



CELEBRATING SUPPORT STAFF: EXCELLENCE IN ALL AREAS

Dorcus “Dee” Williams plays a very important role in Kentwood Public Schools. As the Administrative Receptionist at the district’s main office, Williams is often the first smiling face new families see when they come to KPS.

“My main role here in the district,” Williams says, “is to serve our community. I help families enroll their children; answer any questions they might have about the district. Basically, I just want to serve them, in any way that I can, here at the administration building.”

Our support staff members are not only standouts in their official jobs

Williams is one of the hundreds of members of the Kentwood Public Schools support staff, working hard in a variety of ways to ensure our students are successful. Bus drivers, cafeteria workers, paraprofessionals, academic interventionists, custodial staff, grounds crew, safety staff, behavior specialists, office staff, media clerks, and health aides are just some of the critical support staff roles in KPS.

“Each school facility and department is supported by our dedicated support services staff,” says Executive Director of Finance and Business Operations Todd Bell.

“The members of our support team work tirelessly to create access to resources and opportunities at each building across our district to achieve our vision of Excellence and Equity in Education.”

Bell knows that support staff members impact students’

lives each and every day. “In many instances,” Bell says, “a student’s first encounter and last encounter at school each day is with a support staff member. It could be a bus driver, crossing guard, custodian, or building secretary. The value of our support staff in Kentwood Public Schools cannot be overstated. They are, simply put, the best in the business.”

Support staff members bring specialized skills and knowledge to their work. When safely transporting students to and from school, making sure the registration process is smooth and complete, giving that extra bit of support with academics to students, or making sure students receive healthy meals on a consistent basis, their assigned jobs are critical to student success.



While their work is meaningful, the little extra things they do throughout the day often make the biggest differences for students.

“Our support staff members are not only standouts in their official jobs,” says Bell, “they are also the experts when a locker gets jammed or when a parent needs to be called. They are ‘change-a-tire’ experts, ‘help clean up my spilled lunch’ experts. They are experts in their dedication to the

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students of Kentwood Public Schools.”

For Administrative Receptionist Dee Williams, the uniqueness of Kentwood is part of what drives her to do her best. “I think what mostly makes our district so special is that we’re so diverse,” she says. “We represent so many different nationalities, races, and cultures from all over the world. Because of this, we truly strive to reach the goal of equity and excellence in all that we do.”

Williams has been working for the district for 16 years. “It is an honor every day for me,” she says. “It’s so exciting to see the children all over the district and to watch them grow and excel over the years. Every part works together so well, which is what makes Kentwood so great. We’re all a team, and we’re all one. It’s just such an honor to be able to do your little part.”

This issue of Kentwood School News is dedicated to our support staff team members for their important role in the success of Kentwood Public Schools.



KEESHA GRANT EMBODIES EXCELLENCE AT ENDEAVOR

Keesha Grant is a treasured addition to the Endeavor Elementary family. While officially known as the school’s health aide, Keesha goes above and beyond her role to ensure the well-being of each student she encounters.

Drawing from her personal journey as a parent caring for a special-needs child, Keesha understands firsthand the importance of compassionate care. Witnessing the dedication and support her child received within the school system deeply moved her. “Knowing the care, compassion, love, and dedication that the school system puts into children... I just had to incorporate myself into that equation,” she shares.

For Keesha, it’s not merely about medical assistance; it’s about brightening someone’s day, regardless of the circumstances. “My position is to pour my energy into others to make someone’s day better, whether it’s health-related or not,” she emphasizes.

Beyond her duties, Keesha is a pillar of trust and support for students during their most vulnerable moments. With an ever-ready attitude, she not only tends to medical needs but also extends her assistance wherever necessary. Her approachable demeanor fosters immediate connections with both parents and students, creating a welcoming atmosphere within the school community. At Endeavor Elementary, Keesha Grant embodies the essence of care and dedication, making a profound impact on the lives of those she encounters.



THE OFFICE TEAM AT EKHS IS DEDICATED TO SUCCESS

Rachelle Barone is the Administrative Assistant to Omar Bakri, Principal of EKHS. This is her 10th school year. Rachelle's role is to serve as a liaison between Mr. Bakri, staff, students and parents. She manages all administrative tasks such as handling staff needs, coordinating meetings/events, and handling Mr. Bakri's day-to-day schedule. Additionally, she collaborates closely with the AP's assistants to ensure seamless communication and coordination within the administrative team, supporting the overall functioning of the school building.

Amanda Callaghan has been with the district since October 2021 where she started out as the guidance office clerk before moving across the hall in January 2022 to be an AP secretary. Now her day to day includes supporting Lindsay Kimbrough and the departments she oversees, being the point person for count day, and running behind the scenes organization for graduation. In addition, she supports our attendance office, health room, and front desk staff as a backup to provide assistance whenever needed.

Robbie Hull is in his 12th year as an administrative assistant in Kentwood Public Schools. He began at Crestwood Middle as an office paraprofessional and after two years was promoted to AP secretary supporting Jacquie Harris and the students, parents, and staff of Crestwood. Last school year Robbie transitioned to East Kentwood High School supporting Gary Harmon and the staff of the science, math, and industrial tech departments that are housed in the West Wing of EK. His primary responsibilities include supporting administration, department leads, and the counseling department in building and maintaining the master schedule of classes year over year. Additionally, he assists the behavioral support department for Mr. Harmon's alpha group as well as cultivates a sense of community and a welcoming atmosphere within our staff and students.

Jackie Mann-Jackson is the administrative assistant to Melissa Manning. She has been a part of KPS for just over 6 years. Her primary role is to assist Melissa with her day-to-day tasks. Their office oversees the English, World Language, and Family Consumer Science Departments. In addition, they are responsible for the logistics and coordination of all state mandated testing for our building (NMSQT, WIDA, PSAT10, SAT, ACT WorkKeys, M-Step, and AP.) They also manage the building's returning student registration.



In Photo (Left - Right)
Rachelle Barone, Amanda Callaghan, Robbie Hull, Jackie Mann-Jackson

Rachelle has demonstrated exceptional dedication and efficiency as the Principal's Administrative Assistant, consistently going above and beyond to support both staff and students. Her attention to detail and proactive approach have significantly contributed to the smooth operation of our school, making her an invaluable asset to our team.

- Omar Bakri, Principal

Amanda's calm and positive presence is a cornerstone of our team, bringing stability and warmth to our environment. Her dedication to serving our students and their families is evident in every interaction, providing them with care and efficiency. Amanda's proactive approach to seeking ways to enhance the experience for both our staff and students reflects her commitment to continuous improvement and excellence. We are lucky to have Amanda as part of the EKHS Family.

- Lindsay Kimbrough, Assistant Principal

To describe Robbie with limited words is a task all by itself. Always willing to go the extra mile, he is the heartbeat of the West Wing. His dedication and uncanny ability to make everything better is just a snippet of his daily duties. When you add his work ethic and commitment to serve others it makes for one of the most enjoyable work environments one could imagine. Kudos to Robbie and all that he does to help keep us on top of our game. We are lucky to have him!!!

- Gary M. Harmon, Jr., Assistant Principal

Jackie is dedicated and committed to the East Kentwood family. Her organization and efficiency contribute to the success of our office and building. She works hard to manage the many facets of her role and support both our staff and students. She is a valuable member of our EKHS team.

- Melissa Manning, Assistant Principal

GLENWOOD ARCH APPRECIATES MS. MARI

Ms. Mari has been working with Glenwood ARCH since March 2023 during her senior year of high school. She was inspired to be an activity leader because of her love for children and thought it would be a great opportunity. ARCH has helped her come out of her shell, find her voice and develop leadership skills by running activities with the youth. Ms. Mari's favorite moment with the students has been going to the zoo and seeing the animals this past summer. She loves doing arts and crafts with the students and her favorite thing about working with scholars is their sense of humor. Ms. Mari enjoys painting and drawing in her free time and one of her goals is to become a real estate agent and rehab houses. We appreciate all the work she does for our students after school!



NICOLE NICHOLAS IS VALUED IN MULTIPLE ROLES

Challenger ARCH has been home to a diverse community over the years. Many have revolved in and out of the program; some staying for a moment, letting their brief time in ARCH lay like a warm blanket in their memory. Others stay for years as a staple to the community they've built; however, only Nicole Nicholas has been a light, guiding both scholars and staff through it all. Nicole has been with Challenger ARCH since the winter of 2019. She is a consistent force in scholars' lives through multiple staff changes. Her serene approachability has allowed her to be a confident leader to scholars, peers, and supervisors, and after a lifetime of experience as a preschool educator, she fortunately brought her wealth of knowledge to the walls of Challenger Elementary.

Nicole was born and raised in the Netherlands, but now lives with family in Kentwood. These experiences coupled with her unparalleled sense of empathy has allowed her to foster meaningful connections with scholars. Leveraging these connections have allowed her the capacity to be a key player in both the everyday operations of ARCH and the bigger picture behind the scenes. During enrichment time with scholars, Nicole presents topics in a way that allows them to ask questions and come to their own conclusions. She also never misses an opportunity to let scholars use their voice to share their "Good News" for the week during circle time. Likewise, Nicole elevates youth voices during staff meetings, quickly reminding peers about the unique interests of every individual.

In addition to her work with Challenger ARCH, Nicole has been a crucial member of the support staff at Hamilton's Early Childhood center. Balancing multiple jobs at different buildings is of course a challenge, however, the impact it has allowed her to have on the scholars of this community is hard not to notice. Kindergarteners, scared on their first week at a new school, find comfort in a familiar face they recognize from their previous year. Middle schoolers reminisce about their time under her sympathetic tutelage; and at Challenger ARCH she fosters the heart of our community. From the first hello as they walk through the cafeteria door, to the final wave goodbye as the bus turns out of the pick-up loop, scholars know they are safe, loved, and that her friendly smile will be waiting for them to do it all again tomorrow.



KPS CELEBRATES READING

In celebration of National Reading Month, March was filled with literary festivities across schools in the district! From creative door decorations to welcoming guest readers and engaging in interactive lessons, Kentwood Public Schools has truly embraced the spirit of this special month.

At Meadowlawn Elementary, both staff and students collaborated in a remarkable endeavor, crafting five enchanting habitats inspired by Dr. Seuss's beloved theme, "Oh the Places You'll Go - Habitats." They constructed jungle, desert, ocean, arctic, and mountain habitats throughout the month. Each habitat seamlessly integrated with Google Classroom activities, covering a spectrum of subjects, including math, art, music, writing, and, of course, reading! Throughout the month, designated dress-up days added an extra layer of excitement as students and staff immersed themselves in the theme of each habitat, fostering a sense of community and joy. This collaborative effort has not only provided invaluable educational experiences but has also brought forth an abundance of fun, excitement, and laughter for all involved!



CRESTWOOD'S OFFICE TEAM STANDS OUT

At Crestwood Middle School, our front office staff stands out for their exceptional warmth and welcoming demeanor, creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere for all who enter the school premises. Comprising a team of dedicated professionals, our front office staff (Loree, Jeanie, Damian, and Brenna) plays a crucial role in setting the tone for the entire school community. Their commitment to creating a friendly environment is evident from the moment visitors step through the doors, as they are greeted with genuine smiles and helpful assistance.

One of the key strengths of the Crestwood Middle School front office staff is their ability to make everyone feel valued and respected. Whether it's parents, students, or fellow staff members, the team consistently goes above and beyond to address inquiries, provide information, and offer support. This welcoming attitude not only fosters a sense of belonging but also contributes significantly to the overall positive culture within the school.

The positive culture cultivated by our front office staff has a ripple effect throughout the entire school. Their warm and approachable nature encourages open communication, collaboration, and a sense of unity among students, parents, and staff. This supportive foundation contributes to a more conducive learning environment and reinforces the school's commitment to fostering not just academic excellence but also personal growth and well-rounded development. Crestwood Middle School's front office staff are warm and welcoming, create a positive culture, serve as a shining example, and have a profound impact on the overall experience of the school community. We are so grateful to have such an amazing front office team!



SUPPORT STAFF MAKES A VISIBLE DIFFERENCE AT EKFC

At East Kentwood Freshman Campus, we are extremely proud of our learning and common spaces. The recent passing of our site and sinking fund by our Kentwood community will provide access to resources to continue our work with making our school a space that our scholars take pride in. We are extremely grateful for our custodial team, who go above and beyond, to make sure that our students have a place to come every day that is clean, safe, and inviting. This year, we invited our scholars to go behind the scenes and meet the people who work late at night to make sure that when they come to school that it will be clean and safe for them to do their best by posting their names and photos in our foyer (except one of our more reluctant Falcons). We appreciate Mr. Muller, Ms Gonzalez-Cardero, Ms. Dunlap, Mrs. Peterson, Mr. Johnson, and Mr.

Peterson. Our school is a more beautiful space for our scholars because of the work that YOU do every day!

In addition, at EKFC, we have an amazing group of dedicated women that show up daily greeting staff, students, parents, and visitors with genuine smiles and open arms. Their commitment to creating a welcoming environment sets the tone for our entire school community, making them the heart and soul of our building. These ladies are also trusted confidants and supportive mentors that go above and beyond to ensure our students feel valued and belong here. They also offer words of encouragement, lend a listening ear, ensure our students have a place they always feel heard and supported, and provide guidance during challenging times.

At a time where it seems kindness is often overlooked; our administrative office staff serves as shining examples of the power of compassion and empathy. Help us celebrate their exceptional work and continue to support them as they embody the true spirit of KPS, Excellence and Equality in Education.



DISTRICT LAUNCHES BUDGET TRANSPARENCY DASHBOARD

Kentwood Public Schools values the strong partnership between the community and the district. It is a defining characteristic of KPS and is a critical component of our district's success. Kentwood Public Schools is always looking for ways to continue to make this partnership even stronger.

This is why the district has created and launched [a budget transparency dashboard now available on the district's website](#). Located by clicking on the "Transparency Reporting" button on the main page of the website, community members can now view where the district receives its funding, how those funds are allocated, and the fund balance that remains after funds are spent.

The information will be updated on a consistent basis and is aimed to give all members of the community a more detailed look at the important aspect of funding our district.

TOWNLINE ARCH CELEBRATES COMMUNITY SUPPORT!

The Townline ARCH program is grateful for all the unconditional support we are receiving in our community. We are blessed with kindhearted activity leaders, excellent teachers, skilled community vendors, a dynamic principal and supportive parents. The coming together of these support systems makes life-changing ARCH experiences possible.

Support starts with the huge smiles, genuine passion and warm spirits of our ARCH activity leaders; Steve Vedder, Odelia Mitchell, Sa'Myah Moore and Serene Coleman, when our students are walking into the program. The prepared intentional STEM lessons focused on our scholars, arts and crafts, academic themed hands-on activities, physical health games, cooking (BHC) and club day choices are fantastic opportunities for our after-school students. Our dedicated community vendors from the MSU, Kent District Library, Kids Food Basket, Community Outreach center, Building Healthy Communities, Red Storm Robotics and STEM- MASP, also play a huge part in our program.

Truly, the collaboration of the various positive support systems around our students makes a challenging day an opportunity to create memories, learn to correct mistakes together and hone each other's character.



FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS TEAM DEMONSTRATE DEDICATION TO KPS

Meet Dave Gibson, the unsung hero behind our district's water infrastructure. As our licensed plumber, Dave ensures that every drop of water within our schools meets and exceeds Michigan's stringent standards and regulations. From drinking fountains to science lab sinks, Dave's meticulous maintenance ensures a smooth flow of water for every purpose. His dedication doesn't stop there—Dave's commitment to cleanliness means that his work often goes unnoticed, except by those fortunate enough to witness his expertise firsthand. Here's to Dave, keeping our water systems running smoothly!

Dave Masterson embodies the epitome of organization and diligence within our ranks. With a keen eye for detail and a relentless pursuit of excellence, Dave consistently delivers top-notch workmanship. His collaborative spirit and unwavering commitment to improvement make him a valued member of our team, and we're privileged to have him on board.

In the bustling hub of our district's operations, we're thrilled to welcome Jeff Jakubowski to our team of dedicated groundskeepers! Hailing from North Carolina, Jeff brings with him a wealth of expertise in groundskeeper works and maintenance, coupled with an unparalleled work ethic that truly sets him apart. His seamless integration into the grounds team has already proven him to be an invaluable asset, and we look forward to witnessing his continued contributions to our facilities.

These are just a few of the hardworking individuals who represent the dedicated members of our facilities and operations team. Let's extend our heartfelt appreciation to each of these remarkable individuals for their unwavering dedication and outstanding contributions to our district. Your hard work and commitment do not go unnoticed, and we are truly grateful for all that you do.



MR. Q PLAYS A BIG ROLE AT CHALLENGER

What does a school custodian do? Several students at Challenger Elementary were asked this question. Here's how they responded:

"Clean up and help around the school."
Bella Taylor - 5th grader

"Clean the school and clean the walls."
Acen Vanliere - 2nd grader

"Helps around the school and takes out the trash."
Jasmine Mendoza-Montoya - 4th grader

School custodian Bruce Quondamatteo, affectionately known as Mr. Q to the students and staff at Challenger Elementary, does these things and so much more! He puts smiles on faces, offers a helping hand, and goes above and beyond. Staff members agree. Here's how they describe Mr. Q:

"The hardest working person in the building. He's always available, always happy, and always willing to help."
Judy Kula - School Administrative Assistant

"When Bruce is in the building, we know anything that happens will be handled. He's super reliable and does a great job building relationships with students and staff."
Sara Hughes - Attendance Paraprofessional

"He's always positive and helpful. He will always figure out how to do what is needed, and he never complains."
Jacob Jackson - Special Education Teacher

Again, what does a school custodian do? Google writes that school custodians are responsible for daily cleaning, disinfecting, groundskeeping, preventative maintenance, repair, and building security, amongst other things. Yes, Mr. Q does these things! What's more, Mr. Q does these things with passion. His attention to detail and pride in work make him a model employee. Beyond that, his reach shows up in the KPS strategic plan. He plays a vital role in the following initiatives outlined in the KPS Strategic Plan:

- Initiative 2.1: Ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities in each school building.
- Initiative 3.1: Ensure a safe, welcoming, school community.

For these reasons we highlight Mr. Q. His presence makes Challenger a better school and we are appreciative. He is a high impact staff member that upholds the values of KPS!



EK PREPARES FOR STEAM FAIR

Plans are in the works at East Kentwood High School (EKHS) for the annual EK STEAM Fair. The fair is an opportunity for students to showcase hundreds of different Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math (STEAM) projects from this school year. Families are invited to attend the Community Night on Thursday, May 2, from 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. at the EKHS Fieldhouse. The fair is then open for schools to attend as field trips the following day, Friday, May 3, from 7:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Some of the exhibits will include Warfield's Reptile Petting Zoo; a Drones, Rockets, and Aviation Station; "Slime Time" at the Chemistry Corner; and a chance to check out what's up in e-sports plus many more hands-on experiences.

[Checkout this link to learn more about EK STEAM and the upcoming fair.](#)

This is always a great time for all. Hope to see you there!

WARM DEMANDERS AT VALLEYWOOD

Warm Demander: A warm demander is often described as an individual using mutual respect, holding others to high expectations, that effort is non-negotiable, and that you believe in the ability to be successful.

The behavioral support team at Valleywood is made of four amazing warm demanders. Ms. Todd (sixth grade), Ms. Kettles (seventh grade), Mr. Oray (eighth grade), and Mr. Varnado (safety coordinator) embody what it means to be a warm demander. They have excellent relationships with students, staff, and families. They set clear expectations with students while expecting their best and demonstrating care for all.

Valleywood's behavioral support team is an integral part of helping to maintain a safe and orderly environment while building a sense of community and sense of belonging throughout Valleywood. Whether walking the halls, covering lunch duty, or processing with students, they are constantly engaging with our students and helping prepare them for success.



MRS. SIMMONS MAKES A DIFFERENCE

There are many positions within the educational community that support the learning and academic development of our scholars, but there is one position that has risen within these past few years to be a vital, if not key, component of our daily routine at Meadowlawn Elementary. The job of the behavioral specialist is twofold: 1) Respond to the immediate needs of the scholar who is having a difficult moment, and 2) Help the scholar to develop the necessary skills to help him or her to deal with those difficult moments so that we can re-enter the child into the learning community.

Meadowlawn principal, Julie Schrot enthusiastically shares "I have had the pleasure of working with some incredible behavioral specialists in my nine years as an administrator, and I say with complete confidence that Dyana Simmons is one of the best I have encountered. Her indomitable spirit, loving heart, and ceaseless patience are a blessing to our school family, and it shows each and every day she shows up to change the lives of children. Dyana routinely puts in over 10,000 steps a day, answering the calls to help. The relationships she has built with scholars are so strong that they often seek her out to share their triumphs and bask in the pride she feels when they succeed."



"Recently, Dyana was out for two weeks for a family emergency. While living through her own difficult moment, her scholars were still in her mind and at the very core of her heart. She routinely took calls from her students, assuring them that she was there for them and that she was coming back. When I say that children, and their emotional and physical safety, are at the core of everything Dyana stands for, I mean this: Dyana continuously delivers high care with firm boundaries. She builds kids up to believe in themselves and their ability to succeed in the classroom. She is simply one of the most giving, steady, incredibly talented women I have had the pleasure of working with!"

First grade teacher, Kallie Johnson, says it best, "Dyana is the heart of our building! We are so grateful for all the time, effort, and love she pours into our students to set them up for success. We love you, Mrs. Simmons!"

KRIS CURTIS IS ONE OF A KIND!

Child Nutrition Services (CNS) Administrative Assistant Kris Curtis is an important member of the CNS team. Kris is an absolute delight to work with and is so instrumental in the sustainability and strength of the CNS department.

Director of Child Nutrition, Dan Zehr, had this to say about Curtis: "I can always count on Kris to have a smile on her face and a warm welcome when I step into the office each and every morning. In addition, her enthusiasm and daily pursuit to create memorable (& nutritious) experiences for our students is contagious.

On top of her immense child nutrition knowledge and know-how, Kris is always solution minded. Often, I learn about issues throughout the day after the fact because she just "handled it." I appreciate the way that Kris thinks and takes time to understand a situation before just reacting and also how she never gives up if and when things don't go as planned.

Kris is one of a kind, and I know that her dedication to KPS is unmatched and that our students, staff, and community are better off because of the work she does every single day."



KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS School Calendar 2024

- 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

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

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

No School For Students
 Half Day

* Updated 8/03/23