



EAST KENTWOOD GRADUATES SOAR INTO THE FUTURE

A brisk breeze and a chill in the air did little to cool the excitement at Falcon Stadium on the evening of May 22, as family, friends, and staff gathered to celebrate the East Kentwood High School Class of 2025.

This year, 621 students received their diplomas in a ceremony led by East Kentwood Principal Omar Bakri. In his address, Bakri highlighted the academic excellence of the graduating class, which included 68 students graduating Cum Laude (GPA 3.5–3.79), 52 Magna Cum Laude (GPA 3.8–3.99), and 85 Summa Cum Laude (GPA 4.0 and above).

"We speak nearly 100 languages. We represent every continent. And somehow, through all those differences, we learn from each other. We support each other. We belong to each other. That's EK."

Principal Bakri praised the Class of 2025 for their diversity, resilience, and range of talents. "You are not one thing—but many," he said. He acknowledged students whose first language is not English, those who are first-generation college-bound, students who gained essential career skills through programs in construction, plumbing, culinary arts, and health sciences, as well as student-athletes, artists, club members, ambassadors, and those who have chosen to serve in the military.

"You come from different paths – different languages, countries, cultures, interests, and experiences," Bakri said

as he addressed the group of graduates. "Some of you lead with a paintbrush, others with a ball, a gaming controller, your voice, or a wrench. And yet, here you are—together."

In addition to Bakri, Mike Gorkowski delivered a message to the students and gathered crowd on behalf of the staff at East Kentwood High School. Students Sofia Daniel, Narjis Hussein, and Silas Mitchell also gave powerful speeches at the event.

Superintendent Kevin Polston and Board of Education...

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ENDEAVOR ARCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE

At Endeavor, one of our key achievements this year has been the significant growth in our students' social skills. They have found new and improved ways to interact with



one another, as well as express themselves to both peers and staff. This is a skill set that our students will continue to build on as they progress in their education. Additionally, we had a successful field trip to the Children's Museum this month, which was a fantastic experience full of fun for the ARCH students!

East Kentwood Graduates Soar Into The Future

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President Mimi Madden assisted in presenting the diplomas to each of the graduates. They were supported by other members of the KPS Board of Education, members of the district's leadership team, as well as many East Kentwood and KPS staff members in attendance that evening.



The stands were filled with proud family members, as well, some holding up signs of support for their graduates, and all with warm hearts and smiles as they took in this milestone moment.

In his remarks, Principal Bakri emphasized what sets East Kentwood apart. "We speak nearly 100 languages. We represent every continent. And somehow, through all those differences, we learn from each other. We support each other. We belong to each other. That's EK."

He reminded those in attendance that East Kentwood High School is the largest and most diverse high school in Michigan. "And that's just not a fun fact," Bakri stated. "That's a superpower."

CROSSROADS HIGH SCHOOL CELEBRATES GRADUATES

Crossroads High School had reason to celebrate at their graduation ceremony that took place in mid-May. Eighty-five students celebrated graduation this year in front of a packed house at the East Kentwood High School Fine Arts Auditorium.

Principal J. Mathes led the ceremony which included student speeches, videos celebrating the graduates, and, of course, the presentation of diplomas to each member of the graduating class of 2025. In addition to their diplomas, many students also earned professional certification in a variety of fields that will pave a successful path for them into the workforce.



We congratulate each and every graduate from Crossroads High School and look forward to keeping track of their successes ahead!

CRESTWOOD AND VALLEYWOOD CELEBRATE STUDENT CULTURES

Crestwood Middle School and Valleywood Middle School recently hosted their first-ever Cultural Festivals! These celebrations were organized to highlight and embrace the rich cultural diversity within our school communities. These exciting events brought students, staff, and families together to share in the traditions, heritage, and stories that make our district such a unique and inclusive place to learn and grow.

At Crestwood Middle School, students embarked on a global adventure in the gym. With a creative airline-themed setup, the space was transformed into an international terminal. Upon arrival, students passed through "passport control" and received personalized passports, which guided them through a variety of cultural "destinations" thoughtfully presented by their peers. This immersive travel experience offered students a fun and meaningful way to learn about cultures from around the world.

Valleywood Middle School's Cultural Festival created a lively and welcoming space to celebrate the many cultures represented within its student body. With more than 25 countries recognized, the event featured nearly 100 student participants and welcomed more than 500 attendees.

At both schools, many students took the stage in special performances featuring traditional dances, songs, literature, and fashion shows. Students also explored interactive displays featuring cultural artifacts, traditional foods, music, and customs from around the world.

A driving force behind the success of both events was ML Clinician/Liaison Christie Cobbson, whose vision, leadership, and passion helped bring these festivals to life. Her collaboration with KSSN Coordinators and the support of dedicated staff ensured these first-time events were both meaningful and memorable!



KPS COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT RECEIVES NATIONAL HONORS

The [National School Public Relations Association](#) (NSPRA) has announced its award recipients for 2025, and Kentwood Public Schools has received several honors. NSPRA is the leading school communication organization in the nation. Here are the honors KPS received this year:

CATEGORY: SPECIAL COMMUNICATION PROJECT CAMPAIGN

Golden Achievement Awards (1 Award)

- [A Destination District: Restructuring Elementary Attendance Boundaries](#)

The Golden Achievement Award is one of the top honors given by NSPRA recognizing “outstanding, strategic work in all aspects of school public relations, communication, marketing, and engagement.” This is truly a district-wide victory given the number of people and departments who played a role in our elementary redistricting process.

As part of this award, Kentwood Public Schools has been invited to present at a roundtable session on its communication plan for our elementary redistricting process at the NSPRA National Conference held this year in Washington, D.C. in July.



Publication and Digital Media Awards

For these awards, entries may receive an Award of Excellence (the top award); Award of Merit; or Honorable Mention.

CATEGORY: VIDEO - SINGLE (PRODUCED WITH AN OUTSIDE CONTRACTOR)

Award of Excellence (4 Awards)

- [We Are Kentwood Public Schools - A Destination District](#) (In partnership with [AVES Films](#))
- [KPS Back to School 2024-25](#) (In partnership with AVES Films)
- [A Look at the New KPS Early Childhood Center](#) (In partnership with AVES Films)
- [Through the Eyes of Our Students - Mawqar's Kentwood Story](#) (In partnership with AVES Films)

Award of Merit (1 Award)

- [Through the Eyes of Our Students - Gabriel's Kentwood Story](#) (In partnership with AVES Films)

CATEGORY: VIDEO - SINGLE (PRODUCED IN-HOUSE)

Award of Excellence (1 Award)

- [The Secret Garden](#)

CATEGORY: PHOTOGRAPHY

Award of Excellence (1 Award)

- [STEM Smiles](#) (In partnership with AVES Films)

Honorable Mention (1 Award)

- [Parade of Nations - Celebrating Who We Are](#)

We want to thank and congratulate our valued partners at AVES Films for their role in some of these entries and for their commitment in collaborating with us to tell the story of Kentwood Public Schools.

DISCOVERY ELEMENTARY — CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE!

Discovery Elementary continues to foster a culture of excellence and innovation on behalf of our students, their families, and our staff. We are thrilled to share some awesome achievements and highlights from our 2024/25 school year.

Discovery Elementary is honored to be named a Capturing Kids Hearts National Showcase School for the seventh consecutive school year! This prestigious recognition celebrates schools that go above and beyond in building strong, respectful, and supportive relationships between students and staff. Through our intentional focus on social-emotional learning, connection, and student empowerment, we've created an environment where every student feels safe, valued, and ready to learn.

Adding to our list of honors, Discovery Elementary has received an A rating from the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, placing us among the top 10 percent of schools in the state of Michigan! This rating reflects not only our strong academic outcomes but also our commitment to continuous improvement, equity, and student-centered learning. We are proud of our students, teachers, and families for making Discovery a high-performing school community.

We are also incredibly proud to recognize Ms. Reneeta Polson was recently named "WZZM's Teacher of the Week"! This recognition celebrates her outstanding contributions and the positive impact she makes each day here at Discovery and within the district. This well-deserved honor highlights her passion for education and the meaningful impact she has on her students every day.

Finally, we congratulate Mrs. Ruth Verburg on the recent publication of her scholarly work, "Encouraging Motivation: Teaching Strategies for Multilingual Learners," in the European Journal of Teaching and Education. Her research offers valuable insights about supporting diverse learners and showcases the academic leadership within our school community. We are proud to have educators like Mrs. Verburg advancing the field of education both locally and globally.

At Discovery Elementary, we believe in recognizing and celebrating the remarkable people and achievements that make our school a special place to learn and grow. These accomplishments highlight what makes Kentwood Public Schools a truly exceptional place to learn and grow.



MEADOWLAWN RECEIVES HONORS

The end of the school year is a time to celebrate the wonderful accomplishments we have achieved as a school community. Meadowlawn is incredibly proud to announce that we have once again been nominated as a Capturing Kids Hearts (CKH) National Showcase School. This is our fifth year in a row for this prestigious honor and a testament to the hard work and dedication our staff invest building a culture where students feel safe, connected, and engaged.



Through personalized greetings, the sharing of good news, and morning meetings, scholars feel welcomed and learn that their voice matters. Our work with social contracts, and the adherence to a standard of conduct within each classroom, help us to feel safe and valued. Strategies for engagement, exploration, and accountability in academics help us to feel successful. All those combined, help to build the sense of belonging we hope every stakeholder in our community feels. We are once again thrilled to be nominated as a CKH building of excellence!

Meadowlawn was also honored this year by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy as one of the top-performing 10% of public schools in the state based upon demographics and academic performance. Our staff has worked hard to build rigorous, engaging lessons that are culturally relevant to our scholars. They do their best every day to ensure students within our community have the social-emotional support and resources they need to place academics as a priority in the minds and hearts of our children. An honor such as this is a welcome celebration of the high care and dedication our educators bring to Meadowlawn!

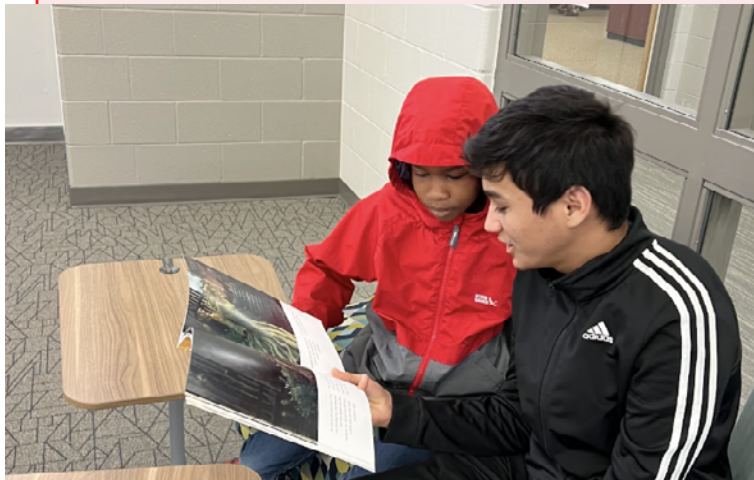
KPS CELEBRATES LAUNCH OF A NEW SECTION IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Kentwood Public Schools is excited to launch a new initiative to expand and diversify school library collections with native language and bilingual books. In collaboration with the KPS Multilingual Department, Kent District Library, the Welcome Plan Collaborative, and other community partners, the district has added more than 500 books in 18 different languages.

These new titles will be housed in the World Language sections of six school library media centers—Bowen Elementary, Endeavor Elementary, Hamilton Elementary, Pinewood Middle, Valleywood Middle, and East Kentwood High School—starting in the 2025–2026 school year. The goal is to better reflect the linguistic diversity of our students and support them in maintaining their home language while learning English.

To celebrate the launch, Valleywood Middle School hosted a special preview event with bilingual partner reading, cultural exploration, crafts, and snacks. Students had the opportunity to engage with the books and see themselves and others reflected in the stories.

This pilot program is just the beginning, as KPS continues to grow World Language sections district-wide and foster a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all learners.



CHALLENGER ARCH CELEBRATES SUCCESSES

Kentwood Public Schools is committed to being a leader of excellence by bridging the gap between school and community. Challenger Elementary's ARCH program supports that goal by creating a quality after-school environment for as many students as possible. Leading the effort is a core group of ARCH staff, including Coleman Albaugh, Nicole Nicholas, and Tamona Guyton-Talley, who have crafted an environment built around community and elevating youth voice. Students benefit from their unique ability to adjust program offerings on a moment's notice to best impact the students in attendance that day. This consistency in program quality has allowed the Challenger ARCH program to grow by an average of 20% each year since 2021, reaching a new peak of over 60 concurrent students in the 2024-2025 school year. In late 2024, the ARCH program was awarded an Out of School Time grant that covers the cost of hiring more talented staff, allowing for even more students to be a part of the fast-growing program. With the 2025-2026 school year just around the corner, the program is excited to continue to serve the community with an excellent space for elementary youth.



EK TRACK COACH RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS HONOR

Congratulations to East Kentwood High School Girls Track and Field Coach Stephanie Stephenson! Stephenson recently was named a member of the Michigan High School Coaches Association's Hall of Fame. She is one of only 14 coaches from across the state to be named a member of the 2025 Hall of Fame class.

We congratulate Coach Stephenson on this prestigious honor and thank her for all she gives to our student athletes, our district, and our community.

THE FRESHMAN CAMPUS HOLDS A SPECIAL CELEBRATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS

At East Kentwood Freshman Campus, a special graduation ceremony was held to honor three remarkable students. This intimate gathering brought together families, educators, and community members to celebrate each graduate's unique journey and achievements.



The personalized ceremony allowed for meaningful moments of reflection and joy. Parents, siblings, teachers, and staff—both past and present—came together to recognize the dedication and growth these students demonstrated in reaching this important milestone.

School staff prepared thoughtful speeches highlighting each graduate's individual strengths and accomplishments. Teachers shared stories of perseverance and success, demonstrating the impact of individualized support and encouragement. Though smaller in scale, the ceremony's significance was immense.

This graduation served as a powerful reminder of community strength and the importance of celebrating achievements in ways that honor each individual. As these students move forward, the connections and lessons from their educational journey will continue to guide their future success.



CHILD NUTRITION SERVICES STAFF RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Kentwood Public Schools Child Nutrition Services staff is celebrating a well-deserved recognition from the United States Department of Agriculture. The group recently received a Healthy Meals Incentives Recognition Award for being a "Breakfast Trailblazer!"

In a recognition letter to the district, Food and Nutrition Service Administrator James C. Miller expressed appreciation for the "hard work and dedication" of the KPS school nutrition professionals. "They are unsung heroes," Miller wrote, "and their commitment to providing nourishing meals to our school children is unwavering."

The KPS Child Nutrition Services team received this honor because its "hard work and innovative practices are paving the way for other districts to advance their school meal programs."

We congratulate KPS Director of Child Nutrition Services, Dan Zehr, and the entire KPS Child Nutrition Services team for this honor.



MEADOWLAWN ARCH REFLECTS ON IMPACTFUL SCHOOL YEAR

Meadowlawn ARCH had another great year! The program grew to serve 70 students and their families throughout the school year. Meadowlawn ARCH provided a wide range of enriching experiences that supported students' academic, social, and emotional development. Scholars participated in hands-on activities such as career



exploration, financial literacy projects, cultural crafts, mindfulness, and STEM challenges. Highlights included a field trip to the Grand Rapids Children's Museum, leadership training through Junior Achievement BizTown, and large-scale events like Lights On!

Afterschool, which brought together hundreds of families and community members. Students also enjoyed weekly clubs and received ongoing guidance on friendship, teamwork, and making positive choices.

One parent shared, "ARCH has been helpful to my student because it has helped her build relationships and widen her communication

skills." A student added, "I like going to ARCH because I get to laugh and have more freedom. ARCH is a place where kids can find new friends, and I like that." Another student noted, "I like going to ARCH because the teachers are really funny. ARCH is really fun. The teachers are really helpful."

As we wrap up the school year, we are proud to celebrate the incredible growth, creativity, and joy our ARCH scholars have experienced.





FREE DROP-IN PROGRAM FOR KIDS
JUNE 17 - JULY 24

Calling all kids ages 7-15! Get ready for an unforgettable summer of outdoor adventure with **Play in the Park**, our mobile activity program. Kentwood Parks & Recreation staff will run various games, art projects, and nature activities at different parks and community events on weekdays throughout the summer. No registration is required - just stop by and join the fun!

WHERE TO FIND US:

DAY	TIME	LOCATION
Tuesdays	11 a.m. - 3 p.m.	Veterans Memorial Park 355 48th St SE
Wednesdays	11 a.m. - 3 p.m.	Jaycee Park 1088 Gentian Dr SE
Thursdays	4 - 8 p.m.	Kentwood Farmers Market & Summer Concert Series 4900 Breton SE



LEARN MORE

ACTIVITIES ALL SUMMER LONG!



CITY OF KENTWOOD PARKS & RECREATION

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/PARKS](https://kentwood.us/parks)

Kentwood Parks and Recreation Department • 355 48th St. SE Kentwood, MI 49548 • 616.656.5270 • kentwood.us/parks

SOUTHWOOD PTC MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR STUDENTS

Over the past year, Southwood's school PTC has been thoughtfully reframing its work to be more meaningful and intentional in how it supports our school community. In collaboration with KSSN and utilizing the community school framework, a big focus for Southwood is to increase staff, student, and family engagement. From organizing a heartfelt and memorable staff appreciation week full of gifts and interactive games, launching new and creative fundraising initiatives, to a family photo night and glow dance, this dedicated group of parents has gone above and beyond to make a positive impact through collaborative leadership and integrated student support. Their efforts are a powerful reminder of what's possible when families and schools partner together.

If you're a parent or community member who wants to give back, we encourage you to explore ways you can get involved. Whether it's helping with events, sharing your skills, or supporting behind the scenes, your time and talents can make a real difference.



EVENT WELCOMES STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

On May 29, schools across the district held a special Welcome Night, inviting families to connect with staff, explore learning opportunities, and get a glimpse of what's ahead for the new school year! This was part of the efforts KPS is making to ensure a smooth and successful start next year for all students, but particularly for those students changing elementary schools as part of the district's redistricting process and the opening of Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center, the district's 11th elementary school.



A Destination District



The open houses featured games, hands-on activities, and informational stations designed to engage students and support families as they prepare for the fall. Staff members from across the district were available to answer questions and build connections with families.

Thank you to everyone who joined us! It was a great way to end the school year while creating excitement for the one to come!

FIFTH GRADE FIELD DAY TRADITION LIVES ON AT FALCON STADIUM

As the school year came to a close, 5th graders across the district participated in Field Day at Falcon Stadium—a tradition packed with fun, games, and teamwork! From relay races to team challenges and tug-of-war, the day was filled with high-energy activities, encouraging movement and friendly competition.

More than just a fun day outdoors, Field Day gave students the opportunity to connect with peers from other elementary schools, show their school pride, and build new friendships before heading to middle school. Field Day celebrates the end of students' elementary years and helps them look ahead to the next exciting chapter!



CRESTWOOD STUDENTS CELEBRATE PERFECTION

Crestwood Middle School is thrilled to recognize three students who achieved a perfect score of 720 on a section of the PSAT 8!

- Math: Josiah Khenkhanthang (Discovery Elementary)
- Math: Ellet Nichols (Challenger Elementary)
- Reading & Writing: Jacob Bradshaw (Explorer Elementary)

These impressive achievements reflect not only the students' hard work and dedication but also the support and guidance of their teachers—both at Crestwood and their elementary schools.

Congratulations to Josiah, Ellet, and Jacob, and thank you to the educators who have supported these scholars along the way!



DISTRICT'S EFFORTS RECEIVE NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Kentwood Public Schools is proud to be recognized as a Frontline District Spotlight D&A Analytics Influence Winner. Frontline Education gives its District Spotlight awards to school districts and individuals who "drive positive change in education."

Frontline states, "Through recognition, we amplify success stories, inspire innovation, and foster continuous improvement."

Kentwood Public Schools was one of two districts in the nation recognized for using location analytics to respond to growth and change. The KPS honor related to the district's opening of its 11th elementary school and redistricting of its elementary school boundaries.



EK THEATRE STUDENTS PERFORM AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

It was a fun and celebratory end to the school year for students in the Varsity Performance class at East Kentwood High School.

Varsity Performance is the top class in the Theatre department's curriculum. Students in the class are responsible for creating independent, student-led productions. Members of the class are students who have followed the theatre department's class progression and have usually participated in EK Theatre productions.



At the start of the class, students are challenged with the responsibility of creating their own production, with the goal of performing the completed piece for an audience of no less than 100 people. Responsibilities range from writing to promotion to directing to design to acting, depending on the idea they are working from.

This semester's class was working with the expectation of fulfilling the final spot of EK's annual theatre production season, the Children's Performance Troupe show. To accomplish this, the class was divided into small groups of 3 (with 1 director/stage manager and 2 actors) to create 5 mini-productions of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*.

The students then contacted each elementary school, and booked performances with

Meadowlawn, Challenger, Discovery, and Endeavor Elementaries.

Over the course of 2 days, in mid May, the students traveled to those schools, performing for 30 different 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade classrooms. The tour was a great success and received wonderful responses from the students, teachers, and administrators of the elementary buildings. The experience was definitely one that the EK theatre students will not soon forget.



KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

School Calendar 2025-26

Aug 25	*First Day of School
Aug 29	No School
Sep 1	No School
Sept 24.....	½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
Oct 9.....	½ Day K-12 / Conferences
Oct 10	No School
Nov 3.....	No School / PD for Staff
Nov 26 - 28 ..	No School / Thanksgiving Break
Dec 18	½ Day K-12/KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
Dec 19	½ Day K-12 KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
Dec 22 - Jan 2 ...	No School / Winter Break
Jan 19	No School for Students & Staff / MLK Day
Feb 16 & 17	No School for Students & Staff / Mid-Winter Break
Mar 4.....	½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
Apr 2.....	½ Day K-12/KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
Apr 3 - Apr 10....	No School / Spring Break
May 25	No School / Memorial Day
June 4.....	½ Day K-12 /KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
June 5.....	Last Day of School - Half Day for Students & Staff

AUGUST							JANUARY						
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17	18	19	20	21	22	23	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

SEPTEMBER							FEBRUARY						
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28	29	30											
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DECEMBER							MAY/JUNE						
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28	29	30	31				24	25	26	27	28	29	30
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No School For StudentsHalf Day