



EXCELLENCE IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM: THE LASTING IMPACT OF KPS STAFF

By Katyjane Newblatt, East Kentwood High School Class of 2022

As a proud East Kentwood High School alum who spent most of my formative years in Kentwood Public Schools, Teacher Appreciation Month holds a special place in my heart and feels deeply connected to my identity.



When I moved to Kentwood in fifth grade, I was terrified to walk through the doors of Townline Elementary School on my first day. Somewhere between the tears and the sniffles, as I pleaded with my dad to let me go home, I found the courage to walk into Mrs. VanDyke's classroom. Throughout that year, I slowly began to come out of my shell, finding

comfort and belonging in my new home at KPS — always supported by Mrs. VanDyke's warm smile and gentle encouragement.

Then, the dreaded transition to middle school crept up, and I found myself scared once again. But this time, I had the friends I made the previous year by my side and a locker combination to conquer. I still remember walking into my homeroom on the first day at Pinewood Middle School and being welcomed with the silly jokes and laughter of Mr. Schaner.

After mastering the locker combination and finding my way through middle school, it was time for the next big step: high school. As I walked the halls of the Freshman Campus, feeling overwhelmed by the size of it all, I searched for a familiar face. That's when I spotted Mrs. Baker. Though I couldn't immediately place her, I quickly realized it wasn't familiarity — it was her warm smile and inviting energy that put me at ease.



Continued on page 2...

CELEBRATING THE FIRST WMTC RESIDENT COHORT: A MILESTONE IN GROWING OUR OWN EDUCATORS

Kentwood Public Schools proudly congratulates the first cohort of Residents in the West Michigan Teacher Collaborative (WMTC)—one of our key Grow Your Own partners—on earning their initial teaching certification!

Continued on page 3...

Excellence In and Out of the Classroom:

The Lasting Impact of KPS Staff

Continued from page 1

Mrs. Baker soon became my go-to person. Whether I needed help with an essay, advice about friends, or simply someone to talk to, she was there for me. To this day, as a rising senior at Western Michigan University, I still meet with Mrs. Baker for lunch and life updates — a true testament to the lasting relationships built within KPS.

When it was finally time to move to the main 10-12 campus, the future felt closer than ever — college applications, career choices, and an unknown path ahead. It was during this time that my Falcon News Network teacher, Mr. Donakowski, became an essential mentor. During his lunch periods, he would talk with me about journalism, different colleges, and possible career paths. Mr. Donakowski was, and still is, much more than a teacher. His encouragement and belief in my potential helped guide me toward journalism and gave me the confidence to pursue internships, leadership opportunities, and my college goals. Even today, he continues to support me, whether it's offering advice for college coursework or updating me about all the new renovations at East Kentwood High School. Mr. Donakowski is yet another example of the spark KPS possesses.

It wasn't just the teachers who made an impact, either. The office staff who greeted students with a smile, the custodians who worked tirelessly to create a welcoming environment, and the coaches who stayed late to offer advice beyond the field, all played a role in making KPS feel like home.



Now, as I continue building my future in college, I see even more clearly the difference a supportive school community can make. The lessons I learned inside and outside the classroom at KPS are ones I carry with me every day: work hard, stay kind, believe in yourself, and never underestimate the power of a little encouragement.

Forever a Falcon.

Katyjane Newblatt is a 2022 graduate of East Kentwood High School who also attended Townline Elementary, Pinewood Middle School, and the EK Freshman Campus. Currently she is a rising senior at Western Michigan University where she is majoring in journalism. This summer Katyjane will participate in an internship with Vogue magazine in New York City.



KPS TEACHER RECEIVES TOP STATE HONOR

A big congratulations goes out to Kentwood Public Schools music teacher Elizabeth Knoll-Bowman. Knoll-Bowman was recently named the Michigan School Band & Orchestra Association District 10 Orchestra Teacher of the Year.

Knoll-Bowman reflected on her time in the organization and how it helped to shape the work she has been able to do with her students here in KPS. "I got involved at the board level with MSBOA District 10 three years ago when I took over as the chair of High School Solo and Ensemble," Knoll-Bowman explained. "This gave me more opportunities to see the inner workings of the organization and how involvement can lead to positive, equitable change for all students statewide, something I am passionate about. In the meantime, I was able to double orchestra enrollment at Valleywood, to the point that numbers supported attending Band and Orchestra Festival with separate 7th and 8th grade ensembles, a feat that hadn't been done in nearly a decade, receiving excellent and superior ratings."

Knoll-Bowman shares this award with her students and colleagues. "I am proud of what we have accomplished. District 10 is one of the biggest in the state, with a plethora of outstanding orchestra teachers. I was honored to just be nominated. I am genuinely humbled to have won and share this with my students and coworkers, especially those at Valleywood who have supported our growth and cheered for our success these past seven years."

We congratulate Knoll-Bowman and thank her for all she has given to the students of Kentwood Public Schools.

Celebrating the First WMTC Resident Cohort: A Milestone in Growing Our Own Educators

Continued from page 1

In mid-April, these future educators were honored in a celebration that brought together Residents from Kent, Ottawa, and Muskegon counties, along with GVSU faculty, superintendents, host teachers, school administrators, and representatives from the Michigan Department of Education.

The WMTC is a teacher residency program aimed at breaking down financial and systemic barriers for aspiring educators. Participants complete a full year of classroom experience alongside a mentor teacher while earning their certification through Grand Valley State University.

We're especially proud of our Kentwood WMTC Residents:

- **Charles Ball** – Elementary Education at Explorer Elementary
- **Erin Weinburger** – Elementary Education at Explorer Elementary
- **Katie Vanderzee** – Special Education (ASD) at Southwood Elementary
- **Celeny Quintino** – Elementary Education at Southwood Elementary
- **Trayon Miller** – Upper Elementary (Grades 3–6) at Crestwood Middle School



We also celebrate Kyle Welter, Special Education Teacher at Discovery Elementary, who attended as one of our Advanced Degree candidates in the WMTC program.

This milestone is a powerful reminder of what's possible when we invest in future educators and provide inclusive, accessible pathways into the profession. We're grateful for the strong network of support that surrounds these Residents—and excited for the positive impact they'll have on students in the future.

FALCON NEWS NETWORK EARNS EMMY HONORS

East Kentwood High School's Falcon News Network (FNN) is celebrating a first as the broadcasting home of EK. In late April, FNN brought home three Michigan Student Emmy Awards from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Michigan Chapter. This is the first ever Emmy wins for EK and FNN! The award ceremony took place at Michigan State University where students in attendance were also able to take part in sessions led by industry leaders in the world of news, sports, and filmmaking.

Students who received Emmy Awards and their categories are: Owen Renwick, Public Affairs/Community Service <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPR9FawG5-g>; Nuha Hussein, Storyteller <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UB2BUk3-H0w>; and Dion Dorris & Syncere Hobson-Washington, Live Sporting Event/Game <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=42VlKtdfuUk>. Congratulations also go out to Erica Large (Sports Program & Newscast), Jasmin Smithers (Newscast), and Robel Yacob (Newscast) for earning Emmy nominations in their categories.

Falcon News Network offers high quality, innovative, real-world learning experiences for students at East Kentwood High School. We congratulate all of our nominees and Emmy award recipients and thank everyone connected with FNN for the high quality news, sports, and information provided consistently to EK, KPS, and the greater Kentwood community.

Episodes of Falcon News Network can be found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/falconnewsnetwork>





ANNUAL STEAM FAIR IS A BIG SUCCESS

The East Kentwood High School annual STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and Math) Fair was a big success again this year.

High school students displayed their work completed throughout the year at the event that was held at the EK Field House. There was a wide variety of learning on display that included work around animal life, cyber-security, artificial intelligence, and orchestral instruments, among many others. The fair was open to the community on a Thursday evening in early May and then on Friday students from schools across the district traveled to the Field House to enjoy the event.

Thanks to all of our students who worked so hard on their projects, as well as the staff members who were responsible for organizing the event, for making this the biggest and best STEAM Fair yet.

SPECIAL ED PARAPROFESSIONALS MAKE AN IMPACT AT EKHS

The Special Ed Paraprofessionals at EK are an invaluable part of our team, dedicating themselves daily to supporting our students in reaching their fullest potential. With patience, compassion, and expertise, they work closely with students who have diverse learning needs, providing personalized assistance and fostering an inclusive environment. Their contributions go beyond academics—they help students develop social skills, build confidence, and navigate challenges with resilience. By collaborating with teachers and staff, our paraprofessionals ensure that every student feels valued, understood, and empowered to succeed. Their commitment and hard work make a profound difference in the lives of our students and in the fabric of EK!



From Left to Right:
Emmanuel Witherspoon, Amber Horne, Sarah Otis,
Providence Amisi, General Willis

CREATING SAFE SPACES AT CRESTWOOD ARCH

ARCH staff play a crucial role in creating safe and welcoming environments for our students outside of regular school hours. By establishing spaces where students feel secure, respected, and supported, after-school programs help to foster emotional, social, and academic growth. These programs provide a structured environment where children can unwind, build friendships, and explore new interests without the pressure of classroom expectations. ARCH staff members are trained to recognize the signs of distress, bullying, or other emotional challenges allowing them to intervene effectively, offering the appropriate support or resources when needed.

ARCH staff members are constantly working to build a sense of belonging and inclusion within our program by establishing student leadership positions, holding monthly youth advisory board meetings, and intentionally fostering an environment of inclusion where all students, regardless of their race, culture, or socioeconomic status feel valued. In this way, after-school programs act as an extension of the care and attention children receive during school hours, ensuring continuity in their well-being.



TEACHER APPRECIATION: CELEBRATING THE CAREER OF A PINEWOOD LEGEND!

The Pinewood Middle School community is preparing to say farewell to a truly exceptional individual who has demonstrated passion and dedication throughout her career in both teaching and coaching. At the end of this school year, Ms. Denise Henning is retiring after an incredible 39 years of inspiring students both in the classroom and on the court.

Ms. Henning's career started at Townline Elementary in 1986 where she taught 2nd through 5th grades and was heavily involved in the after school intramural programming. After 16 years teaching at the elementary level, she moved to Pinewood Middle School where she has been teaching math and coaching basketball, track, and volleyball for the past 20+ years. Throughout this time Ms. Henning has also served in several leadership positions including Math Department Chair and as a member of the School Improvement Team.

For countless middle schoolers, Ms. Henning was the one who could demystify complex mathematical concepts with her sense of humor and no-nonsense approach to the curriculum. She had a knack for making numbers relatable to students' lives and helping students develop confidence, all while having FUN! Many students credit her with not just understanding equations, but with developing a genuine appreciation for the logic and beauty of mathematics.

But Ms. Henning's impact extended far beyond the whiteboard. As the dedicated coach of girls basketball, boys basketball, track, volleyball and intramural teams, she instilled in her athletes not only the skills and strategies for success but also invaluable life lessons about teamwork, discipline, perseverance, and sportsmanship. Whether on the court, track or field, she was a constant source of encouragement, pushing student-athletes to reach their potential and celebrating their achievements, both big and small.



Ms. Henning was the ultimate teammate and credits her success to being able to build positive relationships with people. Her colleagues describe her as being that teacher who would do anything for anyone, and for always being able to find ways to capture the hearts of students. She has a unique ability to connect with young people, fostering trust and creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and striving for their best. While admittedly, her methods were not always done in a standard way, she always put students first and managed to ensure that her students knew she loved them.

We wish Ms. Henning a long, happy, and fulfilling retirement filled with time spent pursuing hobbies and spending time with her family and pet dogs. Her contributions to Pinewood Middle School have been immeasurable, and they will be deeply missed.

Please join us in extending our heartfelt thanks and best wishes to Ms. Henning as she embarks on this well-deserved new chapter. Her impact on our students and our community will never be forgotten.

EK MODEL UN TEAM EXCELS AT COMPETITION

Congratulations to members of the East Kentwood High School Model United Nations team for a successful competition held recently at Aquinas College. At Model UN, students take on the roles of diplomats from various countries to debate and find solutions to real-world international issues. EK's Kian Bakri (Challenger, Explorer, Pinewood) and Emma VanLier (Explorer, Pinewood), represented Angola and earned top honors as the Outstanding Delegation at the competition. Congratulations go out to Kian and Emma and to all of the members of the EK Model UN team for their hard work and dedication.



FOSTERING INNOVATION THROUGH A WHOLE CHILD APPROACH: THE IMPACT OF PAM BIRD AND MICHELLE BEALS

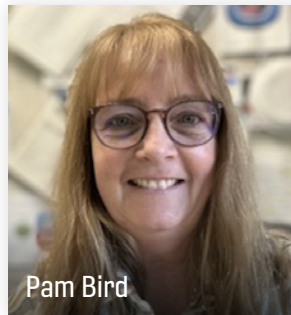
At Discovery, innovation means embracing the whole child, recognizing that success goes beyond academics. Pam Bird (Instructional Coach) and Michelle Beals (KSSN Coordinator) are leading this effort by addressing both student academic and social-emotional needs, creating an environment where they can truly thrive.

Pam Bird empowers teachers through intentional coaching in reading and math. She enhances instruction through co-teaching, lesson refinement, and data-driven strategies. As part of the K-3 Early Literacy Coaching Partnership at KISD, Pam brings statewide best practices to Discovery, strengthening literacy instruction. Her leadership in district professional development supports the implementation of Ready Classroom Mathematics, and helps teachers deliver stronger math lessons. Through grade-level data digs, she ensures students needing extra support or enrichment are identified and assisted. Pam's i-Ready March Madness contest boosts student engagement by making their academic growth something that's fun for all.

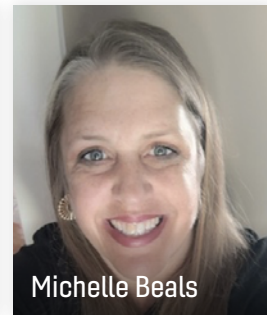
Michelle Beals plays a vital role in removing barriers to learning. As part of Discovery's Tier II and Attendance Teams, she uses data that helps provide targeted interventions for student success. Michelle supports families in many ways and builds trusting relationships that address student and family needs beyond the classroom.

With students, Michelle offers attendance incentives, mental health referrals, and individual breaks with students within the building and countless home visits for those families needing extra support. Her compassionate outreach helps students feel safe, seen, and ready to learn.

Together, Pam and Michelle's dedication to the whole child approach ensures that Discovery students receive the academic instruction and personal support they need to succeed.



Pam Bird



Michelle Beals

CROSSROADS TEACHER LEADS STUDENTS IN BUILDING A BUSINESS

At Crossroads, students are bringing economics to life through a hands-on classroom business powered by 3D printing. In Mr. Justin Velting's "Building Our Own Business" unit, students handle every aspect of running a company—market research, product design, pricing, advertising, and sales.

"Students are involved in every step," said Velting. "They're learning math, inventory management, and real economic principles like supply and demand. The best part is how much they love it."



The idea came from former principal, Ian Gibson, who encouraged Velting to try something new. Since then, the project has grown each semester, with new products and increased student ownership.

In December, students visited Townline Elementary to sell their second-quarter product, the 3D-printed Tentacle Tim, and sold 60 to staff. Velting praised his students for their professionalism and energy.

Townline staff were equally impressed. "They made a great impression—so eager, polite, and enthusiastic," said Instructional Coach Jean Rock. "I now own four Tentacle Tims!"

Students also produced a full marketing video, available here: [Tentacle Tim Marketing Video](#)

Additional products followed throughout the year, including Shark in third quarter and Tornado Twister in fourth. Each new launch brought fresh learning and excitement.

Velting's innovative unit has even inspired other teachers to explore 3D printing in their classrooms. "I learn something new every semester," he said. "It's been a huge success—and a lot of fun."

TL ARCH KPS NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTS

Townline ARCH Activity leaders have been a great asset to our program especially in building positive relationships with our scholars. The dedication they have shown in being present with students means a lot to each of them.

Jose Rodriguez just started working a few months ago and the bond he created through the program has been nothing short of amazing! He has enjoyed the privilege of seeing our learners grow especially in their STEM skills. The students relish the time he gives them to play their game of choice after finishing the ARCH activities, his calm demeanor and how he gives chances when mistakes are made.

Our scholars appreciate the kindness and help that Odelia Mitchell and Marwa Hassan provide during homework time. The children enjoy the math problems they give and time to relax when they need to calm down. Odelia has been working at Townline for 3 years and feels rewarded by being with our children. She is currently pursuing a Master of Education at Grand Valley State University.



Ayanna Robertson and Averie Thompson have been amazing at making our scholars feel welcome, heard and respected. They love how they can share their feelings with them and play fun games when ARCH projects are done ahead of time.

SCHOOLS RECEIVE NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Two elementary schools in KPS are celebrating a recent national recognition each received recently.

Discovery Elementary and Meadowlawn Elementary were both named National Showcase Schools for 2024-2025 by the Capturing Kids' Hearts organization. Capturing Kids' Hearts is a national organization aimed at helping schools and districts implement "relationship-driven" cultures as part of education.

Capturing Kids' Hearts states that the schools they choose as National Showcase Schools each year are "campuses that go above and beyond in building a safe and welcoming environment."

We congratulate the staff and students at both Discovery and Meadowlawn for gaining this important recognition.



BELL RECEIVES STATE HONOR

Todd Bell, former Kentwood Public Schools Executive Director of Finance and Business Operations recently received a prestigious honor from the Michigan School Business Officials (MSBO) organization. Bell, who retired in January after an impactful 30-year career in KPS, received the 2025 Distinguished Service Award from MSBO, one of the organization's top honors.

The MSBO Distinguished Service Award was established to honor exemplary current or former members of the organization. MSBO states the award "is given to members who provide inspirational service to MSBO and the school business management community."

Kentwood Public Schools congratulates Bell for this well-deserved honor.

TEE UP FOR KENTWOOD STUDENTS!

Fore! Get ready to swing into action for a great cause. Join us for the 2025 Falcon Charity Classic, a fun-filled day of golf supporting the Kentwood Public Schools Educational Foundation.

Grab your friends, family, and colleagues for a memorable **Monday, June 2, 2025, at the beautiful Stonewater Country Club**. For just \$120 per golfer, you'll enjoy a fantastic day on the green while making a real difference in the lives of Kentwood students. Registration is open now and closes May 30th. Payment is required at the time of registration online, using a credit or debit card. There will be a scramble format with men's and women's contests for long drive, closest to the pin, and longest putt.

Can't make it for golf? No problem! Join us for a delicious lunch buffet at 11:30 am for just \$25. It's another great way to support the Foundation and connect with our community.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to support education and enjoy some friendly competition (or a tasty lunch!). Visit www.kpsef.org/falcon-charity-classic.html to learn more and register today! Let's drive success for our students together.



**CITY OF KENTWOOD**
PARKS & RECREATION



JOIN THE FUN!

- Free Throw Frenzy and Knockout Competition
- 3 on 3 Basketball
- Kickball
- Snacks
- Music
- Prizes

STUDENTS AGES 10-18 WELCOME!

END OF SCHOOL EXTRAVAGANZA
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 1-4 PM
VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK, 355 48TH ST SE

\$5

REGISTER NOW

**ACTIVITIES ALL SUMMER LONG!****PROGRAMS FOR KIDS OF ALL AGES!**

- Art
- Dance
- Cooking
- Music
- Zumba
- Fishing
- T-Ball
- Basketball
- Soccer
- Martial Arts
- Pickleball
- Volleyball
- Day Camps
- Kayaking
- And More!


REGISTER ONLINE AT KENTWOOD.US/PARKSKentwood Parks and Recreation Department • 355 48th St. SE Kentwood, MI 49548 • 616.656.5270 • kentwood.us/parks



A Destination
District



KENTWOOD
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WELCOME EVENT

Meet and Greet

Thursday, May 29, 2025

Elementary 5:30pm-7:00pm Secondary 6:00pm-7:30pm

Join us for fun, food, and summer ideas for learning!

- **Meet the teachers** • **Explore programs**
- **Get excited for the 2025-2026 school year!**



You



Belong



Here!

Register for the 2025-2026 School Year

www.kentwoodps.org