Kalamazoo Public Schools
KPS
EXCELSIOR

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Kalamazoo Innovative Learning Program Wraps Around Students

(STORY & PHOTOS ON PAGES 8–10)

Guest teacher **Ezzat Belal** is in Kalamazoo to teach, and to learn.

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KPS art students collaborate with the City of Kalamazoo.

pg. 12



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Attendance Matters Every Day for Every Child

A Message from the Superintendent



Dr. Darrin Slade

IF WE expect students to know how to calculate the volume of a cube by fifth grade, then we have to begin teaching them how to add and subtract in kindergarten.

Knowing your numbers, their values, and how to count are necessary to begin working on addition, subtraction, and measuring. Eventually, having mastered addition, a student now has the skills to conquer multiplication because if you know that 2+2=4, then it is easier to grasp the idea that 2x2=4, and eventually understand that 2 inches x 2 inches x 2 inches = 8 cubic inches is how you calculate the volume of a 2-inch cube.

It's easy to see how these simple skills build upon each other. If you miss one skill, then it becomes harder to master the next.

And that is the problem with absenteeism. When a student misses a day, they not only miss that day's lessons — but they also miss the building blocks for all of the future lessons that we have for them. The teacher can be the best teacher in the world, with the best lesson plan, with the most engaging and inventive approach to the classroom — but if students are not in their seats in the classroom to hear the lesson, learning cannot happen that day — and learning tomorrow and the next day become that much more difficult.

Two days a month.

Ten percent of the school year.

Eighteen days.

However you want to tally the loss of days when someone is chronically absent, the loss of learning is too much of a burden to put on our children. We need them in school, so we can teach them. They need to be in school so they have the best opportunity to learn and grow now and to prepare for a brighter future tomorrow.

Being absent means students not only miss classroom lessons, they miss out on friendships, learning social skills and being able to fully engage in career exploration, clubs, sports, visits to the library, author visits, volunteer interactions, special events. They don't get to be a part of their school community.

(continued on page 3)

Attendance Matters — Every Day!

Kalamazoo Public Schools is launching a comprehensive approach to the issue of absenteeism which includes: more careful monitoring of absenteeism trends for students, new attendance committees at each school, and improved communication with parents about attendance, including home visits, emails, and phone calls after 3, 5, 10 and 15 absences.



CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM
15 OR MORE DAYS
- Excused and unexcused absences represent lost time in the classroom and lost opportunities to learn.
- Missing just one day every two weeks can add up to 18 days in a year. Absences add up before you even know it.



WARNING
3-14 DAYS
- Students who are absent an average of 15 days a year miss a year's worth of school before their senior year.
- When students miss a day of school it actually puts them two days behind their classmates.



GOOD ATTENDANCE
2 OR FEWER ABSENCES
- Students with good attendance generally achieve higher grades and enjoy school more.
- Children benefit and make the most of their educational opportunities if they attend school regularly and on time.

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Attendance *(continued from page 2)*

Not being in class today impacts their future learning and success. That is on all levels. According to the American Federation of Teachers:

- Absenteeism in the first month of school can predict poor attendance throughout the school year.
- Poor attendance in the early years of elementary school can negatively affect a child's ability to read proficiently by the end of third grade.
- By sixth grade chronic absenteeism becomes a leading predictor of whether a student will drop out of high school.
- Conversely, we know that if a student can improve their attendance it improves their academic achievement and their likelihood of graduating.

The other thing we know is that engaging parents in the effort to improve attendance can help our students. This is a partnership and we want to work with our families to improve attendance issues.

You may have heard about — or if you have a student who has struggled with absenteeism — actually experienced the district's first "Knock and Talk" session on Oct. 14. That day principals, central office staff, board members, and I knocked on the doors of at least 80 families with students who have had significant absences during the first month of school.

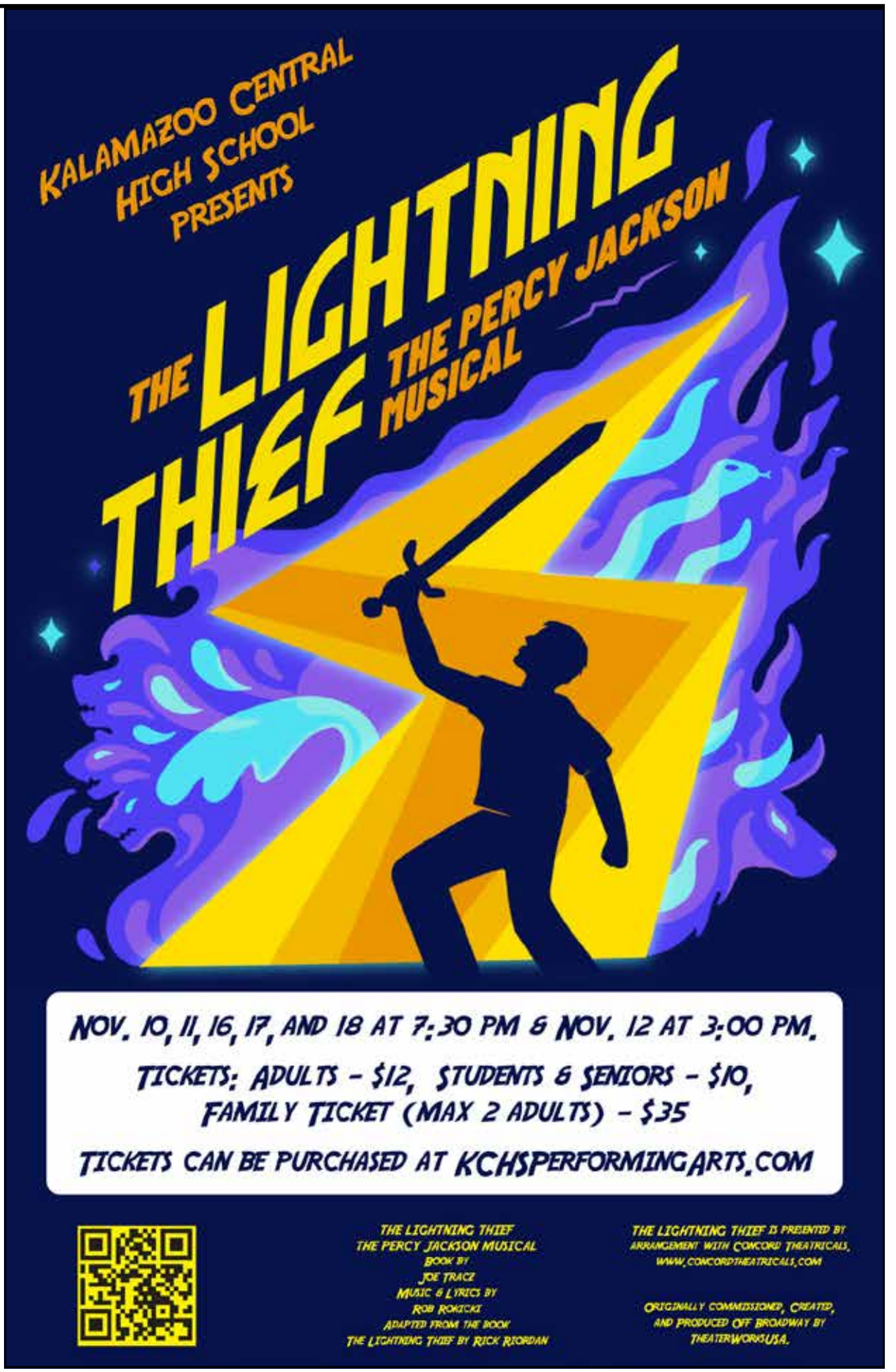
Our hope was to connect with parents, to remind them of the importance of daily attendance, to learn how we could help families that need assistance, and, most importantly, to make that personal connection with families.

The "Knock and Talk" sessions, which will continue throughout the school year, are part of a comprehensive approach to the issue of absenteeism, which includes: more careful monitoring of absenteeism trends for students, newly formed attendance committees at each school, and ongoing communication with parents about attendance.

Attendance is core to ensuring that our students are able to make the most of their school year and that they are able to succeed in the future.

The most important thing for families to know about absenteeism: If you or your family are struggling with chronic absenteeism, Kalamazoo Public Schools wants to help address the situation. We have services and supports available. Call your school, talk to your teacher or principal or the school secretary. There is nothing that we want more than to see your child in school every day.

We can find a way to help.

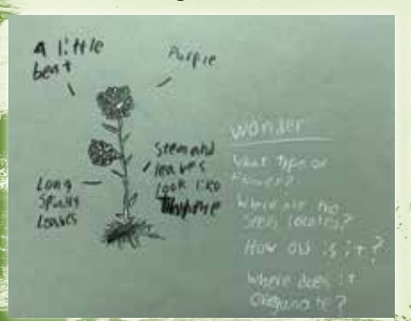


ARTISTS' CORNER

Winchell Elementary School fifth graders explored the outdoors around the school during art class. Students utilized a strategy called "See, Think, Wonder," which is a thinking routine developed by Project Zero at Harvard University. As students strolled the grounds, they were asked to find a natural object to observe. Art teacher Mandy Clearwaters said that "in reflection, students shared that they felt calm and noticed things that they never had before."



Winchell fifth graders went outside for art class.





Austin Cherry draws what he sees outside at Winchell.



Students sketch outside.



Eddie Pittelko shows off his nature study.

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Community Homeworks provides additional critical home repair services for homeowners, such as plumbing, electrical, and other health and safety issues. Visit CommunityHomeworks.org for more information.

This activity is brought to you in partnership with the City of Kalamazoo and support from other grant funding partners.

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Dr. Darrin Slade

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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 School Improvement, Title I and Assessments
Kalamazoo Public Schools
1220 Howard St.
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(269) 337-0161

All other inquiries should be directed to:

Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources
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Recipe

from the KPS Food Service, Chartwells



Kirsten Strong, registered dietician **Samuel Dunn, executive chef**

Roasted Spaghetti Squash



INTRODUCING an amazing and versatile fall favorite — spaghetti squash! That's right, the squash that eats like spaghetti. This is a basic recipe on how to cook this squash, but you can serve it in so many ways, including topped with marinara, meatballs, and parmesan cheese. After cooking, the squash falls apart into long spaghetti-like pieces that are great for fork twirling. It can be used as a healthy substitute wherever you would use potatoes, rice, or pasta. Spaghetti squash grows locally and can, of course, be found at the Kalamazoo Farmers Market until the end of the season.

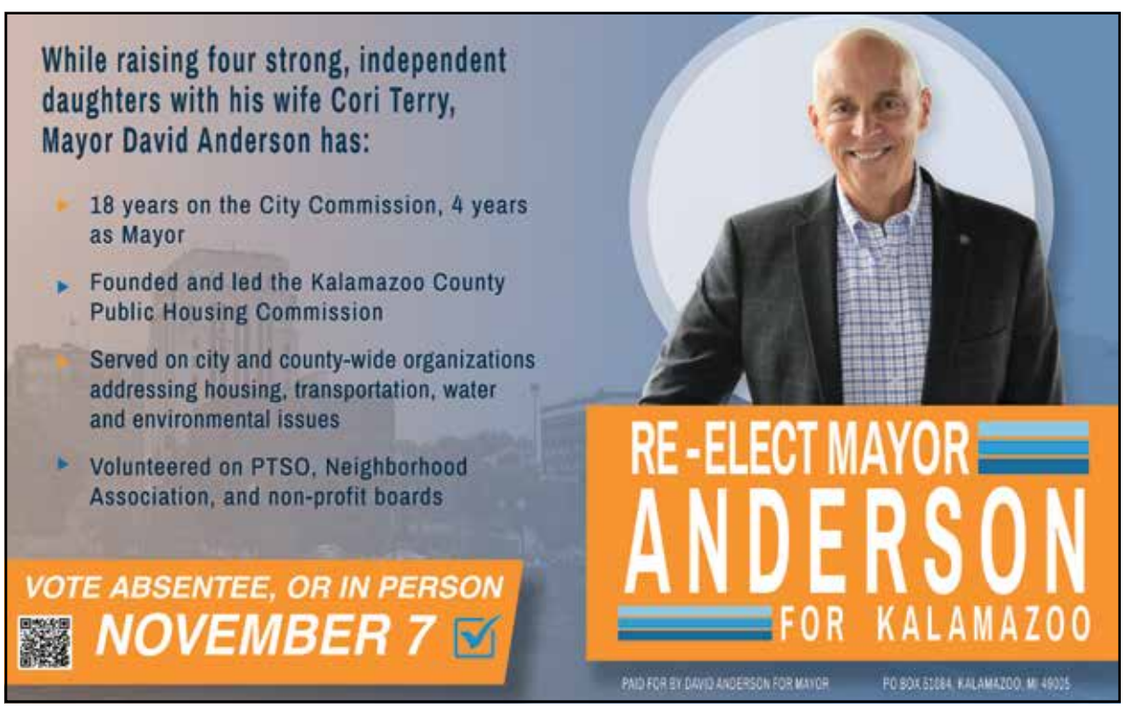
INGREDIENTS

1 spaghetti squash
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

PREPARATION

- Preheat your oven to 400° F. Carefully slice the spaghetti squash in half lengthwise with a sharp knife. Note: If it's really difficult to slice, you can microwave it for 2 to 3 minutes to soften the outside skin.
- Use a large spoon to scoop out the seeds.
- Coat the inside of the spaghetti squash with oil, and sprinkle it with salt and pepper.
- Turn the spaghetti squash upside down on a baking tray and cook for 40 to 50 minutes, depending on the size. You'll know it's done when the top of the spaghetti squash can be easily pierced with a knife and the underside edges have become golden.
- Let the spaghetti squash cool to the touch, then use a fork to scrape the inside to create long strands of spaghetti squash noodles.

About 4 servings



Guest Teacher Ezzat Belal Hopes to Build Bridges Between Kalamazoo, Egypt

EZZAT BELAL is in Kalamazoo to teach — and to learn.

Belal, who is from Damanhour, Egypt, is teaching Arabic language and culture at Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts, as part of the Teachers of Critical Languages Program, which is part of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. It is designed to increase the study and acquisition of important world languages in U.S. schools.

This program enables primary and secondary schools to strengthen their teaching of critical languages by bringing teachers from across the world to the United States to teach their native Arabic and Chinese language for an academic year. Launched in 2006, TCLP has helped start or expand more than 220 critical language programs in K-12 schools throughout the country.



Ezzat Belal is teaching in Kalamazoo for a the 2023-24 school year and, as part of his program, he is conducting outreach to the community.

In addition to having a native speaker of Mandarin or Arabic to teach language classes, students, teachers, and community members have the opportunity to learn about the TCLP exchange teachers' home cultures, expanding their understanding of the world and preparing them for study and work in an interconnected world. Through TCLP, many schools establish lasting bonds with their exchange teachers' home schools.



Maple Street Magnet School student Nylah Davis shows off her name written in Arabic on her wrist.

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs builds relations between the people of the United States and the people of other countries through academic, cultural, sports, and professional exchanges, as well as public-private partnerships and mentoring programs. These exchange programs improve foreign relations and strengthen national security.

Belal, 43, has been a teacher for 23 years. He teaches English in Damanhour, which is located between Cairo and Alexandria. He is married to Bassma, who is

(continued on page 7)



Guest Teacher Ezzat Belal *(continued from page 6)*

an architect. The couple has a daughter, Nada, who is 9, and a son Omar, who is 5.

"I think this experience will be hard for me and for them," he said. "But I am here for them so they can be proud of me and can tell their mates in school that, 'My father is an international teacher. He is a global teacher, a global citizen.'

"You know life is always changing and we have to change. We have to meet new people. We have to learn techniques. We have to adapt to a new life. We are not just to live one life in our home country. You have to meet many people. That is my philosophy."

Belal said he enjoys being a teacher and sees it as important work.

"I think being a teacher is a unique job, a special one," he said. "We help shape the community. We shape the society. We produce the doctors. We produce the engineers. We can shape the minds. That is what encouraged me to be a teacher."

He applied multiple times to join TCLP before being selected this year. He will be building on international teaching experience he gained as a student when he studied and taught in Newcastle, England, in 2009.

Belal has a bachelor's in professional teaching and a bachelor of arts in English literature, both from Alexandria University.

He said he's been enjoying his time at Maple Street, where his largest class has about a dozen students, compared to his classes in Egypt, which can easily top 50 students per class.

"American middle school students are like Egyptian middle school students," he said. "It's the age. This age they are so hyperactive. You have to understand them before you can teach them. You have to find ways to access them and manage them.

"Children are the same all around the world, especially at the middle school age. At this stage they are shaping their personalities and their minds. It's a transition time in their lives from childhood to adulthood. We have to understand them and to be patient with them."

He said he sees his role as an educational ambassador and is here to teach his students about his language and culture, but also to learn.

"I told my students that 'I came here to teach you and you can teach me. It's a win-win situation.'"

When he's not in the classroom, he's been busy exploring Kalamazoo and hopes to travel around the state and to Chicago and New York during his stay in the U.S. When he was originally selected for TCLP, he hoped to be placed in a big city, but he said he's happy to be in Kalamazoo, which reminds him of Damanhour.

"I've come to America for many reasons. I am here to learn, to meet people, to make connections between my home community and my host community, to make friends, to build a cultural bridge between America and Egypt."





Kalamazoo Innovative Learning Program

High School Provides Personalized Support to Help Students Achieve Goals

IT'S NOT THAT other schools don't have staff members who connect with their students, but at the Kalamazoo Innovative Learning Program that is the hallmark of its educational program.

"Every school has those people that the students connect to," said KILP Administrator Kim Kirshman, "but I do believe because we have 10 students in a class, teachers are allowed to get in a kid's mud puddle and really get to know them. And, it's that connection that gets them through to graduation. I'm telling you that is the difference."



Elijah McShan and other KILP students work largely independently, with teachers checking in to help them review and to administer tests.

For junior Da'je-ania Givhan that is certainly true.

"What I love about the program is that the staff and the principal and everyone treats everyone like family," Givhan said. "Ever since I started coming here, it just feels like a home every time I walk through the door. The teachers are helpful and respectful."

KILP launched in 2016 as Kalamazoo Public Schools' fourth high school and was first housed in the South Westnedge School. It then moved to the Oakwood Center. This year KILP moved to the third floor of the Community Education Center, or Old Central.



Kirshman joined Kalamazoo Public Schools as an assistant principal at Loy Norrix High School in 2018, before taking over KILP in 2019. She works with a team of three teachers: Dana Gay, Matt Gorton, and Rich Hamann, who all have experience working with at-risk students.

The school runs two-hour morning, midday, and afternoon sessions every weekday. Students attend one of those sessions either Monday, Wednesday

KILP Administator Kim Kirshman gets hugs from students Briasia Leggett and De'Je-ania Givhan.

ON THE COVER:
KILP Administrator Kim Kirshman and Ja'Onya Bowen smile as they take a break from reviewing her progress.



and Thursday or Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. The program has capacity for 165 students, but right now has about 145. Students often find about and enroll in KILP with the help of their school counselors, but they or their parents can self-refer through an online form on the school's website.

Most students who enroll are behind in their classes. They work on completing their required coursework through the online learning program



KILP student Adeline Ulmer works independently in Rich Hamann's classroom.



KILP teacher Matthew Groton works on reviewing Ca'Nazah Gardner's work in Edmentum Courseware.



KILP teacher Rich Hamann checks in with a student Leon McKay.

Edmentum Courseware. When they come into KILP, teachers are there to help guide and encourage them through the program.

"Many of the students who come here are not typically strong students, they need that support to get through the coursework," Kirshman said. "The students work at home, but they do their tests here. The teachers help them with study guides and notes.

But staff is there for another more important reason, Kirshman said.

"The teachers really make a connection to help motivate them and get them through," she said. "More than anything we really wrap around these kids. We know what every kid's situation is."

The school has counselors, a school nurse, and a Kalamazoo Promise coach, but the goal is for every teacher to provide support to the student and to fully understand their situations and their needs.

They know the kids who are struggling with homelessness, which ones have kids or jobs, and what their shifts are.

"If they miss a day or don't have their ID, the first conversation is not, 'Where have you been? And where is your ID?'" Kirshman said. "We have those conversations but in a different way. It might be,

(continued on page 10)

KILP *(continued from page 9)*

'Hey why don't you get your coffee or your hot chocolate and your breakfast then come in my office?"

While shooting for a coffeehouse feel, the focus is definitely on student success, she said. Staff want students to earn their credits because that's what's going to get them to the next point in their lives — but the way they get there has a college feel that encourages students to work as independently as possible.

"Our students don't love coming to school, but they don't mind being here in part because of the atmosphere we have," Kirshman said. "We really want to work with these students. That's a real desire. We have special relationships with these kids."

Givhan said she appreciates those one-on-one interactions with teachers and the flexibility of the program which allows her to go to school while managing a medical condition. She feels like the teachers are focused on helping her reach her goals.

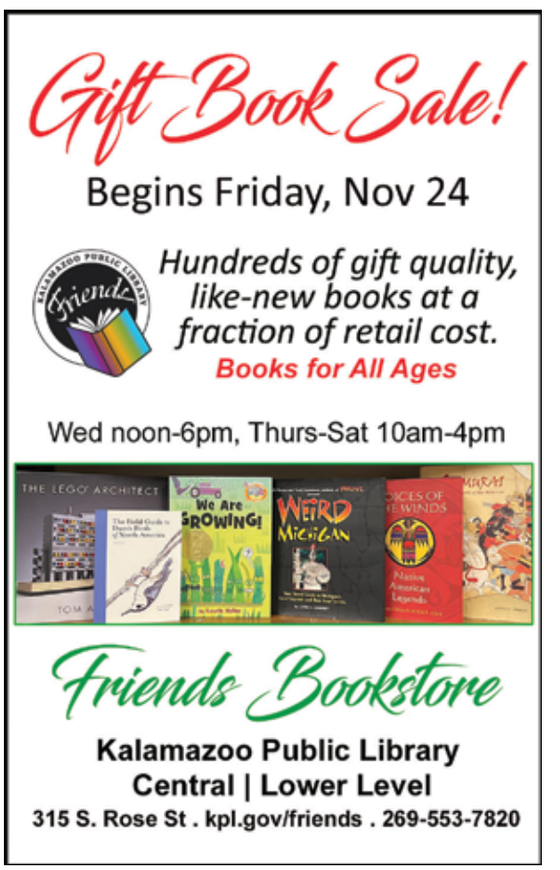
"I know where I want to be by the end of the year, and the teachers are there to help you get where you want to be. This is a good school. I'd recommend it for anyone."



Kalamazoo Innovative Learning Program teacher Dana Gay takes a break from reviewing a lesson with student Annie Jett.







KPS Expands Real-time Language Interpretation Services through Propio

KALAMAZOO Public Schools is partnering with Propio Language Services to help families gain real-time access to interpreters to better communicate with their school communities.

The service connects school employees and families to on–demand phone and video interpreters in more than 350 languages, including sign language.

The system is simple to use. Parents or guardians (or anyone whose primary language is something other than English or who is hearing impaired) can point on a sign to the language they prefer, and KPS staff will be able to connect to a Propio translator who can provide real-time language translation.

"We are proud to announce a significant expansion of our language services initiative, aimed at enhancing accessibility and inclusivity for all students and families across the district," said Wessam Abdelaziz, the coordinator of English as a Second Language and World Languages for Kalamazoo Public Schools. "This initiative goes beyond linguistic support for English as a Second Language (ESL) students/multilingual learners and extends its benefits to the entire educational community. It represents a significant step towards fostering a more inclusive educational environment within the district. We are dedicated to ensuring that every student and family feels supported, heard, and valued as active participants in the educational process. With a focus on diversity and accessibility, we strive to empower students and their families to achieve academic success and personal growth."

KPS serves families who speak more than 60 different languages including Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, French, and Kenyarwanda. Each year the district educates more than 1,000 students whose home language is something other than English.

Part of the beauty of the Proprio system is its ease of use, he said.

"Once parents identify their native language on a sign, the school staff can connect them to a translator using audio or video interpretation through Propio," Abdelaziz said. "The service is being offered free of charge for families. We hope that it helps everyone feel more welcome in our schools and helps build stronger relationships between the schools, our multilingual learners, and their families."

KPS has a robust English as a Second Language program that helps multilingual learners succeed. The ESL staff works to :

- Enable students to become proficient in English.
- Enable students to achieve at grade level in content area instruction.



- Help improve the self-concept of students.
- Increase parental involvement.
- Increase the effectiveness of all mainstream teachers and other staff when working with English language learners.
- Increase awareness and understanding of language acquisition and the strategies that support the learning of English language learners.



Abdelaziz said that In response to feedback from staff members, the district was pleased to be able to introduce sign language interpretation as part of its comprehensive language services.

"This addition reflects our commitment to providing a diverse range of communication tools," he said. "The expanded language services not only comply with federal laws but also emphasize the importance of equitable access to educational resources.

"By offering sign language interpretation alongside oral interpretation, we are empowering families to engage more fully with the educational experience and take advantage of the district's numerous available resources."



KPS Art Students Collaborate with the City of Kalamazoo

THE KALAMAZOO Public Schools Art Department collaborated with the City of Kalamazoo to beautify Bronson Park. Students from Kalamazoo Central and Loy Norrix high schools created colorful designs for utility structures in the park. In early October, students took to the park to paint the structures in group projects with positive community messages.



Catie Frink celebrates KPS graduates with her artwork.



Kathleen Gross, Ransome Biskie and Caleb Phillips take a break from completing their skyline painting.



Sophia Salinas, Kamryn Caldwell and Celeste Perez-Castro create a colorful landscape in the park.

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Ray Dun, Alex Bol, and Jireh McNair add detail work to their paintings.

(continued on page 13)

KPS Art Beautifies Bronson Park *(continued from page 12)*



Kalamazoo Central art teacher Julie Labudda worked with students Ransom Biskie, Allison Bol, Jesslyn Brown, Kyrell Carter, Aaliyah Dunn, Kathleen Gross, Morgan Harmon, Ella Haskins, Reynaldo Jeronimo-Cabrera, Tiann Johansen, Caleb Phillips, Alyssa Shell and Sean Willoughby on the Bronson art project. Some of the students are pictured here.



Loy Norrix art teacher Gregg Stephens with students Kamryn Caldwell, Elizabeth Bierlein, Morgan Hall, Axel Herrera-Villalobos, Myles Frazier, Jireh McNair, Levi Montero, Ava Belknap, Leslie Tellez, Celeste Perez Castro, Sophia Salinas, and Catie Frink pose in Bronson Park.



First Day Shoe Fund Holds Largest Shoe Distribution Ever

THOUSANDS of area children were able to start the school year off on the right foot thanks to the First Day Shoe Fund, which provided new athletic shoes to more than 5,500 students in Kalamazoo County.

This fall the program held its largest shoe distribution ever, fitting students at 47 Kalamazoo County elementary schools with 5,500 pairs of socks and shoes in just 13 days.

"We are so grateful to all the donors that make the First Day Shoe Fund possible," said Frank Rocco, principal of Woodward School.." The excitement and confidence it brings to our students is unmatched. About 175 students from Woodward were able to get new shoes!"

School staff in every KPS elementary school and hundreds of dedicated volunteers made this possible by encouraging students to apply for the shoes, helping to pack and distribute the shoes, and providing each student with a personalized fitting.

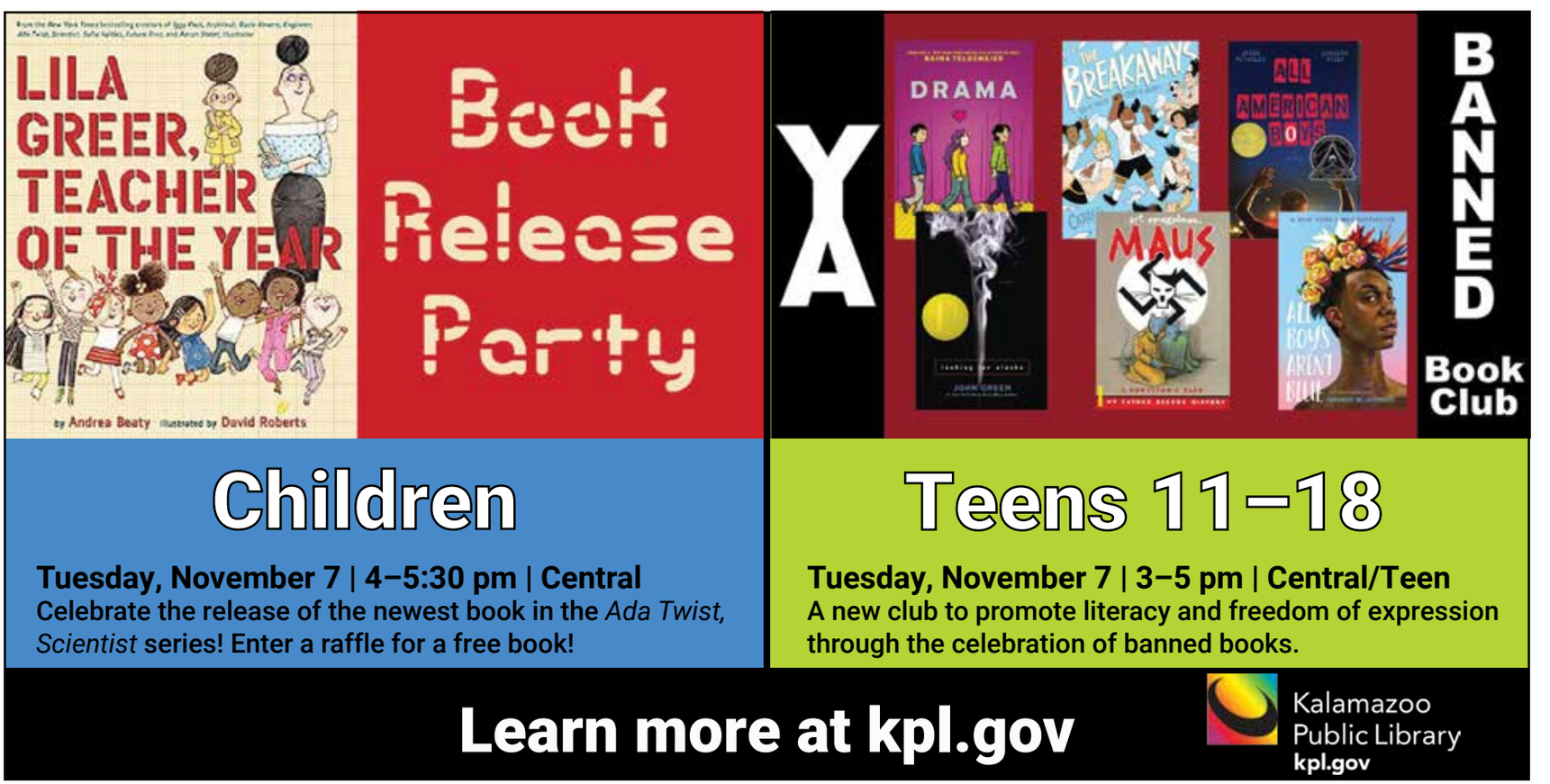
Parents sign their children up for the service, noting the child's shoe size and preferences in terms of style and color. During the fitting process, volunteers check the shoe size and make adjustments, when



Photos courtesy of Christine Brege Photography

A First Day Shoe Fund volunteer helps a student try on a new pair of shoes.

(continued on page 15)



First Day Shoe Fund *(cont. from page 14)*

possible, in terms of size and color. Parents make a final approval of the shoes before the family keeps the shoes.

"We are grateful for their support," said First Day Shoe Fund Executive Director Maggie Hesketh. "FDSF will be expanding their spring pilot distribution to over 20-plus schools so that students can remain confident and comfortable in a new pair of shoes year round."

First Day Shoe Fund is a unique, local grassroots initiative that has provided more than 50,000 pairs of new athletic shoes to elementary school children since 2006.

First Day Shoe Fund founder Valerie Denghel was volunteering in Kalamazoo Public Schools when she recognized the need to help every child start the school year with a properly fit pair of shoes to help with their self esteem and to help them feel prepared.



New shoes make this Woodward school student feel like dancing.



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- Kids enrolled in Kalamazoo Public Schools
- Proud graduate of Kalamazoo Public Schools and Western Michigan University
- Former educator

"Let's create a future we can be proud to hand over to the next generation. The challenges we face and the ambitious growth we hope to achieve require experience and deep passion for this work.

I humbly ask for your vote on Tuesday, November 7."



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WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE KalamazooVALLEY Museum



EXHIBIT **FREE**

OCT. 31, 2023 - JAN. 21, 2024

OFF THE SHELVES: Exploring the Kalamazoo Valley Museum's Furniture Collection

Explore the KVM's furniture collection that spans over 200 years of history, from one-of-a-kind items to mass-produced pieces created by local manufacturers.

EXHIBIT **NOW - JAN. 7, 2024 | FREE**

SPLAT! The Buzz About Flyswatters

Celebrate the passion of collecting everyday objects with this unique display of over 1,000 flyswatters from Iza van Riemsdijk's collection.



UPCOMING EVENTS **FREE**

KVM – Outside the Walls!

The museum is proud to contribute to the following community events. We wish you a wonderful season!

- Holiday Parade | Saturday, Nov. 18 | Downtown Kalamazoo
  Join us at the museum after the parade for special warm and fun family activities.
- Tree Lighting | Friday, Nov. 24 | Bronson Park



EVENT **FRIDAY, DEC. 1 | FREE**

Art Hop: Kalamazoo Mandolin and Guitar Orchestra

The KMGO will perform festive songs to start the season off with merriment. Concerts begin at 6 and 7:15 p.m.

PLANETARIUM EXPERIENCE

NOVEMBER SHOWS | $3 PER PERSON

FRIDAYS & SATURDAYS

Magic Globe | 11 a.m. | 28 min. | Grades K & up
Go on a journey with a young girl, Mia, to learn about the importance of the changing seasons on Earth's delicate ecosystem.

Black Hole | 2 p.m. | 40 min. | Grades 6 & up
Supercomputing technology takes you on a hunt for the ultimate cosmic monster — to the center of a black hole, a place humans can never venture.

SUNDAYS

Dino SOARS! | 1 p.m. | 23 min. | Grades 3 & up
Join paleontologist Malkia to discover connections between the birds of today and the dinosaurs that roamed the Earth millions of years ago.

The Sky Above Us | 2 p.m. | 40 min. | Grades 4 & up
Learn about some of the "celestial wonders" that can be seen overhead in Michigan.

HOURS: Tuesday - Saturday | 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. Sunday | Noon - 4 p.m.

FREE GENERAL ADMISSION

Note: Some areas of the museum may be closed due to exhibit changes, staffing needs, special programs or collections care. We thank you for your patience.

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum is operated by Kalamazoo Valley Community College and is governed by its Board of Trustees.

KalamazooVALLEY Museum

230 N. Rose St., Kalamazoo
kalamazoomuseum.org | 269.373.7990