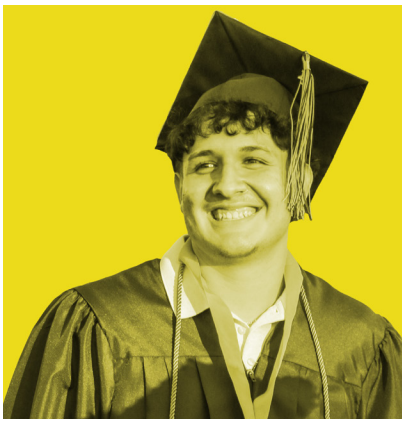

Round Lake Area Schools

Community Unit School District #116

2025-26 ANNUAL REPORT

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Superintendent's Message

As we reflect on the 2024-25 school year, I am incredibly proud of the progress made across Round Lake Area Schools. This year was defined by purposeful collaboration, thoughtful planning, and an unwavering commitment to supporting every student, every family, and every staff member.

Guided by our mission, Inspire and Empower Students to Construct a Thriving Future, our work remained focused on what matters most - high-quality teaching and learning, meeting the unique needs of our learners, and nurturing the social-emotional well-being of our school community. Across classrooms, we successfully implemented new K-5 curriculum resources in literacy, math, and social-emotional learning, paired with meaningful professional development that strengthened instructional practice and student engagement. These efforts were grounded in ongoing staff feedback, ensuring our work remained responsive and connected to real classroom experiences.

We also expanded opportunities beyond the classroom. Students benefited from increased access to college and career pathways, dual credit coursework, internships, and extracurricular offerings shaped by student voice. At the same time, we strengthened systems that support academic growth, behavior, and wellness through improved MTSS practices, restorative approaches, and expanded mental health supports.

Equally important has been our commitment to partnership. Throughout the year, we deepened collaboration with families, staff, and community stakeholders through advisory groups, cultural celebrations, family resource sessions, and partnerships with local organizations and higher education institutions. These relationships continue to strengthen trust and ensure that our schools reflect the values and priorities of the community we serve.

In the 2025-26 school year, our district has also begun important collaborative work in response to a budget deficit identified in July 2025. Through transparent communication and shared problem-solving with the Education Association of Round Lake, we are approaching this challenge with care, responsibility, and a collective focus on long-term sustainability. This work reflects our belief that the strongest solutions are built together.

None of this progress is possible without the dedication of our staff, the support of our families, and the engagement of our community. Together, we remain committed to ensuring that every student feels supported, challenged, and inspired - and that Round Lake Area Schools continues to be a place where all can thrive.

Sincerely,
Donn P. Mendoza, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Transportation

Transportation to school is critical to student success and attendance. In 2025, Round Lake invested in a new platform that helps to enhance student safety and provides up-to-date information to families and students who use district transportation: My Ride K-12.

My Ride K-12 is a mobile app and website that allows families to see their student's bus number, bus stop, pick-up and drop-off times and the location of the bus when it is near their stop. Families can also see when their student scans on and off the bus.

In order to enable students to scan on and off the bus, all K-12 students were given new IDs at the start of the 2025-26 school year. These IDs include technology compatible with the new scanners on buses.

With My Ride K-12, every bus in the district now has a tablet that allows drivers to see the name of students who scan on and off the bus. Each student is connected to their specific route, so if a student scans onto the wrong bus, the driver is notified and can connect that student to their correct bus. This reduces the chance of a student accidentally boarding the wrong bus.

Full Bus Driver Staff

During 2025, as districts around the country struggled with bus driver shortages, Round Lake became fully staffed with bus drivers. The district implemented a few strategies to accomplish this goal, including increasing bus driver pay and hiring a trainer who can assist any drivers without a commercial drivers license in getting that certification as well as help drivers receive their required air break endorsement.

Hiring an in-house trainer means that potential bus driver candidates know they will not have to pay for outside training when considering RLAS-116. The trainer also provides professional development to drivers, offers to ride along with new drivers and can assist with questions on managing student behaviors on buses.

More Than 100 Students Added to Bus Routes

As part of the district's continued pursuit to enhance student safety, the district filed a Serious Safety Hazard form with the Illinois Department of Transportation to absorb walking students who have to cross busy intersections within existing bus routes. Students who walk to Round Lake Middle and must cross the intersection of North Lotus Drive and West Rollins Road are now eligible for busing, as well as students who walk to John T. Magee Middle and must cross the intersection of Washington Street and County V63.

Round Lake Area Schools will continue to ensure all eligible students have accessible transportation to get to school safely and on time.

4,697

Number of preK-12 students eligible for transportation (school year 2024-25; does not include special education)

274,410

Number of miles driven (school year 2024-25; does not include special education)

Finances

In July of 2025, during a detailed review of Round Lake Area Schools' finances, our current Chief Financial Officer discovered a significant budgeting error in the development of the 2024-25 budget. This error was made by a former business manager.

This error involved under-budgeting in two critical areas: Salaries and special education tuition and placement costs. There was also over-budgeting in revenue from the tax levy, investments and Medicaid reimbursement. The error created a ripple effect impacting both the 2025-26 and 2026-27 fiscal years in the amount of approximately $10.3 million

Additionally, the district was notified in August that its state funding allocation for Tier 1 in FY2025-26 was changed from about $2.5 million to $1.2 million. This is due in large part to Chicago Public Schools moving into Tier 1, causing the same amount of money to be divided into smaller portions. These two unexpected challenges forced the district to make substantial adjustments to its financial plan.

District responses to the deficit have included the elimination of eight administrator positions for the 26-27 school year, the reduction in force of more than 60 positions, a 10% decrease in school and department discretionary funds for the 2025-26 school year, and a pause in non-grant-funded, not-required professional development and travel expenses.

As new positions are vacated due to resignations or retirements, the district is notifying staff who were affected by the reduction in force in an effort to rehire eligible employees.

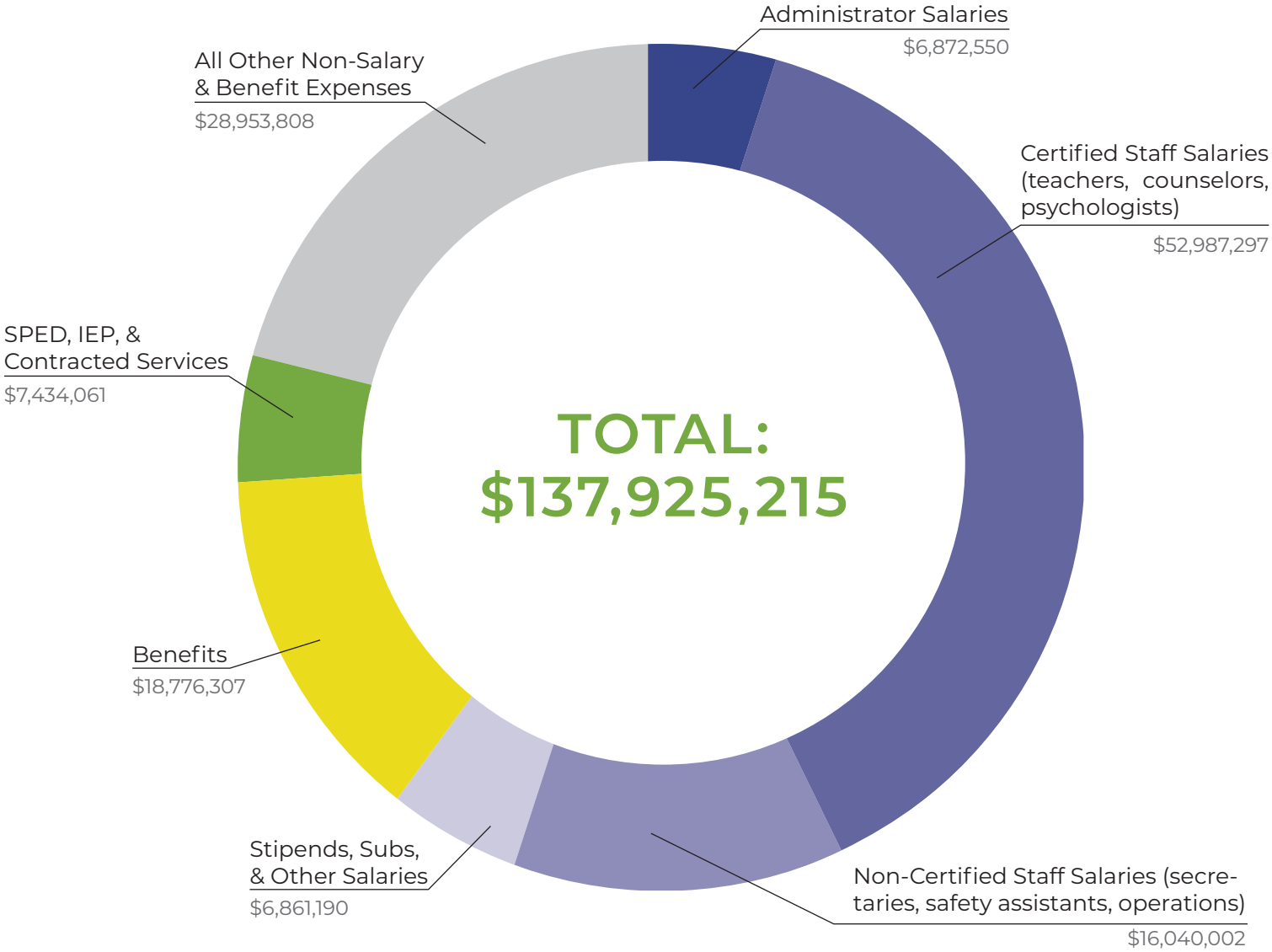
The District has already implemented stronger safeguards to prevent this from happening again, and leadership is committed to ensuring a full financial recovery and rebuilding trust.

Additional efforts the district has taken include ending a lease with the Village of Round Lake for the former Welcome Center and moving administrators to a currently district-owned building as well as working to bring special education transportation routes back in-house. These routes are currently outsourced at significant cost due to bus access limitations.

It is important to note and thank members of the Education Association of Round Lake, who, in order to help combat any possible reductions in services to students, agreed to a reduced increase in salaries over the next two years. This collaborative action reduced the financial impact, avoided more significant reductions in force, and preserved programs and educational opportunities. The District has committed in a Memorandum of Understanding to repaying the dollars staff have sacrificed as future surpluses allow.

To see a full budget breakdown, please visit our website at rlas-116.org/departments/business-office/financial-reporting.

OPERATING FUNDS EXPENDITURE COMPARISON



During fiscal year 2025, which began July 1, 2024, Round Lake Area Schools had a total revenue of $130,663,074. This revenue is generated by property taxes, grants, evidence-based funding from the state, earnings from investments, food service revenue and more. The above graph shows a snapshot of expenditures, which totaled $137,925,215. The majority of expenditures are made up of staff salaries and benefits. Non-salary and benefit expenses include food services, supplies and materials, purchased services, capital outlay and equipment.

Facilities

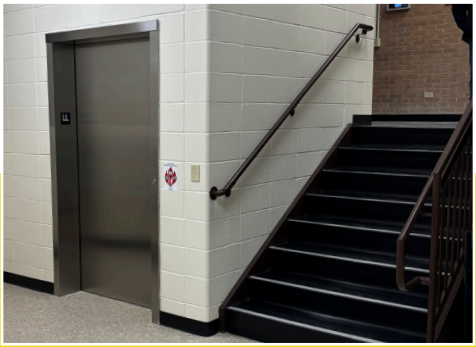
Ensuring all school buildings and facilities serve the needs of all students continues to be a top priority for Round Lake Area Schools.

Over the summer and during the 2025-26 school year, the district embarked on several projects, including paving for four schools, installing an elevator at Murphy Elementary and chair lifts at Beach and Ellis Elementary schools, and new heating and cooling units for Round Lake Middle School and Murphy.

This summer, the district also expects its new baseball and softball complex to be completed and ready for student athletes to reach new heights.

BALLFIELD RENOVATIONS

PAVING PROJECTS



ELEVATOR & CHAIR LIFTS

Baseball and Softball Field Renovation

Funds for the baseball/softball field renovation were approved during the 24-25 school year and the project was kicked off in May 2025.

The significant remodel adds synthetic turf on both new baseball and softball fields, gives each field a dugout, improves related facilities on the complex, and has room for any possible future expansion if needed.

The complex will also include a batting cage, new bleachers, a press box and new scoreboards.

Beyond new additions to the complex, construction crews also ensured the fields are up to Illinois High School Association standards by installing adequate drainage for drier fields and adding lift to the field area to create a flatter and more even surface. The project is expected to be completed this summer.

Paving

As part of Round Lake Schools' continued mission to improve all school grounds and facilities, the district last summer embarked on a large-scale paving project that covered four school driveways and two building parking lots.

The Early Education Center and the Educational Support Center parking lots and driveways were repaved, and Magee and Village received new paving on their driveways.

Beyond the smoother ride of freshly paved roads, facilities staff were thoughtful in the paving of driving lanes on school property, reinforcing them to ensure they will hold up to busing traffic. New paving also aids in student and staff safety by removing any cracks or uneven surfaces previously on the driveways or parking lots.

Elevator and Chair Lift Installation

By the end of the 2025-26 school year, all areas of all 10 of Round Lake Area Schools will be fully accessible to all students.

Chair lifts at Beach and Ellis will allow students with mobility issues to reach the music room and the library, respectively, without requiring students to go around the building to access these areas. At Murphy, an elevator was finished in early 2026 to ease access to the lower, eastern area of the building.

Teaching & Learning

Round Lake Area Schools continues to advance educational offerings for students. Next school year, the district plans to offer eight dual credit courses to high school students. That's twice the amount offered during the 2025-26 school year.

Dual credit courses are available to Round Lake High School juniors and seniors who meet academic benchmarks set by the College of Lake County (CLC). Dual credit courses are classes that students take with a high school teacher but that provide college credit.

In the 2025-26 school year, dual credit offerings include kinesiology, applied mathematics, digital media and design and introduction to teaching. Genetics and society, educational psychology, English composition and video design and editing will be added to the roster next year.

Jessica Kron, director of teaching and learning, said offering dual credit courses gives eligible students the opportunity to save time and money down the road.

"If you go into a university cold, you have to take electives and then hours to earn an associates degree," she said. "But if the student has already taken dual credits, that's much less schooling that they have to do at the university."

Mrs. Kron added that taking dual credit courses increases the likelihood that students will transfer to CLC or another postsecondary institution and continue earning their degree. According to data from the 2023-24 school year, 42% of students who took dual credit courses at Round Lake High School transitioned after high school to continue their education at the College of Lake County.

For the 2026-27 school year, more than 250 high school students are already enrolled in dual credit courses.

College and Career Pathway Endorsements

Within two years, Round Lake has earned five state-approved college and career pathway endorsement areas. Illinois requires high schools to offer three state-approved pathways.

Round Lake has not only met state requirements - the district continues to exceed them. As of the 2025-26 school year, Round Lake High School's approved pathways include medical assisting and general health sciences, education, graphic communications and culinary arts.

The remaining pathways are information technology; agriculture, food and natural resources; and manufacturing, engineering, technology and trades.

Junior and senior students who pursue an endorsement are required to meet the requirements of an Individualized Learning Plan, complete at least six hours of dual credit classes and undergo at least 60 hours of career development experience such as an internship, apprenticeship or school-based enterprise.

As of January 2026, eight seniors were on track to complete all endorsement requirements and earn a prestigious seal on their transcripts. Along with the seal, students who receive an endorsement in any of the approved areas may be eligible for a $500 scholarship to the College of Lake County.

"Having these state-approved pathways is a wonderful and right thing to do for the kids. Their education is really so much more robust with these endorsement opportunities," Mrs. Kron said. "Achieving this endorsement demands academic readiness for both future career and college pathways."

Round Lake High School Principal Named Principal of the Year

In 1999, Brian Peterson, a student at Round Lake High School, was named Prom King by his peers. In 2025, the now Principal of Round Lake High School was awarded Principal of the Year by the Lake Region of the Illinois Principals Association (IPA).

Mr. Peterson, a Panther alumnus, is in his fourth year as principal. Frank Ranalli, who works with Mr. Peterson as the assistant principal of student services, said Mr. Peterson approaches leadership with vision and heart.

"Brian's connection to the school and community runs deep," Mr. Ranalli said. "He approaches leadership with both vision and heart. His passion for Round Lake is evident in every decision he makes, always placing the needs and opportunities of students at the center of his work."

According to the IPA, the award honors "outstanding high school leaders who have succeeded in providing high quality learning opportunities for students." Criteria for Principal of the Year winners include: Demonstrating a positive impact on education and advocacy for children; ensuring the school climate is positive; demonstrating creativity in creating change; and working together with staff to improve student achievement.

We are so proud of principal Peterson and are grateful for the work he does to improve our district every day.

Chicago Bears Partner with Round Lake 116

This year, Round Lake Area Schools was honored to be chosen as a partner by the Chicago Bears to design lotería cards during Latino Heritage Month.

From September through October, teams across the National Football League reimagine the traditional Mexican game of lotería — often described as Mexican bingo — by designing or working with local artists to create custom cards that celebrate Latino culture. Last fall, Round Lake High School advanced painting students had the opportunity to contribute to the Chicago Bears edition of the campaign.

Within weeks, the students worked to craft cards that incorporated community symbols like Sammie's and Six Flags, as well as Bears logos and imagery. Those cards were ultimately used in the Bears' official lotería campaign.

Our students are incredibly talented and we are so impressed with all the work they put into this amazing opportunity. #WeAreRL!