



## A LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

**D**ear Kentwood Families and Community Members, Kentwood Public Schools is truly a special place to serve. Our district has been recognized as one of the top five most diverse districts in the country. In addition, we are recognized for excellence both in and out of the classroom.

### Consider the outcomes from the work of our teachers/ staff members from last year alone:

- Home to the National History Teacher of the Year
- Multiple state champion athletes
- We The People State Champions
- Multiple ESports State Championships
- A record number of EKHS students passing the AP U.S. History exam!

I focused the list on EKHS, but accomplishments in high school reflect the foundation laid by teachers and staff members over the course of their entire PK-12 time. Every KPS community member is vital to student success. We are on a shared journey to achieve our vision of Excellence and Equity in Education for each student in Kentwood Public Schools!

*Every KPS community member is vital to student success*

This is also a district that provides real-world experiences and innovative learning. A great example occurred last year when Bowen Elementary kindergarten and first grade students partnered with EKHS students to create

monsters. The Bowen students designed and drew pictures of them and created the names and backstories of each monster.

*We are committed to seeing our work and daily tasks through the eyes of our students.*

Then art students from East Kentwood High School brought these monsters to life, creating shiny, vibrant clay sculptures based on the Bowen students' work. The culminating event involved Bowen students traveling to EK in late May to receive their monsters from their high school partners and to celebrate their learning at a fun-filled Monster Mash. As a student, I dreamed about this type of education!



Monster Mash Video

What makes this story even more remarkable is that one of the driving forces behind this event was a student teacher from EKHS, senior Amelia Haywood. Amelia was in her second year as a student in EK's Educators Rising course. This program provides training and teaching opportunities for high school

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## A LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

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students interested in educational careers. Amelia collaborated with high school teachers, shared her idea with elementary teachers, and then worked to bring it to life. This is real-world learning on multiple levels!

Our efforts as an educational community are aligned around the district's strategic plan, now in its second year with four goals: 1) Establishing a Culture of Excellence for school climate and instruction; 2) Creating Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes for each student; 3) Ensuring Whole-Child Environments to meet social, emotional, and academic needs; and 4) Recruiting and retaining a High-Impact, Diverse Staff to serve and teach our students.

One highlight from the plan is the opening of our new, state-of-the-art Kentwood Public Schools Early Childhood Center Main Campus next to Townline Elementary. This facility provides learning opportunities for our youngest learners.

Additionally, construction is underway on the new Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center. This will be the district's 11th elementary school and is set to open for next school year. This new facility re-establishes an elementary school in our district's northeast area utilizing an innovative instructional model, expanding our early childhood footprint, and better serving students throughout the district.

In the 2024-25 school year, we remain committed to innovative engagement with our students in safe and caring environments. Our work is centered on the achievement of our students, both in and out of the classroom. Regardless of position, we are committed to seeing our work and daily tasks through the eyes of our students. They are the inspiration for all of us and the primary reason why Kentwood Public Schools is a destination district for families and staff alike.



We greatly appreciate your support and partnership in the education and care of our students, and we look forward to a successful school year ahead. Go Falcons!

Sincerely,  
Kevin Polston  
Superintendent  
Kentwood Public Schools

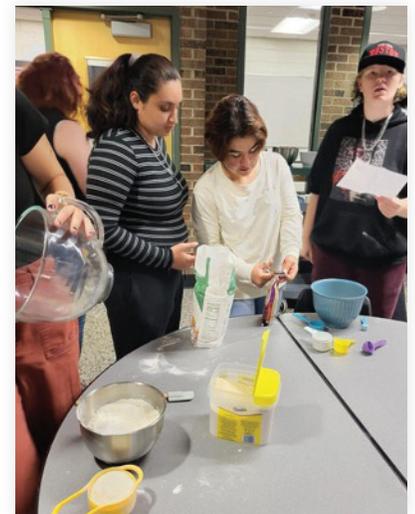


**BACK TO SCHOOL!**

## BUILDING AND BAKING IN THE EKHS SUMMER ARCH PROGRAM

East Kentwood High School ARCH students engaged in two project-based learning units that combined STEAM concepts with creative and practical activities. In the first unit, students designed models of their dream rooms, beginning with vision boards and learning about color theory, feng shui, and furniture design. They visited the Grand Rapids Art Museum for inspiration and used graph paper to draft layouts, later bringing their designs to life through 3D models. The unit concluded with a fun visit to Locked 460 Escape Rooms, where students applied their newfound design knowledge.

In the second unit, students explored the importance of STEAM in baking by collecting recipes, testing baking methods, and following the scientific process to tweak recipes. The unit culminated in designing, baking, and decorating cakes, with students sharing their creations and learnings. A highlight was a day of cookie baking and decorating facilitated by Kentwood Parks and Rec, where students enjoyed experimenting with different ingredients and techniques.



## FAMILIAR FACES IN NEW PLACES

Some Kentwood Public Schools have new principals this year, though many will recognize them as long-time dedicated members of the KPS team.

- **J. Mathes, Principal, Crossroads High School**  
J. Mathes, former principal of Valleywood Middle School, is now leading Crossroads High School, succeeding Ian Gibson, who retired last year. Mathes aims to continue the school's focus on innovative, real-world learning.
- **Jenin Shamali, Principal, Valleywood Middle School**  
Jenin Shamali, previously the assistant principal at Valleywood, has stepped into the principal role, replacing J. Mathes. With a background as an academic coach and math teacher, Shamali is committed to fostering a positive learning environment for students.
- **Ahna Sisco, Principal, Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center**  
Ahna Sisco, formerly dean of students at Endeavor Elementary, has been appointed as the principal of the new Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center, opening in August 2025. She is excited to implement the International Baccalaureate teaching model at the new school.

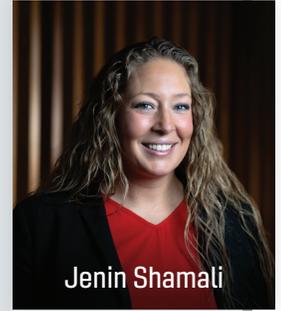
### Additional Administrative Changes

- **Nick Carlesso** is the new dean of students at Endeavor Elementary, transitioning from his role as a special education teacher at Brookwood Elementary.
- **Erika Vann** joins the KPS Early Childhood Center Main Campus as assistant principal, previously serving at East Kentwood High School Freshman Campus.

**Nathaniel Moody** and **Erin Anderson** are new assistant principals at Valleywood Middle School and East Kentwood Freshman Campus, respectively, both coming from Grand Rapids Public Schools.



Justin Mathes



Jenin Shamali



Ahna Sisco

## MARLON BROWN JOINS KPS BOARD OF EDUCATION

Kentwood Public Schools is happy to welcome Marlon Brown as the newest member of the KPS Board of Education. Brown was selected in mid-August to fill a recently vacated seat.

Brown, and his wife LaTasha, are longtime members of the Kentwood community. They are the proud parents of two East Kentwood High School graduates as well as a current student entering his sophomore year at EK.

Brown has enjoyed watching students of the district grow and develop over the years, being a part of his children's and their friends' lives from elementary school all the way through high school. He is appreciative to be part of the Kentwood community, a community that he describes as so supportive, and where he has developed great relationships and friendships over the years with neighbors. He is ready to give back to this community.

"The primary reason (for taking this position on the KPS Board of Education) is just to serve the community and to be an advocate for the students," comments Brown.

Brown appreciates the diversity in our district and is always eager to share the Kentwood story to friends not from or familiar with the district.

"Just seeing the diversity in our district and how everyone comes together to celebrate the accomplishments of our students," Brown says, "it's just so fascinating to see that."



## ARCH PARTY IS AN END OF SUMMER HIGHLIGHT

To celebrate the last day of summer school, 800 ARCH students from all KPS elementary schools gathered for a spectacular end-of-summer celebration, thanks to Maranda's Park Party Recess. Endeavor's outdoor field was transformed into the ultimate playground, loaded with inflatables, games, prizes, community partner tents, and activities to explore. Students enjoyed ice cream from Meijer, played soccer with EK varsity athletes, learned instruments with the Grand Rapids Symphony, explored Kentwood police cars, and petted animals from the Van Andel Institute.



Lori Bramble-Romeo, ARCH Afterschool Project Director shared, "The Maranda Park Party at the end of summer holds special significance for our ARCH students for several reasons. First and foremost, the event fosters a sense of belonging as our students interact with their peers, teaching staff, and community members in a positive environment. It also serves as a celebration of the skills and experiences students have gained throughout the summer. The fun and festive atmosphere allowed our students to create lasting memories, which can positively influence their overall outlook on school and community participation."

Thanks to the incredible efforts of our staff, especially the ARCH team, and our valued community partners. It was the perfect way for everyone to celebrate the end of summer school and get excited for the new school year!

## NEW EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER WELCOMES STUDENTS

The brand new, state-of-the-art Kentwood Public Schools Early Childhood Center is now open for business! The planning and construction of the new school, located on 60th Street next to Townline Elementary, has been in the works for the past two years.

The school is the home for multiple Great Start Readiness Preschool programs for four-year-olds and also offers Early Childhood Special Education services to Kentwood students. In addition, community playgroups are open to community members twice a week. The new building is currently one of two early childhood centers in the district, the other held at Explorer Elementary. A third location will be added next year with the opening of the Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center.

KPS Director of Early Childhood, Teressa Gatza, points out that the new KPS Early Childhood Center Main Campus is, "so special because it was designed intentionally for our little Falcons." Gatza explains that the design process considered the safety and engagement of our youngest learners. She says this is evident as soon as you walk into the building, which even includes a child-sized door at the main entrance to welcome young children.

Creating a space specifically designed for the success of young learners is so important. Gatza explains, "Early childhood education plays a vital role in developing the essential skills needed to be successful in school. Young students learn at an incredibly rapid rate, and we have the opportunity to instill curiosity and problem-solving skills that will stay with them for a lifetime in early childhood education."

Gatza is excited for the talented and dedicated team of early childhood educators to utilize this new space for learning. "Building a brand new, state of the art early childhood center is evidence that KPS is committed to our students and ensures equitable opportunities for all kids," she says. "KPS is committed to growing our Early Childhood offerings, so we are able to reach more Kentwood students in the early years."



## CONSTRUCTION UNDERWAY ON HAMILTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL AND EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

Construction is in high gear for the new Hamilton Elementary School and Early Childhood Center. The project is an extensive renovation of the existing Hamilton building. When completed, it will be the district's eleventh elementary school and will return an early childhood center to the northeastern part of the district.



Kentwood Public Schools Executive Director of Finance and Business Operations, Todd Bell, comments that the building supports the goals of the district's strategic plan, "One goal in our strategic plan is that we have equitable opportunities and outcomes for our students. The new elementary school will have a full-service kitchen and a separate cafeteria and gym space in line with the high standards of our other elementary buildings."

Most recently the Hamilton building served as an early childhood center in the district. The new KPS Early Childhood Center Main Campus opened this year next to Townline Elementary. Bell points out that the new

Hamilton will also have a dedicated space for early childhood learning as part of the extensive renovation and construction project.

"We are here to serve our community," Bell points out. "When construction is completed on this building, we will have three early childhood centers located in different parts of our community—the new building at Hamilton, the KPS Early Childhood Center Main Campus newly opened this year, and also the early childhood center at Explorer Elementary. This provides parents who live in various parts of our community convenient access to early childhood care."

Ahna Sisco, who had been serving as the dean of students at Endeavor Elementary, was chosen to be the principal at the new Hamilton Elementary. The school will offer an International Baccalaureate approach to teaching and learning, an innovative method aimed at "developing inquiring, knowledgeable, confident, and caring young people." The new Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center is scheduled to open at the beginning of 2025-2026 school year.

## CHILD NUTRITION STAFF WORK HARD THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER

At Kentwood Public Schools, excellence is a year-round commitment. This dedication is reflected in the district's Child Nutrition Services (CNS) staff, who participate in summer training sessions to enhance their skills and uphold the vision of Excellence and Equity in Education. These sessions focus on "skill development, professional growth, personal growth, and living out the strategic plan of KPS," according to Dan Zehr, KPS Director of Child Nutrition Services.

This summer, the CNS team prioritized safety with training led by the Kentwood Fire Department. Zehr highlights the importance of this focus, noting that the team produces nearly two million meals annually using large equipment and potentially dangerous tools. "We are taking a very strategic approach to promoting safety for all of our employees in order to minimize workplace-related injuries and any disruption to the important meals we are serving," Zehr says.

Additionally, the team trained with Chef Jenna Arcidiacono, an East Kentwood High School graduate and owner of Amore Trattoria Italiana, who shared tips on preparing fast and easy homemade meals for students. "Our CNS team is fantastic!" says Zehr. "The team loves our students and our district, so they take a great deal of pride in their work and are always engaged... Plus, we generally have a ton of fun while we learn."



## STUDENTS TAKE ON “FOOD FOR THOUGHT”

Students from nine schools in our ARCH program had a great experience in the “Food for Thought” course, a two-week project-based learning experience focused on nutrition, cooking, and culinary careers. They began by understanding the importance of proper nutrition for overall health, then applied this knowledge by evaluating food choices and learning about whole vs. processed foods. The students analyzed nutrition labels, explored tools like MyPlate, and categorized foods as “go,” “slow,” or “whoa” based on their nutritional value.

The hands-on component had students brainstorming and creating recipes using healthy ingredients. Working individually or in groups, they crafted dishes like kabobs, smoothies, and shortcakes, refining their recipes for both taste and nutrition. The program culminated in a cook-off where students proudly presented their culinary creations, showcasing their skills and teamwork.



## VALLEYWOOD STUDENTS TAKE PART IN ‘INTEREST’ING LEARNING

The Valleywood summer ARCH program was a blast, with students delving into how interest grows and affects financial choices. They learned the importance of delayed gratification, realizing that sometimes waiting is better than immediate rewards. By applying division to calculate interest, they connected their learning to real-life scenarios, making it highly relevant. The excitement grew as they started thinking about their future financial goals and the power of investment. As the program progressed, they embraced iterative thinking to refine their skills and ideas. By the end, they were teaching high school students about debt and investment, making a significant impact on their peers.

## PINEWOOD AND TOWNLINE STUDENTS ZERO IN ON “MOMENTS TO REMEMBER”

This summer, Pinewood and Townline ARCH students embarked on a meaningful journey, exploring the importance of intergenerational connections. They learned the value of respecting and understanding people of all ages, discovering that everyone has something to offer regardless of their life experiences. Through games, stories, and crafts, students engaged with senior friends, deepening their appreciation for the wisdom of older generations. They expressed their newfound knowledge by writing hand-written letters and creating biographies, which they proudly presented to friends and family, capturing the cherished memories and stories of their senior companions.

Students also connected with local seniors, including volunteers Grandma Janet and Grandma Dorothy, as well as retired staff member Grandma Gayle. Despite challenges like distance and health concerns, students found creative ways to maintain bonds with their elders, such as letters, photos, and electronic communication. These efforts culminated in thoughtful gifts and messages, emphasizing the special role these seniors play in the community and the lasting impact of the summer’s intergenerational experiences.





# KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## School Calendar 2024-25

- Aug 19 ..... \*First Day of School
- Aug 30 ..... No School
- Sep 2 ..... No School
- Sept 25..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
  
- Oct 10..... ½ Day K-12 / Conferences
- Oct 11 ..... No School
  
- Nov 1..... No School / PD for Staff
- Nov 27 - 29 .. No School / Thanksgiving Break
  
- Dec 20 ..... ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day (non-report)
- Dec 23 - Jan 3 ... Winter Break
  
- Jan 20 ..... No School for Students & Staff / MLK Day
  
- Feb 17 & 18 .... No School for Students & Staff / Mid-Winter Break
  
- Mar 5..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
- Apr 3..... ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day (non-report)
- Apr 4 - Apr 11.... No School for Students & Staff/ Spring Break
  
- May 23 ..... ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day (non-report)
- May 26 ..... No School / Memorial Day
- May 30..... Last Day of School - Half Day for Students & Staff

School	Start	Dismissal	Half Day Dismissal
Elementary	9:00 AM	3:59 PM	12:15 PM
Middle	8:20 AM	3:04 PM	11:35 AM
EKFC & EKHS	7:35 AM	2:19 PM	10:50 AM
Crossroads	7:34 AM	2:10 PM	10:40 AM

AUGUST							JANUARY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3				1	2	3	4
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	26	27	28	29	30	31	

SEPTEMBER							FEBRUARY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7							1
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
29	30						23	24	25	26	27	28	

OCTOBER							MARCH						
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		1	2	3	4	5							1
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
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27	28	29	30	31			23	24	25	26	27	28	29
							30	31					

NOVEMBER							APRIL						
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24	25	26	27	28	29	30	27	28	29	30			

DECEMBER							MAY						
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15	16	17	18	19	20	21	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
29	30	31					25	26	27	28	29	30	31

No School For Students  
 Half Day

**Kentwood Board of Education**  
KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
5820 EASTERN AVENUE SE  
KENTWOOD, MI 49508

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## **KPS UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN RECEIVES HONOR**

Kentwood Public Schools is dedicated to serving our community, a commitment demonstrated through our annual support of the Heart of West Michigan United Way. Last year, thanks to the generosity of our staff, we donated over \$51,000 to their campaign. This achievement was made possible by the hard work of our United Way Campaign Committee, who recently earned the Campaign Committee of the Year Award. We congratulate Debbie Schuitema, Joe Marsiglia, Jenin Shamali, and Dollineller Large for their outstanding efforts, and thank all who contributed to this success!