



## KPS EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER A WELCOMING SPACE FOR FAMILIES IN OUR COMMUNITY

One year after the official ribbon cutting, the Kentwood Public Schools Early Childhood Center Main Campus is buzzing with energy, growth, and opportunity. Among the many programs flourishing in the new space are the Thursday and Friday morning community playgroups — welcoming families from across the district to enjoy an hour of play, discovery, and connection.

The playgroups, held from 10 – 11 a.m., are open to all families with young children in our community, including children who are not yet of school age. Enrollment in other Early Childhood programs is not required for attendance. They offer a chance for little learners to explore, socialize, and grow—all in a safe and welcoming environment designed especially for them.

*Kentwood Public Schools exists to serve our community, and we are so grateful for the investment families have made in our early childhood facilities,” said Teressa Gatza, KPS Director of Early Childhood*

### A Building for the Whole Community

The KPS Early Childhood Center opened its main campus just one year ago as part of the 2021 Bond campaign. While the building houses the Great Start Readiness Program preschool classes and Early Childhood Special Education classes, the district also views it as a space for the entire community.

“Kentwood Public Schools exists to serve our community, and we are so grateful for the investment families have made in our early childhood facilities,” said Teressa Gatza, KPS Director of Early Childhood. “We are committed to providing as many opportunities as possible to all members of our community. Even if your children are not yet in school, we want you to feel welcome here.”

*Continued on page 2...*

### COMMUNITY AND DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP REMAINS STRONG

Now that the 2025-26 school year is off to a strong and successful start, Kentwood Public Schools wants to take a moment to acknowledge and thank the greater Kentwood community and our families for their continued support and partnership in making KPS a Destination District.

Please see the message below from the Kentwood Public Schools Board of Education:

*Dear KPS Families,*

*On behalf of the Kentwood Public Schools Board of Education, I want to extend our gratitude for your continued support of our students, staff, and district.*

*Kentwood is truly a special place. We are proud to be the most diverse district in Michigan and among the most diverse in the nation...*

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## KPS Early Childhood Center—A Welcoming Space for Families in our Community

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### Building Strong Foundations Through Play

The playgroups are led by teacher Emily Backus, who has dedicated her career to early childhood education. She knows firsthand how important the earliest years are for a child's growth.

"Early exposure is so important," Backus explained. "So much of brain development happens before age five. These playgroups give children a chance to engage in activities that build skills and curiosity. At the same time, families can take away ideas they can recreate at home."

Each session includes hands-on activities, music, and opportunities for social interaction. Children learn to clap, count, share, and explore new concepts—all through play. Parents and caregivers also benefit from connecting with one another, sharing experiences, and finding encouragement.

"I'm really proud of this program," Backus said. "I love the relationships I've built with families."

### Families Share the Joy

For many families, playgroup mornings have become a highlight of the week.

"She feels so excited to come here every Thursday and Friday," one parent shared. "Everyone is so friendly and welcoming."

Another parent added, "Honestly, it's a great opportunity. We feel blessed for it. It's such a good head start for my children to be in this environment where they can grow and learn."

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### All Are Welcome

The Early Childhood Center was built with the community in mind, and the weekly playgroups are just one example of how Kentwood Public Schools is investing in families from the very beginning of their educational journey.

Whether it's clapping along to a song, building with blocks, or simply sharing time together, the playgroups are about more than play. They are about creating joyful learning experiences and building community—one child, one family, and one Thursday and Friday morning at a time.

For more information about the playgroups, contact the [KPS Early Childhood Office](#) or visit the [district website](#). To view a video version of this story, please [click on this link](#).



## COMMUNITY PARTNERS SUPPORT A STRONG START AT EXPLORER

Community partners played an important role in helping the school year get off to a strong start at Explorer Elementary.

In September, Steelcase volunteers through the United Way's Day of Caring came to Explorer to help prepare materials for our Math Falcon Groups. Ten volunteers dedicated two and a half hours to support our students, teachers, and interventionists.

We are proud of the work that everyone in the building has done to launch our Falcon Groups. Using iReady data, teachers identified the supports and enrichments that our students need. These groups are designed to meet students where they are and help them grow to new heights. Throughout the year, we'll continue to collect data to adjust instruction and continue to support student growth.

Thanks to the work and support of the Steelcase volunteers, our staff, and students, our Falcon Groups are up and running!



## **Community District Partnership Remains Strong**

Continued from page 1...

*This diversity creates a rich and dynamic community, united by one common value: a shared commitment to the success of KPS.*

*That commitment was especially evident this past year as we prepared to open Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center, our 11th elementary school, and adjusted elementary boundaries to ensure balance across the district as well as neighborhood schools while maintaining diversity at each of our buildings.*

*Throughout this process, you engaged in meaningful ways. You provided feedback through surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings. You asked thoughtful questions that guided district leaders in making well-informed decisions, and you supported the outcome, even when changes were not easy.*

*Because of your partnership, Hamilton Elementary and Early Childhood Center opened successfully, and the school year—with new boundaries in place—began with warmth, energy, and a welcoming spirit. Your role in this success cannot be overstated.*

*A frequent question that came up during the elementary redistricting process was about the impact on our middle school program that the growth in our community would have. With our changes to elementary established, district leadership is now diving deeper into the evolving needs at the middle school level. We trust we can rely on your valued input again as KPS looks at needs for middle school.*

*The KPS Board of Education also extends its thanks to district leadership and staff for their careful planning and dedication to doing what is best for students and families. We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with families and the community as we work together toward our vision of Excellence and Equity in Education for all.*

*With appreciation,  
Mimi Madden  
President, KPS Board of Education*

The role of our families and our community is greatly valued, and your input continues to be a key component in helping us to make the best choices to serve our students. Please keep an eye out for an upcoming email that will share information regarding town hall/focus group meetings to learn more from you and gather input regarding important issues and decisions for KPS, particularly pertaining to our middle school program. The meetings will begin in late October and go into mid-November. We're finalizing specific details on dates, times, and locations which will be shared in the email. Also, look for a survey soon in your email as another way to provide input.

Again, we thank you for your continued support and partnership. Go Falcons!



# EXPLORER ELEMENTARY

OCTOBER 23<sup>RD</sup> @ 5:00 PM



You're invited to enjoy some delicious pasta with meat sauce, a tossed salad, breadstick and a fruit side while enjoying fun activities and connecting with others in a welcoming space. Come for the dinner, stay for the community.



Join us for some yummy pasta, tossed salad, breadstick, and a fruit side.



October 23, 2025 5:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.  
Dinner Served 5:00 p.m. -5:30 p.m.



Explorer Elementary  
2307 68<sup>th</sup> ST SE  
Caledonia, MI 49316



Over 60: Suggested donation of \$3.50 for the meal  
Under 60: Required fee of \$5.00 for the meal

## RSVP

Please RSVP by October 17<sup>th</sup> so we have enough food for everyone.  
Call 616-459-3111 ext 143 or scan the QR code to register today.



**LET'S EAT!**



## DISCOVERY ELEMENTARY WELCOMES NEW AND RETURNING STUDENTS

Discovery Elementary began the school year with a renewed sense of excitement, energy, and opportunity. This fall marks a new chapter for our school community—one that celebrates growth, fresh connections, and the continued spirit of belonging that defines Discovery.

Over the summer, our district implemented boundary changes to support the opening of the new Hamilton Elementary, and with that came some significant shifts for Discovery. While our school looks a little different this year, the heart of Discovery remains the same—our commitment to every child's success.

Staff members have worked intentionally to foster a strong sense of community and stability for all students, both returning and new. Morning procedures, classroom expectations, and schoolwide routines were reviewed and practiced, ensuring that every student feels confident, comfortable, and ready to learn.

The dedication of our teachers and support staff has made this transition smooth and positive. Their teamwork and care have helped create an environment where students feel seen, supported, and connected from the very first day.

As we move forward, Discovery Elementary continues to embrace the opportunity to grow together—building new friendships, strengthening traditions, and setting the stage for another year of learning, growth, and success.



## CROSSROADS HIGH SCHOOL IS OFF TO A STRONG START

The team at Crossroads High School is celebrating a strong beginning to the school year, and it all started at the school's Open House in August. Families and students lined up at the door waiting to get into the Open House. Staff members report the number of families and students attending was bigger than anyone can remember.

Crossroads welcomed workforce partners to answer questions families and students had about the dynamic and expanding workforce program at the school. The school also had other community partners there to share information on services they provide to ensure support for our students and families.

The Crossroads team is committed to making sure the excitement and energy from the opening of the school year continues to grow in the months ahead.

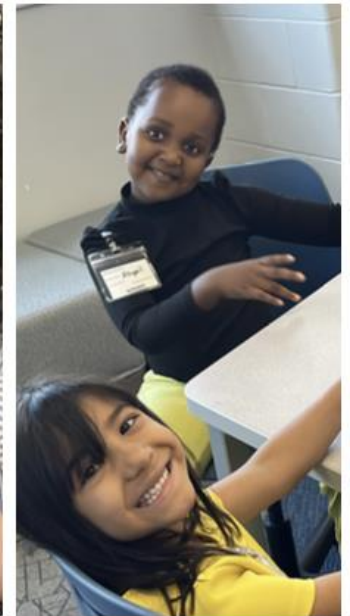
## **PINEWOOD MIDDLE SCHOOL STARTS STRONG WITH FOCUS ON T.E.A.M.**

The halls of Pinewood Middle School are buzzing with excitement after a powerful start to the new academic year, kicked off by our first all-school T.E.A.M. assembly. This year's welcome event was a tremendous display of school spirit, centered on a powerful message of belonging, a celebration of the new year, and an emphasis on our school's core values.

Students and staff were welcomed with high energy, setting a positive tone for the year ahead. A whole-group introduction of our T.E.A.M. attributes followed, with a focus on what it means to be Teachable, Empowered, Accepting, and Motivated. Our amazing Pinewood teachers and PBIS Team brought each attribute to life, helping students understand how these values can guide their actions and shape their behavior throughout the year.

Beyond celebrating our shared values, the assembly included grade-level competitions designed to get students excited and engaged. The energy was palpable as students cheered for their classmates and connected with teachers in a joyful, spirited atmosphere. In addition, several staff and student leaders introduced various clubs, organizations, and ways for students to get involved at Pinewood. These brief presentations encouraged participation and belonging, showcasing the many ways students can find their place in our school community.

As we begin the new year, the assembly's focus on T.E.A.M. attributes, our building expectations, and the wealth of opportunities for involvement will undoubtedly lay the groundwork for a successful and connected school year for all. Go Falcons!



## **GLENWOOD ENJOYS AN ENTHUSIASTIC START TO THE SCHOOL YEAR**

The school year is off to a fantastic start at Glenwood Elementary! We were thrilled to welcome nearly 100 new Young 5 and Kindergarten students to our school community. These eager learners have already begun settling into their classroom routines, and it's been a joy to see their enthusiasm as they explore all that Glenwood has to offer, including their first visits to our vibrant school library.

The excitement extended beyond the classroom as well. This year's Open House was the most well-attended in Glenwood's history, with families filling the halls to meet teachers, explore classrooms, and connect with one another. The strong turnout is a testament to the supportive community we're proud to be part of.

Our dedicated teachers have gone above and beyond to create warm, welcoming, and engaging learning environments. Their hard work over the summer and during the first few weeks of school has truly paid off, helping students feel comfortable, excited, and ready to learn.

We're looking forward to a year full of growth, discovery, and success for all our students. With such a strong start, we know great things are ahead at Glenwood Elementary!

## BACK TO SCHOOL DANCE BRINGS THE BOWEN ELEMENTARY COMMUNITY TOGETHER

Bowen Elementary kicked off the school year with energy, excitement, and plenty of glowsticks at its Back-to-School Dance — a joyful celebration of new beginnings and growing community spirit.

Held in the school gymnasium and sponsored by the Parent Teacher Committee (PTC), the event welcomed students, families, and staff for an evening of dancing, laughter, and connection. This year's dance had special significance, as it marked the first major community event since Kentwood Public Schools redistricting — a fresh chapter for our new families and a symbol of growth and unity.

The space buzzed with upbeat music, the swirl of colorful lights, and the echo of happy feet as students and parents filled the dance floor. Glowsticks lit up the room in every color imaginable, while snacks and drinks helped fuel the fun. From the youngest kindergartners showing off their dance moves to families grooving together, the night was filled with smiles and shared joy.

"This isn't just about having fun — though we're definitely doing that," PTC President Leigh Nix commented. "It's about building relationships and creating a strong, welcoming community around our school."

For many families, especially those new to the Bowen community, the dance served as a chance to meet fellow parents, make new friends, and feel a sense of belonging. "We just moved here, and this event helped us feel at home," said one parent. "It's wonderful to see a school that puts so much effort into building community."

The Bowen Elementary Back to School Dance was more than just a party; it was a powerful reminder that when schools, families, and communities come together, incredible things can happen.



### TRUNK OR TREAT

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18**  
**FROM 10 AM - 1 PM**

**At the Parking Lot of the Kentwood Police Department**  
4742 Walma Ave SE

**Join us for some FREE Family Fun!**  
**Collect treats from decorated car trunks!**

New Location!

### FUN PROGRAMS IN OCTOBER!

**CITY OF KENTWOOD**  
PARKS & RECREATION

<b>ENRICHMENT</b>	<b>SPORTS &amp; FITNESS</b>
Art Expressions: Sculpting	Fencing
Pumpkin Patch Kitchen	Speed Lab
Youth Advisory Council	Martial Arts
Music & Motion	Zumba Kids
Ballet Dance	Pickleball Pals
Chess Club	Rising Hoopers Basketball
	Gridiron Heroes: Flag Football

REGISTER ONLINE AT [KENTWOOD.US/PARKS](https://kentwood.us/parks) **PROGRAMS FOR AGES 1-18**

Kentwood Parks and Recreation Department · 355 48th St. SE Kentwood, MI 49548 · 616.656.5270 · [kentwood.us/parks](https://kentwood.us/parks)

## SOUTHWOOD ARCH BUILDS BONDS TO BEGIN YEAR

This school year our building has the honor of welcoming many new students, who came to us from several different elementary buildings throughout the district. As a result, our after school ARCH program has several new faces.

As we start our programming for this school year, the goals of our staff are teamwork and community building to help our new students feel comfortable and welcome in ARCH after school. Staff have been working hard to support our youth in building healthy, peer-2-peer relationships, in exploring what it means to be a contributing member of a team and giving students the tools to practice positive and effective conflict resolution.

To help our new students learn their school building, and to support strong peer relationships within our activity groups, Southwood ARCH students and staff participated in a photo scavenger hunt. Each group was given a digital camera and a set of clues, then moved around the building and outdoor spaces, solving each riddle, and completing the photo challenge task at each new location. Students worked together to solve each new clue and took turns working the camera at each of the hunt locations.

We are so excited to have such a wonderful group of students and are looking forward to a year of fun and friendships!



## COACH STEPHENSON INDUCTED INTO HALL OF FAME

It's official — East Kentwood High School's own Coach Stephanie Stephenson has been inducted into the Michigan High School Coaches Association (MHSCA) Hall of Fame. In the spring, we shared that Stephenson had been selected for this prestigious honor. Last month, she was formally recognized during the MHSCA induction ceremony in Mt. Pleasant.

Stephenson's long and distinguished coaching career began in 1990 and brought her to East Kentwood in 1992. In addition to serving as head coach of the girls' track and field team, she continues to contribute as an assistant coach for the boys' cross-country team. Over the years, she has also coached softball and competitive cheer — demonstrating an enduring passion for mentoring student-athletes.

The MHSCA highlighted an extraordinary record of achievement under Stephenson's leadership. Her East Kentwood girls' track and field teams have earned:

- 11 OK Red Conference Titles
- 13 OK Red Conference Runner-Up Finishes
- 20 MHSAA Division 1 Regional Titles
- 1 MHSAA Division 1 State Runner-Up Title
- 5 MITCA Team State Championships



Her athletes have achieved remarkable individual success as well, with 243 MHSAA All-State honors, 26 state champions, 22 state runners-up, and 23 All-Americans — including standout names such as Tia Brooks (NCAA shot put champion and Olympian), Gabriela Leon (NCAA pole vault champion and Team USA), and Antoine Lloyd (NCAA hurdles runner-up).

Stephenson herself has been recognized 20 times as Regional Coach of the Year and twice as MITCA Division 1 Girls Track Coach of the Year. Beyond her competitive achievements, she has given back to the Kentwood community through volunteer work with the district's KIDS program, fifth-grade field days, and the Kentwood Track Club.

Please join us in congratulating Coach Stephenson on her Hall of Fame induction and thanking her for more than three decades of dedication, excellence, and leadership within Kentwood Public Schools.

## THINGS FEEL GOOD AT MEADOWLAWN

"The building just feels good!" These are the words every principal wants to hear at the beginning of the year, especially when they're true! Families and staff alike have made a point to recognize what a great start we are off to this year. Scholars are working hard to learn our expectations, and staff can often be seen praising them for their respect, responsibility, and self-control. We are also working on relationship skills, putting our Capturing Kids Hearts, PBIS, and restorative practice to use in our classrooms, hallways, lunchroom, and on the playground.

As we close out our first month, there is evidence that Falcon P.R.I.D.E. has shown around the building in so many different ways. You can see it in the productive group work our scholars are engaged in, working together to understand, problem-solve, and communicate their answers. You can see it in the excitement our 4th and 5th graders have around the Student Council campaign. You can see it in the pride our kinders have for the creation of their Kindergarten Constitution.

Like anything else, we see what we want to see, but here, Meadowlawn Family means we actively look for the great things that are happening each day. We look for the smiles, the laughter, the hard work, and the perseverance. We are especially proud of our redistricted scholars as they learn the Meadowlawn way, and for those that have been here for years and are reaching out to make a difference in the lives of our new family members!



## KPS ART EDUCATOR RECEIVES STATE HONOR

Congratulations are in store for Kentwood Public Schools Fine Arts Coordinator Kimberly Meyers-Baas, who was recently named the Michigan Art Education Association (MAEA) 2026 Supervisor of the Year.

In announcing the award, MAEA highlighted Meyers-Baas's years of dedicated service to the field of art education, her ability to find opportunities for KPS art department staff members to engage with the art community, and ensuring teachers have what they need to be successful in their classrooms.



In their announcement of the award, MAEA writes that they are "grateful for (Meyers-Baas's) leadership at KPS and dedication to high quality, diverse art education for all students. We are very proud to have Art Education represented, supported, and celebrated by Kimberly Meyers-Baas."

Meyers-Baas will receive her award at the annual Michigan Art Education Association Conference next month in Traverse City.

## PULLING OTHERS UP AT BROOKWOOD ARCH

"There are two ways of exerting one's strength: one is pushing down; the other is pulling up." Booker T. Washington

For six years, Karina Pacheco-Estrada has embodied the spirit of pulling others up. At Brookwood ARCH, she's more than a staff member — she's a leader, listener, and source of strength for every student who walks through the door.

What began as "just trying it out" in 2019 quickly became a calling. Karina finds joy in the smiles, hugs, and daily moments of connection that define her work. "I try to talk to all the students and remind them I'm here for whatever they need," she says.

Her approach is simple yet powerful: build relationships, set routines, and model kindness. "It's not important to students — it's important for students," she explains. By creating a welcoming environment where every child feels seen and supported, Karina helps students thrive.

Brookwood ARCH is stronger because of her — and Kentwood Public Schools is, too.



## SENIOR CITIZENS CAN ATTEND SPORTING EVENTS FOR FREE

Kentwood Public Schools is excited to share that senior citizens ages 60 and older can attend any regular season OK Conference sporting event for free! That means free admission to games, matches, and meets to come cheer on our Falcons and be part of the fun.

It's all part of the Golden Age Pass program, which offers free admission to regular season events for those 60 and over. (Please note that passes can't be used for Michigan High School Athletic Association tournament games.)

Getting a pass is quick and easy—and completely free! Passes are available at the KPS Main Office at 5820 Eastern Avenue SE or at the Athletic Office at East Kentwood High School's 10th–12th building, Door H, near the Ice Arena parking lot.

Help us spread the word about this great opportunity so more of our community's biggest fans can enjoy Falcon sporting events at no cost!



## ENDEAVOR ARCH STARTS WITH A SENSE OF BELONGING

The new school year is off to a strong start at Endeavor ARCH! From day one, students and staff have been intentional about building a culture where everyone feels welcome, valued, and connected.

One of the most meaningful activities this fall has been the creation of our social contract. Together, students worked in small groups to brainstorm what respect, kindness, and accountability look like in action. Then, as a whole program, they combined their ideas into one shared set of expectations — a living document that reflects the kind of community we want to be.

This process wasn't just about setting rules. It was about giving every student a voice in shaping the environment they learn and grow in. The contract serves as a daily reminder that everyone has a role to play in maintaining a positive and supportive atmosphere.

Students have committed to revisiting the contract regularly throughout the year to ensure that it continues to reflect our shared values and goals. By holding one another accountable and lifting each other up, our ARCH students are modeling what it truly means to belong.



# KENTWOOD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## School Calendar 2025-26

- Aug 25 ..... \*First Day of School
- Aug 29 ..... No School
- Sep 1 ..... No School
- Sept 24..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
  
- Oct 9..... ½ Day K-12 / Conferences
- Oct 10 ..... No School
  
- Nov 3..... No School / PD for Staff
- Nov 26 - 28 .. No School / Thanksgiving Break
  
- Dec 18 ..... ½ Day K-12/KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
- Dec 19 ..... ½ Day K-12 KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
- Dec 22 - Jan 2 ... No School / Winter Break
  
- Jan 19 ..... No School for Students & Staff / MLK Day
  
- Feb 16 & 17 .... No School for Students & Staff / Mid-Winter Break
  
- Mar 4..... ½ Day K-12 / PD for Staff
- Apr 2..... ½ Day K-12/KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
- Apr 3 - Apr 10.... No School / Spring Break
  
- May 25 ..... No School / Memorial Day
- June 4..... ½ Day K-12 /KEA Records Day (staff non-report)
- June 5..... Last Day of School - Half Day for Students & Staff

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

SEPTEMBER							FEBRUARY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7	8	9	10	11	12	13	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
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21	22	23	24	25	26	27	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
28	29	30											

OCTOBER							MARCH						
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19	20	21	22	23	24	25	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
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NOVEMBER							APRIL						
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16	17	18	19	20	21	22	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	26	27	28	29	30		

DECEMBER							MAY/JUNE						
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28	29	30	31				24	25	26	27	28	29	30
							31	1	2	3	4	5	6

No School For Students  
 Half Day