



Rochester Community Schools Pride in Excellence

Fall 2026 Edition



Everyday actions. Lasting impact.

Welcome to the 2026-27 school year!

We have so much to celebrate at Rochester Community Schools. The key milestones that have been accomplished over the years reflect the hard work and dedication of everyone who makes an impact on student success.

I believe that a strong, cohesive culture is the very thread that binds us together. It helps us lead with kindness and purpose, so everyone who walks through our doors feels safe and welcome. It replaces the fear of failure with the pursuit of curiosity and innovation. It reassures us that when someone stumbles, there are many hands to help lift them up.

Over the past two years, I have seen this culture being lived out

in our buildings every day. It is the cornerstone of the student and staff experience. That is how our team arrived at the theme for this year, which is “Everyday actions. Lasting impact.”

All of these seemingly simple, but extremely powerful and intentional interactions, set the tone for student success and provide a sense of belonging for all who walk through our doors.

It is truly an honor to lead our school community. Thank you for joining me on this journey and for making RCS the best place for each and every student to learn, grow and achieve.

~ Superintendent Nicholas Russo

Providing a strong foundation in elementary literacy

This fall, Rochester Community Schools introduced the Magnetic Literacy curriculum across all 13 elementary schools, advancing the district’s commitment to robust, research-based instruction for students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

This comprehensive transition provides students and educators with the essential building blocks for reading success. Aligned with the science of reading, Magnetic Literacy explicitly and systematically develops foundational decoding skills, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension across all grade levels. In addition to key skill work, the program uses inquiry-based essential questions and connected text sets to encourage students to analyze complex ideas, engage in collaborative discussion

and express their thinking with clarity.

The curriculum is featured on the Michigan Department of Education’s expanded list of approved Tier 1 class-wide reading curricula, directly supporting the district’s adherence to Public Act 146. This state-level



alignment ensures RCS classrooms utilize evidence-based instructional materials designed to strengthen literacy skills for all elementary learners.

To support educators throughout this transition, RCS has established a sustained, yearlong professional development framework.

Teachers receive continuous professional learning, paired with onsite instructional coaching. Furthermore, grade-level teams conduct regular analysis of student progress via unit assessments. This ongoing data review allows teachers to evaluate growth in real time, refine core instruction and plan targeted small-group instruction tailored to individual student needs.

Magnetic Literacy connects reading, writing, phonics and grammar with high-

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Strategic planning: Driving action using a structured, goal-oriented approach

The Rochester Community Schools strategic planning process serves as a living framework that guides the organization's priorities.

Using a structured, goal-oriented approach to drive forward educational excellence, district focus areas include learning, teaching, leadership, professional development and community engagement.

Nineteen goals were prioritized for year two of the five-year strategic plan. The district is proud to celebrate the following



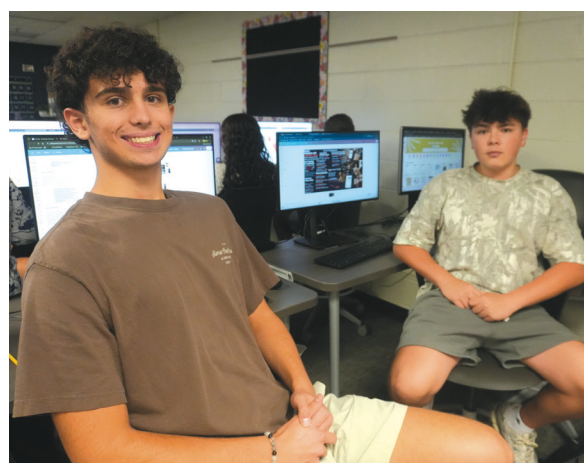
points of pride.

At Rochester Community Schools, reading is a moral imperative. Through the strategic planning process, the district completed a comprehensive K-5 literacy review anchored in reading science. This initiative prioritized instruction in foundational skills, vocabulary, comprehension, and sustaining a lifelong competence and joy for reading.

After a rigorous, multi-year review and analysis, a new literacy resource, Magnetic Literacy, was recommended for all RCS kindergarten through grade 5 students. This new curriculum is currently coming to life in classrooms across the district.

At the secondary level, RCS remains committed to growing work-based learning opportunities by embedding experiences in the curriculum and increasing professional development opportunities.

For high-achieving and high-ability students, Rochester Community Schools continues to explore academic options that are aligned with research and best practices and designed to



maximize student potential and growth.

A point of pride that is a direct result of this initiative includes the introduction of a new dual-enrollment partnership, which brings college-level math courses, like

Calculus 3 and Differential Equations, directly to our high schools. New educational resources were also implemented to guide this ongoing work.

Expanding K-5 access to science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics remains a priority.

"By adopting a structured model, shared lessons and resources are allocated to offer similar experiences to all elementary-aged students across the district," said Superintendent Nicholas Russo. "This initiative has already generated strong enthusiasm among both teachers and students."

As part of the strategic plan, RCS also explored opportunities for alternative scheduling and new course offerings at the K-12 level. The groundwork has been established to further investigate nontraditional approaches to meet diverse student needs and improve engagement.

At Rochester Community Schools, technology and innovation are embraced as tools to propel growth. This past year, the district took a monumental leap forward by successfully developing and rolling out generative artificial intelligence (AI) guidelines, which provide a clear roadmap for responsible and ethical use across all schools. To empower teachers and staff in harnessing AI as a force for innovation, more than 29 professional development offerings were delivered.

The strategic plan also prioritizes student wellness. From a nutritional lens, RCS is proud to introduce scratch-cooking and

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Elementary literacy

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interest units that build meaningful content knowledge. From kindergarten to fifth grade, students have expressed excitement to learn about the topics within the new resource. During a recent classroom visit, first graders were eager to return to the previous day's work, saying, "We loved that book. Can we read it again?"

Families are encouraged to support learning at home by engaging in regular, shared reading, discussing new vocabulary in daily conversation and exploring topics of interest together to cultivate curiosity and a

deeper understanding of the world.



"Literacy truly is the foundation of all learning," said Kimberly Hempton, assistant superintendent of elementary and early childhood education. "By pairing a high-quality instructional resource with a sustained investment in ongoing professional learning, we empower our teachers to meet the unique needs of every student. This combination creates meaningful opportunities for our K-5 learners to build skills, think critically, analyze complex ideas and build lasting confidence."

Walk it. Don't ride it on school property.

Safety is always our priority.

Rochester Community Schools has been monitoring the use of e-bikes and e-scooters on and around school property. The district has also been following efforts by neighboring communities to develop regulations governing the use of these devices.

RCS recognizes that many students choose e-bikes and e-scooters as a convenient mode of transportation. At the same time, the community has seen an increase in accidents and near misses involving these devices.

"Arrival and dismissal times are especially busy for schools. Students walk, ride bicycles, and travel in vehicles and buses. With the increase in e-bike and e-scooter usage among students, walking their electric device on school property will help keep everyone safe, which is always our goal," said Superintendent Nicholas Russo.

To help create a safer environment for everyone, Rochester Community Schools is requiring that e-bikes and e-scooters not be ridden on school property. Riders should dismount upon entering school grounds and walk their device until they leave school property.

"We are not banning bikes. We understand that e-bikes and e-scooters can be an effective way for students to get to and from school. We don't want to take that away. But we also need to be cognizant of the activity during arrival and dismissal times and work to create a safer environment for everybody," said RCS Safety Consultant Steve Schettenhelm.

The goal is to ensure every student, staff member and visitor can travel to and from school safely. Remember: **"Walk It, Don't Ride It."**



Strategic planning

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low-sugar options at all school buildings.

To support a safe environment, security upgrades and refinements were implemented. More than 2,400 crisis alert badges are now in service districtwide. To put some context on the value of this technology, there were approximately 200 activations during the 2025-26 school year that enabled an immediate response for school emergencies. In addition, the new visitor management system registered more than 139,000 students and guests in district buildings.



Rochester Community Schools remains committed to the continuous professional growth and development of every staff member. An employee handbook was created to provide a clear, accessible guide to the policies and professional standards that govern the district. Staff members also have access to additional training materials and resources to improve their understanding of business office and purchasing procedures.

The district leverages a variety of communication methods and tools to provide windows into life at its buildings. Ongoing work from the previous year included standardizing communication tools and introducing a new podcast, called RCS Be Inspired, to highlight discussions impacting K-12 education.

In order to better capture the voice of the community and analyze data, the district also invested in a new experience management platform.

An additional priority for year two of the strategic plan included the commitment to ensuring equitable access to digital information and online tools. When visiting the district website, users can utilize an automated tool that supports compliance with the Americans with Disability Act.

At Rochester Community Schools, the student experience remains at the heart of the strategic plan. Each and every action that is taken defines the future direction to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

"As we move into year three of our five-year strategic plan, we are committed to this ongoing work to ensure all RCS students can receive optimal experiences that propel their future," said Superintendent Russo.

To learn more about the strategic planning process, community members are encouraged to visit the RCS website at www.rochester.k12.mi.us.



Strategic planning

Rochester Community Schools is currently in year three of its five-year strategic plan. Six goals were prioritized for 2026-27.

Learning

Goal 1. Develop inclusive decision-making processes that intentionally incorporate student voice and representation.

Vision. Students will have meaningful input into practices and approaches to learning in collaboration with RCS educators.

Success criteria. By Jan. 1, 2027, processes will be developed to incorporate student voice in decision making at the district and building levels. By June 30, 2027, operational processes will be embedded to consistently incorporate student voice in appropriate decision making.



Goal 2. Design and implement schedules, structures and learning opportunities

that provide students with access to career awareness, career exploration and pathway specialization.

Vision. A variety of specialized focus areas in individual schools will enhance college-bound and direct-to-work pathways.

Career and technical education (CTE) offerings across the district will enhance college-bound and direct-to-work pathways, enabling students to access career certifications, advanced coursework options and post-secondary credit.

Success criteria. By June 30, 2027, offer increased career-based opportunities and content for a variety of pathways, districtwide.

Teaching

Goal 3. Design and implement MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) team structures across district and school levels that build collective capacity to address the full continuum of learner needs.

Vision. RCS will utilize a multi-tiered system of academic and behavioral support.

As part of a proactive approach to behavior, RCS teachers will continue to utilize a deep knowledge of their students' learning needs through relationship building while modeling positive behaviors.

By providing a variety of evidence-based resources and supports, RCS educators are empowered to personally meet every student at their level with the appropriate pacing, breadth, depth and level of challenge.

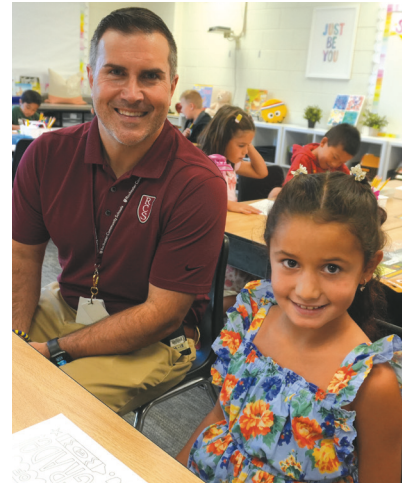
Success criteria. By June 30, 2027, a districtwide framework will be established for consistent implementation of collaborative, data-driven practices and tiered supports across all schools.

Leadership

Goal 4. Develop current and aspiring leaders, establishing processes for equitable access and building a sustainable capacity for the future.

Vision. Cohesive development opportunities will deepen the talent pool of leaders while creating sustainable systems that enable RCS to evolve.

Success criteria. By Sept. 1, 2026, a process will be developed to embed training for current administrators through learning modules and coaching and will be implemented throughout the 2026-27 school year. By Dec. 31, 2026, processes will be designed to identify aspiring leaders and applicable training.



Professional Development

Goal 5. Advance and sustain consistent professional development and training systems that drive aligned practices.

Vision. District departments and schools will collaborate to ensure coherent professional learning experiences.

Success criteria. By June 30, 2027, a professional learning schedule will be created for implementation during the 2027-28 school year.



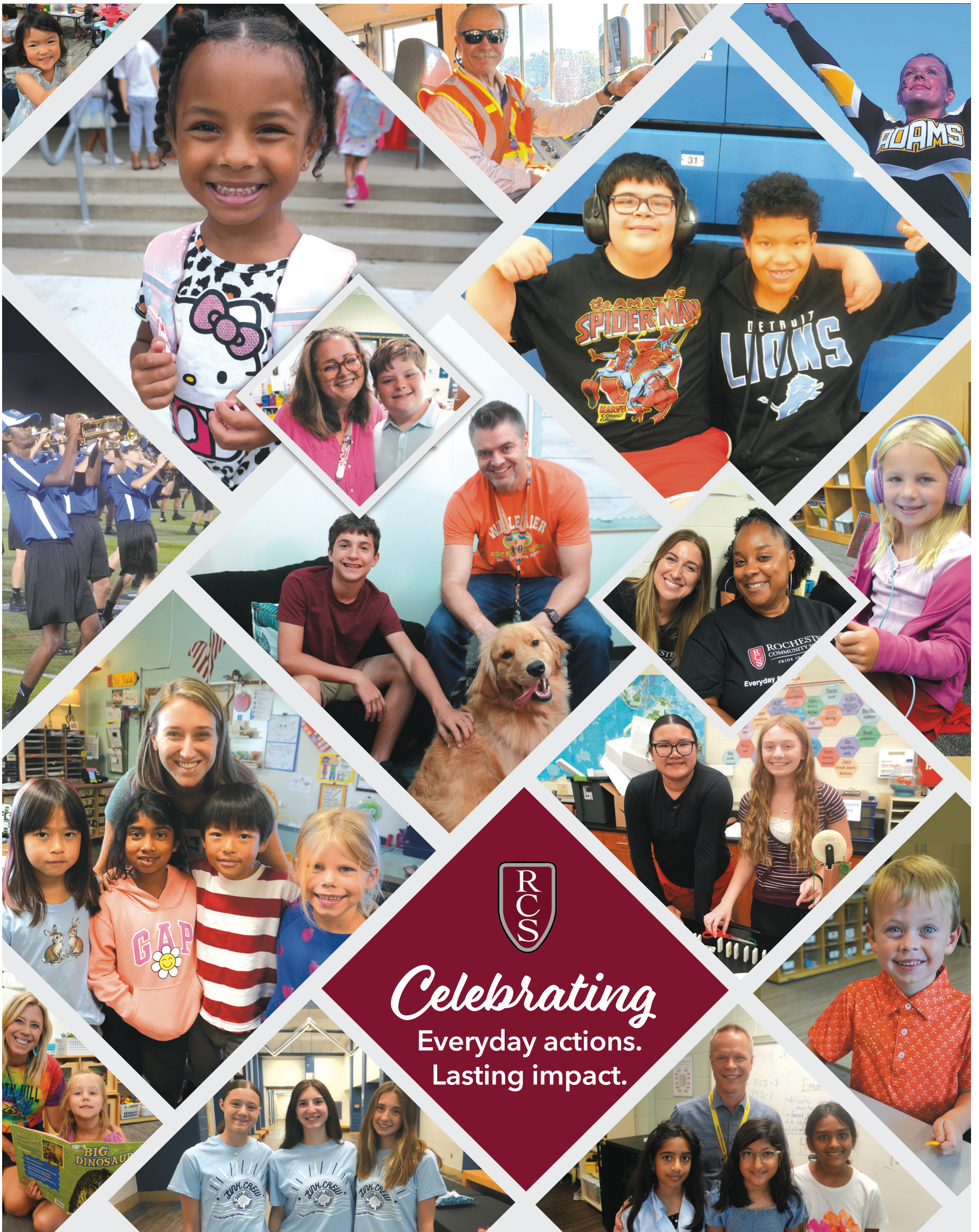
Community Engagement

Goal 6. Design and implement integrated opportunities for new family onboarding, support, tours and collaborative experiences, districtwide.

Vision. To support parents and caregivers who are new to the district, transferring to a new school, or interested in advocating for their students, RCS will provide onboarding, support and collective opportunities.



Success criteria. By June 30, 2027, a systemic process will be developed to welcome new families into the district, using a variety of tools and platforms.



Pride in Excellence

Embedded in the district’s logo are the words, “Pride in Excellence.” During the past year, leaders from every department, program and school embarked on a journey to rediscover what Pride in Excellence looks like through a cultural lens. The district investigated other organizations, held multiple work sessions and assessed its own beliefs. “The result is truly legacy work,” said Superintendent Nicholas Russo.

Pride in Excellence demonstrates that we are student centered, focused on growth, achievement, safety and well-being. Pride in Excellence emphasizes that relationships matter. We foster genuine relationships to create an environment that builds trust and supports honest communication and collaborative problem-solving.

Pride in Excellence reinforces the need for

continuous growth. We embrace innovation and empower individuals to explore new ideas that propel growth.

Pride in Excellence supports an investment in people. We are committed to the continuous professional growth and development of every staff member to support high-quality instruction and services for all students.

And Pride in Excellence celebrates that we are one district with one mission. We uphold a we-over-me mindset to create a seamless, consistent experience and celebrate the growth and achievements of all.

“Pride in Excellence defines our preferred organizational culture. If we truly embrace Pride in Excellence, there is no doubt that our schools will continue to be a place where students want to be – excited for whatever comes next,” said Superintendent Russo.



ROCHESTER

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

PRIDE IN EXCELLENCE

Student Centered

We are student centered - focused on growth, achievement, safety and well-being.

Relationships Matter

We foster genuine relationships to create an environment that builds trust and supports honest communication and collaborative problem-solving.

Continuous Growth

We embrace innovation and empower individuals to explore new ideas that propel growth.

Investment in People

We are committed to the continuous professional growth and development of every staff member to support high-quality instruction and services for all students.

One District; One Mission

We uphold a “we over me” mindset to create a seamless, consistent experience and celebrate the growth and achievements of all.

Real-world experiences enhance academic preparedness

AP Capstone™ is a rigorous two-year diploma program created by the College Board “to develop the critical thinking, research, collaboration, time management and presentation skills students need for college-level work.”

Through the program, high school students take two yearlong courses: AP Seminar and AP Research. Both courses offer students the ability to explore various topics that complement other AP courses they are taking.

“A great opportunity that we offer through the AP Capstone program is that students get to experience real-world, hands-on fieldwork, often in other areas of the country,” said Kara Sears, an AP Capstone educator in the district.

Most recently, AP Capstone students traveled to Florida. In a partnership with the University of Miami’s Shark Research and Conservation Lab, their study included tagging sharks, collecting fluid samples and testing for parasites.

Previous research projects enabled students to complete an ungulate study with Ecology Project International in association with the University of Montana and Yellowstone National Park; explore dolphin and manatee research with the Clear Water Aquarium in Florida; investigate green sea turtle research with the Ocean Alliance Project in Oahu, using facial recognition to locate turtles; and conduct water quality, microplastic and invasive species field work in Suttons Bay with the Inland Seas Educational Association.

“Student interest in the AP Capstone program continues to grow each year. It’s a great opportunity for academically prepared students who want to challenge themselves by choosing a meaningful research project and formulating potential solutions,” said Josh Wrinkle, assistant superintendent for secondary and adult education.

During the 2025-26 school year, 81 RCS students graduated with an AP Capstone Diploma.



This is the official publication of Rochester Community Schools. Please scan the QR code to view previous editions.



National Merit® Scholarship Program



Congratulations, RCS scholars!

Congratulations to 46 Rochester Community Schools students who are commended scholars, along with 24 students who advanced as semifinalists in the 2027 National Merit® Scholarship Program. Students qualified for this honor based on scores through the 2025 PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test).

RCS National Merit Scholarship Program Semifinalists

Prisha Agarwal, RHS
Jiyeon Ahn, AHS
Hiba Akmal, RHS
Lorenzo Ryan Barretto, SCHS
Sanika Gadre, AHS
Shaheer Harrie, AHS
Boden Hinkson, AHS
Addison Kurtin, AHS
Arin Lee, AHS
Braulio Limon-Urdapilleta, SCHS
Elizabeth McMahan, AHS
Gunhong Min, RHS

Meghana Myneni, AHS
Ian Newman, AHS
Rachel Osterholzer, RHS
Tiina Puusemp, SCHS
Hayden Rutter, SCHS
Bryna Sullivan, AHS
Henry Tarling, SCHS
Nainika Valoor, AHS
Akshit Varun, AHS
Aarya Yalala, AHS
Bert Yang, RHS
Larissa Yoshino, SCHS

RCS National Merit Scholarship Commended Scholars

Aarin Agarwal, SCHS
Sanika Arun Sibi, AHS
Siddhanth Ballal, AHS
Dhruthi Bharadhwaj, AHS
Iryna Bobalo, RHS
Daniel Carbone, SCHS
Luciana Catalano, RHS
Hanrui Fang, AHS
Christopher Farhood, SCHS
Joseph Gargaro, SCHS
Kishyo Giri, SCHS
Quinn Gould, RHS
Emmett Goulding, SCHS
Sarika Huprikar, AHS
Sasha Joshi, AHS
Cameron Julian, RHS
Namish Kaluva, AHS
Hoon Kang, AHS
Sadhana Kondapaneni, RHS
Jaelyn Krasny, AHS
Ishaan Krishnan, AHS
Tanvi Kukutlapally, AHS
Lyla Lount, SCHS

Brooklyn Lyons, AHS
Nithin Madhusudhan, RHS
Santanna Minfield, SCHS
Timothy Minfield, SCHS
William Oak, AHS
Shreya Patel, AHS
Adithi Prabhu, SCHS
Akshay Prabhu, SCHS
Brian Qin, AHS
Maryam Quadri, RHS
Harsithraja Raja, RHS
Claire Raymond, AHS
Pranav Redyshetty, AHS
Alex Rendel, RHS
Ibrahim Sajjad, RHS
Jih In Sohn, SCHS
Yeh In Sohn, SCHS
Clifford St. Clair, RHS
Daniyal Syed, RHS
Tyler Vrabec, AHS
Tegan White, AHS
Roselaine Williams, RHS
Dhilan Yusaf, AHS



RCS Foundation Hometown Hustle celebrates 21 years

The Rochester Community Schools Foundation enhances academics, arts and athletics for Rochester Community Schools students.

This year, the Hometown Hustle 5K and 1-mile color run celebrated its 21st anniversary and longstanding commitment to education. More than 900 volunteers, 1,500 participants and numerous business partners had fun raising funds to enhance programs and services for RCS students.

To learn more about giving opportunities, please visit the RCS Foundation at: rcs-foundation.org.



RCS community tailgate events enhance the student experience, forming bonds beyond the classroom



RCS celebrates Pride in Excellence



RCS students outperformed the state average by **25%** on the M-STEP and the county average by **30%** in English language arts and math

All RCS elementary schools identified as having **high growth** and **high achievement** for math and reading using the i-Ready assessment tool

Reading and writing proficiency averaged **87%** on the PSAT for 8th graders



Out of 1,186 graduating seniors, **65% earned a 3.5 GPA or higher; 34% earned a 3.9 GPA or higher** with 4 or more AP courses



More than **2,100** students enrolled in **31 AP courses**; **81%** earned scores that can qualify for college credit



College Board SAT scores average **164 points higher** than the Michigan mean

81 students earned the AP Capstone Diploma



24 National Merit Scholarship program semifinalists; **46** commended scholars

All three RCS high schools are recognized as **2025 AP Honor Roll gold members** for maximizing student performance and college readiness

U.S. News and World Report ranks RCS high schools in the **top 5% or better** nationally, and in the top **3% or better** across the state



**Based on data from the 2025-26 school year*

Cable television update

As technology continues to evolve, the way we access and consume television and video content has changed significantly over the years. Companies, such as WOW, are no longer providing their own inhouse digital cable services. Instead, WOW is partnering with YouTubeTV to deliver streaming services. It is anticipated that Xfinity will be moving in that direction in the near future. The RCS cable infrastructure for Xfinity

is dated. Instead of devoting financial resources to this type of transitional technology, the district will continue to utilize its investment in its streaming environment. Streaming services can provide greater flexibility and access to content regardless of the cable television services that are offered in our community. Beginning on Jan. 4, 2027, Board of Education meetings, graduations, honors convocations and other celebratory and informational videos will be broadcast

using RCS TV only. Viewing services on cable tv will no longer be available. As RCS navigates this shift in processes, the district will continue to provide additional information and guidance to support a smooth transition. Scan the QR code for direct access to RCS TV or visit the RCS website and click on the “connect” button.

