RICH TOWNSHIP
HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 227

The Message

THE OFFICIAL RICH TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 227 NEWSLETTER

FALL 2026

Students Bring Construction Learning into the Community

Rich Township construction trades students will help renovate a district-owned home in Richton Park through a project that connects classroom instruction with work in their community.

The district announced its Construction Trades Home Project on October 21, welcoming students, educators, project partners, village officials and community supporters. Richton Park Village President Rick Reinbold and village trustees joined the gathering to recognize the opportunity ahead.

As the renovation progresses, students will practice construction skills, work through problems and learn how individual tasks contribute to a completed home.





The experience will also help them explore interests in the trades and consider education, training and career options after high school.

The project is supported by the South Suburban Land Bank, National Catastrophe Solutions, Inc., the Village of Richton Park, the district's Board of Education, instructional staff and other partners.

The October event marked the project's kickoff. A ribbon cutting is planned when the home is complete.

INSIDE: National PACK recognition • Page 3

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A Message to Our Community

Dr. Johnnie Thomas
SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Rich Township Families and Community,

Across Rich Township High School District 227, students are putting their learning to work. This fall, they have designed and demonstrated a working palletizing machine, explored local workplaces, shared their experiences with visiting education leaders, and taken meaningful steps toward college and careers.

Our Construction Trades Home Project brings that learning into our community. Students will help renovate a district-owned home in Richton Park, developing practical skills and learning how their individual contributions support a larger project. We are grateful to the partners who are helping make this experience possible.

We also celebrate our R.P.I. Raptors for earning the Judges' Award at the PACK Challenge, along with the broadcasting students who helped share their work. New opportunities through Pepper Construction, Scott's U-Save and our university partners are giving students additional ways to explore their interests and prepare for life after graduation.

The stories in this edition also recognize alumni beginning college, students developing businesses, and staff whose daily work supports our school community. Each story offers a different view of what student success can look like.

Thank you to our families, Board of Education, staff and community partners for supporting these opportunities. We look forward to sharing our students' continued progress throughout the year.

Respectfully,

Dr. Johnnie Thomas
Superintendent

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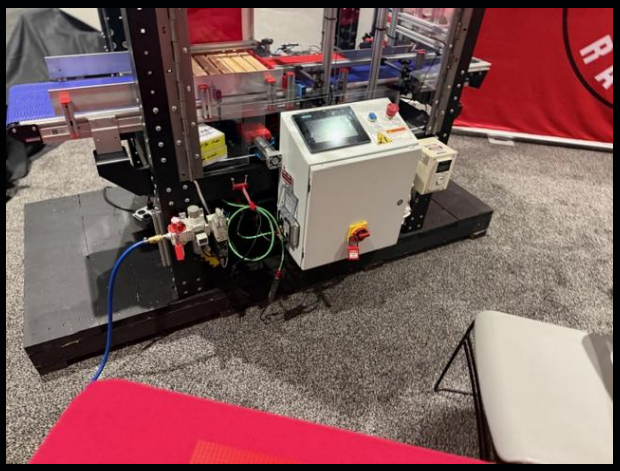
Raptors Earn National Recognition at PACK Challenge



Rich Township's R.P.I. Raptors earned the Judges' Award and a $1,500 prize at PMMI's PACK Challenge during PACK EXPO International 2026, held October 18–21 at McCormick Place in Chicago.

Competing as Rich Palletizing Industries, the Raptors were one of six high school finalist teams from across the country. Students presented VelociStack, a palletizing machine they designed, built and programmed. The competition brought together engineering, troubleshooting, sales and communication as teams demonstrated their machines, presented to industry judges and trained operators.

PMMI's Judges' Award recognizes qualities such as teamwork, creativity and school spirit. The recognition celebrates the work students brought to a challenge that required them to move an idea from design to a functioning system.







Raptor Broadcasting students contributed their own skills through live coverage, interviews and coverage of the awards ceremony. Their work helped families and the school community follow the competition, while NBC 5 Chicago also featured student Jeremiah Moore-Smith in its reporting.

CAREER PATHWAYS AND INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Connecting classroom learning with real-world opportunities





PEPPER CONSTRUCTION / UJAMAA

A New Path for Seniors

Rich Township High School District 227 is partnering with Pepper Construction and UJAMAA Construction to offer a summer internship opportunity exclusively for graduating Rich Township seniors interested in construction, project management or contracting.

The paid, 11-week experience is planned for summer 2027 with Chicagoland construction teams. The opportunity will give selected students a closer look at how construction projects are organized and carried out, helping them connect their interests with possible careers.

By introducing students to industry professionals and workplace expectations, the partnership extends career exploration beyond the classroom. It also creates a next step for seniors considering further education, training or employment in the construction field.

Rich Township appreciates Pepper Construction and UJAMAA Construction's investment in students and the opportunity to strengthen the connection between school and the workplace.

Exploring industry careers

Rich Township Automotive Technology students visited Scott's U-Save Tires & Automotive Repair on October 20 to see how their classroom learning connects with a working automotive business.

Students observed daily operations and learned from industry professionals about technical skills, customer service and business practices. The visit offered a broader view of the field, including the expectations that accompany hands-on automotive work.

The partnership supports the district's Give Me Ten work-based learning initiative. The framework emphasizes 10 hours of career exploration and a progression toward 50 hours of deeper career experience through opportunities such as internships, externships and other supervised workplace learning.

Rich Township thanks the Scott's U-Save team for sharing its expertise and helping students explore the possibilities ahead.



SCOTT'S U-SAVE



Growing Skills and Earning College Credit

Agriculture Grant Expands Hands-on Learning

A $7,500 Next ACRE Grant from Compeer Financial will support new learning opportunities in veterinary science, urban agriculture and student entrepreneurship at Rich Township.

The district received approval for the full grant request on September 23. Its agriculture program, which began in 2022, serves 69 students across five courses.

Planned purchases include an interactive canine vital signs trainer, tools and structures for urban growing, and equipment for student entrepreneurship projects. These resources will help students practice animal health assessments and support growing activities connected with the district's farmer's market.

The grant will benefit students studying Veterinary Science, Animal Care and Management, Urban Agriculture, Plant Processing and Introduction to Agriculture. It builds on the program's emphasis on practical learning and the range of careers connected with agriculture.





Illinois Partnership Opens College Learning

Rich Township is one of 21 high schools selected for the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Dual Credit @ Illinois initiative for the 2026–2027 school year.

At the STEM Campus, the opportunity includes Introduction to Sustainable Food Systems, taught by Jessica Biernacki within the Agriculture pathway. Eligible students age 16 and older can earn three college credits upon successful completion, at no cost to students or families.

The course gives students a way to pursue an academic interest while gaining experience with college-level learning. It adds another option for students planning a path from high school to college.

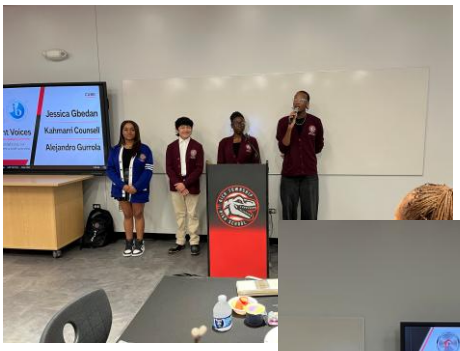
Families interested in the course should speak with their school counselor about eligibility and the course-selection process.

CUBE Visitors Experience Rich Township Firsthand

Rich Township welcomed school board members and education leaders from across the country to the STEM Campus during the Council of Urban Boards of Education, or CUBE, Annual Conference in Chicago.



Visitors toured STEM and Career and Technical Education learning spaces and heard directly from students and staff about the district's pathways. Culinary Arts students prepared breakfast, giving guests another opportunity to experience student learning firsthand.





The visit placed students at the center of the district's story. Their perspectives helped show how classroom experiences, career exploration and school support connect with their plans.

Rich Township thanks the students, educators and staff who welcomed the visitors and shared the work taking place across the district.



STEM Learning Spaces Earn Statewide Recognition

Rich Township's STEM Campus additions and renovations received an Honorable Mention in the Illinois Association of School Boards' 2026 Exhibition of Educational Environments.

Designed by STR Partners, the project was among nine recognized from 22 submissions. Improvements included engineering, robotics and manufacturing spaces, a new cafeteria and renovated science classrooms.

The recognition adds a new chapter to the district's investment in learning environments. This fall's student projects and industry experiences demonstrate how those spaces can support learning that reaches beyond campus.



A Fall to Remember





Representing Rich Township at the CUBE Conference

The Mighty Marching Machine brought Rich Township's sound and school spirit to the CUBE Annual Conference, performing at the Champions of Urban Education Awards Luncheon.

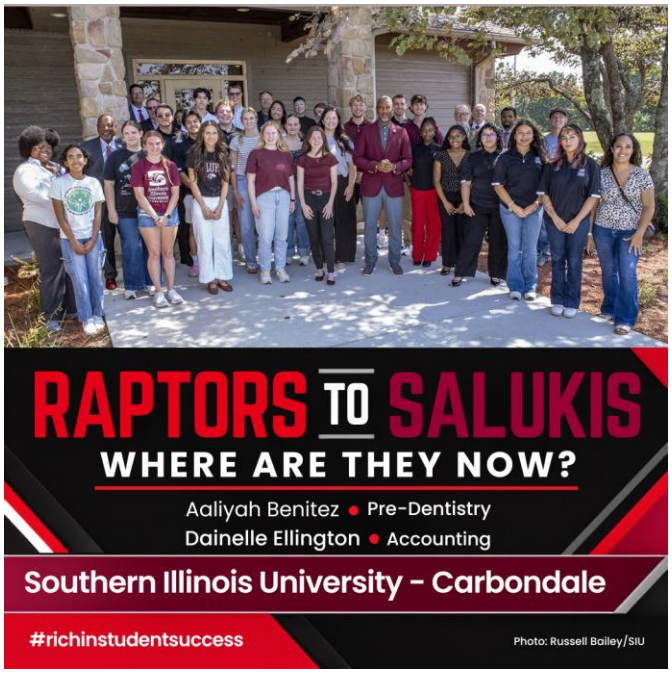
The performance gave our musicians an opportunity to represent their school before education leaders from across the country. Students also received a special message of encouragement from Colin Kaepernick, adding a memorable moment to the experience.

Congratulations to the student musicians and staff whose preparation made the performance possible. Their participation showcased the role of the arts in the Rich Township student experience.



Raptors Take their Next Steps

TWO RAPTORS BEGIN THEIR NEXT CHAPTER AS SIU SCHOLARS



STEM Campus graduates Aaliyah Benitez and Dainelle Ellington are beginning their college journeys as Chancellor's Scholars at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

After receiving their scholarship awards last school year, the two alumni were recognized at a September 15 luncheon with SIU Chancellor Austin Lane and university leaders. They are among 41 Chancellor's Scholars selected from 565 applicants for the 2026–2027 class.

The four-year scholarship covers tuition, mandatory fees, on-campus housing and meals. Aaliyah is pursuing pre-dentistry, while Dainelle is studying accounting.

Rich Township is proud to follow their progress as they continue their education and work toward their professional goals. Their accomplishments give current students examples of the opportunities available as they consider their own college plans.



Sixteen Rich Township students attended the Chicago Latino College Expo, where they connected with college representatives and explored options for their education after high school.

The group earned 12 on-the-spot college acceptances and more than $88,500 in scholarships. These outcomes gave students tangible opportunities to consider as they plan their next steps.

The experience also underscored the value of meeting admissions representatives and learning about financial support. Congratulations to the participating students and the staff who helped them prepare for the opportunity.

Ideas into businesses

Student initiative in school and beyond the classroom.



First Place for Entrepreneurship

Rich Township junior Kylah A. Burns earned first place in The Pitch Black Competition after participating in The Gray Matter Experience's six-week Accelerate entrepreneurship program.

Through the summer program, Kylah developed business knowledge, strengthened her leadership skills and presented her ideas. Her accomplishment was celebrated by the district in September.

Kylah co-owns Ksquared Lemonade, Inc. with her sister, Kailah A. Burns, a member of Rich Township's Class of 2024. Her achievement highlights the initiative and creativity students bring to interests they pursue beyond the classroom.

Sweet Success

Rich Township senior Brandi Johnson started Sweets by Mee at just 11 years old, growing her business through trial and error. Today, she specializes in custom cakes and has expanded her offerings with "Sweet Saturdays."

A student in Rich Township's Culinary program, Brandi continues developing her skills with a goal of opening a brick-and-mortar store. Last year, she showcased her talents during a baking demonstration on *Daytime Chicago*.

Scan the QR code to watch her interview and learn more about Sweets by Mee.



The People Behind the Stories

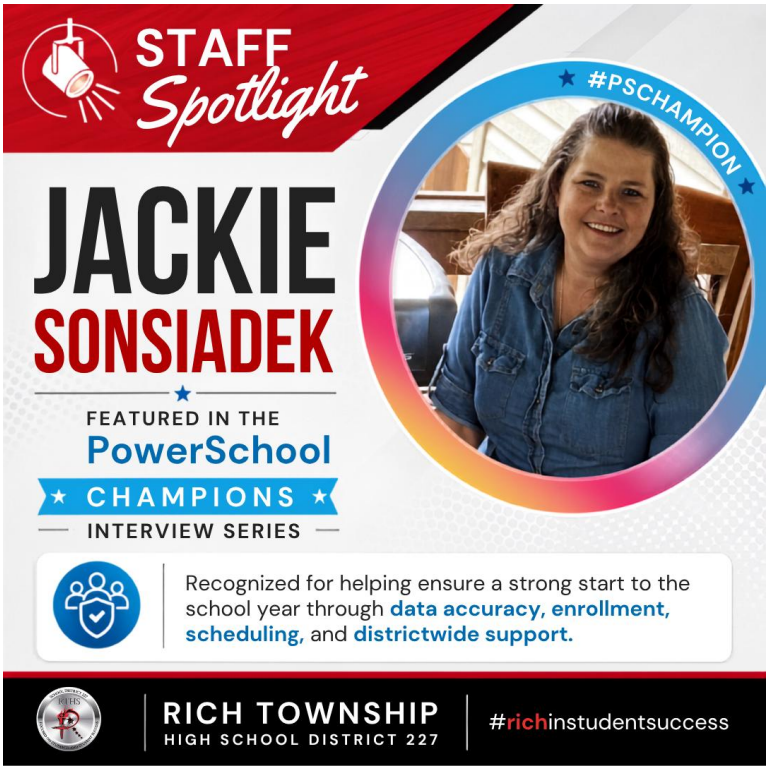
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT | TYRONE USENI



Tech and Engineering Pathway

Tyrone Useni is turning a childhood interest in engineering into hands-on experience at Rich Township. Through robotics, drones and the PACK Challenge, he designs, builds and programs technology to solve problems. His work includes coding autonomous robots and helping develop a machine that stacks cartons onto pallets. Inspired by his father and strengthened by teamwork, Tyrone hopes to pursue computer or software engineering after high school and continue creating solutions.

STAFF RECOGNITION



STUDENT VOICES



Learning and progress



A MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-PRINCIPALS

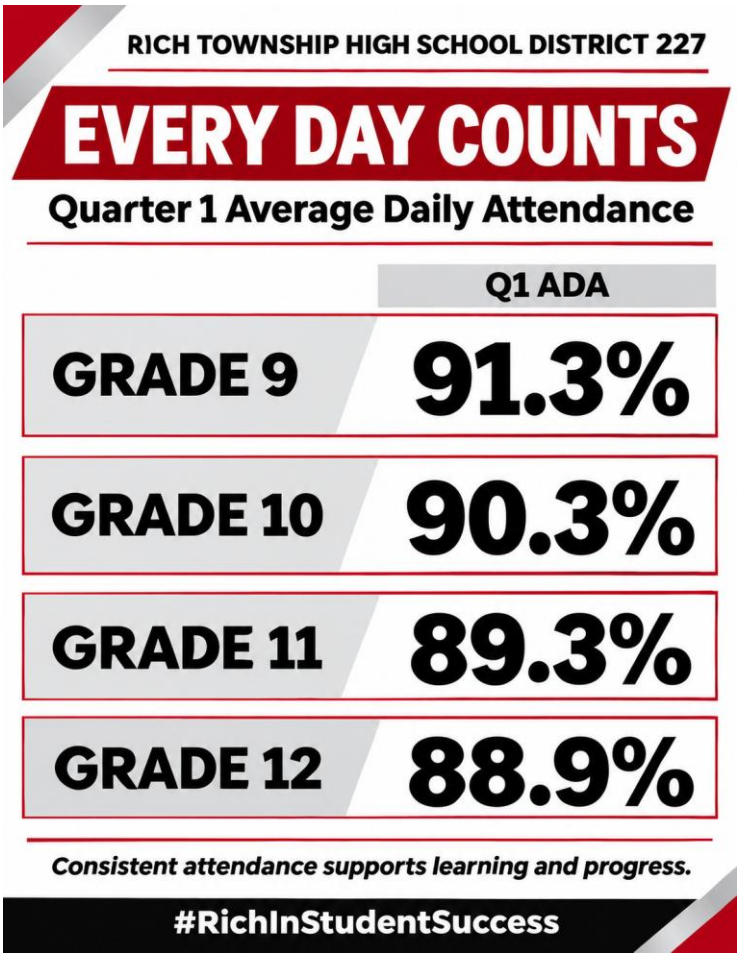
Dear Rich Township Families and Community,

Our students have brought curiosity, creativity and school pride to the opening months of the school year. We see that commitment in classroom projects, college exploration, performances, competitions and the many ways students contribute to campus life.

As we move through the fall, we encourage families to stay connected with teachers, review academic progress and help students plan when they need support. Consistent attendance, completed assignments and timely conversations can help students stay engaged in their learning.

We also encourage every student to explore an activity, team, club or leadership opportunity. These experiences help students build relationships and discover interests that can shape their futures.

Thank you for your partnership and for helping us celebrate the accomplishments of our students across both campuses.



Homecoming brings Raptor Nation together



Rich Township marked Homecoming Week September 28 through October 3, bringing students and the school community together around a shared celebration of Raptor pride.

The week included school spirit activities, football on October 2 and the Homecoming dance on October 3. Together, these traditions gave students opportunities to connect with classmates and celebrate their school.

Thank you to the students, staff and families who contributed to the week. From the stands to the dance floor, Homecoming offered moments that belong in this year's Raptor memories.





HOMECOMING QUEEN & KING

Making their mark

The people and moments that make this school year ours.





The Class of 2027 is making senior year memorable! From gathering with friends at Senior Sunrise to bringing creativity and personality to their painted parking spaces, our seniors are celebrating this milestone year together.

With more senior events to come, there are plenty of opportunities to connect, celebrate and create lasting memories before graduation on May 15, 2027.

Raptors in Action: A Fall of Talent, Teamwork and Achievement



Since August, Rich Township students have filled the fall with competition, creativity and school pride. Football, flag football, volleyball, soccer, cross country and tennis kept our student-athletes busy, while Homecoming and Spirit Week brought Raptor Nation together. Our varsity dance team earned statewide recognition, ranking No. 1 in Top Pom in the Illinois Statewide Varsity Dance Teams Fall 2026 rankings.



Beyond athletics, students put their skills on display. The R.P.I. Raptors earned the Judges' Award at PACK EXPO International 2026, competing among six national high school finalists with a machine they designed, built and programmed. Raptor Broadcasting shared the experience through live coverage and interviews. Culinary students prepared breakfast for visiting education leaders during the CUBE Conference, showcasing their professionalism and career preparation.

Music, mentoring and service added to a busy season. The Mighty Marching Machine's fall schedule included the Circle City Classic, while the Male Mentoring Club welcomed Chicago Bulls broadcaster Cam Smith for "Beyond the Mic," connecting students with advice about academics, persistence and future careers. Key Club and SkillsUSA organized collections to support students and families. Across these experiences, our Raptors are building confidence, strengthening friendships and discovering where their talents can take them.



Celebrating culture, building connections

Rich Township celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month, September 15 through October 15, by connecting cultural pride with learning, community and opportunities for the future.

On October 1, students attended the Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration at Governors State University. Through the experience, “Rooted in Culture, Built for the Future,” students explored Hispanic culture and traditions, shared a meal and experienced a college campus together.

College exploration also brought meaningful results at the Chicago Latino College Expo. Sixteen Rich Township students participated, receiving 12 on-the-spot college acceptances and more than $88,500 in scholarships. With support from our College & Career Readiness team, students connected with college, university and career representatives and explored possibilities for life after high school.

Together, these experiences honored Hispanic and Latino heritage while helping students see new possibilities for their futures. They created opportunities to share experiences, learn from one another and strengthen a sense of belonging across our school community.

Thank you to the staff, sponsors and community partners who helped make these opportunities possible.



Stay connected with Rich Township

Visit rich227.org for district news, school information and upcoming events. Follow the district’s official social media channels for student celebrations, program updates and ways to take part in school life.

Families are encouraged to keep their contact information current so they can receive district and school communications. Thank you for staying connected and supporting our students.

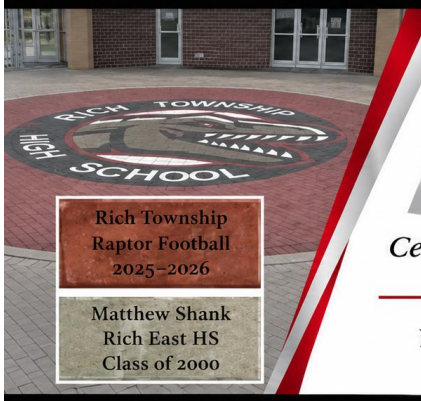
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UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS

Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m.

NOVEMBER	DECEMBER	JANUARY	FEBRUARY
18	16	20	17
2026	2026	2027	2027