

# THE RED & WHITE

FEBRUARY 2025

## A LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

### Vicksburg Community Schools Families,

I'd like to officially welcome you to the second semester of the school year. I am excited about the great things to come in this second half of our year.

I also want to take a moment to thank our community for their patience and understanding during our recent extreme cold temperatures and snow days. I recognize how difficult multiple snow days in a row can be for families. The safety and security of our students and staff will always be our number one priority. Please know multiple factors go into deciding snow days and we have a team of

administrators who drive the roads, monitor the weather and speak with other Kalamazoo County school districts before decisions are made.

We are gearing up for Winter Homecoming this month. I am looking forward to all the fun and excitement at our schools during winter homecoming week.

The second semester brings new opportunities for learning, growth, and connection for our Bulldogs. Our focus at VCS remains on providing a high-quality education that prepares all of our students for success. Whether it is through academics,

extracurricular activities, or community engagement, we are committed to nurturing the potential of every student.

In this month's Red and White you'll read about ways you can help support our students through a fun event as well as the rollout of a new program designed to improve playtime at our schools.



Regards,

**Keevin O'Neill, SUPERINTENDENT**

## Steve Peters Named New Softball Head Coach

Vicksburg High School is thrilled to announce the appointment of Steve Peters as the new head coach of the varsity softball team. With over 15 years of experience coaching youth fastpitch, Coach Peters brings a wealth of expertise, passion, and a proven track record of success to the Bulldogs program.

Coach Peters has an impressive history of developing athletes and leading teams to victory. In 2015, he guided the Vicksburg Little League All-Star team to their first-ever state championship. His coaching journey includes serving as a varsity assistant coach at Schoolcraft High School and head coaching at Finesse, one of Michigan's premier softball clubs.

Over the past decade, Coach Peters has led his club teams to more than 500 victories against elite competition across the Midwest, with over 100 student-athletes continuing their softball careers at collegiate levels ranging from NAIA to Division I. In addition to team success, he

is dedicated to player development, hosting skill camps, and instructing athletes throughout the state.

When asked about this new chapter, Coach Peters shared his excitement, "I would like to thank Mike Roy and the Vicksburg Ad-

ministration for the opportunity to lead the softball program. We are eager to continue building on the rich tradition of Vicksburg Bulldog softball, competing at the highest level, and representing our community with pride. We'll see you at the field this spring— go Bulldogs!"

Please join us in welcoming Coach Peters to the Vicksburg family! We're confident his leadership and dedication will inspire greatness in our student-athletes both on and off the field.



**INTRODUCING THE NEW VHS SOFTBALL COACH**

**STEVE PETERS**

## High School Students Tour Channel 3

Vicksburg High School students in our new television production class got a hands-on tour of the studio and production department at WWMT recently.

Students got to sit in the studio during the noon show and then learned how the weather green screen, cameras and production equipment all work. They also toured the newsroom and learned about the process of writing and building newscasts.

It was a great experience for the students who are interested in possible careers in TV and film production.

Thank you Channel 3 team for taking the time to share this experience with our students!



# Playworks Comes to Indian Lake Elementary



## Indian Lake Elementary Expands Recess Rollout with Playworks: Best Practices for Transforming Play

After winter break, Indian Lake Elementary officially launched its Playworks Recess Rollout, taking the foundational strategies introduced during December's "Power of Play" training to the playground. With the support of Playworks Regional Partnership Manager Kat McKibbin, the school has implemented innovative best practices to ensure every recess is structured, inclusive, and engaging.

### Establishing Recess Best Practices

To create a consistent and meaningful recess experience, Indian Lake Elementary has adopted a series of best practices designed to promote safety, teamwork, and accountability:

#### Home Base Check-Ins

At the start of each recess, students and staff gather at a designated Home Base. This daily check-in sets a positive tone for the playtime ahead and ensures everyone is on the same page.

**PAWS Expectations:** Supervisors and students review PAWS expectations (Practice Kindness, Act Responsibly, Work Hard, Stay Safe and Focused), reinforcing the core values of recess.

**Connection with Supervisors:** Students check in with recess supervisors, fostering relationships and a sense of community.

**Game Updates:** Staff introduce or highlight specific games for the day, ensuring clarity and enthusiasm for participation.

This simple yet effective routine has helped students transition smoothly into play, reducing confusion and creating a

welcoming environment.

### Recess Closing Activities

Each recess concludes with a brief wrap-up session, allowing students to reflect on their playtime and refocus before returning to the classroom.

**Celebrating Success:** Supervisors highlight what went well during recess, such as teamwork or creative problem-solving.

**Refocusing Activity:** A quick, engaging activity (such as a mindfulness moment or a group chant) helps students shift their energy back to learning mode before reentering the building.

### Recess Equipment Management System

Another critical component of the rollout has been the introduction of a recess equipment management system, which teaches students responsibility while ensuring resources are used appropriately.

**Clear Expectations:** Students are taught the proper use of equipment, as well as the rules for popular games, during pre-teaching sessions and Home Base check-ins.

**Student Ownership:** A new system encourages students to take ownership of the equipment, assigning roles such as "equipment managers" to help distribute, collect, and care for items.

**Accountability:** Supervisors and student leaders work together to track equipment, promoting a shared sense of responsibility and pride.

"Empowering students to manage and care for the equipment has been a game-changer," said Kat McKibbin. "Not only does it keep things organized, but it also helps kids feel more invested in their recess experience."

### Transforming Recess Culture

Since the rollout began, the positive impact of these best practices has been evident:

**Improved Behavior:** The combination of structured activities and clear expectations has reduced behavioral issues, allowing students to spend more time playing and less time resolving conflicts.

**Inclusive Play:** Students of all ages and abilities are participating more actively, thanks to Playworks' adaptable games and an intentional focus on inclusion.

**Student Empowerment:** With leadership opportunities like equipment management, students are taking ownership of their recess experience in new and exciting ways.

### An Invitation to Collaborate

Indian Lake Elementary is proud to partner with Playworks and believes the power of play can benefit schools across the region. In mid-January, Indian Lake hosted a showcase where staff members and administrators from neighboring schools and programs observed the Recess Rollout in action. This experience sparked meaningful conversations about how Playworks strategies could enhance recess and overall school culture beyond Indian Lake.

### Partnering for a Brighter Future

We invite regional schools and educational leaders to join us in exploring the potential of Playworks to create active, inclusive, and positive school environments. By working together, sharing insights, and exchanging ideas, we can amplify the benefits of play for students, staff, and communities.

At Indian Lake, our continued partnership with Playworks

focuses on key areas for growth that can also inspire collaboration:

### Expanding Leadership Opportunities:

Playworks fosters student leadership and ownership through structured roles and inclusive practices. We are committed to helping students develop confidence and collaboration skills and invite others to explore how leadership can play a central role in enhancing recess experiences.

### Strengthening Staff Engagement:

Ongoing professional development with Playworks equips educators and staff with tools to create safe, inclusive, and engaging play environments. We welcome opportunities to collaborate with other schools on training or share strategies for integrating Playworks practices into daily routines.

### Measuring and Sustaining Impact:

By tracking participation, behavior, and feedback, we aim to measure the long-term success of Playworks strategies.

### Let's Build a Culture of Play Together

The Playworks program has shown us the immense potential of structured, inclusive play to transform schools and student experiences. By collaborating, we can build a shared vision of how play can foster stronger connections, better conflict resolution, and more joyful learning environments for all.

### A Vision for the Future

With the addition of Home Base check-ins, recess closing activities, and an equipment management system, Indian Lake Elementary has elevated its commitment to creating a safe, active, and inclusive environment for all students. These innovations not only enhance the school's culture but also serve as a blueprint for other schools in the region seeking to transform recess into a cornerstone of social-emotional learning and community building.

"We're thrilled with the progress we've seen so far," said Dr. Bacalia. "The Playworks program has been a catalyst for meaningful change, and we're excited to continue building a culture of play that empowers every student to thrive."

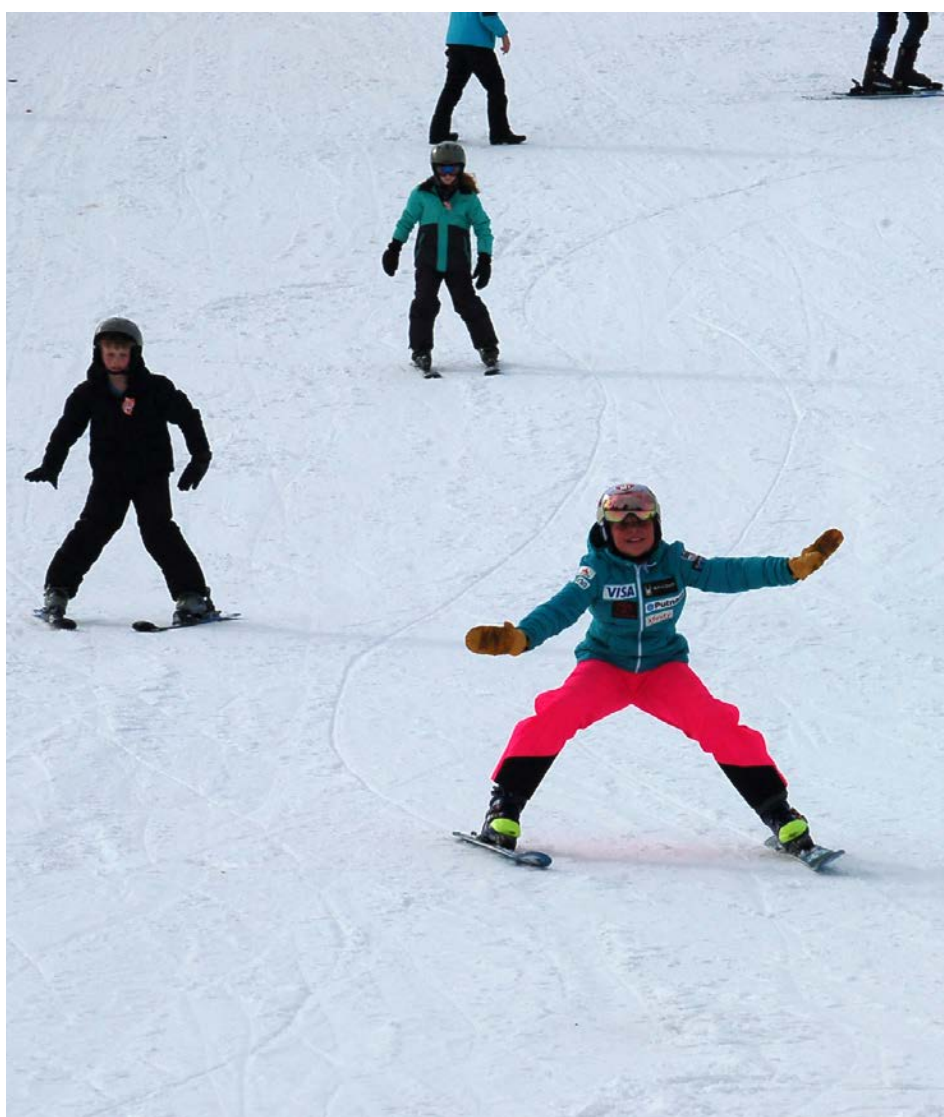
# The Fifth Grade Goes Skiing

All three Vicksburg elementary schools had successful 5th grade ski trips this year with lots of snow for the students to enjoy!

Sunset Lake, Indian Lake and Tobey somehow avoided snow days and extreme cold weather and had great days with fresh powder to enjoy.

It's tradition for the 5th grade classes to spend a day at Timber Ridge hitting the slopes.

As you can see in these pictures from all 3 schools, they had a great time!



# Experiments in Density

Vicksburg Middle School students in Mrs. Pierce's 7th grade science class have been learning about density.

They completed a lab on liquid density as part of their lessons. The students measured salt and water to make a colored salt water solution with different densities for each color. Once each color was complete, they took the different density solutions and layered them, creating a rainbow.

It was a very difficult task to get the colors to stack nicely. The solutions had to be precisely measured and then layered very carefully.



# Model UN Team Competes at U of M



Vicksburg High School students had a chance to learn about diplomacy, international relations, and global issues recently.

13 VHS students in Model United Nations were given the

opportunity to travel to the University of Michigan for 4 days to compete and debate with students from across the country. UN students take on the role of representatives from different countries and participate

in committees that discuss various topics, they also have a chance to be characters throughout history.

The primary goal is to learn about the UN system, global issues, and how international diplomacy

works. But the event means so much more to those involved. The students formed relationships, challenged world policies, and created lasting memories and friendships while also exploring the U of M campus.

## Active Physics Class at Pathways

Students at Pathways High School, the alternative program in Vicksburg, have a new chance to get some hands-on experience in math and science.

The new Active Physics class is providing students with opportunities once only open to those at VHS. The class has STEM components and projects that take the mostly online students away from their computers and out of their comfort zones.

One of the first projects students in the self-paced class work on is the egg drop challenge.

They must create a capsule to protect an egg and then drop it off the second floor of the VAB. The goal is to build something that will cushion the egg and prevent it from breaking during the fall.

It's been a fun project for both students and teachers at Pathways.



## A Truckload of Construction Books

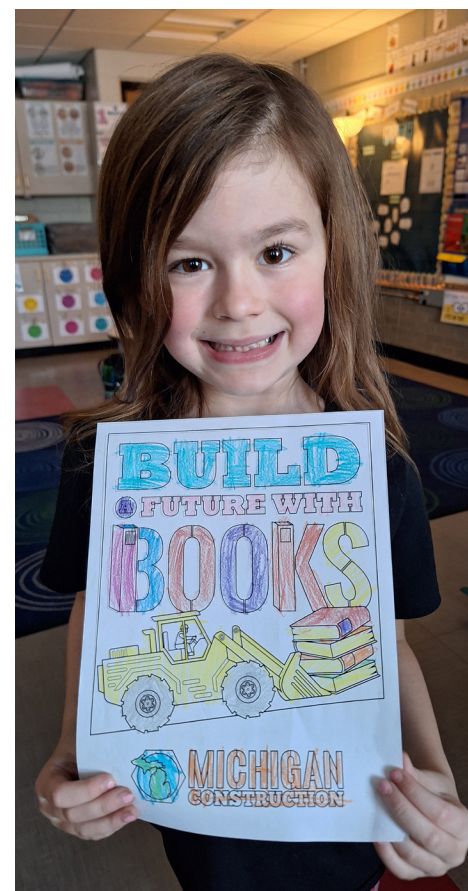
Students in Brenda Warner's first grade class at Sunset Lake Elementary got a surprise delivery of new books thanks to Michigan Construction!

A Michigan construction worker delivered the Tonka Truck full of construction themed books and stayed to read to the students.

Mrs. Warner was one of just 90 teachers across the state

to win the raffle. The contest is held every year to help raise awareness of and interest in the skilled trades.

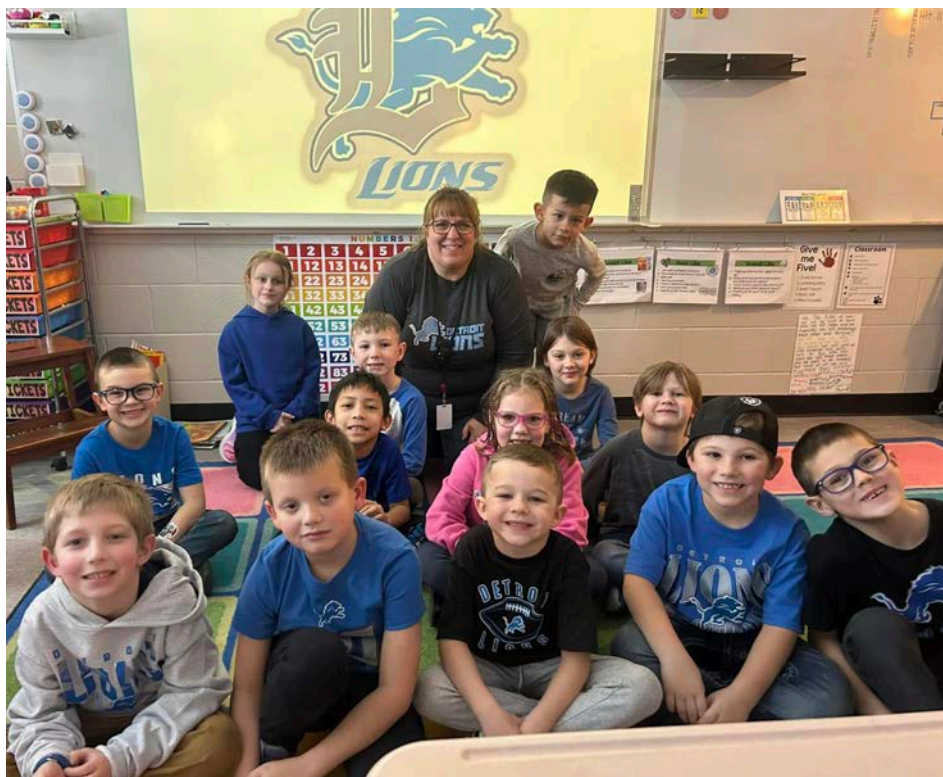
The students had a great time asking questions about construction and learning about all the possible future jobs they could pursue. They also got coloring books and snacks as part of their surprise.



# Rooting for the Lions at VCS

We might fight for the Red and White but this football season the Bulldogs were bleeding blue!

There was lots of Lion pride found at all our schools during the Lions record season. Check out all the students and teachers in their Lions gear.



## A Citizen's Guide to Stormwater

Michigan's rivers and tributaries stretch across hundreds of square miles in Michigan, including highlands and lowlands. The rivers carry rain and snowmelt runoff, or stormwater runoff, into inland lakes and the Great Lakes. The quantity of stormwater entering our rivers, lakes, and streams along with the pollutants it carries can degrade aquatic habitat and water quality. We can all take simple steps to reduce stormwater pollution. After all, the cheapest way to stop pollution is at the source.

### Help prevent stormwater pollution this winter!

Winter brings with it lots of fun activities, like sledding, ice skating and skiing. But winter also means mounds of snow to shovel and layers of ice to remove from our sidewalks and driveways. We often make the job easier by applying

deicers like salt. Besides sodium chloride, many deicers also contain chemicals like cyanide. When ice melts, the salts and chemicals dissolve and flow into street drains that lead directly to the river, endangering aquatic life.

1. Try an alternative! Calcium magnesium acetate (CMA) was developed as a deicing alternative because it has fewer adverse environmental impacts than salt and doesn't cause corrosion. Although CMA is more expensive than rock salt, it is recommended for environmentally sensitive areas.
2. Reduce your salt use. By limiting the amount of salt we use on sidewalks and driveways, we can reduce the amount of polluted stormwater washing into our waterways.

The most important step in deicing is to physically remove as much ice as possible before applying salt. Use a shovel to break up the ice before you add another layer of salt to your sidewalk. Adding more salt without removing what has melted can result in over-application, meaning more salt and chemicals end up in the river. You can also reduce salt use by limiting access to your home to one entrance. For every doorway that is not used, there will be less salt running into the catch basin in your street.

Besides limiting the amount of salt you use to melt ice, start thinking about adding native plants to your yard this spring. Plants native to Michigan have deeper roots than turfgrass, so they help absorb stormwater and filter out pollutants.



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