



FOREVER FALCONS SOAR TOWARD THEIR FUTURES

The sky was clear, the air was warm, and the smiles were beaming brightly across Falcon Stadium on May 26 as East Kentwood High School held its annual graduation ceremony. Six hundred students from the Class of 2024 walked across the field to receive their diplomas late last month.

"Bring kindness, compassion, and understanding to a world that desperately needs it."

The upbeat, uplifting ceremony highlighted engaging speeches by several graduates, East Kentwood teacher Chad VanHouten, and school principal Omar Bakri. In his speech, Bakri acknowledged the important role family, friends, and teachers played in helping the students reach this milestone in their lives. He complimented the Class of '24 for its togetherness and sense of responsibility. He also challenged them to go out into the world and make a difference, to "fight for equality and justice, ensuring that every voice is heard, and every person is valued." He asked students "to push the boundaries of science and technology, exploring the unknown (to make) the impossible possible." He also encouraged students to "bring kindness, compassion, and understanding to a world that desperately needs it."



Following the graduation, Bakri said that the Class of '24 was not the typical group of seniors that he has experienced. "They demonstrated a level of organization and maturity beyond their years," he explained. "This class, probably more than any other class, took advantage of so many opportunities that the school has to offer regarding clubs, sports and activities. I believe this may be a direct result of starting their high school career right after Covid and realizing that nothing is guaranteed."



"Our diverse environment fosters a sense of community, empathy, and global awareness."

The Class of 2024 also demonstrated academic prowess during their time at East Kentwood High School. Seventy-five students graduated cum laude, with a grade point average (GPA) between 3.5 and 3.79. Thirty-three other students graduated magna cum laude with a GPA between 3.8 and 3.99. There were 76 students who graduated summa cum laude, with a GPA of 4.0 or higher.

The graduates now move on to the next phase in their lives. For many that means continuing their academic studies at the college level. For others, it means taking their first

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ENDEAVOR CELEBRATES EK SENIORS

The Endeavor community celebrates a special tradition at the end of each year. Two East Kentwood graduating seniors who attended Endeavor years before are selected to receive a \$500 scholarship for their next educational step. To raise the funds, the school holds an auction that benefits Endeavor staff and students. Over the years, more than \$20,000 in scholarship money has been awarded to the graduates!

The auction preparations begin early in April. Staff members contribute a variety of goods and services for bidding, ranging from golfing gift cards to pancake breakfasts with a 30-minute morning recess for grade-level students. Later in the month, a silent auction for staff members determines the winners of these items. This year, 23 items were auctioned, raising \$1,000.



Seniors interested in the scholarship write an essay responding to the prompt: "Share your fondest Endeavor memory to show how Endeavor made a difference in your life." The staff reviews the essays and votes to select the two scholarship recipients. We are proud to award this year's scholarships to Allison Cahill and Andy Tran.

Forever Falcons Soar Toward Their Futures

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steps in the professional world. All will move forward shaped by the unique experiences they have had while students at Kentwood Public Schools.

"Our diverse environment fosters a sense of community, empathy, and global awareness," says East Kentwood Principal Bakri. "Our graduates truly have a well-rounded perspective. When they attend college or the workforce next year, there will not be a shock value when they walk into their dorm room and their roommate is from a different country or culture. They will be able to work alongside anyone regardless of their racial or economical background."



The feelings Bakri has when he speaks of the Class of '24 are warm, strong, and genuine. "I have immense pride and confidence in the Class of 2024," Bakri says. "This class has demonstrated creativity, leadership, and a willingness to seek solutions, proving they are ready for the future. I want this class to know that successful people do not leave things to chance. They don't wait for opportunities; they look and create opportunities. They work hard and use what they learned to complete tasks or solve problems but, most of all, they have a great attitude!"

[Click here to see more photos from the graduation ceremony of the Class of 2024.](#)

EK STUDENTS WIN ART COMPETITION

Congratulations to three East Kentwood High School students who swept the top prizes at this year's Grand Rapids League of Women Voters Go Vote Poster Contest. The contest invited high school students in Kent County to submit original artwork that raises awareness and celebrates "our citizens ability to vote and shape our democracy."

The first-place winner of the contest was Junior Ruquayah Hussein. Second place went to Senior Charlotte VanWingen. The third-place recipient was Senior Ayoush Gurung.

The winners were announced at a reception at the Grand Rapids Art Museum. The posters were then displayed at the museum in a special exhibition that ran through early June.



EKHS STUDENT RECEIVES NATIONAL HONOR IN JOURNALISM

Congratulations to East Kentwood High School student Nuha Hussein for being named one of only 24 students in the nation to join PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs (SRL) for its ninth annual summer academy this June. This year's event will be hosted at WETA, a leading public broadcasting station near Washington D.C.

Nuha will join student journalists from across the nation for one week of intensive journalism and storytelling training. This great opportunity is led by professional journalists who will work with the participants to produce video reports about issues facing young people in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia area.

Nuha will be a Senior next year at East Kentwood High School and is a member of Falcon News Network and East Kentwood High School's Production Club.



CELEBRATING 5TH GRADERS AT FIELD DAY

Kentwood Public Schools loves traditions. Whether the tradition of excellence in the classroom, events celebrating our diversity (like the Parade of Nations), or the annual sights and sounds of homecoming football in the fall, there are many events that students and families look forward to each and every year.

Fifth grade field day at Falcon Stadium is one of those special traditions. Once again, fifth grade students from all ten elementary schools had the opportunity in May to travel to East Kentwood's Falcon Stadium to take part in field day, participating on the track and field in a day of competition and fun. The event is held over two days to make sure each school has an opportunity to participate.

A big thank you to KPS physical education teachers and the EK athletic department who organize and run the event, as well as to fifth grade teachers who organize and support their students. The 2024 fifth-grade field day was a tremendous success!



CELEBRATING CRESTWOOD STUDENTS' I-READY GROWTH SUCCESS

During the last week of May, Crestwood Middle School had some incredible celebrations to honor the hard work and achievements of our students in their i-Ready growth assessments. The celebrations were filled with excitement, laughter, and well-deserved rewards!

Students who met their typical growth targets were treated to refreshing Kona Ice, a sweet reward for their dedication and effort. The smiles on their faces as they enjoyed their icy treats were priceless and a testament to their hard work throughout the year.

But the fun didn't stop there! Students who went above and beyond, achieving their stretch growth goals, were given the unique opportunity to dunk a Crestwood staff member in the Dunk Tank. The atmosphere was electric as students lined up, aiming to send their favorite teachers and principals into the water. The cheers and laughter echoed across the campus, creating a memorable day for everyone involved.

We are incredibly proud of all our students for their commitment to their academic growth. Their achievements in iReady reflect their perseverance and determination. A big thank you to our wonderful staff for being such great sports and to Kona Ice for providing the delicious treats.

Let's continue to support and encourage our students as they strive for excellence. Here's to more growth, more achievements, and more celebrations in the future!

[Link to Kona Ice & Dunk Tank Photos](#)

VALLEYWOOD ARCH CELEBRATES A SUCCESSFUL YEAR

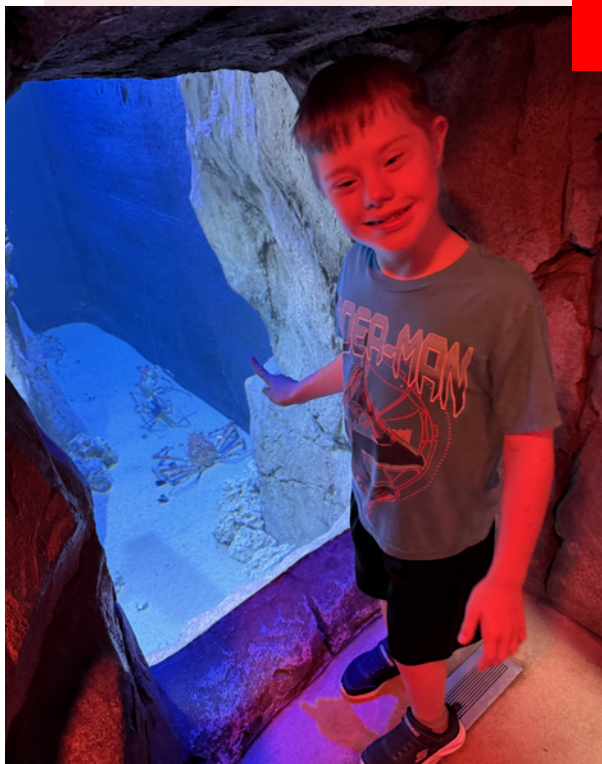
As we come to the close of another school year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the remarkable journey we've shared together in the Valleywood ARCH program. This year has been filled with its own unique set of challenges, yet through it all, our students have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to growth and resilience.

I am incredibly proud of each and every one of our Valleywood ARCH students. Despite the uncertainties and changes we've faced; they have chosen to remain steadfast in their pursuit of excellence. Their dedication to staying with us speaks volumes about the strength of our community and the relationships we've nurtured.

I've had the privilege of hearing directly from our students about the impact of our program. From providing a safe space for open dialogue to offering support with academic challenges, it's clear that our efforts have not gone unnoticed. Their words remind us of the profound influence we have in their lives.

Our students have highlighted the importance of feeling heard, valued, and supported. They appreciate the opportunities we provide for them to make decisions and participate in activities that enrich their experiences. It's evident that our collective efforts to create a positive and inclusive environment have resonated deeply with them.

To all the Valleywood ARCH students, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude. Your resilience, determination, and spirit have made this year truly remarkable. As we celebrate our successes together, let us continue to strive for excellence and pursue our dreams with passion and purpose. You are the shining stars of our program, and I am honored to be part of your journey. Here's to a future filled with endless possibilities and continued growth.



CELEBRATING IMMEASURABLE GROWTH AT BOWEN

On behalf of Bowen's MoCI Program, we want to recognize the amount of love, effort, and support that went into making one student's growth immeasurable!

Since his Kindergarten year, Brandt has been known for his running skills! Brandt's fast feet have led him on many adventures throughout his career at Bowen Elementary. On Friday, May 3 our school Social Worker, Devin Cook was able to help him channel his energy by joining him on his first major trip into the community. Brandt and his classmates ventured to John Ball Zoo, transitioning out of their normal routine and schedule to enjoy the experience of a lifetime. Brandt explored the lanterns at the zoo and saw animals he had only read about or viewed on a screen. Brandt stayed with his trusted adult and worked to stay safe in the community.

Devin was able to give Brandt the most amazing thing we can do as educators, the opportunity to grow, trust, and show pure love. And lastly, he had the opportunity to show us what he could do with the belief of a trusted adult, Miss Devin Cook.

We are so thankful that Miss Devin truly sees Brandt!

STUDENTS FINISH STRONG AT THE EAST KENTWOOD FRESHMAN CAMPUS

Students from the EKFC categorical program and students from Crossroads celebrated their last Superbuddies event of the year! They went to Boulder Ridge and experienced many different activities. Students enjoyed visiting the parakeet enclosure and feeding them using popsicle sticks with bird seed. Students also fed the giraffes, goats, and camels. They had private animal encounters and were able to learn about and touch each animal. The snake and 6-month-old wallaby were a hit! Superbuddies has blessed students with amazing friendships and unique experiences! We are beyond thankful for this partnership!

Earlier in May, four students on our Problem Based Learning Team (Erys Pennock, Caylee Turbin, Ta'Clara Griggs, and Anthony Walker) presented projects related to sustainability and stewardship at a Groundswell event held at GVSU along with their mentor, Mr. Barrett. Students shared their proposed approaches to making food practices more sustainable, supporting Great Lakes ecosystems, and other ideas to help make our community last well into the future. They completed this work as part of our cross-curricular approach to empower students to become better problem solvers and influence their community to find sustainable solutions to address food insecurity.

One of the culminating activities for students in Mr. LaFleur's sculpture class is to use the skills they have developed over the semester to create marionettes, a puppet that is manipulated to move by way of strings. Marionettes have been used as early as 2000 BC and are still commonly used in children's puppet show theaters around the world. Students enjoyed researching, designing, and building their marionettes, bringing their characters to life using imagination and strings.

A longstanding tradition at EKFC is to "clap out" the freshman class as they transition from EKFC on to EKHS. Students exit the building through a tunnel of their staff that they have built deep and lasting relationships with during their time at EKFC. Lots of hugs and high fives are exchanged along with a handful of tears. The class of 2027 has left EKFC a better place and will do great things as they traverse the parking lot to the Big House!



EXPLORER ARCH CELEBRATES COMMUNITY

We prioritize community and actively engage in helping one another at the Explorer Elementary's ARCH program. Community is not just a word; it is something that we live by. Our students enjoy assisting with various tasks and eagerly involve fellow students and parents in our activities. A recent celebration for our students and their families was our Family Food Night, which was held at the end of April. ARCH students organized a day filled with food and entertainment. Parents were invited to join us for a meal, to socialize with other families, and to participate in a friendly game of dodgeball. The event was a hit, and both parents and students had a wonderful time bonding and creating lasting memories together.

CROSSROADS STUDENTS CELEBRATE GRADUATION

More than sixty students at Crossroads Alternative High School graduated in mid-May during a ceremony at the East Kentwood High School Fine Arts Auditorium. The students received their diplomas and, for many, additional certifications in a variety of professional industries.

The ceremony included heartfelt speeches by graduates who talked about the positive impact of their time at Crossroads. Crossroads Principal Ian Gibson, who is retiring, gave a tribute to the Crossroads class of 2024, and a couple of videos honoring the graduates were shown.

The students graduated in front of a large crowd of supportive and happy family members, friends, and KPS staff who were there to cheer them on. Congratulations to all as we look forward to great things ahead!



EXPLORER ENJOYS TRADITIONAL END OF YEAR CEREMONY

Every year at Explorer the school year ends with a flag lowering ceremony. This year we said our farewell message to students at the ceremony, followed by music teacher Hayley Stoner conducting the Star-Spangled Banner with a group of 3rd grade students. After the message and song, Mr. Marsiglia, our dean of students, supported our 5th grade students in lowering and folding our flag to be put away for the summer. We ended the ceremony with the entire school singing the Explorer song. It was truly a meaningful way to say "see you later" to so many wonderful students and staff!

FITNESS IS BLOOMING AT BOWEN

Bowen Elementary students recently took part in the Feeln' Good Mileage Club, a running program designed to get kids moving toward a healthier lifestyle. Ms. Campione kicked off the 3-week program with an assembly explaining proper stretching, the distance of a mile, and incentives students could work toward. Each child received a foot-shaped punch card and special necklace tokens to denote miles completed, and five lucky participants won a healthy snack and Riverbank Run dog tag each week. The school was thrilled to have more than 70% participation and a special feature on Maranda.

As a final reward, ten students were invited to participate in the Junior Riverbank Run at EKHS on May 8. They earned medals and prize bags and enjoyed a special area with bounce houses, snow cones, popcorn, and more. According to Ms. Campione, the program was a huge success, and hopefully will encourage activity in her students outside of school. "Students spend a lot of time being asked to sit and listen. They need a healthy outlet, and fitness is a crucial and fun way to help them stay balanced."





KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

School Calendar 2024-25

- Aug 19 *First Day of School
- Aug 30 No School
- Sep 2 No School
- Sept 25..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff

- Oct 10..... ½ Day K-12 / Conferences
- Oct 11 No School

- Nov 1..... No School / PD for Staff
- Nov 27 - 29 .. No School / Thanksgiving Break

- Dec 20 ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day (non-report)
- Dec 23 - Jan 3 ... Winter Break

- Jan 20 No School for Students & Staff / MLK Day

- Feb 17 & 18 No School for Students & Staff / Mid-Winter Break

- Mar 5..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
- Apr 3..... ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day (non-report)
- Apr 4 - Apr 11.... No School for Students & Staff/ Spring Break

- May 23 ½ Day K-12 / KEA Records Day (non-report)
- May 26 No School / Memorial Day
- May 30..... Last Day of School - Half Day for Students & Staff

AUGUST							JANUARY						
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	26	27	28	29	30	31	

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

NOVEMBER							APRIL						
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17	18	19	20	21	22	23	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	27	28	29	30			

DECEMBER							MAY						
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15	16	17	18	19	20	21	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
29	30	31					25	26	27	28	29	30	31

* Updated 5/23/24

	No School For Students
	Half Day