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IMPORTANT DATES

Given the evolving nature of the COVID-19 outbreak, all dates and times are tentative. Check the KPS website at www.kalamazoopublicschools.com and Facebook page @KalamazooPublicSchools for the latest calendar information and other district updates.

Board of Education Meetings

Thursday, June 11 & 25, 2020
7 p.m.

Administration Building
1220 Howard St.

Board Advance Meeting
Tuesday, June 23, 2020
6:15 p.m.
1627 W. Main St.

For more information, call
(269) 337-1572

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Thank you for your support of the KRESA Enhancement Millage!

Meet Dr. Rita Raichoudhuri New KPS Superintendent Begins June 1

It was the children who inspired Dr. Rituparna “Rita” Raichoudhuri to go into education.

Raichoudhuri, 40, will become the new superintendent of Kalamazoo Public Schools on June 1. She was selected by the KPS Board of Education in February to succeed Dr. Michael Rice, who was named the state superintendent of public instruction by the Michigan State Board of Education in May 2019. Deputy Superintendent Gary Start has served as the interim superintendent for the past year.

Raichoudhuri, who is a native of the San Francisco Bay area, was studying environmental science at the University of

California, Davis with the intention of going into environmental law when she had the opportunity to take an internship with a local elementary school. Her job was to work with students on topics of environmental citizenship and stewardship.

“I was with these students for a semester working on various hands-on projects together and talking about recycling, clean water, and basic human rights — they were so engaged,” she said. “I didn’t realize until then that young children can be so aware of the world around them — so interested in being better humans — and have such a high level of academic curiosity.”

(continued on page 3)



Dr. Rita Raichoudhuri
Superintendent, Kalamazoo Public Schools

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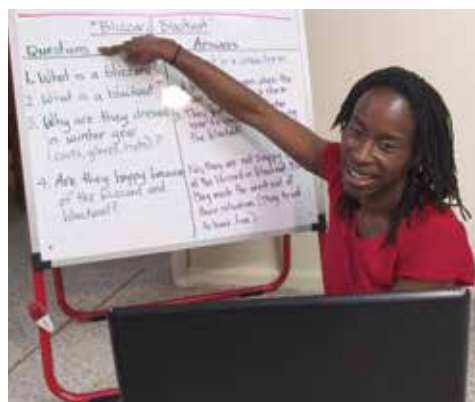
Teaching at a Distance, Keeping Students Close at Heart

Teachers Implement Continuity of Learning Plan

Teachers agree: Teaching online is not as good as teaching their students in person.

But they also agree that there are good things that can happen online, especially when it means providing students with some structure and stability in the face of the uncertainty of COVID-19 and school closures.

King-Westwood fifth-grade teacher Tom Hall started Zoom homeroom meetings with his students the week after Gov. Gretchen Whitmer ordered schools closed on April 2 in an attempt to stem the spread of the virus.



El Sol Teacher Danielle Jean-Baptiste teaches her students online now.

“Just like we do in a normal classroom meeting, I’d pose a question that I’d send out the day before,” Hall said. “I would have the students go around and answer the question of the day, and at the end I’d leave time for them to share. Even though they are fifth graders, we actually did show and tell and they enjoyed that.”

“It just gave them some sense of normalcy that comes from being able to socialize and share and talk and to know that we’re all in it together. Even when things were uncertain, this was one thing that was

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Kalamazoo Public Schools is Hiring.

Find information at <http://www.kalamazoopublicschools.com/Departments/HumanResources/EmploymentOpportunities>

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** ECRWS **

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A Challenging Year Made Easier by an Outstanding Team

It has been a year.

And, by that, I mean not an easy year.

It is a school year that started with Eastern Equine Encephalitis and is ending with COVID-19. Between those bookends, you'd find a school year that would have been remarkable if it had only consisted of normal duties such as educating children, establishing budgets, launching new curriculum, overseeing construction projects, running over one hundred bus routes and delivering thousands of meals each day.

Normally, I'd be involved in monitoring all of those things as deputy superintendent for business, communications, and operations. But this year, I monitored those events as the interim superintendent for Kalamazoo Public Schools.

On June 1, I will turn the responsibilities of the job over to Dr. Rita Raichoudhuri, who takes the

helm of KPS as its newest superintendent. She brings to the job a keen intellect and warm personality, as well as 16 years of experience in education as a teacher, principal, and administrator.

When she and I sit down to talk we will review all of those challenges — challenges that will certainly extend into her tenure as superintendent. And while that conversation may start sounding daunting, it will turn into something else as I tell her the secret of how I handled each day.

The secret is that I was part of an amazing team. I never faced a single challenge alone.

When we were faced with EEE in the fall, administrators,



Gary Start, Interim Superintendent

athletic directors, coaches, and band directors scrambled to find ways to allow athletes and marching band members to still participate in their activities. It meant facilities modifying mowing and implementing spraying schedules. It meant parents and our transportation department getting students to activities at odd hours, and students being flexible as schedules changed day by day.

For my one year as interim superintendent, I wish it could have been easier. It was, however, a perfect example of how the KPS staff, families, and community pull together.

During the school year as I oversaw the office of the superintendent, I also maintained my day job as the deputy superintendent. And, if I haven't said it before, I'll say it now: I have the best business and support offices in the state. They kept

the district operating smoothly, from business and finance, to communications, to facilities management, to food service, to technology services, and to transportation — even when my attention was pulled to other aspects of my job. I cannot thank them enough for all that they do to make me look good as deputy superintendent.

Chronicling this year's challenges would not be complete without talking about the COVID-19 pandemic. Our staff continues to find new ways to help students — from helping teachers and families get up to speed on new devices and learning platforms, to everyone involved in our Grab-and-Go meals, to disinfecting and cleaning buildings.

Since last month, the district has created a Continuity of Learning plan, which involved teachers and administrators undergoing professional develop-

ment, developing curriculum, distributing more Chromebooks, and developing plans and resources to meet the socio-emotional needs of our children.

This tremendous effort has another unit of the team — and that is the students and families of KPS. Do not think that we do not know that this virus has turned your worlds upside down. And, yet, you remain committed to education and learning. Parents, these struggles were layered upon new demands from your jobs, illness, childcare issues and it wasn't easy, but you stayed with us for the benefit of your children. We thank you all for your support and efforts to keep learning.

It has been a year — perhaps not the year I would have wanted, but when I look back I will feel gratitude for all everyone has done. Thank you for the privilege of serving as your interim superintendent for the year.

A colorful poster for the Kalamazoo Public Library's 2020 Summer Reading Challenge. The text 'KALAMAZOO PUBLIC LIBRARY' is at the top in blue. Below it, 'STAY STRONG READ' is written in large, stylized letters: 'STAY' in blue, 'STRONG' in red with a heart in the 'O', and 'READ' in yellow. At the bottom, 'ALL SUMMER LONG' is in blue, and '2020 SUMMER READING CHALLENGE' is in a smaller blue font.

Starts on June 1, 2020!

Please visit **kpl.gov** for more details

A purple robot with a single antenna, holding a blue book in its right arm and a purple flower in its left hand. It has a red heart on its chest.

(269) 553-7800

The Kalamazoo Public Library logo, featuring a stylized 'K' with a rainbow gradient and the text 'Kalamazoo Public Library' to its right.

Meet Dr. Rita Raichoudhuri (continued from page 1)

“It was one of the most defining moments of my life.”

Raichoudhuri, who had been focusing on environmental law and policy classes, changed her focus to education.

She went on to earn a master’s degree in education, with an emphasis on curriculum and instruction from Chapman University in Orange, Calif., and a doctorate in urban education leadership from the University of Illinois, Chicago. She also completed fellowships at the University of California, Berkeley, Northwestern University, and the Erickson Institute in Chicago.

And, although she felt a calling for a career in education, it wasn’t always easy. She struggled in her first year as a teacher.

“I was working with high-needs students who were dealing with a lot of trauma,” Raichoudhuri said. “At that time in teacher education, you didn’t get much theoretical learning about teaching students with trauma. I was suffering heavily from their residual trauma. I was feeling like I was a terrible teacher and that maybe this was not the calling for me.”

Despite her own personal doubts, there was someone who was in her corner: her principal. She learned first-hand the power of having a strong, supportive administration. Her principal assigned a coach to work with her and provided professional development opportunities. Then, as she improved in the classroom, she said, he gave her leadership roles within the building to help nurture her potential and to keep her engaged not only in teaching — but in learning.

She began to lead school committees, sharing her new best practices and started to focus her interests on data-informed teaching practices. Her experience was a testament to how teacher empowerment and teacher-driven learning communities can transform schools.

“My students started to perform really well and soon

became the top-performing class in the school,” she said. “The same students that people had given up on — and whom I almost gave up on — were shattering all stereotypes. It was a pivotal learning experience for me and many others.”

Raichoudhuri was asked to share her experiences at the district level, and she eventually transitioned from teacher to administrator. It wasn’t something she’d considered when she first stepped into the classroom.

“I don’t think I ever thought about all the possibilities and positions that existed in education beyond being a teacher,” she said. “I don’t think most teachers do as they enter into the field for the first time. They — as I was — are just interested in and excited about being in the classroom, with kids every day making magic happen.”

After teaching at Glenbrook Middle School from 2004 to 2008, she became director of special projects for the Mount Diablo Unified School District in Concord, Calif. In January of 2010, she moved to Chicago for

a position as senior manager in the Chicago Public Schools Office of Performance. With CPS, she served as director of the Office of Professional Learning, 2011 to 2012, resident principal at Wells High School 2012–2013, principal at Wells 2013–2017, and executive director of Early College and Career Education in the Office of College and Career Success.

Raichoudhuri said she is excited to bring her wide array of educational experiences and interest in developing educator practices to engaging students in robust academic instruction and social emotional learning to the district and to begin working with teachers, staff, the community, families, and students.

“The biggest challenge in the K–12 system, and really almost all social and public systems in our country, is the equity gap — as we are seeing it play out so vividly as a result of the current crisis,” Raichoudhuri said. “I am committed to ensuring the best possible educational outcomes for students of all ages and on closing the achievement gap.”

Who is moving to Kalamazoo with you?

I recently purchased a home in Kalamazoo. It’s important to me to live in the community in which I’m serving. I’m moving to Kalamazoo by myself. I don’t have family in the Midwest. I’m so looking forward to making new friends, who, I’m sure, will become like family. The community has been so welcoming. I have received messages from teachers and other members of the KPS family. I feel very welcomed and I know Kalamazoo will feel like home in no time. I already feel like I belong.

Favorite movie?

My all-time favorite movie is “Dead Poet’s Society.” My eighth-grade English teacher actually introduced it to me. I was obsessed with it and asked my parents to buy me the videotape (yup, we didn’t have DVDs back then, I’m totally dating myself). I watched it over and over again until I had many of the lines memorized, “Oh Captain, my Captain.” Two other films made a mark as a

grown up: “Dangerous Minds” and “Freedom Writers.”

Favorite meal?

I don’t think I have a favorite. It depends on my mood and what I’m craving at the moment. I love seafood and spicy foods with rich flavors.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Spare time is a luxury that rarely visits me. However, I love to travel. That’s how I reset mentally and re-energize to re-engage in the work. So, whether or not I can make time for anything else around self-care, I do make time to travel to an international destination every year to engage in a new culture, new cuisine, and alternative world views.

I also enjoy arts and crafts, reading, cooking, and gardening. When I lived in California, I hiked a lot, and it was like meditation. Chicago didn’t offer the opportunity to be in nature much. However, in Kalamazoo, with all her forest trails, I am looking forward to hiking again when the weather is nice.



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Finding What Feeds Us During Uncertain Times

By **Stephanie Hampton**
Maple Street Magnet School,
ELA teacher

This original blog post for teachers can be found on Stephanie Hampton's blog, *Writing Mindset*, at www.writingmindset.org.

Now is the perfect time for each of us to find what makes us curious and passionate about the world around us. The idea of passion projects is not new. We may call them genius hours, hours of wonder, or curiosity Fridays. However, the idea of the passion project being the medicine we need during tough or uncertain times is an idea that becomes relevant and clear as we move forward through the state of school closures. As teachers, the idea of learning and discovering new things is one of the reasons why we teach. We like to see the lightbulb moments in our students. The ah-has. The moments of change that we find meaningful. Learning is something that drives the inner motor of all people — no matter if you are in a school building, a classroom, or at home.

It is time we find what feeds us, especially right now with all of the school closures. And even more so, after the closures.

Passion projects are activities that we find meaningful because they feed our natural curiosity and encourage us to learn how to present our findings to the world around us. Passion projects are the keys to unlocking our mission and purpose in a way that feeds back into the magic we all seek in our classrooms and now outside of our classrooms. The magic is not gone with the buildings being closed; it is relocated. These projects are not necessarily about results, but more so about the day-to-day drive for the pursuit of creativity, happiness, and self-fulfillment. So, our job is to fill the cup while we wait to get back to doing what we do best.

Let's talk about some ideas.



Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts English Language Arts teacher Stephanie Hampton

FINDING YOUR PROJECT

Grab a notebook. Any piece of paper will do. Find something to write with—it can be a crayon, marker, pen, or pencil. Maybe it is the notes app on your phone. Take a moment and answer the following journal prompt questions:

- “If I had more time, I would be...”
- “I’ve always wondered about/why...”
- “If I weren’t so busy, I would be...”
- “I would love to do...”
- “Some of the things that make me happy are...”

10 IDEAS for Passion Projects

Publish your writing

Now is the time to create a blog, write an article, or create a book. Readers make the best writers because they already understand what books are out there and what books need to be written. Put your vast reading experience to work and sit down and write the story you have always wanted to write. Your story may be the one that is missing from the shelves.

Launch a podcast

I think more people should have podcasts! Mix equal parts good conversation with good

SIX EASY PROJECT STEPS

1. Brainstorm ideas
2. Make a list of questions
3. Create a project timeline
4. Research, read, and find out information
5. Make your project
6. Share your project with others

ideas, and the result is a great podcast that people want to listen to! As a teacher, I overhear the best conversations between people. A podcast is just you recording your ideas or conversations for others to hear. People want to listen. Find something that you are passionate about, and turn your work into something people can hear!

Try photography

One of my teacher friends is an amazing photographer. She loves photography because she loves the learning that happens with photography. The angles, the lighting, the composition of the shots, etc. She takes pictures of everything. I think this could even start with using your phone to take pictures around your house and around your yard if possible. Try to capture the moments we have during this time. This could apply to any new hobby or skill you are considering.

Plan a garden

Now is a great time to start planning where to layout an entire garden, a tower garden, herb garden, or flower patch. There is a whole method of planning that goes into what plants go into what kinds of sunlight and soil. This could be the perfect opportunity for someone who has always wanted to do some planting or even composting. Use this time to make the world a better, greener place.

Learn how to code

Coding is such an important skill! Head over to websites like KhanAcademy and take the “Hour of Code” course. It is like learning a new language! The language of computers. If you are interested in building your own website, video game, or app, this could be the perfect hobby for you to become an expert. Coding teaches all of us how to take big ideas and break them down into smaller parts.

Learn lettering or calligraphy

Another teacher friend of mine is working on her lettering and calligraphy during the time of school closures. She bought a workbook, but a lot of people have resources for free online. You can do a lot of these classes with simple Crayola markers that you may have around the house. This could not only make your journal more creative, but you could do things like create signs, invitations, and more. Send a letter to someone while we are social distancing with your fancy new writing!

House projects

I love house projects. Just the smell of fresh paint reminds me of new beginnings. Maybe you have a room in your house that needs work. Perhaps you can make a pile of things to donate. Now is a great time to research different organizational methods to make your house into what you always wanted it to be. You don't need to be a car-

penter or contractor to make big results. Start with HGTV, look up some awesome bloggers or home DIY experts, and get inspired.

Do something for the community

I received a letter from my niece and it made me cry. This was a great reminder about the power to do things for others. Since we all seem so far away, we can try to bring the idea of service for others closer to home. If you know how to sew, make masks to donate to hospitals. If you can write letters to those in older adult and assisted living facilities, do that. Make signs to thank our people working in hospitals and grocery stores. From writing letters to troops to donating materials, if you have a skill, use it to make the world a better place. The best passion projects often solve problems.

Design jewelry or make art

Another teacher friend is obsessed with good jewelry design. She often will come up with different designs and materials that you can order easily online. In turn, she creates things and often will give them to other people. Thus, bringing joy. She loves doing the small intricate designs for hours at a time. You don't have to necessarily have a craft like this one, but something that gives you joy that also involves your creativity is key in finding a passion project that works for you.

Travel the world

I don't mean actually travel just yet! Get curious about different places around the world. Maybe you have always wanted to travel to the Great Wall of China? Perhaps you have wondered what the Amazon rainforest in South America looks like. Make yourself a travel itinerary and try to read and research about different places. Design your own passport and create a selection of locations to make “stops” on your travel map. Make your world bigger with travel dreams!

Taking Care of Students with Lunches and Chromebooks

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The District will not tolerate or condone any act of bias or discrimination toward any person on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy, gender identification, height, weight, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, and disability in any of its activities, hiring practices, programs or services.

Inquiries by students and/or their parents/guardians should be directed to:

Director of Student Services
Kalamazoo Public Schools
1220 Howard Street
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(269) 337-0161

All other inquiries should be directed to:

Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources
Kalamazoo Public Schools
1220 Howard Street
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(269) 337-0177

District Directory at :
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Food Service workers at Kalamazoo Central celebrate School Lunch Hero Day.



Food service workers show off their spirit at Northeastern Elementary on School Lunch Hero Day.



Phoenix High School Principal Mark Hill prepares to hand out a Chromebook to a student.



Loy Norrix High School Principal Chris Aguinaga helps hand out Chromebooks during one of the first district distributions.



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PeaceJam: A Chance to Learn Social Responsibility, Help Others

Times like these with the mandatory quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic make civic responsibility come into focus even more, says Loy Norrix teacher Sveri Stromstra-May. These times pull each of us to be creative, because we can't carry on with our daily routines.

The Loy Norrix PeaceJam Club has been in existence for 17 years, and under Stromstra-May's guidance it has helped ninth through 12th graders learn about social justice, activism and volunteerism.

Every year, students have the opportunity to give back

to Loy Norrix, the Kalamazoo community, the nation, and world relief efforts. Many of the projects require students to research and learn about world issues as they begin their volunteer activities. The group's international work has included volunteering for UNICEF and fundraising for Serious Fun, a program that supports terminally and seriously ill children in developing countries. PeaceJam students have participated in international volunteer trips to Peru, South Africa, Cuba, India and Vietnam. Students were scheduled to travel to Kenya this summer.

Once a year, the Great Lakes PeaceJam hosts a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who travels to Kalamazoo to share their wisdom about and passion for social responsibility. They share information about the work that earned them a Nobel Peace Prize.

The following are comments from current and former Loy Norrix PeaceJam members describing how PeaceJam helped them to become more socially responsible.

Kim Chheu — Loy Norrix senior

I think a lot of us tend to take the little things in life for granted. Joining PeaceJam has really been an eye opener as to how much some people struggle to get the necessities that we don't even think twice about. We are a community and because of that, we should be willing to help.

Maria Egloff — Class of 2017

PeaceJam is a club that includes anyone and everyone, no matter what, to contribute to the community and the world. It taught me so much about how doing service work and volunteering makes not only a community stronger but can make a school stronger as well. Once I joined Peace Jam, I discovered a new love and connection with Loy Norrix and was blessed to see just how many people love



The Loy Norrix PeaceJam Club

this community and helping as much as I do.

Delaney Eller — Class of 2018

I participated in a range of service opportunities from organizing book fair donations for the Edison Literacy Project to food drives and clothing donations. Currently, when something in the community needs to be done, I step up before someone tells me what needs to be done. There comes a point in someone's life that you have to make a choice to step up or to be passive and let someone else take care of things.

Samantha Fuller — Class of 2018

I would say being a part of PeaceJam and being able to volunteer really helps you as a kid. It's a life-changing experience for those doing the volunteering and for those we help at the end of the day.

Layla Houslander — Loy Norrix junior

PeaceJam has not only made me grow as a person, but it has helped me grow to be a more socially responsible student. I have begun to really recognize the differences as something good, especially when I am able to be involved with those who are different than I am and we are able to help one another — while complementing the oth-

er's differences, weaknesses, and strengths.

Felicie Jones, Class of 2016

PeaceJam was the program that showed me how good it feels to help another in need. I felt like my actions mattered. I became more socially responsible because I was exposed to some of the many small ways I can help my peers or community. Even if I never saw the person's reaction to the supplies or food we helped to get for them, I still felt a sense of satisfaction and contentment because I accomplished something that helped another person or family. I thank PeaceJam for humbling me and showing me that there are problems in the world and my community which I can help fix — even if it's just one person at a time.

Emma Knutson — Class of 2019

The things I was able to experience and witness in PeaceJam gave me purpose and a hope for humanity. My junior year, we started a fundraiser for Serious Fun Camp which is a global project that creates camps for kids with disabilities and terminal illness to ensure they are able to make memories. Being a part of something that you know is helping not only the people around you but also around the world is special and makes you socially aware of the good and bad

happening in your community. PeaceJam isn't just fun, it's an opportunity to learn things about yourself and change the world.

Ava Longcharte — Loy Norrix junior

Working with kids through PeaceJam has helped me gain perspective about the socioeconomic conditions of kids throughout KPS and also helped me become more patient, especially during the literacy project.

Sariah Metcalfe — Class of 2014

Working with PeaceJam has impacted my adult life by giving me a foundation to understand the importance of doing social justice work and a focus on local and global issues. Loy Norrix PeaceJam projects were some of the first that I ever coordinated, which allowed me to practice student leadership and organizing at an early age. I now work with college-aged student leaders to develop leadership skills and political analysis of world issues and to do voter education.

Emma Miller — Loy Norrix senior

Freshman year I would never have imagined that I, an extremely shy person, would turn into someone who volunteers to coordinate the Loy Norrix clothing drive and eventually lead the

(continued on page 7)

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PeaceJam: A Chance to Learn Social Responsibility, Help Others

(continued from page 6)

Serious Fun fundraiser. Through these programs I found my voice, encouraging my peers to think outside of themselves. It helped me look at life through different perspectives and to form a new group of people focused on helping the community and beyond. I continue to go out of my comfort zone; knowing that there are more important things than myself — worth speaking up about and acting on.

Hannah Miller — Class of 2015

PeaceJam absolutely made me a more socially responsible person. Before joining PeaceJam my freshman year of high school, I had already gained some experience volunteering in my community and had learned that it was something I enjoyed. PeaceJam served as a fun and effective counterexample to the powerlessness often felt by and ascribed to young people.

Breyon Richards — Loy Norrix junior

For me personally, getting involved in PeaceJam has made me more socially responsible, because I get to go out into the community and see directly the different environments people live in. It made me realize that we are all responsible for the conditions of the community we live in.

Shelby Richardson — Loy Norrix junior

I joined PeaceJam as a freshman. What I really like is how being a part of PeaceJam has convinced me of opportunities I would have never given a second thought to, such as the Vietnam trip last summer. PeaceJam is all about giving back to the community, but it's also really fun.

Sidney Richardson — Class of 2017

Working with PeaceJam throughout high school exposed me to the arena of helping people — not just for some personal gain, but because everyone deserves that kindness. PeaceJam

instilled the values of selflessness in me and taught me just how great it feels to help your fellow man.

Drew Samuelson — Class of 2017

The main purpose of PeaceJam is to promote peace and community service. It's great if you have a passion for promoting peace and helping the community in times of need. The main concept I gained as a student is a sense of having real opportunities to help the community.

Samantha Shaffer — Loy Norrix junior

Getting involved in PeaceJam helped me become a more socially responsible student because it opened my eyes to the struggles people face in my own community. The projects we do give me an opportunity to give back to the community that has given me so much. PeaceJam also helped me find volunteer opportunities I could pursue on my own.

Howard Tobochnik — Class of 2009

The students in PeaceJam tend to be passionate, caring, and friendly. I met people from all different backgrounds and learned about their lives on a personal level. Understanding other people in this way leads to empathy. It also develops passion, as our projects are no longer abstract ideas. I learned to not just have an opinion, that altruism, justice, and freedom are important, but how to take action and make a difference.

Zh Xuan (Shannon) Wee — Class of 2013

PeaceJam got me out of my shell as a person. I got to meet different people and to work with the community. I like that we all can relate to each other with PeaceJam as our connection.

Donovan Wilson — Loy Norrix sophomore

PeaceJam gives me a purpose outside of just being a stu-

dent. My mom encouraged me to join the Loy Norrix PeaceJam. She wants me to understand the values of giving back to others, promoting human rights and civil rights and contributing to the community.

Zhi Ni Wee — Class of 2016

PeaceJam made me a socially responsible student. I am driven to take responsibility for others that I normally might not have. PeaceJam showed me that there is a bigger world than just our own and that everyone should help our community and contribute positively to our society. PeaceJam opened my eyes to the dichotomies of the world and pushed me to want to make the world a better place.

Mey Wong — Class of 2018

I think the projects gave us a sense of responsibility, not for ourselves but for others who really need our help. It allows students to gain perspectives from different parts of the community which overall helps us become a better person and more responsible for the people around us.

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Teaching at a Distance, Keeping Students Close at Heart *(continued from page 1)*

certain and concrete for them.” Since those early days, Kalamazoo Public Schools has launched a more formal Continuity of Learning Plan. Those plans were approved by the state and implemented for the remainder of the school year.

Cindy Green, assistant superintendent for Teaching and Learning Services, her staff, Student Services, and teachers have worked to create continued learning opportunities for students during the pandemic. Within the first week of the school closures, TLS staff began printing learning packets to be distributed at the Grab-and-Go meal sites and launched the Learning Hub, an online educational resource center. Technology Services and TLS also coordinated the distribution of thousands of Chromebooks to students and helped families establish internet access.

TLS led the development of the Continuity of Learning Plan, including new curriculum, online classrooms and virtual office hours for teachers, with input from teachers, administrators,

Student Services, Human Resources, Food Services, Technology Services, and Facilities Management — and with review by the KPS Board of Education.

“The teachers, support staff, and administrators continue to work hard in connecting students to learning in the new environment,” Green said. “We know that teaching in person is the best way to learn for our students, but I am amazed at how quickly everyone is adapting.”

Staff continues to work to find new ways to work with families that lack access to services — technological and otherwise, she said.

“Our students need social-emotional support and direct contacts with people in person,” she said. “So many of our students do not have internet access to gain the most assistance. Families can come to the school parking lots and Western Michigan University’s campus to get internet access, but this is not ideal for learning to sit in a car with a laptop or Chromebook.

“We continue to work with several community organiza-



King-Westwood teacher Tom Hall prepares for an online class with his fifth-grade students.

tions to coordinate efforts to get hotspots or in-home internet access for our students. We also continue the work with many mental health agencies to support our students and families during this challenging time. They are finding the positive aspects in the new learning environment and applying new ways to teach. People are so willing to help out in whatever way they can. We need to continue providing hope, patience, flexibility, and grace.”

Taking class to the students

Mandy Clearwaters, who is a classroom art teacher and the lead art teacher for the district, has been connecting with students through videos since the school closure began. At the request of Matt McCullough, director of curriculum, instruction, and professional development, Clearwaters created a short series of videos to get students thinking creatively while in quarantine. She issued open-ended drawing and building challenges for students to complete and share.

The art staff started with a little bit of an advantage. Their summer professional development focused on a new style of art education called “meaning making,” which asks students to make art but with few of the traditional constraints about media or style.

“It’s all about creative problem solving,” Clearwaters said. “One of the things we had to tackle as an art staff, is we don’t know what kinds of supplies students have. When we’re designing our lessons, we’re creating them so kids can use whatever materials they have available.”

Recently, for example, she asked students to design a robot. Some students chose to draw, others created robots out of LEGOs, while others crafted theirs from objects found around their houses.

“There’s something a little

magical happening that I don’t necessarily see in the art room that much,” she said. “Because kids are being forced to be creative and think outside of the box with materials, we’re getting a lot of different solutions to problems. It’s really expanded their problem-solving skills.”

Strong problem-solving skills and flexibility have been key to making distance learning successful for Kalamazoo Central teacher Shannon Wintz, who is staying in touch with her English Language Arts students.

Her approach to distance learning was rooted in an open relationship with her students.

“I’m kind of abnormal,” Wintz said. “A lot of teachers would say, ‘I don’t understand why you give out your phone number,’ but, if a kid needs something, it’s so quick to just text them — and I’m kind of a night owl anyway.”

Being a night owl also meant that she was totally open to what the students wanted in terms of setting up their online classroom, which is why when her Honors 10 class voted to meet at 6:15 p.m., she said, “Sure.” It meant it wouldn’t bump into classes that other teachers had scheduled during the day and it avoided the noon hours, which are reserved for lunch for students.

“I reconstructed my life to what was easiest for the kids so we could keep learning going,” Wintz said. “Whatever comes your way, just be flexible so we can secure the future of these kids.”

That’s not to say that sometimes this new lifestyle isn’t harried or “weird.” Her husband is working from home. She has two children at home — and three dogs. And, then, sometimes cooking and cleaning and “mom” stuff bumps into school work.

“My daughter will pop in and say, ‘How long do the cookies have to stay in the oven?’, and I’m in a Google Meet,” Wintz laughed. “It’s a balance, but we’re making it work.”

At Hall’s house, he turned *(continued on page 9)*

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Teaching at a Distance, Keeping Students Close at Heart (continued from page 8)

his home gym into an online class space — while his wife, who is a teacher in another district, claimed another part of the house. And, while they were teaching, they also had to parent two elementary school-aged children who had their own classwork.

Hall, who is a math teacher, says that after some initial trepidation, he feels like he and the students have managed to build a good routine, but like Clearwaters, what he cares about most are the kids and wanting to make sure that he provides them with a personal connection while learning.

Online, he is working with about 60 students at a time, and to get through the lessons and provide some control all the students are on mute.

“Obviously we were all concerned to a certain degree about the technical aspect of online learning, but I was even more concerned about how do you reach all of these kids over the computer,” Hall said. “I’ve lost that ability to talk to individuals during a lesson and allow them to share.”

The work-around is to provide office hours where he can meet with students, but that isn’t quite the same as immediate give-and-take during a lesson.

“I love what I do. I’m passionate about teaching,” he said. “I want to make sure that even in this situation I’m still passionate and doing the best for the students I have, even if that’s at home.”

Linden Grove sixth-grade science teacher Morgan Minisee-Barber also started meeting with students and offering voluntary lessons before the official Continuity of Learning plan kicked in. Her first lesson was a unit on viruses.

“It was a good unit at the time,” she said. “It answered a lot of questions they had about what was going on and it got them used to a distance learning platform. We used Zoom and created a Google classroom. They

did activities and labs and I gave them feedback. We met twice a week, just like they do now — but with all of their other teachers as well.”

Teachers are always trying to perfect their craft, Minisee-Barber said. This new environment provided challenges, but she said she approached it like any new challenge and saw it as a chance to expand her skills and find new ways to serve her students. She learned not just from her Kalamazoo colleagues but from other teachers that she worked with in Georgia and Indiana through the years.

There is a benefit to this new system that has eliminated the standard grading policy, she said.

“It enables me to be more flexible as a teacher, and kids are actually giving me more than ever and I can give them more feedback. The dynamic has changed,” Minisee-Barber said. “Learning is no longer punitive in the child’s eye.”

If a child gets a bad grade for a wrong answer, they may shut down, but when the teacher takes out the grade and simply



Art teacher Mandy Clearwaters tries to keep learning fun — even in the online environment.

has a conversation about why they think the student may have a misconception about the material, students are more willing to go back and review the material and learn from their mistakes, she said.

But, she notes, the students who struggle the most with the new “no grade” policy are her advanced students who have to be motivated in new ways to do their best. That may often be getting them to think about how their performance in this envi-

ronment will affect their work next year, or awards they might get in eighth grade, she said with a smile in her voice.

Wintz agreed that the new learning format has definite pluses for her students, who are in honors and AP classes. With more streamlined assignments, that means students can concentrate on upping the quality of their assignments.

“I’ve said to my students this is honestly a gift to you. We’re not heavy loading on the assign-

ments,” she said. “For my AP students that means we’re picking the most important pieces these kids need to learn and discuss to do well on the exam. It’s really an easier way for them to earn their credit. Everyone is turning their assignments in and generally it’s really good work.”

There is a different challenge for El Sol Elementary teacher Danielle Jean-Baptiste. She teaches first graders.

And first graders don’t go to online classes by themselves.

“A parent has to be involved, and parents have to use their tech skills to make the online classroom work,” she said. “Luckily, our parents are all in.”

Her work is further complicated, because many of her families are Spanish-speaking, which requires her skills as a bilingual teacher. She’s using her translation skills to help families navigate technology and enrollment issues.

In her online classroom she employs a mantra of “little by little,” making sure lessons are enjoyable and familiar for some of

(continued on page 10)

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Teaching at a Distance (continued from page 9)

the youngest students in the district. Her first lessons replicated her read-aloud times for students. She records herself reading stories for the children, which was always one of their favorite parts of the day. They are also reviewing shapes, which many are familiar with, but building on those concepts so they learn new material – but aren't overwhelmed.

Parents – It will be OK

Jn-Baptiste said she knows parents are feeling overloaded, but she encourages them to take it day by day. She wants them to know they are doing a fine job.

“Take it one day at a time and do not think that you have to fill the student’s day with constant work,” Jn-Baptiste said. “Communicate with your teachers. We are here and ready to get to our kids and to keep teaching. Everyone is being stretched from students to teachers to parents. We’re all going to be a lot better when we come out of this.”

Hall said he knows what parents are going through, because he and his wife are juggling working and caring for their children while under quarantine too.

“The first few weeks were stressful. We were trying to figure everything out, and it felt like we were working 24 hours a day, pretty much nonstop, to try to

develop a plan,” he said. “Now, we have schedules and we’ve gotten into a groove of things. This has become the new normal.”

He suggests parents develop a routine and make schedules for everyone just to keep the day organized. In his house, the focus is school work from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. And, the kids know Mondays through Fridays are school days.

Minisee-Barber emphasized that down time is key for students and parents alike. Students need a break some time, and parents should feel free to give themselves a break too. As the parent of a sixth grader, she said she’s learned that “sometimes having to turn things in late is OK.” Teachers are being flexible as everyone learns how to navigate this new form of learning.

“Just take a deep breath,” she said. “We’re all in this together. This is not going to defeat us.”

Clearwaters remains positive about the growth she’s seeing in her online classrooms, and by the hard work she sees from students, parents and her fellow teachers. She hopes everyone offers each other a measure of grace as they try to navigate this landscape.

“I just want the kids to know that we love them and we miss them. It’s probably over-said, but it’s true.”

Chef Shaun • KPS FOOD SERVICE CHEF

Broiled Mahi-Mahi

Hello Kalamazoo! Time for an easy, fresh, summer recipe. This fish dish can benefit from herbs from your own garden, and it pairs well with a nice salad or a bed of sautéed zucchini, squash, and mushrooms. Have fun with your flavor combinations. Enjoy your summer and be safe, Chef Shaun

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, shredded
- 1/3 cup Romano cheese, shredded
- 1/3 cup butter, softened, plus more for greasing dish
- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons fresh squeezed lemon juice
- 1/4 cup green onions, chopped
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt

- 1/4 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder
- 2 teaspoon fresh dill and rosemary, chopped
- 2 dashes Sriracha sauce
- 2 pounds skinless Mahi-mahi

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven broiler. Grease 9x13" baking dish with a thin coat of butter.
2. Mix Parmesan, Romano, butter, mayo, lemon juice, green onion, dill, rosemary, and sriracha in a small bowl until well blended.
3. Arrange fish in a single layer in the baking dish and season with salt and pepper. Broil fish for 8 minutes or until it flakes with a fork. Remove from oven.
4. Sprinkle chili powder on top of fish then carefully spread cheese mixture over top of the fish. Broil 2 additional minutes, or until topping is bubbly and lightly browned.



Shaun Robinson is the district chef for Chartwells at KPS Food Service.

Notes: Julienned fresh basil or crumbles of goat cheese will enhance this delicious entrée. Salmon, cod, and halibut are also good options for this recipe.

Servings: 6

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Excellence in Education Honors 12 KPS Students, 2 Teachers

Excellence in Education recognizes the top-achieving high school seniors from Kalamazoo County's public and non-public high schools. This year, 44 seniors — including 12 from Kalamazoo Public Schools — were selected for the honor, which comes with a \$1,000 scholarship. Each student recognized an educator who significantly impacted their K-12 education.

The Excellence in Education program has also awarded nine Educator Incentive Grants. The grants provide funding for teachers and administrators in Kalamazoo County schools to explore new ideas to enhance teaching styles, motivate and inspire their students. Carrie Cook, KPS lead music teacher, and Robin Greymountain, KPS homeless liaison, received grants through the program.

Robin Greymountain plans to attend the National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth conference in Dallas. The association helps provide professional development for serving the needs of children who are suffering from homelessness. This conference will help Kalamazoo Public Schools ensure homeless youth have transportation to and from school and are able to fully participate in school activities by removing barriers to identification, enrollment, attendance, and success.

Carrie Cook plans to attend the First Steps in Music and Conversational Solfege training through Feierabend Association for Music Education. This training will provide Cook with the knowledge and skills to support students' musical ability throughout the learning continuum. The strategies used in the course will increase the ability of Kalamazoo Public Schools music teachers to create opportunities for students to engage with music.



Ethan Fonger
Kalamazoo Central High School
Parents: Melissa and Reid Fonger
College: University of Michigan
Major: Aerospace Engineering
Significant Educator: Michael Sinclair



Daniel Nguyen
Kalamazoo Central High School
Parents: Phuong and Hiep Nguyen
College: University of Michigan
Major: Computer Science
Significant Educator: Modhi Alshehri



Adonia Alexopoulos
Loy Norrix High School
Parents: April and Christos Alexopoulos
College: Undecided
Major: Chemistry and Psychology
Significant Educator: Christina Holmes



Nathan Goodwin-Kelly
Loy Norrix High School
Parents: Mary Kate Goodwin-Kelly and Chris Goodwin
College: University of Notre Dame
Major: Social Science, Life Science and Environmental Science
Significant Educator: Bill Brieger



Isabelle Hawkes
Kalamazoo Central High School
Parents: Paula and Ernest Hawkes
College: Undecided
Major: Biochemistry
Significant Educator: Valerie Vande Guchte



Cormac Roth
Kalamazoo Central High School
Parents: Megan and James Roth
College: University of Denver
Major: Game Design and Music
Significant Educator: Ken Briggs



Riley Dominianni
Loy Norrix High School
Parents: Erin and Andy Dominianni
College: Undecided
Major: History and Criminal Justice
Significant Educator: Niambi Pringle



Carly Loken
Loy Norrix High School
Parents: Sandy Barry-Loken and Brian Loken
College: University of Michigan
Major: Psychology
Significant Educator: Paul Mahar



Alyxandria Hough
Kalamazoo Central High School
Parents: Rebecca and Daniel Hough
College: University of Michigan
Major: Psychology
Significant Educator: Rex Hafer



Charity Sidwell
Kalamazoo Central High School
Parents: Christie and David Sidwell
College: Oakland University
Major: Physics
Significant Educator: Chartanay Bonner



Lily Dorstewitz
Loy Norrix High School
Parents: Gail and Troy Dorstewitz
College: Yale University
Major: Mechanical Engineering
Significant Educator: Kristin Antoniotti



Antoinette Puca
Loy Norrix High School
Parents: Deanne and Michael Puca
College: University of Michigan
Major: Data Science
Significant Educator: Michael Sinclair

Artists' Corner

Kalamazoo Public Schools artists didn't stop making art just because they couldn't go to school. Students kept using their imaginations and design skills while they were in quarantine at home. Mandy Clearwaters, the art coordinator for KPS, issued several online challenges, and students from Winchell Elementary School and Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts responded to a prompt to design their dream bedrooms. And Prairie Ridge art teacher Doug Duncan was pleasantly surprised by a student's study of birds.



Juliana, first grade, Jasmine, fourth grade, both from Winchell, and Justin Liggins, sixth grade, Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts.



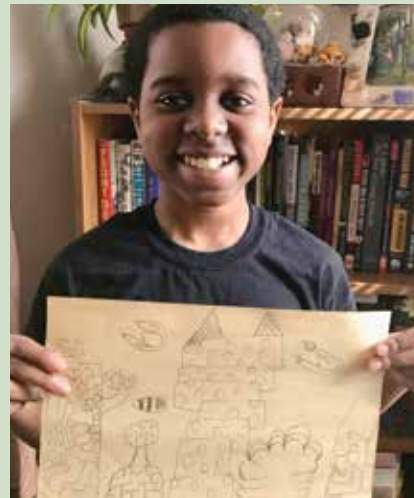
Kanley and Myles Covault, fifth and second grade, Winchell



Olivia Brooks, fourth grade, Winchell



Chloe Storm, third grade, Winchell



Darek Roberts, fifth grade, Winchell



Natalie and Madeline Hunt, second and fifth grade, Winchell



Josiah Dawson, second grade, Winchell.



Lia The, fifth grade, Winchell



Annika Johnson, fifth grade, Winchell, with her dad Branden Johnson.



Jackson Welch, third grade, Prairie Ridge Elementary School.