



TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT RECOGNIZED FOR LIFESAVING ACTIONS

A special recognition took place at the December Kentwood Public Schools Board of Education meeting as Superintendent Kevin Polston, along with board members and the KPS Central Office Team, honored the caring and proactive actions of the district's Technology Department, actions that ultimately saved a life.

The recognition stemmed from an incident involving Technology Department Network Engineer Mike Lepeak. One morning in early October, Lepeak did not arrive for an 8:00 a.m. meeting and did not call or message to indicate he would be late or absent.

That was out of character for him. Concerned colleagues attempted to reach him by phone and text but received no response.



As the meeting began, Executive Director of Technology Evan Hordyk said it "just didn't feel right" not being able to connect with Lepeak. He asked some members of the department to head to Mike's home to check on him, and some to connect with the KPS Security Department.

"For them to notice and to take action, literally made the difference"

When technology staff arrived at Lepeak's home, they immediately sensed something was wrong. His car was in the driveway, music could be heard inside, but no one answered the door. Police and paramedics were called to the scene and discovered Lepeak unconscious on the floor near the entrance to his bedroom. He was suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Lepeak was found just in time.

"The paramedics told me," Lepeak shared in a recent interview, "that I probably only had about 45 minutes left if I had remained in my home."

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DISTRICT GATHERS COMMUNITY INPUT

In a series of five town hall meetings three feedback points were identified.

1. Stakeholders affirmed real-world, hands-on learning models.
2. Safety and Success are key themes stakeholders value in the work ahead.
3. More than 95% of stakeholders supported "reimagining" over "renovating" Valleywood Middle School.

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KPS Cares: Technology Department Recognized for Lifesaving Actions

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Paramedics were able to revive him in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, where he spent three days recovering. Fortunately, Lepeak is now doing well and has returned to work in Kentwood.

The incident was traced to an issue with his furnace that he had been unaware of. Lepeak hopes his experience serves

as an important reminder about carbon monoxide safety.

"You truly can't smell it, or you can't taste it," Lepeak explained in talking about what happened. Although he had a carbon monoxide detector in his home, he was unable to hear it due to

where it was located. Since then, the fire department has installed updated and additional detectors in his home, something Lepeak strongly encourages others to consider. (Additional carbon monoxide safety tips can be found on [page 3](#).)

Lepeak also shared his appreciation for the caring culture at Kentwood Public Schools.

"I've worked in a lot of places," Lepeak said, "and I can tell you it is not as likely in those other places that someone would have checked on me and my wellbeing."

"Kentwood has just been so overly inviting. It has truly felt like a family," Lepeak explained. "It has really felt like home."

Lepeak credits the genuine, caring nature of the close-knit team that works in the technology department for acting when things didn't feel quite right. "For them to notice and to take action, literally made the difference," he said.

Lepeak, who has worked in KPS for three years, added that this sense of care extends far beyond his department. He says, as he travels around the district for his work, he feels this throughout the KPS community.

"Kentwood has just been so overly inviting. It has truly felt like a family," Lepeak explained. "It has really felt like home."

[Click this link for a video version of this story from EK's Falcon News Network's Julie Islas.](#)



FALCON ESPORTS SOARS AT STATE PLAYOFFS

East Kentwood High School's Falcon Esports program delivered an outstanding performance at the MIHSEF Esports State Playoffs, held Saturday, December 13, at the University of Michigan–Flint. The event featured **more than 400 student competitors representing over 50 high schools** from across Michigan, and East Kentwood once again proved why it is recognized as one of the premier esports programs in the state—and the nation.

The Falcons captured their **sixth consecutive Valorant State Championship**, continuing a remarkable dynasty led by team captain **Andi Haska**. East Kentwood also secured its **second state championship in Rainbow Six**, with **Grant Songer** serving as team captain. These victories further cement EK's reputation for excellence across multiple esports titles.

In addition to the championships, Falcon Esports earned two impressive runner-up finishes. The **Mario Kart team**, captained by **Reuben Starnes and Y-Tien Le**, raced their way to a **state runner-up** finish, while earlier in the week the **Splatoon team**, led by their captain **Jackie DeVries**, also claimed **state runner-up honors**.

With these results, Falcon Esports has now amassed an incredible **22 state championships and 10 state runner-up finishes since 2019**. This sustained success recently earned East Kentwood High School national recognition, as the program was ranked [**#14 esports program in the country by USA Today**](#).

"I couldn't be prouder of how our students represented East Kentwood on the biggest stage," said coach **Bill Dixon**. "Their teamwork, preparation, and sportsmanship were on full display, and the results speak for themselves. This success is about more than winning. It's about giving students opportunities to grow, compete, and belong."

As the fall season concludes, the **winter esports season begins with the start of second semester**, bringing new games, new teams, and new opportunities for students across the district to get involved. With momentum like this, the future of Falcon Esports looks brighter than ever.

KENTWOOD FIRE DEPARTMENT OFFERS TIPS ON CARBON MONOXIDE SAFETY

In response to the situation involving our staff member and carbon monoxide poisoning, Kentwood Public Schools reached out to the Kentwood Fire Department to learn about safety tips to share with our community.

First, the Kentwood Fire Department shared that they, along with surrounding fire departments for their communities, will install a carbon monoxide detector at no charge in Kentwood homes. If you are a Kentwood homeowner and would like a carbon monoxide detector, and/or a smoke detector, installed in your home, you may call 616.554.0803 or [complete an online form using this link](#) to set up an appointment. The Kentwood Fire Department adds that they are happy to provide life-saving devices to Kentwood residents.

The department notes that, for rental properties, residents need to contact their landlords regarding installation of detectors as they are required to do so.

In addition, the fire department shared some useful information provided by the American Red Cross regarding carbon monoxide safety. Here are a few safety tips to keep in mind according to the American Red Cross:

- Make sure all gas appliances are vented properly.
- Have all heating systems inspected and serviced annually by a professional using a portable CO detector.
- Never leave a car running inside a garage, even if the garage door is open.
- Do not use a gas range or oven to heat your home.

[Please click this link for a complete list of safety tips, as well as carbon monoxide safety information, from the American Red Cross.](#)



FRESHMAN CAMPUS PUTS PEN TO PAPER TO CREATE A CARING ENVIRONMENT

At the Freshman Campus, students and staff are putting "KPS Cares" into daily action in meaningful, tangible ways. This fall, our Falcons launched a schoolwide gratitude initiative, reminding one another that kindness, appreciation, and connection are powerful parts of learning.

Each week, students focused on a different group to thank. One week, they wrote gratitude notes to their former middle school teachers, reflecting on the people who helped them get to high school and naming specific ways those teachers made a difference. Another week, students wrote to a friend—someone who has supported them, made them laugh, or helped them through a tough moment. On a third week, students chose a current EKFC staff member to thank, from teachers and office staff to custodians, lunch staff, and support personnel, reminding the adults in the building that their hard work is noticed and valued.



Staff are also modeling care and appreciation for one another. At every monthly staff meeting, the check-in QR code doesn't just take attendance—it prompts staff to send a quick affirmation to someone they appreciate. In just a few minutes, dozens of positive messages move through the building, lifting spirits and strengthening relationships among colleagues.

These acts of kindness don't go unnoticed. We regularly highlight gratitude notes, affirmations, and examples of students and staff going above and beyond in our daily announcements. By celebrating these moments, we send a clear message: in KPS, caring for one another is not an extra, it's part of who we are. At EKFC, we don't just say "KPS Cares"; we show it, one thank-you, one affirmation, and one kind action at a time.

CARING IN ACTION: VALLEYWOOD STUDENTS CREATE A TRADITION OF JOY

At Valleywood Middle School, caring takes many forms, but one of the most heartwarming appears each December when students come together to create something special for their peers and families. Guided by staff and fueled by the enthusiasm of our student council, a group of young leaders works behind the scenes to transform a simple idea into an experience that brings joy to the entire school community.

Each year, students help set up a space where their classmates can choose small, meaningful gifts for the people they love. What makes this tradition so powerful is not the shopping itself, but the feeling behind it. Students take pride in selecting something thoughtful, imagining the smiles of parents, siblings, and friends. Many describe it as the first time they get to experience the joy of giving on their own terms.

For the student council members who organize the event, the experience is just as meaningful. They spend hours creating displays, arranging items, and making sure everything feels welcoming. They take their roles seriously, knowing that they are helping their peers create moments of connection at home. One student leader shared, "We want everyone to feel excited about doing something kind."

The result is a tradition that weaves caring into the fabric of our school, with students supporting students, families feeling seen and included, and young people discovering that giving can be just as joyful as receiving. At Valleywood, this season reminds us that the most meaningful gifts are the ones that bring us together.



KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS EDUCATION FOUNDATION SUPPORTING EVERY KENTWOOD STUDENT

Kentwood is a community that believes in its children. Across our district, thousands of students depend on opportunities that help them learn, explore, and imagine what's possible. The Kentwood Public Schools Education Foundation (KPSEF) exists to ensure those opportunities continue to grow.

KPSEF's mission is simple and essential: to secure resources, raise funds, and build community support for educational enhancements and innovative programs that help every student reach their fullest potential. As Kentwood Public Schools continues to thrive as one of the most diverse and dynamic districts in Michigan, KPSEF plays a key role in expanding access to the tools and experiences students need to succeed.

What KPSEF Supports

The Foundation invests in programs and initiatives that make a real difference in students' daily lives, including:

- **The KIDS Program**, providing after-school enrichment and sports opportunities for thousands of young learners.
- **STEM enrichment**, giving students hands-on experiences that spark curiosity and build future-ready skills.
- **Teacher mini-grants**, helping educators bring creative, innovative ideas into their classrooms.
- **Milestone support**, including AP exam fee assistance, caps and gowns, and other resources that help students confidently take their next steps.

Your Support Makes This Possible

KPSEF relies on the generosity of families, alumni, neighbors, and community partners who believe in the power of education. A gift of any size strengthens programs that directly impact Kentwood students and helps our district continue providing exceptional opportunities for all learners.

To donate or learn more about how you can support students, visit: https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/Qt6R07Xt_WHvyfmzjfJlbw

HAMILTON PTC LAUNCHES WITH STRONG MOMENTUM



Hamilton Elementary is celebrating the launch of its new Parent-Teacher Committee (PTC), which has already made a positive impact on school culture and community engagement. The PTC's early work reflects strong parent leadership and a commitment to equitable experiences for every student.

A key focus of the PTC has been uplifting student voice, an essential element of the IB Primary Years Program. By partnering with the student council, parents have helped shape experiences that reflect what matters most to Hamilton's learners.

In just a short time, the PTC has hosted community-building events such as Skate Night, Movie Night, Popcorn Fridays, and a Holiday Shop. These experiences foster connection and belonging while supporting learning that leads to action.

With strong momentum underway, Hamilton looks forward to continued collaboration, where students, families, and staff work together to create positive change and further strengthen the school community.

Young 5s & Kindergarten Registration

**Thursday, March 5, 2026
6:30pm at your child's home school**

We invite you to step into a world of learning and fun as you register for the 2026-2027 school year. This meeting is to gather essential information about our Young 5's and Kindergarten programs. Meet the amazing staff who will be working in partnership with you to guide your child's journey. See you there!

- Young 5s and Kindergarten at all eleven elementary schools - all day, every day
- Online registration opens February 23, 2026
www.kentwoodps.org





 @sheclubekhs

In celebration of March being Women's History Month, the S.H.E. Club is excited to host and have you at our second..

EAST KENTWOOD HIGH SCHOOL'S **WOMEN'S EXPO**

Featuring: Women-owned business's, clubs, speakers, performances, activities, art, food, prizes, and more!

Join us to celebrate Women's History Month!
**March 14th
11 pm - 3 pm**

Vendor Application Form


East Kentwood Freshman Campus
6170 Valley Ln Dr SE, Kentwood, MI 49508



SOUTHWOOD CONNECTS WITH COMMUNITY THROUGH JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

Southwood recently had Junior Achievement visit the classrooms for a day of learning. Each grade level participated in a different lesson tailored to their age group. Junior Achievement lessons are delivered by dedicated volunteers from the community. These presenters provided engaging, hands-on activities that emphasize financial literacy, work and career readiness, and entrepreneurship. Their involvement creates an enriched learning experience that helps students make meaningful connections between what they learn in the classroom and the world beyond school.

We have welcomed Junior Achievement to Southwood for many years. We appreciate their time and look forward to seeing them in the future.



GORDON RECEIVES TOP HONOR IN MICHIGAN

Congratulations to Kentwood Public Schools Executive Director of Human Resources, Jamie Gordon. Last month, Gordon received the Outstanding Professional of the Year award from the Michigan Association of School Personnel Administrators. This is a great accomplishment, particularly because it is given by colleagues who work statewide in personnel administration.

Members of the KPS Human Resources Department, along with members of the district's Leadership Team, were on hand in Lansing when Gordon received the award.

We congratulate her on this honor and thank Gordon for her longstanding commitment and service to the students, families, and staff of Kentwood Public Schools.



STUDENT COUNCIL BAKE SALE SUPPORTS CRESTWOOD'S CLOTHING CLOSET

Crestwood's Student Council once again demonstrated the power of community and kindness through their annual Bake Sale, held on Wednesday, December 3rd during all lunches. Thanks to the hard work of our student council leaders, generous staff donations, and plenty of sweet treats, the event was a wonderful success.

Each year, the student council chooses a cause that directly benefits Crestwood students, and this year's focus was our school's clothing closet—a resource that provides essential items to students in need. In addition to the bake sale proceeds of \$700, our staff went above and beyond by contributing an additional \$475 in donations.

Together, the Crestwood community raised a grand total of \$1,175 to support the clothing closet, a tremendous contribution that will help ensure students have access to warm clothing, everyday basics, and emergency items throughout the school year.

Thank you to everyone who baked, donated, purchased a treat, or simply helped spread the word. Your generosity continues to make a meaningful difference in our school community.



EAST KENTWOOD INDUCTS STUDENTS INTO NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

NHS members go through a rigorous application process prior to being inducted. The application is demanding and includes an essay outlining how their lives align with the four pillars of the organization. Each candidate has above a 3.6 GPA and is evaluated on leadership, character, and service by the entire staff. Finally, an anonymous faculty council reviews each application, and extends an invitation to those members that are approved.

Our EKHS NHS is a vibrant, joyous, intelligent, community minded group of students. We are proud to induct them into this prestigious association. Our EKHS National Honor Society Inducted 34 new members from the Class of 2026 and the Class of 2027 on Wednesday Nov. 19th. Our esteemed advisors coordinated a formal, yet celebratory evening to celebrate the juniors and seniors who received an invitation to apply. The presence of our entire administration team lent gravitas to the evening. Our executive board is made up of NHS students who, again, had to go through a rigorous application process and interviews with the advisors, Ms. Kooy and Mrs. Wierenga. We are proud of our hard-working executive board and their dedication to community service.



President: Mireille Banza Mwenyi

Co-Vice Presidents: Charlene Otu-Konadu & Ahmed Elkhwad

Secretary/Treasurer (aka secretresurer): Sophia Delval

Event/PR Coordinator: Amberly Nguyen

Academic Program Coordinator: Emma Johnson

Service Chair: Lejla Kmetas

Since the beginning of the school year, 65 Members from the Class of 2026, have served over 570 hours of volunteering in our community: here at EKHS, at Kentwood elementary schools, churches, libraries, and small, local businesses. They have made 50 lunch bags for Kids' Food Basket, 24 cards for the upcoming holidays for a seniors' home, and over 70 greetings for young people with cancer. East Kentwood High School has many niches for students to find their place, and the National Honor Society is certainly thriving with the hard work and dedication of these students and their advisors.

We look forward to 2026, where we can see our NHS Falcons out in the community, showing what it means to be a student that is focused on Scholarship, Service, Leadership and Character.

ENDEAVOR CELEBRATES MATH SUCCESS

Over the past year and a half, Endeavor staff have engaged in a deep dive into implementing our new math curriculum and strengthening our Professional Learning Community (PLC) work. This focus is already showing positive results for students. When we look back at student proficiency, we are encouraged by the progress made so far this year.

Compared to this same point last year, we are seeing nearly a 5% increase in the number of students performing on or above grade level in math. This growth reflects stronger alignment to grade-level expectations and more consistent instructional practices across classrooms.

We are also seeing encouraging gains in student growth. At the midpoint last year, the median improvement score was approximately 54%. This year, that number has increased to about 62%, representing an 8% increase in typical growth. This progress tells us that our staff and students' hard work is bringing results.

Looking ahead to the second half of the year, we remain focused on building momentum. Through continued collaboration, targeted instruction, and support for every learner, we are confident that students will continue to grow as mathematicians.

COMMUNITY WEIGHS-IN ON FUTURE FACILITIES PLANNING FOR KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

In the fall of 2025, members of the Kentwood Public Schools community offered up important input regarding the next leg of the facilities journey for Kentwood Public Schools. This came in the form of a survey and a series of town hall meetings held in late October and November. Meetings occurred at each middle school with a virtual option available.

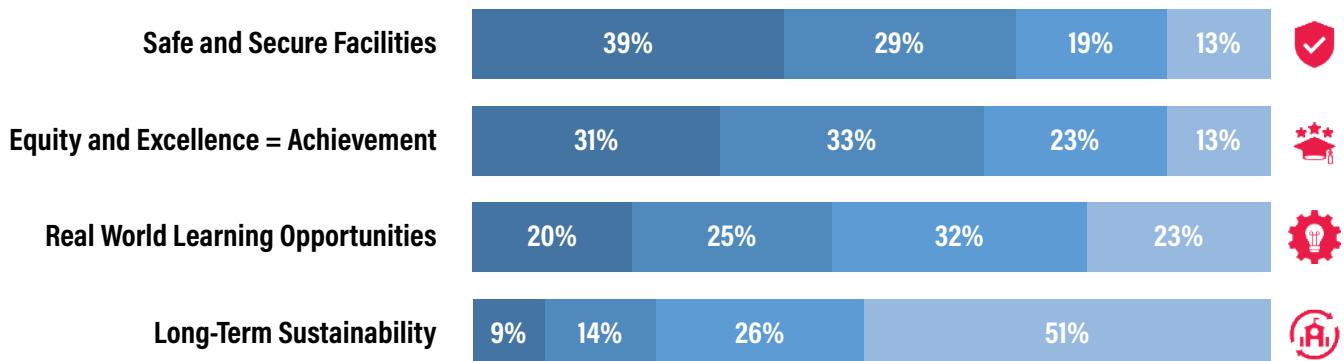
Conversation in this round of stakeholder engagement centered on the future of secondary education in KPS, with a particular focus on middle school. Below is a summary of some of the findings from the 1,435 participants.



Safety + Success Ranked as Key Themes

KPS Future Facilities Survey - Fall 2025 Guiding Principles for Future Facilities Planning

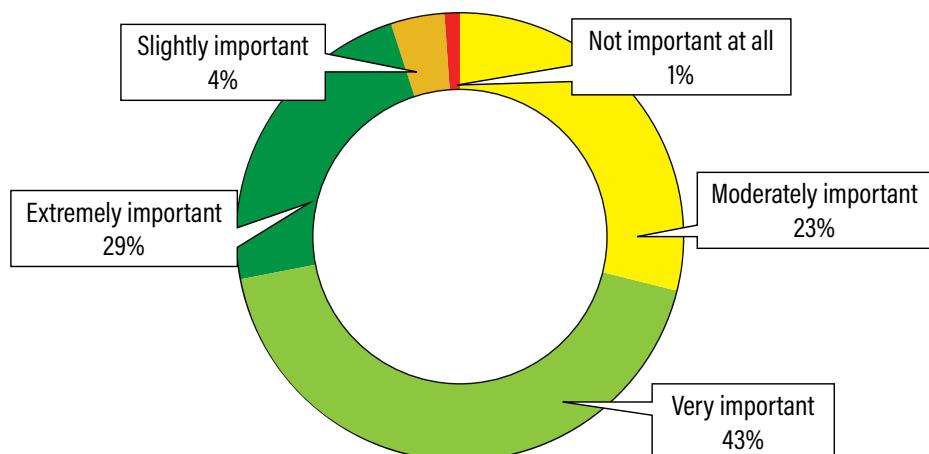
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MIDDLE SCHOOL IS TOP PRIORITY FOR PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Ninety-five percent of survey respondents indicated that middle school should be an important component of planning future facilities needs of Kentwood Public Schools.

KPS Future Facilities Survey - Fall 2025 Importance of Middle School in Future Planning

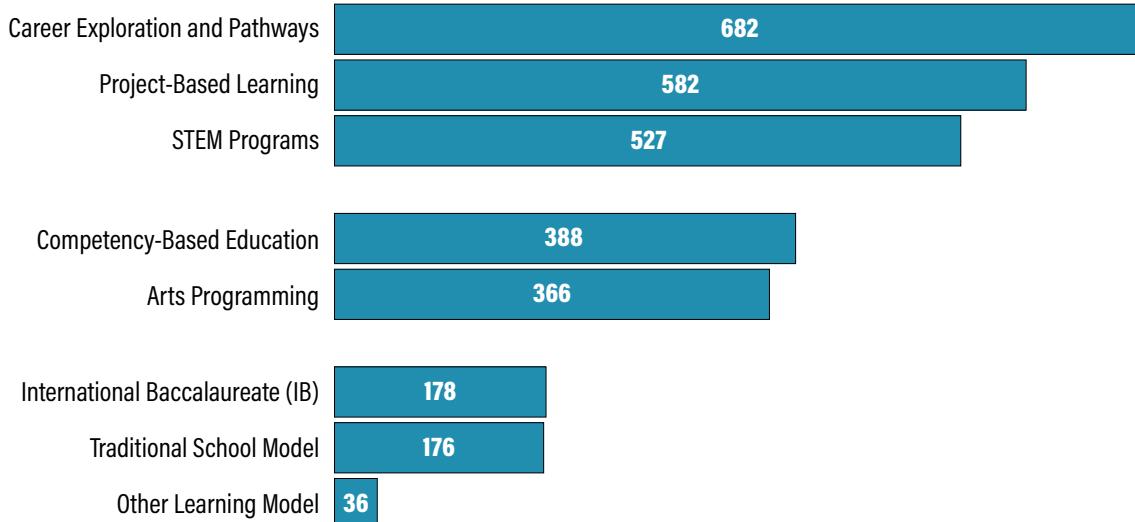




REAL-WORLD LEARNING MODELS TOP LIST OF POSSIBILITIES

"Real-world learning" options topped the list when participants were asked to consider which learning models should be kept in mind for future facilities planning.

Learning Model Preferences (out of 1,435 respondents)



MOVING FORWARD

Kentwood Public Schools extends a sincere thank you to all in our community who participated in this discussion around future facilities planning in the fall of 2025. Whether through a survey response or attending a town hall meeting, your voices are crucial in planning for the successful future of our students. We greatly value this partnership.

The KPS Board of Education plans to further discuss this matter at its meeting later this month on January 26.



BOARD MEMBER POWELL-MAY TO RECEIVE GIANT AWARD

Kentwood Public Schools is extending a sincere congratulations to KPS Board of Education member Tanya Powell-May for being selected as a 2026 GIANT Award recipient. The GIANT Awards, sponsored by Grand Rapids Community College, recognize "members of the African American community for their exceptional contributions, going above and beyond to shape the history, culture, and quality of life of the Grand Rapids community." Each year, a variety of awards are given out named "after a local 'giant,' serving as a memorial to their notable service-leadership."

Powell-May has been selected to receive the Milo Brown Business Award, given each year to an individual who exemplifies "strong successful business knowledge and ownership." She will receive her award, along with the other recipients, which includes Lamar James, husband of KPS Board Member Sylvia James, during a special ceremony at the end of this month.

We congratulate Powell-May for this prestigious honor and thank her for all of her contributions to our community, including her leadership, commitment, and guidance to our school district as a member of the KPS Board of Education.



Annie Hammill Lindsey Greenfield Amanda Tallas Sarah Kresnak



Krissy Alles Courtney Steketee Matt Vriesman

SEVEN KPS TEACHERS EARN PRESTIGIOUS CERTIFICATION

Kentwood Public Schools is celebrating a huge achievement by seven teachers across our district. In December, the teachers—Annie Hammill, Lindsey Greenfield, Amanda Tallas, Sarah Kresnak, Krissy Alles, Courtney Steketee, and Matt Vriesman—were notified that they had earned National Board Certification.

This came after a rigorous two-year process in partnership with Teach Michigan. Less than 1% of teachers in Michigan have earned this distinguished credential. National Board Certification is considered one of the top teaching certifications in the country.

We congratulate these teachers for this accomplishment and thank them for their dedication in serving the students and families of Kentwood Public Schools.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS SUPPORT FAMILIES DURING THE SEASON OF GIVING

The spirit of giving was evident throughout our community this holiday season as the community came together to support Kentwood Public Schools students and families.

The City of Kentwood provided more than 300 gift bags to be given to students and families in need. City employees, firefighters, and Mayor Stephen Kepley were among those who helped deliver the gifts, showing their care and appreciation for the KPS community. This marks the ninth year the City of Kentwood has supported KPS students and families in this way.

Bell House Training Co. also helped spread holiday cheer through its Big Give charity initiative. Their team raised funds, helped shop for gifts, and thoughtfully wrapped each item to provide holiday gifts for students, adding an extra layer of joy across the district.



We are grateful for the spirit of generosity shown across the Kentwood community and for the meaningful impact these partnerships have on our students and families. Together, these acts of kindness helped make the holiday season brighter for all.



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						

School	Start	Dismissal	Half Day Dismissal
Elementary	9:00 AM	4:05 PM	12:15 PM
Middle	8:19 AM	3:04 PM	11:35 AM
EKFC & EKHS	7:35 AM	2:20 PM	10:50 AM
Crossroads	7:34 AM	2:10 PM	10:40 AM

AUGUST							JANUARY							
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SEPTEMBER							FEBRUARY							
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OCTOBER							MARCH							
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NOVEMBER							APRIL							
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DECEMBER							MAY/JUNE							
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No School For Students
Half Day