

In Focus

Spring, 2023



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Superintendent Greetings

Dear Birmingham Public Schools community,

Excitement fills the air as the district continues to follow through with its commitment to academic excellence, thriving students and the plans for the upcoming year. This edition of In Focus magazine allows us to highlight some of the amazing things occurring around the district.

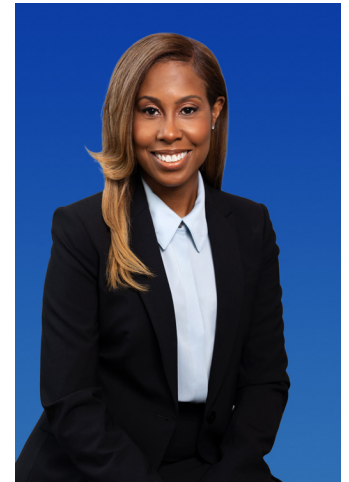
In September, the Board of Education approved a strategic plan, our Birmingham compass, which sets the vision for the next five years. Our strategic plan focuses on cultivating excellence in student achievement, creating a culture of unity and well-being, attracting and retaining world-class talent and being responsible stewards. We are also piloting new math resources that will allow students to participate in more rigorous instruction. For students to access deeper learning, we must attend to their emotional wellness. As a National District of Character, our schools are focused on character education as a vital part of culture and climate. In addition, we have also partnered with Easterseals to help when students may need more support. At Birmingham Public Schools, we understand the importance of cultivating the whole child.

While the district is known for its strong academics, our students are flourishing in other areas, too. Students have resumed taking field trips, after-school activities are thriving and students are discovering numerous ways to give back to the community. This academic year, we watched high school students raise over \$50,000 for charity, Groves and Seaholm finish first and third, respectively, at the MHSAA boys swim & dive state finals, our robotics and debate teams competed nationally, and our orchestra & band ensemble earned high-performance ratings.

As an educational resource, we are consistently learning and improving as we engage with stakeholders to uncover ways of enhancing the student experience. Our district has increased the number of town halls to include parents, students and community members, and revitalized communication strategies. We love hearing from you! Listening and learning make us better. I am proud of the direction Birmingham Public Schools is headed. As we move forward, we ask you to continue to engage with us for the sake of student achievement. Each child walks into our buildings with unique talents and their own individual brilliance. Together we can continue to create an amazing experience for every child. Remember, be bold, be brilliant, be Birmingham.

Dr. Embekka Roberson

Superintendent
Birmingham Public Schools



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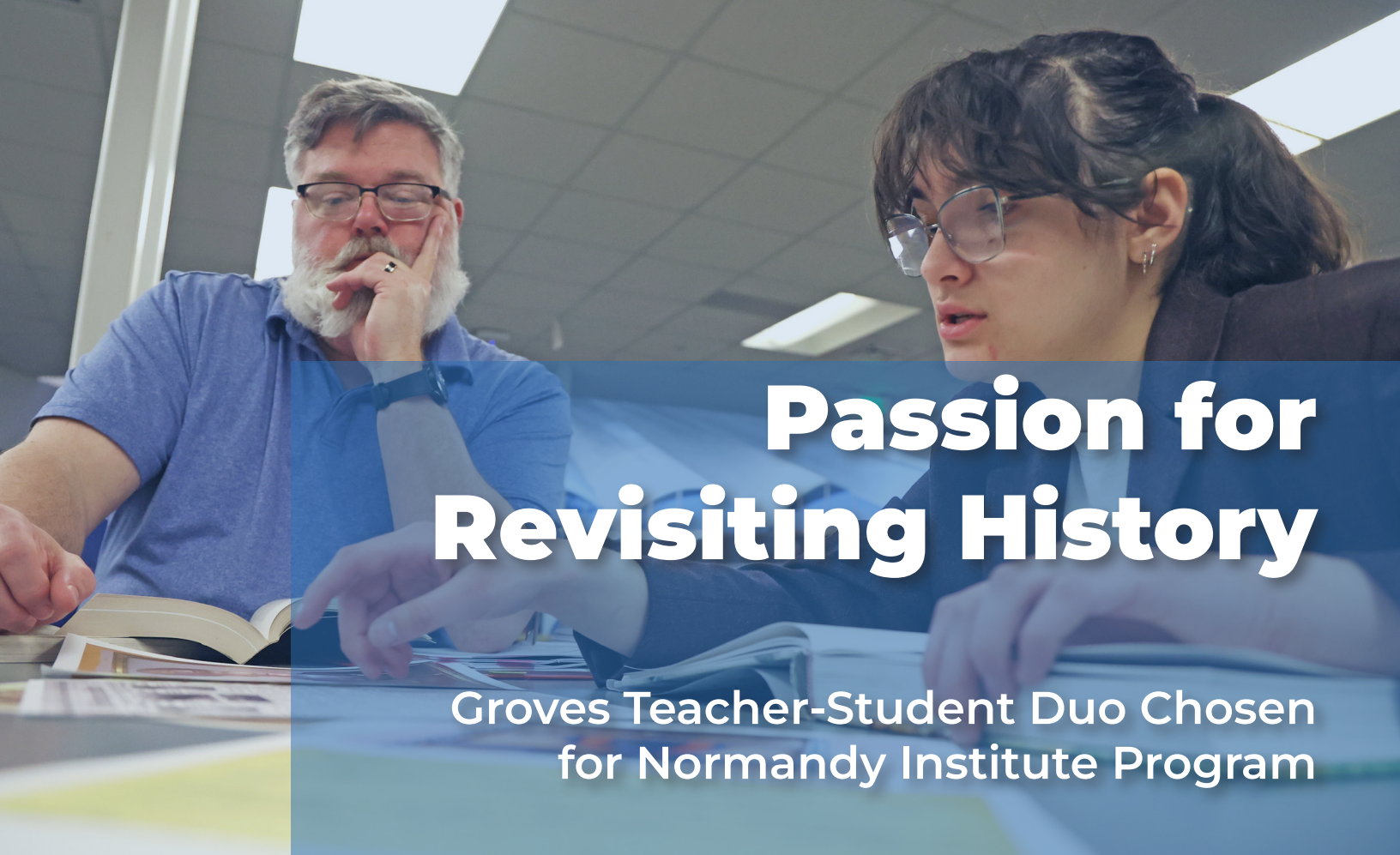
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Passion for Revisiting History

Groves Teacher-Student Duo Chosen for Normandy Institute Program

Photo Credit: JC Carroll

Office of Marketing & Communications

For years, Geoffery Wickersham waited patiently to find a student who equally shared his deep passion and appreciation of world history.

The Groves High School teacher had learned about an amazing opportunity for a student-teacher team surrounding World War II research, Michigan soldiers and a chance trip to Normandy, France.

It did not take long for Wickersham to realize Erika Rice was the ideal student to partner with regarding the Albert H. Small Normandy Institute program.

“I thought that would be cool if I got the right student,” Wickersham said. “After having Erika last year in my AP U.S. History class, I thought this could work.”

The Normandy Institute accepts only 15 student-teacher teams total into its intensive program to research the D-Day campaign of 1944 and the sacrifices made by young American soldiers.

The duo will study provided WWII materials and participate in online discussions most of the winter and spring months prior to traveling to the campus of George Washington University in Washington, D.C. for a series of lectures and activities in June.



2nd Lt. Carl Thompson; Army Air Corps, 485th Fighter Squadron, 370th Fighter Group, Ninth Air Force

“We’ll be taking a graduate course on World War II over the next few months in addition to the regular work we have to do,” Wickersham joked about the extra work added to his workload.

In July, Wickersham and Rice will spend a few days visiting many of the historical sites of the Normandy campaign in France.

“I am hoping to get a more hands-on experience with history,” said Rice, a junior. “I’ve read books on WWII and I’ve studied it in a classroom setting, but I think it will be a lot more impactful to study history where it took place.”

As a capstone project, the pair are conducting research on fallen WWII soldier Lt. Carl Thompson, a Birmingham native. He fought and gave his life to help liberate France and defeat Nazi Germany. Rice will present a eulogy for the hometown soldier while standing by his grave in the Normandy-American Cemetery.

It is believed that more than 400 Michigan soldiers are buried at the Normandy-American cemetery.

“Not all of them died during the Normandy invasion,” Wickersham said. “Some died at different times during World War II. Only one Michigan soldier has had his story told so far.”

The pending summer trip to France will be Rice’s first time out of the country.

“Every year my family takes a trip and every year I insist my family go to a historical site,” the 17-year-old said. “I get some pushback there, but finally I get a trip that’s just historical sites.”

“It will be a lot more impactful to study history where it took place.”

- Erika Rice



Photo Credit: JC Carroll

Erika Rice and Geoffery Wickersham speak with Fox 2 News reporter, Liz Lewin, about their pending trip to Normandy, France this summer. The pair are one of fifteen teacher-student duos chosen to participate nationwide.



History in the Making

Sanchez becomes first BPS female athlete to sign wrestling scholarship

Photo Credit: JC Carroll

Office of Marketing & Communications

Isabel Sanchez did not set out to make history when she decided to join the wrestling team at Groves High School.

Girls participating in high school wrestling was still somewhat a novelty in Michigan and she had no personal experience to lean on during the early stages of her athletic journey on the mat.

“My best friend back in Florida wrestled for a long time, so did his dad, so when I moved to Michigan, I decided I would give it a try after hearing Coach (Joe) Jones was looking for some girls to join the team,” she explained.

Sanchez has now morphed into one of the program’s top performers in less than two years, posting an impressive record in her final season before falling short of her state championship goals in the district tournament.

It was a conversation between Sanchez and Jones, Groves wrestling coach, last summer that really jumpstarted her transformation into a serious athlete. That interaction also marked the first time she expressed concerns about how she was going to afford college.

“She had concerns about affording college, but I told her that if she really wanted to go to college that I would do everything in my power to help her get there,” Jones said. “She really dedicated herself to getting better.”

The hard work and dedication ultimately paid off for Sanchez, who recently became the first female athlete from Birmingham Public Schools to sign an athletic scholarship in wrestling. She will continue her sports career at nearby Rochester University, an NAIA program.

“It’s an incredible feeling,” Sanchez said of scholarship. “Coach Jones told me from the beginning that he was going to set me up good. I don’t think I would be going to college if not for coach and this sport.”

Jones’ relationship with the coaching staff at Rochester University, which just started a women’s program, helped secure the scholarship offer.

“I called around to a few programs and spoke to a few coaches,” he said. “I called Rochester and I already have a student-athlete up there, so I took her up there for a visit. She’s still new to wrestling - a baby in the sport. They’re going to mold her into what they want her to be.”

The news of Sanchez receiving scholarship money has generated buzz and interest from female student-athletes at Groves.

“Some of her classmates are shocked that there’s money in girls wrestling,” Jones explained. “I tell them that there’s a lot of money for the sport. Schools are calling everyday trying to find young ladies that want to wrestle. It’s one of the fastest growing sports in the country.”

There are currently 124 women wrestling programs and 76 club teams at the collegiate level. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), participation for girls wrestling at the high school level has increased for more than 30 straight years.

The Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA) officially sanctioned girls wrestling in 2022. More than 31,000 female student-athletes compete across the country.



“She really dedicated herself to getting better.”

- Coach Joe Jones



A Job Well Done

Seaholm's Kyle Hall retiring after 40-plus years in K-12 education



Photo Credit: JC Carroll

Office of Marketing & Communications

Relocation was a term Kyle Hall understood very well during the early stages of her life.

She seemed to always be packing her belongings and setting off for the next town to start anew with her family. Hall had already spent portions of her life in places such as Massachusetts, Illinois, Indiana, Texas and South Carolina before permanently planting roots in Michigan.

"I was born in Massachusetts and my parents moved around quite a bit," Hall explained. "My dad worked for General Electric – he'd be promoted then we would move to the next town or state, so I was never really connected to one place."

That all changed upon joining the staff at Seaholm High School. Hall is now just a few weeks away from completing her 35th and final academic year at Birmingham Public Schools as she prepares for retirement in June.

"Losing Kyle Hall is a huge loss to the Seaholm community and the Birmingham district at-large," said Dr. Embekka Roberson, BPS Superintendent. "Her dedication to elevating academic excellence has not gone unnoticed as a teacher, department head and principal. She epitomizes thinking with reflection, acting with compassion, and performing with honor."

Her departure also signals the conclusion of a 40-plus year career in education.



“It is in Birmingham Public Schools and Seaholm High School where her impact will be felt for generations,” said Dr. Mark Lineburg, BPS Deputy Superintendent. “A simple walk of the Seaholm halls and you can feel the pride cultivated by this magnificent leader. Maple pride is permeated throughout the building because of an extraordinary English teacher turned principal. The BPS community applauds her stellar career.”

Hall began her career at Seaholm in 1987 as an English teacher before transitioning into an administrative role as department chair, splitting her time between the classroom and the administrative office.



Kyle Hall has played a vital role at Seaholm for the last 35 years.

“I was 50 percent in the classroom and 50 percent administrative,” she said. “I got to impact the curriculum, which I loved at that time. It was ideal for me because I got to still be in the classroom. I did that for 23 years and I loved every minute of it.”

Her story at Seaholm could have concluded much earlier. Hall’s husband, Ken, had accepted a new job in Chicago, leaving her to seriously contemplate retirement after the couple spent several months living in separate states.

Hall’s decision to remain employed by BPS ultimately led to her ascending into the principal’s position in 2017. It was former Seaholm Principal’s Rachel Guinn’s promotion to BPS deputy superintendent that cleared the way for Hall just six months after stepping into the assistant principal role.

**“In my life,
It’s one of
the biggest
honors I’ve
ever had.”**

- Kyle Hall

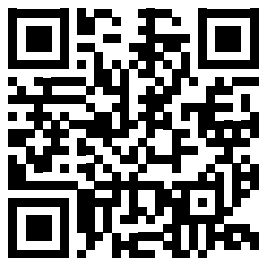
She had no aspirations of becoming principal. It would be her Seaholm peers who raised their collective voices to members of the search committee in favor of removing the interim title and putting Hall permanently in charge.

“Still to this day, it was the best thing,” she said. “It’s such an honor. In my life, that’s one of the biggest honors I ever had. Somebody actually voiced that opinion – it was enough talk and support there. My husband and I joke that I was the accidental principal because I had no intentions of doing it.

“Once I was in the role, I just cared so deeply about the staff, the students and the community. If they wanted me to do that then I wanted to be the best thing I could for them.”

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Get 2 Know Us



Joanna McKinney
Principal, Bingham Farms Elementary

What is your guilty pleasure?

I love getting up early and having the house to myself. My house is full of boys (husband + 3 teen/pre-teen kids) so this time allows me to play what music I want and it won't be changed by one of my kids. Embarrassingly, I love me some Air Supply! The 70-year-old musicians absolutely take me back to my youth driving around with my mom.

What is your useless talent?

Have you ever seen the movie *13*? They speak some weird language in it. I learned how to speak it in high school and can still speak it. I only talk to my sister and best friend from high school. Utterly useless, but fun in high school.

What movie do you wish you could watch again for the first time?

I loved the movie *Shawshank Redemption*. The first time I watched it, I was impressed by the creative story and the underlying theme. "Get busy living, or get busy dying" is a quote I say often based off of the movie.



Noelle Davis
Principal, Greenfield Elementary

What are you passionate about?

In the education world? Teaching, collaborating and celebrating successes! Also self-care is a balance and walking is my passion outside of Greenfield.

If you could choose a new name, which one would it be? Why?

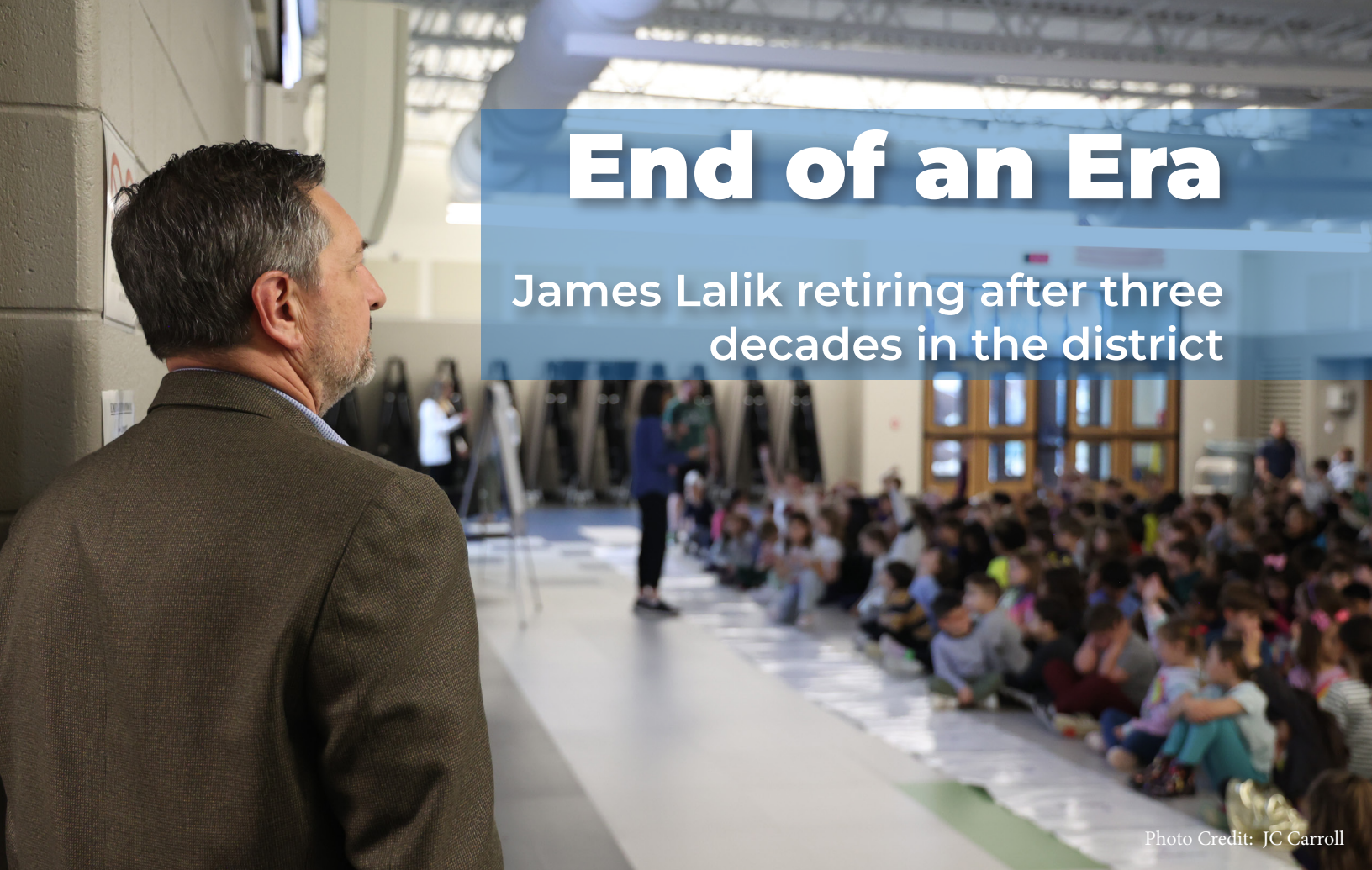
I love my name! Even though I wasn't born at Christmas... I wouldn't change it at all!

If you could travel to the past and change one event, which would you pick?

High School! I would love to go back and do it all over again! So many friendships evolved, sporting events attended and the high school vibe!

What are you looking forward to most this summer?

Spending time with our family and having friends visit our cottage up north.



End of an Era

James Lalik retiring after three decades in the district

Photo Credit: JC Carroll

Office of Marketing & Communications

The professional priorities for James Lalik haven't changed much over the last three decades.

That will all change at the conclusion of this academic calendar, as the longtime Pierce Elementary principal has decided to retire from Birmingham Public Schools after 30 years.

"The final week of school will be pretty emotional for me," Lalik said. "It's going to be hard, so I hope people understand if I don't talk much. It's going to be hard, but I am looking forward to it. It's going to be bittersweet."

The former elementary science teacher has served as principal at Pierce for the past 16 years, beginning his BPS journey coaching boys sixth-grade intramural basketball in 1993.

"The contributions Jim Lalik has made in Birmingham Public Schools and Pierce Elementary are profound," BPS Deputy Superintendent Dr. Mark Lineburg said. "I admire his expertise, his kindness and I will absolutely always remember his steadiness. Over the years I have come to realize that strong and steady leadership carries the day. He has done both. In short, Jim Lalik has earned his venerated status."

**"A pillar in the
Pierce
community for
almost two
decades"**

- Dr. Embekka Roberson

Lalik plans to pursue interests outside of the education.

“There are a lot of different things,” he said. “I’ve always been interested in the area of athletics; I’ve done a lot of handy work, so I like working with my hands and I’ve been interested in the real-estate area. I am interested in a lot of areas, so I am just going to see what fits.”

Family really played an integral role in his retirement decision. For the past 10 years, Lalik and his wife have had numerous conversations about the potential of migrating to the South before any of their children laid roots somewhere.

“No one has kind of made roots anywhere,” he said. “One of our goals was to make the move before anyone was set in an area and they wouldn’t be able to come with us. We have three kids and we’re kind of hoping all of them will come with us.”

Lalik’s looming departure is another unfortunate loss to the principal group of BPS, which will also say goodbye to fellow principals Kyle Hall (Seaholm High School) and Debbie Hubbell (Harlan Elementary). Each has served the bulk of their K-12 career within the district in various capacities and leadership roles.

“Jim Lalik has been a pillar in the Pierce community for almost two decades,” BPS Superintendent Dr. Embekka Roberson said. “Students and staff will miss his steady leadership, warm smile, and inquisitiveness. Losing him will create a void that will be difficult to fill.”



Photo Credit: JC Carroll





Changing the Narrative

Weinberg pens investment book,
profits benefit Detroit Public Schools

Photo Credit: JC Carroll

Office of Marketing & Communications

"Ian Weinberg manages to make reading and understanding the complex world of investing exciting, lively, and clear for young and old. I can't wait to share this book with students." -Holly Arida, YouthTank Co-Founder

INVEST EARLY TO GROW YOUR WEALTH



BY IAN WEINBERG
A TEENAGE INVESTOR

Paperback copies of *Invest Early to Grow Your Wealth* can be purchased through Amazon.
Digital copies are available for Kindle, too.

Ian Weinberg wasn't any different than his teenaged classmates during the initial months of the global pandemic, spending most of his time adjusting to online classes, remaining connected to friends through video games and staying in the house.

However, Weinberg – a junior at Seaholm High School – found himself slowly becoming disengaged with his new daily routines after a few months.

"During COVID, I was playing Xbox a lot because I had all this free time," Weinberg recalls. "I became bored with it; I just couldn't play any more video games. I needed to find something else that would keep my attention or find a passion project."

Weinberg would spend the next 18 months fully engulfed in learning as much as possible about investment tactics and strategies. Through his extensive research, the 17-year-old learned quickly there was a hole in the market that was dying to be filled.

"I noticed the people writing investment books were not teens or young people at all," he said. "I started to think, why don't I just write a book? It was first just an idea, but I became more confident through my research."

His entry-level book, *Invest Early to Grow Your Wealth*, simplifies and deconstructs the basics of investing into concepts that are more relatable for teens. Weinberg came to the realization that investing has been a space primarily utilized by adults for adults through adult language, giving off an impression that investing is strictly for adults.

Weinberg felt it was time to change the narrative of how young people receive insight and information about tactical strategies regarding investing.

“My hope is that this book will encourage young people to invest early, which is crucial to building wealth and achieving financial independence,” the first-time author said. “You do not need a lot of money to start, not even hundreds or thousands of dollars. Just like a seed grows into a tree, any small amount can grow.”

His investment book will do more than just pique the interest of young investors as it is also set to benefit Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD). Through a partnership with Youth Tank Detroit, all proceeds from the book will directly support programs at the neighboring school district.

“We have come to know Ian as an exceptional student who really cares about his peers,” Seaholm Principal Kyle Hall said.



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248-203-3350

Greenfield Elementary

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248-203-3210

Harlan Elementary

3595 N. Adams Rd., Bloomfield Hills, MI 48304
248-203-3265

Pembroke Elementary

955 N. Eton Rd., Troy, MI 48084
248-203-3888

Pierce Elementary

1829 Pierce, Birmingham, MI 48009
248-203-4325

Quarton Elementary

771 Chesterfield, Birmingham, MI 48009
248-203-3425

West Maple Elementary

6275 Inkster Rd., Bloomfield Hills, MI 48301
248-851-2667

Birmingham Covington School

1525 Covington Rd., Bloomfield Hills, MI 48301
248-203-4444

Berkshire Middle School

21707 W. 14 Mile, Beverly Hills, MI 48025
248-203-4700

Derby Middle School

1300 Derby Rd., Birmingham, MI 48009
248-203-5000

Wylie E. Groves High School

20500 W. 13 Mile, Beverly Hills, MI 48009
248-203-3500

Ernest W. Seaholm High School

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248-203-3700

Lincoln Street Alternative

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