

CONTINUING THE KPS TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

Dear Kentwood Families and Community Members,

On a warm evening in late spring, it was a pleasure to join several of our EKHS students at Celebration Cinema to welcome guests and community members to a special premier screening. The screening was for a video, created by our students and students from another district, and it showcased groundbreaking cancer advances that are saving lives in west Michigan and around the country.



Just a few short weeks later, I felt a similar sense of excitement visiting a pilot summer learning lab site at Southwood Elementary. Students were behind their school in a creek, waders and goggles on, test tubes in hand, doing scientific experiments on the health of their neighborhood stream.

In each instance, our students were guided by teachers who inspired and believed in them. Our KPS teachers use innovative opportunities to share subject material. They bring learning alive while helping students make a positive impact in our community. Seeing excellence and innovation in action is exciting for all of us to experience and observe.

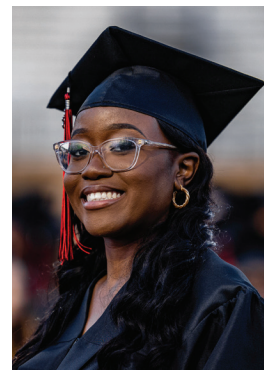
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Kentwood Public Schools has a long history of excellence and innovation. Our parents and students, staff and community members take pride in our academic achievement, particularly for groups of students that have traditionally struggled. We have had schools awarded national recognition such as National Blue Ribbon Schools, Building the Hope Schools, and Beating the Odds Schools, some of the highest honors in the nation. We have several schools consistently named as Capturing Kids' Hearts National Showcase Schools for our commitment to building strong relationships with students as the foundation of our work. Just last year, our students won multiple state championships in academic competitions!

Excellence is not an accident; reaching these peaks of success took hard work.

Excellence is not an accident; reaching these peaks of success took hard work. Building trust within our community has allowed Excellence and Equity in Education to move past being a slogan to become an ongoing reality. The hard work of our staff and partnership with our families have made a difference.

This year, the work begins as we implement phase one of our strategic plan. We will climb that next mountain with a rapidly growing and changing community. Last year we reviewed



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Continuing the KPS Tradition of Excellence

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educational trends, best practices and input from students, parents, staff, and community members. We collected more than 3,000 points of data to hear what people were proud of in Kentwood and what changes might be needed. Based upon this data, our community, staff, and school leadership identified outcomes and implementation plans for the KPS strategic plan.

Our strategic plan has four goal areas: 1) creating a **culture of excellence** in all aspects of our district; 2) establishing **equitable outcomes and opportunities** to impact student learning and achievement; 3) focusing on **whole-child environments** to keep our students safe and supported in all areas; and 4) recruiting and retaining **high-impact staff**, in particular, staff that are reflective of our community diversity.

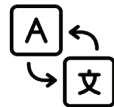


If we continue the tradition of excellence that defines Kentwood Public Schools, we will take our district to the next level of accomplishment. Some decisions will be difficult, and the work challenging; however, with the dedication of our staff and the continued trust and partnership with our families and community members, our students can reach new heights. Together, we will reach the next pinnacle of excellence!

It will be an exciting year. I am thankful that you are on this journey.

Go Falcons!

Sincerely,
Kevin Polston
Superintendent
Kentwood Public Schools



STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR EXCELLENCE & EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Kentwood Public Schools is excited to launch our new Strategic Plan for Excellence and Equity in Education this school year. The plan consists of four goal areas:

- 1. Culture of Excellence:** Establish, implement and uphold a common standard of excellence for school climate and instruction.
- 2. Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes:** Celebrate diversity while elevating equity of opportunities of outcomes for each student.
- 3. Whole-Child Environments:** Cultivate an inclusive school environment that recognizes and addresses the whole child, which includes their social, emotional, physical and mental wellness, and safety.
- 4. High-Impact, Diverse Staff:** Recruit and retain high impact staff that uphold the values of KPS, in particular, staff that are reflective of community diversity.

In addition, we include two cross-cutting themes in our plan. These are meaningful learning, making learning meaningful and accessible for all students through innovation and “real world” learning; and communications and engagement, ensuring that students, families, and staff benefit from effective communication, ongoing outreach, and engagement opportunities.

EK'S 2023 SUMMER OF STEAM

For the second summer in a row, East Kentwood High School's STEAM SQUAD offered their summer STEAM camps for students in kindergarten through 6th grade. The camps are taught by KPS teachers and assisted by students from East Kentwood High School. Student participants were excited and engaged as they learned about a variety of topics. Hands-on exploration of animals and their ecosystems, a study of anatomy, and robotics are just a few of the interesting topics which were introduced.

“Everyone had so much fun this summer, and I was so proud of our high school student leaders helping the younger students have a great experience,” said Chad VanHouten, EKHS teacher and organizer of the STEAM camp. More than 500 students benefitted from this rich summer-learning experience.





ARCH - PROJECT BASED LEARNING

The district's ARCH program had another successful summer. Students who participated in ARCH this summer across the district benefitted from participating in Project Based Learning experiences from the elementary school level, to the middle schools, and high school, as well.

Projects included studies of butterflies, insects, and animals, an exploration of how to reduce waste problems in the community, a study of preparing nutritious meals for peers, and a project on how to build and maintain small businesses.

The work included trips out into the community to many places such as Frederik Meijer Gardens, John Ball Zoo, and the Kent County Recycling Center, among others. In addition, our ARCH team was able to collaborate with valued community partners including Kent County Parks and Rec, the Kent County Humane Society, and Blandford Nature Center.

Kentwood Public Schools thanks ARCH Afterschool Project Coordinator Lori Bramble-Romeo and her team for leading another summer of meaningful learning for our students.

POLSTON TO SERVE AS PART OF SPECIAL GROUP APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR WHITMER

Kentwood Public Schools Superintendent Kevin Polston was recently named to participate in one of four work groups as part of the "Growing Michigan Together Council." The Council is tasked with creating a plan to attract young people to Michigan and keep native Michiganders from leaving the state in an effort to boost the state's overall population. Polston is one of only 16 people in the state to work in the group that is focused on Pre K-12 education.

Members of the work groups were chosen based on a variety of criteria, including past and present professional experiences, volunteerism, and philanthropic involvement. "The diverse workgroup members of the Growing Michigan Together Council will be instrumental in our effort to grow our economy and population while protecting our natural resources," said Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

In addition to the group focused on Pre K - 12 education, other work groups will look at areas such as infrastructure, jobs, talent and the economy, and higher education.

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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**

”



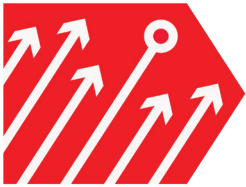
STRATEGIC PLAN

FOR EXCELLENCE & EQUITY IN EDUCATION



KPS

KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS



CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE

PLC

Excellence does not just happen. It takes intentional planning and work to create a culture of excellence. One initiative Kentwood Public Schools is undertaking this year to build upon our culture of excellence is to create Professional Learning Communities (PLC) for our educators across the district. "At its core a PLC is a team of educators committed to working collaboratively on a regular basis to ensure high levels of learning for all students," says Bré Bartels, Kentwood Public Schools Executive Director of Secondary Education. "A PLC learns and grows together with input from each team member on determining the core knowledge and skills that students need for success, how best to support students who may need more time to build these skills, as well as how best to provide opportunities to extend student learning."



This summer a team of district leaders, principals, and teachers took part in a PLC Summit in Arkansas with other schools from across the nation led by Solution Tree, an industry leader in Professional Learning Communities. KPS plans to systematically and intentionally develop a PLC model across our district to positively impact student learning.

"Incorporating this process into our regular practice in Kentwood," explains Bartels, "will help grow our culture of excellence by creating a forum for our educators to share best practices, collaborate around high impact student supports and extensions, and ultimately bring the collective insight of all of our teachers to ensure the best possible learning experience for all of our students."



EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES & OUTCOMES

PEAKS

The PEAKS advanced learning program for students in grades 3rd - 8th has long been a popular program in Kentwood Public Schools and an important part of the district's tradition of excellence. However, a review of the program in 2022 revealed that 75% of the incoming third graders for last school year came from the district's three largest elementary schools. Those schools, though, only accounted for a little more than 40% of incoming 3rd graders for the entire district. The district wanted to do something about this inequity, to figure out a way to give access to students from more schools in the district.

After an intentional and thoughtful year-long process that included teachers along with building and district leaders, a few changes were made that impacted the PEAKS selection process. An additional section was added for this program. Also, 3rd grade PEAKS was moved from Discovery Elementary to Glenwood Elementary, bringing PEAKS classrooms to a

different part of our district. Finally, a lottery system was implemented involving higher performing students in both reading and math from all 10 elementary schools being eligible for PEAKS selection. In the end, the incoming 3rd grade class this year has 50% of the students from the three largest elementary buildings, which is more in line with those schools' overall population, and an increased number of students entering PEAKS from the seven other elementary schools in the district.

"The changes we made with PEAKS signifies our commitment to ensuring that every child in KPS has the opportunity to reach their full potential," said Executive Director of Strategy and Innovation Sunil Joy. "This initiative aligns with our core belief that true equity necessitates equitable access and support for all students."



WHOLE-CHILD ENVIRONMENTS

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Kentwood Public Schools is entering its second year of implementing Restorative Practices as a means of creating positive environments that focus on the whole child. "Every community operates on a set of beliefs and expectations that are designed to keep everyone safe, engaged, and productive," says Kentwood Public Schools Executive Director of Student Services Veronica Lake. "There are norms by which we operate and demonstrate a level of respect for each other and take ownership for our roles in that community."

Restorative Practices, along with other district initiatives such as Capturing Kids' Hearts and the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, play a crucial role in establishing safe environments for students where their social and emotional well-being is nurtured along with their physical and mental wellness.

"Restorative Practices provide a framework for how we engage proactively so that when someone in the community has been harmed, the person responsible for the harm and the person who experienced the harm use the tools to resolve conflict and work towards restoring trust," says Lake. "We call this, separating the deed from the doer!"

The district has added more staff to schools to support these important initiatives for the year ahead.



HIGH-IMPACT DIVERSE STAFF

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

Kentwood Public Schools knows that retaining and recruiting a high-impact staff, including staff members that reflect the rich diversity of our community, is key to student success. This past school year, the district formed a Recruitment and Retention Team to help meet this need. One of the team's goals has been to strengthen, grow and develop new partnerships with local colleges and universities. These partnerships have included developing a variety of Grow Your Own programs with schools, such as Davenport, Grand Valley State and Western Michigan University, that provide affordable, quality pathways for current staff to pursue a career in teaching.

Kentwood Public Schools has also had the opportunity to think creatively about how to expose our current students to education as a career through CTE accreditation and a new dual enrollment partnership with Michigan State University that will take place alongside our Educator's Rising class. These programs give our current students opportunities to earn college credit while in high school.

In addition, the district is excited to have expanded partnerships this past year to include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's). A team from KPS had the privilege earlier this year of visiting College of Education programs at Howard University and Virginia State University. This has opened the door for future relationships with other HBCU's. Executive Director of Human Resources Jamie Gordan states, "We understand the importance of being intentional about growing and developing the next generation of educators and ensuring that our students see themselves in their learning environment." This important work continues this school year.



EK TEACHER NAMED MICHIGAN HISTORY TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Please join me in congratulating EKHS Social Studies Teacher Matt Vriesman for being named 2023 Michigan History Teacher of the Year!!! Matt is a great example of a high-impact staff member who is dedicated to the students at Kentwood Public Schools. Matt is an innovator in his classroom, and he is constantly striving to live the vision of Excellence and Equity in Education for each student at East Kentwood High School. He seeks to find students for his Advanced Placement (AP) classes that reflect the rich and valued diversity of our student population. His students feel valued and comfortable in his room which allows them to take academic risks and grow as learners. Students in his classroom consistently outperform the national average on exams for AP World and AP US History. By being named the Michigan History Teacher of the Year, Matt is now being considered for the National History Teacher of the Year award, too. We thank Matt for his work with our students and congratulate him on this important recognition.

NEW LOOK FOR SUMMER LEARNING

Summer learning took on a new look this year for some Kentwood Public Schools students. The students were part of a Summer Learning Labs pilot program that took place throughout the district. The labs were one response to feedback from students, parents, staff, and community members gathered last school year during the district's strategic planning process. Through surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings, many called for more hands-on learning for students. Summer Learning Labs offered just that.



Teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels proposed ideas for labs to district leaders beginning in late February. Many were then selected to be part of the pilot program. Student learning went in all kinds of innovative directions in the labs this summer, including a class on bicycle maintenance, forest and creek exploration, and going on an "amazing race" to learn about countries and cultures around the world.

East Kentwood Freshman Campus teacher Rob Barrett led two summer learning labs, one which involved designing an outdoor learning space at their school, the other which centered on adapting electronic toys for kids with disabilities. The toys were then donated to Mary Free Bed. Barrett offers a great assessment of the summer learning labs experience, stating, "The Summer Learning Labs are meant to be an immersive experience that help students see and build on the connections between the knowledge and skills they get in school and the real-world impact we want them to be ready to make by the time they graduate. In just a short period of time we built confidence, made a difference in our community, and opened doors to new possibilities by working together to serve others. That style of learning is transformative and powerful. It's the fuel that keeps us striving to improve ourselves and inspire others to do the same."

District leaders will discuss expanding the program next summer. To see some summer learning labs in action, take a look at these videos available through this QR code.



Celebrating twenty years of the National History Teacher of the Year



Congratulations Matthew Vriesman!
2023 Michigan History Teacher of the Year
East Kentwood High School

GO FAN INFORMATION

Kentwood Schools offers many exciting events at Falcon Stadium, the KPS Aquatic Center and elsewhere and tickets are required for some of these events.

Access to the Go Fan ticket site is on the KPS website at kentwoodps.org. Scroll down on the front page to the "In the Spotlight" section and click on the "Ticket" button to access Go Fan. For more information on how to purchase tickets, check out this video by scanning this QR code. Hope to see you at many events, cheering on our Falcons!





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						
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SEPTEMBER							FEBRUARY						
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OCTOBER							MARCH						
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NOVEMBER							APRIL						
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DECEMBER							MAY						
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No School For Students
 Half Day

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

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Cherry Health

Kentwood Public Schools will again partner with Cherry Health this school year to offer dental services for our students. These services will include an exam, x-rays, cleaning, fluoride, and sealants, if needed. The opportunity for these services was one of the options during the online registration process for your child. This is a wonderful opportunity to have preventative services completed at school if you do not have a dentist and need a dental home or are already a patient with Cherry Health.

If you would like these services and are unsure if you are registered, please call Cherry Health School Linked Health programs at 616-776-2345.