



OFF TO A STRONG START!

Kentwood Public Schools is celebrating a strong start to the 2024-25 school year! Some of the highlights include building strong, authentic relationships with students across the district, developing student leaders in our buildings, and launching initiatives to boost attendance. Another highlight is opening the new Kentwood Public Schools Early Childhood Center Main Campus.

School board members, district leaders and staff, and members of the community were on hand for the official ribbon cutting ceremony in mid-September. The new building was funded through a recent bond proposal, supported by the KPS community. It is home to multiple Great Start Readiness Preschool programs for four-year-old children and also offers Early Childhood Special Education Services to students.

...every decision during the design and construction process was made with the youngest learners in mind.

“What is so unique about this new building,” says KPS Director of Early Childhood Teressa Gatza, “is that every decision during the design and construction process was made with the youngest learners in mind.” Gatza points out that these decisions include convenient cubbies for storage, the size of bathroom equipment, tables, and chairs, the aesthetic look of the building, as well as specially designed learning spaces for young learners. “Everything

is preschool size,” Gatz adds, “but there was an intentionality in the design to promote gross motor development which is so important for students of this age.”



The community was also able to visit the building during the school’s Open House. There was plenty of excitement in the air that evening.

Continued on page 2...

VALLEYWOOD STUDENTS SERVE AS MENTORS

Valleywood Middle School’s Math Buddies program has created a buzz in the community, bridging the gap between 8th graders and 1st graders through a unique, hands-on approach to learning. This innovative initiative pairs Valleywood’s enthusiastic 8th grade students from Mrs. Wolf’s Teen Leadership class with Meadowlawn Elementary’s young learners, fostering a collaborative and engaging math experience.

The Math Buddies program, which began this semester, aims to enhance mathematical understanding, and build confidence in students from both schools.

Continued on page 3...

Off to A STRONG START

Continued from page 1

"I loved the energy at our Open House," Gatza stated. "Our parents, students, and staff all were so enthusiastic about seeing this new school. Not only did we have moms and dads coming for Open House, but grandparents were also coming along to see this new place. We actually had people calling other people to come see the building. I was so excited at how proud our families were to enroll their children to be part of the first group of students in our new early childhood center."

Gatza understands the importance of early childhood education for a child's long-term success with learning.

"Early childhood is so crucial," she says. "We know with brain development that students at a younger age are like sponges. The more opportunities we give them at these ages will positively impact their entire academic careers." Gatza mentions that early childhood education impacts students' cognitive development, as well as their problem-solving skills, language development, and social skills.

Kentwood Public Schools understands the importance of early childhood learning. One way the district is supporting early learning is by continuing to expand its early childhood offerings to families. In addition to the new building, located next to Townline Elementary on the west side of the district, the district also has early childhood classrooms at Explorer Elementary located in the southeast part of the district. Next school year, the new Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center will open as the district's 11th elementary school with part of the building dedicated as an additional early childhood center, located in the northeast part of Kentwood.

"We know that driving students to their early childhood location can be a burden for parents if the location is not close to home," Gatza explains. "We're hoping that by offering early childhood learning options in a variety of places in our district that it will provide easier access for many families."

For more information on early childhood offerings in Kentwood Public Schools, please visit our website at kentwoodps.org/ourschools/early-childhood/hamiltonelementary/.



A STRONG START FOR THE EK FRESHMAN CAMPUS

This school year, we have actively worked to build positive relationships and establish clear expectations through various initiatives. We began by reaching out to students with a history of low attendance, sending postcards to encourage starting the year with strong habits of attendance. Before school began, we facilitated our second annual New Falcon Camp, teaching leadership skills through games, activities, and competitions to help our new 9th graders learn about themselves and others while also learning about school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) expectations.

Once school began, in each class, we introduced our PBIS Matrix, Falcon P.R.I.D.E. (Preparedness - Respect - Integrity - Dependability - Effort), through interactive lessons and team-building activities that reinforced our expectations in all school spaces. Our dedicated Falcon P.R.I.D.E. Time has not only strengthened relationships but also provided new high school students with vital information on achieving success.

Recently, our academic pillar team conducted a lesson emphasizing the importance of understanding credits and graduation requirements, ensuring students are well-prepared for their future. These efforts have fostered a supportive environment that promotes accountability and success and have been carefully developed to meet the developmental needs of 9th graders in their first and most pivotal year of high school.



Valleywood Students Serve as Mentors

Continued from page 1

Each week, Valleywood's 8th graders visit Meadowlawn Elementary, stepping into the role of mentors and tutors. They work alongside 1st graders, guiding them through fundamental math concepts in a supportive and interactive environment.

The initiative benefits both age groups. For the younger students, working with their older peers brings a fresh perspective to their learning process, often making abstract concepts more accessible through creative and relatable explanations. The one-on-one attention and tailored guidance from their Math Buddies help solidify their understanding of basic arithmetic and problem-solving skills.

On the flip side, Valleywood's 8th graders gain invaluable experience in teaching and leadership. They learn to adapt their communication styles to different learning needs, hone their patience, and develop a deeper appreciation for the foundational skills they once mastered themselves. This role reversal also instills a sense of responsibility and pride as they witness the positive impact they have on their younger counterparts.

The Math Buddies program has been met with enthusiasm from both schools. Meadowlawn teachers report increased engagement and mathematical confidence, while Valleywood's students cherish the opportunity to give back to their community in a meaningful way.

The program continues to grow, exemplifying the power of peer mentorship and collaborative learning, and proving that educational enrichment can be both effective and enjoyable!



LAGONE NAMED AS NEXT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Kentwood Public Schools is pleased to announce that Thomas Lagone, CPA, will be the district's new Executive Director of Finance and Business Operations. The decision became official in a September meeting of the KPS Board of Education.

Lagone has served the KPS community for the past two years as Director of Fiscal Services, playing a key role in the district's financial leadership. Before joining Kentwood, he was the Director of Finance and Operations at Hamilton Community Schools, and prior to that, served in similar roles at other districts in the Ottawa Area ISD. His earlier career includes successful roles in financial management within the private sector.

"Tom Lagone is a skilled educational leader with private and public sector experience as a CPA and previous central office experience as an assistant superintendent," says KPS Superintendent Kevin Polston. "He leads with integrity, expertise, and compassion for those he serves. The entire KPS school community will be well served by Tom's leadership for years to come."

Lagone recently participated in the prestigious Leadership Grand Rapids Class of 2024, a selective 10-month leadership program bringing together 44 community leaders to address critical issues through systems thinking and collaboration. In addition, he holds certifications from Michigan School Business Officials in the areas of finance and business management.

"I am honored, humbled, and excited to serve the Kentwood Public Schools community in this new role," Lagone said. "I am committed to carrying out the goals of our strategic plan. By aligning our financial and operational resources with the district's mission, I aim to support

both students and staff in achieving their fullest potential. With a strong focus on Excellence and Equity in Education, it's a privilege to continue building on the district's success and ensure that every student and staff member has the tools they need to thrive."

Lagone and his wife Laura have three children, ages 11 to 14, as well as a much-loved German Shepherd. Lagone will succeed Todd Bell who will retire at the end of the calendar year after 30 years of dedicated service to KPS.



EDUCATION RISING IS OFF TO A STRONG START IN 2024-25

Real-world learning opportunities are an important part of the educational experience for students in Kentwood Public Schools, and the Educators' Rising program is a great example of this. The program is off to a strong start this year.



Here are some highlights:

- Four EK graduates who were former Education Rising students recently received tuition scholarships ranging from \$1,000 - \$10,000 from the EXPLORE Future Proud Michigan Educator grant the district received recently. This is also part of our developing Grow Your Own program, providing support and pathways for future educators.
- Four EK high school students in their second year of Ed Rising are starting paid internships in three of our elementary schools this year. The students will be providing small group and individual reading instruction as AmeriCorps employees.
- Ed Rising teacher, Jasmine Ramahi, recently organized an event to bring more than 50 middle school and high school students to support play during recess at Meadowlawn Elementary.

We thank all who take part in creating and supporting these valuable learning opportunities for our students.



ROCK/PAPER/SCISSORS FUN AT EK

While hard work and innovative learning is off to a strong start at East Kentwood High School, the school has also made an effort to have some fun as a way to build a strong community to start the year. Part of that fun involved a spirited rock/paper/scissors competition at EK.

During the first 2 weeks of school, freshmen through seniors participated in the school-wide competition. At the first recognition rally of the year, the 10-12 building champion faced off against the freshman campus champion.

It was definitely a close, and fun-filled battle. While 9th grader Jayden Garcia defeated senior Gabe Wolf in the best out of 3, Gabe stormed back and ultimately won best out of 5!

It was all around a GREAT way to start the school year!



A Destination District

MORE TOWN HALL MEETINGS PLANNED TO HEAR YOUR VOICE

Construction continues on the new Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center, set to open for the 2025-26 school year. The district also continues to develop plans to ensure the opening of the new school goes smoothly for all.

With the opening of the district's 11th elementary school, elementary attendance zones will be adjusted for all elementary buildings. Last year, the district received valuable input from families, students, staff, and community members regarding these attendance zone changes.

Your voice is important! Be on the lookout for an email coming soon regarding the next round of town hall meetings that will take place throughout the fall, beginning this month. At these meetings you will receive information on revised attendance zones based on feedback we received in the spring, and you will be able to offer more input and ask questions of district leaders regarding this process. We will also be sharing a survey to continue to receive input from all stakeholders on this important process.

We thank you for partnering with us and look forward to our continued collaboration as we move toward the opening of Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center in 2025.



JOY FOCUSES ON ELEVATING EQUITY AND SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Early in the workday, Kentwood Public Schools Executive Director of Strategy and Innovation, Sunil Joy, is reviewing feedback from a student focus group he attended to acquire input on issues important to the success of KPS.

"I actually spend a lot of time talking with students in my work to get their perspective on what it is like to be a student here," Joy says, "and I'm always impressed by how much insight they provide on their own experiences here in Kentwood Public Schools."

Joy also enjoys the opportunity to continue to build upon the history of celebrating diversity while continuing to strive to raise the level of equity for all students in Kentwood Public Schools. He describes his primary role as being centered around the development and implementation of the district's strategic plan, which is the district vision for the next three to five years to ensure success for all students.

Superintendent Kevin Polston is confident Joy is the right person for the job. "Sunil Joy is an expert on research and data science to put innovative strategies into practice to improve outcomes for students," Polston explains. "He has a rare skillset that allows our district to think differently, more creatively, to boldly advance our district's vision of Excellence and Equity in Education for each student."

“ Sunil Joy is an expert on research and data science to put innovative strategies into practice to improve outcomes for students ”

Joy, a native Michigander, was born in Detroit to parents who immigrated to the United States from India. He, like many students in our district, is multilingual, speaking English and Malayalam, his family's native language. Joy holds multiple degrees from the University of Michigan, including a graduate degree in public policy.

At the University of Michigan during the early days of his undergraduate work, he became interested in working in education. Joy volunteered at the Peace Community Center, a center which primarily served students living in a nearby low-income housing project, many of whom were immigrant and refugee families. He volunteered at the center throughout his entire college career.

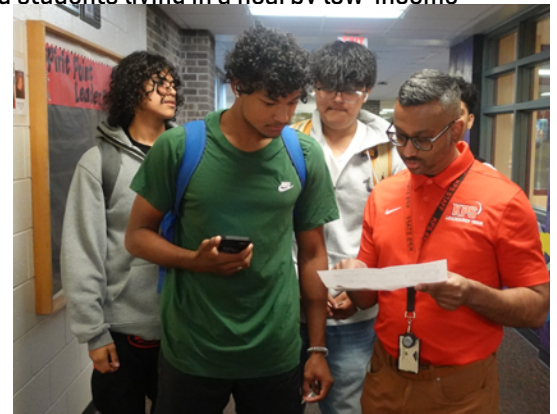
Joy's professional life, prior to coming to Kentwood, provided him opportunities to positively impact students on a large scale. He worked as the Director of Policy and Research at Education Trust - Midwest, a national education policy and civil rights organization, where he worked to influence policy to close student achievement gaps and advocate for students, particularly students of color.

Joy also worked as a data scientist for the Kent Intermediate School District where he supported the work of schools throughout Kent County. During this time, he helped to create and launch the MI Student VOICE Perception Survey. This student survey attains data to help school districts look at important issues such as diversity, equity, inclusion, social emotional learning, and student engagement. Originally developed for Kent County, the survey is now utilized statewide, with more than 70,000 students participating from 110 districts in Michigan last year.

Joy loves working in Kentwood Public Schools. "There is this deep sense of pride of being a part of Kentwood," Joy says when speaking of the KPS staff. "That sense of pride," he continues, "is built around the students we serve. It resonates with our staff and families and contributes to the strong culture we have in our district to do the very best for our students."

"Sunil has a clear purpose for the work he does on behalf of Kentwood Public Schools," says Superintendent Polston. "He seeks to create equitable opportunities and access for students to achieve their human potential. In the private sector, positions like the one Mr. Joy carries out for KPS are commonplace, but his role is not common in most public schools. KPS is fortunate to have such a strong advocate with a clear purpose and passion for students!"

Joy embraces his role in Kentwood and deeply understands the importance of the work he and each staff member do at KPS. "It's easy to get caught up in the routines, and the planning, and everything that happens every single day," Joy explains. "Sometimes, though, we just need to step back and think about why we are really here in the first place. What are we trying to accomplish?" Joy continues, "The work we do, the work of educating students, is really about changing the world. And that begins with our students."



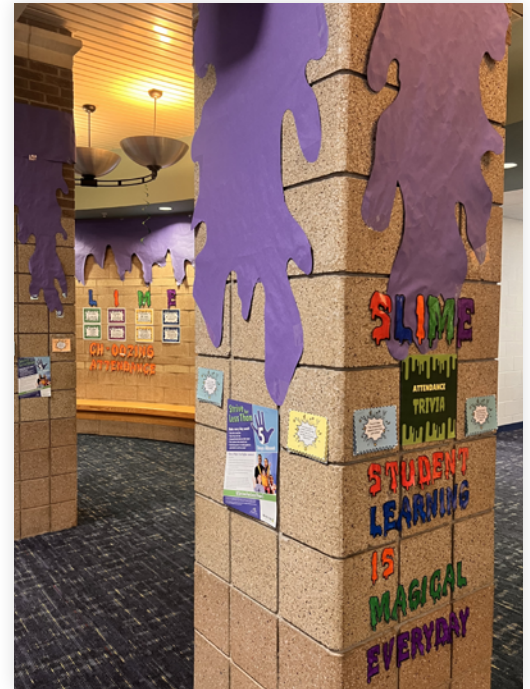
POSITIVE ATTENDANCE IS “OOZING” AT SOUTHWOOD

As a district, we recognize the importance of attendance for a student’s success. At Southwood, staff wanted to hit the ground running at the beginning of the school year to highlight this topic and provide everyone tools for attendance success.

During the month of September, KSSN coordinator, Adam Swenson, and principal, Jeff Overkleeft, brought together the resources of school staff, Kent ISD, and community partners to make this attendance challenge come to life.

This month-long challenge centers around a slime theme. Each letter in the word ‘slime’ stands for something that can be helpful for individuals to be successful in having great attendance. There is an interactive lobby display featuring attendance trivia, classroom lessons taught by Mr. Adam, updated slime videos to share, and weekly prizes for those that meet the challenge expectations.

At the end of the month, scholars who have perfect attendance for the month are invited to a slime-making celebration and other rewards. Another perk is that grown-ups of those scholars are entered to win a gift card, because staff also want to acknowledge the efforts caregivers make to help their children get to school on time, every day. The hope is that this will model positive habits, enhance communication, and strengthen relationships with the school and other community partners.



BUILDING A POSITIVE AND ENGAGING CLASSROOM COMMUNITY



At Crestwood, we are committed to creating classrooms where students feel safe, respected, and engaged. Our continued focus is on building strong classroom communities through a variety of powerful approaches aimed at fostering positive relationships and a supportive learning environment.

Our teachers are using team-building and culture-building activities to strengthen connections between students and promote a sense of belonging. These activities encourage collaboration and trust, laying the foundation for a successful academic year. Establishing consistent routines and procedures is another key strategy. Clear expectations help students feel secure, enabling them to thrive academically and socially. In addition, our use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) rewards positive behaviors, helping students make good choices and supporting their social-emotional growth.

We are also proud to implement programs like Capturing Kids’ Hearts and Restorative Practices, which prioritize strong teacher-student relationships and conflict resolution. These approaches ensure that students feel heard, valued, and part of a supportive community. Proactive circles allow students to share their thoughts and feelings in a safe space, promoting understanding and empathy among classmates.

Together, these strategies are helping us create a dynamic, inclusive environment where students can grow both academically and personally. Thank you for your support as we continue to foster a positive and engaging school culture!

STUDENT LEADERS HELP MEADOWLAWN GET OFF TO A STRONG START

The start of a new school year is always busy as we find ourselves focusing on building a strong climate and culture. Student voice is a vital aspect of that culture and a hallmark of being a Kentwood scholar. There is no better way to get our voices heard than by being a part of the educational decision making process in the building.

This year, the Meadowlawn Student Council, run by Mrs. Jessica Vogler and Mrs. Lindsey Greenfield, got off to a strong start with September candidate speeches and a school-wide election that allowed our 2nd through 5th grade scholars to be an integral part of the democratic process.

Mrs. Vogler and Mrs. Greenfield set the bar high with standards of excellence our scholars needed to embody in order to participate in the election process. Fourth and fifth grade candidates for president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary created posters that hung in our hallways. They campaigned and had to write their own speeches that were delivered in front of families and the student body.

Student Council is a wonderful way for our scholars to share in student leadership. We are so proud to have the Council up and running within the first month of school! Our electees, as well as our 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade representatives, are already hard at work fundraising, holding meetings, participating in the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports celebrations, and setting up events for the rest of the school year. Congratulations to all our Student Council representatives for their desire to share their voice and vision to improve our school family!



STUDENTS AT BOWEN “LEND A HAND”

Bowen ARCH students participated in a summer project-based learning program called “Lend a Hand,” where they explored the concept of microlending. Through this initiative, they learned how small loans can significantly benefit a community by starting with the basics of money management and budgeting. Faced with engineering challenges and limited resources, students crafted structures from recycled materials, enhancing their teamwork and problem-solving skills.

The program concluded with group presentations where students showcased how a small loan could support a chosen community’s growth. They also proposed creative fundraising strategies, demonstrating their commitment to making a positive impact.



STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN “THE DIRTY TRUTH” PBL

This summer, ARCH students at five schools explored sustainable agriculture in Michigan and studied the challenges of cultivating crops on Earth and Mars. They engaged in hands-on activities, including planting radish seeds in Martian regolith and Earth soil, and created commercials based on their research.

Field trips to the Grand Rapids Public Museum and other locations enriched their understanding of sustainability and space exploration. The program culminated in student presentations advocating for either Mars exploration or Earth conservation.



KPS UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN RECEIVES HONOR

Kentwood Public Schools is dedicated to serving our community, a commitment demonstrated through our annual support of the Heart of West Michigan United Way. Last year, thanks to the generosity of our staff, we donated over \$51,000 to their campaign. This achievement was made possible by the hard work of our United Way Campaign Committee, who recently earned the Campaign Committee of the Year Award. We congratulate Debbie Schuitema, Joe Marsiglia, Jenin Shamali, and Dollineller Large for their outstanding efforts, and thank all who contributed to this success!



BROOKWOOD AND SOUTHWOOD ARCH STUDENTS FOCUS ON “WHAT’S IN YOUR WATER”

Brookwood and Southwood students participated in hands-on learning projects focused on water conservation and pollution prevention. Brookwood students engineered devices to prevent water contamination, analyzed local water samples, and connected their findings to global clean water issues. Southwood students explored the impact of pollution on local waterways, conducted water quality experiments, and developed initiatives to reduce pollution. Both projects highlighted the importance of protecting our watersheds and culminated in student presentations and a fundraiser for global clean water access.

BUILDING AND BAKING IN THE EKHS SUMMER ARCH PROGRAM

East Kentwood High School ARCH students engaged in two project-based learning units that combined STEAM concepts with creative and practical activities. In the first unit, students designed models of their dream rooms, beginning with vision boards and learning about color theory, feng shui, and furniture design. They visited the Grand Rapids Art Museum for inspiration and used graph paper to draft layouts, later bringing their designs to life through 3D models. The unit concluded with a fun visit to Locked 460 Escape Rooms, where students applied their newfound design knowledge.

In the second unit, students explored the importance of STEAM in baking by collecting recipes, testing baking methods, and following the scientific process to tweak recipes. The unit culminated in designing, baking, and decorating cakes, with students sharing their creations and learnings. A highlight was a day of cookie baking and decorating facilitated by Kentwood Parks and Rec, where students enjoyed experimenting with different ingredients and techniques.





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

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	7:35 AM	2:19 PM	10:50 AM
Crossroads	7:34 AM	2:10 PM	10:40 AM

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

OCTOBER							MARCH						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5							1
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
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						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2			1	2	3	4	5
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
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						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7					1	2	3
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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

No School For Students
 Half Day