



## ANTHONY TRAN MAKES A DIFFERENCE

**A**nthony Tran walks through his social studies classroom at East Kentwood High School with comfort and confidence. Tran, in his second year as a teacher at EK, is supporting his students while they are learning about the American Revolution, asking them questions, and helping them discover information. He also checks in on them personally, finding out how things are going at sports practice or in their daily lives. Tran understands the important role building authentic relationships plays in learning. "If you don't feel like you belong in a classroom," Tran says, "you are not going to learn anything."

Having high-impact teachers in the classroom is not new to Kentwood Public Schools. It is part of the tradition of excellence that has defined the district for years. Developing and maintaining a high-impact, diverse staff is a goal of the district's current strategic plan.

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Tran was introduced to the district because of his connection with some veteran KPS staff members. As a son of parents who immigrated to the United States from Viet Nam in the 1980's, he was immediately drawn to the district's diversity and commitment to elevating equity for all students. Tran says he "fought" to be in Kentwood for his student teaching. Once here, he realized KPS was where he wanted to start his teaching career. "I fell in love with (Kentwood Public Schools)," Tran declared. "I couldn't see myself anywhere else."

Tran is one of many new staff members who see Kentwood Public Schools as a destination district. The opportunity to work with a wonderful diverse group of students is appealing. The district's facilities are second to none. Tran also points out how welcoming and supportive the veteran staff members are in Kentwood. "Since the day I began as a student teacher here," Tran explains, "my very first day, they have given me all kinds of knowledge and tips to be successful in the classroom. It is such a welcome and open community."



Director of New Teacher Development and Curriculum Debbie Schuitema agrees with Tran. "The KPS staff are very welcoming, supportive, and committed to establishing an environment where both students and staff can thrive," she affirms. "Everyone is a learner here."

Schuitema adds that new staff members are adding to the culture of excellence in the district. "One of the most exciting aspects of our new staff members joining the KPS team is the fresh perspective and innovative ideas they bring. Their enthusiasm and diverse experiences will enrich our collective knowledge and help us to continue to evolve and provide an even better educational experience for our students."

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## Anthony Tran Makes a Difference

*Continued from page 1*

Tran understands the added impact he can have as an Asian-American teacher in Kentwood, noting he did not have teachers who looked like him when he was a student. "I saw a picture of myself in the building," Tran said when he considered working at East Kentwood High School. "I knew I needed to be here."

To learn more about Anthony Tran, please check out this Falcon Feature by scanning the QR code.



## POSITIVE PROFESSIONALS AT PINWOOD

The incredible staff at Pinewood Middle School is well-known for their ability to create a positive environment where learning is the focus and lasting friendships are formed. This month, we would like to celebrate a couple of staff members who are new(er) to our family and have been making a huge impact on our school community.

**Mr. Giuseppe Barone, social studies teacher** - Mr. Barone has served as an invaluable member to our 7th grade team for the past year and a half as a social studies teacher. As a graduate of East Kentwood, he understands our community and where students are coming from. His dedication and work ethic have been on display since the moment he

arrived. With a calm demeanor and caring attitude, Mr. Barone has the unique ability to inspire students and motivate them to do their very best.

Beyond the classroom, Mr. Barone serves as the East Kentwood Boys Soccer Coach and has led our boys to two very successful seasons. As a former player at Michigan State University, he understands what it takes to be successful at a high level, and both his students and athletes have benefitted from his leadership. We look forward to witnessing the continued positive influence that Mr. Barone will bring to the lives of our students for years to come.

**Mrs. Natalie Hillestad, librarian and media clerk** - Mrs. Hillestad's love for books and her deep respect for the power of literacy have been evident in her role as our school librarian. She is determined to turn our library and Collaboration Center into a vibrant hub of knowledge and exploration. She is also committed to enhancing student learning by organizing fun activities such as "Book Tastings" and "Literacy Lunch", where students get to hear from a special guest speaker and pick out their favorite books. With her book recommendations, reading incentives, and passion for lifelong learning, Mrs. Hillestad will certainly inspire a new generation of book lovers.

Mrs. Hillestad also serves as our Media Center clerk. In this role, Mrs. Hillestad ensures that students can connect to online curriculum, information and learning activities. She is responsible for hundreds of student Chromebooks and her dedication to our students and their learning with this effort is truly inspiring. Her leadership and approach to creating a positive and inclusive learning environment has made a tremendous impact on our school community.



## MR. CHRISTIAN MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Whenever we grow our team at Bowen, we always look for qualified people who sincerely care about kids... and Connor Christian, our new Behavior Specialist, is a perfect example!

Mr. Christian grew up in Chelsea, Michigan, graduated from Hope College, and spent the last couple years serving as a substitute teacher and coach. Originally, he felt drawn to athletic operations, but quickly realized it didn't give him enough proximity to students. "I wanted more of a day-to-day impact on kids," he explained. "I really like helping them through the tough parts of their day, so they can understand why they're upset and be able to reset. I just want to be someone kids can rely on and trust no matter the problem." According to Bowen Principal Mary Campione, that's exactly what he's doing. "What I most appreciate about Connor," Campione says, "is that he's jumped right in, immediately building relationships with students and staff. He believes in helping kids learn rather than just assigning a consequence. We're so thankful to have him aboard."

Welcome, Mr. Christian!







## INTRODUCING MARTEL POSEY AT CROSSROADS

Crossroads has partnered with Health Net of West Michigan to offer case management services to students and families. Crossroads is excited to introduce you to Martel Posey, a resident of Grand Rapids who believes in the importance of a healthy lifestyle encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. Martel currently works as a Community Health Worker at Health Net of West Michigan, where he also serves as a Community Partner at AYA Youth Collective. In his new role at Crossroads, Martel ensures that students and families are connected to essential resources such as medical, dental, and mental health services. Beyond his professional roles, he operates a food truck and organizes community-focused bicycle events on the southeast side of Grand Rapids. Throughout the school year at Crossroads, Martel anticipates the opportunity to establish connections with students and families and ensure that they have the necessary resources for success.

## LAURA STERKENBURG: DISCOVERY'S SHINING STAR

Meet Laura Sterkenburg, a real-life superhero! Back in 2014, she and her family decided to open their hearts and home to kids who needed some extra love and care. Imagine this: they've welcomed 15 children, all with their own unique stories, and even adopted two brothers in 2020. Their journey with these kids taught them a lot about being the best parents they could be.

But Laura's magic touch isn't just at home. In 2015, she became a "book buddy" in her son's kindergarten class. This was her first step into the world of helping kids who found reading a bit tricky. This experience lit a spark in her, and soon she was helping in more classrooms. Feeling inspired, Laura went on to get her degree in education. And guess what? By 2021, she was teaching her own second-grade class at Discovery Elementary!

Laura's way of teaching is special. She makes sure every child feels safe and loved, and she designs lessons that fit each student's needs. She believes that when kids are happy and feel good about themselves, they learn better. And she's right! Laura says she's living her dream every day as a teacher, and she's so grateful for it.

In short, Laura Sterkenburg is a shining star, lighting up the lives of everyone she meets. Whether she's at home with her five children, or in the classroom, her love and dedication shine through. As she always says, "Not everyone gets to show up to their dream job on a daily basis. I do. I will never take that for granted." And we're so lucky to have her!







## POLSTON RECEIVES COMMUNITY HONOR

Congratulations to Kentwood Public Schools Superintendent Kevin Polston! Polston recently received the Hispanic Advocate Award from The Committee to Honor César E. Chávez. The award was given to Polston in October at the Hispanic Excellence Scholarship and Community Awards to recognize his ongoing commitment to serve and support the Hispanic community.

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# STUDENT VISION STATEMENTS

- I AM** CARED FOR, **SUPPORTED & HEARD**
- I AM** EMPOWERED **TO INFLUENCE MY COMMUNITY**
- I AM** MOTIVATED **TO LEARN & ACHIEVE NEW & CHALLENGING IDEAS**
- I SEE** **MYSELF & OTHERS IN MY** LEARNING
- I KNOW** **WE ALL** BELONG & ARE VALUED

”

**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
FOR EXCELLENCE & EQUITY IN EDUCATION

**KPS**  
KENTWOOD  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## MATT VRIESMAN RECEIVES NATIONAL HONOR

Congratulations to East Kentwood High School History teacher Matt Vriesman on being named the 2023 National History Teacher of the Year by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History! Mr. Vriesman was selected from a pool of 7,000 educators nationwide who were nominated for this award. In August, Vriesman received notice that he had been named the Michigan History Teacher of the Year, which made him eligible for the national award. In choosing Vriesman for this prestigious honor, the selection committee noted that Matt “stood out for his exceptional ability to tell the story of American history through the lens of his community.” Matt was honored last month in a ceremony at the Harvard Club in New York City. To learn more about Matt and his commitment to his students at East Kentwood High school, check out this Falcon Feature, available by scanning the QR





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## A KIND AND HELPING HAND AT EXPLORER

At Explorer we are excited to celebrate David Masterson, our building head custodian. Dave came to Kentwood Public Schools two years ago from the St. Joseph area. Dave decided to take the challenge of working in schools after 21 years working in retail, largely through the advice of his wife, who was the Arch coordinator at Pinewood. Dave began his career at KPS at Pinewood, but we are fortunate to have him as a team member of Explorer for the last year.

Early in the morning Dave is busy preparing the building for the start of the day for students and teachers. After the bell rings and kids are coming in, he is in the hallway waving, high-fiving, and saying hello to students as they enter. Dave does not stop there. During lunch, he helps students in the cafeteria. Whatever they need, he is taking care of them. Dave hands out lunch utensils, gets kids ranch dressing, ketchup, milk, walks them to their tables, or helps them out when they need something cleaned up. Dave is all over the building throughout the day but is never too busy to stop, say hello, and ask anyone how they are doing.

How you really get to know Dave, though, is by talking to our students and staff. They rave about the impact he has had on our school. If you ask our students, they will tell you that he tells funny jokes, is friendly, helpful, nice, and he does a really good job making sure that everything is clean and how it should be. If you ask our staff, they tell you that he is super friendly, reliable, responsive, he gets it done, he's helpful, positive, a team player and good at building relationships. One teacher highlighted that, "He is so kind. You can always see him in the hallways saying good morning to students and staff!" We are truly fortunate to have him as a member of our team and thankful that he chose Explorer!







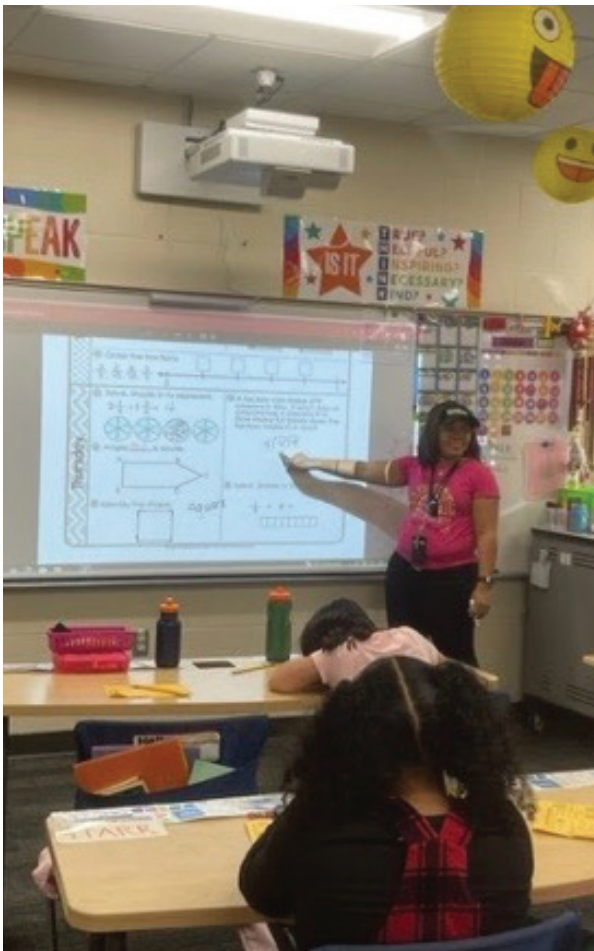
# STRATEGIC PLAN

## TRACK THE KPS STRATEGIC PLAN

## FOR EXCELLENCE & EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Implementation is underway for the Kentwood Public Schools Strategic Plan for Excellence and Equity in Education, and now you can keep track of the progress! Last year KPS went through an extensive process, in partnership with students, families, community members, and staff, to create a new strategic plan for the district. The plan builds upon the district's tradition of excellence and will guide and prioritize decisions to positively impact students for the next three to five years. This has been a collaborative effort from the beginning, so KPS is making the plan available on our website.

Visit <https://www.kentwoodps.org/ourdistrict/strategic-plan/> to view the plan and track our progress on the dashboard or access it through this QR code. Kentwood Public Schools looks forward to continuing to partner with you and our community and receiving your input as we implement our strategic plan.



## TEACHING IS HER CALLING

Cherrell Wilson is in her third year of teaching 4th grade at Glenwood Elementary. She does an amazing job making a difference in her classroom through the development of genuine positive relationships with students that makes them excited about learning. Originally, Cherrell pursued a career in health care as a pre-medicine major at the University of Michigan. By the end of her junior year, though, she knew she wanted to do something where she could work more closely with children and families. This led her to consider a move to school social work and a variety of positions on the east side of the state, including camp counselor, a before and after school childcare supervisor, and a paraprofessional in a Kindergarten classroom.

After moving back to the Grand Rapids area in 2016, Cherrell had a desire to do more work in a school district, particularly one where she could serve a diverse student population. Her husband encouraged her to check out Kentwood. She did, and eventually took a position as a school secretary. She served the district in this role at Explorer Elementary and Townline Elementary. During her time as a secretary, she decided to pursue her teaching degree, which included student teaching at Townline.

By this time, Cherrell knew there was no other place she would rather teach than Kentwood and began her teaching career in her 4th grade room at Glenwood. She loves her work and appreciates those who helped shape her journey to get her to this point. "Growing up I always knew I wanted to have a career where I was working with kids and could make a difference in their lives," she says. "I feel that teaching is the job that allows me to do what I was called to do."



# KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## School Calendar 2023-24

- Aug 21 ..... \*First Day of School
- Sep 1 ..... No School
- Sep 4 ..... No School
- Sept 27..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
  
- Oct 12..... ½ Day K-12 / Conferences
- Oct 13 ..... No School
  
- Nov 1..... No School / PD for Staff
- Nov 22 - 24 .. No School / Thanksgiving Break
  
- Dec 22 ..... ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day
- Dec 25 - Jan 5 ... Winter Break
  
- Jan 15 ..... No School for Students & Staff / MLK Day
  
- Feb 19 & 20 .... No School for Students & Staff / Mid-Winter Break
  
- Mar 6..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
- Mar 28..... ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day
- Mar 29 - Apr 5.... No School for Students & Staff/ Spring Break
  
- May 24 ..... ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day
- May 27 ..... No School / Memorial Day
- May 31..... 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	7:41 AM	2:31 PM	10:48 AM
Crossroads	7:30 AM	2:18 PM	10:46 AM

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

SEPTEMBER							FEBRUARY						
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3	4	5	6	7	8	9	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
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		

OCTOBER							MARCH						
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1	2	3	4	5	6	7						1	2
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
29	30	31					24	25	26	27	28	29	30

NOVEMBER							APRIL						
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26	27	28	29	30			28	29	30				

DECEMBER							MAY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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10	11	12	13	14	15	16	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	26	27	28	29	30	31	

No School For Students  
 Half Day

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## **SPIRIT STORE GETTING READY FOR HOLIDAY SHOPPING SEASON**

Are you looking for that perfect holiday gift for that special Falcon? If so, check out what the Falcon Fanwear Spirit Store offers! The store is in the foyer of East Kentwood High School. Lots of winter-weather merchandise is being stocked right now to gear up for these cold winter months ahead. To learn more about what the store has to offer and to look for special holiday season shopping hours, please visit the store's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/FalconFanwearSpiritStore>. Go Falcons!