



A LEGACY OF EXCELLENCE. A FUTURE OF POSSIBILITY.

Dear Kentwood Families and Community Members,
Welcome to the 2026-27 school year!

Each August brings a renewed sense of excitement and possibility. Students return to familiar classrooms, others walk through our doors for the very first time, and together we begin another chapter in the story of Kentwood Public Schools.

For decades, our district's vision of Excellence and Equity in Education has guided the work of Kentwood Public Schools.

For decades, our district's vision of Excellence and Equity in Education has guided the work of Kentwood Public Schools. By living that vision together, our educators, families, and community members have built a legacy of belonging, achievement, and opportunity for our students. While every school year brings new opportunities and new challenges, those same commitments continue to guide our work and priorities:

Sense of Belonging

Every student deserves to feel known, valued, and connected.

This spring, East Kentwood High School valedictorian Ahmed Elkhwad reminded us what is possible when students are surrounded by caring educators, supportive families, and a community that believes in their potential. After arriving in the United States as his family sought safety and opportunity, Ahmed graduated with a GPA above 4.0 and is now headed to

one of our nation's premier universities to study engineering. His story reflects what can happen when students know they belong.

High Achievement

We will continue strengthening teaching and learning so every student can reach their full potential.

This year, we'll implement a new research-based elementary literacy curriculum, strengthen professional collaboration, and thoughtfully utilize future ready skills to enhance learning while ensuring relationships remain at the center of education.

Together, we share a commitment to helping every child reach their full potential.

Unparalleled Opportunities

Every student deserves opportunities that prepare them for success in college, career, and life.

From nationally recognized academic programs and championship athletics to our award-winning fine arts groups and career prep programs such as the EKHS Residential Construction program, Kentwood students continue to thrive because of the unmatched opportunities created through strong partnerships and community support. That same commitment was reflected this spring when voters approved our Safety and Success Bond, investing in the future of our students and our district.

Continued on page 2...

A Legacy of Excellence. A Future of Possibility.

Continued from page 1

These priorities are made possible because of the people who make Kentwood special: our students, families, staff, and community partners. Together, we share a commitment to helping every child reach their full potential.

As we begin another school year, thank you for the trust you place in Kentwood Public Schools. We appreciate our partnership as we continue working with you to build a district where every student belongs, every student achieves, and every student has an opportunity to succeed.

Each generation of Kentwood educators, families, and community members has strengthened Kentwood Public Schools for those who followed. That is our legacy. This year, we have the privilege and the responsibility to strengthen that legacy for future generations.

Go Falcons!



Sincerely,
Kevin Polston
Superintendent
Kentwood Public Schools



SMART TOOLS. HUMAN CONNECTION: AI MEETS KPS

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to change the way we live, learn, and work, Kentwood Public Schools is taking the next step in its thoughtful, phased approach to AI in education.

As shared with KPS families near the end of last school year, beginning this fall the district is expanding access to carefully selected AI tools at the secondary level. Students in grades 7–8 will have access to NotebookLM, while students in grades 9–12 will have access to both NotebookLM and Gemini for Education on district-provided devices. These tools were selected in part for their student privacy protections and age-appropriate safeguards.

The focus, however, extends well beyond learning how to use new technology.

“Our goal is not simply to teach students or staff how to use AI tools,” said Brooke Storms, KPS Instructional Technology Coordinator. “It is to help them understand when and how AI can support learning while recognizing the value of human judgment, creativity, and connection.”

This year, KPS will focus on building foundational AI knowledge among students and staff and finding intentional ways to put that knowledge into practice. Teachers will continue to guide when and how AI is appropriate for learning, while ongoing professional learning will support staff throughout the implementation.

“We want to be intentional about ensuring that AI creates more opportunities for meaningful interaction rather than fewer,” Storms said. “AI should enhance teaching and learning, not replace the relationships, interactions, and human experiences that make learning meaningful.”

As this technology continues to evolve, that principle will remain at the center of KPS’s approach: using AI to support learning while keeping human connection at the heart of education.

MORE KPS STORIES. MORE LOCAL EDUCATION NEWS.

Looking for more great stories from Kentwood Public Schools and public schools across our area? School News Network provides in-depth coverage of the 20 public school districts in Kent ISD, serving more than 102,000 students.

Founded by Kent ISD, School News Network’s team of reporters, editors and multimedia journalists covers classroom teaching and learning, explores important issues facing students, and highlights the “education magic” happening every day in our public schools.

Keep up with stories like the recent behind-the-scenes look at Valleywood staff helping to plan their future school and much more from KPS and neighboring districts at SchoolNewsNetwork.org.



KEEPING YOU IN THE KNOW

As this school year gets underway, there's a lot happening across Kentwood Public Schools. Keeping You in the Know highlights important updates, reminders and information to help KPS families stay informed and connected.

Cell Phone Policy

As shared with families in June, Kentwood Public Schools is implementing a new cell phone and personal wireless communication device policy for the 2026–27 school year. The policy was developed in response to new state legislation and is designed to minimize distractions, increase student engagement, and support focused learning.

While expectations vary by grade level, one expectation is consistent across KPS: personal wireless communication devices may not be used during instructional time. The district's graduated approach provides students with increasing access to devices as they progress through middle and high school.

Families are encouraged to review the detailed information and grade-level guidance shared in June and contact their building principal with any questions.

Protocols for Safety

Keeping students and staff safe requires everyone to understand what to do when a situation occurs. Kentwood Public Schools uses the nationally recognized *I Love U Guys* Standard Response Protocol, which provides clear, consistent language for responding to a variety of situations.

Throughout the year, families may hear KPS use five response terms: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate and Shelter. Each requires a different response based on what is happening in or around a school.

A Hold keeps hallways clear while normal activity continues inside classrooms. Secure is used when there is a potential concern outside the building in a surrounding neighborhood, while Lockdown is used when a threat may exist inside the building. Evacuate moves students and staff to another location, and Shelter provides specific instructions for protection from a hazard or emergency.

Students and staff practice these procedures so they are familiar with the appropriate response should a situation occur. Families can learn more about these terms through the Safety Department page on the KPS website.

Building / Grades	Instructional Time	Before & After School	Passing Time	Lunch Period
Elementary Schools K-5	X	X	X	X
Middle Schools 6-8	X	✓	X	X
Freshman Campus Grade 9	X	✓	X	✓
East Kentwood & Crossroads High Schools 10-12	X	✓	✓	✓

 ✓ = Permitted student access to phones/devices
  X = Phone/device access not permitted during this time

KPS SAFETY RESPONSE MODES

FIVE TERMS. DIFFERENT RESPONSES. ONE GOAL: KEEPING EVERYONE SAFE.

Kentwood Public Schools uses the *I Love U Guys*® Standard Response Protocol.

 HOLD Used when hallways need to be kept clear. Students remain in class or are temporarily held in their current location.	 SECURE Used when there is a potential concern outside the building. Students and staff continue normal activities inside.	 LOCKDOWN Used when there is a threat or danger inside the building. Students are secured in classrooms and activities stop immediately.	 EVACUATE Used when students and staff need to leave the building. Everyone moves to a safe location as directed by staff.	 SHELTER Used when specific actions are needed for safety due to a hazard or severe weather. Students and staff follow instructions.
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WE PRACTICE. WE PLAN. WE'RE PREPARED. | TOGETHER, WE KEEP KPS SAFE.

ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE: MEET SOME OF OUR KPS LEADERS

As we begin a new school year, Kentwood Public Schools is pleased to welcome new administrators to the district and recognize several leaders who have recently joined KPS or transitioned into permanent leadership roles.

Jaime Bellant — Special Education Supervisor

Jaime Bellant joins KPS with a wide range of experiences in special education. Since beginning her career in education in 2008, she has served Godfrey-Lee Public Schools as a paraprofessional, early childhood special education classroom teacher, middle school special education teacher, teacher consultant, and most recently, director of student services.

Taylor Lindman — Dean, Early Childhood

Taylor Lindman joins the Hamilton Early Childhood Center after previously serving students in Hudsonville and Holland. Her experience includes roles as an elementary counselor, first-grade teacher, early Intervention teacher, and special education co-teacher. She has worked in education since 2021.

Sierra Cox-Parada — Assistant Principal, Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center

Sierra Cox-Parada begins her second year serving students, staff, and families as assistant principal at Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center.

Shannel Haigh — Special Education Supervisor

Shannel Haigh joined the KPS administrative team as a special education supervisor during the 2025–26 school year and continues in that role this fall.

Sheree Harmon — Director of Special Education

After serving in the role on an interim basis, Sheree Harmon begins the 2026–27 school year as KPS Director of Special Education.

Becky Barrenger — Director of ARCH

Becky Barrenger also moves from an interim role into the permanent position of director of ARCH as the new school year begins.

Abbie Jeplawy — Director of Fiscal Services

Abbie Jeplawy begins her second year as director of fiscal services, helping support the financial operations and stewardship of Kentwood Public Schools.

We congratulate these KPS leaders and look forward to their continued work supporting our students, staff, families, and community.



BUILDING THE FUTURE: VALLEYWOOD PLANNING BEGINS

Work connected to the 2026 Safety + Success Bond is officially underway, starting with plans for the new Valleywood Middle School.

Over the summer, Valleywood teachers, administrators and support staff joined representatives from GMB Architecture + Engineering for a series of planning sessions focused on imagining the new school. Staff provided input on everything from classrooms, the media center and cafeteria to spaces for music, art, athletics and outdoor learning. They also explored ideas for flexible learning spaces, natural light and creating a welcoming environment that can serve students and the broader Valleywood community.



And staff members are just the beginning. As planning continues, students, families and community members will also have opportunities to help shape the new Valleywood, continuing the stakeholder-driven approach that helped develop the Safety + Success Bond proposal.

Construction of the new school is expected to begin in 2028.

MARANDA PARK PARTY BRINGS SUMMER FUN TO ENDEAVOR

Summer excitement took over Endeavor Elementary in July during a special Maranda Park Party Recess. More than 600 students participating in the Summer ARCH program



joined together for an afternoon of activities. After enjoying lunch prepared by Kentwood Public Schools' Child Nutrition Services team, students played games, danced, enjoyed inflatables, won prizes, and connected with local community partners. Although the event was moved indoors due to weather, students still enjoyed a memorable park party experience.

The afternoon was made possible through the support of Maranda and her team, Kentwood Public Schools staff, and community partners. A special thank you goes to the ARCH team, child nutrition services, facilities, Sydney Hanlon, and everyone who helped make another park party a great success.

A LEGACY ON ICE

Congratulations to the Kentwood Hockey and Skating Association, which will be inducted into the Grand Rapids Sports Hall of Fame this September in recognition of the vision and community effort that led to the creation of the Kentwood Ice Arena.

The arena broke ground in 1984 through the efforts of Kentwood hockey and skating families, the City of Kentwood, local businesses, Kentwood Public Schools, and countless volunteers. Remarkably, the project was accomplished without seeking funding from the city or school district.

More than four decades later, the Kentwood Ice Arena remains a landmark facility on the East Kentwood campus and a lasting example of what can happen when a community comes together around a shared vision.

We congratulate the Kentwood Hockey and Skating Association and everyone who helped make the arena possible on this well-deserved honor. Their legacy continues every time another generation steps onto the ice and will continue for generations to come.



ADULT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE AT CROSSROADS

Adult learners can once again take advantage of GED preparation and English language classes offered by Kent ISD right here in Kentwood at Crossroads High School.

GED classes support adults aged 18 and older working toward their high school equivalency certificate, while English language classes help beginning through advanced learners strengthen communication skills for work, home and everyday life.

Both programs meet Monday through Wednesday from 5:15–8:45 p.m. at Crossroads High School.

To learn more or register, visit adulted.kentisd.org or scan the QR code.



Adult Education
Kent ISD



FIT FOR THE FUTURE: FALCON INDOOR TRAINING COMMUNITY CENTER TAKING SHAPE

If you've traveled near the East Kentwood High School campus recently, you've probably noticed a major new facility taking shape between the Freshman Campus and the EKHS 10–12 building.

The Falcon Indoor Training (FIT) Community Center, part of the district's 2021 bond program, is designed to provide flexible space for students, staff, and the community. The facility will feature an indoor football field surrounded by a walking track, along with community spaces and room for a variety of athletic teams and the East Kentwood marching band to practice.

But FIT is being designed for much more than athletics. It will provide opportunities for a variety of student experiences, including STEM learning for students from across the district, while also providing a unique new gathering and activity space for the KPS community.

Construction continues to progress nicely, and if work remains on schedule, the FIT Community Center is expected to be completed by the end of the calendar year.

We're excited to watch FIT take shape and even more excited about the possibilities it will create for our students and community!

KPS TRANSPORTATION TEAM GOES THE EXTRA MILE FOR STUDENTS

Kentwood Public Schools and the KPS Transportation Department were proud to once again team up with the Heart of West Michigan United Way for its annual Stuff the Bus campaign. The community-wide effort brings together volunteers, businesses, and organizations from across West Michigan to collect school supplies and help ensure students throughout our area have what they need for a successful start to the school year.



This year, KPS buses and drivers played an important role in the effort, traveling throughout the area to pick up school supplies donated by local businesses and community partners. The buses then delivered the donations to Townline Elementary, where volunteers, led by the Heart of West Michigan United Way, unloaded, sorted, and organized the large collection of supplies for distribution to schools across West Michigan.

KPS is grateful for our continued partnership with the Heart of West Michigan United Way and for the many businesses, organizations, and volunteers who contributed to this year's campaign. We send a special word of thanks to our KPS Transportation Team for going the extra mile to serve students and families throughout our community.

BUILDING A LEGACY — ONE HOME AT A TIME

For more than 40 years, East Kentwood High School students have been leaving their mark on the community, quite literally, through the school's residential construction program.

This past school year, another group of talented EK students continued that legacy by completing construction of a beautiful new home in our community. As part of the hands-on learning experience, students work alongside their instructors throughout the construction process, developing valuable skills while seeing their classroom learning take shape in the real world.

Shortly after the end of the school year, students proudly welcomed KPS Board of Education members and district leaders into the finished home for a tour and an opportunity to see their craftsmanship firsthand. The home was later listed for just under \$537,000 and recently sold.

For the students who helped build it, however, the finished home represents something even bigger: skills gained, pride in a job well done, and the knowledge that something they helped create will remain part of their community for years to come.

Congratulations to our residential construction students and staff for continuing an incredible EK tradition of learning, craftsmanship and legacy — one home at a time.



CROSSROADS HIGH SCHOOL SHINES IN STATEWIDE SPOTLIGHT

Crossroads High School is earning statewide recognition for its innovative approach to helping students find success in school and beyond.

The Michigan Department of Education recently selected Crossroads for a District Spotlight highlighting effective strategies supporting Michigan's goal of increasing high school graduation rates. The spotlight celebrates how Crossroads has transformed the alternative education experience through personalized learning, strong relationships, career exploration, and authentic workforce experiences.

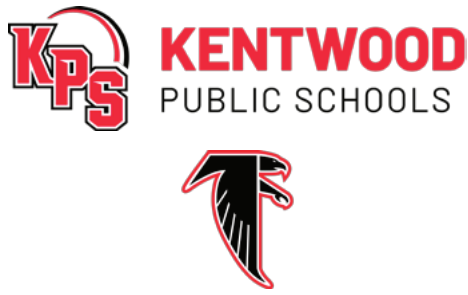


The results are impressive. Since implementation of its redesigned workforce-focused model, Crossroads' four-year graduation rate has grown from just over 36% in 2022–23 to nearly 63% in 2024–25, while chronic absenteeism has declined significantly.

Most importantly, the MDE spotlight captures what makes Crossroads special: a small, supportive learning community where students are challenged, connected, and given meaningful opportunities to prepare for their futures.

Scan the QR code to read the full MDE District Spotlight to learn more about the innovative work happening at Crossroads.





KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

School Calendar 2026-27

Aug 24	*First Day of School
Sep 4	No School
Sep 7	No School
Sept 30.....	½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
Oct 8.....	½ Day K-12 / Conferences
Oct 9	No School
Nov 2.....	No School / PD for Staff
Nov 25 - 27 ..	No School / Thanksgiving Break
Dec 17	½ Day K-12/KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
Dec 18	½ Day K-12 KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
Dec 21 - Jan 1 ...	No School / Winter Break
Jan 18	No School for Students & Staff / MLK Day
Feb 15 & 16	No School for Students & Staff / Mid-Winter Break
Mar 3.....	½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
Apr 1.....	½ Day K-12/KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
Apr 2 - Apr 9....	No School / Spring Break
May 31	No School / Memorial Day
June 3.....	½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
June 4.....	Last Day of School - Half Day for Students & Staff

School	Start	Dismissal	Half Day Dismissal
Elementary	8:55 AM	4:00 PM	12:10 PM
Middle	8:20 AM	3:05 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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9	10	11	12	13	14	15	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	24	25	26	27	28	29	30

SEPTEMBER							FEBRUARY						
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27	28	29	30										
OCTOBER							MARCH						
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NOVEMBER							APRIL						
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DECEMBER							MAY/JUNE						
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No School For StudentsHalf Day

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

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Kentwood
Community
Center

Become a Member!



Be here from day one!

Sign up before Sept. 26, join us as a Founding Member!

The first **500** early supporters will receive special perks.

Experience a vibrant new gathering place designed to help our community connect, stay active and thrive.

Membership Benefits:

- Access to full Fitness Area
- Use of 3-Lane Walking Track
- 3 free fitness classes per month
- Room and Party Rentals
- Affordable Child Watch
- Drop-In Sports Play
- Member discounts
- And more!

Learn more about the space,
membership benefits, and the exciting
experiences waiting for you at
kentwood.us/CommunityCenter

