

JUNE 2026 | ISSUE 45

ROCK RIDGE REPORTER

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF ROCK RIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



EDUCATION TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION

LAURENTIAN GRADES PREK-6 PATRIOTISM IN COLOR

We are proud to recognize Sophie and Na'Zailya for their outstanding achievement in a recent art contest sponsored by the VFW!

Their creativity, talent, and hard work earned them top honors, and we couldn't be more excited to celebrate their success. Through their artwork, they showcased not only artistic skill, but also the dedication and imagination that make our students shine.



A WALK DOES EVERYONE GOOD

Students took advantage when Minnesota's beautiful spring weather showed up last month by enjoying a nature walk around our campus. As they explored the outdoors, students observed signs of the changing season, appreciated the natural beauty surrounding our school, and enjoyed the opportunity to learn and connect outside the classroom.



Experiences like these provide valuable opportunities for students to stay active, engage with nature, and develop a greater appreciation for the environment. The sunshine, fresh air, and scenic campus setting made for a memorable day of learning and exploration.



MEET KODA

This year, a Laurentian 3rd grade classroom welcomed a very special new member – our bearded dragon, Koda! What began as a classroom pet quickly became an incredible hands-on learning experience for our students.

Koda’s name has a meaningful story behind it. Earlier this year, author Mark Mindt visited our classroom to share about his books and life philosophy. At the time, “Koda” was written on the board as one of our possible pet names. In a memorable coincidence, Mr. Mindt shared that Koda was also his nickname and even showed students his license plate with the name on it! Students also learned that “Koda” means “friend” in the Dakota language, making it the perfect name for our classroom companion.

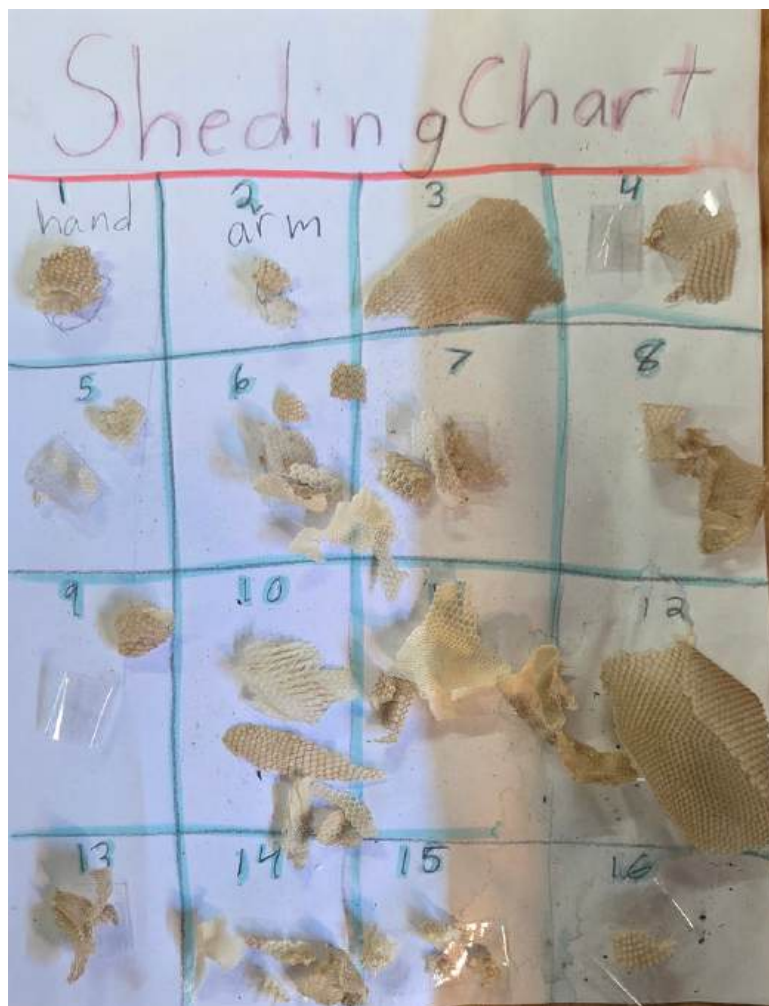


Students have taken great pride in caring for Koda through rotating “Zoologist” jobs. They help with feeding, fresh water, habitat care, and monitoring temperature and humidity levels. Along the way, students have learned about animal adaptations, camouflage, nutrition, habitat needs, and the importance of calcium and vitamin D3 in preventing metabolic bone disease. They even learned how gut-loading dubia roaches helps provide important nutrients for reptiles.

This experience has brought science to life while helping students grow in responsibility, teamwork, curiosity, and empathy. Koda has become much more than a classroom pet – she has become an important part of our classroom family.

We would also like to extend a sincere thank you to the Rock Ridge Education Fund for awarding our classroom a grant that made this amazing opportunity possible for our students.

And a special thank you to our custodian, Mr. Kipley!! He was the driving force, who initially purchased Koda and brought her to us from Snake Discovery!



MOVING ON UP!

Laurentian Elementary proudly celebrated the 6th Grade Class of 2026!

This special milestone marks the completion of their elementary school journey and the beginning of an exciting new chapter.

Throughout the years, these students have demonstrated academic growth, creativity, perseverance, and determination.

We are incredibly proud of their accomplishments and the young people they have become. Congratulations, Class of 2026—we can't wait to see all the great things your future holds!



PARKVIEW

GRADES PREK-2

LIL' SCIENTISTS, BIG DISCOVERIES

Little scientists dressed in lab coats, wearing safety goggles, and mixing "potions" could be seen recently in the ECFE classroom.



The children were taking part in the "STEAM Specialty class" – a four week class which helped young explorers to experience hands-on learning. Other specialty classes included "Hands on Cooking" and "Reading Literacy."



GOING ON A BEAR HUNT

First graders had fun at their end-of-year field trip to the Bear Center in Ely!

Through different stations, they learned about animals in Northern MN, played "Hibernate, Migrate, or Adapt," met garter snakes, Noodle and Spaghetti, and of course, met the bears - Lucky, Holly, and Tasha!



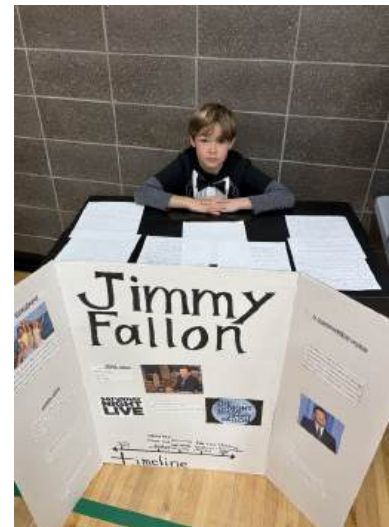
NORTH STAR GRADES 3-6

WHO WOULD YOU LIKE TO MEET?

Our 5th grade students recently transformed North Star into a living museum during their annual Wax Museum Project. Each student selected a famous person, researched their life and accomplishments, and created a presentation highlighting their contributions to society.



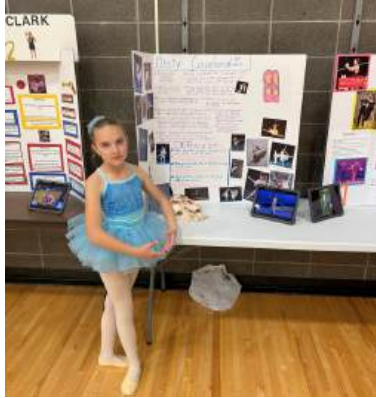
On museum day, students dressed as their chosen historical figure and stood proudly beside their displays. Visitors had the opportunity to learn about inventors, presidents, athletes, scientists, artists, activists, and many other influential individuals.



This project provided students with valuable opportunities to strengthen their research, writing, and presentation skills while developing a deeper appreciation for the people who have shaped our world. We are incredibly proud of the effort, creativity, and confidence our 5th graders demonstrated throughout this project. Thank you to the families and community members who joined us in celebrating their hard work!

HERE FISHY, FISHY...

On the Wednesday following the fishing opener, the 5th grade participated in the 2nd annual City Connect Fishing Contest hosted by Mr. Little's Class. All bait and over 40 prizes were donated by local businesses to the event.



Though the fishing on Silver Lake was slow, the times were good, and lifelong fishing skills were acquired. Fisherman's knots, reel mechanics, and tackle installation were learned by Mr. Little's students, which allowed them to be the "fishing guide" for each team of 4 kids. This was to help them become independent kids that can enjoy some fishing in their spare time this summer, even if mom and dad are a little too busy to help!



Sixth graders from his last year's class also came to support the event, which was a great help in knowing the "secret spot" where the one and only fish was caught. Maisie Knotts won the whole contest with a 16-inch Largemouth Bass. She was aided by 6th grader, Brenna Westling.



RRHS GRADES 7-12

EXCELLENCE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND A LEGACY OF ACHIEVEMENT

As the 2025-2026 school year comes to a close, Rock Ridge High School has much to celebrate. This year has been defined by achievement, innovation, service, and a commitment to the belief that has become the foundation of our school culture: Our School, Our Responsibility.

Nowhere was that commitment more evident than in the graduating Class of 2026. As seniors crossed the stage at Raduenz Field on May 29, they left behind a legacy that will be felt for years to come. Throughout their time at Rock Ridge, these students demonstrated what can happen when a community believes in its young people, challenges them to excel, and provides opportunities unlike anywhere else.

The Class of 2026 distinguished itself through excellence in academics, activities, athletics, leadership, and service. In athletics and activities, this group helped lead Rock Ridge to a State Team Championship, 16 State Tournament team appearances, and nearly five times as many individual state participants as previous graduating classes. Students advanced to national competitions through DECA for three consecutive years, represented Rock Ridge at state competitions in Music, Speech, and One Act Play, and earned top-five finishes in multiple Iron Range culinary competitions. This class also helped revive the beloved Madrigal Dinner, bringing back a tradition that had not been seen in over two decades.

Beyond competition and performance, these students helped create opportunities for others. They played a key role in launching Unified Sports at Rock Ridge, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to compete and represent their school. They also helped organize the first high school hockey game ever announced in Ojibwe, honoring the rich cultural heritage of our region and creating a moment that resonated throughout the community.

Academically, the Class of 2026 raised the bar. Students completed an impressive 305 college-level courses through Rock Ridge University, our College-in-the-Schools and Advanced Placement programs. Those opportunities translated into more than \$600,000 in college tuition savings for families while preparing students for the rigor of post-secondary education. The class also earned over \$1.4 million in scholarships, produced five Alworth Scholars, and celebrated 45 students who graduated with both a high school diploma and an Associate of Arts degree. Rock Ridge

students also captured first place in the St. John's University Engineering Design Competition, further demonstrating the academic excellence that has become a hallmark of the school.

The school's Career Academy model continued to showcase how education can extend beyond traditional classroom experiences. For the first time in school history, more than 60 graduates earned Pathway Proficiency Cords and Senior Capstone distinctions, recognizing students who demonstrated mastery within their chosen career pathways. Students built "The Wolverine" fish houses through Rock Ridge Construction, earned Certified Nursing Assistant credentials, became certified Educational Assistants, and completed capstone projects connected directly to future careers. These experiences allowed students to graduate not only with diplomas but with industry-recognized skills and certifications that will serve them long after high school.

The accomplishments of the senior class were highlighted during the 2026 Senior Scholarship Ceremony held on May 17 in the Rock Ridge Performing Arts Center. The event recognized scholarship recipients, military enlistees, dual-degree graduates, National Honor Society members, and students earning top academic honors. More than 180 scholarships were awarded, totaling over \$1.4 million. Beau Akerson and Noah Perron were recognized for their commitment to serving in the United States Marine Corps, while Brynley Heisel was honored for enlisting in the Minnesota Army National Guard. Five students were awarded the prestigious Alworth Foundation Scholarship, one of the most respected scholarship programs in the region.

Yet perhaps the most meaningful accomplishments of the Class of 2026 cannot be measured in scholarships, championships, or awards. Through National Honor Society, CORE, WEB, LEO Club, athletics, activities, and countless acts of service that never made headlines, these students gave thousands of hours back to their school and community. They lived the philosophy of Our School, Our Responsibility by taking ownership of the culture and climate of Rock Ridge High School and helping make it a place where students feel connected, supported, and valued.

That same spirit was on display recently when CORE students helped organize a community-wide event at the new Eveleth Community Center. More than 150 community members attended an evening filled with activities, music, food, and fun. Guests enjoyed bouncy houses, axe throwing, button making, puzzle coloring, and performances by student band Rhetorical and the Rock Ridge Fiddle Club. Students ran the activities, prepared food, welcomed guests, and ensured everyone felt included. The event was such a success that plans are already underway to make it an annual tradition.

Inside the classroom, students continued to engage in

rigorous and meaningful learning experiences. CIS Chemistry students recently completed their final laboratory investigation of the year, an Acid-Base Titration Lab that challenged them to apply advanced scientific concepts using college-level laboratory techniques. Experiences like these demonstrate the depth of academic opportunities available to Rock Ridge students and the school's commitment to preparing graduates for success beyond high school.

This year also brought significant recognition to Rock Ridge High School itself. The school received the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals Gold Star Award for Innovation in recognition of its work surrounding Our School, Our Responsibility, while the facility earned the prestigious 2025 James D. MacConnell Award, recognizing it as the best-designed educational facility in the world. These honors reflect not only the vision behind the building and programs but also the students who bring them to life every day.

As the school year concludes, there is a great sense of pride across the Rock Ridge community. The accomplishments of our students remind us that education is about much more than grades, test scores, or diplomas. It is about creating opportunities, building character, serving others, and preparing young people to make a positive impact on the world around them.

The Class of 2026 has done exactly that.

On behalf of the Rock Ridge High School staff, School Board, families, and community, thank you for the impact you have had on our school. You have left Rock Ridge better than you found it, and we could not be prouder of all that you have accomplished.

Congratulations, Class of 2026. The future is bright, and your story is just beginning.



