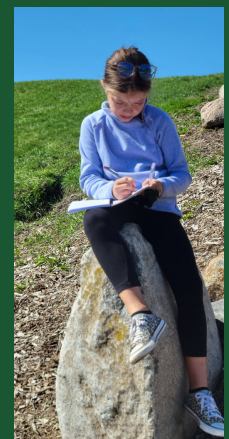


FALL 2021

Rocket Report

ROCKFORD AREA SCHOOLS
DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



OUR MISSION

In partnership with our communities and families, Rockford Area Schools provides challenging opportunities to engage, inspire, and educate globally-minded citizens.



Message From Superintendent

Rhonda Dean

Greetings,

This is an exciting time for Rockford Area Schools. Over the past 18 months, the school board and the administrative team have engaged in a strategic planning process that included collecting data from staff, students and parents. As a result of our efforts, at the March 2021 school board meeting, the school board approved a revised mission, vision and strategic direction. The strategic plan will guide our efforts to ensure we provide a robust quality educational experience for all our students.

District Mission: *In partnership with our communities and families, Rockford Area Schools provides challenging opportunities to engage, inspire and educate globally-minded citizens.*

Vision: *Rockford Area Schools provides a supportive, rigorous, and relevant learning culture producing courageous learners prepared to enter a global society.*

Strategic Directions:

1. Improving our educational programs and partnerships
2. Aligning and developing proactive training and response protocol for increased safety and security
3. Improving supports for students and their learning
4. Strengthening instructional practices, processes, curriculum, and assessment
5. Improving parent, community, and staff awareness and engagement

Core Values:

- **Excellence:** *To be our best, expect our best; to be inspired daily to become the very best we can be*
- **Students First:** *A safe, healthy environment to challenge, engage and inspire all students*
- **Community:** *It's about all of us, all the time*
- **Integrity:** *Align actions and words with values and beliefs while respecting differences*
- **Stewardship:** *Care and responsibility with our resources including natural and social environments*
- **Student Experience:** *All students have access to engage in a rich arts and academics environment, and an abundance of extracurricular opportunities*

Rockford Area Schools has leaned into the challenge of providing a quality educational experience for students while mitigating the effects of COVID-19 in our schools. As a result, we are pleased to report that last year, our elementary school remained fully open to in-person instruction five days a week, with the exception of six Fridays. During those six Fridays, our youngest learners practiced distance learning from home. Our secondary schools, the middle school and high school, operated under an AA/BB hybrid model during the first semester; and transitioned to in-person instruction four days a week in the second semester. We are proud of the Rockford community for their efforts in helping maintain the "Rockford bubble." It's through our collective efforts that Rockford Area Schools has continued to provide quality instruction.

Among the many things that the pandemic has revealed is the importance of skilled trade workers. Fortunately, Rockford Area School has positioned itself to meet this growing need. During the pandemic, Rockford High School was authorized as an International Baccalaureate (IB) World school offering both the IB Diploma program and the IB Career Pathway program. It's the IB Career pathway program that focuses on skilled trade workers. Over the next several years, we will be expanding opportunities for students to gain the knowledge and skills to enter the workforce. This is an opportunity to partner with local businesses to expose students to different vocational options. We are excited about the future of Rockford Area Schools and look forward to expanding our educational programs.

Respectfully,

Rhonda Dean

Stronger Internet Services Could Mean Additional Funds

By Jeff Kienitz, Technology Director

Broadband (internet) services are getting a fresh look in our school district. Hennepin and Wright Counties are in the process of studying the delivery and signal strength of public and private broadband services within our communities, and these results should allocate additional funds to improve the local infrastructure to families and businesses within our school district.

Each county has recently allocated up to \$10 million from federal funding to address the issue of improving broadband disparities in access to the internet and support for digital literacy. Phil Essington is the Director of Broadband and Digital Inclusion for Hennepin County and Elizabeth Karels is a Project Manager from Wright County who are leading their county's efforts for improvement. Our District Technology Director has been in discussion with both of them to help focus resources in our community to help improve digital inclusion and equity.

The Minnesota Department of Education recently requested the school district conduct a survey of all families with children in our schools regarding access to broadband services and the digital issues our community faces. The district has included this survey in our new online registration program. The new online enrollment program will be used to update student enrollments and annual forms through our Infinite Campus Parent Portal program. The Minnesota Department of Education asks each household to complete the survey.

A general mapping of the survey results will be shared with Wright and Hennepin Counties to help them locate areas within our community needing additional resources.

Rockford Area Schools is committed to helping families improve their digital inclusion and literacy. The district has adopted a one-to-one digital device program to provide students with the ability to connect and learn. Each K-12 student in our school district has an assigned Chromebook and teachers have placed much of their teaching resources online to support teaching and learning on and off campus.

The district has also provided internet "hot spots" to many families that reside in areas where digital resources are not fully available to meet the needs of remote learning. Last month, our school district applied for a federal emergency connectivity fund grant with the intent to continue our efforts in providing these digital learning services to our community and continue our support of digital inclusion and equity.

Additional resources

<https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/tech/digital/>

<https://www.hennepin.us/tech>

<https://www.co.wright.mn.us/1017/Broadband-Committee>

<https://www.emergencyconnectivityfund.org/about/>



Rockford Area Schools Receives AAA Rating On The Minnesota School District Credit Enhancement Program

Our MN Rating Call was conducted over the phone with Standard & Poor's (S&P) in Chicago, IL on September 22, 2021, regarding our General Obligation School building refunding bond series 2021B. We received **S&P "AAA"** **Minnesota School District Credit Enhancement Program Rating and S&P underlying rating "AA-"** (Stable Outlook).

This is an upgrade from our previous S&P "A+" bond rating in 2015 for our school district. This is the result of strong financial management of the District and it will help to achieve better bond refinance rates based on our current investment market conditions.



Safe Routes to Schools Update

By Denise Willenbring, Rockford City Council

With the SRTS Plan in place, it's time to shift attention to implementation and a progress update for the various projects in the planning/funding/execution stage for 2021-2023.

Maple Street Crossing and Highway 55, Highest Priority

A Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) has been planned, funded, and approved for installation at the Maple Street and Highway 55 crossing before the end of 2021.

CR 50/Rebecca Park Trail Road Improvement Project

The project scheduled for construction in 2023 will begin at Cut Off Trail and end 600 feet east of Dogwood Street with goals to eliminate the bypass lanes and replace them with left/right turn lanes. Additionally, install median/refuge islands at Kola Street and Sterling Drive crossings, add curb extensions, install enhanced pedestrian crossing signs, and add a potential RRFB.

CR50/Rebecca Park Trail Curbed Connector from Bridge Street to Cut Off Trail

The MnDot/SRTS grant solicitation cycle ending in December could fund the addition of a curbed multi-use 8-10 feet wide connector trail for proposed construction by 2023.

The SRTS team is working on other key initiatives such as implementing an Adult Crossing Guard program, Walk! Bike! Fun! Curriculum, and the potential of adding a wide paved path behind RMS leading to the crossing at CR33/Elm Street connecting to Muttterer Park/Elmwood Trail.

Any questions/comments or if you would like to join the SRTS Team, Contact Denise Willenbring, SRTS Team Lead and Rockford City Council member at dwillenbring0221@gmail.com

Resource links:

www.dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/about.htmlwalkbikefun.org



From the desk of the Director of Buildings and Grounds

By James Leuer

Hi Rockford Area Schools community, I hope you find this information about me interesting and informative. I grew up and did some farming in the Rockford area. I started my custodial career as a third shift custodian and a facilities supervisor at two large metro districts before coming to Rockford as the Director of Building and Grounds. With more than 26 years of work experience in K-12 facilities, I can say one thing for sure, Rockford Area Schools (RAS) is the best school district I have worked in. The custodial/maintenance staff at RAS are the best people I have worked with. I love working for a great organization.

I want to share some statistics on the work our custodians and maintenance staff do every day.

We maintain:

- 140.76 acres
- 2.75 miles of sidewalks to make and keep safe
- 475,000 sq. ft. of facilities
- 3 educational buildings, 1 bus garage, 1 greenhouse, 5 outbuildings
- On average, each custodian is responsible for cleaning 35,000-47,000 sq. ft. each night
- 17 sports fields
- 8 hot water boilers to operate

This is just a small portion of what an amazing custodial/maintenance staff performs daily.

If you have any questions, or concerns about our facilities, please feel free to email me at leuerj@rockford.k12.mn.us.



REAMS

ROCKFORD ELEMENTARY ARTS MAGNET SCHOOL

Arts Opportunities Return to REAMS

By Brenda Nyhus, Principal REAMS

Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School, a member of the Northwest Suburban Integration School District, is celebrating its eighteenth year as an arts magnet school for students in kindergarten through grade four. Students are provided with learning adventures that take them beyond the traditional instructional classroom experience. Teaching through the arts helps students experience concepts rather than merely discussing or reading about them. Teachers focus on a strong academic core with opportunities for creative expression, critical thinking, self-confidence, communication skills, appreciation of the arts, and multicultural experiences for students. These concepts are promoting skills for students that assist them in academic as well as life success.

Students at Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School spent the 2020-2021 school year in school the entire year but had put many arts experience opportunities on hold because of the pandemic. REAMS is excited that these arts opportunities for students will be back this year.

Artist in Residence experiences will take place for all students in grades K-4. The Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School staff is excited to partner with many local artists who provide experiences for students at REAMS in the areas of dance, drama, music, visual arts, and diversity. Children have the opportunity to work with many of the artists for one or more sessions and often couple their learning with a connected field trip. The teachers have also related the work with the artists to the core curriculum back in their classrooms to enhance the students learning.

In addition to artist-in-residence experiences, students will once again participate in the spotlight on the arts concerts at each grade level. Spotlight concerts give students performance experiences that foster creativity and boost confidence. Concerts are connected to the core curriculum and enhance student learning.

Lastly, a major arts related experience that will be returning for REAMS students will be Fabulous Friday celebrations. Students come together once a month in an assembly to share their work. Students of all grade levels share their learning and their talents in a performance-based atmosphere. Fabulous Friday is an assembly where students can share a wide variety of learning in a non-threatening environment. Students begin the assembly with the school song and end with the school kindness song.

As an Arts Magnet School that gives students opportunities in creativity and confidence building, the staff at REAMS is excited to bring so many of these learning experience back to the students during the 2021-2022 school year.

REAMS Sends Kind Messages

On Monday, Oct 4, students at REAMS did their part to spread joy and kick-off National Bullying Awareness Month (October) by "chalking" cement spaces around the elementary school. Armed with pieces of chalk, students decorated the sidewalks with messages celebrating kindness, love, Rocket Pride, and acceptance.

"The relationships we build in school can have lasting, lifetime implications for better or for worse," said Michael Rask, new counselor at REAMS and organizer of the Kindness in Chalk initiative. "Sometimes all someone needs to hear or see are kind, positive words to remind them that they are cared for and they have a village of

people to support them. At an elementary level, an event like Kindness in Chalk enhances positivity and helps kids feel good about themselves and gives them a greater sense of belonging."



ROCKFORD ELEMENTARY

Reading Interventions Succeed at REAMS

Title One and Alternative Delivery of Specialized Instructional Services (ADSIS) are part of the REAMS general education support program. A goal at REAMS is to provide extra reading help and instruction to students who are struggling with reading. The reading instruction is specialized and reinforces and supplements reading work done in the classroom.

It is a goal that reading intervention and providing reading assistance at a primary level will result in more rapid results and a greater success rate for students. Reading intervention at REAMS happens during a student's WIN (What I need) time and does not take students out of the core reading and math lessons of the day. Title One and ADSIS participants meet in a small group (2-4 students), 5 times weekly for approximately 30 minute sessions.

Children will work on phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding words, fluency, vocabulary, and writing. There are two Title One and ADSIS teachers at REAMS who foster an enjoyment of books and encourage students to read as a leisure activity. The teachers also hope by providing reading success, our teachers are able to aid students in developing a positive attitude and greater self-confidence.



Arts Troupes Goes Beyond Traditional Curriculum

Fourth grade students have an exciting opportunity to participate in one or more Arts Troupes during their final year at REAMS. These specialized classes of presentation or performance groups are in the arts areas of visual art, dance, music, or theater. By offering in-depth fine arts experiences, students have an opportunity to go beyond the traditional elementary arts curriculum in a smaller setting with more hands-on training.

For example, fourth grade students have an option of working with Mrs. Weber in the visual art studio creating a year-long project that will be added to the REAMS permanent gallery. Another option this fall has been 4th Grade Choir, working with Ms. Larson and Mr. Eliason. Students in the choir arts troupe learn to use their voice properly for singing and to learn to sing a wide variety of songs in several music styles. The culmination of Fourth Grade Choir arts troupe is singing at the annual District Choral Festival concert with all of the middle school and high school choirs in the district.

A few other arts troupes offered this year include Intro to dance classes, Intro to Theater Games, Reader's Theater (putting on a short play), Gullah Stick Pounding and World Drumming, to name just a few.



Members of the Choir Arts Troupe



REAMS

ROCKFORD ELEMENTARY
ARTS MAGNET SCHOOL



RMS-CES

ROCKFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL - CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Green light for opening the Greenhouse at RMS-CES

By Dr. Bobbi Anderson-Hume, Principal RMS-CES

If you build it, they will learn! Rockford Middle School - Center for Environmental Studies is excited to report the greenhouse is open and ready for students! It has been a long process to realize the dream of building a greenhouse for students. It is located on the school district property across Ash Street from the District Office and RMS-CES, sharing its new spot with already established raised-bed gardens that middle school students have been using for several years. The location was chosen because of its accessibility to both students and community members. There are many plans to welcome the community to the greenhouse for visits, classes, and even shopping!

The greenhouse was built with quality in mind, sacrificing the immediate purchase of furnishings for a structure with a warranty that would stand the test of time. This does not mean, however, the space will not be immediately available to students.

Now that winter weather is not far away, there is a learning curve to be mastered managing a greenhouse in frigid weather. However, where there is a learning curve, there is learning! RMS-CES students will be keeping plants in the greenhouse over winter to learn more about the systems as well as to host experiments with what plants need during this time. Winter will also be a time of planning and grant writing for needed materials such as flooring, growing tables, racks, and a watering system.



Middle School - Place Where Everybody Belongs

By Beth Russell

The first day in a new place can be very difficult. RMS-CES students and staff have been working to eliminate the nervousness and anxiety surrounding the first day and first year of middle school with a program called Where Everybody Belongs (WEB).

A place where everybody belongs is at the core of Rockford Middle School. WEB is a middle school orientation and transition program that welcomes 5th graders to our building and makes them feel comfortable during the first year of middle school. Eighth grade WEB Leaders are trained with activities to support students from the moment they arrive on campus on the first day. WEB Leaders are role models and leaders who help 5th graders understand how to survive and thrive in middle school. Many of our WEB Leaders report that they wanted to become a leader due to their positive interactions and experiences with their WEB Leader when they were in 5th grade!

Positive experiences at the start of the year create an environment for success, happiness, and enjoyment in middle school. The WEB program facilitates beneficial relationships, connections, and experiences for students at the start of their middle school journey, and the positive start increases the likelihood of success throughout a student's years at RMS-CES. We are proud of our 8th grade WEB Leaders for stepping up to a challenge, providing support and guidance for 5th grade, and being positive role models in our building.

ROCKFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL

Center for Environmental Studies

RHS

ROCKFORD HIGH SCHOOL

Rockford High School - An IB World School

By Paul Menard, Principal RHS

As we surge into another school year hoping to put a long season of pandemic adjustments behind us, we find ourselves cautiously optimistic at the many signs of getting back to normal. Though I am in my third academic year in the district, for the first time I was fortunate enough to witness a more traditional start to the school year. We hosted families in the building for an open house, students and spectators filled stands at athletic events, and we welcomed new and returning students in an energetic and positive manner. Many families, particularly those new to the district, shared positive comments about how welcoming, enthusiastic, and supportive our community is.



In order to build on this reputation, particularly in the age of contentious societal rifts, I urged our students to respect individual choices. As I met with every grade level to welcome them back for another year of school, I invited them to look around. Currently, in the absence of a mandate, masks are strongly recommended but not required. The decisions to wear a mask or not are personal (or familial) choices. We are to respect those choices. If we feel compelled to ask questions and discuss these choices, we must do so respectfully and maturely. As they continually have been, our students are a great model for this type of engagement.

There are so many things to look forward to this fall: homecoming events, our fall musical, athletics and playoffs, concerts, our first IB Diploma courses getting off the ground, and more. We are uncertain what the winter months will bring, but we are certainly thankful for the strong start to the school year.

Lacrosse comes to Rockford

By Jessica Matheson

Thanks to a grant associated with the Rockford Native American Parent Action Committee (NAPAC), all physical education students, K-12 will have the opportunity to be exposed to lacrosse. Lacrosse traces its origins to Native Americans and was originally known as “stickball” but is now trademarked “the fastest game on two feet.” Rooted in Native American religion, lacrosse was often played to resolve conflicts, heal the sick, and develop strong virile men. To Native Americans, lacrosse is still referred to as “The Creator’s Game.” By introducing this fun and relevant sport, Rockford Area Schools can incorporate Native American and Minnesota history into the physical education curriculum.



Through the grant, elementary, middle and high school physical education programs were able to purchase sticks, balls, nets, goggles and storage racks (see picture above).

High School Senior Bryan Ortega is on the attack while junior Zach Nelson tries to stop him. (Left picture).

Rockets

discover COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Parenting Support with Early Childhood Family Education

Introducing Jessica Koch, M.Ed, Parent Educator

Some years ago, when I discovered there was a program, and a profession, that supports families with young children because parenting is hard and the early years are REALLY important, I knew I was heading back to



school. I received a Master's Degree from the Parent and Family Education program at the University of Minnesota and am thrilled to now be supporting families in the Rockford area community! I'd like to say this makes me a master parent to my own three kids, but I'm still only human. I do, however, have many more tools in my box from which to parent.

I sometimes compare being a parent to a Tilt-A-Whirl ride: moments of calm, followed by spinning out of control, all while moving up and down and trying to stay in one place at the same time. Oh, and don't forget the uncontrollable laughter that can happen; sometimes out of pure joy and sometimes out of sheer fright. Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) classes are a great place to connect with other parents who are on the same ride as you, looking for a little more time on the slower and more predictable Ferris Wheel ride.

I hope you will check out some of the opportunities we have to offer. I look forward to connecting with you!

For more information about ECFE, visit:
rockford.ce.eleyo.com.



Galaxy program: Spring, Summer, Winter, and Fall

Galaxy Kids is a certified before and after school child care program for preschool through 6th grade students. Offered through Rockford Area Schools Community



Education, Galaxy is conveniently located in the Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School right across the hall from ECFE and the Preschool classrooms. Galaxy is open Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., to assist with family child care needs. They have many different registration options that are sure to accommodate most busy schedules. If you are looking for child care, before, during, or after school, then this may be the program for you.

The Galaxy program is a choice-based program where students get a chance to immerse themselves into many different activities, including art, science, math, theater, music, sports, engineering and technology, language arts/literacy, mentoring and community services, homework assistance, and self-guided activities. "At Galaxy, we strive to promote positive behavior, social skills, and friendships while encouraging self-expression, creativity, and leadership amongst the students," comments Galaxy Program Coordinator Cody Hallahan. "Each and every day is a new adventure for students participating in Galaxy."

Galaxy Kids staff are well-trained and knowledgeable individuals who strive to engage and entertain every student that is part of the program. They are professionals who strive to provide a high-quality program that not only meets the expectations of parents but also is a program students enjoy being a part of. They come to work each and every day to put a smile on students' faces and try to engage all that is part of the program.

If you have any questions, contact Program Coordinator, Cody Hallahan at 763-477-7555 or hallahanc@rockford.k12.mn.us.



Link Crew Helps Make Connections At The High School

By Carolyn Young

Link Crew (Link), now in its fifteenth year at Rockford High School, continues to grow stronger. The Link Leaders have done a fantastic job this fall reaching out to 9th grade students and aiding with their transition into high school.

Link Crew is a program that was created by The Boomerang Project, an organization dedicated to creating programs that allow schools to better teach students as they develop relationships and strengthen ties within the school. As the founders put it:

“The Link Crew program provides a structure which guides freshmen toward both academic and social success. Link Crew helps create an environment where freshmen learn that people at school care about them and their future by [creating] ... support, connection and a sense of comfort and belonging.”

Link Leaders must be available each August for 10 hours of training. Training helps build a network of like-minded student leaders who can support each other as they assist with problem solving, community building, and program development. The training also helps show Leaders the activities they will lead the first day but it also provides experience in the skills they will need to lead freshmen all year long.

In 2020, the Link program was entirely virtual. Because of the importance of 9th grade orientation, an entirely new process was implemented via Google Meets. This year

distancing and smaller groupings were brought back to life. The first day of school is launch day for 9th graders. Students spend several hours engaging in activities designed to find common ground and deliver important messages about success in High School.

Over the last fifteen years, Rockford High School teachers have seen the benefits Link Leaders can have in the classroom. Leaders, having worked independently to lead small groups of 9th graders, are able to see the effort and time it takes to develop effective lessons and relationships with students. They are more empathetic, more eager to participate, and more engaged members of the classroom. Link impacts 9th graders by making them more comfortable with asking questions, with process and procedures, in engaging in friendships with upperclassmen, and in creating a support system that freshmen go back to time and time again.

In the past, Link has been able to play host to a regional Link Student Conference. This conference, led by Boomerang Project speaker Harriet Turk, emphasized the idea that these Leaders are not just Leaders to their Crew of 9th grade students, but also a part of a larger program that works to develop leaders and improve school cultures across the country (and the world). While the ongoing challenges of the pandemic will limit the opportunities we have to do such Conferences this year, we know that these messages remain true. We are all connected.



COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Rockford Community Center Offers Programs For All Ages

The fall season of Community Education programs are in full swing and everyone is having fun. There are still plenty of upcoming programs for youth and adults, so make sure to check out all of our awesome programs at <https://rockford.ce.eleyo.com/>!

You will want to explore all of our options, as there is something for everyone: art, dance, sports, band lessons, and much more!

If you are looking for an awesome fitness center, please check out the Rockford Community Center! The RCC has cardio, cabled, and free weight equipment to help you in your fitness journey. We also have fitness trainers for those of you looking for a certified individual to get you on the right track.

Last but not least, don't forget that most of our fitness classes are included in your monthly membership fee! (Yoga, Cardio Sculpt, Zumba, Pound, Senior Fitness, Prime-time Fitness, Strength, and Conditioning, to name a few.) Come in for a tour and let our awesome staff help you on your fitness journey!



Rockford Community Center

(763) 477-5294

- Single and Family memberships
- Running/walking track
- Volleyball and Basketball courts
- Multi-purpose cage
- Tennis and Badminton courts
- Fitness center- cardiovascular and weight machines



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