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# CRCSD Future Ready Today Newsletter

## Listen to the Newsletter This Week!

We know life gets busy—between work, family, and everything else, it can be hard to keep up! That's why we're shaking things up and bringing you an easier way to stay in the loop. **Introducing our new podcast!** In just a few minutes, you'll get all the highlights from this week's newsletter.

Hit the button below to listen, and if something catches your ear, scroll down for all the details. You can also **find it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, and YouTube.**

Listen To The Podcast

# A Message of Hope from Dr. Grover

## Spring Forward: A Season of Progress and Purpose



Dear CRCSD Families,

As spring draws our students outside to laugh, learn, and stretch toward the finish line, there's renewed momentum in every corner of our district. With only weeks left in the school year, we're taking time to celebrate the meaningful progress we've made—and share what's ahead.

There is much to be proud of—and even more to look forward to.

**Graduation Momentum**
Our four-year graduation rate rose to 79.1%, up from 77.5% last year. More than numbers, this reflects the dedication of students preparing for finals, milestones, and graduation. We're committed to helping every student finish strong.

**Shaping School Culture**
Stronger routines, earlier interventions, and restorative practices are shifting the tone in our schools. Staff are better equipped, students are supported earlier, and we're building environments where students feel safe, valued, and ready to learn.

**Celebrating Student Success**
Across the district, students are shining:

- Taft Middle School's Team Cotasinga won the Mayor's Choice Award at Future City
- Johnson STEAM Academy was named a Top Magnet School of Excellence
- Kennedy High School's Jazz One placed 8th at the Iowa Jazz Championships

**Safe and Secure Learning**
We're investing $2 million in support for student safety and wellness, including:

- Early behavioral and emotional supports
- On-site mental health professionals
- Strengthened building security

**Bond Refinement**
We're updating our bond strategy—focused on renovating existing buildings, enhancing safety, and maximizing long-term value—based on community input. An updated plan will go to the Board on April 28.

**Leadership Realignment**
Strategic changes at the district level are streamlining support, aligning teams, and strengthening service to schools.

**Rooted in Purpose, Ready for More**
Growth doesn't always shout. Often, it unfolds—quietly, daily, and with discipline. This season, we are planting with intention. We are building with care. And we are continuing forward together.

Thank you for journeying with us—for believing in our mission and helping every learner in CRCSD take their next strong step forward.

With gratitude,
Dr. Tawana Grover
Superintendent
Cedar Rapids Community School District

## No School Reminder

As a reminder, there will be no school for students on Monday, April 21. While classes will not be in session, district offices will remain open during regular business hours.

We hope you enjoy the extended weekend and wish a joyful Easter to those who celebrate!

## District Updates

### Kennedy High School Teacher Receives National Teaching Award



We're proud to announce that Kennedy High School teacher Dana Melone has been honored with the 2025 APA TOPSS Charles T. Blair-Broeker Excellence in Teaching Award. This prestigious national recognition is presented by the American Psychological Association to outstanding high school psychology teachers across the country.

Ms. Melone was selected for her creative, hands-on teaching style and her commitment to making psychology meaningful and accessible for all students. Her classroom philosophy of "every student, every time" reflects her dedication to inclusive, student-centered learning.

Her impact extends beyond the classroom. At Kennedy, she founded the Cougar Bandana Program, a mental health awareness club, and the Psi Alpha Psychology Honors Society.

Nationally, she contributes her expertise through the APA's TOPSS Committee and the College Board's AP Psychology program.

The award includes a $500 cash prize, APA classroom resources, and national recognition. Please join us in congratulating Ms. Melone on this incredible achievement!

## CRCSD Awarded STEM Grant to Support Elementary Science Education



We're proud to announce that Cedar Rapids Community School District has received several **Iowa STEM Scale-Up Grants** to bring the "**Getting Started with Elementary OpenSciEd**" program to classrooms during the 2025-2026 school year!

These competitive grants, awarded by the Iowa Governor's STEM Advisory Council and the Iowa Department of Education, provide educators with high-quality training, instructional materials, hands-on science kits, and ongoing professional development.
OpenSciEd is an engaging, student-centered science curriculum that brings science to life through real-world connections and hands-on exploration. It's aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards and also supports literacy and math development.

Thanks to the efforts of our Curriculum and Instruction Team and our dedicated educators, **12 teachers from 7 elementary schools** will participate in this exciting opportunity:

- **West Willow:** Jeff Englert, Lory Christoffersen, Nicole Smith
- **Trailside:** Andrea Soukup, Loan Arkenberg
- **Van Buren:** Melena Urbanowski, Christina Humrich
- **Hiawatha:** Amy Boyles
- **Johnson STEAM Academy:** Brittney Steinkamp
- **Nixon:** Tina Martindale, Kari Whitlow
- **Wright:** Susan Foster

These teachers will attend training this summer and begin piloting the OpenSciEd materials in their classrooms next school year. Their work supports CRCSD's broader curriculum review process as we explore new, high-quality science options for our elementary students.

We're excited to see the impact this program will have on student learning!

## Johnson STEAM Academy Receives Top National Honor



We're excited to share that **Johnson STEAM Academy** has earned two prestigious recognitions from Magnet Schools of America: **Certified-Demonstration Magnet School** and **Top Magnet School of Excellence**—the highest level of certification and merit award given nationally!

These honors recognize JSA's commitment to innovation, equity, academic achievement, and student-centered learning. The school's STEAM-focused, hands-on approach continues to inspire curiosity and creativity in every classroom.

At the Magnet Schools of America National Conference last week, **Ms. Jones, Ms. Fuqua, and Ms. Thompson** proudly accepted the award on behalf of the entire JSA community.

Congratulations to the students, staff, and families of Johnson STEAM Academy on this outstanding achievement and for shining a national spotlight on the amazing work happening in CRCSD schools!

## Metro High School: Celebrating Innovation, Recognition, and Growth



Metro High School continues to shine with a series of exciting updates this spring!
On April 14, three students from the STEAM Academy presented at the Iowa Work-Based Learning Conference—an incredible opportunity to showcase the innovative, hands-on learning happening at Metro.

At this year's Iowa Association of Alternative Education (IAAE) Conference in Dubuque, Metro staff were honored for their outstanding contributions. Anthony Jensen received the *Newcomer of the Year Award*, and Shannon Ellis was inducted into the *IAAE Hall of Fame*. Congratulations to both for this well-deserved recognition!

Metro also proudly represented the district during IAAE Legislative Day at the Capitol, where STEAM Academy students exhibited in the Rotunda and connected with Iowa legislators to share their learning experiences.

Finally, mark your calendars: the first-ever **Greenhouse Plant Sale** will be held on **April 26**! This sale marks a major milestone for Metro's greenhouse program and a great opportunity to support student-grown projects.

## Annual Verification Is Open



It's time for families to complete Annual Verification for the upcoming school year! This important process ensures your student's information is up to date.

Log in to your Infinite Campus Parent Portal to review and submit your forms. Completing verification early helps us prepare for a smooth start to the school year.

## Bringing Nature Everywhere: A Greener Future for Our Schools and Community



Cedar Rapids has been selected to join the **Nature Everywhere Communities** initiative—aimed at expanding access to nature where kids live, learn, and play.

In partnership with **CRCSD, Indian Creek Nature Center**, and the **City of Cedar Rapids**, this project will bring more outdoor learning and play opportunities to our schools through green schoolyards.

These nature-based spaces may include outdoor classrooms, edible gardens, trails, native plantings, and nature play areas—supporting student learning, community wellness, and climate resilience.

**Your voice matters!** Community feedback will help shape how these spaces are built and used. Together, we can grow greener, healthier spaces for all.

Take the Survey

## Champions Program End-of-Year & Summer Update




As we approach the end of the school year, please note that the **last day for Champions before and after school care** will be **Wednesday, June 4**. There will be **no Champions services (AM or PM) on June 5 or 6.**

Looking ahead, **Champions Summer Champ** Camp kicks off on **Monday, June 9**. Limited space is still available.

Sign Up for Camp

## GreenState Give & Grow Match Program Now Open




The GreenState Credit Union Give & Grow to Schools program now accepts donations through April 30. This initiative allows GreenState members to have their donations matched—up to $500 per household— in support of the Cedar Rapids Community Schools Foundation.

Please help spread the word and encourage participation in this great opportunity to support our schools!

Donate Today

## Glance Around CRCSD








Hoover 2nd graders had fun with their Easter Egg math hunt today!

7th Grade students at Harding Middle School - Rocked the Water with the Iowa State Extension and learned about Biodiversity.

Cleveland had a great neon family dance for the 4th and 5th graders.



West Willow 3rd graders received a copy of the *Just Like Caitlyn* book thanks to the Jensen Family Foundation.



Washington student in Doc Jones's APUSH toured the Brucemore Mansion learning about the impact of the women that lived there.



Trailside students earned a school wide celebration of “chalk the walk” to celebrate making our goal of  compass tickets.

## In The News

In case you missed it, here are recent news items about or of interest to Cedar Rapids Community School District students, teachers, and parents.

- KCRG: CRCSD announces staffing cuts at the Educational Leadership and Support Center
- Gazette: Cedar Rapids schools to reduce 27 full-time district positions
- KCRG: Keeping up with the Hospodarskys
- KCRG: Everyday Iowa - Eastern Iowa Pet Expo & Car Show 2025!

Jefferson High School Activities Calendar

Kennedy High School Activities Calendar

Washington High School Activities Calendar

CRCSD is hiring! View open positions and apply here.

Learn more about breakfast and lunch meals here.

View your school's virtual backpack

**Follow us on social media for the latest updates:**

Sign Up For Future Ready Today

**Non-Discrimination Policy**

It is the policy of the Cedar Rapids Community School District not to discriminate in educational programs and/or activities on the basis of race, creed, color, gender, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, gender identity, socioeconomic status, national origin, religion, disability, age (except for permitting/prohibiting students to engage in certain activities) or genetic information and in employment opportunities on the basis of age, race, creed, color, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, disability or genetic information. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. If you have questions or a grievance related to this policy, please contact Darius Ballard, Chief of Human Resources, Educational Leadership and Support Center, 2500 Edgewood Rd NW, Cedar Rapids, IA, (319) 558-2000.

**April 18, 2025**

Cedar Rapids Community School District | 2500 Edgewood Dr NW | Cedar Rapids, IA 52405 US

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