



Romeo Community Schools

The **Bulldog** Bulletin

Fall 2023

Vol. 7 No. 1



Ninth graders recite the Commitment to Graduate pledge on August 31 during a special assembly.

Welcome Back!

A Commitment to Graduate

Romeo 9th graders kicked off the 2023-24 school year on August 31, with a Commitment to Graduate ceremony. Following lessons in class about the importance of making this personal commitment, each student signed a Class of 2027 banner that will be displayed at senior events and graduation four years from now.

The 9th graders then gathered for an assembly on Barnabo Field, where Romeo High School Principal Bernie Osebold led them in reciting the following pledge: "By signing this banner, I understand that my education is very important to my future and will help me become a successful and a productive person. My goal is to graduate from high school with a purposeful plan and be ready for college, a career, or whatever lies beyond high school." *Read more about the 9th Grade Academy journey on page 3.*



Update from the Superintendent

Dear Parents, Families and Community Members,

Welcome back! We couldn't be more excited about the start of the 2023-2024 school year. Our students have done a great job settling into their school routines and we are grateful for all the dedication of our staff in supporting a successful start to this year.

There is a different level of excitement across our buildings as we begin the new year. I believe this is a combination of embracing tradition and the anticipation for all that is "new" in our district. This newsletter highlights some examples of both. The annual Watchdog campaign and football game at Romeo High School is a genuine example of a tradition that represents the essence of our unique community.

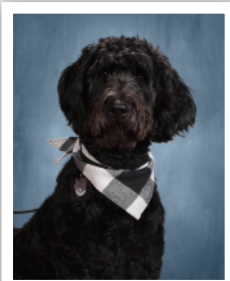
Our current construction efforts made good progress over the summer months. The newly renovated serving area at Romeo Middle School is a good example of "new." We're experiencing the excitement of newly renovated classrooms at Croswell Early Childhood Center, new elementary classroom furniture at three buildings, and new student lockers at RMS as we start this year. We await the new additions at Hamilton-Parsons Elementary, Indian Hills Elementary and Croswell to be completed later this year. We look forward to staff and students moving into these new learning environments.

Construction projects are not all that is new as we begin this year. Our 2023 RCS Strategic Planning is moving forward with year one implementation efforts underway. This newsletter highlights a couple of marquee efforts: the rollout of our new K-5 ELA curriculum and the middle school academy's transformation planning process. It's an exciting time to be a Bulldog!

In closing, our annual theme for this year is "Choose Joy" and I couldn't be more pleased at how our staff and community have embraced this so early in the year. The essence of this year's theme is to remain positive, be grateful and enJOY each day. Although the work of public education is more challenging and important than ever, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve our students and each other in such a special place. It is no secret that the past few years have challenged all of us but the past is behind us and our focus is on the many exciting things ahead.

Go Bulldogs!

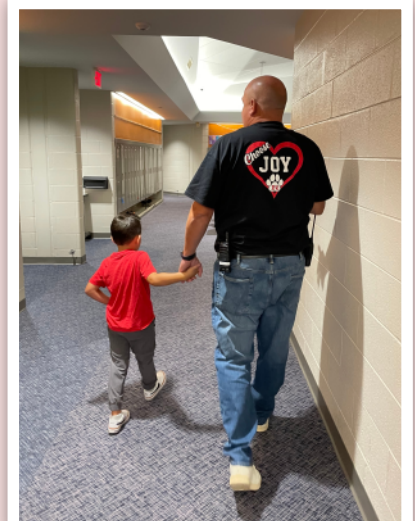
Dr. Todd R. Robinson
Superintendent



Meet Milo!

Washington Elementary students had seen Milo around the hallways last year, but little did they know the 1½ year old goldendoodle would become a regular presence at their school beginning this fall. The therapy dog's "big reveal" took place during a school assembly on August 31.

[Read more about Milo's journey here.](#)



Hevel Elementary Principal Paul Essian helps a kindergartener get acclimated on his first full day of school.

Welcome New Bulldogs!

We are extremely excited to welcome a new group of educators to the Romeo family this school year. This highly talented group of educators—21 teachers, a school social worker, district psychologist, and three administrators—represent over a century of experience. Their tenure ranges from just out of college to 17 years of classroom experience. Our district continues to be a destination of choice for dedicated, compassionate educators. Please join us in welcoming these "New Dawgs in Town" to our community.

Troy Bartlett	Olivia Orsini
Paul D'Angelo	Leah Ott
Fara Galati	Hannah Raymond
Antoinette Genovese	Karen Saabedra
Erin Gillespie	Kelly Sandridge
Anthony Gillespie	Julia Sanko
Meredith Griffin	Erin Schweihofer
Krystal Hildebrandt	Ornela Shkreli
Francesca Hughes	Megan Snyder
Valia Jirjees	Cassidy Tissler
Tatum Loraway	Rita Van Steveren
Brittany Noland	Lauren Wickersham
Molly Northupsmith	Vasiliki Zarmakoupis

The 9th Grade Academy Difference

What is the 9th Grade Academy experience at Romeo Community Schools and why is it so different from the traditional 9th grade experience?

This year's 9th graders are about to find out. Assigned to Team Discovery, Team Expedition or Team Quest for the year, students will have the opportunity to earn points and vie for the coveted championship plaque, awarded in the spring.

More importantly, these teams serve as learning communities throughout the year, creating a sense of belonging, fostering collaboration, and building class camaraderie.

They also create a smaller "school within a school" experience. With a class of approximately 480 students, each learning community is made up of about 160 students, leading to higher achievement and success.



9th graders sign the Class of 2027 banner.



Students compete to earn points for their team.

The 9th graders have a lot to look forward to this school year. This includes a career day, the opportunity to visit a community college and university, and a special ceremony called Pathways Reveal, when students receive an envelope

informing them which academy and pathway they will embark on for the remainder of their high school experience.

Learning and growing together in their own dedicated space affords the 9th graders the freedom to own their own education before embarking on this important next step. Meanwhile, they have the opportunity to explore and experience as much as possible while honing their interpersonal, communication and social skills.

"The 9th Grade Academy gives them a place to still be 14," said Superintendent Dr. Todd Robinson. "It makes a big school smaller, and the teaming model provides a smaller environment within the school so that each student is set up to succeed."

Follow the 9GA Journey with us this year! Look for updates in the Bulldog Bulletin and on social media.

The Watchdog Game



The RHS Marching Band outlines a ribbon on the field for spectators and athletes to fill. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE NICLEY.

It started as a way for Romeo High School's football team to unite for a cause. Today it has grown into a community event. Known as the Watchdog Game, this event offers a way to honor others and give back to those who have faced tremendous adversity.

This Romeo tradition has expanded to Watchdog Week and includes groups, club members and many other Romeo sports teams joining together to help fight and find a cure for cancer.

"It is an amazing event where many from our community show their solidarity in our commitment to fight for a cure," said Varsity Football Head Coach Curt Rienas.

During the Watchdog game, held this year on Sept. 15, several special activities honored and supported cancer survivors. A survivor tent provided a gathering place for honorees to unite before the game. JV players served as their escorts, accompanying them

during dinner and to the survivor tunnel. Just before the game, the football, cheer and dance teams formed a tunnel for the survivors, their escorts, and anyone currently battling cancer to walk through and be honored.

After the game, players took photos with their honoree and their loved ones and passed their jersey on to the honoree or their family as a cherished keepsake. To end the evening, the RHS Marching Band outlined a ribbon on the field, with spectators and athletes filling the shape.

Over the past years, Romeo High School and the Romeo community have raised and donated over \$500,000 to various organizations committed to fighting cancer. A final tally for this year is not yet in, as several other sports teams are contributing to the effort as well. Charitable organizations selected as beneficiaries this year are St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, The Cassie Hines Shoes Cancer Foundation and Rainbow Connection.



Romeo's football team came ready to play, defeating Eisenhower with a 20-14 MAC Red Division win. A player displays the name of an honoree on the back of his jersey, another Watchdog Game tradition.

A New Approach to Literacy



Students from Amanda Moore and Indian Hills are engaged in CKLA lessons.

Executive Director of Teaching and Learning Mr. Rob Murray is excited about the future of Romeo Community Schools' K-5 literacy program.

Piloted last year, Core Knowledge Language Arts (CKLA) was the clear favorite of teachers from every grade level and principals in all five elementary schools among the top three programs researched.

"CKLA is a structured literacy program," Mr. Murray explains. "It's very explicit and intentional about how kids learn to read. It also pipes in the piece we've been missing over the course of the past 20 years: that you get better at reading by knowing things. Kids who have more background knowledge, or core knowledge, are better readers because they are better able to understand the context of what they're reading. Not only does CKLA teach explicit reading skills, but it does so by backfilling

foundational knowledge that has been missing for so long."

A total of 12 teachers—two from every grade level from each elementary building—participated in the



pilot, along with each building's literary specialist. Teachers who were not part of the pilot had the opportunity to observe a lesson led by literacy coach Mrs. Noel

Kaczmarczyk and provide feedback. There also will be additional professional development opportunities throughout the year to help with fully implementing the program.

"The knowledge part is something students have been missing," said Mrs. Kaczmarczyk, who has had the opportunity to observe the program in action in classrooms across the district.



In Mrs. Kaczmarczyk's view, the program is comprehensive, encompassing reading, vocabulary, morphology,

spelling, comprehension, speaking and listening skills and more. Moreover, it emphasizes listening comprehension and encourages students to think critically and dig deeper into discussions based on their experiences beyond their reading level.

"I'm excited to see the growth that our students make," she said. "This year will be the growth year and after that I think it's really going to take off and we're going to see some nice progress."

RCS is an early adopter of the program in Macomb County, leading the way for other districts in adopting and implementing it.

Says Mr. Murray, "The key is to teach those foundational skills that kids need to be able to understand parts of words and whole words and sentences, while also giving them the opportunity to soak in the world around them."



The Middle School Transformation

Following the success of The Academies at Romeo High School, with its focus on preparing all 9th to 12th grade students for college, careers and life, RCS administrators turned their attention to aligning pre-K to 8 to this approach, in keeping with the Strategic Plan.

This process begins with the middle school transformation and, following past practice, involves collaboration among a community of teachers, staff, parents and community partners.

To get the ball rolling, Assistant Superintendent of Academic Services Ms. Jennifer McFarlane attended a webinar in January of 2022 to learn about Akron Public Schools' unique approach. Rather than following the high school model of a career pathway, Akron created community service opportunities for middle school students.

Intrigued by this philosophy, Ms. McFarlane, accompanied by Romeo High School and Middle School teachers and administrators, followed up the webinar with a study visit to Akron, Ohio, in October of 2022.

The next step was to engage middle school staff members in the process. Ms. McFarlane and Ford Next Generation Learning community coach Scott Palmer met with approximately 80 staff members to brainstorm and create the beginnings of an action plan. The focus was on the importance of creating an environment and culture where students could make connections and experience a sense of belonging.

Again, as in past practice, district leaders looked to the Ford NGL roadmap for guidance. They also reviewed the results of an Association for Middle Level Education assessment, in which

RMS administration observed a clear alignment with the RHS Academies and where staff wanted to head.

"It's about envisioning what you want to see in the future," Ms. McFarlane explained.

Two "visioning and framing" meetings in August involving parents, students, staff and community organizations advanced this work. Focusing on student voice, another important aspect of the Strategic Plan, participants split into groups and brainstormed ways to engage students using an activity from Ford NGL.

Another planning meeting among RMS teacher leaders took place on September 7, with team members looking at key focus areas for the future. One community service approach, for example, might follow a model of *Explore/Engage/Empower*, in which sixth

graders would explore a non-profit or community organization to pique their interest, engage with a partner in seventh grade, and be empowered as eighth graders to undertake an individual Changemaker Challenge.

Ideas generated from these meetings will be further explored by a Steering Committee in October and November, with a formal master plan presented to the RCS Board of Education in January. The team's aim is to capitalize on the passion and excitement generated by the work thus far to begin implementation in the fall.

"Middle school kids want to do good things," Ms. McFarlane said. "Think back to your own experience in middle school. What would

have made it better? What we are doing with this middle school transformation is putting activities in place to create a better environment for our kids."



*Top: Josh Tebeau, RMS PE teacher, and Scott Hill, RMS Band teacher, engage in a game of Rock, Paper, Scissors.
Bottom: Meeting participants prioritize ideas during a "Gallery Walk."*

Party in the USA!

The Romeo High School Dance Team, led by senior captains Ashley Hamilton and Maddyn Kemp, held their annual Fall Kids Dance Clinic the week of September 18. Over 128 students participated from all our elementary schools. Joining the students in a performance during the pregame activities at the home football game on September 22 were dancers from the middle school, JV and varsity teams. In keeping with the Dawg Pound theme of the night, the group performed a choreography to "Party in the USA." The dance clinic has been in existence for over a quarter of a century.



2023-2024 BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Dr. Todd R. Robinson, *Superintendent*

Mission

Embracing **R** community while engaging, educating, and empowering students to inspire the future.

Vision

Forging pathways through academic exploration guided by...

- Passions of our students
- Dynamic learning environments
- Invested community advocates

2023-2024 District Calendar (First Semester)

**Tuesday & Thursday,
October 10 & 12**
Middle School Conferences
(Evening Times TBD)



Wednesday, October 11
Homecoming Parade, 6pm

Friday, October 13
Varsity Football Game, 7pm

**Wednesday & Thursday,
October 18-19**
High School Conferences
(Evening Times TBD)

Wednesday, November 1
No School (All Students)
Teacher Professional Development

Friday, November 10
½ Day Grades K-8 - Records Day
*End of 1st Trimester

**Wednesday & Thursday,
November 15-16**
Elementary Conferences
(Evening Times TBD)

**Wednesday-Friday,
November 22-24**
No School - Thanksgiving Break
*School Resumes Monday,
November 27th

December 20-January 2
No School - Winter Break
*School Resumes Tuesday,
January 3rd

Monday, January 15
No School - MLK Day

**Thursday & Friday,
January 18-19**
½ Day Grades 9-12 - HS Exams
*End of 1st Semester

Notice of Nondiscrimination

In compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disability Act of 1990, and the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act of 1977, it is the policy that the Romeo Community School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex (sexual orientation or gender), disability, age, height, weight, marital status or any other legally protected characteristic, in its programs, services or activities, including employment opportunities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policies: Director of Employee Services, 316 North Main Street, Romeo, MI 48065. (586) 752-0230.