

# Community Update

WINTER 2026 EDITION



ROCHESTER  
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

PRIDE IN EXCELLENCE

## Keeping the focus on student-centered teaching and learning



### AP Capstone raises the level of academic rigor

When offered the opportunity to challenge themselves academically, highly driven Rochester Community Schools students continue to enroll in the research-intensive AP Capstone Diploma program in increasing numbers each year.

RCS launched the nationally recognized, two-year AP Capstone program in 2018, with its first graduates in 2020. The number of participants has increased consistently, with 75 students completing the diploma program in 2025. Since it began, more than 200 students have earned an AP Capstone diploma, after completing one year of AP Seminar and one year of AP Research.

Now, five years of data indicates that RCS AP Capstone students and alumni have excelled in college-readiness and academic achievement. As one indicator of the program's success and popularity among students, mentorship opportunities have formed between AP Seminar classes, AP Research classes and AP Capstone alumni at all three RCS high schools.



"Students embrace the work and have established their own community of scholars," said Rochester High School educator Kara Sears, who has taught the program since its inception at RCS. "It's really gratifying to see such significant

motivation and learning growth in these young adults."

A more flexible alternative to an International Baccalaureate program, AP Capstone is a two-year College Board research program that offers high school students two rigorous yearlong courses that develop skills in research, analysis, evidence-based arguments, collaboration, writing, presenting and college-readiness.



"It focuses on learning skills, rather than one particular content area," said Tony Lafferty, Stoney Creek High School teacher. "That innovative shift means AP Capstone teaches students *how* to study, rather than *what* to study, making the work more personal and engaging."

The project-based nature of the curriculum allows students flexibility to explore their own passions through scholarly research, choosing topics that are meaningful.

"It's really impactful," a group of seniors agreed. "For starters, we've developed a framework for research that helps us in all our classes. But additionally, we have discovered effective ways to use our ideas and voice to make a difference."

Subjects under investigation this year include: nuclear energy expansion in the

### A message from Superintendent Nicholas Russo

It is with sincere gratitude that I thank our school community for prioritizing the educational growth, safety and well-being of our students. Through a unified effort, we are creating a supportive environment where children are happy, valued and respected – qualities that are essential for each and every student to reach their full potential.

As the largest school district and a top 10 employer in Oakland County, the magnitude of what it takes to achieve our mission cannot be taken for granted. Our outstanding teachers, administrators and staff, who work in collaboration with our dedicated families and community partners, give us the edge.

Last year, 60 percent of our 1,207 graduating seniors earned a 3.5 grade point average or higher, which is remarkable. When students receive an RCS diploma, they have an incredible advantage. I truly believe that there are no limits to what they can accomplish.

Moving forward, our intentional coordination, along with a balanced budget and equitable spending plan, will ensure all students can continue to have access to comprehensive academic programming and extracurricular activities where they can thrive.

Thank you for making Rochester Community Schools the best place for students to learn, grow, discover their passion and live into their purpose. It is truly an honor to lead our school community.



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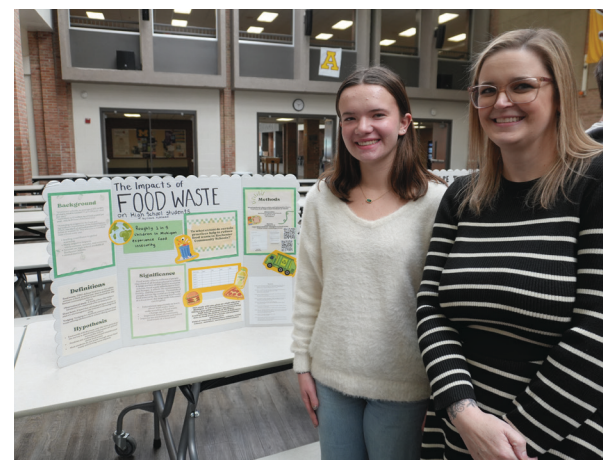
## AP Capstone Diploma program *continued from page 1*

United States, child marriage in southeast Asia, factors motivating volunteers in nonprofit organizations, lowering the voting age to 16, optimizing water efficiency, true crime media consumption, food waste and more.

“The ability to collect and analyze data is critically important,” said Adams High School teacher Allie Danielson. “But what’s equally important, is that students develop soft skills

for the real world: time management, leadership and conflict resolution management, just to name a few.”

According to Aden Barghouty, a recent RCS graduate who now attends the University of Michigan, “No class or high school activity prepared me better for college than AP Capstone. I am grateful for the long-lasting benefits of this program. The skills I learned continue to serve me well.”



## Rochester Community Schools sells refunding bonds, resulting in \$8.6 million in cost savings to taxpayers

The Rochester Community School District is pleased to report the successful sale of its 2026 refunding bonds. Funds raised by the 2026 bonds will be used to refinance the district’s 2016 Series 1 school building and site bonds, resulting in an interest cost savings of more than \$8.6 million to taxpayers.

The district received 18 proposals for the bonds, all within a narrow margin of 0.12 percent from the highest- to lowest-interest cost bidder. Jefferies LLC was the successful purchaser; bonds were sold at a tax-exempt fixed interest rate of 2.57 percent with final maturity in 2036. The face value of the bonds totaled \$48,770,000.

“The fiscal responsibility and dedication of

the Board of Education is commendable.

This positive financial position strengthens the district’s long-term ability to maintain its commitment to a robust strategic plan and to provide an outstanding education for all students,” said Superintendent Nicholas Russo. “Strong fiscal management and a strong credit rating resulted in a competitive market for the bond purchase and a positive outcome for the taxpayers in our community.”

The district’s credit rating of AA, as indicated by S&P Global, contributed to the successful bond sale. In evaluating the credit quality of Rochester Community Schools, S&P cited a strong track record of 10 consecutive years of balanced-to-positive operating performance, an affluent taxbase, and a manageable debt

and liabilities profile.

In its credit highlights report, S&P stated, “We believe the district’s strong management with a culture of long-term planning, ability to outperform its budget, and additional liquidity from a 2019 voter-approved sinking fund millage limiting future debt issuance lend additional credit support.”

As of June 26, 2025, only seven of S&P’s 354 rated Michigan K-12 school districts had an AA credit rating or higher.

“Rochester Community Schools is proud of its strong position in this community. District leadership remains committed to providing both educational and economic value to benefit our students, families and residents,” Russo said.

## Making sense of math through Number Corner

Math workouts are taking place in elementary classrooms across the district as students gather for Number Corner exercises each school day.



A key component of the Bridges in Mathematics curriculum is Number Corner, which focuses on hands-on engagement with math concepts through five daily activities including calendar grid, calendar collector, computational fluency, problem strings and solving problems.

Right from the start, students are eager to share their thoughts: “I

see a pattern. I think the next angle will be acute. Those shapes are congruent. The numbers are increasing, like the date. That’s the inverse of the shape before it. The digits double each day.”

With students gathered around the calendar, each daily square presents a shape or structure for discussion. Depending on the grade level, items in the calendar grid may include a series of dots, shapes, angles, fractions or Egyptian numerals, for example. Over time, students make observations and predictions about how the patterns and concepts are related.

“Differentiated activities for kindergarten through fifth grade provide engaging, real-life application of math concepts,” said Mike Gittner,

math coach and curriculum consultant. “Manipulatives like cubes, sticks, shapes, coins, or data markers help students practice counting, computation and solving problems. Number lines, ten frames and grids may help with visual interpretation of abstract concepts.”

Each day involves some sort of data collection that gets added to a cumulative data set. Students may measure the volume of liquid, or weight of objects. They may use a spinner to add numbers and complete graphs or charts. They may even cheer when a pie chart is filled or a number grid is completed.

“It’s empowering for students to talk about math and make personal connections to their world,” said Kim Mroczek, math coach and curriculum consultant. “We’re normalizing questioning, conversing and diving deep into mathematics. Through these collaborative classroom routines, students gain confidence and become leaders in their learning.”

As one third grader eagerly volunteered, “Hey, hey. I figured it out. Can I tell you what I think?”

Each day is new opportunity to make math connections through engaging Number Corner routines in RCS classrooms.



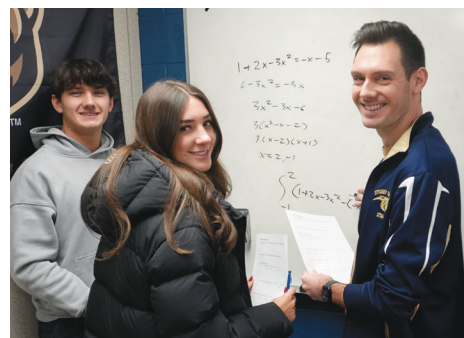
## Newly approved classes meet student needs

The Board of Education has approved the addition of four new high school courses that expand advanced academic opportunities for RCS students. Options include two new college-level math electives and two advanced placement courses in cybersecurity and business/personal finance.

### Mastering math

A growing number of high-achieving math students have exhausted the available calculus sequence by senior year, leading them to the next step: college classes through dual enrollment. RCS is making the pathway easier.

Two new math electives, Calculus 3 and Differential Equations, will be offered for dual enrollment credit through Lawrence Technological University, with a major location perk. Classes will be taught by an RCS teacher within our high schools during the regular school day, making dual enrollment more accessible by eliminating concerns about afterschool scheduling conflicts.



“There are many benefits to this partnership with Lawrence Tech and the onsite availability of college-level classes for RCS students,” said Jill Gumz, district high school math coach. “Because they are offered during the school day, students

don’t have to choose between extracurriculars and academics; they can do both. In addition, classes offer college credit before high schoolers graduate, and at no cost for students or families.”

In alignment with the RCS strategic plan, this initiative supports high-achieving and high-ability students. “These courses provide a rigorous, nationally recognized option for students seeking academic challenge, ensuring equity in access to high-level math coursework,” said Taylor Antoski, district Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) coach.

As an added benefit, Lawrence Technological University will train RCS educators, providing all textbooks and resources, including math liaison support, with LTU scholarship funding available to students who continue their college careers at LTU after high school.

### Advancing business opportunities

Future business and computer science professionals may be interested in two new advanced placement courses, AP Cybersecurity and AP

Business with Personal Finance, which offer college-level preparation for career readiness.

“Cybersecurity is one of the fastest-growing fields in the global job market,” said Michelle Reckling, computer science teacher at Rochester High School.

“Exposure to material about information technology, network protections, risk assessment, threat detection and response/recovery builds career competence for aspiring professionals.”

Furthermore, this work supports state and national education priorities by expanding learning in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), CTE (career and technical education) and computer science.

Addressing another high-demand college major and field of study, the new business class offers several advantages. “Students seeking to build business skills now have an AP option that adds college-level academic rigor in high school,” said Lorie Hand, Rochester High School business educator.

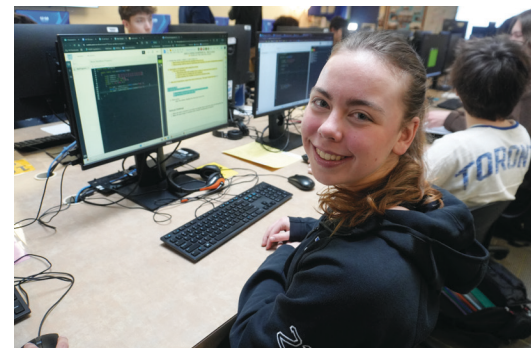
“The AP Business with Personal Finance course supports careers in business, finance, marketing and entrepreneurship, providing practical experience that colleges and employers like to see,” said Karen Malsbury, CTE and career readiness director. “We are educating career-forward students prepared for the future.”

### Making college-level classes more accessible

All four new course selections reduce barriers to college-level learning. Dual enrollment options are typically offered outside regular school-day hours on local college campuses, like Oakland Community College and Oakland University.

“RCS learning options are designed to advance academic offerings, support workforce readiness, meet students where they are and align with emerging state graduation requirements,” said Pasquale Cusumano, assistant superintendent of secondary and adult education. “We are proud to see our students taking advantage of the rich, rigorous, high-quality education offered across Rochester Community Schools.”

New course offerings will begin in the 2026-27 school year.



## Learning with innovative instructional tools

What student can resist driving robot cars, flying a drone, starring in a podcast and programming a device to see their name in lights?

The RCS CoLab is a collection of innovative educational tools that are used in classrooms at all grade levels across the district. They include 3D printers, drones, programmable robots, esports video games, snap circuits and virtual reality headsets, to name a few.

“These tools are designed to amplify classroom experiences and provide hands-on, minds-on opportunities for students,” said Rachel Mainero, instructional technology specialist. “We are educating students to

thrive in a modern, innovative world. Our learning environments and instructional tools reflect that.”

With a focus on student engagement, Rochester Community Schools teachers are using digital technology tools to pique their students’ interest in curriculum subject matter. For example, world geography lessons come alive when students fly a drone over a scaled map that covers an entire gymnasium floor. Computer coding is rarely described as boring when students use it to design a video game. And the science of electricity becomes visible when learners use snap circuits to power a fan, light or alarm.

Jennifer Minney, career consultant, says RCS educators share a commitment to student curiosity, creativity and growth. “We are preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. We are bringing modern tools and real-world connections to the classroom for lasting, authentic learning.”



## Unified Basketball program inspires authentic inclusion beyond the gym

"It's not an exaggeration to say that this basketball team is changing the high school experience for students," said Rebecca Gibson, a Rochester Community Schools teacher consultant and coach of the Triple Threat Unified Basketball team.



A new Unified Sports initiative brings together athletes and partners from all three Rochester Community Schools high schools, where students with and without disabilities work together to build social relationships and most importantly, authentic experiences.

Gibson explained the importance of making this a true high school sports season, with uniforms, practices and games played in the school gym in front of classmates, parents and fans. "Our athletes love coming to practice, having their names and nicknames announced when they score, and wearing their team shirt to school on gamedays, just like the JV and varsity athletes in the

building," she said.

"Game days are my favorite," said Whitney Batey, a Rochester High School student athlete. "I get to be with my friends."

When asked if the other team had a chance of winning, Adams athlete Jacob Robinson confidently said, "Not on my watch."

Lucy Meteyer, an Adams High School student and Triple Threat partner, said what's most important to her is the opportunity to build true relationships that extend beyond the basketball court. "We've become friends," she said of her teammates and classmates. "We say hello in the cafeteria. We talk outside classes. We hang out between games. Basketball has connected us with students we may not have known otherwise."

Unified Sports is a collaboration between Special Olympics Michigan and the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) to promote meaningful social inclusion through sports training and competition.



The RCS Triple Threat team plays against six other Oakland County programs. A highlight during this inaugural season was playing during the RCS Crosstown Showdown on a big stage at the Oakland University O'rena.



RCS has launched its program as a recipient of the Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools grant which challenges schools to improve their culture by embracing inclusive sports, inclusive youth leadership opportunities and whole school engagement.

"We embrace a participation model so that all students have the same opportunities for engagement. Students are able to meaningfully connect with each other through their shared interests and experiences," said Amanda Sawka, special education supervisor. "Our goal is to build equitable, authentic experiences that form a foundation for school sports and the school culture overall. In this way, everybody wins."

## Michigan Music Conference honors RCS musicians



Showcasing talented students and excellent music education in Rochester Community Schools, the Rochester High School wind ensemble, under the direction of David Uhrig, and the Stoney Creek High School symphony strings program, under the direction of Brandon Ulrich, were invited to perform at the 2026 Michigan Music Conference in Grand Rapids. RCS musicians were honored as two of only eight student groups selected statewide to perform.

Rochester Community Schools continues to build upon a rich history of musical excellence. For the 11th consecutive year, the district has been recognized as one of the 2025 Best Communities for Music Education by the NAMM Foundation. With a well-rounded curriculum and outstanding instruction, RCS offers world-class band, choir, and strings programs. Bravo to everybody who brings outstanding music education to our students.



# ENROLLING NOW!



\*No action is required for current TK-12 students.

Students who are new to Rochester Community Schools for the 2026-27 school year may enroll online at [www.rochester.k12.mi.us](http://www.rochester.k12.mi.us).

