

January 2021
vol 18 ♦ no 4

Focus on Outdoor Learning at Rockford Middle School

January 29, 2021*
**Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

February 5, 2021*
**Board of Directors
Meeting**
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

February 26, 2021*
**Executive/Legislative
Committee Meeting**
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

March 5, 2021*
**Board of Directors
Meeting**
7:30 a.m. - 9:00 a.m.

***These meetings will
likely be conducted
remotely and
instructions will be sent
prior to each meeting.***

Teachers and students at Rockford Middle School - Center for Environmental Studies love to be outside and they are out learning all year long. When one of the suggestions to keep students and staff safer from COVID-19 was to hold classes outside, RMS-CES fully embraced it! The mission at RMS-CES is to provide authentic, hands-on, environmental experiences for students, and this involves learning outdoors with the support of our school partners. Although the fall of 2020 was different than usual in many ways, outdoor learning was still a focus at the middle school.

Before the year started, teachers and staff were trained by the naturalists from Baker Outdoor Learning Center on outdoor learning techniques. The middle school has had a partnership with Baker for many years, and it was exciting to learn from the experts about how to run an outdoor classroom. Teachers identified outdoor learning spaces, from fields and the school forest to gardens and the Crow River, and gathered outdoor learning materials such as clipboards, sit-upons, buckets, easel whiteboards, and other items to make teaching outside possible.

RMS-CES is also fortunate to have a great relationship with the City of Rockford, who gives us access to The Lion's Park for learning opportunities all year. The on-site shelters and meeting areas are the perfect setting for students to attend class.



Language Arts studies in the school forest.

AMSD's Mission

To advocate for state education policy that enables metropolitan school districts to improve student learning.



Association of
Metropolitan School Districts

From the Chair

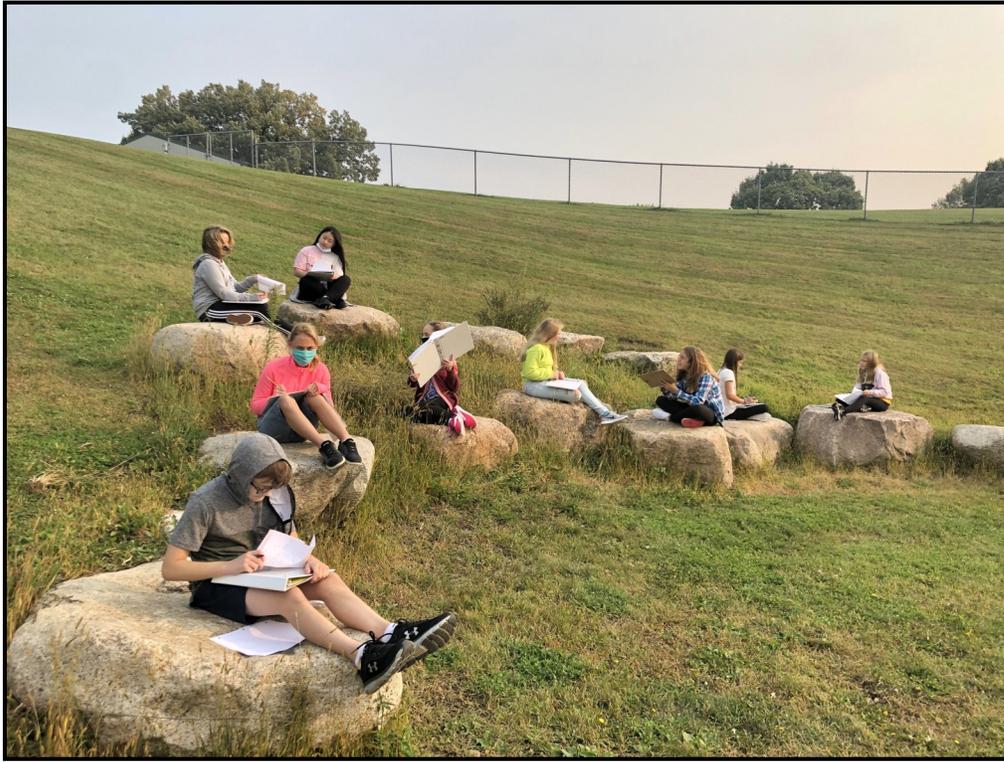
It was energizing to have over 220 legislators, superintendents, school board members, school district staff and other public education advocates in attendance at AMSD's annual legislative session preview on January 8. A big thank you to the nearly 50 AMSD legislators for making time in their schedule to attend and show their support for public education. A special thanks to Governor Walz, Lt. Governor Flanagan, MDE Commissioner Ricker, Speaker Hortman, Majority Leader Gazelka, Minority Leader Kent and Rep. Kresha for sharing their thoughts on the upcoming session. We know the 2021 session will present challenges, but we have persevered through a global pandemic to serve our students and I know we will continue to do so. Please stay engaged throughout the session. We need your voice and advocacy for our students and our schools!

Curtis Johnson, school board member, Roseville Area Schools, is chair of AMSD.

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Students Learn From Nature and In Nature

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This group is out during their Art class to extend their fine arts skills.

Another great resource at the middle school is across Ash Street from the school. This is the site of our raised bed gardens and the soon-to-be home for our greenhouse! RMS-CES is fortunate to have our very own school forest on-site. This outdoor classroom has been groomed each year to become the perfect spot for all classes to get outside, spread out, and both learn from nature and learn in nature.

On any given day this fall, classrooms could be seen outside, enjoying the beautiful fall weather. Mr. Reeck's math class learned with the new number lines on the basketball courts while Mrs. Gregory's class cleaned the rain gardens with the help of staff members from Wright County Soil and Water Conservation. Ms. Udalla's class read a play outside and were able to yell the scary lines, and Mr. Madson's class created sound maps. Mrs. Werth's class compiled data in the school forest, and Ms. Hendrickson's class used the same space for a poetry walk. Mr. Ferdig and Ms. Bauer's band classes practiced outside under the pergola (even as snow started to fall), and Mrs. Lingo's class played flag football.

Students were still able to experience outdoor visits from Baker and the Raptor Center this fall, and teachers and staff modified our typical fall field trips into shorter outdoor lessons. 7th graders saw raptors up close and had a lesson on mapping and GPS, and 6th and 8th graders will participate in archery and voyageur activities. Students in Mrs. Oliverius's 5th grade class identified animal skulls and pelts with naturalist Chad Hollinbeck during their Baker visit. Mrs. O, who has prior experience teaching as a naturalist, is currently planning an outdoor winter day for her 5th grade class. Like many staff members at RMS-CES, she is passionate about the outdoors and enjoys teaching and learning with students outside of the classroom.

RMS-CES teachers work incredibly hard to provide engaging lessons in the outdoor classrooms near our building. Students and staff both report feeling connected to nature and excited about being outside during the school day. Despite all the challenges that 2020 has brought to education, being outside with students was a continued highlight of the start of the school year.



Fifth graders identifying animal skulls and pelts

This month's member spotlight was submitted by Beth Russell, STEM Coordinator, and Bobbi Anderson-Hume, Ph.D, Principal, Rockford Middle School—Center for Environmental Studies.

2021 AMSD Legislative Session Preview Brings Legislators and Education Leaders Together

January 5 saw an unprecedented start to a legislative session as the Minnesota Legislature convened the 2021 session with many members being sworn in virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, for the first time the AMSD Legislative Session Preview, held on January 8th, was conducted in a virtual format. Despite the preview being held remotely, more than 220 attendees, including legislators, legislative staff, superintendents, school board members and district staff, came together to discuss AMSD’s legislative priorities and the outlook for the 2021 session.



In addition, Gov. Tim Walz, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan, and Commissioner of Education Mary Cathryn Ricker, spoke about the critical importance of E-12 education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact that distance learning has had on students throughout the state. While the 2020-21 school year returned with some school districts meeting in person or a hybrid learning model, most districts have had to transition to distance learning at least part of the time under the state’s Safe Learning Plan. The leaders’ remarks followed a presentation by three AMSD superintendents who shared an overview of AMSD’s legislative platform.

AMSD Superintendents Christine Tucci Osorio of North St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale, Kim Hiel of Fridley, and Mike Redmond of Shakopee, presented not just the challenges that the pandemic has brought to metro-area school districts, but also the longstanding challenges that face small, large, metro and rural school districts alike.

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Legislative Session Preview Highlights 2021 Platform Priorities

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Supt. Tucci Osorio focused on the importance of stabilizing education funding and highlighted the [report from the School Finance Working Group](#), which she co-chaired, that identified several priorities to stabilize the funding system and improve educational outcomes.

Supt. Hiel spoke specifically to closing opportunity gaps — for students as well as new teachers in Minnesota. Supt. Hiel particularly cited the importance of recruiting and retaining teachers of color including the importance of maintaining the multiple pathways to licensure provided under the tiered licensing system.

Supt. Redmond spoke to the importance of indexing the funding formula to inflation, reducing mandates, encouraging innovation in education, and increasing and expanding the allowable uses of Long-term Facilities Maintenance revenue to ensure safe schools.

The five key themes in the 2021 platform include:

- Stabilizing school funding
- Closing opportunity gaps
- Ensuring safe schools
- Enhancing taxpayer equity
- Reducing mandates and encouraging innovation

Following the presentations and the remarks, the preview ended with a legislative panel that featured Senate Majority Leader Sen. Paul Gazelka (R-Nisswa), Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent (DFL-Woodbury), Speaker of the House Rep. Melissa Hortman (DFL-Brooklyn Park), and Rep. Ron Kresha (R-Little Falls), the ranking minority member on the House Education Finance Committee.

The panel took questions from AMSD Executive Director Scott Croonquist and shared their respective caucus' priorities and goals for the session.

[Link: View a PDF of the 2021 AMSD Legislative Platform](#)

[Link: View a PDF of the Superintendent Presentations at the Legislative Preview](#)

