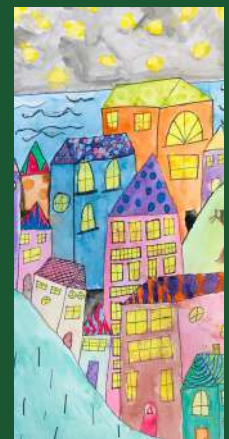


WINTER 2022

# 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 Rockford Community,

It has been a pleasure to serve the Rockford community and to work in partnership with the City of Rockford administrators and other local agencies over the past couple of years. This year has been a breath of fresh air to see students, parents, and families in our buildings, engaging in school events. We are proud of the Rockford community for maintaining our Rockford bubble. It's through our collective efforts that Rockford Area Schools has continued to provide a quality, in-person educational experience for all students.

At the end of the 2021 school year, we were pleased to report that Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet school remained fully open to in-person instruction. So it was no surprise when U.S. News and World Report selected **Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School (REAMS)** to its 2021 top 30% of elementary schools in the State of Minnesota, making it a U.S. News Best Elementary School. Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School ranked number 159 in Minnesota Elementary Schools and number 7 in Minnesota Magnet Elementary Schools.

The methodology for the rankings focuses on two areas: math and reading proficiency. The rankings are based on data from the U.S. Department of Education and only include public schools. At Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School, 76% of students scored at or above the proficient level for math, and 67% scored at or above that level for reading.

Rockford Middle School-Center of Environmental Studies (RMS-CES) and Rockford High School-International Baccalaureate (RHS-IB) are both poised to follow the lead of REAMS. Rockford Middle School is expanding its environmental footprint by offering more opportunities for outdoor experiential learning. Rockford High School is implementing IB for all providing every student access to a rigorous curriculum.

Moving forward, our challenge will be navigating the external forces that impact K-12 education. External forces include legislative mandates, financial limitations, stagnant enrollment, continuous technology upgrades, and the ability to provide necessary improvements to our facilities. We will continue to meet these challenges by leveraging our resources, increasing enrollment, and improving operational efficiencies. Your continued support of our schools is our most powerful lever and for that, I thank you. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions to improve the educational experience for our students, please reach out to me.

Warm Regards,  
*Rhonda Dean*

## Rockford Area Schools





### Summer Programming Returns to Rockford

By Robert Danneker, Director of Student Services

Second semester has begun and summer will soon be here. Once again, this summer, Rockford Area Schools (RAS) will support several academically-based learning opportunities for students!

During summer 2021, RAS hosted 237 students in grades K-12 for summer programming – a 540% increase over summer 2020! The district is hoping to increase student enrollment again this summer. While specific plans are to be finalized, RAS is considering every opportunity to make summer learning meaningful, relevant and engaging for every student!

Summer 2022 learning plans currently under consideration include:

- Hands-on activities and programming at the elementary and middle schools that engages student's imagination and focuses on academics and social-emotional well-being.
- Credit recovery options at the high school that allow students who have missed credits and/or who are not on-track for graduation to complete coursework at their own pace and with the support of licensed content-area teachers.

- Two separate transition programs specifically designed for students moving from 4th to 5th grade or from 8th to 9th grade. Both programs could balance academic support with character education while familiarizing students to a new learning environment. Additionally, the 8th to 9th grade program could include high school credit (stay tuned).

This year, summer programming will be hosted at multiple district and partner locations, including the elementary, the middle and the high school as well as at the Hope Center at Maple Hill Estates.

Later this spring, look for summer programming details and enrollment information.

If you have questions about RAS summer programming, please contact:

Robert Danneker, Director of Student Services  
[www.rockford.k12.mn.us/district/departments/student-services](http://www.rockford.k12.mn.us/district/departments/student-services)  
(763) 477-5846 x 3057  
[dannekerr@rockford.k12.mn.us](mailto:dannekerr@rockford.k12.mn.us)

### From the Desk of the Director of Buildings and Grounds

By James Leuer

Rockford Area Schools recently received a grant from SFM Mutual Insurance Company to help reduce slips and falls during the winter. As temperatures plummet, the number of slips and falls increases. The district used the grant to purchase an applicator machine - the yellow apparatus in the attached pictures - to spray a mixture of salt brine and calcium chloride to deice sidewalks and prevent snow and ice build-up.

The district also partnered with the City of Minnetonka to purchase brine and different mixtures of brine to use on the sidewalks. The district has been working closely with a neighboring school district and with the City of Minnetonka to understand the best way to apply product.

As always, in icy conditions, do the penguins shuffle and wear the right footwear. STAY SAFE.



# REAMS

## ROCKFORD ELEMENTARY ARTS MAGNET SCHOOL

### Happy Days Are Here Again!

By Brenda Nyhus, Principal REAMS

Students at Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School have been back at school for the 2021-2022 school year in a more normal fashion than they were last year due to COVID-19 restrictions. For some students being back at school comes with a sense of relief and hope for continued activities and traditions. What that means for all students is a need to re-learn some skills that were lost or perhaps never solidified in their early elementary years.

As an Arts school, students spend a fair amount of time performing and presenting in front of other people. What is consistent for students at REAMS is their annual grade level concert. These concerts are based on core curriculum learning from their classrooms and consist of singing, playing instruments, movement, and often speaking parts or solos. As students prepare for a grade level concert, they must rely on several executive functioning skills that need to be taught. For instance, do students have appropriate social behavior and self-control on stage, in front of an audience? Believe it or not, those skills are taught and practiced before a public performance. Are students able to focus on the task at hand when something is going on in the audience? Not easy to do when you are a child just learning this skill. If things don't go as planned and practiced, do students have the flexibility to think on their feet? Much of this is led and guided by the director or music teacher, however, it is also a goal at the elementary school to help students learn these important skills. Public presenting or speaking is one of the biggest fears in our society. At REAMS the staff works hard to give students these skills at a young age so they will be comfortable for their entire life.

The students at Rockford Elementary Arts Magnet School are so excited to be back on the stage performing again this year. They are working hard to regain the skills to make them confident, comfortable presenters and performers.



### Students Showcase the Arts on Stage

Students at REAMS are given many opportunities to showcase their creative expression, critical thinking, self-confidence and communication skills through dance, music, theater and visual art.

Throughout the school year, teachers and arts specialists collaborate to connect the arts and academic concepts studied in the classroom in annual grade level performances. Kindergarteners had their first experience with a Winter Program. Second grade students kicked off the Spotlight Concerts in December. In January, the third graders followed with a concert featuring Historical Songs of the USA. The fourth and first graders will wrap up the school year with concerts in March and April, respectively.



## Years of Love and Talent Move to the Next Chapter

This past winter, REAMS said goodbye to two employees who brought more than 50 years of combined service to students, staff, and families in the community.

### **Sally Martinson, Special Education ASD/DCD Teacher; 14 yrs/paraprofessional, 10 yrs/teacher.**

My first position was a substitute for paraprofessionals, helping in the office and in the lunchroom in 1996. For most of my years, I taught academics, social skills, functional skills, and fine motor skills to K - 4 ASD/DCD students. Each student is taught at their level and pace, so each child has their own curriculum.

I was a parent volunteer for my children, and the principal asked me if I was interested in becoming a substitute as a paraprofessional. I hadn't ever thought of having a job in the education field, but I found I loved working with students! The next year I applied for an opening in special education and as they say, the rest is history.

I really loved watching children progress. There were times I would have tears in my eyes when a child accomplished a task they had tried for literally years. Once you work with students, they worm their way into your heart; I truly love them!

Over the years including kids with special needs into general education classrooms has evolved. Students with special needs learn from their same aged peers, and other students learn from students with special needs.

I have learned that you cannot take things personally, be thankful for everything you have, and make connections with coworkers. I will miss the students and my coworkers.

During retirement, I plan to have a slower pace of life. I finally have grandchildren, so I plan to enjoy time with them and my family including my siblings. Of course, I was brought up volunteering, so I look forward to volunteering.

### **Dawn Hedelson, Office Assistant/Secretary, 26 years.**

For most of my years, I welcomed parents, students, and visitors to REAMS. I managed all office expectations which included track substitutes, attendance, and doing everyday office duties.

I volunteered at the elementary school when my kids were young and really liked the teachers. My first job was in 1995. I was a playground supervisor and worked two hours a day. I worked on the playground, in the health office as a health aide, and I covered the office staff for breaks. I became full-time in 1997 as an Office Assistant/Secretary. Going to work each day was a no brainer. I really enjoyed the variety of my job and talking to parents and hearing all the exciting stories about students. Everyday was different and my coworkers were pretty fun to work with!

Some changes I've seen over the years were the new elementary school, new Community Center, tennis courts, and track, the elementary school became an Arts Magnet School, the middle school became a STEM School and the high school became an IB School.

A few of my most memorable moments were the PIE Fundraiser carnivals which I volunteered at every year. I also enjoyed Kindergarten Round-up. It was so much fun to see all of the JOY on each child's face!!

I've learned a lot by working at REAMS. Don't take people for granted. You don't know their stories. Everyone has a story. Don't assume it's all fine. Kindness is the most important thing. The REAMS staff and students know this all too well and live it everyday.

During retirement, I will spend more time with my wonderful retired husband, my two kids (both went through the Rockford School system), and three amazing granddaughters! I also plan on traveling, hiking, playing tennis and pickleball and volunteering more at the Rockford Food Shelf.

*Thank you!*



— HAPPY —  
*Retirement*



*Thank you!*



# RMS-CES

## ROCKFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL - CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

### Student Council Returns to RMS-CES

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

Students at Rockford Middle School - Center for Environmental Studies will have another opportunity to lead; Student Council has been revived and the candidates are deep into their preparations for the election. RMS-CES Student Council 2021-2022 (\*not all members are pictured)

#### 8th Grade:

Levi Bartels- *President*

Khloe Hunter- *Vice President*

Julia Jensen - *Secretary*

Ryelee Ash - *Treasurer*

Olyvia Yonak - *Representative*

#### 7th Grade Class Representatives:

Quiana Larson and McKenna Evans

#### 6th Grade Class Representatives:

Grace Oluwafemi, Elijah Schuck

#### 5th Grade Class Representative

Yaatu Tesfa and Maggie Cihlar



### Language Arts Connects to Nature

By Jan Hendrickson

This past fall, students in Language Arts 8, studied the Oglala Lakota culture and learned how Native Americans value nature. The 5th – 8th grade writers who contributed to the book, *Walking on Earth & Touching the Sky*, attend Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. They wrote about their relationships with Unci Maka, Grandmother Earth. With an understanding of the Oglala's deep connection with nature, 8th grade students headed up the hill to the School Forest to work through a "Poetry in the Forest" activity.

Students read and analyzed a selection of poems from the book while focusing on word choice and figurative language. Through reflection and conversation, students thought about how they could connect to Nature and journaled their ideas. Back in the classroom, students let their inner poet shine and wrote an original Haiku.

Writing is a process, even when creating a three-line Haiku! Students drafted, edited, and revised versions to reach a final copy poem that reflected proper Haiku format and included powerful word choice, imagery and artwork. Writers were engaged in the activity and showcased their creative flair that honored nature. As students journey through the year, they will continue to be readers, thinkers, and writers who are careful observers of the world around them.

### RMS-CES Spelling Bee Winner

By Holly Biorn

The room was quiet, the tension was mounting, not even a buzz of the bee was heard. Rockford's Annual District Spelling Bee was in progress. On Tuesday, Jan. 1, 26 5th through 8th grade students displayed their spelling knowledge in a district-level spell-down. In the 10th round, 6th grader Imani Gladney, reigned as our 2022 RMS-CES Spelling Bee champion! Her winning word was "hawsers," meaning "large ropes for towing or mooring a ship or securing it at a dock." Imani defeated the 2nd place contestant, Ada Koranda (7th grade), ending with the word "conurbation," and 3rd place contestant, Laura Ickes (8th grade), ending with the word "mien." Congratulations Imani! Miss Gladney represented Rockford Area Schools at the Regional Spelling Bee on Feb. 8 in Sartell, Mn. She made it to round six and was the last 6th grader remaining. Congratulations to all of Rockford's qualifying spelling bee participants!



*Congratulations Imani!*

# RMS-CES

## ROCKFORD MIDDLE SCHOOL - CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

### School Forest History

By Elisa Xhelilaj, 8th Grade

The idea of having a school forest was first sparked by the teachers at Rockford Middle School. They wanted a place where they could safely walk students and hold outdoor classes/learning activities. After all, we were and still are a STEM School, so having a school forest would be very fitting. Two teachers, Mr. Madson and Mrs. Russell, met with Amy Kay Kerber and together they walked to an area that would become the middle school's school forest.

Amy Kay Kerber runs the School Forest Program for the State of Minnesota, which provides teachers the training and lesson plans to use in an outdoor environment!

The area where the school forest is located, was a public junk field, a dump. It was filled with old tires, cement blocks and broken washing machines. The land was basically a public garbage disposal for unwanted belongings. This was both harmful to the environment and the people who lived there. Placing a school forest in that space would be beneficial for our school and for the Earth!

Students and staff worked together to properly dispose of the garbage and transform the area by pulling Buckthorn, spreading wood chips, and clearing space. At the very beginning, there were only two trails; no benches and no signs. However, over the years, students continued to add more and more to the forest to make it more welcoming and exciting. We have included creative and artsy signs indicating the multiple trails that have been added, there are bird feeders located in various spots, benches to sit on, and there is even a little "classroom" so teachers can have a setting similar to indoor classrooms.

After lots of hard work, on Oct. 14, 2011, the school forest became an official DNR School Forest. The school forest is very special to RMS-CES because of all the work that has been done by Rockford students. The students contributed to the future of the school. They left a legacy that will forever remain for students who decide to use the wonderful area.

One challenge the school faces with having their own forest is controlling the stubborn Buckthorn that grows and grows. No matter how many Buckthorn cleanups are held, it seems that Buckthorn is inevitable. Another problem is vandalism in the forest. However, the forest is on public land so there isn't much that can be done beside consistent reminders that the Earth is not our canvas, it is a place where we live.

Sometimes, the school forest isn't the most ideal place to hold a class. There could be weather issues or the forest just doesn't accommodate a lesson plan. Despite these issues, the school encourages staff to use the forest as it is our pride and could be a new learning experience. Since they've added a "classroom" to the forest, more teachers have been using it and year-round too! We aren't where we would like to be with the amount of time the school forest is used, but it is a work in progress that's heading in the right direction.

In summary, the school forest is a place that the RMS-CES is proud of. It's a part of our school history and a place that many former students have contributed to. We hope that the legacy of our forest will continue on and it will keep evolving to be a better place for everyone.



### Rockford High School - An IB World School

By Paul Menard, Principal RHS

#### What does being an IB World School really mean?

International Baccalaureate, most often referred to as IB, refers to a world-renowned curriculum that prepares students for college and career success. An IB program is different from other advanced programs such as Advanced Placement (AP). Both AP and IB were established in the 1960s; however, IB updates its training and assessments regularly as educational research continues to evolve and is centered on assessing diverse learning styles.

Testing is another difference. AP tests students one time, on one day (typically using multiple choice tests). IB tests students in a variety of ways over multiple years (presentations, essays, and research projects) and students are awarded the average score of all assessments. AP Programs prove students can test well. An IB Program proves students learn well, perform well academically, develop the character traits of the IB Learner Profile, and make real-world connections.

Most importantly, an IB Program emphasizes interdisciplinary learning. Colleges and universities typically require a general education component over the first two years of study - the primary purpose of general education courses is to prepare students to make connections across disciplines. An IB education trains students to make these connections which results in stronger retention of ideas and sustained learning over time. An AP model tests students on isolated subject mastery.

#### Who can enroll in the IB program?

The IB Program is accessible to all Rockford High School students. Students can follow two IB pathways; the Diploma Program (DP) and the Career-related Program (CP).

#### Diploma Program

The Diploma Program (DP) is open to students in grades 11-12. DP courses are co-seated with our College in the Schools Program (CIS). The academic advantages of the DP include students earning credits from Minnesota universities; potentially from any domestic higher education institution. Additionally, students in the DP have access to significantly higher acceptance rates at competitive universities and reassurance of college and career readiness. Students in this program also complete community service projects, an essay about a topic about which they are passionate, and through a course entitled "Theory of Knowledge," students graduate with an understanding of how knowledge is acquired.

#### Career Related Program

Through upper level courses, the Career-Related (CP) program affords students with real world connections. Students learn from challenging coursework. They engage in professional skill building, adult responsibilities, and are exposed to career fields of interest. Students in this program are connected to a career mentor from the community, complete a reflective project and present it to a business in the area.

At Rockford, we have dedicated staff members who are committed to successfully launching this program and a student body size where we personally know all our students, can identify their strengths and passions, and develop a personalized pathway to achieve their post-secondary goals and dreams.



*Rockets*





## Students Explore Health Careers

By Jessica Matheson

Students enrolled in health careers at Rockford High School explore several different careers in the health science career cluster. We break down the five health science career cluster pathways: biotechnology research and development, diagnostic services, health informatics, support services, and therapeutic services. In addition to student presentations, we are fortunate to have had several guest speakers come in.

Thank you to the following guest speakers:

- Tanner Azeltine - U.S. Marine Corps
- Jennifer Canterbury - U.S. Navy
- Amanda Carlen - Athletic Trainer, TCO
- Stephanie Cihlar - Clinical Research, Medtronic
- Summer Cook - Pharmacist
- Brooke Eischens - Midwife
- Jeff Garcia - Police Officer
- Melanie Hoiland - Physicians Assistant
- Courtney Lotzer, Mat Bedard, and Mindy Latour - Lake Ridge and Park View Senior Health and Living
- Mike Kinnan - Emergency Room Doctor and Toxicologist
- John McIntrye Jr. - U.S. Army
- Tim Skarin - Minnesota National Guard



Rockford parent Mike Kinnan is always a student favorite in health careers class. Mike brings an upbeat attitude with his personal stories as an emergency room doctor and toxicologist.



Rockford parent Stephanie Cihlar, who works for Medtronic in clinical research, brought devices she's worked on obtaining patents for and the students had the opportunity to try them.

## How Technology has Changed Teaching and Learning

By Kathy Mattson

I've been teaching for eighteen years. I was a student for seventeen years. All told, then, I've been in schools for 35 years. Until high school, technology wasn't a regular part of my school experience and-even then-its integration was clunky at best. Over time, however, its integration has really evolved--especially in the last three years. Now, as I integrate EdPuzzle and Padlet and FlipGrid and Google tools regularly in my classroom with students who have Chromebooks, I see something really powerful happening: students are learning how to build their understandings and share their understandings in new ways. Technology allows students to reflect on the skills they developed throughout a unit. Technology allows students to share perspectives. Technology allows a wider array of projects. Technology showcases and develops a different array of skill sets. Technology doesn't make those things happen--it allows them to happen as teachers integrate the technology with purpose. When that happens, technology can truly transform teaching and learning.



# discover ACTIVITIES

## All About Activities

By Dan Pratt, Activities Director

The Class of 2022 senior athletes of winter sports at RHS are pictured below. Your senior year of high school can be filled occasionally with anxiety and stress about unknown future plans, but it can also be an amazing, confidence building time in a person's life. RHS seniors have undergone an interesting (to put it mildly) high school experience considering the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused people worldwide. With that in mind, a question we decided to ask these senior athletes is below. We think that you might appreciate some of their responses.

**"Now that you are a senior in your final year of high school, what advice would you give your younger self entering your freshman year?"**

*"Enjoy every second, and don't take yourself too seriously."*

- Cassia Cady

*"Remember to take it all in before it disappears, four years isn't that long."*

- Rylee Larson

*"Do not stress on the little things because in a year you will think of how silly it was to waste so much time worrying."*

- Jazmyn Weddig

*"Don't take anything for granted."*

- Nolan Perry

*"Go out and explore more, hang out with your classmates and underclassmen more."*

- Caleb Richards



*"It gets easier, just need the experience first then you can learn."*

- Gabriel Mayfield

*"This is not like 8th grade; the grades actually count so try your hardest."*

- Logan Gusse

*"Work hard and have fun."*

- Mackenzie Bakken

*"Working hard and trying from the very beginning to get good grades, but also to go out and have fun. There's a balance, and studies aren't everything but you should continue to do your best."*

- Jayden Doboszenski

*"Never hesitate to try everything out when it comes to extracurriculars. It is better to work hard the first few years to reap the benefits later."*

- Ella Robberstad

*"Be nice to everyone, you never know who needs a friend."*

- Skyla Lewis

Seniors pictured left to right:

First row: Derek Pepin, Avery Gordee, Cassia Cady, Rylee Larson, Caleb Richards, Reagan Pedersen

Second row: Logan Eisentrager, Sam Zilmer, Emma Sather, Aliyah Robran, Logan Gusse

Third row: Natasha James, Ella Robberstad, Jazmyn Weddig, Ava Cusciotta, Makayla Graunke, Carter Edwards

Fourth row: Nolan Perry, Elliot Colton, Jayden Doboszenski, Skyla Lewis, Mackenzie Bakken

Fifth row: Mitch Dorbor, Max Carcamo Briebe, Gabriel Mayfield

photo credit: David Bank Studios





# discover COMMUNITY EDUCATION

## 2022-23 Launching Pad Preschool Registration is Open

Launching Pad Preschool is accepting registrations for the upcoming 2022-23 school year. For children 3 to 5 years old, we offer half-day options 2, 3, and 5 days a week, and full-day options 2 and 3 days a week. Launching Pad Preschool provides an outstanding and unique public preschool experience. Children learn and play together in an atmosphere that is rich in opportunities to discover and explore. They are encouraged to problem solve and try new ways to do “old” things in accepting, nurturing surroundings. The caring and highly trained teachers and staff interact with the children, engaging them in conversations about their work and encouraging them to reach beyond their current abilities. The entire program is designed to be engaging and fun so children don’t just learn, they love to learn!

Online registration and information are available at [www.rockford.ce.eleyo.com](http://www.rockford.ce.eleyo.com). You may also visit [www.rockford.k12.mn.us](http://www.rockford.k12.mn.us). Under the Community tab, click Early Childhood Programs. For more information, please call (763)-477-7500.

## Welcome to ECFE

The Rockford Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) Program welcomes Lori Vigesaa to their team. Lori and her husband have three boys, ages 10, 13 and 16. Their family keeps busy with the boys’ various sports and activities. Before pursuing ECFE, Lori was an Early Childhood Special Education teacher working in a variety of settings, including in schools and in homes. Lori said, “I have always really enjoyed being in the ECFE classrooms, both as a teacher and as a parent. I’m really looking forward to teaching in Rockford and meeting you and your family!”

The ECFE Program offers parents hands-on learning experiences that nourish a lifetime of teachable moments. Parents and children, newborn to kindergarten age, participate in activities and experiences that foster children’s social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and language skills. Parents have opportunities to discuss the joys and challenges of parenting, while gaining insight into their child’s development. They also find a support network and friendships right along with their children. Classes are taught by licensed early childhood teachers and parent educators to provide quality education for both children and parents. Learn more at [www.rockford.k12.mn.us](http://www.rockford.k12.mn.us) or call us at (763) 477-7500, for more information.

## Early Childhood Screening

Identifying possible concerns early is the best way to prevent serious problems later in young children. State law requires all children to participate in Early Childhood Health & Development Screening before they may enter public kindergarten. The ideal time to screen children is at age 3 to 4. Early Childhood Screening also provides an opportunity for parents to discuss questions and concerns, and find out about resources in the school and community.

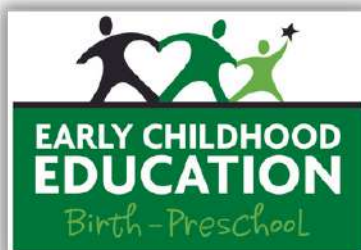
### The Screening Process

Screening includes a health history, height and weight, immunization review, follow-up with parents and screening in the following areas:

- Hearing and vision
- Speech and development
- Fine and gross motor skills
- Social-emotional development

Make your appointment at (763) 477-7500.

Appointments are needed and letters are sent to families with age-eligible children. If you have a child in this age group and do not receive a letter, please call the Early Childhood Programs office at (763) 477-7500.





**Independent School District 883**  
ROCKFORD AREA SCHOOLS  
6051 Ash Street  
Rockford, MN 55373

PRSTD STD  
Non-Profit Org.  
US Postage  
PAID  
Postal Patron ECRWSS  
Madelia MN  
Permit No.4



FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



FB.com/isd883



@isd883



@isd883



Rockford Area  
Schools MN