award from the Minnesota Department of Education this summer.

This award recognizes the dedication of staff, students, and families in fostering a positive

of Excellence

school community based on four core values: respectful, responsible, safe, and kind.

We are committed to educating the whole child — academically, socially, and emotionally. This is demonstrated through daily practices like positive morning announcements and our Trailblazer Leadership program, which enables older students to mentor and support younger classmates. Our goal is to blend high-quality academics with a culture that nurtures student leadership and ensures student voices are heard.

Robert J. Elkington Middle School (RJEMS)

Robert J. Elkington Middle School is excited to announce a new course offering for seventh grade: Introduction to Agricultural Science. This engaging, hands-on class will give students the opportunity to explore five key areas of agricultural science — forestry, fuel, flowers, food, and fiber. Students will gain practical experience through interactive projects designed to spark curiosity and build foundational knowledge in these important fields.

Throughout the course, students will not only gain valuable knowledge but also connect what they learn to the real world. Guest speakers and community partners will highlight local career paths and employment opportunities, inspiring students

to think about their futures while deepening their understanding of the vital role agriculture plays in our lives. This new course reflects the school's commitment to offering innovative opportunities that prepare students for both academic success and meaningful contributions to their communities.

Bigfork School

Music is important across our district. At Bigfork School, we were able to bring music back by hiring a qualified teacher to lead the program, with incredible support from staff, families, PTA, and the Music Boosters. With this encouragement, both Band and Choir are steadily growing, and students are making impressive progress in their musical skills.

From K-6 grade, students are exploring singing, rhythm, composition, and instruments such as percussion, recorders, and ukuleles. Students in grades 7-12 have the opportunity to take part in both Band and Choir. Choir members are developing multi-part singing and self-reflection skills, while Band students are improving ensemble balance, notation reading, and performing across genres. This year, Band even elected two student leaders to support organization and teamwork.

The program is thriving, and the enthusiasm of Bigfork students is evident as they continue to learn, grow, and share the joy of music with the school and community.

Grand Rapids High School

Grand Rapids High School is proud to highlight the continued success of its College in the Schools (CITS) program, a strong partnership with the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD). Currently, 13 GRHS teachers are UMD-certified faculty, offering 19 rigorous courses that provide students the opportunity to earn up to 55 college credits while still in high school.

During the 2023–24 school year, 234 unique students participated in CITS courses, collectively earning an impressive 2,427 college credits. This outstanding achievement not only saves families significant tuition costs but also gives students a strong academic foundation, valuable classroom experience, and increased confidence as they prepare for future college and career opportunities.

“Our CITS program is an incredible way for students to challenge themselves academically while getting a head start on their futures,” said GRHS Principal Hofstad. “We are proud of our students’ accomplishments and grateful for the dedicated teachers who make this opportunity possible.”



Want to Learn More?

Join us November 19 for a Community Conversation featuring Literacy and the Science of Reading.

✦ A CLOSER LOOK

Grand Rapids Area Schools Fresh Look

You may have noticed, Grand Rapids Area Schools recently introduced a refreshed logo and visual identity. This is not a big, flashy, campaign — it is simply an opportune time to ensure that how we present ourselves reflects who we are, where we are headed, and what we value as a district.

The timing made sense. We were notified that our website platform was being phased out, so as we prepared for that transition, we took the opportunity to modernize our overall look. We worked with a designer from our community — someone who knows our district and understands what makes this place special — keeping costs down and perspectives local.

The Graduate- A reminder that our ultimate goal is student success.

The new logo blends tradition with progress:

- **Orange** for Grand Rapids High School
- **Royal blue** for Bigfork High School
- **Green and deep blue-** Honoring our region's woods and water, with a nod to our previous logo.



Nine Stars- Representing our nine school buildings.



The Compass- You'll also see a compass icon from time to time — a symbol of direction and a mindset of steady improvement: "Up and to the right" — the belief that we are always working to grow, improve, and move forward together.



GRAND RAPIDS — AREA SCHOOLS —

Resilience ♦ Readiness ♦ Excellence

At Grand Rapids Area Schools, we focus on three values that guide every student from kindergarten through graduation: **Resilience, Readiness, and Excellence.**

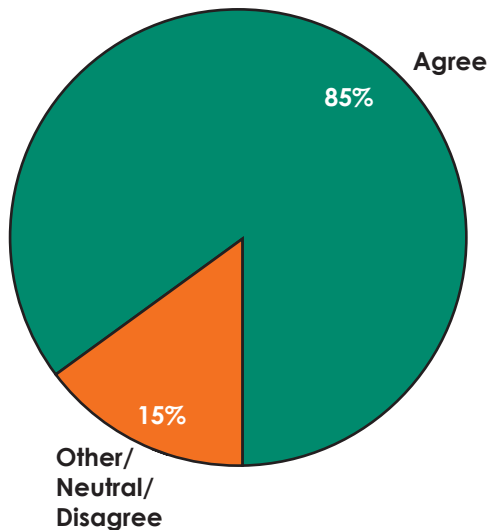
- **Resilience** helps students learn to adapt, persevere, and grow when faced with challenges — skills that are essential for life.
- **Readiness** ensures every student is fully prepared for their next step after graduation, whether it is college, a career, or military service.
- **Excellence** is the high standard we set and celebrate, promoting continuous improvement for both students and staff.

Together, these values create a strong, supportive environment where all students can succeed.

IT'S A FACT

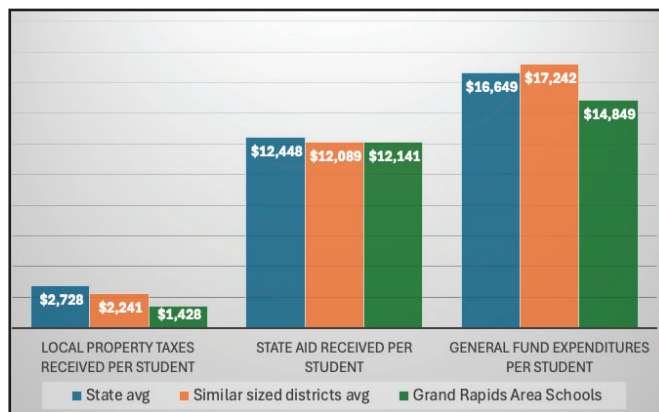
Proudly Stewarding Community Resources

Based on a 2023 survey, 85% of our community agrees that taxpayers get a good value from their investment in the school district.



Grand Rapids Area Schools: Less Revenue, Less Expense

Based on the most recent statewide data available from fiscal year 2024.



For more information visit

 [ISD318.ORG](https://www.isd318.org)

SCHOOL BOARD

Get to Know GRAS School Board

Question (Q1): What was your favorite subject in school, or a teacher who made a big impact on you?
Question (Q2): What is your go-to comfort food?



Chair Mark Schroeder

Q1: Physics, Mr. Krauker.
Q2: Red licorice and beef jerky.



Clerk David Marty

Q1: Henry Emmel, current events and history teacher. He inspired me to do considerable research on the conflict in Vietnam.
Q2: Grilled salmon.



Treasurer David Cowan

Q1: My HS band teacher, Tom Patnaude. I have great memories of starting new music, struggling to play but, eventually producing some pretty great music.
Q2: On a cold day, a nice hot bowl of chili!



Director Ashley Goodman

Q1: Mrs. Wellington in Kindergarten taught me how to read, and a HS Multi Cultural literature teacher who introduced different cultures and other ways of life through reading.
Q2: Chips.. all the chips!



Director Tom Gustafson

Q1: Extra-curricular sports and physical science teacher was my favorite.
Q2: Whatever is readily available.



Director Dr. Malissa Bahr



Student Rep. Eva Ruzynski

Q1: Mr. Herme, my 10th grade English teacher made a large impact on me.
Q2: Goodles Mac & Cheese.



Student Rep. Aaron McMullen

Q1: History or anything in the humanities.
Q2: Meatballs and gravy.

AROUND THE DISTRICT



Boozhoo: Anishinaabe Gikinoo'amaadiwin Program Expands Cultural Learning Across District

The Anishinaabe Gikinoo'amaadiwin Program is proud to announce the presence of Cultural Advocates and programming in all K–12 schools across the district. A recent highlight included district-wide participation in Orange Shirt Day on September 30, raising awareness about the history and lasting impacts of residential schools. Students remembered, honored, and respected every child who didn't come home, as well as survivors and their families. Students also created their own shirts featuring the phrase, "Every Child Matters."

In October, students will explore the Grandfather Gift of Manaaji'idiwin (Respect). Fifth-grade students and program participants will have the opportunity to attend Wild Rice Camp, learning the steps of harvesting and processing manoomin. For more information, contact your school's Cultural Advocate or Program Coordinator.

Safe Routes to RJEMS

For years, pickup and drop-off at Robert J. Elkington Middle School were a challenge — concerns about safety and congestion had no clear solution or funding. Thanks to a recent Safe Routes to School grant of \$469,700, we were able to plan and complete long-awaited improvements at no cost to local taxpayers.

With student safety as the top priority, the new design:

- Reduces the number of student crossings through traffic.
- Increases separation between parent and bus traffic.
- Adjusts traffic flow — south entrances/exits remain south, and north entrances will exit east.

These changes make arrival and dismissal safer by adding accessible parking spaces closer to the school, making it easier for families, students, and older adults. In addition redesigning traffic flow has eased congestion by reduced wait times—feedback from families and staff has been overwhelmingly positive.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

NOV.
19

Literacy & Science of Reading

- 10-11:30am - RJEMS
- 6-7:30pm - District Boardroom

DEC.
10

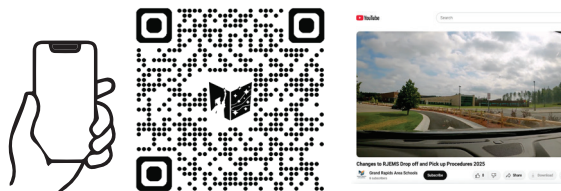
Your Questions, Our Support!

- 10-11:30am - District Boardroom
- 6-7:30pm - District Boardroom

RJEMS
1000 NE 8th Ave
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

District Boardroom
650 SW 7th Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744

Scan to view "Changes to RJEMS Drop off and Pickup" from a dash camera perspective.



YOUR VOICE, OUR FUTURE: Help Shape Grand Rapids Area Schools!

We have exciting news! We're launching a yearlong journey of conversation and collaboration that puts you at the center of our schools' future.

This is your invitation to make a difference. Through November 5, we're asking every resident to complete an important community survey. Whether you're a parent, grandparent, business owner, recent graduate, or longtime community member - your perspective matters.

Did You Know? Over six years, our district absorbed nearly \$10 million in budget cuts and lost more than 80 team members. Our incredible staff works tirelessly to:

- Provide excellent academic and enrichment opportunities with limited resources.
- Navigate state mandates.
- Meet diverse student needs.
- Counter misinformation.

But we're not just identifying challenges - we're building solutions TOGETHER.

Here's how it works, **now through November 5**: Take our survey at **www.ISD318.org/survey**. Tell us what information you need about our schools.

- **November 10**: Results shared with our School Board - your voice influencing leadership.
- **November 17**: Results shared with a new Taskforce addressing these challenges.
- **November-June**: Monthly community exchanges to dive deeper, answer questions, and develop real solutions.

Why This Matters? This is the foundation of a transparent, collaborative process aligned with our strategic directions. Your feedback will shape how we communicate, address challenges, and build a brighter future for every student.

Take the Survey Today!

www.ISD318.org/survey



Meet Julia Stefan, GRHS Class of 2025

After graduating from Grand Rapids High School, Julia continued her education at Northern Michigan University (NMU), drawn to its beautiful outdoor setting and strong education program. She is majoring in Elementary Special Education, a dream she's had since Kindergarten.

While at GRHS, Julia earned 25 college credits through College in the Schools (CITS) courses—all of which transferred to NMU. "My IB and CITS classes really prepared me for college," she said. She also completed the Education Career Pathway, gaining hands-on classroom experience during her junior and senior years.

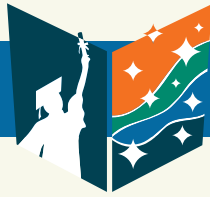
"My most memorable moment was the big group hug I got from a bunch of first graders on my last day," Julia recalled.

Looking back, she says the program confirmed her passion for teaching. Her advice to future students is, "Just go for it! I had a great experience and would 100% recommend doing a Career Pathway — you learn so much and gain knowledge for your future!"



To learn more about Career Pathways visit **www.NEXTPATHWAYS.org**

FAST FACTS



**GRAND RAPIDS
AREA SCHOOLS**

Resilience • Readiness • Excellence



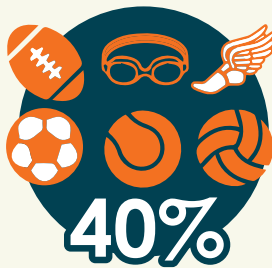
Graduation Rate of
GRAS American
Indian Students
(34% higher than
MN Average)



K-12 students
enrolled in GRAS



Worth of College
Credits earned by
GRHS & Bigfork
students in one year



of GRAS students
(grades 7-12)
participate in at least
one school
sponsored sport or
activity



Students
transported daily

Grand Rapids Area Schools
650 SW 7th Avenue
Grand Rapids, MN 55744-2701

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
DULUTH, MN
PERMIT NO 1947

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

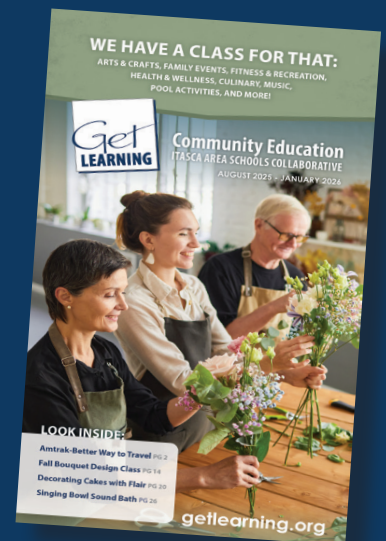
Complete a Community Survey



Scan to view
www.ISD318.org/survey

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING

FUN TO DO?



www.getlearning.org