



THE

RED & WHITE

JANUARY 2025

A LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Vicksburg Community Schools Families,

Happy New Year! As we step into 2025, I hope you and your family are refreshed and ready for the opportunities that lie ahead.

The new year is a perfect time to reflect on our accomplishments and set new goals. I am incredibly proud of the progress our students, staff, and families have made in fostering a culture of growth, collaboration, and excellence across all of our schools. Whether in the classroom, on the stage, or on the field, our students continue to shine thanks to the dedication

and support of our outstanding educators and community members.

In January, we focus on building momentum for the second half of the school year. Whether through academic achievements or extracurricular excellence, I know Vicksburg Community Schools will thrive in 2025. My goal for the new year is to continue to ensure our schools are places where every child feels supported, challenged, and inspired to succeed.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to our district's success. I look forward to all we will accomplish together in 2025.

Wishing you a happy and healthy year ahead.



Regards,

Keevin O'Neill, SUPERINTENDENT

Emelyn Germay Does It Again!

Congratulations to Vicksburg High School junior Emelyn Germay!

She has been selected for the Michigan All-State Band this year. This is now her third time being selected into an All-State ensemble (in 8th, 10th and 11th grades), which is a very impressive feat!

Band students must prepare a piece to audition, as well as perform a series of scales and sight-read during each 10 minute recorded audition.

Every year, about 2,500 Michigan students audition for the 400 seats in the 5 All-State ensembles.

Emelyn will now get to perform with the ensemble at the Michigan Music Conference.

Great job, Emelyn!



**Congrats
Emelyn Germay!**

**Emelyn has been
selected to join
the Michigan
All-State Band
for the 3rd time!**



Indian Lake's Giving Tree Helps Those in Need

Great job to the students and community at Indian Lake Elementary!

They filled their giving tree with bows this holiday season and donated to a number of local organizations.

For every donation, students got to add a decoration to the tree.

They collected items for

Generous Hands, handmade holiday cards for Senior Services and pet food and toys for the Animal Rescue Project.

In all, they brought in more than 182 pounds of people food and about 38 pounds of pet food!

We are proud of their efforts to help those in need in our own community.



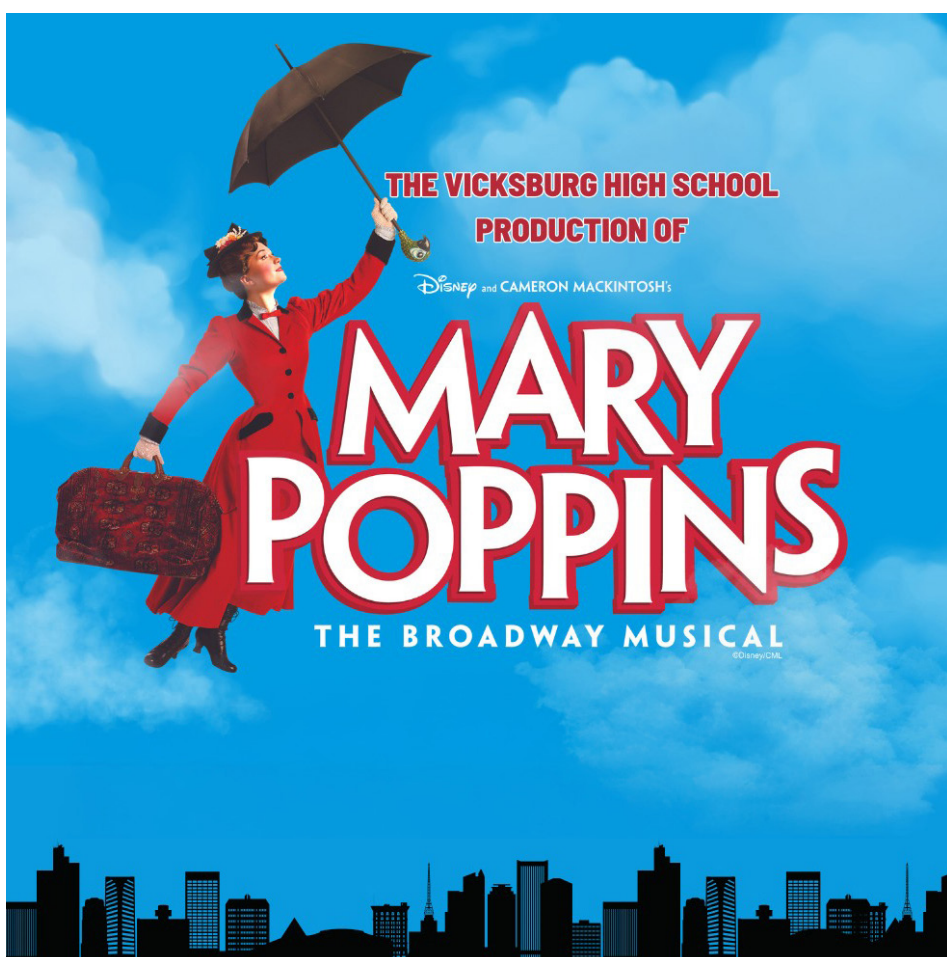
VHS Improv Workshop Fundraiser

Vicksburg theater is hosting an Improv Workshop at Vicksburg High School as a fundraiser for their spring play, Mary Poppins. It's an opportunity for 3rd through 8th graders who love theatre to keep working on their skills. They are even creating an Improvisation for Tech workshop for those students that like to be

backstage as well.

So much of theatre is about thinking on your feet, so this day of activities is all about teaching them to think fast and be creative.



January 25th. \$30 per student. Email mspark@vicksburgschools.org with questions.



JAN 25 | 1-4PM

Improv Workshop

All 3-8 graders welcome!
Hosted in Vicksburg High School PAC
Demonstrative show to follow at 4pm
\$30 per student, made payable in check to Vicksburg Community Schools or at the QR code below

Reception Held for Lohman and Knowles

After 40 years of incredible service to Vicksburg Community Schools, two cherished school board members have decided to retire.

Virgil "Skip" Knowles and Carol Lohman were both elected to the Vicksburg Community Schools Board of Education in 1983. Knowles has served as president of the board for 37 of his 40 years.

In December, after their final board meeting, the district held a retirement reception in their honor.

Throughout their tenure, Knowles and Lohman have made lasting impacts on VCS, shaping policies, supporting educational initiatives, and advocating for the students, staff, and community of Vicksburg. Both have been instrumental in navigating the challenges and successes in the district over the years. "We knew our job was to let our administrators and teachers do their jobs," said Knowles. "It's how we developed the philosophy of raising our



"Skip and Carol share our commitment to providing quality education for every student," said Vicksburg Community Schools Superintendent Kevin O'Neill. "Their support while I was a principal at VHS and now VCS superintendent has been incredible. Our community and schools are better places because of their leadership."

At the reception in honor of Knowles and Lohman, a representative from State Representative Matt Hall's office brought plaques to commemorate their incredible service to our schools and community. They were signed by Hall and State Senator Sean McCann, along with Governor Whitmer and Lieutenant Governor Gilchrist.

We thank all of those who came out to celebrate the accomplishments of these two dedicated individuals.

superintendents from the inside. We wanted to help develop and create the leaders for our own community."

"It's been a labor of love," said Lohman. She said giving out diplomas to her own children

and grandchildren, as well as the thousands of students over the last 40 years has been a special blessing. For Lohman, celebrating the graduations of our Pathways High School students has been a favorite part of her job.



Middle School Robotics Team Goes to State

Congratulations to the Vicksburg Middle School Robotics teams!

They received the highest engineering award at one of their fall competitions and earned a spot to compete at the state competition in December.

This was their third year in a row taking the VMS team to State. Team members Zachary and Isaac have been in the program since the 4th grade, and this was their fifth consecutive year going to State, including their two years in Lego Robotics!

Their primary program goal was to turn our students into leaders, and they have had great success in that regard over the last few years.



Minds in Motion Class Learns New Skills

Students in the Minds in Motion class at Vicksburg Middle School visited a downtown Vicksburg business to get inspiration for their next project.

The class went to Zoja Beauty to inspire the work they will be doing for a multi-genre writing experience that is the second half of the course. Sara Miller, the owner of Zoja Beauty, demonstrated how she makes the popular lip balm sold in her shop. The students watched as she mixed the ingredients over a bunsen burner and explained the process of pouring the balm in the tubes.

Following the live demonstration, the students chose a chocolate-scented or an unscented lip balm to take home. Back in the classroom, students are

learning about persuasive writing techniques to create a print ad for Zoja Beauty lip balm. These ads will be given to Sara as a thank you and possibly for display in her shop.

After Holiday Break, the lip balm demonstration will be the springboard activity for students when completing a technical writing assignment in which they describe the steps of a process they will demonstrate for their classmates.

In the past students have shown us how to fold origami, how to make a fruit smoothie and how to care for a pet. Students always love learning from each other, and Sara's demonstration reinforces how enriching it can be to learn something new!



Bulldog Beginnings Preschool Ranked Highly

Congratulations to our Bulldog Beginnings preschool programs for not only passing their fall CLASS observations but also being ranked in the top of the nation!

Two of the classrooms scored above the national average for preschool classes in all domains.

CLASS stands for classroom assessment scoring system and the domains are emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support.

We are proud of our Bulldog Beginnings teachers for providing such a great foundation for lifelong learning at Vicksburg Community Schools.



Sunset Lake Elementary Cleans Up

4th graders in Michael Schimp's class at Sunset Lake Elementary put one of their lessons into action this holiday season.

They spent a day helping two of our community members clean up the leaves in their yards and get ready for winter weather.

The students practiced their acts of kindness, something they've been focusing on in school this year.

It's always a fun day for the students to see how their kindness can help others.



Tobey Elementary Offers a Helping Hand

The elves at Tobey Elementary have been very busy once again this year working on their "Offer a Helping Hand" holiday collection.

This year, they adopted 21 families with a total of 55 Vicksburg students who had a brighter Christmas thanks to the generosity of our community.

The families provide wish lists with items like clothes, bedding and towels, along with toys. This year more than ever, families wished for household items like laundry detergent, toilet paper and garbage bags.

Thank you to the dozens of local businesses that adopted families and displayed gift tags for others to adopt. This massive project could not be done without community support!

Parent Organizer April Wilson and her right hand elf Chelsea Lawrence spent weeks wrapping, shopping and organizing it all as the donations came in.

All of the gifts are delivered by Mr. Barwegen to the families. It's often done in secrecy to keep the Christmas magic alive.



Playworks Brings the Power of Play to Indian Lake Elementary

On December 13th, Indian Lake Elementary hosted an inspiring professional development session led by Playworks, a national organization dedicated to promoting safe and healthy play in schools. Made possible by the Vicksburg Community Foundation's Innovation Grants, this engaging "Power of Play" training brought together 32 staff members from all three elementary schools, Kids Klub, and Bulldog Beginnings to reimagine the role of play in their schools.

The session, facilitated by Jenna Jordan, a Pro Trainer with Playworks Michigan, focused on the transformative impact of play in fostering teamwork, positive communication, conflict resolution, and social-emotional learning among students. Drawing from the "Power of Play" resources, staff participated in hands-on activities and discussions that emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive, active, and fun environment for all children.

Key components of the training included:

Group Management Strategies:

Staff learned how to manage large groups of students during recess and other playtimes, using proactive techniques to create a safe and engaging space for all.

Conflict Resolution Tools: The training introduced techniques, such as the "Rock, Paper, Scissors" method, to empower students to resolve minor conflicts independently and build confidence in their problem-solving skills.

Inclusive Play Practices:

Participants explored how to modify games to ensure every student, regardless of ability, could actively participate and feel valued.

The Power of Play: The session emphasized how structured play promotes students' physical activity, reduces behavioral issues, and strengthens social connections.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in hands-on demonstrations of Playworks' signature games, including "Switch," "Let's Go Fishing," "Three Line Soccer," and "Band-Aid Tag." Each game showcased how fun and engaging activities can foster teamwork, inclusion, and positive energy on the playground. Staff



played the roles of students, experimenting with how to teach, adapt, and lead these games effectively.

"This group of educators brought such enthusiasm and a willingness to step out of their comfort zones," said Jordan. "It's clear they are deeply committed to creating a supportive and fun environment for their students."

"The energy and teamwork in the room were inspiring," said Dr. Bacalia, principal of Indian Lake Elementary. "It's exciting to see educators come together with

a shared vision of using play as a tool to enhance our students' learning and well-being."

Next Steps for Recess Rollout

The Playworks Recess Rollout is already in motion, with a detailed schedule prepared for implementation after Winter Break. Kat McKibbin, Playworks Regional Partnership Manager, will work with IL staff members and Recess Supervisors to pre-teach select games to all Indian Lake students during 30 minute sessions prior to recess. She will join IL staff for hands-on

implementation to rollout Power of Play strategies.

Schools and administrators across Southwest Michigan, who may benefit from the Playworks program have been invited to see the Recess Rollout of the Power of Play in action at Indian Lake.

Indian Lake Elementary is excited to continue its journey with Playworks, ensuring all students have access to active, inclusive, and meaningful play experiences.

Special Flowers Grown by VHS Students

Students in the Vicksburg High School Plants and Horticulture classes had an opportunity to grow paperwhites for five weeks to give to South County Community Services residents.

It was a fun project where students got to learn how to push flower bulbs during the winter months and provide these beautiful flowers to residents in the community.

Thank you South County Community Services for this great opportunity!



Having Fun Learning About Volcanoes

Vicksburg Middle School students in Mrs. Pierce's 7th grade Science class played games of Jenga to learn about volcanoes!

The Jenga games modeled volcano growth/time and eruption distance.

Students played the games and then measured how far the distance of the "eruption" was to make the connection between time/growth and volcano eruption size.

