



Reimagine Rdale: how we got here, how we're moving forward
Page 2-4



Students help shape school menu—one bite at a time
Page 5



Building healthy smiles through strong partnerships
Page 6



RSI Co-Principal Dr. Alejandra Estrada-Burt receives leadership award
Page 7

RDALE ROUNDUP

ROBBINSDALE AREA SCHOOLS

SPRING 2026

Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030 building stability while planning for the future

For more than a year, we have held important conversations about our significant financial challenges and the future of Robbinsdale Area Schools (Rdale).

Like many school districts across Minnesota, we've been dealing for some time with declining enrollment, rising costs, and growing repair needs in our facilities. More recently, our main operating fund fell below the state-required minimum, placing the district in Statutory Operating Debt (SOD), and requiring us to take immediate action to stabilize our finances.

Because of these realities, we've had to make difficult but necessary decisions, including budget reductions, program changes, and school closures.

We can continue making cuts in the same way as we have, but that will only take us so far—and it won't reflect what we want this district to be for our students, families, staff, and community. Instead, we tried to think differently about how to move forward, reimagining Rdale in a way that is both more financially sustainable and one that serves our students, and that our community can be proud of.

Throughout this process, we've stayed focused on engaging our staff, students, families, and community through the **Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030** planning process. These conversations helped guide us in our thinking about the present and the future of our district.

- Our work centers on two key priorities:
- Stabilizing the district financially today
 - Building strong, sustainable, and innovative learning environments for the future

Since September 2025, our School Board has reviewed enrollment trends, future budget estimates, facility needs, and community feedback to help guide their long-term planning discussions.



Community members share ideas and feedback during a Reimagine Rdale community engagement session last year as part of ongoing long-term planning discussions for the district.

Team • Survey • Community Engagement

Learn more

To help community members stay informed, **Pages 2-4 of this publication include:**

- A closer look at our financial stabilization work
- Planning student and staff building and program changes
- Planning for how to use our buildings more efficiently, including a potential referendum

You can also find timelines, School Board materials, FAQs, and updates at: rdale.org/vision2030.

Right now, we're also focused on supporting students and staff through ongoing transitions while continuing to explore future facility and program options. We will keep sharing updates as this important work moves forward. ■



Celebrating the people behind student success

**Superintendent
Dr. Teri Staloch**

At Robbinsdale Area Schools (Rdale), our mission is to inspire and educate all learners to develop their unique potential and to positively contribute to their community. That work happens each day through the shared commitment of our staff, families, caregivers, and community.

Throughout the year, we recognize staff in different roles through various appreciation and recognition weeks. In May we celebrated Teacher Appreciation Week and School Nurses Week, and I want to take a moment to express gratitude not only to the educators and health staff who support our students every day, but also to the families and caregivers who serve as children's first and most important teachers. Learning and growth do not happen in isolation. They happen through partnership.

This has been an incredibly challenging year for our district and community.

Together, we have navigated
Dr. Staloch, page 4

How we got here, how we're moving forward

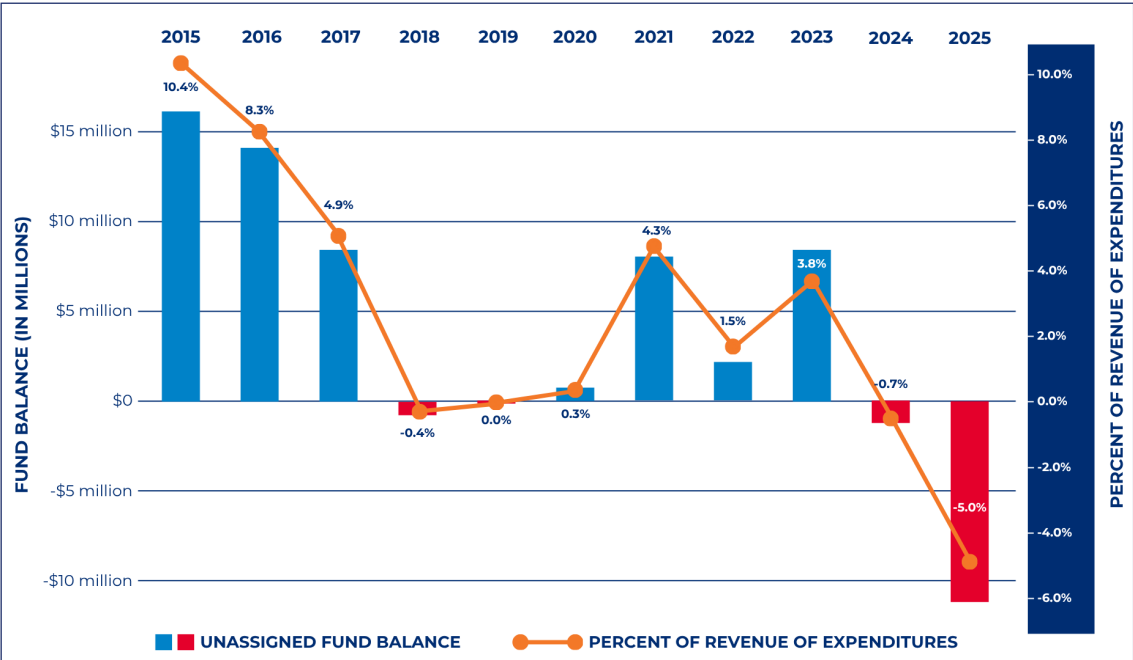
Years of financial pressures and declining enrollment led Rdale into Statutory Operating Debt (SOD), prompting major operational changes and reductions for the 2026-27 school year

Why changes are needed for Rdale

Our current financial crisis didn't happen overnight, and it didn't result from just one thing. Major factors influencing this situation include:

1. **Declining enrollment:** The height of enrollment for Rdale was in 1971, with more than 28,000 students. This year we dipped below 10,000, and forecasting shows our enrollment at 9,209-9,566 in 2034. See chart below.
2. **Too many buildings:** Our district footprint still reflects past enrollment numbers; too many of our buildings aren't operating at full capacity, which keeps our overhead and operating costs too high.
3. **Negative Financial Reserves (Fund Balance):** Minnesota does not require school districts to maintain a specific minimum positive operating fund balance. However, the state does closely monitor districts whose financial reserves become negative. Under Minnesota law, a district enters Statutory Operating Debt (SOD) when its unassigned general fund balance falls below -2.5% of annual expenditures.

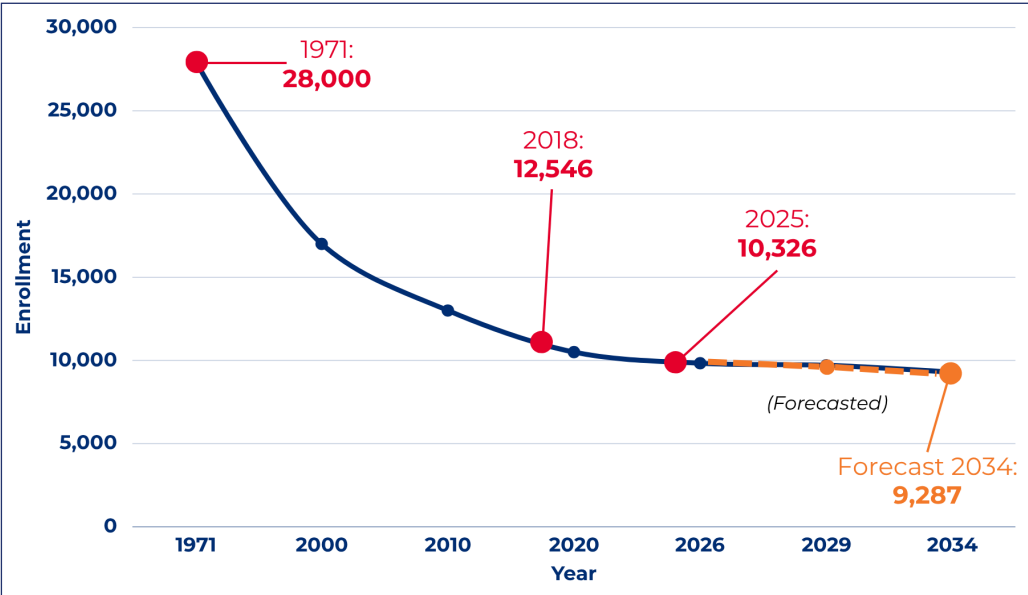
We have spent more than we have received in revenue for several years, resulting in declining financial reserves over time. While temporary



Rdale’s unassigned fund balance has declined for more than a decade, with temporary federal COVID-19 relief funds briefly slowing the trend between 2020 and 2023. In 2025-26, the district’s fund balance fell below the state-required minimum, placing Rdale into Statutory Operating Debt (SOD).

federal COVID relief funding delayed the district's entry into SOD, the underlying financial trend existed prior to the pandemic and continued afterward.

As reflected in the chart above, Rdale officially entered SOD at the end of 2024-25, triggering increased state oversight and requiring the district to implement a plan to restore financial stability and rebuild reserves.



Rdale enrollment peaked in 1971 with more than 28,000 students. This year, district enrollment fell below 10,000 students, with projections showing enrollment between 9,209 and 9,566 students by 2034.

4. **Deferred Repairs:** Many of our buildings date from the post-war boom of the 1950s and 60s, and they reflect their age. Rdale has \$140 million in maintenance needs, and that's just replacing broken things, not renovating to modernize learning spaces or increase efficiency.
5. **Compensatory Funding Error (known in the community as our budget error):** In planning for the 2024-25 school year, our School Board approved \$17.4M in budget reductions. However, district staff made the mistake of counting compensatory funding a second time during the staffing implementation process, and as a result, only \$3.2M in cuts were actually made. Simply put, we spent \$14.2M on staffing that year that we didn't intend to, and couldn't afford. This error accelerated our current fiscal crisis. (See "Understanding the compensatory funding error," on Page 4)
6. **Other factors** influencing our financial picture include inflation and rising special education costs. ■

2026-27 changes approved through the SOD process

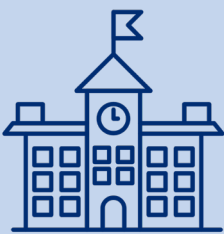
Robbinsdale Area Schools (Rdale) entered Statutory Operating Debt (SOD) after the 2024-25 school year after years of declining financial reserves and ongoing budget deficits. Under Minnesota law, districts enter SOD when their assigned general fund balance falls below -2.5% of annual expenditures, triggering increased state oversight and requiring a financial recovery plan.

As part of that plan, Rdale will implement nearly \$8 million in budget reductions and operational changes for the 2026-27 school year. While difficult, district leaders said the changes were necessary to stabilize finances and support the district's long-term future.

In January 2026, the School Board approved the following changes as part of the district's SOD plan for the 2026-27 school year:

Closures

- Noble Elementary School
- Sonnesyn Elementary School
- Robbinsdale Middle School
- Education Service Center (ESC)



Program and staffing changes

- Discontinuation of middle school magnet programming at FAIR School Crystal
- Transportation and operational adjustments across the district
- Other adjustments to improve long-term financial sustainability

Relocations to FAIR School Crystal building

- Robbinsdale Academy - Highview
- Robbinsdale Virtual Academy (RVA)
- Education Service Center

We made these difficult decisions based on both data—including enrollment trends, facility repair needs, space configurations, equity considerations, and more—and community voice. These changes help better align our operations, staffing, and facility use with current enrollment and long-term financial realities. We do not take any of these changes lightly. At the same time, we recognize that meaningful adjustments are necessary in order to navigate our current financial challenges and ensure long-term stability. ■

Planning the future of Robbinsdale Area Schools

As we work to stabilize the district, the Board is also looking ahead through Reimagine Rdale, a long-term planning effort focused on efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability

Over the past several months, we've discussed how to best support students in the years ahead while also making sure our system is sustainable for the long term. These conversations are about how we align buildings and programs with changing enrollment and the needs of today's and future students.

No final decisions have been made, but the ideas we are exploring include:

- A single 9-12 high school model
- Maintaining strong neighborhood elementary schools
- Expanding arts and innovation opportunities for all students
- Continuing Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion School as a K-5 program
- Changing how we use some buildings to better match enrollment and program needs; and using our facilities more efficiently

One concept we've discussed includes:

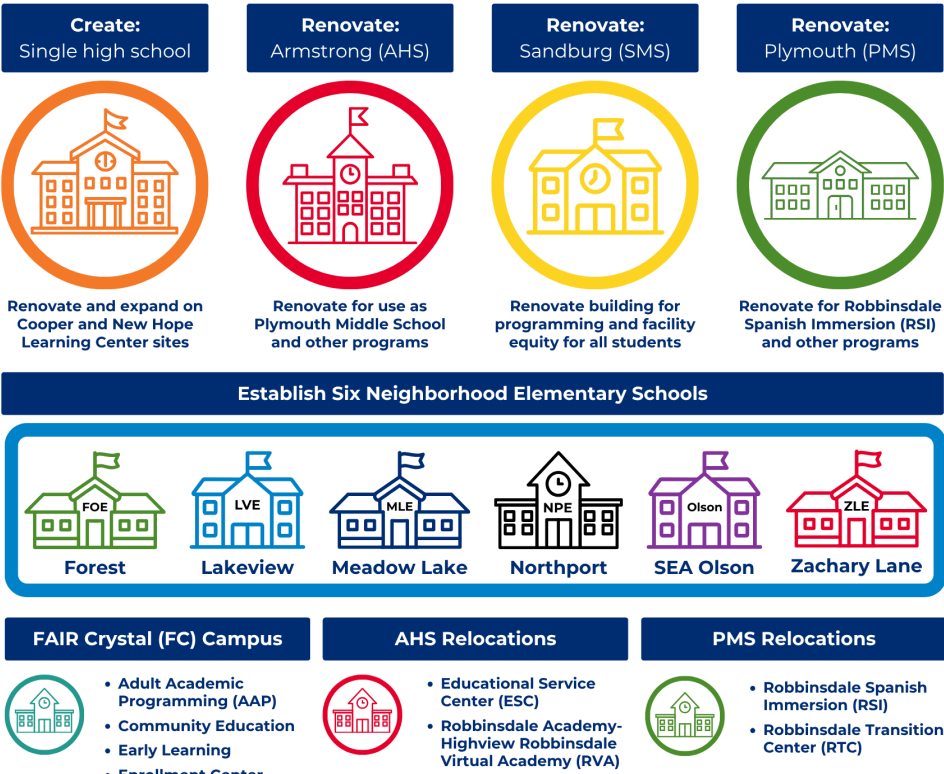
- Renovating and expanding the Cooper High School and New Hope Learning Center site into a single high school campus

- Using the Armstrong High School site for middle school programming, district services, and Robbinsdale Academy - Highview
- Renovating Plymouth Middle School as the future home of Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion School and the Robbinsdale Transition Center
- Updating Sandburg Middle School
- Relocating programs such as Adult Academic Programs, Community Education, and Early Learning into renovated spaces
- Transitioning to six neighborhood elementary schools

A key part of this work is recognizing that we currently have more buildings than we can efficiently operate. When we spread students and programs across too many underused facilities, it drives up operating costs that take away from teaching and learning. By consolidating some spaces and, in some cases, expanding or modernizing our buildings to serve more students, we can

REIMAGINE RDALE: VISION 2030

Operationalizing the vision



run a more efficient system that puts more resources directly into classrooms.

This is also why long-term facility investment, including a building bond, is connected to financial stability. It allows us to modernize our buildings to reduce ongoing operating costs and redirect

resources toward what matters most—teaching, learning, and student support.

This work is still in progress, and we will continue to refine ideas through School Board discussion, financial review, and community engagement. ■

Discussions about a possible future building bond referendum

Our School Board is reviewing early financial scenarios connected to a possible building bond referendum.

At this stage, these are only preliminary discussions, and we expect the Board to decide in mid-June whether or not to go out for a voter-approved bond in November. Currently, the Board is looking at options that could include:

- Approximately **\$515 million in possible voter-approved building bond and (Long-Term Facility Maintenance) LTFM funding** to support remodeling, renovations, and modernization of all district schools, as well as overdue LTFM repairs.
- or-
- **Approximately \$140 million in LTFM bonds and general fund PAYGO bonds** to support overdue LTFM repairs and maintenance, and offer limited investments in safety, modernization and efficiencies of building space. PAYGO bonds allow districts to fund projects directly through annual property tax collections rather than through long-term voter-approved borrowing.

District financial advisors have shared early estimates, suggesting that by combining LTFM and an approved building bond referendum, the impact for a median-value home could be approximately \$24-\$30 per month.

DIFFERENT PATHS

Option 1: VOTER-APPROVED BUILDING BOND

\$515 Million Total Project Amount

This funding option utilizes a 20-year bond term



Funding sources:

- Approximately **\$370-425 million** in possible voter-approved building bond funding
 - Approximately **\$80-90 million** in Long-Term Facility Maintenance (LTFM) funding
- These investments will support remodeling, renovations, and modernization of all district schools, as well as overdue LTFM repairs

Possible tax impact:

\$30 a month for the median (\$340,200) home
*\$14 more a month than Option 2; **voter-approved***



Option 2: BOARD-APPROVED LTFM + PAYGO BONDS

\$140 Million Total Project Amount

LTFM bonds and general fund PAYGO bonds utilize a 10-year bond term



Funding sources:

- Approximately **\$70 million** in board-approved general fund PAYGO bonds
 - Approximately **\$70 million** in Long-Term Facility Maintenance (LTFM) funding
- These investments would support overdue LTFM repairs and maintenance, and offer limited investments in safety, modernization and efficiencies of building space

Possible tax impact:

\$16 a month for the median (\$340,200) home
*\$14 less per month than Option 1; **not voter-approved***

Even without a future referendum, \$140 million in LTFM and PAYGO needs would still likely increase property taxes by approximately \$16 per month for a median-value home. Those investments would primarily support repairs and maintenance rather than broader modernization efforts. ■

Importance of community engagement

Throughout the Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030 process, we welcome feedback from students, staff, families, and community members.

We've hosted engagement sessions this spring, including:

- Vision Team+ focus group meeting
- Community conversation events
- Student engagement opportunities
- Staff engagement sessions
- Ongoing feedback and planning discussions

In addition to these face-to-face sessions, we also commissioned a second residential survey to hear from voices beyond those with students attending our schools. We are grateful for the input we've received so far. ■

Stay informed!



rdale.org/vision2030

Supporting students, staff, and families through transition

At the heart of this work is our commitment to supporting one another through change. We know transitions can bring uncertainty and strong emotions. At the same time, this moment gives us an opportunity to demonstrate what it means to be *Rdale Proud*—coming together as a community and moving forward stronger together.

Throughout the spring, we have worked closely with students, families, and staff to prepare for the 2026-27 school year. Across the district, schools and transition teams have focused on helping students and staff remain connected, supported, and prepared for the year ahead. Planning efforts have included:

- School-based transition teams
- Student visits and

orientation opportunities

- Staff transition and placement support
- Transportation and enrollment planning
- Family information nights and communication updates
- Building in support for students and staff who are changing schools and/or programs and who are welcoming in new students to their buildings

For example, at Neill Elementary, students and families from Sonnesyn and Noble Elementary Schools participated in transition and community-building activities designed to help students feel welcomed and connected before the start of the school year. Plymouth and Sandburg Middle Schools and Neill, Lakeview, and



Two students pose for a photo with a staff member during Neill Elementary School's transition open house May 7. New students and families had the opportunity to tour the school, meet staff, and participate in activities ahead of the 2026-27 school year.

Zachary Lane Elementary Schools held similar community-building activities.

And we will continue to offer more welcoming opportunities this fall as students and families settle into their new school communities.

Teams across the district are also coordinating operational planning to support smooth school moves over the summer, including transportation coordination and classroom packing systems to help materials and supplies arrive at the correct new locations. ■

Understanding the compensatory funding error

Understanding the compensatory funding error
In planning for the 2024-25 school year, the School Board approved \$17.4 million in budget reductions. However, during the staffing implementation process, compensatory funding was mistakenly counted a second time. As a result, only about \$3.2 million in reductions were actually implemented. This issue is often referred to by community members as the district's "\$20 million budget error" in 2024-25.

Simply put, the district spent approximately \$14.2 million on staffing and programming that year that it did not intend to spend and could not sustainably afford. Additional inflationary increases created a projected \$21 million deficit heading into the 2025-26 fiscal year.

Because of this error:

- Many planned school-level budget reductions were not implemented
- Schools retained staffing and resources for an additional year
- The district overestimated available revenue

We want to be clear:

- **No money was missing**
- **No funds were stolen or misused**
- The district continues to undergo required independent financial audits



This error should never have happened, and the district takes it seriously. District leadership has since implemented additional review processes and safeguards designed to help prevent similar issues in the future.

While this error accelerated the district's current fiscal crisis and entry into Statutory Operating Debt (SOD), district leaders noted that long-term enrollment declines, rising operational costs, and aging facilities had already placed Rdale on an unsustainable financial trajectory over time. ■

Literacy gains, from page 8

All Rdale elementaries have designated Bridge2Read coaches who observe classrooms once a month and provide feedback to teachers. Coaches also participate in weekly professional learning meetings and help analyze implementation and student outcome data to guide instructional decisions.

"Bridge2Read's implementation is an excellent example of how, when teachers and administrators collectively commit to implementing with integrity and utilizing data for instructional decisions, we can positively impact student learning together," said Maria Roberts, Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning. "There has been intentional analysis of both adult data in the form of implementation metrics and student outcomes using Bridge2Read. This analysis helps us to ensure we are meeting both educators' and students' needs."

The implementation of Bridge2Read in Rdale began in fall 2022 with pilot classrooms at Lakeview Elementary and Sonnesyn Elementary. As educator interest grew and early student data demonstrated success, the district expanded the program to all kindergarten through third grade classrooms at both schools during the 2023-24 school year before scaling districtwide in 2024-25.

"Learning a new curriculum is never easy, and our educators' consistent efforts to support students in foundational literacy skills are fantastic," shared Roberts.

ServeMinnesota has worked closely with Rdale throughout the implementation process, supported in part by a three year, \$450,000 grant from the Ciresi Walburn Foundation. ■

Dr. Staloch, from page 1

continued budget reductions, school and program transitions, Operation Metro Surge, and ongoing planning for the future through Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030. Through it all, I have continued to see the resilience, care, and commitment of the people who make up Rdale.

At the beginning of the school year, I shared the theme "Take Yourself On" with our staff. I could not have predicted all that this year would bring, but I have seen that theme come to life across our district in meaningful ways. I see it in classrooms, on buses, in cafeterias, in offices, at school events, and in homes across our community where families support their children's learning each day.

Every adult who interacts with our students has the potential to make a positive difference.

Our dedicated staff, families, and caregivers all play an important



role in helping students feel a sense of belief, belonging, and the opportunity to become who they are meant to be.

I know this work is not always easy, especially in moments like this. But the care, compassion, and commitment shown by our staff and families continue to make a difference in the lives of our students every single day.

Thank you for continuing to support our students, our schools, and one another.

Be well,
Teri ■

Students help shape school menu—one bite at a time

The verdict came quickly.

“The honey sriracha chicken taco is amazing,” said Armstrong High School senior Abdi Bootaan after taking a bite. “That one needs to be on the menu.”

Around him, a group of students debated the merits of dill pickle grilled cheese, sampled Nepalese dumplings dipped in coconut curry sauce and compared notes on whether a retro pizza burger deserved a place in the school lunch lineup.

On March 4, Robbinsdale Area Schools’ (Rdale) Nutrition Services team invited 25 students to sample and evaluate six potential menu items as part of the district’s ongoing effort to keep school meals healthy, exciting, and reflective of student tastes.

“School meals today involve a lot of thought and collaboration,” said Brianna Smith, Assistant Director

of Nutrition Services. “Our team of registered dietitians and culinary professionals is always working on developing new recipes and bringing in flavors that reflect the diversity and interests of our students.”

But before any new item makes it onto menus across the district, students get the first say.

At the Armstrong event, students sampled:

- Cuban grilled cheese
- Dill pickle grilled cheese
- Momo (a Nepalese dumpling) with coconut curry sauce
- Lemon berry oatmeal bar
- Honey sriracha chicken taco with cilantro lime slaw
- Retro pizza burger

For many students, the chance to help influence future lunch menus made the experience even better.

“I loved this,” shared ninth grader



Armstrong High School students Kylee Raeker (center) and Abdi Bootaan (right) share feedback during a student taste test, helping shape future school menu items.

Vicky Mendoza Gonzalez. “I’m really happy to hear that they’re trying to reach out to the younger audience and get our opinion on everything.”

“I liked that we were able to try different types of foods, and we were able to experience a lot of different textures and tastes that we aren’t normally inclined to try,” said junior Kylee Raeker. “I liked that they let us share ideas and they actually listened.”

After each taste test, Nutrition Services staff review student feedback and evaluations to see what items went over well and which ones didn’t, with student voice guiding which new foods make it onto school menus.

“Balancing nutrition standards, operational realities, and evolving student preferences can be challenging,” Smith said. “But it’s also what keeps our menus improving.” ■

Cooper students share voices at student summit

The Cooper High School (CHS) cafeteria buzzed with energy earlier this school year as students gathered for the fifth annual CHS Student Summit. Organized and led by the Student Council, the event brought together about 100 students, representing every grade, to share ideas, elevate student voices, and shape the future of their school, one meaningful conversation at a time.

The Student Council selected four areas of focus for the summit: *safety, climate and culture, learning environment, and student life*. For each topic, the 11 tables of students were given 20 minutes to share their experiences, give feedback, and offer ideas for possible improvements.

“The goal of the student summit is to amplify student voices,” said CHS senior Chad Hill. “As Student Council president, I feel it is our responsibility to have students’ perspectives be heard and to be our highest priority. The student summit is a great way to achieve that.”



Cooper High School students participate in the annual Student Summit, sharing ideas and feedback to help shape their school community.

At each table, members of the Student Council served as facilitators and note takers, gathering information to be compiled and shared with the entire council and CHS administration. Blank posters were also available for attendees to share further thoughts or questions on any of the topics.

“It’s also important that students listen to the opinions of people around them, and have conversations about the positives and negatives,” said CHS junior Kyllander Nelson, CHS’ Student Council Vice President. “Student Council is a reflection of the student body and what’s important to them, so it’s crucial to have events where we get the broader perspective!”

“One of my biggest takeaways was that students want to be a part of making CHS a better place,” said Hill. “The future of Cooper is bright, and I can’t wait to see how bright it gets.” ■



Armstrong receives MASSP Silver Star Award for innovation

Armstrong High School (AHS) isn’t just rethinking how students prepare for life after graduation—it’s rebuilding the path itself.

That work is now earning statewide recognition. The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) has awarded AHS a Silver Star of Innovation for its Preparing Falcons Futures program, a three-year effort that transformed the school’s media center into a hub of personalized support, mentorship, and postsecondary planning.

Inside that space, students don’t just pass through—they connect. Ninth graders find targeted support through BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks), peers and staff build relationships through mentoring and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and older students map out college and career pathways with dedicated guidance. Staffed by a team of five licensed educators, the program is designed move students forward with purpose.



“This recognition reflects the intentional work our team has done... it truly meets students where they are,” said AHS Principal Erick

Norby. “By creating targeted areas for BARR support, mentoring and AVID, and college and career exploration, we are ensuring every student has access to the resources and relationships they need to succeed.”

The result: Preparing Falcons Future is a reimagined learning environment where preparation isn’t an abstract goal, but built into every interaction, every day, Norby said. And it builds on the successful implementation of the BARR model at AHS, which was recently recognized as a BARR School of Excellence. ■

ENROLL NOW!

At Robbinsdale Area Schools, kindergarten is a great time to discover **learning is FUN!**

Visit rdale.org/enroll to learn more, or call our Enrollment Center at 763-504-8080 to get started.

Cooper High Students, Early Learners connect through joyful learning



Cooper High School students Sabrina Daoud (back left) and Sabrina Shamszoda (right) connect with Early Learning students at New Hope Learning Center through hands-on activities that build relationships and support learning.

Cooper High School (CHS) and the Robbinsdale Area Schools Early Learning program are collaborating closely, offering opportunities for their students to build relationships and share their skills. This year, two different CHS classes visited the New Hope Learning Center (NHLC), which houses the Early Learning program.

Most recently, CHS students in the *Intro to Theater* class, performed puppet shows they had been rehearsing for the Early Learning students and staff. These shows filled NHLC with fun voices, songs, and laughter.

“My students had an amazing time; they were talking the rest of the week about how sweet it was to make the little kids laugh,” shared Rachel Fettig, English,

dance, and theater teacher at CHS.

Earlier this year, English Language learner high school students spent time in Early Learning classrooms reading to the younger students, building their confidence through meaningful practice.

“It is awesome to see them engage together,” said Emilie Levinson, Director of Early Learning. “Each interaction builds connection and supports the growth and well-being of both groups.”

This collaboration was kicked off earlier in the year by CHS Civil Engineering and Architecture students, who built small-scale wood projects for the Early Learning playground and classrooms last spring. ■



Meadow Lake Elementary students smile during a live performance by Sounds of Blackness, bringing music, culture and inspiration to the school community.

‘Sounds of Blackness’ inspires at Meadow Lake Elementary

It started with a phone call in November, and three months later, on March 18, singing, clapping, and dancing were the sights and sounds of Meadow Lake Elementary School’s gymnasium as the Grammy Award-winning musical ensemble *Sounds of Blackness* performed for students in grades three through five.

“I was looking for something new and meaningful. I picked up the phone and called the Ordway with no real plan—just hoping to find opportunities and experiences for our students,” said Diamond Sampson, Climate and Culture Specialist at Meadow Lake. “What came from that moment was so much bigger than music. Hosting this group was a reminder of what can happen when you take a chance.”

Sounds of Blackness is a Minneapolis-based group that has celebrated African American history and culture through

gospel, soul, R&B, and spoken word for over 50 years.

The performance included a multitude of positive messages for students and staff through song and dance. Members of the group also spoke about their roles in the community, from careers to creative passions.

“These performers aren’t just artists—they’re nurses, educators, and professionals from the Twin Cities. People with everyday careers who still make space for their passion and chose to share that gift with our scholars,” shared Sampson. “And the most powerful part—they’re from right here. Showing our students that greatness isn’t far away or out of reach.”

Sounds of Blackness aims to share uplifting messages of hope, unity, love, and peace for all humankind, and they work passionately to achieve it through their performances nationally. ■

Building healthy smiles through strong partnerships

Neill Elementary School hosted a Ready Set Smile dental clinic earlier this year, offering students on-site dental care at no cost to families and education as part of the district’s growing Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) efforts.

Robbinsdale Area Schools (Rdale) is proud to have Full-Service Community Schools and partner with local organizations to bring valuable resources directly to students and families, and those partnerships extend to other district sites such as Neill Elementary.

“A Full-Service Community School is more than just a building—it’s both a physical place and a powerful set of partnerships between schools and community resources,” said Nieshea Smith, Community Partnership and Resource Specialist. “Our FSCS sites are true community hubs—open to everyone and active beyond the traditional school day, including evenings and weekends”

One strong example of this model in action is the district’s partnership with Ready Set Smile, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit that provides free dental treatment and oral health education to children.

When the partnership began in the 2022-23

school year, fewer than 20 students across two schools received care. Since then, the program has expanded significantly. During the fall of the 2025-26 school year, Ready Set Smile has served 327 students across six Rdale elementary schools, and more clinics occurred this past winter and spring.

Through the clinics, Ready Set Smile staff have identified 384 cavities, treated more than 204, and placed over 275 sealants. In addition, they have made over 100 referrals to connect families with essential follow-up care, often working with other dental partners to provide free or low-cost dental care.

With strong results and growing demand, Rdale and Ready Set Smile plan to expand



A Neill Elementary student receives care during a Ready Set Smile dental clinic, bringing free, on-site dental services to students as part of Rdale’s Full-Service Community Schools efforts.

the dental clinic program to four additional elementary schools and the district’s Early Learning program.

“We’re confident in this model because we see the difference it makes for our students, families, and neighborhoods every single day.” ■

Principal Zoraba Ross earns *Excellence in Education* Award

When Zoraba Ross learned that he was being honored for the 2025 *Excellence in Education Award* from The Ohio State University's College of Education and Human Ecology, he was deeply grateful, humbled, and emotional.

"Receiving this award caused me to pause for a moment and reflect back to when I was a young Black boy going through the public education system and being told, more than once, that I was the 'worst kid ever and won't amount to anything,'" Ross said. "But even then, with the encouragement of a Black teacher/coach, I chose to believe that I was worthy. I chose to believe that my life had value, that my future had possibility."

Ross, who has served as principal of FAIR School Crystal for nine years, graduated from The Ohio State University in 1988. As the district implements Reimagine Rdale: Vision 2030, the FAIR School Crystal magnet program is being phased out, and Ross will transition to serve as principal of Plymouth Middle School for the 2026–27 school year.

He said he is passionate about positively impacting the lives of students, families, colleagues and



Zoraba Ross

staff who cross his path.

"To every student, every young person, every dreamer who has ever been told they are not enough, let my story be a reminder. When people tell you that you're not worthy, believe in yourself anyway. Never give up. Every one of us is worthy if we put our mind, our heart, and our effort into it," Ross said.

Ross was recognized alongside other honorees at the university's Hall of Fame and Alumni Awards last fall. ■

Armstrong Activities Director Larry Tate named Region 6AA AD of the Year

Recognized for his continued dedication and leadership, Armstrong High School (AHS) Activities Director Larry Tate was named the 2025 Region 6AA Activities Director (AD) of the Year by the Minnesota Interscholastic Activities Administrators Association (MNIAAA) earlier this year.



Larry Tate

"It is a very humbling experience to receive this honor, as all activities directors put in a lot of long hours, and to be recognized by my colleagues really has me taken aback," said Tate.

Tate is in his sixth year serving as the AD at AHS and is in his 20th year working for Robbinsdale Area Schools (Rdale).

He said that the most rewarding part of his role is watching students maneuver the highs and lows and grow with each experience. "I also enjoy watching the community and student body come together to support each other," he said.

The MNIAAA honors its members and other individuals connected with Minnesota cocurricular programs who have distinguished themselves or have otherwise made significant contributions to Minnesota High School Activities.



"All the hard work is worth it," said Tate. "Being able to tell a student, staff member, or community member that I see them is impactful and fuels my why." ■

Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion (RSI) Co-Principal Dr. Alejandra Estrada-Burt receives leadership award

Reflecting her years of dedicated service, equity-driven leadership, and an unwavering commitment to multilingual education, Robbinsdale Spanish Immersion School (RSI) Co-Principal Dr. Alejandra Estrada-Burt has been named the 2025 West Suburban Division Leadership Award winner by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals' Association (MESPA).

"I'm deeply honored by this recognition. Leadership is never a solo endeavor, and I accept this award on behalf of the talented team I have the privilege to represent. I am also fortunate to co-lead with the amazing Ken Habel," said Dr. Estrada-Burt. "I'm committed to fostering collaboration and helping leaders confront the complex challenges



Dr. Alejandra Estrada-Burt

before us. Our principals play a pivotal role in advancing solutions to today's critical school issues, and I'm proud to do anything I

can to support that work."

In her six years as co-principal and eight years as assistant principal at RSI, Dr. Estrada-Burt has centered students and equity in her school's dual language program, leading efforts to improve outcomes for all learners.

"I feel very blessed to serve the RSI community as a bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural Latina leader. I feel a great responsibility to be a steward of the gift of bilingualism and the power of immersion programming. Immersion invites us into a new world; bilingualism lets us carry that world with us. It is a gift that shapes identity, builds bridges across cultures, and empowers us to participate more fully in an interconnected world. I feel it is

a place where I can affirm and uplift the linguistic gifts of all our students."

This recognition celebrates school leaders who go above and beyond to support their fellow principals and advance educational leadership in their region.

"Now more than ever, strong, student-centered leadership is vital to the success of our schools," said MESPA Executive Director Michelle Krell. "Dr. Estrada-Burt exemplifies the type of collaborative and courageous leadership that uplifts entire communities. Her dedication to equity, instructional excellence, and advocacy for multilingual learners embodies what this award stands for." ■

Join #Rdale281 today!

Educating Rdale students requires teachers, education assistants, custodians, Nutrition Services staff, secretaries, administrators, school counselors, and mental health professionals, nurses and more. And we're always looking for individuals who are passionate about making a difference and sharing their skills to make Rdale a place where every student can **believe, belong, and become**.

Check out current job openings, or apply online at rdale.org/careers.





Independent School District 281
Robbinsdale Area Schools
4148 Winnetka Ave. N.
New Hope, MN 55427

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
TWIN CITIES MN
PERMIT NO. 3027

RDALE ROUNDUP

ROBBINSDALE AREA SCHOOLS

SPRING 2026

Rdale Students See Early Reading Gains

Bridge2Read is helping more young readers reach grade-level benchmarks

In classrooms across Robbinsdale Area Schools (Rdale), more young students are learning to read at grade level, and the growth is happening early.

During the 2024-25 school year, every kindergarten through third grade classroom in the district implemented Bridge2Read, bringing to thousands of students, coaching, and tutoring to thousands of students. Early results show promising gains, particularly among students who entered the year behind in reading.

Bridge2Read, developed by ServeMinnesota, is a literacy initiative based on the science of reading. As an extension of the successful Reading Corps initiative, Bridge2Read equips teachers with free resources, ongoing coaching, and systematic instruction strategies to ensure all students become confident readers.

In the districtwide implementation of Bridge2Read during the 2024-25 school year, some of Rdale's youngest learners showed significant growth in reading achievement:

- **Overall Growth:** Classrooms averaged a 7% increase in students meeting benchmarks.
- **At-Risk Students:** 29% of students who did not meet the fall benchmark met the spring benchmark.
- **Kindergarten Impact:** The largest gains were in kindergarten, where there was a 14% increase in students reaching benchmarks overall, and 48% of students who did not meet the fall benchmark met the spring benchmark by the end of the year.
- **At-Risk Students' Growth:** Students who did not yet meet spring benchmarks still closed the gap toward proficiency by an average of 38%.

Robbinsdale Area Schools Board of Education



Chair
Dr. Greta Evans-Becker



Vice Chair
Dr. Kenneth Wutoh



Clerk
ReNae Bowman



Treasurer
Aviva Hillenbrand



Director
Helen Bassett



Director
DJ (Richard) Brynteson



Director
Caroline Long

RDALE ROUNDUP

ROBBINSDALE AREA SCHOOLS

SPRING 2026

Rdale Roundup is a semi-annual publication of Robbinsdale Area Schools (Rdale), delivered to residents across our district to keep the community informed about our schools, students, and our shared investment in public education. Robbinsdale Area Schools serves approximately 9,500 students across seven communities: Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Golden Valley, New Hope, Plymouth, and Robbinsdale.

Communications and Marketing Department
Derrick Williams, Senior Communication Specialist
Claire Little, Communication Specialist

Find us on social media:

- facebook.com/RobbinsdaleAreaSchools
- instagram.com/RobbinsdaleAreaSchools
- youtube.com/RobbinsdaleAreaSchools
- linkedin.com/company/514811

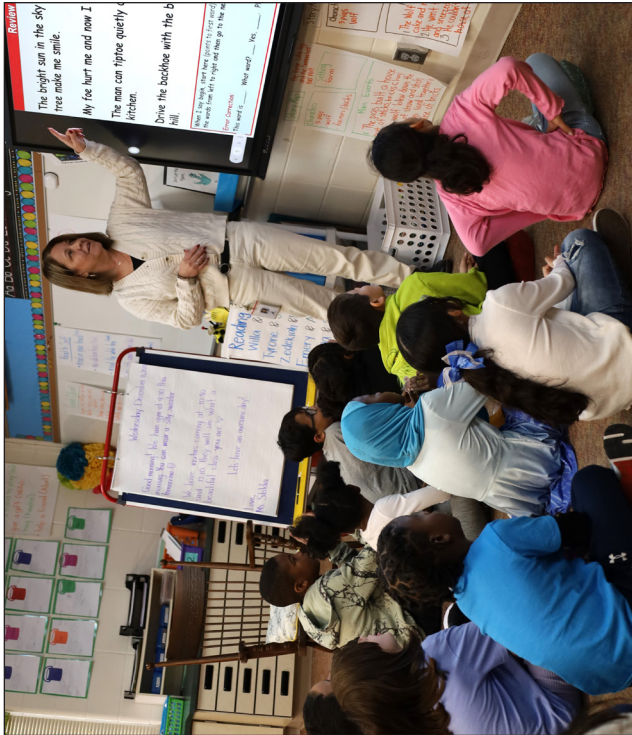
Robbinsdale Area Schools, in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, affirms its commitment to providing equal educational and employment opportunities for all individuals. The district does not discriminate on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender, marital status, disability, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, age, family care leave status, or veteran status.

Upon request, Robbinsdale Area Schools will make reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities—including staff, students, families, and community members—so they may participate in the district's programs, services, and activities. Individuals requiring accommodations should notify the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator or their building principal as early as possible prior to a school-sponsored event, meeting, or program.

Students who qualify as individuals with disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 will be identified, evaluated, and provided with a free and appropriate public education, regardless of the severity of their disability.

Equal opportunity applies to all aspects of employment within Robbinsdale Area Schools, including hiring, promotion, compensation, discharge, and access to facilities.

If you need this information in an alternative format due to a disability, or in another language if your primary language is not English, please contact the Robbinsdale Area Schools at 763-504-8000. A minimum of three days' notice is requested.



Teacher Leslie Stokka leads a second-grade Bridge2Read lesson at Sonnesyn Elementary School last year. Bridge2Read provides evidence-based literacy instruction and support for students in kindergarten through third grade.

For district educators, the growth reflects the importance of building strong literacy foundations as early as possible.

"I see students utilizing the science of reading and applying skills in ways that I was not seeing before," shared Molly Nelson, a third grade teacher at Noble Elementary. "Students are saying things like 'that word needs the floss rule,' or are tapping their sounds out on their fingers and placing their hands on their jaws to break words down into smaller parts."