

## North Branch Area Schools “Person of the Week”

Welcome to our NBAS Person of the Week! Each week, we highlight a member of our incredible team to showcase their unique contributions and share a bit about their journey. This week, we’re shining the spotlight on Kierstyn Cooper, NBAS’s Food Service Supervisor.

Across the country, school food service supervisors positively impact the children who come through their cafeteria lines for breakfast and lunch each day. NBAS recognizes the dedication, ingenuity and compassion shown by Kierstyn Cooper who has excelled in providing high-quality, nutritious meals to students throughout the school year.

Kierstyn Cooper is passionate about feeding students nutritious meals with homemade touches while ensuring those meals follow state and federal guidelines. Kierstyn wants both students and staff to have a positive experience every time they have a meal at school and has worked on menu improvements, such as creating a make-to-order sandwich station for students in the Ruth Fox Middle School, and college level food court style options including a stir fry station at North Branch High School.

### Kierstyn’s story:



Thank you so much for this recognition as NBAS Person of the Week! It’s always such a good feeling when positivity and praise are given from others for the job that you do!

My name is Kierstyn Cooper. I am the Food Service Supervisor for North Branch Area Schools. This is my fourth year in the position. I oversee the kitchens and staff for all four of our buildings as well as create the menus for our students.

I am part of the Class of 2008 North Branch Alumni. All my siblings attended and graduated through NBAS. My mother has been a teacher with the district for 23 years and counting! Many of the staff members are like family to me. They have taught me, seen me grow up, and now teach my own two children. Taking this position was like coming home and one of the best decisions I have made.

I have always been what they call a “foodie”. I attended Lapeer County Ed Tech Center for Culinary Arts. I fell in love with Baking and Pastry Arts. I competed in the SkillsUSA competitions both my Junior and Senior year of High School, and even participated at the National Level placing fifth in the Nation my senior year! I then attended Baker College in Muskegon which opened the first Culinary Institute of Michigan my sophomore year of college. I graduated with

my Associates Degree in Baking and Pastry Arts. I've dabbled in many different food service positions such as catering companies, chocolatier, pastry chef, fast food, North Branch Bakery, and I even owned my own cake business for a time. Food services for K-12 schools was never something I gave thought to. When the opportunity presented itself, I really began to think about the positive change I could bring to this community through this position. As a mother of two that attends NBAS, that's what really sealed the deal for me.

I came to this position with big visions and I am so excited and proud to see them starting to play out. I enrolled our district into a program that allowed our students to have free meals. I don't think any student should have to worry about going hungry. I have worked with two of our buildings, the Elementary and the High School, to assist in getting the garden clubs up and running with the best equipment we could provide. The vegetables they are growing are being served right to the students in the cafeterias. Ruth Fox Middle School offers a make-to-order sandwich station daily for our students, and I still get compliments in the hallways from parents and students about this awesome option! Our High School Cafeteria is turning into an AMAZING space for our students, full of school spirit and college level food court style options. My ongoing project is to bring Farm-to-School to North Branch. What better way to include our small farming community than that! I want the students to be eating the healthiest and best quality food they can. We are helping grow our future in these students both physically and mentally.

I have a favorite poem: The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost. I try to remind myself from time to time of the last line, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference." No matter what life throws at you, or what obstacles you face, take that step that may bring fear of the unknown. It could be the start of something great!

### **Here is what some of her co-workers had to say...**

- Kierstyn is very dedicated to NBAS and goes way beyond what her job responsibilities are! She is always improving and expanding the healthy options for our students so that they have more choices. She has improved the serving line areas and kitchens and made sure her staff have the equipment needed to make healthy meals for our students. She fills in as a sub when employees aren't able to make it in. She is truly an amazing person who is always positive and pleasant! We are so fortunate to have Kierstyn at NBAS!
- We are so fortunate to have Kierstyn as our Food Service Supervisor! She works very hard making sure that our students are provided with healthy and delicious meal choices! She's added more variety to the menu and the meal choices that students are able to make. She's improved and enhanced students dining experience by updating equipment and food serving lines. Plus, not only are the meals healthy and delicious, but they are also free to our students because of Kierstyn's efforts in helping our district becoming a CEP school district! Kierstyn is very dedicated and always willing to pitch in

whenever help is needed! She truly goes above and beyond, often filling in and working alongside of her employees when needed! Kierstyn is always smiling, cheerful and a pleasure to work with and around!

- Kierstyn is an extremely hardworking individual who works hard to make our food service program meet the needs of all of our students. On several occasions we have enlisted her help to help navigate the nutritional or allergy needs of students. She has dove in, researched, label read and done all she could to help meet the needs of all our students. She communicates openly, is an active problem-solver and is constantly striving to make our food service the very best it can be! Thanks for all you do!

Thank you, Kierstyn, for your support, guidance, and leadership of our food service program. We appreciate that you are always open to suggestions and ideas to improve nutrition services at the school. It is very obvious that you care about the students and staff and the success of the school nutrition program. Thank you for being such a valuable part of our team.