

Kalamazoo Public Schools

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Literacy Night Bundles Fun and Reading

(STORY AND PHOTOS ON PAGES 6-7)



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KPS Graduation Rates Increase, Demonstrate that Hard Work Must Continue

A Message from the Superintendent

Dr. Darrin Slade



KALAMAZOO Public Schools recently shared the exciting news that the district’s graduation rate for the 2023-24 school year showed significant improvement over previous years.

The district graduation rate increased from 65.85 in 2023 to 75.31 in 2024. Not only did the district post its highest graduation rate for the last 17 years (with the exception of the virtual year for Covid), but the district rate improved by almost 10 percentage points. All of our high school programs — Kalamazoo Central, Loy Norrix, Phoenix and the Kalamazoo Innovative Learning Program — showed significant improvement.

But perhaps most importantly, that overall increase represented substantial improvements to graduation rates for all

subgroups of students, including significant growth for African American male students and Hispanic female students. The graduation rate for African American male students rose 20.1 percent from 47 percent in 2023 to 67.1 percent in 2024. For Hispanic females, the increase was 12.1 percent, from 67.9 percent in 2023 to 80 percent in 2024.

Likewise, African American females saw an increase of 3.7 percent, and Hispanic males’ graduation rates improved 3.3 percent. Graduation rates for white females improved 7.3 percent, white males 3.1 percent, economically disadvantaged students 7.9 percent, and for students with disabilities 3.2 percent.

With more than 30-plus years of experience, I can honestly say these gains impress me as an educator. These numbers inspire great pride and confidence in the ability of our students to work hard and to learn the lessons and skills they need to thrive and succeed. The improvements only expand my respect for

our educators and staff and their ability to teach and inspire our students.

I want to thank the principals at those buildings for their leadership in guiding these improvements, which have led to these increased rates of success: Valerie Boggan at Kalamazoo Central, Chris Aguinaga at Loy Norrix, Ajamian Gardner at Phoenix; and Kimberly Kirshman at Kalamazoo Innovative Learning Program.

While we are pleased with the news that the district’s rate of improvement in graduation rates outpaced the rate of growth for the state — KPS improved by 9.4 percent compared to the state’s increase of 1.1 percent — we know there is much work ahead of us.

The graduation rate for the State of Michigan in 2024 was 82.8 percent, which is also its highest rate in 17 years and comes under the leadership of State Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice, Kalamazoo’s former superintendent. As a district we are confident that we can reach that standard, however, we aspire not

only to match that rate but to exceed it.

The district has established a goal of having a 90 percent graduation rate by 2030. You will find that Academic Excellence is listed as the first pillar of the district’s new strategic plan.

Every initiative in the district, from improving attendance to promoting early childhood education, from increasing career and technical education opportunities to providing social-emotional supports — is designed to serve the goal of helping students attain the skills they need to succeed in school and graduate.

I want to thank everyone in our district — students, families, teachers, principals, counselors, support staff, and the Board of Education — for their focus on improving graduation rates and helping us attain academic excellence.

There is no greater goal for a school district than to have all students be able to walk across the stage at graduation knowing they are able to conquer the world.

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KALAMAZOO RESA

Career Connect

New District Chef Josh Kerby Comes Home to Inspire Nutrition

WHEN JOSH KERBY was hired as the new executive chef for Kalamazoo Public Schools, it was a true homecoming. He will be preparing meals for schools that he attended as a child.

Kerby, 39, attended King-Westwood Elementary School, Hillside Middle School, and Kalamazoo Central. He graduated from Central in 2004.

Back then, he was heavy into the arts, playing cello, writing poetry and participating in slams. He was taking Education for the Arts classes in photography and video production and was thinking about pursuing a career in photography — then he got a job at Coney Island in downtown Kalamazoo.

“I fell in love with the atmosphere and of course the food,” he said. “The guest interaction, the high-pressure atmosphere during busy times. The camaraderie with your co-workers.”

After graduating from KC, he attended the Secchia Institute for Culinary Arts in Grand Rapids. His new found passion showed as he rose to the top of his class and was consistently on the dean’s list.

He ended up in the Pacific Northwest, working for a breakfast cafe in Portland, Oregon, then starting his own catering business. His last few years in Oregon he was the head chef and general manager for a restaurant at the base of Mount Hood. When he returned to Michigan a few years ago, he became a sous chef at Gun Lake Casino in Wayland.

Kerby is new to school food programs, but excited to join KPS and Chartwells to help guide the district through a challenging new phase as it gears up for the launch of the district’s new central kitchen, which is being built on the westside of Kalamazoo on the former location of Chime Elementary School.

“It is a very exciting challenge, every day is different,” Kerby said. “It’s keeping me on my toes. Imagine running 27 consistently busy restaurants at the same time, every day. I’m the kind of person who wants to get things done right away, and I’ve had to learn that change within an operation this large has to come at a slower pace. There are a lot of moving parts.”

In addition to managing the mechanics of launching the central kitchen, Kerby is focused on how the new facility will broaden the district’s ability to develop healthier recipes and introduce children to better nutrition.

“It can be a bit of an uphill battle when everything they’re eating at school is low fat, low sodi-



Executive Chef Josh Kerby

um and low sugar — and when they’re outside of school they’re exposed to foods that can be full of those elements, which can come across as a bit more flavorful” he said.

The new kitchen, he said, will give the district more opportunities to develop their own recipes.

“This is why I am excited for our new kitchen, so we can develop our own recipes and try to account for reduced fats and sugars by using things like spices and herbs to increase flavor,” Kerby said. The new kitchen will allow staff to get away from pre-made, processed foods, and to

start making homemade items such as breakfast sandwiches and cookie dough.

Getting kids to think about eating healthier and exploring new food options requires exposing them to a broad range of foods and flavors from an early age, he said. “There’s science to back this up. You are way more likely to try something as an adult if you were exposed to it as a child.

“That’s what I am focused on with my discovery kitchen demos. I am just trying to get kids to try something different like beets or a unique fruit. They aren’t always going to like it — and they are sure to let me know when they don’t,” he laughed. “But it’s an important part of the job in my eyes.”

Kerby encourages parents to cook with their children to help broaden their interest in food, nutrition and the world around them.

He actually encourages all of us to be a little more adventurous with our diets. He understands why our dietary worlds have shrunk a little after Covid.

One simple way to do that is to try one new recipe a week. Make something you’ve never had before, something that may be different than your usual meals. These new recipes can be an exploration of healthier eating or inexpensive meals.

“I think the whole world feels like they are in a bit of a funk,” he said. “When you’re not feeling yourself, or a bit down, you’re going to turn to those rich, decadent comfort foods. I think the biggest thing people can do to improve their health is to try new things. Step out of your comfort zone.”

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Dr. Darrin Slade

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

Director of School Improvement, Title I and Assessments

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1220 Howard St.
Kalamazoo, MI 49008
(269) 337-0180

All other inquiries should be directed to:

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District Directory at:
www.kalamazoopublicschools.com

Recipe

from the KPS Food Service, Chartwells

Josh Kerby,
executive chef



Kirsten Strong,
registered dietitian
nutritionist

Mock Mac Tacos

THESE little babies are a delight! If you are a fan of a certain classic, fast food burger, this recipe might help to satisfy your craving without visiting the restaurant. The sauce tastes just like the real thing and that's what sets this recipe apart. These tacos are a fun play on the original hamburger sandwich and are even a little healthier, too. This is a quick and simple crowd-pleasing dinner that will shake things up. Scan the code to check out a video demo of this recipe with Chef Josh and Resident Dietitian Kirsten on the KPS Food Services Facebook.



TACOS

Makes 8 small tacos

1 pound ground beef (lean or regular)
8 small, soft flour tortillas
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon cracked black pepper
Olive oil spray
8 slices American cheese
2 cups iceberg lettuce, shredded
½ cup dill pickles, sliced or chopped
½ onion, finely diced
Sesame seeds

SPECIAL MOCK "MAC" SAUCE

2 tablespoons onion, grated
1 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons sweet pickle relish
2 teaspoons white vinegar
2 teaspoons sugar
2 teaspoons mustard
1 ½ teaspoons paprika
1 teaspoon onion powder
Salt to taste

PREPARATION

1. Cook ground beef over medium-high heat in a pan on the stovetop, stirring frequently until there is no

pink. Drain if needed. Add ½ cup of the mac sauce to the cooked ground beef.
2. Heat tortillas in the microwave or in a lightly oiled frying pan.
3. To assemble the tacos, layer the beef, American cheese, pickles, diced onion, lettuce, sauce, and sesame seeds in the tortillas — and enjoy!
4. Use ground turkey or chicken and lite mayo to reduce calories. Use whole grain tortillas to increase your fiber.

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Literacy Night Celebrates Reading Every Day

KALAMAZOO PUBLIC SCHOOLS elementary and middle school buildings held their annual literacy night celebrations on Feb. 26 and 27. Literacy night helps the district kick-off National Reading Month, which is held in March. National Reading Month began as a celebration of children's book author Dr. Seuss's birthday.

This year, some of the themes for literacy night included camping, superheroes, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) learning, Motown and Black history, and world cultures.



El Concilio dancers add fiery color to the multicultural literacy night at Milwood Magnet.



The Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety was a hit at Greenwood Elementary.

Northglade Montessori Community In Schools Coordinator Emma Bradford handles giveaways at literacy night.



Milwood Elementary student Junior Arthanas shows off his non-Newtonian fluid, which is solid when squeezed but becomes fluid at rest. Milwood had a STEAM-themed literacy night.



Students practice reading music with Northglade Montessori Teaching Assistant Carianne Zomonski and Teacher Bethany Conley.

Literacy Night (cont. from pg. 6)

ON THE COVER: Greenwood first-grader Kamilla Davis dreams of being a doctor at literacy night.



Woods Lake Assistant Principal/ Batwoman Sierra Prather poses with The Hulk, Fox Newland, during the Woods Lake superhero-themed celebration.



Northglade's literacy night theme was Northglade Rocks. All of the events were tied to music in some way. From left to right: Hendrick Nieboer, Weston Howe, Holland Nieboer, Campbell Weiler, Clare Pappalardo, Matilda Thole-Velting, Tove Kerney and Tesla Milcarek practice their karaoke.



Loy Norrix teacher Brad Schmidt explains Pi to Aiden Jackson, Juma Arthanas and l'Talia Keaton at Milwood Elementary.



Indian Prairie students Harper Bradford and Ava Mitchell celebrated the "Heart of Black History."



Rootead dancers thrill guests at Milwood Magent School.

ARTISTS' CORNER

Edison Academy art teacher **Marlena Smith** shares the wide range of projects and techniques that Edison students have been working on this year.

Kindergarteners, like Raylynn Grady, were introduced to a variety of lines along with color. Students were able to choose their lines and colors and dance them across the page.

Lea'jah Walker and other third graders created fall and snowy landscapes that reflect off the water.

Smith introduced fifth graders like William Kelsey to tempera paint sticks and the technique of overlapping colors to create secondary colors on watercolor paper.

Eliana Bimbe, who is in second grade, printed her handprint and used markers to play with the negative space on the page.



Raylynn Grady



Lea'jah Walker



William Kelsey



Eliana Bimbe

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SUMMER CAMP 2025

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Picking a Camp: Start Early and Ask Questions



Soon that last school bell will ring and kids will be ready for summer. For parents and caregivers, however, the thought of summer’s arrival can be stressful as they try to figure out the best ways to keep their kids active and engaged during the summer break. One of the best ways to keep your kids from going stir-crazy (and making you crazy) is to sign them up for various camps throughout the summer. But with so many options and types of camps from residential to day camps, science to arts, academic to adventure, choosing the best camp for your child means starting early and asking the right questions.

- 1. Start now.** Camps fill up quickly. April is the peak time for parents to sign their kids up for summer camps, so don’t put off too long making your decisions. Also, some camps require health appraisal forms or deposits to secure a spot, so you need to plan ahead to ensure that you have taken the steps needed to reserve your child’s spot in a camp.
- 2. Decide on the type of camp.** Do you want your child’s camp experience be to learn new skills, develop self-confidence, increase their athletic ability or provide adventurous, age-appropriate activities? As you narrow down the types of camps, be sure

to include your child when finalizing the selection. Some children, just like adults, appreciate being made aware of or involved in the decisions that affect them.

3. Get recommendations. Ask other parents and caregivers for recommendations of summer camps that match your child’s interests. You can often learn about the physical environment and the camp’s daily operations, including things like noise level, type of food served, and staff diversity, that could affect the quality of your child’s camp experiences. It doesn’t hurt to ask former campers about their experiences as well, and to share what you learn with your child.

4. Make a budget and stick to it. Summer camps can be expensive, so decide early how much you will set aside for your child’s camp experiences. Make sure to find out if the camps you’d like them to attend offer scholarships or other financial aid, because many do. Don’t let a camp’s price tag keep you from considering it for your child; you might be surprised at the financial help that is available.

(Continued on page 12)





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(Continued from page 10)

5. Do your homework. As you narrow down different camps for your kids, make a list of any concerns and questions you may have for each camp. Camps' websites are a great place to learn about rules, procedures and special considerations for campers, including what to bring and what to leave at home. If you still have questions after reviewing the information, reach out to the camps. Camp directors will gladly talk to you and tell you how they can address your concerns. Here are some questions to consider:

- What kind of support is available for campers with special health care needs?
- What is the refund policy if my child becomes sick and can't attend camp?
- What medical facilities are on-site or nearby?
- What is the camp's approach to discipline and how does it handle conflict between campers?
- What are the camp's relationships and statistics with staff and campers?
- What does the ratio of counselors to campers look like and how old are the counselors?



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SUMMER CAMP 2025

Benefits of Camp Can Be Lifelong

Summer camp offers kids the chance to learn a variety of different skills that may have been missing from their day-to-day experiences. According to the American Camp Association, summer camp experiences help students develop social skills and self-respect, build character and learn about caring and being a good citizen. In addition, attending a camp can have these benefits:

1. Socializing and Friendship Building

Whether it's a day camp or overnight camp, summer camp provides a great opportunity for kids to socialize and meet new people, especially other kids who share the same interests. A summer camp program provides a safe environment for children to develop social skills and decision-making skills. Kids develop important life skills through socializing — such as sharing, setting boundaries, and problem-solving — and learn how to develop strong, healthy relationships by interacting with their peers.

2. Less Sitting and More Exercise

Our kids spend a lot of time sitting at school and during screen time and are more sedentary than ever. Sedentary lifestyles increase the risk of health issues including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and obesity. A summer camp is a great solution to get kids moving again. Many programs take place outdoors and include physical activities such as hiking, archery, horseback riding, swimming, rock climbing, dance and team sports.

3. Personal Growth and Exploration

Summer camps are an opportunity for kids to explore their interests and learn new things. For example, local science-focused camps can teach kids about chemistry, robotics or aeronautics, while other camps focus on such things as the arts, cooking and nature. While they are having fun and exploring new interests, kids are also being educated and challenged. Studies have shown that 70 percent of parents report that their child gained self-confidence while at camp.



4. Positive Role Models

Through their camp counselors and directors, children will have opportunities to interact with positive adult role models. Many camp counselors are younger adults who work or volunteer over their summer breaks from school and whom kids see as “cool” and more relatable than their parents. Because these young adults often share their personal experiences as well as interests with campers, they can provide your child a glimpse into what their future could be like.

5. Becoming More Independent

Going to camp gives kids an opportunity to become more independent. Whether for a day, week, or entire summer, separation from parents and caregivers allows children to learn to rely on themselves and other trusted adults and peers. Separation from parents allows children ability to think independently, which builds self-esteem. ●



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No-cost, low-cost options for summer fun

Looking for a little more fun this summer for your family and children? Here's a list of places no-cost and low-cost alternatives:

KYD Network Summer Program Finder

A great place to start your search for summer programs is through KYD Network (Kalamazoo Youth Development Network). KYD Network works to ensure that youth in Kalamazoo and Calhoun counties have access to high-quality out-of-school-time programs year-round. You can use the online summer program finder tool to filter programs by neighborhood, grade level, cost, focus area and more to find one that's right for you. Check it out at www.kydnet.org.

Camp Kzoo

The City of Kalamazoo's Parks and Recreation department offers a variety of programs for Kalamazoo's youth. Plans for this summer's activities will be available on its website at kzooparks.org/programs. Financial assistance is available from Kalamazoo Friends of Recreation to help ensure that these programs are available to, and affordable by, everyone. For more information, visit the Kalamazoo Friends of Recreation website at friendsofrec.org.

All Things Possible is a free program offering career and college exploration for KPS students entering high school. Held 9 a.m.–4 p.m. Monday–Friday, there will be two 4-week sessions this summer: June 11–July 5 and July 8–Aug. 2. Daily events will include learning work skills and life skills, recreational activities, talent development and career/educational exploration. For information or to register visit kzooparks.org/Programs/All-Things-Possible.

Outdoor concerts

Another great outdoor activity is offered by the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo's Summertime Live concert series. Free concerts are held throughout the community including in Portage, Parchment, Oshtemo Township, and downtown Kalamazoo. The schedule was still being finalized at press time, but to find out who is playing where and when visit kalamazooarts.org.



Join a Reading Program

Kalamazoo Public Library offers a robust reading program for kids with benchmarks and prizes. All that's needed to participate is a library card (which most KPS students got in first grade!). Visit kpl.gov or check with your local library branch for the details of this summer's reading program.

Take a Rewarding Hike

The Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy is challenging kids to Hike Our Preserves (HOP) this summer. Registration is \$7 per person and includes a free hiking stick (while quantities last), a medallion for each HOP preserve you visit, and a prize from Jr. Rangerland Educational Publishing for the first 25 hikers to visit all 10 preserves. Preserves feature many different types of landscapes from wetlands and forests to fens and beaches. For more information visit swmlc.org/hop or call (269) 324-1600. ●

KIRK NEWMAN ART SCHOOL SPRING & SUMMER ART CAMPS

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kiarts.org/schedule
Scholarships available





2025 KALAMAZOO VALLEY YOUTH SUMMER CAMPS



Looking for some summer fun? Explore Kalamazoo Valley's wide variety of youth summer camps.
From athletics to hands-on learning, there's plenty at Kalamazoo Valley to keep kids busy all summer long!

For more than 30 years, Kalamazoo Valley Community College has offered summer sports camps for area students. In Summer 2025, we will offer boys and girls basketball, volleyball, softball and baseball camps at the college's Texas Township Campus. Registration is now open. To register, visit athletics.kvcc.edu/camps.

VOLLEYBALL CAMP

JULY 7 - 10 | 9 A.M. - 4 P.M.

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES K - 3 | 9 - 10:15 A.M.

CAMP FEE: \$60

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES 4 - 6 | 9 - 11 A.M.

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES 7 - 8 | NOON - 2 P.M.

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES 9 - 12 | 2 - 4 P.M.

CAMP FEE: \$90

Registration closes on June 30.

Equipment needed: gym shoes, socks, shorts, knee pads, jersey or T-shirt and a labeled water bottle.

GIRLS BASKETBALL CAMP

JULY 14 - 17 | 9 A.M. - 4 P.M.

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES 6 - 8 | 9 A.M. - NOON

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES 9 - 12 | 1 P.M. - 4 P.M.

CAMP FEE: \$120

Registration closes July 7.

Equipment needed: gym shoes, socks, shorts, jersey or T-shirt and a labeled water bottle.

BOYS BASKETBALL CAMP

JULY 21 - 24 | 9 A.M. - 4 P.M.

BOYS ENTERING GRADES 6 - 8 | 9 A.M. - NOON

BOYS ENTERING GRADES 9 - 12 | 1 - 4 P.M.

CAMP FEE: \$120

Registration closes July 14.

Equipment needed: gym shoes, socks, shorts, jersey or T-shirt and a labeled water bottle.

SOFTBALL CAMP

JULY 28 - 31 | 9 A.M. - 4 P.M.

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES 6 - 8 | 9 A.M. - NOON

GIRLS ENTERING GRADES 9 - 12 | 1 - 4 P.M.

CAMP FEE: \$120

Registration closes July 21.

Equipment needed: a softball glove, bat, helmet, cleats and a labeled water bottle.

BASEBALL CAMP

AUG. 4

BOYS ENTERING GRADES 9 - 12

POSITIONAL PLAYERS: 9 A.M. - 4 P.M. OR

PITCHERS: 11 A.M. - 4 P.M.

CAMP FEE: \$65 (PLEASE REGISTER FOR ONLY ONE)

Registration closes July 28.

Equipment needed: glove, bat, practice gear, cleats, shorts, T-shirt and a labeled water bottle.

All camps are held at the Texas Township Campus. A limited number of scholarships are available. Contact Athletic Director Russ Panico at rpanico@kvcc.edu or 269.488.4393.

Cancellation Policy: Campers may cancel or request a refund (less a \$15 administrative fee) up to seven days before their camp begins. No refunds will be given after this deadline.

EXPLORE YOUR FUTURE

June 9 - 12 | 8:30 A.M. - 3 P.M. | \$175

July 7 - 10 | 8:30 A.M. - 3 P.M. | \$175

July 14 - 17 | 8:30 A.M. - 3 P.M. | \$175

ANNA WHITTEN HALL

ROOM 128 | GRADES 6 - 8

Join us for this career camp as campers explore the possibilities that are available to them through the Early/Middle College program in high school and beyond. Campers will experience math, science, animation, machining/manufacturing, horticulture, culinary arts, community and team building. Students are provided a light breakfast, lunch, snacks and Kalamazoo Valley swag. They will explore all four of our campus locations. Transportation is provided to the Texas Township and Groves campuses during the week.



**SCAN FOR REGISTRATION
AND MORE INFORMATION**

LEGO CREATION & STOP MOTION CAMP

JUNE 16 - 19 | 9 A.M. - NOON | \$150 | GRADES 3 - 5

June 23 - 26 | 9 A.M. - NOON | \$150 | GRADES 5 - 8

CENTER FOR NEW MEDIA | ROOM 020

LEGO! Camera! Action! Create your very own stop-action movie. Campers will design, build and communicate using Lego bricks. This camp offers participants the opportunity to explore STEAM education and activities.

URBAN FARM EXPLORERS

JULY 21 - 24 | 8:30 A.M. - NOON | \$125

FOOD INNOVATION CENTER | GRADES 6 - 8

See what it takes to grow, harvest and sample foods grown in our five-acre urban garden. Students will have the opportunity to explore our greenhouse, hoop houses and outdoor growing spaces, create salsa (depending on the seasonal availability of the produce), enjoy sampling local fresh produce and create art using botanicals.

SPECIAL SUMMER MUSEUM ACTIVITIES

THURSDAY, JUNE 19 & JUNE 26

THURSDAY, JULY 3, JULY 10 & JULY 24

1 - 3 P.M. | KALAMAZOO VALLEY MUSEUM

A great activity for children with their adults. This summer, embark on a whimsical journey with Shaun the Sheep and Wallace & Gromit at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum on Thursdays, June 19 through July 24. The museum's summer break "Inventive Adventures" program is packed with fun, creativity and laughter, bringing the beloved characters to life through engaging activities and interactive exhibits. Each week focuses on a different movie or short film, STEM activities, art and more. The festivities tie in with the museum's upcoming traveling exhibit, "Wallace & Gromit and Shaun the Sheep: Shear Genius!" on display from May 17 through Aug. 31. FREE.

Kalamazoo**VALLEY**TM
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City of Kalamazoo
241 W South St
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

If you're struggling to pay your water bill, we can help.

The City of Kalamazoo is making critical investments in our water and wastewater systems. These investments are funded by all of us through the rates we pay. Rates in Kalamazoo remain low compared to other communities, but we understand that rising costs may create hardships for some households. Financial and other aid options are listed below.

Payment plans and due date extensions are available. Call 311 or (269) 337-8000 for help. The Community Action Agency of Southwest Michigan can help low-income households pay overdue bills. Call 211 or 1-877-422-2726 for more information.

Consumers Energy offers a free home analysis that can help customers save money by reducing energy and water consumption. Call 1-888-316-8014 for more information.

www.kalamazoocity.org/UtilityHelp

Si necesita ayuda para pagar su factura de agua o alcantarillado, hay ayuda disponible. Para obtener información en español, llame al 311 o al 269 337-8000.

- Quality education
- Affordable
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Fall registration opens April 7

Classes start Sept. 3

www.kvcc.edu/register

Kalamazoo**VALLEY**[™]
community college

KPS Virtual Students Meet for IRL Hands-On Learning

KPS VIRTUAL sixth grade science students got their hands dirty in real life, when teacher Jodi Heaney held one of her popular hands-on lab classes.

Heaney played mad scientist while the students wrapped up a unit on the human body as a system. Students explored how the nervous and musculo-skeletal systems work together to keep the body moving, thinking, and reacting to its environment.

Through microscopic investigations, they examined the intricate building blocks of life — cells and tissues — using prepared slides to uncover the cellular details of these essential subsystems.

Students got an up-close look at real animal organs — handling a sheep brain to study its structure and function and dissecting chicken legs to observe how muscles, tendons, and bones work in harmony. By comparing these animal specimens to the human brain and gastrocnemius muscle, they uncovered fascinating similarities in anatomy and function across species.

Heaney said she offers the hands-on learning opportunities several times a year to her students at all grade levels as a way to bring their learning to life — helping them see, touch, and understand the complexity of the human body in ways that digital learning alone can't provide. The in-person classes give the virtual students the chance to socialize with their peers while experiencing enrichment ac-



KPS Virtual science teacher Jodi Heaney, center, talks to students during an in-person class, in which sixth graders dissected sheep brains. Clockwise from bottom left; Eric Christopher, Pyper Eichorn, Chris Juarez, and Alana Lofton.

tivities to add to the curriculum, she said.

“Teaching a hands-on curriculum is very challenging to do in a virtual setting, so I offer these for kids who learn best when they ‘do’ the activity,” Heaney said. “I also selfishly do these activities because I do miss the lab part of the in-person classroom. The kids really enjoy it, so that is the main reason. Some of these labs are open to everyone, and others I offer as a reward incentive for kids who are making good

progress on their mastery assessments.”

The hands-on classes have included Halloween chemistry, rock and fossil investigation, microorganisms and cells, and chemical reactions. This year, she plans to add a study of the Kalamazoo River (testing for the presence of certain substances and indicator species) and a STEM activity to create a water filtration device.

(continued on page 23)



Eric Christopher uses a magnifying glass to examine a brain.



Teacher Jodi Heaney helps Chris Juarez dissect a piece of chicken.



Pyper Eichorn studies a sheep brain with the help of another student.

Virtual Science *(continued from page 22)*

Student feedback on the real-life experiences tends to be positive, Heaney said. They think it’s “cool” and “fun,” and they also enjoy the interaction with their peers in real life, she said. “There are a lot of laughs, a lot of ‘WOAH!!’ reactions, and it helps them to understand what we are learning about in class. Kids that come to these usually have a lot to contribute to our live class sessions.”

KPS Virtual Principal Kimberly Kirshman said the in-person classes are an example of the flexibility virtual offers families seeking an alternative learning environment, while ensuring students can experience a rich learning environment.

KPS Virtual has about 190 students in grades 6 to 12. It is a supportive learning environment where students connect with teachers and peers, while benefiting from one-on-one and group interventions. Teachers and mentors are available to help families navigate the program.



To learn more about KPS Virtual go to kpsvirtual.kalamazoopublicschools.com

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At Family Health Center, your health is our mission. We believe everyone in our community deserves access to quality, comprehensive, patient-centered care delivered with dignity, respect, and a welcoming spirit.

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CHECK FOR TICKS



Ticks are most active in Michigan between the months of April to September. However, they can be active any time the temperature is above 40 °

Feel for bumps and look for tiny brown spots, especially in these areas: scalp, ears, underarms, belly button, waist & back, behind knees, & in between legs.



How to remove a tick

- 1 Use fine-tip tweezers to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible.
- 2 Pull upward with steady, even pressure. Do not twist or jerk the tick.
- 3 After removal, clean the area with alcohol or soap and water.



KALAMAZOO
COUNTY GOVERNMENT
Health & Community Services Department

KAMSC Visit Designed to Inspire El Sol Students to Explore Math, Science

EL SOL Elementary School fifth graders recently visited the Kalamazoo Area Math and Science Center — their next door neighbor — for an indepth look at opportunities for advanced math and science learning.

The March visit included tours, a look at KAMSC research projects, and hands-on science experiments and math puzzles. While the visit was a chance to learn about math and science — it was also an opportunity to learn another basic lesson — that this is a program that they can start preparing for now.

“We want to get students thinking about what math and science classes they can take when they’re in middle school so they can be ready to apply to KAMSC when they’re in eighth grade,” said Heather Kortlandt, who became the director of KAMSC last summer.

It’s a lesson that other people have been thinking about as well.

KAMSC seniors Sophia Barnard and Eloise Dunfee noticed earlier this year that they were the only two seniors at the advanced math and science program who were alums of El Sol Elementary School.

They found that curious given that El Sol and KAMSC are basically neighbors in the Vine Neighbor-



KAMSC and Loy Norrix senior Eloise Dunfee, second from right, conducts a science experiment with El Sol students, clockwise from bottom left; Genevieve Cameron, Marshall Barrientos Molina, Yaritza Morales, and Jose Lopez-Armijo.

hood. Barnard, who is a senior at Kalamazoo Central, and Dunfee, who is a senior at Loy Norrix, decided they could do something about that.

The girls began visiting El Sol once a week to share the good news about math, science and the

opportunities at KAMSC. So, once a week they would go to the elementary school and visit with fifth graders. They talked about KAMSC, conducted easy science experiments with the kids, gave them math
(continued on page 25)

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Visit us at Kmetro.com for information on transportation options to increase student access to educational opportunities throughout the community!

El Sol *(continued from page 24)*

puzzles and shared the message that “this could be you.”

Barnard said she was inspired to start volunteering at El Sol after running into El Sol staffer Israel Catarino, who always inspired her. “We realized that not many El Sol students come to KAMSC. We wanted to incorporate some more STEM into their day and let them know what KAMSC means and to let them know that all of them are welcome to apply and come to KAMSC.”

Dunfee added, “El Sol is a cool program and I really enjoyed it. It helped me to be there and I think it’s going to help me a lot in the future. I think it’s important those kids know that no matter what background they come from or where they come from, they have a lot of opportunities available to them in their community.”

When Kortlandt and El Sol Principal Dr. Natalie Wilson began discussing the El Sol visit, Wilson told her about Dunfee and Barnard’s mentoring work. Kortlandt asked the girls if they would help lead the



KAMSC and Kalamazoo Central senior Sophia Barnard explains to El Sol student Carsten Mills how air pressure causes a can to implode.

science sessions, where students learned how to use air pressure to crumple a can.

Kortlandt will be doing more outreach to younger students and their parents as she recruits for future KAMSC classes. She planned to follow up the fifth grade visits with information sessions for parents

about preparing for entrance exams and planning middle school coursework to prepare for advanced STEM programs.

Dunfee thought the El Sol visit was a success. She was glad to introduce younger students to KAMSC. “I know I didn’t know about KAMSC when I was in fifth grade, even though it’s right across the street.

“I think just getting El Sol kids in the building is important, so they can see what it’s like here. Sometimes the idea of an advanced program can seem intimidating and makes people not want to do it. Seeing it at a young age and doing the fun experiments gets them interested in math and science. Hopefully it inspires them to prepare and get on a fast track in middle school to be able to participate in KAMSC and to imagine themselves here.”



**For more information
go to [kamsc.org](https://www.kamsc.org)**



**First Saturday
at the
Kalamazoo Public Library**

Family

Saturday, April 5 | 11:30 am–1 pm | NACD
Join us for First Saturday at the NACD (612 N. Park St.) focusing on financial literacy for youth.



**SLAM! Poetry Workshop
with Fire Arts Collaborative**

Teen

April 8, 15, 22 | 3–4:30 pm | CEN/Teen Studio
Learn about poetry composition, how to read aloud to a group, and use confident expression through verse.

Learn more at [kpl.gov](https://www.kpl.gov)



**Kalamazoo
Public Library
[kpl.gov](https://www.kpl.gov)**

Alex Smith Living Life with a Unique Soundtrack

FROM THE TIME he was in high school, Alex Smith aspired to be a musician.

But he wasn't interested in rock star fame or making it on the pop charts — he wanted to be an opera singer.

Smith is hard at work on that goal, this season serving as resident artist baritone with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City in Missouri. He sang the roles of State-ly String in "The Haberdasher," Prince and Fiorello in "The Barber of Seville," and will sing Ping in "Turandot" and Cat in the world premiere of "Maya and the Magic Ring" by Lori Laitman and Dana Gioia.



Smith singing Benoit in "La Boheme" at Yale.

Smith grew up in Kalamazoo and attended Winchell Elementary, Maple Street Magnet School for the Arts, and Loy Norrix High School. He earned his bachelor's of music in vocal performance from the Oberlin Conservatory and a master's of music in voice from the Yale School of Music in the spring of 2024.

Music is in his blood. His father Brad Smith played oboe for the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra, while his mother Dr. Wendy Rose taught bassoon at Western Michigan University.

"They started me on the cello when I was 3 years old and from there I fell in love with it" Smith said. "To this day, it is still my favorite instrument."

He said his experiences with his middle school



Loy Norrix grad Alex Smith is currently the resident artist baritone with the Lyric Opera of Kansas City.

choir and orchestra were great entry points into the world of performing in larger ensembles, as was his time with the Kalamazoo Junior Symphony Orchestra.

"The KJSO was definitely a pillar in helping me gain the musicianship skills I needed in order to take my music-making to the next level," he said. "Looking back, some of my best musical memories still come from times when I was playing great music with great friends in KJSO."

But, when he was in middle school, he began doing shows at the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre and started taking voice lessons. Singing became his passion.



Smith sings Albert in "Werther" with soprano Jaeun Shin.

"I felt that singing was a new way for me to communicate story and feeling through music and I became kind of obsessed with it. I continued taking lessons through high school until eventually I decided that it was what I wanted to do for school. That's when it started to become more serious for me."

Smith shared his journey to becoming a professional opera singer.

Q: Why opera?

A: In my eyes, I think opera is the culmination of all
(continued on page 27)



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Alex Smith *(continued from page 26)*

the performing arts. It's just so grand and elaborate, from the sets to the orchestration, and that really drew me to it. The fact that so many people can come together to make something like that is incredible and in the end I think it's that collaboration that really excites me the most.

Q: You have your master's degree. Is that necessary to succeed in the world of opera?

A: I would say that for the vast majority, it is necessary to get a graduate degree in voice in order to pursue a performing career in opera. It also provides more experience in terms of teaching since most graduate institutions have a teaching program of some kind where you can give secondary lessons to undergrad students who are interested in music but don't necessarily want to do it for their main studies.

In terms of influential teachers, I would have to mention my private teachers Lorraine Manz at Oberlin Conservatory and Adriana Zabala at the Yale School of Music. They have been so formative in my development as an artist and as a person, I am so grateful for the guidance they have given me.

Q: How does one grow a career in opera?

A: Growing a career in opera can really differ from one person to the next depending on what style of music they want to perform as well as what their voice type might be (soprano, mezzo, tenor, baritone). No matter what, creativity is definitely key in finding opportunities and putting yourself out there. Lots of auditions, lots of lessons and coachings, but it all feels very rewarding and exciting.

Q: What things have you done outside of school to build your resume?

A: I have worked at a few different opera companies including The Glimmerglass Festival in upstate New York. I am currently working as a resident artist at the Lyric Opera of Kansas City. Basically, companies have programs that are aimed towards young singers that are just starting their career and give them opportunities to get on stage and gain more experience. It also gives more exposure and allows one to be heard by different managers and agents.

Q: What kind of career are you hoping for?

A: I would love to have a career, whether it be teaching or performing, where I can inspire others and introduce people to the operatic art form. There is such a stigma that opera has to be high brow or sophisticated

which is just not true! I truly believe that the stories told through opera are ultimately human stories and can be relatable to anyone who is watching.

Q: What advice do you have for other students

interested in careers in the performing arts?

A: Do what you love and work hard at it. I know that's super cliché but it really is true! There are a lot of ups and downs but in the end you have to love the journey and enjoy it all.

Project SEED



ABOUT:

Project SEED is a summer fellowship program for high school students. Students spend 8-10 weeks in a lab working on a project with a mentor and additional lab members.

BENEFITS:

- Paid fellowship (\$4000)
- Hands-on or virtual research experience in a lab
- Great addition for your resume and college application
- Scholarship opportunities for college (\$5,000 - \$20,000 in scholarships over 1-4 years)

ELIGIBILITY:

- Interest in chemistry/science
- Qualify as low-income based on the program criteria (refer to our website for more information)
- Successfully completed at least one course of high school chemistry

APPLICATION OPENS:

Early February

Website: For more info on program dates, eligibility criteria, and to apply visit www.acs.org/projectseed



WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE



UPCOMING EVENT APRIL 4 & 5

FOODWAYS SYMPOSIUM: FRESHWATER FOODWAYS

Friday, April 4 | Kalamazoo Valley Museum

6 - 7 p.m. Community Seed Share | Free seeds will be provided by area seed libraries and the Kalamazoo Seed Collaborative.

7 - 8 p.m. Keynote Address | Manidoo Ogigitgann (The Spirit Garden), presented by Roger LaBine and Cortney Collia.

Saturday, April 5 | Culinary and Allied Health Building, 418 E. Walnut St.

10 a.m. - 3 p.m. A day of culinary exploration, presentations, a plant walk, youth activities, a community organization showcase, tours of the buildings, and a brewery open house. Lunch, featuring wild rice and other foods of the water, may be purchased at the Havirmill Cafe. All are welcome!



EXHIBIT NOW - AUG. 31 | FREE

COLORFUL COLLECTIONS

Delve into the color spectrum like never before as you enjoy some of the brightest and boldest artifacts from the Kalamazoo Valley Museum's permanent collection.



EXHIBIT NOW - APRIL 27 | FREE

RAY HARRYHAUSEN: MINIATURE MODELS OF THE SILVER SCREEN

Over 100 original and magical artifacts from the collection of animation filmmaker Ray Harryhausen are on display, showcasing his extensive career and the importance of his contribution to the art of stop-motion animation.

- **Film screenings:** Enjoy stop-motion animation films by Ray Harryhausen at 1 p.m. March 30, April 6 and April 13! Visit the museum's website for the titles.
- **Lecture:** Hear the Scotland-based exhibit's curator at 1 p.m. April 27! *The Ray & Diana Harryhausen Foundation (Charity No SC001419)*



FREE EVENT APRIL 1 - 5 | FREE

SPRING BREAK: FANTASTIC CREATURES & HOW TO MAKE THEM



Spend the week learning how to create fantastic creatures through a variety of hands-on activities. All experiences tie in with the special Ray Harryhausen exhibit on the museum's third floor. Visit kalamazoomuseum.org for times and more details.

FREE EVENT SATURDAY, APRIL 12 | 5 - 8 P.M.

STATEWIDE ASTRONOMY NIGHT

Space science activities and special free planetarium shows for all ages.

FREE EVENT SATURDAY, APRIL 26 | 11 A.M., 1 P.M., 2 P.M. & 3 P.M.

EARTH DAY RAIN GARDEN TOURS

These family-friendly tours will last about 20 to 25 minutes. Each tour will provide insights into the importance of rain gardens and how simple landscaping changes can have a significant positive impact on the environment.



EXHIBIT NOW - AUG. 31 | FREE

THE ART OF ADVERTISING



Featuring artifacts from local businesses from the permanent collection of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, "The Art of Advertising" offers up an eclectic mix of advertising paraphernalia from bygone eras.

PLANETARIUM EXPERIENCE | APRIL SHOWS | \$3 PER PERSON

Visit kalamazoomuseum.org for details. Note: No daytime shows April 12.

We Are Guardians | 11 a.m. Sat. | 25 min. | Grades K & up

Learn about the impact of human activities on climate change and the delicate balance of our planet's environment.

Habitat Earth | 1 p.m. Sun. | 25 min. | Grades 4 & up

Explore the living networks and environmental connections that exist on our planet, and discover what it means to live in a connected world.

The Sky Above Us | 2 p.m. Sat. & Sun. | 35 min. | Grades 4 & up

Learn about some of the "celestial wonders" that can be seen overhead in Michigan in this live, season-focused program.

SPRING BREAK PLANETARIUM SHOWS | APRIL 1 - 4 | \$3 PER PERSON

Mythic Skies | 11 a.m. & 2 p.m. | 30 min. | Grades 2 & up

Journey through the stars and explore mythic creatures, gods and heroes reflected in the constellations.

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

FREE GENERAL ADMISSION

SPECIAL NOTICE: The museum will be closed April 20

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.



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